he New Beginnings Newsletter, January 2020

Shana Harming

Follow this and additional works at: https://openprairie.sdstate.edu/wokini_news

Part of the Indigenous Studies Commons
The Violent History of Blood Quantum

A common question that many people ask American Indians is, “what percentage of Indian are you?” This is especially true for many American Indians who do not match the stereotypical native phenotype that is prevalent in movies and in the media. While this sort of question may seem relatively harmless on the surface, the notions of “percentage” and “blood quantum” of Indian identity comes from a long history of assimilatory and genocidal thinking.

When the U.S. was first working out legal definitions for who counted as American Indian and who did not, the government decided to use a definition based on percentage of Indian blood, or blood quantum. At the time of the law’s implementation, the U.S. was looking to reduce financial obligations to tribes and to reduce the number of native beneficiaries of treaty rights (Schmidt 2012). A blood quantum definition of American Indian identity allowed the government a legal means to deny services and rights to American Indians as they increasingly intermixed with the settler population. The idea was to “biologically absorb” American Indians by breeding out Indianness, thus absolving the government of responsibility for treaty
obligations (Ellinghaus 2009).

Blood quantum arguments were also used as a form of land disenfranchisement. During the Dawes Act, reservation land was split up and parceled out to individual American Indian families with half American Indian blood or greater. Through this legislation, American Indians lost land in two ways: one, those who could not prove they had half or greater Indian blood had their land taken away, and two, the sum of the individual allotments was far less than the original reservation land base. Breaking up the reservations in this way allowed for companies and communities of white people to be interspersed into the newly created surplus land. The proximity of the racial groups would theoretically lead to more intermixing, and overtime, a smaller, whiter, less Indian population (Schmidt 2012).

Another complication that many American Indians run into is proving a tribal ancestor on complicated and unorganized tribal rolls. Since many American Indians were never officially counted in the Dawes Rolls (1899-1906) many people with American Indian ancestry cannot officially enroll in a tribe (Garoutte 2001). There is evidence that those who constructed the tribal rolls understood that they were systematically reducing the number of American Indians who could claim ancestry by leaving some tribal members off the rolls (Carter 1991).

The history of federal attempts to control and identify who is native shows how the genocide of American Indians was accomplished not only through violence and war, but also through definition, racial ideology and law. The attempt to erase a population through means other than through direct violence has been termed structural genocide (Wolfe 2006). The Dawes Act, ideologies of how ‘Indian blood’ is transmitted and ‘diluted,’ and the construction of tribal rolls were all forms of structural genocide that played a part in legislating American Indians out of existence.

References


---

Tribal Spotlight: Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe

The Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe is comprised primarily of descendants of a band of the Dakota called the “Mdewakantonwan” which translates to “spirit lake dwellers.” This name is a reference to Mille Lacs Lake in central Minnesota around which this band used to live. According to their creation story, this lake is the place of creation of
the Dakota people. The present-day Flandreau Santee Sioux Indian Reservation is located on 2,500 acres of land along the Big Sioux River in Moody County, South Dakota, near the Minnesota-South Dakota border. Due to the reservation’s proximity to Pipestone National Monument, the reservation specializes in the creation of traditional pipes.

During the 1800’s, white settlers and explorers began to populate the area. Competition over game and other resources began to intensify between settlers and the Dakota. The US government owed money to the Dakota for lands they had sold in Wisconsin and parts of Minnesota. Pushed by starvation, Mdewakantonwan warriors began to raid settler villages which led to the US-Dakota war of 1862. The government eventually defeated the uprising and publicly executed 38 Dakota warriors. This was the largest public execution is US history. The surviving Dakota were moved to concentration camps in Davenport, Iowa and Fort Thompson, South Dakota. The Dakota groups in Davenport and Fort Thompson were eventually reunited at the Santee Agency in Nebraska in 1866. Several families decided to renounce tribal rights to become citizens of the United States and set up a small community of homesteads that later became the town of Flandreau, South Dakota. In 1934, the Flandreau Reservation was formally recognized by the Indian Reorganization Act.
Wokini Spotlight: Megan White Face

Megan White Face serves as the Program Coordinator for the Wokini Initiative. A citizen of the Oglala Lakota Oyate, and graduate of Red Cloud Indian School, Megan received her Bachelor of Art in Studio Art from SDSU and a Master of Science in Education from Fort Hays State University. She has resided in the Brookings area for more than seventeen years working in various capacities but found her passion in higher education while working with tribal communities across South Dakota. Megan’s college experiences drove her desire to aid other Native students in their quest for higher education and to improve their overall experience.

As program coordinator, Megan oversees the implementation of a grant that is to fund professional development curriculum about Oceti Sakowin communities and culture. This professional development will help faculty and staff on campus to better support American Indian students and improve their college experiences at SDSU.

Book of the Month: There There by Tommy Orange
There There is a novel that explores the theme of identity formation amongst Urban American Indians. The novel follows a large cast of American Indians growing up in Oakland, California and their struggle to understand their identity and place within Oakland. Each character has their own storyline and their own unique struggle with identity and belonging, however by the end of the novel, the character's stories coalesce in a surprising event at the Oakland powwow.

The Annual SDSU Wacipi
The 29th Annual SDSU Wacipi will be held on Saturday, March 28th, 2020 at the Frost Arena at 1 PM. Wacipi is a Lakota/Dakota word for people commonly call a powwow. These events feature dance competitions, singing, drumming and socializing. General admission is $6 and the event is free for children under 5, adults over 55 and SDSU students with a student ID. There will be prize money for the top 3 dancers in each category. For more information, contact Morgan Catlett-Ausborn or Amber Morseau at 605-688-5263 or visit facebook.com @sdstatewacipi.
Dr. Darryl Tonemah- Trauma and Healing in the Native Community

Dr. Tonemah will be speaking on historical and generational trauma in Native communities. The talk will be taking place on March 27th from 10 to 11:30 AM in the Volstorff Ballroom.

Darryl Tonemah (Kiowa/Comanche/Tuscarora) has a Ph.D., in Counseling Psychology and Cultural Studies, a Masters Degree in Community Counseling and three Bachelors of Science Degrees. He has sat on numerous state and national
boards addressing disparities in education and health care among the Native community. He has done extensive work training hospitals, clinics, Universities, corporations and schools in the U.S. and Canada on Trauma and its relationship to behavior and health.

**Lakota Word of the Month**

January- “The moon of scarce sun.”

Wiótheñika Wi – (wee oh tay hee ka wee)