



As long as the grass grows and the waters flow : an indigenous perspective of Blackfoot land history
by Thedis Berthelson Crowe

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Art in Native American Studies

Montana State University

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Abstract:

In order to understand contemporary issues regarding land management policy, as well as resolve conflict, and solve complex problems, one must examine history to develop a thorough understanding of the situation. There is no written information that comprehensively addresses the land history of the Blackfoot, as indigenous people. This thesis addresses the first step to construct and write a Blackfoot land history narrative, the initial beginning of a long term project to address the contemporary land and natural resource management issues on the Blackfeet Reservation.

The purpose of this thesis was to critically evaluate the colonial historical narrative, taking into account the worldview and traditional value systems of the Blackfoot, in order to construct and write a Blackfoot land history narrative and provide an indigenous historical perspective of the impacts colonial influences have had upon the traditional land base of the Blackfoot.

A decolonized tribal land history that reincorporates and adds value and emphasis to Blackfoot philosophies, worldview, and cultural values is the key to unlocking the dysfunctional management system and identifying the colonial influences from federal Indian policies.

This Blackfoot land history narrative is only the first step in a process that will need to include further evaluation and deconstruction of colonial policies and the development of contemporary management strategies.

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ABSTRACT

In order to understand contemporary issues regarding land management policy, as well as resolve conflict, and solve complex problems, one must examine history to develop a thorough understanding of the situation. There is no written information that comprehensively addresses the land history of the Blackfoot, as indigenous people. This thesis addresses the first step to construct and write a Blackfoot land history narrative, the initial beginning of a long term project to address the contemporary land and natural resource management issues on the Blackfeet Reservation.

The purpose of this thesis was to critically evaluate the colonial historical narrative, taking into account the worldview and traditional value systems of the Blackfoot, in order to construct and write a Blackfoot land history narrative and provide an indigenous historical perspective of the impacts colonial influences have had upon the traditional land base of the Blackfoot.

A decolonized tribal land history that reincorporates and adds value and emphasis to Blackfoot philosophies, worldview, and cultural values is the key to unlocking the dysfunctional management system and identifying the colonial influences from federal Indian policies.

This Blackfoot land history narrative is only the first step in a process that will need to include further evaluation and deconstruction of colonial policies and the development of contemporary management strategies.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Importance of Constructing an Indigenous Land History

At the end of the nineteenth century the Blackfoot people were in a state of transition to a reservation way of life, caught in the quicksand of being colonized and struggling for basic survival when the door opened to outsiders to write the history of the Blackfoot people. George Bird Grinnell's "Blackfoot Lodge Tales, the Story of a Prairie People," first published in 1892, established the foundation for a colonial historical narrative about the Blackfoot. This collection of stories is the first comprehensive piece of historical literature transcribed and written about the Blackfoot. The book and the history that Grinnell portrays contains strong tones of ethnocentrism, a paternalistic over-protectiveness on Grinnell's part, and examples of white superiority and racial bias that prevailed at the turn of the twentieth century. Grinnell's views about the Blackfoot, as indigenous people, are clearly articulated in his historical rendition about them and their stories about their way of life:

Our people [white] have disregarded honesty and truth whenever they have come in contract with the Indian and he has had no rights because he has never had any power to enforce any. Americans are conscientious people, yet they take no interests in these frauds. They have the Anglo-Saxon spirit of fair play, which sympathizes with weakness, yet no protest. This reason is the fact that practically no one has any personal knowledge of the Indian race. The white person who gives his idea of a story of Indian life inevitably looks at things from

the civilized point of view, and assigns to the Indian such motives and feelings as governed the civilized man. The Indian is a man, not much different from his white brother, except that he is underdeveloped, intensely religious, and has the mind and feelings of child with the stature of a man (Grinnell, xii).¹

Colonialism is established in the historical narrative and became the underlying principle for the foundation upon which the written tribal history was then based. The colonial influences that were so tightly woven into the fabric of that narrative became the acceptable views about the Blackfoot. Overcoming this colonial historical narrative has been a tremendous barrier and a challenge for the Blackfoot people, and continues to plague us as we struggle for self-determination as a Tribe in the twenty-first century.

It will be critical to our survival as Tribal peoples to understand how history has impacted federal and tribal policy making regarding Indian lands and land management, as well as how that policy has in turn affected indigenous value systems. It is of utmost importance for Blackfoot people to undertake the process of critically evaluating and analyzing the historical narratives and policies that mark our past and how that past impacts the way we utilize land and natural resources today. The process needs to start with an evaluation and critical analysis of written historical materials and policy. We need to evaluate and understand all of the influences that have impacted us as indigenous peoples and affected our relationship and connection with the land, including the impacts of colonization, the resultant federal Indian policy that we are forced to live with today and other factors that influence tribal policy making. This process needs to include major emphasis on the critical analysis of colonial ideologies that underlie specific policy documents and historical materials, and the construction of

an indigenous framework upon which to write a decolonized indigenous land history narrative.

This thesis critically evaluates the colonial historical narrative, taking into account the worldview and traditional value systems of the Blackfoot, in order to construct and write a Blackfoot land history narrative and provide an indigenous historical perspective of the impacts colonial influences have had upon the traditional land base of the Blackfoot. I specifically focus on interactions with the grasslands environment, including the Blackfoot peoples' historical relationship with the grazing of bison, horses and later, domestic cattle:

This process of re-identifying with our own historical foundations is critically important for us to understand how we got to where we are today. It is extremely important for us to capture and record the Blackfoot philosophy regarding the people-land connection as it relates to our historical relationship with the land and our natural environment. In our efforts to succeed as a tribe with self-determination and self-governance, it is important to critically evaluate the colonial historical narrative, and construct and write a Blackfoot land history narrative. This Blackfoot land history narrative is only the first step in a process that will need to include further evaluation and deconstruction of colonial policies and the development of contemporary management strategies. A major political challenge arises from this effort and the attempt to balance that foundation with contemporary land management issues that we currently face. It is critical for us as tribal peoples to incorporate our worldviews and cultural value systems into the historical narrative and our relationship with the land, as

well as identify colonial aspects that continue to influence the contemporary land management system. A decolonized land history should aid in the process of evaluating and resolving complex resource management issues and problems on the Blackfeet reservation. As tribal peoples, we need to identify solutions and develop management strategies that include Blackfeet philosophies, worldview and cultural values so that we can plan and effectively manage our natural resources for the long term sustainability of our lands and our tribal societies.

A decolonized tribal land history that reincorporates and adds value and emphasis to Blackfeet philosophies, worldview, and cultural values is the key to unlocking the dysfunctional management system and identifying the colonial influences from federal Indian policies. Dysfunction and chaos were created when colonial land management values and systems were applied to indigenous societies and their relationships with the land and natural environment. The inconsistencies created by these mismatching values continue to impact the management system that our natural resources are currently being managed. Revitalizing and reintegrating Blackfeet philosophies, worldview, and cultural values regarding the historic land-people connection and the stewardship ethic is one means of resolving the political and cultural conflicts, including the clashes between competing factions within the tribe over the contemporary management of land and resources. Understanding colonialism and addressing the impacts colonization and historical marginalization have upon the Blackfoot people, with regard to their relationship with the land, will create a renewed awareness of the foundation upon which these indigenous values were based. A

renewed awareness will strengthen our abilities to succeed as a self-determined people. Understanding these impacts is crucial in reestablishing a decolonized historical foundation for the tribe and in providing long term sustainability of our lands and resources and move in a forward direction in the 21st century.

I believe that by critically analyzing policy we can initiate the process of decolonization. Writing an indigenous decolonized land history, as we know and experienced it, will reaffirm the cultural values and worldviews of the Blackfeet and add value to our historical foundation, as indigenous people. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, a leading indigenous scholar and theorist on decolonization of the Maori in New Zealand, states:

“Indigenous peoples have mounted a critique of the way history is told from the perspective of the colonizers. At the same time, however, indigenous groups have argued that history is important for understanding the present and reclaiming history is a critical and essential element of decolonization (Smith, 30).”²

Decolonization of the historical narrative is only the first step in the process of reconciliation with our pasts.

Understanding History Through the Use of Decolonization and Deconstruction

Decolonization and deconstruction should not be limited to the critical analysis of colonial policy and history as the dominant story. For indigenous peoples the process of decolonization needs to move beyond this point. Because history, politics and cultural considerations are so interwoven it is extremely important for Tribes to

understand the impacts and influences of colonialism and how it affects the tribal communities that we live in today. Smith defines decolonization in the following manner:

Decolonization is a process which engages with imperialism and colonialism at multiple levels. For researchers, one of those levels is concerned with having a more critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations and values which inform research practices. Within this critique there have been two major strands. One draws upon the notion of authenticity, of a time before colonization in which we were intact as indigenous peoples. The other strand demands that we have an analysis of how we were colonized, of what that has meant in terms of our immediate past and what it means for our present and future. The two strands intersect but what is particularly significant in indigenous discourse is that solutions are posed from a combination of the time before, *colonized time*, and the time before that, *pre-colonized time*. Decolonization encapsulates both sets of ideas.

In addition to decolonization, I also examined the theory of deconstruction, a philosophy proposed by Jacques Derrida in France in the 1960's. In order for indigenous scholars to apply colonial tools, it is important to understand the theoretical foundation from which those tools were developed. Deconstruction as a methodology has grown and expanded from its inception in the 60's; the implications of limiting deconstruction to an apolitical application has been the subject of much debate. Derrida himself, entered the debate about the political implications of deconstruction in the 1990's in his book *Spectres of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*³ which clearly demonstrates his intention that deconstruction is not merely an apolitical amusement limited to literary criticism and texts. Deconstruction was turned into a tool of decolonization when Gayatri Spivak, used it to deconstruct the "West" as a center of academic "truth" by deconstructing academic metanarratives. She uses deconstruction to open up a place for the oppressed "Other" to speak in these

academic discourses.⁴ Smith, as an indigenous theorist, also advances the oppressed "Other" in addressing decolonization.

American Indian scholars have employed deconstructionist methodologies in new contexts to decolonize academic disciplines, such as history and anthropology, and their hegemonic claims to expertise regarding the study of Indian peoples in the Americas. Native scholars, such as Angela Cavender Wilson and Donald Fixico, have tailored and refined the use of deconstruction as a tool to critically examine the colonizer-colonized power and authority differential underlying academic metanarratives about American Indians and to free Indian history from the ivory towers of academia. Native American Studies scholars have to recognize deconstruction as a tool, pick it up and learn to apply it as a methodology within their own sociocultural contexts to further the political process of decolonizing academia.

I believe that using deconstruction in this manner is a necessary step to open up space within these hegemonic discourses, to create the latitude for indigenous scholars to develop indigenous theories and construct indigenous perspectives from Indian voices and viewpoints that have been marginalized and suppressed.

As an indigenous scholar, I am using deconstruction as a tool, just one part of the process of taking information apart, in this case dismantling the historical narrative of the Blackfoot, separating historical information into its basic elements or parts. The deconstruction process is focused on examining the basic elements and identifying the influence that ethnocentric bias has on the historical narrative to determine how bias has affected the distribution of power and the claims to authority within the historical

model. It is equally important for other indigenous scholars to redefine how these tools will be used in an indigenous context.

I have cautiously applied the tools of decolonization and deconstruction to information and historical materials relating to the Blackfoot people land relationship from several different research areas. My thesis addresses the construction of an indigenous perspective of the decolonized history of the Blackfeet people land relationship.

According to Richard White, Professor of History at the University of Washington, using environmental history as a research tool is one that must also be used cautiously. White warns that while utilizing ethnohistory, environmental history and environmental sciences for interpreting Native American history, we should consider the origin of documented sources and how whites and Indian people perceived their realities and terminology, as well as being aware of the need to ask the proper scholarly questions. He states that:

Much of what we do is a kind of literary analysis, but with a difference. History is an act of interpretation; it is among other things, a reading and rereading of documents. Ideally our methods are always comparative. We compare documents; we read them against each other. We order them chronologically. Deconstruction is, in a sense what historians have done for a considerable time. We look for assumptions; hidden threads of connection; we probe for absence (White, 93).⁵

The process of constructing and writing a decolonized indigenous land history narrative Blackfoot people can use to understand the colonization process, how it impacted the people-land relationship and how it continues to impact land management decision making is not be an easy task because of the politics involved. The critical

analysis of the historical materials will be the easiest part. Constructing and writing an indigenous historical narrative can be accomplished by incorporating indigenous concepts, reaffirming traditional values systems, and developing indigenous theories that re-integrate our worldviews back into contemporary land management systems which affect the tribal communities, as well as the greater American society we live in. There will be political resistance because a small faction of tribal members adapted to the colonial policies, exert political pressure in the system and have benefited from colonization at the expense of the communal society and the land base that remains. But the question still remains, how do we know where we are going as a tribal people with regard to the management of the land, if we do not understand the history of how we got to where we are today? That is why it is so important to redefine the way we see ourselves and the way the world sees us, and to approach the issue of "*rewriting* or *rerighting* our position in history (Smith, 28)."

I believe that Blackfeet people and all other indigenous peoples need to have a solid understanding of their respective tribal histories because this is the foundation upon which cultural identity and worldview are so strongly tied. It is important to know where one comes from and how the historical evolution progressed through the perspectives and history of one's own people. By recording and continuing the indigenous understanding of our respective histories, worldviews, and traditional value systems, we control our self-identity as indigenous people and this in turn perpetuates our cultural existence.

American history is written from a colonial perspective, the result of a progression of American colonial politics, and the scientific and anthropological theories it has produced over the past 500 years. The conceptual framework and the dominant narrative of American history, United States history, and Montana history lacks an indigenous perspective and voice. American historians tend to ignore or dismiss people whose experiences and interpretations of the past do not conform to the master narrative (Calloway, 3).⁶ The succession of the American historical narrative directly correlates to colonial management philosophies and Federal Indian policies developed to manage and assimilate indigenous peoples into American society.

The injustice surrounding the past five centuries of writing American history and Indian history is that indigenous peoples have had little opportunity to participate, or provide their perspectives in the historical narrative that defines them or their places on the North American continent. During the process of colonization, the indigenous peoples of America did not have any participatory role in the development of Federal Indian policy and law other than to challenge them and to seek remediation through the colonizer's legal systems and Supreme Court. A direct result of this exclusion is that American Indian Tribes in the United States are forced to live within a colonized structure and are the most heavily regulated political/minority group that exists in the United States.

The United States of America is not a post-colonial nation as we enter the 21st century. The concepts of trust responsibility, Indian trust lands and the trust relationship that exist between the United States government and federally recognized

tribes, as well as individual Indian people who are recipients of the trust, is a prime example of the continued colonization of tribes, Indian people and Indian lands. The efforts by the U.S. judicial system to resolve the Cobell Trust Funds lawsuit that resulted from the 100+ years of federal mismanagement of Indian trust funds derived from Indian trust assets is a case in point.

Writing history is about power and authority. Who has the power and authority to decide what "really" happened in history and who gets to determine who has the privilege of writing that history? It is because of this power differential that indigenous peoples have been excluded from the historical narrative, marginalized, and perceived as inferior or in a negative manner. We became the "others," because those who had the power and authority to write history felt that the safest place for indigenous peoples to exist was on in the margins, or not included in the pages of history at all.

The cultures, lifeways, and worldviews of indigenous peoples are different from those who colonized this continent, just as they are different for each Tribe. Being the colonized peoples of America, we experienced the history of colonization in a different manner than those who colonized North America and the immigrants who invade our lands. Our understanding and perspectives of those same historical events is different. We need to re-write (re-right) the historical narrative to include our perspectives and our respective tribal histories to reflect those facts. History need to be written in a manner that includes the experiences and understanding of the colonization of indigenous peoples, without any bias, inferiority, shame or remorse. Ward Churchill states, "Virtually everyone has agreed that the impacts of colonialism on Native

Americans and their societies must be considered and that Native American Studies needs to bring new, post-colonial perspectives on the Native American past, present and future.”

History is also about justice. It is important for society to recognize that the way that the historical narrative is written continues to have impacts upon present day situations and will continue to exert influence into the future. It is extremely important for scholars and historians to examine the effects and impacts that colonialism and politics have upon history as a theoretical model. They must also ensure that history is decolonized and deconstructed, such that it portrays an accurate and comprehensive understanding of the historical events. Indigenous peoples need to look further within their respective tribal histories to determine the direct results and impacts these colonial influences have on them. It is extremely important for indigenous peoples to be an inclusive, interactive part of developing and constructing the historical narrative so that it accurately reflects their culture and history and includes their worldview, perspectives and values.

Decolonization and deconstruction, as methodologies, critically dissect the historical narrative by identifying the influence that colonialism and ethnocentric bias have on the historical narrative, as well as the claims to authority within the historical model, despite its claim to be objective. Since very little Indian history or tribal histories are actually written by Native historians, it is extremely important for native peoples to be able to critically evaluate historical information and materials and deconstruct policies as they relate to one's respective tribal group. In a decolonized framework,

deconstruction is part of a much larger intent (Smith, 3). It would be extremely difficult to undertake the process of decolonization with understanding or using deconstruction to critically evaluating information and historical materials.

To avoid further marginalization, it is necessary for indigenous scholars to apply decolonization and deconstruction, colonialist academic tools, to the historical narrative to critically analyze authoritarian views, identify ethnocentric bias, and dismantle the power differential between non-Indian and Indian historians. It is critically important for indigenous peoples to be an inclusive, interactive part of reconstructing that framework for the development of historical narratives that present a more comprehensive history that is free of bias, accurately reflects indigenous cultures, oral traditions, and includes indigenous worldviews, perspectives and traditional values as we know and understand them. Students and scholars need to be able to evaluate, critique and analyze both native and non-native historians, political and social systems, and scientific theory to determine the context and intent of the historical information. An understanding of indigenous tribal histories is necessary, as well as perspectives which cut through the usual point of reference in colonial history that obscures indigenous voices. By correcting historical narratives, written primarily from colonial perspectives outside our cultures, we will impact present day interpretations and influence history in the future.

It is important to acknowledge the differences in recording history. Many indigenous cultures, including the Blackfoot, evolved as oral cultures and we transferred knowledge through the mechanism of oral traditions and oral histories. The Blackfoot

did not have a written language so there was a distinct cultural difference between recording time in a linear manner in written narrative form versus recording time as it occurred in a cyclical manner. The Blackfoot used winter counts to illustrate and document significant events on an annual basis. Although they were not utilized to record history in a comprehensive manner, Dempsey states that, "The winter counts of the Blackfoot Indians were simple but effective methods of reckoning time (Dempsey, 3)."⁷

It is particularly important that written materials include our worldviews, traditional value systems and cultural values from emic perspectives, as we see and understand them. There is very little Blackfoot history or materials that have been written or published by Blackfoot people about Blackfoot culture or the history about their relationship with the land. The literature review will provide a brief overview of those written material that do exist with regard to supporting this thesis.

The authority for the foundation of the written history about the Blackfoot appears to be non-native outsiders capturing Blackfoot history from etic perspectives, outside the Blackfoot circle. Due to cultural differences, and differences in worldviews and value systems, these outsider views are limited in scope and perception. They exclude Blackfoot culture, worldviews and values. As Grinnell stated, when he published the *Lodge Tales* in 1892, "Practically no one has any personal knowledge of the Indian race. The white person who gives his idea of a story of Indian life inevitably looks at things from the civilized point of view, and assigns to the Indian such motives and feelings as governed the civilized man (Grinnell, xii)."

In *Ethics in Writing American Indian History*, Fixico states that, "The problem for those who write about American Indians is that written sources have been produced almost exclusively by non-Indians (Fixico, 92). " This puts us at somewhat of a disadvantage in an academic sense because as an oral culture we lack the written materials that are so valued and used to legitimize the historical narrative that supports American history. On the other hand, it provides the opportunity for us to work with our elders and others within our communities to develop Blackfoot history as we know it through oral traditions, preserving our culture and worldviews. Understanding both the internalness [emic perspective] and externalness [etic perspective] of tribal communities is critically important in presenting a balanced history (Fixico, 92).

As native scholars we need to move beyond the realm of academia and institutionalized learning and refocus the lens of learning to allow for the development of indigenous theories, the construction of indigenous models, and the revival, reaffirmation and inclusion of indigenous concepts and values. This would support balanced learning styles that are more comfortable and conducive for us as indigenous peoples and ensure inclusion of our worldviews and philosophies into the writing of historical perspectives.

In contemporary tribal societies, there is a clash between traditional values systems and the dominant colonial values that has been brought about by colonization. The process of colonization and the resultant American history included Euro American science, political science and sociology, policymaking and law. These colonial influences impact every aspect of the lives of indigenous people in today's world. Some of us have

survived very comfortably as "the others" for a long time in a colonial political environment. Those who economically benefited from the chaos, dysfunction and exploitation of the current politically driven land management system will probably be critical of a historical deconstruction and the process of developing a decolonized historical narrative.

Indigenous peoples need to decolonize themselves by critically evaluating American history and the process of colonization, examining the influences and subjugation that colonial history and policies have upon them as communal societies and the changes colonization brought to the worldview concerning the people-land-relationship and the values regarding indigenous knowledge. The process of decolonization is critical to recognize the impact that colonial influences have upon the system under which our land and natural resources are managed.

The contemporary confines of Federal Indian policy and tribal resource policies are directly influenced by colonial history and colonial management philosophies that were not developed or written by Blackfeet people and do not include our cultural worldviews, cultural values and traditions. The problems are also defined by a set of attitudes and economic relationships that place Native communities under the control of outsiders. Any conscious person must also recognize that "decolonization" alone is not a total solution, but it is a start (Hoxie, xiii). Additional efforts are needed to deconstruct federal and tribal policies, evaluate the effectiveness of these policies, and the influences and impacts colonization have upon the people and the land.

Indigenous people need to assume leadership for reviving and reaffirming indigenous worldviews and cultural value systems to meet tribal needs within tribal circles and management of tribal resources. The ability to perpetuate our self-identity as indigenous peoples is dependent upon our ability to write and preserve our respective histories, worldviews and traditional value systems. This reconciliation with the historical narrative is necessary for us to begin healing as indigenous societies as we move forward with self-determination as tribal peoples. We need to come to terms with who we are, where we came from and how we got to the current situations that we are in as Tribes. As tribal peoples, we need to understand the influences and impacts of colonization, resolve some of the age old values conflicts that stem from being colonized and living under the influences of a colonial historical narrative, and strive to balance and sustain the management of our lands and natural resources to survive as an indigenous society in a contemporary world. This process of decolonization will require us to identify those colonial processes that influenced us in the past and continue to influence our political systems today. This is the only way that we can move beyond the political chaos and dysfunctional land management systems that we are currently stuck in and move forward as a people.

The emphasis of my thesis changed over time. Initially, I wanted to evaluate the current grazing policy of the Blackfeet Tribe. The grazing policy impacts me personally as a tribal member, a land owner and leasee of land on the Blackfeet Reservation. Moreover, the dysfunction of the land management system is impacting the land and resource base of the Tribe. Graduate school was the means for me to develop tools that

and provide me with the necessary foundation I would need to begin to facilitate conflict resolution and provide leadership to identify ways to address complex resource management issues on the Blackfeet Reservation. However, I realized that in order to understand contemporary issues regarding land management policy, as well as resolve conflict, and solve complex problems, one must examine history to develop a thorough understanding of the situation. There is no written information that comprehensively addresses the land history of the Blackfoot, as indigenous people. This thesis addresses the first step to construct and write a Blackfoot land history narrative, the initial beginning of a long term project to address Blackfeet land and natural resource management issues.

To write such a history, it is necessary to conduct research and to complete a review of literature on the subject. Because of the enormous amount of information that needs to be included in this process, to create a total picture and comprehensive document of this type, the information in my thesis has been greatly condensed to provide a brief overview of only the necessary topic areas.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review outlines the historical materials, documents and other reference information used to support this thesis. I chose to use Donald Fixico's *"Reconstructing Native American History"* and *"Ethics and Responsibilities in Writing American Indian History"* along with William T. Hagan's *"New Indian History"* and Devon Mihesuah's *"Introduction"* to the anthology *Natives and Academics – Researching and Writing about American Indians* and Angela Cavender Wilson's *"American Indian History or Non-Indian Perceptions of American Indian History?"*, these works allowed me to critically evaluate the historical information, examine emic and etic perspectives, as well as the ethics of the history that was presented in specific materials and documents. I also used these works as models to organize references and materials for the literature review. Fixico, Mihesuah and Wilson are leading Native scholars and all prominent historians in the field of American Indian or Native American history.

I also used methodologies outlined by Linda Tuhiwai Smith in her book *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* to critically examine and evaluate historical materials and information to decolonize those perspectives. Smith provides an indigenous perspective regarding the need for indigenous peoples to recognize the influence of colonization upon their communities. In addition, Smith addresses the need for indigenous people to examine and decolonize history, as well as

western based philosophical influences that threaten indigenous epistemological foundations.

For native scholars, constructing and writing history about one's own indigenous group becomes even more problematic than just evaluating and examining written materials. Writing an indigenous historical narrative has to take into account the written history that exists, identifying and critically examining its colonial influences, while emphasizing the tribe's oral traditions and history to provide an indigenous perspective. This indigenous perspective should braid these various historical threads together and provide a balance to all of these aspects. As Fixico states, "The complexity of American Indian life and reality has been underrepresented by scholars and writers, who have produced more than thirty thousand books about Native Americans. It has become too simple to write American Indian history from only printed documents."⁸

There are volumes of historical materials written about the Blackfoot that span the timeframe of the past century; the initial historical pieces were published in the 1890's and at the turn of the twentieth century. These materials vary widely in their scope, context and frame of reference to the Blackfoot as indigenous people, their history and way of life. This literature review is an overview of the major pieces of literature that I used in formulating and developing my thesis. There are several other pieces that I used minor references from that are included in the bibliography.

It was easier to see the similarities and differences between the materials and information when I began to use Fixico's *Reconstructing American Indian History*, and his *Ethics and Responsibilities in Writing American Indian History* along with William T.

Hagan's *New Indian History* as models to organize the literature into specific groupings. Fixico and Hagan break Indian history into specific time periods based upon publication dates. They also establish the foundation for Indian history by examining the context under which the materials were written and the ethics that should be involved in writing Indian history. Fixico distinguishes between frontier historians, who were living in that period of time and writing about it, from contemporary historians who write about the frontier era. Fixico states, "Before the 1960's, writers of Native American history literally wrote about Indians from an outsider's point of view, and they relied on printed documents as their primary evidence (Fixico, 118)." His statement distinguishes a difference between the ethics of historians that were initially writing about Indian history and historians addressing Indian history in a more contemporary sense. It is important to note and understand that, "Each generation reviews and rewrites history in the light of its own experiences and understandings, aspirations, and anxieties (Calloway, 2)."

After reading, rereading and researching many of these historical materials, I sorted the initial historical literature about the Blackfoot into "first encounter or contact history," one of the timeframes that Fixico suggests can be used to assess the value of sources of Indian history. These materials include George Bird Grinnell's *Blackfoot Lodge Tales*, *The Story of a Prairie People*, Frank Linderman's *Indian Why Stories*, *Sparks from War Eagle's Lodge Fire*, Clark Wissler and D.C. Duvall's *Mythology of the Blackfoot Indians* and James Willard Schultz's *Blackfeet Tales of Glacier National Park*. These works are followed

by John C. Ewers' *The Blackfeet, Raiders of the Northwestern Plains* and *The Horse in Blackfoot Indian Culture*.

I quoted George Bird Grinnell's "Blackfoot Lodge Tales in my introduction to illustrate how written history established the foundation for a colonial historical narrative about the Blackfeet. As I stated previously, this collection of stories is the first comprehensive piece of historical literature transcribed and written about the Blackfeet. Although it contains strong tones of ethnocentrism, as well as examples of white superiority and racial bias that prevailed at the turn of the twentieth century, it established the foundation for other pieces that would follow. In the newly republished version of Linderman's *Indian Why Stories* (2001), Celeste River's quoted the following in her "Introduction to the Bison Books Edition" which raises question as to Grinnell's true intentions and motives in his initial writings about the Blackfeet and other Indians.

In a letter to Linderman, Grinnell wrote: "You say faking is about to begin on Indian stories. Your tense is wrong. Faking began a good while ago, but it is certainly true that it is growing all the time.... One hundred years hence no one who reads about the Indians will be able to distinguish the true from the false, the facts from the inventions."⁹

I interpreted Grinnell's instructions to Linderman to mean that he had embellished upon Indian stories in his writings and that he was encouraging Linderman to do the same, since in a hundred years no one who read the stories would be able to distinguish if what they had written were truly facts or if the stories were invented.

Because of language and cultural barriers, Blackfeet storytellers, at the turn of the nineteenth century, lacked the ability to critique Grinnell and other writers' interpretations of the stories from oral traditions. They had no way to ensure that the

outsiders with whom they had shared and entrusted the care of the stories to be put into books would document the oral traditions and tribal history in a manner that was unbiased and truly reflected the cultural values regarding history. As a result the encounter and contact pieces of history written at the turn of the twentieth century need to be examined very carefully.

James Willard Schultz opened the door to the Blackfeet world for Grinnell. Grinnell gives credence to Schultz as the "discoverer of the literature of the Blackfeet," and credits him with originally making public a portion of the materials contained in the "Lodge Tales." Through a literary means, Grinnell's "Blackfoot Lodge Tales" further exposed the Blackfeet, their culture and oral traditions to the world. The "Lodge Tales" set the stage and served as the primary foundation for others that would followed Grinnell. A multitude of anthropologists, archaeologists, historians, ethnographers, researchers, writers, artists and photographers such as Frank Linderman, Edward S. Curtis, Charlie Russell, Clark Wissler, Walter McClintock, John C. Ewers, Hugh Dempsey, William Farr, and Alice Kehoe among others have marched through the Blackfeet world over the past century, following in Grinnell's literary footsteps.

Grinnell's "Lodge Tales" provides the reader with an etic perspective of the Blackfeet, that of an "outsider" looking in. The one clear distinction that must be remembered is that Grinnell only had a brief glimpse of the Blackfeet world. Observational history is one dimensional and limited to description, whereas a fuller understanding of American Indian [Blackfeet] history requires rethinking the Indian past as distinct communities with their own cultures and with their own understanding

of their historical relationships ... (Fixico, 126). The Blackfeet world from an "insider's" perspective is markedly different from that has portrayed in the "Lodge Tales."

There is another dimension to the Blackfeet world, beyond that of observational history that Grinnell could not put to paper, no matter how hard he tried. It contains a rich, vibrant, multi-dimensional culture. As stated by William Farr, noted scholar of Blackfeet history, "What matter most in constructing a sustaining and sustainable future is the ritual history - that is the stories, oral and written, [a connection to the history and ceremony of Blackfeet life] which together provide a reassuring grasp of the rules, of the code to the whole Blackfeet spiritual economy (Farr, 306)."¹⁰

Grinnell first came to the Blackfeet Reservation in 1885 and published the "Lodge Tales" in 1892. Blackfeet people at that time realized the differential of power and politics when pen is put to paper under the written control of an outsider, but were powerless when it came to the overcoming the barriers of the loss of ideology and meaning when Nitsi poi yiks (speaker of the real language) was translated to English. Grinnell acknowledges Schultz's assistance and identifies two Blackfeet people who provided assistance with language interpretation.

Following is a translated passage that Grinnell used to open the Lodge Tales. The excerpt is focused on one of the storytelling sessions in which Double Runner, one of the storytellers, picks up a piece of paper Grinnell had been writing on and says to him:

"This is education. Here is the difference between you and me, between Indians and white people. You know what this means. I do not. If I did know I would be as smart as you. If all my people knew, the white people would not always get the best of us (Grinnell, ix)."¹¹

Few Blackfeet people spoke English at that time and they were not reading literature written in English. The push to formally educate Blackfeet children did not begin until after 1890. It wasn't until 1912 that Blackfeet people, like D.C. Duvall, who was actively working with Clark Wissler, began interpreting Blackfeet stories into written English and interpreting written literature ("In Memoriam," *Social Life of the Blackfeet Indians* [1912, p. ii]).¹² The Moonlight School, primarily focused on educating adults in an effort to eradicate illiteracy was not opened until the early 1930's (Farr, 128).¹³

Grinnell's "Lodge Tales," being the first piece of literature written about the Blackfeet, has been held as the foundational piece of written literature about the Blackfeet. As such, it influenced other writers and researchers that followed him. The "Lodge Tales," as a written historical narrative of Blackfeet oral traditions, influenced not only the world's views about the Blackfeet and those most curious about Indian people over the past century, but our own views about ourselves.

Written literature is used as one of the primary means of educating others. In the process of assimilating Indians into the greater American society, education was one of the primary means used to accomplish that task. Indian students were not allowed to question the materials and American history we were being taught.

As the grandchildren of the generations that followed, we have read the stories and other things that our grandfathers, the storytellers, told Grinnell. As scholars, we now have the skills and abilities to critique Grinnell's "Lodge Tales" and other literature regarding our oral tradition and history that our grandparents lacked in that time so

long ago. It is up to us to unlock the interpretation of our past and the foundation of our respective tribal histories for ourselves and for our tribal communities. We have a responsibility to identify inaccurate interpretations of Blackfeet culture and history, as well as the influences these interpretation had upon history. We must ensure that the stories and written history are accurate and unbiased for our grandchildren and others.

Over a hundred years after Grinnell published the *Lodge Tales*, the influence of his works is strewn across and referenced in other pieces of literature that span over a century of time. Contemporary anthropologist, Alice Beck Kehoe, still considers the foundation Grinnell established to hold true. Kehoe references Grinnell's work by stating, "Blackfoot Lodge Tales (1892) remains a sound volume of well-told stories.", in the *"Introduction to the Bison Book Edition"* she wrote for the republished edition of the *Mythology of the Blackfoot Indians* in 1995. The *Mythology of the Blackfoot Indians*, also a contact piece of literature, written by Clark Wissler and D.C. Duvall in 1908, references Grinnell's works as being, "by far the most complete collection (Wissler and Duvall, 6)." ¹⁴

This is why it is so important for indigenous scholars and others to critically analyze and evaluate the context under which encounter and contact history was written because these pieces of literature established the foundation for written literature and influenced researchers and writers that followed. Although these encounter and contact pieces of literature are available to be used as references, the etic perspectives they provide of the culture and history of indigenous peoples need to be critiqued and carefully examined using decolonizing methodologies.

In efforts to write better American Indian history, those writing post 1950's and 1960's literature about Indians were beginning to emphasize the "displacement of Indians from American Indian history (Fixico, 118)."¹⁵ In the mid to late 1950's transitional pieces, researched and written from ethnohistorical perspectives began emerging. At that time, the root cause of revisionism was the greatly increased activities in the field brought on by the need for expert testimony for cases before the Indian Court of Claims (Hagan, 30).¹⁶ Such scholarship was used support tribal treaty claims and claims regarding aboriginal territories during litigation. Michael F. Foley's *An Historical Analysis of the Blackfeet Reservations by the United States 1855 - 1950's, Indian Claims Commission, Docket Number 279-D* is an example of transitional ethnohistorical literature about the Blackfeet. Another book written during this era was Walter McClintock's *The Old North Trail*.

Hagan states that, "The New Indian history was born in the discussion of ethnohistory that flourished of the 1950's and 1960's."¹⁷ This change was influenced by opening of the D'Arcy McNickle Center for the History of American Indian, at the Newberry Library in 1972. In 1975 Francis Jennings, Dean of the Center, "led the way for a major revision of the history of Indian - white relations in the colonial period (Hagan, 33).", when he published *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest*.

Literature focused on Blackfeet history written during this new Indian history era attempted to capture the Blackfeet side of history. The literature on Blackfeet history that I utilized for research and writing from this new Indian history era included Hugh

Dempsey's *A Blackfoot Winter Count*, William Farr's *The Reservation Blackfeet, 1882-1945* and *Trouble Bundles, Troubled Blackfeet: The Travail of Cultural and Religious Renewal*, John C. Jackson's *The Piikani Blackfeet, A Culture Under Siege*, Michael Malone, Roeder and Lang's revised edition of *Montana, A History of Two Centuries*, and Paul C. Rosier's *Rebirth of the Blackfeet Nation, 1912-1954*.

The literature that is based upon emic perspectives of Blackfeet people outlining the history of the Blackfeet people land relationship through oral traditions and oral histories and genealogy includes Percy Bullchild's *The Sun Came Down, The History of the World as My Blackfeet Elders Told It*, the Blackfeet Heritage Program's *Blackfeet Heritage 1907- 1908*, and The Blackfoot Gallery Committee's *Nitsitapiisinni, The Story of the Blackfoot People*.

I compared non-Indian written encounter and contact literature, such as Grinnell's works, with ethnohistories and literature from the new Indian history. I then critically examined these non-Indian works in light of those written by Blackfeet people, as well as my own experiences with oral traditions and Blackfeet history, which provide an emic perspective.

Constructing a land history from an emic perspective requires an understanding of the indigenous philosophies surrounding the relationships between the Blackfeet, plants, animals and the land and is paramount to writing an indigenous land history. I utilized the following pieces of literature to examine philosophy regarding land history and sacred ecologies and the Blackfeet relationship with grasslands, bison and horses. This literature included Keith H. Basso's *Wisdom Sits In Places, Landscape and Language*

Among the Western Apache, Vine Deloria, Jr's *For This Land, Writings on Religion in America* and *Red Earth White Lies*, *Native Americans and the Myth of Scientific Fact*, Andrew Gulliford's *Sacred Objects and Sacred Places, Preserving Tribal Traditions*, Alex Johnston's *Plants and the Blackfoot*, Howard I. Harrod's *The Animals Came Dancing*, *Native American Sacred Ecologies and Animal Kinship*, Brian Reeves and Sandy Peacock's *The Mountains Are Our Pillows, An Ethnographic Overview of Glacier National Park*, along with information from Nitsitapiisinni, *The Story of the Blackfoot People* that addresses Blackfeet perspective of sacred ecologies, as reference above. I also considered Sheppard Krech, III's *Ecology, Conservation and the Buffalo Jump* to examine contrasting views of indigenous people's relationships with land and animals.

In examining land history it is important to address land tenure and land use issues. I evaluated information from Terry Anderson's *Land Tenure and Agricultural Productivity in Indian Country* and *Sovereign Nations or Reservations*, William Cronon's *Changes in the Land, Indians, Colonists and the Ecology of New England* and Cronon and Richard White's *Ecological Change and Indian - White Relations*, Peter Iverson's *When Indians Became Cowboys, Native People and Cattle Ranching in the American West*, Winona Laduke's *All Our Relations, Native Struggles for Land and Life*, Ward Churchill's *Struggle For The Land, Indigenous Resistance to Genocide, Ecocide and Expropriation In Contemporary North America* and Donald Fixico's *Invasion of Indian Country in the Twentieth Century*.

I compared literature regarding philosophies surrounding sacred ecologies and indigenous relationship with land, specifically focusing on the Blackfoot's relationship and philosophy regarding the land, buffalo and plants. I examined works that address

indigenous land tenure issues and the way colonialism impacted indigenous values regarding land. In addressing the philosophical foundation of the Blackfeet people land relationship, land ownership and land use issues, I also incorporated a lifetime of personal experiences as a Blackfeet person and experiential learning that occurred in a cultural context. I also drew upon my twenty years of professional work in tribal affairs, experiences as a tribal conservationist and natural resources planner, along with my serving as a member of the Blackfeet Fish and Wildlife Commission.

I also researched and reviewed legal documents pertaining to treaties, land cessions and agreements between the Blackfeet and the U.S. Government. These included the *Treaty with the Blackfeet*,¹⁸ 1855, *Blackfeet Reserve established by Treaties of October 17, 1855, Treaty of July 18, 1866 and September 1, 1868* (both unratified), an *Act of April 15, 1874*, an *Act of May 1, 1888*, an *Agreement of June 10, 1896*¹⁹ and map *Montana* ¹²⁰, *Indian Land Cessions in the United States, 1784 to 1894*. All of these documents are available online through *The Library of Congress* website and Kappler's *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties, Vol.1, Laws*. These documents are critically important in constructing an indigenous land history because they established the legal foundation and precedence upon which legal decisions are based with regard the Blackfeet relationship with the U.S. government.

In an effort to create an environment conducive to indigenous theory and indigenous perspectives regarding decolonization of history I utilized David R. M. Beck's *the Myth of the Vanishing Race*, Ward Churchill's *The Tragedy and Travesty: The Subversion of Indigenous Sovereignty in North America*, Arif Dirlik's *The Past as Legacy and*

Project" Postcolonial Criticism in the Perspectives of Indigenous Historicism, Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies, Research and Indigenous Peoples* and Franke Wilmer's *The Indigenous Voice in World Politics*. I used these works to establish a foundation from which to apply decolonization to information and historical materials.

Because it is impossible to construct an indigenous perspective of a Blackfeet land history narrative without considering the contemporary political era of tribal self-determination and self-governance as a Tribe, I also researched literature addressing political and legal interpretations, as well as self-determination and sovereignty issues specific to American Indian tribes. These works included Vine Deloria, Jr. and Clifford Lytle's *The Nations Within, The Past and Future of American Indian Sovereignty*, James J. Lopach, Brown and Clow's *Tribal Governments Today, Politics on Montana Indian Reservations*, Sharon O'Brien's *American Indian Tribal Governments*, David E. Wilkins, *American Indian Sovereignty and the U.S. Supreme Court* and Wilkins and K. Tsianina Lomawaima's *Uneven Ground, American Indian Sovereignty and Federal Law*, along with Chapter I of Judith V. Royster and Michael C. Blumm's *Native American Natural Resources Law, Cases and Material*.

I realized, throughout the research and the writing of this thesis, that the process of evaluating the colonial historical narrative to construct and write an indigenous land history would be a complex and extremely challenging task. There are so many different strands of history and differing perspectives that need to be considered and critically evaluated during the process. Taking on such a task carries with it many responsibilities.

The Blackfeet Land History outlined in Chapter Two will weave these strands and perspectives together, while decolonizing information and historical materials to provide an indigenous perspective of the Blackfeet people-land-relationship and tenure upon the land. Due to those challenges of focusing specifically on historical influences that affect the land, this thesis presents other colonial influences in an extremely condensed manner, not intended to negate their impact but with respect to timely acceptance for academic purposes.

CHAPTER 3

THE STORY OF NITAWAHSI, OUR TERRITORY

A History of the Blackfoot People and their Land

As an indigenous person and a member of the Blackfeet Tribe, I am claiming a genealogical, cultural and political foundation with regard to my views, values and experiences. A lifetime of being immersed in the culture of my Tribe, living by these cultural standards and values have left me struggling to understand the impacts that colonization has upon the Blackfeet Tribe, other American Indian Tribes and indigenous peoples. In my personal journeys, I have become more focused on gathering materials and information relating to the indigenous perspective of the history of my tribe, in particular I have focused on the Blackfeet people and land relationship, how my tribe utilized and managed natural resources, and how this affects their lifestyles and attitudes today. This personal journey through time, place and history is what motivated me to pursue an academic degree in soil science and land resource management, a career as a conservationist and resource planner and led me to further my education with an advanced degree in Native American Studies. The past ten years have provided several opportunities that I have taken advantage of to conduct research, study and teach Blackfeet and other indigenous land history. I felt it was of critical

importance to develop indigenous theories and incorporate these concepts into a reconstructed Blackfeet land history that support decolonization.

No written historical narrative exists that addresses the historical impacts colonization had upon Blackfeet lands. By developing a thesis that provides an indigenous perspective of Blackfeet land history and constructing a written historical narrative that supports decolonization, the Blackfeet tribal people and others, will benefit from a more comprehensive historical narrative. This thesis is the first step towards developing an indigenous historical framework for the Blackfeet, as colonized peoples, to evaluate and critically examine the historical events that impacted the people and the land and seek to understand the historical past. I will discuss Blackfeet worldviews and philosophies regarding the traditional territory, and how it diminished in size and capacity from colonization. I will also address the cultural changes that occurred from the colonization of the Blackfeet with regard to the people-land relationship, as well as the impacts this has had on the cultural value system.

To begin the process of decolonization it is necessary to examine and critically evaluate the history of the colonization of the Blackfeet, as indigenous peoples, in a separate context from that of other Tribes. It is difficult to separate the history of the Blackfeet people from their history upon the land because they are so interconnected and interrelated. It is important to evaluate the history of indigenous people and their land tenure to determine the impacts of settler objectives in displacing the Blackfeet from their homelands in the colonization process. It is necessary to construct a Blackfeet

land history that illustrates how the impacts of colonization diminished the land base and territories that had sustained the Blackfeet people for thousands of years.

Historical colonial narratives that were developed, formed and written about the land ignored, marginalized or excluded the history of Blackfeet, as indigenous peoples. Colonial policies in the form of federal Indian policies justified the displacement of the indigenous peoples and their separation from the lands. These influences and the effects of colonization displaced people from their traditional territory and created a disconnection between the indigenous peoples' cultural values and worldviews relating to their traditional lands. Colonization influenced changes in the cultural, social, economic and political structure of the Tribes that continue to plague the Blackfeet people and their lands. The dysfunction between the colonial system and Blackfeet cultural value systems continues to spill over into contemporary situations and creates conflicts over land use today.

The Blackfoot People and their Traditional Territory

The Southern Piegan are one of three tribes that comprise the Blackfoot Confederacy. The confederacy is made up the Siksika (the Northern Blackfoot), the Kainaii (Many Leaders also called the Blood), and the Pikani or Piegan (including the Amsskaapipikani (Southern Piegan) in Montana and the Apatohsipikani (Northern Piegan in Southern Alberta).²¹ These tribes consider themselves Nit Sitapi Ksi, "Real People." The Siksika, Kainaii and Northern Piegans all reside as First People Nations

and have reserves (reservations of land) located in Canada. The Southern Piegan are the only part of the Blackfoot confederacy that resides in the United States as a federally recognized tribe and comprise what is referred to as the Blackfeet Tribe of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation of Montana. They are also referred to as the Blackfoot Nation.

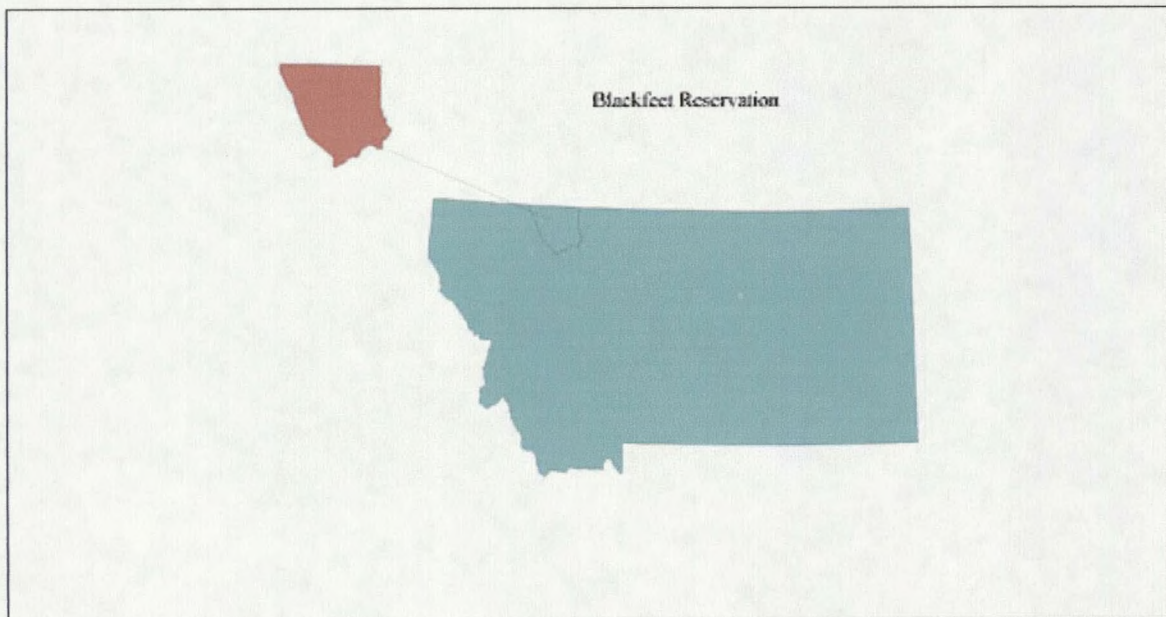
The Blackfeet Reservation Today

The Blackfeet Reservation is what remains of the southern portion of the traditional territory or homelands of the Amsskaapipikani, the Pikani or Southern Piegan people, who are now formally recognized as the Blackfeet Tribe. The reservation, located in north central Montana, lies along the east slope of Nina Stakis, the Backbone of the World (the Continental Divide). Bounded on the west by the Northern Rocky Mountains, the United States and Canadian border mark the northern most geopolitical boundary of the reservation. The little meandering perennial stream of Birch Creek marks the southern border. The eastern border is a combination of a geopolitical boundary that runs north and south from the Canadian border and merges with Cut Bank Creek.

The land base of the Blackfeet Reservation in Montana is comprised of 1,525,712 acres.²² According to the U.S. Bureau of Census, 1997 American Indian Areas report the Blackfeet Reservation has a total population of 8,529 persons, 7,025 (82%) are American Indian. The Blackfeet Enrollment Department reports that as of June, 2002 there were

15,300 enrolled member of the Blackfeet Tribe. Approximately 56% of the tribal members reside on the reservation.

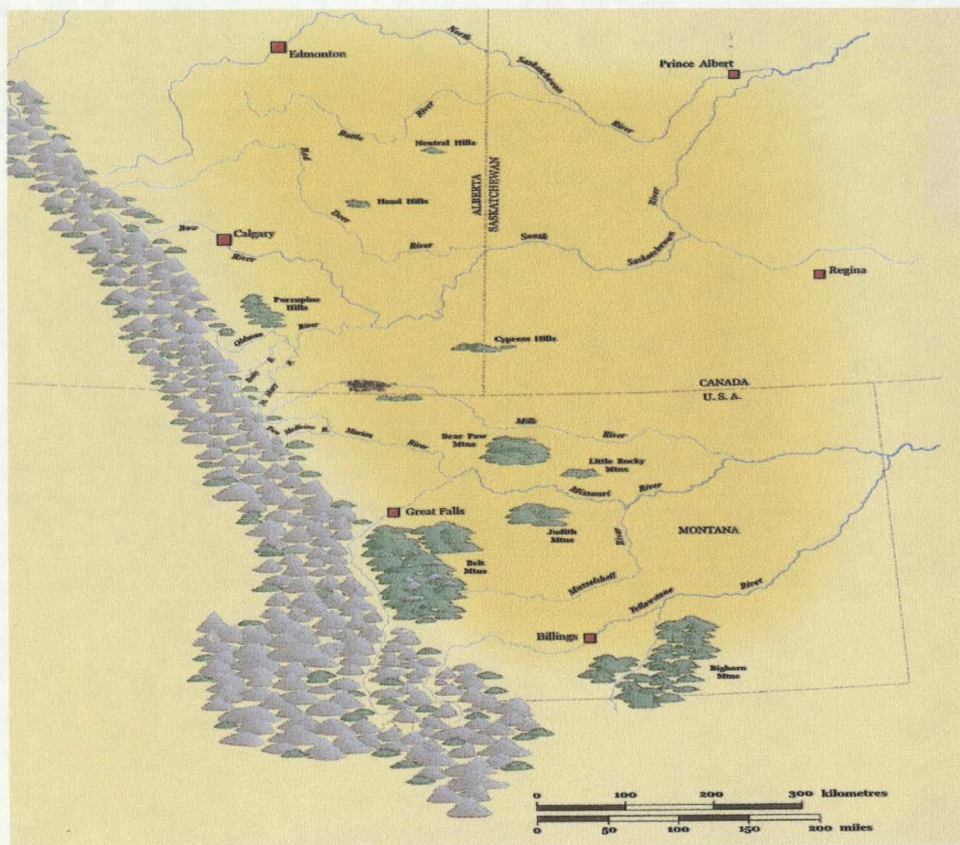
Figure 1 – Blackfeet Reservation in Montana



The finite land base of the Blackfeet Reservation, as we enter the 21st century, is a small remnant of the traditional territory that the Nit Sitapi Ksi occupied for thousands of years. According to the Blackfeet Gallery Committee, comprised of tribal representatives from the Amsskaapipikani (Southern Piegan), the Kainai, the Siksika and the Apotohsipikani (Northern Piegan) tribes and members of the staff of the Glenbow Museum in Calgary, Alberta,²³ who wrote the history of the Blackfoot in *Nitsitapiisinni, The Story of the Blackfoot People*, the traditional homelands of the Blackfoot Nation consisted of the following:

Nitawahsi is our name for our territory. Our ancient stories tell us that we were given this territory by Ihtsi-pai-tapi-yopa, Our Creator and Essence of Life. These stories exert our right to exist here. Our traditional territory extended from Ponoka-si-sahta (Elk River also known as the North Saskatchewan River) south to Otahkoi-tah-tayi (the Yellowstone River). We lived along the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains and eastward beyond the Omahski-spatsi-koyii (the Great Sand Hill in what is now Saskatchewan). It is an immense land, with some of the richest natural resources in the world.

Figure 2 – Nitawahsi - Blackfoot Traditional Territory¹



¹ Blackfoot Gallery Committee, Nitsitapiisinni, The Story of the Blackfoot People, Firefly Books, 2001. Permission granted for map use for thesis only, Glenbow Museum, Alberta, Canada, March 2003.

The estimated size of the traditional territory of the Blackfoot was approximately six hundred miles in length, ranging from the North Saskatchewan River in northern Canada to the Yellowstone River, located in southern Montana, in the United States. The western geographical boundary consisted of the Canadian and Northern Rocky Mountains and extended eastward out into the northern plains of North America for some five hundred miles. The eastern edge of the territorial boundary ran from the confluence of the North and South Saskatchewan Rivers in northern Canada southward to the area that included the geopolitical border between Montana and North Dakota in the United States. This traditional territorial area encompassed approximately 255,000 square miles, being slightly smaller than the state of Texas and almost twice the size of the state of Montana.

Philosophies of Sacred Ecologies

The traditional philosophies of Blackfeet sacred ecologies were centered around the connection between Nit Sitapi Ksi, "the Real People," and the "Nitawahsi," the territory, the place where we exist. This relationship was not organized in a hierarchical manner or defined in a methodology of control, entitlement or supremacy of the humans over the land or its resources. There was no organizational structure that defined power or a separation of the aspects of the physical human from the earth or from the resources that the earth provided. The spiritual philosophy of the sacred was interfused into the all-encompassing relationship between the humans and the earth, as a living being, the

physical interactions with each other and other beings, respect, reciprocity and a symbiotic relationship that was fostered through time. The basic relationship between "the People" and the territory was more than an ecological one that resulted from the interactions between Blackfeet people within their physical environment. This relationship was bound by a spiritual cord that tied and held the world together.

I can speak only speak from an indigenous perspective regarding my understanding of Blackfeet history, place of philosophical reference that I was born of and have grown to know as a Blackfeet person, and my personal experiences within that cultural realm. I can not, and do not, speak for all Blackfeet people. My philosophies and frame of reference of the physical world I have experienced and lived are deeply ingrained in who I am as a Blackfeet person.

Indigenous peoples are cognitively linked to the land through the development of cultural identity and worldviews that develop as a result of the exchange between the physical resources of our world, the humans that we are and our spiritual connection to that world. Our minds and cultural values define us within the landscape in which we were born. Our intimate relationship between the physical space that we historically and traditionally occupied is linked with Blackfeet creation and history throughout time to the place within which we now exist. Tribal Histories are land centered; every feature of the landscape has stories attached to it (Deloria, 252).

The Blackfeet landscape has undergone minimal change since its creation. These lands are where the physical world of Blackfeet creation is contained. Blackfeet oral history outlines our historical evolution as indigenous people and intimately tied us to

these places for thousands of years. Our oral history, oral traditions and our experiences upon the land over time tie us to the physical reality of the world that we have come to know and our spiritual existence within time and these places. Although we no longer control much of the land base that was our traditional territory, our history and cultural are still contained within the landscapes of these places.

The concept of defining the sacred ecologies of indigenous peoples and categorizing sacred lands is relatively new and being explored from differing perspectives. Keith Basso, a professor of Anthropology at the University of New Mexico, Vine Deloria, Jr., professor of history at the University of Colorado and Andrew Gulliford a professor of history at Middle Tennessee State University all define sacred ecologies and outline distinctively different approaches and methodologies to the categorization of landscape, language, and philosophies as they apply to indigenous peoples and physical place. I examined Basso, Deloria or Gulliford's methodologies for categorization of sacred lands.

The complexity of tying the ceremony that relates to the sacredness of life and the actual spirituality of living with and upon the landscape is a much more complex system than can be defined within academic or scientific rational thought. The Creator gave human beings abilities beyond those that he gave the four leggeds, the underwater beings and the beings of the air. Beyond our physical and mental existence, He gave us the gifts of emotions and spirituality. These abilities can not be measured or easily categorized. Basso states:

What people make of their places is closely connected to what they make of themselves as members of society and inhabitants of the earth, and while the two

activities may be separable in principle, they are deeply joined in practice. If place-making is a way of constructing the past, a venerable means of *doing* human history, it is also a way of constructing social traditions and, in the process, personal and social identities. *We are*, in a sense, the place-worlds we imagine."²⁴

Old Man, also known as Napi, came from the south, creating the physical world of the mountains, the prairies and the forests and arranged the physical world as we see it today. The physical landscape included in the Blackfeet creation exists within the contemporary geography of the world as we now know it. The Blackfeet creation story includes significant places such as "Mistakis," the backbone of the Nit Sitapi Ksi (Blackfoot) world, the Continental Divide which physically separates the North American Continent from north to south. He created Kuto yis sic, the "Sweet Grass Hills" and other areas like the Stick Man during his efforts to create the world and his travels across the landscape. We believe that Napi created Nit Sitapi Ksi, "Real People," and all other things that are a part of this physical world. This included the soil, water, air, and all of the plant and animal beings that he made to occupy these three dimensional areas and those beings and places that existed within a dimension beyond. In the beginning, there was no distinction between the physical world as we know it and the fourth dimensional, metaphysical world.

Each of these significant places has a story attached to how it came to be through creation and the relationship and interaction of Blackfeet people in those respective places. Through oral traditions these stories have been passed from generation to generation. Oral traditions are a fundamental part of the relationship between the people and these places upon the landscape. These traditions are further enhanced by

experiential learning, ceremony of place and the actions of Blackfeet people in their efforts to maintain a spiritual relationship with the land.

As a child I often walked with my grandfather along the creeks gathering plant materials for food and medicine, went to the mountains to pick berries and to the meadows along the creeks and streams with my grandma and aunts to pick and braid sweet grass in the evenings. It was during these times that the Napi stories relating the connection between humans and the physical world were told to teach lessons and values about the way we were to live upon the land, how we were to maintain a relationship with the resources it provided and our responsibilities to the natural environment and to the land.

I have climbed Ninastakis, Chief Mountain, to pray. I've ridden horseback across Mistakis, the Backbone, and through the mountains to places that few people will ever have the privilege of seeing. I sat upon the shore of the lakes (Waterton) where the Blackfeet were given their most sacred medicine bundle, the Beaver bundle. I've sat quietly and watched cow elk with new born calves in the spring, heard and seen bull elk bugle in the fall, moose feeding in lakes and marshes and mountain sheep jump from rock to rock to travel down to water. I know that Old Man sat upon a rock, within these same places, marveling at the world and the beings that He created just as many Blackfeet have done for eons of time in this same landscape.

I'm often astounded and emotionally and spiritually overwhelmed by the physical evidence that Old Man left upon the land when He created it, including the mountain ranges, geologic formations, rivers, streams, plants, animals and other

resources. I am fortunate to be connected culturally, philosophically and spiritually to the land in these ways, along with the countless generations of Blackfeet people that have lived upon and traveled across these same landscapes. Our cultural ties still remain and our history is here on the land, in the things our ancestors left, sacred places and cultural resources such as rock drawings at areas like Writing on the Stone and pishtaa sites (buffalo jumps) like the Women's Buffalo Jump and Head Smashed In. I've walked the river valleys with Blackfeet elders mapping tipi ring sites where my Blackfeet ancestors camped and buffalo jump sites where they hunted their food. I've hiked the grasslands that my grandfathers and grandmothers walked upon during the dog days and later traveled across with horse and travois. I've crawled upon the ground tracing travois trails with my hands through the overgrown grasslands, mapping movements from river bottom campsites to other sites.

The Blackfoot Gallery Committee, comprised of members of the Siksiká, Kainai and the Northern and Southern Piegan Tribes, outlines the Nit Sitapi Ksi's reference to sacred places and history as follows:

There are special places in Blackfoot territory where the ancient stories of our culture happened. These places provide physical evidence that the events really happened and are part of Blackfoot history. Our stories and these sites are uniquely important to us. They tell us that we belong to this place in a way that no other human being can. Sacred places connect the Blackfoot to our territory, are part of our identity and are the basis for our claim to this territory.²⁵

Like my grandfather and his grandfathers before him, I still look to the northeast at the Sweet Grass Hills to determine what the weather will be like. I watch the muskrats in the fall to see where they build their houses to predict how intense the

coming winter will be. I've learned to observe the number of seed heads on the grasses in the late spring and early summer to determine whether the growth of the grasses will be good or poor for that grazing season. These are all examples of experiential learning that occurred in a culturally distinct manner that relates to the significant relationship between Blackfeet people and the cultural, physical and spiritual contexts that exist within their landscape and the physical world. None of these things had anything to do with western science, academic learning or classrooms.

I will share a personal experience about a recent journey to China that I completed in August of 2002 to illustrate what I am trying to explain about the people land connection. I accepted an assignment to serve as a team member along with staff from three different tribal colleges on a foreign exchange project involving cultural and indigenous plants for the USDA Foreign Agricultural Service. During the exchange I experienced just how much my philosophical views of the world are tied to my indigenous references to land and the universe. My spirituality and philosophical core are strongly tied to Blackfeet values and the physical world we evolved in as distinct indigenous people. After being physically ill for several days, I hiked up a hillside to a pagoda one evening, watched the sun set and looked out into the universe to orient myself physically and spiritually to the world that I know. I'd been very ill during the previous week, was very weak and sought to find a spiritual connection with which to sustain myself in prayer. I found myself confused and disoriented because the stars and constellations were not in their usual places of reference that I utilize to orient myself physically and spiritually. I wasn't able to utilize my physical surrounding or the stars

as a reality check because the space that I occupied at that moment in time was not in the Blackfeet cosmology or the landscape that I had come to know in a spiritual sense. I know that the creator who created China, that side of the world and the people there also created the world as I know it, even though it was far away on the other side of the globe. Even though I sat quietly crying because I felt so displaced from the reality that I know, I prayed anyway. I prayed for patience and strength to help me persevere during my struggles with the stark reality of the physical space that so many Chinese people occupy, their culture, their limited rights, and limited resources. I prayed for assistance to help me understand their relationship with the land. During the exchange program, I think I learned more about myself as a person and my philosophical and spiritual ties to Blackfeet land than I did about Chinese agriculture.

There is a difference in being physically and emotionally connected to the land and the intimate relationship that indigenous peoples have nurtured with the land and their environments. I know it exists within Blackfeet philosophies, and within my heart because have felt it in my soul. Are these connections to the land and the natural environment sacred? Yes. The history of the landscape and the ceremony of living as a Blackfeet person and experiencing life in sacred places are the tether that intimately binds us to land, not just any land, but the Nitawahsi that the creator made specifically for the Nit Sitapi Ksi.

The history of the Nit Sitapi Ksi, "Real People," and Nitawahsi, their indigenous territory, has been handed down from generation to generation by means of oral traditions and oral histories. I grew up as a child in a family and community

environment where storytelling was not only used as a traditional method of teaching history, but was also used to incorporate cultural values into everyday life. Many of the great Blackfeet story tellers, the elders of my grandfather's generation, are becoming a cherished memory. The opportunity for our children to benefit from these same experiences will be limited to our abilities to capture oral traditions, oral histories and information as we remember it, or as we can gather and reconstruct it from historical documents and materials.

The Importance of Oral Traditions and Oral History

The majority of the storytellers have passed on. Those who practice storytelling, relaying the oral traditions and oral histories, has somewhat diminished in the present times. During the past quarter of a century, the Blackfeet people began incorporating indigenous perspective of Blackfeet stories and history in written form. Until recently, very few historical materials were written by the Blackfeet people themselves.

Researchers and historians have had to rely on written materials and historical perspectives prepared primarily by non-Blackfeet outsiders. Fixico concludes in his article on "*Reconstructing Native American History*" that, "Before the 1960's, writers of Native American history literally wrote about Indians from an outsider's point of view, and they relied on printed documents as their primary evidence (Fixico, 118)." Many of the materials written about the Blackfeet were based upon the foundation that George Bird Grinnell established when he published "Blackfoot Lodge Tales," in 1892.

Grinnell's "Lodge Tales," was the first comprehensive piece of literature written about the Blackfeet that contained references to Blackfeet history.

Blackfeet oral histories are actual historical accounts or oral histories of specific individuals and groups of Blackfeet people as told in the oral tradition. As Angela Cavender Wilson, an indigenous Dakota scholar and native historian, states about native conceptions of history in the article "*Power of the Spoken Word – Native Oral Traditions in American Indian History:*"

The definition of oral history is contained within that of the oral tradition. For the Dakota, "oral traditions" refers to the way in which information is passed on rather than the length of time something has been told. This definition also applies that while those belonging to an oral tradition would be able to relate aspects of oral history, not everyone relating an oral history necessarily belongs to an oral tradition. (Wilson, 102).

The oral histories, as told by the Blackfoot storytellers in the Lodge Tales, provide a narrative of specific historical events and happenings. The stories outline the physical landscape and the geography that is associated with events that intimately tie the Blackfeet people to places upon the land. The storytellers told of raids and escapades along the Elk River (the Yellowstone River), the Milk River (the Teton River), and the place where Badger Creek and the Two Medicine River come together, among other places. The stories included the changing seasons, as well as the relationships and connections the people had with animals and the natural environment. They also spoke of the stars and the Wolf Trail (the galaxy of the Milky Way Galaxy).

These stories are the bonds that link the Blackfeet with their physical reference of place in the world and in the greater cosmos. The stories reference real places that exist

within the landscape and the celestial universe today. Although the physical, geopolitical world of the Blackfeet has diminished considerably over time, the connection to these places through oral histories and oral tradition still remains. The landscape bears the evidence of the many paths that our grandfathers and grandmothers followed and mark the history of our past.

As to Linda Tuhiwai Smith observes in *Decolonizing Methodologies – Research and Indigenous Peoples*:

History and the multiple discourses about the past are very much a part of the fabric of communities that value oral ways of knowing. These contested accounts are stored within genealogies, within the landscape, within weavings and carvings, even within the personal names that people carried. The means by which these histories were stored was through their system of [indigenous] knowledge. Many of these systems have since been reclassified as *oral traditions* rather than histories.

Through the use of oral tradition, storytellers explain how the Blackfeet people received their ceremonies, songs, dances and the medicines that ultimately became the Blackfeet ideology and religion. They use the oral tradition to lay out the creation of the Blackfeet world in what Grinnell refers to as "The Blackfoot Genesis." The stories tell of the many places that Old Man created, the Milk River (the Teton River), the Sweet Grass Hills and the Stick Man; the people he created; the things he created, animals, plants and berries; the things he taught us, how to use tools, gather food and roots for medicine. Our creation story is as real for the Blackfeet as are the stories of Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden to others. It's important to understand the link between oral traditions and oral history and how they connect Blackfeet people, through philosophy and ideology, to physical place and their spiritual existence.

The stories are extremely important to the Blackfeet people because they explain our history, connection with the land and how we came to be as a people. The difference, between the stories we tell and the "Lodge Tales" that Grinnell put to paper, in addition to other literature and history prepared by non-Blackfeet people, is that Blackfeet people are intimately linked and bound through time by the oral traditions and oral histories of the people that came before us and to the land. Grinnell's "Lodge Tales" are one dimensional and lack the intimacy and cultural understanding of Blackfeet philosophies and ideologies. Oral traditions and the stories are a major part of our cultural connection, the strong umbilical cord that keeps us tethered to the Blackfeet world and reminds us where we come from. We need to ensure that the stories and storytelling continue for oral tradition and oral histories are the foundation of Blackfeet cultural heritage and future generations of our grandchildren need to have this connection to history, culture and place.

Legitimizing the Land History

According to George Bird Grinnell's rendition of Blackfeet history, "This land had not always been the home of the Blackfeet. About two hundred years ago the Chipeweyans invaded this country and drove them [the Blackfeet] south and west."²⁶ The foundation he laid of the Blackfeet's history and land tenure is in stark contrast to the indigenous history of the Nit Sitapi Ksi's connection to land and these sacred places

and to the archaeological evidence that remains upon the landscape that supports our living in this region for thousands of years.

One of the most significant archaeological sites that exists in North America today, within what was previously the traditional territories of the Blackfeet, is the Head Smashed In Buffalo Jump Complex located on the eastern slope of the Porcupine Hills in southern Alberta, Canada.²⁷ The site was first recorded in the 1880's by the Archaeological Survey of Canada. The site itself is very large, covers an area of 1,470 acres and is one of the oldest, largest, and best preserved buffalo jump sites in North America. It was documented as a unique site when the first archaeological investigations began in 1938 because the site was in almost pristine condition. Archaeologists using radio-carbon dating have determined that the bones and tool beds, found as deep as eleven meters at the base of the cliffs, are between 200 and 5,700 years old and that the site may have been used as early as 8,000 B.C. The massive amounts of bone deposits, the stone tools used for butchering and the firebroken rock that reflects distinctive butchering and processing techniques testify to the success of generations of hunters in killing buffalo at this site. The oldest evidence of humans at Head-Smashed-In are two Scottsbluff spear points dated back 9,000 years. Although it had not been used in the last 150 years, the Blackfoot Indian Nation utilized it for a kill site for thousands of years.²⁸

Eleven meters of stratified deposits were excavated from several units of various sizes in the kill deposits of the pishkin site. Radio carbon dating these deposits established the age of the site and identified the cultural and technological sequence the

site represented. A total of 18 radio carbon dates were obtained from the stratified layers of the site.²⁹

Head Smashed In was designated a UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Service and Cultural Organization) World Heritage site in 1981, placing it among other archaeological sites of global values such as the Egyptian pyramids, Stonehenge and the Galapagos Islands. World Heritage sites are pieces of property, either cultural or natural, that are outstanding examples of human creation or by the forces of nature. Head Smashed In is recognized around the world for its remarkable testimony of prehistoric life and outstanding intrinsic value. The site bears witness to a custom practiced by native people of North American plains for nearly 6,000 years.³⁰ What makes the Head Smashed In Buffalo Jump site a World Heritage Site according to UNESCO is the evidence it represents of cultural use of the natural landscape by indigenous people:

Head Smashed In Buffalo Jump represents a unique and unsurpassed communal way of hunting used for thousands of years by native peoples of the Great Plains. The repeated use of the kill site over such a lengthy period of time is a testament to the ideal conditions of the site for buffalo jumping and the skill of the hunters that used it. The chronology of the cultural remains and the excellent degree of the preservation at the site, provides a unique opportunity to trace the evolution of communal buffalo hunting from its earliest beginnings to its abandonment in the early 19th century. The extraordinary archaeological, historical and ethnological values of this site, combined with the dramatic prairie setting and outstanding interpretive potential, were factors considered in the designation of Head Smashed In Buffalo Jump as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Deloria explores the evolutionary framework for the human species and various theories about indigenous people in North America in great length in his work *Red Earth White Lies*. The important point Deloria makes is that we should, "look at the actual

materials we do possess so as to create a more realistic interpretation of history. Until then, the political implications of classifying American Indians as some group of late-developing Cro-Magnon creatures stands in the way of equal treatment of Indian today."³¹

The Land History – Relationship with Buffalo, Horses and the Grasslands

The Blackfeet evolved from a limited mobile hunting and gathering society, traveling within the prairie landscape on foot for basic survival and hunting during what was termed the "dog days." Archaeological sites such as Head Smashed In provide scientific evidence that the Blackfeet existed as indigenous people within the grasslands environment for a much greater period of time. This evidence supports the primary history of the Blackfeet with regard to land, grasslands and grazing that was established through a historical relationship with bison and other grassland wildlife. Aspects of this historical relationship with grasslands and grazing changed when the Blackfeet acquired and domesticated horses. This pre-historic and historic relationship with grasslands and grazing would be forever changed by contact with non-indigenous peoples, colonial influences and competition for grazing resources to graze domestic cattle.

Due to the symbiotic relationships between Blackfeet people and the buffalo, as the primary staff of life, and the reliance of the buffalo upon the grasslands for sustenance, the Blackfeet people were intimately connected to their grasslands

environment and grazing. For centuries before the white man set foot upon this continent, the great herds had been coexisting with the Plains Indians in a rare balance between man and nature (McHugh, xxii). The emphasis on this symbiotic relationship was so strong that it emerged in the all of the life philosophies of the Blackfeet. These philosophies are contained within the language that references their relationship to the buffalo as the primary food. Buffalo meat was *nit'api waksin*, "real food"; all other foods were *kistapi waksin*, "nothing foods."³² Of primary importance and as an essential element of survival, were the infinite uses of the buffalo. By-products provided materials for clothing, lodge covers for shelter and other basic necessities. The importance of the buffalo was also a primary focus in Blackfeet religious ceremonies. Jackson's historical account of the Blackfeet in the dog days sums up this relationship well:

The People were born, grew up, lived and died within the elbow-close intimacy of the lodge. The leather walls were a constant reminder of the debt they [the Blackfeet] owed to the buffalo. Practical habits of camp life, hunting and war were intertwined with matters of spirit in their being (Jackson, 3).

The people refined their skills in specific areas focused on interactions within the natural environment and the landscape for subsistence hunting, butchering carcasses and preparing hides and robes for trading and procuring materials. Through this relationship with buffalo, the Blackfeet gained biological knowledge over the centuries about the types, habits and habitat of not only the buffalo, but also about the grassland environment and the geography within which they both co-existed. McHugh states that, "The tribes became as much a part of the plains community as the grasses, the pronghorn, the prairie dogs and the buffalo themselves, for they learned how to belong

to the land as well as to take from it. The buffalo with whom they shared their domain became linked with them in a unique physical and spiritual kinship."³³

According to documentation from early traders and their expeditions in Blackfeet country, the Blackfeet became equestrian Indians beginning in the early 1700's. Ewers states that, "The Blackfeet first acquired the horse about 1730. The story was told to David Thompson nearly sixty years later. Thompson was a trader that recorded a Blackfeet elder's story about a conflict with the Shoshonis who surprised the Piegan "with a strange new weapon - a big four-footed animals on which they rode swift as deer. Never before had the Blackfeet seen horses."³⁴ Utley states:

Within but a few years the Blackfeet had acquired their own "Big Dogs" and firearms. Horses probably came in trade from other tribes and guns came from the Assiniboines and Crees, who obtained them from French traders farther east. Other metal tools and utensil accompanied the guns. By mid-century the Blackfeet had become true horse-and-gun Indians, embarked on the rich life these innovations made possible (Utley, 24).³⁵

McHugh notes that, camels and horses evolved for millions of years on the Great Plains of North America before becoming extinct. "Horses did not reappear on the continent until brought here by Spanish explorers in the sixteenth century (McHugh, 29)."³⁶ Both the Blackfeet and the Lakota have stories about these pre-historic horses in their oral traditions, ceremonies and songs.

The introduction of the horse, contact with non-indigenous peoples and the fur trade influenced changes in tribal traditions and the cultures for the Blackfeet and other plains tribes. Domesticated horses heightened their ability to travel throughout their traditional territory and beyond; horses also enhanced the economy by means of becoming personal possessions which further impacted the economic structure of the

people in trade and social influence. Acquisition of the horse, contact with whites and the trading escalated, resulting in a tremendous amount of cultural changes within one to two generations. These factors also increase the amount of contact between tribes within their traditional territories than they had previously occupied in the pre-colonial period. Horses increased the ability for tribes to become more mobile in nature, increased contact between tribes and competition for territory, resources and warfare. The horse and fur trading also influenced domestic relationships within the bands and tribes of the Blackfeet Nation, as well as relationships with other tribes and whites. Trade economics institutionalized the ideology of personal property. Advanced mobility also allowed a greater area of influence increasing conflicts between tribes over hunting territories, war and horse raiding.

The acquisition of the domesticated horse changed the historical relationship between the Blackfeet, the buffalo and the grasslands environment. The significant difference was with regard to grazing. Bison are large grazing wildlife, foraging through the grassland environment at will. Horses also need to graze. With the responsibility of having a domesticated animal also come the responsibilities of providing for grazing, as well as access to water and shelter. Jackson states that, "Before the Pikuni could metamorphose into equestrians, they had to become horsemen and herdsmen. Building up a herd in an environment not particularly suited for horses took time. It required learning the unfamiliar fundamentals of herding, training and breeding. Before enjoying the romantic horseback jaunts through an endless sea of grass, the Pikuni learned the grandness and grossness of animal husbandry."³⁷ In a

short period of time, the Plains Indians became one of the foremost equestrian peoples in the history of the world (McHugh, 74).

At the same time that white traders were recording history in their journals and such regarding their contact with the Blackfeet, the Blackfeet were recording these same events on their winter counts. Another trader with the Hudson Bay Company, Anthony Hendrey, was sent out in 1754 on a solitary mission to encourage the Pikuni tribes, including the Northern and Southern Piegons, to come to the Hudson Bay to trade. Hendrey's perception of tribes and trading was limited to Indians as travelers on foot or by canoe. He was fascinated by the Blackfeet and their use of horses. He documented the use of horses for buffalo hunting, war and trading activities. Hendrey observed that, "They are so expert [hunting on horseback] that with one or two arrows they will drop a buffalo."²

This new mode of transportation enabled the Blackfeet to acquire a greater amount of household materials and personal items, as well as enhanced their abilities to move their possessions from place to place. They could now travel greater distance with a larger amount of belongings. The possession of horses changed their traditional hunting habits, which in turn affected other aspects of their daily lives. These changes were significant cultural changes for the people and the communal societies they existed in. Horses, like buffalo, also became a significant focus in ceremonial matters, with emphasis being incorporated into sweat lodge ceremonies, songs and societies.

² Ewers, John C., *The Blackfeet Raiders of the Northwestern Plains*, 1958

By the 1780's the Blackfeet no longer had to rely on intermediaries for trade goods. They were traveling to the far north to establish direct trade relationship with traders, who had established trading post along the northern boundary of their territory, to obtain guns and other trade goods. They began trading buffalo meat, buffalo robes and horses (Utley, 24).

The period of time between 1750 and 1850 is known in Plains history as the golden years. Heightened mobility, brought about by the acquisition of horses, and hunting with guns ultimately affected diets which resulted in an increase in family size, as well as a change in the economy of individuals, families and the tribe. By 1790, the trader, David Thompson, estimated the buffalo skin lodges of the Pikuni housed 150 families. Three years later, there were 190 lodges. Within nineteen years the population had swelled to an estimated 350 lodges, including 700 warriors – almost 3,000 people in total. (Jackson, 35).

The horse brought great prosperity for the Blackfeet, during these golden years, more than they had ever known in the past. Along with this prosperous time, the horse also brought other influences that would also dramatically change Blackfeet life. Horses became the primary mode of transportation for the buffalo robe trade. They were used not only to hunt buffalo, but to ease the burden of transporting meat and eventually processed buffalo robes to the far off trading houses at Fort Vermillion and Rocky Mountain Trading House in northern Canada in the late 1700's and early 1800's. The increased ease of hunting, combined with the supply and demand of the buffalo robe

trade over the next hundred years, affected the numbers of buffalo on the plains, ultimately affecting the primary food source of the Blackfeet.

With greater contact between tribes came the first deadly impacts of disease. In 1781, a scouting party of Piegans were sent southward into the hunting area of their traditional enemies, the Shoshonis. After deliberating the non-activity of the camp, they attacked the Shoshonis lodges. What they found and scavenged, including the horses, would ultimately change life for the Blackfeet forever. The first smallpox epidemic reached the Blackfeet.

"The occupants of the lodges were all dead and dying. Each was a mass of corruption. Believing a bad spirit had destroyed their enemies, the Piegans collected the best of their lodges, camp equipment and horses and returned home. Two days later the deadly smallpox broke out in their camp. More than half of the people perished before the plague was spent (Ewers, 29)."³⁸

The children who survived the smallpox epidemic of 1781 were also the first generation who had never known life without horses (Jackson, 15). There were at least four other smallpox epidemics and two other outbreaks of measles that devastated Blackfeet society, dramatically reducing the population with each onset.

The acquisition of the horse accelerated the pursuit of agriculture, in terms of being domesticated livestock and the need for the Blackfeet to intentionally utilize grasslands for grazing. Bad Head's winter count, covering the period 1810 to 1883, documents that the Blackfeet had an established relationship with domesticated horses and had institutionalized the practice of horse raiding. The winter count shows that traders were cropping the tails of their horses to distinguish them from Blackfeet ponies in 1810 because of horse raiding. The acquisition of the horse served as a major influence of

cultural change for the Blackfeet with regard to their traditional territories and their relationship in the grasslands environment. With this improvement to their way of life, also came other changes and considerations that included utilizing grassland resources to graze domesticated horses, ensuring access to water, and providing feed in the winter. Geographic constraints would become a much greater emphasis when choosing transportation routes and camp sites. It required a major paradigm shift for the people who once existed in independent, solitary bands on foot, following the buffalo in their migratory grazing patterns to develop a different type of relationship with domesticated horses and an inter-dependence upon the grasslands for grazing. Not only were the grasslands a necessary component of sustaining the buffalo, as their primary food source, they were now a requisite for grazing their domesticated horses.

This relationship between the Blackfeet and horses resulted in another type of relationship within the grassland ecosystem that was different from the symbiotic relationship that existed for centuries between the Blackfeet and the buffalo. Providing for the additional considerations of domesticated animals, beyond the immediate needs of the people, for adequate water and access to grasslands and grazing resources for a small band of people with fifty or so horses to a large tribal gathering, where there could potentially have been hundreds of horses, must have been a challenge when selecting campsites. The ability to confine a large number of horses for any extended period of time while following large herds of migrating buffalo had to have had short term impacts on the grassland resources. Horses, like domesticated cattle will continuously graze within the same areas, especially if confined. In contrast, buffalo were selective

grazers, nomadically moving about the grasslands as the grasses changed during the growing season, usually not returning to the same area to graze.

Historically the Blackfeet had been able to keep fur trappers, traders and other white people out of their traditional territories through physical force. The traditional territorial area of the Blackfeet began coming under pressure from the intrusion of whites in the late 18th century and carried into the early 19th century. In the book *Fort Union Trading Post: Fur Trade Empire on the Upper Missouri*, Thompson states:

The Upper Missouri did not quickly reveal its mysteries to the hunters and traders of the French colonies. For the century after two Quebecois, Louis Jolliet, a couer de bois, and Father Jacques Marquette, a Jesuit, discovered the river's mouth in 1673, geographers could only guess about the Missouri's headwaters (Thompson, 1).

That was all about to change. As the door was closing on the 18th century, the interior of North America represented great unknown, the intrigue and possibility of a potential water route and transportation corridor across the continent became the driving force behind the struggles for hegemonic power and control between European states, the new fledgling United States and indigenous peoples for the conquest of the lands. Unbeknownst to them the land from which the headwaters of the Missouri River flowed was located within Blackfoot territory.

CHAPTER 4

COLONIAL LAND POLICY

Treaties

Eastern tribes institutionalized a process of negotiating treaties with Great Britain, other European governments and the thirteen colonies during the colonial period that began in the 1600's, a practice they continued with the United States after the Revolutionary War. In these new relationships with European powers, the parties brought different diplomatic traditions and expectations to the encounter. Out of the interactions between the various groups that engaged in treaty making over many years and in different locations, a new kind of diplomacy took shape. This new diplomacy was neither Indian nor European. It was rather a complex mix that changed over time according to changing power relationships (Jones, 185). Thus, the eastern tribes established the principle foundation historically relating to treaty agreements between sovereign European entities before they formalized their initial relationship with the colonial government. By the time treaties were being introduced to the Plains tribes in the 1850's, the American government had reaffirmed the treaty process with eastern tribes used by the thirteen colonies. According to Robert Kvasnicka's work on United States Indian Treaties and Agreements:

Treaties were complex instruments that implemented the prevailing Indian policy of the federal government. The most important purpose of many of the treaties came to be the extinguishment of Indian title to land, but secondary considerations were the regulation of commerce with the tribes and the education and acculturation of the Indians to facilitate their assimilation into White society.³⁹

Tribal perspectives, worldviews, and cultural values differed substantially in a historical, social and cultural context from that of the United States government and the governmental representatives during the treaty making processes. In *Changes In The Land: Indians, Ecologists and the Ecology of New England*, Cronin states:

What the Indian owned was not the land but the things that were on the land [usufructuary rights] during the various seasons of the year. It was a conception of property shared by many hunter-gatherer and agricultural peoples of the world, but radically different from that of the invading Europeans.⁴⁰

With the ever increasing influx of people immigrating to America, the colonial government entered into treaties with eastern tribes, expanded by adding states, purchased western territories and began exerted pressure on the eastern tribes by pushing them further westward. Like a domino effect, the eastern tribes pushed interior tribes further west and exerted influence on the Plains tribes. Eastern tribes were not only resisting colonial settlement through treaty agreements and conflicts, they were also exerting pressure on other tribes through forced migration westward, influencing changes in territorial boundaries.

The Territory Louisiana

King Louis XIV of France claimed the entire Mississippi River Valley, following the expeditions of the French explorers Louis Joliet and Rene'-Robert Cavelier, Sier De La Salle in 1663.⁴¹ As the discoverer of the mouth of the Mississippi River, La Salle was able to lay claim to the whole territory drained by that river which came to be known as the Louisiana Territory, after Louis XIV. Unbeknownst to France, the Mississippi River drainage included the Missouri River and a vast area westward to the Rocky Mountains. The headwaters of the Missouri arose in the southern portion of the traditional territory of the Blackfeet.

The struggles for control of the interior of North America began in the mid 1700's between Britain, France, and its ally Spain. The French and Indian War (1754 to 1763), between the French and British, was part of a "great war for empire." Each country fought for the rights of control and ownership of the North American continent, with the assistance of Native American and colonial allies. Both nations received military assistance from colonists, but also relied on Native American peoples who participated, because of their own rivalries for land and power.⁴² The southern portion of the traditional territory of the Blackfoot would become the conquests of the French and Indian War (1754 to 1763) that expanded into Europe as the Seven Year War (1757 to 1763). At the conclusion of the big free-for-all between European powers, colonists and tribes that were involved in the French and Indian War, there were several treaties that transferred the property back and forth between these different powers. Spain ended up

with the Louisiana Territory. All of these entities felt they had the political right to exert power and control over the land and engaged in conflicts over ownership with little regard for the indigenous peoples who occupied the land.

In the book *Undaunted Courage*, Stephen Ambrose addresses these views about the unknown Louisiana.

Louisiana in 1801 – that part of North America lying between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains – was up for grabs. The contestants were the British coming out of Canada, the Spanish coming up from Texas and California, the French coming down from the northwest, and the Americans coming from the east. And, of course, there were already inhabitants who possessed the land and were determined to hold on to it (Ambrose, 55).⁴³

The colonial period and the fur trade era of the 1700's were followed by the westward movement of other tribes and white settlers to the Mississippi River valley. The conflicts created by this westward movement were the primary reason the colonial government initiated efforts to gain and control the interior of North America. Most importantly from colonial perspectives at the turn of the century, was the unknown that Louisiana represented. Ambrose states, "What remained to be discovered on earth was the interior of Africa, Australia, the Arctic and Antarctic, and the western two-thirds of North America. The latter was the most important to Europeans and Americans (Ambrose, 54)."

When Thomas Jefferson took office in 1801 as the third President of the United States, the boundaries of the colonies stretched from the Atlantic Ocean to the Mississippi River, from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico. Jefferson's goal and objective was to acquire Louisiana. He was plotting to do just that even before he took

his oath of office. He believed: "that all the great rivers of the west – the Missouri, Columbia, Colorado, and Rio Grande – rose from a single 'height of land' and flowed off in their several directions to the seas of the hemisphere, linked by a low portage across the mountains, that would lead to the Pacific (Ambrose, 55)." Even before the United States bought the "Louisiana Purchase" from Spain in 1803, Jefferson had already acquired approval, as well as an appropriation of funds from Congress, to fund the Lewis and Clark expedition. The Louisiana Purchase, the executive decisions by President Jefferson to initiate the Lewis and Clark expedition, and Congress' approval and funding of the expedition were really the first colonial policies of the United States that would impact the Blackfeet and have later implications upon their traditional territories.

The Lewis and Clark expedition began on August 31, 1803 and concluded in St. Louis on September 22, 1806, some twenty eight months later. The only physical battle with Indians that occurred in the eight thousand mile round trip was during Meriweather Lewis' Marias exploration. The objective of the Marias exploration was to find the northern most branch of the Marias River, and to identify and map the headwaters of the Missouri River. In early July of 1806, Lewis led his small party of four further into the heart of Blackfeet country. On Tuesday, July 22, Lewis got within twenty miles of the Rocky Mountains, in sight of the Continental Divide (Ambrose, 386). He set up camp along Cut Bank Creek and camped there for four days. Because of weather and time, he never did venture further west to map the headwaters of the Marias. This camp site is called Camp Disappointment and is designated by a marker

along U.S. Highway 2, which runs from east to west across the Blackfeet Reservation. Four days later, when the party began their journey back to the Missouri, Lewis' small party encountered eight Blackfeet warriors. The two parties camped together on the southern bank of the Two Medicine River. On the morning of Sunday, July 27, 1806, a skirmish broke out over horses and resulted in two Blackfeet being shot. Lewis and his party escaped back to the Missouri. The area where the confrontation occurred is now referred to as the Fight Site.

Following the confrontation with Lewis on the Two Medicine River, the Blackfeet resisted the Americans who were attempting to advance up the Missouri. Thereafter, for a quarter of a century, the Blackfeet effectually denied the rich beaver country of the upper Missouri to the "Big Knives," whose occasional forays into this region invariably ended in disaster (Utley, 28).

Fur Trade in the Territory

For nearly three quarters of a century, the Blackfeet had maintained control of their traditional territories, successfully kept fur traders at bay and resisted the establishment of trading posts within the interior of Nitawahsi. In their initial efforts to establish trade relationships, the Blackfeet traveled first to far off trade centers at Buckingham House (1780) and Rocky Mountain House (1799) in Northern Canada and later to Fort Union (1828), along the Missouri River near present day New Town, North Dakota.

These initial trade centers were followed by Fort Piegan (1831), Fort McKenzie (1832), later reestablished as Fort Benton (1847) along the Missouri, and Fort Whoop-up and Fort MacCleod in Canada. The Blackfeet needed all the power they could summon, for the pressure generated by the fur trade kept tribal ranges and relationships in constant flux (Utley, 26). The important thing to note about the fur trade and the establishment of the forts was that once the interior of the territory was breached and access was granted to the Missouri, the steamboats gained access to the upper Missouri and a flood of whites gained a foothold inside the territory.

Treaties, Executive Orders and Agreements With the Blackfoot

The first treaty to impact Blackfoot traditional territories was the *Treaty of Fort Laramie with Sioux, Etc., 1851*. Although the Blackfoot were not present or an official party to the treaty, the treaty identifies "The territory of the Blackfoot Nation," within Article V, independent from the territory of "the Sioux or Dahcotah Nation." A misappropriation resulted when the territory of the "Blackfoot Nation," and the usufructuary rights they controlled within those boundaries was defined in the 1851 treaty without their participation or agreement. Jackson notes the Blackfeet's lack of participation in *Piikani Blackfeet, A Culture Under Siege*:

Alexander Culbertson, the upper Missouri River trader, was charged with bringing Piikani representatives to the great council (Fort Laramie). He was unable to locate them in time, so there were no Blackfeet present when the bounds of the Crow country along the Musselshell that limited their [Blackfeet] eastern ranges were established (Jackson, 170).⁴⁴

The geopolitical constraints outlined in the 1851 treaty included and effected what was the eastern boundary and south-eastern corner of the traditional territories of the Blackfeet, the area southeast of the Mussellshell River. On the plains, a tribe exercised usufructuary rights within a territory only as long as they maintained physical control of that area.

The Fort Laramie Treaty of 1855, also known as Lane Bull's Treaty, was the first and only formal treaty the Blackfoot entered into with the colonial government.

There were six principle points in the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1855 that spelled out the terms of the agreement and associated attempts to initiate colonization. These terms were included in the margin notes of the treaty and include the following: 1)

Relationships regarding peace, war and depredations with and against the U.S.

Government, within the Blackfoot Nation, themselves and against other tribes; 2)

recognition as a common hunting ground; 3) defined the respective territories of the

tribes; 4) that citizens be allowed to pass through and live in Indian Territory and

addressed protection against depredations; 5) stipulated that roads, telegraph lines and

military posts may be established within the territory; and 6) sets forth annual payments of annuities.

There were three major tribal group affiliations, consisting of eight different tribes, that were listed as parties to the treaty in the margin notes including: the Blackfoot Nation (consisting of the Peigan, Blood, and Blackfoot); the Gros Ventre; the Flathead Nation (consisting of the Flathead, Upper Pend d'Oreille and Kootenay tribes); and the Nez Perce. The Fort Laramie Treaty of 1855 differed from the Fort

Laramie Treaty of 1851, in that the tribes that were party to the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1855 were to have geographically defined permanent homes east and west of the continental divide.

Although Article III addressed the issue of the territory being a common hunting ground, Article IV stipulated that defined geographical area "shall be the territory of the Blackfoot Nation, over which the nation shall exercise exclusive control." I found this stipulation interesting. My interpretation is that those who were negotiating the treaty recognized that the Blackfoot were firmly entrenched and physically controlled that portion of the territory along with the consideration that this stipulation recognized a political hierarchy within the tribes that were parties to the treaty.

Bad Head, an influential leader of the Kainai (Bloods) and keeper of the winter count, signed the Blackfoot treaty in 1855. His winter count⁴⁵ not only addresses the treaty signing, but also provides accounts of conflicts within the territory between raiding parties, and more intense conflicts over the territorial boundary between war parties, as well as documents instances where other tribes were allowed into Blackfoot territory to gather medicine.

The Indians viewed the treaties as a means of preserving themselves as people (Deloria and Lytle, 8). They sought from the federal government a recognition of "their exclusive right to the use and occupancy of a well defined area," and a commitment to defend and protect their rights within that area from non-Indian encroachment (American Indian Policy Review Commission 1977, 1:145).

As previously outlined, the Lane Bull treaty of 1855 was not the first attempt to establish territorial limits of the lands of the indigenous Blackfoot peoples and begin the process of colonization and assimilation, nor would it be the last. A succession of colonial land policies followed that further diminished the territorial land base and moved the Blackfoot further down the road of assimilation into white society.

The interpretations of treaty agreements differed between the individual members of the tribes, the United States government, and citizens representing the U.S. government in negotiations. Chiefs were formally designated by the colonial government as treaty representatives to sign the treaties on behalf of their respective tribes; this was accomplished by mimicking the colonial, Euro American political structure.

Steamboats on the Missouri utilized in the past to deliver trade goods were also used to deliver annuities, as promised in the treaty. The first agency was established at Fort Benton. The transition from a market economy, controlled on both sides by a trade relationship, to an agreement with the U.S. government became very apparent to the Blackfoot with the trend of late delivery or no delivery of goods promised by the treaty. But the treaty was successful in one aspect, as stated by Dempsey, "The pact opened the way for government and missionary activities, bringing more white people into the Upper Missouri region." By 1860, the Blackfoot had been engaged in trading for almost a century. The Indians that were parties to the treaty agreements soon recognized that annuity goods were not the same quality that they were used to obtaining through trade at the forts and trading posts along the Missouri and in Canada. In fact, some of the

materials were of no practical use to them. They knew they could turn over the strange foods and other articles that they had no real need to their "white brothers-in-law" (white men married to Indian women) at Fort Benton and ride off to hunt buffalo – their traditional source of good meat and of basic materials for scores of useful objects (Ewers, 230).

In 1864, President Lincoln approved Montana's designation as a territory. The first order of business by the territorial government that impacted the Blackfoot was initiated in 1865, ten years following the *Lame Bull* treaty of 1855, when Montana's newest settlers presented a revised treaty to Congress and to the Blackfoot "in an attempt to stop the bloody confrontations which were occurring on the Montana frontier."⁴⁶ This treaty was not ratified, since the Blackfoot continued to commit depredations [raiding small homesteads and engaging in open conflict with settlers], which were not unprovoked, because white migration into their country continued at a rapid pace (Burlingame, 43).

Due to the differences that existed in the Blackfoot social and political structure, a shift in political power and influence resulted. Because of the way that the Blackfoot communal society was traditionally structured, the colonial designation of peace chiefs to sign the treaty agreement did little to appease the war chiefs of their power and authority to act against others who were not parties to the treaty agreement. For example, Ewers documents the murder of Little Dog [I] and his son (1867) in response to political disagreement within the tribe, "So strong was Piegan animosity toward the

whites that some of them regarded their peacemaking head chief as a traitor and removed him from his influential position with finality (Ewers, 242)."

Although the Blackfoot were troubled by the broken treaty promises, they were more concerned with the influx of whiskey traders, miners and prospectors into the area, along with the pressure from other tribes, such as the Cree, the Assiniboiné and the Crow. Open warfare, raiding and revenge became the norm of relationship between the Blackfoot, other tribes and whites. In 1869, in an attempt to move the Blackfoot further from the Missouri, the agency was moved from Fort Benton and reestablished along the Teton River, near the present town of Choteau.

Several conflicts with minors and settlers trespassing within Blackfoot territory happened within six year of Montana's recognition as a territory. According to historian Hugh Dempsey, these conflicts precipitated the event that resulted in the Baker Massacre also known as the Massacre on the Marias in 1870:

The five years of conflict with the Americans can to a tragic culmination during the winter of 1869-70, after a prominent Montanan, Malcolm Clark, was shot and killed by Peigans. Claiming that fifty-six whites had been killed and more than a thousand horses had been stolen by Bloods and Peigans in that year alone, the U.S. marshal appealed for help from the military. In response, Colonel E.M. Baker conducted a mid-winter attack on the Peigan camp of Heavy Runner, believing it to be that of Mountain Chief who was accused of harboring the man who had killed Clark. After the raid on the morning of January 23, 1870, there were 173 men, women and children dead on the prairies. Remembered as the Baker Massacre, the killings so shocked the Blackfoot tribes that any thought of retaliation was forgotten. The "Blackfoot war" that had started with the blood of ten woodchoppers, ended with the death and dispersal of an entire Indian camp.⁴⁷

The Baker Massacre forever changed the political landscape of the new Montana territory and the Blackfoot people who had always existed there; it changed the

relationship between the U.S. Government and the Blackfoot. The Baker Massacre was also one of the primary influences that affected the psychological and sociological reaction of the tribes in further land agreements.

Several other factors, including the end of the treaty making period in 1871, began a succession of other types of colonial politics that resulted in policy changes further impacting Blackfoot people and continuing the diminishment of their lands. After treaty making ended, most tribes came to regard their treaties as sacred pledges on the part of the United States (DeLoria and Lytle, 8).⁴⁸ Following the abolishment of treaty making by Congress in 1871, three separate Executive Orders and three Acts of Congress were passed that specifically reduced the traditional territories and land base of the Blackfoot Nation. These pieces of legislation were influenced by conflicts between the new territorial government and the Blackfoot people concerning the invasion of miners, settlers and cattlemen who were entering and settling in Blackfoot territory and competing for land and access to resources in what was the new Montana Territory.

Burlingame summed up the Montana frontier well when he wrote:

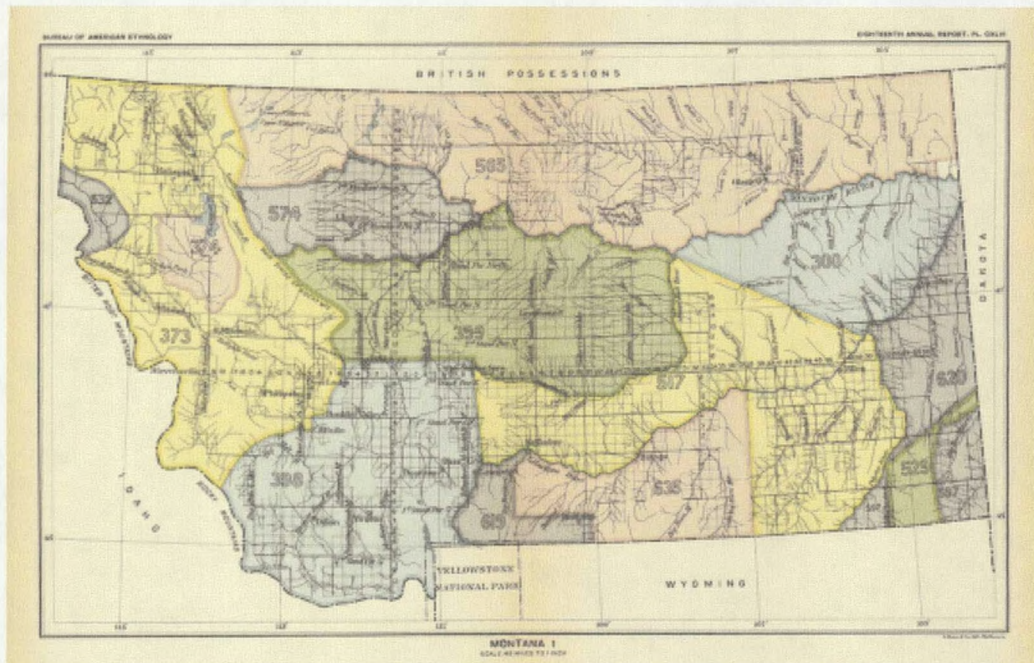
The predominant theme which runs through the frontier period of Montana is the exploitation of its natural resources. A first tremendous surge of acquisition took its furs; a second, which dwarfed the first, attacked its minerals with gusto. A third resource was its range lands, countless millions of acres for the high plains bunch grasses, cut through with sparkling streams, and this in turn became the object of acquisition by a large group of strong men in another distinct era of development.

The settlers thereupon set out with vigor to clear the plains of Indians and Indian reservations and drove enormous herds of cattle into the Montana plains. The broken nature of the country, cut by rivers, major creeks, and low ranges of mountains and hills, divided the range into domains of vast extent, on which proprietors of the cattle companies

exercised the rights of kingship in as real a manner as in any other time or place.⁴⁹

Several documents contained within *Indian Land Cessions in the United States, 1784 to 1894, A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation: U.S. Congressional Documents and Debates, 1774 – 1875*⁵⁰ establish the foundation for the remaining pieces of policy that impacted the Blackfoot and their lands. The Executive Order of 1873 moved the southern boundary to the Sun and Missouri Rivers and distinguished the eastern boundary as being between the Montana and Dakota Territories. An Act of Congress in 1874, spurred by political pressure from cattlemen, reestablished the reservation boundary even further north of the Sun River by moving the boundary to Birch Creek; designating the lands between the Marias and Missouri Rivers to be public domain. This last action was made possible by the scattering of the Piegans in the Baker Massacre (Merrill, 43). President Grant, yielding to congressional opinion and complaints from the Blackfeet, issued the Executive Order of 1875 restoring the lands between the Sun and Marias Rivers. President Hayes signed the Executive Order of 1880, placing the 1875 concession back into the public domain and the reservation once again conformed to the 1874 boundaries. The map contained in Figure 3 – Treaty Map – MONTANA 1, corresponds to the changes that occurred to the boundaries that distinguished Blackfoot territory with each successive change in legislation by executive action or congressional act.

Figure 3 – Treaty Map – MONTANA 1



The traditional territorial area of the Blackfoot diminished even further in size when the geopolitical boundary between the United States and Canada was established. The Medicine Line (the International Boundary), established in 1832, separated the Queen's Land (Canada) from the Louisiana Purchase and the area that later became the Montana Territory. The International boundary line, surveyed in 1874, affected the migration of the Blackfoot, Bloods and Piegans, between the Montana territory and Canada. As a people who had always exercised a mobile lifestyle, they began to realize that the buffalo as their primary food source was rapidly diminishing as was their traditional territorial land base.

The formal survey of the Medicine Line in 1874 divided the Tribes of the Blackfoot Nation into distinct political tribal groups, divided the territory into geopolitical areas in two countries, and subjected the Blackfoot peoples to two separate regimes of colonialism, that of Canada and the United States. By 1877 the Blackfoot in Canada concluded Treaty No. 7 with the Canadian government, securing the settlement of the western Canadian frontier (Surtes, 209).⁵¹

In 1876, the Blackfeet Agency was moved to Badger Creek, to a site just west of where US Highway 89 now crosses Badger Creek. The possibility of agricultural development was important, since Indian affairs were rapidly shifting away from conflict with tribes, where discipline and control were dominant to Indian policy focused on education and civilization (Burlingame, 43). The Blackfeet continued to leave the agency to travel to the Bearpaw Mountains, out into the traditional territory they had always utilized to hunt during both summer and winter. Following the winter hunt in 1878, Ewers noted:

Their leaders were convinced that the time was fast approaching when failure of the buffalo would force them to make a change in their way of life. One of the men told the agent John Young, "the time is close when the tail of the last buffalo will be seen disappearing from the prairie."

Early in July 1882 two Piegan bands led by Chiefs Little Dog and Bullshoe rode to hunt in the neighborhood of the Sweet Grass Hills, where nine years before buffalo had been seen in countless numbers. They killed just six buffalo and a few antelope (Ewers, 290). The buffalo were gone and the Blackfeet connection to their way of life in the grasslands was forever changed. In 1889, there were less than 85 free-ranging unprotected buffalo left in the plains area where Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, North

and South Dakota, western Nebraska and Western Kansas now share their borders (McHugh, 294).

The Blackfeet people were confined to the reservation and dependent upon the Indian Bureau for food rations. Drought hit in the summer of 1882 adding insult to injury, along with conflicts later that November over "white men's cattle grazing illegally on the reservation (Ewers, 292)." All of these factors decimated hundreds of Blackfeet people during the "Starvation Winters" of 1883 and 1884, affecting the long term health and welfare of those who survived. Of the Blackfeet fatalities, Ewers states:

"There is no adequate number of Piegan deaths from starvation during those nightmarish year 1883 - 1884. Almost-A-Dog, a Piegan Indian, is said to have kept a record of each death as it occurred by cutting a notch on a willow stick; the number of those notches is said to have 555 (Ewers, 294)."

Approximately 20% of the Piegan population, one out of every five people, starved to death waiting for treaty annuities and rations promised in exchange for lands already ceded to the United States. In addition to the devastating impacts of the Starvation Winter upon the Blackfeet people, one has to include the psychological effects that resulted from colonization, as well as the feeling and views that became deeply ingrained in the history regarding their relationship with the U.S. government.

The Starvation Winter and its associated issues had a tremendous affect upon those who emerged as the Blackfeet leadership in their attempts to negotiate with the U.S. government to ensure that the government upheld its part of the bargain. Based upon their communal philosophy of what was in the best interests of the people

collectively, the responsibility of the leadership was to ensure that those Blackfeet people who remained would survive.

Two pieces of legislative policy finalized the diminishment of Blackfoot territory and created separate reservations of land for individual tribes. The Blackfeet Reservation that exists today is what remains of the land base that was carved out of Blackfoot territory by these two pieces of policy. Although they were approved as Acts of Congress, the agreements that finalized these two land cessions were undertaken through a more formally negotiated process between representatives of the United States government and representatives of the Blackfoot tribes. The Agreement of 1888, was signed by the Blackfeet in 1887, ratified and approved by an Act of Congress in May of 1888. This agreement established reservation boundaries and annuity payments were again set forth. This agreement is known by the Blackfeet as "the time when we sold the Sweet Grass Hills." The Agreement of 1896 was the final cession of land along the western boundary of the reservation that had been established eight years earlier. This cession of land was concluded in return for a ten year continuation of annuity payments established in the 1888 agreement. The ceded area later became Glacier National Park and the northern portion of the Lewis and Clark National Forest. Many Blackfeet refer to this area as the "Blackfeet Ceded Strip or Ceded Area." Usufructuary rights within Glacier National Park continue to be a bone of contention between the National Park Service and the Blackfeet Tribe. Usufructuary rights within the Lewis and Clark National Forest are referenced in the Blackfeet Fish & Wildlife Code⁵² and the managed as the "Blackfeet Unit."

Supporting documents involving the final two agreements outline an intense process of negotiating monetary settlements that were to be paid to the tribe as annuities and include the Tribe's emphasis to retain usufructuary rights within areas that were our traditional territory. Conflicting values emerged within the Blackfoot Nation regarding these new land agreements. Foley documents that:

There were only two objections, those of Little Bear Chief and Little Dog [II], to the land cession, the settlement prices, as well as objections regarding the influence of outsiders. His [Little Bear Chief] remarks reflect the disagreement among the Piegans, but they suggest a dislike of the recommendations by non-Indians as well, especially to the cession of lands (Foley, 195).

These documents, differences in interpretation between the U.S. government and the Blackfeet tribes, and tribal perception regarding the history surrounding these negotiations continue to influence the perceptions and attitudes of the Blackfeet people today. After completing this research and constructing this Blackfeet land history narrative, there is very little question in my mind about why our Grandfathers made the decisions they did and what they retained for our use.

Montana attained formal recognition as a state and achieved statehood in 1889, thirty four years after the federal government initiated its first formal treaty with the Blackfeet. The State Enabling Act that preceded Montana's Constitution, contains an Indian disclaimer clause. As Wilkins and Lomawaima point out:

Congress insisted that disclaimer clauses be inserted into eleven of the eighteen western states' constitutions, including reference that the state forever disclaim all rights to Indian lands; those lands remain under absolute federal jurisdiction; states may only tax land of individual Indians who have severed tribal relations, but not if lands was granted by Congress with an express tax exemption (Wilkins & Lomawaima, 182, 194).⁵³

THE RESERVATION ERA

Without abundant buffalo, tribes had little choice but to provide for themselves with the resources at hand. To do so required institutional changes compatible with settled agriculture rather than those that had evolved from the nomadic buffalo hunters (Anderson, 38).⁵⁴

Allotment and Agriculture as a Tool of Assimilation

The Dawes Act of 1887, also known as the General Allotment Act, was the legislated policy that provided for reservation lands to be allotted to individual Indians for agricultural purposes. This piece of legislation set the stage for two subsequent policies that impacted the Blackfeet Reservation and what remained of the lands the tribe had reserved and held communally. The Allotment Act of 1907 and the Homestead Act of 1919 laid the grounds for allotments of land to individuals on the Blackfeet Reservation. The unity of the bands was lost in a kind of ramshackle suburbanization, as families accepted individual allotments and scattered to sheltered places, cabins on cattle ranches made better sense than canvas lodges (Jackson, 212). These allotments of land resulted in a mixture of land ownership on the reservation and what is referred to as a checkerboard land ownership pattern. Surplus lands located on the reservation were then opened up for homesteading by non-Indians.

Table 1 – Land Ownership – Resulting from Allotment

Blackfeet Reservation Land Ownership		
Tribal	Indian Trust Land Acres	Fee Lands
	Individual Allotted	
	962,172 acres	564,540 acres

Bureau of Indian Affairs, Billings Area Reservations Report, 8/5/1999

The government introduced cattle on the Blackfeet Reservation in the early 1880's. The introduction of domestic livestock brought about many changes and adaptations for the Blackfeet. They were a welcomed food source during times of famine. They not only became a substitution for "real food" in the diet after the buffalo were gone; beef tongues were also substituted to replace buffalo tongues during ceremonies. It was on a flat, south of the agency at Badger Creek, that the Piegiens held the first Sun Dance after the buffalo were gone, the first in which cattle tongues were the sacred food.⁵⁵

It is not clear how much of the first allotment of cattle was intended for food and rations, and how much was set aside for livestock seed sources or how individuals came to acquire cattle for agricultural purposes. With regard to land tenure and agriculture, Anderson states, "Given the economies of scale in grazing and a tradition of private ownership of horses, it made sense to have individually ownership of the livestock and common ownership of the land (Anderson, 40).⁵⁶ The colonial policies stressing assimilation became a part of the equation. Iversen states, "Not all Blackfeet had an equal chance at getting started in the cattle business. Washington preferred that cattle

be given to "deserving Indians," and not all, apparently, fell into that category. As of 1903, of the 20,000 head of cattle, only 5,000 had "full blood" owners."⁵⁷

The Indian Reorganization Act

Commissioner Collier and other federal delegates met in January of 1934 to consider the recommendations of the Meriam Report titled "The Problem of Indian Administration." They unanimously concluded that the federal government had severely mismanaged their relationship and trust with regard to Tribes. They focused their political efforts to support a new policy, eventually passed by Congress and known as the Indian New Deal, that: (1) repealed the land allotment law; (2) consolidated Indian heirship and trust lands for agricultural purposes; (3) promoted tribal ownership of grazing and forest lands, and; (4) acquired additional lands for landless Indians.

President Roosevelt signed the Indian Reorganization Act in June of 1934 and the law went into effect. The IRA became the primary piece of colonial policy, along with its "cookie cutter" constitutions, legislated to reform the political structure of traditional tribal governments into the democratic, contemporary tribal governments we see today. In addition to ending the allotment policy, which lasted for 47 years, the Act authorized Congress to annually appropriate funds for the purpose of formalizing tribal governments on reservations and for land acquisitions.

Constitution and By-Laws of the Blackfeet Tribe

The Blackfeet accepted the Indian Reorganization Act, adopted a colonial structure of government and a democratic system of doing business, and approved the Constitution and By-Laws of the Blackfeet Tribe of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation of Montana. The Certificate of Adoption states:

Pursuant to an order, approved on October 19, 1935, by the Secretary of the Interior, the attached Constitution and By-Laws were submitted for ratification to the members of the Blackfeet Tribe of the Blackfeet Reservation and were on November 13, 1935, duly approved by vote of 884 for and 157 against in an election in which over 30 percent of these entitled to vote cast their ballots, in accordance with Section 16 of the Indian Reorganization Act of June 18, 1934 (48 Stat. 984), as amended by the Act of June 14, 1935 (Pub., No. 174, 74th Cong.).

Article I and Article VII of the Constitution define the Territory and Land respectively.

Article VII Land also includes Amendment V, approved in August of 1964. The Constitution has been amended ten times since its inception in 1935.

The Blackfeet Tribal Business Council continues to do business as an IRA government, managing the affairs of the tribe, as well as to promulgating laws and regulations that affect the land base and the resources of the Blackfeet Tribe. The traditional political process of striving to reach consensus used in the past has been replaced with the model of American democracy.

The majority of the reservation land base is utilized for agricultural uses relating to the production of food, beef cattle, crops and harvesting timber resources. There is a

minimal amount of oil and gas production. Current tribal policies, instituted by the tribal government, reaffirm use of the land base for agricultural uses.

This extensive historical relationship and the use of grassland resources for grazing continue to influence the relationship between Blackfeet people and the land today. A relatively small percentage of Blackfeet people, less than 4% of the population that reside on the reservation and less than 2% of the total tribal membership, are engaged in ranching operations, utilizing grasslands and grazing resources that comprise 75% of the land base to produce domestic cattle and horses. These operations are dependent upon reservation grassland resources to sustain their agricultural operations.

Table 2 – Land Use on the Blackfeet Reservation

Land Use - Indian Trust Resources			Fee Land Ownership	
Rangeland	Farmland	Timberlands	Indian Fee Lands	Non-Indian Fee Lands
730,000 acres	174,000 acres	38,918 acres	132,340 acres	432,200 acres
Indian owned lands = Indian Trust Resources + Indian Fee Lands = 1,075,258 acres or 70.5 % of the reservation land base				

Report - Bureau of Indian Affairs, Trust Acres By Specified Land Use and Total per Reservation, Rocky Mountain Region, 1999, Report - Catalog of Forest Acres, Acres By Land Class, 9/30/2001

In the relatively short time period of 200 years of colonization, federal Indian policies changed the traditional Blackfoot people-land-relationship, in addition to diminishing the traditional Blackfoot territory. This thesis does not begin to address the

impact to the Blackfeet people, their culture, and societal changes that resulted from colonization, nor does it address the continual influences that colonization continues to have on the Blackfeet Tribe.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This thesis, "An Indigenous Perspective of the Blackfoot Land History," was constructed to include an indigenous perspective of the worldviews and traditional value systems of the Blackfoot people regarding their relationship with land, as well as provide a critical analysis of the colonial historical narrative to write a decolonized historical narrative that addresses the impacts colonization had upon the Blackfoot people and their territory.

As outlined in the introduction, the construction of a decolonized Blackfoot Land History is only the first step in attempting to evaluate and address complex land management issues of the Blackfoot Tribe on the Blackfoot Reservation. Because no written historical narrative exists that addresses the Blackfoot and their lands, it is difficult to evaluate the impacts that colonialism had upon the people and the land. This newly constructed Blackfoot land history, contains an indigenous perspective that supports decolonization; it can be used as an educational tool to help develop an understanding in the Blackfoot community of how the Blackfoot people arrived at this specific point in time and came to occupy the current land base of the Blackfoot Reservation. In addition, this Blackfoot land history can be used to reaffirm cultural

values regarding the land and the natural environment and provide a model for other indigenous peoples to use.

Conducting research and writing this thesis has been a personal and academic challenge. For indigenous scholars researching history, uncovering the history that results from colonization of your Tribe and the associated, devastating impacts colonization has had upon indigenous people and the land, can be traumatic and extremely emotional. It is an extremely difficult task to "reright" history in a manner that presents an indigenous perspective, but the experience has been very rewarding.

As a Blackfeet person, my genealogy, culture and indigenous heritage not only connect me to the land, they also tie me to the actions of the Tribe's leaders that emerged in the 19th century and the leadership they provided during the transition to a new way of life in the beginning of the 20th century. I am a descendent of the Bullshoe and Little Dog families. Little Dog [I] is identified as one of the principle chiefs that signed the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1855 on behalf of the Piegiens. He was also one of the principle negotiators for the agreements that followed the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1855 between the Blackfoot Nation and the U.S. Government. Little Dog [II] refused to sign the 1896 agreement. During my research I discovered that my great-grandfather, Mike Little Dog, one of the tribal leaders in the early part of the 20th century, was not a direct descendent of Little Dog (II). Mike was Little Dog's nephew. He was ten years old when Little Dog adopted him after he was orphaned; his entire family perished during the Starvation Winter of 1883 and 1884. It galls me that Blackfeet people were starving to death by the hundreds while white cattle were being allowed to graze illegally on the

grasslands resources of our reservation. William Russell, my great -great grandfather was one of the interpreters during the negotiations that preceded the Agreement of 1888. He also served as one of the two interpreters for Grinnell's "Lodge Tales." My great-great grandmother, Two Bear Woman, was recognized for her success as a healer. My great-grandfather, Joe Bullshoe, was born at Fort Benton in 1879 and was one of the first Blackfeet people to adapt to agriculture at the turn of the century. My grandfather, Leo Bullshoe, and my grandmother, Cecille Little Dog, were both allotted land in the Blackfeet Homestead Act of 1919. Although my "Grandpa Leo" only had an eighth grade education, he succeeded in passing on the cultural values and the legacy of the Blackfeet through the oral traditions to his children, grandchildren and numerous extended family members.

During this research, there were times when I connected to the historical documents and information in a very personal, intimate manner that was at times emotionally overwhelming and difficult. How do you explain to a research librarian why you are crying, or are emotionally overwhelmed by historical documents or historical photos that appear to them to be just old pieces of paper? How do you articulate your thoughts in an academically appropriate manner when you are intimately connected as an indigenous person to the history and the tragedies that colonization brought upon your tribe?

As a member of a colonized group, it is a difficult process to uncover the intimate details of that history, as well as understand the colonizing process, recognize the influences that persist from that process and attempt to reconcile with the past. I

personally understand why historical events and the feelings associated with them are still so deeply ingrained in indigenous people who have been colonized.

The Next Steps

President Thomas Jefferson was somewhat right when he surmised that within the unknown Louisiana Territory, all the great rivers of the west – the Missouri, Columbia, Colorado and Rio Grande – rose from a single ‘height of land’ and flowed off in their several directions to the seas of the hemisphere (Ambrose, 55). The headwaters of all the great rivers of the west, more specifically the Missouri River and the Columbia River, begin within the Backbone of the World, the Continental Divide. These rivers and the lands upon which their headwaters arise feed the North American continent and more importantly serve as the sources for waters that sustain the western United States.

The Blackfeet Reservation sits at the headwaters of three major watersheds. These watersheds supply the water that ultimately drains northeast into the Hudson Bay, southeast into the Missouri River that feeds the Mississippi River and eventually into the Gulf of Mexico and westward into the Columbia River drainage and the Pacific Ocean. The waters that begin in the St. Mary’s watershed supply the surface waters that are covered under an international boundary agreement between the United States, Canada and the Blackfeet Tribe, and ultimately return to the United States further downstream as the Milk River.

The influences of soils, water, air, plants, animals, and the activities of humans upon those resources all impact the quality of water and ultimately effect the quality of

life for the people living on the land. The management of resources adjacent to streams, rivers, or lakes or located within upland areas impacts not only the immediate land base, but also ground and surface water. If resources, more specifically grasslands resources, are being mismanaged or are stuck in dysfunctional management systems, the quality and value of the resources and the land base begin to diminish over time. Because the Blackfeet people and the Blackfeet Reservation are located at the headwaters of St. Mary's watershed and the Missouri and the Columbia Rivers, the impact from the management of our resources not only affects our own land base, but also affects all others who are downstream in these watersheds. If our resources are degrading because of lack of management or an inappropriate land management system, the system that effects our land base is not only detrimental to us as a Tribe, but also has negative impacts on everyone else who is downstream of us.

It is important for indigenous societies to understand their historical relationships with the land, and evaluate their land management systems and policies. It is critical to recognize the point Taiaiake Alfred makes in *Peace Power Righteousness*, when he stated:

All societies must take their sustenance from the land; however, we must also recognize that the earth has an inherent value, beyond human needs. The modern reality demand that indigenous peoples use the land much more intensively, and in very different ways than their ancestors did. The only position on development compatible with a traditionalist frame of mind is a balanced one, committed at once to using the land in ways that respect the spiritual and cultural connections indigenous people have with it and to managing the process so as to ensure a primary benefit for it indigenous stewards.⁵⁸

It is important to have a Blackfoot land history narrative that provides an indigenous perspective of our relations with the land. A critical aspect of the struggle for self-determination has involved questions relating to our history as indigenous peoples and a critique of how we, as the "Other," have been represented or excluded (Smith, 28).

This Blackfoot land history is only the first step in understanding the past from the Blackfeet viewpoint and beginning the process of decolonizing mainstream Euro American historical accounts of this history. Indigenous groups have argued that history is important for understanding the present and that reclaiming history is a critical and essential aspect of decolonization (Smith, 30).

Further work needs to be initiated to deconstruct the land policies, both tribal policies and the federal policies of the Bureau of Indian Affairs at the Blackfeet Agency, that impact the people of the Blackfeet Tribe, and their land and resources on the Blackfeet Reservation. The Blackfoot land history is one of the first step in providing a foundation for the land tenure of the Blackfeet people. Deconstructing policy is necessary for us to complete the process of decolonizing ourselves as an indigenous community. Decolonization and deconstruction are essential to understanding the relationships we have to each other as tribal people, our relationship with the land and the natural environment, and our relationship with other people. With secure [land] tenure, and the sovereignty it implies, [Blackfeet] people will be able to take a longer-term view towards the environment (Weaver, 21).⁵⁹

We need to move the process of decolonization even further along to develop land management strategies based upon indigenous worldviews that reaffirm cultural

values and seek to create a balanced system that addresses contemporary land management issues. It is extremely important that we begin addressing the dysfunction within our current land management system and identifying solutions that provide for the long term sustainability of our land base and natural resources. The population of the Blackfeet Tribe continues to grow; yet, the land base that we occupy is now finite. We will need to address the long term sustainability and management of our lands if we are to perpetuate our existence as a tribal people. We also need to be pro-active in developing indigenous land management strategies that address issues within the aboriginal territory that we occupied as indigenous peoples.

Although the boundaries of the Blackfeet world have been changed by the dominant colonial laws of the land, the world that Old Man created for the Blackfeet still exists today. The same mountains of our past remain firmly rooted in place and the creeks and rivers still flow, although they are called by different names now. The seasons still change on an annual basis and the stars still twinkle at night showing us the Wolf Trail. Old Man left his mark and influence upon the world when he created it. Generations of Blackfeet people have left the traces of our history upon the land that He created for us. From where the Blackfeet now stand in the present, we recognize the responsibility that exists with regard to our relationship to the land that we have yet to fulfill.

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