

A CONTEMPORARY WINTER COUNT

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Signature Page

Dedication

For those who are following in the footsteps
of elders who have lived, learned and sacrificed,
to succeed in both worlds.

For those who learn from these elders can
research the past, the land, the language, the stories,
and continue to search for the truth.

They will, in turn, will lead us.

For those who want to learn, but from a Native artist's perspective.
Let them not be discouraged by the norms that are there for others to follow.

Abstract

The past is the prologue. We must understand where we have been before we can understand where we are going. To understand the Blackfoot Nation and how we have come to where we are today, this thesis examines our history through Indian eyes from time immemorial to the present, using traditional narratives, writings of early European explorers and personal experience. The oral tradition of the First Nations people was a multi-media means of communication. Similarly, this thesis uses the media of the written word and a series of paintings to convey the story of the Blackfoot people.

This thesis provides background and support, from the artist's perspective, for the paintings that tell the story of the Blackfoot people and the events that contributed to the downfall of the once-powerful Nation. With the knowledge of where we have been, we can learn how to move forward.

Preface

This thesis provides background and support to a series of paintings by the author. Each painting tells a story of a specific period of time in the history of the Blackfoot Nation. Since contact with Europeans, the life of the Blackfoot People has changed dramatically. The paintings each represent some of the factors that contributed to the changes, some of them devastating, to the lives of a proud, capable and independent People.

Acknowledgments

My source of strength and inspiration has been my connection to the power and place of
this traditional territory.

My spiritual relationship with this territory has pushed me to write and to paint this story.

Thank you to the generations of grandfathers and grandmothers who suffered but left
their stories for us to research and interpret.

Thank you to those who supported me through all the adversity and had the patience to
see me through.

Table of Contents

Signature Page	ii
Dedication	iii
Abstract	iv
Preface	v
Acknowledgments	vi
Figures	x
Introduction	1
<i>A Contemporary Winter Count</i>	3
<i>The History of The Blackfoot</i>	8
Chapter I – Literature Review	13
<i>The Anthropology Problem</i>	14
<i>Sense of Place</i>	20
<i>Origin of the Blackfoot People</i>	25
<i>Using History</i>	28
Chapter II - Napi’s World	29
<i>The True Origin of The Blackfoot People</i>	33
<i>Naató si and Napi</i>	39
<i>Napi</i>	40
<i>Medicine Bundles</i>	41
Chapter III - The Horse and The Gun	43
<i>The Myth of the “Noble Savage”</i>	46
<i>Dog Days</i>	48
<i>Out of the Water</i>	51
<i>The Gun</i>	54
<i>Raiders of the Plains</i>	56
Chapter IV - Contact - Black Robes and Christianity	62
Chapter V - Slashed World	67
<i>Manifest Destiny</i>	70

<i>Genocide – The Answer to the Indian Problem</i>	72
<i>The Invisible Enemy of the Blackfoot Nation and the Ally of the Fur Trade</i>	75
<i>The 1764 Epidemic</i>	75
<i>The Fur Trade and the Blackfoot Nation</i>	76
<i>The 1780-1781 Epidemic</i>	79
<i>The 1837-1838 Epidemic</i>	83
<i>The 1869-1870 Epidemic</i>	84
<i>Population Numbers</i>	86
<i>The Long-term Impact</i>	89
Chapter VI - Treaty 7 - Crowfoot	91
<i>Christianity</i>	95
<i>Appropriation</i>	96
<i>Exploitation by Appropriation</i>	98
<i>White Superiority</i>	100
<i>Linear versus Holistic Thinking</i>	101
<i>Loss of Cultural Identity</i>	103
<i>Collective versus Individual Society</i>	104
<i>Colonization</i>	106
Chapter VII - Residential Schools, Drunks and Jails.....	108
<i>Assimilation</i>	110
<i>Two Worlds</i>	112
<i>Students at University</i>	114
<i>Drop Outs</i>	116
<i>The New Order</i>	118
Chapter VIII - Stitched World	120
<i>A Language in Transition</i>	122
<i>Solutions</i>	124
<i>Knowledge Gap</i>	125
<i>Parenting</i>	127
Chapter IX - Conclusion	129
<i>A Return to Native Spirituality</i>	131
<i>Isolation, Good and Bad</i>	138

References..... 143

Internet Sources 149

Appendix 1 - Definitions 150

Appendix 2 - Traditional Blackfoot Territory 152

Appendix 3 – Population Estimates 153

Figures

Figure 1: Napi's World, 2006.....	30
Figure 2: The Horse and The Gun, 2005.....	44
Figure 3: Black Robes and Christianity, 2005.....	63
Figure 4: Slashed World, 2006.....	68
Figure 5: Crowfoot – Treaty 7, 2005.....	92
Figure 6: Residential Schools, Drunks and Jails, 2006.....	109
Figure 7: Stitched World, 2006.....	121
Figure 8: Winter Count, 2006.....	130

Introduction

The past is the prologue. We must know and understand where we have been before we can understand where we are going.

The Winter Count was what was passed from one person to the next to assist our People in knowing and understanding where we had been and what had occurred in the preceding years. It was our recorded history, our method of tracking time. It was maintained as long as there were people around who could remember the significance of events represented by different types of symbols. It was part of the oral history of our People, for the men who took it upon themselves to record history, retained in their memories all the facts relating to each particular symbol; they were then able to relate the story with remarkable accuracy. It was not the chronological order that was important, but the story contained within each symbol that mattered. Each year was marked by a symbol that illustrated the most significant event that had occurred in that particular year, but unlike a European linear record of history, time was recorded in a circle. The figures were painted on a tanned hide starting in the centre and spiraling outward in a counter-clockwise direction to establish a chronological order of events. Dempsey (1965) describes the accuracy of Blackfoot Winter Counts' representations of time that more or less parallel the European documentation of the history of the plains.

The Winter counts of the Blackfoot Indians, like those of other Plains tribes, were simple but effective methods of reckoning time. One outstanding event was recorded for each year and, if nothing occurred which affected the whole tribe, a local or personal incident was recorded. Thus, winter counts kept by different men varied in some years but were identical in recording epidemics, treaties and other significant events.¹

¹ Dempsey 1965: 3.

A Contemporary Winter Count

This thesis provides background and support to a series of paintings, each representing a significant period of time, that symbolize the history of the Blackfoot Nation. From the perspective of the author, who is also the artist, these paintings show a progression of events impacting the Blackfoot Nation over time, symbolizing what led to the downfall of the once powerful Blackfoot Nation, its struggle to come to terms with what has happened, and where the Nation stands today. The purpose of this Winter Count is to recount the oral history of the Blackfoot Nation, using recorded history from non-Natives to back up our oral history (traditional narratives), to show the validity of our way of recording history through the use of a Winter Count.

The examination of history in this thesis tries to demonstrate continuity between the past and the present through the use of a variety of sources, such as the traditional Winter Count, oral history, writings of early European explorers and personal experience. Instead of using a scientific framework as the foundation for an examination of Blackfoot history, this thesis uses a Native perspective, with a specific foundation in traditional Blackfoot spirituality, language, knowledge and the metaphysical relationship with the Universe.

This thesis is not about the scientific method where the researcher starts with a hypothesis or research question, and then proceeds to collect data to support or refute the hypothesis. This thesis is a discussion about the stories and legends from previous times that *are still alive today*. It is argued that this strategy is as valid as any applied scientific method, because it is through the traditional perspective and looking at history through Indian eyes that we can learn about the subtleties of our history which are left untouched

by the interpretations of scientists. What is key to understanding the rationale for this approach is that the traditional Blackfoot culture is a *living* entity. Continuity with the past allows the living culture to respond to what is new.

The source of traditional Blackfoot spirituality is the Creator, **Á pistotooki**. Traditional narratives and renewal ceremonies honouring **Á pistotooki** are alive and well with each of the Blackfoot tribes, but uninformed individuals would not be aware of this without the benefit and privilege of membership in cultural and spiritual societies.

Based on the knowledge of traditional culture, narratives and my *personal experience* as a Blackfoot Nation member, alternative explanations of events, errors and inconsistencies in the writings of early explorers are presented to challenge existing literature. For example, the metaphysical relationship that the Blackfoot had (and traditional Blackfoot continue to have) with the Universe is a subject that few people are aware of and can comprehend, let alone write about.

This thesis also discusses the Blackfoot Nation and its entire Territory. A discussion of the culture of only one part of the Nation, such as the Piikáni or Aapáhtsipikáni (Peigan), ignores the remaining Blackfoot constituents, the Káínaa (Blood), Siksiká (Blackfoot) and Aamsskáápipikani (South Peigan).

By combining the medium of paintings with the written word, this Winter Count is both traditional, and contemporary, but it is also tribal and personal. First, it is a traditional Winter Count because it uses the traditional model of recording memorable events by using mnemonic devices. However, instead of recording a single event for each year, this Winter Count records, from the artist's perspective, the most significant events that have impacted the Blackfoot people since contact with Europeans.

It is a contemporary Winter Count because rather than recording a single event for a given year as a traditional Winter Count did, this contemporary, or present day, Winter Count breaks time into eras, and focuses on significant historical events that affected the Blackfoot Nation. It is a tribal Winter Count because it is a rendition of the history of the entire Blackfoot Nation. It is a personal Winter Count because of the paintings that accompany this thesis were created by the author. And it is a personal Winter Count because the author is a by-product of the residential school era and a student of Blackfoot history.

In order to do the People justice and to understand how the current situation of the Blackfoot evolved, an in-depth look into recorded Blackfoot oral history is undertaken, for it is from this tradition that the people's culture stems; it is necessary to analyze our history in order to understand some of the present day social problems that plague our People – problems that began with contact. As Deloria (1999) suggests, the problems of our People stem from an aggressive attitude of superiority of a culture that assumes the divine right of conquest and suppression.

The central issue has been that of culture and civilization. How does one determine the value, worth and reality of culture? What factors are considered in weighing the values by which men live? Does an expanding technology give to one group of men the divine right to force on another group of men behavior patterns, values, laws and concepts that are foreign to them? What factors finally determine how we understand “civilization” as it appears among men?²

Ironically, from the Native perspective, the concept of oral tradition could be considered a fallacy as it is described and used by teachers and professors today. It is a fallacy because it focuses only on oral communication. In reality, our oral tradition was

² Deloria 1999: 197.

an all-encompassing medium of communication that included the telling of the story, the gestures that accompanied the story and symbolism as depicted within a Winter Count. All reflected the history of our community and our communal conversation, mirroring the mind of our society and the character of our civilization. Sign (sign language) was the communication medium of all Plains Indians and it is from Signs that the Winter Count was able to be recorded. In addition, Sign, as Tomkins (1969) describes, was a language with a scope in its evolution and content that went beyond simple communication. Indeed, Sign may have been the “first universal language,” a “genuine Indian language of great antiquity” with a “beauty and imagery possessed by few, if any, other languages.” Sign was the “foremost gesture language the world has ever produced.”³

Sign made it possible for individuals from tribes of different language groups to communicate with each other. The People were not limited to words. They utilized the cultivated art of Sign and symbolism. Sign was not only used in close quarters when communicating with friends, or used as a necessity when secrecy was vital to survival. Sign could also be used at ease when the eye could see but the distance was too great for the ear. It was a thing of beauty, for its gestures were wide and sweeping, and when combined with a spoken Native language, the speaker’s intentions were rarely misunderstood. To observe accomplished Sign talkers today is a wonder that anyone of any race would marvel at.

We Indians see in the world around us many symbols that teach us the meaning of life. Indians live in a world of symbols and images, where the spiritual and the commonplace are one, and where the physical and its spiritual aspect are connected – this

³ Tomkins 1969: 7.

is part of the metaphysical world of the Indian. To most non-Natives, symbols are just words, spoken or written in a book. To Indians, they are a part of nature, part of ourselves and they act as an umbilical cord that keeps us connected to all things in the universe. We try to understand them, not with the head, but with the heart, and we need no more than a suggestion to remember and give us the story.

The commonplace, to an Indian artist, appears wondrous because of symbolism, and instead of seeing a geometric pattern of Blackfoot beadwork, for example, with only lines, triangles and diamond shapes, the artisan can track the accomplishments of an entire life story. In this way, symbols let us record our history without an alphabet. And symbols are there to remind us and give meaning to the abstract.

In the past, the communicative aspects of Indian life were vital to the survival of the Indian people. Over long distances they could communicate with each other via smoke signals or via signs when following a trail. There were ways of letting the tracker or follower know the intentions of the others. Symbols and signs could consist of mounds of stones piled on the ground or sticks laid out in various formations that would provide information to the observer. When one looks at the symbol painted on a buffalo robe or carved into a rock face or laid out on the ground, it is reasonably apparent that each sign was the complete formation of a sentence. This was how the Winter Count keepers, with their use of symbolism, were so adept at remembering stories. By painting the different time sequences in this contemporary Winter Count, it is easy to understand how this is possible, for it only takes one look at a painting and all the memories of the time period materialize, as if by magic. Like the symbols of Winter Counts of old, the paintings are the triggers to remind us of the events of a time gone by. Evidence of this is responses to

the paintings that the author and artist has received, because when Indian eyes look at these paintings, they respond by seeing beyond the work of art to their own personal experiences, and the paintings stand as witnesses to the time that has elapsed for them.

Lame Deer (1994) explains to us that Indians see beyond the obvious. By being attentive to “symbols and images,”⁴ Indians find the connectedness between the reality of the physical world and spirituality. Just a “hint” is needed to remind the people of the significance of what they see around them. Everything is part of them, part of the creation of oneness with the world.

The History of The Blackfoot

So it is here, through the use of symbolism, that we take up the story of the Blackfoot Nation. Pictographs of Blackfoot history left on rocks provide evidence of life in the old times, similar to the contemporary portrayal of time periods in this thesis. An entire dissertation waits to be written to help interpret Blackfoot history left on the sandstone cliffs in Blackfoot Territory. The great Sioux Chief Sitting Bull knew that if something has been lost, one had only to go back to carefully look where it was lost to find it again.⁵ Similarly, Tomkins (1969) writes that pictographic evidence tells us about what the Indians had in the past. Pictographs are the “most important basis we have for comparison of the life and habits of early man in America with the Indians of today.”⁶

In all Indigenous societies, oral tradition continues to play a very important role. At one time, the entire globe was populated by tribal peoples. Many of the stories that have survived to the modern era from these cultures started out as oral traditions. The

⁴ Lame Deer 1994: 108.

⁵ Brown 1970: 425.

⁶ Tomkins 1969: 91.

Innu, the Hawaiians, the Polynesians, and the Maori, to name a few, all have oral traditions that are very similar to those of the American Indians, and most still adhere to certain protocols found in their oral history. Some present day scholars clearly appreciate the complexity and veracity of the oral tradition. Even Velikovsky (1950) recognized the value of traditional narratives.⁷ Regardless of the controversy that still surrounds his work, the sentiment that he expresses about the “folklore of peoples” is valid.

The scholars who dedicate their efforts to gathering and investigating the folklore of peoples are constantly aware that folk tales require interpretation, for, in their opinion, these tales are not innocent and unambiguous products of the imagination, but veil some inner and more significant meaning.⁸

Those who doubt the accuracy and reliability of the traditional Winter Count have only to read the words of Supreme Court of Canada Justice Lamer, who proclaimed the following in the case of *Delgamuukw v. Regina*:⁹

Notwithstanding the challenges created by the use of *oral* histories as proof of historical facts, the laws of evidence must be adapted in order that this type of evidence can be accommodated and placed on equal footing with the type of evidence that courts are familiar with, which largely consists of historical documents.¹⁰

⁷ Although Velikovsky received an honorary degree from the University of Lethbridge in 1974, he is at best controversial, and at worst, discredited by mainstream anthropologists and cosmologists of today. While Velikovsky may not be accepted as a valid *scientific* source, his metaphysical speculations resonate with the long-standing traditional narratives of the Blackfoot who, like Velikovsky, do not fall into a mainstream scientific framework.

⁸ Velikovsky 1950: 304.

⁹ The case of *Delgamuukw v. Regina* was launched in 1987 by the Gitksan and Wet’suwet’en in British Columbia in an attempt to establish their pre-existing title to land in the courts. The Supreme Court of Canada released its decision on December 11, 1996. It was the most lengthy and costly Aboriginal land title case in Canadian history. For the first time, at a truly national and constitutional level, there was explicit recognition of the reality of Aboriginal title existing within the Canadian legal system. It gives First Nations an opportunity to begin planning for the future acknowledgment of their Aboriginal title. And it provides Aboriginals with a chance to make truly significant, lasting and positive impacts on public policy at both the provincial and federal levels.

¹⁰ Laliberte 2000: 298.

Lamer's decision gave oral tradition equal credibility to European-based historical evidence. Lamer's decision should have opened up the eyes of everyone, especially those in academia, for not only has academia traditionally not recognized the validity of the oral tradition, but the Native people themselves have let oral tradition lay by the wayside for too long. Despite Lamer's decision, our oral tradition is still rarely, if ever, given equal status to written documents. Natives too often give credence only to what has been written by European historians. Very rarely are tales of Napi used today by the Blackfoot as pedagogical tools, but they come in handy in telling dirty jokes at the expense of others. Nevertheless, they are collectively preserved in the book, *The Sun Came Down*, by Percy Bullchild, a Blackfoot Elder. So the stories are available for any aspiring Blackfoot, academic, or other person to study and utilize in the way that they were intended.

Very few Native writers of *any* Nation have written about their own history, a lack due not to illiteracy but rather the adherence to the essence of Native culture which is the *oral tradition*. However, as time marches on, our reliance on oral traditions changes as history manifests itself in written accounts and more Native writers sense the urgency to record them before the traditions are lost. Examples of such publications can be found even from members of my Nation, although a rough estimate of the percentage of Piikáni writers is less than 1%, based on a population of 3500.

This thesis concentrates mainly on the Blackfoot Nation of Canada and the United States, where my ancestors are from. However, as backup to the contemporary Winter Count, this thesis not only focuses on the assimilation and colonization process that was imposed upon the Blackfoot Nation, but also attempts to trace a portion of the collective

Blackfoot history as a whole Nation; rarely does one see in contemporary writings by non-Blackfoot authors any real attempt to ferret out the Blackfoot's emergence and the history of the Siksiká, the Káínaa and the Piikáni people as one distinct Nation and why they were obliged to separate. Documented oral history is used as proof and medical science and the journals of early French and English explorers are called upon as corroborating sources. And where they are relevant, the journals of Spanish explorers and early anthropologists are also referenced because, despite their biases and misinterpretations, these individuals contributed a great deal to the recorded history of the Blackfoot Nation under the guise of ethnography.

From the available literature, the journals of the earliest explorers are considered the most reliable sources for researching the time periods of this thesis. Although these writers interpreted their observations through their own cultural lenses, their writings are available verbatim, and reflect their actual experiences. These records are examined to interpret them more appropriately through the eyes of an Indian.

The discussion of the Winter Count time periods in this thesis is difficult to achieve because the Indian mind set does not categorize and pigeon-hole. All things are connected, related, and cannot be separated into distinct units. Consequently, there is repetition, and as in the oral tradition, concepts are discussed more than once. Certain stories may be repeated in part because they are all connected in some way or other.

The sections of this thesis each provide a context for the eras of time symbolized by the paintings of this contemporary Winter Count. Chapter I, a review of literature, is supplemented by the oral tradition of the history of the Blackfoot People. Chapter II, the first time segment, describes the origin of the Blackfoot People and the world of the

Blackfoot as it was in the beginning. Chapter III traces the arrival of the horse and the gun, two things that significantly changed the lives of the Blackfoot Nation. Chapter IV discusses the impact of Christianity. Chapter V recounts a world that fell apart because of smallpox, disease, alcohol, and the loss of identity and spirituality. Chapter VI reviews the impact of the loss of traditional Blackfoot territory. Chapter VII describes the time of forced assimilation and colonization. Chapter VIII, the final time segment, is a discussion of the world of the Blackfoot today. Chapter IX concludes with a discussion of power and place. Appendix 1 lists definitions of various terms used in this thesis. Appendix 2 shows a map of traditional Blackfoot Territory. Appendix 3 provides population estimates prior to and following the smallpox epidemics discussed in this thesis.

Chapter I – Literature Review

Approximately seven Blackfoot generations have gone by since the arrival of the first *English* man into Blackfoot territory in 1754.¹¹ The cultural loss that began with that first contact and the negative impact on Blackfoot identity and resulting social upheaval of the Blackfoot Nation, and, for that matter all First Nation's People, continues today. To comprehend what has been lost, one must travel back in time to understand and appreciate the Native frame of mind as it existed before contact and how it became what is it is now. The traditional Native holistic way of thinking was changed forever by the influence of European invaders whose principal mandate was 'aggressive civilization' – the assimilation of the Indian people at all costs. Assimilation was merely one of the evils that contributed to dysfunction in Indian society. Alcohol, drugs, disease, discrimination, poverty, and the loss of territory, freedom and the principal source of food and livelihood are only the beginnings of a list too long to detail here. The result of the evils that came with contact and the experiences forced on the Indian people was that Natives were no longer able to see and live life through their Indian eyes. Instead, they were forced to look at life through the alien eyes of the Europeans.

The Anthropology Problem

Anthropology, more than anything else, has indiscriminately wreaked havoc on the history and the lives of Indian people in the Americas. As the historian Milloy (1972) writes, the anthropologists used Native Americans as their private subjects, to promote the anthropologist message to suit its own needs, and to discuss and uphold the

¹¹ The first Niitá'piaapiikoan (person of English descent or real white man) in Blackfoot territory in the region of the Red Deer River was Anthony Henday (see Ewers 1982). The first Niitsáápiikoan (French person or original white man) in the territory of the Blackfoot was La Vérendrye in 1737 (see Smith 1980).

anthropologist agenda against all objections by other groups, including the Natives who were, and continue to be, the subjects of the debate.

The actual damage of early anthropologists in the Canadian context cannot be singled out. Legends of the Blackfoot were the traditional narratives of all bands, Aamsskááipikani, Aapáhtosipikáni, Káínaa and Siksiká, and a misinterpretation of one legend affected all Blackfoot people, regardless of their location. When Natives became literate (in the European sense) during the residential school era, they were able to read accounts of Blackfoot legends recorded by early European explorers such as Heday and Henry. The misinterpretations of these early European writers served to cast doubt on oral traditions because they were in direct conflict with what Natives confined to residential schools had learned from their elders.

Certainly the mystery surrounding Indians and the nature of their social and political development has been exacerbated by the fact that they have customarily been the exclusive preserve of anthropologists who have produced, through the application of their own specialized, non-historic methodologies, conclusions embedded in the particular terminology of their discipline.¹²

Many of the anthropologists' justifications for their views of Indian peoples have been driven by academic self-promotion - researching and referencing the papers of other anthropologists. One example of this type of poor research is *Changing Configurations in The Social Organization of A Blackfoot Tribe During the Reserve Period*, by Esther Goldfrank (1966), a book that is testimony to the method used by many anthropologists. The text is filled with annotations, quotations and references from the accounts of early

¹² Milloy 1972: iv.

ethnologists such as Wissler, Maximilian and Ewers. Ten days of camping and living alongside the Káínaa during a Sundance Ceremony by Goldfrank should hardly be considered adequate time or sufficient research to comprehend the social life and the most sacred ceremonies of the Káínaa. How a person could condense the thousands of years of evolution of the Káínaa religious rites and social life into one small book of 120 pages, including the bibliography, overwhelms the mind.

An accurate literary description of the Indians' pre-reservation life cannot be found in the writings and transcripts of early anthropologists, as many of them wrote about the Indians only after they had been confined to reservations. Natives, Deloria (1988) writes, had few weapons to defend themselves against the powerful anthropologist.

Anthropologists came to Indian country only after the tribes had agreed to live on reservations and given up their warlike ways. Had the tribes been given a choice of fighting the cavalry or the anthropologists, there is little doubt as to whom they would have chosen. In a crisis situation men always attack the biggest threat to their existence. A warrior killed in battle could always go to the happy Hunting Grounds. But where does an Indian laid low by an anthro go? To the library?¹³

On the subject of Indian people, anthropologists have been so successful in advancing their theories that many Indians themselves have come to repeat the anthropologists' ideas, perpetuating them as fact because of the illusion that anthropologists know everything about Indian people. However, as Milloy (1972) found, the tendency of the anthropologist was to concentrate not on the crucial history of a tribe,

¹³ Deloria 1988: 81.

but on those events or factors which were uncommon or which had been more recently introduced to the Natives.¹⁴

Exceptions to this are the Apache Tribes of the Southwest, including the Mescalero, San Carlos, White Mountain and the Jicarilla, who have managed to maintain an identity-saving anthropological gulf. According to Deloria (1988), the Apaches have been spared the loss of their self identity to the abstractions of the anthropologists because they have maintained the “freedom to choose” their identity, thereby escaping the anthropologist trap of manipulation.¹⁵

The same cannot be said for most other tribes. Many young Indians attend workshops and feed on theories doled out by “authoritative” anthropologists. In a sense, some of the younger Indians have completely lost their real Indian-ness through the intense and thorough indoctrination of the anthropologists’ focus on the Indian people.

The history of Indian people has been documented and speculated upon by generations of social scientists. But much of Indian history has been recorded from the perspective of the invader, rarely from the perspective of the Indian – the resident – and what the Indian had to offer. Actions of the first European explorers are not questioned. For example, Ewers describes the first Lewis and Clark expedition in 1806 into Blackfoot territory to scout the northwestern boundary of the Louisiana Purchase and potential fur trade routes. The first encounter of Lewis’ with the Blackfoot Indians was not a pleasant one and resulted in the deaths of two Blackfoot. Lewis and Clark lost no time leaving Blackfoot Territory and returning to “civilization.”¹⁶ Ewers’ description of this event does not criticize or even question the behaviour of Lewis; Ewers leads the reader to

¹⁴ Milloy 1972: v.

¹⁵ Deloria 1988: 84.

¹⁶ Ewers 1982: 48.

accept the actions of Lewis as justified. This is typical of how the history of Natives has been recorded by non-Natives. In reality, Lewis and Clark were in Blackfoot country. Lewis and Clark did not ask for permission to enter the territory, nor did they make any attempt to understand the ways of the Blackfoot. They offered no gifts, and made no effort to make friends. Instead, Lewis tempted his hosts with a careless display of guns, thereby inviting conflict.

The result of the Lewis encounter was that no American (or any white man) was safe in Blackfoot territory for a quarter century thereafter. But although the Blackfoot were able to protect their territory for a time, the insidious invasion of Europeans from the Hudson Bay Company to the North was tolerated, resulting in a growing reliance on trade goods. Ewers (1982) accurately assesses the significance of increased contact with the Europeans. The inevitable consequence was the beginning of the end of the traditional Indian way of life. Contact with European diseases, languages, cultures and “competing values” led to the obliteration of Indian traditions and the destruction of their “universe.”¹⁷

To understand the drastic change from a traditional lifestyle to one which narrowly avoided complete assimilation, it is helpful to examine a statement issued in 1942 by the Indian Department’s Superintendent of Welfare and Training, R.A. Hoey, where the importance of the oral tradition is made clear.

I can understand now why there appears widespread prejudice on the part of the Indians against residential schools. Such memories do not fade out of human consciousness very rapidly. You and I may not be able to do much but at least we can be humane and kindly in our treatment of these underprivileged and unfortunate people.¹⁸

¹⁷ Wallace 2003: 17.

¹⁸ Milloy 2003: 111.

It is evident from Hoey's statement that although he was not entirely ignorant of the Native perspective, he was also not entirely aware of the complexity involved.

Native cultures are grounded by their oral traditions and consequently rely on a very good memory, *a collective one*, in order to maintain the importance and the profound messages within the dialogue delivered through the oral tradition.

Indian history, according to Native historians, had its beginnings in the oral history that was handed down from one generation to the next. According to Blackfoot Elder Percy Bullchild, our Native people did not have history written on paper like our "White friends." Native history from the beginning of our life was passed on by the spoken word and "learned by heart" for each generation to recount.¹⁹ But when our history was documented by non-Natives, it was largely inaccurate and distorted.

Is our oral tradition changed by a written record? Yes, but not only because it is written. More importantly, the oral tradition is changed because it is mistranslated into languages other than Blackfoot. Only a written account of oral tradition in the Blackfoot language will allow the deeper meanings and subtleties of the language and history to be heard. David Peat (2002), a physicist who spent time with the Káínaa, explains that the world of Indigenous languages is unique, and translations into other languages are not able to capture the essence of the Indigenous message. The Blackfoot language is a "world of animation" which cannot be translated, and when written on paper, these words "seem to disappear from the page."²⁰

¹⁹ Bullchild 1985: 2.

²⁰ Peat 2002: 17.

Sense of Place

The Indian peoples' sense of place and relationship to the land specifically revolve around our mythology and spirituality. The Indian identifies space in specific categories with respect to direction, sacred and particular places, but does not isolate or secularize them. Thus the Native approach is conceptually distinct from non-Natives, who define place or relationship to the land in secular terms. Blackfoot words for sacred places, directions, and actions are part of their relationship with the Creator. For example, the seven directions of north, south, east, west, up, down and here are specifically used during ceremonial prayers. Moreover, as the linguist Whorf (1956) explains, words are inextricably linked to the philosophical framework of beliefs.

Every language contains terms that have come to attain cosmic scope of reference, that crystallize in themselves the basic postulates of an unformulated philosophy, in which couched the thought of a people, a culture, a civilization, even an era. Such are our words 'reality, substance, matter, cause... 'Space, time, past, present, future.'²¹

Sacred places are scattered throughout the territories of different Nations. Chief Mountain, The Sweet Grass Hills (Sweet Pine Hills), and The Cypress Hills are some of the sacred places for the Blackfeet.²² Sacred places for other tribes include the Black Hills for the Sioux and Bear Butte for the Cheyenne. These are designated areas given to these Natives by the Creator as spiritual places where they seek a spiritual presence; at the same time, these places are also highly respected by other Nations. Specific places also define particular species of plant or animal, and in human terms, particular people.

²¹ Whorf 1956: 61.

²² "Blackfeet" is usually associated with the South Piegan Band in Montana, the Aamsskáápipikáni, whereas "Blackfoot" is usually associated with members of the three Canadian bands of the Blackfoot Nation, the Piikáni (Aapáhtosipikáni), Káínaa and Siksiká. In this thesis, Blackfeet and Blackfoot are used interchangeably. Note also that Piegan is the spelling used for the band in Montana, whereas Peigan is used in Canada.

All place names that formed the boundaries of traditional Blackfoot country are still found on present-day maps. Many of the names of towns and landmarks remain the same although the Blackfoot words have been anglicized. For example, Ponoka (ponoká-elk), and Okotoks (óóhkotoki-rock), are Blackfoot words that have not changed dramatically except by mispronunciations. Other towns have simply eliminated the Blackfoot version and use the English translation to identify themselves, not knowing where the name originated. High River, Medicine Hat and Seven Persons are a few such examples of names derived from events in Blackfoot history.

The sacred places of the Blackfeet lie within the boundaries which were given to them by Napi or the Old Man, the Sun's messenger to the Blackfeet people. The conception of place has deep roots that are firmly planted in Native spirituality within the framework of the oral tradition. It is one thing to hear these stories in English, but to experience the animation that comes through the speaker telling the stories in Blackfoot truly brings them to life.

Early ethnologists and anthropologists such as Clark Wissler, Walter McClintock, and John Ewers wrote extensively on the Blackfoot history and lifestyle. Their works are still the "go to" sources for research on Blackfoot culture, but Blackfoot Elders maintain that early anthropologists' accounts of Blackfoot history and culture are in reality an extremely distorted version of oral tradition and history. In their attempt to understand the cultures they encountered, these authors tended to superimpose Christian theology onto Native spirituality. They exhibited a blatant form of cultural superiority and paternalism which manifests itself throughout their writings. Too often, these writers' sense of superiority surfaced because of their inability to understand the metaphysical

connection between the Natives and their relationship to their lands, spirituality and language. In the following example, McClintock's (1992) typical approach clearly illustrates the attitude of early ethnologists and anthropologists.

Without the medium of divine revelation, through which the Christian races received knowledge of the true God, and with only their senses and reason, and the light of nature to guide them, the Blackfeet evolved a very reasonable form of pagan religion in their Sun worship.²³

Another example is Wissler, who also reveals a similar attitude of superiority by anthropological references to Napi or the Old Man as a white man. Wissler and Duvall (1975) describe the writings of the explorer and writer, Henry.²⁴

The writer [Wissler] once asked a well-informed old Peigan man if such a story was known to his people [Henry's interpretation of the Blackfoot story of creation]. His reply was to the effect that he heard of it, but regarded it as a White Man's tale. *This may be an error* [emphasis added], for Henry wrote about a century ago as follows:-

At first the world was one body of water inhabited by only one great white man and his wife, who had no children. This man, in the course of time, made the earth, divided the waters into lakes and rivers...²⁵

What Wissler is doing, early in his study of the Blackfeet, is discounting the oral tradition of the Blackfeet and dismissing the "old Peigan's" objections in favour of Henry's account of the "tale." In addition, Wissler uses a missionary's tactic of converting elements of the "tale" to Christianity, by insinuating that the Blackfoot Creator was a *white* man. Wissler essentially postulated that the "old Peigan man" had mixed up his oral history, and Henry, who recorded the story, had the right one, even though Henry was not an expert on the Blackfoot language and had spent but a short time

²³ McClintock 1992: 169.

²⁴ Probably Alexander Henry "the younger," a fur trader, explorer and writer, who traded with the Peigan, among others, from 1811-1812. (See the Dictionary of Canadian Biography at <http://www.biographi.ca>).

²⁵ Wissler and Duvall 1975: 8.

in their presence. Wissler had already drawn his conclusions from Henry's journals. In the words of Deloria (1988), the anthropologist, with his conclusions drawn from the writings of other anthropologists, determines who and what is Indian before he sees an Indian or sets foot on any Indian land.

You may be curious as to why an anthropologist never carries a writing instrument. He never makes a mark because he ALREADY KNOWS what he is going to find. He need not record anything except his daily expenses for the audit, for the anthro found his answer in the book he read the winter before.²⁶

Although the writings of these early explorers and anthropologists are extremely tainted by their European backgrounds, they contain a lot of valuable information. But it takes one who is totally immersed in the Native perspective, and who has knowledge of the Native language, to actually decipher the real Indian narrative and make sense of what these writers are trying to describe.

It is easy to see how a non-Blackfoot, in this case Henry, misinterpreted what he had heard regarding that particular legend because the Blackfoot word for the European man is **Napi-koan**. The trickster figure in Blackfoot legends is **Napi**. There are two possible explanations for Henry's error. When he interpreted the legend of the Blackfoot Creator as being "one great white man," Henry appears to have mistaken the term Napi-koan with the term **Napi Naató'si**, and also with Napi, the Trickster figure. The Creator in Blackfoot is Naató'si, in reference to the Sun itself. When a Blackfoot-speaking person uses the term Napi in conjunction with a prayer to Naató'si, he is referring to the power of the Sun, *not* to the Trickster. He can also be referring to the morning light that precedes the rising of the Sun.

²⁶ Deloria 1988: 80.

Lancaster (1966), a linguist and the adopted son of South Peigan Chief White Calf, was cognizant of the differences in meanings of Napi Naató'si versus Napi²⁷, and offers the following explanation for Henry's error.

One informant suggested that the phrase does not mean "old white man" but rather "white old man" (there is significant difference between these two translations) and I would be inclined to go along with him if only for the reason that sometimes the Blackfeet in their prayers to the Sun will refer to the Sun not as *Nah-tóh-sey* but as *Náh-pi*. "Old White man" would refer to an elderly Caucasian, whereas "white old man" could refer to an elderly, (hence in the Indian belief, wise) old man of any race."²⁸

In short, the reference would be to the color of one's hair, white in this case signifying an old white-haired man. This is one example of how facts can be interpreted incorrectly if one is not fluent in an Indian language.

²⁷ There are conflicting versions in the literature available today in reference to Napi. C. Yellowhorn (2002, pg. 3) states, from her reading of Bullchild (1985), that the Creator "...sent Napi to the physical world to teach the Blackfoot People..." The distinction between the Creator (Naató'si) versus Napi is clear. This version is in agreement with the description in this thesis of the Creator versus Napi and the Blackfoot story of creation. Bullchild's informants were highly esteemed elders of the Blackfoot Nation, including Yellow Kidney (Piikáni), Jim White Calf (Piikáni), Percy Creighton (Káínaa), Little Leaf (Piikáni). It is interesting to note that one of the informants was a Piikáni known as Yellow Horn.

In contrast, the version used by E.C. Yellowhorn (2002, pg. 40) is that "Naapi" had the power to create a new world and had the power to re-create humans. This version is strikingly similar to the one recorded by Wissler and Duval (1975). I cannot support this version because of who Napi was. Bullchild (1985) writes that although Napi was highly regarded when he came to the people from the Creator, in the end he was the trickster who was prone to mischievous and foolish actions. He was hardly the one that any Creator would entrust with the power and responsibility of total creation. Even Wissler alludes to this in his recordings of personal contacts with the Blackfoot. "Whenever the writer asked if the Old Man [Napi] was ever prayed to, the absurdity of the question provoked merriment. The usual reply was, that no one had enough confidence in him to make such an appeal" (Wissler & Duvall 1975: 9).

The conflict in versions emphasizes the dilemma created by a reliance on the writings of early explorers and anthropologists who were not fluent in the Blackfoot language, and whose versions of traditional Blackfoot narratives are suspect. If there were no other sources available today, early writings such as Wissler and Duvall would most likely be acceptable. However, because there are sources such as the book written by the Blackfoot elder, Percy Bullchild, a Piikáni, conflicting versions cannot be considered as reliable. Bullchild was greatly offended by the "false" Blackfoot legends because they "smeared" the beginning of the Blackfoot People. It was the reason that Bullchild gave for writing his book.

²⁸ Lancaster 1966: 230.

Origin of the Blackfoot People

The story of the Blackfeet is long and at times contradictory between non-Native anthropologists and Blackfoot historians, but the oral history and traditions of our people lend clues to their origin. Blackfoot oral tradition tells us that the Blackfoot have always been in this Territory.

Linguists and anthropologist have categorized Blackfoot as an Algonquin, thereby having the Blackfeet people originating from the Red River and the western shores of Lake Winnipeg. Differences between Blackfoot and “other” Algonquin languages are attributed to the Blackfoot people leaving that area much earlier than the rest of the Algonquin peoples and remaining isolated from them for so long that their language underwent a enough change to make it essentially foreign to the parent linguistic group. If this is the case, then a similar linguistic transformation should have occurred with the Tsuu T’ina (Sarcee).²⁹

Inaccurate translations of the many different Native languages have often resulted in a loss of the original meanings of Native languages with the consequence being propagation of false information. In addition, a Eurocentric agenda can cause tension between the scientist and the subject. Goulet (1998) describes, for instance, an encounter between an anthropologist and a Navajo over whether or not the Navajo language

²⁹ The oral tradition of the Tsuu T’ina explains their split from their main tribe through a legend. According to the legend, a tribe of Athapaskan speaking people was crossing a large lake in midwinter when a woman noticed an animal’s horn protruding from the ice. When she struck it with an axe to break it free, the ice cracked and the tribe was split into two groups, one going north and the other south. The main group continued traveling south. The group that was left behind, the Tsuu T’ina, were taken in by the Blackfoot, protected and made part of the Blackfoot Confederacy. The language of the Tsuu T’ina, however, remains distinct from the Blackfoot language and, moreover, the Tsuu T’ina and the Navaho can, in part, understand one another. (Source: personal communication with members of the Tsuu T’ina Nation, including Tammy Dodging Horse.)

contains a word that can be translated as “religion,” with the anthropologist insisting that his interpretation was correct.

Not only does the difficulty of fluency in another language impact the accuracy of the translation, but non-Natives apparently struggled to elicit reliable information from their informants. According to Milloy (1972), instead of being able to record reliable information, David Thompson found that informants would deflect the question by answering in a way to “avoid other questions and please the enquirer.”³⁰ Compounding the problem was that the translation had to undergo an additional transformation in order for it to be appropriate for the intended European/American audience, rendering the accuracy of the information even more questionable. Evidence and traditions were frequently ignored because the writers felt they would not be “acceptable.” According to Milloy, “Charges that the Indian at times told the White man what they thought he wanted to hear are probably true.”³¹ For Milloy, this was validation of the allegation that some “white men” only “hear what they wanted to hear.”

An important observation regarding mistranslation of native languages concerns the Blackfoot and Cree relationship. The term ‘Slaves’ as applied by the early fur traders to identify the Blackfeet people in history books is incorrect. The Cree term for the Blackfoot actually meant Strangers.

On page 168, vol. 1, Richardsson states that at an early period the Stone Indians came to Saskatchewan under the protection of the Crees and aided that tribe in driving out westward the original inhabitants. These original inhabitants he says are usually called Yatche-thinyoowue by the Crees, and this name is translated by the traders as *Slaves* but more properly has the meaning *Strangers*.*

³⁰ Milloy 1972: 9.

³¹ Ibid: 9.

*Maximillian in his Cree vocabulary gives Yatchethinyoowuk as the word for Enemy. Lacombe (Dict. Lang. Cris) says the word means Strangers. Awokkanak is the Cree word which really means Slave.³²

The reference above first helps to identify who the Cree were referring to when using the correct spelling, meaning and pronunciation. The latter spelling by Maximillian correctly identifies the Blackfoot as Yatchethinyoowuk (Strangers) as opposed to Archithinue³³ as recorded by the early French and English explorers. Second, there are no r's in the Cree or Blackfoot languages. Archithinue was, in fact, a fabricated word which only served to mix up and mistranslate the Cree and Blackfoot languages, and for years make it harder to identify the Blackfoot Indians. Third, the actual meaning of the word Yatchethinyoowuk (Strangers) implies that someone you had no knowledge of suddenly makes an appearance on the scene. This further challenges the Algonquian theory and instead, lends credibility to Blackfoot oral tradition as described by Schultz (1974), that the Blackfoot arrived on the Plains after a trek through the mountains (see the discussion of Scar Face in Chapter II – Napi's World). Finally, linguists and anthropologists have to revamp their theories regarding the Blackfoot who do not fit the mold of the Algonquin people. Haphazardly lumping the Blackfeet into this group only reinforces the "outmoded" Bering Strait theory (Deloria 1999), which is described as "simply shorthand scientific language for 'I don't know, but sounds good and no one will check.'"³⁴

³² Hyde 1933: 37.

³³ Ewers 1982: 27.

³⁴ Deloria 1999: 78.

Using History

According to Ewers (1982), the source of most solutions that have been used to address the social problems that the Indian people face today is archival material written by anthropologists and ethnologists and currently housed in the National Archives in Washington. This material contains the “voluminous and enlightening correspondence of successive Blackfoot agents with the Washington office.”³⁵ Many studies have been undertaken on these materials to find different solutions that will curtail the problems of today’s Indians and to advance them into a better life. As Goldfrank (1966) claims, in an “analysis of acculturation,” history is essential to understanding the “past changes in social structure.”³⁶ However, these solutions are largely doomed because they stem from a Western ideological framework, not appropriate to the Indian way of thinking. As Deloria (1988) puts it, these solutions fail because they do not address the reality of the Indian world.

White solutions fail because *white* itself is an abstraction of the attitude of the mind, not a racial or group reality.³⁷

What is it that we have lost? We have lost the clarity of life that we had when we lived in this world with Napi, when he was physically here with us. The brightness of that world has been dimmed, but it is still evident, etched into the metaphysical world of the Blackfoot People.

³⁵ Ewers 1982: xi.

³⁶ Goldfrank 1966: 2.

³⁷ Deloria 1988: 189.

Chapter II - Napi's World



Kerry Scott

Napi's World, 2006

Acrylic on Canvas

30" x 40"

Collection of the Artist

The painting of Napi's world is the artist's rendition of what makes up the Natives' metaphysical interpretation of power and place. Within this painting are depicted sacred vision quest sites and certain power animals. The land, the animals, the air we breathe, the water, are part of our spirituality. Our sacred bundles and societies are derived from Mother Earth, the Creator and the connection to everything around us. We sense that there is power in our surroundings and we only need to see a symbol to remember. A picture of a landscape which has not been altered by man is a potent reminder of power and place.

Here we start down the path that Napi, the Trickster in Blackfoot legend, laid down for the Blackfoot Nation to follow. The country that Napi gave them was part of the Great Plains, the area now known as the Alberta and Montana grasslands.

This was the time of the Indian utopia, a time in history when the People could communicate with the animals and a great many things were learned from animal society. Many religious and social functions were passed from the animals to the People. It was a time of a relationship with the natural world. Prior to contact with the European, the life of the Indian community was based on the concept of relatedness. All activities and entities were related. Everything was connected to everything else, and everything in the universe was alive. Every experience had value and informed the people about some aspect of life.³⁸

The Indian People of the Americas believed that they were surrounded by supernatural powers. Their beliefs told them that spiritual forces would come to their aid, when they called upon these powers for protection and assistance in their times of need. These powers resided in the skies, in the waters and on the land. All the animals, birds, insects, snakes, rocks and plants had the ability to bestow their powers on the Indian people if they chose and if a person was deemed worthy of receiving such a gift.

Supernatural powers were gained through dreams – bestowed by supernatural entities through the vision quest, the age-old practice of the Plains Indian. Seldom were supernatural powers sought in a community setting. Instead, the powers were received in isolated places such as mountain tops, buttes or by lakes, always in places that were rarely visited. If a person was fortunate and his prayers were strong, a spirit would come

³⁸ Certain features of culture will be referred to in the past tense because the inroads of Christianity have taken hold of a portion of the Native population, and not everyone believes in the old ways.

and impart some of its power to the seeker. He or she would be instructed in the use of songs, paint designs and the rules and rituals associated with the use of the spirit's particular power or medicine.

In time, the Blackfoot and their allies controlled the region from the North Saskatchewan River in Alberta in the north, to the Yellowstone River in Montana in the south. The Territory was bordered on the west by the Rocky Mountains and on the east by the Eagle Hills and the Cypress Hills (see map of Traditional Blackfoot Territory in Appendix 2). The Blackfeet maintained control over the land through bitter wars with the Shoshoni, the Cree, the Assiniboins, the Flatheads, the Kutenais and the Crows, and in later times, their one-time allies, the Gro Ventres. As they increased in numbers, the Blackfoot drove out the tribes that stood in their way and their need for expansion. Berry (1995) describes the last great battle waged across the grounds of the University of Lethbridge and in the immediate surrounding area and river bottoms.

The 25 October 1870 battle at Lethbridge began when a band of mingled Cree, Sauteaux and Young Dogs from Touchwood Hills and South Assiniboin from Wood Mountain gathered at the call of Cree Chiefs at the Red Ocher Hills (now the Vermillion Hills northeast of Swift Current on the South Saskatchewan River). Eventually they numbered 600 to 800 warriors, hereafter referred to as Crees. The Crees knew the Blackfoot had been severely weakened in 1869 by a small pox epidemic. Thus they decided to attack the Blood Indians in camp on the Belly (now the Old Man) River near Fort Whoop-Up.³⁹

The Crees' misfortune was that they attacked only the center camp of the entire Blackfoot Confederacy, and were consequently quickly put to flight. Berry (1995) writes that the victorious Blackfoot suffered 40 killed and 50 wounded in the battle "through the coulees and across the river." The exact number of Cree losses, however, was not

³⁹ Berry 1995: 8.

ascertainable because many of the Cree drowned while attempting to cross the river. Conservative Cree losses were estimated at over 200.⁴⁰

The True Origin of The Blackfoot People

Percy Bullchild, in *The Sun Came Down*, passes on his Elder's account of the beginning of Blackfoot culture. The book traces the history of the Blackfoot since time immemorial. It reaches back to the Blackfoot Creator, the Sun, and the beginnings of the Blackfoot world. Bullchild tells of Napi, a Trickster figure who is both good and bad, and Ku-to-yis⁴¹ who is sent by the Sun to right Napi's misdoings. In his book Bullchild recounts the origins and cultural significance of Blackfoot ceremonies, including the importance of the Sundance in Blackfoot society.⁴² No other literary work captures as well the essence of the theology, folklore, and psychology of the Blackfoot people. In the words of Deloria,

The inventers of myth, Feyerabend reminds us, *started* culture; scientists merely *changed* it.⁴³

Bullchild very eloquently illustrates this concept throughout his work. Ironically, the legends of the Blackfeet have been compiled and recorded in the Western way by this Native Elder who saw the urgency to record and preserve "the version of our true ways in our history and in our legends."⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Ibid: 8.

⁴¹ Ku-to-yis, or Blood Clot, came to the Blackfeet after the departure of Napi who had become very foolish with the power entrusted to him and had made many mistakes. Ku-to-yis was sent by the Sun to set things right.

⁴² The Sundance is the supreme expression of the Blackfoot religion.

⁴³ Deloria 1999: 10.

⁴⁴ Bullchild 1985: front flap.

According to Blackfoot oral tradition as documented by Apikuni (Far Away White Robe),⁴⁵ also known as James Willard Shultz (1859-1947), an American who was adopted by the Blackfeet in Montana, the Blackfoot People came from the mountains.

Well Old Man having made the world,...It was in a small valley at the foot of great mountains; and soon the people became so many that they killed off all the game and began to starve....Said an old man to his wife, and three married sons, one day: ' I have had a talk with our Maker. He told me of a country he had made where game is plentiful, and pointed the way. Let us go find it.'⁴⁶

Where are these mountains today? One can only surmise that they are the Rocky Mountains to the west. The legend itself does not insinuate that the Blackfoot were a thousand miles away from their traditional Territory, and in fact, emphasizes that the Blackfoot have always been in the vicinity of the Rocky Mountains.

A Blackfoot Indian hearing this particular version may object, but our People must open their minds to the validity of our oral histories and how our histories fit together. Oral tradition tracks the history and travels of any Indigenous people, not only the free-roaming Blackfoot.⁴⁷

As stated previously, according to linguists, the Blackfoot language is from the Algonquian linguistic family which originated in the forests east of the Great Plains. Of the six tribes that supposedly migrated to the west during the historic period, the Cheyenne, the Plains Cree and the Plains Ojibwas were the later arrivals. It is here that

⁴⁵ Apikuni received his name from a noted warrior, Chief Running Crane, "...in recognition of Schultz's bravery on the war trail and in token of the Chief's friendship for the young white man." Some Blackfeet translate Apikuni as "Scabby Robe" which is how it appeared on the Blackfeet Tribal Rolls of 1907-1908 (see Hanna 1986: xiv).

⁴⁶ Shultz 1974: 146.

⁴⁷ According to McClintock (1992), the equestrian Blackfoot went on long expeditions, sometimes for several years, traveling as far as Mexico in their quest for adventure.

science and the oral tradition are at odds. According to Ewers (1982) in his description of the origins of the Plains Indian Nations,

The Arapahoe's, Gro Ventres, and the Blackfeet were older residents of the grasslands. However, persistent Arapahoes point out their migration from a region further east, probably the Red Deer Valley of Minnesota, and to Gro Ventre separation from that tribe. This leaves the Blackfoot as probably the earliest Algonkian [sic] residents of the plains.⁴⁸

Linguists say that the Blackfoot language differs from the parent language most markedly in its word formation and attribute this to relative isolation from other Algonquian-speaking peoples. They add that prolonged contact with other tribes speaking alien languages helps to explain why Blackfoot differs from all other Algonquian dialects. Oral tradition suggests that linguists are looking in the wrong direction for the origin of the Blackfoot People. Blood typing done on the Blackfoot during the 1940's and 1950's found that their blood types did not match any tribes that originated to the east of Blackfoot territory. Instead, the blood types matched Nations from British Columbia, lending credence to the oral tradition of the Blackfoot that situates them on the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains of Alberta and Montana. Dickason (1997) writes,

Like the Filipinos, Amerindians are almost lacking in A and B blood types, but there are some striking exceptions. A is found among the peoples of the Northwest Coast (in similar frequencies to Hawaiians), as well as among the Beaver, Slavey, and Assiniboin in the interior; most striking of all is the fact that the Blackfoot, Blood, and Peigan of the Northwestern Plains have the highest known percentages of A in the world.⁴⁹

An examination of the legend of Scar Face, a Blackfoot hero who triumphs over adversity through kindness, courage and perseverance, shows how the distribution of blood type A could have come about. The legend is documented by both Walter

⁴⁸ Ewers 1982: 6.

⁴⁹ Dickason 1997: 11.

McClintock in *The Old North Trail*, and by Percy Bullchild in *The Sun came Down*. The direction Scar Face traveled when he left his People was westward. Both writers mention the mountainous country that Scar Face traveled through before reaching the great waters (Pacific Ocean) and both speak of his journey back to the Territory of the Blackfoot. It is important to note that Scar Face was with Creator Sun during part of his travels; the Creator gave Scar Face the ceremony of the Sundance which he brought back to his people. After Scar Face returned and recounted the people and the places he had seen, others were encouraged to follow suit to view things for themselves. It is not hard to imagine that intermarriage would have taken place and that subsequent visiting and trading ensued. This could very well explain the high esteem that the Blackfoot have for the dentalium⁵⁰ shells used in jewelry adorning Blackfoot women and men even today.

Drawing upon oral tradition again, we turn our attention to the three distinct Blackfoot Nation bands, the Siksiká (the Blackfoot proper), the Káínaa (the Blood) and the Piikáni (the Peigan). Early explorers who first made contact with the Blackfoot People misidentified the Nation's bands, as the explorers relied on references made by the Cree Indians. Ewers (1982) found that the explorer Henday was not as observant as Cocking⁵¹ regarding the identity of the different tribes of the Confederacy, who Cocking recorded as "Powestic-Athinuwuck (ie.) Water-fall Indians, ...Mithco-Athinuwuck or Bloody Indians, Koskitow-Wathesitock or Blackfooted Indians, Pegonow or Muddy-

⁵⁰ Dentalium shells are found in several places in the world and are common on the northwest coast of North America. They were valued by the Indians as ornaments for regalia and also served as currency (see *The Encyclopedia Americana*, Canadian Edition).

⁵¹ Matthew Cocking was the third Hudson's Bay Company representative to travel through the Plains in 1772-1773. He hunted with the Blackfoot until his return trip to York.

Water Indians & Suxxewuck or Wood Country Indians,”⁵² and as they are still known today, the Gro Ventres, Bloods, Blackfeet, Peigan and Sarcee.

The alliance that made up the Blackfoot Confederacy had been established long before 1772, the year that Cocking reached Blackfoot Country. Although some history books say that the English were the first Europeans to come into contact with the Blackfoot, I would argue that the evidence suggests otherwise. The Blackfoot name for the Frenchman is “niitsaapiikoan,” which literally translates to “original Whiteman,” whereas the Blackfoot name for the English is “niitá’piaapiikoan,” which literally translates to “real Whiteman.” Early explorers and their translators confused the historical record by naming the People in French and English rather than documenting the names in Blackfoot, and probably without asking the People themselves who they were or how they referred to themselves. The observations of the early explorers, as described by Deloria (1999), recorded what they “wanted to see” and “wanted to believe”⁵³ in the communities they encountered.

Returning to the legend of Scar Face, it is postulated that several families did follow in the direction Scar Face had taken to visit the people west of the mountains. The Blackfoot Peoples’ name for themselves and their distinct divisions came about when one of these families, an old man and his three sons who had been residing in a mountainous area, was without food. They went on a journey to return to the land where the old man had probably been born – the land that Napi had given his people – the Great Plains on the east side of the mountains. When their journey ended after crossing the mountains, the sons had their first look at the buffalo, and since they were in need of meat, the oldest

⁵² Ewers 1982: 27.

⁵³ Deloria 1999: 189.

son asked if he could kill one for food. Schultz (1974) provides the following version of the legend.

‘Very well the’ father answered, ‘it shall be as you say.’ And he rubbed a secret black medicine on his son’s feet which enabled him to run right up alongside a band of animals and kill a number of them with bow and arrow.... ‘My son you have done a great favor to us all,’ said the father. ‘I see that we are to become a very numerous people; too many to all camp together and hunt together. Therefore, you and your children, and those to come after them, shall be known as the Blackfoot clan. In time to come you must leave us, and choose, and live in a part of this great hunting ground Old Man has given us....’⁵⁴

Upon hearing this, the other sons became jealous of their older brother and requested the same treatment be given to them and their families. Hearing their complaints, the father told them to go south and east to see what they could find for themselves. He would name them upon their return according to what they had accomplished. Schultz continues with the legend.

The sons departed at once and were gone a long time. The second son returned first, bringing some weapons, and some beautiful clothing of a strange people who had tried to kill him, and so the father named him Pi-kun-i; clothing..... “Came home the third, the youngest son. He had gone farthest, seen many strange peoples, and killed and scalped a number of their chiefs. Because of that the name Ahk-ai-na, or for short, Kai-na: Many Chiefs was given to him, for himself and those to come after him.”⁵⁵

With the mystery of the appearance of the Blackfoot origin partially settled through the interpretation of traditional narratives, and their names correctly explained, we find that the three tribes are not really “a Nation,” but an old and large, extended family.

What remains of the original Confederacy that Cocking met are the three Blackfoot tribes and the Sarcee’s (Tsuu T’ina); the Gro Ventres had long since left the

⁵⁴ Shultz 1974: 147.

⁵⁵ Ibid: 147-148.

area and the Confederacy and had become enemies of the Blackfoot due to a circumstance instigated by the Shoshoni. Grinnell (1921) describes how a war party of the Snakes (Shoshoni) killed two Gro Ventres and stole a white pony which they gave as a peace offering to a party of Peigans. The Gro Ventres, seeing their horse in the camp of the Peigan, assumed they had killed their Shoshoni tribesmen and “this led to a long war.”⁵⁶

Naató si and Napi

Many misinformed people have trouble dealing with Napi, the Trickster figure in Blackfoot legends and culture, and confuse him with the Supreme Being, Naató si (Holy-One). Percy Bullchild describes how Napi is not specific to the Blackfoot culture, but instead makes his appearance in Native cultures all over the Americas.

Among the many tribes of the American Native, this Napi, Old Man, was known in many ways and names. He was coyote to many Western Natives and to some of the many bands of Crees too. He was Raven to many Coastal tribes. To some he was *Sayn Day*. Old Man was known throughout the continents, North and South America and all in between, and is named many ways.⁵⁷

Napi is referred to as Nanabush by the Cree, Nannabozo in Ojibwaj, and Iktomi by the Dakota Sioux. Other tribes of Indians have their own names for him, but according to many written accounts, he is one and the same person.

Although we do not see Naató si, the Supreme Being, we can see the Sun, the expression of Supreme power. The Sun, in essence, is the visual manifestation of the Creator. It is essential to understand that we do not worship the Sun itself, but the Being *behind* the Sun. In prayer, we use the following to address the Creator:

⁵⁶ Grinnell 1921: 244.

⁵⁷ Bullchild 1985: 88.

Á pis totooki (Our maker – the one who made us)

Iih tsi páí ti pii yo' pa (Our Creator – the one through whom we live)

Napi

As the Creator was occupied with many duties, He needed someone to take care of things for him on earth. That person was Napi. Therefore, Napi was of the Sun, literally a part of the Sun. Bullchild found that from the beginning, our Native legends and history tell us that the Creator Sun took part of His spirit to shape a “solid form”⁵⁸ like that of the children He had created on Mother Earth. To this form, which Bullchild refers to as both “Old Man” and “Napi,” Creator Sun gave “much of his powers” and instructed him on what to share with the “brothers and sisters of Mother Earth.” Old Man was to emulate the life of Creator Sun, and, as His earthly embodiment, was to set an example for the People and teach them how to live.

The legends of Napi and the many wonders that he performed can still be seen and are still talked about within Blackfoot society and our traditional Territory. The many place names that reference these ancient stories are still in use today, and markings of his travels remain firmly fixed to the ground.

The stories of Napi and Ku-to-yis that Bullchild recorded in his book served to maintain the culture and tradition of the Blackfoot Nation. Their primary purpose is to imprint into children a sense of moral responsibility that they can live by throughout their lives. The center of Blackfoot spirituality revolves around the Creator, the Sun, and the very first Niitsitapii (real people) He created were Mudman and Ribwoman at the beginning of human life (Bullchild 1985).

⁵⁸ Ibid: 86.

Medicine Bundles

The pipe and tobacco were gifts received from Creator Sun. Medicine bundles were also received from Creator Sun or His representatives in nature. Medicine bundles, or Sacred Holy Bundles, collections of highly meaningful items wrapped and contained within rawhide cylinders, are of great spiritual significance and are revered by traditionalists.

The very earliest Medicine Bundle was given to the Blackfeet from the Star People who had received it from the Sun. This particular bundle was known as the Ancient Pipe Bundle. The next bundle to come to the Blackfeet was the Preserving Pelts Pipe Bundle, received from the Beaver persons. The Blackfoot People defended their territory great determination, not only to protect the large numbers of wildlife within their Territory, but because the most important part of their spiritual beliefs involved these animals that were central to their religion. The fur-bearing animals coveted by the Europeans in their never-ending quest for riches made up the spiritual components of this Sacred Holy Bundle. Bullchild (1985) explains the correct name for the bundle and the origin of the name.

This holy pipe bundle was given to a young man and his wife by the animals of Mother Earth and her body... Among us Peigans, this particular pipe bundle is known too as ni-nam-sky-yah-koo-yi-nee-mahn, Selecting a Chief Pipe. This is wrong according to the right translation of Native words, and the story of where the holy pipe bundle came from... The right translation of what it meant in the first place was, "Preserving Pelts Pipe Bundle," and is pronounced in our Native tongue as Preserving Pelts Pipe. It is known to be a bundle of our holy faith. The original word for this was ee-ins-kaa-oo-yin-ee-mahn, which explained the origination of this particular pipe bundle. It meant "peeling the hide or pelt off of an animal and preserving it by tanning it." This Preserving Pelts Pipe Bundle

consisted mostly of the many small fur-bearing animals of the Piegan area at the time this pipe was given to this certain young couple.⁵⁹

This particular Bundle, given to the Blackfoot People through the young couple, was a direct gift from a Beaver Person. It became one of the most important aspects of Blackfoot spirituality. All aspects of ceremony and transfer rights, and all the fur-bearing animals and all of the birds of the Northwest were contained in this Bundle. Insects and fish were also represented, as were the lizards and frogs, all creatures that the Blackfoot revered. The ceremonial transfer from the Beaver Person to the young couple took four days to complete, and during each of those days, the ceremonies were carried on from early in the morning until late at night. The young couple was taught the secrets that accompanied the Bundle, and they learned of its “mysterious source of power” that extended to all those present at the ceremony. The place where this transfer took place, then an isolated and far-off place, is now known as Waterton Lakes National Park.⁶⁰

It is for this reason that the Beaver itself was protected by the Blackfoot, and combined with the mandate set down by Napi, the Blackfoot and their allies maintained a concerted effort to keep all others out of their Territory. They not only defended their homeland and its wildlife, but their religious beliefs as well. They could be called the first environmentalists of this great Northwest.

In essence, these religious articles predated what is known as the Medicine Lodge, now referred to as the Sundance, which was given to Scar Face by the Sun. The Pipe and Tobacco, along with the two Medicine Bundles, formed the foundation of Blackfoot Spirituality - they were all gifts stemming directly from the Sun and nature.

⁵⁹ Bullchild 1985: 292.

⁶⁰ Ibid: 321.

Chapter III - The Horse and The Gun



Kerry Scott

The Horse and The Gun, 2005

Acrylic on Canvas

30" x 36"

Collection of the Artist

The Horse and The Gun painting represents the peak period of military power of the Blackfoot Nation. With the horse and the gun, the Blackfoot and their allies that made up the Confederacy, were able to maintain complete control of their territory, thereby protecting the power and place of their Territory. This period also symbolizes the beginning of the change in the Blackfoot language from an animated and dynamic verb-based language to an inanimate noun-based language.

This was the time of growth, wealth and expansion because of the horse and the gun. It was also the beginning of a drastic change in the Blackfoot Peoples' perspective and outlook on life. For the Blackfoot and other Plains Indians, the horse was one of the few good things that the Europeans brought to North America. The horse played a major role in the lives of the Plains Indians, and whole new cultures evolved with a change from pedestrian to equestrian People.

Nowhere on the face of the earth could a people be found that could match the riding abilities of the Plains Indian People. Never has there been a more inspiring sight than the "iconic figure of the mounted warrior."⁶¹ In order to satisfy popular fascination with this image, Hollywood has spent and made millions of dollars trying to recapture the awe- inspiring sight of a mounted Indian warrior on the warpath, creating the "quintessential American epic." Based on personal experience in the film industry, that image still exists in the minds of the general public and movie makers.⁶² In addition, most Europeans maintain a mental picture of a fierce and proud individual decked out in all his finery and war paint, mounted on his prancing war horse, and setting out to lift some scalps and plunder the helpless. Ironically, Native people today can barely relate to these images and most cannot even ride a horse.

⁶¹ Hämäläinen 2003: 1.

⁶² Kerry Scott's film industry credits include:

- Native Advisor (2006). Buffalo Coat Productions Inc.: *Bury My Heart At Wounded Knee*.
- Native Advisor (2004-2005). Dreamworks (Stephen Spielberg) Television and Turner Network Television: *Into the West - Wheel to the Stars*.
- Native Advisor (2004-2005). Dreamworks (Stephen Spielberg) Television and Turner Network Television: *Into the West - Manifest Destiny*.
- Native Advisor (2004-2005). Dreamworks (Stephen Spielberg) Television and Turner Network Television: *Into the West - Dreams and Schemes*.
- Native Advisor (2002). Hallmark Entertainment: *Dreamkeepers*.

Yet for the Plains People, the image of the expert equestrian was fact, and was captured by great ethno-historical artists such as Charles M. Russell, Frederic Remington, George Catlin, Carl Wimar and Karl Bodmer. The expression “a picture is worth a thousand words” is appropriate here, but when one studies some of the great works by these artists, even a thousand words is not enough to tell the stories behind their images.

The Myth of the “Noble Savage”

The noble savage myth, as postulated by Rousseau, was in fact a myth and was not directed at North American Indians. “Rousseau and other romantics attacked scientific progress, glorified emotion, and praised the ‘natural man,’”⁶³ however the concept was specific to the different social strata that made up Rousseau’s European society (Kaufman 1980). The noble savage figure is more likely to be found in writings such as *The Imaginary Indian* by Daniel Francis (1992), who clearly implies that artists such as Paul Kane “manipulated” their images of Indians with their “fanciful” portrayals.

Early artists, such as Charlie Russell, Frederick Remington, Winold Reiss and Thomas Mails, painted from what they saw; they were not tainted by misinterpretations of others. These artists were realists who had no need for abstract imagery or embellishment. Another example is the artist Nicholas de Grandmaison (1892-1978), whose sought out the “pure Indian,” untainted by European blood to depict in his portraits of Native Americans (Dempsey 1982). The self-imposed mandate of these artists was to record what they observed, without the constraint of satisfying a capricious public.

⁶³ Kaufmann 1980: 23.

In 1832, self-taught artist and Indian enthusiast George Catlin painted the earliest known portraits of Blackfoot Indians at Fort Union. Catlin painted in an era that sought to capture the “noble and vanishing savage,” and although he was considered to be an idealist, he left a valuable legacy through his works of art. Catlin wrote,

The Blackfoot are, perhaps, one of the most (if not entirely the most) numerous and warlike tribes on the Continent. They occupy the whole of the country about the sources of the Missouri, from this place to the Rocky mountains; and their numbers, from best computations, are something like forty or fifty thousand they are (like all other tribes whose numbers are sufficiently large to give them boldness) warlike and ferocious, i.e. they are predatory, are roaming fearlessly about the country, even into and through every part of the Rocky Mountains, and carrying war amongst their enemies, who are, every tribe who inhabit the country about them.⁶⁴

The Blackfoot, although declining from the heights of their military power when Catlin was introduced to them, continued to instill fear in their Indian enemies and white people alike. Their reputation was duly deserved, but not for reasons ascribed by European explorers; the Blackfoot were just protecting a territory that had been given to them by the Creator. Grinnell (1972) recorded the following legend, as told to him by Double Runner, Small Leggings, Mad Wolf and Little Blackfoot, at a meeting on the Two Medicine River in approximately 1892. According to the four Blackfoot informants, Napi was very clear in his instructions to the Blackfoot Confederacy that the People were to protect the land *he had given to them*.

In later times once, *Ná pi* said, “Here I will mark you off a piece of ground,” and he did so. Then he said: Let no other people come onto it. This is for you five tribes (Blackfoot, Bloods, Peigans, Gro Ventres, Sarcees). When people come to cross the line, take your bows and arrows, your lances and your battle axes, and give them battle and keep them out. If they gain a footing trouble will come to you.”⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Catlin 1973: 42.

⁶⁵ Grinnell 1972: 143.

Double Runner, one of the informants, understood very well the significance of the record that Grinnell was making, as Double Runner knew that times were changing and, in the future, education would be paramount to the Blackfoot Nation. He knew that in the future, the People would not know about the things of their grandfathers unless they read it in books such as the one Grinnell was writing.⁶⁶

Dog Days

Before the horse appeared in Blackfoot culture, the dog was the beast of burden for the Blackfoot People. Just as in contemporary times when an existing model of transportation is phased out due to new technology or a newer model, so was the dog replaced by the horse in Blackfoot culture, but the dog remained and still holds a place of honor among the Blackfoot. Grinnell (1921) recorded the views of an unnamed Peigan about dogs.

‘They are our true friends,’ he said. ‘Men say they are our friends and then turn against us, but dogs are always true. They mourn when we are absent, and are always glad when we return. They keep watch for us in the night when we sleep. So pity the poor dogs.’⁶⁷

Dogs were essentially retired from heavy work and most of their transport duties were taken over by the horse, but dogs continued to patrol the camp, clean up the leftovers and watch the children. Due to its size and strength, the horse vastly improved the mobility of a whole camp. Not only could the horse be ridden, it could also transport more weight than the dog, and with the introduction of the gun, the Blackfoot became the strongest Nation on the Northwestern plains.

⁶⁶ Ibid: vii.
⁶⁷ Ibid: 207.

The first documented English contact with the Blackfoot Confederacy, as mentioned earlier, was established by Henday who recorded in his Journal of 1754-55 that the Blackfoot were mounted on horses. Henday describes the horses of the Indians of the Northwestern plains as “fine tractable animals, about 14 hands high; lively and clean made.”⁶⁸ More evidence is from Cocking who writes that the Blackfoot were mounted in the year 1772.

It would be impossible to identify the tribe with any degree of certainty were it not that Cocking supplies the key. He, too, visited the Archithinues, and in his Journal, under date of December 1st, 1772, he says; “This tribe is named Powestic-Athinewuck (i.e.) Water-fall Indians. There are four Tribes or Nations more, which are all Equestrian Indians...”⁶⁹

By all accounts rendered by these early explorers, the Blackfoot were already fine horsemen and their horses were of fine stock. Thus the acquisition of the first horse by the Blackfoot is narrowed down to a short period of time preceding 1754. Some sources put the horse in the possession of the Blackfoot as early as 1730.⁷⁰ Other sources, such as Ewers (1982), record that the Blackfoot first saw the horse when being attacked by Shoshoni mounted on these “strange new weapons” in approximately 1730.⁷¹

The question that remains is from where and how the Blackfoot acquired the horse. Ewers (2001) suggests that it was “improbable” that the horse came from the Shoshoni to the Blackfoot because they were at war with each other. Instead, Ewers proposes that the horse was acquired through trade with the “Flatheads, Kutenai, Nez Percé, or Gro Ventres.”⁷² Hämäläinen (2003) corroborates this theory, saying that the

⁶⁸ Henday 1907: 338.

⁶⁹ Hyde 1933: 31.

⁷⁰ Internet: <http://www.telusplanet.net/public/dgarneau/indian16.htm>

⁷¹ Ewers 1982: 21.

⁷² Ewers 2001: 19.

horse spread to the north, “not through the Plains, but via the ancient Rocky Mountain trade network.”⁷³ Renk (2003) writes that the horse had already arrived in Kootenai territory by the early 1700s. As the Flathead had a tradition of friendly trade with the Blackfoot,⁷⁴ it is highly likely that horses were also trade items. The Manataka American Indian Council historical time lines supports this premise as the way in which the Blackfoot acquired the horse, because of “peaceful” trade between them and the Flathead, Kootenai, and Nez Percé from 1730 to 1750.⁷⁵

Milloy (1972) suggests another strong connection between the Blackfoot and the Kootenai, based on the writings of Father P. de Smet who found similarities between the languages of the two Nations.

So it was seen by some early observers. Alexander Mckenzie, for one, noted that they “speak a language of the own” and in emphasizing his point stated “nor have I heard of any Indians with whose language that which they speak has any affinity.” Father P. de Smet was somewhat more observant on this point. He discovered that the Kootinai language is altogether different from the language of the above mentioned tribes [Flatheads and Nez Perces]. It resembles rather the language of the Blackfeet.⁷⁶

Oral tradition tells us that that the Kootenai and the Blackfoot were intermittently friends and enemies, which explains the similarities in their languages, dress, religions and material cultures. Consider also the alliance that was maintained between the tribes of the Flathead, Shoshoni, and Kootenai (Ewers 1982). The latter were situated closest to their enemy, the Blackfoot. Milloy (1972) reports that the Salish (Flathead) and Shoshoni had completely withdrawn from the Plains by 1760 and 1805, respectively. The Kootenai, with their Flathead and Shoshoni allies, had defended their territory admirably,

⁷³ Hämäläinen 2003: 24.

⁷⁴ Ibid: 19.

⁷⁵ Internet: Manataka American Indian Council

⁷⁶ Milloy 1972: 18.

but by themselves following the retreat of their allies across the mountains, they were no match for the Blackfoot Confederacy and were the last to retreat in 1807. It is difficult to explain why the Kootenai were allowed to stay for so long by themselves. One explanation could be the horse which, according to Dickason (1997), was an important trade item for them.

Horses were the Kutenai's principle stock-in-trade, much desired by the Peigan and other Plains people, who consequently took all more care to see that the Kutenai did not gain access to European traders. Nor' Wester Duncan M'Gillvary (early 1770's-1808), at Fort George on the Saskatchewan, noted in his journal that 'the Coutonee's [Kutenai] a tribe from the Southwest are determined to force their way this year [1795] to the Fort or perish in the attempt.' They pinned their faith for 'obtaining a safe passage hither by bribing their enemies with bands of horses.'⁷⁷

Given the trading relationships described earlier, 1795 would not have had the first instance of horse trading between the Blackfoot and Kootenai. The Kootenai were desperate to force their way through to Fort George to the east, and the only Indians to stand in their way were the Blackfoot. It follows then that the horse was first used as a means of bribery to allow the Kootenai to hunt for buffalo out on the plains as they had been accustomed to doing,⁷⁸ and in this way the Blackfoot obtained their first horses, long before the fur trade became established in Blackfoot territory.

Out of the Water

The horse evolving from salt water is the tradition to which many Native myths adhere. It is the same for the Peigan and, for example, the Crow, both of whom had horses brought to them by different routes and different Indians. What must have been eye witness accounts of the appearance of the first horse in the Americas was passed on

⁷⁷ Dickason 1997: 179.

⁷⁸ Internet: Multicultural Canada – Aboriginals: Ktunaxa

by oral tradition, and from Nation to Nation. Ewers (2001) suggests that the Crow and the Peigan myths “developed from a common source.”⁷⁹ This example is in itself adequate to corroborate the myth of the horse emerging from a great salt lake and pinpoint Utah as the logical source of the myth. However the myth, if followed up further, is not a myth but a bona fide fact.

The horse owes its “supernatural” origins to the arrival of the Spaniards. The first (modern) horse was introduced to the Americas by Christopher Columbus in 1493. The horse made its first appearance on the mainland with Cortez’s expedition to Mexico in 1519; its diffusion began from that expedition, as did the so-called myth. In order to land their livestock, the Spaniards had no recourse but to swim them to shore. Thus, the emergence of the horse from “a great salt lake” is fact, and once again, oral history is supported. As Deloria (1999) found, oral traditions are worthy of careful examination, as they hold within them “tribal memories” that have been “taught for thousands of years.”

Over a decade earlier, Dr. D. Wayne Moodie, A.J.W. Catch Pole, and Kerry Abel reviewed the tradition and concluded that the Native tradition might have very well been an eye witness account.⁸⁰

The Spaniards were largely responsible for the “supernatural” appearance of the horse as related in Indian mythology. They took great advantage of the Southern Indians in every way imaginable, particularly their beliefs in signs and prophesy. Todorov (1984) relates a vision of a Michoacán priest, living with his Nation in the vicinity of present day Mexico City, who dreamed that “people would appear bring strange animals which turned out to be the horses which he had not known...”⁸¹

⁷⁹ Ewers 2001: 298.

⁸⁰ Deloria 1999: 118.

⁸¹ Todorov 1984: 93.

By preying on the Southern Indians beliefs in signs of the supernatural and enmities against one another, and combined with smallpox and other diseases that they brought, the Spaniards were quickly able to overpower the Nations of Mexico, facing only token resistance. The sense of the supernatural of these southern tribes was experienced time and time again when their Spanish enemies appeared on horseback. Such was the case when the Blackfeet first encountered the horse in battle against the Shoshoni in approximately 1730. The Blackfoot were frightened out of their wits, and literally their country. However, unlike the Shoshoni who left a dead horse on the battlefield, the Spaniards went to great lengths to keep the horse a mystery. Todorov (1984) explains,

At first the Indians are not sure that the Spaniards' horses are mortal beings; in order to sustain this uncertainty, Cortés has the animal corpses buried during the night after the battle. He will resort to many other stratagems in order to dissimulate his true sources of information, to make it appear that his information comes not from an exchange with human beings but from the supernatural realm.⁸²

The Blackfoot had their own escapades with the Spanish, and one of the stories was documented by the explorer David Thompson in his narratives (Tyrell 1968).

In the year 1807, in the early part of September a party of about two hundred and fifty Warriors under the command of Kootana appe went off to war on the Snake Indians; they proceeded southward near the east of the Mountains and found no natives, they continued further usual, at length the scouts came in with word that they had seen a long file of Horses and Mules led by Black Men (Spaniards) and not far off...the Spaniards all rode off leaving the loaded Horses and Mules to the war party, each of whom endeavored to make prize of a Horse or Mules. They were loaded with bags containing a great weight of white stones (silver) which they quickly threw off the animals on the ground...

⁸² Ibid: 111.

The place this war party started from is about 53° 20' N, and the place where the Spaniards conveying the silver from the mines is about the latitude of 32 degrees north a distance of 1500 miles in a direct line.⁸³

As word spread that the Spaniards were not the Gods they claimed to be, their ruse was put to a halt by the Pueblo revolt in New Mexico of 1680, which, as Espinosa (1988) writes, sent the Spaniards quickly back to the Rio Grande.

Toward the middle of the century, however, oppressive treatment of the Indians by unscrupulous Spanish governors, compounded by economic hardships, weakened respect for all Spanish authority and led to constant hostile acts and plotting by rebellious Pueblo Indian leaders. In 1680 a secretly planned and well-executed general Pueblo Indian revolt took place, and Spaniards who survived the bloody massacre fled southward to El Paso del Rio del Norte.⁸⁴

So while the Spaniards invincible mystique vanished with their retreat to warmer climates, the horse remained with its mystique that probably preceded its introduction to the many nations of the Northwestern Plains.

The Gun

The gun, known to the Plains Cree because of the expansion of the Hudson Bay Company into their territory starting at the end of the 17th century (Mandelbaum 1937), had yet to make its appearance in Blackfoot communities. With the horse in the possession of their Shoshoni, Flathead and Kootenai enemies, the Blackfoot found themselves in a precarious dilemma. In the 1730s, they were still a pedestrian People, pushed to the northern part of their territory and subsequently were in retreat of the Shoshoni advancement as described below in the quote from Saukamappee, an aged Indian that David Thompson interviewed (Ewers 1982).

⁸³ Tyrell 1968: 370.

⁸⁴ Espinosa 1988: xv.

Never before had the Blackfeet seen horses. Unable to cope with their enemies' new mobility alone, the Piegans sent messengers to the friendly Cree and Assiniboin camps asking for help. These neighbors not only sent warriors but brought with them a new and equally strange weapon- a curious hollow rod of iron which made a terrifying noise and hurled a tiny missile so swiftly that the human eye could not follow its flight, and with such force that it could kill or cripple an animal or a man at a distance. The allies brought ten of these new fangled contraptions, with about thirty rounds of ammunition for each.⁸⁵

Terrified and running on foot from a mounted enemy, the Blackfoot were easily dispensed of by the Shoshoni. Unfortunately for the Shoshoni, while they were already in possession of the horse, they had had not yet gained possession of the gun. In desperation, the Blackfoot called upon their Cree allies⁸⁶ who brought the gun to the defense of the Blackfoot. It was then the Shoshonis' turn to retreat south, terrorized by the sound of the gun and the damage it caused. Thus, with the gun in hand and the knowledge that the horse could be used to make war, the Blackfoot soon acquired horses from one of their neighbors, the Kootenai, who had probably heard of the destruction that the gun had dealt to their Shoshoni allies. In this way, the two most important elements came to the Blackfoot that made them most feared tribe on the Northwestern Plains, by both whites and Indians alike.

The dog, meanwhile, still respected by the Blackfoot, was to be immortalized forever in the Blackfoot language, for in the naming of this new animal that replaced him, the Blackfoot named the horse in reference to their friend. According to Ewers (2001),

⁸⁵ Ewers 1982: 21.

⁸⁶ Most Blackfoot Indians today would be shocked to find out that in the past, their closest Indian allies were the Cree Indians. The Blackfoot Indians who live within driving distance of Lethbridge, Alberta are reminded daily of the last great Indian battle between the Blackfoot and the Cree. Most Indians of this area have ancestors that participated in the fight, and the accounts of this battle are relatively fresh in their memories. The pre-battle history of the friendship between these tribes is rarely mentioned or hardly known of today. Ironically, it was this alliance that enabled the Blackfoot to secure for themselves both gun and horse, in that order. (See Tyrell 1968.)

the Blackfoot first called the horse “big dog,” but by 1790, the name had evolved to “ponokomita” (elk dog).⁸⁷

The horse soon took over the chores of the dog, who then lived a more favoured life. The life of the Indians, on the other hand began to degenerate. On the surface, life seemed much easier, but a drastic change had begun, the impact of which still affects Blackfoot language, beliefs and thought. The horse was a “mixed blessing” that brought many advantages to the Blackfoot through wealth, power and faster mobility, but it also brought “destabilization, dispossession, and destruction.”⁸⁸ It was the beginning of the assimilation of two vastly different languages and cultures, and the name of the horse, translated as elk-dog or big dog, traveled along with its diffusion north, from tribe to tribe, language to language, and Nation to Nation.

Raiders of the Plains

With the gun and the horse firmly in the possession of the Blackfoot, they became known as ‘Raiders of the Plains.’ The Blackfoot, as directed by Napi, defended the boundaries of their lands against all other people with warlike ferocity and dealt out death to those that ventured into their lands without their permission. The Blackfoot Nation repelled all other Indigenous Nations that surrounded their Territory and also kept out the French, the English, the Spanish and other nationalities that sought to enter to exploit the rich trapping grounds. The ferocity with which the Blackfoot defended their homeland was undeniable, and there are many accounts of deaths of both white and Indian people who ventured into Blackfoot country attempting to take advantage of the valuable

⁸⁷ Ewers 2001: 16.

⁸⁸ Hämäläinen 2003: 3.

resources. Ewers (1982) writes that attacks by the Blackfoot were so frequent that trapping was difficult and insignificant numbers of beaver pelts were harvested. A war record of one of the Blackfoot Indians against the fur traders was also documented by George Catlin who painted a portrait of a warrior who boasted of taking with his own hand the scalps of eight trappers and traders.⁸⁹

The “zero tolerance” for anyone other than the Blackfoot to hunt in their lands was documented from the time of Heday’s arrival in Blackfoot country, many years before the arrival of the American fur traders along the Missouri river. MacGregor (1954) records the experiences of other Natives who knew that to venture into Blackfoot territory to trap meant a likely death.

The days drifted along until near the end of December, when, Heday says: “...Killed 2 Waskesew and 2 Moose: I set a Wolf-Hap [sic]. I asked the Natives why they did not Hap [sic] Wolves: they made the answer that the Archithinue Natives would kill them, if they trapped in their country.”⁹⁰

The Blackfoot continued their war against intruders non-stop from 1806 when Captain Merriwether Lewis had the ill-fated meeting with a group of Piikáni below the junction of the Two Medicine River and Badger Creek on the present day Blackfoot reservation in the United States. It was here that the war began in earnest for the Piikáni who guarded that part of Blackfoot territory, and for the next twenty-five years, there was no peace between the Piikáni and the American traders, trappers and neighboring enemy tribes. The American traders were forced to withdraw from the vicinity of Blackfoot territory in 1811. Ironically, the withdrawal of the Americans because of the threat of the Blackfoot Nation led to the “discovery” of the Oregon trail (Ewers 1982).

⁸⁹ Catlin 1973: 50.

⁹⁰ MacGregor 1954: 191.

A compromise of sorts was reached in 1830 between the Blackfoot and the traders when Kenneth Mckenzie, a former employee of the Hudson Bay Company, built a trading post at the mouth of the Yellowstone within the boundaries of Assiniboin territory for the American Fur Company. Although this post catered to the Assiniboin, the Plains Cree and the Plains Ojibwas, its main purpose was to establish a presence near Blackfoot Territory, for it was in this country that the richest and most valuable furs lay. Ewers (1982) writes that Mckenzie relied on the services of another former Hudson Bay employee, Jacob Berger, to establish a tenuous peace with the Blackfoot.

Among the men at Fort Union there was a seasoned old trader who had served some twenty-one years in the Canadian fur trade, a goodly part of it with the Hudson's Bay Company in Blackfoot country. This man, Jacob Berger, spoke the Blackfoot language...Mckenzie succeeded in establishing peaceful relations with the warlike Piegans because he offered them a real Indian trade. The Indians themselves would collect the furs and barter them at the posts of his company. This adoption of the Canadian system by the Big Knives won the approval of the Indians. The Blackfoot chiefs told Major Sanford, Indian agent for the Upper Missouri tribes, 'If you will send Traders into our Country we will protect them & treat them well; but for trappers-Never.'⁹¹

It is clear that the Blackfoot were very adept at defending all corners of their domain. They had to be a very numerous people or this would have been an impossible task, considering the extent of the Territory. The Nation kept up a steady defense of their lands until 1837. In this time they allowed for some trade but maintained their vigilance against all interlopers, including the earliest missionaries to Blackfoot country. The missionaries were just as adamant in condemning the Blackfoot Indians as anyone else whose efforts to enter into Blackfoot territory were thwarted. Harper (1969) records the words of Father De Smet, a Jesuit priest, who concluded,

⁹¹ Ewers 1982: 56-57.

The Blackfeet are the only Indians of whose salvation we would have reason to despair, if the ways of God were the same as those of man, for they are murderers, thieves, traitors, and all that is wicked.⁹²

Donnelly (1967) records the words of another Jesuit priest, Nicolas Point, who traveled with Father De Smet and was just as “flattering” in his description of the Blackfoot people.

At the mere mention of bloody Blackfeet, American travelers have visions of the worst possible things in Hell. A hundred times they have heard travelers preceding them say that these terrible enemies of the whites breathe only pillage and carnage, and this is not without some foundation in truth. But what the travelers do not always add is that the Blackfeet are all this and something else besides.⁹³

The years between 1806 and 1837 were rife with war, not the time to be hunting and trapping in Blackfoot country. Many American fur trappers, traders and free trappers lost their lives. Some of the American fur-trading companies that were completely run out of the country included the Missouri Fur Company in 1821, and The Rocky Mountain Fur Company in 1822. The latter opened up again in 1825 on the western side of the Rocky Mountains which caused it to be especially hated because it supplied arms and ammunition to the Indian enemies of the Blackfoot who made no distinctions among interlopers; they were all considered enemies. Harper (1969) records a letter dated September 6, 1846, written by Father De Smet.

On the 16th of August we left St. Mary’s by a mountain gap, called the “Devil’s gate,” [Hell Gate; Fr. Porte de l’Enfer] a name which it probably received from the fact of its forming the principle entrance of the marauding parties of the Blackfeet.⁹⁴

An interesting observation can be made here, for De Smet wrote that letter in 1846, sixty six years after the Blackfoot People had been decimated by the smallpox

⁹² Harper 1969: 318.

⁹³ Donnelly 1967: 111.

⁹⁴ Harper 1969: 583.

epidemic of 1780. And even though it was the second epidemic to strike the Nation, the first striking in 1764, De Smet had a very negative opinion of Blackfoot. The two epidemics had taken an enormous toll on the strength of the Blackfoot People, yet they were still a formidable force.

As late as 1870, the Blackfoot were able to successfully defend their Territory, without engaging in an actual battle between the Blackfoot and the United States Army, or in Canada against the Red Coats. Only one event can be considered an encounter between the Blackfoot and an army acting on behalf of a government. The Baker Massacre occurred on January 23, 1870, when Col. E.M. Baker of the U.S. army ordered the attack on a friendly Piikáni village located on the Marias River in present-day Montana. Many people of the camp had suffered from smallpox. Baker's attack resulted in the deaths of 173 Peigans and the capture of 140 women and children. After destroying the lodges and camp equipment, the army released the captives and left them homeless in the frigid winter.⁹⁵

The question we are left with is, did the Blackfoot actually inspired fear in all their enemies because they had an all-consuming lust for the death of others, or were they compelled to do so for other reasons. The answer is that the Blackfoot defense of their Territory was based on a simple directive from Napi – *they were to protect their land from all intruders*. The words of the Piikáni, Double Runner, Small Leggings, Mad Wolf and Little Blackfoot, regarding the directive from Napi were recorded by Grinnell (1972) as follows:

⁹⁵ Ewers 1982: 250. The Indian agent, W.A. Pease, himself an army lieutenant, had reported that only fifteen of the dead Indians had been fighting men between the ages of twelve and thirty-seven, while ninety were women and fifty were children under twelve years of age.

Our forefathers gave battle to all people who came to cross these lines, and kept them out. Of late years we have let our friends, the white people, come in, and you know the results. We, his [Napi's] children, have failed to obey his laws.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Grinnell 1972: 144.

Chapter IV - Contact - Black Robes and Christianity



Kerry Scott

Black Robes and Christianity, 2005

Acrylic on Canvas

30" x 36"

Collection of the Artist

*The painting, **Black Robes and Christianity**, symbolizes a concept that did not exist in Native spirituality prior to contact: the devil. It was the time when belief in our Creator was undermined. It was the time when our legends were ridiculed and our spiritual societies were accused of consorting with demons. It was a time when Our Indian Creator was called the Father of Lies. Our faith in our Holy Bundles was eroded and their purity and sacredness were attacked by Christian missionaries. It was a time when our sacred bundles were desecrated and destroyed.*

This was the beginning of acculturation and conversion, and the time when the erosion of our culture and traditions began. It was the time of a profound degeneration of relatedness, the advent of the wearing away of old time spirituality, community and culture, and it was the beginning of colonization.

Prior to contact, the Blackfoot practiced a natural faith, relying only on their senses, logic and nature to direct them. A very complicated relationship with the Sun, as the central focus of reverence, evolved from within this world and the cosmos. The Sun was the unmatched source of light, of existence and of supremacy. The Blackfoot considered themselves to be a part of nature, and spirituality related directly to the social and political life of the People. The spiritual life they once enjoyed was a relationship to all things that they connected to in their daily survival. Peat (2002) writes,

Quantum physics pictures the material world as being the outward manifestation of patterns, forms, balances, and relations of energy. Likewise, the first People speak of relationships among the powers and spirits that surround them. The various alliances, compacts, and relationships that the People have entered into with these powers form an important aspect of this Indigenous world. These relationships carry with them obligations and the necessity of carrying out periodic ceremonies of renewal, of which one of the most important is the Sun Dance.⁹⁷

That life, and the very existence of the Native, was overrun by the many denominations of Christian missionaries that started to descend on the Natives. As the influence of the Christians spread, the spirituality of the Native mind as it existed before contact became warped and twisted by the teachings of the missionaries.

Prior to the appearance of Christianity, spirituality was intimately connected to a particular territory and the community in which they lived, and was maintained by culture and tradition. Deloria (1994) provides the following quote to describe the true meaning

⁹⁷ Peat 2002: 31.

of Christianity in this description from the traveler Tom Newcomb, as cited by Ernest Thompson Seton, his guide in 1912 and 1914 in the West,

I tell you I never saw more kindness or real Christianity anywhere. The poor, the sick, the aged, the widows and the orphans were always looked after first. Whenever we moved camp, someone took care that the widow's lodges were moved first and set up first. After every hunt, a good-sized chunk of meat was dropped at each door where it was most needed. I was treated like a brother; and I tell you I have never seen any community of church people that was as really truly Christians as that band of Indians.⁹⁸

In the conflict between Christianity and Indian spirituality, one religion had to lose. Indian spirituality was made the villain, making the transition to Christianity for Indian people not much of a contest. For the average believer, it is simple to be a Christian. He goes to church once a week. He can be rotten throughout the week and then one confession relieves him of his sins. The Christian comes to no harm by denying himself of a few frills that he can easily do without. There is no suffering except what he denies himself, and what he denies is usually not essential to life. In contrast, traditional Indian spirituality is difficult. Sacrifice is part of life – worldly belongings, the body, abstinence and fasting for days – bringing hardship and physical, emotional and mental pain. Indian spirituality requires the individual to *commit to act* every day with everything that surrounds him. Turning away from the hardships of Indian spirituality was not a difficult choice when Christianity presented a “much easier and more practical religion” (Deloria 1988).

⁹⁸ Deloria 1994: 201.

But, Christianity does not fit. It came from a certain land, for those people, and their relationship to their land. It did not come from this land. As Lame Deer (1994) writes,

His [Jesus] religion came out of the desert in which he lived, out of his kind of mountains, his kind of animals, his kind of plants.⁹⁹

What did Christianity do for the Indian people? It made them turn away from what can be considered “true Christianity.” And this is ironic because the former life of the Indians constituted a communal way of life, and helping each other was what brought strength to the tribe. Christianity, as it was taught and as it is practiced in this land, has caused the Indian people to focus on the individual and has taken them away from the community. Spiritual conviction for Indians before Christianity held a significant station in life. It incorporated the daily life of the social order of the people so that life was experienced in unison. Christianity, on the other hand, has demonstrated the ability to morally defeat this principle, allowing communal living to break up until life itself has become a number of unrelated categories. Christianity is about individualism, about each person’s relationship with the Divine. It is something the Native mind cannot reconcile.

⁹⁹ Lame Deer, John (Fire), and Erdoes, Richard 1994: 168.

Chapter V - Slashed World



Kerry Scott

Slashed World, 2006

Acrylic on Canvas

30" x 40"

Collection of the Artist

The slashed world painting represents the horrific transition that the Blackfoot experienced when their old way of life was interrupted with the arrival of the European. The destruction of the buffalo herds and other wildlife wreaked havoc with the independent lifestyle of the Blackfoot. Smallpox, alcohol and starvation threatened the Blackfoot on a daily basis.

This was the time of complete breakdown of a culture, of an attack by alcohol, dependence on trade goods, extermination of the natural food chain, a home base intruded upon and lost and the ever presence of the missionaries. It was the time of germ warfare attempted on the Indian People – the time of the dreaded smallpox epidemics of 1764; 1780-1781; 1837-1838; 1869-1870. For the Blackfoot Nation, it was the time of chaos and uncertainty, because of increased invasion of their territory by the Euro-American, justified by an unknown God, and attacks by an enemy they could not see, resulting in the loss of scores of the People.

The total lack of immunity of Natives to the European “political assassination squad”¹⁰⁰ of diseases, such as the common cold, influenza, measles and typhus, accounted for the deaths of millions of Native people. The most destructive, however, was smallpox. Although this section focuses on the effects of smallpox and the resulting decimation of the Blackfoot People, one must not forget other factors that, combined with this disease, had devastating impacts. Todorov (1984) writes about the Indigenous population of Mexico, and the impact of disease, the Spanish brutality and the loss of freedom on their spirits.

The half-caste Juan Bautista Pomar, in his *Relación de Texcoco*, finished around 1582, reflects on the causes of depopulation, which he estimates, quite accurately moreover, on the order of a reduction of ten to one; there are diseases, of course, but the Indians were especially vulnerable to diseases, *for they were exhausted by hard labor and lost the will to live, the blame goes to “affliction and fatigue of their spirits because they had lost the liberty God had given them; for the Spanish treated them worse than slaves [italics added].*¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Wright 2003: 13.

¹⁰¹ Todorov 1984: 135.

The Blackfoot Nation was not subjected to the brutality of the Spanish, however the Nation was exposed to the same European diseases as the Indigenous People of Mexico, with equally devastating results. But just as destructive was the European invasion itself. Stannard (1992) writes that the Europeans, “saints and soldiers alike,” were drawn to this New World.

The wilderness and the carnal wild man within the wilderness – like the irrepressibly sensual wild man within the self – were there to be confronted by the Christian, confronted and converted, domesticated, or destroyed.¹⁰²

For the Europeans, the land was theirs for the taking, and those that stood in their way were in peril. What gave the Europeans the justification was the supposedly divine directive from their God.

Manifest Destiny

Most historians who write about the fur trade concentrate mainly on the eventual conquest of North America, after the different fur-trading companies had plundered the land; they romanticize much of the debauchery and murder that occurred. It was after the most serious smallpox epidemics had run their course that the phrase ‘Manifest Destiny’ was introduced. Europeans in the 19th century justified acts of genocide with the notion that white people were destined by God to conquer and own North America. Brinkley (1995) writes that John L. O’Sullivan, an American democrat and journalist, introduced the phrase in 1845 to explain the greedy expansionism of America.

[It is]...the right of our manifest destiny to spread and to possess the whole of the continent which providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty and federated development of self government entrusted to us. It is right such as that of the tree to the space

¹⁰² Stannard 1992: 174.

of air and earth suitable for the expansion of its principle and destiny of growth.¹⁰³

The concept was widely accepted and used by the settlers as justification for “exterminating” Indians who were considered burdensome. Bordewich (1997) describes the prevailing attitude of the time.

Was it really a crime to kill someone whom God, Manifest Destiny, or the law of natural selection had condemned to die anyway?¹⁰⁴

Manifest destiny is a well-known concept today. However, this thesis suggests that it is, in fact, an old concept that began with the Spanish conquest of Mexico. Although the term is usually applied specifically to the United States and its expansion Westward onto Indian lands, the concept was used by the Spanish to justify their brutality, the impact of contagious diseases they brought with them and their invasion of the Americas. While the Spanish may not have conceptualized manifest destiny, they certainly executed it in practice, believing in their divine directive to appropriate, subjugate and annihilate wherever and whenever it suited their purposes, all conveniently in the name of the Christian God. Todorov (1984) writes that it was the Spanish invaders’ contention that Mexico was “justly punished” because it had “incurred the wrath of God.”

... it is certain that the conquistadors see epidemics as one of their weapons: they do not know the secrets of bacteriological warfare, but if they could, they would not fail to make use of disease quite deliberately; we can also assume that in most cases they did nothing to prevent the spread of epidemics. That the Indians die like flies is proof that God is on the conquerors’ side. The Spanish may have presumed a little regard to divine benevolence on their behalf, but on the evidence, the outcome was incontestable.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Brinkley 1995: 352.

¹⁰⁴ Bordewich 1997: 51.

¹⁰⁵ Todorov 1984: 135.

Genocide – The Answer to the Indian Problem

The downfall of the once-powerful Blackfoot Nation and its allies came about because an invisible enemy and a tide of European humanity could not be stopped. I postulate that the Blackfoot Indian “problem” presented itself in a variety of ways, from the time of fur trade expansion in the late 1700s until the last smallpox epidemic of 1869-70. First, the fur traders were very anxious to secure unrestricted access to the rich trapping grounds in Blackfoot Territory, but the Blackfoot stood in their way. Second, the flood of immigrants trying to reach the west coast could not safely traverse through Blackfoot Territory. Third, the United States had completed the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 which included part of Blackfoot Territory in present day Montana, and the American government wanted control of the Territory. Fourth, Canada (in 1885) and the United States (in 1869) were both building transcontinental railroads that would eventually cross the dangerous Blackfoot Territory. And finally, the Blackfoot Confederacy was a formidable force to reckon with.

The controversy of whether smallpox was deliberately spread to Indian Nations continues today, particularly when the term genocide is raised. Many American and Canadian scholars and historians vigorously defend their governments when that word is mentioned in the same breath as “Native Americans.” Often overlooked in the case of the Blackfoot is that hardly any early writers came to the realization that the Blackfoot People were fighting the invaders in defense of the wildlife and the land that they were given by the Creator, to take care of and protect against all others. Early writers, including the missionaries, preferred to condemn the Blackfoot for not submitting to the “superior” European man and his God. The picture that many of the early writers painted

was therefore a portrayal of the Blackfoot as completely villainous, a convenient way to whitewash the true purpose of the European invasion – materialistic avarice and claiming by “holy right”¹⁰⁶ a land that they considered was waiting for them to take.

Smallpox, regardless of whether or not it was deliberately spread, very conveniently contributed to the eventual control of Blackfoot Territory by Euro-Americans and Canadians. This thesis hypothesizes that there were alternative routes of dispersion of the disease than existing literature suggests. This thesis also hypothesizes that the population numbers prior to the epidemics were much higher than the calculations of early ethnographers and anthropologists. In addition, there was a pattern of events that occurred repeatedly, and in the same general order, that eventually brought smallpox to every corner of this continent and ended with the loss of almost all of each Nation’s land. The events started with the fur traders, followed by Jesuit missionaries, smallpox, an army from somewhere, and finally, Treaties. Such was the case with the French and English wars which, at the beginning, were primarily fur-trading conflicts involving that famous rodent, the beaver. The pattern seemed more pronounced when smallpox was raging, and particularly if the English, French, or American armies were on the brink of defeat. Dickason (1997) writes about the Nations of eastern Canada, where although the pattern was initially not recognized, the Natives were soon able to identify the connection between missionaries as the cause of smallpox and their apparent immunity to it.

Hardly two years had passed after the Jesuits’ return in 1634 when smallpox appeared among the Montagnais, soon to appear among the Hurons; within four years up to two-thirds of the latter were gone. To the disheartened Jesuits, the epidemics seemed to have ‘singled out the

¹⁰⁶ Stannard 1992: 15.

Christians more than the Infidels, cruelly decimating their families and more frequently sparing those who refused baptism. In the Amerindian view, such disasters were neither impersonal nor random; somebody or something must be the cause. The Jesuits were the obvious suspects, particularly as they did not die of the contagion.¹⁰⁷

During this time, when the French and English were disputing the right to cheat the Indians out of their lands, the Native people were struggling to cope with the influx of Europeans, their diseases and the attacks of the missionaries. Dickason (1997) writes that “nativistic movements” began at that time, as a way to cope with the pressures of colonization. The Delaware Prophet, also known as Neolin (One That Is Four), gave the following prophesy to his people in approximately 1762.

I warn you, that if you will allow the English among you, you are dead, maladies, small pox, and their poison will destroy you totally, you must pray to me and do my will only.¹⁰⁸

In the case of the twelve-year war when the British suffered heavy losses, it is very easy to see how biological warfare could have been introduced. British Commander-in-Chief Jeffrey Amherst was just one of many diabolical people of the Indian wars, and in 1763-64, he ordered that every devious type of warfare was to be employed against the Indians, including drugs and “small pox infected blankets.”¹⁰⁹ There were other instances where biological warfare was contemplated against the Indians, and the Army officers in charge let their intentions be known. Harper (1969) cites a letter written by Father De Smet, who writes about the mandate of an American army officer and his position on dealing with the Indian problem.

Captain Mullan, of the United States, speaks as follows in a report which has been published by the order of the Government and at the Government expense. You will find the paragraph somewhat long, but I prefer to give it

¹⁰⁷ Dickason 1997: 105.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid: 156.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid: 157.

entire. The Captain puts the Indian question to his Government very directly---the response, or at least the ordinance practice, is to push them further back into the wilderness or to exterminate them....

The Indian is destined to disappear before the white man, and the only question is, how it may best be done, and his disappearance from our midst be tempered with those elements calculated to produce to himself the least amount of suffering, and to us the least amount of cost.¹¹⁰

Father De Smet wrote his letter in the fall of 1842, only a few short years after a fatal epidemic of 1837-1838 which swept through all tribes trading within the vicinity of Fort Union and Fort McKenzie.

The Invisible Enemy of the Blackfoot Nation and the Ally of the Fur Trade

A review of the epidemics that devastated the Blackfoot Nation shows that the Blackfeet did not lose their lands to any mortal enemies. Instead, they lost their lands to an enemy that was invisible to them, and to defeat such an enemy was impossible. Four of the smallpox epidemics that struck the Nation are discussed here.

The 1764 Epidemic

This epidemic usually goes unnoticed but was recorded by Bull Plume, the last of five keepers of a Peigan Winter Count that recorded events from 1764-1924.¹¹¹ Rackza (1979) describes the historical significance and importance of this longest surviving record of the Blackfoot. The first entry on Bull Plume's calendar, in 1764, was the smallpox epidemic. Very few escaped death from this particular epidemic, and it coincided with the smallpox outbreak attributed to Jeffrey Amherst in 1763. Raczka (1979) describes the impact of this epidemic on the Blackfoot Nation.

¹¹⁰ Harper 1969: 799.

¹¹¹ Raczka 1979: 4.

It is here that the story begins, and there is little doubt that the first recorder thought he would be the last. The feelings of loss and helplessness contained in this small symbol, are tremendous. The glory of the Blackfoot nation was crushed as no real enemy could have possibly done. The country was empty and the people spread to the far corners of the land.¹¹²

Bull Plume's Winter Count also records every other small-pox epidemic that followed, all of which are documented by European historians. What is particularly significant about this Winter Count is that it covers the period of time that corresponds precisely with the periods of time discussed in this thesis, and that it is a perfect example of how a Winter Count was maintained and kept the events within the memory of the keeper.

The Fur Trade and the Blackfoot Nation

The westward expansion of both the United States and Canada cannot be separated from the fur trade, which, having decimated fur-bearing animals in the eastern part of North America, now turned its greedy eyes to the west. Henday's journey west in 1754 was for the express purpose of finding Indians that would trade with the Hudson Bay Company.¹¹³

In the short time it took to make the eastern tribes dependent on the inferior goods it offered in trade for their valuable furs, the traders used the concept of "divide and conquer" on the Indians to move inland. By supplying guns and ammunition to friendly tribes they had in their employment, successful invasion of the interior was easily accomplished. Ray (1998) explains how the fur traders armed their emissaries, the Cree

¹¹² Ibid: 4.

¹¹³ Internet: Dictionary of Canadian Biography (Henday).

and the Assiniboine, who were constantly at war with the Dakota Sioux from 1670 to 1870.¹¹⁴

The fur traders' advancement west, along with the Assiniboine Cree, who benefited a great deal from their close relationship with the traders, stalled in 1717. The fur traders could not go any further southwest, because the Dakota Sioux happened to be in the way, and the fur traders could not advance directly west because the Blackfoot defense of their Territory was impenetrable. The Indian enemies of the Blackfoot were equally unsuccessful at breaking through Blackfoot defenses and suffered heavy losses. Ray (1998) writes about the loss of Assiniboine trappers, who the fur traders considered their "best beaver Indians."¹¹⁵

A very interesting paragraph was written by Ray (1998) that summarizes what could have easily led to the smallpox epidemic of 1780-1781.

The fur trade was the most pervasive force influencing the economic and political development of Western Canada between 1660 and 1870. During this period it operated as an integrating force between Indians and Europeans. To be successfully prosecuted, the fur trade required the cooperation of both parties. In the broadest sense, it was a partnership for the exploitation of resources. Although it was not an equal partnership, nor one in which the same group always held the upper hand, at no time before 1870 would it have served the interests of one party to destroy the other since by doing so the aggressors would have been deprived of their supplies of goods, or furs and provisions. It is not surprising therefore that peace prevailed between Indians and Europeans in the western interior of Canada prior to 1870.¹¹⁶

The Dakota Sioux, supplied with arms by the French, had no need for the Hudson Bay Company which armed their enemies. The Blackfoot, on the other hand, were

¹¹⁴ Ray 1998: 14.

¹¹⁵ Ibid: 21.

¹¹⁶ Ibid: xxxiii.

generally in need of nothing and put a complete stop to anyone who dared enter their Territory. Three sentences in the above quotation are worth examining in detail.

1. *'To be successfully prosecuted, the fur trade required the cooperation of both parties.'*

The Blackfoot did not need to cooperate with the fur traders because they needed nothing from them. Since Blackfoot life depended mainly on the buffalo, there was really no need for cooperation in order for them to sustain their livelihood. The Blackfoot had everything, but everything in their Territory was coveted by all of their enemies. Ewers (1982) provides the following quote from the traveler, Henry.

Henry regarded the Blackfoot tribes as “the most independent and happy people of all tribes E. of the Rocky Mountains. War, women, horses, and buffalo are their delights, and all these they have at their command.”¹¹⁷

2. *'In the broadest sense, it was a partnership, for the exploitation of resources.'*

The only real partnership that the Blackfoot had (and maintain today) is the Blackfoot Confederacy, made up of the Siksiká, the Káínaa, the Piikáni and the Tsuu T'ina. Rather than exploiting their own country by allowing others into their Territory to trap for furs, the Confederacy maintained a careful watch over their lands that in all its scope, has not been surpassed to this day. Hyde (1933) writes,

These original inhabitants he says are usually called Yatche-thinyoowuc by the Crees, and this name is generally translated by the traders as *Slaves* but more properly has the meaning *Strangers*. These Slave Nations now occupy the country near Fort Augustus and have increased in strength until they are the terror to the Crees and even to the Assiniboines. They are mounted and have firearms; they trap furs to trade but live on the buffalo.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Ewers 1982: 41.

¹¹⁸ Hyde 1933: 37.

3. *'Although it was not an equal partnership, nor one in which the same group always held the upper hand, at no time before 1870 would it have served the interest of one party to destroy the other since by doing so the aggressors would have been deprived of their supplies of goods, or furs and provisions.'*

As they were self-sufficient, the Blackfoot had no need to enter into agreements of any kind with trappers, traders or enemy Nations. The Blackfoot traded for guns and ammunition at posts set up on the perimeter of their territory, but only enough to acquire the weaponry to defend their borders. So with the Sioux creating havoc of their own at this particular time, and the combination of the Blackfoot Confederacy and the Sioux Nations having such a detrimental effect on the fur trade, something had to change.

The 1780-1781 Epidemic

The smallpox epidemic of 1780-1781 was the first one to reach the Blackfoot according to Western historians. A key figure significant to this outbreak was Peter Pond, who was also connected to Jeffrey Amherst and The Northwest Company.

There are many different descriptions of Peter Pond, all conveying a sinister and volatile person with a destructive nature. The anger that this man unleashed was directed not only at Indian Nations but also at white society.¹¹⁹ A very concise description of Peter Pond and the background of this unsavory character is in, *Inkonze: The Stones of Traditional Knowledge*, by Phillip R. Coutu and Lorraine Hoffman.¹²⁰ The book also recounts why Jeffrey Amherst advocated using biological warfare on the Indian populations of North America. Though the subject of government involvement in biological attacks against Native populations has never fully been explored, Stearn and Stearn (1945) strongly suggest that Pontiac's victory at Fort William Henry in 1757

¹¹⁹ Gates 1965: x.

¹²⁰ Coutu 2002: 167.

precipitated an unofficial but government-funded program of biological warfare against the Indians.

The diabolical scheme that resulted in unknown numbers of Indians dying in the 1780-1781 epidemic was hatched in Canada by Amherst, but it was implemented and carried out by American Fur Traders. I suggest that it was deliberately started at Eagle Hills by Peter Pond and his colleagues, following the example of Jeffrey Amherst, under whom Peter Pond had served. Eagle Hills was at the eastern perimeter of Blackfoot Territory and it was here that Amherst was anxious to break through Blackfoot defenses.

The Northwest Company men, known as Northwesters, relied on brutal and callous treatment when dealing with their Indian customers. In 1777, three of Peter Pond's men were killed by their customers in retaliation for the treatment that they received from these independent traders. In 1881, six more of their men were killed for using the same tactics on the Assiniboine River. However, according to MacGregor (1966), it was an incident in the Eagle Hills described by Sir Alexander Mackenzie that probably precipitated the smallpox epidemic, the epidemic likely initiated by Peter Pond.

Most of us who passed the winter at the Saskatchewan, got to the Eagle Hills where, in the spring of 1780 [1779], a few days previous to their intended departure, a large band of Indians being engaged in drinking about their houses, one of the traders, to ease himself of the troublesome importunities of a native, gave him a dose of laudanum in a glass of grog, which effectively prevented him from giving further trouble to any one, by setting him to sleep forever. This incident produced a fray in which one of the traders and several of the men were killed, while the rest had no means to save themselves but by a precipitate flight, abandoning a considerable quantity of goods and near half of the furs which they collected during the winter and spring.¹²¹

¹²¹ MacGregor 1966: 9.

The smallpox epidemic broke out at this post in 1780-1781 and, although it had originated in the Mississippi Valley and spread to the Dakotas by the summer of 1781, it is difficult to explain how it could have reached Saskatchewan and Alberta in the cold winter months. It was very likely already there, waiting to be unleashed by the Northwesters, who could not *manage* these Prairie Indians with only the bullying and intimidation tactics for which they were well known. The traders could easily transport a deadly cargo in what was called a trader's cassette, a small, waterproof box, used by the traders to carry personal effects.¹²²

The idea that smallpox could be carried around in such a way is not new; it was the safest method of transporting the germs. A cassette was light and safe, but with its deadly cargo was like a time bomb. It could be used whenever the carrier chose, for example, intimidating the people to get desired results. Cox (1957) describes how the trader Duncan McDougall used such a threat against the Indians of the Oregon territory.

In 1812 or 1813, when the Indians around Astoria (at the mouth of the Columbia River) showed signs of hostility, the trader Duncan McDougall threatened to infect them with small-pox: "He assembled several of the chieftains, and showing them a small bottle, declared that it contained the small-pox; that although his force was weak in number, he was strong in medicine; and that in consequence of the treacherous cruelty of the northern Indians, he would open the bottle and send the small-pox among them."¹²³

The Blackfoot Nation was very numerous and their Territory was enormous. The People, including their allies, the Tsuu T'ina and the Gro Ventres, did not huddle together in one corner of their lands and move en masse to the next camping site when necessary.

¹²² Historical Society of Alberta 1977: 326.

¹²³ Cox 1957: 169.

And they were still on friendly terms with the Assiniboine in the eastern part of the Territory. MacGregor (1966) describes the Territory that the Confederacy occupied.

Following the arc of a larger circle and keeping south of the North Saskatchewan River, the Blackfeet in historic times occupied the western part of Alberta and of Montana. Turning in a tighter circle, were the Gros Ventres who, when first encountered by fur traders, extended from about Nipawin in Saskatchewan to the Eagle Hills south of Battleford. They kept on the move along the eastern flank of the Blackfeet until after Fidler's time they crossed the Cypress Hills into the United States, where they have stayed.¹²⁴

History has documented that the Blackfoot caught the 1781-1782 smallpox epidemic from a dead and dying camp of their enemies, the Shoshoni. It is important to determine where this Shoshoni death camp was located. According to Saukamappe, a Cree Indian living with the Blackfoot and the explorer David Thompson's informant, the particular band of Blackfoot that he was traveling with were moving down river. Tyrrell (1968) writes,

We thus continued to advance through the fine plains to the Stag River when death came over us all, and swept away more than half of us by the small pox, of which we knew nothing until it brought death among us.¹²⁵

The question to be answered is where the Shoshoni contracted the virus. Non-aboriginal historians make the claim that the Shoshoni brought it over from mountains, thus infecting the Blackfoot from the west. But it is highly unlikely that a large encampment of people could traverse the mountains to the west in the winter, burdened with sick and dying people and reach an area that would be situated near present day Medicine Hat, Alberta. A more likely route of contagion would be to take the incubation period of two weeks and apply it to the distance from the Eagle Hills to where the

¹²⁴ MacGregor 1966: 55.

¹²⁵ Tyrrell 1968: 336.

Blackfoot found the dead and dying camp of the Shoshoni. That distance would apply more aptly to the encampment on the Stag River and to the distance from there to the Eagle Hills. The distance between the two locations is a feasible for a large encampment to travel in two weeks, making Eagle Hills the more likely site for the smallpox outbreak. And thus, Peter Pond is implicated in the matter, for the incidents at Eagle Hills had all the indicators needed for a plot of revenge and a chastisement of the Indians in the usual manner that followed the path of the Northwesters.

The 1837-1838 Epidemic

A great deal has been written about the 1837-1838 epidemic and much of it is intended to shift the blame of the epidemic onto the Indians themselves. The “blanket story” surfaces here, with a Blackfoot implicated in this epidemic as well, supposedly responsible for carrying the blanket to his own people camped at Fort McKenzie. What is not well known regarding this epidemic is that the blanket theory originates with Francis Chadron, the chief factor of the American Fur Company at the Mandan post, Fort Clark, who related this to John James Audubon, an amateur botanist, mineralogist, and geographer. Devoto (1947) writes,

That is the beginning- and that is what the St. Peter's had done when she stopped at Fort Clark. At some stage of her upriver journey small pox had broken out. Several cases were in the infectious stage at Fort Clark and though Chadron and his lieutenants tried to keep the Indians away from the boat, they could not. Six years later Chadron told John James Audubon that one of them stole a blanket from a dying member of the crew, and though a reward for it for it was offered at once it could not be got back. He says nothing about this in his journal and the story of the stolen blanket has a quality of legend and reappears at Fort McKenzie and, in fact, nearly everywhere else.¹²⁶

¹²⁶ Devoto 1947: 280.

The 1837-38 smallpox epidemic spread north to a campground much favored by the Káínaa at the confluence of the Old Man and St. Mary's Rivers in Canada. At this site, so many Blood Indians died that it was known thereafter as *Akaisakoyi* (Many Dead).¹²⁷

Some important outcomes of this epidemic greatly benefited the fur trade. The epidemic practically exterminated the Mandan who were the middle men of the established trading network and in direct competition with the fur traders, and it weakened the Blackfoot Nation to the extent that it opened up Blackfoot Territory, making it much safer for fur traders to move in. Devoto (1947) describes the significance of this epidemic for several Nations.

So it was throughout Blackfoot country. The Gro Ventres got off more easily, having been somewhat immunized by an epidemic in the southern plains in 1831 while they were visiting the Arapahos. The other three tribes, the Blackfoot proper, fared worse than anyone else except the Mandans. There is no way of knowing how badly they fared. Estimates vary from Halsey's seven hundred, certainly too small, through Culbertson's six thousand, or about two-thirds of their whole number,' too large and bad factoring, to Schoolcraft's characteristic eight thousand. No matter: all summer and into the fall along the rivers and across the high valleys of the Blackfoot country small-pox was doing more pacification than the fur companies had ever been able to do. Hereafter that country would be open-though not safe.¹²⁸

The 1869-1870 Epidemic

Once again, the infamous blanket is blamed for an epidemic. However, there are two different accounts for how this epidemic started. The first account implicates a Blackfoot Indian for the theft of a contaminated blanket. According to Dempsey (1980),

¹²⁷ Dempsey 1980: 14.

¹²⁸ Devoto 1947: 291.

First signs of the dreaded disease appeared in the late summer of 1869 when some Blackfoot purportedly stole a blanket from a smallpox patient on a Missouri steamboat. Quickly the disease spread through the Blackfoot Nation and by fall it had struck almost every camp and every lodge.¹²⁹

The second account of how this epidemic started is described by Berry (1995) who puts the blame on a single individual.

The smallpox plague of 1869 which so ravaged the Blackfoot Confederacy was caused by the malevolence of a single white man. An American trader named Evans and his partner had trouble with the Blackfoot in 1868, the partner being slain and all their horses stolen. Evans made his way back to St. Louis, where he swore revenge. Purchasing several bales of blankets infected with smallpox, he set them on the banks of the Missouri in Indian country, and the plague swept through the tribes like wildfire. The Blackfoot tribe alone lost nearly 1400 men, women and children in five months-truly, a life for a life, with vengeance.¹³⁰

This particular epidemic was essentially the last one that took such a devastating toll of the Blackfeet people. There were many other diseases, including alcoholism, that followed, but none were as damaging as the “Apixosin”- smallpox – the invisible enemy. The effects are long lasting and continue even today, as there is no other contagion that has managed to remain so long to impact the memories, lives, traditions and the spirituality of the Blackfeet People. The losses from smallpox were no different than losses that can be attributed to war. Wright (2003) states,

If truth is the first casualty of war, the second is tradition. Catastrophic war kills off the older generation and its knowledge.¹³¹

The after-effects of these shattering losses showed up mainly in the bloodlines of the People. The once feared and abhorred custom of inbreeding made its appearance in Blackfoot communities. What the old people had learned through communicating with

¹²⁹ Dempsey 1980: 68.

¹³⁰ Berry 1995: 8.

¹³¹ Wright 2003: 318.

the plant and animal world – that the spirits of plants and animals were able to select what was right to prevent inbreeding – was ignored. More and more frequent violations of the custom forbidding marriage into one’s own tribe or clan occurred, as people were confined to the Reserves, allowed to leave only with permits to visit other Reserves or just to go to town. Closer marriages within family units resulted in the clan system imploding upon itself. The violation is even more evident today, and the strict protocol that was put into place to prevent such marriages in the past is not adhered to by today’s Blackfoot People. The knowledge of the old people was lost in this war, but just as importantly, their adherence to these essential cultural norms was ignored, with the consequence being a weakened Nation.

Population Numbers

The population of Indigenous People in the Americas prior to contact in 1492 has been estimated time and time again by historians, but without consensus. Conservative estimates have suggested the pre-contact population was at least 80 million.¹³² In Mexico alone, the population was estimated at 25 million, but by 1600 it had dropped to one million on the “eve of conquest.” According to Todorov (1984),

If the word genocide has ever been applied to a situation with some accuracy, this is here the case. It constitutes a record not only in relative terms (a destruction on the order of 90 percent or more), but also in absolute terms, since we are speaking of a population diminutive estimated at 70 million human lives. None of the great massacres of the twentieth century can be compared to this hecatomb. It will be understood how vain are the efforts made by certain authors to dissipate what has been called the “Black Legend” of Spain’s responsibility for this genocide.¹³³

¹³² Todorov 1984: 130.

¹³³ Ibid 133.

Historians have also estimated the population of the Blackfoot Confederacy, but most of these estimates were from the time of contact, following the decimation by the various epidemics. Few estimates of population numbers prior to contact have been recorded. As the strength of Blackfoot numbers was one factor that contributed to the successful defense of their Territory, it is important to know what the population may have been prior to contact.

Population losses attributed to only smallpox have been estimated by historians as anywhere from 50 percent (Tyrell, 1968), to 80 percent and 90 percent (Fenn, 2001). To estimate the number of Blackfoot People prior to contact, a reliable but conservative number is required as a baseline figure. For this we turn to George Catlin, a man who had no ulterior motive but to paint Indians and record their history.

In 1832, George Catlin arrived at Fort McKenzie at the mouth of the Yellowstone River. It was here that he first encountered the different Indians that inhabited the region and traded at the Fort. Accompanying his drawing of a Blackfoot warrior is a note where Catlin comments on the number of Blackfoot living in this particular area.

Blackfoot In-ne-o-cose. (the Buffalo's child) a warrior of the Blackfoot tribe, in a dress. holding his lance, and medicine bag, in his hand. The most numerous and powerful tribe in N. Am. numbering 60,000 and occupying a vast tract of country on the Sources of the Missouri, and through the Rocky.¹³⁴

As George Catlin had never seen an encampment of the Blackfoot tribe prior to his visit up the Yellowstone in 1832, his estimate of 60,000 confounded other historians and many doubted him, suggesting much lower figures. It is important to note that the year Catlin

¹³⁴ Catlin 1984: 126.

arrived at Fort McKenzie was *fifty two years after* the 1780-1781 smallpox epidemic had decimated the population of the Blackfoot People.

For a reliable estimate of population losses due to smallpox, we turn to MacGregor (1966) and the words of a Hudson Bay Company man, A.S. Morton, who describes the aftermath of the 1780-81 epidemic.

For none of us had the least idea of the desolation this dreadful disease had done, until we went up the bank to the camp and looked into the tents, in many which they were all dead, and the stench was horrid. Those that remained has pitched their camps about 200 yards from them and were too weak to move away entirely, which they soon intended to do; they were in such a state of despair and despondence that they could scarcely converse with us, a few had gained strength to hunt which kept them alive. From what we could learn, three fifths had died under the disease.¹³⁵

In Appendix 3, we use Catlin's number of 60,000 as a baseline, and Morton's figure of three fifths of the population lost to smallpox, to derive the population prior to the 1780-1781 epidemic. Catlin's estimate of 1832 in Yellowstone is used as a baseline for the Piikáni population, as Catlin was in the south of the Blackfoot Territory which was traditionally occupied by the Piikáni. The population numbers of the remaining bands of the Blackfoot are based on Catlin's (1973) observation that the Piikáni were the most populous, followed by the Káínaa, and then the Siksiká.

A total population of 120,000 Blackfoot Indians before the epidemic of 1780-1781 may seem very high, but this would have given a population density of only one person per two square miles for an area of 249,000 square miles that could have supported a much higher density. Considering the area of the Territory and the Nation's successful defense of it, the population estimate is not unreasonable.

¹³⁵ MacGregor 1966: 10.

Diamond (1995) gives a decline in numbers of the New World's pre-Columbian Indian population as 95%. Using this percentage as a basis for calculation of the population loss of the Blackfoot Nation from the smallpox epidemics discussed in this thesis (from 1764 to 1870), and using the pre-epidemic population estimate of 300,000, the derivation of the total Blackfoot Nation population at the end of the last epidemic of 1869-79 is 7,680. Compare this number to Hind's (1859) estimate of 6,650 in 1853, and his 1858 estimate of 7,600 (Berry 1995). The numbers are *very* close. Also, these calculations do not factor in the losses attributable to other diseases, starvation and alcohol. Note also in Appendix 3 that the population of the Nation continued to decline, and according to census numbers reported by Berry (1995), by the end of 1948, the population had dropped to 3,602, which is 1.2% of the original estimate of the population prior to the first smallpox epidemic. This figure is much less than Diamond's 5% survival rate. Therefore, the numbers derived using a 40% survival rate, are generous.

The Long-term Impact

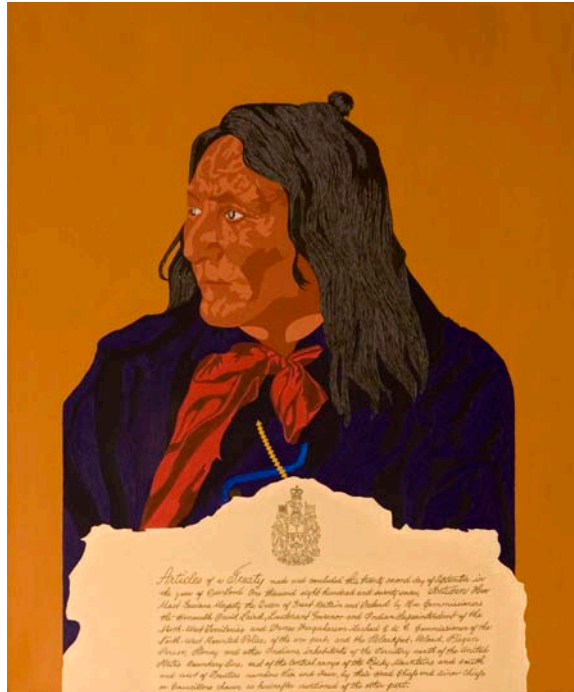
Many of the problems that exist today in Native cultures can be traced directly back to the smallpox epidemics. Smallpox not only ended the lives of many Natives, but also impacted, over the longer term, all aspects of Native life. It had the most damaging effect on the spirituality of the people, and because of this unseen enemy, the missionaries were easily able to do their work of conversion. As MacGregor (1975) writes in his study of the life of Father Lacombe,

Among the groups of Indians still coming to Fort Edmonton to trade he found the most change. All of them spoke of living theoretically on such and such reserve and of supplementing the produce of their hunts with government handouts. All of them spoke of humiliation and hunger. Their unenviable lot was reflected in their thin frames and pinched faces but

much more so by their lack-luster glances-much of their old devil may-care pride had slipped away. Their looks alone told him that even that early they had become the unwanted skeletons in the white man's closet.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ MacGregor 1975: 251 & 252.

Chapter VI - Treaty 7 - Crowfoot



Kerry Scott

Crowfoot – Treaty 7, 2005

Acrylic on Canvas

30” x 36”

Collection of the Artist

The name Crowfoot is readily identified by contemporary Blackfoot as the head representative at the signing of Treaty 7 at Blackfoot Crossing. This event placed the Blackfoot on separate reserves, with promises by the Canadian government of money, ammunition, education, tools, cattle and farm equipment. The concepts surrounding the Treaty were never fully understood by the Blackfoot. Terms such as “cede, surrender, and yield” were alien to the process of a Treaty and the way the Blackfoot made them.

This was the time of a one way deal intended to get rid of the Indian problem by imposing the “law” on the Indian People to acquire all Indian land without a fight. It was the time of grand theft. It was the time of the implementation of the industrial schools and boarding schools. It was a time when the Indian People learned about “white privilege,” and learned to think in a linear fashion. It was the time when Indian communities changed from a focus on the well-being of the community to the interests of the individual.

The British North America Act of 1867 put the responsibility for the Indians and Indian lands with the federal government that was bound by terms of the Royal Proclamation of 1763 which recognized the Indians as rightful occupiers of their hunting grounds “until such time as these were ceded to a government authority.”¹³⁷ One of the goals of the federal government was to build a transcontinental railway but until the rights of the Indians were *extinguished*, the railway could not be built. Those rights were extinguished through treaties.

The history of the People was in the art recorded into the landscape of this continent. Evidence of Native American residency was found etched into the cliffs and spread over the lands by Native ancestors recording their deeds, the different animals and even the dinosaurs in rock drawings, teepee rings, medicine wheels and buffalo jumps; it was proof that we have been here for thousands of years. Despite this evidence, the land was deemed by the Euro-Americans and Canadians as theirs to appropriate.

In the minds of the Blackfoot, Napi’s directive to keep all others out of their Territory remained firm and clear. However, that did not prevent the Nation from

¹³⁷ Internet: Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Historical Background

sharing their Territory with others. The precedent had been set with the alliance between the Blackfoot Nation, the Sarcee and the Gro Ventres forming their Confederacy.

Sharing *did not* mean surrender of the Territory, especially to the Euro-Americans and Canadians. Pard (1985-86), a Piikáni, writes the following about her People's understanding of treaties.

Their [the Piikáni] understanding of the treaty was based purely on the idea of *our* treaty process, which is to share a mutual bond and to share a mutual territory. According to our understanding of treaty, we were allowing people to come into the Blackfoot territory.¹³⁸

The non-Native understanding of treaties was radically different and was in direct conflict with Napi's warning. The consequence of the collision of cultures and understanding of treaty making was catastrophic for the Blackfoot. For Europeans, especially the British, "the possession of private property was an essential difference between man and beast."¹³⁹ Furthermore, Sir Thomas More convinced the British that they were justified in seizing land from people who were not putting it to good and profitable use. Private property and the notion of "possessive individualism" was key to the appropriation of the land, because by exercising "individual acquisitiveness,"¹⁴⁰ the invaders were assured of not only enriching themselves by raping Mother Earth, but they were guaranteed that they would remain human while doing so, because after all, the civilized Europeans were the ones wearing pants. The savages wore only breeches.¹⁴¹

The Indian people have lived up to the proper use of the term "Indian Giver" in all their dealings with the Governments of Canada and the United States. Indians gave up

¹³⁸ Pard 1985: 90.

¹³⁹ Stannard 1992: 233.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid: 234.

¹⁴¹ Ibid: 229.

this entire North American continent in exchange for a very small pittance.¹⁴² The Bureau of Indian Affairs in the United States and the Department of Indian Affairs in Canada had Indian agents who were ostensibly sent to care for the well being of the Natives, but whose sole interest was, in fact, to help themselves to the monies, food and annuities meant for the People.

Christianity

With the signing of the treaties, the doors were opened to the different Christian denominations that competed for dominance, thereby turning Native people against each another – clans against clans and families against families. No example can be given that describes this predicament more eloquently than the words of Chief Joseph, a thousand miles to the south of Blackfoot Territory, in answer to the question of why he banned the various religious denominations from his lands (Armstrong 1971).

They will teach us to quarrel about God, as Catholics and Protestants do on the Nez Perce' reservation [in Idaho] and other places. We do not want to do that. We may quarrel with men sometimes about things on earth, but we never quarrel about the Great Spirit. We do not want to learn that.¹⁴³

Soon after the Natives were confined to Reserves, the boarding school era began, and despite their resistance, the Indians were thrust rudely into an environment that was completely foreign. Their way of life and their relationship to all things were torn apart, and when they were forced to identify with the abstract God of Christianity, they lost their understanding of Native spirituality, a crisis that continues today.

¹⁴² This practice can be traced back to the father of Indian exploitation, Chris Columbus, who initiated the practice by extorting gold from the Indians in the name of God, King and country. The first lesson the Indians learned from the “original boat people” was larceny when the Spaniards held Montezuma for ransom. The Indians paid the ransom price, but Montezuma still lost his life and things have not changed much in five hundred years.

¹⁴³ Armstrong 1971: 95.

Appropriation

In contemporary society, it is not only the Indian people who are undergoing a spiritual crisis, but also mainstream (non-Native) society. It is one of the reasons that non-Native society is so intensely curious and covetous about the so-called Indian spirituality or “knowingness.” Western society deceives itself into thinking that it has attained this “knowingness” by adopting the terms, language and customs that Indians have about relationships (with each other, the land, space, time) and claiming them as their own. Bone (2002) provides an example of appropriation of Indian “knowingness.”

The concept of a sense of place (land) for example then, recognizes that people living in a region have undergone a collective experience that leads to shared aspirations, concerns, goals, values.¹⁴⁴

Bone has secularized this knowingness by removing entirely the spirituality which is at the foundation of the Indian way of life. While the concept he describes is essentially what Indian people have practiced on this continent since time immemorial, it does not necessarily apply to non-Natives who only recently arrived here after abandoning their homelands. What Bone really means is that a people’s relationship to the land is where their ancestors’ remains have returned to Mother Earth. Those are the ties that bind them to their lands, their territories and their regions. Bone used extensive references to Native Land Agreements and Treaties in his book, and it is therefore logical to assume that it was from those documents that he appropriated such concepts. By removing the words from their intended context, however, Bone changed them into individual achievements that do not fit with the collective mind set of a tribal people. In other words, the Western mind set uses the land for speculation and exploitation for what monetary value that can

¹⁴⁴ Bone 2002: 7.

be earned from it, and when no more profit can be taken, the land is abandoned for greener pastures (or other continents), leaving irreparable damage to the earth and whatever is left of it.

Williams (1990) writes about John Locke's description of private ownership of land which does not appropriate any part of Indian knowings, but was used as justification for European's taking Indian lands.

To which let me add, that he who appropriates land to himself by his labour, does not lessen but increase the common stock of mankind. For the provisions serving to support human life, produced by one acre of enclosed and cultivated land, are (to speak much with in compass) ten times more, than those, which are yielded by an acre of land, of an equal richness, lying waste in common. And therefore he, that incloses land and has greater plenty of the conveniences of life from ten acres, thus he could have from a hundred left to nature, may truly be said, to give ninety acres to mankind. For this labour now supplies him with provisions out of ten acres, which were but the product of a hundred lying in common.¹⁴⁵

In contrast, the Native relationship with this land through time and space is reflected in our oral traditions that record how long we have been here on Turtle Island. The context of our relationship to this land, therefore, is that our traditions embody the sense of place that is referred to by Bone. We have that "collective experience" which has led to "shared aspirations, concerns, goals and values." This land was given to us by the Creator. This land and its sacred places are an integral part of the Indian people, past, present and future. It is part of our life and our spirituality. Our religion evolved from it and, according to the Cherokee-Teehahnahm, Donald Panther-Yates (2001), a professor of communications, public relations and Native American Studies, it is older than the so-called world religions of Christianity, Islam and Judaism.

¹⁴⁵ Williams 1990: 248.

Native American spirituality is probably the oldest religion in the world. If I remember correctly, Hinduism and Taoism are about four or five thousand years old. Christianity is only 2,000 years old, and the Baptist denomination in Georgia is just a little over 200 years old. One of our ceremonies still performed today is the Cedar Grass Honoring Ceremony that goes back to the first fire made by our people. How long ago was that? We have names for mastodons, giant pigs, woolly mammoths and different types of dragons. We remember a time when the moon was brighter in the sky, when Venus was not yet a star in the heavens, and when the sun came up in the west.¹⁴⁶

The blood and bodies of Indian people have and always will be a part of this land.

When one considers the smallpox epidemics and other calamities that laid waste to the Blackfoot, one can well imagine that almost every part of the ground in Traditional Blackfoot territory must contain the remains of the bodies and bones of these people, mixed with the earth to remain here and part of us. And according to the Indian philosophy of life, our blood and bodies are the only things we can claim as our own because everything else belongs to the Creator.

Exploitation by Appropriation

Almost all aspects of Native society have been touched by the spiritual crisis that Western society is experiencing. The feelings of being “uprooted from cultural traditions, community belonging, and spiritual meaning” have resulted in Euro-Americans looking for solutions to their “malaise.”¹⁴⁷ One of their solutions has been to pursue all things Indian for profit and as an answer to their spiritual dilemma. Consequently, Native American art, history, literature and most things Indian, have been appropriated by non-Natives claiming to be part Indian, Indian at heart or Indian in a past life, as an excuse to exploit Native culture or to find their spiritual peace. The internet is rife with sites of

¹⁴⁶ Panther-Yates 2001.

¹⁴⁷ Aldred 2000.

“wannabe Indians” promoting their wares, so-called authentic Indian rituals and “New Age” connections to Indian knowingness. These “plastic shaman,” “plastic medicine men” or “shake and bake shamans,” are nothing more than “shrewd businessmen and women who know how to tap into lucrative markets” (Aldred 2000).

Natives have a term for Indian groupies that want to turn Native. “Twinkies” claim to be Indian “just so they can swindle you out of money and rob you spiritually.”¹⁴⁸ They are imposters, posing as bona fide Indians, defrauding Natives of their culture and spirituality because they are “gold mines.” Every aspect of Indian tradition can be looked on as a potential El Dorado. It is very fashionable to claim Indian ancestry and to have Indian blood flowing through one’s body. Indian blood that was meant to be lost through the process of assimilation has been found to be of great monetary value. No other people on this continent can claim to have as many descendants of other nationalities as the Indian People.

Non-Natives, zeroing in on spirituality at the core of Native culture, are starting their own tribes in Germany and elsewhere and patterning themselves after real Indians. For these Native aficionados, being Indian provides an escape and “a fantasy for those wishing to escape dilemmas of their own culture” (Aldred 2000). Ironically, one can say that true Indian spirituality is one of the few religions that does not proselytize.

Native art is another of the many facets of Native spirituality that is not understood by exploiters. While a non-Native might be able to paint a rendition of what may resemble Native American Art, it should be considered fraudulent. As Archuleta and Strickland (1991) quote from the Cheyenne artist, W.R. West,

¹⁴⁸ Jean 2001.

There will always be Indian art because of the color of skin. But without exposure to the old culture, it's like a nonnative trying to paint Indian.¹⁴⁹

One must be an Indian to paint like an Indian. You have to have experienced what an Indian has experienced. The Indian has adapted, because by nature he can “roll with the flow.” But this does not necessarily mean that he must abandon the old ways. The feelings and the visions of an Indian cannot be passed on to another culture because they cannot be comprehended by other cultures. You have to be an Indian to know about these things. It is instilled into the Indian's mental framework.

White Superiority

The response of Wissler described earlier (see Chapter 1) to the words of the well-informed Piikáni, is typical of the Western cultures – it reflects an attitude of “white privilege” where the domination of Western cultural norms is systematically enforced without question, at the expense of people of color. It is the assumption of Western-based mind set that the dominant white culture is neutral and generic, and white privilege is normalized.

White has been abstracted into a magical nebulous mythology that dominates all inhabitants of our country in their attitudes toward one another. We are, consequently, all prisoners of that mythology so far as we rebel against it. It is our misfortune that our economic system reflects uncritical acceptance of the mythology and that economic movements tend to reinforce the myth.¹⁵⁰

The investment of societies and individuals in Western culture as a universal culture is unconscious. Everything in the world and in life is interpreted through that lens, and if it does not fit, it is modified, revised, recounted, or altered to fit into that

¹⁴⁹ Archuleta and Strickland 1991: 82.

¹⁵⁰ Deloria 1988: 189.

mental framework – supposedly the supreme cultural group and the epitome of human progress.¹⁵¹ The Euro-American society demanded that the Indian either had to be eliminated or had to be reshaped into the “Jeffersonian ideal of what the Native American should become: physically Amerindian, mentally European.”¹⁵² But once you have killed the culture, you have killed the Indian. If you take away the culture that had at its foundation a spirituality that encompassed every aspect of life, you destroy the essence of the people.

Ironically, the slim connection to old beliefs that Indian people of today have, and the “grounding effect” that the People receive from that connection, is what is coveted by greater society, hence, the compounded interest in Native spirituality and Indigenous knowledge today. And as Jean (2001) writes, “Unfortunately, the Wannabe people of the IWISHIWAS tribe is increasing...”

Linear versus Holistic Thinking

The words “Us,” “I,” “Me,” and other individual connotations that define Western society have made great inroads into Native life. Western society, generally followers of a linear pattern of thinking, is described by Little Bear (1993) as a people with individualistic aspirations.

A linear singular worldview leads toward specialist and product orientation. The singular nature of a line results in a singular identity and being a something. Personal identification is drawn from a specialty such as a lawyer, teacher, doctor, mechanic, and so on. If people cannot apply a label of some kind to themselves, they are ‘a nobody’ in terms of social status.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Wright 2003: 5.

¹⁵² Ibid: 232.

¹⁵³ Little Bear 1993.

The worldview of a people acts as the foundation and repository of culture.¹⁵⁴

The non-Native (Western) linear worldview sees time as a straight line. This worldview categorizes, dichotomizes and reduces, resulting in a bias toward individualism, specialization and product orientation. The responsibility of the individual is the domination of creation.

In contrast, the worldview of the Natives is cyclical and holistic with a focus on generalist knowledge and process, and respect for cycles, phases and repetition. The Native worldview is based on a complex set of inter-relationships, and man is only one part of creation. The relationship with the sacred earth is one of collective responsibility for maintaining associations with all of creation, and the whole or the group is of more importance than the individual.

The traditional Native perspective is a worldview that encompasses togetherness and synthesis, characterized by the experiences of Natives with the universe. Relatedness is the word that best describes the Native worldview. It is a life that seems to be so simple to the Euro-American but in fact is based on an extremely complex system of relationships – a pattern of entities, emotions, revelations and cooperative enterprises. The connection with the earth is alive, and so intimate with the world around that it shapes our relationships with each other and the conception our world. This is the connection that has been damaged; it is rejected by some, and is so fragile in others that the survival of Natives as a distinct people is in jeopardy.

The consequence of colonization and assimilation by Western cultures is so profound that Natives, in general, have difficulty comprehending what has happened to

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

them. Colonization and assimilation have turned Natives into hybrids with transitional perspectives. As Deloria (1999) writes,

Natives do not understand what has happened and have difficulty expressing what that means. The result is a people that are “partial creature[s] that in many ways can never again be made into a whole being.”¹⁵⁵

Loss of Cultural Identity

The shift in the mindset of the Blackfoot people today has resulted in individual thinking and use of the terms such as “Us Bloods,” “Us Blackfoot,” “Us Peigans.” This is deeply concerning because the maintenance of our Blackfoot identity as a collective should be more important to us in today’s world than the distinction of individual bands.

True heroism, according to Lame Deer, is communal, not individual. The welfare of the group takes precedence over a single person’s desires.¹⁵⁶

The individual thinking of today illustrates the theory of “divide and conquer” from the Greek philosopher Aristotle.

Romans divided their enemies by fermenting internal fights within the enemy groups (e.g., ethnic groups). When the enemy was exhausted from the internal turmoil’s, either the Romans attacked and destroyed the enemy’s weak defense or, more often, they engaged in the dispute as peace maker. In this way, the Romans could lead their own legions among the enemy lines so to control the territory and the enemy animosities. Julius Gaio Caesar (100-44 B.C.) was the ultimate practitioner of the Roman’s motto ‘Divide and et Impere.’ Even though he was not the person who coined the phrase, he was the first putting it into practice, successfully and also recording the results in his logs (e.g. during the Gaul War Caesar was a general and a historian).¹⁵⁷

Aristotle’s theory was implemented to great effect on the Indian people in the Americas. In the case of the Blackfoot Nation, their traditional Territory was divided by

¹⁵⁵ Deloria 1999: 197.

¹⁵⁶ Lame Deer and Erdoes 1994: xiii.

¹⁵⁷ Internet: Alberto, Paolo.

the International border between Canada and the United States. The freedom the Blackfoot people enjoyed prior to the survey of the 49th parallel was essentially halted by that imaginary line, hence the term Medicine Line. The three bands were then allotted reservations in both Canada and the United States. The Piikáni Band was further divided into the Aapátóhsipikani (North Peigan) in Canada and the Aamsskáápipikani (South Piegan) in Montana.

Collective versus Individual Society

We come back to the terms, “Us Bloods,” “Us Blackfoot,” and “Us Peigans.” These words must be ridiculed when they are compared to how they were used by our forefathers. In the old days, when one wanted to brag, he boasted about himself and the deeds that he alone had performed - this was what was referred to as counting coup. The recounting of war deeds always seemed to take place at religious ceremonies, and stories of exploits in war had to be true because the storyteller was relating them not only to the people, but also to the Creator. Many times stories were told at the construction of the Medicine Lodge and other ceremonies, where one had to be most careful not to lie. Today, however, it is a different story, because most people refer to the deeds of others as a collective event and joyfully include themselves, rather than acknowledging them as individual achievements.

Sharing does not happen much today. The excerpt below is from an interview in 2004 with the Blackfoot Elder Morris Smith, who describes very poignantly the traditional concept of communal unity.

Success for the natives comes from the community. I, the letter I, doesn't apply to native people under this area. I can do this, I want you to do that, I am ordering you, I want you to go get me wood, I, I, I, or Me, Me, Me,

that is selfish, a very selfish word this I. Community develops with the W, and the W is we, so anytime you express yourself in what you are going to do, you bring them as a whole. We should work together, we should try together, we should bring back our identity.

However, the concept of community is as complex as the traditional worldview. Collectivity and community did not negate individual achievement, but neither was collectivity and individualism a contradiction. Traditional Blackfoot society was not as collective as it has been made out to be. Lancaster (1959) writes that individualism was characteristic of the American Indian. For example, battles were fought by groups of Indians, but with each individual fighting as he pleased. And regarding generosity, Lancaster writes that it was done on a “voluntary basis,” and the People competed to acquire the wealth they needed “with which to be generous.”¹⁵⁸ This phrase explains a concept that is easily misunderstood about Blackfoot society regarding collectivity. Today, we have kept the freedom to maintain our individuality, but our individual idea of sharing has gone the way of the buffalo. Instead, we have taken on Western society’s ideas of hoarding wealth with no intention of sharing with other people.

Among the Blackfeet, all men were free and equal, and office was not hereditary. Formerly each gens was governed by a chief, who was entitled to his office by virtue of his bravery and generosity. The head chief was chosen by the chiefs of the gens from their own number, and was usually the one who could show the best record in war, as a proved at the Medicine Lodge, at which time he was elected; and for the ensuing year he was invested with the supreme power. But no matter how brave a man might have been, or how successful in war, he could not hope to be the chief either of a gens or of the tribe, unless he was kind-hearted, and willing to share his prosperity with the poor. For this reason, a chief was never a wealthy man, for what he required with one hand he gave away with the other.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ Lancaster 1966: 179.

¹⁵⁹ Grinnell 1921: 219.

Colonization

The damage done to Native people through forced assimilation and colonization has been unmistakably detrimental to the world in which they now live. Indian people today suffer from the ill effects of policies that were implemented to make them “civilized” inhabitants of the “New World,” policies that had already been perfected by Europeans on white and Indigenous societies in other parts of the world. Many of the issues that plague today’s society might be traced back to colonization which, has essentially inflicted an identity crisis on the entire world.

While greater society looks on smugly and half-heartedly attempts to rectify the wrongs done to Indian people, it fails to see that it is also suffering from colonization’s effects; it is a denial of the loss of cultural identity and spirituality of most Euro-American ethnic groups. Prior to Christianity and its attempt to convert the whole world to a single belief system, the inhabitants of the entire globe were tribal peoples; ironically, the religions of the first inhabitants of even the Old World paralleled the thinking of the Native people of the New World.

Assimilation policies were used with great effect on the conglomeration of people in North America. But Native elders of today, according to Bullchild (1985), while suffering from the fallout of policies that were used on their ancestors, are trying to rectify the damage by trying to regain, as much as possible, the teachings of old.

The last of the 1930’s brought back some of the culture the Native lost. But in the many years previous, we weren’t allowed to use our culture, which was several generations. Most of it was outright lost to our younger people that tried to reorganize for the lost culture... We find pieces, those we are fitting like a jigsaw puzzle, because our young people hunger for that great culture. And as the Native goes along in life, we piece together

those lost parts of our great culture of life and once more live like those precious days of yesteryear.¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ Bullchild 1985: 84.

Chapter VII - Residential Schools, Drunks and Jails



Kerry Scott

Residential Schools, Drunks and Jails, 2006

Acrylic on Canvas

30" x 36"

Collection of the Artist

This particular period of time was devastating for the children, for the ontological attack on the Blackfoot culture and religion was aimed and implemented directly at them. Assimilation attempts and a conversion to Christianity made for a very bleak period in the mindset of the Blackfoot. The institutionalized upbringing prepared many for the correctional facilities that exist in greater society.

This was the time of forced assimilation. They talk of people becoming institutionalized within greater society, for example in Universities and Alcohol Treatment Centers. Well, the boarding schools institutionalized the Native People and prepared them for reform schools and jails. This was a fearful time for Indian children because the colonizers tried to turn Indian children into white men. It was an all-out attack on anything Indian. Entire cultures, languages, spirituality, society and families were turned upside down.

Assimilation

The key for the Indian Agents, working hand in hand with their church partners, was to replace Indian spirituality with the Agents' and missionaries' kinds of Christianity. The many competing Christian denominations were founded on the concept of divine disclosure through which Christians received knowledge of their Supreme Being. The "barbarous spirituality" of the Native had to be blotted out to produce people with the same thoughts, sentiments and values of the colonizers. In order to become truly civilized, the Indians had to be Christianized, as their "pagan superstition(s)" would not be sufficient for them to live a moral, virtuous life they needed to resist the "vices" of civilization (Milloy 2003).

The mad dash to save the Indian people from eternal damnation sped up the assimilation process. Entire cultures felt the loss of identity, and spiritual confusion was rampant as the missionaries descended upon the Indians and tore into their collective societies. Far from understanding either Native law or culture, the European based his

actions on Manifest Destiny¹⁶¹ which he believed gave him the right to impose his will and systematically destroy everything Indian.

Examples of these policies of destruction are numerous, exemplified even today by the government's intention to terminate its fiduciary responsibilities to the Indian. The end result may very well be the termination of the Indian's right to the land which is an integral part of their lives. Land, community and spirituality are integrated into one, and the loss of any part destroys the "whole" from which Indian "knowingness" stems, and on which the foundation of Indian spirituality is based. That spirituality, rooted in the inter-relatedness of everything in the universe, dominates and structures the traditional Indian way of life.

In order to understand the source of the problems facing the Blackfoot Nation today, one must take a careful look at the initial attack on the Indian way of life and try to see it from a Native perspective. Titley (1986) writes that the separation of children from their parents was done with the intent of obliterating the traditional communal way of life, and by placing the children in industrial schools, and later, boarding schools. The intent was to remove the children from the influence of their parents.

The education of native children in industrial and residential schools was one of the key elements in Canada's Indian policy from its inception. The destruction of the children's link to their ancestral culture and their assimilation into the dominant society were its main objectives.¹⁶²

This policy had its start in the pre-confederation period when it was designed to "civilize" the Indian populations of Upper Canada. Eventually, thousands of Native boys and girls from across Canada were taken from their homes and placed in environments

¹⁶¹ Manifest Destiny is discussed in Chapter V – Slashed World.

¹⁶² Titley 1986: 75.

completely foreign to them. The supervision of these children was in the hands of strangers completely intolerant to the cultures, beliefs and languages of their wards.

The removal of these young children from their homes, where they were surrounded by family and extended family, had a terrible psychological effect. Lame Deer (1994), an institutional graduate, describes his experience.

To the Indian kid the white boarding school comes as a terrific shock. He is taken from his warm womb to a strange, cold place. It is like being pushed out of a cozy kitchen into howling blizzard.¹⁶³

The extended period of time that the children remained in these institutions completely alienated them from what they had learned of their own culture. They entered boarding schools disoriented and confused but knowing that they were Indians, but sadly upon leaving, they did not know whether they were red or white. With few exceptions, education of the people in this fashion did not have the desired effect of complete assimilation of the Indian mind, but instead, turned the Indian world upside down and inside out. The Indian people could not function surrounded by this foreign ideology, but already contaminated by it, they withdrew inside themselves, laying the foundation for the internal strife that manifested itself in behavioral problems, such as alcoholism, that continues to contribute to the social chaos today.

Two Worlds

The Indian people have always lived in two worlds, the spiritual and the traditional. The governments of Canada and the United States must have wondered why their policies of assimilation took so long and were eventually considered unsuccessful. The artist Young Man (1998) describes the two worlds of the Native.

¹⁶³ Lame Deer and Erdoes 1994: 27.

Native people must be seen to, theoretically, live in two worlds, or to be “living between two worlds,” if they are to harmonize with the *amour propre* of the status quo. They must not only be seen to live in their world but they must also, literally, try to straddle that of the white man’s.” The *ethnographic present* becomes *ethnographic present* politics.¹⁶⁴

Being able to adapt to whatever life throws at them has always been a part of the Native psyche. So to expand on Young Man’s conceptualization, the Western world can be considered the Indians’ third universe. Indian spirituality, rather than weakening and sliding into obscurity, as planned by the governments, has stopped its descent and has solidified more than anything else in Native culture. Native spirituality is the backbone of our culture, and like any society that adheres to their religious beliefs, our culture will remain. For that reason, assimilation will not work on the Indian people.

The Indian people, by nature very adaptive long before the European ever came to this country, have adjusted to all the challenges presented by this new world. The Káínaa philosopher and author Everett Soop (1990), writes about the survivability of the Native.

...Everett Soop...attacked the reissuing of the 1950s racist song, “Squaws Along the Yukon,” an action which he said showed that white society considered the Indian to be nothing more than a pest. But, he said “pests are survivors and will not die, regardless of what new and improved pesticide, insecticide, infanticide or genocide is used.”¹⁶⁵

Paradoxically, many of the Indian people who were once traditional enemies have been brought together and have shared their religious beliefs and visions as a result of white aggression on their faith. The governments inadvertently forged “a peace alliance” amongst all Indians in the Americas. The same thing would probably not have been possible if left up to the Indians themselves. Horse raiding and women stealing alone would have kept them fighting over deeds that had happened one hundred odd years ago.

¹⁶⁴ Young Man 1998: 18.

¹⁶⁵ Soop 1990: 14.

These feuds would probably have been about some stolen war pony or the loss of some one's great, great, grandmother, regardless of whether the old girl would have wanted to be rescued or not. It is ironic that great Indian leaders like Sitting Bull and Tecumseh could not accomplish this feat of Indian rapport. It took the Euro-American and Canadian scheming and wily legal ways to accomplish it, even though it was not what they intended. One can argue that the Indian is indebted to non-Native bureaucrats for making them a united force fighting together for the first time. Unfortunately, on the Reserve level, that unity is not evident.

Students at University

Native people have the challenge of learning two, often contradictory, systems of education. One is a system completely oriented toward science and secularism, where we learn how things work and ask the question, what use is it? The other system is based on traditions that teach us about the connectedness and relatedness of everything, and the question to ask is, what does it mean? It is a means of orienting people toward the immediate world in which they live. Native people in today's world need both systems. Education in the Western sense helps Native people deal with fundamental issues that make their way into Native Society at a government and management level. The Mohawk educator and writer, Taiaiake (2003), states,

...going into battle without an education today is like going into battle two hundred years ago with no bow and arrow, or actually more like one hundred years ago, going to battle down at the river here with a bow and arrow and they have a Gatling machine gun. You don't stand a chance. You really don't stand a chance unless you're really educated and rooted. Then the next question comes, well what is education? Is it, as we've been talking about here, learning their ways, learning their ways of thinking, learning their skills, learning all of this? Well, in part, it is. It is learning

about the thing that is oppressing you. It is learning about the thing that has done the damage to you.¹⁶⁶

Natives must learn Western skills, and at the same time must remain grounded in their traditional ways. For many of us, we must learn for the first time what our traditions are. One of the many challenges that Natives face is assimilating our own traditional knowledge, regardless of where we come from, an urban or Reserve setting, and balancing that knowledge with a Western education. To overcome racism and discrimination, both Native and non-Native people need to recognize that our Native traditions comprise a body of knowledge that is valid in and of itself. It is an immensely practical worldview that informs us at every step of life about how to deal with things, how to respond to people and how to make sense of the world.

In some cases, Native students who have gone on to post-secondary studies to receive post-secondary degrees, have returned to their individual Reserves with hopes of making things better. Unfortunately, these students have been educated from a Western perspective, and they cannot communicate with their people. They suffer greatly from a cultural barrier between themselves and their people, caused by learning the Western way of doing things. The thinking they have formulated through “higher education” is foreign to the people back home. It is exceedingly difficult and frustrating for graduates to communicate at a level that their people can comprehend. Betty Bastien, the first Piikáni to obtain a university degree, encountered this problem. Bastien (2004) writes that even though she wanted to apply the knowledge and skills she had acquired in her university education, it was not possible because those skills were not appropriate for addressing the critical problems facing her people.

¹⁶⁶ Taiaiake 2003.

The people left at home are caught in the middle of an acculturation process. They have little exposure to the Western way of thinking and, in addition, are not able to understand that they are caught in a “perspective in transition.” Adjusting to another way of thinking is very difficult. The differences between the Western and the Native perspectives are very significant, and moreover, most people on either side are not even aware that there is a difference. As Soop (1990) writes,

The conflict of two people’s principles, philosophies and way of life is, in fact, the conflict of two cultures which, after close to a hundred years has not changed very much.¹⁶⁷

This is, in part, the problem of the social breakdown of the Native people today, a complete unawareness of different perspectives.

Drop Outs

A significant problem on the Reserves, impacted by the differences in perspectives, is the high drop-out rate of Native students from post-secondary and adult oriented programs. Some of the reasons for the high drop-out rate of the Blackfoot can be traced historically to the time when Treaty 7 was signed. The experiences of elders are important to relate here, because it is the elders who can put events into context. The elders remember the social organization of the people in that era. They also remember the impact of boarding schools on the Reserves in the years following the signing of Treaty 7 in 1877.

Too often, the memories of traditional elders of their boarding school experiences are not favorable. The Blackfoot Elder Morris Smith told of how the Indian agent made liars out of his parents (personal communication). When his parents brought him to the

¹⁶⁷ Soop 1990: 112.

residential school, the Indian agent encouraged his parents to inform him that he would be only staying a few days. Little did he realize that he would be seeing his parents only twice a year. It was under the threat of jail that his parents were forced to lie. The elder also mentions the psychological effects that he suffered when he was forced to watch his brother being punished. The elder provided other important information, such as some of the older generation's inability to talk of those times. The elder described his experiences at residential school.

...at the time I did not know all these things that were going on but as you looked at it through school, the hardship that your older brother went through, when you are looking at him being spanked and everything, that affected me a whole lot, and I'm sure it affected him too when I got strapped too. There again too, you could never talk to your sister when she was just across the room. You could not even talk to them period. So there was nobody there to look after you. There was no junior years for us, no juvenile years for us boys. It was all ordered, sort of a by law, that you had to be a certain kind of little boy, if you did wrong you were punished. So you were treated as an adult at that young age, you were treated as an animal, so to speak. If an animal did wrong, he got punished for it, even though he didn't do it, so you had to be aware of all these things that you did in school. So you see that is why you see a lot of elders who won't talk about it today because of the effects of what they did to us.

The elder also talked about the changes in the communal living of his people during those times as he had heard it from his father and grandfather. In reference to the disappearance of the buffalo and social changes caused by boarding school days he said,

It sort of changed because they all went into that boarding school level, some of them never did, you know so they maintained only in a different pattern. Well before it was the buffalo, how they looked after one another with the buffalo and going this way, there was this animal to feed which was the cow, they knew they had to supply the feed for the animal. The pattern never changed, they developed it back again, that this was the way of life they always followed. They adapted to this new animal and maintained this way of life.

When one looks back at the wisdom that the elder imparts, it is easy to see why many Native people were not attracted to education. It was because education was forced on them in a manner that was not in keeping with their ancestors' ways of teaching. When one is forced into something, a normal reaction is "fight or flight." My own experiences attest to this, because I ran away from boarding school more than once.

The New Order

The indoctrination and conditioning methods used in boarding schools have had long-term detrimental effects, well after the People were no longer in those institutions. We were treated as children. Many of us still act like children because we have not learned to think or to take responsibility. Our ancestors who were confined to the Reserves were treated in the same manner by the superintendents and Indian agents in charge of their lives. The People were rewarded when they did as the superintendents wanted – they received more rations that way, and more permits to visit with relatives on the other Reserves. If they reported on others, they were again rewarded in some way. They became accustomed to "stabbing one another in the back." These behaviours resulted in a People that could not think for themselves, act for themselves, or function without direction from someone in authority.

All the people in authoritative positions were white, – a white priest, white minister, white superintendent, white farm and ranch boss – and of all these white people who were there to "mind" the Indians, got rich. But the Indians didn't. Money and resources meant for the Indian people disappeared. Instead, a People were created who were of no use to each another. Much of this kind of conditioning is still very evident and can be found today on almost any reserve in North America. Soop (1990) writes,

To go back to the question why the Indian isn't rich, it is simply because he is not yet fully possessed by greed. The tie to the Great Spirit is not broken. For this reason his spirit is not broken. What you, the white man, see as Indian greed and demand and take as a race for life, we see as a right to a walk in life, for we have no one to beat but ourselves. ¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸ Soop 1990: 79.

Chapter VIII - Stitched World



Kerry Scott

Stitched World, 2006

Acrylic on Canvas

30" x 40"

Collection of the Artist

Since the signing of Treaty 7 and the boarding school era, the Blackfoot have pieced together the remnants of their once great society within the confines of a very small portion of their former vast Territory. Although a new lifestyle was introduced, they have been able to keep their culture intact, and as much as possible, keep the world that the old ones remember, retaining many of the old customs and traditions.

This is a time of transition. It is a time of bringing back what we were, piecing together our lives and learning to walk in a new universe. It is a time when Indians are trying to make sense of what has happened. This is the contemporary world – our world today.

Napi's perfect world was slashed and destroyed, and to symbolize that destruction, the original Napi painting was slashed and destroyed. The painting was sewn back together to represent the Blackfoot People and their efforts to rebuild their world. The red stitches that reconnect parts of Napi's world represent smallpox, one of the most destructive forces ever unleashed on the Indian people. Two other elements that wreaked additional havoc were the black robes and Treaty 7. The black stitches represent both the black robes, and the "X" signatures of the Chiefs who signed Treaty 7. The destruction of Napi's world also represents the near extinction of the animals; the spiritual disconnection with the animals and the land; the loss of knowledge and family connections; and a radical transition in the language. The combination of these factors was catastrophic for the spirituality of the Blackfoot people.

A Language in Transition

Today, as a result of colonization, many Natives may be able to speak their own language but they unconsciously think with a Western perspective. No longer immersed in their own culture, many Indians have lost the ability to think or even dream in their own language. Their thought processes and words are English. For example, eye-i-in-nawhw brings to the mind that still processes the Blackfoot language "in Blackfoot," the visualization of actions embodied by that word. Bullchild (1985) describes the impact of the changing times on that specific word.

This was the original name given the buffalo by those first people, or directly by our Creator Sun: eye-i-in-nawhw, shall be peeled. In these days of misdoings this name of the buffalo, the original name, is wrongly pronounced. It is shortened and doesn't mean the same anymore. These people of today call them ee-neew, which is a shorter word than that original one, eye-i-in-nawhw. This new name means die, death, or deceased. This new version of the original name of the buffalo doesn't pertain to what has to be done to the buffalo after it is killed – the hide peeled off and then taking the flesh to eat.¹⁶⁹

To clarify, the contemporary meaning of the Blackfoot word for buffalo has evolved from the word the Blackfoot used for the buffalo at the time of its near extinction. The word ee-neew, referring to “deceased,” is still used by Indian people today, most likely because the buffalo has not yet returned to the position of “staff of life.” In other words, the buffalo is effectively still deceased in the minds of the people, for how often do they have the opportunity to eat its flesh today?

It is very important here to be sensitive to the fundamental difference between the English and Blackfoot languages. English is a noun-based, inanimate language, devoid of life; the worldview of Euro-American and Canadian cultures is manifested through noun-focused languages. When that mind set hears a word, the mind thinks of that object, not an action. In contrast, Blackfoot is a verb-based, animate language, full of action. For example, as Bullchild (1985) describes, Creator Sun's explanation to Mudman for the naming of beek-si-gow (elk) is because of its mystic or magical feet and legs. To observe an elk in the wild would render the meaning of the verb-oriented Blackfoot word crystal clear. An elk moves rapidly but can navigate through heavy brush as quietly as a church mouse. Language, the essence of understanding, reflects the

¹⁶⁹ Bullchild 1985: 55.

structures and traditions that form the basis of communal life. A loss of tradition constitutes a loss of communal understanding.

Solutions

Although sincere efforts have been made by social scientists from a variety of areas to find solutions for the “Indian problem,” there are difficulties because their disciplines are weighted with historical baggage. Anthropology, for example, was based on a racist paradigm; its ideas were founded at a time in history when Europeans were still enslaving people of color and believed that tribal peoples would eventually disappear if forced into mainstream society through colonization and assimilation.

Peat (2002) describes how Natives can find a way to heal, not only themselves, but also the damage that Western society has done to Mother Earth.

On the other hand, dialogues are beginning between Western and Native American thinkers. Elders claim that they attempted to talk to the white people five hundred years ago but they did not know how to listen. Today they are willing to try again. A Blackfoot Elder said that the white race is the youngest race. It has great energy and potential, but, for the past few thousand years it has been playing like a child while it is watched by the black, yellow, and red peoples. Now the time has come for the white race to begin to learn, and assume its responsibilities along with the three other colors in the world.¹⁷⁰

The revitalization of Indian traditions and cultures is represented by the stitching of the damaged painting, creating a semblance of the original painting that symbolizes what the Native world has experienced. Natives are in the process of reassembling their culture – their societies, traditions and spirituality. One of the barriers that Natives must overcome is the impact of their adoption of the worst that Western society has to offer. Soop (1990) effectively describes how assimilation has gone awry on the Reserve.

¹⁷⁰ Peat 2002: 311.

With apologies to my mutt, the truth is that the equality of the Indian way of life has gone to the dogs. The Indian Affairs Department, with their friendly termination and genocide programs, have very effectively turned the Native people against themselves, tribe against tribe, Indian against Indian, Indian against Metis, Metis against Metis, brother against brother. In our dog-fight (fight for life) with the government, we as Native people should support one another and encourage each other. Instead of acting as though we are some kind of pedigree in a dog show, we should unite into one strong union to help each other.¹⁷¹

Even the thinking of our elders has been influenced by missionaries, residential schools and Indian agents, all of which served to contaminate in one way or another critical aspects of our history and culture. Sadly, most elders today are hardly aware of why these different aspects of assimilation and acculturation were instituted. But it is the research that enlightened elders are doing today, and the thought processes of the elders of tomorrow, that make them the greatest hope for rectifying this phenomenon. They will start making inroads into correcting the social issues that plague present-day Native society.

Knowledge Gap

There is a knowledge gap that extends from the time of contact to the present that needs to be bridged. This gap formed because of misinterpretation, mistranslation and the loss of spiritual elders. Ironically, some important aspects of Indian culture have been preserved in the very texts that this thesis has in part condemned – Wissler, Ewers, McLintock, ethnologists and anthropologists who interpreted journals that had been written by early explorers such as La Verendry, Fidler, Thompson and others. Their

¹⁷¹ Soop 1990: 124.

interpretations were naturally biased by their own experiences and their own outlooks on life. But they have at least offered a reference point for modern-day scholars.

The greatest untapped resource, however, still lies in the People themselves. Some contemporary Native researchers have the singular advantage of being connected to sacred societies where traditions are maintained, history confirmed and insights given to enable a correct interpretation of history and events. The essence of Indian religious societies has not changed. The vital parts of ceremonies have been handed down intact, and it is for that reason that members of today's societies, who have knowledge of the past, are so valuable. Societal knowledge gives one a better understanding of events and the ability to more accurately interpret material that is in the journals of the earliest explorers. Even so, only knowledge that serves to connect Society members to the public can be revealed.

In order to make sense of the past, the contemporary Native researcher must study the earliest historical records. It is in these old journals that the closest interpretation of traditional narratives can be found. Here, one can hear history first hand, not accounts that have been interpreted again and again, until the initial narrative is lost through misinterpretation. These second hand interpretations were constructs of Europeans, who were not intimate enough with the language and traditions to be able to provide the "real" story. Nor were they knowledgeable about the religious societies where teachings originated and insights were received, to correctly interpret events and the past. In addition, the interpretations of the Europeans, for the most part, used Western thought or historical and biblical events that happened in Western society as their interpretive frameworks, not Native philosophy.

Parenting

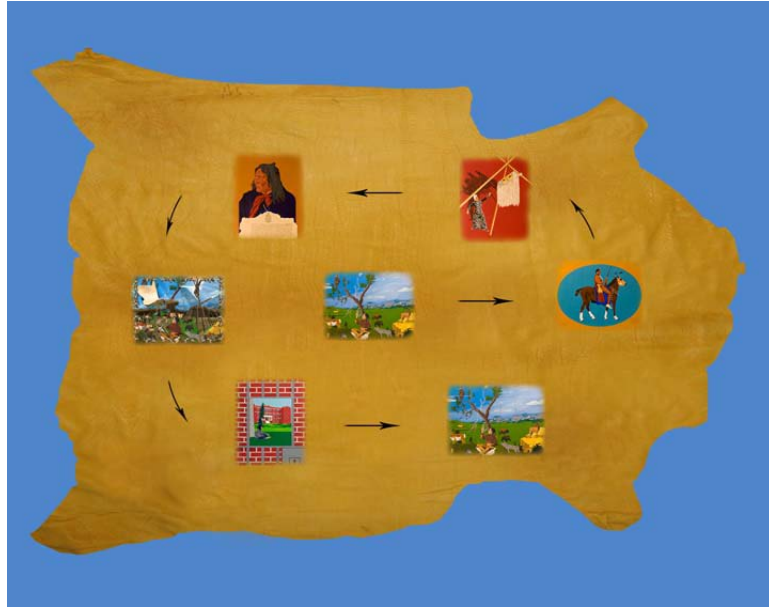
One of the most important aspects of Native culture that was severely damaged during the era of the boarding schools was parenting skills. Children, torn from their parents to be raised in boarding schools, did not learn the meaning of family. They lacked the tools they needed to give their own children guidance and encouragement about education. The early years, when a child most needs his or her parents, were lost, as were the skills that a parent learns from raising children. Many generations have been affected by this process, and as it is only a short time removed from the lives of Native People, the long-term implications are yet to be seen.

From observations of younger Native people attending University, it is clear that there is a remarkable increase in the number of new faces each year – not only in the younger people pursuing their studies, but in the older generation as well. At one time, only a few attended University, let alone completed their degrees. It could be that since higher education is now a voluntary pursuit, there is more motivation. It is also apparent that children with educated parents are more likely to seek their own degrees. The age-old practice of learning by example seems to be reappearing, and the prediction is that in the near future, we will see many more educated Native people of all ages.

Another encouraging concept that can be applied here is to take the idea of an individual's coup, as used in the traditional manner, and apply it to today's educational setting. The traditional roles of men were to protect the people, provide food and obtain individual war honours. Those same roles are valid today, with the exception of war honours which can be replaced by education honours. In addition, gender roles of people today are often reversed. It is the woman who is counting most of the education coups,

becoming the breadwinner, the family care giver. She is the one who buys and feeds the “mechanical war pony.” Everything that was traditionally the responsibility of the man is now the mandate of the woman. This comes about because most Indian men have lost their identity and purpose regarding traditional society. Today, the only protecting that the man does is to guard his woman from other men. That is why he rides around in his war pony all day in the vicinity of her workplace to keep a jealous eye on her.

Chapter IX - Conclusion



Kerry Scott

Winter Count, 2006

Acrylic on Canvas

30" x 40"

Collection of the Artist

The Contemporary Winter Count symbolizes different time periods in the history of the Blackfoot Nation. Like a traditional Winter Count, this Winter Count begins in the centre and spirals counter-clockwise to go forward in time. The artist respects the custom that traditional Winter Count symbols can only be used through transfer, and therefore, contemporary art pieces replace the symbols to tell a story that most Blackfoot Indians of today can relate to because many have actually experienced the more recent periods recorded here.

Metaphysics is the title of a treatise by Aristotle on a division of philosophy concerned with the fundamental nature of reality and being in the realms of ontology, cosmology and often epistemology. This thesis has attempted to reconnect the ideas of Aristotle with the all-encompassing holistic outlook of life arising from a Native perspective. As the research demonstrates, each part of Aristotle's conceptualization of metaphysics can be paralleled by Native philosophy. What has materialized from this research is the awareness of the metaphysics embedded in this land and in the spirituality of the Native people – it is metaphysics that connects us to each other, to our sacred places, our pipes, our animals, our bundles – all our spirituality. Deloria and Wildcat (2001) describe the metaphysics of the Native.

The best description of Indian metaphysics was the realization that the world, and all its possible experiences, constituted a social reality, a fabric of life in which everything had the possibility of intimate knowing relationships because, ultimately, everything was related.....The Indian world can be said to consist of two basic experiential dimensions that, taken together, provided a sufficient means of making sense of the world. These two concepts were place and power, the latter perhaps defined as spiritual power or life force.¹⁷²

A Return to Native Spirituality

A return to Native spirituality appears to be the crucial link to the recovery of the Indian people, as it is what is missing in their lives today. However, understanding the concept and returning to Native spirituality cannot be easily achieved. The tendency to define the Native people using Western concepts has had a severely negative impact on young Native students. They do not recognize that anthropology is the foundation of the social sciences, from where social anthropology, historical anthropology, political

¹⁷² Deloria and Wildcat 2001: 2.

anthropology and economic anthropology are all derived. Native students naively choose to pursue degrees that are completely framed by Western society. Deloria (1988) writes,

Over the years anthropologists have succeeded in burying Indian communities so completely beneath the mass of irrelevant information that the total impact of the scholarly community on the Indian people has become one of simple authority. Many Indians have come to parrot the ideas of anthropologists because it appears that the anthropologists know everything about Indian communities. Thus many ideas that pass for Indian thinking are in reality theories originally advanced by anthropologists and echoed by Indian people in an attempt to communicate the real situation.¹⁷³

Many Native graduates with degrees from various disciplines offered in University would likely not accept that they lack essential parts of their education – the ability to distinguish between the Native and Western perspectives, and an appreciation for traditional spirituality. A critical change in the curriculum must be made at the lower levels of education on the Reserves. In the old days, spirituality was reinforced on a daily basis through the actions of the individual. The connectedness of all things was constantly emphasized to younger people. Through teaching by example, the Native perspective of viewing the world was passed on as a way of life, rather than through indoctrination.

The policies put into place by Indian Affairs and the various Christian denominations were specifically designed to re-socialize Indian children in the boarding schools for the purpose of assimilation. The methods used were designed to reorient their world from the familiar Native “landscape” to a place filled with only “European”

¹⁷³ Deloria 1988: 82.

meaning and values. The goal was complete “disorientation” of the children to facilitate their assimilation into the European world.¹⁷⁴

In order to undo the damage of the boarding school experience, the indoctrination must be reversed. We have to go into the past to learn and reclaim the Native perspective, to reverse the European ontology. We must view the world again through Native eyes so that we can pass on our traditions by example and as a way of life. We must teach our current generation of children who are just as disoriented by their education as their ancestors were in boarding schools. Taiaiake (2003) states,

The present practices have to change, but not according to Western society and perspectives, nor the contemporary way that Indians are doing things because Indians have been assimilated too much into Western customs and have lost so much of traditional values...¹⁷⁵

For Natives, ancestral memories are the source of great conflict because of the need for compliance and compromise in order to live in the Western world. The “compliance gene” seems to be particularly prominent in the Indian people. Compliance was essential for the survival of the community. Compliance was what made it so easy for Christianity to replace traditional spirituality. But for the traditional Indian, contemporary Christianity does not conform to true Christianity; traditional Indian spirituality and its cultural manifestations were closer to true Christianity than anything the Indians were ever taught by those “Christian” missionaries.

One of the most important attributes of the Blackfoot peoples was their tenacity in fighting for their traditional Territory, that is still marked by sacred place names, some of which are mentioned in this thesis. Blackfoot healers still make their trips to these sacred

¹⁷⁴ Milloy 2003: 37.

¹⁷⁵ Taiaiake 2003.

landmarks for purposes of receiving spiritual powers. This demonstrates how Native Americans describe power and place – a metaphysical explanation of their relationship to the land, and the spiritual power that emanates from all these places. The spirits of sacred places bestowed power upon the people for their protection against enemies in war, and for healing, spiritual power, protection of family identities, names, clans and the social fabric of the tribe. It gave them political influence with ownerships of bundles and war medicine. It was spiritual power derived from the land that encompassed the entire life of the people.

Blackfoot sacred places – hills, mountains, lakes and buttes – all have sacred powers. The ones who know of these sacred places, particularly medicine men and women, can feel the connection to the spirits and remember the knowledge that has been passed down from their mentors. They can sense the holiness of these places and recognize that in these places, they walk on sacred ground. So the importance of the oral tradition is still paramount to contemporary Natives in all aspects of their lives.

When one embarks on a vision quest, the spirits that inhabit these places may bless the individual with spiritual power. It does not come easily, for the recipient must truly suffer for it – by prayer, and denial of food, water and comfort, and exposure to the natural elements, regardless of the season. If the spirits take pity on them, and if their prayers are strong, the seeker may receive a gift of power. The blessing of a gift of spiritual power may originate in plant form with instructions on its use for healing, or in other forms that provide protection from harm. Each sacred place has its own spirit and each spirit has its own unique characteristics. Some people never receive any spiritual

power, regardless of how many times they may attempt a quest. The spirits that inhabit these particular places can be quite discriminating about who receives their gifts.

The reality for Blackfoot people is that it is still from within their traditional Territory that their culture and religion stem. The first gifts to the Blackfoot from the Creator were the pipe and tobacco. The first medicine bundles were given to the Blackfoot in Blackfoot Territory, in the area of Waterton Lakes, which is still easily accessible to any Blackfoot living on any of the four separate Reserves in Canada and the United States.

It is ironic that although the North American continent has been divided up by white governments, making distinct divisions of countries and people within Blackfoot Territory, the land of the Blackfoot and the Blackfoot themselves remain unchanged at their core. The way the Blackfoot defended their Territory and the groups of people that descended from the three brothers remain the same, including the placement of the Blackfoot now confined to Reserves in different countries. The Aamsskáápipikáni (South Piegan) of Montana and descendants of the second brother, are still on the frontier to the south, and they are still fighting the Americans over land issues. The Aapátóhsipikáni (North Peigan), an offshoot of the Aamsskáápipikáni, live north and west of the Káínaa (Blood) in Canada, the youngest group, who are still strategically placed in the middle, while the Siksiká (Blackfoot proper), the descendants of oldest brother, are still in the rearguard.

It may seem ironic that the Káínaa have maintained intact most of the traditional societies. Mails (1973), a Protestant minister with a great interest in Native societies and cultures, states,

According to Curtis, the kit-fox society has not existed since the smallpox epidemic of 1841, when all the members except one died, and he “took his medicine to the Horn society.” This explains the assertion of a Peigan who told Curtis that the Peigan Kit-fox society was the equivalent of the Horns society of the Bloods and Blackfeet.¹⁷⁶

To be able to really understand the loss of the Horn Societies by the Blackfoot and the Piikáni, we can draw a parallel between the safekeeping of the Kit Fox Society, and a valuable family heirloom for any contemporary family unit. In order to preserve something of value, and to keep the item within the family, it is generally passed down to the youngest member of the family. In the old days, the Piikáni were always fighting invaders from the south, west and east along their frontier, and while the Blackfoot in the northern part of the territory defended their boundary, they were generally on good terms with their Cree neighbours. The safest place was in the middle, where the Káínaa were situated. They were the descendants of the youngest brother, according to Blackfoot oral tradition, and as in many cases, the youngest in the family is most often favored. One must keep in mind that at times the Blackfoot had to contend with up to six different Nations of Indians enemies, and also had the additional burden of fighting the Americans, the French, the English and of course, the invisible diseases of the white man. Milloy (1972) discusses the number of Blackfoot enemies.

Why after thirteen years of continual hostilities (1806-1819) had the Blackfoot suddenly sued for peace? It is true that throughout this period they had not only suffered repeated blows of the Crees and Assiniboine but had been compelled to fend off the attacks of the Crow, Flathead, Snake and Kootenay.¹⁷⁷

So it is safe to assume that in order to keep certain societies and religious artifacts out of harm's way, the Blackfoot would entrust them to the people in the most defended

¹⁷⁶ Mails 1973: 113.
¹⁷⁷ Milloy 1972: 206.

position, in this case the Káínaa in the middle. It is therefore possible to understand why the Horn Society disappeared from the Siksiká and from the Aamsskáápipikani but remained with the Káínaa. One can also conceive of a resurgence of the Kit Fox Society with the Aamsskáápipikani. The Horn society has already made its reappearance with the Blackfoot proper in the last few years. I predict that the Kit Fox Society will soon make its reappearance with the Aamsskáápipikani.

It is important to remember that we are dealing with Indian metaphysics here. Because of the connectedness and inter-relatedness in Blackfoot culture, a change in one facet of life will result in the change of another. The swift, or kit fox, originally exterminated in the early 1900's, has recently made its reappearance in Montana on its own. A reintroduction scheme was put into place in Alberta and Saskatchewan in 1983, however, the fox, like its ancestors, did not recognize the 49th parallel and crossed over the medicine line with relative ease. In the summer of 1996 a Montana graduate student, Amy Zimmerman, captured a highly unlikely expatriate from Canada. After six weeks of capturing only skunks in a live trap, Amy got her first look at a swift fox approximately 25 miles northeast of Havre, Montana.

“It’s a swift fox! It’s a swift fox!” she shouted to her assistant before climbing down from the truck for a closer look at an animal that Montana had officially declared extirpated (locally extinct) in 1969.¹⁷⁸

Since then, the swift fox has been reintroduced on the Blackfeet Reservation (in 2000) and continues to make a very successful recovery. It will be but a short time before the Kit Fox Society of the Aamsskáápipikani returns home, for the power animal from whence the society evolved, has already returned. Deloria (1999) writes,

¹⁷⁸ Internet: <http://fwp.mt.gov/mtoutdoors/HTML/Articles/2004/SwiftFox.htm>

Medicine men taught that plants and animals do not become extinct—they go away and do not come back until the location is being treated properly. This belief is being verified today in ecological restoration projects. Lands abused for generations, if treated properly and with respect, will see a flowering of plants that once lived there and that were believed to be extinct, and the birds and animals related to those plants will return. It is worth noting that the plants return first, than the animals, and finally the birds.¹⁷⁹

So although the people are now confined to Reserves, the metaphysics of power and place remain the same. The language, although somewhat altered, has started a reversal back to the old ways, which in turn, is reviving the old way of thinking. For many years, the people were not aware of the change from a language derived purely from verbs to a noun-oriented language. Native educators and linguists sensitive to this distinction are now facilitating Blackfoot speakers with processing this reversal.

Isolation, Good and Bad

The tribal formation and the geographic areas of the separate Blackfoot tribes are still maintained today. Although the people have been confined to Reserves and their lands have shrunk to but a small portion of what they used to be, their relationship and connection to their traditional Territory has not changed. Neither have their traditions and legends changed, despite the pressures of assimilation and colonization policies that tried to convince the people that their beliefs were laughable. According to Wright (2003),

...the problems of acculturation were not only ethical but metaphysical. They were told that their legends were ridiculous, that their healers consorted with demons, that their Master of Life was the Father of Lies. They were made to forsake their own Holy Land – every numinous rock, spring, mountain, grove, and ancient mound in the Nation – and acquire a new one, one they would never see, with names like Jordan, Galilee, and Golgotha.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ Deloria 1999: 58.

¹⁸⁰ Wright 2003: 225.

The term isolation, when viewed from a Native perspective, can have different interpretations when compared with a concept such as reductionism. Today, Native people reference “isolation” frequently in their daily lives. For the Blackfoot, it is symbolized by the 49th parallel, resulting from the Anglo American Convention of 1818 and the Oregon Treaty of 1846 which divided the Nation into American and Canadian Blackfeet. As a result of Western education and the implementation of residential schools, many Natives cannot see anything positive about the term “isolation.” Its conventional interpretation results in a very detrimental impact on much of Native culture, especially when viewed through the lens of reductionism.

The paradox is that in reality, both good and bad have resulted from isolation and how it has influenced the lives of Native people. Treaty 7 signed in 1877 at Blackfoot Crossing was the second phase of isolating Blackfoot people from each other, the first being the enforcement of the 49th parallel. Treaty 7 separated the Blackfoot further, and the reductionism that took the place of isolation had a profoundly negative impact on the Blackfoot. Deloria (1999) states,

Education today is wholly oriented toward science and secularism. At the very core of every curriculum is the belief that we can look at phenomena with a completely rational and objective eye and find abstract principles underlying all behavior, from atoms to masses of people. This perspective implies, of course, that the natural world and its inhabitants are materialistic and that even the most profound sentiments can be understood as electrical impulses in the brain or as certain chemical reactions. We have arrived at this state of affairs through the application of reductionism, a tendency to divide, subdivide, and subdivide again in order to find the constituents of an entity or event.¹⁸¹

¹⁸¹ Deloria 1999: 129.

Reductionism is one more element that has caused immense damage to Blackfoot people. They divided the country into two – Canada and the United States. They divided the Piikáni into two – the Aamsskáápipikani in the South and the Aapátóhsipikáni in the North. Treaty 7 came along and further divided the Piikáni, Káínaa and the Siksiká onto Reserves. When the Reserves were established, they divided the people and then kept them isolated from one another by requiring them to apply for permits before they could visit their relatives on other Reserves. The practice of intermarriage into family clans and the onset of inbreeding are the consequences. The implementation of boarding schools separated the children from their parents, thus depriving them of parenting skills that should have served them later in life. Private ownership of the land began, causing tension between families and clans, leading to the breakdown of the family unit.

When isolation and reductionism are applied in this manner, everything essential to a collective society is destroyed, including all of the relationships on which Native society is based – the interconnections or the metaphysics of life.

On the other hand, even though the Blackfoot Reserves were reduced to only a fraction of their original Territory, the Reserves acted like barriers between the Blackfoot and the Western worlds, which was essential to the fundamental survival of Blackfoot culture. The core of Native spirituality was, in a sense, buffered from the outside by these little islands of refuge. Greater society was essentially kept at arms' length, thus slowing the process of complete assimilation and acculturation that was intended for the Blackfoot People.

Isolation, when applied to sacred places, time, and spirituality is positive for the Indian. The isolation of the hills and mountains, where Native people went to seek their

visions, gave strength to the seeker, for he was removed from the many temptations and conveniences of life. By being isolated in these lonely places, the people were able to concentrate on their prayers, giving them the opportunity for individual connections with the spiritual forces of these places. Isolation was also evident in tribal, or personal winter counts with symbols acting as memory aids or mnemonic devices that triggered the keeper's memory. Thus, isolation is good or bad, depending upon on its implementation.

Looking back into the history of the Blackfoot, it is difficult to appreciate the differences between the Blackfoot of old, and the Blackfoot of today. Present-day Blackfoot are seeking a connection with the old before it is forever lost. Researchers, such as Knowlton (2005), are helping to identify that connection.

Although it may be the consensus in some academic circles that Aboriginal people have lost, or, are in danger of losing their identity, for those Aboriginal people who preserve information about their identity in the environment instead of in print, their identity is very much alive. As a result, everything from a small pile of rocks up to the most significant features of the land still have a purpose and reason for being. In practically every instance where a place name was used to describe a particular location, it also serves as a means to access other information.¹⁸²

Although much has changed over time, and the way we once saw the world has become distorted, the land is still here and the sacred places are still prominent fixtures on the prairies and in the mountains. The plants, the animals, the birds and the people are still here to assist the younger generation to make a life long commitment to know their traditions and history, with the hope that they can emerge from the fog created by assimilation and acculturation to discover who they really are. A Western education at the university level today enables us to compete in larger society for work to keep food on the table. But, in the words of Vine Deloria (1999),

¹⁸² Knowlton 2005.

You are an Indian, first, last, and always. You may have a degree in anthropology, law, or nuclear engineering, but that is your *profession*, that is how you make a living, it is not you!! So your traditional education should give you guidelines on how to behave. Your first responsibility is to be a human being, an Indian.¹⁸³

What remains at the heart of the solution for Native people is the adherence to the values, customs and traditions on our which culture was born. The reminder is there continuously for people of all World Nations to see. It can never be forgotten, especially by Native People. The Creator is the giver of all life and not an abstract being. He is Naato'si, the Holy-one, the Sun. The answers to the social problems that plague Natives today can only be found in the history and legends of the Native people, the source of their spirituality. They have to turn their eyes to Father Sun and seek advice; He will answer them.

In conclusion, I say it again, "The past is the prologue."

¹⁸³

Deloria 1999: 142.

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Appendix 1 - Definitions

The following definitions are provided to clarify some of the terms that are used in this paper.

Blackfoot Confederacy: The Blackfoot Confederacy is made up of three tribes, the Piikáni (Peigan), the Káínaa (Blood) and the Siksiká (Blackfoot), and their two allies, the Tsuu T'ina (Sarcee).

Blackfoot Nation: The Blackfoot Nation is made up of three tribes, the Piikáni (Peigan), the Káínaa (Blood) and the Siksiká (Blackfoot).

Citizenship: Native people in Canada are not Canadian citizens. They are citizens of their Nations.

Taiiakae (2003): Now, I'm not a Canadian. I'm not an American. I'm Mohawk.

Colonisation (Reverse): Refers to the policies adopted by the government that endorse European (English, Dutch, Spanish, Portugese) superiority, and a non-European inferiority complex in all others, made possible through a takeover by one culture of another through force. For example, the history of England is one of successive takeovers by foreign kingdoms such as the Romans, Anglos, Saxons, Danish, Norse and Normans.

Colonising Process: Entering and destroying people's domains, and developing methods of disciplinary control over their lives, while devising various techniques for taking their lands.

Colonisation and Assimilation: Through government policies and the ministries of evangelism, education and medicine, the move to bring enlightenment to the "savage" and "ungodly" Natives and to culturally assimilate them into white mainstream society. Colonisation and assimilation policies subjected Native people to a ruthless regime of land-seizure, economic exploitation and genocide and a deliberate effort to eliminate tribal cultures, languages and education.

Native Perspective: The perspective that is based on relatedness, a way of looking at the world. The simplicity of the Native perspective is deceptive because it is based on complex relationships that are the foundation of relatedness. The Native perspective is comprised of a body of knowledge that involves a complete point of view of the world; it is practical and informs us at every step of life, how to deal with things, how to respond to people and make sense of the world.

Perspective in Transition/Hybrid Perspective: Many people are trapped between tribal values constituting their unconscious behavioural responses and the values that they have been taught in schools and churches, which primarily demand conformity to seemingly foreign ideals (Deloria 1999: 311).

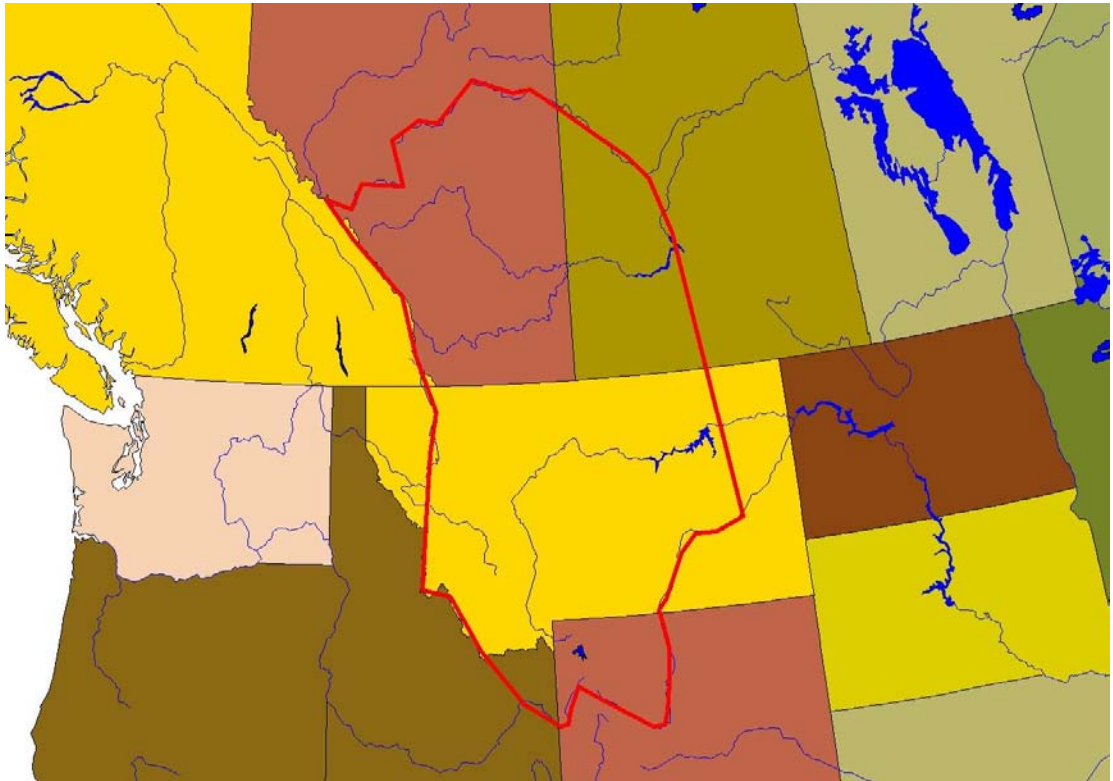
Western Cultures: For purposes of this thesis, Western cultures are those based on European cultures which predominated at the time of contact and immediately after (English, French, Spanish).

Western Perspective: The Western perspective is characterized by isolationism, categorization, knowledge specialties, reliance on mathematics to describe reality, and above all, domination over one's surroundings.

White Man: Refers to a ... "reflection of the fact that the first disruptive contacts [between the inhabitants of Turtle Island and European explorers] were with people, generally men, who had 'white' faces and subscribed to a fairly uniform set of beliefs about society, property, government and religion" (Peat 2002: 21).

White Privilege: The assumption of Western-based cultures that the dominant white culture is neutral, generic and white privilege is normalized.

Appendix 2 - Traditional Blackfoot Territory



The traditional territory of the Niitsitapi (Blackfoot Nation) and its allies extended from the North Saskatchewan River in the north to the Yellowstone River in present day Montana in the south, and from the Rocky Mountains in the west, to the Eagle Hills in the east. The territory covered approximately 249,000 square miles.

Appendix 3 – Population Estimates

Blackfoot Nation Population Estimates Prior to and Following Smallpox Epidemics

Source	Smallpox Epidemic Year(s)	Piikáni	Káínaa	Siksiká	Pre-Epidemic Population	Survival Rate	Post-Epidemic Estimate
% of total		50%	33%	17%	100%		
Derivation	1764	150,000	100,000	50,000	300,000	40%	120,000
Baseline Calculation:							
Catlin at Yellowstone (Catlin 1984)	1780-81	60,000	40,000	20,000	120,000	40%	48,000
Derivation (rounded)	1837-38	24,000	16,000	8,000	48,000	40%	19,200
Derivation (rounded)	1869-70	9,600	6,400	3,200	19,200	40%	7,680
Comparison Figures:							
Diamond (1995) 95% loss					300,000	5%	15,000
Hind (1859) estimate of 1853		2,450	2,450	1,750			6,650
Hind estimate of 1858 (Berry 1995)							7,600
December 31, 1948 census (Berry 1995)		653	1,844	1,105			3,602