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INTRODUCTION

This special issue of *Great Plains Research* was edited by Clare McKanna, Jr., and Beth R. Ritter. The issue represents a unique interdisciplinary examination of a number of current issues facing Plains Indian peoples. These issues include gaming, education, medical problems, land titles, retribalization, and cultural retention.

Initially the idea of a special issue was proposed by Beth R. Ritter. Clare McKanna, Jr., editor of *Great Plains Research*, decided this would be an excellent opportunity to pursue a variety of social science approaches to Native studies, and he agreed to the proposal. Together McKanna and Ritter selected possible essays for inclusion in the special issue. The essays were read by outside reviewers resulting in acceptances and rejections, and each editor revised the various articles, McKanna editing those contributions involving Ritter as an author.

The first essay, "'Make-Believe-White-Men' and the Omaha Land Allotments of 1871-1900" by Mark J. Swetland, considers how two groups of Omahas attempted to anticipate and take advantage of the division of their lands during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Although they cooperated and favored the division of their lands into allotments, actions that seemingly would suggest a co-optation of Omaha ways, they were able to retain communal lands, the Omaha clan system, and many aspects of Omaha culture all the while protecting their reservation land base. Although these Omahas were willing to divide up their lands, in the process they stretched the boundaries allowed them. Notably they leased lands to non-Omahas in defiance of their agents and the federal government. Thus, within what appears to be the surface of "civilized" behavior were actually patterns of cultural retention and acculturative resistance.

Unlike the Omahas, the Northern Poncas lost their land base and much of their Ponca political and social customs. In 1962 during John F. Kennedy's administration, the Northern Poncas were the last tribe to be terminated. Beth R. Ritter documents in "The Politics of Retribalization: The Northern Ponca Case" how the Poncas have come back to gain restoration of their tribe in 1990 under a federal act. This has been a difficult struggle. The Poncas were dispersed having lost their land base during termination, and they settled in a number of urban communities within and outside the Plains. Although there have been any number of setbacks for the Northern Poncas, their story is one of persistence and eventual ratification of Ponca ways. The first tribal election

under the restoration act electing a tribal chairman and council recently occurred in October, 1994.

Kiowas on the southern Plains are the subject of a different emphasis. Benjamin R. Kracht explains in his essay, "Kiowa Powwows: Tribal Identity Through the Continuity of the Gourd Dance," how Kiowas have been able to maintain tribal identity through dancing. Kiowas have continuously danced the Gourd Dance, retaining its intricate cultural nuances, since the reservation period. This was accomplished even though the federal government banned dances, including the Kiowa Sun Dance. Today the Kiowa Gourd Dance is frequently performed on the southern powwow circuit.

While Plains Indians have successfully fought to maintain their cultures in the twentieth century, a significant threat to their well-being remains health. Lisa M. Hug in "Diet and Disease on the Plains: Diabetes Among the Omaha" shows how diabetes clearly threatens the very fabric of Omaha life today. Over one-third of all Omaha adults on the reservation have non-insulin diabetes. The disease has spread in almost epidemic proportions because of major changes in diet among the Omahas caused in part by economic dependence upon the federal government. The author concludes that much needs to be done to identify further information about the extent of this debilitating disease among the Omahas and other Plains tribes and to begin successful education and treatment services.

Another important aspect of current Indian tribal revivalism on the Plains is education. Janet Goldenstein Ahler charts, in "The Evolution of Bilingual Education in an American Indian Community: A Decade of Evaluation as Applied Anthropology," how bilingual education can make a difference for local Indian populations. Culture is linked easily to language in the classroom, and by introducing Indian language instruction throughout elementary and secondary grades, cultural retention is much more likely to be achieved. Current research suggests that bilingual Indian education has great promise.

The last essay addresses the recent economic successes associated with Indian gaming. Beth M. Wilkins and Beth R. Ritter in "Will the House Win: Does Sovereignty Rule in Indian Casinos?" do not take sides on the issue of whether gaming represents a positive or negative impact on Plains tribes, but clearly significant economic resources never before available have come to several tribes. This has happened even though the role of the federal government has yet to be clearly identified. Wilkins and Ritter discuss the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act, its ramifications, and the current legal issues involved with this new economic initiative for tribes.

Thus, this issue of *Great Plains Research* offers a variety of essays that seek to elucidate and clarify the current issues facing Plains Indians. These issues are integrally related to sovereignty questions and the ability of Indian peoples to confront a variety of fundamental problems.

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