Small Robe Band of Blackfeet: Ethnogenesis by Social and Religious Transformation

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One of the most significant challenges facing Native Americans and their indigenous identity is a greater understanding of the historical complexity of relationships that interconnected ethnically diverse populations across geographic landscapes. This thesis examines the range of Blackfoot political, social, economic structures, spiritual beliefs, and practices that were in place at the time of Euro-American contact. I use historically documented evidence of transformations that took place from the beginning of the fur trade era through the reservation era. Through the theoretical lens of ethnogenesis I use a case study of the Small Robe (Inuck’siks) band of the South Piegan of Montana to elucidate their responses to conditions of change. I conclude that all divisions of the Blackfoot Confederacy changed in response to catastrophic conditions of disease, warfare, and other natural phenomena as well as contact with and inclusion of other Indian and non-Indian people and their cultures to ensure continuity and survival.
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It is not an exaggeration to say this thesis would not have happened without the inspiration and spiritual guidance of my ancestors whose stories will always live in my heart and mind as I hear their voices from the past. Many individuals have given me inspiration and assistance along the path of recovering knowledge about the Small Robe Band of Blackfoot Indians. I would like to thank the members of my committee. First was Dr. Richmond Clow, Professor of Native American Studies who insisted that scholarly works be seen through Indian eyes. Dr. Greg Campbell, of the Anthropology Department, who inspired me to see the diversity of Indian tribes prior to the arrival of the Euro-American and Dr. Richard Sattler for his early encouragement in critique of literary sources. I also wish to thank Kate Shanley and the writers group, as well as Dean Sharon Alexander and Dr. Sally Thompson who consistently offered words of encouragement and a much appreciated willingness to read and comment on my drafts. But, if there is one person who brought all the support, knowledge and inspiration together with her excellent abilities as a true scholar I offer many sincere thanks to my friend, adopted niece, and colleague, Elizabeth Sperry for providing great avenues to research, reading and suggesting, rereading and proofreading so many versions of this paper. Most of all I appreciate my sons, Steve, Edmond and Robert for their encouragement, support and inspiration to continue on this path of a role model for them and their families. I am so very thankful for my seven grandchildren who so patently waited and understood my need to finish this paper.
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Chapter 1
Introduction

One of the most significant challenges facing Native Americans and their indigenous identity is a greater understanding of the historical complexity of relationships that connected and defined ethnically diverse populations.¹ Prior to contact and influence of Euro-Americans, the four tribes now known as the Blackfoot Confederacy self-identified as fluctuating populations. By critically examining a series of historical and sociopolitical episodes on the Northwestern Plains, this thesis addresses the emergence, characteristics, composition, evolution and integration of a band of Southern Piegan to neighboring tribes and reintegration to a social organization from which they originated.

All cultures change for a variety of reasons, but the core of social identity is based upon a shared belief system. It is how they adapt to their living conditions, how they change in response to catastrophic conditions, disease, warfare and other natural phenomena, and how they must alter their life-ways at certain intervals that determines if they are going to continue to be a people.²

The early ethnographic literature about Native North American societies assumed that the culture, as described, was a highly standardized form of social behavior, existed with little change over an indefinite period preceding European contact.³ Some scholars assumed further that certain homogeneity
existed in tribal societies throughout time and space. In other words, it was assumed every aspect of their lives remained constant, such as their language, their cultural traditions, social structures, and often assume people to look a certain way, to remain consistent. Early ethnographic studies of the allied Blackfeet were included in these narrowly defined assumptions.  

For example, George Bird Grinnell discussed the bands of the Blackfoot in his 1904, publication of Blackfoot Lodge Tales; he described them as “true gentes,” meaning they were people that recognized descent only through the male line, which narrowly defined the culture following a discretely bound unit. Anthropologist Julian Steward (1934) also assumed certain Blackfeet homogeneity when he was commissioned to develop a report for the National Park Service. Steward described the Blackfeet as having a “typical plains culture.” This lengthy report was made specifically to interpret the history and societies of the Blackfoot life-ways through ethnographic museum exhibits, public interpretations, and park naturalists of Glacier National Park. He further generalized Blackfeet phenotypical attributes imbued with racial ethnocentrism of his time: “Physically, he is most like Plains tribes though tending somewhat to resemble the marginal peoples. He is tall (171.5 cm. -5’7”) round headed (cephalic index, 80), and has high cheek bones, a prominent nose and a certain strength and nobleness of countenance which is conspicuous among Plains Indians.” This report misinformed millions of visitors to Glacier National Park for over 75 years, and unfortunately park service employees
accepted many of the cultural and racial descriptions that serve to reinforce and entrench these stereotypes in the literature where they persist today.

An exception of greater understanding was anthropologist Clark Wissler’s (1911) personal interviews with Blackfeet regarding Blackfoot social life that chose a more consistent view of the data available to him and he wrote:

When a band begins, it may be a group of two or three brothers, fathers, and grandfather, or a small family band [which means the same thing]; later, friends or admirers of the head man in this family may join them until the band becomes very large. Bands may split in dissention, one part joining another or forming a new one. A new group is soon given a name by other people according to some habit or peculiarity. They do not name themselves.  

Wissler further observed a consistency in band affiliation by individuals when he stated, “it appears that continuous residence or association with a band is practically equivalent to membership therein. The individual seems free to select his band.” This study was the first to indicate that Blackfeet were not bound together solely by ties of kinship or blood. Rather, he indicated they had an open conceptualization of community membership, and an individual was welcome to join, or be adopted into the community. Even at the micro-level of societal organization (i.e. bands), people were not bound together by simple kinship ties.  

The attenuated ideology of tribal social and biological homogeneity was generally paramount within the confines of the early studies of tribal cultures, and was carried out in generalities about tribal people until 1971, when William
Sturtevant produced a more in-depth culture study of the Seminole people as they distinguished themselves as separate from the Creek people. His introduction of this sociopolitical process gave birth to the term “ethnogenesis” and, although he generally defined ethnogenesis in this work as “the establishment of group distinctiveness,” his work inspired the production of comprehensive ways of describing the historical emergence of a people.

Beneficial works that have followed Sturtevant’s began to describe the varied ethnogenetic processes (see Albers 1993; Sattler 1996; Sharrock 1974; Moore 1987; Campbell 2001). These works address how local groups changed their ethnic identities concomitant to their relationships with others. Scholarly studies conducted by Patricia Albers (1996) and Susan Sharrock (1974), indicate constant movements of many tribes and bands comprise indigenous people of the Northwest plains. Richard Sattler’s 1996 article took group distinctiveness a step further when he produced a valuable reconsideration of Seminole ethnic identity as it reflected political alignments. This work observed the use of older bases of power to create new ones, yet remain vulnerable to challenge, by which he concludes both political affiliation and ethnic identity retain their fluidity today.

Important to the study of the Blackfeet and the bands within each division are the revelations contained within these works, of an ethnogenetic process that involves variable transformative processes. Few other studies have been done at the micro-level of tribal social organization, therefore, Greg Campbell’s
(1993) work with the Lemhi Shoshone is valuable to this paper as it relates to a smaller unit of study as they formed their identity, distinguished themselves from other bands of the Shoshone and continue to be living entities.¹¹

Ethnogenesis provides a theoretical construct for looking at a tribe, a division, or in this case a micro-level band unit, to determine how the actions of individuals within the band contributed to their identity. Study of the Small Robe band of Blackfeet also reveals other dimensions to the ethnogenetic processes by involving economic growth, geographic movements, formation of new alliances as well as creative synthesis, and adaptation of European religions. As a result of these processes their ethnic identities underwent a series of changes.¹²

To describe these changes, other scholars traditionally emphasized theoretical models based upon biological constructs that demanded that each entity must have one and only one parent. However, by utilizing rhizoic models from disciplines other than biology, it became clear that the convergence of diverse roots formed a hybrid or amalgamated descendant group whereby each entity had many parental stocks. This illustration was used by John Moore (1994) in his seminal article, “Putting Anthropology Back Together Again: The Ethnographic Critique of Cladistic Theory” where he suggests looking to other disciplines to find more appropriate means to study the formation of human origins and history. Moore believes alternative models are just as appropriate for studying human evolution and prehistory as models.
borrowed from biology. He uses examples "Metallurgical models provide appropriate analogies for cultural processes because they allow for the creation of new entities that are qualitatively different from their components. The study of river morphology has required models that show how the channels of a river separate and recombine in a complex fashion, just as the component populations of the human species separate and recombine."13

The analogy of visual images projected by the study of river morphology, the fluidity, occasional swirling process of refinement and distillation of human experiences, as the river channels occasionally separate, and continue at some point to come together again provide a culturally appropriate way to discuss ethnogenesis of Small Robes (Inuck’siks) Band of South Piegan Blackfeet whose spiritual, cultural, political, and economic experiences not only reflected an inclusive world-view surrounding their reality, but they also embraced inclusion as the basis for separating, living and organizing society, as well as a means, of survival. Therefore, the world-view from which the band emerged continued to demonstrate a capacity to include all people regardless of difference, be it gender, national origin, tribal affiliation, spiritual beliefs, or age, they continued to remake themselves throughout their history.

The challenge to define the specifics of ethnogenesis from the band level is a personal challenge as well. Reading early historic interpretations of Blackfeet culture and social organization informed me that the divisions of the Blackfoot Confederacy included one major division called the Small Robes had gone
extinct due to warfare and disease. However, transmission of oral traditions, and personally knowing people who self-identified as belonging to or descending from the Small Robe Band, as well as written family history on the Blackfeet Reservation indicated otherwise. My maternal great-grandmother's 1832 story of traveling with the Small Robes down the Rocky Mountain front to their favored wintering grounds in the Judith Basin in eastern Montana was recorded by military Major General Hugh Scott. Other scholarly studies continued to indicate their presence on the Blackfeet Reservation as late as 1970.

While studying the advent of Catholicism among the Blackfeet it became evident that the Small Robes band of South Piegan was responsible for stewardship of Catholicism to the larger bands of the Southern Piegan in the mid 1800’s. The history of this Christian religious belief system, how it came to the people, and why they chose to synthesize it with their own traditional beliefs became important to me, as well as contemporary Blackfeet tribal members and Catholic clergy in service to the Blackfeet Reservation. My ancestors of this band lived nearest the Rocky Mountains, naturally in close contact with tribes whose traditional homelands were west of the Rocky Mountains. This alliance served to explain much of my personal ancestry back to eight generations ago, to include Nez Perce, Salish, Kootenai, Cree, Pend D'Oreilles, and Blackfeet tribes, as well as French, Irish and English. The fur trade era, including a member of the Corps of Discovery, were responsible for
the Euro-American contributions to my heritage. My children are of nine tribal
nations, due to the later historical period of the Boarding School Era, when our
grandparents traveled far from the Blackfeet Nation to Indian boarding schools
like Chemawa, Oregon; Carlisle, Pennsylvania; and Haskell Institute in
Lawrence, Kansas for education. During their young adulthood in these
institutions they met and married people from the Tlingit, Haida, and Oneida
tribes, and returned home with their spouses who also chose to live out the
remainder of their life-time within the Blackfeet culture.

Over two decades of work inside Blackfeet Tribal Governmental structures
revealed my ethnic identity is not one formed in isolation; it is much the same
for each the South Piegan bands, as well as, the three distinct divisions of the
Blackfoot Confederacy. From birth to adulthood, Blackfeet cultural nuances
informed my identity. Therefore, my understanding of the past relies heavily on
oral tradition the mechanism used to record Blackfoot history both prior to and
following Euro-American contact.

1.1 Ethnohistoric Method

According to the analysis of early oral traditions and historical
documentation, all nations and micro-level bands of the Blackfoot Confederacy
were created gradually from indigenous families and tribal communities who
were at times, ethnically related, and or lived in close geographical proximity.14
This study focuses on the changes that took place in the first one hundred years of Blackfeet Euro-American contact, 1780 to 1880. The Blackfeet and the allied tribes that constituted what came to be called the “Blackfoot Confederacy,” to the major division of the Piegan, to the band of the Inuck’siks as they emerged as a powerful influence on the western plains in both population and economic growth to a rapid decline through disease and warfare, and governmental intervention and oppression.

This study intends to elucidate the range of Blackfeet particulars in political, social and economic structures, and cultural practices that integrated to produce and define the ethnicity at the band level. By using the band or micro-level framework for historical analysis of formative processes, I am able to define ethnogenesis from the divisions of Blackfoot in the first few decades of contact and define what made the Southern Piegan, and ultimately the Small Robes, distinct from other bands and divisions of the Blackfoot.

The utilization of written documents produced in the late 1700’s in the form of personal journals, company reports, and maps of early explorers provided records of the fur trade industry as it expanded across Canada and made direct contact with Blackfeet Divisions as well as small groups known as bands. The earliest Protestant and Catholic priests to visit and settle among the allied tribes also provide documented sources of direct contact. Post Lewis and Clark Expedition governmental interaction provide documents relative to the pre and post treaty period. I also use editorials and articles from the earliest of
Montana newspapers to document *Inuck’siks* activities. Another set of information comes from interviews and observations reported by ethnographers who started visiting the Piegan/Blackfeet around the turn of the century and had knowledgeable Blackfoot informants. These documents give good indication that the *Inuck’siks* exhibited such independence to non-conformance that ethnicity in the generic and highly abstract sense of a tribe or band name did not always accurately describe them, nor could it be a marker of geopolitical boundaries for them. Literary sources give fragmentary descriptions of stories, myths and oral traditions of Blackfoot culture at various intervals during the entire period of contact. These publications, together with orally recorded historical accounts by Blackfeet, illustrate how the stories, myths, legends, and oral traditions merge to validate ethno-historical data with a focus upon with interethnic hybridization, or merging of a people to describe the historical processes of ethnic change.

Throughout this paper, I argue that to be accepted as a member of the Small Robe Band of Blackfeet, or a member of the Southern Piegan, or a member of the larger Blackfoot Alliance did not necessarily mean that a person must be somehow bound by the blood of their ethnic community. However, each individual shared a cultural, economic, political identity and a relationship with the spiritual and living world based upon a shared sense of community and commitment. Individuals, regardless of gender, were free to do as they chose, so long as their actions respected their place in the community, and their
responsibilities within their families, and the broader web of human and non-human interaction. This, the *Inuck’siks* achieved by what author Rupert Ross (1992) terms radical individualism and from the other divisions and bands of the Blackfoot, the ethic of non-interference.¹⁵
Chapter 2
Overview of Blackfeet Confederacy Political and Social History

The history of the Blackfeet, their creation/origin stories, sacred knowledge, and science is the foundation from which personal identity becomes manifold.\textsuperscript{16} Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a complete ethnohistory of the entire Blackfoot Confederacy, it is however, necessary to provide the reader with baseline historical ethnographic information about the Blackfoot Confederacy’s major divisions, tenure, the socio-political configurations, and system of belief to describe the ethnogenesis of the Inuck’siks band of the South Piegan Blackfeet.

2.1.1 Who We Say We Are: Our Homeland

The people of the Blackfeet Nation in present-day Montana and Alberta are the descendents of those first put on earth by Ihtsipaitapiiyopa, the Source of Life, and the one who gave us breath. Within the Great Plains region they are presently located in their aboriginal territory extending along the eastern face of the Rocky Mountains from the North Saskatchewan River in Canada, to the Yellowstone River in Southern Montana.\textsuperscript{17} The tribes of the Blackfoot Confederacy were not resettled by either the United States or Canadian governments, as were many Native American nations, to lands outside their traditional homelands. As a result, they retained part of their traditional lands within the final boundaries of the Blackfeet Reservation in Montana and the Blood, North Piegan and Siksika Reserves in Alberta.\textsuperscript{18}

The people of the Blackfoot Confederacy collectively refer to themselves as Niits’i’tapi (Real People), defined by Piegan elder Duane Mistaken Chief as
“Those who are true to themselves, their individual and collective empirical knowledge, with the understanding of how and why myths, legends and pre-historical events are embedded within Blackfoot culture.”

2.1.2 The Blackfoot Alliances

Albeit collectively and commonly referred to as a “confederacy,” the term is a misnomer denoting an agreement of each division to subordinate its power to that of a central authority in common affairs. An exhaustive review of the ethnography and oral tradition of the earliest times does not indicate that a “federated” structure was ever in place, nor did it ever exist as a standard of hierarchical authority of each division to their relationships at the micro-level designated as “band.” Today, the term “Blackfoot Confederacy” is used by the people within the culture as a matter of functional convenience.

The alliance that more aptly describes their affiliation has existed between the Blackfeet divisions continues as it was at the time of first Euro-American contact and, unlike many examples of tribal people whose general histories are understood as a creative adaptation to violent changes, the alliance of the four divisions was not established through acts of violence, oppression, or domination by conquest and war. The Blackfoot/Blackfeet may be described as a hybrid nation in and of itself, fused with subsidiary or derivative nations further comprised of populations jointly occupying a large area of territory in the northwestern plains. Although dramatic fluctuations in population of all four divisions have occurred during the historic period they have endured with both collective yet distinct social and political identities.
Contemporary leadership of each of the four divisions came together in 2000, signing a declaration of solidarity that reaffirmed their relationship and renewed pursuits of social, political, and economic interests. This meeting of solidarity allows the leadership to discuss mutual social concerns, such as loss of language and restoration efforts, political issues, and spiritual regeneration. The 2000 declaration is offered here in its entirety as valued contemporary cultural information of reaffirmation of their purpose:

Whereas, we, Amsskapipiikunniwa, Kainaiwa, Siksikawa, and Aapatohisipiikunniwa, members of Siksiatsiitapiwa, known as the Blackfoot Confederacy, occupying since time immemorial our collective traditional territory bounded on the north by the North Saskatchewan River, on the east by the confluence of the North and South Saskatchewan rivers, on the south by the Yellowstone River, and on the west by the Continental Divide; This said territory given to us by the Creator to live in harmony with all of his creation; marking this territory with our sacred sites including, but not limited to, Chief Mountain, Buffalo Springs, Belly Buttes, Blackfoot Crossing, Miistuks Koowa (Castle Mountain), Cypress Hills, Hand Hills, Old Man River, Yellowstone River, North Saskatchewan River, Table Mountain, Whale Back Ridge; connecting ourselves to these sacred sites with our stories, songs, and ceremonies; collectively maintaining our Blackfoot culture and our Blackfoot language in accordance with the Creator’s teachings as contained in our stories, songs, and ceremonies; and whereas we have entered into treaties with the United States of America and the Crown of the Dominion of Canada for good and peaceful relationships; and whereas said treaties have been misconstrued by the United States of America and Canada resulting in colonization of our people; and whereas said colonization displaced our people both geographically and culturally; and whereas the international boundary between Canada and the United States of America has arbitrarily divided our people without our consent resulting in restricted access to our traditional territories and interference with our religious, economic, social and governmental relationships; and whereas we, in order to maintain renew, and strengthen our sovereignty over Blackfoot territory and to maintain, renew, and strengthen our relationships with our Creator, with each
other, and with all our relations, do hereby declare the following: The Siksikatsiitapiwa, or Blackfoot Confederacy, is hereby confirmed and renewed to deal with common issues and, where appropriate, to join together to deal with governments and other entities as one united confederacy. In wisdom, we unify for the betterment of the lives of the people who together comprise the Blackfoot Confederacy and to regain our strength and sovereignty as a people over traditional Blackfoot Territory. The Blackfoot Confederacy, as represented by the Chiefs of the Aapatoksipiikuniwa, Kainaiwa, Siksikawa, and Chairman of the Amsskapipiikuniwa hereby ratify and confirm this declaration on the 25th day of May, 2000, at Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada.21

In addition to the Sun Dance (Okaan), this is the second of the annual meetings where representatives of each division come together for mutual benefit or to permit the joint exercise of functions. The International boundary line at the 49th parallel requires special considerations of increased homeland security regulations of locations where the alliances will meet each year.

2.1.3 Locations

The two Piikunii (Piegan) nations, the North (Apatohsi) and South (Amskapi) Piikunii were originally one.22 The name “Piegan” is the English pronunciation of the Blackfoot word Piikunii, which means “poorly dressed” or “torn robes.”23 The North Piegan are located along the Rocky Mountain front, settled in and around the town of Brocket, Alberta, Canada, and the Southern Piegan (Blackfeet) along the same mountain range, with a central location of Browning, Montana. Other First Nations people of the Blackfoot Confederacy are the Siksika (Blackfoot proper) located in the area east of the Saskatchewan River, around east of Calgary, Alberta, Canada. The Kainai (Many Chiefs) who traditionally centered their activities and wintering ground on the Bow and Belly Rivers, between the Siksika and Piikunii. The Sarcee, Dene-speaking allies lived north of the Piegan in Saskatchewan along the edge of the foothills. The
allied nation of the Atsina (Gros Ventre) located on the eastern border of Blackfoot Territory was also considered part of the family of Blackfoot Nations.

Figure 1: Territory of the Blackfoot Alliances and Neighboring Tribes 1800-1840, By Hugh Dempsey

2.1.4 Allies and Neighboring Tribes:

Prior to contact with the Euro-American, the surrounding geographic areas of the Blackfoot were inhabited by Cree to the north and east, Assiniboine to the east, Crow and Shoshone to the south, Kootenai, Pend D'Oreille, Salish and Nez Perce were close neighbors on the West side of the Rocky Mountains as illustrated by ethno-historian Hugh Dempsey (1972).

According to studies conducted by (Sharrock (1974), Albers & Kay (1987) Albers (1996) Denig (1961), all people within this region changed through an
ethnogenetic process. This included Cree, Assiniboine, Crow, Atsina, Sarsi, Kootenai, Salish, Pend d'Oreille, Nez Perce, Shoshone, the Mandan and Hidatsa, and each division of the Blackfoot Confederacy. Not only did their social configurations change from one locale to another, but they also transformed economically and politically while gaining knowledge of other languages, and spiritual growth within each geographic area over time. In varying ways and degrees, they intermarried and collaborated in a range of activities from indirect trade, to combat, to subsistence and interchange of beliefs and ceremony.

A political mission is most evident in relation to territory, for while the land had been provided for all of creation to use; there existed a strong sense of territoriality, which is not to be confused with the western concept of ownership. Although it was not an exclusive territory defended by impenetrable frontiers, and the Blackfoot did not utilize every square mile of it every single day of their lives, it was their territory, and the Creator gave them the responsibility for that territory to ensure their survival and the ability to fulfill their responsibilities in the cycle of life.

Eminent Blackfoot scholar Darrell Robes Kipp offers a succinct geographic, economic, social and worldview in 2006 when he states:

For generations the Amskapi Piikunii or Southern Piegan have been where we are. Blackfeet ancestral territory extends along the east side of the Rocky Mountains from the Yellowstone River in southern Montana, north to the North Saskatchewan River in Canada. And
while we may have been hunters and gatherers, both pedestrian and equestrian, in fact we repeatedly traced familiar orbits, accumulated immense amounts of geographical, natural, and cultural knowledge that we encoded in the names we attach to particular places. After generations, the landscape filled up with names, stories, songs. The landscape itself became a cultural text as to how the Blackfeet relayed information regarding travel, natural resources, creation, and moral direction. Settled in place, at home, the Blackfeet stayed put like few others. We have not moved. We have not experienced migration. Because we stayed put, we became intimate with our lands and the identity of our places became our own – replete with plants, animals, the elements, and the supernatural. Stories and places, places and stories rendered both landscape and cultural identity could be learned through the names the Niitsi’tapi, the original people given—in our own, original language. Here is power.\textsuperscript{26}

By their own system of reckoning time, the Blackfeet have occupied the region since their creation as a people and since the creation of the earth. Blackfeet people’s traditions are bound to the environmental, an ecosystem and cosmic context originally conceived and practiced. To ignore these contexts is to fail to understand the socio-political culture of the Blackfeet.

One indication of this long-standing occupancy is that sacred places and creation stories (involving Old Man \textit{Napi}) mark the boundaries of the Blackfoot territory. The early creation story reveals the distinct relationship between the people, environment and geography, and the animal and plant worlds. The stories and legends of \textit{Napi} address the origins and existence of the \textit{Siksika} (Blackfoot) culture as well as the geographical features of their territory. This can easily be seen in many of \textit{Napi’s} activities associated with specific locations in northwestern Alberta and Montana. The oral history surrounding \textit{Napi} stories explain their cultural relevance. For example, in Alberta the “Old
Man’s Sliding Place,” the Old Man River flowing between the Piegan Reserve is said to be the Old Man’s Gambling Place. Current anthropological scholars, Gerald Otelar, Brian Reeves, and Sally T. Greiser, have used archaeological evidence to placed Clark Wissler’s hypothesis on firmer intellectual ground by dating Blackfoot homeland to approximately 500 A.D.

2.1.5 One Nation – Two Countries

In 1846, the international boundary line separated the Blackfoot divisions as well as their associated allies. The Gros Ventre became subject to the United States, together with a large portion of the Piegan, while the remainder of the Piegan, Blood, Blackfoot and Sarsi held to their homelands in Canada. These relations conform in large measure to the original habitats for these tribes and therefore represent their historical positions, but it was not until after 1870 that these tribes ceased to travel back and forth, across what they saw as an invisible line of the whites. Although signatories to the treaties of 1855, more commonly known as The Lame Bull Treaty, and subsequent treaty of 1865, and 1869, It is apparent that neither the Kainai or the Siksika ever considered allegiance to the United States, and the boundary line at the 49th parallel cut through the territory of the Piegan. After the treaty of 1855, the South Piegan regarded themselves as belonging in their original domain as claimed by the United States. Although many historians and scholars continue to identify the Piegan as one of the “three” tribes of the Blackfoot Confederacy,
the North and Southern Piegan have not considered themselves politically or economically as one Blackfoot division since the 1870's. Social and religious structures remain in place; however dominant forces of policies and laws enacted by U.S and Canadian governments severed most all political and economic ties.

2.2 Population

Historically, the population numbers within each division, and among the respective bands, fluctuated with instances of merger, disease, warfare, capturing raids, alcohol, and starvation. The earliest recorded loss of an estimated one-half the allied Blackfoot tribes occurred in 1781, when an epidemic ravished all the tribes of the Northwest. Other early population estimates were from the artist George Catlin visited the confederacy in 1832; he estimated the population at 16,500. Catlin noted a few years later, that Major Pilcher, Superintendent of Indian Affairs at St. Louis, informed him the entire confederacy of the Blackfeet was closer to 60,000 in number. German Prince Maximilian zu-Wied and artist Karl Bodmer, visited the region a year later noted the figure closer to 20,000 members. Bodmer and Catlin’s portraits and depictions of the confederacy illustrate why Catlin called it “perhaps, the most powerful tribe of Indians on the Continent. Who, having been less traded with, and less seen by white men than other tribes, is more imperfectly understood.”

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During his eight-month stay with the South Piegan in 1846-47, Catholic Priest, Nicholas Point estimated in his reports to his superiors in St. Louis, Missouri, “These four tribes may contain about 1,000 lodges or 10,000 souls. This is not half what they were, before the contagion of smallpox introduced among them by the whites.”

Today there are in excess of 32,000 enrolled members of the four Blackfoot divisions. 16,000 are enrolled members of the Blackfeet Tribe in Montana, U.S.A. and the remaining 16,000 distributed among the three divisions residing in Alberta, Canada.

2.2.1 Oral Traditions

Twentieth century scholars in the United States and Canada perpetuated theories about Blackfeet origins, archaeology, and history without regard for Blackfeet knowledge about themselves. For a half century, since anthropologist John Ewers (1958) concluded that the Blackfeet were recent migrants into the Montana plains, Blackfeet oral history, mythology, and folktale relegated to discrete categories of quaint stories and rarely considered to have value outside of the category. Oral history about Napi was analyzed for its style, content, and contextualized around the moral lesson held within; it was not understood as a source of historical evidence or ecological knowledge, or the ethnogenesis of the people.
For Blackfeet, almost all-social knowledge, including religious traditions and rituals that informed and shaped their individual and collective identity was through oral tradition. Oral tradition required those symbols through song, dance, and art be displayed as cultural boundaries, and that continuation of cultural identity be supported by accurate transmission through social time lines. The knowledge could be lost at any given time, but despite that fragility, and even in the face of what otherwise would seem to be overwhelming events, such as genocide and the devastating impact of epidemic diseases, Blackfeet societies maintained and transformed their traditions. Important cultural meanings embodied in living bundles, and their accompanying ritual processes continued to be transmitted to people who sought to maintain their relationship to important powers and beings that transcended the human. Even in the most desperate of circumstances, elements of the oral culture and cultural objects were transmitted and preserved, providing a barrier against the total loss of social identity.

Origin or creation stories reveal the longevity of the Blackfoot in the Northern Plains region of the continent. The origins of the ancestors are preserved in myths, legends and stories recorded by Blackfeet, David Duvall (1934) a member of the Inuck’siks band, Percy Bull Child (1985), Joan Kennerly, and Carmen Marceau (1981), Darnell Rides at the Door, and Mary Grounds, (1978). Other non-Piegan authors include ethnographer’s, George Bird Grinnell (1901,1926,1962), Walter McClintock(1910, 1923,1935), James
Willard Schultz (1907, 1915), Frank Bird Linderman, (1935) Clark Wissler (1911, 1912, 1933) as well as, his protégé John Ewers (1946, 1955, 1958). Blackfeet elder’s transmission of oral tradition stories, and legends in educational programs have obtained a prominent place within the existing range of possibilities to communicate oral traditions and social memory. One characteristic of the predominantly oral culture of many Native life-ways is that the basic precepts and practices transferred to younger generations by oral tradition and by practicing this tradition in its appropriate settings. Recently, both Blackfeet, and non-Blackfeet have labeled storytelling practices in educational programs, as crucial to the survival of present day Blackfeet life. 

In 1953 author Ella E. Clark, captured but a fragment of a very important creation story from Chewing Black Bones, who was in his early 90’s, and spoke in the old language of the Blackfeet. It is important to note here that, I say a fragment because it only contains the written word; there is tremendous loss of the story importance without the accompanying genres of song, dance, audience participation, and reaction as is expressed through this story while in ceremony. He began with an explanation of how the Niits’i’tapi believe the world was created by stating that the father of Napi (Old Man) was the Sun and Napi’s mother was the Moon. The Sun sent Napi to the earth to create people and to remain with them for a while. He told her:

Old Man came from the south, making the mountains, the prairies, and the forests as he passed along, making the birds and the animals
also. He traveled northward, making things as he went, putting red paint in the ground here and there—arranging the world as we see it today. He made the Milk River and crossed it; being tired, he went up on a little hill and lay down to rest. As he lay on his back, stretched out on the grass with his arms extended, he marked his figure with stones. You can see those rocks today; they show the shape of his body, legs, arms, and head. Going on north after he had rested, he stumbled over a knoll and fell down on his knees. He said out loud, “You are a bad thing to make me stumble so.” Then he raised up two large buttes there and named them the Knees. They are called the Knees to this day. He went on further north and with some of the rocks he carried with him he built the Sweet Grass Hills. Old Man covered the plains with grass for the animals to feed on. He marked off a piece of ground and in it; he made all kinds of roots and berries to grow—camas, carrots, turnips, bitterroot, serviceberries, bull berries, cherries, plums, and rosebuds. He planted trees, and he put all kinds of animals on the ground.

One day Old Man decided that he would make a woman, and a child. So he formed them both of clay, the woman and the child, her son. After he had molded the clay in human shape, he said to it, “you must be people.” And then he covered it up and went away. The next morning he went to the place, took off the covering, and saw that the shapes had changed a little. The second morning he saw more change, and the third morning he saw still more. The fourth morning he went to the place, took off the covering, looked at the images, and said, “Arise and walk.” They did so. They walked down to the river with their maker, and then he told them that his name was Napi, Old Man. That is how we came to be people. It is he who made us.

The first people were poor and naked, and they did not know how to do anything for themselves. Old Man showed them the roots and berries and said, “You can eat these.” Then he pointed to certain trees. “When the bark of these trees is young and tender, it is good. Then you can peel it off and eat it.” He told the people that the animals also should be their food. Old Man took the first people over the prairies and through the forests and the swamps, to show them the different plants he had created. He told them what herbs were good for sicknesses, saying often, “The root of this herb or the leaf of this herb, if gathered in a certain month of the year, is good for certain sickness.” In that way the people learned the power of all herbs. When the people had learned how to make bows and arrows, Old Man taught them how to shoot animals and birds.
Old Man told the first people how to get spirit power: ‘Go away by yourself and go to sleep. Something will come to you in your dream that will help you. It may be some animal. Whatever this animal tells you in your sleep, you must do. Obey it. Be guided by it. If later you want help, if you are traveling alone and cry aloud for help, your prayer will be answered. It may be by an eagle, perhaps by a buffalo, perhaps by a bear. Whatever animal hears your prayer, you must listen to it. That was how the first people got along in the world, by the power given to them in their dreams.

After Old Man had taught the people all these things, he started off again, traveling north until he came to where the Bow and the Elbow rivers meet. There he made some more people and taught them the same things. From there he went further north. When he had gone almost to the Red Deer River, he was so tired that he lay down on a hill. The form of his body can be seen there yet, on the top of the hill where he rested. When he awoke from this sleep, he traveled farther north until he came to a high hill. He climbed to the top of it and there sat down to rest. As he gazed over the country, he was greatly pleased by it. Looking at the steep hill below him, he said to himself, “This is a fine place for sliding. I will have some fun.” And he began to slide down the hill. The marks where he slid are to be seen yet, and the place is known to all the Blackfoot tribes as “Old Man’s Sliding Ground.”

Old Man can never die. Long ago he left the Blackfeet and went away toward the west, disappearing in the mountains. Before he started, he said to the people, “I will always take care of you, and some day I will return.” Even today some people think that he spoke the truth and that when he comes back he will bring with him the buffalo, which they believe the white men have hidden. Others remember that before he left them he said that when he returned he would find them a different people. They would be living a different world, he said, from that which he had created for them and had taught to them to live in.33

The oral tradition of the Blackfoot is not just limited to a story of their Creation. Rather, it is an all-encompassing source of history, spirituality, and culture which differentiated the Blackfeet in relation to other collectivities. As the main method of socialization in Blackfoot society, it provided a shared
sense of being, a collectible identity, a common good, a unifying vision of the past, present, and future, and a political will to remain an autonomous people within their territory. It also provided a foundation for inclusion and honoring all, as each had been given a different gift by the Creator, and diversity was embraced in the oral tradition and people were taught to honor their gifts.\textsuperscript{34}

The uniqueness of Blackfoot spirituality provided a shared identity and a means of differentiation from other societies, for they had their own unique way of being and relating to their physical and spiritual environment. Additionally, their spiritual traditions provided a means of identification and differentiation between members of the Blackfoot divisions, just as spiritual traditions differed between nations. Visits to distant tribes clearly indicate that Blackfoot travelers brought back more than knowledge of geography and of the languages and hunting methods of other terrestrial peoples. Some of them returned with sacred objects and rituals that enriched the religious life of their own people.\textsuperscript{35}

That is to say, a strong sense of responsibility and belonging to the collective was imperative because there were no omnipresent coercive or authoritative structures that placed limitations or restrictions on the freedoms of individuals. As Siksika elder Russell Wright explains:

The emphasis was on human worthiness to be worth something to the tribe. This is an ancient tribal philosophy, and it’s why our ancestors were so strong. They were strong in the community sense, and they stayed together as a holistic society. Tribal governments systems were based on self-rule through consensus, and that meant that everybody understood what was required of them. Of course, there
were no written laws. They were orally transmitted, and everybody had to learn them and abide by them. They weren’t enforced, just practiced.\(^{36}\)

The Blackfeet holistic sense of unity can be determined to be a strong coalition of kinship, familial ties, and predominantly societal and religious unification. Each of the distinct nations of Blackfoot came together in their own large camp during the summer. By far the awe-inspiring ceremony of the Blackfeet people was the annual Okaan (Sun Dance). Anthropologist Clark Wissler wrote: “In short, the Sun Dance was for the Blackfeet a true tribal festival, or demonstration of ceremonial functions in which practically every important ritual owner and organization had a place.”\(^{37}\)

The ability to join communities of thousands if only for a few weeks each year enabled the Blackfoot to maintain appropriate civil institutions as well as a sense of nationhood and group membership at the national level. Humans found mates in the big summer reunion camps, they also engaged in trading, feasting, gambling, adjudication of disputes, strategic planning among allies, and religious ceremonies. Wissler’s described the gathering as “a kind of town, like villages in fantasy, that came alive periodically and then disappeared as into mists.”\(^{38}\) During the winter months, they dispersed into smaller family or bands of ten to thirty lodges.\(^{39}\)
2.3 Band or Micro-Level Formations

Identification of the Blackfoot nations by ethnohistorians note that each major division was subdivided into micro-level socio-political, economic units most commonly referred to as “bands”. According to a suggestion by early explorer William Keating (1823), the “term “band” as a unit of identification as applied to a herd of buffalo, has almost become technical, being the only one in use in the west.” It is derived from the French term *bande*. Anthropologist, Alice Kehoe notes the way of the bison were very similar to those of the Blackfoot people, she posits similarly, the culture changed as the environment changed, incorporating technological changes into the culture as environmental and other natural changes were incorporated within the context of creation.

Ethnohistorian John Ewers suggested in 1954 that the hunting band was still the basic political unit among the Piegan, and probably a much more fluid unit than it had been in prehistoric times. He stated:

In early times, when everyone stood literally and figuratively on an equal footing, the chiefs had no property to dispense. But in the middle of the nineteenth century poor families looked to their chief for charity. They changed their band allegiance if they believed they might better their economic condition as followers of a more liberal chief.

In order to differentiate the Blackfeet from other plains Indian tribes or nations and the North American Indians who more commonly have a definite pattern of clans, Wissler stated: “As a hypothesis then, for further consideration we may state that the band circles and the bands are the
objective forms of a type of tribal government peculiar to this area, an
organization of units not to be confused with the more social clans and gentes
of other tribes, which they bear a superficial resemblance.\textsuperscript{43} The term as used
in anthropology is defined as the principal social unit of tribal organization in
which descent is esteemed exclusively in either the paternal or the maternal
line. The divisions/bands/individuals of the Blackfoot alliances did not reckon
themselves as clan societal structure but did organize themselves into bands.

Grinnell’s (1892), work states that within three early divisions of Blackfoot
there were a total forty-five bands. Of this number, he specifically identified
twenty-four as bands as belonging to the North and Southern Piegan
\textit{(Piikunii)}.\textsuperscript{44} Blackfeet transmitted their band names to him as Blood People;
White Breasts; Lone Fighters; Dried Meat; Black Patched Moccasins; Black Fat
Roasters; Early Finished Eating; Don’t Laugh; Fat Roasters; Black Doors; Lone
Eaters; Skunks; Seldom Lonesome; Small Robes; Big Topknots; Worm
People; Small Brittle Fat; Buffalo Dung; No Parfleche; Kill Close By; All Chiefs;
Red Round Robes, and Many Medicines.

Paul Raczka (1979) a non-Indian historian of the North Piegan, in Alberta,
Canada, identified six remaining active bands among this major division. The
Seldom-Lonesome; Gopher-eaters; White-Breasts; Blood or Bulrush People;
Hairy-Nose or Padded-Saddles; and the Lone Fighters; the sub-bands of the
Never-Lonesome, included the Never-Laughing, Coyote-Cut-Bank, and the
White Robes. He explained that The Lone-Fighters were evidently low on
numbers at one point in their history, joined by members of the northern division of the Grease-Melters. Thereby indicating fluidity and reintegration of bands with varied experiences and contacts would further elucidate the band. Raska observed that maintaining band ties, in recent years has taken on additional importance among the North Piegan with the repatriation of a number of bundles that returned to each of the four divisions. Raczka further rationalized his belief with this statement:

There are definite reasons why the band system survived to the present day. It is mainly the elders and traditionalists who maintain the band ties today. Those involved in the traditional religion are dependent on the band for support and for prestige. During the transfer of ceremonial bundles, payment must be made to compensate the person transferring, for the loss of blessings and power. Since getting the bundle benefits not only the new owner but also his family and band, the members of his band are expected to help in the payments. The more bundles a band has, the greater its prestige. Therefore, it is necessary to maintain the band ties.

Wissler indicated in his 1911 work that “while the band is a definite group in the minds of the Indians and every individual knows to what band he belongs.” The bands of the North Piegan have grown in recent years and while they maintain knowledge of their band affiliation their experiences under colonization by the British was quite different from those of the South Piegan who experienced a politically varied oppression from the Euro-American in the United States.

By 1865, mining interests, pioneers, settlers, government agents, politicians, and fresh out of work from the civil war military officials began to identify
designated Piegan bands who occupied prime farm or cattle grazing lands as either hostile or friendly. This began tumultuous time for all the bands of the South Piegan and during that time association with a band name, and to be identified by a favored geographic location, became portentous.

Members of the South Piegan bands became fully aware of their vulnerability to unwarranted attack after the devastating loss of the peaceful Heavy Runner Band. This massacre took place in January 1870, when Colonel Eugene Baker forged an attack on the Mountain Chief Band and injudiciously destroyed a peaceful band of South Piegan.

The reverberations of that 1870 experience continue to have an effect on the 2007 Southern Piegan community, whose leadership carefully weigh their reactions to federal as well as state governmental imposed actions. Driven further underground band name disappearance accelerated after the epic Starvation Winter of 1883-84. During the period, it became common practice of the Indian Agent to withhold rations from entire bands if just or unjust accusations or reprisals came from white settlers, military personnel or territorial officials against individual members of a particular band.  

Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century the South Piegan people made a covert decision not to identify individuals with the names of their bands, nor to attribute band names by specific geographic locations. Unlike the Crow, Navajo, Hidatsa or even the sister tribes of the allied Blackfeet residing in
Canada, today it would be rare to hear a Southern Piegan Blackfeet of Montana state publicly the band to which they belonged. Although many people on the Blackfeet reservation know their band origins, still, many do not, and many still speak privately and/or discreetly when they affirm, “I am a Small Robe, or I am from Mountain Chief’s band, or my people are the “Worm people.” It became a matter of survival in the late 1800’s to not to have a name, or favored geographic location that may come under scrutiny of the military, government officials, or land and resource hungry pioneers, but to remember secretly one’s unique identity. The disappearance of band names became an underground resistance to the tyrants occupying traditional Blackfeet territory in Montana.

Band names were important, not only for identification, but many carried with them sources of historical knowledge. In his study of the “Social Organization and Ritualistic Ceremonies of the Blackfoot Indians,” Wissler could find “no evidence of a belief in a band ancestor, human or animal; hence, no band totem.” However, the language and mythology give other evidence. English translation of the name Piikunii is “poorly dressed” or “torn robes,” which is also the name of Akaiyan, (Scabby Robe, Old Robe, or Round-Cut-Robe) an individual who in ancient times survived one winter inside a beaver lodge. He returned to his people with the knowledge of the prayers, songs, dances, and the ceremony itself. He also knew how to use roots and herbs, how to treat sickness, and how to mark time. Mythology and language indicate the
Piikunii name may have originated with the individual bringing beaver knowledge to the tribe. Wissler also gave insight into the versatility of band membership within all the allied divisions as well as those integrated as contributors to the community when he wrote:

For a man to join the band of his wife at marriage is not unusual. The reasons for such changes are usually selfish, in that greater material and social advantages are offered, but we have no suggestion of such transfers being made with the idea of recruiting a depleted band. A man who changes his band may become a headman or even a chief without hindrance, as in the case of a well-known Piegan chief now living. Thus, it appears that there is no absolute rule of descent in band membership and that what bonds exist are rather those of real blood relationship than of an artificial system. Further, it appears that continuous residence or association with a band is practically equivalent to membership therein. The individual seems free to select his band.\(^1\)

Origin names of Blackfoot bands frequently related to women and the activities or actions of women. Women were the lodge owners, as they constructed them from the hides they tanned, were responsible for the maintenance and upkeep, putting them up, taking them down, and packing when the camp was on the move. The lodges belonged to the women and many times band names as a collective or unit of lodges were named for the actions, behaviors and activities of women. The Never Laughs band, because the wife of a chief rarely smiled. Back-fat Roasters, to the gender responsible for food preparation, Dried Meat, for those who processed the food to sustain them through the winter months, or in this case the independent Small Robes
(Inuck’siks) band whose identification was tied to people who wore small robes, smaller than whole robes over their shoulders when observed by others.\textsuperscript{52}
Chapter 3
The Blackfoot Common Belief System

The important underlying structures of Blackfoot cosmology have remained intact; the basic elements remain and retain all the powers inherent to them. It is important to examine this worldview for a profile of how things are interconnected and how various relationships relate to one another.

In Blackfoot cosmology, there three levels of beings below Issapaitapi, or the Supreme Being: The Above People Sspomitapiisksii; the On Earth People Ksaahkommitapiiksi; and the Underwater People Sooyiitapiiksi. These people represent (or are represented by) the spirits of various animals, plants, and other elements within the Blackfoot world, and they have given themselves to various bundles or, sometimes, have given bundles and ceremonies to the Blackfoot. Sspomitapiiksi include the sun, moon, Morningstar, other stars and planets, cranes, eagles, and other birds of the upper sky. Ksaahkommitapiiksi include birds of the lower sky, plants, and animals of the earth. Sooyiitapiiksi are the fish and underwater creatures as well as beaver, marten and other who live in the water and on land. 53

Real People Niitsi’tapi, human members of the Blackfoot culture, use the physical representations within the bundles as a means of connecting with the intangible (that is, the spirits and their power). This connection, or awareness, is necessary for reminding the Real People that they must maintain a balance through a social relationship between the concerns of the material world and 35
concerns of the spiritual world.\textsuperscript{54} The \textit{Piikunii} understand that with the knowledge of these sacred powers comes the ability to call upon them for protection, and the bundles and pipes are a major source of protection as social beings that can react. As a result, they relate to the natural forces with respect, the fundamental premise of their ethical and moral conduct.\textsuperscript{55}

The concept of bundles and bundle ownership provides insights to Blackfoot ideology and social relationships, not only between the Blackfeet bands, but between them and other social beings and cultural heroes. This world-view is one level of interacting and a bond of connecting others. Spiritual power rests in the physical objects found in many types of Blackfoot bundles. Although there are a number of important bundles, one of the most important is the Beaver Bundle. The origin of the Beaver medicine and the annual beaver bundle ceremony illustrate this philosophical world view and the intimate relationship with the environment. This medicine-bundle is the largest, oldest and ceremonially most complex of all Blackfoot bundles.\textsuperscript{56} Its contents and the specific ritual associated with its opening symbolize human interdependency with all creatures and elements of the environment. Wolf Plume, beaver-medicine mentor and benefactor of Walter McClintock gave him this origin story:

The man who lived all winter with the Beavers was given a beaver-skin by them. They also gave him their dance and taught him the songs and prayers that went with it. After he came back to his camp, he called upon all the rest of the animals and the birds for help.
came to his lodge, gave him their skins, and taught him their dances, songs, and prayers. Frog alone of all the animals could not dance, nor could he sing, so he is not represented in the Beaver bundle. Turtle could not dance and had no song, but is represented in the bundle because he was wise and borrowed a song from Lizard, who had two good songs. Elk and his wife Moose each had a song and dance which they contributed to the Beaver bundle.57

The basic belief in the animate nature of the sun, constellations, birds, animals, waterfowl, etc., is their ability to communicate some of their sacred knowledge to humans. The ceremony held each spring unites the life cycle of the Blackfeet with that of the animals and the powers of the above people. By recognizing and honoring these powers through such a ceremony, the Blackfeet reaffirm their position in their worldview. The continuous acknowledgement of their relationship with the creator unites the community in a “collective mindfulness”58

Those who owned the bundles are among the most respected members of the community. They are considered elders and intellectuals of the community because of their knowledge of bundle care and daily maintenance, the hundreds of songs that must be sung during a single bundle opening and the prayers, dances that must be learned as well as the important order in which all must be carried out. The importance of that order is crucial to the success of the ceremony.59

The ceremony that celebrates the opening of the beaver bundle serves more than one purpose. In earlier times, the bundle was used to call the buffalo to the Blackfeet. The buffalo song summoned wind and storms that would drive
the buffalo to them. The bundle also had the power to instill good luck on the men who went on horse capturing raids or to war. Most commonly, the family of or a person afflicted with an illness approach a bundle holder for health and healing on behalf of a sick person. Although it is most common to address the man as the beaver bundle holder, it is in fact a husband and wife who act as true co-owners, or more properly, the parents. The bundle holders carry out the spiritual contract made between them. When the person regains their health, they hold a feast for the beaver giving gifts and payments to the bundle holder.

Ceremonies are a way to make present, teach, and demonstrate through origin stories the life of the ancestors, the natural laws of universe and relationships, the moral and ethical conduct of the people, and the essence and respectful approach to the alliances of the bundles. The legends and stories of these bundles and ceremonies are the connection to Blackfoot knowledge, customs, and rituals. They constitute the pedagogical foundations for acquiring knowledge that is a way of life, just as knowing is a way of being. Both mutually reflect and are conditioned upon each other as they are embodied in the ways of relating to and participating in a world designed for balancing the cosmic world in which we live.

When food was scarce, they called upon the Beaver Bundle holders to open the bundle and perform the ceremony to call the buffalo, just as Ksisskstaki, the Beaver, instructed them to do. The keeper and his wife would sing the
songs that would charm the direction of the wind and drive the buffalo toward
camp. In exchange, the bundle keepers would receive choice cuts from the
buffalo kill. This ceremony is one of the forms of alliances whereby Blackfeet
engage in traditional ecological relationships to honor and renew mutual
dependency.

The stories and ceremony tell us that there would have been a powerful
aversion to the hunting of beaver by the Blackfoot. The Blackfoot had an
anathema, or ecclesiastical ban of hunting beaver. Grace Morgan’s
dissertation shows a correlation between country where beaver were critical to
ponding water that would last through the summer and the reluctance of Indian
hunters to kill beaver. She acknowledged a wisdom that Euro-Americans did
not discern when hearing (or reading) the traditional histories of beaver and
humans.\textsuperscript{63} Although some co-resident and neighboring peoples of the plains
such as the Cree and Assiniboine also rejected the killing of beaver on the
Northwest plains, there is no evidence that any tribes outside the Blackfoot
Confederacy have retained or continue to maintain the powerful belief in
beaver medicine bundles.
Chapter 4
Era of the Fur Trade

4.1 **Indirect Trade**

The Hudson Bay Company began operations around 1670. French traders pressed in from the Great Lakes a few years later. Both had easy water routes to Lake Winnipeg and thus to the Saskatchewan and the plains. The northern end of the plains area ends with the northern branch of the Saskatchewan, bounded on the west by the Rocky Mountains and on the east by Lake Winnipeg. The Assiniboine tribes occupied the territory east of the lake and seemed to have formed the habit of visiting the Hudson Bay posts via Nelson River early in 1680. This may have been due to a long-standing acquaintance with the Cree, who were in direct contact with the Hudson Bay Company. Further, the Assiniboine either from their own initiative or by direct encouragement became traders carrying trade goods to the tribes west of them and in return transporting furs etc., to Hudson Bay.\(^{64}\)

For nearly a half century the Cree and Assiniboine middlemen who through their eastern Canadian contacts brought Euro-American trade goods to the Blackfeet in the form of metal tools, utensils, and iron arrowheads. The first contacts with white culture were indirect, and came most simultaneously from neighboring tribes.\(^{65}\)
At that time, the Assiniboine and the Blackfoot Divisions held all of the territory between the Saskatchewan and the Missouri River. Therefore, it is certain that the Assiniboine traded, interacted socially, and integrated with the Blackfeet during this period and thus were the carriers of some phases of white culture. However, The Cree intermediates often referred to the Blackfoot as “Slaves,” In 1912, Clark Wissler had no idea why the reference was made.  

But in 2000, author, John Jackson thinks its early use was an allusion to Blackfoot dependence on goods that the Cree obtained from the strangers at Hudson’s bay. Early accounts of the traders stress the fact that the Blackfeet would not leave the plains, being unwilling to travel by foot or canoes, they found no good reason to travel the long path to the Hudson’s Bay.

For the first seventy-five years of the fur trade, it appears they were quite content to trade and interact with the visiting tribal people. The people of the Blackfoot alliances, like all humans coming within in close contact, were trading, feasting, gambling, and adjudicating disputes, planning strategies among their allies, and performing religious ceremonies as well as integrating individuals and whole families with all the tribes within their geographic locales.

The fur traders were emphatic in their complaints about the aversion of several Northern Plains tribes to the hunting of beaver. Alexander Henry stated that, “Beaver are numerous, but they [Blackfeet] will not hunt them with
any spirit, so that their principal produce is dried provisions, buffalo robes, wolves, foxes and other meadow skins, and furs of little value.”

The journal of Peter Fidler, written in 1792 was critical of Piegan for not hunting beaver he noted: “These Indians are very little acquainted with killing Beaver in their houses. …Several of them are so full of superstition as even not to touch one, and a great many of them will neither eat of them or suffer one to be brought into their tents.”

Northwest Company trader in charge of Fort George on the North Saskatchewan River, Duncan McGillivray, grouped the non-beaver hunters under the category *Gens du large*, which included the Blackfoot, Gros Ventre, Blood Indians and Piegan. He compared them with the beaver hunters whom he observed, “…are treated with less liberality, their commodities being chiefly horses, wolves, fat & pounded meat which are not sought after with such eagerness as the beaver.”

Ethnohistorical documentation by Morton (1929) and Nelson (1973) has also led them to point out this broad geographical distinction with regard to beaver hunting. Nelson also claims that these differences in attitudes to beaver hunting affected the relationships the Indians developed with the fur trade. He concluded “…the Indians of the North became dependent on the trader much more quickly than the people of the plains. One reason was their lack of any apparent phobia against the hunting of riverine animals.” Ethnographers
such as John Ewers pointed out and stressed the fact that the non-use of beaver resources did not appear to be a response to a scarcity of beaver noting:

if the traders anticipated a rich harvest of beaver in the Blackfoot trade, they were soon disillusioned. There were plenty of beaver in the creeks and rivers. A good hunter could have killed a hundred of them a month with his bow and arrows… the Blackfeet were generally not beaver hunters.\textsuperscript{75}

Also noted in early journals of Alexander Henry he wrote:

There are 30 or 40 tents [Piegan] who seldom resort to the plains… This small band generally inhabit the thick wood country along the foot of the mountains where they kill a few beavers, and being industrious, they are of course better provided for than those Piegan who dwell in the Plains. The latter despise labor, and will not kill a beaver or any other fur animal to enable them to purchase an axe or other European utensil, though beaver are numerous in every stream throughout their country.\textsuperscript{76}

Throughout their written history the people of the Blackfoot Confederacy, at all levels of social organization have demonstrated and expressed through action and in deed, the desire for self-sufficiency and sovereignty. Within their worldview, the one animal in all of creation who inherently demonstrated possession of these attributes was the beaver. By the creation of their own environment as well as one that is conducive to the needs and survival of others the beaver remains one of the few animals that can accomplish self-determination and sovereignty. The legends, ceremonials and stories that are written tell but a segment of their importance. The reverence for this animal by
the Blackfeet ancestors is profound based on their behavior and refusal to hunt or trap them.

The lifestyle of the beaver is one of ingenuity, resourcefulness, thrift, and energetic persistence. To “work like a beaver” is an almost universal expression and it is doubtful whether the work of any animal has such far-reaching results. The influence of the beaver-dam is astounding. Upon completion, it becomes a highway used day and night by mice, porcupines, bears, rabbits, mountain lions and wolves, as well as humans make a bridge of it. It attracts the birds finding nests in the reeds and marsh grasses, insects, which attract the fish, which attract the carnivore and other fur bearing animals. From ancient to present time, no other animal is more revered in Blackfoot culture as each spring calls for the reopening of nineteen active beaver bundles in Canada and the United States.

Changes to the system of belief began during the late 1700’s and at the turn of the century when the encroaching Euro-American world began closing in on them with the expanse of the British mercantilism. The Piegan and their system of belief that protected and prevented harvest of the beaver underwent tremendous upheaval beginning with the smallpox epidemic of 1781. This epidemic of smallpox struck all the Indians of the northwest with such devastation that they lost not only an estimated half of their population, the lost many cultural institutions that went with the death of the elders, knowledgeable leadership in both men and women. They may have been able to resist the
trade, and continue with a strong belief system that had served them as empirical knowledge gained in the past hundreds and thousands of years. However, when economic, political, social worlds collide, formidable belief systems go underground and remain so until it is safe to return.

Although in close proximity, the Blackfeet refused to meet the demands of European traders for beaver. Euro-American culture collision was not racial or racist as it was religious as well as economic. The onslaught of European and Tribal (non-Blackfoot) beaver hunters and traders was the beginning of a holy war that would place the Blackfoot and all their belief systems in the direst of straights, leaving them with the most acidic reputation of being “The Raiders of the Northwest Plains.”

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4.2 Direct Trade

The European fur trade directly reached the northwestern plains with the establishment of Buckingham House on the North Saskatchewan River in 1780, and the Rocky Mountain House in 1799 on the upper reaches of the North Saskatchewan. Fort George and Fort Vermillion were located further east on it, all just beyond Blackfoot territory; then in 1800, Chesterfield House was established within the territory, where the Red Deer River meets the South Saskatchewan.

In 1772, Hudson’s Bay Company sent employee Matthew Cocking to the interior to find the Blackfeet known as the “Archithinue”, by the Assiniboine/Cree intermediaries who had previous trade relations, to persuade them to come to York Factory to trade. While in Blackfeet country, Cocking was informed by both Assiniboine and Cree that the trade items obtained from the Blackfeet in exchange for European goods were horses, buffalo skin garments, wolves, and other furs. There is no mention of beaver as a trade item.\(^{78}\) Alexander Mackenzie pointed out a geographical and/or environmental distinction between beaver and non-beaver hunters.

Of all these different tribes, those who inhabit the broken country on the North-West side, and the source of the North branch [the Saskatchewan], are beaver-hunters; the others deal in provisions, wolf, buffalo, and fox skins; and many people on the South branch do not trouble themselves to come near the trading establishments.\(^{79}\)
A statement by Alexander Henday in 1754 was the first indication that Blackfeet began visiting the trading posts instead of dealing with the Assiniboine and other Cree intermediaries. He noted while on the south Saskatchewan that the Piegan had come to the northeast to visit a trading post, presumably a French post near Fort La Corne at the forks of the Saskatchewan River in central Saskatchewan. Henday also observed that they were excellent equestrians. During this time, many changes were initiated which greatly intensified during the historic period, irrevocably altering the pedestrian life ways. The acquisition of the horse was perhaps one of the most important events. Its oral history and impact will be discussed more fully later in this chapter.

Along with the infiltration of whites were eastern tribesmen. Foremost was the Shawnee mixed-blood George Drouillard, former Lewis and Clark Corp member, and at least five of his tribesmen. Algonquian-speaking Delaware came west in later years as did Iroquoian-speaking Wyandot who ended up among the Salish and Kootenai. Conspicuous among the westward migrating tribesmen were descendants of the Iroquois Five Nations. Mohawk, Oneida, Onadaga, Cayuga, and Seneca intermediaries who controlled the trade of their neighbors and their beaver hunters ranged into Canada and the Ohio Valley. After the American Revolution, those hunters were forced to travel beyond the Great Lakes. By the end of the century, Iroquois contract trappers became a significant factor in the greater Northwest.
Although trade goods and services brought by the Euro Americans were a tremendous factor in the social and cultural changes, a common historical misconception that continues is that they invaded and overwhelmed the Indians of the Northwest. But, the initial dispossession was through infiltration and acculturation by Indians as well as whites. The blending of northeastern and northwestern Indian cultures was neither racial nor racist; it was a struggle to maintain a world view while understanding their overwhelming interests were purely economic.\textsuperscript{82}

The Northwest Fur Company sent a young David Thompson, explorer and tradesman, specifically to find and make friends with the Piegan Indians in order to induce them to hunt for furs and to make dried provisions for trade.\textsuperscript{83} He spent the winter of 1787-88 in the lodge of \textit{Saakomapee}, a 75 or 80-year-old Cree Indian living with the Piegan. As a young man, \textit{Saakomapee} went on a joint raiding party of Cree and Piegan against the Shoshone and upon his return found his young wife had left him for another. He told Thompson that he returned to the Piegan and remained throughout his lifetime. \textit{Saakomapee’s} father had been an intermediary trader during the time of indirect trade.

Thompson described him as such:

The Peegan in whose tent I passed the winter was an old man of at least 75 or 80 years of age; his height about six feet, two or three inches, broad shoulders, strong limbed, his hair gray and plentiful, forehead high and nose prominent, his face slightly marked with small pox, and altogether his countenance mild, and even, sometimes playful; although his step was firm and he rode with ease, he no
longer hunted, this he left to his sons; his name was Saukamapee (young Man); his account of former times went back to about 1730. Saakomapee was a fully acculturated Piegan when he married the sister of the chief of that band. He remained with the Piegan all of his life and remembered the times when the Blackfeet and the Cree did not have horses. When asked by Thompson if it were common for men to take more than one wife, Saakomapee responded, “it is common, yet it happens too often.” A substantial loss of male population through hunting accidents, disease, and warfare, required others to take additional responsibility for the women and children until she found a mate from co-resident units or other ethnic units whose members occupied contiguous territories.

Thompson’s prior observation of strict monogamy among of the eastern woodland tribes was the result of their indoctrination with Christian morals for at least two centuries prior. This indoctrination occurred through western legal enforcement, or voluntary assimilation of monogamous lifestyles. Polygamy on the north-western plains existed upon the basis of cultural, economic, and social survival.

That information coincides with another basis for polyethnic occurrences among the Piegan. Saakomapee gave Thompson an account of the devastating first Piikunii contact of small pox from a raid upon the Shoshone in 1781, which had occurred just six years earlier. His story is significant in that it
required the *Piikunii* not only to seek new ways to combat the disease, but also to recover their population to maintain a community. He stated:

> When death came over us all, and swept away more than half of us by the Small pox, of which we knew nothing until it brought death among us. …We had no belief that one man could give it to another, any more than a wounded man could give his wound to another. …When at length it left us, and we moved about to find our people, it was no longer with the song and the dance; but with tears, shrieks, and howling of despair for those who would never return to us. War was no longer thought of, and we had enough to do to hunt and make provision for our families, for in our sickness we had consumed all our dried provisions; but the Bisons and Red Deer were also gone, we did not see one half of what was before, whither they had gone we could not tell, we believed the Good Spirit had forsaken us, and allowed the Bad Spirit to become our Master. What little we could spare we offered to the Bad Spirit to let us alone and go to our enemies. …Our hearts were low, and dejected, and we shall never be again the same people.⁸⁷

The tribes of the Northwest plains would not be the same people after that devastating blow. Data for the small pox epidemic of 1871 is very scarce for all the tribes of the Northwest who first encountered the disease. The loss of an estimated one-half their population was an unforeseen event that disrupted the normal course of things. They were appalled and disheartened through an extended mourning period of three years. Although acculturation and integration of people had taken place prior to contact, it is apparent that this epidemic began an intensive focused drive to strengthen and recover their population.

**According to Saakomapee**, the Piegan began plans for major changes, and alterations of their life-ways took place just three years prior to Thompson’s
stay with them in 1787. At that time, the Piegan were in the early enactment stage. Saakomapee related to Thompson that a council of all the Blackfoot divisions came together to discuss and make plans and preparations for recovery and continuity. An elder chief of the Piegan stated, “I am an old man; my hair is white and have seen much. Formerly we were healthy and strong and many of us, now we are few to what we were, and the great sickness may come again.”

They blamed the Shoshone whose camp they came upon days prior to their outbreak. However, at that time neither Euro-Americans nor Indian knew much about transportable air born pathogens. The devastation of small pox called for an intensive plan to recover their population and to look for ways to combat the disease. All the Piegan bands agreed to this plan for recovery as delineated by a Piegan elder:

Now we must revenge the death of our people and make the Snake Indians [Shoshone] feel the effects of our guns, and other weapons, but the young women must all be saved, and if any has a babe at the breast it must not be taken from her, nor hurt, all the boys and lads that have no weapons must not be killed, but brought to our camps, and be adopted amongst us, to be our people, and make us more numerous and stronger than we are.

Integration of people from outside the confederacy was based upon the contributions made to the good of the group. This is evident in David Thompson’s journals as he described the chieftainship of the Piegan. At his arrival in 1787, He met Sakatow as the Civil Chief of the Piegan, and Kootenai Appe (Kootenai Man) as the Piegan War Chief who came from the Kootenai tribe, west of the Rocky Mountains. Thompson described this Kootenai War
Chief as “both loved and respected, and his people [Piegan] often wished [Kootenai Appe] to take a more active part in their affairs but he confined himself to War, and the care of the band, generally fifty to one hundred tents.”

When David Thompson met Kootenai Appe he was socially, economically, culturally, integrated into the Piegan Inuck’siks. He had twenty-two sons and four daughters by his five wives, four of which were Piegan.

Figure 2. Kootenai Appe made his home with the Piegans and sometime after the 1781 epidemic of small pox became their War Chief. His portrait was painted by the artist Karl Bodmer in 1832.
4.2.1 Piegan Acquisition of the Horse:

It is probable that if Thompson met the Kootenai in 1787 as a War Chief that Kootenai Appe was the same Kootenai described in the legend given to George Bird Grinnell by Wolf Calf, to have brought the first horse to the Piegan between the years of 1750-1854. It is unlikely there was more than one Kootenai among Piegan who had achieved status of a War Chief during that time. The horse culture raised the standard of living and increased the ease of supplying the camps with furniture and the ability to carry lodge poles, as well as increase the size of the lodges. And added another reason for increased mobility. The gift of the first horse he made to the Chief of the Piegan was substantial. It also introduced a new type of property, since the early accounts of the people stress the fact that certain individuals possessed herds of horses. But, more importantly in increased contact with other tribal people as well as the ensuing Euro-Americans.

It appears that throughout the lifetime of Kootenai Appe, he fulfilled the leadership requirements to acquire his position as a War Chief. His leadership did not require his ethnicity to be bound by blood. Discussion of band chieftaincy by Grinnell (1892:219) and Wissler (1911:22-23), Ewers (1955:246) as well as others Blackfoot informants each agree with the following requirements:

The position of a chief was neither hereditary nor elective, but wholly self creative. The young man ambitious of this distinction sought to be
conspicuous for energy and daring in war, intelligence in council, and liberality in giving feasts and providing tobacco for the guests of his lodge. The exhibition of these qualities in more than ordinary degree would win him the respect and confidence of one after another of his band, ready to follow his guidance and accept his council. When this point was reached, he began to have influence and be regarded as a leader or chief. Practice in obtaining popularity was certain to attach for life. The greatness or authority of a chief depended wholly upon his popularity, upon the proportion of the tribe whose confidence could be won and adhesion secured. The number of chiefs that might be in a band was dependent simply upon the number who could secure this following. This system did not necessarily array the members of a band into opposing factions, for several chiefs might enjoy the equal consideration of all.92

Within his lifetime, this Kootenai Man and his descendents brought a number of important, epic changes to the Inuck’sik and ultimately to the larger division of the Amskapi Piikunii. This is the highly significant story given by Wolf Calf, a Piegan elder and possible Inuck’sik, to ethnologist, George Bird Grinnell, of when the Piikunii first received the horse, he said:

The first horses we ever saw came from west of the mountains. A band of the Piegan were camped on Belly River, at a place we call “Smash the Heads, where we jumped buffalo… There had come over the mountains to hunt buffalo a Kootenai who had some horses, and he was running buffalo; but for some reason he had no luck. He could kill nothing. He had seen from far off the Piegan camp, but did not go near it, for the Piegan and the Kootenai were enemies. …At last he made up his mind that he would go into the camp of his enemies and give himself up, for he said, “I might as well be killed at once as die of hunger.” ….So with his wife and children he rode away from his camp in the mountains, leaving his lodge standing and his horses feeding about it, all except those which his woman and his three children were riding, and started for the camp of the Piegan. They had just made a big drive, and had run a great lot of buffalo over the cliff. There were many dead in the piskun [corral] and the men were killing those that were left alive, when suddenly the Kootenai, on his horse followed by his wife and children on theirs, rode over a hill nearby. When they saw him, all the Piegan were astonished and wondered what this
could be. None of them had ever seen anything like it, and they were afraid. They thought it was something mysterious. The chief of the Piegan called out to his people: “This is something very strange. I have heard of wonderful things that that have happened from the earliest times until now, but I have never heard of anything like this. This thing must have come from above (i.e., from the sun), or else it must have come from out of the hill (i.e., from the earth). Do not do anything to it; be still and wait. If we try to hurt it, maybe it will ride into that hill again, or maybe something bad will happen. Let us wait.” As it drew nearer, they could see that it was a man coming, and that he was on some strange animal. The Piegan wanted their chief to go toward him and speak to him. ….but at last he started to go to meet the Kootenai, who was coming. When he got near to him, the Kootenai made signs that he was friendly, and patted his horse on his neck and made signs to the chief. “I give you this animal.” The Chief made signs that he was friendly, the Kootenai rode into the camp and were received as friends, and food was given them. The Kootenai stayed with these Piegan for some time, and the Kootenai man told the chief that he had more horses at his camp up in the mountains, and that beyond the mountains there were plenty of horses. The Piegan said, “I have never heard of a man riding an animal like this.” He asked the Kootenai to bring in the rest of his horses; and one night he started out, and the next day came back driving all his horses before him, and they came to the camp, and all the people saw them and looked at them and wondered….. This young man… finally became head chief of the Piegan. These were the first horses the Piegan saw. (Wolf Calf, Piegan) 93

There are three significant points to this story. First it confirms a most important example of how ethnogenesis took place on the northwestern plains when a person of another tribe, particularly from one who has been described as an enemy tribe of the Piegan, could, and did, become the War Chief of a band of Piegan. Second, the story of how intertribal economic exchange occurred prior to Euro American contact giving evidence of a Piegan band’s story of acquisition of the horse, which enabled additional travel and an increased access to and contact with other tribal people. Surely, not all
divisions of the Blackfoot actually saw, or had access to, the horse at the very same moment, or even the same day or month, or possibly until they met the next year at Sun Dance. It makes sense that the Kootenai people and those living nearest the Shoshone and southwest sources would be the first to obtain it. Third, it illustrates the three tiered belief and worldview of the Piegan in three cosmologies of the universe, being the above people, the earthly people and the under the earth water people. Their empirical worldview told them the horse came from one of those places.

4.2.2 Hybridized Group Coalition

As the War Chief Kootenai Appe’s focus was to seek revenge on the Shoshone, but more importantly in the process, he was charged with the leadership responsibility of renewing, replenishing, and enlarging the Piegan population to insure their continued survival as a nation. Wolf Child’s story indicates how the Kootenai/Piegan War Chief utilized his resources to begin the process:

After he had so many horses, he would select ten boys out of each band of the Piegan to care for his horses. Many Horses had more horses than all the rest of the tribe. White people had begun to come into this country, Many Horses young men wanted ropes and iron arrow points and saddle blankets, and the people were beginning to kill furs and skins to trade. Many Horses began to trade with his own people for these things. He would ask the young men of the tribe to kill skins for him, and they would bring them to him and he would give them a horse or two in exchange.94
Before the horses reached them, the range of the tribe was limited by the inability of the foot passenger. With the horse, the expansive prairie ceased to separate tribe from tribe and thus greater accessibility began to alter territorial alignments. The initial effects of the acquisition of the horse offered greater mobility and the range of travel of the Blackfeet becomes evident during the winter of 1801 and 1802, when three Blackfeet men named Ackomokii, Kioocus, and Ackoweek and an unnamed “Fall Indian” (a Gros Ventre, or Atsina) who visited the Hudson’s Bay Company trading post at Chesterfield House on the South Saskatchewan River. At the request of trader and surveyor Peter Fidler, drew maps of the region. The Gros Ventre drew a map depicting the western plains all the way south to New Mexico. The first map, drawn by Ackomokii (known to the traders as Old Swan or Feathers) delineated the Red Deer and Saskatchewan Rivers coming from the west, the Rocky Mountains to the south, the tributaries of the Missouri River in the east. Beyond the Rockies it showed the Snake and Columbia Rivers and the Pacific Coast. Ackomokii provided information about the landscape, including the number of days’ travel between prominent features of the Rockies, and also about the locations of different peoples—he drew circles indicating thirty-two bands. The result was “a detailed picture of more than two hundred thousand square miles of North America.”

Explorer David Thompson and Peter Fidler, both employees of the Hudson’s Bay Company, were in contact with them, and kept journal notes. These Euro-
American men traveled with the Blackfeet map makers to record and define the best waterways for beaver harvest. Contrary to popular belief, or great omissions left out of history books, The early Euro-Canadian/American and Blackfeet relationships, were much more amicable in the mid to late 1700’s simply because non-Indians were not in control of what transpired on a daily basis on the plains. Fidler’s early experience in traveling with them gave good indication of culturally appropriate behavior and demonstrated who was in control when he wrote:

….Awin met us & stopped our horses and would not allow us to proceed any further either me or John Ward. …We found out that a Snake [Shoshone] Indian man was near & that he wished us to strip all our old clothing off & put our very best on that we might cut a more respectable appearance to the Snake Indian who he said that he would shortly introduce us to; it being cold & quite in the middle of the plain we seemed adverse to strip, but he would not let us stir till we had thrown off our old & put on our new jackets, shirts, washed & combed ourselves. 

On Wednesday, November 21, 1792, Fidler wrote about the Inuck’siks:

I also sold my Gun, the Indians borrowing it every day to kill Buffalo with upon horseback, and run great risks in falling & breaking it, which induced me to sell it, as it was of no use to me while they had it & I could not refuse lending it to them with any propriety. Had I done it they would probably have used our Horses riding after the Buffalo.

Shortly after the smallpox epidemic that occurred in 1781, increased pressure came to bear upon all the divisions of the Blackfeet to dismiss the ecclesial ban on beaver hunting first with the North West Company, and shortly thereafter the Hudson’s Bay Company’s refused to accept animal skins other
than beaver. This was of little consequence to most tribes surrounding the Blackfeet whose world-view did not include the three tiered cosmology which included the Underwater People as the beaver were known. Therefore other tribes like the Assiniboine and Cree were not averse to trapping beaver, which allowed them to quickly and firmly establish trade relations with the whites to acquire guns and ammunition. The Blackfeet were hard pressed to find a commodity with which to purchase sufficient guns and ammunition being offered as a trade item. Some bands chose to seize forcibly the beaver pelts from their enemies, most commonly white trappers.  

Culture collisions did not just occur with Indian and Euro-American contact. The devastation suffered from the small pox epidemic of 1781, began a breakdown within the Piegan who in the pre-small-pox past had a strong-shared belief system that included an aversion to beaver hunting. The War Chief Kootenai Appe also came from a tribal culture whose world-view did not include a belief in the powers inherent in the Underwater People as did the Blackfoot. His leadership charged him with the responsibility of increasing the population by capture of members of other tribes. In addition, Wolf Child’s story informs us that the young men under his mentorship “wanted ropes and iron arrow points and saddle blankets, and the people were beginning to kill furs and skins to trade began to trade with his own people for these things. He would ask the young men of the tribe to kill skins for him, and they would bring them to him and he would give them a horse or two in exchange.”
The increased need for guns and ammunition was the vulnerability of the Piegan Indians, with disastrous consequences in their relationships with their enemies. And, accessibility to such was largely determined by one distinction: whether or not the group hunted beaver. The beaver hunters were highly favored by the traders, and given preferential treatment.100

The Kootenai/Piegan in his allied position wielded a great deal of wealth and power as a war chief. Along with trading the young men for horses, he was mobilizing future hunters and warriors. By doing so, he also had the responsibility of teaching the art of warfare, and the production of weapons and protective shields and other accoutrement’s. For Kootenai Appe to take responsibility for warfare, he undoubtedly brought with him the technology and resources he previously acquired from his tribe the Kootenai, and a possible explanation of the varied spear points found in the area known to the Blackfeet as aboriginal homeland.

4.3 The Linguistic and Archaeological Connection

There also exists a linguistic tie between the Kootenai and Blackfeet that became evident in Oscar Lewis’ (1942) publication of the article “The Effects of White Culture Upon Blackfoot Culture” in his noted personal communication with Linguist Charles F. Voegelin who wrote:

The linguistic evidence which distinguishes the Blackfoot, from the two other divergent western Algonquians is that we know of a language,
Kutenai, which shares with Blackfoot the Algonquian obviative and some other morphological features...

Voegelin asked the questions in 1942 “Are the Blackfoot and Kutenai ultimately related? If so, a point of dispersion near the Rockies is called for. Are Blackfoot and Kutenai not genetically related? If not, they have had contact in proto-historic times which permitted borrowing.” Either way, he stated, “the Blackfoot need to be placed adjacent to the Kutenai to account for the linguistic tact’s.”

This Kootenai-Piegans cultural connection becomes important when in Blackfoot legend a Kootenai becomes a prominent leader as a War Chief of the Piegan. This legend, and historic ethnography may contribute to the archaeological evidence. Archaeologist, Brian Reeves has attempted to compare and contrast the material culture of archaeology with that of resident groups including the Piegan, whose tenure in the region Reeves believes to be very old. He wrote, “at the southeastern edge of the Porcupine Hills in western Alberta, there the Piegan Indians of historical and their predecessors have been stampeding buffalo to their death over a cliff or at least 5,600 years and possibly for as long as 9,000.” Much of Reeves= interpretive scheme is based on lithic material selection patterns in addition to morphological characteristics of projectile points. His findings indicate Pelican Lake projectile points have stems rather than being notched at the corners and made from exotic raw material: metamorphosed argillite from the Kootenai Lake area of
British Columbia some 800 meters west of Head-Smashed-In. Both their source and their alien shape suggest that visitors from Kootenai Lake occasionally participated in the Pelican Lake people’s buffalo drives. The Old Woman’s culture phase, and the 1958 excavated site of the same name, extended from 850 A.D. to 1800 A.D. show transitional strata between the two in a gradual change in arrowhead style and in other stone technology.¹⁰⁴
Chapter 5
Case Study: The \textit{Inuck’siks} (Small Robe Band)

5.1.1 Identification

Earliest recorded knowledge places the Blackfeet Band of \textit{Inuck’sik} Small Robe’s as a major division along with the Bloods, the Blackfoot and the Piegan. Diaries and journals of early explorers, tradesmen, nomadic trappers, encroaching pioneers, and itinerant priests, as well as the earliest newspapers in Montana speak of the people who wore small robes. They have often been referred to by non-Indian historians, as La Petite Robes, Small Robes, Little Robes, Little Blankets, Little Robe’s Band, and even as Little Rogue’s Band, but they are known to the four larger divisions of Blackfoot, as well as neighboring tribes, as \textit{Inuck’siks} or people who wore small robes.\textsuperscript{105}

5.2 Band Name Origin

In 1942-44, while curator of the Museum of the Plains Indian on the Blackfeet Reservation, ethnologist and ethnohistorian John Ewers interviewed several South Piegan regarding the origins of the \textit{Inuck’siks} band. His interview with 70-year-old Mike Day Rider, a senior surviving member of the \textit{Inuck’siks} acknowledged the Small Robes always joining the camp circle each summer for the tribal Sun Dance. Day Rider transmitted to Ewers the origin story of his people, who from all Blackfeet and non-Blackfeet historical accounts, were identified permanent band of the South Piegan, he stated:
A long time ago there was a young woman of this band who was very pretty. Many young men wished to marry her, but she refused them all. Her father asked her to marry a certain young man he had selected for her. Still she refused. Later the young woman found a sweetheart of her own choice. She doubled a year old buffalo calf robe over her head and neck like a scarf and went to meet him. That is how the Small Robes band got its name. Mike Day Rider (born 1871)\(^{106}\)

From neighboring tribes Dr. Harry Turney-High interviewed elderly Kootenai about other tribes of the area whom they identified as “Little Blankets (\textit{k’tsalmałhnána}).” He recorded:

These people lived in Canada and are said to be related to the Blood, although Chief Kustata denies that they are Blood proper. Most informants think that they were a band of Blood and are now extinct…..Chief Paul disagrees in the identification of the Little Blankets, claiming that they are just the ordinary enemy seen around Browning, that there is nothing mysterious about their identity, that they are just ordinary ‘South Piegan’.\(^{107}\)

Ewers also interviewed Richard Sanderville, (Chief Bull), designated as official interpreter for the Blackfeet Tribe, himself a South Piegan Blackfoot described the band continuity to Ewers when he said, AThe band was named after the peculiar custom of its members of wearing pieces of buffalo robes, smaller than whole robes, as shawls thrown over their shoulders when visiting other bands\(^{108}\).

5.2.1 \textbf{Geographic Location}

The \textit{Inuck’iks} began to be written into the historical record in the 1780’s. Early explorer and trader, Alexander Henry, gave the most precise description
of the country occupied by the Piegan in 1787 he said of the Piegan, “The territory they occupied was along the foot of the Rocky Mountains on the headwaters of the various branches of the Saskatchewan.” He noted however, that one band lived almost entirely in the foothills, trapping beaver and seldom resorting to the Plains. This description closely relates to the occupation and the location of the Inuck’iks band of the Piegan. The Inuck’iks traversed and occupied for yearly sustenance from the Saskatchewan River, along the eastern edge of the Rocky Mountain front, south to the three forks of the Missouri. Although that may have been a specific location when first observed by Euro-American’s they clearly had knowledge of, and traversed a much broader expanse of territory to the west and south of the Alberta locations.

First recorded contact with the Inuck’iks was found in the Edmonton House Journals of the Hudson Bay Company Archives. These journals indicate that in 1823, Hudson’s Bay Company officials asked the Inuck’iks Chief, Rising Head to take along and watch out for the young trader named Hugh Monroe. Their entrepreneurial reasons for this are threefold. First they wanted him to learn the language so he could become an interpreter for them, and second, they wanted him to map out the best trapping streams east of the Rocky Mountains, third he would make every attempt to induce the Inuck’iks them to trap beaver for trade at the Hudson’s Bay Company when they returned the following year.
Monroe left Edmonton traversing south and east along the eastern edge of Rocky Mountains. He described the expanse of Inuck’sik’s population as “A three-mile long column of families, horses, and camp gear.” They took him from Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, across the British possessions into American territory, south along the mountains to Cut Bank Creek, than to the Badger Creek to participate in the Sun Dance and later crossing the Great Falls of the Missouri went to Arrow Creek, a stream that rises in the Belt Mountains, and on to the Judith River where they camped on a creek in the Bears Paw Mountains. The Inuck’sik battled with the Crow on this journey, than continued traveling as far south as the Musselshell River finally settling into winter camp along Warm Spring Creek, near present-day Lewistown, Montana. They spent the rest of the year along the three-forks of the Madison, Gallatin and Jefferson Rivers. This was the homeland they were most comfortable, and most in control of in the early years of Euro-Canadian/American contact.

5.2.2 Inuck’siks Population

An important epoch in their history was the smallpox disease. The tragedy of the outbreak of 1781 created a transformation of the basic belief system that had been in place for hundreds perhaps thousands of years. The Narrative of explorer David Thompson quotes an earlier trader named Mitchell Oman who in 1781 directly encountered the Piegan at the base of the Rocky Mountains. He indicates the loss of their population to be “three-fifths” or over one-half.
Where we saw the first camp and some of the people sitting on the beach to cool themselves, when we came to them, to our surprise they had marks of the small pox, were weak and just recovering. For none of us had the least idea of the desolation this dreadful disease had done until we went up the bank to the camp and looked into the tents, in many of which they were all dead, and the stench was horrid; those that remained had pitched their tents about 200 yards from them and were too weak to move away entirely, which they soon intended to do; they were in such a state of despair and despondence that they could hardly converse with us, a few of them had gained strength to hunt which kept them alive. From what we could learn, three fifths had died under this disease; Two Indians with their families came and hunted for us. These informed us, that the Indians of the forest had beaver robes in their tents some of which were spread over the dead bodies, which we might take and replace them by a new blanket. The countries were in a manner depopulated the Natives allowed that far more than one half had died, and from the number of tents which remained, it appeared that about three-fifths had perished; despair and despondency had to give way to active hunting for both provisions, clothing and all the necessaries of life; for in their sickness, as usual they had offered almost everything they had to the Good spirit and to the Bad, to preserve their lives and were in a manner most destitute of everything. 

While this was a tremendous loss, by the early nineteenth century, John Rowand, (1804-54) Hudson’s Bay Company trader, estimated the population of the tribes of the area. In addition to the “Blackfoot, Piegans, Bloods, Gros Ventres or Fall Indians, and Circes [Sarcee]” he listed a large sixth group as the “Mountain Tribes,” comprising the “Cotones” [Kootenai] and Small Robes. He estimated the combined population of these two “Mountain Tribes” at 250 tents or approximately 2,500 people.

With a loss of over half their population in 1781, it appears the Inuck’siks began a rapid recovery of their population by integration of individuals as well as entire families, and possibly other bands weakened by the smallpox
epidemic to become one of the larger bands of the Piegan between the years of 1800 and 1837.

In 1832, five years prior to the second decimation of smallpox in 1837, James Kipp, American Fur trader, described the Inuck’siks as a distinct body of 250 lodges, to be distinguished from the 500 lodges of the Piegan. At an estimated 10 persons per lodge, 2,500 Small Robes correspond to the possible conformity and structure of the band Monroe traveled with in 1823. Ethnographer John Ewers, estimated The Small Robes were 150 lodges strong prior to 1846. Along with periods of starvation, they also experienced a tremendously violent battle with the Crow in 1846 which it was estimated a loss of 50 lodges with only 30 Small Robe lodges remaining by 1847.\textsuperscript{114}

Smallpox left survivors heartbroken and dazed. Sometimes it left them pockmarked and blind. It eroded confidence in traditional healers and healing rituals. Survivors had to regroup socially and politically as well as psychologically and emotionally. Sometimes small groups of survivors from larger stricken populations congregated to form new communities that cut across ethnic boundaries. Some communities tried to rebuild their populations by large-scale adoptions. Societies struggled to redefine their political structure and patterns of leadership.\textsuperscript{115}
5.2.3 Balancing an Ancient Belief

In the latter half of the eighteenth century, a number of representatives of the Hudson’s Bay Company, and the Northwest Trading Company were sent to induce the Blackfeet to trade beaver pelts with them. Beaver pelts were some of the most highly prized furs of the time, and the Blackfeet would have surely prospered in trade with the English and Americans.

Yet aside from the Inuck’iks band, virtually none of the Blackfeet agreed to trap beaver for the traders. Such was their contempt for the whole idea that it soon became quite dangerous for many trappers to even venture into Blackfeet territory at all. In (1787-1812), David Thompson, a representative with the Hudson Bay Company, reported nearly three hundred fifty European trappers killed by the Piikunii when trapping beaver. However, this report may well have been created and inflated by the trappers themselves, to discourage competition from both Hudson’s Bay Company as well as the American Fur Company, and even more so, the free trappers who were released from the companies to do business on their own. It was an exaggerated and damaging report to the reputation of all the allied tribes of the Blackfeet.

The Inuck’iks killed a very limited number of beavers despite their aversion, However, such numbers were inconsequential compared with the enormous quantity taken from the northwest by the fur trade industry. Indicative of a worldview in which all interactions with the many medicine powers are
personalized, the Blackfeet were not averse to trading stolen furs, once someone else killed the trapped beaver. One may reasonably deduce that it was the act or trapping and killing the beaver that offended the beaver medicine power, not the actions taken thereafter in trade. The Blackfeet were thus able to abduct and trade beaver pelts without personally offending the beaver medicine power. They were in fact making the best of a situation not of their reality.  

It is difficult to know if the Inuck’siks fully understood the intentions of the Hudson’s Bay Company was to induce them to give up the ecclesial ban on beaver hunting when they sent Monroe along the Southern route of the territory. The Inuck’sik Chief, Rising Head, assigned him to the lodge of Lone Walker, who shortly thereafter become his father-in-law when Suyikaiyiahki (Mink Woman) took him as her husband. Rising Head, after their first journey to the, three-forks, thrashed, and banished Monroe from his lodge because of his unscrupulous behavior at the trading house. Monroe left the band but continued to explore the region, and encourage beaver trade among the Inuck’siks

It is also important to note that the Indians initially encouraged the formation of marriage alliances between women and the European traders. The Indian viewed marriage in an integrated social and economic context; a marital alliance created a reciprocal social bond, which served to consolidate her economic relationship with a stranger. Thus, through marriage the
trapper/trader was drawn into the Indian’s protective kinship circle as a band/tribal member. Under the protection of tribes, the life of the fur trader in what he most likely saw as the “vast wilderness” far outweighed the value of a few perishable trade goods. These advantages in exogamous relationships were evident in the early recordings of Father Jean De Smet. He noted on one occasion while delivering an address to the Piegan through his interpreter [Jemmy Jock Bird], he stated:

...a gathering of these savages, who sat on the side of a hill, the chiefs on the ridge and the common crowd below, all attentive to his instruction. When he had ended, one of the chiefs came down to shake hands with him, saluting him in a very good English, telling him at the same time that he had a rather poor interpreter. ‘These people,’ said the chief, ‘are deeply interested in what you have been preaching to them, but your interpreter has not put it before them in the right way.’ ‘But you, sir, please, where did you learn English?’ asked Father De Smet, amazed and bewildered with astonishment. ‘In Ireland, faith, replied the Blackfoot chief.

De Smet further elaborated “The Irishman, for such he was, went on with his story telling how he had wandered to the border settlements of the Northwest, where he had become too fond of drink; how he fell in with an old friend, a trader in the Indian country, who took him along, to save him from whiskey.” This man enjoyed his new life with the Piegan, and remained in their environment where he further distinguished himself in a war with another tribe, and attained the status of a Chief. He informed De Smet that he had married a Piegan woman with whom he had five children, “whom I have baptized myself,
as well as I knew how. But I’d like your Reverence to do it all over for me and
do it right this time.  

In addition to the intermarriage with the trappers and traders with whom they
came in contact, The Inuck’siks exhibited their independence by a continued
relationship with the Kootenai and Salish whom they would join in hunt with
near the Three Forks and south of the Missouri river. While the remaining
bands and divisions of the Piegan, Kainai and Siksika were hardly hospitable
toward the Salish, the Inuck’siks maintained regular trading and marital
relations with them, often traveling with them to the Judith Basin, the
Yellowstone Valley and Three Forks of the Missouri River to hunt and visit.  

Under the leadership of Kootenai Appe the Inuck’siks made those friendly
familial ties and alliances. South Piegan informants to John Ewers (1958)
acknowledged the ties between the tribes west of the Rocky Mountains. He
interviewed South Piegan, Richard Sanderville, who was familiar with the
tradition of the Inuck’siks friendship with the Kootenai, and Salish and he told
Ewers of the strength of that relationship when they were forced to make a
decision that put a strain on the Piegan relationship, he stated:

They were very friendly with the Flatheads, and frequently joined them
in hunting buffalo on the plains. At one time, before the 1855
Blackfoot Treaty, the Piegans fought the Flatheads on the Musselshell
River. On that occasion the Small Robes helped the Flatheads by
supplying them with Piegan ammunition.  

The comfort zone of the east side of the Rocky Mountains was enhanced for the smaller tribes of the Flathead, or the Salish, Kootenai, Pend D’Oreille and sometimes joined by the Nez Perce, while in the company of the *Inuck’siks*. Like all the tribes of the plains, they were a seasonally mobile people who moved throughout a vast area seeking mobile and non mobile resources such as plants when they were ready for harvest.

The intermarriage between *Kootenai Appe* and a South Piegan woman produced the internationalist known as *Makuie-Poka* (Wolf’s Son).

![Figure 3 Makuie-Poka ("Child of the Wolf") the son of a Blackfeet mother and Kootenai Appe. Father and son were painted on the same day in mid-August at Fort McKenzie 1832-34.](image)

In about 1820, Wolf Child married a Salish woman which strengthened the kinship ties of the two groups. Relatives visiting their Salish and South Piegan relatives became links to more understanding relations. Ties with the Kootenai and Salish also resulted in early interaction with the people who
traveled from the east, and brought them another belief system in the form of Catholicism.¹²⁴

According to Father Lawrence Palladino (1922), the tribes west of the Rocky Mountains first obtained notions of Christianity between the years of 1812 and 1820. Eastern tribesmen of the Iroquois Nations who either worked for the Trading Companies or came as freemen trappers and fur traders, were the first stewards, teachers and missionaries of Catholicism. Freeman trappers were generally those who were released from the fur companies after mergers or layoffs. They became independent traders and often were taken in by tribes whom they had established trade contact.

By the early 1800’s, a band of Iroquois free trappers led by Ignace La Mousse, known as Big Ignace or Old Ignace, reached the Salish homeland in the Bitterroot Valley of Montana, was hospitably received and he and his party remained. La Mousse and members of his band of Iroquois also intermarried with the Salish and became accepted as members of the tribe.¹²⁵ While Old Ignace acquired status and great influence with the Salish tribe, he often spoke of the Catholic religion, its teachings, its prayers and its rites. Always concluding with the advantages and necessity of having the Black Robes or Catholic missionaries among them, by whom they could be taught and instructed. They learned from him the principal truths and precepts of Christianity, the sign of the Cross, the Lords Prayer and other ritual practices of Catholic devotion.¹²⁶
With their close marital, and kinship ties, the Inuck’siks band became the first to learn of these teachings. By the spring of 1831, they were convinced of the need for the medicine of the Black Robes. The first joint delegation traveled thousands of miles to St. Louis, Missouri. Two Nez Perce, a Salish and possibly an Inuck’isik went to inquire about the possibility of direct Roman Catholic Christian instruction. When they safely reached St. Louis in the early part of October, The Reverend Joseph Rosati, Catholic Bishop of St. Louis, wrote an account of their arrival, which he sent to the Annals of the Association of the Propagation of Faith, dated December 31, 1831, it reads:

Some three months ago four Indians who live across the Rocky Mountains near the Columbia River (Clark’s Fork of the Columbia) arrived at St. Louis. After visiting General Clark who, in his celebrated travels, has visited their country and has been well treated by them, they came to see our church and appeared to be exceedingly well pleased with it. Unfortunately, there was no one who understood their language… We have since learned from a Canadian, who has crossed the country which they inhabit, that they belong to the nation of Flat Heads who, as also another nation called Blackfeet, had received some notions of the Catholic religion from two Indians who had been to Canada, and who had related what they had seen, giving a striking description of the beautiful ceremonies of Catholic worship, and telling them that it was also the religion of the whites.127

This was the first of four delegations who traveled to St. Louis, Missouri to ask for the teachings of the Black Robes among the Blackfeet/Salish/Nez Perce. However, their requests did not elicit a response from the Catholics for another decade when the Jesuits arrived in 1841.
In 1837, the *Inuck'siks* again suffered another devastating blow from a wave of small-pox disease that affected many of the Northwest tribes. This was witnessed by Alexander Culbertson as Chief trader at Fort McKenzie when he noticed a loss of Indian trade coming to the fort. Convinced that the disease must have struck the Piegan, he and Isidoro Sandoval rode to the three-forks where a very quiet village of sixty lodges. As they neared, an overwhelming stench greeted them. The scene, in all its horror, then unfolded; hundreds of decaying forms of humans, dogs, and horses lay amidst the lodges. The only survivors were two old women, too feeble to travel and too disoriented by grief to make sense. All who had not died on the spot had fled in small bands here and there, frantic to escape the pestilence, which pursued them at every turn, seizing its victims on the prairie, in the valley, among the mountains, dotting the country with their corrupting bodies till thousands had perished.\(^{128}\) It is estimated that cost the *Inuck'siks* the estimated loss of over half the population they acquired since the small pox devastation of 1871.

The death toll to the *Kainai, Sik'sika, and Piegan* numbered not less than six thousand, or about two thirds of their whole number. Most of those who survived had previously been exposed to the disease in 1781, and through their immunity survived the 1837 epidemic, but their children did not. Once again, there were fewer survivors at the reproductive age.\(^{129}\)

But unlike the epidemic of 1781, the people observed the increased numbers of Euro-Americans continued to survive the devastation of the disease.
Therefore their reaction would be quite different with this epidemic. The people looked for new and powerful medicine that would combat the disease. They were logical in their decision. If the disease came with the Europeans, possibly they too have a cure. The possibilities of counteragents were already foremost in the minds of the *Inuč’siks* fathers, mothers and spiritual leaders. From their empirical world-view, it was a person of spiritual strength who held powerful medicines who could accomplish this. Traditional medicinal practices were not working on Whiteman diseases and they looked to the harbingers and their Christian holy people to help contend with unknown debilities.

5.2.4 **Black Robed Medicine Men Bearing War Power**

By 1840, trading people and explorers of European descent were now a part of the Blackfoot world and for a time, the Blackfeet welcomed contact with western civilization thinking they would have an innovative and expansive influence upon traditional Blackfoot institutions. Nevertheless, when Father De Smet's arrived the positive effects were already beginning to be overshadowed by processes that were more ominous. White diseases continued to take an appalling toll on the young and the old, as was the expanding liquor traffic brought by the trades' people. An economic war between the Hudson Bay Company of Canada and the American Fur trading companies had placed the Blackfeet people directly within their paths.
The warring factions of the fur trade Industry spread fearful rumors about the Blackfeet. Therefore, the early Black Robes, particularly the leading Jesuit Black Robe, Father Jean Pierre De Smet, was never anxious to see the Blackfeet. Tradesmen and trappers wanting to discourage competition in the rich beaver country reported back to eastern friends, relatives, and government officials of atrocities of vicious, savage Blackfeet people. Prior to beginning his trek west, these reports had already prejudiced his mind and invoked a fear deep within him. So that his first journey west, was not by the shortest route from the Missouri River at the Great Falls, but one that took him far south below known Blackfeet Territory along the Oregon Trail, than Northwest along the back side of the Rocky Mountains. Even when he purported to go in search of them, he never directly crossed into their country.

When De Smet arrived among the Salish on August 15, 1841, a contingent of Salish met them at Fort Hall, Idaho, on the Snake River. They escorted the Jesuits to the Flathead country in the Bitterroot Basin, and chose a site on the right bank of the Bitterroot River for their mission. While visiting their relatives in the Bitterroot Valley and after the missionaries arrived, the Inuck’siks noticed many changes: the Flathead sang songs in a strange language, rested on the seventh day, and made peculiar signs of a cross over their chests.130

De Smet believed that the Rocky Mountains in general and the Bitterroot Valley in particular exhibited many of the same basic elements that first made the Paraguayan reductions a success. The high mountains surrounding the 78
Bitterroot Valley compared favorably to the impenetrable jungles in forming a natural barrier to isolate St. Mary’s Mission from the distracting influences of white pioneers. In addition, within four or five days’ journey from the St. Mary’s lived numerous large tribes of Indians—the Pend D’Oreille and the Nez Perce to name two, all of them offering thousands of potential converts to Christ. De Smet in fact envisioned two hundred thousand potential new Christians in the Pacific Northwest. A possible defect of the Bitterroot Valley site, De Smet admitted might be its proximity to the Blackfeet, “the only Indians of whose salvation we would have reason to despair...for they are murderers, thieves, traitors, and all that is wicked.” He would have to think about how to deal with them. But, what he thought of the Flathead was clear, “we may draw this conclusion, that the nation of the Flathead appear to be a chosen people—the elect of God that it would be easy to make this tribe a model for other tribes.”

The cultural difference in the system of belief prior to contact with Euro-American’s, and continued among traditional ceremonialists today, was that they often encountered and interacted with other indigenous tribal people. They were curious and often sought to acquire the power released by the religious entities and actions of other individuals and groups. If the traditions and rituals of one group seemed more attractive, they might attempt to understand and replicate this power. Even though transfer processes and the imitative reproduction of certain rituals and symbolic objects took place on the
Northern Plains, there was nothing in these religions like the missionary impulse that characterized European Christianity.¹³²

Religious interchanges had taken place among other tribes of Indians, but the Blackfeet people were not motivated to convert others, because they did not believe that one religion was true while the other was less true or even false. Evangelism and conversion were not the point of these religions, the teaching and gaining knowledge was the point. It was an avenue to greater power.¹³³

The difference or variation in moral and ethical values was not between racial barriers of white and Indian, but between the ideologies of creation and the guesswork of whom or what is in charge of it. The Piegan Indian does not ask one to believe his belief or recommend what he perceives as salvation. He knows him and only he is responsible for his behavior on earth. If he gives good advice, just words will assist his fellow man. He is not, has ever been, nor will ever be able to neither count as “coup” the salvation or devotion of another’s soul to the Creator nor will the soul of another counted in his behalf upon his death. Therefore, those Indian people who practiced their ways of worship prior to Christian contact did not feel the need to be the evangelist, and there was some degree of tolerance.
In 1841, while visiting their friends, and relatives the Inuck’siks met the Catholic missionaries. As Father De Smet became acquainted with the Inuck’siks, he considered them a separate tribe from the Piegan. He wrote:

The tribe of the Peigans forms a portion of the six tribes known by the generic name of Blackfeet. The other five are the Blackfeet, properly so called, the Men of Blood, the Sarcees, the Little Robes and the Grosventres.134

Four months after his arrival, Father De Smet baptized the son and grandson of Kootenai-Appe on Christmas day 1841. In doing so, he renamed Makuie-Poka (Child of the Wolf) the Christian name of Nicholas. He also baptized his son Sata and five of his children. De Smet gave him the name Gervais, and later wrote, “Sata has almost the same meaning as Satan in French.” While Blackfeet translation of Sata is, thin-skinned, overly sensitive, easily offended; iikssataitapiwa, (or one who can’t take a joke or teasing). However, whatever he had been, Sata, and his father, Wolf’s Child would become Christian apostles for their South Piegan Nation. After the baptisms, De Smet left the Salish and laid down his intentions on how the Jesuits would conduct themselves, “with regard to God, neighbor and self.” As well as their plans for the Indian populations they came in contact with.135 He outlined:

Flight from all contaminating influence, not only form the corruption of the age, but from what the gospel calls the world.

Caution against all immediate intercourse with the whites, even with the workmen, whom necessity compels us to employ, for though these are not wicked, still they are far from possessing the qualities necessary to serve as models to men who are humble enough to think
they are more or less perfect, in proportion as their conduct corresponds with that of the whites.

We shall confine them to the knowledge of their own language, erect schools among them, and teach them reading, writing, arithmetic and singing.

Should any exception be made to this general rule, it will be in favor of a small number, and only when their good dispositions will induce us to hope that we may employ them as auxiliaries in religion.

To facilitate the attainment of the end in view, we have chosen the place of the first missionary station, formed the plan of the village, made a division of the lands, and determined the form of the various buildings.

Next we have made regulations respecting public worship, religious exercises, instructions, catechisms, confraternities, the administration of the Sacraments, singing, music, etc. All of this is to be executed in conformity with the plan formerly adopted in the Missions of Paraguay.

From the grand missionary intention, the presence of Father Pierre Jean De Smet among the Inuck’siks was very short. He never stayed over two weeks with the Blackfeet, and the baptisms would have very little lasting effect except for an inspired curiosity of western value systems. The widespread colonial belief was that “civility must precede Christianity,” that is, the Indians must adopt an English lifestyle before they can be trusted with the Christian sacraments.¹³⁶

De Smet returned east to hurried trips to New Orleans, Philadelphia, and several other cities in search of funds for the St. Mary’s Mission for the Salish and he returned to the tribes of the Northwest. But it took him another seven
years before he ventured into the land of the Blackfeet. When he did, he immediately wrote back to his superiors:

The year 1845 will be a memorable epoch in the sad annals of the Blackfeet nation….The Crows have struck them a mortal blow—fifty families, the entire band of the Little Robe, were lately massacred, and 160 women and children have been led into captivity.137

Edwin Thompson Denig, fur trader, also wrote about this battle, his description also notes a process of interethnic adoption, he wrote:

About 12 years ago in a great battle with the Blackfeet in which the Crows killed all the men of 45 lodges of the former, they also took 150 women and children prisoners. These they did not even use harshly. The women were made to work like their own wives—tho not abused. The children were adopted into their own families have grown up, and are now as much Crow as those of their own producing. It is also worthy of remark that he women after a year’s residence, and understanding some of the language, will not return to their people when given their liberty.138

In 1923, Major General Hugh Scott interviewed 103 year old Margaret Armell Deshamps, Blackfeet daughter of Augustus Armell. With clarity of mind she told her version of the story when asked by General Scott if she had been thinking of any particular happenings among the Indians of those early days, she replied:

I have been thinking of a battle on Flatwillow creek (in what are now Fergus and Petroleum counties) between the Piegan and the River Crows, in which the Crows were nearly wiped out, we had been in the Musselshell country but could find no water so we moved out. The Piegan men had gone out hunting when the Crows attacked the camp from the rear and captured all of the women. This was when I was about 10 years old. I succeeded in hiding and was not taken. When
the hunters returned, they went in pursuit of the Crow and in a four
day battle they killed most of the Crow and retook the women.\textsuperscript{139}

John Ewers refers to an additional statement of Edwin Denig made about the

\textit{Inuck'siks} Crow battle that Denig wrote in 1854:

The Crow Indians a few years since, after killing all the men and boys
of 50 lodges of the Blackfeet, took prisoners upward of 200 women
and children. One of our gentlemen now in charge of that nation was
with the Crow camp when the battle took place, and for two or three
months afterwards, during which time he sought occasions to liberate
about 50 women and send them home to their people.\textsuperscript{140}

Elias Goes Ahead, Crow elder remembers through oral tradition among the
Crow this battle that took place in 1845 between the Crow and the \textit{Inuck'siks},

He stated:

This was at the time, again Hair On Top, Double Face, and there
would be another war chief named Slow among the Crows. Now, up in
the Judith Gap country, \textit{Buua-xa Aa-shuu-ish}, the Spotted Fish
Country. There, this band called the Small Robes, one of the biggest
Piegan bands up to 1845. There were so many of them that they went
to the Bitterroot Country and they smoked the pipe with the Flatheads.
And they had an alliance with the Flatheads. And so they would go
down to the Bitterroot country, the Small Robes band, and they would
trade with the Flatheads. In turn, the Flatheads would come…go with
the Small Robes band and they would hunt the buffalo in the Judith
Gap country. So, and…this one instance where Double Face and Hair
On Top, their scouts were up wolfing around the Judith Gap country
and they said that they found the Small Robes band and their men are
all hunting – they're miles away from the camp. So Hair On Top and
Double Face, they would soon make plans and they completely
surrounded the camp of the Small Robes. And then they would swoop
down on them from all sides on horseback and then they would kill
most of the old men and then they would have the women and
children, they would lead them away from the camp. Then the men
who were hunting buffalo, they would all come back. And then there
was a battle then – a feud. Now, Hair-On-Top and Double-Face and
Slow, they had their warriors make a shield so the men of the Small
Robes band they would come, but then another band surrounded them. They came from the rear and then they attacked them, so they were surrounded and in this battle over 100 men were killed among the Small Robes. Every one...every man that tried to defend himself, they were ridden over and they were clubbed to death. Then some of the Small Robes did survive. There was...of this, there was actually about between 50 to 80 lodges of the Small Robes band that was destroyed. And so this was a mortal blow to the Small Robes band and a lot of the women and children that were captured, they lived among the Crows. After awhile, the Crows took care of these women. Some of the children grew up to be Crow warriors. Especially the little boys grew up to be Crow warriors. But the women were left. They were left with good horses, and I believe about 50 of them did return. Some of them did not return since life was good among the Crow camps that they did not care or bother to move back to the Blackfeet country in the Northwest Territories. They were in Montana....out of this capturing of this Small Robes band, there would be a half Crow, half Piegan named Prairie Chicken who was a sub-war chief among the Crows. About 20 years later after this battle, he would go up into the Piegan country and visit his relatives, but he came back again, this Prairie Chicken man who was a sub-chief among the Crows. And the rest of them women, about 50 of them, did go back. The Crows gave them good horses to go back. They were free to go as they pleased. And so a lot of the relations coming from this battle, there quite a few of them that still have...some of the Crow still claim Piegan or Blackfeet, but even to the present of 2004. So this was a battle that really reduced the Small Robe band after Hair-On-Top and Double Face, they all overran this camp that was left unprotected.\textsuperscript{141}

The destruction of the \textit{Inuck'siks} was not as complete as many historians and later scholars believe. John Ewers estimated a loss of 50 lodges from the Crow battle with only 30 Small Robe lodges remaining. As the \textit{Inuck'siks} looked for reasons for this devastating defeat, the one most pragmatic that gained credence over all others was Father DeSmet's new religion, Christianity. While he had been active in baptizing them, both children and adults, he had assured them they had been “saved.” Their reaction was with great regret, it was far from being the “good medicine” they had imagined, it
was concluded the disaster had come to pass because they had deserted their belief system. Some believed the only way to escape the further destruction was to return to the traditional beliefs. About one-third of the remaining lodges with family ties to the Salish and Kootenai returned to the Bitterroot. The other two-thirds, some twenty-three families disagreed, and made the decision to move north to rejoin with other bands of the Piegan at Fort Lewis.¹⁴²

Those of the twelve lodges that returned with their Salish and Kootenai relatives were the first to interpret Black Robe religion as war medicine, claiming Catholicism as a property right. Initially, the Jesuits were quite willing to let them believe it was as long as it inspired converts. While living among the Salish In 1846, Inuck’siks witnessed striking victory of these tribes over the Crows. Their interpretation of the victory is significant:

While the battle lasted, we (the Blackfeet) saw their old men, their women and children on their knees, imploring the side of heaven; the Flatheads not loose a single man—not only one fell, a young Nez Perce, and other mortally wounded. But the Nez Perce did not pray. We prayed morning and evening with the Flatheads, and heard the instructions of the chiefs. They were so overwhelmed that they allowed Father De Smet to baptize eighty of their children.¹⁴³

This curiosity was enough to inspire the Inuck’siks to bring the powerful war medicine of the Black Robes to the main body of the Piegan who were camped in the Judith Basin.¹⁴⁴ So, on August 16, 1846, with Wolf’s Son, (Nicholas) the Inuck’siks elder and Chief, along with his son Sata (Gervais) led the Black Robed priests De Smet, and Father Nicholas Point from the Bitterroot Valley to
the main body of Blackfeet. They passed through what De Smet called “Devil’s Gate, [Hell Gate] a name which it has probably received from the fact of its forming the principal entrance of the parties of the Blackfeet.”

On the 11th day of their journey, De Smet wrote, “at the very base of the Muscle-shell Mountains, the Inuck’siks Chief, Wolf’s Son, fell from his horse and died, he acted ever since the day he was baptized the part of a most effective missionary, in preparing the way for the introduction of the gospel among his tribe.” His son, Sata (Gervais), led the remainder of the trip to the Piegan. Two days later, as they neared the Piegan camp in the upper Yellowstone Valley, two of the Inuck’siks were sent ahead to announce the Black Robes arrival. The differences in religion, beliefs, values, culture, and character are never more evident than in this first meeting of the Black Robed Priests and the Blackfeet Indian. Father Point wrote:

Our approach was joyful, but the Piegan came toward us with a reserve that suggested either timidity or indifference. Their head Chief, Great Lake, was not in the lead. In his place was Great Toque, the bearer of the Great Calumet, who received the first tokens of our friendship. In a spirited improvisation an older Blackfoot spoke words bordering on ill humor. Then Sata began to speak. By his tone of voice and the fact that he gazed toward heaven, we understood that he was talking about prayer, and that his heart had not forgotten his father who wanted to introduce God’s ministers to his people. Next he explained why the orator before him had expressed discontent. He too believed the reception the Piegan gave the Black Robes was not as solemn as he would have liked it to be. Then hands were shaken and we were persuaded to believe that if their approach had been cool it was still fundamentally cordial. Great Lake having recovered from the shyness which had caused him to assume the role of a lesser person, expressed gratitude for our friendliness. The modesty of this
chief, so often the most intrepid warrior on the field of battle, could have been one of his most attractive qualities if he did not sometimes exaggerate it. Under similar circumstances Flathead modesty would not have prevented expressions of warmth.¹⁴⁷

This situation is clearly indicative of the misunderstanding and arrogance of the first Jesuit Priests. What they failed to understand upon this meeting was the sacred pipe, or great calumet referred to by De Smet, is most commonly known as a most sacred item to the Blackfeet through which prayers are transmitted and carried to the creator. It is carried with a medicine bundle, and opened only on certain occasions. During his stay with the Piegan at Fort Lewis, Father Point came to understand its import, and wrote: “...the calumet is the most revered instrument of the cult. Its guardians are pontiffs of the nation. The horse that carries it on the march is exempt from all other use and the woman who leads the animal by the bridle is the most honored woman of the tribe.”¹⁴⁸

Figure 4 - Blackfeet Holy Woman, Bundle & Pipe meet the Jesuits. 1846 Painting by Jesuit Father Nicholas Point
The leading Jesuit Priest Pierre Jean De Smet’s purpose was twofold. First, the priests hoped to establish peace between what he perceived to be enemy tribes of Flatheads and Blackfeet. He also believed the seasonal rounds of hunting, socializing and gathering food made conversion even more difficult than it already was. And to put an end to that he saw them as becoming sedentary enough through farming efforts to stay in one place, therefore his second goal was to establish sufficient rapport with the Blackfeet so that he could leave Point in charge of developing a permanent mission among them.

Father De Smet spent only two weeks with the Blackfeet Piegan, Father Nicholas Point was left to spend the winter of 1846-47 with his headquarters at the trading post called Fort Lewis, which was located six miles west of what is now Fort Benton. During his brief ministry he baptized 330 boys, 295 girls, but only four men and 22 women. The reason he gave for his lack of progress was his continued frustration by the Piegan persistence in interpreting Christianity as “powerful war medicine.” Writing to Father De Smet, Point described this frustration:

I could have baptized a great number of adults; they even seemed to desire it ardently, but these desires were not yet sufficiently imbed with the true principles of religion. I could not content myself with the persuasion generally existing among the savages, that when they have received baptism they can conquer any enemy whatsoever.149

Nicolas Point received orders after eight months stay to work with the missions in Canadian territory. Although the Inuck’sik’s convinced some
members of the South Piegan of the power of Black Robe medicine, most retained the daily practice of traditional worship, and many would incorporate some of the Catholic prayers and rituals to the extent of translation in the Blackfeet language.\textsuperscript{150}

When Point detached himself from the mission, he collected over two-hundred-dollars from the Indian families who were working at Fort Lewis, toward the assurance that a permanent mission would be established for them. But, the Blackfeet would not see another Black Robe until 1859. During the dozen years that passed, an old world had died and a new world for the \textit{Inuck’siks} was born.

5.3 \textbf{The U.S. Governmental Intervention}

The new formal relations with the American Government began for the tribes in the east, and mid-west based on treaties, which described this intent. The Blackfeet, by this time, experienced the cultural nuances of Euro-Americans who came as adventurous explorers, fur traders, trappers and the Jesuit priests and Protestant missionaries, but nothing they experienced thus far prepared them for the American experience. What the \textit{Inuck’siks} knew through generations of freedom and liberty redefined as an American concept of liberty, and freedom that would place unknown boundaries and limitations upon nearly every aspect of their lives.
Although the Blackfeet were not present at the site of the treaty negotiations, the treaty of 1851, or more commonly known as the Fort Laramie Treaty, these negotiations established the first land boundary known as Blackfeet territory, but without their consultation. Father Jean De Smet, previously made two trips into Indian country, and spent the first five years with the tribes of the Northwest avoiding Blackfeet contact. He knew through his guides, and other tribes living nearby, what territorial boundaries were Blackfeet. Therefore, he accepted the official responsibility for the preparation of the official maps designating Blackfeet lands. A formal description of those resolved, legitimatized boundaries appear on the sheepskin copy of the Treaty of Fort Laramie, preserved and displayed at the National Archives in Washington, D.C., it stated:

The territory of the Blackfoot Nation. Commencing at the mouth of the Muscleshell river, thence up the Missouri river to its source-thence along the main range of the Rocky Mountains, in a Southern direction to the headwaters of the northern source of the Yellow Stone river-thence down the Yellow Stone to the mouth of Twenty five Yard Creek-thence across to the head waters of the muscle-shell river-and thence down the Muscle-shell river to the place of beginning.¹⁵¹

Four years later, the Blackfeet were involved in formal negotiations with the U.S. to define their territory. The Treaty of 1855 declared what had been previously defined by themselves along with their constituents in the Salish, Kootenai, Pend d’Oreilles and Nez Perce and Shoshone, as their favored wintering ground, as well as hunting and gathering grounds, defined in this
treaty as a “Common Hunting Grounds” which included parts of Yellowstone National Park, as well as, lands that include the State Capital of Montana.\textsuperscript{152}

In less than a decade, the \textit{Inuck’siks} were reduced from a large division to a group of 30 lodges, much due to the epidemic’s of smallpox, but largely to the loss of being fused into the Crow Tribe by capture. During the winters of 1855 and 1856 were being characterized by the rabble of Fort Benton as pitiable remnants, and loafers. During that period they were mentioned in the Fort Benton Journal as:\textsuperscript{153}

Jan. 16, 1855. Sent an Indian to Little Robe Camp to see if these Indians had not picked our horses… [p. 18]

Dec. 16, 1855…in the afternoon Camp of “Little robes” arrived with their Lodges which they have pitched in the Prairie… [p. 56]

Dec. 18, 1855, Little Robe Band moved Camp and intend settling for the present at Pablos Island to dress what Robes they have… [p. 56].

January 9, 1856. A Little Robe Ind. Passed with one Robe to trade being all we have got for the past two days… [p. 58]

January 13, 1856. The Little Robe band moving Camp from across on “Chantier” looked in to loaf and anoy us but gave us no Robes… [p. 59]

January 26, 1856. Some Little Robes paid us another loafing visit for the 100\textsuperscript{th} time… [p. 61]

Within the next four years, this land designation would have a direct effect on the life ways of the \textit{Inuck’siks}. The previously established reservation boundaries began to shrink from the cancerous encroachment of miners,
cattlemen, settlers that came onto the southern portion of the reserved Indian lands beginning in the 1850’s and escalated during and after the Civil War.

The Blackfeet considered winter camps as their true home. It was here that both the bison herds and human populations, prior to contact, were able to remain for up to five months. However, political pressure from Montana cattlemen, miner’s and politicians successfully lobbied to have all that land taken by executive order of August 19, 1874, signed by U.S. President Ulysses S. Grant. It removed them from land where the Inuck’siks wintered and traversed between their relatives on the Flathead Reservation, east to the Judith basin, and South to the Yellowstone, The Inuck’siks like all the bands of the Piegan, were pushed further north to the boundary of the Birch Creek, where they were forced to remain within designated boundaries. Here they began to be reintegrated into the main body of Piegan bands.

By 1869-70 General Alfred Sully, U.S. Army officer serving in the civilian capacity of the Superintendent of Indian Affairs for Montana Territory listed fifteen Piegan bands in his annual census report. These bands ranged from ten to thirty-six lodges each, average size being twenty-four lodges. Therefore, it must be concluded the Inuck’siks band as they survived was a little larger than average size of each of the remaining Piegan bands.

Although, John Ewers (1946) interviews and investigations of the Inuck’siks led him to believe there were only two remaining families left of the entire
Band, the Calf Robes and the Day riders, there are however many others. He viewed the band as a patriarchal society, tracing all lineages to the male members of the tribe when in 2005, along with the progeny of the families he named; there are an estimated 500 Blackfeet enrolled descendents of Hugh Monroe and Jemmy Jock Bird who married *Inuck'sik* women.¹⁵⁵ Many other unnamed families are descendents of the *Inuck'siks*; however it was not likely they would consent to public admission during Ewers research efforts in 1946.
Chapter 6
Conclusion

The experience of Inuck’siks people of the Southern Piegan Division of the Blackfeet Allied Nations is indicative of the changes experienced by all the people of the Blackfoot Confederacy. They rebuilt their society after the first smallpox epidemic of 1781, and their band society changed over time. They were people who survived by dealing effectively with challenges from the environment, drought, disease, religious conversion attempts, population growth and decline, new and closed opportunities. They balanced tradition and innovation, weighed war and peace, and endured encounters and became changed or modified by becoming acculturated with other Indian tribes, as well as French, British and eventually American neighbors and new-comers.\(^{156}\)

The Inuck’siks were at their zenith for at least the first quarter of the nineteenth century when outside European observational writers identified them as one of the largest bands among the Piegan division, and even at one point in their growth, a major division of the Blackfoot Confederacy. (See Ewers 1946; McClintock 1910; Catlin 1832) The idea that the Inuck’siks shared a sense of community and simultaneously otherness was not a mere ethnic identity or cultural confederation, for they created a political mission to maintain their population, spirituality, autonomy, and territory and possibly the expansion of that territory. This is evident in that manner in which they dealt with others for they engaged in trade, waged wars, negotiated treaties of peace.
and friendship, and struck alliances to ensure their continued autonomy and maintenance of territory in a manner conducive to their traditions and survival by bringing others into their community.¹⁵⁷

Often times others brought into their community from neighboring tribes brought with them their own cultural values that influenced and became accepted norms of younger generations, who watched an old world end and a new begin. For the Inuck’iks band, the foremost epic transitions defined some of the conditions that fostered a widespread process of ethnic hybridization, and that contributed to the emergence of new cultural groups and ethnic identifications during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were:

- 1760’s Inuck’iks acquires the horse from a Kootenai who becomes the War Chief of the Piegan.
- 1781 smallpox epidemic decimates over one-half the population.
- 1790’s dismiss the ecclesial ban on beaver trade under Kootenai leadership
- 1800 began an ethnic bloc confederation with the Salish and Kootenai.
- 1830 actively seek a new powerful belief system in Christianity to add to their existing belief.
- 1837 smallpox devastates the band in their wintering ground with a loss of over half the population.
- 1840 witness a successful defeat of the Crow by the Salish and Nez Perce, and accept the Christian rite of baptism from Father De Smet.
1845 Inuck’sik loose an estimated 50 lodges, and 150 women and children in a battle with the Crow. 30 remaining bands split over new Christian belief system. Half returned with the Salish to the Bitterroot Valley, others remain with the South Piegan.

1846 Salish fused Inuck’sik Introduce Jesuit Priests and Catholicism to other bands of the Southern Piegan.

1855 Sign the Lame Bull Treaty at Judith Landing

1870 Heavy Runner band is decimated by U.S. Calvary.

1874 All Piegan bands moved north of Birch Creek by U.S. Government.

1880 Southern Piegan Band names begin to disappear from public.

The process of Inuck’siks ethnogenesis and reunification with the Southern Piegan must be seen within the context of the interaction of indigenous sociopolitical models and shifting geopolitical situations. However, sense of community, and a commitment to being a member of the group, its ideals, and its future that held everyone together and kept the Inuck’siks a strong, viable component of the greater Blackfeet Alliance. Their will to survive as part of their own group, and as part of the South Piegan Nation, were of utmost importance to them. A national identity as Blackfeet always prevailed, regardless of ethnicity, gender, or band affiliation that comprised tribe or nation.

Not to be committed to being a viable entity within the community would have been to lose the self in the dominant mass of humanity, either ceasing to be or merely persisting... drifting with no place, with no relations, was unacceptable to them.158
ENDNOTES


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153 Ewers, "Identification and History of the Small Robes Band of the Piegan Indians."

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