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“Autonomy or Agency?” A Geopolitical Analysis of the Northern and Southern Lakḥótas’ Political and Military Leadership*

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“They are the only people that make rules for other people, that say, ‘If you stay on one side of this line it is peace, but if you go on the other side I will kill you all.’ I don’t hold with deadlines. There is plenty of room; camp where you please.”
-Crazy Horse to He Dog
(Fort Robinson, Nebraska, Spring 1877)

An old Teton saying epitomizes the importance of history within the culture of the Lakḥótas (Teton Sioux): “a people without history is like wind on the buffalo grass.”¹

If not for the Lakḥótas preserving their own history, modern historical interpretations of their northern Plains empire would be limited by foreign Anglo-American primary documents. The Lakḥótas maintained their rich history through oral tradition and band historians’ recordings of the most significant tribal events in Winter Counts.² Such an emphasis on their people’s history encouraged a rich cultural awareness and pride, legitimizing the notion of political, eco-

University of Pittsburgh truly inspired me to research and write as much as possible on the Teton Sioux.

- 1 Bull, Amos Bad Heart and Helen Heather Blish. *A Pictographic History of the Oglála Sioux*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967. xix.
- 2 For a more comprehensive Winter Count, see Oglála historian Amos Bad Heart Bull’s Winter Counts, published in Helen Heather Blish’s *A Pictographic History of the Oglála Sioux*.

* I would like to dedicate this paper to my late Great Grandpa Bernhard Rapp, whose copy of Mari Sandoz’s *Crazy Horse* was passed down to me, sparking my initial fascination with “His-Horse-Is-Crazy.” I would also like to dedicate this paper to the late Robert Doherty, whose course on the Lakḥótas at the

conomic, and militant supremacy. This ever-present historical consciousness consistently influenced political and especially military decisions, leading the Lakhótas to expand their territory and increase their dominance over the Northern Plains at an unprecedented rate from the early 1800s to the late 1850s.³ Despite their dominance of the Northern Plains, multi-generational inter-band rivalries and disputes lingered below the surface of prosperity, threatening to undermine the temperamental unity among the seven *ti-ospayepi* (tipi divisions) of the Lakhótas.⁴

After interactions with the United States military and government increased in the 1840s and 1850s, a new fracturing element became prevalent, namely the question of whether to resist or accommodate the increasingly restrictive demands made by the American government. Militant and conciliatory arguments subsequently proliferated among the Lakhótas; generally younger warriors favored militant resistance, while middle-age warriors transitioning towards non-military roles within Lakhóta society often favored a more conciliatory response. The age division in opinion of response is best understood when examining the economic differences in the Northern Plains during the 1840s, which was the time period conciliatory elder warriors came of age, and the 1860s, when the militant warriors began participating in war and politics.

During the 1840s, when the Northern Plains were an unrestricted trading zone, Native Americans from many tribes used their status and control of the land to dictate the market in which multi-ethnic “white” traders and explorers participated. At this time there were relatively few Anglo-Native conflicts largely because there were not many Anglos within the region. While the Lakhótas were unchallenged and in control of their territory, there was an abundance of buffalo, game, and traders. As this economic landscape began to disappear by the middle of the century, the elders who favored peace with U.S. agents likely envisioned another

economic boom if they came to peaceful terms with the American government.⁵

Conversely, by the 1860s, the younger warrior generation was only willing to maintain peace with the Americans if they abandoned their migrant trails, military forts and trading posts in Lakhóta territory (Figure 1). American dismissal of Lakhóta demands led to two major wars with the Northern Plains empire.⁶ In the Powder River War (1866-1868), the Lakhótas, along with the Northern Cheyennes and Northern Arapahos, raided and fought the American military and Anglo civilians to much success (Figure 2). At the conclusion of the Powder River War, with the American abandonment of the Bozeman Trail and Forts Kearny, Smith and Reno, the Lakhótas secured complete control and sole occupation of the Powder River Country for the next eight years. Although the Fort Laramie Treaty, signed at the conclusion of the Powder River War, promised to respect Lakhóta territory, upon the discovery of gold in the area, the United States became increasingly disinterested in keeping its citizens out of the Lakhóta nation. In the Black Hills War (1876-1877), after American miners, soldiers, and migrants began encroaching into the Black Hills region, the Lakhótas employed similar tactics to those used in the Powder River War, successfully fighting the Americans at the Battle of Rosebud and defeating them at the Battle of Little Bighorn.⁷ The majority of warriors fighting in the Powder River and Black Hills Wars had no recollection of the olden days in which white trade brought valuable resources to the Lakhótas. This new generation of Lakhóta warriors predominately associated whites with bringing about difficulties to their people, making conciliating their aggressors unfathomable.⁸

Despite their military success against the United States, the loose unification of the Lakhótas and inability to permanently settle political and societal disputes would prove to be their downfall.⁹ Ultimately, the decentralized na-

3 Hämäläinen, Pekka. “The Rise and Fall of Plains Indian Horse Cultures.” *The Journal of American History* 90. 3 (2003): 833-862. Print. & White, Richard. “The Winning of the West: The Expansion of the Western Sioux in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries.” *The Journal of American History* 65.2 (1978): 319-343. Print.

4 The seven *ti-ospayepi* consist of the *Brulés*, *Oglálas*, *Itázipčhos* (*Sans Arcs*), *Húŋkəpə́has*, *Mnikhówožuś* (*Miniconjous*), *Sihásapas* (*Black Feet*), and *O’ohe Nupás* (*Two Kettles*). Walker, J. R., and Raymond J. DeMallie. *Lakota Society*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982. Examples of the divisive nature of Lakhóta disputes are evident in the effects of Crazy Horse’s Uncle, Male Crow’s military failure in an expedition against the Shoshones and Crows, found in the first chapter of Kingsley Bray’s *Crazy Horse*, the after effects of Red Cloud’s murder of Bull Bear described in the second chapter of James Olson’s *Red Cloud and the Sioux Problem*, and No Water’s attempt on Crazy Horse’s life described in the sixth chapter of Mari Sandoz’s *Crazy Horse*.

5 There were however exceptions to the generational divide. By the early 1860s, some elders, typically in Northern Lakhóta bands, also began to question the ideology of interethnic relations and cooperation.

6 For a detailed analysis of the two non-European empires in the North American Plains region, the Comanches and Lakhótas, see Pekka Hämäläinen’s *The Comanche Empire* and “The Rise and Fall of Plains Indian Horse Cultures.”

7 Message from the President of the United States, March 15, 1875, information in relation to the Black Hills country in the Sioux Indian reservation.

8 These difficulties came about in the form of indiscriminate killing and military hostility, land encroachments to build railroads, forts, and telegraph lines, which pushed away buffalo, and distribution of rations and cheaply made goods which caused dependency on whites.

9 This juxtaposition of Lakhóta opinions, is not meant to suggest the decisions of the Lakhótas to resist or capitulate was right or wrong; it is more meant to demonstrate that Lakhóta society placed an emphasis on independent pragmatic decision

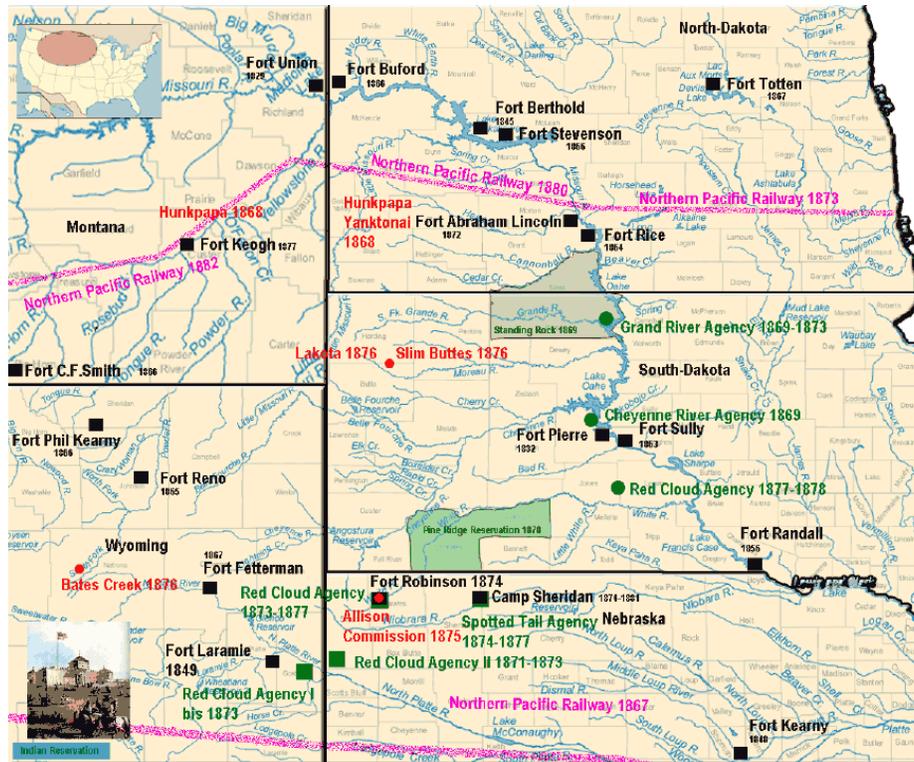


Figure 1 Courtesy of the State Historical Society of North Dakota

ture of Lakḥóta society and the oppositional ideologies of band leaders inhibited the political and military cooperation necessary to maintain national sovereignty and further perpetuate Lakḥóta success against the United States military.

Once the Lakḥótas completed their gradual migration from the Upper Mississippi (1750s), across the Missouri River (1780s), and into the Northern Platte (1790s), they quickly became the preeminent empire of the Northern Plains.¹⁰ However, prior to settling into the Black Hills region, their journey presented them with numerous challenges. While migrating across the highly contested Northern region of the Great Plains, the Lakḥótas' survival depended on constant adaptability. As a key cog in the Missouri River economy, the Lakḥótas oscillated between trapping, hunting buffalo, growing crops, and acting as middlemen within

the trade networks. Their survival tactics would once again require adaptation upon the arrival of European traders, who severely undermined the Lakḥótas' economic role, forcing them to seek economic expansion west of the Missouri River. In order to do so, they would have to defeat their sedentary agricultural rivals in the region.¹¹ This only became feasible once European diseases rapidly ravaged the highly concentrated agricultural villages in the 1770s, finally allowing the Lakḥótas to continue west, settling in the Northern Platte and Black Hills territory.

As the Lakḥótas established their empire in the Northern Plains region, their economic and cultural emphasis began to solely focus on hunting buffalo and acquiring horses. This shift in philosophy brought about radical change to the Lakḥótas' economic structure, culture, and daily life. Suddenly, this new buffalo/horse based economy put the Lakḥótas on a direct path towards contact and confrontation over limited amounts of land, horses, and war honors with the Kiowas, Arapahoes, Crows, and Cheyennes.¹² Once the Lakḥótas became fully immersed in the culture of horse

making. Hyde, George. *Red Cloud's folk; a history of the Oglála Sioux Indians*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1937., Hyde, George. *Spotted Tail's folk; a history of the Brulé Sioux..* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961., & Sandoz, Mari. *Crazy Horse, the strange man of the Oglálas: a biography*. 50th anniversary ed. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992.

10 Bray, Kingsley M.. "Teton Sioux: Population History, 1655-1881." *Nebraska History* 75 (1994): 165-188. Print. & White, Richard. "The Winning of the West." 319-343.

11 The horticultural northern Mandans and Hidatsas and southern Omahas, possessed "large populations, numerous horses, and fortified towns," easily resisting "incursions by the less numerous and poorly mounted Sioux." White, Richard. "The Winning of the West." 323.

12 Bull, Amos Bad Heart , and Helen Heather Blish. *A Pictographic History of the Oglala Sioux*.

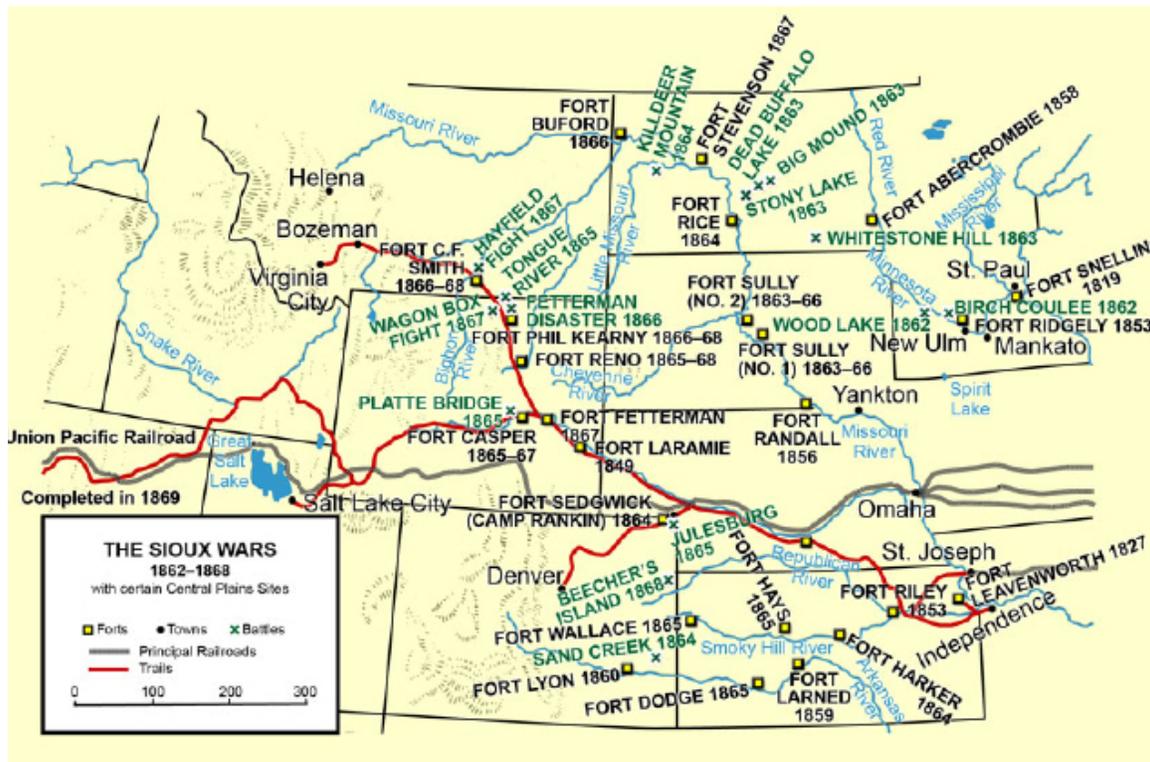


Figure 2 Courtesy of Imgid.com

raiding and trading, their unusually fast population growth and aggressive military control of the ecologically rich “indeterminate zones” and hunting grounds allowed them to dominate the Northern Plains well into the late nineteenth-century.¹³

The Lakhótas were at times, loosely organized from a governmental standpoint. Band leaders often made decisions solely in the best interest of their familial based camps rather than the Lakhóta nation as a whole. Additionally, political, military, and personal disagreements made inter-band cooperation more difficult, often going unresolved.¹⁴ In spite of these conflicts within Lakhóta society, the majority of the population was in favor of maintaining their warrior-nomad lifestyle, political independence, plains-horse economy, and spiritual traditions. Additionally, the victory of the Powder River War had demonstrated the viability of warfare in

forcing legitimate United States governmental concessions. While Crazy Horse’s kicamnayan military tactic made up for the disadvantages faced by the Lakhótas in combat against the American army.¹⁵ The victories at Rosebud and Little Big Horn, moreover, had shown the supremacy of the Lakhóta military when the nation was fully unified.¹⁶ However, by the time the Lakhótas had begun to reach their climax in terms of military prowess, the empire had essentially been split in two.

Although the Lakhótas’ acceptance of peace treaties and subsequent U.S. transfers onto agencies prior to outright military defeat seems to contradict the resistant mindset of the Northern Plains empire, upon consideration of the demographics of diplomatic participants at events such as the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty, it is clear that those willing to negotiate with, and capitulate to, the United States were only representative of the Southern Lakhóta coalition rather than the entire Lakhóta nation.¹⁷ Fortunately, for those who

13 White, Richard. “The Winning of the West.” 330-336. Only war parties ventured in indeterminate zones as they were too dangerous for bands to travel into these regions to hunt. This placed minimal pressure on the animal populations in these contested areas.

14 For detailed examples of Lakhóta disputes see the disagreement amongst Black Bull’s Brulés in 1803 found in Richard White’s “The Winning of the West”, Red Cloud’s murder of Bull Bear in 1841 found in Catherine Price’s *The Oglála people*, and No Water’s attempted murder of Crazy Horse in 1870 found in Mari Sandoz’s *Crazy Horse*.

15 Similar to the guerilla tactics employed by, Mao Zedong (China), Ho Chi Minh (Vietnam), and Che Guevara (Cuba), Crazy Horse’s, emphasized attacking at the “moment of maximum instability, fighting fluidly in open terrain, maintaining constant mobility, and preventing the enemy from establishing a secure permanent position.

16 Bray, Kingsley M.. “Crazy Horse and the End of the Great Sioux War.” *Nebraska History* 79 (1998): 167-284. Print.

17 *Ratified treaty no. 369, treaty of April 29, 1868, with the Brule,*

opposed the policies of the capitulators, the loose political structure and geographical differences of the Southern and Northern Lakhóta simply allowed for, after politically pragmatic consideration, all who opposed the Southern policy to join the northernmost peoples in establishing a strong military coalition.

This paper will argue that by the middle of the nineteenth-century, there was a clear geopolitical break in the Lakhóta Empire between the southern and northern peoples. Set in motion by the significant increase in American migrant trails cutting through Lakhóta territory, when the geopolitically distinct Northern and Southern Lakhótas developed their strategies for resistance, their responses to American encroachment were, not surprisingly, as different as the regions they inhabited. Ultimately, this paper will use this geopolitical perspective to explain two critical questions of nineteenth-century Lakhóta history; first, why did the Southern Lakhóta leaders accept U.S. transfers onto agencies, and second, why did the Northern Lakhótas develop into a more radically militant and nationalist group than their southern relatives? This paper answers these two questions with a focus on the leadership of Spotted Tail and Crazy Horse.¹⁸ In regards to Spotted Tail (or *Siŋté Glešká*), his decision to capitulate to the United States is of great significance due to it being the first instance in which a prominent Lakhóta warrior and headman used accommodationist politics to counter the pressures of the American government and military. His decision to rely on political diplomacy allowed Lakhóta communities unable – for a variety of reasons – to resist the U.S. militarily, to protect themselves from further American aggression. In Lakhóta histories, Spotted Tail has often been portrayed as a “sell-out” or traitor who gave in to the demands of whites. This paper argues against these notions. Similarly, Crazy Horse (or *Tašúŋke Witkó*) has often been just as misrepresented and misunderstood. *Tašúŋke Witkó* has often been portrayed as one of the greatest, albeit naïve and foolish Lakhóta warrior leaders, due to his drawn out refusal to negotiate with the United States. This paper argues against the notion that Crazy Horse possessed minimal talents for political and societal leadership or military innovation.¹⁹

This paper is composed of three parts. Part I specifically addresses the implications of the different ways in which

secondary sources have explained the Lakhóta “defeat” or U.S. “victory.” Part I, then positions the overall argument of this paper, explaining the downfall of the nineteenth-century Lakhótas from a relatively new and as yet underdeveloped position; namely the importance of understanding Lakhóta political leaders’ reasoning behind their differing responses to United States expansionism. It then concludes with a brief emphasis on the relevance and importance of studying historical agents within various Native American histories.

Parts II and III explain the oppositional responses to American encroachment and demands by emphasizing the geopolitical differences between the Northern and Southern Lakhóta. Part II begins with an introduction to the general structure of Lakhóta politics as well as the history of the Southern Lakhótas prior to the late 1860s. Part II then focuses on Spotted Tail’s political leadership of the Brulé Lakhótas in the context of his decision to submit himself and his people to American treaties and Indian agencies. Part III examines the features of Northern Lakhóta society and the development of Northern Lakhóta nationalistic-militant decision making. Part III then examines Crazy Horse’s distinct and successful military strategies. Lastly, Part III will examine why after such resounding military success, the Northern Lakhótas failed to remain united after the Battle of Little Big Horn.

Throughout the hundred years or so of historical research on the Lakhótas, there have been multiple distinct shifts in interpretive paradigms. This paper reflects and contributes to the newest shift in Lakhóta historiography. Undoubtedly influenced by the work of past historians, this work nevertheless offers a new and unique explanation of the eventual confinement of the Lakhótas on U.S. agencies. While the eminent historians Richard White, Pekka Hämäläinen, and Jeffrey Ostler have made groundbreaking contributions to historical understandings of Lakhóta imperial ascension by stressing Lakhóta historical agency, they neglect to similarly explain how Lakhóta choices and actions ultimately contributed to the empire’s downfall.²⁰ This contradictory historical shortcoming is mystifying; if the Lakhótas possessed the agency to dictate their imperial rise, then surely they made enough autonomous decisions to contribute to their downfall. This paper will explain the erosion of nineteenth-century Lakhóta sovereignty from the perspective that the decentralized structure of the Lakhótas’ politics and military, seen in the North/South divide, greatly hindered their ability to maintain any semblance of Lakhóta independence once American intervention occurred. Hitherto, the dwindling buffalo population, the unfulfilled promises of the local American military personnel and In-

Oglala, Miniconjou, Yanktonai, Hunkpapa, Blackfeet, Cuthead, Two Kettle, Sans Arcs, and Santee bands of Sioux Indians, and the Arapaho Indians. (April 29, 1868).

18 While Sitting Bull and Red Cloud certainly deserve historical attention, their actions predominately influenced their own and neighboring bands, the leadership of Crazy Horse and Spotted Tail transcended band divisions.

19 Neihardt, John. *Black Elk speaks: being the life story of a holy man of the Oglala Sioux*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008., *Voice of the American West, Volume 1*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005.

20 See Hamalainen’s “The Rise and Fall of Plains Indian Horse Cultures.”, Ostler’s *The Plains Sioux and U.S. colonialism*, & White’s “The Winning of the West.”

dian agents, and lack of understanding of Lakḥóta dynamics by the national government have all tended to be overstated in Lakḥóta historiography. Contrarily, there has not been enough emphasis on the political actions of the Lakḥótas in a political environment, which despite Anglo-American encroachment and enemy Native American tribal conflict, they still largely controlled.

The differing Lakḥóta historiographical perspectives can essentially be divided into two broad stances, “inevitable conquest” and “imperial conflict”. Traditionally, the earlier historians of the Lakḥótas tended to explain the story of “conquest” as an inevitable process, in which superior peoples overcame archaic nations. These outdated histories were representative of the racial ideology of the time. This scholarship on the Lakḥótas, and more broadly the Indian peoples of early America, prevailed until the late 1970s when a new wave of historians attempted to develop a history of “how Euramericans and Amerindians shared in the creations of the society that became the United States of America.”²¹ These more recent historians have tended to write from the perspective that conflicts between the United States and Lakḥóta empires were brought about by a struggle for control over limited resources between, comparable, albeit different, empires in terms of power and influence.

To break these two schools of thought down further, both perspectives can be divided into subfields. The inevitable conquest’s first subfield, tends to write with notions of racial superiority, “manifest destiny,” and ethnocentrism.²² Only by ignoring or dismissing the intricacies of the cultural, political, and economic landscape of the Lakḥóta people and more generally, the Northern Plains region, as racially inferior can the fall of the Lakḥóta empire be rationally explained as an inevitable conquest.²³

Opposite the ethnocentric perspective, the second subfield portrays the Lakḥótas as passive victims lacking the sophistication or knowledge to ward off the remorseless surge of American expansion’s guns, germs, and steel. The racially superior perspective is obviously problematic due to its ethnocentric bias. While the second subfield, which positions the Lakḥótas as helpless bystanders, may invoke more empathetic feelings than the ethnocentric stance, it is equally problematic. Although it is obviously true that disease and technological advances often favored the U.S. empire, this

historical factor is often overemphasized and used as a blanket and overly deterministic explanation for the demise of all Native American peoples.

There were multiple Native American empires that survived or avoided rampant disease during the same time periods in which others were totally decimated. Secondly, in regards to combat and military technology, during the peak periods of Lakḥóta imperial prominence, the American empire was still a fledgling republic. During the nineteenth-century, especially around the antebellum and civil war period, the U.S. military was far from an overwhelmingly powerful force. It was not uncommon for units to be comprised predominately of untrained militiamen or volunteers. In many instances the Lakḥóta military often had far more disciplined and combat proven warriors.²⁴

While historians of both “imperial conflict” subfields write with a tone of equivalence in terms of power, influence, and societal sophistication between the United States and the Lakḥótas, there are significant differences in regards to which actors are recognized as being instrumental in determining the outcome of Anglo-American and Lakḥóta conflicts. The first subfield attributes the primary cause of the imperial defeat of the Lakḥóta nation to the actions of the American military and government officials.²⁵ Either the direct strategies and conscious efforts of American personnel simply outmaneuvered their “ignorant and or naïve” counterparts, or less directly and perhaps unintentionally, the ambivalent promises and contradictory policies carried out by American personnel were so unpredictable that they forced Lakḥóta political leaders to make rushed, reactionary, and potentially detrimental concessions without the assurance of equitable compensation. While at least acknowledging the competency of the Lakḥóta empire, this subfield nevertheless overemphasizes the effects of Anglo-American decisions.²⁶

21 Richter, Daniel. “Whose Indian History.” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 50.2 (1993): 379-393. Print.

22 “Crazy Horse’s Treachery: How He Laid a Trap for General Crook - The Latter Has a Narrow Escape.”, & “Operations of Gen. Crook Against the Hostile Indians.” *Union and American* [Greenville] 30 Mar. 1876: 1. Print.

23 Michno, Gregory. “Crazy Horse, Custer, and the Sweep to the North.” *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 43.3 (1993): 45. Print. & Smith Jr., Cornelius. “Crook and Crazy Horse.” *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 16.2 (1966): 14-26. Print.

24 Olson, James C.. *Red Cloud and the Sioux problem*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965. 44. From footnote 14. Carrington to Litchfield, July 30, 1866. Carrington, Frances C. *Army Life on the Plains*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1910. Additionally, Lakḥóta leaders Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull (or Thatháŋka Íyotake) effectively acquired significant amounts of the latest gun models not long after they were available, as seen by approximately fifty percent of Crazy Horse’s warriors possessing guns upon their disarmament during agency surrender in 1877. (Bray, Kingsley M.. *Crazy Horse: a Lakota life*. 111-112 & 284.)

25 Ambrose, Stephen E.. *Crazy Horse and Custer: the parallel lives of two American warriors*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975. Print.

26 Hedren, Paul . After *Custer: loss and transformation in Sioux country*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011. 3-50., Hyde, George. *Red Cloud’s folk; a history of the Oglála Sioux Indians.*, Hyde, George. *Spotted Tail’s folk; a history of the Brule Sioux.*, Olson, James C.. *Red Cloud and the Sioux problem.*, & Ostler, Jeffrey. *The Plains Sioux and U.S. colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee*. Cambridge: Cambridge University

The final and least explored subfield in Lakhóta historical work, in which this paper takes part, focuses predominantly on the ramifications of Lakhóta leaders' decisions and how their success or failure hinged on the decentralized nature of their society rather than the privileging actions of the United States. Although few historians have fully committed to this perspective, it is likely to be the most accurate representation of Lakhóta history thanks to its restoration of Lakhóta military and political self-determination.²⁷ In order to explain more accurately the degeneration of nineteenth-century Lakhóta society, historians must focus on the divided actions of Lakhóta political and military leaders.

Some militarily pragmatic historians may feel an argument centered around Lakhóta political actions causing the dissolution of their nineteenth-century society overemphasizes the strength of a Lakhóta empire that was simply too small to turn away American imperialism. However, it cannot be emphasized enough that the defeat of the Lakhóta empire should not be thought of as a foregone conclusion. There are multiple instances in which nations, significantly smaller than and seemingly subordinate to their aggressor, used effective military and political tactics to permanently turn away the advance of an aggressive, imperial force. The Vietnamese and Seminole deterrence of American imperialism, as well as the Ethiopian defeat of colonialism should all serve as proof that the defeat of the traditional Lakhóta nation was not necessarily a foregone conclusion.²⁸

When Native American historians write with the notion that the Lakhóta defeat was inevitable, they are essentially dismissing the actions and decisions of Lakhóta political leaders as irrelevant. By assuming that the Lakhótas inevitably succumbed to the United States, historians imply that Lakhóta political and military maneuvers did not make a difference. This in turn justifies historians' failure to thoroughly critique and analyze the decisions of the most influential Lakhóta leaders: Spotted Tail, Red Cloud, Sitting Bull, and Crazy Horse. The most appropriate perspective on analyzing the downfall of the Lakhóta empire must focus on the decisions and mistakes of their own political leaders, for they are the ones whose actions had the greatest impact on their defeat.

Lastly, it is important to offer an opinion in regards to the notion of "Indian History." Daniel Richter's article

entitled, *Whose Indian History?* laments the state of Native American history, claiming that the end of the line may have been reached in terms of historical contributions due to "its scant impact on larger areas of scholarship."²⁹ Although there have been numerous ethnically united "Indian" movements, the notion that there is some sort of all encompassing "Indian History" Native American experience could not be further from the truth.³⁰ This generalization is often seen in ethnocentric historical interpretations, similar to the outdated notion of a universal African experience seen in the early works of sub-Saharan African history. Throughout the heterogeneous histories of Native American peoples, some felt they could benefit economically by offering minimal resistance to American encroachment, such as the Mandans and Hidatsas trading along the Missouri river. Others, like the Crow scouts who served in the American Army in the Great Sioux War, saw an alliance with the American military as an opportunity to exact revenge against enemy tribes, while some tribes did in fact join together to resist the American advance, like the Lakhótas and Northern Cheyennes.

To suggest that that historical work on Native Americans has run the gamut and no longer serves to benefit "larger areas of scholarship" is equally problematic. Only by viewing Native Americans as an anomaly, a group of people so culturally and historically different and unusual than all other peoples throughout all eras of history, could one conclude that the history of Native American tribes is no longer useful or applicable to the grand realms of academia. The fact remains that Native Americans are humans with tendencies and habits that have produced historical narratives not dissimilar to European, African, or Asian histories. Native Americans were a wide ranging group of people. Some were undoubtedly victims of unwarranted violence while others acted sadistically and mutilated enemy Native Americans and Anglo-American settlers. Some nations only took up arms to defend themselves in response to illegal seizure of land and property while others decided to strike first before they became victims. Some leaders sought only to ensure their own personal gains while others were determined to protect their people and way of life at all costs. These actions and responses are no different than that of other groups of peoples, who throughout history have been forced to confront the

Press, 2004.

27 Bray, Kingsley M.. "Crazy Horse and the End of the Great Sioux War." 94-115., Bray, Kingsley M.. "We Belong to the North: The Flights of the Northern Indians from the White River Agencies, 1877-1878." *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 55.2 (2005): 28-47. Print., Hämäläinen, Pekka. "The Rise and Fall of Plains Indian Horse Cultures.", & White, Richard . "The Winning of the West."

28 For detailed historical works on these military conflicts, see John Mahon's *History of the Second Seminole War, 1835-1842*, Harold Marcus' *A History of Ethiopia*, and Stanley Karnow's *Vietnam: A History*.

29 Richter, Daniel. "Whose Indian History." 379-393.

30 Gregory Evans Dowd's *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815* examines the development of the notion of a shared "Indian experience". The Pan-Indian movement lasted seventy years and ranged from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico. Although there are other instances of prophetic, religious, Pan-Indian revivals (i.e. Ghost Dance revival of 1890), they tended to resemble reactionary movements using religious based explanations to the hardships given tribes were facing. While these movements emphasized returning to traditional practices, they did not necessarily represent the reality of the ethnic and geopolitical differences that existed amongst the given Native American peoples.

presence and encroachment of foreigners. What follows is one of these stories; namely how the Lakhótas confronted U.S. invasion of their homelands in the second half of the nineteenth-century.

While political compromise between the sedentary Lakhótas (“Loafers” and “mixed-bloods”) and Americans was a common occurrence in the first half of the nineteenth-century, the advocacy of political negotiation by prominent warriors and nomadic headmen was unheard of. This changed in the mid-1860s when Spotted Tail, one of the most revered Lakhóta warriors of the time period, and the nomadic Southern Lakhótas began advocating political negotiation, rather than open warfare with the United States. Indicative of a monumental turning point in Lakhóta society, Spotted Tail’s political advocacy and peace policy with the United States conflicted with the ideals of many Northern Lakhótas. As both the northern and southern peoples became increasingly entrenched in their oppositional ideologies a clear geopolitical split occurred amongst the Lakhótas which would have serious implications for both groups in their resistance of American expansionism. This section examines the general structure of Lakhóta politics and the factors that led to the settlement of the sedentary Lakhótas, as well as the reasoning behind the Southern Lakhótas’ reliance on political negotiation rather than warfare.

Some historians such as George Hyde have misinterpreted Lakhóta politics in terms of ascribing sole decision making power to a band’s head chief, assuming Lakhóta political decision making was vaguely autocratic. In reality the decision making process was rather decentralized, independent, and fluid. As Catherine Price’s *Oglála Politics* demonstrated, there was far more than one individual in each of the seven *ti-ospayepi* that had a significant political voice within the decision making process. Despite the United States’ misguided interpretation of Lakhóta politics, the political decision making process was far from autocratic. At any given time, *akicitas*, shirtwearers, respected elders, and medicine men could significantly influence the decision making process.³¹ That being said, those headmen within the Lakhótas were still chosen for their positions because they possessed the traits most valued by their peoples for maintaining an appropriate balance among war and peace and religion and politics. Their opinions were typically considered to be in their people’s best interest and it was therefore likely that the majority of people would approve of their decisions. However, Lakhóta society was also built upon independent decision making; whenever one head of family or group of kinsmen disagreed with the decision making process of their leaders,

31 Walker, J. R., and Raymond J. DeMallie. *Lakota Society*. 28-40. & Price, Catherine. *The Oglála people, 1841-1879: a political history*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996. Print.

they were free to pack up their camps and join another band that more closely held their political views.³² This is seen in the fact that there were significant numbers of inter-tribal marriages and relocation amongst the seven tribes.

This balance within Lakhóta society between acceptance of political leadership and individualism explains why agency capitulation was an easy decision for some, a pragmatic alternative to others, and, in the case of the final surrendering parties, a settlement preferable only when facing death. These distinctive responses to U.S. invasion among the Lakhótas can be best understood in terms of geography. Those Lakhótas concentrated along and slightly southwest of the North Platte River (Brulés and Southern Oglalas) were among the earliest Lakhóta people to become dependent on the agencies, while those north of the Platte, concentrated around the White River, Black Hills (Itázipčhos, Húŋkpaḥas, Mnikhówožus, Sihásapas, and O’ohe Nuŋpas), and were among the last to capitulate.³³

Prior to the foundation of the Lakhóta agencies in the early 1870s, there was a well-established faction of Lakhótas who chose to abandon nomadic buffalo hunting. Between the 1820s and 1840s, this group of Lakhótas began to settle close to American forts and trading posts. As Anglo traders began to inter-marry amongst the Lakhótas, a significant “mixed-blood” population emerged in the Fort Laramie region. Despite the major cultural differences that developed between sedentary Anglo-Lakhótas and their nomadic relatives, the Loafs-About-The-Fort peoples, or “Loafers,” remained heavily involved in intertribal Lakhóta political counseling. The other significant pre-agency group of sedentary-Lakhótas was predominately of the Brulé and Lower Oglála. This faction broke away from their relatives following the Smoke-Bull Bear whiskey fueled *mêlée* of 1841. After Red Cloud shot and killed rival chief Bull Bear, Bull Bear’s band dispersed to relatives both south of the Platte and north into the Black Hills. Within five years of the feud, Old Smoke’s people (Wágluḥes) established a permanent settlement in the Fort Laramie district. A significant number of the Wágluḥe women began to marry Anglo traders and military personnel and like the original “mixed-bloods” in this region, the sedentary Lakhótas would also play a significant role in the following years of contested Lakhóta politics. Like any distinct political group, these Lakhótas frequently sought to protect their own political interests, which frequently opposed the ideology of their non-treaty and non-agency relatives. These Lakhótas, along with the Spotted Tail and Red Cloud Agency residents, would

32 Walker, J. R., and Raymond J. DeMallie. *Lakota Society*.

33 Bray, Kingsley M.. “Teton Sioux: Population History, 1655-1881.” 165-188., Bray, Kingsley M.. “‘We Belong to the North’: The Flights of the Northern Indians from the White River Agencies, 1877-1878.” 28-47., Hyde, George. *Spotted Tail’s folk; a history of the Brule Sioux.*, & Olson, James C.. *Red Cloud and the Sioux problem*.

form the most significant capitulation faction and were often the only Lakḥótas interested in negotiating away land and residence in the form of treaties.³⁴

In both nationalistic Lakḥóta history and other non-Lakḥóta derived histories of the Lakḥótas, the mixed bloods and “Loafers” are almost exclusively viewed as “sellouts.”³⁵ Portrayed as allies of the American military and traitors to the Lakḥótas, too quick to abandon the buffalo hunt, fattened and slowed by the white man’s food, and poisoned by his alcohol, some of these descriptions of sedentary Lakḥótas may certainly have some basis in reality. It should nevertheless be recognized that these Lakḥótas lived in markedly different conditions to their relatives to the north. While the northern bands of Lakḥótas resided in a region void of any Americans and filled with far more buffalo, the bands to the South were directly in the path of the Oregon Trail and the booming white population that came with it.³⁶ Increased contact with Anglo-Americans led to the incorporation of some aspects of the outsiders’ culture into Lakḥóta life. This resulted in particular changes within Southern Lakḥóta society. To say this change made them any less Lakḥóta denies the Lakḥóta long tradition of cultural adaptability.

The circumstances surrounding Spotted Tail and the Brulé’s capitulation are markedly different than the pre-agency settlement of sedentary Lakḥótas. Although the Southern Brulé’s interacted more often with Cheyennes and sedentary Lakḥótas than the Northern Lakḥótas, Siḡté Glešká was still one of the most renowned Lakḥóta warriors of his time. Recognized both as a fierce warrior, from the numerous war honors he achieved fighting Pawnees, and as a leader acting within the best interest of his people, Spotted Tail succeeded Little Thunder to lead the Brulé’s in the late 1860s.³⁷ It is unlikely that the Brulé’s would have tolerated a leader who, according to his political opponents, was only concerned with appeasing the demands of the United States military and government.

In the Plains region during the mid nineteenth-century, there was far from a simple ethnic dichotomy of Native Americans and whites. The Lakḥótas, as the dominant people of the region, viewed their allies and enemies in different

ways. While they regarded the Cheyennes and Arapahoes as being of comparable superiority, they viewed many foreign tribes, such as the Pawnees and Crows, as ethnically and culturally inferior people, who they could attack or raid at any time.³⁸ Many critics of Spotted Tail’s pro-agency actions argue that by his advocating for peace and signing treaties with the Americans, Spotted Tail called for total peace among his people and an abandonment of Lakḥóta warrior tradition. Such judgments, however, fail to account for the fact that Siḡté Glešká made peace with the U.S. merely to protect his people from American aggression, not to abandon their frequent and successful battles and raids of enemy tribes such as the Pawnees.

In *Spotted Tail’s Folk*, George Hyde consistently argued that Spotted Tail adamantly believed there was no point in militarily challenging the Americans due to their overwhelming superiority. While this idea is overemphasized and clearly tainted with an American-superiority complex, Hyde’s theories, once the ethnocentrism is removed, nevertheless suggest factors that likely influenced Spotted Tail’s decision. In particular, the Battle of Blue Water Creek – in which General William Harney’s attempts to arrest Brulé warriors for the Grattan Fight led to the death of Lakḥóta warriors, elders, women, children, and infants – had a significant effect on the Brulé collective psyche.³⁹ Hyde’s assumption of the “battle’s” effects is not a ridiculous proposal; since the establishment of the Lakḥóta empire in the northern Plains region, the warrior generation of the 1850s had not experienced a military slaughter close to the magnitude of the Battle of Blue Water Creek. Battles with Pawnees, Crows, or Utes, were considered to be disappointments if more than a few warriors were slain, and led to mourning and shame within Lakḥóta camps. Losing dozens of warriors in battle, having their women and children slaughtered and taken prisoner would have been difficult for the majority of Spotted Tail’s people to cope with.⁴⁰ While this would not have kept young warriors from seeking out revenge and taking up arms in future battles against the Americans, the young warrior population of the Lakḥótas only constituted a fraction of the Brulé population. Even if Siḡté Glešká had the desire to relocate the Brulé’s in the North and join the militant Lakḥótas, it is likely that such a commitment would not have been sup-

34 *Ratified treaty no. 369, treaty of April 29, 1868, with the Brule, Oglala, Miniconjou, Yanktonai, Hunkpapa, Blackfeet, Cuthead, Two Kettle, Sans Arcs, and Santee bands of Sioux Indians, and the Arapaho Indians. For a list of documents relating to this treaty see special list no. 6 (April 29, 1868).*, Hyde, George. *Spotted Tail’s folk; a history of the Brule Sioux*. 114-115., & Kappler, Charles Joseph. *Indian Affairs Laws and Treaties Volume V*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1941.

35 For an example of this commentary, see the Loafer portrayal in Mari Sandoz’s *Crazy Horse*.

36 Hyde, George. *Spotted Tail’s folk; a history of the Brule Sioux*. 33-41 & 73-87.

37 *Ibid.*, 99-129.

38 Hamalainen, Pekka. “The Rise and Fall of Plains Indian Horse Cultures.” 833-862., Hyde, George. *Spotted Tail’s folk; a history of the Brule Sioux*. 27-32., Walker, J. R., and Raymond J. DeMallie. *Lakota society*. 124-157., & White, Richard. “The Winning of the West.” 319-343.

39 Engagement between United States troops and Sioux Indians. Letter from the Secretary of War, transmitting information relating to an engagement between the United States troops and the Sioux Indians near Fort Laramie. February 9, 1855. – Laid upon the table, and ordered to be printed.

40 Taylor, Emerson Gifford. *Gouverneur Kemble Warren; the life and letters of an American soldier*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1932. 18-29.

ported by the general Brulé population after such a disaster. It was more practical and safe for the non-warrior Brulés if Spotted Tail simply allowed his warriors to fight with the Northern faction if any so desired, while keeping the rest of the Brulé population in peace efforts.

As an experienced warrior headman, Spotted Tail presumably understood the limitations of fighting a full scale war against the Americans. While it is unlikely that a Lakhóta warrior would have believed that the Lakhóta military was outmatched by their American opponents, he likely felt that the Lakhótas – with their subsistence needs – were not capable of supporting a year-round war effort.⁴¹ Historically, this theme is not dissimilar from the limitations peasant rebels have frequently faced in revolutions.⁴² Considering Lakhóta culture placed great importance on the hunt and general collection of food in the months leading up to and immediately after the harsh northern Plains winters, Lakhóta warriors could only realistically be devoted to significant military expeditions in the summer months, after which they had to return to their respective hunting grounds to support their families and bands. This argument is supported by the Brulés' involvement in the Julesburg raids of 1865. When militant advocacy was at its peak amongst Spotted Tail's people immediately following the Sand Creek slaughter, they joined the Northern Cheyennes in carrying out successful raids of the Julesburg way station and destruction of the Overland trail. Following their success in the South Platte region, they remained in the area for the fall hunt and winter preparation, eventually settling east of the Powder River with minimal interest in carrying out additional military expeditions.⁴³

Following the Overland trail destruction, in the spring of 1864, while Spotted Tail and other Southern Lakhótas attempted to find an appropriate political and military position with the United States that would maintain their independence and sovereignty, the "Loafers" and "mixed-blood" Lakhótas had become full participants in the American sponsored Indian Police programs. Prominent around American forts and trading posts, these Lakhóta, drawn primarily from the Kit Fox society, served the Anglo-Americans by acting as informants, protecting the forts from bandits and, in general, shoring up the livelihoods and property of Anglos in the area.⁴⁴

41 Hyde, George. *Spotted Tail's folk; a history of the Brule Sioux*. 92.

42 A prominent historical example of this phenomenon took place during the Mexican Revolution of the early twentieth century. Samuel Brunk's *Emiliano Zapata!* details this phenomena.

43 Hyde, George. *Spotted Tail's folk; a history of the Brule Sioux*. 94-96. & Bray, Kingsley M. *Crazy Horse: a Lakota life*. 46.

44 Hyde, George. *Spotted Tail's folk; a history of the Brule Sioux*. 100-103. The Kit Fox Society was one of the numerous military societies found in Lakhóta culture. Primarily in charge of maintaining military leadership and discipline within the tribe, their participation in the Indian Police program was

At this point in time, while the sedentary Lakhótas had become willing employees of the American military, *Siŋté Glešká* and the Brulés were disinterested in the demands of the United States. When the American military was preparing their expedition against the Northern Lakhótas, they decided that the Brulés – who in reality had minimal if any involvement with Northern Lakhóta actions – needed to be removed and forced as prisoners of war to Fort Phil Kearny. In response the Brulés, led by Spotted Tail, acted quickly, attacking and killing Captain William Fouts and several other soldiers before fleeing to the North.⁴⁵ Acting independently of the military actions of their Northern relatives, Spotted Tail and the majority of his people were mostly uninterested in the following military conflicts carried out in the spring months prior to the start of the Powder River War in 1866. Although not as frequently involved in military rebellion as the Northern Lakhótas, Spotted Tail's people remained independent in the Powder River Country, clearly resisting the demands of the American military and government.

What ultimately brought Spotted Tail into his first significant contact with Anglo-American capitulation advocates was the dying wish of his daughter, who asked to be buried at Fort Laramie by the grave of Chief Smoke. After the burial, the Brulés remained in the vicinity until *Siŋté Glešká* along with several other Brulé and Southern Oglala headmen signed a peace treaty with the United States in late June of 1866.⁴⁶ Yet Spotted Tail did not sign the treaty in order to appease the American government; he made the decision after it became clear to him that there was minimal, if any, room for his people to hunt in the lands of their Northern relatives. Therefore, a peace with the United States, which guaranteed Brulés hunting rights in their territory south of the North Platte, while avoiding dependence on government rations, was a pragmatic decision.

Spotted Tail had little interest in the United States' expectations of eventual agricultural adoption. Rather, he decided to establish a peace with the American government to achieve the permanent freedom of his people to hunt on their land and continue fight their traditional enemies.⁴⁷ While it is clear that Spotted Tail and the Brulés were far from the subservient actors that they are often portrayed as, they still took a political (albeit calculated) gamble by entering a peace with the United States. While Spotted Tail's political faith towards the United States certainly, in hindsight, seems to contain elements of ignorance and naivety, he surely understood that the peace would only last if the United States held up their end of the agreement.

Indeed, the logic of Spotted Tail's gamble becomes clear when one considers Spotted Tail and his Brulé peoples' position within the geopolitics of the Northern Plains. The

viewed with disdain by the Northern Lakhótas.

45 *Ibid.*, 100-106.

46 *Ibid.*, 106-111.

47 *Ibid.*, 129-136.

Brulés were certainly, aside from the “Loafers” and “mixed-bloods,” on the lower levels of Lakhóta society in terms of possession of hunting territory and military power. This is especially obvious in comparison to their militant nationalist opponents in the North, who possessed an abundance of hunting grounds and a superior army, putting them in a far stronger position to resist American demands. Although Spotted Tail and the majority of Lakhóta headmen eventually entered further treaties and agency agreements with the United States they still maintained significant control, political influence, and decision making within Lakhóta agency society.⁴⁸ Unfortunately, their politically pragmatic gamble came at a cost.

Once Lakhóta capitulators formally agreed to submit themselves and their followers to their respective agencies, Indian Agents and American military officers enforced laws that efficiently and drastically altered many major aspects of Lakhóta life. Immediately upon arrival at an agency, all Lakhótas were forced to surrender their weapons and horses. Without horses or guns, Lakhóta autonomy was effectively eliminated. Lacking the staples of their culture, Lakhótas were no longer capable of providing sustenance to their people or acquiring goods to sustain their economy. Lakhóta warriors who surrendered to the agencies were stripped of their identity and consequently, the Lakhóta people as a whole became largely reliant on the American government for food and employment.⁴⁹ Unable to leave the agency without special permission from the U.S. military or government, the days of freely hunting wild game and roaming the Northern Plains became a mere memory.⁵⁰

The only manner in which an agency Lakhóta could escape confinement and acquire a weapon or horse was to enlist as an Indian Scout in the U.S. Army or become an agency policeman. Those that joined the U.S. Army were to attack “enemy” Native Americans such as the Nez Perce as

they desperately fled towards refuge in Canada.⁵¹ Those that became agency police arrested “unlawful” agency Lakhótas in addition to capturing and returning Lakhótas fleeing the agencies to join the free bands of Crazy Horse or Sitting Bull. Both of these pseudo-warrior occupations were a compensation for the freedoms of the pre-agency Lakhóta warrior societies.⁵² Migration to the camps of their nationalist relatives in the North became an increasing occurrence for those opposed to these features of agency life. The Northern Lakhótas, at war with both the Anglo and Native Americans in the region, successfully maintained the nomadic warrior society for another decade.⁵³

While the regional dynamics of the Southern Lakhóta territories encouraged early permanent agency residence by “Loafers” and “mixed-bloods,” and the eventual surrender of Spotted Tail and Red Cloud’s followers, in the Northern Black Hills, Belle Fourche, and Cheyenne River region, the radically different Northern Lakhóta territories encouraged the development of a nationalistic and militant branch of Lakhóta society. This section analyzes the geographical and military features of the Northern Lakhótas. In particular, the valuable territory they controlled, their unified nationalist ideology, and the exceptional military leadership, with an emphasis on the brilliance of Crazy Horse as a political and military tactician allowed them to be successful against the United States in warfare.

Considering the scale of Anglo invasion would not come close to resembling that of the Northern Platte until after the Battle of Little Big Horn, unlike the Southern Lakhótas who were limited in their viable responses due to their location and proximity to whites, the Northern Lakhótas essentially had free range and control of their main areas of habitation. Additionally, thanks to their military dominance in wars with other Native Americans, they were also in control of a far greater range of hunting grounds than their southern relatives. This allowed the Northern Lakhótas to turn to a variety of locations to supplement their food stocks with deer, antelope, and other wild game when buffalo were sparse in the area; a luxury that their southern relatives

48 This political fracturing, seen in Lakhóta society, between political leaders adopting either a policy of militarily nationalistic or pragmatic accommodationist response towards foreign attempts to regulate or take over their government should come as little surprise when considering the political history of the Lakhótas within the greater history of imperial attempts at political repression. This historically thematic political split occurs across cultures and time periods. Demonstrative of this argument is the Irish political response to Britain’s Act of Union of 1800 and the similar fracturing in political ideology between the nationalistic Young Irelanders and political pragmatist, Daniel O’Connell. For detailed historical work on the Irish response to the Act of Union, see J.C. Beckett’s *The Making of Modern Ireland* pgs. 306-351.

49 Ruby, Robert. *The Oglala Sioux: Warriors in Transition*. New York: Vantage Press, 1955.

50 Bray, Kingsley. “Crazy Horse and the End of the Great Sioux War.” 94-115. & Bray, Kingsley M.. “‘We Belong to the North’: The Flights of the Northern Indians from the White River Agencies, 1877-1878.” 28-47.

51 For a detailed historical work on the Nez Perces’ resistance, see Elliott West’s *The Last Indian War: The Nez Perce Story*.

52 Garnett, William, Valentine McGillicuddy, Carroll Friswold, and Robert A. Clark. *The Killing of Chief Crazy Horse: three eyewitness views*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988. Hinman, Eleanor. “Oglala Sources on the Life of Crazy Horse, Interviews Given to Eleanor H Hinman” *Nebraska History* 57 (1976): 1-52., & Pearson, Jeffrey. “Tragedy at Red Cloud Agency: The Surrender, Confinement, and Death of Crazy Horse.” *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 55.2 (2005): 14-27. Print.

53 Bray, Kingsley M.. “‘We Belong to the North’: The Flights of the Northern Indians from the White River Agencies, 1877-1878.”

did not possess.⁵⁴ By controlling the Black Hills region, the Northern Lakhótas had access to, as Sitting Bull remarked in an 1875 speech, “the food pack of the people.” During times of poverty these Lakhótas could turn to the Black Hills as a nineteenth-century food bank.⁵⁵

In addition to the advantageous geographical location of the Northern Lakhótas, their other main strength lay in their military prowess and leadership. The Northern Lakhótas were able to strengthen their horse economy and military through frequent raids and battles against neighboring peoples such as the Crows and Shoshones.⁵⁶ While all Lakhóta bands warred and raided neighboring peoples, the unusually high military success rate the Northern Lakhótas experienced allowed them to develop into the strongest military group.⁵⁷ Therefore, by the time U.S. agents began attempting to control Lakhóta territory, and consistently failed to adhere to treaty stipulations, a distinct Lakhóta subculture had taken hold in the north, characterized by notions of military supremacy. This subculture espoused exceedingly nationalistic and militant doctrines, even by Lakhóta standards.

The main constituents amongst this Northern Lakhóta society were the Northern Oglala, primarily of the Hunkpatila band, closely allied with the Mnikhówožus; while the Itázipčhos, Sihásapas, and O’ohe Nuŋpas remained more loosely aligned with the Hunkpatila Oglala. Of the more distant Lakhóta bands, similar to the Oglala alliance with the Mnikhówožus, the Húŋkpap̄has also frequently engaged in militarily and political pacts with the Hunkpatila. An increase in interactions with northernmost kin was also caused by the increasing necessity of non-agency Lakhótas to range further north and west towards Canada and Yellowstone in the hunt for buffalo herds.⁵⁸ Additionally, the Lakhótas’ possession of indispensable territories, as well as their high military success rate, led to the development of a more fundamentalist national identity. This identity consistently emphasized isolationist policies, militant responses to threats against sovereignty, culture, and economy and minimal negotiation with the enemy.

By the mid-1850s, after the continued diffusion of militant-nationalistic ideology, the Northern Lakhóta conglomerate had become even more prominent and influential. Support for this political stance among northern people was fueled by infrequent disinterest in interacting with American military personnel and Indian agents, suspicions towards treaty provisions, particularly how “annuities committed Lakotas to land cessions like those that marked the

Eastern Dakota agreements in Minnesota,” and the increased meddling of American representatives in intertribal disagreements.⁵⁹ Despite this militant view of the Americans, these Lakhótas did not openly seek conflict. Rather, their previous military success and flourishing national identity simply produced a mindset that would not accept an invasion or purchase of their land and would respond to intrusion with the appropriate force.⁶⁰ At the core of this Northern Lakhóta political-military ideology was Crazy Horse, whose emphasis on weapons improvement, shift in Lakhóta military tactics, and distinct leadership in politics and on the battlefield was arguably the greatest asset to the Northern Lakhótas, and helps explain their consistent victories against the American military.

While the Lakhótas were certainly not intimidated by the military prowess of the American army, by 1857 they understood the limitations in their weaponry compared to the Americans. Warrior headmen therefore “recommended hit-and-run raids by small war parties, running off army horses and beef herds,” and surprising and killing military personnel quickly and retreating when the numbers no longer favored them.⁶¹ After multiple joint council meetings between the Oglalas and Húŋkpap̄has in the late 1850s further emphasized the importance of breaking the military stalemate in the Crow War, the first major alteration to the Lakhóta military stratagem took shape, eventually becoming a major factor in the Lakhóta battles against the whites. Inspired by his thunder spirit, this tactic was characterized by “fronting charges to act as the leading edge of an unpredictable lightning like strike.”⁶² With oblique lines of charging horsemen, and with Tašúŋke Witkó dangerously and inspirationally leading significantly ahead of the charge, the Lakhóta military had a viable solution to their struggle with the Crows and eventual full-scale war with the American army.

By the early 1860s, Lakhóta military tactics no longer focused solely on combat against Crows and American military personnel; wasicu (white) trading posts, ranches, and migrants passing through the region also became targets of raids and Lakhóta guerilla tactics. Although the attacks were typically small scale, they had astonishing effects in driving out whites and discouraging American military retribution, as the United States did not possess the means to successfully execute search-and-destroy missions when the Northern Lakhótas were at their peak of resistance participation.⁶³ The final phase of the Lakhóta response, full scale warfare with the American military, like the guerilla tactics, would also need to be strategically altered in order to trans-

54 Bray, Kingsley M.. *Crazy Horse: a Lakota life*. 46.

55 Ibid., 187.

56 Bull, Amos Bad Heart , and Helen Heather Blish. *A Pictographic History of the Oglala Sioux*.

57 Bray, Kingsley M.. *Crazy Horse: a Lakota life*. 20. & Walker, J. R., and Raymond J. DeMallie. *Lakota society*. 28-40.

58 Bray, Kingsley M.. *Crazy Horse: a Lakota life*. 152-156.

59 Ibid., 26-29.

60 Ibid., 116.

61 Ibid., 54. & “Crazy Horse’s Treachery: How He Laid a Trap for General Crook - The Latter Has a Narrow Escape.”

62 Bray, Kingsley M.. *Crazy Horse: a Lakota life*. 56-60.

63 Ibid., 96.

late to victory. Crazy Horse likely realized this after the stalemate at the Wagon Box Fight, August 2, 1867. In instances of larger scale battles, the traditional “fixed-position strategy” seen at the Fetterman and Wagon Box Fights, “reminiscent of woodland Indian warfare against colonial period troops” would no longer be effective given the further advancement of American military weaponry and the increasing willingness of the post Civil War American government to increase the number of deployed troops.⁶⁴

In light of this, Crazy Horse and the Northern Lakhótas turned to two responsive strategies. Firstly, the Lakhótas made aggressive efforts to replace and increase the percentage of warriors equipped with guns. While the majority of Lakhóta warriors at the time of the Wagon Box Fight were equipped with smoothbore flintlocks, at the Battles of Rosebud and Little Big Horn, Springfield breechloaders and Henry and Winchester repeating rifles were far more effective and prominent within the Northern Lakhóta army. Through trade of buffalo robes and mules with the Canadian plains Métis and unlicensed itinerants, one-fifth of Lakhóta warriors owned repeaters and one-half owned some kind of gun. The effects of Tašúŋke Witkó’s weapons campaign, which began in 1866, were clearly felt by the American military at Rosebud and Little Big Horn.⁶⁵ Secondly, Crazy Horse emphasized a shift away from the sedentary, fixed-position, massed foot charges seen in previous years. The characteristically small party and at times highly disorganized surprise guerilla tactics that succeeded in raids and small scale military conflicts needed to be translated onto large scale warfare.⁶⁶

Crazy Horse’s military instincts stressed open action, in which the Lakhótas forced rapidly deployed mounted warriors against a moving foe in open terrain. His kicamayan tactic emphasized attacking during the moment of maximum instability, keeping American soldiers on the run, and preventing them from securing a permanent defensive position. In the heat of battle, mounted Lakhóta warriors could count on their superior riding skills as well as their “shock and rapid-response capabilities, to isolate troop units.”⁶⁷ If the Northern Lakhótas were able to isolate and attack disoriented army units, the United States command structure, its “chief asset,” would be negated. Without the hierarchical command structure guiding its troops, American soldiers would likely panic.⁶⁸ While the more disciplined Lakhóta warriors, possessing a far greater motivation to fight, would remain desperately composed no matter the circumstan-

es.⁶⁹

Shortly before the battles of Rosebud and Little Big Horn, Tašúŋke Witkó and Thatháŋka Íyotake were elected head war chiefs of the Northern Lakhóta military.⁷⁰ With the national-militant ranks reaching their climax in terms of cross-*ti-ospayepi* participation, the changes to the culture and military, spearheaded by Tašúŋke Witkó and other Northern Lakhóta nationalists, would soon be on display in the successful full scale military victories at the Battles of Rosebud and Little Big Horn.⁷¹ In both Rosebud and Little Big Horn, Crazy Horse’s kicamayan tactics and the significant upgrades in weapons proved to be key factors in ensuring the resounding defeat of the United States Army.⁷²

In addition to the new military strategy improving the general effectiveness of Lakhóta combat, the reassuring presence and reputation of Crazy Horse amongst his people, which translated to effective leadership on the battlefield, played a major role in future successful Lakhóta campaigns. As Tašúŋke Witkó solidified his reputation among the Lakhótas, he attracted an unprecedented number of followers from almost every Lakhóta band. Those who joined the Hunkpatila war camp were not limited to Lakhótas, by the 1870s, Northern Cheyenne and Arapaho military headmen were also aligning themselves with the Northern Lakhótas. Additionally, Crazy Horse’s modest demeanor also likely accounts for such an immense following; although frequently chosen as a leader, he “had no ambition to be a chief,” often more interested in servicing his people as a warrior, scout, hunter, and spiritual visionary than as a politician.⁷³

64 Ibid., 112.

65 Ibid., 167.

66 Ibid., 108-115.

67 Ibid., 112.

68 Spring, Agnes Wright, and Caspar Weaver Collins. *Caspar Collins: the life and exploits of an Indian fighter of the sixties*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1927.

69 Bray, Kingsley M.. *Crazy Horse: a Lakota life*. 211.

70 Vestal, Stanley. *Sitting Bull, Champion of the Sioux: A Biography*. Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1932.

Vestal, Stanley. *Warpath, the true story of the fighting Sioux told in a biography of Chief White Bull*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984.

71 Neihardt, John, Black Elk, & DeMallie, Raymond. *The Sixth Grandfather: Black Elk’s teachings given to John G. Neihardt*. 170. In the second week of May 1876, Little Big Man went south to the Red Cloud Agency and swayed the opinion of one hundred lodges of Oglala to join the war effort, numerous Brulé and other Lakhóta bands would join them as well, leaving from the White River region.

72 “The Custer Fight.” *The Bismarck Tribune* 11 June 1877: 2. Print., Message from the President of the United States, transmitting, in compliance with a Senate resolution of July 7, 1876, information in relation to the hostile demonstrations of the Sioux Indians, and the disaster to the forces under General Custer. July 13, 1876. - Read, ordered to lie on the table, and be printed. Besides the general specifics from 199-234 in Bray’s work, for more specific instances throughout both battles in *Crazy Horse*, see the dismantling of the Royall detachment (209), the psychological and militarily destructive effects of the weapons upgrades (211), and Crazy Horse’s leadership in combat (220).

73 Garnett Interview, Tablet 2, Ricker, Eli Seavey, and Richard E. Jensen. *Voice of the American West, Volume 1*.

Crazy Horse's patience also frequently ensured the continued success of the Lakhóta military. According to He Dog, "He didn't like to start a battle, unless he had it all planned out in his head and knew he was going to win. He always used judgment and played safe."⁷⁴ Additionally, similar to Spotted Tail's political influence being limited by the emphases on individualism as well as total group consensus, Crazy Horse was certainly still limited by the dynamics of Lakhóta politics. If the headmen of the tribe came to a consensus on a given matter that opposed Crazy Horse, he had to honor the will and wishes of his people.⁷⁵

In Lakhóta histories, as well as in the narratives written by historians, Crazy Horse has often been portrayed as lacking either the acumen or interest to participate in Lakhóta political leadership.⁷⁶ In reality, Crazy Horse's position as the most influential war leader of the Lakhótas made him a highly influential political representative whose opinion was sought out regardless of his political ambitions. Therefore, Crazy Horse's decision never to visit agencies, remain silent throughout the majority of Lakhóta political councils, disassociate himself from treaty negotiations, and ignore diplomatic advances by the American military and government was as much a political announcement to his people as a Red Cloud or Spotted Tail speech.⁷⁷ By not engaging in political debate or negotiation with whites, Crazy Horse's message was clear, whatever results negotiation with the Americans yielded, they would not benefit his people and therefore the Northern Lakhótas would not adhere to their stipulations.

This nationalistic stance effectively undermined the efforts and rhetoric the accommodationist leaders attempted to spread in the North. On the rare occasion that Crazy Horse did engage in Lakhóta political debates, his discussion centered on a marked increase in Lakhóta nationalism and militancy.⁷⁸ He denounced dependency on rations for food and clothing and American treaty violations, and emphasized protecting Lakhóta land at all costs, encouraging a return to traditional Lakhóta practices, and completely rejecting American influences. Individuals that went against

these emphases or tried to capitulate to the American agencies were threatened with having their horses killed, or in the case of large scale consideration of capitulation, open civil warfare.⁷⁹

Crazy Horse's own individual recruitment of warriors in order to increase and strengthen the Northern Lakhótas also demonstrates his political leadership and acumen. In order to promote more widespread warrior solidarity, Crazy Horse called upon the Hoksi Hakata, or Last Born Child Society. These individuals were the fiercest and bravest warriors within the Northern Lakhótas, and their lack of a clear cut hierarchy and officers or flashy uniforms endeared them across many Lakhóta bands. They helped spread the anti-treaty and agency edict and provided a previously unseen, supremely talented, and disciplined group of warriors on the battlefield.⁸⁰

Upon the conclusion of the Battle of Little Big Horn, the Northern Lakhóta nation was at a crossroads. After such a resounding victory, the momentum was clearly in the Lakhótas' favor. In order to maintain their stranglehold on the region and continue their military success, the Northern Lakhótas needed to depart from their systematic post-summer diffusion and remain more closely united than was typical for their society.

However, Lakhóta leaders were unable to reach a consensus on the appropriate future strategy. Not surprisingly, the decentralized nature of Lakhóta society won out, with bands carrying out operations from their own perspectives and motivations. Significant groups of political leaders and lodges elected to move south in search of buffalo and eventual agency refuge. While Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse reached a pact to maintain their military campaign against the United States, neither leader would budge on their subsequent strategies. Sitting Bull stressed the need to head north for more plentiful buffalo and a restocking of weap-

74 Hinman, Eleanor. "Oglala Sources on the Life of Crazy Horse, Interviews Given to Eleanor H Hinman," 14.

75 De Barthe, Joseph. *The life and adventures of Frank Grouard : chief of scouts, U. S. A.* Missouri: Combe Printing Company, 1894.

76 Garnett Interview, Tablet 2, Ricker, Eli Seavey, and Richard E. Jensen. *Voice of the American West, Volume 1.* Opinions on Crazy Horse such as Billy Garnett's exemplify this perspective. According to Garnett, Tašúnke Witkó was "good for nothing but to be a warrior," and was disinterested in Lakhóta politics because of his frequent silence in non-military council meetings.

77 Bray, Kingsley M.. *Crazy Horse: a Lakota life.* 84.

78 "General Crook Reviews Indian Warriors - "Crazy Horse" and other Chiefs Make Speeches." *San Francisco Bulletin* 26 May 1877: 1. Print.

79 Bray, Kingsley M.. *Crazy Horse: a Lakota life.* 75. & Clark, Wissler. "Societies and ceremonial associations in the Oglala division of the Teton-Dakota." *Anthropological paper of the AMNH* 11.1 (1912):9.

80 Bray, Kingsley M.. *Crazy Horse: a Lakota life.* 177-178. Bray emphasizes that Crazy Horse was acutely aware of the dynamics of his own culture, and used it to his peoples' advantage: "Crazy Horse selected as members the younger sons of prominent families. Older sons, Crazy Horse was well aware, were typically favored with preferment and the family birthright, and therefore they were most amenable to the consensual compromises of the elders. With less to lose, the Last-Born were more likely to hold stubbornly to the principles of nontreaty status. Psychologically, too, Crazy Horse showed keen insight into warrior motivation. Society member Eagle Elk observed that younger sons were fiercely competitive. "If they did great deeds or something very brave, then they would have greater honor than the first child. They were always making themselves greater."

ons and ammunition in trade with the Métis.⁸¹ Tašúŋke Witkó, in contrast, was hesitant to abandon residence in the Black Hills region; he likely felt that to remove his people from their heartland, even if for only the fall and winter months would be disastrous.⁸² Exposing the Black Hills to unresisted settlement by Anglos would effectively eliminate any chances at sustained military success or total societal independence.⁸³ After an American detachment surprised Thatháŋka Íyotake's followers and forced them to flee into Canada, Tašúŋke Witkó remained the sole military headman left to defend the most crucial region of the Northern Lakhóta territory.⁸⁴

The sudden isolation of Crazy Horse's followers essentially sealed the fate of the Northern Lakhótas. The continued dispersal, despite the acknowledged risks, of political and military leaders following the victory of Little Big Horn exposed Crazy Horse's band and followers to eventual engulfment by the American army. Despite numerous military engagements with the Americans, Crazy Horse managed to evade capture and heavy loss at the hands of the American military for about a year.⁸⁵ However, without the atypical unity seen in the months leading up to the Battle of Little Big Horn, Crazy Horse realized the futility in leading his dwindling followers into any further battles with the American army. As supplies ran low, and voices of agency capitulation heightened within even the most militant and national tipis, Crazy Horse became the last of the Lakhótas to yield to the American agency in early May, 1877.⁸⁶

The fluidity and decentralization that was a consistent characteristic of the Lakhóta culture from the eighteenth to nineteenth-centuries proved to be a source of both their rapid expansion and their ultimate demise. Upon their crossing of the Missouri River at the turn of the eighteenth-century, the political flexibility and independent action around which Lakhóta society and politics revolved allowed for all seven *ti-ospayepi* to benefit from economic expansion and newly established trade networks. Similarly, thanks to the increase in horse acquisition, as the Lakhótas rapidly spread their empire from the Upper Platte and Black Hills

– north towards the Canadian border, south into Colorado, and west into Wyoming and Montana – all Lakhótas reaped the benefits brought about by new hunting territories and the increased material wealth afforded through trade. Yet as the regions into which the seven *ti-ospayepi* spread became increasingly geographically and culturally distinct, the Lakhóta nation essentially contained a different small-scale society within each regional group. Consequently, political interests and policies became increasingly geared towards the specific needs of the regional bands.

As demonstrated in Parts II and III, the diversity of the Lakhótas and the regions they inhabited eventually produced distinct and at times oppositional groups, who were so accustomed to making decisions independently of one another that the notion of concession and compromise in order to produce a more unified front against the United States was unachievable. By studying this feature of Lakhóta culture, one can better understand how Lakhóta society fostered such diverse actions as permanent agency residence by “Loafers” and “mixed-bloods;” the eventual surrender of Spotted Tail, Red Cloud, and their followers to Indian agencies; the formation of a nationalistic-militant northern society; and the separation of the Northern political and military leaders at the end of Little Big Horn, despite the obvious risk to the demise of their freedom in the North.

In conclusion, this paper argues that the decentralized nature of Lakhóta society allowed for politically similar groups to make decisions without compromise to the needs of politically opposed groups. Shaped by their geopolitically based needs, this feature of the Lakhóta political decision making process explains how the Northern Plains empire produced two dramatically different factions in the second half of the nineteenth century. These two groups primarily differed on their response to American encroachment into Lakhóta land. The response to U.S. imperialism, heavily influenced by geopolitical features, led to the southern coalition engaging in political diplomacy and peace with Anglo-Americans, and the northern coalition employing fundamental nationalist policies and open warfare with Anglo-Americans. The Southern Lakhótas' acceptance of treaties with the United States and transfers onto agencies, as well as the Northern Lakhótas' nationalistic based military response to American encroachment both have their roots in the fundamental Lakhóta political concept of decentralized decision making; this concept allowed for each individual within Lakhóta society to choose between autonomy or agency.

81 Bray, Kingsley M.. “Crazy Horse and the End of the Great Sioux War.” 94-115.

82 Military expedition against the Sioux Indians. July 15, 1876. -- Referred to the Committee on Military Affairs. July 18, 1876. -- Recommitted to the Committee on Military Affairs and ordered to be printed.

83 Bray, Kingsley M.. “Crazy Horse and the End of the Great Sioux War.”94-115.

84 Ibid.

85 Pearson, Jeffrey. “Nelson A. Miles, Crazy Horse, and the Battle of Wolf Mountains.” *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 51.4 (2001): 52-67. Print.

86 Pearson, Jeffrey. “Tragedy at Red Cloud Agency: The Surrender, Confinement, and Death of Crazy Horse.” 14-27.