

**Malcolm Wiener Center for Social Policy
John F. Kennedy School of Government
Harvard University**

**Mending the Sacred Hoop of the Lakota Nation:
The Chief Big Foot Memorial Rides
[*Si Tanka Wokiksuye Okolakiciye*]**

**A Teaching Case Study in Tribal Management
for Oglala Lakota College**

by

Jonathan Taylor

PRSC-7

**Harvard Project on
American Indian Economic Development**

July 1996

This case is for teaching purposes only. It is not intended to be a complete and accurate reporting of relevant events, and therefore should not be cited for research purposes. Primary documents may be found by referring to footnotes, and some may be located in the Oglala Lakota College library archives.

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Manager as Warrior Program, Oglala Lakota College, the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, the Malcolm Wiener Center for Social Policy, or Harvard University.

Reproduction of this paper is not permitted without permission. For permission, contact the Manager as Warrior Program, Oglala Lakota College, P.O. Box 490, Kyle, SD 57752; or contact the Publications Department, Malcolm Wiener Center for Social Policy, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 79 J.F.K. Street, Cambridge, MA 02138.

The Manager as Warrior Program is directed by Eileen Iron Cloud. For more information, she may be contacted at (605) 455-2321. The Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development is directed by Professors Stephen E. Cornell (Department of Sociology, University of California, San Diego) and Joseph P. Kalt (John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University). For more information, contact the Project's Executive Director, Manley Begay, at (617) 495-1338.

Wiping the Tears of Seven Generations

On December twenty-ninth, 1990, temperatures in South Dakota hovered around thirty degrees below zero, and the wind pushed the chill factor some forty or fifty degrees lower still. Most people in the state were enjoying their winter holidays in the comfort of their homes, well away from the prairie winds. More than 300 Lakota¹ men, women, and children and supporters from around the world were not. Instead they were on horseback riding past Porcupine Butte and into a bowl-like valley at the bottom of which flows Wounded Knee Creek. All around them were rolling hills capped with beige grass stubble and wrapped in drifts of snow. On one particular hill was a simple monument consisting of a pillar to one side of a large concrete rectangle in the ground. At one end of the surrounding fence, two pillars and a simple steel arch marked a gate.

At the front of the pack of horses, several riders carried long staffs wrapped in fur. Eagle feathers along the staffs streamed horizontally in the wind. One of the staffs had a red hoop in the crook from which a cluster of a dozen eagle feathers hung with some ribbons of cloth. Some of the riders wore eagle feathers in their hair or attached to their insulated caps. Others wore cowboy hats. Nearly everyone was wearing two or three

¹ *Lakota* is the name some Sioux subgroups give themselves. *Sioux* is a French mispronunciation of a Chippewa name for the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota, three linguistically related Siouan people. According to Hassrick, the "Great Sioux Nation" divides into seven subgroups: the Oglala ("Scatter One's Own"), the Sicangu ("Burnt Thighs" or Brulés), the Miniconjou ("Those Who Plant by the Stream"), the Hunkpapa ("Those Who Camp at the Entrance"), the Sicasapa ("Black Feet"), the Itazipcho ("Without Bows" or Sans Arcs), and the Oohenonpa ("Two Kettles"). It is these Sioux that comprise the Lakota who are known as the Teton Sioux ("Dwellers of the Prairie"), the Plains Sioux, and the Western Sioux. Hassrick, Royal B., *The Sioux: Life and Customs of a Warrior Society* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), pp. 3-7. NB: except where otherwise noted, material for this case came from interviews with participants listed at the end of the document.

coats, insulated pants, and heavy boots. No one left much skin exposed to the wind, and the riders rode slowly out of concern for their horses. The air froze the nostrils when inhaled quickly, and the riders did not want their horses to begin breathing hard. Few spoke.

Most of the group had been riding for a week. Some had been out longer still. On December 15, the anniversary of Sitting Bull's death, some young relay runners had braved the cold to carry a staff 45 miles to the riders' starting point. The runners started their relay at Sitting Bull's customary camp on the Grand River near Little Eagle, South Dakota, on the Standing Rock Reservation. Not straying too far from the warmth of their parents' cars, they passed the staff from runner to runner and then finally to a group of Sitting Bull's descendants who were waiting to carry the staff another 100 miles on horseback to the hamlet of Bridger, on the Cheyenne River Reservation (see Exhibit A). There, on December 22, a complement of riders met them bringing the total to 325. The new riders were largely descendants of a band of Lakota that had followed Chief *Si Tanka*—Chief Big Foot. The merged group then rode another 152 miles south through the Badlands on the northern border of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, home of the Oglala Sioux Tribe. Their final destination was Wounded Knee, a small town named for the nearby creek.

The riders shared a legacy of grief and a desire to put spirits to rest. They all wanted to finally and deliberately grieve the victims of the last violent confrontation of the United States' Indian Wars—the Wounded Knee Massacre. Many of them had been preparing for five years—praying in sweat lodges, going on *hanbleceyapi* (vision-quests),

seeking the advice of holy men, and riding the ride of Chief Big Foot's band four Decembers in a row.

One hundred years earlier, the Big Foot band and a band of Sitting Bull's followers had fled the Cheyenne River and Standing Rock Reservations. Sitting Bull's death in the custody of the U.S. government led them to fear for their lives, and they sought to join Red Cloud and his people at the Pine Ridge Agency. The killing of hundreds, including Big Foot, at Wounded Knee Creek, less than fifteen miles from Pine Ridge, marked the end of Big Foot's ride. To many Lakota, it also marked the end of the Sioux's time as a strong and independent society—a society that for decades had been one of the most formidable adversaries of the United States. According to *Hehaka Sapa* (Black Elk) and other Lakota holy men since his time, it was at Wounded Knee that the “Sacred Hoop” of the Lakota Nation had been broken.

To the modern-day riders, the Sacred Hoop remained broken in large measure because the victims of Wounded Knee had never been properly grieved. It was to mend the hoop that they came from Little Eagle and Bridger to Wounded Knee Creek. They rode up from the creek, through a cloud of purifying smoke, and formed a circle around the monument. In the earth below the concrete rectangle, several hundred of their relatives and their friends' relatives lay buried in a mass grave. None of the relatives had been given a proper Lakota burial, and the riders began a ceremony of wiping away the tears, a traditional Lakota grieving ritual to be performed a year after the death of a relative. It was the hundredth anniversary of the Wounded Knee Massacre, and this was the first wiping of tears for its victims.

For the riders, this was both an ending and a beginning. It was the end of a prophesied period of cultural disintegration, social disunity, and individual suffering—seven generations' worth. It was also the beginning of a period of foretold revival for their nation. As a matter of traditional Lakota theology and as a matter of modern social renewal, ghosts were laid to rest. Alex White Plume, one of the early organizers of the rides, observed:

We're bringing our nation out of grieving. After the ceremony, we will celebrate a new future. The next seven generations will celebrate *Wolakota*—the people will be stronger than ever. The tree still grows. The unity of the people will mend the hoop.²

The Wounded Knee Massacre

One hundred and fourteen years earlier, it had appeared like the Lakota were going to make it through to the end of the Indian Wars with their culture intact and their sovereign powers respected by the federal government. In that year, 1876, Crazy Horse and other chiefs led the Sioux to defeat the Lt. General George Armstrong Custer's Seventh Cavalry at the Little Bighorn River. It seemed at the time, that the Sioux would remain a force to be acknowledged by the federal government, and that the gradual erosion of the Sioux treaties (Ft. Laramie, 1851 and 1868) would come to an end. Within two decades, however, the leadership and the will of the Sioux Nation had been broken.

Shortly after the Battle of Little Bighorn, in February of 1877, the sacred *Paha Sapa*, or Black Hills, and 22.8 million acres of surrounding land were appropriated by

² *Wolakota* can be loosely translated as the Lakota way. Simon, David J., "Healing the Sacred Hoop: Lakota and the National Park Service Work Together to Commemorate Wounded Knee," *National Parks* September/October, 1991, p. 29.

Congress in direct violation of the terms of the Ft. Laramie Treaty of 1868. Gold had been found in the Hills, and the Lakota refused to sell their most sacred land. As a result, Congress abrogated portions of the Treaty by fiat. The Indians of the Great Sioux Nation (heretofore occupying the western half of the Dakota Territory) were thereby forced to reside on five reservations which consisted of the more barren lands of the Territory. By the end of that year, Crazy Horse, the Sioux's most powerful and revered chief, was dead and all the other major Lakota leaders were on reservations. In 1883, the last major herd of bison was wiped out,³ and the Lakota had become dependent on the government for their material sustenance. Ninety-seven years later, the U.S. Supreme Court said of the legacy of broken treaties: "a more ripe and rank case of dishonorable dealings will never in all probability be found in our history."⁴

Unwilling to accept the deception and decimation they suffered at the hand of the United States, the Lakota desperately sought to avoid Spotted Tail's conclusion: "Our time has come."⁵ One place to which they turned for hope was the rituals of a Paiute mystic named Wovoka. The rituals were popularly known as the Ghost Dances. In them, the Lakota (and many other native groups) danced to hasten the end of the world and the return of the buffalo and dead ancestors. Many dancers wore holy garments, ghost shirts, believed to be impervious to bullets. After the return of the buffalo, White man, or *wasicu*, would disappear and the earth would be renewed.

³ Matthiessen, Peter, *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse: The Story of Leonard Peltier and the FBI's War on the American Indian Movement* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992).

⁴ As quoted in, Simon, p. 26-7.

⁵ As quoted in Matthiessen, p. 17.

Several Lakota leaders (among them Crow Dog, Sitting Bull, and Big Foot) adopted the ghost dance, and the spreading popularity of the dance ceremonies made Indian agents and neighboring whites nervous. They feared the growing fanaticism and the violence it could potentially bring. On the Indian side, anger was rising as a result of growing hunger—a consequence of drought conditions in the northern plains and Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) corruption.

The tension was made worse by the death of Sitting Bull at the hands of Standing Rock Reservation police on December 15, 1890. The official account held that he was killed resisting arrest by policemen. Indian accounts say he was shot in the back while turning to enter his house. Regardless of the circumstances, the death of yet another Lakota war leader under the custody of federal government caused Chief Big Foot, now the last traditional chief of the area, and his Miniconjou band of Lakota to fear for their lives. On December 22, 1890, they fled the Cheyenne River Reservation with some remnants of Sitting Bull's band, intending to join Chief Red Cloud at Pine Ridge some 150 miles to the south.

They traveled on foot down through what is now western South Dakota and through the Badlands, evading the Army where possible. On December 28, Big Foot, who had come down with pneumonia, realized he could not outrun the Army any longer and surrendered to the Seventh Cavalry, Custer's old command. The unit took the band to its battalion bivouac at Wounded Knee Creek and the following morning announced that the band would have to turn over all its arms. When the first search turned up only a

few weapons, the poorly trained troops became agitated. Yellow Bird, a holy man began a ghost dance, singing:

Let your hearts be strong to meet what is before you! There are lots of soldiers, and they have lots of bullets, but the prairie is large and the bullets will not go toward, but over the large prairies.⁶

As the commander of the Seventh approached the holy man, a scuffle between a deaf warrior defending Yellow Bird and a soldier caused a gun to go off. In the fire fight that ensued, 200 to 300 Lakota men, women, and children were killed.

The Army had surrounded Big Foot's camp, occupying the high ground around Wounded Knee Creek. A pair of Hotchkiss guns mounted on a nearby hilltop each spewed a bullet per second into the camp. Well after the Indian guns were silenced, the Army continued to shoot fleeing women and children in the frozen creek beds and gullies leading away from Wounded Knee Creek.

While I was lying on my back, I looked down the ravine and saw a lot of women coming up and crying. When I saw those women, girls, and little boys coming up, I saw soldiers on both sides of the ravine shoot at them until they had killed every last one.⁷

Some victims were found as far as several miles from the camp. The storm of shells was so intense that some two dozen U.S. soldiers were killed by crossfire cutting through the camp. Officially recorded as a battle, the Wounded Knee Massacre was the last major violent action in the Indian Wars.

For three days after the Massacre, a blizzard buried the dead (and survivors) in snow (a live baby was reported to have been found under its mother's body after the bliz-

⁶ Simon, p. 28.

⁷ Iron Hail, a wounded Lakota warrior, as quoted in Simon, p. 28.

zard). When the storm cleared, soldiers and hired hands hastily dug a mass grave in the hilltop where the Hotchkiss guns had stood. The dead were quickly buried without ceremony and without the participation of relatives. Many limbs were hacked from the bodies to accommodate the small grave. No swatches of clothing nor locks of hair were cut by relatives to wipe away the tears on the anniversary of the deaths. No bodies were allowed to rest in scaffolds or on treetops to allow spirits to escape. Such practices had been central to traditional Lakota grieving. Instead, the bodies were defiled. Soldiers cut souvenirs from the bodies. Big Foot was scalped.⁸

The U.S. Congress saw fit to award 20 Congressional Medals of Honor to members of the Seventh Cavalry for their participation in the “Battle” of Wounded Knee.

The Seven Generations Following Wounded Knee

The Wounded Knee Massacre culminated a long-running campaign to settle the West by obliterating or containing the Indian nations resident there. For the Lakota, what followed this military campaign was a pattern of policies and neglect that gradually eroded the foundations of their culture, language, and religion. At the time of Wounded Knee, the Lakota were already dependent on the Bureau of Indian Affairs for food, and their dependence on outsiders gradually increased until, by the early 1990s the vast majority of all material sustenance was directly or indirectly derived from federal or foundation sources.

⁸ For a more detailed treatment of the incident, a popular account can be found in Brown, Dee *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West*, (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1970).

By the time of the massacre, the Bureau of Indian Affairs had already banned certain religious practices (e.g., Ghost Dancing), and a more systematic erosion of Lakota culture began under the direction (or at least with the tacit consent of) the Bureau. Different denominations of Christians were afforded access to the reservations and actively sought to convert Lakotas from their traditional religion. BIA schools were established wherein children were physically punished for speaking Lakota. Despite the pressure to abandon their ways, the Lakota religion was practiced in secret by a few. Nevertheless the pressures to become assimilated by the Anglo-European culture were intense. “We were encouraged to get an education and leave the reservation,” reported one Lakota in the 1990s.⁹

Accompanying this cultural onslaught were economic and political policies that undermined the soundness of the reservation as a self-sustaining sovereignty. Perhaps the most egregious of the economic policies was allotment, a policy of assigning tribal lands to individual tribal members in the manner of the Homestead Act, i.e., 160 acres per household. That land left over after allotment was for the federal government to sell to Whites, the government retaining the income rather than the land as its trust responsibility. Allotment had the effect of privatizing a resource that had heretofore been un-owned, and reservation plots were gradually sold to non-Indians. Today, some of the Sioux reservations are near majority-owned by non-Indians.

⁹ Gerald Clifford, as recorded in Bode, Ken, *CNN Special Assignment: Return to Wounded Knee* (Atlanta, GA: Cable News Network, April 13, 1991).

Exacerbating these policies that undermined the economic integrity of the tribes were various policies that undermined the tribes' governmental effectiveness. Acting under the auspices of the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, the Bureau designed and proposed constitutions for many of the Sioux tribes. The boilerplate constitution, from which many tribal constitutions were drawn, centralized authority in a chief executive, gave relatively minor powers to a legislature (usually a Council), and had no provision for an independent judiciary, all in direct contradiction to the organizational form of pre-reservation Lakota government. The Lakota had had a parliamentary structure of government in which local allegiance, i.e., band or clan loyalty, commanded the most legitimacy. Government had also been characterized by separation of powers. For example, the *Akicita*, a police-like group, were given broad authority to enforce directives and maintain order in camp but no authority to make laws or strategic decisions.¹⁰

This alien governmental form was recognized by the federal government as the legitimate authority of the Tribes, while the members of the Tribes were split on the issue of its legitimacy. Because federal resources were funneled through the tribal governments, they quickly became focal points for tribal members' attention and energies. However, the underlying alien structure of government repeatedly raised questions of legitimacy, especially for those retaining strong ties to their original language and culture. The gradual cultural and religious assimilation of some Lakota exacerbated the tension

¹⁰ See Cornell, Stephen, and Joseph P. Kalt, "Where Does Economic Development Really Come From? Constitutional Rule Among the Modern Sioux and Apache," Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, Working Paper Series, 93-7, April 1993, for a more elaborate discussion of the appropriateness of governmental form and its effects on tribal economic development.

created by this alien governmental form, and by the early-1970s, many Sioux reservations had become culturally and politically polarized.

The most pronounced line between the two groups of Lakota was drawn along the dimension of assimilation. Those retaining the Lakota language, religious practice, and cultural outlook called themselves “traditional” and harbored resentment against their brethren who had not retained Lakota ways. Those adopting Christian, Anglo-European, or “modern” ways, tended to defend the federally constituted reservation government and its ties to federal resources as the way up from poverty and social decay.¹¹ In the worst terms, traditionalists saw the assimilating Indians as “sell-outs,” “mixed-bloods,” or worst of all, “hang-around-the-fort Indians.” The adapting Indians, on the other hand, denigrated the traditionalists as “pagan,” “primitive,” or (in later years) “radical.” In certain times and on certain reservations, there was no overstating the animosity between the two groups. Each group, of course, saw its sub-culture as the most ennobling way of leading the Lakota out of the considerable poverty and social decay that had evolved to characterize life on the reservations. Similarly, each viewed the other as the main impediment to the revitalization of tribal life. Nowhere were the social conditions as dire nor the political divisions as deep as at the Pine Ridge Reservation, the home of the Oglala Sioux Tribe (OST) and the reservation where Wounded Knee Creek is located.

¹¹ As with most social polarizations, the lines are not always starkly drawn. At times, “traditionalists” filled the offices of reservation government and used the levers of government to alleviate social conditions on the reservation. Nevertheless, there exists a general tendency among traditional Lakota to view the central government with suspicion, and to view district government as more legitimate. See Cornell & Kalt (note 10) for a discussion of the locus of authority and perceptions of legitimacy.

Shannon County, South Dakota is by most measures the poorest and least developed county in the United States. Its boundaries are within or coterminous with those of the Pine Ridge Reservation. In the mid- to late-1980s, unemployment hovered in the high 80% to low 90% range depending on how it was measured. Sixty percent of high school students dropped out. The infant mortality rate was 50% higher than that of Cuba, Costa Rica, and Bulgaria. One out of every four babies was born with *delirium tremens*, a symptom of alcohol withdrawal. The suicide rate was double the national average.¹² Though the reservation is dry by ordinance, the liquor stores of the neighboring town of Whiteclay, Nebraska (population, less than 50), sold more than 75,000 cases of Budweiser products alone in 1989.¹³ Housing is in short supply with up to dozens living in single-family homes provided by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. While the levels have changed slightly from decade to decade, the basic health, income, and social conditions on the reservation have remained stubbornly dire since shortly after its formation.

These social conditions combined with the growing polarization of traditionalists and non-traditionalists to erupt into violence in the early 1970s. In 1968 a traditionalist-leaning President of the Oglala Sioux Tribe was elected. Among many reforms that alienated non-traditionalists, he insisted that Council meetings be conducted in Lakota. Many non-traditional tribal members spoke only English. Two terms later in the spring of 1972, the disenfranchised non-traditional members elected Richard Wilson to the

¹² Valente, Judith, "A Century Later, Sioux Still Struggle, and Still Are Losing," *Wall Street Journal*, March 21, 1991, p. A1.

¹³ Bode.

Presidency. Wilson was a forceful President, and as the degree of polarization was high and rising, he became an ardent advocate of non-traditional ways. His governing style took an ominous turn (from the traditionalists' perspective) when rumors swirled of his corruption and numerous petitions calling for his impeachment were signed. Among other things characterizing his self-styled "law-and-order" response was his (at least tacit) approval of a police force adjunct that adopted the name Guardians of the Oglala Nation for its acronym, GOON. This armed group harassed and intimidated traditionalists, creating the wide-spread impression that the safety of traditional Lakotas was in jeopardy.

In response to the Wilson Administration's governing style and to spreading perceptions of corruption in the government, traditionalists staged a takeover of the monument at Wounded Knee under the leadership of the American Indian Movement (AIM). AIM, a pan-tribal movement of Indians—often urban Indians—had been growing in influence as a result of its community organizing and direct-action political mobilization. It was also gaining a reputation in non-Indian newspapers and among non-traditional tribal members for "rabble rousing"—a number of its protests had erupted into car burnings and vandalism. The organization, which remains a center of controversy into the 1990s, was viewed with suspicion by the non-traditional members of the Tribe because of its urban and left-leaning origins. Many traditionalists, however, saw the movement as an empowering confirmation of their belief that holding onto traditional values and practices was a

legitimate path out of poverty and social decay. The group's successes in organizing tribal communities bolstered this belief.¹⁴

The AIM-led occupation of Wounded Knee in 1973 became the longest-running FBI siege and a focal point for national attention on Indian policy. The standoff between armed Indians and the FBI underscored how deeply driven the wedge between traditional and non-traditional had become. It emboldened dormant passions for traditional Lakota ways among some. Among others it raised suspicions that traditionalists were being radicalized by outsiders. The deaths of two Indians in the siege of Wounded Knee (and the deaths of one Indian and two federal agents in a siege outside the town of Oglala shortly thereafter) widened what threatened to become a permanent divide in the Tribe.¹⁵ A dozen years later, as the hundredth anniversary of the Wounded Knee Massacre drew near, the animosity still simmered, erupting occasionally in protest camps and rallies, in community meetings and political campaigns, and even in tussles between neighbors.

The Preparatory Rides

An Emerging Vision

The categories *traditional* and *non-traditional* oversimplify the underlying reality of cultural retention and adaptation. On the one hand, traditional culture had been up-

¹⁴ See Cornell, Stephen, *Return of the Native: American Indian Political Resurgence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), for a more detailed treatment of the political evolution of Native groups in the post-War period.

¹⁵ Peter Matthiessen gives a very detailed, though highly controversial account of AIM, Wounded Knee II (as the occupation became known), and the incident at Oglala in *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse: The Story of Leonard Peltier and the FBI's War on the American Indian Movement* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992). See also the documentary directed by Michael Apted, *Incident at Oglala: The Leonard Peltier Story*, (Miramax Films, Spanish Fork Motion Picture Company, 1991).

rooted by the demise of the buffalo, by the creation of reservations, by the expropriation of the Black Hills. Songs had been lost, prayers forgotten. Many families had intermingled socially and nuptially with non-Indian families. Generations had received college degrees or had served in the armed forces, giving them values foreign to their forebears.

On the other side of the divide, non-traditional Lakotas were discriminated against as Indians—outsiders not recognizing distinctions that had serious consequences on the reservation. They enjoyed Indian status under federal law, joined pow-wows, adopted Indian symbols, and remained proud of their Lakota legacies. Many fought vigorously for the protection of the sovereign integrity of their reservation.

Among many on both sides, but especially among tradition-oriented Lakota, there was a feeling of unease with the intermingling of “cultures.” Particularly, there was concern that, in the presence of two cultures, people would not be well-grounded in either one. The view of Alex White Plume, a former Tribal Council member and former local School Board President, was not uncommon:

We’re losing the best of two worlds... We’re not totally White, so we don’t get the sense of being totally happy in the culture of the White way, and we’re not totally Lakota so we’re not getting the best of this world. We’re in between the both of them, and we’re losing, in the end, because we’re not getting the full of either. It’s a culture of slop, I guess. There’s nothing good between the two worlds.

The Lakota had lost something that they could not get back, and they had gained something they could not fully embrace.

In context of the evolution of and competition between the two cultures, some people on the reservation began to share religious experiences—dreams, prayers, and visions—that spoke to their spiritual anxiety and to their need for cultural renewal. The

visions came to people who were, in large measure, receptive to Lakota language and culture, but who were by no means pure traditionalists, committed AIM supporters, or otherwise vigorously opposed to assimilation. They were veterans, former Council members, teachers, and cattlemen who were more to the center of the reservation's political spectrum than to one extreme or the other. They had in common a desire to improve upon the "culture of slop," and an uncertainty about where to begin. Their religious experiences began to suggest at least one way, but it was years for some until the shape of that way took concrete form.

Prior to the rides, Celane Beard Not Help Him, a member of the Wounded Knee Survivor's Association, had been searching for spiritual connection:

I miss[ed] my ancestors and I had often asked them, 'Is there a way we can talk? Is there a way we can hear you?'

As early as the 1960s, Birgil Kills Straight had dreams of his ancestors.

I had a dream several times in which White Lance, one of the [Wounded Knee] survivors, and Iron Hill, his brother, both of whom were my grandfathers, were coming on a path. One night I heard a voice in the dream telling me I should support [making a monument at Wounded Knee].

Now, in Lakota, you have to chew on a vision like that. I asked my father about it the next morning, and he said the only way that people should remember the victims is to do a prayer for them. He thought the whole idea was too wild. Anyway the dream kept happening, and I didn't really didn't know what to do with it then.

As Alex White Plume noted of the years preceding the first ride:

About 1984 or 1985, I started noticing people were thinking about Wounded Knee—people like Claudia Iron Hawk, Auntie Celane [Beard Not Help Him]. These people were the survivors of the Wounded Knee Massacre, yet they seemed to be the poorest people, and they weren't sure of themselves. They were elderly ladies, but they always talked in a humble, pitiful way.

So, Birgil and I started talking about it. We [thought we] needed to get the Black Hills back. 'Let's ride our horses up to the Black Hills and take them back on horseback,' we said. We went and offered a pipe to Curtis Kills Ree¹⁶ [a holy man] to ask him what we could do to help our people. We weren't even thinking about riding for Wounded Knee.

Many others on the reservation had read and remembered the observation of *Hehaka Sapa* (Black Elk, a Lakota sage who lived from 1862 to 1950), about the effects of Wounded Knee on the Lakota:

I did not know then how much was ended. When I look back now from this high hill of my old age, I can still see the butchered women and children lying heaped and scattered all along the crooked gulch as plain as when I saw them with eyes still young. And I can see that something else died there in the bloody mud, and was buried in the blizzard. A people's dream died there. It was a beautiful dream...the nation's hoop is broken and scattered. There is no center any longer, and the sacred tree is dead.¹⁷

As Birgil Kills Straight noted prior to the fifth and final ride:

For the last one hundred years, as individuals and as a Nation we have been spiritually crippled. After the Massacre at Wounded Knee our ancestors never went through the ritual accorded to family. Until the time that takes place, we will remain in a period of mourning.

Around the time of the Massacre there had been many prophecies of decay and collapse, and a number of them indicated it would last seven generations. At the turn of the century, many believed that in the seventh generation, the Lakota Nation, would begin mending, that the Sacred Hoop would be brought back together. While in the late twentieth century many shared an understanding of the collapse of the Lakota Nation and, while the grim social reminders of the long legacy of that collapse were plain for all to

¹⁶ The Ree (or Arikara) were one-time enemies of the Sioux. Black Elk, *The Sacred Pipe: Black Elk's Account of the Seven Rites of the Oglala Sioux*, recorded and edited by Joseph Epes Brown (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1953), p. 102.

¹⁷ As quoted in Brown, p. 446.

see, no shared understanding of how to break its hold existed. A good number of policies and projects were underway to address, for example, fetal alcohol syndrome, worker skill development, health care, education, sovereignty, treaty violations, and language retention. However, there was a general perception that these programs addressed symptoms and not root causes, which, despite a good deal of religious practice on the reservation, appeared to many to have spiritual roots.¹⁸

When Birgil Kills Straight and Alex White Plume went to see Curtis Kills Ree, he had just come back from a *hanbleceyapi*.¹⁹ Kills Ree held a purification sweat for them, and in it he told them to be *ikcewicasa*:

You can't talk first—don't holler at the people. You pull yourself back. You be more common than the smallest blade of grass. Remember you're pitiful.

Ikcewicasa, common man or common man way, is a traditional virtue to which Lakota men and women were to aspire. The opposite, having pride, or setting yourself up as better than others was (and is) frowned upon as egotistical and self-centered. This is not to say that humility was a traditional Lakota virtue. The opposite was true; humility

¹⁸ The Pine Ridge Reservation is seen by Indians and non-Indians to be a “Mecca” of Indian religion. A large number of Lakota travel there from other reservations to sweat and dance with holy men, and the reservation attracts many other Indians, Americans, and foreigners eager to observe and participate in Lakota ceremonies.

¹⁹ In Lakota religion one of the most sacred rites is the *hanbleceyapi* or lamentation for a vision. In it, the seeker is purified in a sweat ceremony and then stands (usually on a mountain or butte) for four days neither eating nor drinking, naked except for a buffalo blanket. During the fast, he or she must pray to *Wakan Tanka* [Great Spirit] and look for signs from animals and birds. If a vision or a dream comes, then the seeker must take it to a holy man for interpretation. See, Black Elk, *The Sacred Pipe*, Chapter IV, “*Hanblecheyapi*: Crying for a Vision,” (which describes vision quests) and Chapter III, ‘*Inipi*: The Rite of Purification’ (which describes sweat ceremonies).

was seen as a sign of weakness. *Ikcewicasa* is perhaps best equated with modesty and reserve.²⁰

Kills Ree also told them to conduct a pilgrimage:

Make a journey back from Bridger to Wounded Knee on horseback. And when you do that, don't tell anyone you're going. Don't ask people to come and join you. The spirits are going to do the drawing for you.²¹

White Plume and Kills Straight were at once humbled, excited, and fearful. Going on a spirit journey was an opportunity to commemorate the ancestors' spirits, yet it was also a dangerous undertaking. In Lakota theology, if the rituals are not done with the right intent or the proper preparation, disaster can befall the participants. In *hanbleceyapi*, for example, praying improperly can result in a snake wrapping around the seekers' leg.²²

Stories of a Cheyenne commemoration gone awry gave the White Plume and Kills Straight pause. Apparently, a commemoration of a massacre at Sand Creek was done by a Cheyenne holy man to release the spirits. He died mysteriously shortly thereafter. The next year, another holy man did the same, and he died. The following year, it happened again. White Plume and Kills Straight wanted to be very careful to follow the instructions of Kills Ree as closely as possible. The spirits of the dead of Wounded Knee had not been released in a wiping of the tears ceremony, and the two men accepted their charge with trepidation.

²⁰ See Hassrick, Chapter 2, "Morals, Modes, and Manners" for discussion of this and other traditional virtues.

²¹ As recounted by Alex White Plume.

²² Black Elk, *The Sacred Pipe*.

As White Plume and Kills Straight began to prepare, more men joined their group, and a core formed consisting of Eugene (Genio) White Hawk, John Around Him, Art No Horse, and Theodore Kills Right. Over a number of months of purifying sweats with Curtis Kills Ree they gathered their instructions.

The instructions he gave them were simple and required reverence for Lakota spirits and traditions. As was customary with a number of Lakota ceremonies, there would have to be a cycle of four preparations or purifications. In this case they would take the form of four spiritual rides, one each year before the 100th anniversary of the Wounded Knee Massacre. In that fifth year there would be a celebratory ride—a *wopila* ride to wipe away the tears—to commemorate the dead and release their spirits into the universe. The rides were to begin at Bridger, a small hamlet in the very southwest corner of the Cheyenne River Reservation (see Exhibit A) and were to follow the path of Big Foot's band. (Later the rides were extended to include the descendants of Sitting Bull's band and the march from Sitting Bull's camp on the Grand River.) Each night the riders were to camp at the places where Big Foot and his people had hidden from the Seventh Cavalry. The lead horse in the ride had to be blindfolded, and a staff had to be carried with ten feathers on it. No one was to cross in front of the staff. Each rider was to wear a feather on the left-hand side of their heads.

Each of the men was honored to participate, yet each had doubts about the meaning of the instructions. Why ten feathers on the lead staff? Lakota tradition was to wear feathers on the right. Why were they to reverse that on this ride? As their doubts about

what was proper and their fears of the dangers of preparing incorrectly mounted, they also became targets of criticism within the Tribe.

When word got around to others in the Tribe that these men were going to have a commemorative ride, skeptics began to attack them. One day as White Plume greeted his uncles on the porch of the post office, they asked him why he was going on the rides. He explained he was trying to bring back the language and the Lakota ways. His uncle responded:

Who in the hell are you? What in the hell do you think you're doing? You're going to mess everything up. We're not Indians any more; we're White People. Look, we dress in White Man's clothes, we drive in White Man's cars, we live in White Man's houses. You're going to mess everything up.

White Plume was taken aback, but he resolved to commit his whole family to the rides. Even in the face of this and other criticisms that he was doing the rides for political reasons, for his ego, for money, he began to notice the effect of being *ikcewicasa*. He felt he had been barely living prior to the ride preparations, but something was changing. Somehow his life was getting better. He and his wife were getting along better. He did not seem to be lurching from crisis to crisis. The preparations brought him a joy and a pride of his heritage that he had not had in a long time.

The First Ride

On the twenty-second of December, 1986, nineteen riders set out from Bridger for Wounded Knee, a journey of 152 miles. They carried *wasna* (spirit food) and little tobacco pouches (also gifts for spirits), and occasionally they would take a pinch of *wasna* and a pouch and offer them to the spirits. They rode quietly, sometimes singing or chat-

ting but always mindful of Big Foot's band and their last journey. They slept under the stars, sometimes waking up under a blanket snow. Each of them tried as hard as possible to be *ikcewicasa* during the ride. As White Plume described it:

Nobody was in charge. We all prayed together. When we did something, we tried to do it by consensus. I told everyone at the camp that [first] night, 'We're all supposed to be common. Each more common than the other—*ikcewicasa*. But, we didn't really have to tell anyone that first ride; everyone already sensed that.

It was just comical, that first ride. Everyone was trying to be more common than the other. It felt *so* good to be in that kind of group.

It seemed that they were doing something right. Not only was morale high despite the cold, but the spirits also appreciated their reverence. At the Badlands, a series of barren alkali cliffs on the northern border of the Pine Ridge Reservation, passage on foot is treacherous and on horseback even more so. When the riders arrived there, they could not find Big Foot Pass, the safe route down that the original riders had taken. As they zigzagged on the top of the Badlands looking for a way down, Kills Straight and White Plume saw a coyote. The others in the group tried to shoo it away, but White Plume told them to be quiet.

The coyote ran right at us, and he turned to the left and ran over a slope. We all looked up at an eagle flying low in the same area. So we followed the coyote's track over the hill. There was a gentle slope, and we just walked down. We knew we had spirits among us.

In the night, spirits spoke to them as well. On one moonless night the riders were getting quite spread out, and White Plume and Rocky Afraid of Hawk began to worry that some would wander off the path and get lost. They rode up to the front of the pack and

made a bottleneck with their horses that forced the other riders to go between them. They began counting horses:

[When I] counted 86...87...88... I caught myself and said, 'Geez! there's only supposed to be 19 of us.' So I asked Rocky, 'Rock?' He said, 'Yeah, let's get with the group!' And we were about a half a mile away from the [front of the] group, still counting horses that were coming with us.

When I was running toward the group, I was running fast on gravel. You could hear a ton of horses hitting the ground, and there were sparks. Four or five sparks with each foot. Blue things were going off the horses' ears. I saw them on my horses, and Rocky said he saw them on his. We really booked hard to catch up to the rest of the riders. And, all that time it was like someone was sitting right on my back. We were *way* out there in the middle of nowhere. We actually were out there riding with spirits! That was the scariest thing. A lot of things went through my mind. I was thinking about death—my death.

It was quite exhilarating to believe that the commemoration of the dead would actually bring spirits out. However, it would not be clear until the end of all the rides, whether this was really a good or a dangerous omen.

When the riders got to Wounded Knee Creek and the monument, it was empty of people. Not many tourists drive the two hours from the interstate three days after Christmas. But gradually, descendants of the victims appeared at the grave site. They were coming on their own accord, unaware of the ride. It was the ninety-sixth anniversary of the Massacre. They stood at the mass grave occasionally breaking silence to offer a prayer or to comment on the cold.

Later Rides and Growing Controversy

In the following three years the ride grew in size and complexity, but it remained a spiritual ride, a reflective event for its participants. In the second year, 36 riders finished the ride. In the third year, 86 riders, and in the fourth, 115. In order to orchestrate

the larger rides, some in the group had to organize and lead, but being a leader in the usual sense clashed with the instruction to be *ikcewicasa*. On the one hand, food for scores of riders had to be prepared, camps had to be set and broken, and press questions had to be answered. On the other hand, this was supposed to be a prayerful ride meant to be conducted in a spirit of modesty and reverence. It was a difficult balance that had to be struck.

In the second year Kills Ree appointed four “society leaders”: Birgil Kills Straight, Jim Garrett, Rocky Afraid of Hawk, and Alex White Plume. They were to guide the rides until they were over and to stop after the fifth year. No one was to use his position of formal leadership for self-promotion nor for political purposes during or after the rides. Each of the four had been given a public trust, and they took it seriously. Nevertheless, the very act of raising up these men as “leaders” was to stir up controversy and attract anger that threatened to undermine the unity of the rides. The society leaders bore the burden of controversy anyway. The ride seemed to be accomplishing its purpose, and abandoning the rides at this point would squander the gains already brought.

Not least of these gains was a galvanization of people who had long turned away from Lakota culture. Among those affected was Winston Mestes, a neighbor of Alex White Plume’s. White Plume recruited him to join the ride, but Mestes had no eagle feathers nor any knowledge of how to tie them. The two of them went to see Max Mestes, Winston’s father, to see if he had any. They were doubtful that he would. As White Plume recalled, father and son were about as “cowboy” as Lakota can get.

Max was expecting us. He was sitting at the table with the rest of the family but the kids were all looking away. The focus was on us, even though they weren’t looking at us. After about a dozen cigarettes and five

or six cups of coffee, I looked at him, and he waved his hand. One of his sons went into the other room and brought back a big, old Bible. He opened it up and took two beautiful spotted eagle feathers out of the Bible, and he said to me, 'I want you to teach this here boy. These are two eagle feathers that belonged to my grandfather Standing Bear. These were off the tails of his war bonnet.'

Right off the bat I was really impressed. I showed Winston quickly how to tie an eagle feather. Then he wrapped the other one slowly and carefully. Winston was just *so* proud that he cut and tied his eagle feather. When he was done he looked his father right in the eye and said, 'Yeah, Dad you're just an old f—n' honky. You should have taught me this not Alex.'

There were 30 seconds of deathly quiet in that room. Nobody knew what to say. I was getting ready to come to his dad's defense. I was just thinking, 'What can I say? This is so disrespectful.' I was going to tell him, 'If it wasn't for your dad, you wouldn't even be here.'

Then Max said, 'You know son, 50 years ago the BIA told me: Forget your language; forget your religion; do everything we tell you to, and you'll be happy.' He did. He goes to Catholic Church, and doesn't practice his [Lakota] ways. 'You know son,' he said, 'I'm not happy. I'm sending you on this ride, and you're going to lead this family to the Lakota way of life.'

It was this expression of a desire to return to traditional culture and others like it that sustained White Plume and the other riders through the cold and the criticism.

That's what made me stay through the whole four years that was left. I knew we were doing something, but I didn't know what it was. Here was a family that always were cowboys, all of a sudden they stopped mid-stream and said: 'Hey, we're going to be Lakota again.'

The rides continued to have this effect on people. As more tribal members became involved, more began to learn more about their pre-1890 culture. Some learned new words in Lakota. Some practiced old rituals that had been lost by their forebears. Some found unresolved grief. Others found anger, White Plume among them:

I guess what I learned...from the rides was to say 'I hate you' to White people. I'm proud of myself because I can stand up and say that. I'd say

that right to their face: 'I hate you.' Not *you* personally, just what you represent.' I was venting anger out, and I got a good feeling just by saying that. I guess I got it out of my system, and I can get along well with everyone.

I think every Indian person has a deep-down hatred for White people someplace, and they need to vent that in the right way. Instead, they keep it covered up. We've got to face it. We were done wrong every inch of the way. Our parents probably hated them, and that's probably within our minds too. We've got to get all that out, and then we can be friendly. True friendship not just a facade. It sounds silly, but it felt so good.

Still others found strength. Celane Not Help Him, an octogenarian member of the Wounded Knee Survivors Association, reflected on the rides a few years afterward:

It's not easy, but when you get it done and sit back, think about it, it's good. Before you do anything, you're kind of afraid, but when you think about your children and the future, you do it. It really makes you feel good. It gave me courage.

As the rides grew, the original riders' religious leanings were confirmed. More and more riders had experiences like Mestes's and Not Help Him's. The early doubts about what to do about the "culture of slop" were gradually replaced by a confidence that present-day troubles were linked to unfinished rituals of the past and that choosing the sometimes difficult path of self-preparation and purification and the demanding virtue of being *ikcewicasa* would be a way to improve morale and community life on the reservation.

Challenges to the Society Leaders

The rides were not uniformly well-received on the reservation. The rides began to attract attention as they got bigger. The more riders participated, the more external critics thought the "society leaders" were self-aggrandizing or the participants less than genuine.

It was an inevitable outgrowth of expansion that the rides needed leadership. As the preparatory rides went on, more food had to be prepared, more phone calls had to be made, more horse trailers had to be found, more eagle feathers tied. At the same time, more outsiders needed to be managed—their preconceptions of the rides corrected to reflect the underlying spiritual purpose. As Debbie White Plume, a teacher at the tribal college and the wife of Alex, recalled:

We had people from Japan, Norway, all different countries in Europe, and from South and Central America—all over America too. It just took time explaining things to them. People had heard of Wounded Knee, but they didn't know much about Indians. A lot of it was just explaining and making sure they knew the basic rules.

Financial demands also became more of a concern, and a treasurer had to be appointed. In the first year, everyone had covered their own expenses. At one point in the early rides, someone had needed gas yet did not have the wherewithal to pay for it. The riders passed a hat around, and so much was contributed that they had enough to buy gas for everyone. When 325 riders rode in the last year, the original informal arrangements were no longer possible. The society leaders had to collect donations on and off the reservation (tribal funding amounted to only \$300), and they had to manage expenses (\$17,000 in the fifth year). The necessities of twentieth-century logistics threatened to intrude on the spiritual purposes of the rides.

Perhaps the greatest intruder was the video camera. It was Arvol Looking Horse, the Keeper of the White Buffalo Calf Pipe, who first raised the issue, albeit inadvertently. According to Lakota teaching, the Sacred Pipe was handed down from Buffalo Calf Woman to the Lakota people upon their creation by the Earth Mother. The Pipe was the

Lakotas' most sacred object, and smoking the Pipe their most solemn ceremony. In the third year, Arvol Looking Horse brought a Californian film crew with him on the ride. In the process of filming various parts of the ride, they taped a ceremony in which Arvol loaded the Pipe—in violation of a generally accepted taboo. This caused the society leaders to face the question of video cameras directly. Some felt it would be inappropriate to let cameras tape any part of any of the rides. As Debbie White Plume reflected:

It was a challenge to help [the film crews] understand that everything to do with [the rides] was of a spiritual nature. [It would have been impossible to] tell them, 'OK, we're not going to be spiritual from 8:00 until 12:00, then at 12:00 we're going to have a ritual.' They wouldn't understand.

Others felt it would be appropriate to allow video taping in the fifth ride as it was a *wopila* ride, a ride of celebration, and not a ride of purification. Others felt it would be acceptable to film the least prayerful moments of the rides, even the preparatory rides. This would mean allowing cameras in the camps and along the routes but banning cameras in sweats, in times of prayer, and most importantly, at the wiping of the tears at the grave site. This more pragmatic view carried the day—the riders acknowledged that their ability to control private cameramen and the news media was limited, especially in the fifth year. They also recognized that the ride could serve the purpose of reconciliation with Whites (admittedly a secondary purpose), if news of the rides were widely disseminated.

The combination of the rides' increasing management needs, the mobilization of money to support the ride, and the introduction of outside media observers touched a raw nerve on the Pine Ridge Reservation. The intermingling of money, the media, and religion raised especially strong suspicions among the more ardent traditionalists on the reser-

vation. Prior to the creation of reservations, holy men had provided their services to all comers in exchange for nothing. Holy men in pre-reservation times obtained their sustenance from the community at large, often by way of gifts. This practice was consistent with the public role of private religious practice—many of the rituals of the Lakota explicitly recognized the public purpose of private quests. Black Elk, for example, recalls that one of the prayers used in *hanbleceyapi* called for the Great Spirit to bestow a vision “that my people might live.” Similarly, at the conclusion of *hanbleceyapi* a holy man would offer a prayer for the seeker:

O *Wakan-Tanka* [Great Spirit], You have established a relationship with this young man; and through this relationship, he will bring strength to his people.²³

Today, however the original mechanism for sustaining holy men has disappeared, and nothing has replaced it. As a consequence, the issue of paying religious leaders has become quite contentious. On the one hand, many holy men and their followers take a practical view that paying for religious services is the same as sustaining holy men with food and gifts as had been done in pre-reservation life. Holy men have been paid to pray at the tribal College’s commencements or to conduct certain rites for families. Some holy men have charged a fee to non-Indians who want to join in sweats and dances. Some have charged outsiders consulting fees in return for explanations of ceremonies to be used in documentaries or television programs. While this pragmatic approach is consistent with the Catholic, Episcopal, and other Christian missions’ practice of paying their ministers, there are those who feel paying holy men taints them and constitutes “selling out” to

²³ Black Elk, p. 57, 65.

the White society's way. Their view is that holy men should not be paid by the service but salaried or supported by the tribal government or through collective contributions. To date, however, no consolidated form of permanent compensation for holy men has materialized.

The taping of Arvol Looking Horse raised hackles immediately, and as the rides progressed, more criticism of the society leaders surfaced. Some of the appointed society leaders and other *de facto* leaders of the rides, among them Alex White Plume, John Around Him, and Arvol Looking Horse, were listed as "consultants and inspirations" in the credits of a documentary of the fifth ride.²⁴ Regardless of whether they had been paid for assisting in the documentary, their listing as consultants sparked allegations that they were "commercializing Lakota religion," "selling religion," and "selling out their culture." The attacks came from the traditionalist-leaning AIM supporters and some holy men affiliated with AIM. The implication raised was that the ride's leaders were not, in fact, *ikcewicasa*, but self-promoters—not responsible keepers of the faith, but shameless degraders of tradition.

The gradually rising tensions over the role of outsiders, the integrity of the society leaders, and the relationship between money and religion threatened to break apart the ride in the final year. The presence of news media made the stakes even higher. The media presence gave the society leaders an opportunity to show the outside world Lakota pride and Lakota spiritual healing. By the same token, the critics of the rides' organizers

²⁴ *Wiping the Tears of Seven Generations: The Wounded Knee Ride*, Kifaru Productions, 1991.

had an opportunity to punish (in the court of reservation and national opinion) those they saw as opportunistic. The AIM group threatened to stage a separate ride in the fifth year.

While the threat was real and could have been damaging to both the spirit and the purpose of the ride, the society leaders felt confident that they could call the bluff of the critics. They had moral confidence that their spiritual preparation and intent was right, that is, that they were advancing a divine purpose. They also felt that a separate AIM ride was not in AIM's interest; AIM staging a boycott in the fifth year after having participated minimally and certainly not as an organizing presence in the first four years would give the appearance of political sour grapes. The society leaders decided AIM could ride behind their own staff, but insisted that there be only one ride.

In the end, AIM agreed, and for a short time at the beginning of the fifth ride, they remained aloof. Gradually, however, the two groups intermingled and a single ride developed. Only at the Wounded Knee grave site did divisions re-emerge. The AIM group, in particular Russell Means, a veteran of Wounded Knee II, insisted on excluding South Dakota Governor George Mickelson from the site. Means felt, "It would be an insult [to allow Mickelson] because we live in the racist state of South Dakota, and he is the Governor."²⁵ The AIM leaders and their supporters then held a separate ceremony to commemorate the dead.

²⁵ *The New York Times*, 12/30/90, p. 12.

Five years of preparations had had its costs for Alex White Plume. The late nights, the phone bills, the cold rides, and the time away from his job had each been unpleasant in their own way, but the worst was the criticism. This fifth year, he had hoped would be as inspiring and as joyful as the first, however the political stakes had been raised by the large numbers of riders and by the media attention. There was no reason to expect that, with these higher political pressures, the rides would remain as spiritually focused as they had once been. As White Plume reflected afterward:

During the rides we had good feelings; everyone pitched in. Now we were finished, and we were all divided up. It's hard to respond to the [critics], especially for me. I have a new truck now, and [people say], 'Ach, Alex went on a ride, and he's getting all those donations. Now look at him. Now he's driving a brand new truck.'

Instead of saying, 'Alex, you guys did such a great job, I really appreciate your efforts,' they all said we were stealing and ripping people off. I thought of sending them my phone bill.

Nevertheless, White Plume, Kills Straight, and the other society leaders did not regret doing the rides. After all, there were many who appreciated the opportunity to re-connect with the religion of their forebears and to grieve the dead of Wounded Knee.

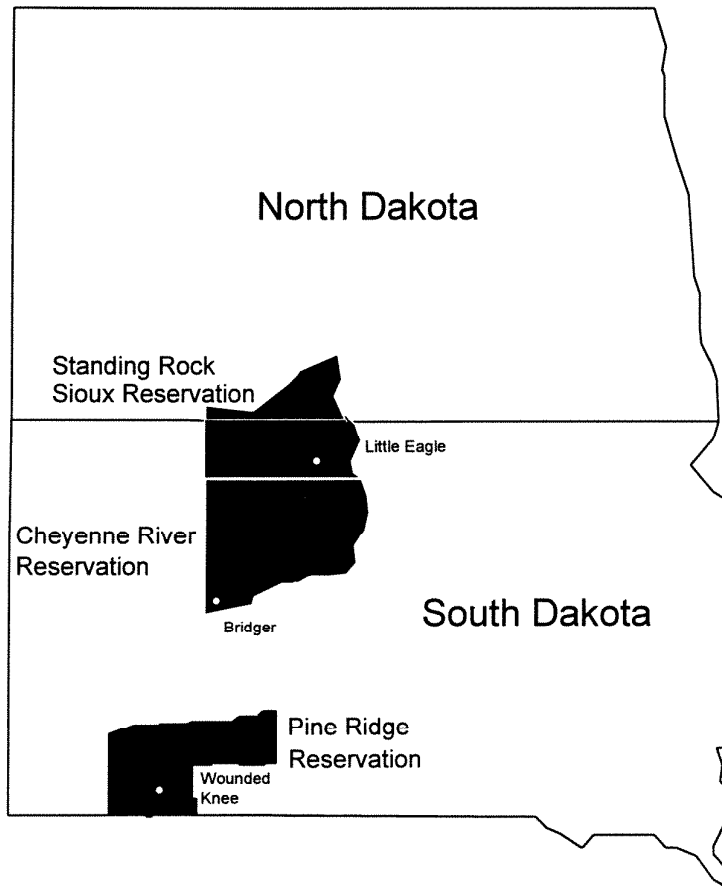
As they looked back on the five years, their thoughts returned to the spiritual and cultural origins of the rides. It turned out that ten men had ridden in all five rides, and to White Plume, the meaning of the ten feathers on the lead staff was now clear: there was a sacred eagle feather for each of them. The spirits had known at the outset that ten men would carry the rides to conclusion. They had begun with uncertainties and self-doubts, but by focusing on being *ikcewicasa* and on mourning the victims of Wounded Knee, they had kept the rides from being torn apart politically for most, if not all, of the five

years. And, the rewards of witnessing the changes in everyone who participated were more than enough to make up for the criticism. Moreover, the risks he feared when he counted the 88-odd riders with Rocky Afraid of Hawk were unfounded. The spirits had come to him in good will with a good omen.

Still, White Plume pondered what the rides had accomplished. Clearly, the riders had done what the victims' families could not do in 1890: they had wiped tears for the dead. Nevertheless, White Plume was sure the mending of the hoop was still underway. No one could expect a five-year spiritual journey to be sufficient to reverse the deterioration brought on by 100 years of reservation life and subjugation. What could have been done differently to bring together traditional and non-traditional Lakota? What could have been done to make the AIM supporters a more integral part of the group? What more could have been done to help Indians with their rage against Whites? What was still left to do to mend the Sacred Hoop of the Nation?

Exhibit A

The Standing Rock, Cheyenne River, and Pine Ridge Reservations



Interviews:

Alex White Plume
Birgil Kills Straight
Bob Gay
Celane Beard Not Help Him
Debbie White Plume
Gary Rowland
Jim Garrett
Wilmer Mesteth