

Committed: Remembering Native Kinship in and beyond Institutions, by Susan Burch. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2021. ix, 222 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$17.95, paperback.

Reviewer Linda M. Clemmons is a professor of history at Illinois State University. She is the author of *Dakota in Exile: The Untold Stories of Captives in the Aftermath of the U.S.-Dakota War* (2019) and *Conflicted Mission: Faith, Disputes and Deception on the Dakota Frontier* (2014).

In *Committed: Remembering Native Kinship in and beyond Institutions*, Susan Burch, professor of American Studies at Middlebury College, tells the story of the Canton Asylum for Insane Indians, a federal psychiatric hospital in southeastern South Dakota that operated between 1902 and 1934. During those years, the Canton Asylum detained nearly 400 people from more than fifty Indigenous nations. Many (if not the majority) of the people were committed to Canton against their will. This short book (112 pages of text) is about much more than the horrors of confinement at Canton, although Burch does provide disturbing accounts of abuse, neglect, and cruelty. Rather, *Committed* focuses on how the past continues to inform the present through historical trauma. Indeed, the author does not include “Canton Asylum” in her book title, which illustrates her decision to focus “on the larger issues and lived experiences that travel beyond individual brick-and-mortar structures” (6). *Committed* also provides insight into how to ethically research and write Native American history.

Burch organizes her chapters thematically instead of chronologically. Each chapter focuses on one, or several, microhistories—“the focused study of individual lives”—to reveal the author’s chosen theme. Collectively, these microhistories illustrate the “violent entanglements of settlers colonialism, racism, ableism, and sexism” (2). Chapter 1, “Many Stories, Many Paths,” for example, discusses the “rippling, damaging impact of the Canton Asylum” (22). To illustrate this theme, Burch focuses on the story of Elizabeth Faribault, from the Lake Traverse Reservation in Sisseton, South Dakota, who was committed against her will to the Canton Asylum. She never returned to her husband, children, or kin even after multiple escape attempts and petitions from her relatives. She gave birth to a daughter, Cora Winona, at Canton; after Elizabeth’s death, Cora Winona also remained institutionalized until adulthood. Through Elizabeth Faribault’s story, Burch illustrates the multi-generational trauma of the institution.

Other chapters further delve into the themes of trauma and resistance established in the introduction and Chapter 1. Chapter 2 focuses on the attempts of Canton to erase Indigenous cultures and families and replace them with “white settler models” (40). Chapter 3

reveals the lasting trauma Canton had on families left behind; Chapter 4 focuses on conditions and life at Canton for its inmates. Chapter 5 returns to the theme of historical trauma and how the “slow-violence of the incarcerations wove into the worlds of subsequent generations” (84). Finally, Chapter 6 discusses remembrance and healing among the present generation. Her epilogue summarizes one of her main arguments: “The violence of Canton Asylum was collective as well as individual” (111). Amid the violence, however, are stories of survival, resilience, and resistance. In sum, readers will not get a complete institutional history of Canton, as Burch aims to focus on the larger themes of settler colonialism and Indigenous self-determination, especially into the present, rather than specific institutional policies or leaders.

In addition to weaving together the past and the present through the stories of Canton’s inmates and survivors, Burch offers ruminations on how to write Native American history in each of her chapters. She addresses issues of terminology, and how to use written sources, oral history, and material culture. For example, government archival sources reveal the names and detailed western medical histories of each of the people held at the Canton Asylum. Burch, however, only reveals names, medical details, and photographs if the Tribal Historic Preservation officers or relatives granted permission. Burch also wanted to take down barriers to engaging with historical scholarship; as such, *Committed* uses accessible language rather than technical terms. The book also is available in multiple formats (ebook, paper, and audiobook with alt-text transcriptions of images) and is offered for free as an ebook.

Committed is a short but powerful book. Burch weaves together the past and present to create a cross-generational history of the Canton Asylum for Insane Indians. Her microhistories place the book’s focus not on the institution itself, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, or the White doctors and administrators, but on the people who lived in the institution and their relatives who were forced to live without them. At times, however, the specific themes of each individual chapter could have been clarified. The thematic nature of each chapter also led to some repetition across the book. Despite these minor flaws, *Committed* offers a case study of how Native American history should be researched and written. It should be read by historians and activists alike.