

Echoes of a Mourning Nation: How the Struggle Between Economic Power and Cultural Identity Impoverished the Sioux Tribes

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Faculty Introduction

Dr. Aaron Hyams

In the Fall of 2019, Lauren Huckaby bravely waded into this fraught topic to produce a paper that contributes greatly to our understanding of the last two decades of the 19th century on the Lakota Reservations of South Dakota. Ms. Huckaby worked from the Annual Reports of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, a federal government circular produced from the 1830s until the 1910s, to author a work of original research that nobly extends the practice of the New Indian History. Ms. Huckaby found what so many others who have studied the same time and place could not: historical agency in an era where it is frequently assumed that individual American Indians had none. She ably demonstrates that while the mandates of Federal Indian Policy provided the Lakota nations few options or choices, Lakotas possessed choices nonetheless.

Abstract

Historical timelines concerning the encroachment on Lakota lands and liberties by the United States government rely predominantly on the militant endeavors of The Great Sioux War and the Massacre at Wounded Knee as the two catalytic events that diminished and impoverished the Lakota Sioux Nations. However, accepting this storyline neglects the crucial decade between these battles and how the political conflicts between the United States and Lakota leaders greatly determined the devastating circumstances of a nation impoverished, struggling to keep their families fed and their heritage alive. This research paper examines how the tumultuous events within the diminishing Sioux reservations of the 1880s led to the destitute Indian nation's culturally united uprising against the US and their failed attempts of assimilation.

Historical literature describing the Lakotas' secession of land to the United States tends to rely on the military events of the Great Sioux War of 1876 and the massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890. It highlighted these circumstances leading to the Lakota and their allies' loss of the Powder River country and the plains of the western Dakotas before they were ushered off of history's stage. The 1880's, however, proved a crucial decade in the Lakotas' cultural and economic decline, and the events of that decade proved far more devastating than the Great Sioux War itself. Additionally, the decline of Lakota independence in the 1880s set the stage for the outbreak of the Ghost Dance religion on the Lakota reservations in 1889 and 1890, and the tragic massacre at Wounded Knee. Disagreements between Lakota leaders and government agents over the manner of life Lakotas would be allowed to pursue on their diminishing reservations in the 1880s created economic stagnation and ultimately caused a rebellion against the federal government's attempts at forced assimilation throughout the decade. Despite the US

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government's attempts to strip the Lakota of their heritage and culture, the violence that ensued in 1890 created a sense of unity as the remaining tribe members strove to preserve their collective identity in the midst of poverty and dispossession.

Long before the US drew plans for westward expansion, the Lakota natives called the Great Plains their home. Living off of the land they deemed sacred, these tribes depended on the vast expanses of otherwise unoccupied land to secure their physical, cultural, and spiritual needs. As pioneers headed west in search of prosperity through mining and livestock trades, the Sioux bands eagerly signed treaties to give up their lands in return for peaceful coexistence with their new neighbors.¹ However, as the growing white settlements required increasingly larger portions of the natives' designated resources, the tribes of the Great Plains found themselves in need of self-defense. The Sioux and the US engaged in continuous battles and subsequent negotiations, all resulting in the further constriction and dispersion of designated native property. Upon the final division of the reservations, US government officials strived to strip the Lakota nations of their cultural identity and

¹ Alan L. Neville et al, "The Diminishment of the Great Sioux Reservation Treaties, Tricks, and Time," *Great Plains Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (2013): 237-251.

assimilate them into “modern” society. The results proved to be dismal; the ceaseless turmoil ultimately brought the Sioux to create a religion in a desperate attempt to regenerate the hope of saving what was left of their community. Instead of ridding the nation of its “Sioux Problem,” the actions of the US officials throughout the time period only succeeded in creating a poverty-stricken society united through tragedy.

Early Conflicts and the Designation of Reservation Land

For almost a century, the Lakota Sioux held the lands surrounding the Black Hills as their own. Having conquered the Kiowa and Crow tribes to secure a means for bountiful hunting and trading with western pioneers, they established a prosperous and mostly peaceful means of living on the Plains. As more white settlers intent on starting new lives flooded to the area, many of the Lakota migrated even further south to Fort Laramie, where they developed connections with the businessmen and military personnel camped there. During this time, one Sioux warrior in particular, Red Cloud, successfully managed to cultivate a strong and trustworthy reputation among both the native peoples and the soldiers and officers of the area. Despite Red Cloud’s character as a man intent on staying out of political disputes between the US and the tribes, he and his band found it increasingly difficult to remain inactive in battle as miners and hunters continued to encroach on their lands. When Colonel Carrington arrived at a peace negotiation between the US government and the Sioux with 700 troops, intent on securing the Bozeman Trail through military force, an infuriated Red Cloud set out for a wrathful retribution. Within two years, he and his tribe triumphantly forced the US military to abandon the forts built within their territory.²

Illusions of Property, Promise, and Protection

Following the Red Cloud Wars, representatives from both the US government and the Sioux nation gathered for a meeting to discuss and negotiate the terms of their land in the Dakotas in 1868. This treaty, held at Fort Laramie, aimed to end the ongoing land feuds by designating

² Robert W. Larson, “Part 1: Red Cloud The Warrior Years.” *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* (Montana Historical Society) 47, no. 1 (1997): 22-31.

sixty million acres of land exclusively for the Lakota.³ Though it did require that the Plains Indians allow for construction of railways on land surrounding the reservation, the 1868 treaty gave the Lakota faith that their lands, newly designated as The Great Sioux Reservation, would remain untouched by white settlers.⁴

Within the perimeters of this treaty laid one monumental problem: rumors of gold throughout the Black Hills area had been circulating since 1804, and the pioneers of the west were in search of *El Dorado* (which, much to their dismay, was never found). Soon after the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie, scientific reports from a multitude of geologists emerged. When Lieutenant Colonel George Custer's 1874 survey of the area confirmed these rumors, miners and pioneers began to flock toward the forbidden Sioux territory in hopes of finding wealth. Despite the agreement to uphold the laws and protect the Sioux, military leaders outwardly encouraged exploration of the land and conducted their own expeditions.⁵ As a result, "large numbers of Sioux departed their agencies on the reservation, intent on hunting and conducting raids on the whites who traveled toward the Black Hills in ever-increasing numbers."⁶ After failed attempts at negotiating terms with the Sioux chiefs on and off of reservations, the commission advised Congress to force the free-roaming Sioux in northern Nebraska onto the Great Sioux Reservation and end subsistence allotments if the tribe members refused to sell their land. When the Sioux ignored President Grant's order to return to their reservations by the end of January 1876, General Sheridan prepared his troops for war.⁷

Despite the fugitive Lakotas' initial successes against General Crook at the Battle of the Rosebud and General Custer at Little Bighorn, most of the fighting ended within a year as the tribes' chiefs and their followers

³ John H. Burkholder, "Poised for Profit: Fort Pierre and the Development of the Open Range in South Dakota," *South Dakota History* (South Dakota State Historical Society) 41, no. 3 (2011): 323-352.

⁴ Neville et al, "The Diminishment of the Great Sioux Reservation Treaties, Tricks, and Time," *Great Plains Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (2013): 237-251.

⁵ John D. McDermott, "The Military Problem and the Black Hills, 1874-1875," *South Dakota History* 31, no. 3 & 4 (2001): 188-210.

⁶ Burkholder, "Poised for Profit: Fort Pierre and the Development of the Open Range in South Dakota," *South Dakota History* (South Dakota State Historical Society) 41, no. 3 (2011): 324.

⁷ John D. McDermott, "The Military Problem and the Black Hills, 1874-1875," *South Dakota History* 31, no. 3 & 4 (2001): 188-210.

surrendered to the US agents by fall 1877.⁸ As the Lakota tribes resigned to their reservations, the US Congress quickly moved to enact laws to aid in their initial aims for the conflicts by opening up the Black Hills area to miners and cattlemen looking to make profit on the new frontier. The Sioux nation grew increasingly irritated with the US government and its failed promises to them as they moved hundreds of miles, often on foot, to their newly assigned homes.⁹ In one of his reports, Commissioner James Irwin of the Red Cloud Agency (an Oglala Sioux tribe reservation) noted that:

It is a fact known to every intelligent man who has been with Indians on the frontier, that the most damaging effects have heretofore resulted from broken promises made by the government officials, causing the greater part of the troubles with the Sioux since the treaty of 1868. It is true the government has spent large sums in feeding them, but it has driven them, contrary to treaty promises, from place to place, each time taking more of their territory, until nothing is left them but the 'bad lands.'¹⁰

As a result of the end of the Great Sioux Wars, the US Congress enacted The Black Hills Agreement of 1877. This agreement not only forced

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Lakotas to migrate to smaller confines, but also permitted for the establishment of roadways that ran from the northern areas of the Black Hills to agricultural communities east of the Missouri River.¹¹ With Lakotas confined to their reservations and the consequential expansion of open ranges, cattle overpopulation soon became an issue. Settlers of the Black Hills frontier often directed their cattle onto the reservation, allowing them to graze freely on the Lakotas' grasslands while evading

⁸ Jerome A. Greene, "Out with a Whimper: The Little Missouri Expedition and the Close of the Great Sioux War." *South Dakota History* (South Dakota State Historical Society) 35 (2005), 1-39.

⁹ James Irwin, "Red Cloud Agency, Dakota." *Reports of Agents in Dakota* (1878) 36-38.

¹⁰ Irwin, 37

¹¹ Neville et al, "The Diminishment of the Great Sioux Reservation Treaties, Tricks, and Time." *Great Plains Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (2013): 237-251.

the taxes and grazing fees they owed on their profitable livestock.¹² As a result, the cattlemen and agricultural industry eventually succeeded in petitioning Congress to continue to diminish the reservations. In 1887, the US passed the Allotment Act, forcing the tribes into owning individual sections of land, subdivided within the reservations as the government worked tirelessly to strip them of their nomadic culture. In addition to opening up formerly reserved tribal lands to non-Indians, this act permanently ended The Great Sioux Reservation by dividing it into six separate entities: Pine Ridge, Rosebud, Standing Rock, Cheyenne River, Lower Brule, and Crow Creek.¹³

The Fight to Maintain a Cultural Identity as the US Encroached on Land and Lifestyle

Nevertheless, this division of the Lakota tribes and subsequent forced allotment did not promote westernization or acceptance of defeat for the Lakotas. Many of the tribes, whose nomadic culture often led to the assembling and disbursing of groups well before the continual diminishment of the reservations, maintained their fights for justice as they reestablished their roles among their tribal members each time they moved.¹⁴ **Red Cloud, a central-leading figure of the Oglala Lakota, residing on the Pine Ridge Reservation, rapidly secured his reputation for defending his people from westernization.** Red Cloud, a central-leading figure of the Oglala Lakota, residing on the Pine Ridge Reservation, rapidly secured his reputation for defending his people from westernization. A symbol of cooperation among the natives and Americans, the Oglala warrior was well-known in high political circles and held the attention of a variety of civic leaders throughout the nation. In addition to his friendly demeanor toward politicians, the chief also earned respectability from many of the white settlers and the military personnel who lived and worked near his

¹² H. D. Gallagher, "Report of Pine Ridge Agency," *Reports of Agents in Dakota* (1888), 46-52.

¹³ Neville et al, "The Diminishment of the Great Sioux Reservation Treaties, Tricks, and Time," *Great Plains Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (2013): 237-251.

¹⁴ Larson, "Part 1: Red Cloud, The Warrior Years," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* (Montana Historical Society) 47, no. 1 (1997): 22-31.

tribe.¹⁵ Because of the agreements following Red Cloud's War, the chief believed that he had secured the rights of his people to conduct their lives as in the ways of their culture within the reservation grounds.¹⁶

However, this distinguished reputation of good character among much of the white populace did not transfer into automatic likability and partnership with everyone who came in contact with Red Cloud. In numerous reports throughout his seven-year stint as an Indian Agent on the Pine Ridge reservation, V. T. McGillicuddy repeatedly referred to the Oglala's political figure head in language that was uncomplimentary, at best. The commissioner's mission was to encourage the assimilation process among the Sioux and Northern Cheyenne population, and he believed that Red Cloud was the predominant culprit behind his lack of professional progress on the reservation. Though his distaste for the chief (and his support from officials in Washington) is evident throughout all seven years of the Pine Ridge Reservation's reports, his growing frustration is unmistakable in his final report of 1885. In this record, McGillicuddy opened with a self-promoting image of a rapidly improving Sioux Agency population, with the exception of the Northern Cheyennes reserved within the Sioux Agency, and a few Oglala members who chose to follow Red Cloud's example.

I regret to report that Red Cloud and his retainers on different parts of the reservation still remain huddled in small villages, passing their time in dancing and feasting, and mourning over the degeneracy of some of the young men present, ay, who, in place of proving their bravery on the war-path, as was custom when they were boys, are making slaves of themselves working for a living.¹⁷

This rift between the two opposing figure heads was a direct result of both economic and cultural conflicts on the reservation. While Red Cloud believed that the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie gave himself and his tribal members the right to pursue their own way of life within the blurred lines of the establishment, McGillicuddy persisted in his efforts to break apart any tribal relations and assimilate the natives into a more

¹⁵ Larson, 22-31.

¹⁶ Neville et al, "The Diminishment of the Great Sioux Reservation Treaties, Tricks, and Time," *Great Plains Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (2013): 237-251.

¹⁷ V. T. McGillicuddy, "Pine Ridge Agency, Dakota," *Reports of Agents in Dakota*, (1885), 35.

“American” form of behavior. Along with Red Cloud and his followers’ refusal to build and live in the allotted log homes, the band continued to rely on their promised government food rations when there was no longer wild game to hunt within the reservation confines.¹⁸

This problem of dependence on government-provided sustenance swiftly bled into another key protestation of Red Cloud’s followers: the refusal to send Indian children to the government-run schools. The implementation of day and boarding schools on Pine Ridge Reservation created fresh conflicts between the Oglalas, the reservation agent, and members of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington. Many of the settlement’s children attended Carlisle, a boarding school in Pennsylvania, far from their families on Pine Ridge. As local day schools produced moderate success amongst their students, government officials (along with support from many of the Sioux) pushed for the formation of a boarding school within the confines of the reservation. McGillicuddy opposed this movement, believing that separating the Indian children from their communities was the only reliable means of assimilating the next generation of natives.¹⁹

Despite his initial feelings, the commissioner eventually saw the potential of a local boarding school to elevate his standing in Washington and assert more power over the Oglala people. The school opened its doors in December of 1883, but it wasn’t the resounding success that McGillicuddy had hoped for. Red Cloud refused to send any of his children to the school, describing it as a means to enslave the younger generation of the Oglalas.²⁰ In April of 1885, Red Cloud accused Agent McGillicuddy of withholding his rations. However, in an agreement made in 1876, the Lakota headmen had agreed that his continued food allowance was dependent on the children of the reservation participating in the required education system.²¹ In an attempt to extinguish this ongoing battle on Pine Ridge and bring peace, officials ultimately

¹⁸ McGillicuddy, 1885. “Pine Ridge Agency, Dakota,” *Reports of Agents in Dakota* (1881, 1883, 1885): 44-50.

¹⁹ McGillicuddy, 44-50.

²⁰ Nancy J. Hulston, “Federal Children: Indian Education and the Red Cloud-McGillicuddy Conflict,” *The South Dakota State Historical Society* (1995), 1-15

²¹ McGillicuddy, “Pine Ridge Agency, Dakota,” *Reports of Agents in Dakota* (1885), 33-38.

made the decision to remove McGillicuddy from the agency.²² Red Cloud's remarkable victory over McGillicuddy proved that he still held substantial clout among both US officials and his followers on the reservation. Like Lakota victories on the battlefield in the 1870s, however, this success was hard won and short lived. Subsequent events proved that the Lakota's eroding cultural conditions and reliance on the federal government would only continue.

The Deterioration of a Nation and the Rise of an Impoverished Cultural Identity

A great deal of complaint has been made by the Indians, and justly so, on account of so many of their young men being taken away each year by show companies to figure as attractions for the circus, Wild West exhibitions, quack-medicine business, and every conceivable scheme to make money out of them. The evil has grown to such proportions as to deserve particular attention.²³

By 1889, the forced participation in circuses amongst the Lakota populace (and more specifically, the Oglala of Pine Ridge Reservation) became such a critical problem that the Indian Agent, H. D. Gallagher, designated an entire section of his annual report to the Bureau of Indian Affairs to the matter. The repercussions of this practice were multifaceted: it took young men away from their families, who were depending on them to help support their efforts in farming; and it meant that many (in the case of Pine Ridge,

While some of these young Sioux went against their will, others, such as Luther Standing Bear, went of their own volition...

at least 100) natives were illegally taken off of their reservations and were no longer under the care of the federal government.²⁴ While some of these young Sioux went against their will, others, such as Luther Standing Bear, went of their own volition, hoping to gain employment and to relight the sense of mobile adventure they once had as members of a free tribal nation.²⁵ The Lakota members' participation in the Wild

²² Hulston, "Federal Children: Indian Education and the Red Cloud-McGillicuddy Conflict," *The South Dakota State Historical Society* (1995), 1-15

²³ Gallagher, "Report of Pine Ridge Agency," *Reports of Agents in Dakota* (1889): 153.

²⁴ Gallagher, 153.

²⁵ Ryan E. Burt. "'Sioux Yells' in the Dawes Era: Lakota 'Indian Play,' the Wild West, and the Literatures of Luther Standing Bear," *American Quarterly* (Johns Hopkins University Press) 62, no 3 (2010): 617-634.

West exhibitions outwardly displayed the internal struggles among the younger generation. Taught the importance of earning a living through Indian boarding schools, they found it impossible to do so on the lands that the government provided them.

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Though the rifts between the older and younger generations of Pine Ridge Reservation certainly played a role in the economic hardship that families faced throughout the allotment era, circuses and Wild West shows were not solely to blame. The designated land of the reservation was often described as dry earth with no feasible means of promoting irrigation and the cultivation of crops.²⁶ Even McGillicuddy, who once said that the natives had "...not much use for grain unless he can have it served up in the shape of hot rolls and buckwheat cakes in a Washington hotel,"²⁷ admitted that the land was hardly suitable for any type of agricultural growth. Despite these initial problems, the Lakotas on the reservation eventually learned to farm with moderate success; but this did not guarantee a viable and self-sustaining food source. In the report of 1888, Commissioner Gallagher described the ongoing problem of nearby pioneers purposefully placing their cattle within reservation lines in order to allow for free grazing and to be exempt from the taxes they would otherwise be required to pay.²⁸ When many of the residents left their reservation in order to represent Pine Ridge at the Sioux Commission the following year, their crops were destroyed by the wandering cattle and lack of members to care for their harvests while they were absent.²⁹ Despite the eagerness of the Lakotas to adapt to learning new practices and the appeals of consecutive commissioners to the government to send additional farmers, the reservation remained largely unaided.

²⁶ McGillicuddy, "Pine Ridge Agency, Dakota." *Reports of Agents in Dakota* (1881), 44-50.

²⁷ McGillicuddy, "Pine Ridge Agency, Dakota," *Reports of Agents in Dakota* (1883), 35.

²⁸ Gallagher, "Report of Pine Ridge Agency," *Reports of Agents in Dakota* (1888), 46-52.

²⁹ Gallagher, "Report of Pine Ridge Agency." *Reports of Agents in Dakota*, August 27 (1889), 153.

Even though the dry land of the reservation was mostly fruitless for the Sioux, American pioneers still considered it to be extremely valuable for their own purposes. As the mining industry continued to expand, reservations became an increasingly bothersome barrier to the advancement of their businesses. In order to gain access to marketing prospects east of the Missouri River, miners, cattlemen, and numerous other business ventures required passage through the appointed Native lands. To accomplish this, the government crafted agreements with the Lakota: they exchanged mostly infertile reservation land for cattle: something members of the Pine Ridge reservation needed for sustenance.³⁰

By 1890, the multitude of problems surrounding the management and leadership of the reservation caused the residents of Pine Ridge to reach their breaking point. A rumor began that an old medicine man had appeared in Wyoming, claiming that he would “resurrect and rehabilitate all the departed heroes of the tribe, and restore to these people in greater abundance than ever before known such herds of buffalo and other wild game.”³¹ As a result, the Indians would be free of the white man’s rule, able to live as they chose, once again. Soon after, the tribes began gathering in masses to pay ceremonial homage to their new savior. On Pine Ridge, the reservation’s police and military forces ended these ceremonies as quickly as possible. Though the natives carried guns and ammunition, prepared to fight to the death, the Indian agent reports from September of that year claimed that the officers had no intentions of using violence in their attempts to disburse the tribes.³² However, when military officials executed Sitting Bull, one of the figureheads surrounding this new religion, violence arose.³³ On the morning of December 29th, 1890, 400 troops surrounded and killed at least two hundred Sioux and Northern Cheyennes on the White Clay Creek.³⁴

³⁰ Greene, “The Sioux Land Commission of 1889: Prelude to Wounded Knee,” *South Dakota History* (South Dakota State Historical Society) 1, no. 1 (1970): 41-72.

³¹ Gallagher, “Report of Pine Ridge Agency.” *Reports of Agents in South Dakota* (1890), 49.

³² Gallagher, 49.

³³ Greene, “The Sioux Land Commission of 1889: Prelude to Wounded Knee,” 41-72.

³⁴ Greene, “An Artilleryman at Wounded Knee and White Clay Creek: The Reminiscence of Private John W. Comfort.” *South Dakota State Historical Society* 46 (1): 55-84.

The battle that ensued on Wounded Knee Creek between the Sioux and the US 7th Cavalry exposed the hard truths that history created for the Pine Ridge Reservation and the Sioux nation throughout the strenuous and fallible assimilation period. Caught between their own cultural practices and the new “American” lifestyles they strived to create through the assimilation process, the people of the Pine Ridge Reservation continued to lose their tribal identities as they fell deeper into poverty. Whereas the 1890 census reported that there were 1,181 Oglala Sioux and 141 Northern Cheyennes for a total of 1,443 families,³⁵ the report of 1893 recorded mixes of Upper Wakpamini, Lower Wakpamini, White Clay, Upper Wounded Knee, Lower Wounded Knee, Porcupine, Medicine Root, and Pass Creek families; totaling to 1,636.³⁶ As the natives worked to rebuild both their own security among the civilization and their trust in a government that had turned on them, the commissioners on the Pine Ridge Reservation continually reported that the instability persisted within the social and political structures of the reservation, and was quickly deteriorating and eclipsing any progress made with its people and government leaders.³⁷ Despite the reported successful implementation of the cattle industry on the reservation, excessively dry seasons and subsequent fires to the crops threatened to disrupt any real monetary earnings or economic independence for the Lakota.³⁸

In the face of this seemingly bleak loss of identity among the Lakota and their neighboring tribes, the natives in the southern region of South Dakota continued to pay homage to their lost loved ones and their cultural identities through the ritualistic and artistic expression of the Ghost Dance. One onlooker, who witnessed the ceremonial practice just one year after the massacre of Wounded Knee took place, described the scene:

³⁵ Gallagher, “Report of Pine Ridge Agency,” *Reports of Agents in South Dakota* (1890), 48-55.

³⁶ Chas G. Penney, “Report of Pine Ridge Agency,” *Reports of Agents in South Dakota* (1893), 287-289.

³⁷ Penney, 287-289.

³⁸ Penney, 287-289.

As nearly as I could count, there were between three and four hundred persons. One stood directly behind another, each with his hands on his neighbor's shoulders...[they] sent up the most fearful, heart-piercing wails I ever heard,- crying, moaning, groaning, and shrieking out their grief, and naming over their departed friends and relatives, at the same time taking handfuls of dust at their feet, washing their hands in it, and throwing it over their heads. Finally, they raised their eyes to heaven, their hands clasped high above their heads, and stood straight and perfectly still, invoking the power of the Great Spirit to allow them to see and talk with their people who had died. This ceremony lasted for about fifteen minutes, when they all sat down where they were, and listened to another address, which I did not understand, but which I afterwards learned was words of encouragement and assurance of the coming Messiah.³⁹

Though the US still held fast to the claim that the cavalry troops were attacked by participants of the Ghost Dance in 1890, the Sioux pressed to memorialize

...the Sioux pressed to memorialize and honor the great losses that they endured throughout the European-American expansion into the west.

and honor the great losses that they endured throughout the European-American expansion into the west. In 1903, the surviving children of the Wounded Knee Massacre victims helped to construct a memorial obelisk in the same fashion that General Custer and his exhibitions were memorialized throughout their territories. The monument stood as a direct protest to the misconstrued recorded history that depicted the battle as the ultimate triumph against the native savage.⁴⁰

Throughout the 1800s, the US made many empty promises in an attempt to momentarily appease the Lakota as they acquired lands for their own monetary gain. While US government officials worked tirelessly to assimilate natives into an economically based, individualistic society, the Lakota remained steadfast in maintaining their cultural identities as collective tribes. Contrary to the commissioners and US

³⁹ Z. A. Parker, "Ghost Dance at Pine Ridge," *The Journal of American Folklore* 4, no. 13 (1891): 161.

⁴⁰ David W. Grua, "'In Memory of the Chief Big Foot Massacre': The Wounded Knee Survivors and the Politics of Memory," *Western Historical Quarterly* (2015), 31-51.

government's attempts throughout time to erase the cultural practices and historical events from the minds of the younger generations, the new era continued in the tradition of remembering their past as they endured through their present circumstances. Ultimately, the American government's unreliability in upholding its commitments plunged the declining Sioux nation into material poverty as they fought to keep their heritage alive. ■

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Student Biography

Lauren Huckaby was a senior majoring in history at the time this article was written. The author believes that an honest narrative, including perspectives from all participants in the storyline, is crucial to understanding the past and present-day society. She became enthralled with the historical narrative of the American Indian, along with the long term social, economic, political, and cultural effects of Anglo colonization, after enrolling in a Native American History course. Under the mentorship of Dr. Aaron Hyams of the Department of History, Lauren was inspired through her research to demonstrate the significance of the political decisions of US and Lakota Sioux leaders in the 1880s and how they influenced the fate of the Sioux nation, a concept that is predominantly overshadowed with stories of war in the traditional text. She is in the graduate program at Sam Houston State University, studying history with an emphasis on rights and identities. Lauren intends to graduate in December 2021 and to continue aiding in the unearthing of a more authentic cultural history that represents voices from all members of society.