

The Dakota People and those at Tinta Wita

“For several hundred years prior to the first documented contact with Europeans in the second half of the seventeenth century the ancestral Sioux occupied the headwaters region of the Mississippi River and its northernmost tributaries, exploiting both woodland and prairie environments” (Anderson, 1). The Dakota were described as having economic adaptability, tribal unity, and strategic positioning which resulted in dominance and a long exercised autonomy; until the substantial engagement created by European trade. The Dakota sought trade, but only on their terms and the Ojibwe were considered the “middle men”. On the middle ground, Indians recognized Whites as something other than strangers, using the idiom of kinship, and Europeans exchanged goods and symbolic objects for Indian allegiance and furs. Thus, resulting in changes in leadership, the old criteria became undermined; also Chiefs or other high regarding people marrying their daughters to traders in return for societal gains.

Regalia and body decoration were important symbolic expression of identity, and could be read by other tribes, and also is similar to military uniforms worn by soldiers, etc. We must understand that ideas were different from the Euro-American perspective and the Dakota. An example is the ideas of pity—Europeans think their begging, however Indians were invoking kinship on the father-child relationship that was setup. When Perrot began trading at St. Antoine it jeopardized the peace between Ojibwe and Dakota people because they were considered the

middlemen. The author would also argue that economic and political processes of European contact led to the division of the Sioux into “woodland” and “plains” segments, and occurred with the dramatic change in buffalo populations in the nineteenth century. “It was only with the movement of the Sioux westward, the adoption of horses, and the development of symbiotic east-west relationships among the bands, directly influenced by changes in bison availability, that deer hunting became primary for the Eastern Sioux and bison hunting became the specialization of the western Sioux. Although the eastern Mdewakantonwan, Wahpekute, and Wahpetonwan adopted woodland cultural traits such as the bark lodge, the medicine society, and floral beadwork, both the geographical and historical distribution of cultural traits demonstrates a cultural continuum rather than a bimodal dichotomy” (Anderson, 67).

With credit availability and the implementing of alcohol use was created for economic gains because of dependency on European goods. The traders had both diplomatic and commercial relations with Indians under both the French and British, but after 1820 they became under control from an Indian agent at Fort Snelling. They were no longer seeking alliances with Indian people in the new territory. “During the period 1820-1862 immense changes took place, resulting in the loss of economic and political autonomy for the Dakota” (Anderson, 103). Changes which included: crises in band leadership, warfare with the Ojibwe continued, resources became depleted, and the alliance between the Seven Council Fires shifted to interdependence. The Dakota ultimately relinquished their land base and relocated to a reservation due to the signing of treaties in 1837 and 1851. The expulsion of the Dakota from the state of Minnesota was a rationale for a racial ideology of American empire-building. Therefore this resulted in the Dakota Conflict of 1862, along with the removal from Minnesota.

After the return to Minnesota the family of Blue sky woman, though her name came to be

Anna Johnson, who was thirty-three in 1880 received seven acres of land on Prairie Island. She lived with her children and husband. Her husband was Running Wolf and his name was Joseph Johnson, who was also an Mdewakanton; who was released from Davenport. They had five children but only two were left alive. Those two were a daughter and a son whose names were Little Fawn, Julia Johnson; Yellow cloud, Thomas Johnson. They were the only two who had survived.

Anna recalled the 1886 appropriations which gave them \$10,000 for the support of the full blood Mdewakanton bands of Minnesota which was to be spent on agricultural implements that included cattle, lands, and in making improvements thereon. However she remembered that appropriations like these are what essentially started the conflict, traders were being unfair allowing all that so called credit to be built up to where they got every penny of their annuity payments. Yet today the same thing can be seen she thought, since whenever funds were appropriated it became good news for the area economy because the money inevitably ended up in the hands of the whites.

The land on Prairie Island was nothing but marginal, the ground was sandy, so I don't know how they ever expected them to be able to take off with farming. "Making self-sufficient farmers of the Dakota continued to be the aim of appropriations, although the land assignments were so small that it is hard to believe they could ever attain anything but a marginal economic status" (Anderson, 26).

Anna also knew how whites performed business because she remembers Henton's census where he made it his best effort to only enroll those who were their friends. So some of our relatives didn't get enrolled. She also seen the system where whites thought they needed to be in

charge of us because they thought we couldn't be trusted, or even to know what is good for ourselves in relation to our welfare, but in reality what they meant was to make decisions leading to the most advantageous solutions for the dominant society. Plus we were always subject to these census's where men would come by to everyone's home here on Prairie Island and ask us who all lived with my husband and I.

“There were two important long-term results of these appropriations for the Dakota in Minnesota: 1. A land base, albeit meager, was established for the Dakota in Minnesota; and 2. A relationship was reestablished between them and the U.S. government, which was one of if not complete ward-ship, then paternalism bordering on ward-ship. However, the issue of entitlement resulted in enrolling, causing conflict. The government, having granted the funds, ultimately decided who would get them, based on the recommendations of the “friends of the Indians” and the local politicians. This reinstated a legal definition for “Mdewakanton in Minnesota,” based on an as yet unrefined concept of blood quantum and ignoring cultural factors” (Anderson, 37).

Anna and her family were never afraid to assert their identity, and let their local politicians know. She also remembered joining in to participate in the first ever winter carnival in St. Paul in 1886. She went with her family, and her daughter who was sixteen where dressed in skirts and blouse with Blankets over themselves with layers and layers of necklaces. While her husband and son who was seventeen, were dressed in men's apparel. Most of their regalia were floral work that portrayed local medicines used, which wee associated with our family and were typically on velvet. However her husband Joseph had a skunk skin tied around one of his legs. Yet even without events going on like the winter carnival, Anna liked to dress in her traditional regalia just to show her resistance to the domination of whites, and frequently encouraged others to as well.

Joseph and Thomas hunted, fished, and trapped to help support their family since there was an abundance of fish, turtles, fur-bearing animals, waterfowl, and deer. While Anna and Julia kept to the garden the family planted. They also picked plumes, nuts, berries, gathering wild rice in the fall and make maple sugar in the spring. They also sold berries and large quantities of wild grapes to local whites, which they then used to make wine. Yet the men including Joseph had to seek seasonal employment with neighboring farmers. Since cash was needed primarily to buy food when it was not available through other means. However second-hand clothing was obtained from donations by Red Wing churches and charities. Given that the soil was highly porous and sandy, making it susceptible to both flooding and drought. So it would have been foolhardy for them to rely solely on their crops for livelihood as was described earlier.

In result the primary sources of cash were seasonal farm work, chopping wood, which was something that both female and male people did, trapping and selling wild foods, and manufacturing craft items for sale. Both mother and daughter spent time preparing the different craft items for sale. Some things they made were miniature moccasins, dolls, birch bark baskets, and miniature canoes. Julia can remember long hours sitting outside preparing dolls and miniature moccasins as souvenir items. Even though she often complained to her mother about spending all this time preparing these various items she realized the importance in doing so; she knew that it was necessary in order for her family to survive.

While they were doing that, her brother and father also spent time preparing men's crafts like carving pipestone items, which included pipes, or other various things. They could sell craft items because whites wanted some traditional Indian artifacts, and served as great gifts for friends because not all lived next to Indians. They also came to reflect mythic and past historical

experience rather than everyday realities, and represented Indianness in a symbolic rather than a descriptive way. Anna and her family frequently hopped on the train to go to St. Paul to sell their crafts, and they had about at least 600 pairs of moccasins one time, which was a week's worth of work. They sold them for around fifteen cents a pair, and in the end served at least as ten dollars for their family, if not more depending if other family's joined in with them.

Julia often noticed that her family hardly went into Red Wing. The only time they actually did was for special events like Christmas, or to visit people who took a special interest in them. They preferred to keep white society at a distance. "Unlike all the other Minnesota Dakota communities, Prairie Island did not affiliate specifically with any church as benefactor and protector" (Anderson, 58). Anna and her family went into town on day however for a community members baptism for his child.

Both Thomas and Julia attended school at Prairie Island in a one-room schoolhouse with the white farmers children living at Prairie Island. Thomas proved himself to be quite a baseball player. "Baseball was another means of expressing Indian identity in a public setting under controlled circumstances. It also provided a limited means for young men to gain honor and prestige through intercourse with the outside world, an opportunity that had not readily afforded itself since 1862" (Anderson, 65).

By 1892 Julia had reached marrying age. She was now twenty years old and had a young man from Santee seeking her for marriage. Her family agreed to let this young man marry their daughter. His name was Storm Walker, Samuel James, he was twenty-two and a member from Santee. Joseph agreed to let his only daughter left marry Samuel because he knew she would not leave Prairie Island, but that Samuel would join them here. Plus he was an old friend's son.

Since “the predominant pattern was for the husbands to move in, creating a core of closely related women and men with ties to other Dakota communities that could be taken advantage of” (Anderson, 67). Especially since “intermarriages are the primary means of sustaining potential alliances on a regional basis. No doubt these marriages were to a large extent based on previous ties, such as friendships of the parents” (Anderson, 67). Julia and her new husband Samuel lived near her parents on four acres she had received. Yet her parents were trying to find a wife for their son Thomas who was twenty-one. It just seemed there was not a young woman in their community who wasn’t already married. So Joseph and Anna were looking to see what friends they had who had a daughter who didn’t already have an arranged marriage setup. Since “the Dakota people were always one people, connected by bonds of kinship, and always maintained those ties through visiting, cooperation, and mutual obligation” (Anderson, 69).

It was not because Thomas was a bad young man or anything that he didn’t already have a wife; it was just that most of the young girls at Prairie Island had arranged marriages setup between friends of their parents. Thomas had his eyes set on this girl he knew from the community but she was a little younger. One option he had was to wait until she was a little older, which was not unlikely for older men to sometimes marry younger women. Even some women remarried after becoming a widow because male life expectancy was lower. Yet there was one girl that he knew from the one-room school he attended who was white. It was not suitable however because her parents disagreed, and his as well, besides the fact that he was not that all interested in her.

The woman he was interested in was kind of like his sister, who was a traditional young woman. She had long black hair, which was often braided, and knew how to gather food, cook, and make clothes and souvenir items for sale. She was like his mother in the way they lived life

by their own sense, and spread Dakota history and thought from their family on. Like how his mother told him and his sister about Dakota culture because her father died when she was young, her mother was left to tell her about her people. Mothers often took up that role of spreading their culture to their children if their husband died which was likely due to their low life expectancy rate. So many women at Prairie Island were keepers of the knowledge of their culture and traditional people. Anna was also very independent in thought and so was this young woman Thomas liked. Also a good Dakota woman had the following traits: faithfulness to spouse, devoted to children, industrious, skillful in womanly arts, hospitable, generous, thinks much but says little, and she has no deeds. All of these can be seen in Anna, and most so far in Julia.

Anna often portrayed what many of Dakota felt when they came back to Minnesota: “they were coming home, but wished to maintain a low profile and be in control of their relationships to the dominant society as much as they could” (Anderson, 68). Plus it was important to return to the burial places of their ancestors, and Prairie Island is abundant in burial mounds. Along with the dwelling of their Dakota gods, to accord them proper respect once again, would restore their relationship to them was also an important fact. Also this was the place where the medicines grew that restored their health, and the foods that had in the past made them strong people.

So the “Dakota pattern of interdependence of male and female roles could more easily be upheld utilizing a mixed economy of planting, hunting, trapping, gathering and seasonal wage labor” which has been described (Anderson, 68). “In fact, reliance on crops that inevitably failed must have seemed the height of folly and highly demoralizing to the Dakota man who was responsible for the welfare of his family, especially when it led to dependence on government

provisions that reinforced the relationship of ward-ship” (Anderson, 68-69). Luckily for Joseph and his family they did not have to rely so heavily on the government for assistance compared to others who weren’t so lucky. Joseph and his son spent time besides farming to hunt, trap, and fish to make sure their family was okay. While Anna and Julia contributed in helping chop wood, gather some traditional food, and make souvenir items to sell. Yet, when they could they often helped out other families by giving them things, helping them farm, get food, and just having them eat with them. For that is what being Dakota meant.

We have seen that while men were responsible for protecting and providing for the people—women were responsible for generating and sustaining life, for which the men provided the means and opportunity. Like it has been shown, it was up to the woman to uphold moral order and pass it on by being an example to younger generations. Anna was a great model to young woman at Prairie Island, which cannot only been seen in her daughter Julia, but in other young woman as well. Then “to be a Dakota, then, was to be humanized, civilized. And to be civilized was to keep the rules imposed by kinship for achieving civility, good manners, and a sense of responsibility toward every individual dealt with” (Anderson, 71).

“Using the terms acculturation of a people or assimilation of individuals to describe the process by which the inexorable power of American ideology, backed up by military force, political domination, corruption, and bureaucracy changed the Dakota people is to mask the magnitude of the change as well as underestimate what held them together” (Anderson, 69).

We saw how women were entrusted in the survival of the Dakota people, while all but a small number of men were completely denied performance of their roles. Some people of Prairie Island were able to overcome obstacles by returning home. Yet, “this internal identity system

had to be safeguarded and even hidden from the dominant society. At Prairie Island, the people chose isolation, maintaining a very low profile, while at times selectively choosing the situations for interaction with whites as individuals in public” (Anderson, 73). However the people of Prairie Island became their Indians, which was their only connection to the people at Red Wing most of the time. The only other option was when people were actually interested in them, which didn’t happen often. They came to be seen by whites as “innocuous remnant of the conquered savages who now knew their place in the order of things” (Anderson, 73). Anna and people at Prairie Island were aware of how the whites were evaluating them and romanticizing them, but what was there to be done.

“All of the things that the dominant culture defined as Indian culture were what it denigrated and tried to destroy: religion, clothing, hunting, male and female roles, language. This was done through force, with the goal of reshaping Indian people into citizens—civilized, individualized, Christianized yeoman farmers. Two core elements were left that helped them survive as a people: The web of kinship that united them as a people, and their values about what it meant for an individual to be Dakota” (Anderson, 70).

All of this can be seen in the Dakota people at Prairie Island, and especially in the family of Anna. Her family was deeply rooted in Dakota thought and personhood. Her family really had some struggles, but was able to face and conquer them by keeping to Dakota culture.

