

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Nebraska Anthropologist

Anthropology, Department of

2006

Lakota Struggles for Cultural Survival: History, Health, and Reservation Life

Benjamin Jewell

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nebanthro>



Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#)

Jewell, Benjamin, "Lakota Struggles for Cultural Survival: History, Health, and Reservation Life" (2006). *Nebraska Anthropologist*. 19.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nebanthro/19>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Anthropology, Department of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Nebraska Anthropologist by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Lakota Struggles for Cultural Survival: History, Health, and Reservation Life

Benjamin Jewell

Abstract: The effects of alcohol use on Pine Ridge are epidemic and have had a devastating impact on the current status of the residents. The historic effect of U.S. colonial relations with the Lakota has engendered a system of dependency, making the transition from an independent trading economy to capitalism difficult. This paper is an attempt to investigate the current life of Pine Ridge residents and relate how the past has shaped the present through a successful attempt by the U.S. to bring an end to the life-ways of the Lakota. This analysis will include a detailed statement of the economic and social impacts occurring at Pine Ridge, and also interactions between the Lakota and Whiteclay, NE.

Introduction

The Pine Ridge reservation, in Southwest South Dakota near the Nebraska border, is in many ways typical of reservations across the United States. Abject poverty, diseases resulting from a sedentary way of life, alcoholism, and unemployment are reflections of the sociocultural alterations brought by the U. S. government. Through the Ft. Laramie treaties of 1851 and 1868, the Sell or Starve Bill of 1877, and the Act of 1889, the once bountiful territory of the Lakota is today represented by a fraction of what it used to be (Website 1). The Indian Allotment Act of 1887 (known as the Dawes Act) stripped Indian land from communal use and transformed it into a Western model of individual ownership where land was doled out in individual parcels for use in agricultural production. The remaining tribal land was sold to non-Indians, and the profit of the sales was used for “education and civilization [of Indians]” (Reyhner & Eder 2004: 82). The outcome of this policy was that it “contributed to the state of poverty most Indians found themselves in during the harshest days of Indian land dispossession” (Wilkens 2002: 60).

Without a stable land base, and expected incorporation into the capitalistic environment of the United States, the social structure of

many Native American groups was forever altered. In the establishment of trust relations between the U.S. and quasi-sovereign Indian nations, the United States assumed “a protectorate role for tribal people, their lands, and their resources”, demonstrating the belief that Native Americans were incapable of managing their resources (2002: 3). As such, the alteration of evolved cultural systems of expression has made the transition into mainstream Euro-American society problematic. This paper is an attempt to demonstrate that the life of a resident on a reservation in the United States, with the example of Pine Ridge, is representative of a successful endeavor by the United States to control an enemy nation. Reservations are a means to restrict, deny, or alter freedoms to a group of people and, as such, the reservation system in the United States has accomplished these aims. Evidence of these limitations to freedoms can be seen through the continuum of relations between the U.S. and Lakota nations, whose totality has brought the situation to its current manifestation.

Reservation Life

The late 17th and early 18th centuries brought dramatic social and economic change for the Lakota, as they migrated westward from Minnesota and onto the Plains region of the upper Missouri (Lazarus 1991). The Lakota adapted to a region lacking familiar ecosystems by utilizing a bountiful new resource for subsistence, the bison. In fact, the Lakota’s reliance on the bison as both a means of nutritional and economic subsistence would prove to be both a blessing and a curse. The nomadic existence of the hunters had the effect of greatly reducing the devastation wrought by European contagions, yet the twin juggernauts of American westward expansion and the explosion of the bison-robe trade in the mid-19th century would ultimately cripple the Lakota economy (Isenberg 2000).

The confluence of a multitude of forces was brewing an explosive situation on the Plains in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The influx of smallpox in 1780-82 and the construction of the fur trade brought a new formation to the Plains economic environment. The result of the smallpox epidemics (1780-82 and 1801-02) was that many of the once powerful horticultural groups of the Missouri, who were the most dramatically impacted due to their sedentary lifestyle, were forced to take up the nomadic way of life. According to Isenberg (2000):

The Omahas had remained agriculturalists along the Missouri despite the epidemic of 1780-82, only to be nearly destroyed when the

pestilence swept the Missouri again in 1801-02. The second outbreak of the disease reduced the number of Omahas from an estimated thirty-five hundred to three hundred. The Omahas thus belatedly opted for the alternative that the nomadic societies had chosen in the mid-eighteenth century. (60-61)

Not only did this create greater competition for the Lakota, but perhaps most importantly it removed the trade alliance from which horticultural foods could be acquired without the effort of growing them (Isenberg 2000).

Changing economic conditions had begun long before the impacts of smallpox, as the “economic and political incorporation of the Lakota was well under way by 1725”, largely in the form of the fur trade (Pickering 2000: 3). The expansion of this trade throughout the 18th century, and most explosively in the beginnings of the 19th century, led to the depletion of the beaver and the increased demand for the bison robe trade (Isenberg 2000; Wood 2004). The importance of the fur trade to the Lakota is two-fold. First, it created a steady source for the acquisition of European trade goods such as “firearms, metal ammunition, glass beads, knives, blankets, and cloth.” Second, the demand for fur in the Eastern U.S. and Canada (and later for the leather thongs in industrial manufacture)—combined with the increased efficiency in the hunt and aided by new technologies from trade—would ultimately catapult the bison into the same fate as the beaver (Wood 2004: 419).

For the Lakota, the beginning of the treaty era came in 1851 when the clashes between Plains tribes and migrating settlers had reached a pinnacle unacceptable to the United States. Retaliatory efforts by the U.S. military to protect homesteaders did little to lessen the tensions, spurring the need for an agreement (Lazarus 1991). The ensuing negotiation, known as the Fort Laramie treaty, brought a promise of peace between the Indian tribes and the U.S. citizens migrating through the Plains, in exchange for the recognition that “every square inch of the Great Plains [was] the sovereign territory of one or another of these counterpart nations and [the United States] pledged itself to prevent the establishment of permanent communities of its citizens within their domains” (Churchill 1997: 223).

For a brief time, Lakota life returned to normal. Then, in 1868, the two nations came once again to the negotiating table, this time for the establishment of an undisputed territory for the Sioux Nation created in perpetuity, and guarded from trespass by the U.S. military. The Fort Laramie Treaty, signed April 29th, 1868, states that:

The United States pledged that the Great Sioux Reservation, including the Black Hills, would be “set apart for the absolute and undisturbed use and occupation” of the Sioux Nation (Sioux), and that no treaty for the cession of any part of the reservation would be valid as against the Sioux unless executed and signed by at least three-fourths of the adult male Sioux population. (Website 1).

The territory delineated by this treaty was quite substantial in comparison with the current reservation occupied by the Sioux people. The Great Sioux Nation included “all of present-day South Dakota west of the Missouri River, and reserved to the Lakota the right to hunt north of the North Platte River-in Nebraska and in the territories of Wyoming and Montana-and on the Republican River in Kansas and Nebraska” (Biolsi 1991: 5).

The U.S. government was relatively unconcerned about the loss of such substantial tracts of land because it was deemed worthless (Albers 1983; Churchill 1997; Lazarus 1991). The soil was dry and brittle; the growing season was short and the semi-arid summers provided little rainfall for significant agricultural development. However, this is precisely the life the U.S. would have the Lakota lead, as agricultural implements were included in the treaty negotiations.

The attempted establishment of agricultural production on Pine Ridge, as stipulated in Article 8 of the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty, was an effort to eradicate the traditional subsistence strategy of the Lakota that required high levels of mobility (Website 1). This tactic would provide two benefits for the burgeoning United States: first, with the Lakota confined to a reservation, great tracts of land would be unguarded for easy passage and settlement by westward migrants, and second, from a purely economic standpoint, the United States, beset by major economic depression, could afford relatively inexpensive yearly payments to support a Pax Americana, but not the major economic cost of continued military engagement (Lazarus 1991: 69). Dissatisfaction increased on both sides, as the Lakota rejected the agricultural plans pushed by the United States and the U.S. officials could not figure out why a “savage” life would be desirable.

The thrust of the U.S. government’s attempts to “civilize” and save the Lakota was enacted in complete ignorance to cultural values and ideals. Having existed as a nomadic hunting and foraging people for the previous 200 years, if not more, the Lakota were not going to shake their culture’s approved way of life readily. Part of the belief system of the Lakota is a spiritual connection to the earth and their homeland, the Black Hills. According to Standing Bear (1933), “Of all our domain we loved, perhaps, the Black Hills the most. The Lakota

named these hills He Sapa, or Black Hills, on account of their color...According to a tribal legend these hills were a reclining female figure from whose breasts flowed life-giving forces, and to them the Lakota went as a child to its mother's arms" (43). Agricultural practices were antithetical to the Lakota system, because they would necessitate alteration of the landscape and a breaking of the union between the land and the people: "Farming was more than just foreign to the Sioux, it was repugnant. Taking up the plow meant renouncing the culture" (Lazarus 1991: 52).

As had been done with the Five Civilized Tribes in the East, protection of tribal land holdings were upheld until the discovery of great mineral wealth (Taylor 1998). For the Lakota, this discovery came with the intrusion of the 7th Cavalry, led by General George A. Custer, onto the protected Great Sioux Nation. In direct violation of the 1868 Ft. Laramie treaty, Custer in 1874 announced the discovery of gold in the Black Hills spurring an influx of white prospectors (Churchill 1997). According to Reyhner and Eder (2004), "The speed with which a reservation was allotted was directly proportional to how much the land was desired by whites. The desert reservations of Arizona, without any then-known mineral resources, escaped allotment" (82).

The U.S. government's approach to dealing with the Sioux Nation after Custer's discovery changed to reflect their desire to control the land, specifically the Black Hills, that had already been ceded in treaty. Custer and the 7th were sent back in 1876, with the specific goal of removing the Sioux Tribes to reservation lands (Website 1). The defeat of the 7th cavalry at the Battle of Little Big Horn in June of that year prompted the U.S. to adopt a more punitive policy towards the Lakota. In the fall of 1876, Colonel Ronald Mackenzie was put in charge of ensuring that the various Sioux Bands were secured on the reservations. The policies of Mackenzie are aptly described in Churchill (1997):

Mackenzie suspended rations to captive Lakotas, pending an agreement to a cessation of the Black Hills, in September 1876. Ultimately, about 15 percent of all adult male Lakotas signed the transfer instrument—a far cry from the 75 percent required to legitimate such cessations under provisions of the still-binding 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty—in order to feed their families. Despite the transparent illegality of the proceedings, Congress passed a law taking formal possession of the Hills in February 1877 (242 footnote).

This action, now known as the Act of 1876 or the “sell or starve bill”, provided the final blow to Lakota freedom and made reservation life a reality (Lazarus 1991: 90). In the next decade, the allotment of reservation lands into individual parcels and the delineation of separate reservations for the various Sioux bands (Website 1) greatly reduced land holdings once more. In the end, the area of land lost comprised nearly 90% of the total amount laid out in the 1851 Treaty or approximately 47 million acres of hunting and tribally owned land (Churchill 1997: 243; Lazarus 1991: 92).

The forced occupation of reservations endured by Native peoples has produced similarly negative results in terms of the impacts to health and cultural stability. Degrading health is a result of dietary changes which take away the nutritionally beneficial regimen of unprocessed foods and wild game and replace them with rations of highly refined sugars and flours, and low-quality meats. Studies conducted with groups around the world have shown that traditional foraging diets tend to provide a more balanced array of vital nutrients and vitamins (Freeman et al. 1998; Lee 1965). These traditional diets are adapted over thousands of years in specific ecosystems, making them highly efficient and elaborate examples of human adaptation to environments.

Lee’s (1965) analysis of the !Kung Bushman diet clearly demonstrates their ability to acquire adequate nutrition, without reliance on agricultural production or government commodities. By utilizing a wide array of vegetable and animal species (85 and 54 respectively), the !Kung were able to produce 93.1 grams of protein in a 2,140 calorie diet (35, 39). Similarly, the Inuit Eskimos have long relied on whale products to create an adequate supply of valuable nutrients for survival. Not only does whale meat (mattak) provide a source for vitamin C, A, riboflavin, thiamin and niacin, but it also contains high levels of iron and essential fatty acids (Freeman et al. 1998: 45-47). The statements of Inuit peoples provide a clear indication that the Inuit diet is also valuable to the culture, as much of the social relations are centered on procuring and sharing whale meat. Without the whaling, many Inuit feel that they would cease to exist as they do today. One Inuit man, Eben Hopson notes, “The whale is more than food to us. It is the centre of our life and culture. We are the people of the whale” (Freeman et al. 1998: 55).

American commodity-based diets, which resemble reservation diets, are centered on convenience and the need for mass-production, thus reducing quality and nutritional beneficence. Clear evidence of this comes from the American Medical Associations’ (AMA) announcement that the number of Americans who are overweight or

obese has increased greatly in recent decades to include more than 131 million Americans, almost half the population. Further, from the 1960's to the 1990's obesity (defined as having a Body Mass Index [BMI] of >29.9) rates have more than doubled from 13.5% to 30%, and extreme obesity (BMI >39.9) has jumped from 2.9% to 4.7% over the same period (AMA 2004). These figures for the adult population have been mirrored by the rates for school children, which leads to issues of emotional problems and overall lowered quality of life. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC), in response to the rising death rate from obesity, stated that, in the United States obesity "may soon overtake tobacco use as the leading cause of death" (2004).

With traditional subsistence strategies eliminated due to the systematic eradication of adequate bison populations (Churchill 1997; Isenberg 2000) and restrictions placed on hunting territories, and the alternative (agriculture) representing a moral incompatibility, the only remaining option was to rely on the nutritionally insufficient government food subsidies. Perhaps the most direct evidence of the lacking nutritional status of those living on reservations is the rate of Type II diabetes. At more than three times the national average (GAO 2005), diabetes not only limits life expectancy and lowers quality of life, it further increases the financial burden of an already impoverished people by necessitating greater health care expenditures. Type II diabetes is derived from the body's inability to transfer sugar from the blood to the cells. The result is a surplus of sugars in the blood stream, which can cause kidney, eye and heart failures, and a simultaneous lack of energy in the cells of the body producing fatigue (Website 2). The lacking availability of fresh produce and lean meat has forced the Lakota and others into near epidemic rates of adults with diabetes.

While health care is available to Native Americans living on reservations, the quality of that care is limited by the lack of funds provided to the Indian Health Service (IHS). The total budget of the IHS for fiscal year 2005 was \$2.6 billion, to cover the health care needs of 1.4 million people. This includes direct care, such as routine check-ups, and contract care, for special needs not available immediately from the IHS facilities. On average, a resident of any reservation in the U.S. can expect to receive \$2100/year in health care expenditures, less than half of the national average (GAO 2005).

In their study on the condition of the Indian Health Service around the country, the General Accounting Office put forth three main reasons for the lacking quality of the care provided. The first is waiting time experienced between scheduling an appointment and receiving care. From a sample of 13 facilities, the General Accounting Office says "four facilities reported that patients routinely had to wait more

than a month for primary care. The wait times at the four facilities ranged from 2 to 6 months, with the services requiring [the most] lengthy waits being women's health care, general physicals, and dental care" (GAO 2005: 15). The second factor looks at the distance between the residents and the facilities where treatment can be acquired. Again, out of 13 facilities, "8 reported that some of their patients traveled 60 miles or more one way for care [and] of these 8 facilities, 3 reported over 90 miles of travel one way to obtain care" (16). While traveling great distances is as much a product of a rural setting as anything, due to high levels of unemployment the third limiting factor for accessing health care by American Indians is a lack of transportation: "9 of 13 facilities reported that transportation to reach services was a challenge for certain tribal members [due to] the inability of many members to afford a vehicle or pay for other transportation" (17).

The second major impact of reservation life is the destabilization of culture. The lasting effects of U.S. imposition on the Lakota can be seen in the dissolution of the extended kin network that provided social and economic support. Known as the *tiospaye*, the extended kin network historically "included the immediate family, by blood and law, of a particular leader and those people who chose to live with him as relatives" (Deloria Jr. 1999: 109). The *tiospaye* was a fluid bilateral organization until the government's land allotment efforts forced acceptance of the Euro-centric ideal of patrilineal ownership (Albers 1983: 184-5). According to Medicine (2001), the current status of the Lakota can be attributed to the imposition of "external decision-making and colonialist procedures from a myriad federal agencies (e.g. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Housing and Urban Development, Health and Human Services, and others) that direct Native life at all levels" (163).

Every society develops means of social control to deal with detrimental influences such as crime and drug abuse, but when those systems are destroyed it can have wide reaching impacts. During the reservation period, both men and women lost access to traditional roles that conferred political and social esteem. Traditionally, control mechanisms among Lakota men "took the form of *akicita* (soldier) societies, [which] were formulated to meet certain needs...With the disappearance of hunter and warrior roles...traditional patterns of male self-actualization [were rendered] almost impotent" (Medicine 2001: 216). In addition, the initiation of government rations doled out exclusively to male heads of households removed women from a critical role in pre-reservation Lakota society as distributors of meat resources (Albers 1983: 192). Albers (1983) describes the reservation-era political environment as follows:

Local level authority and power were fragmented along family and household lines, where men as well as women could exercise influence. What power each sex exerted was not absolute but relative to the contributions that each made to the support of their households and families. Thus, while it is clear that many traditional avenues of female influence were closed in the community at large and confined to a domestic arena, it is also obvious that most areas of male power were similarly restricted (193).

One option to avoid this situation has been to move into nearby cities and towns. Living off of the reservation is a difficult decision that many have faced in a pursuit of more numerous opportunities, only to recognize that for those with minimal training, the opportunities may be limited. Not only does migration to urban environments mean a loss of connection to family and culture, but also a loss to the community in terms of positive contributors to the social environment. Many return to the reservation in search of a renewed connection to one's familial base, to help out when a family member gets sick or to try and make a go of it where one is surrounded by friends. The downfall of returning to the reservation is that with an unemployment rate reported to be 83% by the tribal government (Website 1) the chances of finding employment are slim, thus requiring subsistence based on government annuities.

Economics

The Lakota, like other American Indian groups, face a difficult confluence of factors that have made economic expansion nearly impossible. Wirtz (2002) characterizes the Pine Ridge economy as a "cash-and-carry" system, and perhaps not surprisingly, with nearly 85% unemployment there are no banks on the Pine Ridge Reservation (Pickering & Mushinski 2001). With no flow of income and a reliance on government welfare, poverty has always been lurking at Pine Ridge. While entrepreneurial efforts are common, Pickering and Mushinski (2001) indicate that 83% of the population practices "micro-enterprise"), the inability of residents to procure loans makes business start-ups problematic. In fact, it is the nature of the trust relationship enacted by congress in the 19th century that has prevented residents of Pine Ridge from having collateral to secure a loan, as the lands that all reservations sit on are held in trust by the United States government (Pickering & Mushinski 2001; Wilkins 2002; Wirtz 2000).

In an attempt to alleviate some of the economic problems on Pine Ridge, the Lakota Fund was created in 1986 to provide non-collateral loans to micro-enterprisers (Pickering & Mushinski 2001: 1). The structure of the Lakota Fund was modeled off of the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh, which allowed people who would otherwise be unable to procure business loans to form a credit group that could collectively attain credit from a lender. The group is then reliant on all of the members to uphold a positive relation with the lender, in order to enable the other members to acquire their individual loans (2-5). The scheme is successful because group members can use peer pressure to ensure the compliance of other members. Although the Lakota Fund was eventually disbanded, due in large part to lacking consideration of the cultural underpinnings of the Lakota, it is my belief that this form of economic development is likely a potential option for future efforts. In the future, however, the structure would have to take into account the value of kin ties to the Lakota and allow relatives to constitute a credit group.

One of the stipulations of the traditional Grameen Bank scheme is that credit groups are not to include family members. For the Lakota, the *tiospaye* provides security and represents an institution where people feel most comfortable. Pickering and Mushinski (2001) report that outside of the extended family, “many people discuss the difficulty of trusting [non-kin] people” (5). While the Lakota Fund did eventually allow some groups to include family members, the switch to a collateral form of loans ultimately brought the end of this program in 1996 (4). As the main barrier to obtaining loans is the lacking availability of collateral, another possible solution to this situation would be for the United States to end its trust relationship with American Indian tribes, thus allowing for full ownership of allotted lands. For the Lakota, the immediate return of the Black Hills may represent the only equitable solution to address both the cultural and economic damage brought by the United States.

Alcohol

Much research on the subject of Native American alcohol use points to issues of impoverishment (Escalante 1980; Haynes et al. 2002), peer pressure and loss of cultural mechanisms for control (Albers 1983; Medicine 2001; Waddell 1980), and differences in perceptions of drinking behaviors (Abbas 1982; McElroy & Townsend 2004) as the causal factors. The psychology of poverty is well studied, and clearly shows that poverty and a lack of opportunities can lead to crime, depression, suicide and drug abuse (Haynes et al. 2002). In the

United States, the highest percentages of heavy drinkers are unemployed (Website 2). This is true for Native American groups, as well as the American society as a whole (Anelauskas 1999; Escalante 1980). According to Escalante (1980), excessive drinking among Native Americans is due to the fact that they “share with other minorities similar conditions of low socioeconomic status: discrimination, poverty, poor housing, lack of education, and other deprivations” (183). Haynes et al. (2002) demonstrate that impoverishment produces feelings of hopelessness making risky behaviors such as drug and alcohol dependency seem less costly. For example, when self-perceptions are negative, a sense that there is nothing to lose will increase the chances of drug dependency. For Pine Ridge, the pattern is no different, and the drug of choice is alcohol.

The breakdown of social institutions and peer pressure are important factors in considering drinking behavior. Medicine (2001) says that “the breakdown of social institutions and the resulting demoralization of a people...represents an acculturational process in which new norms and values were not realistically represented by the agents of socialization and religious forms that followed the suppression of Native belief systems” (212). Further, the inability of many Lakota males to find employment and provide for their family raises the level of dissatisfaction and feelings of ineptitude. To compensate, Medicine argues, “drinking alcoholic beverages, and participating in the daring exploits that mandates, is thought of as a validation of manhood” (213).

Peer pressure plays an important role in Lakota use of alcohol, engendering strong feelings of expectations to drink, and making attempts at sobriety complicated. The adolescent cohort and the immediate family provide the social milieu through which introduction and acceptance of alcohol is attained. When seeking sobriety, many are forced to choose a more solitary life to provide distance from the pressure to imbibe. Medicine (2001) says that people who were seeking a life of sobriety often mentioned the “taunts by drinkers who urge them to drink with them, the lack of support groups, the loneliness initially encountered, and the ‘lack of friends’” as deterrents (219).

It may be that the imposition of *etic* definitions of alcoholism onto American Indians has exaggerated the reports of problem drinking. McElroy and Townsend (2004) call for a clarification between “alcohol use that fulfills ritual and social functions, and alcoholism as a compulsive, progressive illness” (289). There are apparent differences in the patterns of Indian and white drinking behaviors, and in many cases statements by Native Americans reflect a disagreement with the label of ‘alcoholic’. Native Americans tend to

drink spontaneously, in groups, and seek intoxication quickly (Abbas 1982; Escalante 1980; Medicine 2001). Further, there is an indication that 'deviant' actions performed while intoxicated are later forgotten on the basis that it was the alcohol, not the person who transgressed (Medicine 2001: 220). Lastly, due to the common lack of steady income, drinking will often cease for days or weeks at a time, until such time that a new supply of alcohol can be purchased (Abbas 1982: 48).

For dry reservations like Pine Ridge, one of the most relevant issues is the proximity of a supply source. Border towns provide a means to acquire alcohol and perpetuate the drinking behavior. Whiteclay, Nebraska sits just across the border from Pine Ridge, and has been mired in controversy for the past decade. It has been reported that greater than 50% of the Pine Ridge population battles addiction to alcohol, that 8 in 10 families are affected by alcohol, and that deaths resulting from alcohol use are 300% higher than the national average (Website 7). Here, I will relate some of the issues that surround the relationship between Pine Ridge and Whiteclay.

Whiteclay

White Clay White Clay! Site of so many fistfights, and of shootings and beatings and stabbings! Next-to-last stop of so many cars whose final stop was a crash! Junkyard, dusty setting for sprawled bodies, vortex consuming the Oglala Sioux! Sad name to be coupled with the pretty name of Nebraska! White Clay White Clay! (Frazier 1990: 124)

Situated in the Northwest portion of Nebraska along the border with South Dakota, the town of Whiteclay sells an average of 11,000 cans of beer per day, mostly to residents of Pine Ridge who walk or drive the 400 yards across the border (Manguson 2006). With four liquor establishments, \$3-4 million generated in revenue per year, and annual tax payments from the sale of alcohol at nearly \$250,000 in recent years, Whiteclay has become a financial bonanza (Frazier 2000: 125; Manguson 2006; Website 4). Unfortunately, money is the only positive feature to emerge so far from this situation, and in reality it only benefits the four establishment owners, and the state of Nebraska. With a population of just twenty-two, Whiteclay is an unincorporated village possessing no local government or police system (Magnuson 2006). These facts are insignificant as such, but when combined with the effects of alcohol use by the residents of Pine Ridge, Whiteclay becomes an area in need of serious reflection.

The recent murders of two young Lakota men, Ronald Hard Heart and Wilson Black Elk Jr., have created a renewed demand for

more stringent investigations into crimes on and around Pine Ridge (Magnuson 2006). Both men were found on the side of the road that leads from Whiteclay to Pine Ridge, brutally beaten and shot in the back of the head in June of 1999, yet as of March 2006, no murder charges have been filed. As a direct response to this incident, Camp Justice was founded by relatives of the slain victims to protest the sale of alcohol in Whiteclay and the lack of investigation into the murder cases (Website 4). Peaceful demonstrations have occurred since June of 1999, involving Pine Ridge residents marching to Whiteclay, and stopping at the site where Hard Heart and Black Elk's bodies were discovered. At the first such demonstration, a peaceful march was disrupted by a group of already intoxicated people in Whiteclay, leading to the physical destruction and structure fire in one of the local establishments. On the second march, Nebraska governor Mike Johanns ordered an evacuation of Whiteclay and supplied a military presence of more than 100 state troopers. The troopers created a roadblock, preventing the Camp Justice marchers from continuing into Whiteclay. In protest, nine demonstrators crossed the line and were arrested for failure to obey a lawful order (Website 4). The positive result of this situation was that it brought national attention to the problem, spurring a meeting between Governor Johanns and the members of Camp Justice to address the problem.

In recent years, as in the past, efforts have been made at both the grass roots and the legislative level to curtail the impacts of alcohol use on Pine Ridge. In 1882, president Chester B. Arthur took the advice of Valentine McGillicuddy, the Indian Agent for the South Dakota Territory, to restrict alcohol flow within a fifty-mile radius of the reservation. This act became law in 1889, enacting a buffer zone around the reservation to lessen the damaging effects of alcohol. Fifteen years later, President Theodore Roosevelt ended this law, reopening the buffer zone in 1904 to the sale of alcohol (Humphrey 2001).

In more recent actions, there has been ardent support for the termination of liquor licenses in Whiteclay in an effort to reduce the devastating impacts known in Pine Ridge. This support is a combination of the Lakota Sioux tribal council, local residents in South Dakota, Nebraska non-profit organizations such as Nebraskans for Peace, and increasingly, with Nebraska politicians. Most notable of the latter are Don Preister in Bellevue and Tom Osborne, representative of Nebraska's third district. Tom Osborne recently secured a federal grant of \$100,000 to deputize Pine Ridge officers granting them authority to enforce violations in the town of White Clay (Preister, personal communication). Law enforcement has been a major issue in this

situation, as many speak to the need for further enforcement of violations committed by both those using alcohol and those selling it. In response to a query about what could be done about the preponderance of unprosecuted liquor violations in Whiteclay, Senator Preister had this to say:

The other alternative is a real presence of law enforcement in White Clay. The reports of liquor law violations by the White Clay liquor licensees are many, but with ‘hit and miss’ law enforcement and compliance checks conducted every 2 to 3 years, it is difficult to catch the licensees breaking the laws. With a daily law enforcement presence and increased compliance checks, there should either be more liquor law violations identified against licensees (which can result in the loss of a liquor license), or a decreased amount of liquor sales due to compliance with the liquor laws since it is thought that much of the large quantity liquor sales probably result in smuggling of liquor across the border onto the reservation (personal communication).

In remote areas such as Nebraska’s panhandle, it is difficult to provide enough support as numbers of state patrol officers are based on population demands. With only 22 people, White Clay hardly qualifies for multiple units of officers. Yet when considered in conjunction with Pine Ridge and the direct connection that Whiteclay plays in the degradation of Pine Ridge’s citizens, one must accept the fact that Whiteclay is an unusual situation. In 2003, Sgt. David Sankey of the Nebraska State Patrol testified in regards to LB 691, a proposal put forth by Preister to use sales tax from alcohol sold in Whiteclay for full-time law enforcement during the hours alcohol is sold. Sankey said that it would require “4 to 5 full-time troopers to provide full-time law enforcement in Whiteclay for a total cost of between \$260,000 to \$325,000 per year” (Preister, personal communication).

Another way to help reduce alcohol use would be to increase the amount of treatment that is available to Pine Ridge residents. Currently, there is only one treatment facility on Pine Ridge, *Anpetu Luta Otipi*, which is designed for adolescents aged 12 to 17. After initially being modeled on Alcoholics Anonymous, *Anpetu Luta Otipi* has developed into a culturally relevant program utilizing the Lakota language and traditional sweat lodge (*inipi*) ceremonies (Website 5). If the proposal for increased law enforcement is to have the desired effect, greater access to alcohol treatment will be needed to transition alcohol dependent people into sobriety. Since health care is woefully insufficient for even routine problems, there will be a great need for financial support from other sources. One possibility would be the use

of sales taxes from alcohol sold in Whiteclay to be directed for increased treatment facilities on Pine Ridge, in addition to law enforcement as proposed by Senator Preister. Sole reliance on authoritarian means of control carries the danger of continued ignorance of the underlying problems.

It appears that there has been some success in curbing the sale of alcohol in Whiteclay. According to the Nebraska Liquor Control Commission Website, three of the four liquor establishments in Whiteclay have been denied renewal of their licenses (Website 6). All three licenses are set to expire on April, 30th of this year. As for the fourth liquor establishment, the Commission denied their license request in 2004, and as of May of that year there was an appeal to have the license granted (Website 6).

Conclusion

This paper has been an attempt to illuminate the social, historical, and economic undercurrents that have shaped the current status of Pine Ridge residents. It is important to recognize the concomitant issues that have altered the health and culture of the Lakota, and how this has impacted the use of alcohol. Through the loss of land, and traditional subsistence systems, the United States government has irrevocably changed the economic and health status of the Lakota. In combination with the cultural alterations brought by the erosion of the *tiospaye*, and imposition of European ideals, the assimilation of the Lakota into American society has been tenuous. As a result, many, though clearly not all, have turned to alcohol as a means to deal with the poverty, and inequalities of American reservation life.

There is no easy solution to these problems, but the onus is clearly on the side of the United States government. The immediate return of the Black Hills and all other lands agreed upon in the Fort Laramie treaties to the Great Sioux Nation represents the most just means of healing past wrongs. This would signal the United States' acceptance of responsibility for past actions, and the recognition of Native American's right to self-determination. Further, the return of the Black Hills would create a substantial income for the Lakota, from which continued culturally-relevant adjustments could be made for the improvement of the quality of life of Pine Ridge residents.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to the following people for their assistance on this paper: to Dr. Martha McCollough for the encouragement and support, the editorial staff of the *Nebraska Anthropologist* for their insightful comments and suggestions, and finally to Robyn for her friendship and role as in-house editor.

References

- Abbas, L. (1982) "Alcoholism Among Native Americans". In Mitchell, W and Galletti, M. (Eds) *Native American Substance Abuse: An Anthology of Student Writings*. Tempe: Arizona State University.
- Albers, P. (1983) "Sioux Women in Transition: A Study of Their Changing Status in a Domestic and Capitalist Sector of Production". In Albers, P and Medicine, B. (Eds) *The Hidden Half: Studies of Plains Indian Women*. Lanham: University Press of America.
- American Medical Association. (2004) "Report 8 of the Council of Scientific Affairs". Accessed on 12/01/05.
<http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/13653.html>.
- Anelauskas, V. (1999) *Discovering America as It Is*. Atlanta: Clarity Press, Inc.
- Biolsi, T. (1992) "Organizing the Lakota: the Political Economy of the New Deal on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Reservations". Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- The Centers for Disease Control. (2004) "Overweight and Obesity: Obesity Trends: U.S. Obesity trends 1985-2004".
<http://www.cdc.gov/needphp/dnpa/obesity/trend/maps/index.htm>. Accessed on 12/4/2005
- Churchill, W. (1997) *A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas 1492 to the Present*. San Francisco: City Lights Books.
- Deloria Jr., V. (1999) *Singing for a Spirit: A Portrait of the Dakota Sioux*. Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers.
- Escalante, F. (1980) "Group Pressure and Excessive Drinking Among Indians". In, Waddell, JO. and Everett, MW. (Eds) *Drinking Behavior Among Southwestern Indians*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Frazier, I. (2000) *On the Rez*. New York: Picador USA.
- Freeman, MMR., Bogoslovskaya, L, Caulfield, RA, Egede, I., Krupnik, II, and Stevenson, MG. (1998) *Inuit, Whaling, and Sustainability*. Lanham: Altamira Press.

- General Accounting Office (GAO). (2005) "Indian Health Service, Health Care Not Always Available to Native Americans".
- Haynes, GW, Haynes, DC and Smith, V. (2002) "Poverty Status and Substance Abuse Treatment Need on Native American Reservations". *Consumer Interests Annual*, Vol. 48.
- Humphrey, K. (2001) "Whiteclay Panel Debates Alcohol Problems". *Indian Country Today*, 4/18/2001. Accessed on 11/26/2005. <http://www.indiancountry.com/content.cfm?id=1857>.
- Isenberg, AC. (2000) *The Destruction of the Bison: An Environmental History, 1750-1920*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lazarus, E. (1991) *Black Hills White Justice*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Lee, RB. (1965) "What Hunters Do for a Living, or, How to Make Out on Scarce Resources". In, Lee, RB and Devore, I. (Eds). *Man the Hunter*. Chicago: Aldine Transaction
- Magnuson, S. (Forthcoming) "The Battle of Whiteclay".
- McElroy, A and Townsend, PK. (2004) *Medical Anthropology in Ecological Perspective, 4th Ed*. Buffalo: Westview Press.
- Medicine, B. (2001) *Learning to be an Anthropologist and Remaining 'Native'*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Pickering, KA. (2001) *Lakota Culture, World Economy*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Pickering, KA and Mushinski, DW. (2001) "Cultural Aspects of Credit Institutions: Transplanting the Grameen Bank Credit Group Structure to the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation". *Journal of Economic Issues* 35(2).
- Reyhner, J and Eder, J. (2004) *American Indian Education: A History*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Standing Bear, L. (1933) *Land of the Spotted Eagle*. Cambridge: The Riverside Press.
- Taylor, Q. (1998) *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990*. New York: Norton and Company.
- Waddell, JO. (1980) "The Use of Intoxicating Beverages Among Native Peoples of the Aboriginal Southwest". In Waddell, JO and Everett, MW. (Eds) *Drinking Behavior Among Southwestern Indians*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Wilkins, DE. (2002) *American Indian Politics and the American Political System*. Lanham: Rowman & Littleman Press.
- Witz, RA. (2000) "Breaching the 'Buckskin Curtain'". *The Region*. September.

Wood, R.W. (2004) "Verendrye Family". In Wishart, DJ. (Ed) *The Encyclopedia of the Great Plains*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Web-Based Sources

1. Oglala Sioux Tribe, History of the Oglala Sioux. Accessed on 2/20/06.
<http://www.lakotamall.com/oglalasiouxtribe/history.htm>
2. American Diabetes Association, Type 2 Diabetes. Accessed on 11/24/05.
<http://www.diabetes.org/type-2-diabetes.jsp>
3. Drug-Rehabs.org, Alcohol statistics. Accessed on 02/28/06.
<http://www.drug-rehabs.org/alcohol-statistics.php>
4. "Camp Justice a History". Accessed on 11/26/2005.
<http://www.aics.org/justice/camp.html>
5. Anpetu Luta Otipi, Living in a Red Day, USA. Accessed on 2/23/06.
<http://iisd.org/50comm/commdb/desc/d28.htm>
6. Nebraska Liquor Control Commission, License Search. Accessed on 02/28/2006.
http://www.lcc.ne.gov/license_search/licsearch.cgi?mode=beg_in_search&Clas=&SLicenseNumber=&STradeName=&ApplicantName=&TradeCity=Whiteclay&TradeCounty=&TradeState=&TradeZip=
7. "More about Life on Pine Ridge". Accessed on 03/01/06.
<http://www.sweatlodges.info/id76.html>