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Wokini Initiative: The New Beginnings Newsletter

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The New Beginnings Newsletter, July 2020

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WOKINI INITIATIVE

A NEW BEGINNING

South Dakota State University®



The New Beginnings Newsletter July 2020

Oral tradition is much more than just history

The Oceti Sakowin and many other tribes have been using oral tradition since time immemorial. Academics within western institutions of education have been tempted to see oral tradition as a native form of historiography. While American Indian oral tradition does partially function as a form of history, oral tradition is much more dynamic and encompasses a broad range of other social needs (Kurkiala 2002). The attempt to see oral tradition as simply recounting a linear narrative of the past has led to conflict between western academics and American Indian worldviews. In order to overcome these conflicts, it is important to understand that oral tradition is not just history, but also a form of education, a moral and ethical system and a cosmology.

Oral tradition is a way of passing down collective knowledge and culture amassed over generations to the present generation and includes environmental knowledge, historical events, stories, and moral and ethical systems (Einhorn 2000). Many indigenous cultures argue that writing excuses members of a society from fully internalizing the lessons and knowledge of oral tradition and, therefore, limits the knowledge and culture known to each person (Thorne 1993).



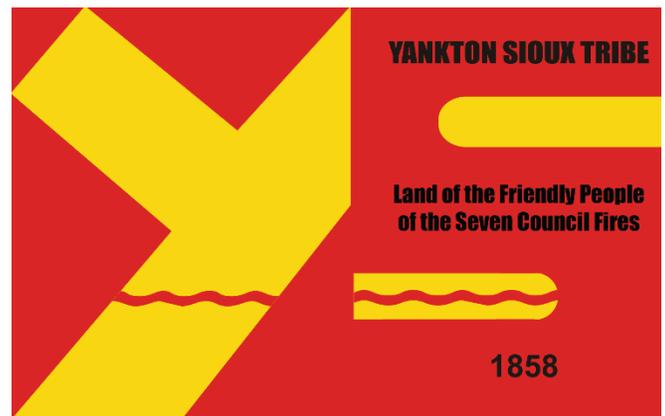
In contrast to western historiography, oral tradition is not only an argument about what occurred in the past, it is also a cosmology. Cosmology is intended or invented by humans to rationalize symbolically their universe and to justify what they believe to be its orderliness (Powers 1987). In this sense, oral tradition is cosmological because it provides an origin story to the universe, explains the origin of a specific tribe or people, and gives people a framework with which they can understand their place in the world. Through oral tradition, cosmology changes and adapts to meet the needs of people within a culture and a time period (Powers 1987). This means that oral tradition is not just a form of making a claim about what happened in the past, it is also an explanation of reality and provides guidance on how individuals are to act within the world.

Often the origins and history of a tribe, as told by oral tradition, differs from the account offered by historians, anthropologists and archeologists. Yet the claims made by these academic disciplines are not politically neutral in their effects. Kurkiala (2002) writes that tribes resist outsider views of their history because they produce an “uneasiness in having one’s history, identity, spirituality and problems continuously defined by outsiders (458).” In other words, history and anthropology have a long history of turning native people into an object to be understood and in the process they downplay native people’s own perspectives on their world, history and identity. Native people sometimes unknowingly reproduce this colonial power dynamic when they try and reframe oral tradition within the rules of western academic history. Kurkiala argues that oral tradition is a fundamentally different entity than history because oral tradition goes beyond history. It creates an ordered cosmology, it creates identity, it gives people a meaningful place within the natural order of the universe, and it creates moral systems. All of this is lost if native people debate the validity of oral tradition by only focusing on those elements that are an ‘objective’ recounting of the past. These criteria are only a very small part of the full function, power and purpose of oral tradition.

When historians and other academics attempt to disprove the claims of native people’s origin stories, oral histories and traditions, what is at stake in those arguments goes beyond whether or not the historian is objectively correct or has uncovered the ‘truth’ of the past. They are reproducing a colonial dynamic that continues to define native history, identity and worldview from the perspective of outsiders, colonizers and epistemological

systems foreign to their own. Native people should have the right to define themselves and their own worldview.

Tribal Spotlight: The Yankton Sioux Tribe



The Yankton Sioux Tribe reservation is home to the Ihanktonwan Dakota. Ihanktonwan is a Dakota word meaning "people of the end village." There are over 11,000 enrolled members of the tribe, 3,500 of which currently live on the reservation. The reservation was established in 1859 and is located in southern South Dakota in Charles Mix county. The southern border of the reservation is formed by the Missouri River.

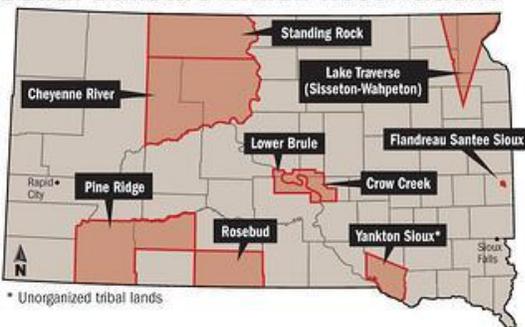
In 1804, the Ihanktonwan came into contact with the Lewis and Clark expedition. Before this time, they had already established trading relationships with French and English traders. The tribe wanted firearms and ammunition to protect their nation, but the Lewis and Clark expedition refused. Instead, they accepted an invitation to send a delegation to Washington D.C., where

they could establish a trade relationship with President Jefferson.

Many decades later, the Ihanktonwan would make a trip to Washington D.C., but under very different circumstances. With pressure to open up southeastern South Dakota to white settlement, several Ihanktonwan leaders traveled to Washington D.C. to negotiate a treaty of land cession. On April 19th, 1858, tribal leaders and government officials signed the Treaty of Washington. With the adoption of the treaty, the tribe gave up 11 million acres of territory and moved to a 475,000 acre reservation on July 10th, 1859. Homesteading and encroachment by white settlers gradually reduced the land under tribal control. Today, the reservation is approximately 40,000 acres.

The Yankton Sioux tribe is the only tribe in South Dakota that did not comply with the Indian reorganization act, and therefore has retained its traditional style of government. The governing body of the tribe is the Tribal Business and Claims Committee. The committee consists of nine democratically elected council members.

South Dakota's Indian Reservations



Sources:

[PBS](#)
[Akta Lakota Museum and Cultural Center](#)

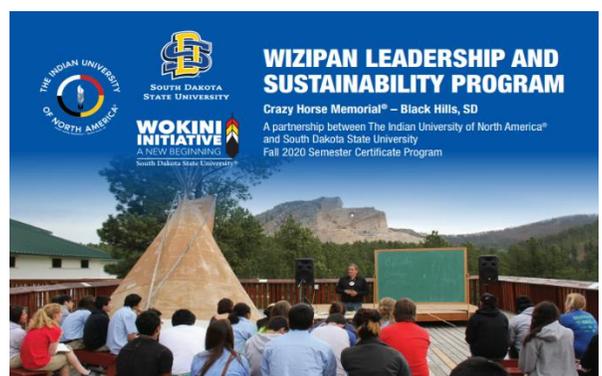
Lakota Language Instructor Position Available

The American Indian Studies Program, American Indian Student Center, and the Wokini Initiative have come together to offer an exciting career opportunity for a Lakota Language Instructor/Lecturer at our Brookings campus. We are looking for a creative individual grounded in Lakota culture, language, and communities to join our collaborative programs beginning in August of 2020. This is a nine-month, full-time, benefits-eligible position, supervised by School of American and Global Studies Director in the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences.

SDSU is especially interested in candidates who can effectively contribute to and/or coordinate course offerings that address the experiences of underrepresented minorities in organizations and our university's understanding of Indigeneity, tribal relations, treaties, and sovereignty. Indigenous people, women, minorities, veterans, and people with disabilities are especially encouraged to apply.

For more information on this position and to apply, click [here](#).

The Wizipan Leadership and Sustainability Program



The Wizipan Leadership and Sustainability Program of The Indian University of North America® at Crazy Horse Memorial is a semester long experience through a partnership between the Crazy Horse Memorial Foundation and South Dakota State University. Wachante Hecha Wizipan in Lakota implies the Heart of Everything that Is, but Wizipan on its own, according to the late Lakota leader Albert White Hat, references the Black Hills as a container of all resources; any person that goes into the Black Hills starving can be nourished, both physically and spiritually. The program will begin on August 31st and end on December 16th. The experience is focused on Care of Self, Care of Community, Care of Environment, and Care of Culture.

The courses offered are designed to provide students with the skill sets needed to understand the role of leadership in their communities. Sustainability affords students the opportunity to ensure the well-being of their communities and future generations. The Wizipan Program is equivalent to a study abroad program, but offered at The Indian University of North America at the Crazy Horse Memorial®. Students will have the opportunity to earn 15 credits and think critically about what sustainability and leadership in action can look like in their communities.

If you have advisees or know students who might qualify for this program, you can find more information and application instructions [here](#).

Book of the Month: Standing in the Light, A Lakota Way of Seeing

Standing in the Light: A Lakota Way of Seeing, is a book by Severt Young Bear and R.D. Theiz. Severt Young Bear is the founder and lead singer of the Porcupine Singers. Through the biography of Severt Young Bear, the book approaches diverse themes such as the significance of names, understanding modern Lakota identity, Oceti Sakowin oral traditions, powwows and giveaways, child-rearing practices, native humor and leadership styles.

The book also goes in depth into Severt's history with the AIM movement during the occupation of Wounded Knee in 1973 as well as his long career with traditional Lakota music and teaching at Oglala Lakota College. This book is ideal for anyone interested in American Indian activism, traditional music and the role of oral tradition.

Lakota Word of the Month

Čhaŋpǎ Sápa Wí (July) The moon when chokecherry's are black.

[Listen here](#)

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