2005

For as long as the sun shall rise and the mountains cast their shadows

Betty K. Henderson-Matthews

The University of Montana

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FOR AS LONG AS THE SUN SHALL RISE AND THE
MOUNTAINS CAST THEIR SHADOWS

by
Betty Henderson-Matthews

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts
The University of Montana

May 2005

Approved by:

Chairperson

Dean, Graduate School

Date
This study encompasses the years from 1855-1895. These were crucial years for the Blackfoot people. During this time, they went from militarily dominating the Northwestern Plains to being completely dependent upon the United States' Government for their survival. Their colonization and subsequent dependency was brought about in a brief timeframe. During this time, the Blackfoot people were separated from their land and resources, and were bombarded with the United States Government's assimilation policy. Although the events of this time period have been written about before, past interpretations have viewed the military aggression, starvation, and ill-health the Blackfoot people experienced as isolated incidents. They are not. These three factors facilitated the rapid process of the United States' domination over the Blackfoot people. This investigation of Blackfoot history, places these three factors into a broader perspective, by examining each of them, and their individual part in creating the Blackfoot people's dependency upon the United States Government. This investigation is based on the theoretical foundation of historical materialism. Karl Marx developed this theory to analyze the interactions between people as they enter into economic relationships. By placing the military aggression, starvation, and ill-health experienced by the Blackfoot people into this theoretical framework, a broader perspective of history emerges. This perspective explains the interactions between the Blackfoot people and the United States Government during the crucial years 1855-1895 as the result of a collision between two opposing economic systems and the values that motivated each system. Historical documents, secondary sources, and interviews with Blackfoot people were merged to reveal the details of this story and to underscore a holistic narrative of the history of interactions between Blackfoot people and the United States. The Blackfoot people regard this period of their history as one of great suffering which forever altered their society and left them with enormous obstacles to overcome. However, they are a resilient people, and as such they have deemed it their purpose to triumph over obstacles placed in their path and to provide an eternal homeland for their children. They have proclaimed: "Then the last encampment of a proud and mighty people shall be the homeland for all Blackfeet Indians that shall endure for as long as the sun shall rise and these mountains shall cast their shadows."
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CHAPTER ONE:

THE COLLISION OF TWO ECONOMIES

"The Blackfeet Nation sleeps in the shadow of the Great Rocky Mountains,
It is the last encampment of a proud and mighty people
Who once roamed the prairies of a vast land which
Was called the "Big Sky."

Driven here by force, we watched an endless flow of
Persons come and go—persons sent as servants by
The Great White Father in Washington, who came to
Serve, but only served themselves.

Suffering from their diseases, enduring hunger and starvation,
Deprived of our precious freedom, still we survived,
But the greatest of all was the loss of our pride and dignity.

So like the mighty grizzly bear who, when fall approaches,
Goes into a winter sleep, we went into our sleep.
Now, the winter of our suffering is over and we arise,
Refreshed with due strength, declaring to all men that
We shall form a new government, a new way of life,
Recapturing our pride and our dignity and fostering
Our culture and our heritage.

Then the last encampment of a proud and mighty people
Shall be the homeland for all Blackfeet Indians that
Shall endure for as long as the sun shall rise and
These mountains cast their shadows, and the Blackfeet Nation will live in peace and harmony with our
Brothers and our neighbors, forever.

Declaration: Blackfeet Constitution 1935.
Introduction

The European colonization of Indigenous lands has been justified in part by the creation of an alternative reality. That reality, Europeans created, is that Indigenous peoples had no political systems and no permanent ties to the land they occupied (Reynolds 1996:23). This reality is codified and perpetuated in the writing of United States history, especially from a Eurocentric viewpoint. In this interpretation of the past, settlers are “noble adventurers,” who conquer a vast wilderness while creating a civilization where there had been only emptiness and savagery. This notion of history also has been forwarded by the use of such terms and ideas as Manifest Destiny and the Doctrine of Discovery, which are commonly used to validate the taking of lands from Indian peoples. By perpetuating such terms and teaching this version of history, the story ensures the American public will continue to perpetuate the myth about how and why the United States was created without considering its colonial designs against Native Americans.

American society is saturated in traditions that families, education, and religion create. These traditions tie the past to the present and pass down the dominating society’s view of the creation of the country (Wessman 1981:70). Thanksgiving, Columbus Day, and the Fourth of July are examples of national celebrations created to encourage Americans to take pride in the development of their nation. They are, in short, ideological messages used to simultaneously instill and justify nationalism. However these traditions, in reality, are based upon historical half-truths. America was not discovered, it was taken from its original inhabitants. Its Founding Fathers were not men of country honor, but rebels who broke away from a country they no longer economically
needed. Thanksgiving is heralded as time of peace to give thanks for the bounty held in the New World. Contrary to this mythological story, the colonizers of this continent were unable to produce their own food, and local native inhabitants kept them alive. Moana Jackson (2004:96) stated why the myths surrounding colonization continue: “The myths become an exercise in absolution for the colonizer, and the basis for ongoing denial of the rights of the colonized.” These myths about the formation of America have created an image of the Indian as a savage.

Because the Indians of America had an economic system based communal landownership that was characterized by production for use, not profit, and was confined to the local residence group, the European colonizers conceived that they had no political systems and social organization. To further their false impression, the Indians believed that everything in the universe had a spirit, and they prayed to all of them (Glenbow Museum 2001:5). This contradicted the European Christian religion. Not recognizing the complex social structure and spiritual beliefs held by the Indians, the European colonizers labeled them as savages. By viewing Indian people as savages, the European colonizers were justified in militarily taking their lands and creating Indian policy to uplift them to civilization (Ege 1970:V).

The stripping away of the stereotype of the savage that has been created to justify the formation of the United States, necessarily leads to addressing the creation of the noble savage concept. The image of the noble savage was constructed to counteract the notion of the savage. In this view, the noble savage is one with nature (Leacock 1982:61). This view of history has done nothing to forward the economic and political interests of Native people, because again there is no recognition of the political and social
systems of the Indian or land and resource ownership. The stereotype of the noble savage is the same as the stereotype of a savage, but more kind and gentle.

Often in past anthropological investigations, the hunter-gather or noble savage, are viewed as being one with nature, instead of seeing the reality of their existence (Leacock 1982:61). Native people utilized their environment to exist (Ewers 1974; Glenbow Museum 2001). To defeat these racist stereotypes of the savage and the noble savage, studies based on history need to be constructed with the realization that Indian people had political, economic, and societal structures. When studies are done that accurately depict Indian people and their societies, then the romantic image of the noble savage and the wild savage version of history can be destroyed; however, the myths forwarded in this version of history have permeated the minds of United States citizens and created an unrealistic image on Indian people.

General Perception of Native Americans in United States Society

The history that has been told about the colonization of America has created a powerful image of Native Americans for the United States’ general public. Eleanor Leacock (1971:3) summed up the American public’s perception of Indians:

“Contemporary Indians are seen as a beaten people on reservations, sharing in a general ‘culture of poverty,’ a curiosity for passing tourists, while the notion persists, despite census figures to the contrary, that Indians are ‘vanishing’ as a racial and socio-cultural entity.” Indian societies certainly have changed as a result of the United States Government policy that has been forced upon them; however, they are neither gone nor
are they going anywhere in the near future. This creates what has been deemed the

"Indian Question." This "question" is how to alleviate Indian people's dependency on
the United States government by compelling them to become self-supporting. The
United States Government created reservations, which ultimately brought about complete
dependency on the government and lasting poverty of Indian people, creating the
"question" which they have since tried to solve.

Two Conflicting Economic Systems

The American colonizers and the colonized were people who came from
economic systems based upon conflicting values. The Indian people of North America
had based their economic systems and social life on a foundation of complex ideology, in
which production was for use, not profit, and resources were accumulated for
redistribution to other society members (Talbot 1981:80). In this economic system,
political and social decisions were governed by community and based upon the ideology
of the society over the individual. The European colonizers based their society around
the belief of land as private property and the individual accumulation of wealth. These
two very separate economic systems and values clashed when colonization of America
occurred.
Colonization

After breaking away from England, the founders of the United States attempted to recreate the economic system from which they came. The European colonizers, who came from a capitalist society where land was privately owned, collided with Indian people, who based their economic system upon the natural mode of production in which land was held in common. The collision resulted in devastation to Native North America (Talbot 1981:80).

Bernard Neitschman (1988:274) asserted that to the Indian people the concepts of "land, resources, identity and responsibility were inseparable." This differs drastically with the European economically driven intense use of resources, which has been described as exhibiting no "moral restraint" (Alfred 1997:34). The European colonizers saw the land and its resources as a way to accumulate wealth for the individual. According to Steve Talbot (1981:80), the Indians natural mode of production was characterized by production for use, not profit, and it was confined to the residential group. As the colonizers expanded westward in search of wealth, they came into contact with the Blackfoot people. Given their contradictory worldviews, conflict was imminent. It is the intent of this study to investigate the collision of these two worldviews, which resulted in the division of the Blackfoot traditional homeland and the onslaught of lasting poverty.

This study is based upon the assumption that people make choices and enter into agreements based upon their ability to participate within the economic systems of their societies based upon belief in the values that motivate them. In this retelling of this
history, the Blackfoot people will not be degraded by implying that their culture or
decisions were responsible for the disease, poverty, and resource loss they have
encountered since 1875. Rather, this investigation will instead examine the motives
behind the actions of the United States Government to remove Blackfoot people from
their natural mode of production and considers the effects that had on their future
generations (Talbot 1981:80). Although the Blackfoot people had participated in the fur
trade, Allen Klein (1980:131) noted in his economic analysis of plains society: “It was
the interpenetration of modes of production, not exchange spheres that resulted in
qualitative internal change during the 19th century.” For the Blackfoot this penetration
would accelerate during the years 1855-1895. To investigate the process and result, this
investigation of Blackfoot history will be guided by historical materialism.

Historical Materialism

The theoretical framework influencing this investigation is historical materialism,
a theory first developed by Karl Marx. Marx believed that people are active participants
in life, and that they make choices based upon their current reality. This reality is based
upon the material goods that people need to survive. In the process of creating,
exchanging, and consuming these goods, they enter into social relationships with other
people (Plehanov 1940:23). James Wessman (1981:5) claimed that Marx did not intend
that people reduce all aspects of social life to the production of material goods, but that
the logic of social life is grounded in material conditions.
Therefore historical materialism, as a theoretical construct, can analyze both the interactions of people in a society or between societies. George Plekhanov (1940:23) asserted that people, while satisfying their needs, enter into social relationships called economic relations. One of the key concepts in this Marxian analysis of history is the mode of production (Wessman 1981:174). Both the material and the social force of production are considered under this term (Wessman 1981:30). These modes of production are organized in societies to create the social and economic systems (Wessman 1981:116). In this sense, the social and economic systems refer to the specific material, social, and ideological arrangements of a society called its political economy (Wessman 1981:175). This theory understands social change as the result of these economic relations that impact the relationships between economic, political, and social systems within and between groups (Wessman 1981:5). These interactions are based on conflict and are constantly being reproduced in a process that continually redefines a society (Wessman 1981:9). In Blackfoot history, this process will not only be viewed within their society, but between two societies who based their economic systems upon two very distinct and opposite sets of values.

When a capitalist society collides with a communal society in a quest for resources, ultimately one will penetrate the other in an effort to subsume it. For the Blackfoot and other native people, incorporation into the United States dominant culture meant separation from their land and resources and an attack upon their ideology that motivated their social system. When the United States attempted to subsume the Blackfoot, they tried to create the conditions under which their capitalist society is based. William Roseberry (1997) explained the conditions on which capitalism depends. People
must first be separated from their means of production and be reduced to working for wage labor to survive. They must enter into a position of interdependency on the people who control the means of production and be free to sell their labor (Roseberry 1997). Separation from land and resources reduced the Native people from self-sufficiency to dependency. During this time of dependency, they were subjected to Indian policy that attacked their values and created divisions within their societal structure. Incorporation of the Indians into the United States capitalist society was the goal of United States Indian policy during 1855-1895, crucial years for the Blackfoot people, but penetration was never complete which created divisions and hybrid factions. The ending result was a society that was divided and the creation of lasting poverty.

Collision of Two Economies

As the theory of historical materialism has asserted, these two societies were not created by chance; they were developed and evolved independently based upon their history. In this sense history is an ongoing process (Bromely 1972:569). It is constantly being changed and defined as a result of the interactions of people based on the material conditions of the time. Paul Blackledge (2002:32) asserted that the conflicts within a society are, “not only the product of competing interpretations of where society should go, but is more profoundly founded upon the existing point to which a society has evolved.” To understand current Blackfoot society, it becomes vital to understand their past.
As the United States citizens moved into the west, the Blackfoot people of the northwestern plains became an obstacle to expansion. The Blackfoot, who based their communal economic system upon their intimate knowledge of the animals, plants, water sources, and landmarks in the traditional homeland, militarily patrolled its boundaries to ward off invaders (Glenbow Museum 2001:9-12). To the Blackfoot people, the resources within the territory were used in common, with everyone in the group having access to them. Hunting laws and regulatory societies were established to ensure that the good of the all was held supreme over that of an individual (Schultz 1917). Their societal band structure allowed the groups to move within their own semi-territory in seasonal rounds, without infringing on the other bands.

Blackfoot social life was grounded in the fluid band structure, in which political leaders were selected on their ability to make decisions that ensured the people thrived (Ewers 1958:39-41). If a member of the band did not agree with the leader or if a leader had made poor choices and his people had suffered, members could chose to leave their band and join another (Ewers 1958:39). Many of these leaders were spiritual leaders as well.

For the Blackfoot people, the land and resources held great spiritual significance. Everything they encountered in their universe had a spirit and the potential to help or harm them (Kipp 2005; Murray 2005; Fish 2005). Their very lives depended upon their ability to access their spiritual landscape to fast, pray, and ask for help. The Blackfoot have a prophecy about the end of their people that reflects their spiritual interconnectedness with their environment. When the Blackfoot ignore their teachings, Chief Mountain will collapse (Fish 2005). Wilbert Fish (2005) explained: “When the
mountain (Chief Mountain) disappears, we are no longer here; the Blackfoot will be wiped out completely. As long as the mountain stands, we are going to live, we are going to survive, and we are going to continue to exist.” Holding on to their landscape meant retaining their ability to be Blackfoot people. These beliefs firmly rooted the Blackfoot to their landscape, which reinforced their resistance to United States expansion.

The United States citizens, driven by their desire to obtain the wealth, prestige, and political participation land ownership brought in their capitalistic society, consolidated their interests with those of the dominant class. Together they applied pressure to Congress to take action in removing the Blackfoot people from their westward path (Phillips 1937:3).

1855-1895 were crucial years for the Blackfoot people. During this time, there were ultimately three major factors the Blackfoot people experienced that fueled United States dominance: military aggression, starvation, and illness. After entering into their first treaty in 1855 with the United States, the Blackfoot people were exposed to the oppressive government Indian policies which reduced their homelands and left them unable to utilize their traditional economy. In 1870, they suffered from a vicious military attack, which was in retaliation for their resistance to the encroachment of United States citizens and the political divisions between the Blackfoot people (Bennett 1982). Under the atrocious living conditions on the reservation in 1883-1884, six hundred Blackfoot people died (West 1958; Kipp 2005). By 1895, the Blackfoot people were in such destitution from illness and hunger; they were forced to cede their control over some of their remaining spiritual landscapes, the Rocky Mountains, to ensure their physical survival (Blood 2005; First Charger 2005; Kipp 2005). The focus of this investigation is
to determine how a people, who were described as the “most dominate military power on the plains,” came to be completely dependant on the United States government for their survival. Separation of the Blackfoot people from their homeland and the societal divisions created in this era has continued to affect Blackfoot people’s lives. For in the end, history is not a phase that societies pass through but an active player in the present.

Past interpretations of the United States’ Government Indian policies have defended the harsh and cruel treatment Indian people experienced during the reservation era. Policies, such as reservations and assimilation, have been cited as a humanistic means to keep the Native people from going extinct (Bee 1982:23). It was a commonly held belief that if the Indians were not separated from American society and taught the skills needed to survive in it, they would vanish, and thus reservations became a humane way to keep them from extinction (Trennert 1975:197). However, the conditions on reservations and the abusive and coercive actions of the people responsible for implementing the policies were anything but humane (Bee 1982:23).

During interviews with Blackfoot people, they revealed what they believed to be the underlying motivation for the treaties, military aggression, and government policy from which they have suffered: the hunger of a capitalist society to gain wealth at their, the Blackfoot, expense (Blood 2005; First Charger 2005; Kipp 2005; Murray 2005). Cynthia Kipp (2005) explained: “Our agency was down at Fort Benton. The pioneers and the people, who lived in and around there, when the Indian people would come into Fort Benton to get trade goods and provisions, would just kill an Indian person on the street and anywhere.” Kipp (2005) spoke of the reason of the violence: “The settlers and pioneers did not want the Blackfoot to be in the area; they wanted our land.” The settlers
disregard for the state of the Blackfoot through the military aggression, starvation, and illness was prompted by their justification that the Indians were savages who needed to be either militarily controlled or confined to the reservation where they could no longer be a threat to settlement (Ege 1970:V).

Blackfoot history will begin with the time before they entered into a formal relationship with the United States Government, when their economic system was based upon a local natural mode of production which is characterized by its production of use and not profit (Talbot 1981:80). The Blackfoot people had a fluid band political structure, in which leaders were selected on their abilities (Ewers 1958:39). This societal structure was a necessary way of life. Based upon the cycles of the bison, it provided the Blackfoot the ability to ensure their survival (Oliver 1962:17). Not only were they able to move frequently to harvest sufficient quantities of available resources, but small band size also ensured that resources were not depleted in the areas surrounding their camps (Ewers 1958:39).

The next chapter will begin with the first treaty in which the Blackfoot participated. This created a hegemonic relationship between them and the United States Government. Subsequent resistance to settler encroachment resulted in the military aggression of the Bear River Massacre (Ege 1970; Bennett 1982). After that, the affects of the reservation period will be investigated. During this time, the Blackfoot people were subjected to inept government agents and policy which resulted in the starvation of approximately six hundred of their people. The resulting desperation forced them into ceding some of their most sacred landscapes, the Rocky Mountains (Blood 2005; First Charger 2005; Kipp 2005). Lastly, the illness brought by the colonizers as well as by

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population concentration, malnourishment, unsanitary conditions, and assimilation policy on the reservation will be viewed. All of these events have altered Blackfoot society from its original form. According one of tribes of the Blackfoot Confederacy, the Blackfeet, who in their Tribal Declaration of 1935 stated: this was a time of great suffering for the Blackfeet, a time when they went to sleep like the bear to survive the winter (Blackfeet Tribe 1935). Today the economic underdevelopment, which was created during these years, has resulted in lasting poverty and illness for Blackfoot people.

Unfortunately, Blackfoot history has been largely written through the eyes of the dominator. The events contained in this examination of Blackfoot history have been described elsewhere before; however, most versions see the poverty and starvation the Blackfoot experienced as a normal process of the bison becoming extinct and the military aggression as the conquering of the west (Freedman 1987:61; Ege 1970). This study takes a holistic approach to expand this chronicle. By utilizing primary sources, secondary sources, and interviews with Blackfoot people, a complete view of the interactions between the Blackfoot people and the United States government emerges. This comprehensive investigation of the colonization and attempted incorporation of the Blackfoot people into the dominant United States capitalist society revealed the full impact of a collision between economic systems that have inherently different ways of viewing the world. To the Blackfoot land was a way of life: to the European colonizer it was a source of profit (Talbot 1981:80).
CHAPTER TWO:

THE BLACKFOOT PEOPLE’S TRADITIONAL MODE OF PRODUCTION

Traditionally the Blackfoot Confederacy consisted of three tribes: the Kainai or Blood, the Pikani or Piegan, and the Siksika or Blackfoot. They were closely related, spoke the same language, intermarried, performed many of the same ceremonies and were mutually dependant on each other for military protection, really constituting a single people (Grinnell 1892). For the purpose of the study, the term Blackfoot or Blackfoot people will be used to represent the confederacy. Their territory extended from the North Saskatchewan River south to the Yellowstone and from the Rocky Mountains east to the headwaters of the Missouri River (Wissler 1910:7). The Blackfoot people were mobile but not nomadic. Their movements within their territory were deliberate and dictated by the knowledge they held about the animals and plants of the region. They militarily defended the boarders of their territory to ensure their ability to harvest ample quantities of the resources they utilized. The following traditional land use will approximately encompass the years 1750-1855. These were the years when the Blackfoot people militarily dominated the plains as horse-riding bison hunters.
Photo 2.1: Rocky Mountains: The Blackfoot people call them the Backbone of the World.

Blackfoot Confederacy Territory

Traditional Blackfoot territory was defined in the 1851 Fort Laramie treaty; the Blackfoot people were not present at the signing of this treaty. Even so, this investigation will treat that territorial definition as an accurate designation of the lands to which the Blackfoot people had restricted access to other tribes. This area contained nutritious, short prairie grasses which supported large bison herds. The Blackfoot people have been identified as a society that was completely dependant on the bison, as no other animal would have been able to support their population numbers (Oliver 1962:17).

Bison

Symmes Oliver (1962:17) believed that the Blackfoot, who were dependant upon the bison, had created their entire social organization to reflect the cyclical patterns of
concentration and dispersal of the bison. As a result, when the bison dispersed into smaller herds in the winter and could not support a large population of people, the bands of the Blackfoot would camp and hunt independently of one another. In the summer months when the bison congregated, so too did the Blackfoot. It was during this time, they took advantage of the large herd sizes by holding a fall annual communal hunt to secure their winter storage of meat. Oliver’s logic behind his conclusion is undisputable. The Blackfoot people, who depended on the bison for their food and shelter, would have had to understand their patterns and cycles to survive.

The Staff Of Life

The Blackfoot people’s diet depended heavily on the bison’s meat, blood, and marrow grease. The meat was eaten cooked, raw, or dried. The ribs along the backbone were one of the choicest cuts of meat. Blood was used to create gravy or soup rich in iron (Glenbow Museum 2001:47). After boiling the bones, the marrow grease was used as a bonding agent in the production of pemmican, a food source of high nutrition, usually utilized in the winter when weather conditions were harsh and hunting difficult. Bison not only provided meat for the diet, but its bones and hides supplied the materials for tools and shelter.

Bison hides were tanned to make lodge covers, blankets, containers, shields, and soles for moccasins (Glenbow Museum 2001:47). The bladder of a bison was made into a container in which liquids could be held (Glenbow Museum 2001:47). Hoofs were made into rattles or boiled to create an adhesive. The sinew taken from the backbone was
used as thread or as the string on a bow, and the bones were fashioned into eating utensils (Glenbow Museum 2001:47). These are just a few examples of the Blackfoot use of the bison, as it had been estimated that the Blackfoot people had over one hundred cultural uses for it (Ewers 1974:35). Dependency was so great on this animal that hunting laws and regulatory societies were active to ensure the success of the communal hunt.

Great organization and planning was required to kill the large quantities of bison required by the Blackfoot to survive the winter. Societies were enacted to keep the organization and punish people if necessary (Still Smoking 1997:29). If an individual jeopardized the hunt by hunting by himself or scaring the game, he was severely punished. The punishment for hunting alone was to have the hunter's horse and gun confiscated (Kipp 1980:45). If a lone hunter scared the bison herds away from the encampment and jeopardized the hunt, the punishment was the destruction of his lodge and saddle, plus the public humiliation of having his personal belongings destroyed and the possibility of being whipped (Schultz 1917; Kipp 1980:45). Although the bison had been identified as the Blackfoot staff of life, the Blackfoot hunted an abundance of other animals (Ewers 1974:35).

Animals of Economic Importance

John Ewers (1974:34) listed the animals that held economic importance to the Blackfoot as the antelope, badger, bears, beaver, bighorn sheep, deer, elk, foxes, mink, mountain goat, muskrat, otter, rabbit, weasel, and wolves. These animals were hunted for
their meat, hides, or ceremonial value (Ewers 1974:34). Other animals found in the
territory were not eaten, but were considered to have a spiritual connection.

The birds of the area such as ducks, geese, loons, and eagles were captured to
remove their feathers for ceremonial purposes. Although fish were plentiful in the
streams and lakes, the Blackfoot did not eat them. According to Blackfoot cultural
beliefs, the fish were the food of the underwater beings (Glenbow 2001:9). If a Blackfoot
person were to eat the fish, and make the underwater beings angry, the water spirits
would retaliate by harming Blackfoot people as they crossed the waterways (Glenbow
2001:9). Because of this threat, the Blackfoot did not build boats or canoes, and
preferred to travel by land when hunting or gathering plants, but if it became necessary to
cross water the Blackfoot always gave offerings to the water beings to ensure their safe
passage (Ewers 1974:31; Glenbow 2001:9). However, water animals such as the beaver,
otter, and muskrat helped the Blackfoot people by instructing them on how to use the
powers given to them by the spirits (Glenbow 2001:9).

Plant Use

The Blackfoot people had a use for virtually every plant in their territory
(Glenbow Museum 2001:49). Traditional plant use can be broken into four main
categories: medicinal, food, tool, and ceremonial. The medicinal usage of the plants will
be addressed in a later chapter, so it will be sufficient to say that the berries and roots
from various plants supplied minerals and vitamins to Blackfoot diets to prevent health
problems (Glenbow Museum 2001:49). The Blackfoot had knowledge of the ripening seasons of the different plants and moved to the different areas to harvest them.

John Ewers (1974:34) identified four main plants that were eaten by the Blackfoot, "The most important edible plants utilized by the Blackfoot were the spring roots of the prairies turnip and the fall berries of the chokecherry, buffalo berry, and sarvis berry." These foods were preserved by drying. Chokecherries were smashed and formed into patties which were then dried to be eaten during the winter months (Hart 1976:42). However, wild strawberries, which were too juicy to dry, were eaten raw (Johnston 1970:313). These berries played an important function in the health of the Blackfoot by supplying vitamins during the winter months. This fact was not overlooked by the Blackfoot who had harvesting laws, which carried severe penalties if not followed (Kipp 1980:45).

Plants also supplied the resources the Blackfoot used to make tools. The trees of the area provided the Blackfoot people with lodge poles with which to construct their homes, as well as materials with which to build backrests, bowls, bows, and arrows (Glenbow Museum 2001:48). Chokecherry wood was gathered at a specific time of year to make bows (Glenbow Museum 2001:48). Ponderosa Pine provided material for pipe stems (Glenbow Museum 2001:48; Long Standing Bear Chief 1992:43). The moss found on the trees also served a purpose. The yellow tree moss, lichen, found on trees and old wood was used to dye porcupine quills (Johnston 1970:304). Moss in general was used to create diapers for babies (Johnston 1970:304). Grasses were weaved to make baskets and containers (Long Standing Bear Chief 1992:43).
The Blackfoot utilized many different plants in their daily lives as well as for spiritual reasons. Plants such as sage, sweet grass, and sweet pine were used during ceremonies to purify oneself. The smoke created during their burning represented the love the Blackfoot people had for everything in their environment (Long Standing Bear Chief 1992:43).

**Mineral Use**

The Blackfoot placed no value upon minerals such as gold, silver, coal, copper, or oil, until United States society placed a value upon them (Ewers 1974:32). They did utilize stone to make pipe stems, weapons, and household utensils (Ewers 1974:33). Minerals were also dug which contained colors that were used to create paint. However, rocks or stone features which had unique qualities such as size or shape were considered to have spiritual significance and were either left as offerings to spirits or had offerings left to them as spiritual beings.

**Spiritual Landscape**

The Blackfoot people held great reverence for their cultural landscape. They believed that everything they encountered had a spirit (Vest 1988:462). Included in this ideology category were the animals, plants, rocks, and climate conditions (Vest 1988:462). These spirits were not benign but had the potential to help or harm anyone they encountered. The Blackfoot feared the spirits who would cause sickness, bad luck,
and death as punishment if the Blackfoot did not properly follow the teachings of the spirits (McClintock 1999:168). This belief cultivated the Blackfoot people's interactive relationship with their environment. Within their environment, the Blackfoot believed that certain areas held greater power than others.

The Blackfoot people traveled to these places to fast and maintain social relations, and ask for the spirits' help. To obtain the power or the right to utilize specific knowledge gained from spirits in their environment, it was necessary to go through a transfer ceremony (Glenbow Museum 2001:49; Murray 2005). This spiritual ceremony allowed a person to obtain the power and knowledge needed to call upon their helper and utilize the gifts they were given. Without this ceremony, a person might have gone through the process of fasting and prayer, but they would not have been able to employ the knowledge they gained to help themselves or others (Murray 2005).

The objective of tapping into this power was to be able to gain powers to help yourself and others. Often the process required participation of the other members of the
community (Blood 2005). By gaining community support it ensured the person seeking the knowledge was properly supervised during and after the fast and prayer, and later when they used their knowledge to help people. This ensured that the person empowered by the spirits would properly conduct their ceremonies and themselves, thus guaranteeing that the Blackfoot people would be favorably looked upon by the spirits and not punished. Some of the most powerful Blackfoot spiritual landscapes lay within the Rocky Mountains. In this region, the Blackfoot people were given their first Beaver Bundle (Kipp 2005; Murray 2005).

The Blackfoot people have spiritual bundles which represent the power and teachings of these spirit beings (Glenbow Museum 2001:13). Within these bundles are physical objects collected to represent the powerful relationship between the spirit world and the Blackfoot. When the first beaver bundle was given to the Blackfoot people, at what is now called St. Mary's Lake, Glacier National Park, all of the animals found in the mountains were present and gave themselves to the bundle (Murray 2005). These
bundles were opened annually to renew the connections with the Spirit Beings and Creator and to ask for help (Glenbow Museum 2001:13). During the bundle openings specific songs and prayers were performed the same way each time. The animals, plants, and geographical locations represented in these bundles anchored the Blackfoot spiritual identity to their landscape. Not only was the landscape utilized for spiritual reasons but geographical landmarks and waterways created the borders for the Blackfoot Territory.

**Geographical Landmarks and Place Names**

The boundaries that were militarily patrolled were defined by the Yellowstone and Saskatchewan Rivers and the Rocky Mountains. The Rocky Mountains created a buffer zone for the Blackfoot, who often militarily stopped the hunting parties of tribes from the west side of the mountains. Within this territory, landmarks were given names which had stories attached to them. Some were named after incidences such as *Atsinai-itomohtsah* (Wolf Creek); the name in Blackfoot means the place where the GrosVentre were massacred (Hungry Wolf 1989:24). They were also given names that taught the values and lessons of Blackfoot society. The name, *Ninastiko* (Chief Mountain) held a spiritual power as well as taught a lesson to the Blackfoot people about the proper way for a Blackfoot leader to act (Blood 2005). Blackfoot people created reminders for their people by giving the landscape names that represented their history and the ideology on which their culture was based.
Societal Structure

Because the Blackfoot were dependant upon the buffalo for their subsistence, Symmes Oliver (1962:17) has asserted that Blackfoot society was based upon a band structure. This logic is undeniable; however, the band structure played an important part in their concept of communal ownership at the local level. Each band was comprised of family or individuals who lived together, and had its own territory in which it moved to harvest resources (Still Smoking 1997:30). Although each member of the band had access to these resources, to harvest the resources under the territory of another band required permission (Ewers 1958:39). These bands were named after certain deeds performed by the members or individuals within the bands (Still Smoking 1997:30). The leaders of these bands were men who had proven themselves in battle, made decisions which provided the members with plenty to eat, and were generous with people less fortunate than themselves.
Band leaders would accumulate wealth to improve their status by redistributing it among their people. Many times these leaders were healers as well. After the introduction of the horse, class systems became evident in Blackfoot society, as a man’s wealth and social standing were rated by the amount and quality of horses he had in his possession (Ewers 1985:20; Mishkin: 1973:21). Not only did he gain social prestige by his ability to accumulate horses but political standing as well. In Blackfoot society, an individual accumulated resources to redistribute to others and to prove his ability to provide for his people (Ewers 1958:39).

The political system of the Blackfoot was based upon a tiered structure. The band leaders would unite under the direction of their tribal leader (Hungry Wolf 1989:16). These bands and their tribal leaders met to make decisions for the Blackfoot Confederacy. This confederacy would unite to keep other tribes out their territory to ensure their ability to harvest the resources they depended on to survive (Grinnell 1892). George Grinnell (1892) noted that to pick a fight with one of the tribes resulted in a battle with all of them.

Cultural Landscape

The Blackfoot viewed their traditional territory as a complete way of life in which every part was interconnected. Based upon their intricate knowledge of their environment, the Blackfoot dictated their movements on their knowledge of the plants and animals they needed to survive (Glenbow 2001: 5). The Blackfoot were so concerned with their environment that they often recorded in their winter counts the diseases that plagued the animals they depended on (Raczka 1979:34). Even the
Blackfoot social structure was based upon the movements and dispersion cycles of the bison, their staff of life (Oliver 1962:17). For the Blackfoot people survival meant communal access to the resources and militarily defending their harvest. In this worldview, the individual was not as valued as the entire Blackfoot society. The Blackfoot people held fast to this worldview, when they encountered the United States and its opposing view of the individual and land as wealth.

The Blackfoot had known the concept of ownership. However, it differed from the European’s ownership concept in that it was band/tribal. The Blackfoot Confederacy had patrolled their borders to keep all other tribes from entering and harvesting their resources. All other tribes who wanted to enter Blackfoot Tribal Territory had to enter into an agreement with the tribes. These agreements were negotiated and payment was rendered. Each agreement was entered into and completed by a passing of a pipe. Acceptance of the pipe confirmed and finalized the agreement (Matthews 2005).

The Blackfoot people expected the same from the United States representatives when treaty negotiations began, but they could not have understood the differences in the way in which they saw their world as opposed to the way that United States citizens did. When these two very different economic systems clashed, the result was devastating to the Blackfoot society.
CHAPTER THREE:

The Years 1855-1870: From Peace to Military Aggression

This section will focus on Blackfoot history from 1855 to 1870 beginning with the first treaty signed by the Blackfoot people and the United States Government and end with the Bear River Massacre. During this time, according to tribal views, the Blackfoot people and the United States Government entered into a lease agreement. While this should have opened the door for settlement and peace on the northwestern plains, conflict and eventually death resulted in the end. The people of the Blackfoot Confederacy had been a self-supporting community when they signed the Treaty of 1855. However, as resources became limited and intrusions of the United States citizens increased, the Blackfoot people found themselves competing with the intruders for access to resources. As a result, conflicts developed between the United States citizens and the Blackfoot people. These conflicts increased until the Blackfoot, who were under the military protection of the United States, were brutally attacked by their guardians, resulting in the death of one hundred and seventy-seven Blackfoot elderly men, women, and children.
Guardian-Ward Relationship

By the time the Blackfoot had signed their first treaty with the United States in 1855, the relationship between Indian tribes and the United States Government had already been defined. Under the Commerce Clause of the Constitution, only the Congress of the United States had the power to regulate commerce with foreign nations, among the states, and with Indian tribes. With this power came the ability to make treaties (Deloria 1983:26; AILTP: 1988:24). This clause established the relationship between the Federal Government and Indian tribes, but the Supreme Court, which maintains oversight responsibility for the constitutionality of the actions of Congress, wrote opinions which have been interpreted to define the boundaries.

In the early 1820-1830s, a series of court cases were decided by the United States Supreme Court which had been used to create the trust relationship between the Indian tribes and the United States Government. These court cases are often called the Marshall Trilogy after Chief Justice John Marshall who wrote the opinions; the cases formed the basis of Indian policy during 1855-1895, crucial years for the Blackfoot. According to Vine Deloria, Jr. (1983:33), “The two fundamental ideas that emerge from these cases are contradictory in the extreme: tribes are domestic dependant nations and the relationship between tribes and the federal government resembles that of a ward to a guardian.”

In the years 1855-1895, the belief that Indian tribes were nations was basically ignored, and the guardian-ward relationship was reinforced. When the Blackfoot entered into the Treaty of 1855, the Government took the position of guardian which allowed it to
push the goals of assimilation. It maintained that stance throughout the events discussed in this paper, therefore, making the Blackfoot subject to complete government control.

To fulfill their duties as guardians, the federal government created the office of Indian affairs in 1832, initially placing it in the War Department, but in 1849 it was moved into the Department of Interior to be administered by civilians (Samek 1987:18). In the Indian division, a bureaucracy was established to enact government policy on the local level. Indian agents were appointed before 1871 to the Tribal agencies; these men had almost complete control of the agencies and their wards with very little oversight. The Indian Bureau was a corrupt system of political patronage, and often the people appointed to the low paying position of Indian Agent were uneducated about their Indian wards and were men of low moral character.

**Westward Expansion**

As the United States' population increased, its citizens expanded west in search of the new opportunities that land ownership brought. The settler’s attempts to displace the Indians created conflicts. The land speculators joined forces with humanitarians. The later wanted to “civilize” the Indians by turning them into farmers and Christians, and, the two groups collectively applied pressure to Congress to do whatever it had to do to accomplish their integrated goals of land acquirement. The United States responded at a swift pace. Between the years 1853-1856, they negotiated 52 treaties with Indian Tribes in the west (Talbot 1981:99). The Indian Tribes lost approximately 174 million acres of land as a result of these treaties (Talbot 1981:99).
Not only did Native people lose control of the land, but the payments promised in the treaties were made at the discretion of the federal government. To forward their economic goals, after having obtained the land, the United States Government set in motion an assimilation policy to transform the Indians into Christian farmers. The belief was that by turning Indians into Christian farmers, they would gain the values and knowledge to enter into American society as part of the working class. Payment for the land was usually in farm implements and goods and services, and money did not actually change hands. With the westward expansion increasing, the Blackfoot, who protected their interest in the resources within their traditional territory by militarily defending its borders, created an atmosphere of hostility against intruders, which forced the United States government to negotiate treaties for peace and land sales with them.

Blackfoot Treaties

The Blackfoot were not in attendance for the treaty in 1851. Their absence was due to the lack of planning on the part of the government. David Mitchell, the superintendent of Indian Affairs in St. Louis, who was responsible for the preparation of the treaty negotiations had not given Alex Culbertson, who was responsible to seek delegations from the tribes, enough time to contact all of the tribes on the northern plains (Ewers: 1958:206). The Blackfoot had their territory established by the other tribes of the area; however, in the 1855 Treaty or Judith River Treaty or Lame Bull Treaty, the Blackfoot Nation comprised of the Piegans, Bloods, and Blackfoot as well as the GrosVentre and the Salish Nation consisting of the Salish, Upper Pend d’Oreille, and the
Kootenai along with the Nez Pierce participated with government representatives, Commissioners Isaac Stevens and Alfred Cummings in the treaty negotiations.

Issac Stevens, the Governor and Superintendent of Washington Territory, was in charge of the exploration and survey to secure a railroad route from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean (Phillips 1937:3). Stevens’ motivation while negotiating the treaty was to secure land for the railroad, to homestead the new lands, and to suppress the hostilities of the Indian people while settlement was being done (Wilmoth 1987:72).

This treaty established a common hunting territory for ninety-nine years for all of the participating tribes, which basically encompassed what now is half the state of Montana (House Report 2503 736). It required the Indians to remain peaceful with each other and the settlers, who would be crossing or moving into the territory, and to permit the building of permanent structures, roads, and telegraph lines by the government or agents acting on their behalf. According to the treaty, the railroad was able to build a rail-line through the territory, and the army, military establishments, by utilizing “materials of every description” found on the landscape (Deloria 1950:6).

In exchange for these concessions, the United States agreed to pay the Blackfoot Nation and the Gros Ventre $20,000 annually for ten years in goods and services to be determined by the President of the United States or an agent acting on his behalf. If the amount was found to be insufficient, it could be increased up to $35,000. In accordance with the assimilation policy of the day, $15,000 a year for ten years would be spent to teach them to become farmers, as well as to educate and Christianize them (Cohen 1950:8). In addition to the payments, the Indians who had proclaimed their dependence on the United States government were guaranteed protection from “depredations and
other unlawful acts which white men residing in or passing through their country may
commit” (Cohen 1950:5). Article 12 of the treaty provided that if any tribe broke the
stipulations of the treaty, their annuities may be discontinued for any length deemed
appropriate by the President or Congress of the United States (Cohen 1950:7). The
United States believed these stipulations would guarantee peace on the northwestern
plains.

During the treaty negotiations, Commissioner Alfred Cummings assured the
Blackfoot that the President did not want them to starve “after the buffalo pass away” and
would teach them how to farm and ranch as well as teach their children trades with which
to survive (Partoll 1937:9). This passage of the treaty and information from modern
informants enabled Clayton Denman (1968:102) to assert in his PhD. Dissertation, that
the Indian’s understanding of the treaty was: “the government was to provide supplies for
the Indians, including food, if restriction to the reservation ever left them without
subsistence.” At the end of the signing of the treaty, the Indians left with the food and
provisions that they had been given as gifts by the United States representatives as an act
of goodwill. According to Henry Kennedy, the Assistant Secretary at the treaty
negotiations, the Indians, not knowing how to prepare them, dumped them onto the
ground and retained the sacks they had come in to make clothing (Walter 1982).

Just as the United States government had their motivations for negotiating the
treaty so had the Blackfoot. The Blackfoot people by the beginning of the 1800s had
suffered the effects of smallpox epidemics which had devastating effects on their
population (Samek 1987:12). One smallpox epidemic of 1781 was estimated to have
killed at least one third of every band on the northwestern plains (Binnema 1963:125).
The diseases brought by the European colonizers had resulted in great losses in population, which along with the increase of people moving west beginning in 1848 had created obstacles for the Blackfoot people in retaining their traditional way of life (Samek 1987:12).

The bison, on which the Blackfoot people had depended so greatly for their survival, were dwindling in numbers and the disruptions to their migration patterns from the settlers had created a pattern unfamiliar to the Blackfoot. As a result, in 1854, the Blackfoot recorded that they had been reduced to eating dogs (Dempsey 1965:12). Although there were still large herds of bison ranging the plains, they were quickly depleted by non-tribal hunters who could sell the hides, tongues, and hair (Branch 1929:119). On the plains, bison hunting became the second most profitable way to make a living behind ranching (Branch 1929:152). Even though the treaty of 1855 had stipulated peace for the area, the competing interests of the people on the plains conflicted.

Competing Interests Create Conflicts

After signing the Treaty of 1855, the Government’s interactions with the Blackfoot people were of neglect, corruption, and military aggression. The first example of their neglect was immediately following the signing of the treaty. The government utilized Fort Benton on the northern most navigable point of the Missouri River to accommodate the distribution of the goods and services required in the treaty of 1855. It was made the site of the first Blackfoot Indian agency with Major Hatch as its agent.
(Ewers 1944:40). His main duty was to distribute the annuities and to make a report on the conditions of the Indians (Ewers 1944:41). After completing his duties, he left, and the Indians and settlers were basically unattended for the rest of the year. The peace promised in the treaty would not prevail, as the Indians and settlers of Fort Benton began to have conflicts immediately, and the protection promised by the United States government in the treaty was non-existent.

Agent Hatch, in his 1855 report, stated that a group of Blood Indians raided the Crow only ten days after the signing of the treaty. He requested army assistance to quell the conflict, but his request was ignored (Wessel 1975:9). The Blackfoot Tribes were not only having conflicts with the Crow, but also with the Gros Ventre, who in 1862, refused to collect their annuity distribution out of fear of the Piegan, who were camped at Fort Benton (Wessel 1975:12). Commissioner of Indian Affairs L.V. Bogy in his report dated October 22, 1866, recommended that, after reviewing the report from the Montana Territorial Governor and the Superintendent, the treaty not be ratified because the Indians had “almost immediately broken out into hostility and thus violated their treaty stipulations” (Bogy 1866). Fatal confrontations between tribes continued as the disputes between United States settlers and the Indians worsened.

Gold had been found in the common hunting ground, prompting waves of settlers to move west in 1862 (Hungry Wolf 1989:12). They traveled overland from Fort Benton to Mullen Road which increased the encounters between settlers and Indians (Ewers 1944:45). In addition to the influx of settlers who came on their own, many were lured to Fort Benton to seek government contracts to provide goods and services to the Indians, as well as for the transportation of the annuity goods. The people who had come to Fort
Benton wanted the land and resources the Indians possessed or the money that could be made from United States government contracts for the Indians; however, when their goals and ambitions clashed with those of the Indians, they stopped at nothing to get what they wanted. August Chapman, the Superintendent of Montana Territory, wrote about their viciousness in his annual report, "It is well known that in thickly settled countries the citizens thereof carry with them more or less hostility towards the Indians and spare no efforts, when success seems certain, in obliterating them from existence" (Chapman 1867).

After the creation of the Montana Territory on May 26, 1864, advertisements prompted cattlemen to move west as no other "state or territory possesses equal facilities for their cheap production or maintenance" and that "no matter how dense her population may become, so large a portion of her area, estimated at 35,000,000 acres, is especially adapted for it" (Dowse 1879:7). These rich grasses of the prairie brought the cattlemen, and conflicts arose immediately between them and the Indians.

When cattlemen were killed outside of Fort Benton, the Blackfoot were immediately blamed, and four men from Mountain Chief's band were killed; later it was learned that they were innocent and a group of River Crow were responsible for the cattlemen's deaths (Bennette 1982:21). During this time, four Blackfoot men approached a settler's home in search of food; as a result, three were hanged and the fourth shot in the back (Ewers: 1958:244). The distain for the Indians was so intense that Indian scalps could be used in bars as legal tender (Overholser 1987:309). Tensions mounted, and eventually deadly retaliations from both the Indians and the settlers began to gain the interest of the United States army.
Thomas Francis Meagher, the acting Governor for the Montana Territory, issued a report in 1866 berating the Blackfoot Agent Upson for distributing arms and ammunition to the Piegan whom he blamed for attacking a group of men who were building a road, killing their oxen, burning their wagon, and taking their mules. Meagher (1866) claimed that the only way to stop the Indians was to have the military present in Montana. Ironically in his 1866 report, the Commissioner L.V. Bogy stated; “Between the Rocky Mountains and the Mississippi peace has been the rule” (Bogy: 1866). He claimed that the charges were manufactured by people who wanted to make profits from the sale and distribution of goods if an Indian war were to ensue. However at Meagher’s insistence, in 1867, the army’s post of Fort Shaw was established on the Sun River in Blackfoot country to protect the settlers (Ewers 1944:44).

In a letter dated August 31, 1861, F.D. Pease, Acting Agent for the Blackfoot Indians, reported to General Alfred Sully who was the Superintendent of Indian Affairs in Montana: “The depredations committed upon the whites so far have been done by the Piegan” (Pease 1861). He continued to state that the Blood and Blackfoot wanted nothing to do with the trouble and wished to continue their relationship with the United States government. This was again asserted by Alex Culbertson (1869) when he also wrote General Sully attesting to the peaceful nature of the Blood and Blackfoot, who he claimed, “were no little surprised to hear the frequent raids made upon the whites by the Piegan” (Culbertson 1869). Obvious divisions had developed between the three tribes of the Blackfoot confederacy, with the Piegan Tribe being blamed for the conflicts and the others being heralded as peaceful people.
Soon internal divisions developed within the tribes between band leaders who were friendly with the settlers and those who were hostile. Little Dog was a bandleader who had been friendly to settlers. He had supplied food to miners who were caught in a severe winter in the Sun River Valley (Ewers 1958:251). Trying to fulfill his treaty obligations of peace, Little Dog returned twelve horses that had been stolen by Blackfoot men to Agent Upham (Ewers 1958:243). For Little Dog's involvement, he and his family were attacked by his own people while returning home; not only was he murdered, but his body was mutilated (Ewers 1958:243). The mutilation of Little Dog's body by his own people is representative of the hostility the Indians had for the settlers and even their own people who befriended them. By mutilating Little Dog's body, the Blackfoot believed he would not be able to enter their spiritual realm of the sandhills. The conflicts continued and retaliations increased.

The United States Congress used the conflicts among the Indians and with the settlers as an excuse to refuse the ratification of the treaty Agent Upson had negotiated in 1865, but had died in route when delivering it to the Indian Office (Foley 1980:14; Wessel 1975:17). Two treaties had been negotiated with the Blackfoot people in the 1860s, but neither of them had been ratified; however, settlers continued to settle on the lands which had been negotiated for and congress sent annuity goods (Wilmoth 1987:80). As the interactions between the settlers and the Blackfoot became more frequent, the severity of the conflicts increased; however, it was the Blackfoot people who were punished with a vengeance. It was estimated that during 1870, for every one settler killed, five Indians were killed in retaliation (ManyPenny 1880:291).
The Killing of Malcolm Clark

In this explosive environment, Malcolm Clark, a successful rancher, was killed by a Blackfoot man, Owl Child. Owl Child was a Blackfoot man born into Mountain Chief’s Band, who married a woman and moved to live with her band, Heavy Runner’s. From this point on, the historical documentation and the Blackfoot oral history diverges.

In most published accounts, Owl Child was not well-liked by his people as his violent actions were not acceptable to the Blackfoot people. Once when he got into a dispute with another Blackfoot man, Bear Head, over who was responsible for killing an enemy man, Owl Child lost his temper and killed him (Schultz 1988:294; Ewers 1958:97). After the murder, Owl Child returned to Mountain Chief’s band for protection. In his book, Death Too, for the Heavy Runner, Ben Bennett (1982:35) claimed, “Owl Child had become a killer, single-minded in his own certainty that only with the death of his enemies might his manhood live.” Malcolm Clark became one of Owl Child’s enemies.

Malcolm Clark was a man who had originally came to Blackfoot country as a government trader and had married a Blackfoot woman. James Schultz (1988:294) said, “Four Bears (Malcolm Clark) had been a West Point cadet. Dismissed from the academy for gross infractions of its rules, he had entered the service of the American Fur Company on the Upper Missouri River, remaining with it until it went out of business in 1864. He is said to be a man of violent temper and ruthless disposition.” He has been described by some as a thieving Indian trader, but others had a different opinion (Foley 1980:10).
Schultz based this description on the opinions of Indians and those who knew him as an Indian trader, but Montana society held a very different view of him.

To the people of Montana, Malcolm Clark was a respectable rancher who lived not far from Helena, Montana (Jackson 2000:176). In the book, *The Progressive Men of Montana* (1902:572), the author described Clark as a handsome, bright eyed boy who had never known fear, and seemed incapable of doing harm to anyone; he was listed as an adopted chief of the Blackfoot who was married to a woman of the tribe. Malcolm Clark was married to Owl Child’s cousin, Cutting Off Head Woman (Phillips 1997:11). It was because of this familial relationship the two men met and became involved in a quarrel.

In research of published works, the story again diverges. Two stories of the events that led to the murder of Malcolm Clark are told. Ben Bennett asserted in his book, that while Owl Child was visiting his cousin on the Clark Ranch, his horses were stolen (Bennett 1982:36). In retaliation, Owl Child later returned and stole Malcolm Clark’s horses (Bennett 1982:36). Malcolm and his son Horace Clark followed Owl Child back to Mountain Chief’s camp where Horace struck him with a whip and insulted him (Bennett 1982:36). By whipping Owl Child and calling him names in front of the entire band, Owl Child would have had to seek revenge.

Another version of the story is much the same. James Schultz (1988:298) in his book, *Blackfeet and the Buffalo*, claimed that Malcolm Clark had knocked Owl Child to the ground and beat him while he was unarmed during a feud that had erupted over Malcolm Clark’s having slept with Owl Child’s wife and his attempt at persuading her to leave him. Schultz asserted that this was the story that Heavy Runner’s band had been told about the murder (Schultz 1988:299). Although both authors told a different version
of the story, they both agreed that, when band leaders Mountain Chief and Heavy Runner
were told of the murder, it was believed to have been justified (Bennett 1982:37; Schultz:
army’s request to produce Owl Child: “If the whites wanted to get revenge for it they
should kill Owl Child.” The Indians had justified the killing as a family conflict based on
the fact that Malcolm Clark had been accepted by the Blackfoot as family and therefore
subject to their tribal laws, which is consistent with their oral account of the events.

Blackfoot Oral History of the Killing of Malcolm Clark

Blackfoot oral history of the events and the people involved in the Bear River
Massacre are told with consistency. The horrendous acts preceding and during the
massacre were burned into the minds of the survivors and the future generations of the
people they told. Oral accounts speak about the invaders to their country, who were
there for land and resources (Kipp 2005). They tell of the horrendous treatment of their
people as they entered into Fort Benton to get their annuities and how settlers and
ranchers encroached upon their land and claimed it as their own (Murray 2005). They,
too, believe that the event of Malcolm Clark’s death was the start of the military
campaign to decimate the Blackfoot people; however, their version of the motivations of
the army contradict the published accounts that it was to satisfy the settler’s cries for the
army to avenge the death of a wealthy Montana rancher by a reprehensible Blackfoot
man.
The Blackfoot tell that the killing of Malcolm Clark was not the only event which precipitated the army’s movement against the Piegans in 1870. They identify the underlying goal of the army’s advance as a mission to either kill every Indian they encountered, or to stop the Indians from retaliating when they were victimized, and to put an end to their resistance of settler encroachment (Kipp 2005; Murray 2005). Because of these continuous hostile interactions between the settlers and the Indians, General Alfred Sully, Superintendent of Indian affairs in Montana, wrote in a letter dated August 18, 1869: “I fear we will have to consider the Blackfoot in a state of war” (Sully 1869). The Blackfoot people also believed they were in a state of war and had little choice but to protect their families and property from the advancing hostile settlers (Matthews 2005). However, to the Blackfoot people the Malcolm Clark event was not a part of that ongoing battle. He was married to a Blackfoot woman, which made him family and thus subject to Blackfoot tribal law according to the Blackfoot.

Blackfoot oral accounts of the killing of Malcolm Clark are discussed in hushed tones still today (Murray 2005). Malcolm Clark had committed a crime against a Blackfoot woman so heinous to their society that the punishment was death (Kipp 2005). Owl Child and the other Blackfoot men had been justified in his killing because they were following tribal law in carrying out his sentence. However, it became clear that his killing would be contorted to justify the military action against the Blackfoot that would satisfy the settlers’, cattlemen’s, miners’ and railroad’s demands to remove the Blackfoot from their path of expansion.
The Bear River Massacre

After determining that the United States army was to be involved, Phillip H. Sheridan, Lieutenant General, plotted the army’s plan of action in a letter to Major General E.D. Townsend on October 21, 1869: “I think it would be the best plan to let me find out exactly where these Indians are going to spend the winter, and about the time of a good heavy snow I will send out a party and try and strike them” (Sheridan 1869). The orders were sent to Colonel Eugene M. Baker to leave from Fort Shaw and proceed north to the Marias River where all of the Piegans were camped. The target of the attack was Mountain Chief’s band of Piegan Indians where Owl Child had gone for protection. Mountain Chief, who was hostile to the government, harbored the murders, and refused to turn them over to the army at General A. Sully’s request (Jackson 2000:177). Knowing that the army would fulfill its promise to punish the Indians for this refusal, Heavy Runner requested written documentation of his band’s cooperation with the government (Bennett 1982:83). Heavy Runner, Big Lake and Little Wolf met with General Sully to assert that they were friendly and to ensure they were not going to be targeted by the army. This message was forwarded to R. De Trobriand (1870), Baker’s commanding officer, who instructed him that the bands of Piegans who had remained friendly were not to be “molested.” Heavy Runner’s cooperation and friendly disposition with the United States Government meant nothing in the end, as on January 23, 1870, Eugene Baker attacked without warning the sleeping village of Heavy Runner which was suffering from small pox, killing 177 Indians.
The story of the identification of the band has been changed and retold several times, but it is known that Joe Kipp and Joe Cobell were the army scouts, who were married to women from Mountain Chief’s band, that led the army to Heavy Runner’s band. Eventually Joe Cobell confessed that he had killed Heavy Runner to divert attention away from Mountain Chief’s band, thus insuring the safety of his relatives (Montana Fish and Game Committee 1975:9). Whatever the real events of the day, the result was that a village wrought with smallpox was attacked, its people killed, lodges burned, and horses and approximately one hundred and forty women and children were captured. According to Baker’s report (February 18, 1870) of the massacre “The result of the expedition is one hundred and seventy-three Indians killed, over one hundred prisoners, women and children, (these were allowed to go free, as it was ascertained that some had the smallpox,) forty-four lodges with all of their supplies and stores destroyed, and three hundred horses captured” (Baker: 1870). It was Baker’s own admission that the weather was the coldest Montana had seen in along time, when he left approximately one hundred women and children suffering from smallpox in the extreme cold without shelter, food, or transportation.

Investigation of the Bear River Massacre

Questions surrounding the Baker Massacre and pressure from reformers in the east prompted the House of Representatives to launch an investigation on March 3, 1870. Later General William Sherman (March 12, 1870) remarked on the report submitted by Baker: “Colonel Baker followed the instructions of his immediate commander, Colonel
De Trobriand, but he does not report in detail, as is proper and usual, the sex and kind of Indians actually left dead at the camp on the Marias.” (Sherman 1870) In the end, General Sherman (March 24, 1870) found that Baker and his troops had done nothing wrong, that they had stopped firing immediately and given quarter to the men and children; he also found it “absurd that it was reported that there were only thirteen warriors killed, and that the balance were women and children, more or less afflicted with smallpox” (Sherman 1870).

Sherman’s ending remarks were in response to W.A. Pease, the Blackfeet Indian Agent, who noted that only fifteen of the dead Indians were men between the ages of twelve and thirty-seven (Ewers 1958:251). The Blackfoot who were there that day, reported there were fifteen men, ninety women, and fifty children killed (Schultz 1988:302). Later George ManyPenny (1880:289) would reinvestigate the issue and support Pease’s figures. Based upon the reports of both Pease and Baker, he estimated there were thirty-seven lodges each having approximately six inhabitants for a total population of 222; of these, only thirty-seven would have been of fighting age (ManyPenny 1880:289). After learning of the massacre, humanitarians in the east were sympathetic, but most Montanans were not, as was apparent in the book, The History of Montana (1885:131-137) where the author stated Baker had taught the Indians in Montana a good lesson and “one of the most necessary punishments” “in the annals of border warfare.” According to Hana Samek (1987:13) the result of the massacre was that, “This military action ended forever the Blackfoot threat to the settlement of Montana.”
The Blackfoot had been mercilessly attacked for resisting the encroachment of United States citizens and were victims of Blackfoot political issues. Had the United States Government fulfilled their treaty obligations to provide protection to both the Indians and the settlers as promised, the need for a military expedition of this magnitude would not have been regarded as necessary. General William Sherman, March 24, 1870, wrote about the conflicting role of the army in keeping the peace in Montana territory while vindicating Baker's actions “The army can not resist the tide of emigration that is following toward these Indian lands, nor is it our province to determine the question of boundaries. When called on, we must, to the extent of our power, protect the settlers, and, on proper demand, we have to protect the Indian lands against the intrusion of the settlers” (Sherman 1870). He concluded: “Thus we are placed between two fires, a most unpleasant dilemma, from which we can not escape, and we must sustain the officers on the spot who fulfill their orders” (Sherman 1870). Congressman Eldridge of Wisconsin later remarked: “If they are the wards of the government, then we who are taking care of them are the most barbarous people on earth. We are the worst guardians ever heard of, in thus, sacrificing the wards entrusted to our care” (Bennett 1982:133). As brutal and horrendous as this attack was the tragedy that followed was worse.

The Policy Shift

The United States government had initially removed the Office of Indian Affairs from the War Department in 1849, and placed it in the Department of Interior in an attempt to stop agency corruption (Samek 1987:18). However, the corruption continued.
Because of the agency corruption and conditions on the reservations, there had been a
push to return the Indian Service back to the War Department until 1870. After the
massacre of Heavy Runner’s band, humanitarians in the East put pressure on Congress to
reform the Indian Service, but the massacre ended any hope of the army controlling
Indian affairs. As a result of the massacre, President Ulysses Grant formulated his “peace
policy” in which he assigned each Indian agency to a Christian denomination in an
attempt to stop the corruption (Prucha 1976: 50). Each Christian denomination would
then appoint its agent; President Grant had hoped that men of Christian values would not
be as corrupt in their administration of Indian affairs, while providing an example to the
Indians of Christian values (Keller 1983:33). The Blackfoot people, who had resisted the
encroachment of the settlers and paid dearly with their lives for it, now faced another type
of attack from the United States Government. They would enter an era where, separated
from their land and resources, they would be dependant upon the government to supply
their survival needs.
CHAPTER FOUR:

RESERVATION ERA 1871-1895: STARVATION AND ASSIMILATION

The reservation era created an environment of desperation forcing the Blackfoot people to enter into a survival mode. They were now confined to the reservation, and were unable to travel their traditional homeland to utilize its plants and animals for food. Restrained in a small area, the Blackfoot people quickly depleted the available resources and became dependant on the Methodist agent they had been assigned to ensure they were adequately supplied with food. Agent corruption, assimilation policy, and the settler's economic interests ensured that the Blackfoot would starve during this period.

Map 4.1: Map of the Blackfoot Confederacy's Territory as defined in the Treaty of 1851. Adapted from The Blackfeet Five View Points. Created by Viny Kennedy.

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Reduction of the Blackfoot Homeland

As cattlemen, miners, and settlers pushed into Montana, they clamored for the Indian lands. They claimed the Indians were not utilizing vast amounts of the land reserved for them in the treaty of 1855. After the ending of treaty making in 1871, the President of the United States responded to the settler’s requests and began issuing executive orders which reduced the borders of the reservation. In 1873, the southern boundary was moved to the Missouri and Sun Rivers, and the eastern boundary was moved to the Dakota line (Kennedy 1978:11). Another executive order in 1874 moved the southern boundary to the Marias River and Birch Creek (Kennedy 1978:11). Also in 1874, an act was passed by congress which established a reservation for the Blackfoot Confederation in common with the Gros Ventre, Assinnaboinies, and Mountain Crow which consisted of approximately 31,250 square miles (Ewers 1944:46). On July 9, 1874 the Commissioner of Indian Affairs informed the Blackfeet Agency that the boundary change had taken effect immediately upon the approval of the President (Smith 1874). According to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs report dated November 1, 1874, the Indians were complaining of the action: “By this action a large tract, formerly roamed
over by these Indians, has been surrendered for settlement, but this being done without their knowledge, is declared by them to be great hardship, depriving them of some of their best hunting along the Teton” (Smith 1874). After moving the boundary, the land that had been taken was opened for settlement; however, the Blackfoot received no compensation for it (Ewers 1944:47). With their territory reduced in size and their resources diminishing, the Blackfoot people went in search of food.

In Search of Food

As soon as the 1873 reservation borders were established, it became apparent that there would not be enough food for the Blackfoot people within them. Cattlemen who now grazed their cattle in the area once occupied by the Blackfoot people began to report their outrage at the Blackfoot who began killing their cattle for food. Lieutenant Colonel C.C. Gilbert with the 7th Infantry wrote, “The game is rapidly diminishing and the temptation for them to kill and eat calves of the ranchmen becomes irresistible” (Gilbert 1874). By the late 1870s the bison herds were becoming more elusive, and by 1879 the bison had disappeared from the Canadian plains (Raczka 1979:69). The Blackfoot people who had been in the north when the Canadian border was established now moved south to participate in the last big bison hunt in the Judith Basin (Samek 1953: 40; Raczka 1979:69). As a result of the loss of the bison in Canada, Hana Samek (1953: 40) estimated that at least a thousand Blackfoot people died between 1879-1881.

The creation of the Canadian border divided the Blackfoot Confederacy. In 1877, Treaty Seven was signed by the Siksika, Kainai, and Apatohsipikani at the Blackfoot
Crossing in Alberta, Canada (Hungry Wolf 1989:13). This treaty established the Canadian government’s authority over two of the tribes of the confederacy, but more importantly it split the Pikani into two groups. Now the Pikani, Piegan, in Canada would be called the Apatohsipikani, Northern Blackfeet, and the Pikani in the United States would be called the Amsskaapipikani, Southern Blackfeet (Glenbow Museum 2001:3).

Although divided and under the jurisdiction of separate countries, the Blackfoot people continued to cross the border to maintain their societal ties and receive their annuities (Hungry Wolf 1989:13). Based upon the treaty relations, the United States government’s reports continued to list all three tribes until the late 1890s. Because of this, the term Blackfoot people will continue to be used to represent the all of the tribes of the confederacy.

The Blackfoot who remained in the United States returned to their traditional hunting grounds. In 1879, White Calf, a band leader, led a group of approximately 100 lodges to the Judith Basin to spend the winter (Stewart 1921: 21). On January 10, 1880, Thomas C. Power, a settler and government contractor, telegraphed the Commissioner of Indian Affairs claiming that the Piegans were “roaming through the Judith country, killing the stock and that other valuable property is in danger of being destroyed” (Power 1880). Colonial Ruger sent orders to the commanding officer at Fort Benton to go to the Judith Country and return the Indians to their reservation (Ruger 1880). Later Ruger reported that White Calf had informed the commanding officer at Fort Benton that “his people could not subsist in the vicinity of the agency unless supplied with full rations” (Ruger 1880). Relying on this report, Ruger instructed Blackfeet Agent John Young to “find additional means for feeding the Indians attached to your agency” (Ruger 1880).
Ruger wanted the hunting parties to remain on the reservation as an increase of cattle on
the Judith in the summer months would mean more complaints (Ruger 1880).

On April 8, 1880, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs advised Agent Young that
“hereafter, you will use every effort to prevent your Indians from leaving their
reservation for any purpose whatever” (Commissioner of Indian Affairs 1880). As a
result of complaints against the Indians killing cattle, Colonial Ruger on April 16, 1880,
advised Agent Young not to grant any permits to the Indians to leave the reservation, and
ordered that all of the Indians belonging to his agency would be returned to it (Ruger
1880). First Lieutenant Hanney of the 3rd Infantry was sent from Fort Shaw to investigate
the allegations and to return the Indians to the reservation (Hanney 1880). After
investigating the cattle incidents, Hanney went to the agency to check on the condition of
the Indians there. He reported, “I ascertained to my own satisfaction that they were in a
state of destitution: the putrid meat of cattle which had died from disease, or exposure on
the prairie, during the past winter, was found in their lodges and most of the Indians gave
that as their main source of food supply” (Hanney 1880). The Indians now separated
from their mode of production, were forced to endure the hardships of the assimilation
policy on their reservation.
Assimilation Policy

Now restricted to the reservation without an available food source, the Blackfoot were subjected to an assimilation policy, which was enacted to transform them into farmers and later by the twentieth century wage laborers, by first eradicating their belief of communal access to resources and then incorporating them into the United States economic system. Provisions had been made to buy farm implements and provide training to the Indians to teach them how to farm. Beginning in 1876, Agent Young tried to make the agency farm successful by moving it to a different location on Badger Creek and in 1879 he had a small irrigation ditch dug to supply the water needed in the dry climate (Wessel 1975:44; Hungry Wolf 1989:13). However, A.B. Hamilton (1878) noted that “it is so stony that the land cannot be cultivated.” He went further to say that he believed the motivating factor in moving the agency was to make money for the agent who had received money from the contractors (Hamilton 1878). In Agent Young’s Annual Report of 1883, he claimed the Indians had been making steady progress in their
agricultural endeavors (Young 1883). However, investigators Howard and Benedict in the same year found the farm to be not properly tended as the agency farmer was busy three days of the week butchering and issuing rations (Benedict 1883; Howard 1883). The agency machinery was weathered and in disrepair, and the Indians had only 40 acres tilled with only half planted (Benedict 1883; Howard 1883). Land on the Blackfeet reservation was not suited for farming; instead it had wonderful grazing conditions, so the emphasis was shifted from farming to raising stock animals, but the effort would not begin until after a preventable disaster (Denman 1968:102).

Cattle

After the cattle were introduced and distributed in the early 1880's, the Indians used the cattle for a food source instead of an investment (Denman 1968:102). In July of 1883, Inspector Benedict noted that the property returns claimed there to be 750 head of cattle, but his count was only 145 animals (Benedict 1883). Agent Young, in his Annual Report for 1883, claimed that, in order to stop the slaughter of the agency beef a night guard had been established to protect the herd (Young 1883). Because of the lack of food on the reservation, the Indians were forced to eat their cattle, their potential avenue to self-support.

However, the reservation’s perfect conditions for cattle grazing had not escaped the notice of Montana cattlemen who were illegally grazing their cattle on the reservation. On June 28, 1883, agent John Young wrote to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs requesting permission to exact a toll for cattle entering the reservation, and
instruction on the regulations for cattle trespass and how to enforce them (Young 1883).

Had Agent Young pursued this avenue of revenue, perhaps the Blackfeet Agency would have had money to purchase food; instead, the Blackfoot people, who suffered from the want of food, were now forced to watch as outside cattle fattened on reservation grass (Foley 1980:70).

**Education**

To execute the United States’ goal of having the Indians enter the dominate society as the working class, schools were created to teach the future generations of Blackfoot the values of a Christian work ethic and skills with which to perform menial jobs. In 1884, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs boasted, “There are also several hundred more Indian children in industrial, agricultural, and mechanical schools, fitting themselves to become useful, intelligent citizens, than there were twelve months since” (Price 1884). However, on the Blackfeet Reservation, investigation reports of the agency schools found them to be lacking in their ability to transform the children into wage workers.

Investigator Howard (1883) claimed the Children attended the school mainly for the food. In an inspection report dated July 26, 1883, Indian Inspector Benedict (1883) asserted that the schools were a failure as he could find only five children who spoke English, and they had learned it elsewhere. The failure he blamed on the agency teachers, both daughters of Agent Young. The findings of the investigators greatly conflicted with Agent John Young’s yearly report of 1883, in which he heralded the day
school’s achievement claiming that it was a great success with more than 100 children in attendance (Young 1883). Inspector Howard (1883) noted that the agency boarding school had closed based upon the interference of the Catholics who had been the Christian presence on the reservation before the agency was assigned to the Methodists during President Grant’s “peace policy.” Eventually, other boarding schools were established to remove the children from their homes in the hope that they would forget their traditional teachings.

On October 29, 1884, Commissioner H. Price (1884) wrote to Blackfeet Agent Allen ordering him to gather twenty-five Blackfoot children to send to the Indian training school at Lawrence, Kansas. He believed it would be easy to get the consent of the families because of the lack of food on the reservation (Price 1884). Consent was not easy to gain as the Blackfoot people held their children close (Black 1960: 31). The representatives of the schools would stop at nothing to get the children into attendance.

In 1881, a Catholic Priest Father Imoda from the St. Peters Mission was accused of abducting three Blackfoot boys from the reservation to attend school (Dryden 1881). The United States Attorney took the mission to court seeking custody of the boys; however, the Supreme Court of Montana Territory decided that the federal government did not have the ability to claim custody of the children and deferred to their parents (Dryden 1881). Agent Young and District Attorney Dryden believed this ruling would be detrimental to the functioning of the reservation schools as they now would have to get parental permission to force the children to attend school (Dryden 1881). After the court had decided that the Blackfoot people had retained custody of the children, the agent had
to resort to withholding rations from Blackfoot families until they agreed to send their children to school (Black 1960: 32).

The United States, now caught in a guardian-ward relationship with the Indians, saw the schools as a potential way to assimilate Indian children into United States society. Assimilation into United States society as wage laborers would alleviate the United States government from having to financially support the future generations of Indians. Commissioner Price stated this goal in his 1884 Report to the Secretary of Interior, "Taken altogether, an impartial view of the situation warrants the belief that some time in the near future it is fair to presume that, with the aid of such industrial, agricultural, and mechanical schools as are now being carried on, the Indian will able to care for himself, and no longer a burden but a help to the Government" (Price 1884).

**Hunger**

The longer the Blackfoot were confined to the reservation, with no available resources, the more they became dependant on the United States Government to supply their food. In a letter dated, July 12, 1881, the Blackfeet Agent John Young (1881) requested an increase in the food supplies for the agency in which he told the Commissioner that the Indians were not going hunting because the last year’s hunt was a failure and, without the increase in food supplies, the Indians would starve. In 1883, when Inspector Howard visited the Blackfeet Reservation, he said, "The Indians are suffering from much want. Nothing for them to subsist upon but what is furnished by the Government" (Howard 1883).
At this critical time for the Blackfoot, when they were dependant on the government for subsistence, rations were reduced to encourage the Indians to become self-supporting farmers. John Young wrote of the Blackfoot reaction to this on August 15, 1882, when he requested army personnel to be present at the next issue day to see the reaction and condition of the Blackfoot people out of fear that they would blame him and rebel (Young 1882). Compounding problems created by the ration reductions were the unfulfilled contracts for food.

**Contracts for Supplies**

Congress was responsible to appropriate money for the purchase of annuity goods that were contracted to individual companies to fulfill. Congress was supposed to approve and monitor these contracts to ensure compliance. However, as Inspector Howard in November of 1883 noted, the annuity goods purchased for 1880-1881 had not yet arrived at the agency, and, because of the severity of the winters in Montana, they probably would not arrive in time to be of much help to the Indians (Howard 1883). He recommended the goods be shipped by railroad to Helena instead of Fort Benton. Bypassing Fort Benton had not happened before because the people of Fort Benton, who had become rich from the transportation contracts with both the United States and Canadian Governments, had considerable clout in the politics of the Montana Territory. They had utilized this clout to keep the contracts in Fort Benton.

Often these contracts were not fulfilled, but, when they did arrive, they were in poor condition, short weighted, or were goods the Indians could not use. In 1882, a
contractor from Fort Benton, T.C. Power, had provided a flour shipment that was rejected by Lt. Stouch from Fort Shaw who also noted that earlier shipments were short weighted (Foley 1980:50). Local contractors were not the only problem, in January 8, 1884, during a time of great starvation, a shipment of bacon arrived from H.O. Armour of New York about which Agent Young wrote: “It smelled so offensive that I had all opened at once and found a large part unsound and full of maggots that I appointed a board of survey from my employees, Dr. Gillette, C. Phemister and B.R. Fowler, who after careful inspection rejected 4737 pounds as totally unfit for human food” (Young 1884). Young also noted that the shipment was short weighted. With the shipments of food arriving short or unfit for consumption (if they arrived at all), the supply of food became of critical concern.

Agency Fraud

Agency corruption compounded the lack of food on the reservation. Reports by Inspectors Howard (1883) and Benedict (1883) claimed that employees issued ration tickets on the orders of the issue clerk, and beef and flour was not measured at rationing time to the Indians or when rations were delivered to the employees of the agency. At the same time, fish, game, and such furnished to the agent and the agency employees by the Indians were paid for out of the agency supplies (Benedict 1883, Howard 1883). The employee payments and corruption of employees might also explain the discrepancy in the number of Indians reported to be at the agency. Agent Young (1883) had reported there were 3,300 Indians, but in the same year Inspector Howard (1883) claimed there
were only 1200-1300. Agent Young would have had to inflate the population numbers to receive additional funding with which to purchase the extra supplies.

The employees of the agency exploited their positions to further their own interests. They utilized the resources on the reservation by having their horses and cattle graze on Indian lands, and Agent Young grew grain for his own food (Benedict 1883; Howard 1883). The people designated to look out for the welfare of the Blackfoot placed their economic interests ahead of their obligations.

**Starvation**

Although the lack of food had created hunger on the reservation since 1874, absolute starvation culminated in the winter of 1883-1884. This winter has been called the starvation winter of the Blackfeet by many different scholars. The reason for the great loss of Blackfoot lives has been attributed to the depletion of the bison on the plains, and the inaction of Congress to appropriate funds. G.R. McLaughlin (1970:52) attributed all of the Blackfoot starvation on the disappearance of the bison the northwestern plains. Others, such as Helen B. West (1958) and Joel Overholser (1978), place the responsibility on Congress by creating an image of Agent Young as a loyal dedicated agent who urgently requested aid for his dying wards but was not heard by Congress. However, to establish the cause based upon one factor is difficult. The Blackfoot starved because of several factors that merged at the same time during the winter of 1883-1884.
The winter of 1883-1884 was one of despair as the Indians who were starving fought a long battle against death. As early as July 26, 1883, the Blackfoot were suffering from starvation (Benedict 1883). These conditions worsened during the winter. Upon recommendation by Inspectors Howard and Benedict, Agent Young tendered his resignation, and Reuben A. Allen took control of the reservation on April 1, 1884. In Allen’s first yearly report he spoke of the condition of the Blackfeet people: “When I entered upon the duties of agent I found the Indians in a deplorable condition. Their supplies had been limited and many of them were gradually dying of starvation. I visited a large number of their tents and cabins the second day after they had received their weekly rations, looked through them carefully and found no provisions, except in two instances. All bore marks of suffering from lack of food, but the little children seemed to have suffered the most; they were so emaciated that it did not seem possible for them to live long, and many of them have since passed away” (Allen 1884). In an attempt to
keep more people from starving, Agent Allen issued the bacon Young had previously condemned (Allen 1884). After the winter months, conditions on the reservation did not improve; Agent Allen reported that the Blackfeet became so desperate for food that that in June and July the Indians stripped the bark off of the trees to eat (Allen 1884). According to Inspector M.R. Barr (September 22, 1884), no record was kept of the deaths from the lack of food. He noted that the doctor’s notes only recorded four deaths, but he was convinced there were several more. The Blackfoot say that the number of people who died that winter is at least 600 (Kipp 2005).

People in the East knew of the extreme suffering conditions of the Blackfoot as attested to in the report of 1884 by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs: “The newspapers of the country have been full of complaints for months past, because certain Indians at the extreme northern agencies were suffering for food, and by inference the cause of this suffering was attributable to neglect on the part of this office; while on the contrary the suffering of these Indians for lack of food, was attributable directly and entirely first, to the fact that the appropriations for them were not made until three months after they should have been made, and second, that when made, the amount allowed was less than was asked for by this office, and consequently insufficient for the absolute wants of these Indians” (Commissioner of Indian Affairs 1884).

Although the commissioner placed the blame onto congress’ lack of a funding, it was the capitalist system, under which the United States government operated, that had removed the Blackfoot people from their resources and tried to incorporate them into a privatized economic system as wage laborers, that had created an environment devoid of food. Caught in the desperation of their situation, the Blackfoot people began a vicious
cycle of entering into agreements with the United States government for land cessions to ensure the continuation of annuity goods and services they had now become dependant upon.

**Land in Exchange for Food**

Conditions on the reservations continued to be detrimental to the Indians. The Blackfoot knew that a lack of annuities would bring about starvation. In 1888, the Blackfoot entered into an agreement which left them approximately 1,760,000 acres of land; by 1890, only 520 acres of that had been cultivated (Report of the Secretary of Interior 1890). The appropriations from this agreement would last ten years, giving the Blackfoot that short time to become self-supporting (Grinnell 1888).

At the urging of United States citizens, who believed the Rocky Mountains contained mineral wealth, the United States negotiated an agreement with the Blackfoot to cede their interests in the mountains (Kipp 2002:31). To ensure their physical survival, the Blackfoot signed the agreement to cede some of their most sacred lands on the Rocky Mountain front in 1896 (Blood 2005). In this agreement the Blackfoot people would retain access to the area for hunting, gathering of plants, and wood harvesting (Henderson 1990; First Charger 2005). They were paid one million five hundred thousand dollars, for relinquishing the western portion of their reservation. The money was to be paid over a ten year period beginning when the last payment was made for the 1888 treaty (Kennedy 1978:14). However, after no significant amounts of minerals were found there,
the land’s intrinsic value was realized, and a portion of it was designated “Glacier National Park” on May 11, 1910 (Kipp 2002:27).

The Blackfoot people’s relationship with the United States Government had been one of loss. They lost their independence, their land, and some their very lives. During this time, one more factor helped to facilitate the rapid decline of the Blackfoot people into complete dependency on the United States Government. Removal from their traditional territory meant the loss of access to resources that had kept the Blackfoot people healthy, and confinement to the reservation had created an environment of overcrowding and unsanitary conditions. Combined, these factors created an atmosphere that allowed diseases to swiftly move through the Blackfoot people.
CHAPTER FIVE:

BLACKFOOT ILLNESS

Illness was a major factor in the reduction of the Blackfoot people to complete dependency on the United States government. As a result of the colonization of America, the Blackfoot people had endured epidemics of European diseases which had resulted in an enormous amount of population loss before they entered into a formal agreement with the United States government. After the Treaty of 1855, military confinement and resource depletion on the reservation created an environment which promoted illness among the Blackfoot people. Traditionally the Blackfoot people were mobile and traveled their homeland based upon their knowledge of the plant and animal species of the area. They utilized their knowledge of the plants to create medicines they had used for centuries to remain healthy. Confinement to the reservation cut off their access to these plants and created population densities and unsanitary conditions. This allowed disease to move through the undernourished Blackfoot people. The illnesses that afflicted the Blackfoot people before and after contact helped to solidify their domination by the United States.
Table 5.1: Blackfoot Medicinal Plant Use:

- Mountain Sorrel was used to treat scurvy and ringworm (Fish 2000).
- Labrador tea was used as a mild laxative, and to rid the body of parasites and mites (Willard 1992:166). The leaves could be dried and smoked; in this form it became a mild narcotic used to treat coughs, colds, and bronchial and pulmonary infections (Willard 1992:166).
- Arnica was used as a topical treatment for the relief of sore muscles and ligaments (Willard 1992:203).
- Cattails were applied as dressings for burns (Johnston 1970:306, Willard 1992:42).
- Yellow Violet was used as a mild laxative and a sedative (Willard 1992:141, Fish 2005).
- False Harbor Seal was dried and snorted to relieve colds (Fish 2005).
- Clover was used to relieve hormone problems (Fish 2005).
- Cow Parsnip is made into a tea that relieves the symptoms of arthritis and the digestive problems such as nausea, gas and hernias (Johnston 1970:317, Willard 1992: 153). The roots and seeds were used to stop the effects of a spastic colon and headaches (Fish 2005).
- Wild Parsley was used to treat coughs, colds, hay fever, bronchitis, influenza, and pneumonia (Willard 1992:155). The root was dried and smoked for lung problems (Fish 2005).
- Autumn Root was used for treating cold sores, the flu, and stomach ailments (Fish 2005).
- Glacier Lilies were used as a laxative, to treat ulcers and as a form of birth control (Willard 1992:51).
- Usnea is a moss that grows in the trees on the east side of the Rocky Mountains; the Blackfoot used it as an antibiotic, because it has the same properties as penicillin (Fish 2005).
- Rattlesnake Plantain was used to heal joints, bones, and ligaments (Fish 2005).
- Oregon grape was used as an antibiotic (Fish 2005). It also could have been used as a laxative and stimulant (Willard 1992:98). The bark of the root can be used for urinary complaints (Willard 1992:98). Externally the roots were applied to wounds as an antiseptic (Fish 2005).
- Sweet Cicely was used as a laxative, and to treat digestive disorders (Johnston 1970:317, Willard 1992:155). It was also to aid in childbirth (Fish 2005).
- Valerian was used as pain reliever for headaches and insomnia (Willard 1992:195).
- The Snowberry was used to treat stomach and intestinal problems (Willard 1992:192).
- Elderberry was used for the treatment of colds, jaundice, epilepsy and swollen joints (Willard 1992:191).
- Alum Root was used to stop diarrhea (Johnston 1970:313, Willard 1992:105). It also will stop the bleeding in small blood vessels (Fish 2005).
- Alder can be made into a tea to treat tuberculosis (Hart 1976:5).
- Cottonwood Leaves are a source of a natural pain reliever (Fish 2005).
- Horehound is an antiviral good for colds and flue, and it is safe for children (Fish 2005).
- White Willow is a plant that has the same properties as aspirin (Willard 1992:66).
- Peppermint was a used as a form of birth control (Fish 2005).
- Gooseberry was used to treat colds, kidney ailments and uterine problems (Fish 2005).
- Loco Weed, which is poisonous, was used in small doses as a heart stimulant (Fish 2005).
- Yarrow was used to stop bleeding (Fish 2005).
- Juniper had been used as a form of birth control (Fish 2005).
- Puccoon root was used to make a tea as a form of birth control; it can cause permanent to temporary sterility (Willard 1992:231).
- Willow was used because it had an aspirin effect (Long Standing Bear Chief 1992:43)
Traditional Medicinal Plant Uses

Plants were a key part of the Blackfoot people's diet (Glenbow Museum 2001:49). The roots and berries supplied key vitamins and minerals which helped to keep the Blackfoot people healthy (Glenbow Museum 2001:49). However, when the people did get sick, there were a variety of plants in the area with which to treat illness.

The Blackfoot generally used the roots, leaves, bark, or twigs, but sometimes they utilized the flower or seeds of the plants to create medicines. Table 5.1 is a list of the plants utilized by the Blackfoot people for medicinal purposes. It is not comprehensive, but it does represent the knowledge the Blackfoot people had of their environment.

Utilizing their knowledge of the plants found in the traditional homeland had kept the Blackfoot people healthy, but nothing could have prepared their bodies for the diseases brought by the colonizers. These diseases had taken a toll on the Blackfoot population even before they had entered into a formal relationship with the United States government. Immense population loss brought about by the waves of diseases had weakened Blackfoot society, which helped to facilitate the process of their domination by the United States Government (Campbell 1987:16).

European Disease

Waves of European diseases decimated the Blackfoot populations in the late 1700's to 1893. Linea Sundstrom (1997:308) estimated that epidemics had occurred on the northern plains in intervals that averaged approximately 5.7 years. Research on the
The demographic effects of diseases during the pre-contact era on the plains is lacking and the historical documentation is limited (Campbell 1989: v, Owsley 1992, Dobyns 1993:273, Sundstrom 1997:305). Although accurate and available, past investigations have ignored the information recorded by Indian people in the form of pictographs on tanned hides and later paper, called “winter counts” (Sundstrom 1997:307). The pre-reservation portion of this investigation will utilize Blackfoot people’s “winter counts” to estimate and describe the tremendous affects they had on population numbers.

Measles was the oldest documented European disease which afflicted the Blackfoot people in 1781, and killed one-half of the inhabitants on the plains (Raczka 1979:24, Hungry Wolf 1989:9). Scarcely had the people recovered from the first bout with measles, when they were struck by what was recorded as a coughing epidemic (measles) in 1819, which killed another one third of the Blackfoot people (Hungry Wolf 1989:9). The last epidemic of measles was recorded in 1893; a Blackfoot winter count documented it killed many Blackfoot children in Canada (Raczka 1979:74). The new diseases brought devastation in cycles with one closely following another.

In 1836, diphtheria killed many of the Blackfoot children (Dempsey 1965:9). During 1864-1865, an outbreak of scarlet fever killed approximately eleven hundred Blackfoot people (Raczka 1979:56, Hungry Wolf 1989:12). Yet no disease had been as damaging to Blackfoot populations as smallpox.

Estimates attribute over ten thousand Blackfoot people died from smallpox during the nineteenth century. The first documented epidemic of smallpox occurred in 1837 and resulted in the death of over six thousand Blackfoot; this represents nearly two-thirds of all their people (Raczka 1979:46; Hungry Wolf 1989:10). Paul Carlson estimated the
total loss of life from this epidemic may have been to up to eight thousand (Carlson 1982:132). It was after this catastrophe, the Indians named the area “Many Died” because of the great loss of the people there; later it was called Fort Whoop-up (Dempsey 1965:15). Smallpox again struck the Blackfoot people in 1845 (Hungry Wolf 1989:10). The last documented large scale assault of smallpox on the Blackfoot people occurred in 1868-1870, when it decimated their population by killing over two thousand people (Dempsey 1965:15; Raczka 1979:60; Keller 1984:56; Hungry Wolf 1989:12). With such large changes in the population numbers brought about by disease, societal change would have been swift and dramatic for the Blackfoot.

Table 5.2 is a summary of the epidemic diseases that swept through the Blackfoot people. The information contained in the table is the consolidation of the winter counts recorded by Bad Head, a member of the Blood Tribe, Mountain Chief, a member of the Southern Piegan Tribe, and Bull Plume, a member of the Northern Piegan Tribe (Dempsey 1965; Raczka 1979; Hungry Wolf 1989).

This population loss was compounded by the military attack in 1870, which occurred at the same time as the last wave of smallpox. The population loss, illness, and military attack overwhelmed the Blackfoot and solidified their confinement on the reservation which created their future dependency on the United States Government. This dependency created an environment which resulted in the loss of over six hundred Blackfoot people to starvation, as well as one in which illness was likely to spread. During their confinement to the reservation, the Blackfoot people were subjected to an oppressive assimilation policy which was an attempt to expunge their traditional way of life.
Table 5.2: Epidemic Disease

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Disease</th>
<th>Recorded in Winter Counts</th>
<th>Population Loss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1781</td>
<td>Measles</td>
<td>The Blackfoot people were infected when they raided a Shoshone camp.</td>
<td>One half of all people on the plains died.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1819</td>
<td>Measles</td>
<td>One third of all Blackfoot people died.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1836</td>
<td>Diphtheria</td>
<td>Recorded as many children died.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1837-1838</td>
<td>Smallpox</td>
<td>The disease was recorded for both years, as it started in the summer of 1837 and ended in the spring of 1838. The Blackfoot people contracted it when a steamboat arrived in Fort Benton with infected people.</td>
<td>It was estimated that approximately 6,000-8,000 Blackfoot people died or two-thirds of their population.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1845</td>
<td>Smallpox</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1864</td>
<td>Scarlet Fever</td>
<td></td>
<td>Approximately 1,100 Blackfoot people died.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1868-1870</td>
<td>Smallpox</td>
<td>The disease was transmitted to the Blackfoot people when a steamboat arrived in Fort Benton.</td>
<td>Approximately 2,000 Blackfoot people died.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>Measles</td>
<td>This epidemic is recorded as many children died.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Assimilation Policy: Effects on Health

Part of the assimilation policy that is seldom overlooked is the placement of doctors on the reservations. Physicians were to provide medical care to the Indians in an attempt to separate them from their traditional healing practices; they were also supposed to teach the children about hygiene in schools as well as being an example of an upstanding man
of Christian values (Pruncha 1976:201). However, the agency physician assigned to the Blackfeet was not. Agent Young in letters dated August 1, and August 29, 1882 requested an immediate investigation of Blackfeet agency physician, Dr. Hughy, for crimes of adultery with a Blackfeet woman and drunkenness (Young 1882). Agent Young wanted him immediately removed from the reservation, claiming he was a bad influence on the civilization of the Blackfeet people (Young 1882). Far more devastating to the Blackfoot people than the crimes of Dr. Hughy was the policy to abolish traditional healing.

According to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, in his Annual Report for 1883, “The evil influence of the Native ‘Medicine Men’ is one of the greatest obstacles to be overcome” (Commissioner of Indian Affairs 1883). Traditionally a “medicine man” was a person who combined herbs and spiritual energy to heal the sick. The medicinal properties of the plants were combined with song, drum, and ceremony, which were performed by the healer to channel the powers they had received from a spiritual being to cure the sick (Long Standing Bear Chief 1992:15). Healers held great social status in Blackfoot society, and were often called upon by the political leaders to offer advice in the decision making process or were leaders themselves. By viewing the Indian’s healing ritual as heathenish and by ignoring their intricate understanding and use of the plants in the area, government policy not only doomed them to a life of illness, but also continued to further degrade the Blackfoot political system (Campbell 1987:102). While being confined to the reservation, not only were the Blackfoot unable to collect and use their medicinal plants, but they were now completely dependant upon the government to supply their nutritional needs.
Undernourishment and Illness

Beginning in the 1870’s and moving through the reservation era, food was scarce. Rations were distributed when they were available. However, to compel the Blackfoot to be farmers, the amount of rations given to an individual had been reduced by one-half. This, combined with the fact that the land on which the reservation had been established was not suited for farming, left the Indians under a constant condition of hunger. With their bodies malnourished, illnesses quickly grasped them (Sundstrom 1997:317).

In his 1871 Annual Report, Blackfoot Agent Jesse Armitage noted, “During the summer and at present the sanitary condition of the Indians, with the exception of a few prevalent cases of colds and other transient ailments, is good” (Armitage 1871). As the years progressed, Blackfoot health worsened. After reviewing the sanitary reports for the Blackfeet Agency, there was a shift in the types of illness encountered on the reservation.

Smallpox, chickenpox and measles, which had decimated Blackfoot populations before the reservation era, occurred infrequently and without the severity they once had. Gregory Campbell (1987:102) noted, “Once Native Americans were confined to reservations; however, because of vaccinations and other factors, smallpox ceased to be a significant factor in Native American disease mortality.” For the Blackfoot this would apply also for measles and chickenpox. In the 1894 Annual Report of the Secretary of Interior, the agency physician noted that there was one case of smallpox at the agency which had not spread because the inflicted person had been isolated and a guard stationed outside of the residence to ensure that no contact was made between the infected person and anyone else (Martin 1894:164). The report also stated that there had been several
cases of measles and chickenpox, but they too had been contained in the same fashion (Martin 1894:164).

During the 1883-1884 starvation winter, medical treatment was given to 1615 people. Considering that the agency population was approximately 2300 people, this number represented a rapid acceleration into illness. Of those 1615 people, 467 had diphtheria (Secretary of Interior Report 1884). However, the main illness of the reservation era was tuberculosis.

Tuberculosis was probably the largest contributor to Native American mortality during the reservation period (Campbell 1987:105). In 1894, fifty-nine Blackfoot succumbed to the disease (Martin 1894:164). Many of these deaths were infants and young children. Gregory Campbell (1987:106) noted: “The risk of developing tuberculosis is highest in children under the age of three.” Tuberculosis is a disease that began in the reservation era and continued to haunt the Blackfoot people through time.

Other diseases were bothersome during the reservation era but not that deadly. Incidence of cholera remained low for the Blackfoot with usually only two or three cases a year. Diseases such as dysentery, bronchitis, and diarrhea, were present, but they did not have a huge effect on the general population.

However, the Blackfoot people still experienced outbreaks of infectious diseases. In 1886, there were 652 cases of conjunctivitis, a highly contagious eye infection (Secretary of Interior Report 1886). This outbreak was result of poor hygiene, poverty, all associated with the crowded living conditions (Benenson 1981:258-359). Influenza hit a high point in 1894 when there were forty-three cases reported (Secretary of Interior Report 1894). The general health of the Blackfoot had deteriorated, with the children
being affected the most during the years from 1855 enabling the United States to gain greater control over them.

Blackfoot Children and Illness

The children who were born during the reservation era or who were in their early stages of development suffered the ravages of ill-health. In 1894, the agency physician noted that many of the children were too sick to go to school (Martin 1894:164). However, by 1896, the children's illness had progressed, as was noted by the agency physician when he reported that he was so busy treating their diseases that his presence was required every month of the year (Matson 1896:183). The children's rapidly declining health was compounded by the conditions of the schools they were forced to attend.

During this time, an inspection was completed by Inspector McConnell, in which he was distressed by the sanitary conditions of the boarding school (Wessman 1975:96). George Martin (1894) the agency physician responded to those concerns in his report. Martin (1894) noted that the children had been sick and that an agency hospital was needed to not only treat the sick, but also to provide an environment with nourishment and protection from the elements. During this time of ill-health among the children at the agency school, the children were also subjected to rigorous labor.

The Superintendent of schools at the agency wrote in 1897, "No one would think for a moment that white children of the same age could do the work these children are
required to last year” (Matson 1897:178). Poor nutrition and physical taxation had accelerated the illness of the Blackfoot children, and often resulted in their death.

Agency physician Martin (1894:164) viewed the health of the Blackfoot children as a hindrance to the goals of the assimilation policy stating that: “Many of the little ones that die now, had they proper care at the critical times during their childhood, might live to be healthy men and women; and since all the advancement of these people in civilization must be through their children, the health of the children becomes a vital part of the Indian Question.” He gave no recognition to the United States assimilation policy which created the poverty and resulting ill-health of the Blackfoot children. He simply viewed their deaths as a hindrance which had caused a delay in the United State’s plan for the Blackfoot people to become self-sufficient.

The diseases brought by the colonizers had rapidly spread through the Blackfoot before they entered into a formal relationship with the United States government. These diseases brought about great numbers of death that can only be estimated due to the lack of data. With such a high mortality count, it can be asserted that the Blackfoot people were experiencing vast social changes at the time of Treaty of 1855. This combined with the illness brought about by the horrendous conditions on the reservation helped to facilitate their domination by the United States. The United States Government has ignored their role in the creation of the conditions of the reservation, and blamed the Blackfoot’s dependency on the United States as a lack of their ability to assimilate into the United States economic system. Later they would create further devastating policy in their quest to answer the “Indian Question.”
CHAPTER SIX:

SOCIETAL CHANGE, LASTING POVERTY, AND ILLNESS

The Blackfoot people who emerged in 1895 were much different socially and physically than those who entered into the Treaty in 1855. In these forty short years, the clash between the Blackfoot and United States economic systems had severely altered Blackfoot people’s identity and society. United States’ Indian policy was based upon the values of a capitalist society in which individual ownership and the accumulation of wealth took precedence over the community. Because of this, the Blackfoot were thrust into a new system that attacked the societal values at the core of the Blackfoot identity. These attacks resulted in the military aggression, starvation, illness, and poverty the Blackfoot people experienced. The transformation from a mobile people to a sedentary lifestyle on the reservation, as well as, the loss of approximately one quarter of their people, forever altered Blackfoot society. The path from being a self-supporting military force on the plains to complete dependency on the United States Government was short and extremely painful.
Societal Breakdown

The Blackfoot bands and their leaders had been the center of Blackfoot society. Traditionally, band leaders rose to their position by their bravery in battle, generosity, and ability to provide for their band membership by making decisions which would allow them to harvest a sufficient amount of plants and animals or by accumulating individual wealth which they would then redistribute (Ewers 1958:39). After signing the Treaty in 1855, a split occurred between the band leaders who were friendly with the United States Citizens and those who were not. This split continued to grow through the reservation era, as the agents selectively issued rations to those leaders who they believed would assist them in furthering the goals of assimilation and as the United States government policy attacked traditional healers (Commissioner of Indian Affairs 1871). During the decline in the traditional societal structure, the last head chief of the Blackfoot people in the United States died in 1903, and a new one was not selected (Hungry Wolf 1989:16). These divisions were compounded when the Blackfoot were militarily forced to become a sedentary people.

No longer able to move in their traditional seasonal rounds, the people were forced to depend upon their Government agents instead of their leaders to provide for their needs. Although the leaders actively requested help for their people, they were often forced to watch while they went hungry. In the past, a member of any band could move if they were not satisfied with the leadership (Ewers 1958:40). However, with confinement to the reservation, people were unable to relocate if a dispute arose. Clayton Denman (1968:104) noted it was impossible from the records to determine which bands

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had lost their leaders in the winter of 1884. Denman also asserted that the bands who did retain their leaders might have still camped in the river bottoms in small groups as was customary, however the houses built for the Indians during the assimilation era created a new settlement pattern.

After the 1907 act of allotment, houses were built in the middle of plots of land with the idea that the people would farm the surrounding areas (Denman 1968:105). As a result the people were separated from one another, which further degraded the communal lifestyle that was the basis for Blackfoot society. No longer living in close proximity to the other members of the band left people isolated unless they traveled some distance. The traditional communal societal structure had been finally destroyed along with a viable economic industry.

Eventually, the cattle which had been issued to the Blackfoot people increased in their numbers and a cattle industry grew on the reservation. In 1891 the Indians who owned cattle were able to access the eastern market by utilizing the railroad (Stewart 1921:4). By 1905, the cattle industry was thriving. At the annual roundup on the reservation the agency report recorded over 25,000 Indian owned cattle (Wessel 1975:122). However the cattle industry which had economic potential for Blackfoot individuals declined after allotment began in 1907 (Wessel 1975:94). By dividing the communal grazing area, small pastures of approximately 320 acres were created. These small pastures could not provide enough grass to sustain a large herd. By 1911 the Blackfeet Agent estimated that the cattle numbers had dropped to 16,000 (Wessel 1974:123). Cattle numbers continued to decline until 1915, when the government stopped issuing cattle to individuals and began a tribally owned herd (Wessel 1975:126).
By dividing the land to create individual ownership, the United States had impeded the economic success of the Indians who had been participating in the United States capitalist society. The land allotment that was done to destroy the communal living pattern of the Blackfoot also destroyed their economic success in the cattle industry. In their effort to ensure the traditional Blackfoot culture would not be passed on to future generations, the United States had created schools to remove the Indian children from their families and their teachings.

The schools, which had been established to erase traditional teachings and replace them with the values and skills with which to enter into United States society as part of the working class, attacked Indian languages. During their time at the schools, Indian children were often severely punished for using their traditional language (Ambler 2004:8, Dean 2004:14). While being taught trades such as sewing and carpentry, Indian children were forced to utilize English language which was not driven by their societal worldview and expressed the values of the dominant culture (Medicine 2001:22). Language loss had further degraded Blackfoot culture as the children no longer were able to participate in their traditional culture. In the Commissioner of Indian Affairs’ Report for 1890, he heralded the boarding school as a great creation: “A better scheme for converting them into intelligent, honest American citizens, self-respected and self-helpful, could scarcely be devised” (Commissioner 1890). As a result of the boarding school, an immense amount of cultural information was unable to pass onto future generations.

Within forty years, the Blackfoot people had survived military, cultural, and biological attacks, resulting in an enormous amount of cultural change. The Blackfeet
Tribe addressed this time in their history by noting it in their declaration to their 1935 Constitution. After reviewing the assaults to their people, they claimed, “But the greatest of all, was our loss of our pride and our dignity” (Blackfeet Tribe 1935). After having survived the cultural and physical attacks, the Blackfoot people would endure another attack on their dignity.

**Blackfoot People on Display**

To further add to the humiliation of having to beg the agent for the annuity goods that had been promised as payment for lands surrendered, they now would have to put on shows about their former life ways to entertain the United States citizens.

In 1887, Congress had passed an act which allowed the Saint Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba Railway Company the right of way through the Blackfeet Reservation (Cohen 1950). Included in the right away had been a provision which allowed the railroad to take considerable land and resources deemed necessary for the construction and operation of the railroad (Cohen 1950). This would allow for the citizens of the United States to not only settle in the West but now tour and vacation there.

The Rocky Mountains, which held great spiritual value to the Blackfoot people, had been ceded by them in 1895. They did this to ensure the continuation of annuity goods upon which they depended to survive (Blood 2005; First Charger 2005; Kipp 2005). The United States government had requested the purchase of the Rocky Mountains based upon the belief that they held mineral wealth (Kipp 2002:31). But when no significant amounts of minerals were found, the land’s intrinsic value was
realized, and a portion of the Rocky Mountains was designated Glacier National Park on May 11, 1910 (Scharff 1967:8; Kipp 2002:27). The railroad, now called the Great Northern Railroad, made Glacier Park one of its tourist destinations (Buchholtz 1966:12).

When Glacier National Park was established in 1910, the Blackfoot People, who were destitute and in need of employment, put on performances and entertained the people who came to the park for pay (Ege 1970:IV). Ironically, they were used as advertisements to increase park visitation (Ewers 1948). In brochures, the pictures of the Blackfoot people were used to encourage tourists to come to Glacier National Park and watch the Blackfoot people dance and tell stories about park lands (Ege 1970:IV). Beautiful buildings were built to lodge and provide services to the tourists. However, the Blackfoot people were not allowed to enter these public places. Out of desperation, the Blackfoot were forced to display their traditional culture for the entertainment for the United States Citizens who came to visit their sacred landscape.

Photo 6.1. Elizabeth Main and Lillie Clark, Blackfoot Girls, pose for a portrait. This picture was used by the Great Northern Railroad to create a brochure for Glacier National Park.
Poverty

The removal of the Blackfoot people from their traditional mode of production established an environment of poverty which resulted in the ill-health of the Blackfoot people. This connection has not been broken. After the treaties, executive orders, and agreements had stripped the Indians of their land base, like the other factors discussed herein, policy aimed at having the Blackfoot people enter into United States social order as part of the working class resulted in the breakdown of the Blackfoot society. In 1901, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs wrote to the Blackfeet Agent, “The able bodied must understand that now the time is rapidly approaching when if ‘they don’t work they don’t eat’” (Commissioner 1901). By taking control of the natural resources available to the Blackfoot people, the United States government had separated them from their ability to provide for their families, while the United States citizens prospered.

Settlement in the Montana Territory had grown rapidly since the signing of the 1855 Treaty. In the Report of the Governor of Montana in 1889, the estimated population for the territory was 200,000 people who paid $88,265.67 in taxes (White 1889). Governor White (1889) claimed that mining had been the most successful endeavor in the territory. He estimated that mining had produced over $200,000 since settlement of the territory had begun (White 1889). The number of horses, cattle and sheep had steadily increased in the Montana Territory. Estimates at the end of 1889, placed their numbers at 1,250,000 cattle, 220,000 horses, and 2,150,000 sheep (White 1889). By this time, the stockmen were in need of more grass, and, with the assistance of Representative Toole, they petitioned the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to allow their animals to graze the
reservation. This infringed even further on the Blackfoot resources and land (Oberly 1888). Within forty years, the Blackfoot people had been reduced to poverty while the United States citizens had obtained land and resources with which to increase their status in the American economic system.

Based upon the Supreme Courts decisions that created the guardian-ward relationship, the Bureau of Indian Affairs has negotiated all timber and mineral sales, as well as all land leasing for Indian people. They have collected and maintained all of the money accounts of these sales and leases. Most of the leases and sales are to people who remove the resources and develop them off the reservation. Without control over individual and tribal lands and resources and their development, not many jobs are available to people on the reservation.

In 1968, unemployment on the Blackfeet Reservation was 72.5 percent (Talbot 1981:6). The 2000 census revealed that, 30 percent of the families living on the reservation live in poverty, with a median household income of $24,646 (United States Census Bureau 2000). The main employer on the reservation is the federal government (United States Census Bureau 2000). Education and training of the people is lacking, with only 24 percent of them graduating from high school (United States Census Bureau 2000). The poverty resulting from the reservation era is not unique to the Blackfoot. High unemployment is a general trend found among Indian people who reside on reservations, with unemployment being 2.5 percent higher than off reservations (Indian Health Service 2001). The Indian Health Service uses figures such as these to conclude, "Disease patterns among Indians are strongly associated with adverse consequences from
poverty, limited access to health services, and cultural dislocation.” (Indian Health Service 2001)

**Blackfoot Illness**

By utilizing the government’s ideology of viewing children’s health in the future as a reflection of the health care they received in their infancy, it is clear that health issues among the Blackfoot in the present are representative of the health care of the past. The diseases created by an environment of poverty and overcrowding during the assimilation era have continued. Tuberculosis, which was the prevalent disease among the Blackfoot people beginning in the 1880’s, was still active in 1937, with 269 cases documented in the Blackfeet Annual Statistical Health Report (Graves 1937). In 1945, a representative of the State Tuberculosis Association made several visits to the reservation. It was documented that she visited many homes in the hopes of getting the people with active cases to accept sanatorium care (Ewers 1944: 63; McBride 1945). It was again reported in 1947 that tuberculosis, “is a serious problem here” (O’Hara 1947). A high rate of tuberculosis appears to be a general health trend for American Indians. In their report of health disparities of 2001, the Indian Health Service reported that American Indians suffer a 500 percent higher morality rate from tuberculosis than other American (Indian Health Service 2001). American Indians also suffer from other dire health trends, yet another repercussion, of the poverty created during the expansion and formation of the United States.
The Indian Health Service (IHS), which is within the United States Department of Health and Human Services, provided health care to approximately 1.6 million American Indians and their descendants in 2002 (Indian Health Service 2002). For this, IHS was appropriated approximately $2.8 billion dollars by Congress (Indian Health Service 2002). Because of the unemployment rate on reservations, 55 percent of American Indians have IHS as their only health care provider (Indian Health Service 2001). With such a heavy reliance on the Federal Government for their health care, and with continued health problems, it is apparent that the resources for health coverage supplied by the government are not enough.

American Indians have a life expectancy that is almost six years less than that of other Americans (Indian Health Service 2002). Infant mortality is also higher (Williams 1995:359). Native infants die at a rate of 8.9 per every thousand live births compared to 7.2 per every thousand live births for other Americans (Indian Health Service 2002). Sanitary conditions on reservations is lacking as a whole with 7.5 percent of homes on reservations lacking safe and adequate water supply and waste disposal (Indian Health Service 2002). The poverty which brought poor health to the people of the reservation continues today to have a significant impact on Indian health, as the economic inequality created in the past is closely tied to the health disparities between Indian people and other United States citizens (Williams 1995:359).
Conclusion Remarks

What has been deemed, the “Indian Question” is the resulting dependency created during the formation of the United States. The United States government’s Indian Policy had attempted to transform Indian people so they would be able to participate in the United States economic system, and no longer be dependant on the United States government. However, the poverty and dependency created during this time has continued for many Indian Tribes. The collision of a capitalist society that valued individual ownership and the Blackfoot people’s economic system based upon the communal access to resources has created a lasting poverty for the Blackfoot people who reside on the reservation.

Blackfoot history has previously been told in parts, but seldom are the events of disease, starvation, and military aggression combined to tell the entire process of the reduction of the Blackfoot people to complete dependency on the United States government. The Bear River Massacre and military confinement to the reservation experienced by the Blackfoot was explained as being a necessary part of the conquering of a wilderness and the punishment of savagery (Edge 1970). In previous investigations, the starvation and appalling reservation conditions the Blackfoot people were forced to endure have often been blamed on the extinction of the bison or the lack of Congress to appropriate money (West 1958; Freedman 1987:61). It is the intent of this reinvestigation of Blackfoot history is to quell those primitive beliefs, by viewing these events and conditions as part of a broader perspective. The interactions between the Blackfoot and the United States were the result of a collision between two societies who had different
economic systems based upon two very different worldviews. It is clear that this ideology and its related policies need to be reexamined, which is the point of this thesis.

To the Blackfoot people, this history is not a thing of the past, but a reality of their existence. For them, their history did not start with the colonization of America, but this portion of their history shook their foundation and created obstacles for them to overcome in the future. The Blackfoot people have survived the past attacks which have separated them from most of their traditional territory and resources creating lasting poverty. However, they have endured the hardships and are not disappearing. Although altered from their traditional form, they have maintained their distinct culture and identity despite assimilation attempts mandated by government policy, thus destroying the "melting pot myth" of America (Alfred 1997:43). In their declaration, they have imparted their heart wrenching history with the United States and proclaimed their continued existence by declaring: “Then the last encampment of a proud and mighty people shall be the homeland for all the Blackfeet Indians that, shall endure for as long as the sun shall rise and, these mountains cast their shadows” (Blackfeet Tribe 1935).
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