

**THE STATE OF THE GREAT SIOUX
PART TWO**

**Ronald G. Stover, Ph.D.
South Dakota State University**

ABSTRACT

By the late 1600s, the Great Sioux had settled in what is now known as Minnesota as village farmers. As a result of conflict with other First Americans, the Sioux –then known as Dakota– began to divide and to migrate west. The result of the division was three groups –the Dakota, Nakota, and Lakota. Within four decades the population of this great nation had been decimated and the nation itself had been reduced to a defeated and despondent people totally dependent on the United States for the resources necessary for its survival. This manuscript describes the Massacre at Wounded Knee, The Great Dakota Conflict, and then summarizes the current population, cultural, and economic status of the Great Sioux.

INTRODUCTION

In Stover (2011), a brief history of the early Great Sioux was presented and a discussion of the massive societal collapse the Sioux experienced from the mid-1800s until about 1900 was begun. Four events were identified as critical in understanding this societal collapse: (1) the Battle of the Greasy Grass/Little Big Horn, (2) the illegal confiscation and continued occupation of the Black Hills, (3) the Massacre at Wounded Knee, and (4) The Great Dakota Conflict. That paper presented a brief history of the Great Sioux, the Battle of the Greasy Grass/ Little Big Horn, and the illegal confiscation and continued occupation of the Black Hills.

By the late 1600s, the Great Sioux had settled as village farmers in the area now known as Minnesota. As a result of conflict with other First Americans, the Sioux – then known as Dakota– began to divide and to migrate west. This division resulted in three groups –the Dakota, Nakota, and Lakota. The Sioux grew in strength and power and by the middle of the 1800s they were the most powerful Indian nation in the upper Great Plains, and arguable one of the two most powerful nations in what is now the continental United States –the United States itself being the second (Biography 1996; Discovery Channel Communications 1993a).

However, within four decades the population of this great nation had been decimated and the nation itself had been reduced to a defeated people totally dependent on the United States for the resources necessary for its survival. Four events can be identified as critical in understanding this massive societal collapse. They are (1) the Battle of the Greasy Grass/Little Big Horn, (2) the illegal confiscation and continued occupation of the Black Hills, (3) the Massacre at Wounded Knee, and (4) the Great Dakota Conflict. Described in Stover (2012) was a brief history of the Great Sioux and of the first two events instrumental in their collapse. The final two critical events and an over summary of their current status are described here.

The Massacre at Wounded Knee

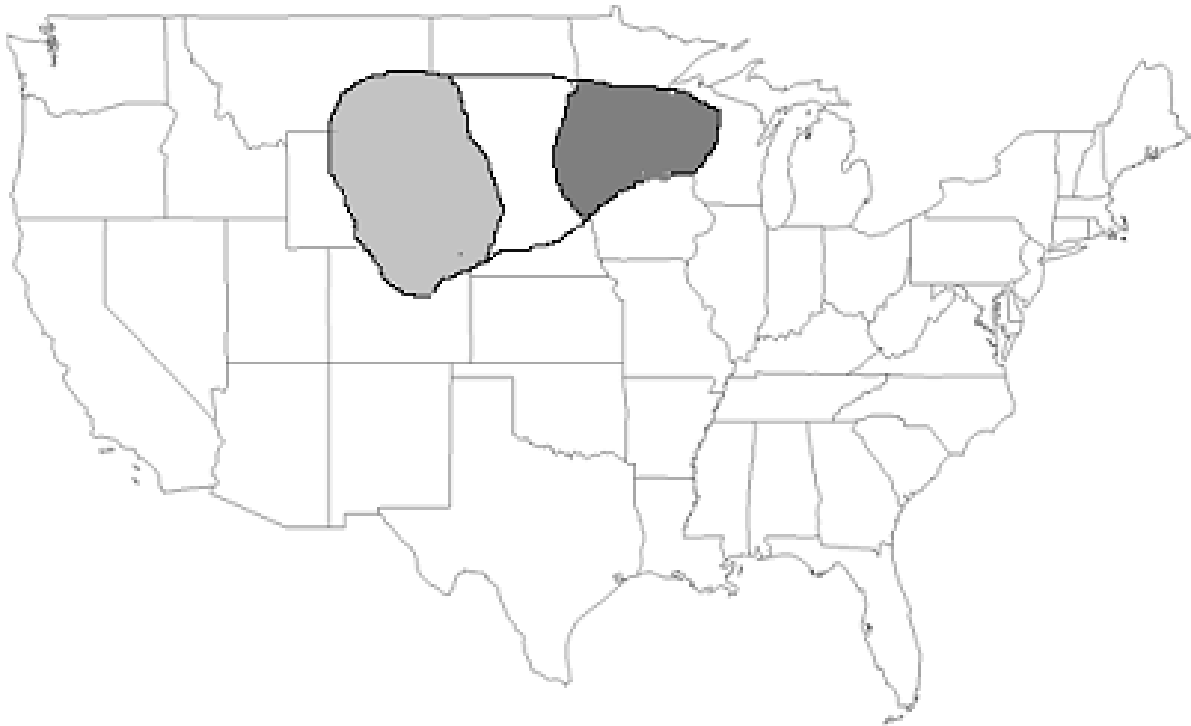
By 1890, the Great Sioux had been reduced to a

despondent, dependent, dispirited people. First, they had lost the basis of their way of life and second, the buffalo. In 1800, an estimated 30,000,000 buffalo roamed the Great Plains. By 1900, a mere 1000 survived (Gibbon 2003:117; Hodgson 1994:71). The loss of the buffalo was devastating to the Sioux way of life. In 1882, an American Indian fighter who had come to respect the Indians is reported to have said, “Ten years ago the Plains Indians had an ample supply of food. Now everything is gone, and they are reduced to the condition of paupers, without food, shelter, clothing, or any of those necessities of life which came with the buffalo...” (Hodgson 1994:71).

Second, they had lost their land base. Through a series of treaties, agreements, and laws, they had lost the overwhelming majority of their land. In the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868, the Sioux had given up ownership claims to all of their land in the territories surrounding South Dakota in exchange for the guaranteed sovereignty of the Great Sioux Reservation. Yet within a decade, that guaranteed sovereignty was violated. The Agreement of 1876 reduced the Great Sioux Reservation by almost eight million acres (Wilkins 1997:221-222). Further, The Act of 1889 reduced the Great Sioux Reservation by an additional eleven millions acres and divided what remained into a series of six discontinuous much smaller reservations (Wilkins 1997: 222).

But arguably the most devastating, and probably the most hated of all laws pertaining to the Great Sioux, as well as to all American Indians, was the Allotment or Dawes Severalty Act of 1887 (Burns 1996a; Utter 2001: 395). The declared purpose of this act was to take communally owned Indian land and to convert it into privately owned land. The procedure was to divide the Indian land and allocate specific parcels of the land to individual Indians or Indian families according to a given formula (Burns 1996a; Grobsmith 1981). The most heinous aspect of this act was the provision that all Indian land not allocated at that time was to be declared surplus and made available by the U.S. government for distribution to whites. For example, on April 22, 1889 two million acres of former Indian land were made available for homesteading in an Oklahoma land rush. By the end of the day, all two million acres had been claimed (Burns

FIGURE 1. *The Three Zones of the Great Sioux*



Legend: The western region was claimed by the Lakota, the center by the Nakota, and the eastern region by the Dakota (approximately 1860).

Source: The information used in the creation of this map was taken from Gaffney (2006).

1996a). Many land rushes followed. Before the Dawes act, there were an estimated 150 million acres in Indian hands. Within twenty years of the passage of the Dawes Act, Indians had lost at least half of their land, and some suggest it was as much as two-thirds, through this appropriation process (Native American Documents Project 2010; Burns 1996b).

The Sioux were not spared this confiscation. Gibbon provided details of their loss when he stated, “The Yanktonai Crow Creek Reservation shrank from 285,521 acres when established in 1889 to 154,872 in 1950; Fort Peck shrank from 2,094,144 acres to 1,100,859 by 1935; Standing Rock shrank from 2,672,640 acres to 1,064,000 by 1950; Lake Traverse shrank from 918,779 acres in 1873 to 117,119 acres in 1952; and the Yankton Reservation dwindled from 430,000 acres to 34,802 by 1980 (Hoover 1996a, 1996b)” (2003:241).

Third, their right to practice their own religious beliefs had been denied. In 1883, Secretary of the Interior Henry M. Teller established special Indian reservation courts to deal with unacceptable Indian religious practices (Utter 2001:151). Among those practices were all public and private traditional religious activities on the reservation. Religious dances, for example, were prohibited. The Sun Dance –the most sacred Sioux religious ceremony– was specifically prohibited (Grobsmith 1881:81; Marshall 2004:217; Utter 2001).

They had lost several of their most important leaders. In 1877, Crazy Horse –their most famous military leader– had been killed while resisting arrest (Marshall 2004; Gibbon 2003). Thirteen years later in December of 1890, their most important political and religious leader –Sitting Bull– was killed in a failed arrest attempt (Discovery Channel Communication 1993b; Gibbon 2003).

Hope among the Sioux, and for all Great Plains Indian nations, suddenly appeared in the 1880s in the form of a religiously-based revitalization movement that had emerged in the south west. A Paiute Indian prophet named Wovoka (Jack Wilson) taught a new religion combining elements of traditional Indian beliefs with elements of Christianity (Burns 1996c; Strom 1995). Wovoka, sometimes referred to as the Indian Messiah, taught a non-violent message suggesting that the dancing of a magical dance –popularly known as the Ghost Dance– would return the world to what it had been before the whites had arrived. The dance, consisting of up to five days of continuous dancing, would bring back the buffalo, bring back the warriors, and sweep the whites away.

Perhaps no Indian nation was more receptive to Wovoka’s message than the Sioux since they had lost so much (Utley and Washburn 1977:334). Many embraced the message. A few Sioux modified it to be more militaristic, teaching that the wearing of a special shirt in addition to the dance would protect the wearer from the

weapons of the whites (Burns 1996c; Josephy 1994; Strom 2010).

Some whites, fearful of the Ghost Dance, demanded military intervention for protection. At first, the U.S. Army resisted. The Army eventually relented and sent military units to the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Reservations in southwest South Dakota.

At the same time, the agency personnel on the Standing Rock Reservation in North Dakota became concerned that famed medicine man Sitting Bull would support the Ghost Dance activities. On December 15, 1890 a contingent of Lakota police was sent to his home to arrest him. His supporters intervened to try to prevent the arrest. Sitting Bull was killed in the ensuing struggle (Burns 1996c; Discovery Channel Communications 1993b; Josephy 1994:439; Strom 1995).

In response to the killing of their leader, the followers of Sitting Bull fled south to the Cheyenne Reservation in South Dakota to seek sanctuary from Sioux leader Big Foot. Fearful of his influence, the US military issued orders to arrest Big Foot. To avoid arrest and because he had been invited to the Pine Ridge Reservation by the important Sioux leader Red Cloud, Big Foot led his followers off the Cheyenne River Reservation south toward the Pine Ridge Reservation (Josephy 1994). He and his followers evaded the U.S. Army for days, but were intercepted at Porcupine Butte (near the Pine Ridge Reservation) by the 7th Cavalry on December 28, 1890. Big Foot and his followers were escorted to a hollow near Wounded Knee Creek and ordered to make camp. The Sioux numbered about 120 men and 230 women and children. The soldiers, numbering about 500, established a circular perimeter on the ridges surrounding the Sioux encampment. Among the weapons the soldiers aimed at the Sioux encampment were four rapid fire Hotchkiss cannon capable of firing 50 rounds per minute.

The next morning, the soldiers searched the camp and the adults –including women– for hidden weapons. The soldiers attempted to confiscate the weapons. Some Lakota men resisted. The Lakota resisted because not only were their rifles and bow and arrows used for defense, they were a means of survival since they were used in hunting. Shots were fired. There is no consensus concerning who fired the first shot. In all, somewhere between 200 and 300 Sioux men, women, and children were killed. About 25 soldiers were also killed. Since the soldiers were shooting into the encampment from a circular perimeter, it is highly likely some of the soldiers were killed by “friendly fire” (Burns 1996c; Discovery Channel Communications 1993b; Josephy 1994; Utley and Washburn 1977). The wounded of both sides and the dead Army soldiers were taken from the battlefield to a church on the Pine Ridge Reservation and treated. The dead Sioux were left where they lay (Burns 1996c).

Three days later, on January 1, 1891, a long procession of Lakota, a burial detail of whites, and an Army troop assigned to protect the others from possible revenge attacks arrived at Wounded Knee. They were surprised to find some of the Sioux had survived the

massacre and the two day blizzard that followed, and were still alive. Others had apparently survived the massacre only to die later. The wounded were placed in wagons and returned to the Pine Ridge Reservation where they joined the other survivors. Paddy Starr, leader of the burial detail, had previously negotiated an arrangement with the U.S Army to bury the dead at two dollars per body. He and his men collected the bodies, dug a deep pit and buried them all in mass grave. A member of the burial detail counted 146 bodies (Discovery Channel Communications 1993b; Utley 1963:4).

Perhaps the most famous of the survivors was a baby of about four months old. As the men gathered the bodies, they heard a faint cry. Searching for its source, the men found a tiny baby lying under her mother's dead body. Somehow she had survived three days of brutal South Dakota winter weather. Since no one knew her real name, she was given the name Sintkala Nuni –the Lakota name for Lost Bird. She is now known to history as “The Lost Bird of Wounded Knee.” She was adopted and raised by a white family (Utley 1963). Throughout her life she struggled as a person caught between two worlds –a Lakota one and a white one. She died of influenza in 1920 in California. In 1991, her California grave was found and her remains were disinterred and brought back to South Dakota where they were reinterred at Wounded Knee (Josephy 1994; South Dakota Public Broadcasting 2000).

Two comments are appropriate concerning the Massacre at Wounded Knee. First, it marked the last violent conflict between the U.S. Army and the Sioux in their several decades' war. Second, the mere mention of the Massacre at Wounded Knee evokes the same kind of visceral reactions among the Sioux that Americans in general have when discussing the attack on Pearl Harbor or the September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Center (Burns 1996c).

The Great Dakota Conflict

The fourth critical event in the story of the United States-Great Sioux relationship –the one least known– has a variety of names. Among other names, it has been referred to as Little Crow's War, the War of 1862, the Great Dakota Conflict, and The Great Sioux Uprising. It was a short war, but the results were devastating to the division of the Sioux nation that lived in Minnesota –the Dakota. It resulted in the deaths of thousands (both directly and indirectly) of Dakota, the loss of almost all of the land they still owned in Minnesota, the virtual depopulation of Dakota from the state of Minnesota, and the largest mass execution in the history of the United States (Coleman and Camp 1988). While there are still Dakota in Minnesota since not all Dakota fled and since some drifted back to their homeland, most Dakota never returned to Minnesota (Coleman and Camp 1988; Gibbon 2003).

The ultimate cause of the war was the desire of whites for Dakota land. In 1805, the Dakota were persuaded to make their first land concession; they sold 100,000 acres

(Coleman and Camp 1988). In 1837, they were convinced to sign the Treaty with the Sioux, a treaty giving up all of their land east of the Mississippi (First People: Treaties and Agreements 2010). In 1851, the first governor of the territory of Minnesota Alexander Ramsey embarked on an effort to persuade the Dakota to give up their land in the southern part of the state to satisfy the land demands of whites who had flooded into Minnesota when it became a territory in 1849. Through a combination of political intimidation and ultimately military violence, the Dakota gave in and signed the 1851 Treaty of Traverse de Sioux, a treaty giving up 20 million acres of Southern Minnesota in exchange for a reservation consisting of narrow strips of land on both sides of the upper Minnesota River (Coleman and Camp 1988; Minnesota Territorial Pioneers, Inc. 2010).

The reservation was about 150 miles long and 10 miles wide. However, the Treaty contained provisions of which the Dakota were not aware. They were given control of the reservation for only five years, where upon they lost that control (Anderson 1988; Berg 1993). When told they had been deceived and owned no land, they were understandably upset. They were then offered full ownership of half of the reservation they had been promised. They reluctantly agreed to the reduction; they had little choice (Anderson 1988; Berg 1993; Coleman and Camp 1988).

They were thus exiled from their native Minnesota woodlands and consequently deprived of their right to hunt and gather to augment their farming lifestyle. However, the Dakota were supposed to be compensated for their loss. According to the terms of the treaty, large sums of money were to be provided "...to pay for the costs of removing the Indians to the new reservation, educating them, establishing agencies and providing supplies and annual cash payments" (Berg 1993; Coleman and Camp 1988). Unfortunately for the Dakota, through fraud and mismanagement most of the supplies and money were siphoned off before getting to the Dakota and they received few of the promised resources.

A decade later, in 1862, the Minnesota Dakota faced starvation on their reservations. Crops had failed the year before. The winter had been long and harsh. And the annual disbursement of supplies and money had been delayed by bureaucratic red tape. Thousands of Dakota gathered at the two reservation agencies –the Upper Sioux Agency near the Yellow Medicine River and the Lower Sioux Agency near the Redwood River– seeking the food to which they were entitled. They were told no supplies would be released until authorization was provided (Coleman and Camp 1988).

In August, Dakota at the Upper Sioux Agency demanded the food and supplies due them in June. When they were again rebuffed, they stormed the agency warehouse and took 100 sacks of flour. A military detachment quelled the incident.

Little Crow, perhaps the most prominent Dakota leader and one of the leaders who had signed the 1851 treaty, rushed to the Agency to try to mediate the crisis. At a

meeting of the Dakota and the white traders at the agency, Little Crow suggested the Dakota be given the supplies they sought, to be paid for when the authorization was given and the reimbursement arrived. The traders refused. One trader, Andrew J. Myrick, is alleged to have issued what is perhaps the most infamous statement of the war– "So far as I am concerned, if they are hungry, let them eat grass" (Coleman and Camp 1988:9). When Myrick's remark was translated, the Dakota exploded with indignation. They went back to their villages to consider war. Several days later at the very beginning of the war, Myrick's dead body was found filled with arrows and his mouth filled with grass. The Dakota had taken their revenge on him for his comment.

August 17th, 1862 was a Sunday. Four young Dakota males were returning from an unsuccessful hunt. They neared the farm of Robinson Jones and asked for water. Jones and his family had no reason to fear the young men since Dakota had been seen in the area before. The young men turned their guns on the whites and within seconds had killed Jones, his wife, her son, an adopted daughter, and a neighbor who had just arrived from Wisconsin (Coleman and Camp 1988). Little Crow's War had begun.

The four Dakota warriors sought refuge at the Dakota reservation on the Minnesota River and recounted what they had done. Little Crow and the other senior Dakota knew there would be a white response. After a night of discussion and debate, the Dakota decided to launch a war against the whites. Little Crow warned the other Dakota that the whites were too powerful to be defeated and cautioned against the war. Out voted, he agreed to lead them in a last-ditch effort to restore the Dakota homeland.

Over the next several weeks, the War played out in the Minnesota Valley. As many as 500 Minnesotans—men, women, and children —were killed. By the end of September, the War was over. After suffering a decisive defeat at the hands of the U.S. Army on September 23, Little Crow and some of his followers began fleeing the state. Many other Dakota warriors were captured.

Trials quickly began for the captured Dakota warriors accused of participating in the conflict. The trials, heard by a five-man military commission, concluded on November 5th (Coleman and Camp 1988). More than 300 Dakota were sentenced to death. President Lincoln, hearing of the sentencing, intervened in the trials. He ultimately approved of the hanging of 39 Dakota. One was subsequently pardoned. On December 26, 1862, in Mankato, Minnesota, 38 Dakota men were hung simultaneously. It was the largest mass execution in U.S. history (Coleman and Camp 1988; Hudetz 2006).

There immediately followed a mass exodus of Dakota from Minnesota and the state was virtually depopulated of Dakota. Fearful of being the victims of white violence, Dakota fled to present day South Dakota, Nebraska, Montana, and Canada.

In 1863, the U.S. Congress enacted a law mandating the removal of four subgroups of the Dakota from

Minnesota –the Sisseton, Wahpeton, Mdewakanton, and Wahpekute (“Eastern Dakota Timeline: 1660-1869,” 2004). Though no longer enforced, the law has not been repealed.

Over the following years, a few Dakota drifted back into the state. Little Crow did. In 1863, he and his son were discovered raiding a farmer’s garden. The farmer shot and killed Little Crow. Little Crow’s remains were first displayed and then stored by the Minnesota Historical Society. They were finally buried at Flandreau, S.D., 108 years after his death (Gibbon 2003).

Intervening Years

For decades the Sioux suffered the consequences of their decimation. But during the mid-1900s their conditions, just like those of other First Americans, slowly began to change. Their population rebounded. Many of their legal rights were restored. Still other rights are now protected. Pride in their cultural traditions is flourishing.

And the Sioux have developed strategies to address their substantial economic challenges.

Current Status of the Great Sioux

In summarizing the current status of the Great Sioux, it is important to note there is a critical distinction between on-reservation and off-reservation Sioux. Unless otherwise noted, information presented here pertains to the Sioux living on reservations.

Population of the Great Sioux

All told, there are currently about 180,000 Sioux. The largest concentration of Sioux –about 60,000 as of 2000– live in South Dakota (U.S. Census Bureau 2006b). The others live mainly in Canada, Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, and North Dakota.

About one half of all enrolled Sioux in the United States live on reservations (Gibbon 2003:196). In South Dakota, an even greater proportion live on reservations; about 50,000 of the 60,000 Sioux live there (Young, 2009b). There are 17 Sioux reservations in the United States– one in Montana, four in Minnesota, one in Nebraska, two in North Dakota, and nine in South Dakota. One reservation –Standing Rock– crosses the North Dakota-South Dakota border (Gibbon 2003:200; U.S. Census Bureau 2010a).

Restoration and Protection of Legal Rights

Their right to practice their own religion has been restored. In 1883, Secretary of the Interior Henry M. Teller established courts on reservations to suppress Indian religions. In 1978, Congress passed the American Indian Religious Freedom Act to guarantee Indian freedom of religion. It was amended in 1994. Despite these official protections, there are allegations that unofficial antagonism toward Indian religions still exists (Utter 2001: 151-152).

They have gained the unqualified right to citizenship independent of tribal membership. In the 1900s, there were many paths to citizenship for First Americans, and by 1924 as many as two thirds were U.S. citizens. In that

year, the Indian Citizenship Act conferred citizenship on all Indians not yet citizens (Utter 2001:247).

The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 marked the first time the federal government stepped into the issue of higher education policy for First Americans. “Until then, religious missionaries and charities had initiated efforts in this area. The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 attempted to increase Indian participation in higher education by establishing loan and scholarship programs...” (Aguiree and Turner 2009:172).

In the late 1960s, the policy of termination began to wane. Termination had been a policy of withdrawing governmental responsibility for American Indians by ending formal recognition of tribes and therefore ending the special federal-Indian relationship and trust obligations of the federal government (Utter 2001: 69-70). Termination has now been abandoned.

Gibbon lists several other legislative initiatives protecting Indian rights: “...the 1975 Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act, which transferred greater governmental and administrative powers to federally recognized tribes; the 1978 Indian Child Welfare Act, which gave Indian people the right to retain custody of their children...” (2003:190). Others he enumerates are “...the 1990 Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), which required museums and other institutions that received federal funds to return human remains, and funerary and sacred objects, to tribes; and the 1990 Act for the Protection of American Indian Arts and Crafts, which made it a criminal offense to falsely identify oneself as an Indian in order to sell artwork” (2003:190).

Pride in the Great Sioux Culture

A cultural revival has taken place. It has appeared in education. Curriculum in the primary and secondary schools in many Indian communities now includes the teaching of the Dakota language and Dakota-Lakota-Nakota culture and history (Gibbon 2003:191). The Sioux have established seven tribally controlled colleges to develop an educated and professional workforce which can also provide role models for the next generation of Sioux. Two (Fort Peck Community College and Fort Belknap College) are in Montana, one (the Nebraska Indian Community College) is in Nebraska, one (Cankdeska Cikana Community College) is in North Dakota, and three are in South Dakota (Oglala Lakota College, Sinte Gleska University, and Sisseton-Wahpeton College). Collectively, these seven colleges enroll about 3700 students. In the academic year 2007-2008, they awarded 234 associates degrees and 52 bachelor’s degrees (National Center for Education Statistics 2009).

The cultural revival has appeared in their engagement in their cultural traditions. Increasingly, the Sioux are practicing traditional arts and crafts, and participating in traditional ceremonies. Many go on vision quests. And Sun Dances –the most revered and sacred of all religious ceremonies– are held on many reservations (Gibbon 2003:194).

But Gibbon insists that the re-emergence of the powwow is the best indicator of their cultural revival. "Throughout the last quarter-century, no other action has signaled the revival of the Sioux so strongly as their growing and enthusiastic attendance at powwows (and wacipis). International powwows are held each year at Fort Totten and Rosebud, and most reservations or communities have powwows and powwow grounds (2003:195)."

It is useful to put the Sioux cultural revival into the context of the cultural revival of all First Americans. It would be hard to find a better representation of the changes in their feelings than in the design, building, and opening of the two hundred million dollar National Museum of the American Indian on the Washington Mall. The Museum took fifteen years of planning, fundraising, design, and building. In September of 2004, literally thousands of Indians from the Americas, not just the Sioux and not just First American from the United States, traveled to Washington to participate with great pride in the opening of their Museum (Franklin 2004; McNeal/Lehrer 2004)

Economic Status on the Reservations

There are both negative and positive aspects of the economic status of Sioux living on reservations. On the negative side, the economic statistics of the Sioux are somber. Per capita income is strikingly low. When the per capita yearly incomes of all large First American reservations were ranked, four of the ten with the lowest incomes were South Dakota Sioux reservations; all four had per capita yearly incomes of \$6000 or less (Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development 2008:118). While varying enormously among the many reservations, overall both unemployment and poverty rates are high. At a time before the Great Recession of 2007-2009 when the U.S. unemployment rate was about 5%, the unemployment rate for South Dakota Sioux reservations ranged from 30% for the Lower Brule Reservation to 85% for the Rosebud Reservation. The poverty rate for the Sioux was three times as high as for the U.S. population; 12% versus 40% (U.S. Census Bureau 2006a). This figure was for all Sioux, not just those living on reservations. The poverty rate for those living on reservations would be higher.

The resolution of the Cobell Lawsuit provides little hope of substantially improving these grim statistics. In 1996, Elouise Cobell, a member of Montana's Blackfeet Tribe, filed one of the largest class action lawsuits ever brought against the U.S. Government at that time (<http://cobellsettlement.com/press/faq.php>; Harriman 2005; House 2006). The lawsuit alleged that for the past century American Indians have been systematically deprived of the royalties plus interest due them for the grazing, mining, logging, and drilling on their land through negligence, incompetence, and actual fraud of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. While difficult to prove due to the loss and actual destruction of records, there are estimates American Indians had been deprived of as much as \$100

billion (NewsAhead 2010; House 2006). To try to end the stalemate, American Indian leaders proposed a settlement of \$27.5 billion. It was not accepted. Desperate to finally resolve the issue, American Indian leaders in 2009 agreed to a settlement of \$3.4 billion. In November 2010, both the U.S. House and Senate voted to pass the Claims Resolution Act of 2010. On Wednesday, December 8th, President Barack Obama signed the \$4.6 billion dollar act which included the \$3.4 billion for settlement of the Cobell lawsuit (Kohan 2010).

Prior to the recent recession, there were some glimmers of positive changes for the economic status of the Sioux. Per capita income had increased and unemployment rates on the reservations had declined. Consequently, the poverty rate had begun to drift down. The average poverty rate for the Sioux reservations was slightly more than 43% in 1990, ranging from a low of 4.9% on the Prior Lake (Shakopee) Reservation to a high of 60.9% on the Pine Ridge Reservation (U.S. Census Bureau 1989; U.S. Census Bureau 1990). By 1999, it was an estimated 41%, ranging from slightly less than 10% on the Lower Sioux Reservation in Minnesota to a high of 54% on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota (U.S. Census Bureau 2000).

Gambling had helped, but not to the extent many had hoped for and many believed. Some reservations—actually very few—have established very successful casinos. Darian-Smith, in her study of casino gambling on reservations, suggests no more than 2-3% are "very successful" (2003). Minnesota's Mystic Lake Casino of the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux is arguably one of the most successful of all casinos anywhere in the United States (<http://mysticlake.com/history.htm>; Hudetz 2006). The Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development found that the top 55 (i.e., 15%) of the 367 Indian gaming operations accounted for almost 70% of total revenues while the bottom 219 (i.e., 60%) accounted for only 8% of revenues (Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development the United States 2008:149). Most Sioux casinos are only moderately successful and do not provide employment for a large number of workers. A principal reason for that moderate success is that the most reservations do not have access to the large population base needed to support a very successful casino.

Many Sioux have created small businesses. The U.S. Census Bureau reported that in the early part of the 1990s over 1300 businesses were owned by Sioux (U.S. Census Bureau 2002). The Sioux have tried a variety of alternative strategies for economic development. The Rosebud Sioux Tribe in South Dakota has created and chartered the Rosebud Economic Development Company (REDCO) to stimulate economic development and to create jobs on the Rosebud Reservation (REDCO, Rosebud Economic Development Company 2010). One of its projects is the wind turbine farm entitled the "Owl Feather War Bonnet Wind Farm" that now sells power to Ellsworth Air Force Base and to Basin Electric (Chamley 2003).

Buffalo management is being pursued both by Sioux colleges and reservations. In 2000, Si Tanka College in South Dakota planned a two-year degree in the scientific study of bison. Possible outcomes of a successful bison industry were thought to include bison management and meat processing jobs as well as products such as bison meat, tanned hides, and material for artwork (Ortman 2000). Both the Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe and the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation have also turned to bison ranching as a tactic of economic development (Braun 2008; fsst.org 2010).

Finally there is the substantial potential economic return from the mining, forestry, and the leasing of land within the reservations. The geographic area of all of the Sioux lands –combining reservation and trust lands–account for slightly more than 23,000 square miles (U.S. Census Bureau 2010a). To put that number in perspective, it would rank the Sioux lands as large as that of the 41st state, West Virginia (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2010a; IPL2 2011b).

SUMMARY

The Sioux face many challenges, but they have reason to be hopeful. The population of the Sioux has rebounded. It is estimated that in 1980 the population of the Sioux was about 80,000 (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1980), in 1990 it was about 105,000 (“Sioux Religion,” 2010), and in 2000 it was about 150,000 (U.S. Census Bureau 2009). As noted earlier, it is now estimated to be in excess of 180,000. The Sioux are not relying on casino gambling as their only strategy of economic development. The establishment of REDCO on the Rosebud Reservation is an attempt to foster economic development and job creation. The Flandreau Tribe in South Dakota is similarly, but more informally, trying to develop job creation strategies. The attempt to build a bison industry is another innovative economic development path.

The challenges facing the Great Sioux are daunting. However, after half of a century of devastating disasters, the Sioux have experienced incredibly positive changes in the last century. It remains to be seen if the trajectory of those positive changes continues.

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