Smudging the book: the role of cultural authority in tribal historical narratives and revitalization at rocky boy

Steven Lyn Williams, University of Iowa

DOI
10.17077/etd.l0dbtlfz

Document Type
Dissertation

Date of Degree
Summer 2012

Degree Name
PhD (Doctor of Philosophy)

Degree In
American Studies

First Advisor
Laura Rigal

First Committee Member
Lauren Rabinovitz

Second Committee Member
Michelene Pesantubbee

Third Committee Member
Philip Round

Fourth Committee Member
Erica Prussing

Abstract
Beginning with Native American activism in the 1960's and bolstered by the Indian Self Determination Act of 1975, tribes have been actively attempting in recent decades to increase tribal sovereignty and self-determination and revitalize tribal communities. One way they are doing this at Rocky Boy's Reservation in North Central Montana, is by taking control of the production of tribal narratives through institutions like the tribe's Internal Review Board and the completion of the first tribal history written completely by tribal members (2008). Another way is by looking back at the history of past researchers to the reservation and having important dialogues about the impacts and legacies of those researchers' work with the community. Out of this dialogue an "oral tradition" has emerged at Rocky Boy centering largely on Frank Bird Linderman (1869-1938) and Verne Dusenberry (1906-1966). These two researchers are often remembered very differently by tribal members: Linderman emerges as a hero due to his political aid for the Chippewa Cree in helping them acquire a reservation homeland, while Dusenberry more often serves as a representative of the troubled relationship between researchers and the tribe in the past.

This dissertation examines the creation of historical narratives about Rocky Boy's Chippewa Cree, focusing on the effects of "contests" over cultural authority between key researchers to the reservation and tribal leaders in the making of those narratives. This dissertation makes a comparative analysis of the similarities and differences between the two researchers' claims to cultural authority by returning them to the contexts of their relationships with Chippewa Cree, and the stories and legacies that emerged around their work on the reservation. It explores the responses of tribal leaders to Linderman and Dusenberry and attempts by Chippewa Cree leaders (Little Bear, Big Rock, Rocky Boy, and Four Souls) to recontextualize and reclaim cultural authority and tribal historical narratives in their interactions with these researchers. By making these comparisons, this dissertation examines the ongoing effects these battles over cultural authority have had on tribal self-determination and revitalization efforts both past and present.

Two of four chapters detail the lives and textual works of Frank Bird Linderman and Verne Dusenberry. These two men serve as a nexus point for the complex, interwoven and historically-layered "contexts" and "contests" over authority--both past and present,
This dissertation intervenes into previous histories written about Rocky Boy that have largely failed to recognize how complexly intertwined and often shared the processes of creating histories about the Rocky Boy’s Reservation have been between outside researchers, tribal leaders and the reservation community. It also intercedes in the ongoing dialogue and debate about the role of researchers, cultural authority and protocols and tribal history in tribal revitalization and self-determination for the tribe.

**Keywords**
Chippewa, Cree, Dusenberry, Linderman, Native Americans, Rocky Boy

**Pages**
vii, 298 pages

**Bibliography**
Includes bibliographical references (pages 289-298).

**Copyright**
Copyright 2012 Steven Lyn Williams

**Recommended Citation**
https://doi.org/10.17077/edl.KdHlffz

On the national political level, the kin-based tribal culture enforced a hierarchical social structure. In this structure, the Durrani Pashtuns are at the top of the pyramid; Ghilzia Pashtun come second; Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras come sequentially at the bottom. The assimilationist nation-building process centralized the Pashtun kin-based political culture as Afghanistan became a tribalized nation-state. For example, Khans played the role of nobles among Tajiks of Badakhshan Province and among Hazaras. The new military class emerged out of marginalized rural populations. The social and economic structure of society allowed this military class to develop and create an independent social and economic base.