From buffalo to beeves: The transformation of the Oglala Lakota economy 1868-1889

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FROM BUFFALO TO BEEVES:

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE OGLALA LAKOTA ECONOMY, 1868-1889

by

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The twenty-year period between 1868 and 1889 marked a significant and liminal period for the Oglala Lakota culture. The nomadic equestrian society that depended upon the buffalo as their most significant economic resource, itself only a little over a century old, ended dramatically with the extermination of the bison and the implementation of the United States' reservation policy. This thesis examines the economic changes that occurred within that twenty-year period, and how the Oglala Lakota attempted to adapt themselves to the alien incursions of the white men and their strange ideas and way of life. The study centers on the emergent cattle industry that developed in the region surrounding the Red Cloud Agency and then later the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation.

The Oglala, defeated by and dependent on the United States, sought to establish a new economy based upon the burgeoning cattle industry that emerged in that region following the Civil War. However, the tribe faced significant obstacles, including an unyielding federal bureaucracy with its unrealistic policies, and regional competition from whites surrounding the reservation and “squaw men” residing on the reservation. Moreover, the Oglala dealt with the pall of racism in their struggle to enter the economic fray of the cattle industry on the Northern Great Plains.

For the Oglala cattle came to represent not only a foundation for a new tribal economy, but a link to more traditional social and economic practices within Lakota society. The Oglala attempted to incorporate new economic and social realities within their pre-existing culture infrastructure in order to deal with these changes in a more familiar setting. Unfortunately, such attempts failed as federal policies pertaining to the assimilation of Native American cultures, which were influenced by philanthropic Jeffersonian ideals, provided strict guidelines for social, political, and economic behavior.

My work is heavily influenced by studies by Richard White, Gary Anderson, David Rich Lewis, and Peter Iverson. These historians examined the cultural changes that occur when two or more different cultures come together in an attempt to understand one another. I have chosen the period from 1868 to 1889 because this liminal, yet relatively brief, period of time saw the Oglala Lakota descend from rulers of the Northern Great Plains to a dependent nation completely at the mercy of the United States. The thesis is divided into three chapters, each of which focuses on one economic stage of development during this period. The first explores the end of the buffalo economy and the introduction of cattle to the tribal economy. The second looks at early Oglala attempts to enter the regional cattle industry. The final chapter examines the events and circumstances that frustrated the tribe's inchoate cattle economy.
INTRODUCTION

When Europeans arrived in the Americas they found not only a “new world,” they encountered an extremely diverse indigenous population. These Native Americans developed a wide range of cultures in the thousands of years of migration and occupation of North, Central, and South America. Advanced civilizations, such as the Aztec and Inca in South America, coexisted with much more primitive societies on their respective continents.¹ Despite cultural differences many Native American societies developed mutually beneficial trade systems that flourished long before contact with Europeans. For example, the sedentary Pueblo Indians participated in an exchange with nomadic plains tribes in what is now the Southwestern United States and Northern Mexico from approximately 1450 AD until the 1600s. The Pueblo villages exchanged corn, bread, cotton blankets, and ceramics for bison meat, fat, and hides with tribes such as the Apache and Comanche. This mutualistic economic system ended when the Spanish gained military control over the Pueblo villages. More significantly, a pattern of economic disruption within Native communities held true throughout the conquest of the Americas.²

Euro-Americans forever altered, and sometimes destroyed, indigenous economies, despite the fact that they were more than willing to accommodate themselves to such trade networks when it facilitated the completion of their missions, whether economically or politically motivated. This does not, however, necessarily imply a conscious or malevolent

intent upon the part of Europeans to systematically bring an end to Native American economies. The destruction of indigenous economies resulted when Euro-Americans gained dominance over Native American cultures politically, economically, socially, or through any combination of the three. When a cultural imbalance occurred the dominant society forced the more vulnerable culture into adopting their economic patterns and techniques. While this does not mean that the dominant culture was not affected, and did not change, it does mean that the cultural response for the weaker society occurred with more significant social alterations within that society. Consequently, when different cultures meet, the result of the negotiated response to circumstances is adaptation, which is an attempt to maintain preexisting conditions in the face of change.³ This study examines the Oglala Lakota’s attempt to economically “adapt” to their defeat and subsequent submission to the United States’ federal government.

For the Oglala tribe, the threat from the United States appeared swiftly and brought about significant cultural alterations. In the brief twenty-year period between 1868 and 1889, the tribe went from the dominant regional power on the Northern Plains to the utterly defeated foe of the United States’ military. More importantly, it was during this period that the culture of the Oglala tribe fell victim to the ideological impingements of Enlightenment thought and economic capitalism that personified western civilization during this period. The United States government’s policy concerning Native Americans centered on the incorporation of indigenous peoples into American mainstream society,

³ For an extensive and fascinating anthropological examination of this topic see, Roy Ellen, Environment, subsistence and system: The ecology of small-scale social formations (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 241.
and that meant Native Americans needed to adopt capitalism as the economic base of their society. Despite conservative attempts to maintain and reproduce the Oglala tribe’s economic infrastructure, the tribe failed to preserve their traditional modes of production and social structure during this liminal period.⁴

Other studies pertaining to the interactions of Euro-Americans and Native Americans bolster the argument laid out in this thesis. Richard White’s seminal work, *Roots of Dependency*, illuminated the negative influence that the market economy played in the destruction of Native American cultures. However, White overemphasized the inevitability of tribal economic dependence on the ever-expanding capitalistic system. Moreover, his study portrayed Native Americans as nearly helpless victims of the malevolent virus of capitalism. According to White, the market itself made Indians dependent and dispossessed.⁵

White’s next study, *The Middle Ground*, presented a different picture entirely. Instead of inevitable dependence White found extended periods of accommodation between Euro-Americans and the indigenous tribes in the Great Lakes region. He noted that for as long as both cultures remained relatively balanced in terms of power, what arose was a world where the two cultures, white and Indian, created a new system of meaning and cultural exchange for each society. White also stated that cultural accommodation broke down when the Americans extended their hegemony over the

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⁴ According to a theory presented by Thomas D. Hall in, *Social Change in the Southwest, 1350-1880* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989), 22-23, by 1889 the Oglala belonged in what he called the third level of social structural incorporation. This means that one culture is dependent upon another and has lost its ability to regain its culture, as it existed before contact with the dominant society.

region following the War of 1812. In economic terms White's study still focuses on trade dependency as a cause of the tribe's downfall. For the Oglala Lakota, dependency upon American trade goods played very little role in the tribe's economic transformation during the period in question.

Kathryn E. Holland Braund's *Deerskins and Duffels*, examines the Creek tribe's relationship with Euro-Americans, and mirrors White's later work in many respects. She finds an extended period of cultural accommodation between the Creek tribe and Spanish, English, and then later, American settlers. Furthermore, as with White, she also marks the Creeks' cultural downfall at 1815, when the United States gained complete control of the deerskin trade within the region. However, she goes farther than White by giving credit to the Creek tribe for the economic success, and even survival, of Euro-American colonies in the Southeastern region of the United States. Both White and Braund focused on the economic influence of Euro-American society and the changes that occurred within Native American society as a result.

Ethnohistorian David Rich Lewis's text, *Neither Wolf Nor Dog*, parallels my study on the Oglala Lakota more closely than either White's or Braund's. The focus of Lewis's study centers on Native American adaptation to the implementation of federal programs designed to promote Native American assimilation into mainstream American society. Lewis examines three western tribes; the Northern Utes, Hupas, and Tohono O'odhams and their experiences with the United States government's agrarian civilization programs.

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7 Kathryn E. Holland Braund, *Deerskins and Duffels: The Creek Indian Trade with Anglo-America, 1685-1815* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993).
He found that each group, when faced with assimilation into white society, attempted to adapt to changes in a manner consistent with their traditional, or pre-contact, modes of production. Lewis ultimately found that each tribe “found itself marginally incorporated or abandoned on the periphery of American society, a product of impractical theory and expectation.”

Tribes, when faced with change, will either consciously or unconsciously try to replicate their cultural system by applying familiar social structures to these changes in order to make them less threatening and more acceptable. Lewis presents a pattern of change within indigenous cultures that compares quite closely to the economic crisis experienced by the Oglala Lakota.

Peter Iverson’s study, *When Indians Became Cowboys*, examines the cultural significance of the relationship between cattle and Indians. Iverson believes that cattle ranching meant more than just an economic enterprise for Native Americans. For Native Americans, such as the Lakota, Apache, and others, ranching offered tribes an avenue toward maintaining their tribal identity. Iverson goes so far as to state that “cattle ranching emerged, therefore, as a symbol of a new day.” However, while it is true that to this day many Native American tribes maintain their tribal identities, in the process of cultural adaptation they lost their tribal cultures. Furthermore, the struggle to successfully maintain their tribal identities contained many variables in the equation, including a racist white society more than willing to relegate Indians to the periphery of American society. The “new day” for many tribes meant poverty and cultural extinction.

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Studies pertaining specifically to the Oglala Lakota include the works of Catherine Price, *The Oglala People, 1841-1879*, and Robert Utley, *The Last Days of the Sioux Nation*. Price examines the political developments, mainly warfare, of the tribe from 1841 to 1879. She found that, despite the United States government’s attempts to modify the political customs of the Oglala tribe and undermine the influence of its leaders, the tribe’s adaptable and fluid political organization allowed the tribe to cope with the hegemonic menace presented by the United States. Price, because of her focus on political events, logically states that the end of Oglala culture occurred in 1879, the last year the tribe presented any real military threat to the United States.

Historian Robert Utley, however, marked 1890 as the “last days of the Sioux nation.” The Battle of Wounded Knee in 1890 provided two reasons for this date to signify the end of the Sioux nation. First, it was the tribe’s last military defeat. Secondly, and more importantly, Utley believes that the disintegration of the Ghost Dance religion provided the United States with a psychological victory over the tribe. The Oglala no longer believed that they could return to their old ways once Wovoka’s predictions of the great millennium proved false. However, the dates noted as the end of the “Sioux nation” are arbitrary. No such definite date exists because the process of cultural breakdown occurred over a period of many years.

This study focuses on the years between 1868 and 1889 because, as noted above, it was this period that witnessed the end of Oglala hegemony on the Northern Plains. The
date 1889 is significant only because it marked an end to the tribe's opportunity of self-sufficiency within the American economic system. After this date the Oglala found it impossible to successfully compete in a regional economy dominated by white ranchers, which prevented the Oglala from providing for their own needs within the encroaching American market economy. More significantly, the date 1889 was a turning point in Oglala culture because the social structures that defined the Oglala culture finally succumbed to the onslaught of the misplaced philanthropic policy of the United States government.
CHAPTER ONE

The End of the Buffalos’ Reign: The Introduction of Cattle to the Oglala Economy

On a cold winter day in December of 1871 the herd came under attack. Some of the beasts ran wildly across the Dakota prairie in a mad attempt to escape the Oglala hunters, while others milled about in confusion.\textsuperscript{11} The bellows of the wounded and frightened animals mixed with the shouts of the mounted hunters to create a symphony of primordial discord that mingled with the cloudy breath of the men, horses, and beasts, and rose into the brisk winter air. Upon this contentious theater of the Northern Plains the great ungulates fell, brought down one after the other by the determined hunters, pierced by arrow or bullet, until the entire herd lay still. Once the men finished their violent task the women came to skin and butcher the animals. The hides were stripped from the beasts’ flesh and much of the offal, such as livers and kidneys, devoured on the spot. When the Indians had eaten their fill, they prepared and then stored the remainder for the coming winter months. This scene undoubtedly played itself out countless times in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as the Oglala Lakota developed into one of the most successful nomadic hunting groups on the Northern Plains. What sets this event apart from previous hunts is the fact that the prey animals were not buffalo, or \textit{Bison bison}, so closely associated with Plains tribes in American history and folklore. They were government issued steers.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{11} Office of Indian Affairs to U. S. Indian Agent J. W. Daniels, Dec. 16, 1871, General Records, Box 2, RG 75, KC. The letter instructs Daniels to employ and supervise the Indians in the slaughter of government cattle for the purpose of packing the meat for future use. The cold weather was believed to enhance the effort by preventing the meat from becoming spoiled.

\textsuperscript{12} The \textit{Statutes at Large, Treaties and Proclamations, of the United States of America, from December 1867, to March 1869}, Edited by George P. Sanger, Counselor at Law, Vol. XV, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1869), 639. It was stated in the Treaty of Fort Laramie, Article X, concluded on April 29, 1868 that, “each Indian over the age of four years, who shall have removed to and settled permanently upon said reservation and complied with the stipulations of this treaty, shall be entitled to receive from the United States, for the period of four years after he shall have settled upon the reservation, one pound of meat...provided the Indians cannot furnish their own subsistence at an earlier date.”
The fact that the federal government turned loose hundreds of steers for the Oglala to hunt in a familiar, or "traditional," manner represents more than a fascinating example of the United States-Indian relationship. It demonstrated the beginning of economic change that forever altered Oglala tribal culture. This paper will examine the pivotal role cattle and the cattle industry played in the formation of a new Oglala economy from the signing of the Treaty of Fort Laramie in 1868 to the Sioux Act of 1889. For although the Oglala knew of cattle and oxen before this period, predominantly from settlers who crossed Lakota territory heading west, bovines were never more than a target of opportunity in raiding or hunting to supplement a diet based almost completely on buffalo meat. However, as buffalo began to disappear from the Northern Plains, the federal government, through a series of treaties, accepted responsibility for providing the Lakota with an adequate food supply. After this development the relationship between the Oglala and cattle evolved into something quite new. Cattle progressed from a target of convenience to a replacement for the quickly diminishing buffalo herds. However, the steers and cows supplied to the tribe meant more than replacement protein. For the Lakota, cattle represented both an opportunity to continue their equestrian and nomadic way of life as a self-sufficient and independent people, and a vehicle that revolutionized not only their economy, but the entire structure of their society.

The hunt referred to at the top of this paper demonstrated one method used by the Oglala to hold on to their traditional methods of meat procurement, which entailed the active pursuit and killing of the prey animal from horseback. However, by the early 1890s the federal government successfully ended that particular manner of slaughtering and butchering of the Oglala tribes' issued beef. Other Oglala techniques used for the care and distribution of stock since 1868, such as communal herds run by an extended family unit, also ended because of governmental intervention. Instead, the American method of stock
raising, itself derived from a collage of European ranching traditions, replaced the Oglala tribe’s communal method by the turn of the century.\textsuperscript{13} This change occurred because western white society did not tolerate deviation from cultural norms, especially from those believed to be culturally inferior. It was during this critical twenty-one year period that the Oglala struggled with both the loss of their independence and power and with the necessity of developing a new tribal economy to replace their buffalo centered culture that so quickly disappeared. However, this complex process did not take place in a regional vacuum, for the attitudes and ideologies brought by the white invaders played a crucial role in the evolution of a new Oglala economy.

These European beliefs and feelings that so greatly influence the Oglala coalesced from decades, if not centuries, of European contact with other indigenous tribes scattered across both of the Americas. By the turn of the nineteenth century many American intellectuals believed that Native Americans needed to be absorbed into white society, and that ultimately through miscegenation they would eventually become white men and women.\textsuperscript{14} This process entailed the transformation of barbarous heathens into sedentary Christians. It mattered little to American policy makers what type of culture these various tribes might enjoy. Their existence depended on accepting incorporation into white society. The ideas and actions of American leaders who delineated federal Indian policy during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries evolved from a growing intellectual movement in Europe.

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries European civilization functioned under the influences of the Enlightenment. Belief in the attributes of science

\textsuperscript{13}For an in-depth study of Western cattle ranching’s origins see the seminal work of Terry G. Jordan, \textit{North American Cattle Ranching Frontiers: Origins, Diffusion, and Differentiations} (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993).
superseded those of religious dogma in the minds of most European leaders. In the eyes of most occidental societies nineteenth century western civilization represented the culmination of thousands of years of human development. Mankind had created a society that would inevitably reach perfection. This firm belief in the greatness of western white society meant that any culture that differed from theirs was inherently flawed. It also meant that these leaders of western civilization possessed a moral obligation not only to themselves but to their descendants to insure the Indians’ survival and inclusion into western culture. And since Native American societies appeared hopelessly inferior they by default had to be repaired or exterminated. But how would one go about repairing, or elevating, these unfortunate people? By reshaping them into a model of one’s own culture, a culture grounded on an emerging market economy.

In order to complete this seemingly benevolent and necessary task the intellectual philanthropists needed to gain the support of the newly formed government of the United States of America. This task was made easier by the fact that most American intellectuals gained some form of political power following the American Revolution. Thomas Jefferson for example, was a great proponent of the transformation of native peoples into productive American citizens. Because of the beliefs of Jefferson and his contemporaries the federal government sought to create a system that would allow Indians to evolve so that they might one day join in mankind’s march to perfection. Later in the nineteenth century well-intentioned “reformers” such as Richard Henry Pratt, who founded the Carlisle Boarding School for Indians in 1875, attempted to complete the transformation of Native Americans into American citizens. Pratt and his fellow reformers believed “that there was only one way for the Indians to survive the onslaught of progress: they would

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have to be swallowed up in the rushing tide of American life and institutions.” In other words Native Americans might survive, but only by forsaking their own culture for another.

For most of the nineteenth century the one word that characterized the policy and goal of the federal government towards Native Americans was assimilation. The American government pursued a policy that attempted to transform Native American cultures into a mirror image of American society. This image centered on the yeoman farmer. Native Americans were encouraged not only to pursue farming as a vocation but to do so using accepted European or American methods of horticulture. This meant that tribes such as the Iroquois of the north, and the Creek of the south, who already practiced extensive agricultural pursuits, needed to adopt new methods of farming. However, this seemingly innocuous reorganization of the physical labor needed to harvest an adequate crop entailed dramatic cultural adjustments for Native Americans.

Tribes such as the Creek, Cherokee, and others maintained matrilineal social systems. This cultural characteristic gave women control over both the land and crops, which they controlled and tended respectively. This allowed tribal women far greater political and economic influence than their Anglo counterparts. For example, women of the Iroquois tribe made decisions about when and where to plant and harvest their crops, which effectively gave control of the tribe’s economy to them. They also maintained the ability to call their men to war in order to revenge an attack from a neighboring tribe, options unavailable to white women. Men on the other hand were expected to provide protection and meat for the tribe, and maintain diplomatic relations with both surrounding tribes and then whites, occupations that often found them away from home for extended

periods. White perceptions of Iroquois culture, heavily influenced by Euro-centrism, were of lazy men who lay about the village while the women slaved away in the fields. White men found this situation offensive, and set about correcting these “flaws” in Native American culture. Unfortunately, the malignant stain of racism would prevent Native American assimilation in the manner proposed by such philanthropists as Thomas Jefferson. The pall of racism, coupled with both political and economic difficulties often present when two vastly different cultures meet, would prevent the Iroquois, Cherokee, and eventually the Lakota from participating equally with whites in American society.\(^{16}\)

Interestingly, the popular conception that European women did not work the fields along side their men has been refuted by studies from such noted historians as Laurel Thatcher Ulrich. She noted that the lives of frontier women in America were extremely arduous. Besides caring for the children and home, spinning cloth, churning butter and the hundreds of other difficult tasks associated with “women’s work” during that time, they also carried seed and plowed fields when necessary. The hypocrisy of this situation failed to influence European policy and the program of assimilation proceeded. However, assimilation of Native Americans into European society as yeomen farmers, or any other occupation, faced the insurmountable obstacle of racism.

That Native Americans suffered harsh treatment at the hands of whites is not an unfamiliar reality. One need look no further than “The Trail of Tears” that the five civilized tribes endured during the 1830s and 1840s to find an example of the white man’s inhumanity towards Indians. And the root cause of this horrific occurrence rests squarely on the universally held belief that Native Americans were lesser beings than whites, and

that the rights of Native Americans meant little in comparison to the interests of whites. Tribes such as the Cherokee and Creek who to a large degree successfully reshaped their societies to mimic the plantation culture of the South, found themselves being driven out of their lands despite their attempts to acquiesce to federal assimilation policy.

While it is undoubtedly true that white Americans' desire for more land greatly influenced the decision to relocate these tribes in Oklahoma Territory it is also true that these tribes' legal claim to their lands were ignored in the interests of whites. It would be foolish to argue that racism played either no, or very little, role in the forced removal of these five tribes. Might the state of Georgia, and later Alabama, have driven white settlers from these lands in order to make room for more white settlers? Of course not, the Cherokee and Creek were forced off their lands because they were Indians, and their claims to the land paled in comparison to white needs. Unfortunately, the Lakota faced similar threats in the latter half of the nineteenth century. They too faced the loss of their land, forced assimilation, racism and a federal bureaucracy at odds with its own agents in the field. However, before examining these events it is necessary to explore who the Lakota were as a people in order to understand more clearly the economic challenges they faced by the late nineteenth century.

The Lakota society of nomadic horsemen and warriors that is so familiar to most Americans actually developed rather late in tribal history, emerging in the latter half of the eighteenth century when the tribe acquired horses. Before this period the Siouan society could be characterized as one of loosely organized nomadic hunter-gatherers. The Siouan tribe's mobility and need for large hunting areas in which to acquire sufficient foodstuffs may have expedited the break-up of the seven original tribes: the Yanktons, Yanktonais, and Tetons that eventually moved west, and the Mdewakantons, Wahpetons, Wahpekutes,
and Sissetons that eventually remained near the headwaters of the upper Mississippi.\footnote{Gary Clayton Anderson, \textit{Kinsmen of Another Kind: Dakota-White Relations in the Upper Mississippi Valley, 1650-1862} (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 2.}

The Oglala, members of the Teton branch of the Siouan peoples, originally dwelt in the Ohio Valley until scattered both eastward and westward by the more organized and better-armed Iroquois in the early seventeenth century.\footnote{Herbert S. Schell, \textit{History of South Dakota} (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968), 18.} The Oglala then settled near the headwaters of the Mississippi River. They remained in this region until approximately 1670 when “abundant beaver and the ready food supply provided by the buffalo herds lured them into the open lands.”\footnote{Richard White, “The Winning of the West: The Expansion of the Western Sioux in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” \textit{The Journal of American History}, (September 1978, vol. 65), 322.}

The beginning of the eighteenth century saw a dramatic shift in Lakota society as the tribe migrated to the prairies and started hunting the vast herds of buffalo that occupied these grasslands. The Lakota’s hostile nature made them disagreeable neighbors, and tribes such as the Otoes, Poncas, and Omahas fled westward in the face of the Lakota advance. Unfortunately for these tribes, the Lakota followed, settling in the regions east of the Missouri River by the mid-eighteenth century. However, at this time the powerful Arikara nation halted the Lakota’s westward advance. These more sedentary peoples at first fled before the Lakota during the first half of the century; however, bolstered by the acquisition of horses and metal blades they were successfully able to withstand the encroachment of the ambitious Lakota. The Arikara remained an obstacle to westward expansion until a smallpox epidemic swept away approximately 80% of their population between 1772-1780. During this same period the Oglala Lakota first obtained horses and began their journey toward western legend. When the tribe crossed the Missouri River they numbered no more than twenty to forty lodges. Yet,
"once across the Missouri their small numbers did not deter them from pushing boldly out into the open plains where they quickly obtained horses and were soon roving widely, hunting buffalo, and fighting enemies on all sides."\(^{20}\)

From the period between 1750 and 1868 the Oglala people experienced dramatic changes within their society. In the mid-eighteenth century the tribe used dog and human power to traverse the open plains. With the acquisition and utilization of horses as beasts of burden the tribe dramatically increased its range. An Indian pony could carry eight times more than an Indian dog and travel three times farther in a single day.\(^{21}\) However, the most significant contribution made by the horse was as a hunting tool. Mounted hunters provided the tribe far greater accessibility to the vast herds of buffalo that roamed the plain's oceans of grasslands. It was during this century and a half that buffalo became the center of Lakota culture and economy. Buffalo provided the tribes with food from the meat and organs, shelter and clothing from its hides, and much more. Without the vast herds of buffalo it is doubtful that the Lakota, or any other Great Plains tribe, such as the Blackfoot or Comanche, would have possessed such great numbers or power in their respective territories.

While it is not the focus of this paper it is significant to note that buffalo played a central role within Oglala religion, and the sudden loss of the great herds undoubtedly brought about significant societal angst. Interestingly, cattle were used by the Oglala to replace buffalo as a food source, yet cattle never joined the phalanx of animals present in Lakota religion. Both the rapidity of the Lakota's loss of both the buffalo and their


independence, coupled with cattle's association with whites, provided the tribe little opportunity or desire to find religious significance within cattle. Nonetheless, with the addition of the horse the tribe's energy production and mobility increased dramatically, and the Oglala grew more numerous and powerful. Yet at the same time their political structure became more decentralized.

Unlike many neighboring sedentary agriculturists whose societies developed a strictly hierarchical organization, the Oglala formed a loose confederation of patriarchal led family units called tiospaye. The development of this loose confederation allowed the Lakota people greater flexibility and maneuverability for following the herds of buffalo, which in turn kept the tribe well fed. Kinship relationships and reciprocity within the tiospaye, and the tribe as a whole, came to control the economy. One gained respect and status within the community by providing food, clothing, and shelter for your family and others within your tribe, not by the accumulation of material possessions for mere individual gain. Thus, the economic process remained subservient to social structure and labor. For a period of approximately 100 years the Lakota developed and enjoyed this equestrian nomadic lifestyle that allowed them to tap more efficiently into the thermodynamic system of the Great Plains, specifically the harvesting of the vast herds of buffalo. However, this way of life disappeared with the buffalo and the emergence of reservation life.

The Treaty of Fort Laramie, promulgated on April 29, 1868, established The Great Sioux Reservation that occupied the western half of the present state of South Dakota,

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23 For a more detailed examination of Lakota economic structure see Anderson, Kinsmen, 58-76.
parts of Wyoming, Montana, and Nebraska, with the eastern boundary being the Missouri River. The tribe maintained hunting rights within the reservation boundaries and, "the right to hunt on any lands north of the Platte, and on the Republican Fork of the Smoky Hill River, so long as the buffalo may range thereon in such numbers as to justify the chase." However, much of the northern buffalo herd had already been eliminated from the reservation and the federal government had taken steps to alleviate the problem. In 1865 the United States government agreed to pay each individual Lakota, "at the rate of about fifteen dollars per head per annum in view of the fact that the buffalo and other game, by means of which these nomadic tribes subsist, are being driven from the country by the whites who traverse it." Special United States Indian Agent J. P. Cooper further indicated the severity of the dwindling bison herds on August 27, 1868 when he requested that all Indians north of the Platte River be sent immediately to Fort Randall for supplies. He noted that, "the great danger now is that the scarcity of buffalo in that region will compel the Indians to commit depredations in order to live."

Many factors influenced the rapid disintegration of the northern bison herd, the most critical being the increased hide trade brought about by the development of a chemical tanning process that dramatically increased the demand for buffalo hides. Furthermore, the invention of the paddlewheel boat provided the necessary transportation for shipping the heavy buffalo hides to eastern markets. Other factors included natural

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mortality, Indian subsistence hunting and market hunting for robes, wolf predation, possible disease introduction from cattle, and a warmer drying climate trend.\textsuperscript{28} The shift to generally milder winters, brought about by the end of the Little Ice Age, meant increased hardships for many Northern Plains tribes who relied upon well-established hunting patterns. As winter came to the Great Plains the buffalo would often seek both forage and shelter from the winds and deep snows in familiar river valleys. This migratory pattern of the buffalo allowed the tribes to predict the movements of the great herds accurately and easily procure a large winter supply of meat. However, as the climate changed and winters became less severe the buffalo no longer sought food and shelter in these river valleys.\textsuperscript{29} Furthermore, the encroachment of white settlers into traditional buffalo watering areas and the bison's natural migratory habits caused widely scattered herds had that roamed over the Northern Plains to coalesce into much larger herds.\textsuperscript{30} The mobility of these larger herds increased as they consumed the forage in an area more rapidly than the previously scattered herds. Therefore, the developing situation of large mobile herds moving about the plains in unpredictable patterns created sporadic hunting success throughout the Great Plains. For the Oglala this meant economic disaster.

Factors worked increasingly against the tribe's ability to procure the needed buffalo so critical to their society, both nutritionally and culturally, thus making the tribe more dependent upon the federal government for their means of survival. For example, further hunting limitations were placed upon the Oglala during this crucial period of


\textsuperscript{29} For a detailed examination of this phenomenon see Richmond Clow's, "Bison Ecology, Brule and Yankton Winter Hunting, and the Starving Winter of 1832-33," \textit{Great Plains Quarterly} (Fall 1995, vol. 15), 259-270.

cultural adjustment. Despite the Treaty of Fort Laramie's declaration of hunting rights in 1868, the tribe hunted buffalo only with permission of the resident Indian agent. Indians that hunted without the agent's authorization risked being labeled hostile and then subjected to punishment. Consequently, buffalo hunts occurred less frequently and became far less successful following the creation of the Great Sioux Reservation. In the only account of a successful Oglala buffalo hunt beyond 1868, Indian Agent J. W. Wham reported issuing two months worth of ammunition for a hunt on the Republican River in mid-September 1871. The Indians requested that no whites accompany them on that hunt, yet sub-agent Yates went along despite their objections. The same report noted that the Oglala killed large numbers of buffalo on that particular hunt.31

The primary reason that buffalo hunts happened with less regularity is that authorization from Indian agents and subsequent support from the federal bureaucracy remained unpredictable. In the fall of the next year the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, F. A. Walker, notified J. W. Daniels, the Red Cloud Agent, that Little Wound had organized a hunting party for a second time without permission. The Commissioner stated that the War Department had been notified and instructed to bring him and his party back to the agency.32 These economic impediments, such as decreased buffalo herds and increased government interference, greatly discouraged the organization of hunting parties following 1868.

As hunting became more restricted and unsuccessful the tribe depended more and more upon the United States for sustenance. Agent Daniels wrote to the Commissioner in

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32 Commissioner of Indian Affairs F. A. Walker to Agent J. W. Daniels, November 5, 1872, General Records: Correspondence received from the Office of Indian Affairs, Indian warehouses & special agents, chronological arrangement, Feb. 24, 1871-Dec. 31, 1877, Box 2, RG 75, KC.
his yearly report of 1873 that the hostile Chief Red Cloud and his followers
come to these agencies starving and enemies, and received the same kind care that
was given to those who had been here for years when they first came in they sent
their soldiers to get rations that they might taste white man’s food without his
knowing of it, but after a few issues they came to acknowledge their
dependency.”

In his 1874 report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs newly appointed Indian Agent J.
J. Saville related how he instructed an independent feeling Oglala who had caused trouble
“to the fact that the buffalo were almost all destroyed, and as soon as they were gone the
Indians would be helpless.” Clearly, Oglala leaders no longer maintained the ability to
provide needed food and shelter for their followers. This development undoubtedly led to
a breakdown in kinship relations and aspects of societal reciprocity. Economic realities
began to dominate tribal decision-making and social structures.

The federal government’s actions of restricting the tribe’s movements and hunting
practices also hoped to prevent conflicts between the Lakota and other tribes in the
region, and the ever increasing population of whites moving into the region. On May 16th,
1874 Little Wound’s band again failed to receive permission to hunt on the Republican
river from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, despite their 1868 treaty rights, because of
the Oglalas’ cruel and unjust treatment of the Pawnee the previous year. The
Commissioner referred to the Oglalas’ ambush and defeat of a Pawnee hunting camp on
the south shore of the Platte River in the summer of 1873, which the Oglala considered
their hunting territory. In the ensuing battle over a thousand Lakota warriors killed almost
two hundred Pawnees.

33 Executive Documents, House of Representatives, Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 43rd Cong.,
34 Executive Documents, House of Representatives, Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 43rd Cong.,
35 Royal B. Hassrick. The Sioux: Life and Customs of a Warrior Society (Norman: University of Oklahoma
Press, 1964), 78.
Two days later Agent Saville received another letter from the Commissioner stating that in spite of the tribe’s legal right to make the hunt no passes or permits would be issued because the hunt would, “terrify the settlers and get the Indians into trouble.”

However, the still somewhat autonomous Oglala organized and conducted an extended buffalo hunt that fall near the Republican River in spite of federal opposition. Unfortunately the several thousand Indians managed to procure only one hundred buffalo and an unspecified number of cattle that fall. That winter was extremely severe, and snowstorms in January and February blocked supply trains and prevented the beef contractor from supplying the Red Cloud Agency. Many Indians went hungry and those nearer the agencies begged for whatever food was available. In the spring the tribe returned to the Red Cloud Agency, “with the sad realization that they had been on their last buffalo hunt.”

The Oglala Lakota’s life as a nomadic hunting group that lived and depended upon the great herds of buffalo had ended. In 1876 the Oglala gave up the western third of their reservation, which included the Black Hills, and their hunting rights in exchange for federal assurance that they would not be removed to Indian Territory in Oklahoma. This agreement of 1876 stated that the, “Indians do hereby relinquish and cede to the United States all the territory lying outside the said reservation, …including all privileges of hunting.” The tribe undoubtedly continued to kill buffalo when the opportunity presented itself but the federal government no longer allowed the Lakota freedom or means to

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36 Commissioner E. P. Smith to Agent J. J. Saville, May 16 and 18, 1874, General Records, Correspondence received from the Office of Indian Affairs, Indian warehouses & special agents, chronological arrangement, Feb. 24, 1871-Dec. 31, 1877, Box 2, RG 75, KC.
pursue the ever-dwindling herds of bison.  

An example of the tribe’s economic desperation was revealed in 1879, and again in 1881. The Commissioner of Indian Affairs denied Young-Man-Afraid-of-His-Horses permission to hunt the Yellowstone and Upper Missouri rivers because of the possibility of conflict with settlers. This denial occurred because the Oglala sometimes targeted surrounding ranches during their intermittent hunting forays. The tribal hunters allegedly killed some of the neighboring ranchers’ cattle, stole horses, and forced herders to surrender food and ammunition. The Wyoming Stock Growers Association complained to Governor Hale of Wyoming concerning this matter in 1883. The Association noted all of the above infractions and added that the Indians offered up their women for prostitution in exchange for food. The WSGA also noted that most of the offending hunters possessed passes issued by the local Indian Agent. The white members of the WSGA undoubtedly exaggerated greatly in regards to these alleged charges in order to gain federal support in limiting Indian access to what the ranchers considered their grazing lands.

However, the fact that some of the tribe’s hunts targeted cattle indicates that the Oglala could not find, or lacked access to, the remnant herds of bison that disappeared from the Great Plains by 1885. It further demonstrates that the tribe was sufficiently hungry to risk hostilities by taking white men’s stock, and their own fledgling tribal herd remained insufficient in size to provide for their needs. The tribe’s association with the buffalo was all but dead, and cattle would soon replace the great shaggy beasts of the

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39 Letter received by Agent V. T. McGillycuddy from Commissioner Hay on October 25, 1879, General Records, Box 3, Jan. 1, 1878-Dec. 26, 1879, RG 75, KC, and Letter received by Agent McGillycuddy from Commissioner H. Price on Oct. 20, 1881, General Records, Box 5, April 26, 1881-June 6, 1882, RG 75, KC.

40 Letter received by Agent McGillycuddy from Commissioner Price, Nov. 13, 1883, General Records, Box 6, June 12, 1882-Dec. 1883, RG 75, KC.
Plains not only as the tribe's primary source of sustenance, but as the foundation of a new tribal economy.
CHAPTER TWO

Cattle Offer Hope: The Oglalas’ Struggle for Autonomy

Cattle easily replaced the buffalo within the Northern Plains environment because this region was, and remains, primarily suited for the care and raising of livestock in the absence of native grazers and large predators. The climate, grasses, and soil combined to create an environment that is particularly adapted for ungulates such as buffalo and cattle. The predominant soils found within the 1868 reservation boundaries consisted of prairie soils, lithosols and shallow soils, and a small amount of chernozem soils located only in the extreme southeastern tip of the reservation. Lithosols and shallow soils consist of “an imperfectly weathered mass of rock fragments, largely but not exclusively on steep slopes,” which are more commonly referred to as either sandhills or badlands. Chernozem soils are “dark-brown to nearly black soils of cool and temperate, subhumid grasslands.”

However, it is the prairie soils that consist of the “very dark brown soils of cool and temperate, relatively humid grasslands,” that are home to the rich and nutritious short grasses such as grama and buffalo grass that buffalo, elk, deer, antelope, and cattle thrive upon.41 Bouteloua gracilis, or blue grama grass is a native perennial in the northern Great Plains. It not only produces highly nutritious summer forage, it also provides excellent winter pasture as it retains its protein content if allowed to cure while standing. Buchloe dactyloides, or buffalo grass, is also an outstanding source of nourishment and forage for herbivores of the Great Plains. Its growth begins in late spring and continues all summer. The forage is attractive to all classes of livestock. Buffalograss becomes established rather easily, and spreads vigorously under use. It withstands prolonged heavy grazing better than any other native grass in its region of adaptation; on ranges severely grazed every

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41 The information and quotes pertaining to soils was obtained from the chart titled GENERAL PATTERN OF GREAT SOIL GROUPS: THE WHEAT BELT in a text by Ladd Haystead and Gilbert C. Fite, The Agricultural Regions of the United States (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955), 180-181.
When the soil conditions and flora are mixed with an annual yearly rainfall of under twenty inches per year it creates an environment conducive to the development of a regional cattle industry once the indigenous wild grazers and their predators are removed.43

With an understanding of the region’s productive capabilities it seems clear that stock raising provided the foundation needed to grant the tribe economic self-sufficiency within the encroaching market system. Some of the Red Cloud Agency’s Indian Agents clearly understood that the development of a cattle industry was crucial to the tribe’s economic independence, as did the Oglala Lakota themselves. In 1875 Agent J. J. Saville stated in his report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs that, “the primary question of civilization is subsistence. This question presents peculiar difficulties in this country. If the Indians become self-supporting, it must be by the same pursuits that the white people engage in, viz, stock-raising.” From June 27th to 29th of the same year a council was held to discuss the tribe’s relinquishment of the Black Hills and all hunting rights in that area.

During the course of this meeting the tribe clearly demonstrated its understanding of the value of cattle in this region and the future benefits that could be derived from the establishment of a tribal herd. The United States offered the tribe $25,000 total for their hunting rights, and the Oglala said that if such a decision came to pass then they wanted the equivalent of the money to be paid in cattle, horses, and harnesses and wagons. Chief Spotted Tail stated, “I want to live on the interest of my money. (received for the loss of

43 The average annual rainfall in South Dakota between 1882 and 1960 was 19.12 inches per year. This average included regions of Eastern South Dakota that were not part of the Great Sioux Reservation and receive a higher average rainfall per year than the reservation. For the reservation created in 1868 the average rainfall was closer to 16 inches per year than 19, which demonstrates why the attempt to cultivate this region using dry farming methods failed. Herbert S. Schell, History of South Dakota, 11-12.
the Black Hills) The amount must be so large that the interest will support us...I will trade some of it for stock to raise cattle...we want some good cattle every year.”

According to the “Final Proposition of Council IV” the Lakota were to receive from the United States government for the loss of the Black Hills, “$50,000 for ten years to be paid in good American cows and other livestock, and in such implements of husbandry as are convenient to stock-growing and as may be deemed advisable by the President.”

However, the treaty failed to guarantee that the federal government would in good faith fulfill its obligations. On August 10th of that same summer in a meeting between the Lakota Chiefs and a committee investigating fraud at the Red Cloud Agency Chief Little Wound complained that, “the wagons had not come yet; the cattle and horses had been delivered, but the cattle were small and the horses were wild and could not be broken.”

Clearly, either the Indian agent in the field or the suppliers did not intend for the Oglala to partake fully in the burgeoning regional cattle industry. Further insights into the troubles the tribe would face in its attempt to build an economy based upon ranching was provided by the Chairman of that committee, the former Governor of Missouri Thomas C. Fletcher, who opened that June meeting of 1875 by admonishing the Oglala to, “learn the white man's way of agriculture and husbandry.”

An examination of the experiences of the Northern Cheyenne at Tongue River Reservation in southeastern Montana demonstrated similarities concerning the economic evolutions that occurred in Oglala culture. First of all, the Northern Cheyenne were close

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allies of the Lakota and often lived and fought beside them during the zenith of their regional power. In fact a contingent of 517 Northern Cheyenne resided on Pine Ridge Reservation as late as 1890.\textsuperscript{46} These two tribes shared considerable cultural characteristics. They both enjoyed the equestrian nomadic way of life that depended upon the buffalo for its economic continuation. Both tribes consisted of a loose confederation of extended family groups tied to one another by a shared language and history. And finally, they closely resembled each other in dress, mannerisms, and even adopted some words of the others language into their own vocabulary.

A striking example of this similarity occurred on May 28, 1877 in Darlington, Oklahoma. On that date a group of Northern Cheyenne arrived on the Southern Cheyenne reservation in Indian Territory after being removed from the Northern Plains. Upon arrival Little Rogue, a Southern Cheyenne, gestured at his Northern brethren and asked, “What are the ‘Sioux’ doing here?” The Southern Cheyenne failed to recognize their Northern brothers as part of their own culture, and they expressed no joy at this forced reunion. The two divisions of the Cheyenne continued to bicker at one another until the Northern Cheyenne, under the leadership of Dull Knife and Little Wolf, fled the Cheyenne-Arapaho Agency. Eventually, after much hard travel and privation, Dull Knife’s band found sanctuary with the Oglala at Pine Ridge. Their descendents made up the contingent of Northern Cheyenne the inhabited Pine Ridge for the next thirteen years.\textsuperscript{47} The Northern Cheyenne inhabiting Pine Ridge later joined other bands of their own tribe on the Tongue River Indian Reservation in southeastern Montana.

Moreover, for the sake of comparison to the Oglala at Pine Ridge the Northern

Cheyenne make an excellent subject. For example the Northern Cheyenne also faced problems from a white community hostile to their very presence at the Tongue River Indian Reservation. Surrounding cattle interests campaigned for the tribe’s removal to Indian Territory throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The cattlemen hoped to gain valuable grazing lands for their ever-growing herds and rid themselves of possible economic competition.\textsuperscript{48} The white man’s fear of economic competition, especially from a defeated and seemingly inferior foe, hindered both the Oglala and the Northern Cheyenne tribes’ ability to participate equally in the expanding capitalistic economic system of the United States.

Nonetheless, while the Tongue River Reservation contained only 460,000 acres by 1900, an increase of 204,000 acres since 1884, and fewer than a thousand Northern Cheyenne, they too hoped to gain economic independence through a tribal cattle industry. By 1880 the Northern Cheyenne had branded their small herds and according to General Nelson Miles they took as much pride in their cattle as they did any of their other possessions.\textsuperscript{49} Unfortunately, the almost mystical, and certainly mythical, image of the independent yeoman farmer as the backbone of a democratic and free nation offered an unyielding blueprint for the assimilation of Native Americans into American society. And as with the Oglala, the Northern Cheyenne in Montana were encouraged to farm rather than raise cattle in the early 1880s.\textsuperscript{50}

However, this was not the first indication for either tribe that the United States would favor farming over ranching on the arid and unpredictable Great Plains. The federal government had already stated in the 1865 Lakota Treaty that its policy towards the tribe,

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., xxi, 30-36, 81.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 29, 145.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid, 31.
as with the vast majority of tribes in the United States, would be the promotion of
cultivation over ranching. As previously noted, contemporary American ideals saw the
independent farmer as the model for American citizenship. Therefore, the goals of United
States’ policies designed to assimilate Native Americans into white society often forced
Indians to adopt the role of farmer despite the environmental realities.51

Federal actions to promote farming over stock raising took many forms. In this
treaty the United States stipulated that the Lakota must promise not to impede members
of the tribe from pursuing agricultural interests. Moreover, the federal government
promised twenty-five dollars per tribal member for those engaged in cultivation of the soil,
ten dollars more than for those Indians who pursued other interests. The treaty also
promised the Oglala that if one hundred lodges gathered in one area for agricultural
reasons then the U. S. must provide an agency for that group and employ a farmer for
their instruction.52 Further reports of Red Cloud Agency Indian Agents indicated that they
found it difficult to implement this policy. This dichotomy between federal and local
decision-making is clearly seen in the Red Cloud Agent’s report to the Commissioner of
Indian Affairs for 1870. He stated that

it will be understood that teaching the Indians the art of cultivating the soil is
attended with many difficulties in this locality... on account of location of the
lands allotted to them for agricultural purposes, which, owing to the frequency of
droughts and visits of the grasshopper, make the failure to produce a crop nearly a
certainty.”53

Despite the agent’s on-cite experience and recommendations the federal policy of
assimilation maintained that in order for the Indians to develop successfully into proper

51 Sheehan, Seeds of Extinction, 7-12.
52 Executive Documents, House of Representatives, Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 39th Cong.,
53 Executive Documents, House of Representatives, Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 41st Cong.,
American citizens they must adopt farming as their primary way of life.

Not surprisingly, the Northern Cheyenne experienced a similar struggle between bureaucrats in Washington who promoted agricultural pursuits and a local agent who envisioned stock raising as the tribe's best chance for economic independence. The temporary agent at Tongue River Indian Reservation, a Private George Yoakam, requested in 1882 that of the money earmarked for rations on the reservation forty percent go towards the purchase of cattle. He hoped that within ten years the tribe would be able to support itself through the cattle industry. Nonetheless, an Indian Inspector, M. R. Barr, instead recommended that the Commissioner of Indian Affairs appoint a permanent Indian Agent, one other than Private Yoakam, one who understood farming. Despite the military's classification of the Northern Cheyenne as "prisoner of war," authorities hoped to settle the tribe in the Tongue River valley in accordance with the Indian Homestead Act of 1875, which provided Indians benefits similar to the Homestead Act of 1862.54

However, the dichotomy between federal policy makers and local agents concerning the future tribal economy of the Oglala was not the only problem found within the infrastructure of the federal Indian bureaucracy. Indian agents in the field were often temporary and differed greatly in their opinions concerning tribal economic opportunities. This is evident from the agent's reports of 1873 and 1874. In 1873 agent J. W. Daniels stated that despite Chief Red Cloud's opposition he believed that the tribe would soon begin to push toward agriculture as a way of life.55 The very next year a new agent, J. J. Saville, stated that, "agriculture can not be depended upon as a means for support for these Indians. The valley of White River and adjacent hills produce a fine grass..." (and)

54 Svingen, The Northern Cheyenne, 35-43.
The situation was becoming polarized because the local environmental conditions influenced local Indian Agents to pursue stock raising as the principle means of Oglala self-sufficiency. Meanwhile the federal government’s rigid policy of Indian Americanization, which hoped to create good United States citizens by turning tribal members into Jeffersonian yeoman farmers, ignored the environmental realities.

For the federal government, the beef ration was merely a stopgap measure to provide the tribe with enough nourishment until the Oglala could learn to support themselves as individual family farmers. Therefore, few attempts were made to supply the Oglala with breeding stock to create their own herds. Instead the government issued steers in order to meet their treaty obligations to provide a beef supply for the tribe. However, the government’s supply of beef inevitably failed to meet its treaty obligations or the tribe’s needs. According to the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty the government agreed to provide each tribal member with one pound of beef and flour per day, or approximately thirty pounds of beef per month. In a nine-month period from September 30, 1867 to June 30, 1868 the federal government issued 145,551 pounds of beef to approximately 6,000 Oglala, Brule, Northern Arapaho, and Northern Cheyenne around the Red Cloud Agency. This came out to about twenty-four pounds of beef for each tribal member for a nine-month period, or about .09 pounds per day. It should also be noted that the number of pounds issued to the tribe was counted in gross poundage, or what the cattle

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57 Statutes at Large, 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie, 639.
weighed on the hoof. Once a steer is slaughtered and processed for consumption the actual poundage of edible beef is cut by an average of two-thirds. Further loss could occur because of shrinkage, and spoilage, which would reduce post-processed beef by another 10% to 50%. Moreover, cattle weighed upon arrival, but not slaughtered immediately often lost hundreds of pounds over the winter yet still appeared on the roles at full weight, and steers that died over the winter also counted as issued beef.59

The federal government also continued to provide far less beef than Indian agents requested. In 1875 Indian Agent J. J. Saville stated in his report that it would take 14,782,500 pounds of beef to feed the Oglala, and Northern Cheyenne around Red Cloud Agency because each steer shipped was producing only 300 net pounds of beef. The government contracted for only nine million pounds. For a population of about six thousand Indians, nine million gross pounds of beef would provide anywhere from 250 to 500 net pounds of beef per person for that year. The amount Saville asked for would have produced from 410 to 820 net pounds of beef per person. The Treaty of 1877 increased the beef ration from one, to one and a half pounds of beef per day. Unfortunately, the government continued to use gross poundage delivered as the measuring system towards meeting its responsibilities, and thus fell far short of its treaty obligations.

In order for the federal government to comply with the Treaty of 1877, each member of the tribe should have been issued an average of 548 pounds of beef per year. In an examination of the beef rations during the seven-year period from 1879 to 1885, I have calculated the average ration per person at between 175 to 350 net pounds of beef per year (Table No. 1). The higher figure assumed no spoilage, shrinkage, or loss of any


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Table No. 1-Federal Beef Rations to the Oglala Lakota between 1879-1885.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>TRIBAL POPULATION</th>
<th>GROSS POUNDS OF BEEF ISSUED</th>
<th>NET POUNDS OF BEEF AVAILABLE PER YEAR</th>
<th>NET POUNDS OF BEEF PER PERSON FOR EACH YEAR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1879</td>
<td>7,000</td>
<td>7,522,807</td>
<td>2,482,526</td>
<td>178-355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>7,200</td>
<td>7,988,712</td>
<td>2,636,275</td>
<td>183-366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>7,500</td>
<td>8,753,332</td>
<td>2,888,599</td>
<td>193-385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>7,500</td>
<td>7,430,282</td>
<td>2,451,993</td>
<td>163-327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1883</td>
<td>7,800</td>
<td>8,280,262</td>
<td>2,732,487</td>
<td>175-350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884</td>
<td>8,300</td>
<td>8,055,075</td>
<td>2,658,175</td>
<td>160-320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885</td>
<td>7,649</td>
<td>7,941,438</td>
<td>2,620,675</td>
<td>172-343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AVERAGE</td>
<td>7,564</td>
<td>7,916,028</td>
<td>2,638,676</td>
<td>175-350</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that the net poundage for each year was probably somewhat lower than presented because all calculations were based upon the weight of the cattle when they arrived at the agency. I was unable to take into account the losses caused by winter forage difficulties and deaths. The population figures are compiled from Indian Agents’ Reports to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. The information provided concerning the pounds of beef issued was compiled from an agency record book entitled, Weigher’s Returns of Beef Cattle, March 29, 1879-June 1886, Administrative Records, Box 754, RG 75, KC. This ledger also contains the dates received, the numbers of steers received for each date, the total weight received for each date, and the names of the sellers who delivered the cattle to the agency.

kind after processing, while the lower figure allows for a 50% rate of loss. As the last column in the table indicates the beef rations for this period failed to meet the individual 548-pound yearly requirement by at least 200 pounds a year. Not surprisingly, during this
same period the Oglala started its own herd in order to provide for their own needs.  

By 1879 the Oglala as a tribe owned 1,622 head of stock cattle. Agent V. T. McGillycuddy predicted that stock-raising should be excellent, as the Department of the Interior had issued 500 cows and heifers and 22 bulls, all of which possessed at least 1/4 blood American stock (which meant non Texas long horns, which were indigenous to Spain). American stock, such as Herefords, offered more meat because of their stockier builds. Texas long horns, while hardy animals, were rather lean. These additional cattle brought the total herd number up to 2,500 by the end of the year. McGillycuddy found that the stock had been well cared for, despite predictions that the cattle would all be slaughtered and eaten, and that the tribe had managed to save 100 cows from the summer beef issue to bolster the herd. He stated that, "Indians have almost invariably herded their cattle well, and have raised young stock in considerable numbers." Unfortunately, the report also identified two problems that would continue to haunt the Oglala throughout the nineteenth century and beyond.

The first pertained to the emerging domination of the tribal cattle industry by "squaw men." These "squaw men," white men who married Lakota women, sought to obtain the rights and advantages meant to provide Indians with an equal economic footing within the surrounding white communities. These white men and their mixed blood descendants continued to dominate the ranching industry on the reservation for generations for two reasons. First, they understood and could manipulate the market system of the whites more efficiently than the Oglala. A market system designed to reward those who attained personal goods and property. In Lakota culture if a man

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60 These numbers were compiled from an agency record book entitled, Weigher's Returns of Beef Cattle, March 29, 1879-June 26, 1886, Administrative Records, Box 754, RG 75, KC. This ledger also contains the dates received, the numbers of steers received for each date, the total weight received for each date, and the names of the sellers who delivered the cattle to the agency.
desired to accumulate personal wealth for its own sake it represented not only bad manners, it demonstrated character flaws, such as selfishness. Such flaws meant he would never hold a leadership position or gain the respect of his family or band because he placed his own needs over that of the tribe’s. Such conflicting worldviews clearly placed the Oglala at an economic disadvantage when in direct competition with “squaw men.” And secondly, “squaw men” could make business decisions without asking permission from an Indian Agent. And within the capitalist system the ability to make timely and independent business decisions is not only beneficial it is necessary in order to compete.

The second difficulty brought to light involved the illegal trespass of outside cattle interests on reservation land. Agent McGillycuddy provided an example of both difficulties when he noted that

the squaw-men assume that by marriage they have all the rights of full-blooded Indians, and they endeavor to exercise these rights not only in possession of cattle themselves, but also in ranging and pasturing upon Indian reservations large herds belonging to other white men, and when the removal of such cattle is attempted by the agent, the squaw-men claim property in them under fictitious bills of sale.61

This practice of trespassing on tribal lands for free pasturage became so blatant that by 1884 between 700,000 and 800,000 head of cattle illegally grazed on the Lakota reservation.62 Clearly, the Oglala stockmen faced difficult economic handicaps in their struggle to compete in an intrusive market economy. Federal Indian policy dictated on one hand that the Oglala alter their entire culture by adopting the precepts of capitalism, such as private property, individual avarice, and the accumulation of material goods. While on the other hand the surrounding white cattle industry, and the “squaw men” on The Great Sioux Indian Reservation, attempted to exclude the tribe from full participation

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62 Schell, History of South Dakota, 243-247.
in the market economy.

For the Northern Cheyenne the problem of cattle trespass assumed a more malevolent character. In southeastern Montana the white cattlemen who allowed their stock to graze illegally on the Tongue River Indian Reservation hoped that a conflict between the Indians and whites, brought about by cattle trespass, might bring about the removal of the tribe to Indian Territory. Moreover, white cattlemen charged that the Cheyenne burned their ranges, and frequently killed their cattle. While these charges proved false and the ranchers' efforts eventually failed, the constant attack upon the tribe's right to remain on the reservation negatively impacted its economic growth. The federal government hesitated to approve allocations for rations or cattle for the Northern Cheyenne on the chance that the charges proved factual. Financial support for the tribe was delayed for years as government inspectors and Special Agents arrived on site to determine the validity of the accusations.63

For the Oglala Lakota the problem of cattle trespass remained centered on economic competition rather than possible relocation. Despite these significant obstacles the tribe managed to increase its herds. In agent McGillycuddy's report to the Commissioner in 1880 he noted that the number of cattle owned by tribal members rose to 3,500 because of a summer issue of 1,000 head of stock cattle. It should also be noted that it is unclear as to what percentage of the herd fell under "squaw man" ownership and what percentage belonged to full blood tribal herd. Agent McGillycuddy provided only total reservation herd size in his reports. He also noted in June of 1880 that the tribe's care of the stock cattle issued was quite good and, "in fact, these Indians taking naturally, as they do, to stock raising and herding, this would seem to offer the most feasible and

63 Svingen, The Northern Cheyenne, xxii, 30-36.
practical method of making them eventually self-supporting.” McGillycuddy found the idea of a sustainable agricultural system for the Oglala unrealistic.\(^6^4\)

However, the most fascinating aspect of the report lies in McGillycuddy’s theory about why Chiefs Red Cloud and Spotted Tail resisted any tribal acceptance of agriculture or herding. He correctly believes that these chiefs feared a loss of power and influence within the tribal political organization.\(^6^5\) Because of the tribe’s concentration around the agency the political structure of the Oglala became much more centralized, which gave leaders such as Red Cloud and Spotted Tail more power than tribal chiefs previously held. Before 1880 the Oglala political structure centered on multiband councils made up of chiefs from the *tiospaye*, or extended family bands, that strove to gain a group consensus before undertaking any significant political decisions. These decisions included discussions on whether or not to send diplomatic forays to surrounding tribes or whites, or a large war party to attack an enemy tribe. The important point to note is that individual chiefs possessed no dictatorial powers, and that they only influenced the council through their reputation as a leader and oratory ability. The council continued to debate such issues until a consensus was reached.\(^6^6\)

However, by 1880 the Oglala chiefs such as Red Cloud and Spotted Tail garnered far more influence within the tribe. This occurred both because of consolidation of the tribal population around Pine Ridge Agency, and the tribe’s societal crisis. The Oglala political framework allowed for fluidity of decision-making based upon necessity. For example, as the tribe moved from one location to another it was vulnerable, so the


wakiconza (camp administrator) briefly held great decision-making power in the tribe. And in times of military crisis, such as the defeat to the white soldiers in the late 1870s, the blotahunka (war party leaders) gained in political influence. As a result, the military defeat of the tribe in the late 1870s brought about a crisis that allowed chiefs to exercise more political influence. Therefore, the result is especially paradoxical when one considers that from the early 1840s the United States government’s main political objective in regards to the Oglala centered on the reduction of the chief’s influence within the tribe. The United States government hoped to more easily control tribal decision making by modifying the political structure of the Oglala. However, as the tribe consolidated around the Agency tribal members looked increasingly to their chiefs for guidance in how to interact with the whites.

Yet as the tribe began to spread out on the reservation in order to practice farming and ranching the chiefs lost much of their influence over the majority of tribal members. What is most interesting is the fact that as tribal members scattered throughout the river valleys to raise crops and livestock they began to readopt the traditional political structure of the tiospaye. The tribe became more decentralized as small family units started to make decisions concerning their lives without the chief’s input. While the political and social organization of the tribe more closely resembled its earlier structure, the same could not be said for its economic delineation.

While tribal members scattered over the reservation in order to farm small plots or raise a few head of cattle they found themselves increasingly alienated from their economic beliefs in kinship relationships and reciprocity, which previously informed their economic practices. For a Lakota warrior the appearance of generosity equaled that of his bravery

\[67\] Ibid, 172.
in the eyes of the community. Generosity most often revealed itself in the social custom of the giveaway. A giveaway bolstered a warrior’s position within the tribe because it allowed him to reaffirm his kinship relationships and acknowledge his debts to others by giving away his possessions. The more a man gave away, the higher his status within tribal society.

Thus, as previously noted, a warrior’s ability to provide for his extended family outweighed his ability to accumulate personal possessions. Often warriors would give away their entire horse herds and many fine garments produced by their female relatives. Moreover, the ability of a man to give away such garments revealed the esteem with which his female relatives held him, for they would not create such beautiful clothing for a man who failed to provide for their every need. In fact the women’s creation of such garments did more than enhance her status and that of her provider, it helped maintain the vitality of kinship relationships within tribal society. However, during the 1870s and 1880s as the male members of the tribe lost access to many means of obtaining social status, such as warfare and raiding, they increasingly felt emasculated. What is most fascinating is that as the social and economic structures of kinship relationships and reciprocity fell into disuse during the 1880s, the women of the tribe greatly increased their production of fine garments in a failed attempt to maintain these methods of economic redistribution.68

As one might imagine, the idea of a giveaway ran counter to good old-fashioned American capitalism and this practice fell quickly out of favor with Indian agents determined to instill this new economic belief. Consequently, giveaways occurred more infrequently, which further degraded the role of kinship relationships and reciprocity within Oglala society.
By 1883 approximately 7,800 Oglala inhabited the region around Pine Ridge Agency on the Great Sioux Indian Reservation, most dispersed throughout the creek bottoms, some as far as forty miles from the agency. The number of cattle owned by tribal members had risen to 5,500, yet agent McGillycuddy was concerned about the continued issue of beef rations. He felt that although most cattle owners on the reservation provided good care for their stock, many neglected their cattle or simply ate them because they believed that the United States would simply provide more. It should be noted that the "cattle owners" mentioned above probably referred to "squaw men" and their families, who more efficiently entered the regional cattle market.

The next year McGillycuddy's report to the Commissioner noted that farming efforts increased in the river valleys, and he hoped for a "more systematic and enlarged effort." He planned to divide the reservation into four farming districts with an agency farmer for each area. The four farming districts created: White Clay Creek, Wounded Knee, Porcupine Creek, and Medicine Root Creek districts, seemed to McGillycuddy capable of supporting a population of about 2,000. However, McGillycuddy did not understand that the Oglalas' method of river valley farming offered the only feasible way to cultivate crops in this arid and unyielding region. Without access to irrigation "more systematic and enlarged efforts" of farming were doomed to failure. The irregular weather patterns of the Northern Great Plains provided occasional years of abundant rain and crops, but eventually the yearly rainfall dropped below twenty inches a year. This unpredictable pattern of rainfall prevented the effective establishment of long-term dry

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farming in this region.\textsuperscript{70}

Clearly, the ecosystem of the region surrounding Pine Ridge Agency was best suited for the development of a tribal economy founded upon the care and raising of cattle. The soils, grasses, and yearly rainfall all combined to create an environment appropriate for large herbivores such as cattle, and prohibitive to the industry of farming. This is evidenced not only by the natural world but also by the economic system established by the surrounding white communities. A system based on ranching. As the Oglala realized that the federal government cared little about meeting its’ treaty obligations concerning meat rations the tribe sought to begin its’ own cattle operation. Yet as the tribe attempted to establish a reservation economy sustained by ranching, it met with resistance from whites both on and off the reservation. “Squaw men” competed with Indians for access to reservation lands and markets for their beef, while white ranchers who ringed the Pine Ridge Agency, and the entire Great Sioux Reservation for that matter, boldly trespassed their herds on reservation pastures. Despite these difficulties the Oglala had established an inchoate reservation economy by the early 1880s that hinged upon the success of their burgeoning tribal herds. Unfortunately, the tribe’s budding cattle industry would experience more set backs and interference in the following decade.

\textsuperscript{70} Executive Documents, House of Representatives, \textit{Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs}, 48\textsuperscript{th} Cong., 2\textsuperscript{nd} sess., 1884-1885, Serial No. 2287, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1885), 81-82.
CHAPTER THREE

The End of a Culture: The Oglalas' Shift to the Market Economy.

As the 1880s progressed the cattle industry emerged as the foundation of the emergent Oglala reservation economy. Agent McGillycuddy clearly illustrated this point when it 1884 he stated that stock-raising went as “well as could be expected, many of the better class of Indians now owning respectable sized herds, breaking in steers for work purposes, and occasionally selling the increase to neighboring settlers, when in the opinion of the agent the same is advisable.”71 Moreover, the Oglala began to cooperate and coordinate with ranchers in Nebraska and the Black Hills area in gathering and returning winter strays. This amicable interaction is noted as being a welcome change from the previous practice of stealing each others’ stock whenever possible. It also demonstrated both groups’ willingness to cooperate when the result was mutually beneficial. Despite this advantageous development, the stock owned by tribal members remained at approximately 5,500.72 Interestingly, McGillycuddy’s remarks above pertaining to a “better class of Indians,” and his intimation to his power over tribal decision-making, offer insights into the developing economic transformations within the tribe and his own unquestionable power on the reservation.

When he refers to a better class of Indian he is describing the fomentation of an economic division within the tribe itself. This division often, but not always, formed along the lines of mixed bloods and squaw men versus the full blood majority. The terms “mixed blood” and “full blood” began to denote more than a difference in blood quantum. The terms evolved into a denotation for education and economic opportunities. Mixed

72 Ibid., 350-351.
blood cattle owners invariably possessed larger herds than the full bloods despite being a distinct minority. The statement, “when in the opinion of the agent the same is advisable,” seems innocuous enough on the surface but is an example of the overwhelming power wielded by reservation agents. The agent, not the individual Indians themselves, decided if a particular tribal member could sell his excess stock for profit or sustenance. In a biography of McGillycuddy’s life, his second wife noted that

at this time there was probably no more autocratic position under the United States government than that of an Indian agent at a remote agency. The governor of the territory had no jurisdiction over the Pine Ridge agent. Though the Sioux Reservation was in Dakota, it was not properly a part of it. Approximately fifteen hundred miles from Washington...the Pine Ridge agent ruled four thousand square miles populated by eight thousand Indians.  

This situation gave “squaw men” and surrounding white cattlemen a distinct advantage in the regional marketplace, as they possessed the freedom to make timely and independent economic decisions concerning their operations.

A letter received in 1886 by Agent McGillycuddy from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, the Honorable H. Price, further evidenced the restrictive and unequal competitive environment that the Oglala cattlemen competed under. In reference to surplus cattle (or cattle numbers beyond a maximum sustainable breeding herd) raised by the Oglala, Commissioner Price instructed Agent McGillycuddy to put an end to the selling of these cattle by the tribesmen. Price also stated to McGillycuddy that, “your Indian police should be on the alert to prevent the sale of these stock cattle, unless when the sale is made with your full knowledge and consent.” Commissioner Price went on to say that “if they (meaning the Oglala) persist in selling their cattle, unless with your consent and under your personal supervision, that they will be placed on the list of Indians not deserving any

further aid from the government in that direction.”74 The Commissioner, safely insulated from the economic realities of Pine Ridge Agency, believed that a larger tribal herd benefited the Oglala more than the ability to make their own economic decisions. The policy of preventing Indians from selling their surplus cattle in order to establish a larger herd might seem the work of a benevolent benefactor from the government. However, the purpose of any cattle operation is to sell off surplus cattle while maintaining a base herd for reproduction.

The prevention of the tribe from participating in the regional cattle market placed them under a severe economic handicap. Surrounding white cattle operations sold, slaughtered, moved, and cared for their herds as the local market economy dictated. Tribal operations on the other hand remained under the strict control of the Pine Ridge Agency Indian Agents. These agents, and not the Indians themselves, shaped the burgeoning tribal cattle industry. In considering the disadvantages of the tribal herders one might also ask how they survived without the ability to obtain capital for needed expenses? This question did not greatly concern Commissioner Price, who had three years previously stated that, “these cattle are to be kept solely for stock purposes and must not be slaughtered nor issued to the Indians, as to the increase from said stock, that will be a matter for future consideration.”75 Clearly the three-year interval had provided no answers in regards to surplus cattle. Thus the Oglala seemed caught in a vise, with the federal government promoting unrealistic agricultural and economic practices on one side, and the autocratic Indian agent, whose decisions affected the direction and effectiveness of the developing reservation economy, on the other.

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74 Letter received by Agent V. T. McGillycuddy from Commissioner Price on March 5, 1884, General Records, Box 7, Jan. 2, 1884-April 22, 1886, RG 75, KC.
75 Letter received by Agent V. T. McGillycuddy from Commissioner Price on July 3, 1883, General Records, Box 6, June 12, 1882-Dec. 1883, RG 75, KC.
In 1885, agent McGillycuddy’s final year on Pine Ridge, he requested that the Commissioner put an end to the issue of beef rations on the reservation. He believed that in order for the Oglala to become independent workers they needed to be forced to work for their food. Moreover, he believed that the beef issue was wasted upon the tribal dog population, estimated at between 30,000 and 40,000 dogs. McGillycuddy reported an increased interest in stock raising for the year, but the number of stock cattle decreased from the previous year’s total of 5,500 to 4,927. He also noted that while Red Cloud’s band killed and ate their issue of stock cattle, more industrious members of the tribe sold 300 head of 3-4 year old steers for $9,000. Again, this is probably an example of the economic divisions that appeared during this period between Red Cloud’s “full bloods” and “squaw men” and their mixed blood descendents. Moreover, McGillycuddy proudly noted that farming output quadrupled, and he credited his four agency farmers for the increase. Yet according to his report only 1,788 acres had been tilled, which was 22 acres less than reported in 1880.\(^{76}\)

As the 1880s progressed the reservation farming enterprises developed by Indian Agents fell on hard times. Oglala efforts at farming under the direction of agent H. D. Gallagher faired poorly in 1887, with only 1,801 acres under cultivation. Although Gallagher noted that Red Cloud’s people, “are certainly beginning to understand the importance of making some effort in the direction of farming,” he also reported that drought killed almost every crop on the reservation.\(^{77}\) The tribe worked diligently in an effort to make the farming programs succeed. They understood the benefits of farming; they had practiced river valley farming for decades before contact with whites. Yet the


tribe’s method of agriculture involved the simple technique of planting scattered, and unsystematic, fields of crops near riverbeds to take advantage of the nearby water source. The Oglala picked up these techniques from more agrarian neighbors such as the Arikara and Pawnee.

For the invading whites this method was unacceptable. They demanded well laid out fields of crops all in neat rows, and they demanded that the men do the farming. While this model succeeded in areas of sufficient rain, and was successfully adopted by eastern tribes such as the Creek and Cherokee, it failed to account for plagues of grasshoppers and a scarcity of rainfall. Again, the harsh environmental realities of the region shattered the hopes of well-intentioned bureaucrats who held fast to their belief that dry-farming on the reservation offered the tribal members their best chance at economic independence.

The drought, and the severe blizzards that followed during the winter of 1886-1887, proved to be disastrous for the free-range cattle industry in this region. Free range ranching, which developed regionally in 1880, allowed cattle herds to roam freely during the winter in search of fodder and shelter in the protected river valleys and creeks. Normally, surrounding cattle outfits gathered anywhere from 10,000 to 75,000 head each spring. However, they rounded up only 3,000 head of cattle during the spring roundup of 1887. This roundup consisted of 23 wagons, 2,500 head of horses, and 325 men representing about fifty outfits in the area. During the boom years between 1880 and 1886 the region was massively overgrazed as each operator strove to maximize herd size and increase profits.

This practice of overgrazing, coupled with a dry summer and a severe winter, left as many as $\frac{3}{4}$ of the area’s outfits, “to the wall with a seventy-five to hundred percent
‘kill’ of their range stock.”78 The grass had failed to replenish itself because of the lack of rainfall, and the deep snows prevented cattle from finding the little forage that remained. Remarkably, the Oglala stock cattle fared very well in comparison because of the reservation practice of providing the herds with winter fodder. At the time of agent Gallagher’s report to the Commissioner in 1887, the number of tribally owned stock cattle stood at 6,278 head, up from 4,927 in 1885 despite the killing winter.79 Unfortunately, the next year saw a dramatic reversal of fortunes for both the tribal and white cattle interests.

In 1888 an event occurred that at the same time greatly decreased the prospects of the Oglala tribe’s cattle interests in the region and greatly increased the surrounding white cattlemen’s future economic security. The Sioux Bill of April 30, 1888, reduced the Great Sioux Reservation by 9,000,000 acres and scattered the separate tribes of the Lakota among various smaller reservations. Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, created for the Oglala and Northern Cheyenne, contained 3,155,200 acres. For the ceded land the entire Lakota nation received a twenty year extension of the educational provisions of the 1868 Treaty, thirty new day schools, farm equipment, $1,000,000 of excess money from ceded land sales, and 26,000 head of stock cows and 1,000 bulls.80 The Oglalas’ share of the stock came out to 7,520 cows and 300 bulls.81 The tribe’s request for such large numbers of cattle revealed their understanding of the industry’s importance to their future economic growth.

Not surprisingly, the cattle industry outside the reservation strongly supported, if

81 Letter received by Captain Penney from Commissioner D. Browning, March 13, 1895, General Records, Box 17, RG 75, KC.
not actually led, the agitation to reduce the Great Sioux Reservation. Because of the region's aridity no great land rush occurred because farmers knew they could not survive in the region, which left the majority of land available for the nearby ranching interests.\footnote{Schell, \textit{History of South Dakota}, 247.}

The effects of this enormous land swap further polarized the ranching industry in the region. For the white ranchers in the region it meant vastly increased pasturage for their herds. For the Lakota it meant severe restrictions on herd size and increased pressure from the white cattle ranchers. For example, the agent reported that during the winter and spring white ranchers herded large numbers of cattle onto the reservation in order to obtain free grazing and avoid taxes. The agent wrote letters to all offending parties requesting that they remove their stock by July 1\textsuperscript{st}, and most complied. However, some small operators ignored the agent’s requests.\footnote{Executive Documents, House of Representatives, \textit{Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs}, 50\textsuperscript{th} Cong., 2\textsuperscript{nd} sess., 1888-1889, Serial No. 2637, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1889), LXXIII.}

The farm equipment provided for the tribe in the Sioux Bill of 1888 underscored the government’s determination to create an Indian community of yeomen farmers. Clearly, the symbol of the independent farmer as the foundation of the nation’s economy remained strong despite the industrial revolution in the latter half of the nineteenth century. For most Americans land still represented economic freedom and the wellspring of democratic influence within the United States. Despite the determination of such well-meaning government officials, the tribe’s farming efforts failed in 1887 because of yet another drought that killed almost all crops raised on the reservation. However, 1888 saw an abundance of rain, and the tribe raised over 21,000 bushels of corn, and 6,000 bushels of potatoes.\footnote{Ibid.} Unfortunately, this temporary success only encouraged the environmentally unrealistic policy of dry farming on the Northern Plains, a mistake that led to ecological
disasters such as the Dust Bowl on the Oklahoma plains. Fortunately, nothing quite so disastrous occurred on Pine Ridge because much less ground was broken by the plow.

The year 1889 marked a significant turning point for the Oglala, Lakota in several ways. This year marked the beginning of a true reservation economy, brought about by a changing federal policy pertaining to the beef ration. For the period between 1885 and 1888 the federal government reduced the approved annual beef rations from 8,000,000 pounds to only 4,000,000 pounds. This reduction occurred in response to a sharp reduction in the tribal census. Agent McGillycuddy’s census in 1885 counted 7,649 Indians on the reservation, while the following year a new agent, Captain J. M. Bell, undertook a far more rigorous census in the name of efficiency and cost-cutting and found only 4,873 Indian living on the reservation. Agent Bell stated that the Indians, “acknowledge, they had been drawing rations for all their ghosts.”

This manipulative, yet clever, behavior on the part of the Oglala demonstrated that the tribal leaders were able to respond to the shortages in the beef ration by working the system for the people’s benefit. If the United States government shorted the Indians on its beef issue, why not then exaggerate the number of Oglala and Northern Cheyenne living near Pine Ridge Agency? The tactic worked for twenty years, and still the Indians went hungry more often than not.

The desire to cut governmental spending while increasing efficiency is a characteristic of the Progressive Era in American history. However, for the Oglala the

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timing proved especially bad when one couples the droughts, blizzards, and impending reduction of the Great Sioux Reservation in the late 1880s with the new census. This population shift from 1885 to 1886 constituted a 35% drop in tribal population, a fact that agent Bell believed could save the government $50,000 a year in beef rations alone. Not surprisingly, the 1887 gross poundage awarded for the beef contracts was reduced from 6,500,000 pounds to 4,500,000 pounds, a drop of 31%.

The reduction in beef rations meant an end to the Oglala tribe’s economic security blanket, which remained at four million gross pounds under contract until the twentieth century. The tribe realized that the United States would never honor its obligation to provide adequate supplies in a timely fashion. This realization, coupled with growing food shortages and crop failures, created far more tribal interest in the cattle industry. After a short period of adjustment that saw their herd size dwindle, the Oglala intensified their commitment to the care and expansion of their herds.

While the tribe increased its interest in the cattle business, the reduction in the beef rations hindered the tribe’s ability to enlarge its operation immediately despite the cattle provided by the 1888 treaty. In 1889 the number of tribally owned cattle stood at 10,968 head, but by 1891 that number dropped to 7,982. This decrease occurred because the Oglala often slaughtered their stock animals in order to survive, such as in 1890 when the tribe was forced to eat 700,000 pounds of their own stock cattle to make it through the winter. Clearly, the sharp reduction in beef rations created a shortage of food for a large portion of the tribe, which adversely affected its own cattle industry. However, by 1897

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the number of Indian stock rose to 40,051 head, an increase of over five hundred percent in seven years.\textsuperscript{92} This expansion in the herd size demonstrates the productivity of the land when utilized for the care and raising of cattle.

Unfortunately, while this increase in cattle numbers helped some members of the tribe to achieve economic independence, the majority of the Oglala failed to reap the benefits from this growing industry. Squaw men, mixed bloods and a small number of enterprising full bloods continued to dominate the cattle industry on the reservation. Nonetheless, this renewed interest in raising cattle in order to gain economic self-sufficiency demonstrated that by 1889 the Oglala understood the importance of cattle to the regional economy and their own independence.

While cattle numbers on the reservation increased greatly, only a small percentage of the Indian population gained economic independence through this industry. “Squaw men,” which constituted only ten percent of the Lakota population on Pine Ridge in 1889, owned a disproportionate percentage of the cattle that legally grazed tribal lands.\textsuperscript{93} Moreover, events later revealed that many of the larger cattle interests on the reservation rejected the associations created by kinship relationships and reciprocity. For example, in 1898 the “squaw men,” mixed bloods, and nearly all Indians who owned large numbers of cattle joined together to form a stock association to protect brands, kill wolves, and work together for each others’ mutual benefit.

The fact that they created a stock association and worked for their \textit{mutual} benefit, and not the tribe’s, indicates that to some degree they accepted the American ideology of capitalism and its focus on obtaining wealth to a significant degree. Moreover, the

\textsuperscript{92} Executive Documents, House of Representatives, \textit{Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs}, 55\textsuperscript{th} Cong., 2\textsuperscript{nd} sess., 1897-1898, Serial No. 3641, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1897), 271.

concept of protecting individual brands demonstrates a strong belief in personal property and material accumulation, a belief not in tune with practices of kinship relationships and reciprocity, nor the generosity of the giveaway. That year the stock growers on Pine Ridge sold 2,000,000 pounds of beef to the United States to help the government meet its beef ration obligations to the rest of the tribe, and branded over 8,000 calves in the spring. The reservation agent was so optimistic about the future of the cattle industry that he predicted the yearly production of steers would soon double.

Yet during the same year he also noted that of the 6,400 Indians living on the reservation, only twenty percent lived off their own labor, and the other eighty percent survived on government rations. This situation reveals that significant obstacles still prevented many of the tribal members from participating in the emerging reservation economy specifically, or the regional market economy in general. For example, larger and better-established white ranches out produced smaller reservation operation. They provided larger amounts of beef to market while at the same time possessing greater access to the markets because of the Indian Agent’s control over Oglala herds. Moreover, the cattle business requires an extensive investment in time and capital in order to compete successfully. Larger operations, both on and off the reservation, had greater ability to pay for shipping costs to distant markets and repair costs inherent with the business. Small Indian ranchers found it almost impossible to compete in the regional cattle market when faced with competition from “squaw men” and mixed bloods on the reservation and whites off, especially when the Agent’s interference was added to the equation. Unfortunately, more governmental “management” of Oglala cattle operations arose soon after the division and downsizing of the Great Sioux Reservation.

A shift in governmental policy pertaining to managing and harvesting cattle also highlighted the year 1889 as a significant date for the Oglala. As noted at the beginning of this paper, the preferred method of the Oglala for procuring and processing the issued beef was the traditional hunting method used to kill buffalo. The cattle were turned loose from corrals after being weighed and then systematically hunted down and shot from horseback. The fact that the Oglala clung to the traditional method for over twenty years demonstrates how cattle were used by the tribe as a tool for retaining as much of their tribal identity as possible. However, the local and federal officials never approved of this method of slaughter. As early as 1874 the Commissioner of Indian Affairs asked agent J. J. Saville if a more efficient method could be found to dispatch the animals. Yet the practice of killing government issued beef from horseback continued for two decades. In June of 1889 a young man named Will S. Hughes gave this account of a beef issue at Pine Ridge:

The boss farmer and his interpreter would enter the small house; at a command the cattle started thru the shute and the interpreter called the two names for each animal turned loose, until 500 long horned steers had been released. The big flat was covered with chasing, shooting Indians, until it sounded like a battle was taking place. After the firing had ceased Mr. Baredy took us out on the prairie where the slaughtering was being done. The first scene we witnessed was two squaws and two old men who were hurriedly ripping the hide from a big long horn. Four or 5 dusky children were eagerly watching the procedure. In fact it seemed that the 2 old 'gals' were doing the work. As the hide came off, meat was cut off in pieces, the papooses eagerly picking up clotted blood from under foot, eating it with apparent relish. The old bucks secured a kidney each, and would cut off huge bites and chew like a Virginia planter would a hunk of tobacco. The whole thing was (a) bit sickening to a tenderfoot.

This scene, seemingly barbarous to the whites who witnessed it, demonstrated that the Oglala still believed that some semblance of their previous way of life was possible.

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95 Letter received by Agent Saville from Commissioner E. P. Smith, April 9, 1874, General Records, Box 2, RG 75, KC.
96 Hall, Roundup Years, 172.
However, in 1889 the policies pertaining to the handling and harvesting of tribal cattle changed. The government issued four new regulations regarding the slaughter of cattle: no cattle could be killed without the agent’s permission, no stock issued for breeding could be killed, cows or heifers could not be killed unless proven barren, and no permits would be issued to kill steers less than three years old. These rules served two practical purposes. The first regulation promoted the growth of the reservation cattle industry dominated by squaw men and mixed bloods. If the small herd owners were not allowed to butcher and eat their beef they had two choices, either attempt to compete with the larger outfits or sell their cattle to them. Either way the larger herd owners enjoyed the advantage. The second purpose aimed at putting an end to the seemingly barbaric practice of hunting cattle. Once the agent possessed the power to decide if cattle could be slaughtered at all, and when, he also held the power to decide the method. Not coincidentally, the practice of “hunting” cattle issued by the government lasted only another year.  

More importantly, new regulations concerning the handling of cattle stated that during the annual spring roundup, held in coordination with non-reservation cattle outfits, all calves must be branded with individual brands, not those of tribal bands. This branding policy further alienated the full bloods who had joined their small herds together in order to compete with larger cattle interests on the reservation. By forcing the bands to divide their cattle the government promoted the importance of the individual and the accumulation of personal property over that of the tribe as a whole. With these new regulations in place the Oglala Lakota on Pine Ridge faced the end of their socially driven

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98 Ibid.
economic practices of kinship relationships and reciprocity as the foundation of their tribal economy.

Both socially and economically the Oglala had reached a significant turning point in the tribe's history in 1889. The Sioux Bill of 1888 cost the Lakota over nine million acres of productive land and created separate reservations for each band of the Lakota. The United States' reduction of beef rations ended the Oglala complacency and sparked the beginning of a true reservation economy centered on the cattle industry. And most importantly, changes in federal policy regarding the care and handling of the tribally owned cattle made it increasingly difficult to maintain more familiar economic practices. These events made 1889 one of the most pivotal and culturally significant years in Oglala tribal history. The tribe still maintained its cultural identity; however, by attempting to both adapt to and adopt the ideals inherent in market capitalism the Oglala experienced an economic disaster that carried significant social and political implications for the Oglala as well.
CONCLUSION

For the Oglala Lakota the twenty-one years between 1868 and 1889 marked the period that saw this once great tribe face the end of its culture. The tribe, which faced the near extermination of the buffalo, found themselves unable to stem the tide of American expansion. In a series of treaties with the United States government the Oglala lost increasingly larger segments of their territory. In exchange for this land the tribe hoped to provide for their future by gaining food rations, monetary compensation, schools, agricultural implements, and livestock. The Oglala believed that they might be able to maintain their cultural practices as they concomitantly adapted to an ever-encroaching society of white men. This aspiration proved an illusion.

The Oglala society, founded on the predominance of social obligations and kinship relationships, differed too greatly from that of the intruders from the United States. As the influence and infrastructure inherent in the capitalistic system of the United States spread across the Northern Great Plains the Oglala culture came under assault. Economic ideals based on reciprocity and social obligations for the good of the tribe fell victim to concepts of personal property and wealth for the benefit of the individual. Indian men, unable to provide for their extended families by hunting or raiding, abilities that had once lead to social status and tribal leadership, found themselves socially and economically emasculated. Most Oglala men, women, and children found themselves dependent upon government food rations for their survival.

In order to escape this dependency many tribal members sought to adopt white methods of economic survival. Many Indians, guided by extreme pressure from local Indian Agents acting on behalf of distant policy makers, tried their hands at farming and stock raising. The attempts at farming failed almost without exception as the environmental realities overpowered philanthropic ideals. Cattle, on the other hand,
seemed to provide the best solution to economic dependence upon whites. However, tribal attempts at stock raising also failed despite the beneficial capabilities of the land. For as the Oglala moved further into the capitalistic world of America, both at the direction of bureaucrats and on their own volition, they not only found that they could not compete on an equal footing with whites, they were deprived of the very foundations of their culture. The social ties of kinship relationships and reciprocity were damaged significantly during the economic transformation.

Many factors eventually contributed to the severing of many of the ties that bound the Oglala Lakota society together. The American government’s underlying theme of assimilation, influenced by Enlightenment thought and strongly informed by the emerging market economy, helped to shape a federal policy that strove to transform Indians into yeoman farmers. Only then could these barbaric heathens be incorporated into American white society. Moreover, the Indian agents, tools of the distant policy makers, implemented regulations that impeded the Oglala tribe’s attempts to maintain tribal identity while concomitantly instilling the values of the dominant culture, namely capitalism. However, while this policy brought about the end of Oglala society, the tribe’s subsequent attempts to participate in the regional market economy were impeded by competition from white cattle operations surrounding the reservation and the ascendancy of “squaw men” and their descendants on Pine Ridge itself.

During this brief twenty-year period the Oglala Lakota experienced a cultural reversal of massive proportions. In 1868 the tribe dominated the Northern Plains. The Treaty of Fort Laramie saw the United States government acquiesce to Lakota demands that closed the Bozeman Trail and assured the tribe complete sovereignty over the lands they claimed as their own. Lakota bands freely traveled across the prairies with their vast herds of horses in pursuit of buffalo. Two decades later the buffalo had disappeared, as
did the Lakota way of life. Confinement replaced freedom, dependency replaced self-sufficiency, and the market economy replaced a system in which the economy remained subservient to social obligations. These social obligations of kinship relationships and reciprocity, practices that once drove the tribe's economy, disappeared from most tribal economic practices as a result of the irresistible expansion of the United States and the market economy.
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