AN INTERDISCIPLINARY RE-EXAMINATION OF AMERICAN FLAG IMAGERY IN LAKOTA BEADWORK

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AN INTERDISCIPLINARY RE-EXAMINATION OF

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BEADWORK

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Abstract: This thesis reexamines the deployment of American flag imagery in in late nineteenth century Indigenous Lakota beadwork. The profusion of flag imagery by Lakota women artists is well documented as a phenomenon, yet despite the depth of scholarly attention the previous examinations have resulted in patronizing and unsubstantiated conclusions portraying the Lakota as blindly expressing patriotism in these works. Utilizing contemporary womanist/Indigenous frameworks is a more productive exercise and re-centers these artworks as visual evidence of complex identities in settler colonial spaces, both material and intellectual. These works are a record of the creative and fraught borrowing of symbols of power, an exercise in resistance and survival, and the balanced role of women in Lakota culture prior to colonial pressures. Contemporary theories on settler colonial power dynamics can better illuminate the aims of the Lakota women artists and the very real world results this borrowing brought upon the wearers and makers of beaded flag motifs.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO LAKOTA BEADWORK AS ART

This research is an attempt to untangle the threads of intent, creation, ownership, payout, and benefit that have been garnered from diverse players from an overlooked and misunderstood selection of artworks belonging to the Lakota people. In the late nineteenth century, a small group of Lakota women artists on the North American plains created vast quantities of elaborately beaded garments and objects as an expression of their culture, belief, and as an active method of coping with change in violent and uncertain times.[1] This amazing body of works is generally not accorded the status of Fine Art, is diminutively referred to in academic and scholarly work as just beadwork, and has been a neglected chapter in the art history discipline.[2]

The quantity of Lakota beadwork is staggering. There are many thousands of items in museums across the US and Europe. This mass of ornamented wearable artworks stands as contrary evidence to the media representations and historical tropes of Indigenous poverty, both material and intellectual. The intricacy, scale, craftswomanship, and graphic quality is often startling to modern observers who primarily have been taught a narrative of marginal survival and gradual disappearance of Indigenous people. The symbolism embedded in these artworks is opaque to modern audiences, scholarly and

[1] Barbara Hail, *Hau, Kóla!:the Plains Indian collection of the Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology*,(Providence, RI: The Museum, Brown University, 1993) 46, 59.

[2] Janet Catherine Berlo, Ruth B. Phillips, *Native North American Art, Second Edition*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015) 133, 134. Within this standard book often used as a textbook there are only a couple of pages devoted to beadwork and none of the text addresses content, form, or design of the artwork.

general, who have rarely had opportunity or inclination to engage with Indigenous cultural expression. Those groups that have engaged with this Indigenous artistic material have primarily been anthropologists, ethnographers, both professional and amateur, and collectors.[3] The Lakota people themselves have been sidelined from the institutional, cultural, and scholarly engagement and production of knowledge from this wealth of material and intellectual history.[4] As a result the knowledge making derived from Lakota beadwork has largely been conducted by and for the benefit of the academic disciplines of anthropology and ethnography, and has excluded the Lakota people.

As a visual introduction to Lakota beadwork and how it was employed in the late nineteenth century we can examine this photo of a Lakota mother with three children. (FIGURE 1) In many ways this is a typical late nineteenth century portrait of a woman in the American west. It appears the family has pulled together funds for a quick portrait taken by one of the many itinerant photographers roaming western towns of the late nineteenth century. She is quickly posed outside, seated in a chair, surrounded by what we presume are her three children. She is wearing a typical late nineteenth century dress, and her children wear cotton/wool clothing, and leather shoes. They are posed at her side against a rather stark landscape devoid of buildings or landmarks. Only two visual features betray her as unbelonging with the white western frontier trope besides her skin color; she wears her hair in two braids in Native fashion and the children are wearing and holding an abundance of beadwork. The small toddler boy at her side wears a beaded vest and breeches, the other toddler girl a beaded vest, and the older girl proudly displays her beaded toy cradleboard. The children are covered in the beaded ornamentation that is the artistic highlight of Lakota women in the late nineteenth century.

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[3] Janet Catherine Berlo, *The Early Years of Native American Art History: The Politics of Scholarship and Collecting*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1992.), 1.
[4] Janet Catherine Berlo and Ruth B. Phillips, "Our (museum) World Turned Upside Down: Re-Presenting Native American Arts." *The Art Bulletin*, Volume 77, No. 1 (1995), 6.

On close inspection of the beadwork, we can also see an additional curiosity of design; two of the fully beaded objects, the cradleboard and the girl's vest, bear American flag motifs. The flags are interspersed with the Indigenous Lakota geometric designs and rendered in Lakota style beadwork, an unlikely pairing of method, material, context and meaning. This photo begs us to ask questions. Is this an American scene, a Lakota scene, a maternal scene or an image of colonial subjects? This image is all these things at once. Colonialism, subversion, acquiescence, reluctance, contradiction, and pride in quick snapshot.

The cradleboard is a toy designed to instruct girls in the care of children and the making of cradleboards, yet it also bears a pair of American flags on each side. The small clothing items are cut in an Anglo fashion, but the ornamentation itself marks it as a kind of garment that white children would never wear. The method is Lakota, the forms colonial, the designs both spiritual and pragmatic. The woman's dress is simple, humble, but very Anglo and would signify a level of assimilation. Some of the children wear leather shoes, while the boy wears moccasins. The way she chose to represent her family through visual signals as both assimilating, to a point, but also proud wearers and owners of beadwork in traditional and adapted Anglo forms is a complicated depiction of identity through dress and art. She is attempting to occupy several states of colonial belonging simultaneously with a range of symbolic contradictions. The overall effect is one of a constant moving back and forth over the lines of identity, belonging, and duplicity. These flags flash like small warning signs; these are out of place, this is unexpected, and this is somehow a sign of something larger at work.

This photo is our introduction to the presence of American flags in Lakota beadwork, a curious visual expression of the settler colonial relationships imposed upon the Lakota people and the central question of this research. Why did these revered and respected artists incorporate the flag symbol into the works of art intended to impart protection, honor, and identity for their beloved family members, and

most poignantly, small children?[5] Did these symbols signal assimilation, resistance, subversion, or a plea for mercy from the terrors of settler colonial incursion? If assimilation, why not simply use an actual flag? That these symbols are rendered in beadwork is the core of the strangeness, the not quite rightness of these works. The possible meanings these symbols held for Lakota women beadworkers and the community members who would wear and display these symbols is the object of this research. Addressing the previous theories that have been promoted by scholarly and institutional parties, and how these theories served those institutions is necessary to understanding the legacy these works have had outside the Lakota community. Correcting those inaccurate and harmful theories is a secondary goal of this research.

To begin to understand the contradictions and questions posed by flags in beadwork we must define the material artistic culture of the Lakota in the late nineteenth century and what became of the majority of these works. As a working artist, scholar, and collections manager I frequently visit museums far from the North American Plains teeming with Lakota beadwork, storage shelves filled with beaded pipe bags, moccasins, saddlebags, dress tops, vests, and a litany of other forms. All with maker unnamed, attribution or community of origin murky, and usually with no clear intention on the part of the institution to exhibit, learn from, share, or even acknowledge the presence of these objects of devotion and pride.[6] The objects sit, mostly silent, mostly in the dark, very far from home. It is a sobering experience as an art historian who is also an Indigenous community member.

The original intent of these beaded artworks as expressions of culture, beauty and pride in their home community is unacknowledged by most institutions, few makers are named, and the acquisition methods shrouded to cover past illicit actions. Very few Lakota families today have intact collections of their own material heritages, most of it stolen or coerced from their possession, knowledge, and use by the

[5] Janet Catherine Berlo, Ruth B. Phillips, *Native North American Art,* 133.
[6] Hail, *Hau, Kóla!*, 29.

imbalanced effects of salvage anthropology and acquisitiveness of amateur ethnography.[7] This is the legacy and reality of Lakota beaded artworks in collections today.

The efforts to reframe the relationship between tribal communities, historic tribal art, and the institutions and individual collectors that now hold those objects is a complicated and ongoing project. Author Chip Colwell in *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits: Inside the Fight to Reclaim Native America's Culture* explores the contemporary struggle for Indigenous peoples of the Americas to "reclaim their stolen heritage from museums and private collections."[8] This reclamation is for both the intellectual and physical culture, the material objects and the system of knowledge making extracted from these objects by the disciplines of anthropology, ethnography, and late but not last, art history. Colwell quotes advocate and Principal Chief of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Nations Gordon Yellowman, Sr. responding to visiting museums as an advocate working for the return of tribal art and Indigenous human remains, "I never did spend time in museums, every time I went, there was always a smell. In some museums it is greater than others. It is a foreign smell. It is not the smell of life, it is not the smell of spirit, it is not the smell of beauty, it is not the smell of freedom. It is the smell of death. I learned later on that a lot of the objects were covered with chemicals for preservation."[9] Yellowman was likely responding to the utilization of arsenic as a pesticide done by museums in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to extend the lifespan of the object.[10] This preservation was done without irony or consideration that the object is now dowsed in poison, thereby having its life as defined by the makers of these works

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[7] Marla N. Powers, *Oglala Women: Myth Ritual and Reality*, (Chicago, Il, University of Chicago Press, 1986), 138, Berlo and Phillips, "Our (museum) World Turned Upside Down", 7.
[8] Chip Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits: Inside the Fight to Reclaim Native America's Culture*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017) 3.
[9] Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits,* 110.
[10] Davis, Lee. "Historical Survey of the Sources of Contamination of Ethnographic Materials in Museum Collections," *Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections, Collection Forum*, Summer 2001, Vol. 16, Numbers 1 and 2, 2-11.

suspended. The presence of arsenic in museum collections is now a major hazard for museum personnel and effectively denies the possibility of future cultural reintegration.[11]

While the presence of Lakota art isolated in institutions and private collections is one kind of solemn story, this research addresses a specific subset of this legacy that has been employed by institutions in a very different fashion from the larger corpus of Lakota beadwork. This subset of Lakota beaded artworks that include the American flag motif have been aggressively collected and exhibited by institutions and private collectors who were and still are intrigued by the presence of flags. These collections have responded not to a Lakota cultural meaning, but to a collective colonial and nationalistic agenda. The meaning of flags in Lakota beadwork has been theorized and debated by scholarly and institutional interests, but the many possible meanings have never been addressed by a stakeholder willing to prioritize Lakota experiences and culture.[12] Non-native collectors consistently try to make the flags in Lakota beadwork mean something positive or sympathetic to the myth of the United States. This search for positivistic meaning is undermined by the curious tensions of the American flag within Lakota beadwork. That tension is described by anthropologists Douglas Schmittou and Michael Logan in a 2002 paper addressing the flag motif question, as "one of the most intriguing paradoxes confronting scholars who specialize in the analysis of Native American material culture."[13] This paradox of a people who resisted American occupation violently and suddenly embraces the visual symbol of their oppressor is problematic, and that this paradox exists is widely acknowledged in the fields of anthropology and ethnography. Yet the narrow range of evidence and methodologies used to interpret flags in beadwork has created a correspondingly limited range of answers.

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[11] Field Museum, Chicago, IL. Author interview with Conservation Department staff, May 18, 2022.
[12] Janet Catherine Berlo*, The Early Years of Native American Art History*, 4.
[13] Douglas A. Schmittou and Michael H. Logan, "Fluidity of Meaning: Flag Imagery in Plains Indian Art," *American Indian Quarterly*, Autumn, 2002, Vol. 26, No. 4, (Autumn 2002) pp. 559-604. 559.

In engaging with these artworks, collectors and institutions are perpetuating what anthropologist William K. Powers describes as cultural dis-integration. W. K. Powers defines cultural dis-integration as the when objects have been "selectively removed from their functional, integrative past and transformed into a novel existence, sentenced to aesthetic exile, legally plagiarized from an ancient tradition, and molded into a new cultural category which never before existed."[14] By specifically choosing these items for the flag motif, removing them from cultural contexts, and exhibiting them in an institutional setting devoid of original intent or creation the institutions are dismantling the integration of object to culture.[15] This cultural disintegration is specifically detrimental to artworks with flags as the meaning of the flag motif is serving a new purpose for the new non-native possessor, with connotations of Americanism far removed from Lakota sensibilities of meaning and intent.[16] W. K. Powers asserts that it is important to remember there is a critical difference to representations of flags and the real flags as used by the military and settler community stating, "The real American flag and its many functions – at celebrations, boarding school, funerary rituals – provide part of the badly needed mythological rationale for the genre, but the real genre is composed of representations of flags in beadwork, quillwork, painting and other techniques. The representations are not real."[17] He powerfully evokes the process of the destruction and exclusion of original contexts to these works. However, even his passionate defense of Lakota ownership of the meaning and intent of these works absents the most powerful factor for the intent of these works, the gender of the makers and the power and authority of that gender within Lakota society.

Every one of the artworks included in this question of flags in beadwork is made by women; women from a society in which women artists were revered and held in high respect.[18] That this fact of

[14] William K. Powers, "The American Flag in Lakota Art: An Ecology of Signs", *Whispering Wind*; Folsom Vol. 28, Iss. 2, (Aug 31, 1996), pp. 4-15. 6.
[15] W. K. Powers, "An Ecology of Signs",6.
[16] W. K. Powers, "An Ecology of Signs", 6.
[17] W. K. Powers, "An Ecology of Signs", 7.
[18] Janet Catherine Berlo, Ruth B. Phillips, *Native North American Art,* 133.

authorship has been completely ignored by all other previous scholars engaged in this question is not an accident and has been a major factor in the misattribution of meaning and use.

Settler colonial agendas crafted the circumstances under which Lakota women created these works and ongoing colonial agendas influenced and continue to affect the interpretation, collection, and presentation of these artworks. The circumstances were not neutral then and the interpretation has not been neutral now. In my readings the many interpretations that have been previously offered generally lack an empathetic interest in or understanding of Indigenous and specifically Lakota culture, have not been impartial in their effect on Lakota people, and are components of a larger program of inherently racist views towards Native people. These effects have had lasting real-world consequences outside of the art and museum realms, especially for Indigenous women.[19] In the resulting settler colonial culture inherited by our contemporary selves, we see the accumulated effects of stripping Indigenous people of artistic intent, political savvy, intellectual potential or achievement, and full agency over choices and futures. Redeeming an element of the agency, complexity, and full personhood of Indigenous women in this one area can contribute to a wider cultural shift towards viewing Indigenous women as empowered resilient artists.[20] Restoring agency of Indigenous women engaging with American flags in complex manners is a step towards restoring the full meaning of these objects within the culture and context of their making and preventing future misrepresentation.

If this problem were more comfortably within the confines of the Art History discipline, we would begin this process of re-examination by asking two questions that should be foremost in understanding the American flags in Lakota beadwork problem. Unfortunately, the absence of data evidence from these two questions serves to highlight the difficulty of performing research in these areas

[19] Nancy Marie Mithlo, *Knowing Native Arts*, (University of Nebraska Press: Lincoln, NE, 2020), 11.
[20] Nancy Marie Mithlo, *Our Indian Princess: Subverting the Stereotype, (*School for Advanced Research Press: Santa Fe, NM, 2009), 7.

of Indigenous women's history. First, we should ask, what do the historical records by and about Native women tells us about their own views on this art form and symbolic inclusion of the American flag? Second, what conclusions have previous art historians reached concerning this question in the past? While Lakota women were undoubtably the makers of all the beadwork material culture of this era there are virtually no records to my knowledge of any type by or about Indigenous women making this type of work. We simply have no known accounts of Lakota women speaking in their own voices concerning Lakota beadwork for this crucial period of innovation.[21] Schmittou and Logan remark in their paper *Fluidity of Meaning,* that it is remarkable that even in the firsthand accounts of anthropologists specifically studying iconography of the Lakota there is no mention of the flag motif. Noted anthropologist Clark Wissler's (1870-1947, American) papers have no mention of this motif, despite iconography being his primary focus while working in the Lakota and Dakota communities in the first decade of the 20th century. Very few women artists of any ethnicity are adequately represented in art history documentation in the nineteenth century, and even fewer records exist by or about Indigenous women, especially Indigenous women from a tribe in direct military conflict with the US government. The archive is totally absent Lakota women's statements and as such reflects the priorities and emphasis of the white, educated, American men creating that archive.

The second question regarding previous conclusions by art historians is a moot point, as nineteenth century beadwork has only recently and rarely been considered and studied as art rather than ethnographic or anthropological topic.[22] As a result, very few art historians have experience with Native art, and even less experience with historic Native art, and there are few corresponding views or literature from the art history perspective.[23] Instead, we must engage with the previous efforts by anthropologists, curators, and hobbyists to understand the conclusions and knowledge making proceeding us. These

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[21] Schmittou and Logan, "Fluidity of Meaning", 562.
[22] Berlo and Phillips, "Our (museum) World Turned Upside Down", 6.
[23] Mithlo, *Our Indian Princess*, ix.

disciplines were/are heavily influenced with burdens of misogyny, racism, and settler colonial values and as such have contributed to over a century of misreading. This misinterpretation has not been a benign factor, but one element in a constellation of factors influencing how the Lakota people have been seen and treated by the dominant society with effects reaching into voting and religious rights, government oversight, and community-based isolation and segregation.[24] Here we can ask how this question of flags in Lakota beadwork has been addressed in the past, what methods were used in those interpretations, and what are the lasting impacts on Indigenous peoples from that type of methodology, both specifically to this case study and more generally to Indigenous art understanding and institutional care.

While I re-examine the why behind the use of flag imagery, many anthropologists before have already firmly established the high quantity of flags in Lakota beadwork and the near exclusive use of the flag motif by Lakota artists as compared to other tribes in the pre WWI eras.[25] This paper does not intend or need to reproduce the previous quantitative efforts by scholars such as W. K. Powers, Pohrt, Logan, and Schmittou. Rather I am exploring the original act of art making by Lakota women with interdisciplinary frameworks and methodologies to reach new conclusions. Prioritizing the experiences, culture, and beliefs of the Lakota people, and especially Lakota women, functions as the best means for understanding meaning and impact. The interpretation of this artwork has generally focused on its politically and culturally loaded flag imagery from a colonial centered perspective but can be better interpreted utilizing the values and goals of the culture and individuals that made this artwork. Reinterpretation is a powerful tool in the arsenal of Indigenous people reclaiming artistic matrimony, current political and legal custodianship, and historic and future narratives.

I maintain that this collection of flag beadwork is a visual and physical legacy of the discomfort and incongruity of the settler colonial relationship. These objects are not simply the efforts of a frightened

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[24] Mithlo, *Knowing Native Arts*, 11.
[25] Schmittou and Logan, “Fluidity of Meaning”, 560.

populace seeking shelter behind symbols, or the begrudging but admiring acquiescence of surrender, or the naïve products of an unsophisticated primitive person blindly copying patterns. These flags in beadwork are the external sign of the very complicated relationship of the colonizer and colonized, of the very messy contradictory dialogue in settler colonial spaces. I further propose that mainstream reluctance to adequately address the possible meanings in flag themed beadwork is the colonizer response and discomfort of contemplating the ongoing discourse so pervasive in the settler colonial experience. I hope to illuminate this relationship and bring empathy and animation to the Lakota people of the early reservation period as fully conscious, politically self-aware artists.

As an effort to apply art history methodology, this thesis includes a close visual analysis of three items to develop a vocabulary and appropriate language for analysis of beadwork. Beadwork is rarely given the benefit of detailed examination, and this can be redressed to positive results in this paper. These visual analyses will be in chapter four and five. As a particular case study this reexamination includes a fully beaded cradleboard that was included in the *American Indian and the American Flag* Flint Institute 1976 exhibition. My research involved a visit to the Philbrook Museum to inspect and photograph the cradleboard and examine the flag motifs in greater detail. That analysis will be in Chapter five with a discussion of the flag motif in children's clothing. (FIGURE 2)

To undertake a reexamination of these works I am relying on the theoretical frameworks and examples in the works of historians and scholars who have paved a way forward with new manners of working with the reality of the colonially constructed archive. I rely heavily on the examples set by authors and scholars Lisa Brooks, Saidiya Hartman, Tiya Miles, and Nancy Marie Mithlo. Nancy Marie Mithlo has provided a vocabulary necessary to discuss the challenges facing Indigenous women scholars who are working in fields attempting to balance the weight of the past, the needs of the future and the pressing requirements of academia. Mithlo describes the deep harm caused by colonial practices to the art legacies of Native people and the coordinated and difficult work of Native academics working with home

communities. Lisa Brooks and Tiya Miles are both working with new writing frameworks engaging with archival information and illuminating the lives and labor of women in color in the early American experience. Both have written powerfully about how the archive is the product of the systems of oppression and a window into the function and form of those colonial systems. Their work is deeply prompted by the writing of Saidiya Hartman whose writings working from fragmentary archives and remnant objects of obscured lives cast a path for feminist writers of color. New Yorker columnist Alexis Okeowo interviewed Hartman in 2021 on the process of her groundbreaking work and the coining of the term "critical fabulation." Critical fabulation can be explained as using historical and archival research combined with critical theory and fictional narrative to redress unintentional or intentional absences in the historical record. Hartman relayed, "I was wrestling with what it means to have the colonial archive, the archive of the Western bourgeoisie, dictate what it is we can know about these lives."[26] In that same vein I find myself asking what the colonial archive intentional did not record pertaining to Lakota women and their artwork. Understanding how to apply this framework to my own work with colonial archives have been a necessary counterbalance to the overwhelming sway of vested colonial pressures in the discussion of Native art. These examples of addressing the absences and making sense of the actions that created the absence in the archive is one part of the framework necessary for me to address the absence of Lakota women's voices.

Each of these scholars weave together their personal experiences as women of color, unwritten and unarchived community history, robust scholarly engagement, and a dedication to reviving and retelling previously marginalized narratives. Each of these scholars recenters women, their work, and attempts to reconcile the richness of lives lived with the deep silence in dominant archives. By following

[26] Alexis Okeowo, "How Saidiya Hartman Retells the History of Black Life" *New Yorker Magazine*, October 19, 2020, pp. 44-51. 45.

these examples, I aim to re-center the experiences and intentions of Lakota women and the stories they tell in their beadwork.

In following their examples, I will adopt elements of multiple frameworks, while not strictly adhering to any one approach. My strategy includes tools from Native American Studies, post-colonial and settler colonial theory, feminism, and gender studies, anthropology, and art history. This flexibility is required as no one framework fits the complex story of Lakota women sewing American flags onto baby cradles under the shadow of military occupation in 1880, and so I correspondingly use what is helpful without obligation to a single overarching theory.

In endeavoring to explore these issues and tell this story I will make one important announcement; I make no claim to strict objectivity. In approaching this subject, I have been encouraged to communicate the deep importance of this story and why I am a potential authority to write this story. I fully embrace my role as an invested agent and observer. I am a person of Lakota descent, a beadworker and artist in my Indigenous community, and a scholar seeking knowledge from both Indigenous and academic sources. My deep commitment in this wider topic of Indigenous artistic intent and interpretation can be an asset rather than an obstacle. My thesis and argument also function to interrogate the question and claims of objectivity by previous scholars engaged in the story of Lakota people and their artwork. I ask the reader to collaboratively join me in examining the cultural consequences of how institutions have viewed, collected, and produced knowledge from the phenomenon of flags in Lakota beadwork. Chapter 2 will examine the Historiography and previous scholarship regarding collections and exhibitions centered on flags in Indigenous American art. Chapter 3 will provide a necessary setting of context for understanding the status of Lakota people in the late 19th century and how their economic and political state affected art production. Chapter 4 will introduce the development of beadwork as an art form in the nineteenth century and how and when the flag motif was at times integrated into the larger corpus of beadwork art. Chapter 5 will address the interesting and at times contradictory phenomenon of flags

employed on the clothing and items intended for very small children and how this use affects our interpretation. Chapter 6 will conclude with examples of consequences for Lakota people and the possible effects reinterpreting these works can have for understanding Lakota art and rematriating Lakota agency over the artistic legacies of Lakota women.

CHAPTER II

HISTORIOGRAPHY

Prior to the early twentieth century the American flag in Indigenous art was a rare occurrence in any tribe with one exception, the Lakota women beadwork artists. Surveys of exhibitions by anthropologists Schmittou and Logan estimate that 70% of all Native artwork with flag motifs before World War I was made by the Lakota tribe.[27] Of the remaining 30% much of it was made with the intent to market directly to tourist trade, whereas the Lakota works show evidence of wear and use in the community and this is reinforced by the wealth of late nineteenth portrait photography of Lakota people wearing flag themed beadwork. The full depth of the flags in beadwork problem is this: why does this tribe, more than any other tribe by several orders of magnitude, seem to embrace and fetishize the symbol of their enemy and oppressor?[28] Past explorations by scholars of Indigenous Plains cultures have asked this question and eliminated several potential answers and I think we should engage those scenarios in short form here to understand the nature of the question and to put to rest the myths and assumptions that do not serve our purpose. This will also establish when and how previous scholars are in a state of contradiction in their own writings on the subject.

Did the Lakota people make patriotic themed beadwork as targeted products for sale to a white audience? The answer is definitively no, though the myth persists in many forms. Collectors in the late

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[27] Schmittou and Logan, "Fluidity of Meaning", 560.
[28] Schmittou and Logan, "Fluidity of Meaning", 560.

nineteenth century were already deep in the mode of viewing the Lakota people as a defeated picturesque culture and actively avoided items that appeared tainted by Euro-American contact.[29] These collectors and amateur anthropologists specifically searched for items that reinforced perceived ideas about authentic or traditional forms and any hint of hybridity, mimicry, or borrowing of colonial forms was avoided. Targeted collection of these works with flags did occur but not until the twentieth century, long after initial creation in the community.

Could these artists have employed the flag symbol as a conscious strategy of deflecting violent racism in settler interactions or from military units? This is a complex question with necessarily complex potential solutions. Possibly, but the violent racism towards Native peoples was so deeply rooted and virulent that if this strategy could have worked, it would have been employed on a wider scale and by other tribes as a pragmatic defense.[30] Further, the ineffectiveness of the flag as shield is undermined by specific examples like the massacre at Sand Creek in 1864 where the Cheyenne purposefully flew the American flag to deflect military attack and the flag as protector failed catastrophically.[31]

Could the American flag in profusion be an example of transferring the cultural ideals of the Indigenous warrior spirit into a new mode and an adoption of the dominant style of American military ethos? This cultural shift did occur, but not until after World War I when many Native men, and later women, joined the military as a form of modern warrior expression and a shortcut to a limited but still desirable mainstream acceptance through service. At that point post World War I the cultural shift with

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[29] Schmittou and Logan, "Fluidity of Meaning", 583.
[30] Schmittou and Logan, "Fluidity of Meaning", 574.
[31] Michael H. Logan and Douglas A. Schmittou, "Inverted Flags in Plains Indian Art: A Hidden Transcript", *Plains Anthropologist*, May 2007, Vol. 52, No. 202 (May 2007), 209-227, 219.
Toby Herbst and Joel Kopp, *The Flag in American Indian Art*. (Seattle: New York State Historical Association, Cooperstown, NY: University of Washington Press, 1993), 16.

accompanying increase in flag and associated military motif beadwork occurred simultaneously in many tribal groups across the US and Canada.[32]

Is this proliferation a visual expression of Fourth of July celebrations that screened tribal ceremonies from persecution and regulation? In the late nineteenth century, many tribes found that they could partially circumvent legal prohibitions on large gatherings and engage in cultural events such as dances and ceremonies if they held these events on the Fourth of July in a parody of patriotism. This is unlikely as a cause of Lakota flag depiction for two reasons. First the frequency of flag depictions begins in large numbers prior to the Fourth of July gatherings, often by ten years or more.[33] Secondly, many other tribes paralleled this strategy of holding events disguised as patriotic gatherings on nationalistic holidays, but no other tribe also created flag imagery to wear.[34]

There are three additional theories that are incompletely formed in the anthropological scholarship that I propose are correct in part. If combined and approached with a perspective of centering Indigenous experiences can illustrate the Lakota use of flags in visual mediums. The first is the idea that the Lakota people simply mimic the signs and visual symbols of power of their oppressor, the second is that the flags were being employed as a subversive set of coded visual cues, and the third is a form of intentional group deception that borders on the act of mockery. These ideas are tentatively touched upon by other scholars, but in each case the author pulls back from the fully formed idea. I suggest that reluctance by anthropologists to name the action is itself a symptom of the settler colonial relationship and that anthropology is a player in this colonial relationship. Each of the scholars examined in this

[32] Schmittou and Logan, "Fluidity of Meaning", 588.
[33] Jeffrey Ostler, " 'The Last Buffalo Hunt' and Beyond: Plains Sioux Economic Strategies in the Early Reservation Period", *Great Plains Quarterly*, Spring 2001, Vol. 21, No. 2, pp. 115-130, 119.
[34] Schmittou and Logan, "Fluidity of Meaning", 581.

Chapter at some point refutes and perpetuates these myths, even when their evidence distinctly negates the myth.

Flag imagery in Lakota beadwork in the late nineteenth century was an artistic event inspired and informed by armed conflict between the tribes of the Northern Plains and the US military.[35] This phenomenon is evident in the frequent presence of flag imagery in beadwork by Lakota artists over an approximately 30-year time span from 1870 to 1900 and on a varied spectrum of objects and clothing ranging from ceremonial dresses, vests, and horse gear, but also unexpected forms like infant cradleboards and baby bonnets. The large number of beaded works with prominent flag imagery has long been an incongruous artistic divergence that confronts mainstream collectors, institutions, and Indigenous scholars alike during attempts to understand the narratives of the artwork and experiences of the Lakota people.[36] The presence of flags in Lakota beadwork is not a rare event, there are hundreds of examples just in the exhibitions and publications discussed in this paper. Hundreds more are easy to find in public collections, and many more rest in private collections as the flag motif is very popular with collectors of historic Native art. A wealth of photos of Lakota people wearing these works in the late nineteenth century and into the early 20th century is also testament to the creation and use in the Lakota context.

Having established that the Lakota made a large subsection of flag beadwork within a larger corpus of beadwork the next natural question would be, why would Lakota people adopt this flag motif when their neighbors avoided it? Politically, artistically, spiritually, why would these gifted and determined artists incorporate the strongest visual symbol of their tormentors and oppressors into the very objects that they clothed their loved ones in, into the very regalia and adornment they wore as deep

[35] Schmittou and Logan, "Fluidity in Meaning", pp. 560.
[36] W. K. Powers, "An Ecology of Signs", 4. Flint Institute of Arts, *The American Indian & the American Flag*, Exhibition catalogue, Flint Institute of Arts, New York, NY: American Craft Council, 1975, Pohrt essay pp 4.

expressions of spiritual care and commitment? Why is the Lakota response to these pressures and crises so different from their neighbors?

This question has been addressed by a series of exhibitions, articles, and books. The first point of evidence considered here is the 1976 Bicentennial exhibition *The American Indian, The American Flag* curated by the Flint Institute of Arts in Flint, Michigan. In 1996 William K. Powers wrote a short but powerful article, "The American Flag in Lakota Art: An Ecology of Signs".[37] This essay was a direct response to a book from 1993 on the subject, "The Flag in American Indian Art", edited by Toby Herbst and Joel Kopp. Anthropologists Doug Schmittou and Michael H. Logan in two well written and researched papers in 2002 and 2007 respectively titled, "Fluidity of Meaning: Flag Imagery in Plains Indian Art" and "Inverted Flags in Plains Indian Art: A Hidden Transcript". Most recently in 2020 the Baltimore Art Museum curated a modest exhibit titled *Stars and Stripes: Reclaiming Lakota Independence* and this is the only institutional work to attempt to center Lakota perspectives in the interpretive process. While many of these exhibitions and writings were well intentioned and well done, the scholarly interpretation has been limited to an anthropological framework that avoids the difficult questions of settler colonial relationships. In general, Indigenous art is not art in the view of the greater academic world, but material culture and the resulting scholarship is strictly from an anthropological perspective.[38] This limited perspective carries the historical burden of the beliefs in white supremacy and cultural superiority and avoided inquiry that led to critical conclusions regarding the ramifications of colonial violence.[39]

The 1976 Bicentennial exhibition *The American Indian, The American Flag* curated by the Flint Institute of Arts in Flint, Michigan had a major impact on public perception of flags in Native art and

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[37] W. K. Powers, "An Ecology of Signs", 7.
[38] Berlo and Phillips, *Native North American Art*, 11.
[39] Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture, Anthropology, Travel and Government*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 6.

perpetuated simplistic ideas concerning Native patriotism. The exhibition was conceived of and proposed by G. Stuart Hodges, Director of Flint Institute of Arts, and Richard A. Pohrt, guest curator at Flint Institute of Arts. Pohrt was a well-known collector of and author about Indigenous material culture, though he achieved this notoriety not through an academic background, but solely through his self-professed expertise and mass collecting. The exhibition purported to advance theories about meaning in Indigenous artwork without adhering to any standards of scholarly minimum documentation or to community involvement. As such the conclusions promoted by the exhibition and in the catalog were a piece of nationalistic propaganda that later became conflated with actual research. The way the artworks are talked about in the exhibition catalogue is a unique window into the views of nineteenth century anthropologists and museum personnel working with Native material culture. The authors and curators working on this collection may have been writing and working in 1976, but the framework from which they operate is a direct inheritance of the beginning of the 20th century.

An accompanying catalogue with introductory essay by Richard A. Pohrt is a key point of evidence in the development of language and arguments regarding the meaning of flags in beadwork. This exhibition was part of a wider legacy of curatorial engagements in relationship to anniversaries of important colonial events. The American Bicentennial, the Quadricentennial of the Columbian Discovery, and the 2004 Bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark Expedition are all examples of moments where dominant cultural institutions engage with Indigenous art as a means of supporting the mythmaking surrounding these American colonial anniversaries.[40] A later publication, *The Flag in American Indian Art* by Herbst and Kopp in 1993, and a responsive article by William K. Powers in 1996, *The American Flag in Lakota Art: An Ecology of Signs* moved the conversation forward and challenged some aspects of the myth making of the earlier publications. More recent and thorough scholarship by anthropologists

[40] Cooper, *Spirited Encounters, American Indians Protest Museum Policies and Practices*. (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2008), 109.

Schmittou and Logan in a pair of articles directly addressing flags in Lakota beadwork in 2002 and 2007 helped expand the conversation yet remains well within the theoretical and cultural confines of the anthropological discipline. Most recently in a small scale but significant exhibition at the Baltimore Art Museum curator Darianne Turner brought together a selection of nine Lakota artworks with beaded flag motifs in the exhibit *Stripes and Stars: Reclaiming Lakota Independence*. This exhibition attempted to address many of the issues of assumptions of patriotism and one-dimensional interpretation that has been assigned to these works in the past. My goal is this paper will expand, support, and substantiate the well-done exhibition spearheaded by the Baltimore Art Museum.

The 1976 Flint Institute exhibition, *The American Indian and the American Flag* or AIAF, was specifically focused on flags in Native American art. AIAF Exhibition attempted to portray the use of flags in Indigenous art as a kind of friendly enduring legacy of Native and white interactions by framing the strange anomaly of flags in Native art as either a curious parroting of motifs or an expression of patriotic enthusiasm. The introduction essay by Richard A. Pohrt is a revealing snapshot in time and provides a window into how museums, anthropologists, and amateur anthropologists engaged with Native artwork with flags in the middle of the 20th century. The language and themes in this influential catalogue need to be addressed to fully understand the impact of amateur scholars and powerful collectors and how this has formed a legacy of flawed scholarship.

Richard A. Pohrt was a collector and self-appointed expert on Indigenous art and people. Pohrt had a military service background and later worked as a bureaucrat at a manufacturing company and held common interests with his friend and collecting mentor Milford G. Chandler, an engineer. Together these two amateurs, "boy scouts" as some modern scholars refer to them, parlayed an interest in collecting into a form of pseudo expertise and scholarship.[41] For both men the financial ability to acquire in depth was

[41] David Penney. *Art of the American Indian Frontier: The Chandler-Pohrt Collection*. (Detroit: Detroit Institute of Arts, 1992), 10.

enough to empower them to declare themselves self-taught experts and scholars.[42] Powerful institutions such as the Flint Institute confirmed these self-assessments by allowing uneducated collectors to steer exhibits, cataloging, collection directives, and write the influential catalog essays. The ripple effect of this "expertise" is not a benign affectation. In many cases the opinions of Pohrt and Chandler were considered valid and desirable by institutions, recorded as facts, and their transition from collector to scholar became not only accepted but exalted, their methods of knowledge making superseding the knowledge or experience of Indigenous people. The boy scouts became experts while Indigenous people were further removed from the role of stakeholder in the professions crafting the legacies of Indigenous arts. This was not a pattern Pohrt and Milford crafted but was an example set by earlier amateurs including R. Walker who were encouraged and mentored by trained anthropologists.[43]

This opening essay by Pohrt reads today as a microhistory in how collectors, curators, and scholars in the twentieth century took the historical evidence and shaped a more congratulatory narrative that still functions to support the settler colonial agenda. The women of the Lakota Oyate in the nineteenth century were telling their version of a relationship to the flag and they left an enormous wealth of objects as evidence. Sorting through the constructed narratives in this bicentennial exhibition and catalogue illustrates where the narrative and the evidence diverge and from that point, we can begin to recenter Indigenous experiences with flags and beadwork.

In the Foreword to the catalogue for *The American Indian, The American Flag,* G. Stuart Hodge, then Director of the Flint Institute of Arts, describes Pohrt as "Flint's outstanding Indian scholar and collector". Hodge goes on to state "That the American Indian used such patriotic motifs at all is somewhat astonishing….These symbols, which are found in American Indian art of the past 100 years, have many

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[42] Mithlo, *Knowing Native Arts*, 12.
[43] James R. Walker, Edited DeMallie and Jahner, *Lakota Belief and Ritual*, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, in cooperation with the Colorado Historical Society, 1991), xiii.

bases for their use – some purely a pride in things American, some for Buffalo Bill shows, rodeos, pow-wows, 4th of July celebrations, and trade with tourists."[44] Hodge's list of options precludes many possible intentions or meanings and seem to preclude the possibility of tension or ambiguity. In this sanitized version there is only the possibility for problematic views of the America Flag when used by contemporary Native men artists as Hodge describes, "Some contemporary Indian artists, like Fritz Scholder and Wayne Eagleboy, can be tongue in cheek, ironic or scornful when using the flag." It does not seem from the language used that Hodge would ascribe these potential motivations to historic Indigenous women. There are no mentions of these forts where Lakota people encounter flags as oppressive entities, no forced boarding schools, no prison, or detainment camps.

This sanitization effort is common even in publications purporting to be Indigenous centered. Barbara Hail's landmark and well respected book about Indigenous North American plains cultures as told through the Haffenreffer Museum Collection, *Hau Kola!,* has a hesitancy with centering Indigenous intention in artwork. The author occasionally resorts to the pattern of attributing innovation in Indigenous style to non-Indian sources. Hail discusses the development of a rectangular motif in beadwork and is insistent that this rectangular shape must be based on rugs. There is a preclusion of Indigenous intent, no discussion of other related forms, (perhaps adapted from the stylized rectangles of painted hides?), just the explanation that Native people must have been truly excited by rugs.[45] In *Hau Kola!* there are eight pages of historiography, methodology, and related topics. At the very end is a heading, *Native American Testimony*. At the tail end of a stream institutional sources Hail belatedly remarks that "Contemporary Native American artists and craftsmen can often provide insight into traditional tribal motifs."[46] This belated and weak acknowledgement is as good as it gets in the most sympathetic scholarly examples. This

[44] Flint Institute of Arts, Hodge essay, 2.
[45] Hail, *Hau, Kóla!*, 59.
[46] Hail, *Hau, Kóla!,* 36.

is the typical public scholarly statement of just how important the Native voice and memory is in the making of knowledge about Native arts. Last, late, and a hesitant afterthought.

Following the Foreword in the Flint Institute catalogue is an extensive essay by Richard A. Pohrt where Pohrt provides his views and opinions on the origin, meaning, and ramifications of the flags in Indian art. Pohrt opens the difficult and contradictory topic in the second paragraph by stating, "The multitude of flag-decorated items is especially surprising when one considers the treatment Indians have received at the hands of the United States government. The history of the Indians' connection with the flag has been long and complex: only by having some sense of their association with it, especially of its military associations, can we begin to understand its appearance in their artwork."[47] Pohrt goes on to paint a historical context of ambiguity with the flag as evidence of promises broken and aggression repeated but fails to conclude on how these broken promises could result in distrust, fear, or resentment. Much of the historical narrative is in a positive light with only limited mentions of atrocities at Sand Creek and Wounded Knee in which American flag symbols played meaningful negative roles. Pohrt also postulates that perhaps flags were incorporated into beadwork "to relieve the monotony of old forms".[48] This shockingly paternalistic view of beadworkers who needed outside inspiration to relieve the monotony of their own creativity is a telling insight into the attitude Pohrt exhibits towards Native women artists. Pohrt also admits that it is "somewhat incongruous that the Sioux, who resisted white domination so long and so well, should be the leaders in the use of patriotic symbols in their arts and crafts." Yet he seems uninterested in how that contradiction could be manifested in visual forms. On page nine Pohrt describes the religious prohibition against "self-torture" as the cause for an inadvertent ban on the Sun Dance when in fact the government explicitly banned many forms of Indigenous religion and ritual, not just the Sun Dance. Tribes that don't practice Sun Dance were still restricted from gathering or practicing

[47] Flint institute of Arts, Pohrt, pp. 8.
[48] Flint institute of Arts, Pohrt, pp. 8.

basic ceremonies. Further descriptions of 4th of July celebrations as being held in place of Sun Dance also deflects the outright ban on not only the Sun dance, but any other type of gathering, or for that matter other means of independent action including travel off reservation.[49]

The Fourth of July celebrations that proliferated on many reservations were not an outpouring of patriotic fervor, though it is this event that is generally used as the reasoning or evidence of Native patriotism as expressed by flags in beadwork. This was usually the only opportunity to gather allowed by the reservation Indian Agent, whose directives on reservations were backed by military and civic force.[50] The Fourth of July celebrations need to be understood as Native people finding creative ways to gather that presented a simulacrum of acquiescence, and of using the holiday as a scenario of plausible deniability. This glossing over of the historical reasons behind the shift in summer celebrations as told by Pohrt is representative of the attitudes of collectors and scholars of Native art. They prefer a neat and trim story sanitized of violence and this editorializing is a hallmark of a settler colonial relationship that scholars like Pohrt perpetuate. In contrast W. K. Powers describes the Fourth of July celebrations as imbued with conflicting meaning, "as long as Old Glory flew over their traditional stomping grounds Lakota were allowed to retain their self-identity through cultural expression. But it was Lakota culture that was being expressed."[51] Here W. K. Powers gives a rare window into the possibility of hidden motives, double meanings, and the duplicity necessary as a colonial subject.

The book "*The Flag in American Indian Art*" by Toby Herbst and Joel Kopp in 1993 presented what at first glance seems to be a more sensitive and Native centered take on the anomaly of flags in native art. By giving equal weight to a triumvirate of interested parties (a Lakota man, an anthropologist, and a collector) the authors have more varied voices in the narrative, but the result remains more aligned

[49] Ostler, "The Last Buffalo Hunt", 124.
[50] Darianne Turner, *Stars and Stripes* Exhibition text, Baltimore Art Museum, 2020.
[51] W. K. Powers, "An Ecology of Signs", 8.

with earlier 20th century attitudes. The narrative of the introductory essay by Herbst and Kopp is more factual and transparent regarding the atrocities suffered by Native people, and specifically Lakota people, than previous works. However, at the one point where the essay begins to explore that this wearing of the flag symbol might be more than just adapting, that it might signal deep fear, mistrust, and evidence of violence beyond the battlefield the authors abandon the thread. They contradict themselves by describing first that "belief in the protective power of the flag was probably one reason why American flag imagery proliferated in Lakota crafts between 1880 and 1900".[52] In the paragraph directly preceding this quote they relate the tragedies at Sand Creek and Wounded Knee in which the flag was a direct party to massacre and in which Native people were murdered while waving the flag as a shield.

This contradiction illuminates the stage at which the conversation about flags in Native art had stalled in the 1990's. The essay is more of the same with an updated package of acknowledged colonial terror. The authors heartedly admit to the horrors of the past, especially the military wrongs, but decline to engage deeper into the everyday terrors of the settler colonial experience. The text often contradicts itself, while offering one paternalistic theory only to discount that with evidence in the same paragraph with no effort to address the contradiction. At one point in the essay the authors state "By covering objects of clothing and personal possessions with images of the American flag wrought in quillwork or beadwork, the Lakota identified, or appeared to identify with the United States."[53] In this one moment the authors hit on what is the most exciting question and idea in the entire publication, and abandon it immediately, shrinking back in discomfort. After all, if the Lakota then only appeared to identify with the United States, how do the Lakota today feel about Herbst and Kopp? How do Lakota people experience the settler colonial state today? How do Lakota people feel about the power and leverage wielded by collectors and anthropologists? Is your guest writer, a token Lakota, only appearing to collaborate with

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[52] Herbst and Kopp, *The Flag in American Indian Art*, 16.
[53] Herbst and Kopp, *The Flag in American Indian Art*, 16.

you? Or is it possible he too seethes with resentment and a constant sense of embattlement. Does he look on your habit of collecting with admiration or does he see you as a thief, a hoarder of ill-gotten goods employed to boost your own cache and importance at the expense of the Lakota people?

The only Lakota voice in the book is an essay from Howard Bad Hand (1948 -), a Rosebud Sicangu Lakota tribal member with a long list of achievements within and outside the tribe. Bad Hand's essay has strong language if one views his participation in this project as a fragile, a tense state of being invited into a scene in which the participants have a [referred outcome and hold all the cards of the power balance. The following statement from his essay is a quiet but powerful critique of the role of flags, "I Believe the Lakota people adopted the American flag as such a symbol because within Lakota culture, the flag carries a far different meaning than that of patriotism."[54] This quote is a perfect example of an ambiguous statement about meaning of flags to Native artists and communities. The way it can be read as both affirmative and negative exemplifies the type of ambiguity I read in the flags in beadwork as it can be interpreted in a spectrum of meanings from negative to positive simultaneously.

As anthropologists and collectors Herbst and Kopp maintain the position of power, while the only person of Lakota descent was invited to contribute a two-page essay. One wonders how much latitude Bad Hand would have been given had he not provided a perspective they could endorse. If this type of response was allowed, would he still have couched his words carefully to avoid the consequences of the Indigenous critique.[55] In an alumni interview with the Dartmouth Alumni Magazine (July/August 2005) Bad Hand described his efforts at reigning in his anger and militant feelings about the racism and estrangement for a longer type of victory. "Being Native at Dartmouth meant being racially different and being at the bottom of the socio-economic scale. You get hardened to racism on the reservation. The

[54] Herbst and Kopp, *The Flag in American Indian Art*, 12.

[55] David Graeber, David Wengrow. *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity*, (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2021), 5. The Indigenous critique is a concept of a reverse gaze of critique by Indigenous people of North America turned upon European culture.

socioeconomic difference was the biggest divide. I was not a good student but I was a good revolutionary. Unlike the militants who were always angry, I tried hard to make friends with faculty members and administrators—John Kemeny, James Wright, Charlie Dye, Dick Jaeger '59 and others and with trustees. I was teaching them. I knew what that would mean. Good relationships create enduring things."[56] Here Bad Hand is succinctly describing the process of stifling the anger at the racism and cultivating relationships with those in power in an effort to relieve the racism experienced by others, to forge a path in partnership, while externally denying those feelings. This is another example of the kind of duplicity employed and found useful by Indigenous people as they navigate multiple roles in colonial spaces.

Anthropologists Michael Logan and Douglas Schmittou have come the closest to reaching conclusions that depart from the simplistic narratives, though even in their work there is an avoidance of the issue of settler colonialism as an ongoing destructive force. Their first paper, *Fluidity of Meaning: Flag Imagery in Plains Indian Art* succinctly describes the contradictions in the art record and the previous scholarly writings. "Why, then, did the Lakota develop a virtual monopoly on the use of the flag motif while their neighbors, the Crow and Pawnee, rarely, if ever, depicted flags in their beaded art? The latter question is particularly intriguing when one considers that the Lakota resisted the Euro-American expansion more successfully, and with greater resolve, than any other Plains tribe. Conversely, both the Crow and Pawnee fought in association with American military forces against the Lakota during the 1860's and 1870s."[57] In this passage the authors neatly punch holes in many purported rationales by illustrating ways in which the Lakota are similar to or unique from their neighbors. If pure appreciation and allyship to the US military was the cause for the use for these motifs we would indeed see other tribes using the symbol, which happens very rarely. What Schmittou and Logan do acknowledge is that "the meanings that Plains Indians ascribed to the flag not only changed dramatically over time, but also served

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[56] Lisa Furlong, "Howard Bad Hand, '73, Finding Harmony in a Discordant World", *Dartmouth Alumni Magazine*, July/August 2005, 98.

[57] Schmittou and Logan, "Fluidity in Meaning", 560.

as an extremely sensitive index of inter-ethnic relations with whites…that the symbolism associated with the flag underwent a similar broad transformation and, in the late nineteenth century, reflected an even broader range of values than has been recognized in previous studies." Schmittou and Logan go on to describe the history of flag in Lakota political encounters and the reflections of those encounters in art, but at each point where they come close to conclusions that Lakota may have been expressing fear, protest, anger, or a range of emotional reactions against oppression, the language becomes hesitant and the discussion ends. So they acknowledge there may be a range of ethnic relations with whites, but hold back that it might be negative for Lakota families. On page 573 the idea of protest is couched as simply something not to be excluded, rather than a viable theory to explore, "…it would be unwise to reject the possibility that the artistic license observed in the representation of flags may have functioned, at least for some artisans, as veiled protest against the dominant culture, that is, a reaffirmation of the persistence of one's people despite efforts to the contrary by a more powerful oppressor."[58]

I propose that this type of protest is part of what can be found in the deep analysis of beaded flags in Lakota art. There is something truly incongruent in the presence of flags on the clothing and items meant for Lakota people, especially children, while those people are threatened in both present and future by the colonial bearers of those flags. Each of these artworks was made by an individual woman in high stakes situations in which she has limited range of action and should give a full range of possible meanings to the makers. We can count these objects as material witnesses for the deep commitment and care intended in each piece. These garments are prayers made physical by the act of labor and each design should be granted the potential intense meaning it must have carried for the maker. It is our present responsibility to fully endow Indigenous women with political understanding or individual creative agency and to manage our own discomfort on our own time.

[58] Schmittou and Logan, "Fluidity in Meaning", 561.

CHAPTER III

THE LAKOTA PEOPLE IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY: CULTURAL CONTEXT

To engage with the material culture of Lakota people of the late 1800's, it is essential to locate the Lakota people in place, time, and cultural values. The Lakota Oyate, or Lakota nation, resided in and maintained general territorial control over an area of the North American plains encompassing an area west of the James River, east and south of the Yellowstone River, north of the North Platte River, and east of the Powder River by the early nineteenth century.[59][60] These territorial boundaries were semi fluid with Lakota people encountering, trading, and engaging in conflict with other tribes and early European and American traders in overlapping and adjacent zones.[61] The Lakota designation represents an allied group of seven subtribes all speaking the Lakota dialect of Siouan language that is mutually intelligible with the other two dialects, Nakoda and Dakota.[62] The Lakota in the pre reservation era had an economic strategy primarily dependent on buffalo hunting, medium to small game hunting, and seasonal harvests of wild plant augmented with fur trapping, trading, and raiding. Lakota people by their 1803 encounter with the

[59]Raymond J. DeMallie, (Vol. Ed), Sturtevant, William C., (Gen Ed.), *Handbook of North American Indians, Volume 13, Parts 1 and 2*. (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 2001), *734.* The term *Oyate* is a Lakota language specific term roughly equivalent to nation and more accurate than tribe. This term is used by Lakota to define themselves, other tribes, and animated natural groups, such as *Pte Oyate*, or Buffalo Nation.

[60] DeMallie, *Handbook of the North American Indian, Vol. 13*, 720.

[61] Hail, *Hau, Kóla!*, 27.

[62]DeMallie, *Handbook of the North American Indian, Vol. 13*, 722.

Lewis and Clark expedition were a fully nomadic horse culture.[63] They excelled in utilizing the naturalized Spanish horses brought north from Mexico by other southern tribes and quickly adopted this and other technological and political realities as they came in turn including trade goods and the fur trade.

Until the reservation era (roughly 1876 onward) Lakota people lived in buffalo hide lodges, more commonly today called tipis, had a communal support system called tiyospayes of extended family, and a strong sense of interrelatedness and obligation in family and tribal connections with a reciprocity element of conspicuous gift giving and feasting accompanying large ceremonies and gatherings.[64] This is also a society of minimal wealth accumulation where power within the social construct was based on reputation, generosity, and regard rather than possession, hoarding, and denial of access to resources. The social organization was based on extended families, a broader definition of relationships such as sibling, cousin, or aunt or uncle than is commonly used in western traditions.[65] Adults of both genders would also belong to specific guilds or societies creating webs of friendship, social display, and service and obligations. These guilds and societies could range from women's quill working guilds, men's warrior societies, and coalitions of spiritual ceremonial leaders.[66] (FIGURE 3) In a photo by Frank Fiske depicts a group of Lakota women preparing to give away a selection of quilts, parfleche, beadwork, tipi and associated parts and tools. This image of a giveaway is further evidence of Lakota values being maintained with great difficulty as a means of cultural cohesion during trying times.[67]

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[63] Hail, *Hau, Kóla!*, 27,29.
[64] DeMallie, (Ed.) *Handbook of the North American Indian, Vol. 13*, 734, 764.
[65] Hail, *Hau, Kóla!*, 46.
[66] Hail, *Hau, Kóla!*, 47.
[67] The term giveaway describes an event in a tribal community where a person and their family marks an important event by giving away large quantities of gifts. The gifts can be for specific persons, more generic attendees, compatriots of a group, or supporters who made an accomplishment possible. The gifts usually range from elite gifts to special persons to everyday useful or household objects. The goal is to express

The Lakota culture is a space of mutual care with networks of immediate family, extended tiyospaye families, gender-based guilds and societies, and larger intertribal alliances working in flux according to need, resources, and ability. This was a society with no concept of land ownership, but a working method of tribal or group claims to land use backed by action. Understanding these concepts of wealth and influence compels us to reimagine the Lakota concept of marriage as very different to a European concept, and this is necessary as we move forward in our understanding of the role of women in the society generally and more specifically as artists. The social and economic impact of marriage must be understood as a bond of future labor, and family connections, and not a joining, preserving, or acquisition of wealth base as seen in European cultures. Within Lakota culture women owned or expressed agency over all the basic material goods for shelter, tools, and household goods. Men retained agency over a very limited inventory of goods limited to their own personal tools or weapons, spiritual items, and horses, depending on the arrangements.[68] These material arrangements prioritized collaboration, consent, and community engagement among marital partners and their associated extended family.

An important cultural value to in respect to understanding Lakota art forms it this was a social system based on consent rather than compulsion.[69] Marriages could and did dissolve when partners were no longer compatible, children did spend time with other relatives if the parent-child relationship was found wanting, and no leader could compel tribal members to action by authority alone.[70] Tribal members at all ages and genders were free to choose among an array of options regarding where to go, how to proceed, how to organize, and what strategy to follow, though many of those options would have been reprehensible if they took a person outside of the web of those interconnected obligations. That option of personal expression is always feasible for

gratitude and wealth by giving wealth away. Potlatch is a term for a similar event in the tribes of the Pacific Northwest.

[68] DeMallie, *Handbook of the North American Indian, Vol. 13*, 810.

[69] Graeber and Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything*, 109.

[70] DeMallie, *Handbook of the North American Indian, Vol. 13,* 801.

an individual, from small personal decisions to larger political intentions, and this aspect to Lakota organization and philosophy will be important to keep in mind when we discuss the development of artistic traditions and the impacts and importance of conforming or experimenting in artistic expression.

The philosophical and religious beliefs of Lakota people encompassed an animated landscape of spirits and entities both living and noncorporeal, religious ceremony dictating proper behavior, but opportunities for highly personal interpretations of intent, signs, and relationships to the spiritual world. It is an elaborate system of ceremonies and relationships to spiritual beings that uses both supplication to and worship of spiritual entities. Women generally have an intense relationship with a dream world, receiving premonitions of things to come and most importantly spiritual instruction on how to make art that the spiritual world is requiring a physical manifestation to help or intercede for the Lakota. Other more public aspects of Lakota religion are communal and highly ritualistic such as sun dance, puberty rights, and the sweatlodge ceremony.[71] Leadership in the Lakota world was a process of rhetorical debate and discussion with few elements or justifications for coercion. Individual groups or subtribes could and would break off into independent acting groups should they choose not to follow a specific leader.

In summary we can describe this late nineteenth Lakota culture as communally focused, with deep ties to extended family of both blood and ceremony, and highly individualized concepts of relating to the natural, spiritual, and political world. Within this world Lakota women were the primary makers for the visual arts, and the sole makers of the beadwork and adorned clothing that drove the forms of personal expression through wearable art.[72]

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[71] Walker, Edited DeMallie and Jahner, *Lakota Belief and Ritual*, 65.

[72] Patricia Albers and Beatrice Medicine. *The Hidden Half, Studies of Plains Indian Women. (*Washington DC: University Press of America, 1983), 109.

The expression of gender among Indigenous people of North America has been poorly understood and even more poorly articulated. Gender was a defining force among the Lakota culture, but not in the patriarchal sense of the European traditions. Gender did in fact define one's social role as a Lakota person, but the expression of gender could still fall within the remit of personal expression. This paper does not intend to delve into the history of the range of sexual and gender expression of Indigenous cultures, but it does need to be said that gender was preeminent as cause for social role, and yet had many more possible forms of expression than in non-native spaces.[73] How the role of women has been studied, recorded, and retold by anthropologists is a lamentable and miserable affair.

An anthropological standard in Indigenous history is the *Handbook of North American Indians*, edited by DeMallie and Sturtevant, published in 2001. While much of the information is deeply documented and irreplaceable, the perspective on women is nearly completely absent and what is included is bizarrely misogynistic. The story of how the pipe and related ceremonies came to the Lakota people is the story of White Buffalo Calf Woman. In this story the spiritual being comes to the Lakota people, first to two young men, to share this new sacred ceremony. In the Lakota version I am most familiar with in my community the story is that one young man attempts to sexually assault this sacred figure and is turned to ash.[74] In the *Handbook* version the young man makes an "unwanted sexual advance". The difference in these languages is stark. Unwanted advance or attempted rape, how a culture defines this is paramount on how they view women. In describing adornment, only the clothing of men is described, and in 64 pages of material, women are the subject of only two full paragraphs, and those paragraphs are entirely focused on adultery, punishment for adultery, and a fascination with virginity.[75] This obsession

[73] DeMallie, *Handbook of the North American Indian, Vol. 13,* 808.
[74] D. M. Dooling. *The Sons of the Wind; The Sacred Stories of the Lakota*. Paperback edition. (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000), 135.
[75] DeMallie, *Handbook of the North American Indian, Vol. 13*, 790, 726.

with sexual control, adultery, and virginity is not in line with more feminine centric histories of actual women's lives and the freedom of choice and action considered naturally within a woman's power.[76]

One of the most prolific, respected, widely published, and cited "experts" on Lakota culture is James R. Walker (B. 1849 – D 1926), a physician assigned by the Indian Service to work on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota between 1895 and 1916, the reservation where most of the Oglala Lakota tribe was confined.[77] Walker worked in this community for about 20 years and although lacking any formal training in anthropology, he viewed himself an amateur working anthropologist. Walker performed extensive interviews with Lakota men elders with an emphasis on ceremonial life, mythology, and spiritual belief. The major drawback with engaging with Walker's work on Lakota culture and using his writings as reliable sources is the strong biases and ego that Walker brought to his work. Walker's lack of anthropological training, his deep sense of superiority towards Native people, his disdain for their perceived naivety, and his complete disinterest in any Lakota people that were not older men all reflect major flaws in his approach. His biases reflect a European social belief that it is educated elder men that make culture and religion, and in this mode Walker's choice of subject matter, interviewees, and manner of interpretation reflect a Lakota world that is absent women, children, respect between genders, and as such as may have existed at the time.[78] As a researcher Walker brought the not inconsiderable baggage of his personal perspectives and his cultural perspectives. His legacy is one that reduces the Lakota people to a caricature of their full selves. While his research has deep value as a rare set of extensive interviews and first-person accounts at a time when few Lakota people could speak for themselves or record their history, all his work should be viewed as

[76] Lucy Eldersveld Murphy. *Great Lakes Creoles: A French-Indian Community on the Norther Borderlands, Prairie Du Chien, 1750-1860.* (New York, NY: 2014), 159.
[77] Walker, Edited DeMallie and Jahner, *Lakota Belief and Ritual*, x.
[78] Albers and Medicine, *The Hidden Half*, 57.

through a distorted lens of his fashioning. The Lakota people he presents are a fiction, a cartoonish version of his making. Scholars uncritically relying on Walker's views on Lakota culture are in danger of creating snowballing assumptions concerning Lakota women based on thin evidence. Photographs of specific dances that celebrated and elevated women and their place in Lakota society are never mentioned in Walker's work, yet as we see in Figure 4 these occasions were major events. (FIGURE 4) A photo from Rosebud reservation c. 1893 by J. A. Anderson, depicts a specific dance held for women. Unfortunately, this photo is titled "The Squaw Dance." Though Walker and his contemporaries did not show interest in or record Lakota women's history and culture, we should frame our perspective to remember that it existed in this time, was a priority for this society, and hold space for the undocumented but real activity of women.

1875 could be considered the last point in time in which the Lakota people were able to maintain the fragile balance of external pressures, conflict, and independence within the maelstrom of colonial assault. At this pivotal moment the Lakota were struggling to reconcile the onslaught of settler colonial pressures from the US military, extractive industries, and ranching/farming incursions into their landscapes. Lakota people had been in a state of near continuous negotiation and conflict with federal powers since the Lewis and Clark expedition of 1803. These negotiations were an attempt to influence and understand the possible futures for Lakota Oyate, what tactics would work for intertribal and international negotiations, and how to grapple with the intense waves of change bearing down upon them. At the Battle of the Greasy Grass in 1876 the allied Lakota, Arapaho, and Northern Cheyenne defeated and destroyed the 7th Calvary under General Custer.[79] The victory was short lived as massive reprisals by the US Army immediately descended on the Lakota and in a series of engagements dealt brutal reprisals forcing

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[79] Debra Buchholtz. *The Battle of the Greasy Grass / Little Bighorn: Custer's Last Stand in Memory, History, and Popular Culture*. (New York: Routledge, 2012), 10. The Battle of the Greasy Grass is the Lakota name for the defeat of Custer at the Battle of the Bighorn.

many leaders to agree to surrender and remain confined to the reservations. Sporadic holdouts continued to evade the reservation restrictions until in 1881 Sitting Bull returned to Standing Rock Reservation from Canada and ended his militarist resistance. Sitting Bull was the last leader to hold out against the reservation confinement and with this capitulation the Lakota were now confined to the boundaries of the treaty land and under the onerous rule and restrictions of the Indian Agent.

The 1881 to 1891 period was a state of cultural and political transition as the era of armed conflict with the US military and individual settler groups was grinding to a grim end and transitioning to the early reservation phase, a time marked by government control, loss of autonomy, and deprivation of physical, social, and spiritual resources. The Lakota Oyate was constricted to a collection of reservations that functioned as large prison camps as they were forbidden to travel without governmental permission, engage freely in religious ceremonies, and threatened with military intervention should their capitulation be viewed as anything less than total. Infectious diseases, especially smallpox and tuberculosis, swept through Indigenous communities that possessed little natural immunity to Old World viruses and were further weakened by malnutrition. Unable to move freely and hunt many people were forced to subsist on irregular and insufficient government issued rations. Government appointed Reservation Agents, or Indian Agents had absolute control backed by military force. Their law was arbitrary, manipulative, and geared towards assimilation where annihilation was not possible or palatable. The latter quarter of the nineteenth century also saw the empowerment of government imposed religious missions granted authority in the tribal communities and involuntary boarding schools that forcibly removed native children from their homes and imposed horrific brutality on those children as a means of cultural genocide.

In addition to the social shifts, Lakota economic strategies had to grapple with dramatic reductions in economic potential. First is the intentional overall diminishment of the buffalo herds

as a government strategy. The final successful buffalo hunt conducted by Lakota occurred in 1882.[80] After this final hunt, with no future possible buffalo hunts, the Lakota people were dependent on the treaty obligations of meat, food supplies, and general goods to replace most Indigenous produced goods. These subsidies were legally required to be supplied by the federal government in payment for land access, permanent or leased, but Lakota women were not considered heads of households are were excluded as representatives for families in these areas.[81] These supplies were a part of the negotiated settlement as Lakota people understood fully that without the freedom of movement to engage in historic strategies the Lakota people would not be self-sustaining. This required subsidies for a set amount of time to ensure basic survival until Lakota people could diversify their income and knowledge of alternative systems. As author Jeffrey Ostler discusses in detail, the Lakota people did adapt surprisingly well, but at each stage of adaptation a new barrier would be erected.[82] If Lakota people were successful at cattle ranching, white neighbors would poach their grazing rights. If Lakota families attempted to protest, they could not obtain redress through normal routes, only through Indian agents who would decline to allow them to defend their economic and property rights. The goal of this reservation confinement was not to allow Native people to fully be themselves in confinement, but to create conditions in which their survival as themselves culturally was impossible and assimilation and abandonment of Indigenous culture was necessary. Efforts at cattle ranching by Native people were successful until neighboring white ranchers were allowed to graze their cattle on Native land completely free from legal or personal action. Retaliation by Natives for injustice, attempts to protect resources, or to resist efforts to remove their children were met with withholding precious resources, violence, and fraud.

[80] Ostler, "The Last Buffalo Hunt", 115.
[81] Albers and Medicine, *The Hidden Half*, 187.
[82] Ostler, "The Last Buffalo Hunt", 115.

As a part of the discussion surrounding economic strategies and these moments of change in the early reservations system, we should address the potential that the large corpus of beadwork created by Lakota women was geared towards a market for trade or sale. Authors included in our historiography of flags in beadwork have addressed this and the conclusions should be reviewed. Pohrt does not state directly that beadwork was made for trade but generalizes that beadwork could have been made for sale as there "was the need to develop every possible source of income," but provides no direct evidence for this possible scenario.[83] In the same paragraph Pohrt relates that the Lakota aims for creating such quantities of beadwork did include a desire to make a proper showing and appearance at social events, but that hoarding was not the ambition, beadwork was utilized as part of the larger gift giving social value, and was likely meant as a means of bolstering social capital rather than economic capital.[84]

During this time of conflict, the Lakota are inserted the American flag into beadwork in truly staggering amounts. My surveys of collections at museums including the Gilcrease Museum, Philbrook Museum, Field Museum, and Milwaukee Museum of Natural History, is that about 70% of all the Indigenous art with flags is made by the Lakota. This estimate is echoed by surveys of the catalogues used in this paper and stated by scholars Logan and Schmittou. It is generally estimated and accepted that Lakota authorship make up approximately 70 % of the pre-World War I Native art with American flags.[85] Of the art with American flags made by other tribes besides the Lakota a significant portion of those works were made for sale and as enticements for tourist trade and so forth, whereas the Lakota works are made for tribal use.[86]

The Lakota make a huge proportion of all historic Native art with flags, and they made most of their art with flags in the beadwork medium. This implies certain things about the

[83] Flint Institute of Arts, Pohrt pp. 9.
[84] Flint Institute of Arts, Pohrt pp. 9.
[85] Schmittou and Logan, "Fluidity of Meaning", 6.
[86] Schmittou and Logan, "Fluidity of Meaning", 6.

interactions with flags that are absent with all their neighbors who also make a majority of visual art in the beadwork medium. The artwork with flags is made at a time when conflict with US military and the threat and reality of violence is at a peak. The artwork is exclusively made by women, who are often in a position of equitable leadership inside their community, but that leadership is not recognized outside the Lakota social circle. Women therefore must adapt and find alternative ways to express the role of family protector, maker of art, and interpreter of signs and events in to art. Author Eldersveld describes similar scenarios in *Great Lakes Creoles* in which Ho-chunk women found themselves excluded from property ownership, public leadership, decision making, and economic ventures by virtue of their gender during the early nineteenth century during the transfer of colonial power from British to American.[87] Murphy Eldersveld describes the ways in which women in the community had to change tactics under the new regime that was distinctly hostile to feminine power and economic agency.

The deep research performed by historians Susan Sleeper-Smith and Eldersveld Murphy functions as a suitable proxy for a lack of detailed data on the marginalization of Indigenous women as the Fur Trade era transitioned to the settler colonial era. These historical narratives tell the stories of Indigenous women in the Ohio River Valley and the northern Wisconsin area but provide a framework for understanding ways in which Lakota women in these more western spaces and at later dates may have responded to the very similar political and economic shifts.[88]

Sleeper Smith describes the social constructs under which Indigenous women prepared elaborate clothing in the nineteenth century and the meaning and prestige associated with the beadwork portions of these regalia. “In the Midewiwin, which spread throughout the Great lakes in the eighteenth century, women fashioned elaborate dress for mide priests, accessorizing it with

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[87] Eldersveld Murphy, *Great Lakes Creoles*, 153.

[88] Susan Sleeper-Smith, *Indigenous Prosperity and American Conquest: Indian Women of the Ohio River Valley, 1690-1792*. (Chapel Hill, NC, University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 65.

beadwork sashes, bandoliers, and shoulder bags to symbolize their office and power."[89] In this passage Sleeper Smith is accurately relating through close reading of historical journals and reports the social and cultural importance of highly ornamented dress and ceremonial regalia across a wide range of tribal groups in the Ohio River Valley and Great Lakes regions. Added to this cultural value of presenting oneself as best as possible with sophisticated regalia we can add the element of radical and sweeping giveaway culture associated with Lakota public ceremony. Dances and celebrations often drew huge crowds of up to 1000 participants and feasting and giveaways of masses of beadwork would be an element of these events. It is very likely that items with flags were integrated into this giveaway culture and the motif was part of a group of ways of expressing docility while trying to maintain cultural ways in the face of military occupation and restriction of cultural events.[90]

(FIGURE 5) This figure in which a family is honoring a daughter, on horseback makes this point. The family has outfitted the father and daughter with huge quantities of fully beaded clothing including fully beaded pants, vest, dress, leggings, moccasins, cuffs, horse gear, saddle blanket, saddle bags, and even more draped across a wagon for display. This conspicuous display of beadwork is even more interesting in the context of specifically honoring a daughter, who can be considered a future maker of beadwork. Ostler confirms in his economic study of the Lakota that beadwork was never a major source of income or a legitimate financial strategy. Ostler contends that most beadwork circulated within the tiyospaye with only a fraction being traded or sold for cash.[91] It is more likely from his description that beadwork would be traded at unfair terms for necessary staples at a trading post and then sold to collectors by the Anglo owners of

[89] Sleeper-Smith, *Indigenous Prosperity and American Conquest*, 174.
[90] Ostler, "The Last Buffalo Hunt", 120.
[91] Ostler, "The Last Buffalo Hunt", 124.

the trading post.[92] In this scenario we could describe beadwork as being traded under duress for needed staples in times of dearth, but not as an active and deliberate economic strategy.[93]

Pohrt also mentions that items would have been made intentionally for sale to the public and brought along to the Wild West shows by Lakota people performing in these types of traveling productions. There is little evidence of this, though the repetition of the idea may be part of a larger fantasy about the Wild West shows and evidence of the crafting of western myths. In L. G. Moses book “Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians, 1883-1933” there is no mention of flags, flag ceremonies, interest in flag images, or flag beadwork. Nor are flags in beadwork present in more than a handful of photos in the large numbers represented in this analysis of photos of Show participants. The Lakota people who participated in the Shows and Expositions often had difficulty obtaining agent permission to leave the reservation to participate in these ventures, and the uncertainty of participation paired with the long lead time necessary to actually make and assemble beadwork collections makes this suggestion impractical.[94] In the book *Oglala Women* anthropologist Marla N. Powers relates that it is the opinion of Lakota tribal members in the mid twentieth century that it simply isn’t possible to make a living now or in the past creating traditional beadwork and that much of what is found in the modern tourist venues is cheap imitations from China and Taiwan.[95] It bears repeating with emphasis that despite the desire of anthropologists to frame themselves as the penultimate audience for these artworks that these works were made by Lakota women for use and appreciation by Lakota people. Supporting this assertion as discussed by Herbst and Kopp is the fact that a majority of items with flag motifs show extensive wear from tribal use.[96] Meaning that these items were intended to be worn and

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[92] Ostler, “The Last Buffalo Hunt”, 124.
[93] Berlo and Phillips, “Our (museum) World Turned Upside Down”, 7. Albers and Medicine, *The Hidden Half*, 187.
[94] Ostler, “The Last Buffalo Hunt”, 124.
[95] M. N. Powers, *Oglala Women*, 137.
[96] Herbst and Kopp, *The American Flag in Indian Art,* 18.

used by Lakota tribal members, were used in those contexts, and only came into collections after significant presence in the Lakota community. These works may have been traded or sold at a later date, but not until they had served a purpose within the intended social context. By intending these items for community use and display we should honor and prioritize that these items were meant to communicate within the tribal value system primarily, and the settler colonial interpretation of experience is a secondary.

It is within this moment of the deepest change, frustration, conflict, and uncertainty for the future that Lakota women peaked in their use of flags on elaborately beaded garments. It is the purpose of this Chapter to pair a general understanding of the state of Lakota affairs with the presence of the flag on so many deeply personal items. In the next Chapter the development of beadwork and relationship of flag motifs to the larger scheme of Lakota geometric and floral designs.

CHAPTER IV

BEADWORK AS ARTISTIC AND MATERIAL EXPRESSION

Lakota people in the late nineteenth century created works of wearable art, music, ceremony, and landscape interventions to express their relationship with an animated spiritually infused world. Of all these types of expression it is the wearable art that is both suitable for public examination here and has also survived in large quantities to the present day. This wearable art can be described as elaborately embellished clothing and regalia densely decorated with tiny glass seed beads sewn and embroidered to the surface of clothing and objects. The beadwork can be described as constellations of abstract geometric designs working in concert to create a large syncretic whole design communicating the values and beliefs of Lakota women.[97]

The beads traded to and utilized by Lakota women for surface adornment in the mid to late nineteenth century are properly described as seed beads. Seed beads are the smallest of commercially manufactured glass beads and were (and are) sold in sizes ranging from size 6/0 measuring 3.3mm to size 22/0 measuring .9mm. The most commonly sold and used seed bead size in the mid to late nineteenth century would be the size 12/0 (1.7mm) and the nearest bookending sizes 11/0 and 13/0.[98] These seed beads are relatively similar in size across countries and manufacturers of origin and are sold in a predictable range of colors with commonly

[97] Hail, *Hau, Kóla!,* 54, 59.
[98] Lois Scherr Dubin. *North American Indian Jewelry and Adornment: From Prehistory to the Present*. (New York, Harry N. Abrams Publishing, 1999), 273.

understood names for shades and types. Most seed beads in the nineteenth century were made in Bohemia and Italy with smaller concerns in France and Germany. Traders utilized sample cards with short sections of beads strung onto heavy cardboard with handwritten or printed color names and batch codes to facilitate bulk orders. Seed beads were an ideal trade good as they were impervious to the elements, small in scale, high profit to weight ratio, divisible into customizable quantities, and highly desired by the intended market. The system of trade between Native and colonial or imperial factors facilitated circumstances in which Lakota women could use a common vocabulary concerning color, size, quantity, and pricing to ensure large batches of coordinated beads to use on large scale projects.[99] This commercial standardization allowed beadworkers to expand their technique from decoration in the minority of surface area to complete coverage of objects in which seed beads would be embroidered to the surfaces of objects in excess of multiple square feet. (FIGURE 6)

Research into the Lakota material culture from 1870 to 1900 could be expected to reflect the desperate and uncertain times in a measurable deprivation of rich visual expression. A quick perusal of public collections focused on the art and material culture of Indigenous Americans reveals a Lakota material culture brimming with creativity, innovation, and bold expression. In addition to the quality, there is the quantity, an enormous and varied quantity of highly detailed and richly adorned beadwork and quillwork. Any museum in the US with even a slight interest towards anthropology has more Lakota beadwork than it generally knows what to do with, and as evidenced by wall text and interpretation models, they don't know what to do with it. In examining Lakota art and adornment, we could expect evidence of a community concerned solely with survival, but the abundance of the material culture shows a community deeply committed to artistic expression as an element of that survival. While we don't have personal artistic statements and interviews about intentionality, we have the abundance of physical material and the vivid

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[99] Hail, *Hau, Kóla!*, 51.

visual language of the beadwork to instruct us in the emotional and spiritual state of Lakota artists in the late nineteenth century.

This quantity is a powerful measurement of artistic expression and cultural health. Specifically, beadwork can function as an insight into the intentions of Indigenous women. This corpus of material wealth held in museums serves as a substitute artistic statement in the absence of women speaking for themselves. This is an opportunity to view these collections from the perspective of first an Indigenous woman, beadworker, and art historian, in contrast to the anthropologist.

Lakota art is not a siloed decorative or expressive pursuit separate from function.[100] The primary intent of Lakota material culture is a complete fusion of artistic expression and functionality. Everyday objects, clothing, and tools serve and work for Lakota people in two ways; first, basic functionality as an object to be used or worn, and the secondary and simultaneous purpose of adornment as a means of expressing spiritual connection and protection. These ideals are mutually reinforced as a worldview that engages spiritual and pragmatic concerns synchronously and as interlinked concepts. The physical is spiritual, and the spiritual is pragmatic.

This worldview of pairing pragmatic and spiritual approaches can be illustrated by examining clothing from the Northern Plains. In precontact eras clothing would have been made exclusively from tanned hide and adorned with techniques including painting with earth mineral pigments, quillwork embroidery, and trimmed with a wide selection of beads and notions made from shells, stone, and animal products including feathers, bone, ivory, antler, quill, and hoof and horn material.[101] Quillwork, the practice of sewing folded and dyed quills in elaborate designs

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[100] Herbst and Kopp, *The Flag in American Indian Art*, 11.
[101] Berlo and Phillips, *Native North American Art*, 133.

onto the surface of hide, was the primary mode of decoration by Lakota women on clothing and any soft sided functional items such as storage bags, pouches, lodge decorations, and horse gear. Designs functioned to signal tribal and individual identity, make connections to spiritual concepts and guides, ward off negative beings or actions, and preserve spiritual and community connections through illustrated motifs.

Within Lakota culture gender roles were strictly defined for the making of functional and adorned objects. The preparation of hides, making of lodges, construction and adornment of clothing, and fabrication and adornment of most functional items was a feminine activity. The process of learning these skills and creating the objects ranges on a spectrum from informal observation and imitation to structured and proscribed instruction during specific life events and guild membership for skilled artists. All these activities were strictly feminine. Men engaged in the making and adorning of their own weapons, ceremonial bundles, some specific horse gear, and a limited array of functional items.

Considering these gender roles, we can assume that most of the historic Lakota material culture that we engage with in public collections is made by feminine hands, from feminine instruction, and from a feminine perspective and prerogative. The relationship Lakota people have to decorating the utilitarian can be illuminated by a Lakota origin myth, the story of Anog Ite, or the Double-Faced Woman.[102] To summarize the story, Anog Ite is banished to the unformed and empty world for transgressions against other powerful spiritual entities including Sun and Moon. She is forced to part from her children, the Four Winds, and she roams the empty land lonely for family and purpose. She has been given a double face with two sides, one hideous, and one unbelievably beautiful and she retains her high skills as a maker, quill worker and beadworker. When the First People, human Lakota people, emerge from the sacred Wind Cave it

[102] Dooling, *The Sacred Stories of the Lakota*, 35.

is Ango Ite who teaches them the skills of making clothing and adorning that clothing in a skilled manner. She is trusted by the people and celebrated for her teachings and assistance until they see her hideous face and drive her from their company. In Lakota culture Anog Ite is the spiritual power that brings beadwork and quillwork dreams to women, giving them proprietary patterns and guiding them as makers.[103] She also is a cautionary symbol of the single-minded focus of beadworkers and highlights the obsessive nature and danger of an artist who forgets to maintain balance in work and family.

This figure's role as practical and moral lesson instructor serves to explain the source of the skills used by Lakota women to clothe and adorn their people, and the prescribed social values of industry, creativity, and modesty.[104] The ability to clothe oneself, to create shelter, and to adorn these items with beautiful and symbolically laden designs distinguishes humans in Lakota spiritual perspective from related animated groups like animals and plants, though these differences do not imply superiority.

By the mid-nineteenth century Lakota material culture was undergoing significant changes as historic fabrication practices were adapting to large quantities of manufactured trade goods from the Eastern US and Europe were brought into the interior of the continent. The introduction of woven fabric had a significant but not structurally altering impact on clothing making and styles.[105] Indigenous women maintained all the basic tenants of design and functionality as they transitioned to wardrobes that integrated new trade good materials including woven textiles combined with hide. A major aesthetic and practical shift for the Lakota was the

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[103] Albers and Medicine, *The Hidden Half*, 241.
[104] Janet Catherine Berlo, "Dreaming of Double Woman: The Ambivalent Role of the Female Artist in North American Indian Myth," *American Indian Quarterly*, Winter, 1993, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Winter, 1993), pp. 31-43, 33.
[105] Janet Catherine Berlo. "Creativity and Cosmopolitanism: Women's Enduring Traditions", in *Identity by Design: Tradition, Change, and Celebration in Native Women's Dresses,* ed by E. Her Many Horses, Washington DC: National Museum of the American Indian, (2007), 97-147, 100.

introduction of glass seed beads. The basic and humble seed bead would gradually replace quillwork as the primary mode of decoration on clothing and as available quantities of seed beads increased the desire for and employment of the new material also grew in abundance and importance. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century quillwork had been mostly replaced with beadwork. Beadwork had exceeded the original confines of quillwork from a decoration that was minimally employed with a strong emphasis on negative space to a decoration method that completely covered the surface.[106] Many of the beadwork with flag examples are objects that are fully beaded with multiple square feet of solid beadwork. The existence of these fully beaded objects subverts the trope of the desperate refugee clinging to survival or the dejected aimless defeated subject. The objects exist as decadent displays of wealth and ornate projections of identity reflecting a defiant pride in self, tempered by a desire for safety.

Beadwork techniques originally mimicked the established forms of porcupine quillwork. Quillwork is described as the embroidery or couching of dyed and folded porcupine strips onto a hide matrix or wrapping the quills around a narrow column such as a rawhide strip or leather fringe. These relatively simple techniques could be massed and repeated to create works with maximized visual impact with limited areas of coverage. Quillwork generally utilized thin stripes or narrow contoured shapes that when compounded together built larger design components that were then incorporated into constellations of elements. These compositions utilized negative space as an intentional background and arrangement of elements within the larger object to emphasize meaning.

An example of a quillwork and hide vest made (FIGURE 6) for a man in the 1870-1880 period with design that is primarily abstract botanical elements but with one flag motif added to the arrangement is illustrative of how flags were incorporated into larger design constellations in

[106] Berlo and Phillips, *Native North American Art*, 137.

the earliest artworks. The bright commercial aniline dyes used to color the porcupine quills indicate a last quarter nineteenth century date as does the cloth and silk ribbon used to line, back, and trim the vest.

The arrangement of adornment on the front of the vest is comprised of a grid of quillwork elements. Each element is made by embroidering and tacking folded and dyed porcupine quills to the surface of the Native tanned hide. Each element measures approximately 3” x 3”, is finite and not connected to each other by stems, vines, or other contrived links. Each element is comprised of a small array of leaf-like shapes arranged in a symmetrical x ray pattern. The general fan pattern in each element has variety expressed in differences in leaf length, curvature, and color. Eleven of the botanical elements on the lower ¾ of each side of the vest are very similar in design and execution but with an obvious aim of slight distinction as no element is an exact copy of another. The pattern uniformity diverges where the garment is cut narrower for the armholes and the tapered collar or neck area. On this narrower transition from the torso to the shoulder the last two elements are a pair of simplified crossed American flags and an elaborate botanical element at the very top that is distinct from the other 11 elements. The flags are simplified having only five stripes and the blue canton with stars minimized to a blue and white striped rectangle. The flags are crossed indicating the imagery is derived not from an observed flag in use but imitating the crossed flag motif used by the US military on its insignia and printed material. The last botanical design at the top where the upper vest front meets the vest back diverges from the other botanical designs in both color and visual arrangement. The design is executed in only red while the other designs are a minimum of two colors, and most have three or four. The top design has elements that reach down and up from a center beginning point, almost resembling a fleur-de-lis, whereas all the other botanical designs have an obvious base center at the bottom with all elements reaching laterally and up, but never arcing below the base. This difference in design and its isolation from the other designs, and its proximity to the flag motifs may mean it has a distinct

meaning outside of the typical abstract botanical. The right and left sides of the vest are exact mirror images of each other, and each side has a total of 13 elements laid out in a rough stepped or alternating grid.

In total the design, materials, and execution indicate that this work is likely made by a member of the Santee Band, a group of Lakota with artistic and cultural ties to eastern Dakota and Nakoda bands. None of the botanical elements are meant to represent a specific plant species but signify a general theme of growth and organic potential. The animated worldview of Lakota belief includes groups like rocks, places, plants, weather phenomena and animals as animated beings with agency. The botanical forms on this vest indicate the animated quality of plants as more important and informative than a strict identification of a specific specie.[107] By including the flag in with botanical elements the artist can be emphasizing the perceived power of the symbol, as a related type of motif emanating power and meaning beyond just the existence of the shape and colors employed.

Lakota beadwork developed first as complement to and then a stand in for quillwork but quickly exceeded the original reach and designs of quillwork. The material of glass seed beads enabled artists to expand the color palette, durability, type and complexity of design, and sheer volume of coverage as compared to quillwork. Lakota quillwork was primarily executed in narrow parallel stripes with a negative background and the transition to beadwork retained the design elements from quillwork even as the material restraints were lifted. The stripes developed as parallel lanes and compressed the decoration into an allover treatment with no negative space. From this time forward the negative space background would be filled with beads and the design would be a part of the overall effort, not above and separate from the matrix. The type of

[107] Berlo and Phillips, *Native North American Art*, 31.

beadwork called Paha stitch[108] or lane stitch organizes the surface to be adorned into typically horizontal strips or lanes. Within each horizontal lane the beads would be sewn in vertical stiches with anywhere from four to twelve beads per stitch. Varying the colors in a pixilated pattern within this overall grid of rectangles and lines the Lakota style of elaborate compound geometric designs is revealed.

In Figure 7 we see the verso and recto views of a Lakota pipe bag with a ledger style figurative scene on the verso with figures on horseback pursuing a buffalo, and a complex geometric design on the recto. (FIGURE 7) The geometric design illustrates how "well the flag's composition conforms to preexisting aesthetic traditions" as described by Schmittou and Logan.[109] Lakota beadwork patterns and designs were configured in a manner that meant swapping or inserting American flag motifs was a simple act of slight simplification and addition. The color combination and stripes strongly mimic Lakota base elements and as such Lakota women could integrate these shapes seamlessly into the new overall aesthetic of beadwork adornment. In this example we see the flag added as elements at four corners in between the cardinal direction elements radiating off a central box within a box motif, among one of the oldest Lakota designs. The flag is rendered with 8 stripes and six stars and at each corner the flag is rotated to keep an alignment with the design rather than maintain an upright presentation that mimics the flag display in reality. This reinforces W. K. Powers assertion that these motifs are representations of the flag, an interpretation of the flag, and a product of the flag in the imagination of Lakota women.[110]

This adaptation, alteration of original design, utilization within traditional motifs all illustrate the way Lakota women borrowed the flag design, changed it at will, and felt the

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[108] Rhonda HolyBear, Lakota tribal member, and expert on the history of nomenclature for Lakota beadwork, interviewed by Murphy Adams, Oct. 2022, phone conversation. Unpublished.
[109] Schmittou and Logan, "Fluidity of Meaning", 5.
[110] W.K. Powers, "*An Ecology of Signs*", 9.

freedom to modify it however best fit their artistic goals. This freedom of alteration is one way we see a sense of resistance and empowerment as Lakota women changed the very symbol that by patriotic standards is unchangeable. The American cultural expectations around flags, military insignia, symbols of rank, and nationalistic projections require faithful and exact representation. The number of stars and stripes are symbolically laden and historically significant, the colors are important, the correct handling and presentation is paramount, and so the disregard for the exacting protocols of military display should be read as a powerful projection of individual independence within the shadow of colonial power. Editorial freedom by colonial subjects in expression can also be read as subverting the symbol, of making it *not quite right*.[111]

These two works, vest and pipebag, are made by Lakota women in the last quarter of the nineteenth century mostly in and on the reservations in South and North Dakota. This is the beginning of the confinement of the reservation period when the bands, or tiyospayes, of the Lakota were prevented from traveling and through military force and patrol were governed by Federally appointed Indian Agents who had wide lateral control over the people, land, and events within the reservation. This included strict prohibitions against gatherings for religious ceremonies, political consultation, or subversive activities such as giveaways or group hunting ventures. This fraught political environment of changing tides of fortune and freedom is expressed in the partially integrated but also not quite rightness of the flags in these works. This uncertainty of belonging and expressions of power is directly reflected in the visual cues on these beaded and quilled works. The two works examined in detail above are examples of works made by women for exclusively masculine use. In a later chapter we will look at items made by women for the exclusive use of very young children and the potential expanded interpretations possible when we engage with works outside of a masculine framework.

[111] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (New York, NY: Routledge Classics, 2004), 122.

In order to understand how and why Lakota women depicted flags in beadwork we should understand how they interacted with American flags symbolically and practically. Early nineteenth century tribal interactions with flag symbols focused on the flag as a powerful or even holy symbol of their enemy. The Lakota male warriors modeled their behavior on previous interactions with powerful enemies: capture, adopt, and coopt that which is powerful against you. Lakota warriors captured flags during armed conflicts and attempted to remove flags from military forts as a means of breaking or subverting the power of their enemies.[112] In the early 1870's use of the flag in beadwork was rare and limited primarily to men's clothing items, by the 1880's the motif became widespread and included a surprising frequency of use on children's clothing and accessories.

The use of flags in beadwork parallels the development and highs and lows of the armed conflict with the US government. There are no flags in beadwork prior to the victory of Red Cloud and the Treaty of Fort Laramie in 1868. Between 1868 and 1876 the Lakota were in a rare state of relative peace with a sense of security having won the violent contest for the Bozeman Trail and autonomy over land use.[113] A few flags were introduced into beadwork forms in this narrow time frame, and mostly on men's garb. By 1876 the US government resumed violent and intrusive violations of the Treaty of Fort Laramie and pressed the Lakota people with direct military conflict in attempts to confine their territorial use and activity.[114]

While the Lakota and allies won the major engagement at the Battle of the Greasy Grass in 1876, there was to be no long-term benefit or victory for the Lakota. Between 1876 and 1881 Lakota people were scattered in smaller bands for safety, with some leadership including Sitting Bull leading bands to relative safety in Canada, and other bands employing varying tactics to

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[112] Schmittou and Logan, "Fluidity of Meaning", 571.
[113] R. H. Anderson, "When the Spirits Arrived: Divergent Lakota Voices of the 1890 Ghost Dance", *Plains Anthropologist*, vol. 63., no. 246, pp. 134-151, 9.
[114] Anderson, "When the Spirits Arrived", 143, 144.

preserve family and negotiating power. By 1881 Sitting Bull returned to the US and submitted to reservation confinement and authority, though not necessarily to full assimilation.[115] During this stretch from 1876 to 1881 flags appear in profusion, as though in a direct response to the conflict and uncertainty closing in on Lakota people. Between 1881(surrender of Sitting Bull) and early 1891(Massacre at Wounded Knee) the Lakota people socially, spiritually, legally, and economically adapted to the confinement and strain of a reservation system enforced with military occupation. The ever-greater number of settlers and larger armed military units occupying and enforcing reservation powers changed the contexts and system of encounters with the flag accordingly. This period of adaptation comes to a grim end with the violence of the murder of Sitting Bull, the overall repression of the Ghost Dance, and culminated in the massacre at Wounded Knee.[116] (FIGURE 8) Only two months after the massacre at Wounded Knee we can see this photo of Lakota women forced to wait for rations in difficult conditions. The potential for violence in these spaces must have felt overwhelming to Lakota women and I would read their artwork as a direct expression of the contradictions of these spaces.

During this early reservation period Native people attempted to find equilibrium by making treaties and agreements, but any equilibrium achieved could be upended by the political changes in the Federal administration, turnover in military personnel, or more frequently, when new previously unknown resources are discovered on supposedly legally protected Native land. The identity of the oppressor was malleable, but the symbol constant and so the relationship to the symbol became more important than the relationship to individual representatives of the government.

Slowly the American flag shifted from the symbol of our enemy to the symbol of our oppressor. The symbol was no longer coopted for success but shifted to a form of shelter, protest,

[115] Anderson, "When the Spirits Arrived", 143, 144.
[116] Ostler, The Last Buffalo Hunt", 126., Anderson, "When the Spirits Arrived", 145.

and discrete messaging. The presence of flags purposefully inserted into the clothing and toys of infants and small children is a perplexing and emotionally charged subject. From one perspective this can be read as a form of compliance with authority. Beadwork was already a form of imbuing sacred clothing with protective power, and one could see the flag as an extra component of protection from the powers that have the potential and habit of harming the Lakota children. The elaborate beaded cradleboards, clothes and toys with flags featured unmistakably radiate a feminine plea for mercy, while also functioning as a distinctly Lakota form and activity.

The role of women as primary artists of the Lakota is disregarded or even disbelieved by anthropologists. In regard to the catalog and the discussion of beadwork Pohrt only vaguely mentions women as the makers of all beadwork, while never drawing attention to the unique gendered nature of art making.[117] W. K. Powers doesn't once refer to women in all of his discussion of flags in beadwork, and merely attributes all the artwork to "Lakota people".[118] Schmittou and Logan do mention Lakota women as the makers of all beadwork artwork, but never consider gender specifically as a source of key interpretive information when analyzing the sources, causes, and meanings of the designs.[119] Beadwork and adornment of clothing in an intensely gendered activity and having scholars patently ignore one of the most defining features of the making of these works whines a light onto the blind spot of previous analysis. The role of the maker and the role of the object cannot be divorced from the designs embedded in the object from a Lakota perspective. Previous scholars have stubbornly held onto the adult male as default for person, we can and should assign adult Lakota female, with all associated connotations, as our default artist of beadwork.

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[117] Flint Institute of Arts, Pohrt essay, 11.
[118] W.K. Powers, "*An Ecology of Signs*", 9.
[119] Schmittou and Logan, "Fluidity of Meaning", 560.

CHAPTER V

CHILDREN WRAPPED IN THE FLAG

A striking feature of the corpus of artworks with flags rendered in beadwork is the unexpectedly large number of works intended to be worn or used by very young children. Flags can be found on cradleboards, baby bonnets, and infant and toddler clothing in high enough frequency that this was not an anomaly, but an intentional deployment of the motif. As a specific case study, we can perform a close analysis on a cradleboard that was included in the 1976 *American Flags in Indian Art* exhibition. The catalogue does not specifically address this exact object in detail, though in the introduction written by Richard A. Pohrt it is mentioned and I will quote that mention on page ten of the catalogue here. (FIGURES 9-14 are recent photos taken by the author at the Philbrook Museum on a research visit. Figure 9 shows a full-length image of the cradleboard.) Pohrt states, "This exhibition includes many examples in which the skill and imagination of the Sioux beadworkers are immediately apparent. Artistic liberty was often exercised with great success to fit a symbol into a given area. Sometimes new arrangements or location of the stripes and canton were attempted. On a baby carrier stripes area above the canton as well as opposite and below it. There are other equally interesting examples. In general stripe and star count are rarely correct. This is not only an expression of the artist's freedom, it reflects the limitations imposed by the decorative materials and space."[120] This quote neatly summarizes

[120] Flint Institute of Arts, Pohrt, 11.

the obvious conflicts in how curators express their thoughts and opinions about the use of American flag motifs. Authors acknowledge the obvious alterations made to the flag, generally ascribe it to limitations of the media and materials, but then fail to address the many instances where those incorrect flags could have been easily rendered with correct stripes if not stars.

Let us consider labor as a unique investment in this particular style of infant carrier. There is a significant (often between a minimum of 40 and 200 hours per piece)[121] investment of time and labor into these works that can only be worn for a very short number of months by each young wearer due to growth. Though we also understand that these works would have been used, reused, and loaned out to an extended family group for each new young family member, we can also assume that repeat use would be anticipated rather than guaranteed and subject to changing fashion making for a shaky return to justify the time investment. We can extrapolate a deep sense of intent and determination of the makers in the community to use this symbol when it is employed on items for infants and this investment of time can be one measurement of care for children in general. Clothing children in symbols prompts interesting questions related to what types of hoped for results might have been anticipated by mothers as both caretakers and art makers.

The materials are another area of obvious investment, though as with all beadwork the materials are always a distant second in proportion to time as investment. A fully beaded infant cradleboard is about 6 square feet of beadwork, roughly the same square footage of an adult man's fully beaded vest, front and back. The anticipated wear, public facing time, and possible number of wearers would be dramatically higher in a man's vest with the same investment of

[121] Estimate using authors experience as a beadworker, averaging 2 square inches per hour using sinew sewing techniques.

materials as used in the beaded cradleboard. Yet women repeatedly continue to choose to invest their labor and materials into the making of young children's items.

If we acknowledge the materials and the labor embedded in the object as evidence, how does this shift our interpretation of this motif on children's clothing? This evidence and propensity for this type of usage diminishes argument for flags as expressions solely of the warrior ethos. It isn't that beadwork designs don't reflect family identity and deeds, these designs do accomplish that task, but that the high proportion of these children's items seems a direct window into the maternal aspirations in the making of these items rather than masculine accomplishments. The flag is usually incorporated as one part of a constellation of designs, one piece of an overall visual and cultural aesthetic in which Lakota aesthetic is the primary driving force and the predominant concern. Previous authors have neglected to acknowledge the feminized gender of the women makers of the works and the age of the intended users or to assign any social or emotional value to these identities, whereas I argue the gender identity is paramount to interpretation.

Cradleboards in Lakota culture are an especially poignant expression of maternal care and concern. These objects are treasured family gifts and a barometer of the importance of children and the sense of protection and care afforded to small children. The Lakota were regarded in the nineteenth century as permissive and loving parents, abhorring corporeal punishment, and valuing the individuality of the child as a person.[122] The existence of many fully and partially adorned cradleboards with flags attest to the pattern being specifically deployed on an object whose sole function is to protect and secure an infant is a testament to the conflicted feelings of makers and mothers. It is a wrapping of a child in symbolic flags while avoiding the real flags, and deploying the motif as a protective emblem.

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[122] DeMallie, (Ed.), *Handbook of the North American Indian, Vol. 13*, 769.

The Lakota cradleboard from the Philbrook Museum featured in the *American Indian American Flag* exhibition is analyzed here to better understand the use of the flag, the relationship of the flag to the Lakota designs, and the intentional misrepresentation of the flag in this composition. The cradleboard has been in the Philbrook collection for an unknown number of years coming to the museum as a gift from the University of Tulsa by way of the Ellis Soper Collection. This particular cradleboard was included in the 1976 Bicentennial exhibition titled *The American Indian and the American Flag*, organized by the Flint Institute of Arts

The cradleboard in the Philbrook collection is a classic fully beaded Lakota cradleboard in fair/good condition and with all the expected qualities of Lakota beadwork made circa 1880 – 1890. The beaded body of the cradle measures 26" high and 10" wide, not including the beaded decorative tab on the head or the wood support and frame. For future reference all descriptions of the cradleboard will be based on the orientation of the cradleboard standing vertically, or as it would look being worn on the back of a mother.

The 23 rows of Paha Stitch (lane stitch)[123] run in parallel rows from the foot to the head, wrapping around the circumference of the cradle exterior. The beadwork is applied with sinew on native tanned hide (attributed as cow hide) and the cradle cover is unlined. Each row of beadwork is made up of individual stitches consisting of about 9 beads per stitch. The beads would be classified today as a size 12 by the conventions used by European beadmakers, and the beads are likely Italian and Bohemian in origin. The rows of beadwork circumnavigate the ovoid front opening that laces up to contain and protect the child inside. The background is a solid opaque white size 12 bead and designs are rendered in deep opaque apple green, opaque cobalt blue, opaque mustard yellow, and whiteheart red, a historic bead type utilizing a layer of transparent

[123] Rhonda HolyBear, Lakota tribal member, and expert on the history of nomenclature for Lakota beadwork, correspondence, Oct. 2022. Unpublished. HolyBear has spearheaded the effort to rename the derogatory "lazy stitch" to Paha Stitch, to return to Lakota nomenclature.

red glass over a white core resulting in startling luminosity and intensity of color. The color selection is consistent with Lakota designs of the 1880's, and the centrality of the designs, the absence of narrow linear elements, and the overall aesthetic indicates that this composition of designs is more in line with early 1880 time period than the 1890 proposed on the Philbrook object file. The overall cradle design has two alternating main patterns, a four directions symbol embedded in a full parfleche symbol that is surrounded by simplified lodge with a door design, and paired flags design. The square in the square and lodge design is outlined with layers of concentric outlines in red, blue, yellow, and red again, with a green interior, and inside that green field a blue four directions symbol. Outside of the outlines of the square there are two lodges on each side of the square, on the heartline or top and bottom side the lodges flanking the line are cobalt blue with a yellow door. The lodge designs on the right and left of the square are also blue with a yellow door but have additional features of being taller and thinner overall, a red outline around the door, and red tips on the smoke flaps. I would propose that the lodges with the red accents are more representative with true lodges that Lakota people live in, whereas the "lodges" on the heartline sides are more of a cognate or stand in for sacred mountains with cave entrances, or the sacred cave of origin, the Wind Cave in the *Paha Sapa*, the Black Hills. All in all, the sacred geometry and number four is repeated in every possible way in the Lakota designs with great attention to the relationship of the number of things to the meaning of things. The center of the square has a four directions symbol, the symbol is embedded in the full parfleche prosperity symbol, the prosperity symbol is contained by four outlines, and the square is surrounded by 4 x 2 lodges, four of each type. This square and lodge design is near the foot on the left and right, and again at the head of the cradle for a total of three repetitions.

This attention to multiples of four also extends to the flag and how it is portrayed on the body of the cradle, The flags are oriented upwards with flag poles extended down mimicking the orientation of a flag flying, the flagpoles oriented parallel to the heartline, the fly edges of flag

closest to the heartline and the hoist edges on the exterior edges of the cradle. The total number of flags on the cradleboard is four, with a matched pair on each side. In these qualities the flag appears to be made or oriented “correctly”. The flag design however also has a several anomalies that are suggestive of intentional mistakes. First the numeric qualities of each flag, the canton contains a grid of twenty stars, and there are twenty-one stripes in total, eleven red and ten white. Also, several stripes are above the blue canton.

Aside from the two main designs there are additional minor decorative elements. There is a repeating mountain design wrapping around the front cradle edge. This is a deep rolled edge stitch about twenty beads deep. The depth of the rolled edges mimics the width of the rows of Paha stitch and maintains that visual repetition, and the design mimics the idea of triangles with doors or splits mimicking caves. The overall wrapped design encompasses the opening of the cradle, and each small design element is placed without regard to the main cradle designs, indicating the placement of these edge designs is not dependent on the location of the main design, the meanings and placement are separate, though perhaps thematically complementary.

A note on the wood used for the frame. There is no way to know if the wood frame is original to the cradle cover or a later replacement. It is however very unlikely that it was made at the same time or intentionally for this cradle. These types of cradle covers were a product of a pragmatic people and were not intended to be displayed or stored in their fully constructed state if not being used. The entirety of a cradleboard could be deconstructed, the wooden frame removed and dismantled, and the elaborately beaded cover rolled up and stored for the next time a family had an infant needing a cradleboard. Later the cradle cover would be brought out and attached to a new or recycled wood frame. This frame is painfully devoid of design or decoration and the only interesting aspect is that it is made from commercially produced wood trim meant for finishing interior buildings. The trim is 3” wide and has parallel grooves milled into the facing side. The maker of the cradle frame, whether an Indigenous user or a later collector, intentionally

put the commercial milled side of the wood trim facing the back and rusticated the front facing edges of the wood. These efforts imply that the commercial qualities of the wood trim were undesired, and the maker intentionally made efforts to make the frame look more like older frames made from Native sourced wood. The result is pragmatic but revealing that aesthetics concerning materials and sources were important to the final user, whether that user was Native or not.

When we compare and examine the exactitude concerning numbers of elements on the two types of designs, we have a stark difference in execution. The Lakota designs are executed with forethought and emphasis on getting the number of elements precisely represented. In contrast the flag form with the stripes above and below the canton and the numerical representation of the stripes and stars is off, and off by so much that we can draw conclusions about priorities and care. This type of “mistake” is common in other versions of flag imagery in Indigenous art. On the cover of the catalogue for the American Indian Flint catalogue the drawing has nineteen stripes and 16 stars despite the media allowing exacting precision. A quick survey of the catalogue shows that more than 60% of the beadwork items depicted have dramatically incorrect flags. What can we conclude by understanding the intention and execution of these designs side by side in one piece by one maker?

Indigenous women were highly focused on representing a thing in a certain manner with extraordinary care to number, orientation, and placement of elements. It is likely that the entire focus of beadwork as an art form is focused on the requirement and desire to accurately include the proper repetition of elements and achieve the correct harmony in numbers. In the same object to inaccurately portray a design also having a social value privileging number and placement of elements is incongruity to the point of intention. Are these Native women were naïve or incapable of observing the importance in the design and elements of the flag? We can see in the beadwork art that native women were capable of properly managing the process of adapting the flag

elements to beadwork constraints when it suited them and certainly, they were masters of design of geometric style. That Native women didn't care very much about the rightness of the flag implies either that they personally assigned very little importance, which is contradicted by the presence of the flag. Conversely that native women intentionally made mistakes in representing the flag as a subversive act.

Most scholars attribute mistakes in the flag as flowing from the constraints of the materials and the type of objects.[124] I would willingly concede that there are categories in which the size, design, inherent restrictions of the malleability of beads create circumstances in which it would be impossible or undesirable to depict the flag with pedantic accuracy. Items with small workable areas such as moccasins, belts, small pouches, etc. do not have sufficient area in which to properly depict an accurate flag. In other instances, the effort to render the flag accurately would require the design to become too complex to be read properly at that scale from any distance. In these cases, we can clearly see how the artist simplifies the flag motif while keeping enough of the design elements to keep the message clear. I heartily agree that in those cases the restrictions of space and media are the cause of the alterations.

Instances where the space, media, and skill set have ample opportunity for accuracy, but the artists deviates anyway is an opportunity to imagine the alternative intentions. On the cover of The Flint Catalogue mentioned above the artist drew and painted an image of a war dance. The painting is on muslin and was created by a Shoshone man, dated 1910. In this image the flag is on a pole flying over a group of Shoshone men dancing and a group of men around a drum. Every detail is rendered with minute care. The drum has seven singers, with two women seated nearby. Every singer has unique clothing, face paint, and adornment. The drum has four curved post adornments with feathers, again minute detail. Every dancer has the correct number of feathers on

[124] Flint Institute of Arts, Pohrt essay, 11.

their breechcloth, and even buttons on vests are rendered carefully. Above it all flies a flag with 20 stripes and 16 stars. In this media and on this scale the artist could have easily rendered the flag correctly, and we can see from the rest of the image that the ability to depict is obvious. The artist is acting with absolute precision to depict details important to the maker and viewer by having the exact representations of dance regalia, body paint, and clothing details. And yet, the flag is glaringly wrong. For previous scholars to gloss over this wrongness there must be an active avoidance of the questions that would arise from such an observation. There is a sense of disrespect, of even disdain in the intentional wrongness of the flag in these depictions.[125] That same intentional wrongness is present in the flags on the Philbrook Museum Lakota cradleboard. Perhaps this type of disrespect or disdain for the rightness of the flag could masquerade as simpleness, or ignorance, or merely the limitations of an inferior people. Could these individuals be employing the flag as a means of appearing to agree with the wild assumptions made of them? Could employing this motif be a source of self-empowerment, a decision to wrong something to reclaim the right of commentary?

In the many versions of children's clothing, cradles, and toys with flags I see unique stories that provide a clear window into the Lakota experience of the early reservation time. Images such as our Lakota mother (FIGURE 1) and children can be a tool to seeing the flag in beadwork as a sign that can be read many ways, but not patriotic. In this image we see the mother making very deliberate and nuanced choices in representing her children and how flag motifs could play a role in the identity of Lakota people. The children wear Anglo clothing, except where the beadwork intervenes, as a partial and adapted form of Lakota identity signaling. The flag is incorporated into the overall Lakota design, but these children do not hold small flags, the promotional kind that were handed out on the reservations every Fourth of July. Flags have not

[125] Logan and Schmittou, "Inverted Flags in Plains Indian Art", 217.

been repurposed or sewn into the clothing, only represented in a partial manner, in a Lakota scheme, on Lakota clothing.

It is not as if this kind of hybrid merging of Lakota and colonial forms was the only option or the nor. Many photos portray Lakota women in full Lakota dress with no clothing cut in Anglo form or any compromises. This choice of all Lakota dress existed temporally alongside our Lakota mother who is strategically making different choices for her children, possibly hoping for different outcomes. In this photo we see a Lakota woman making choices for her children that are a kind of bid for a positive outcome, a necessary compromise for a palatable outcome. She models a tactic of wear the Anglo clothing, but always keep your Lakota identity in reserve for important occasions. She has appeared to assimilate while maintaining a Lakota identity with Lakota artwork made by Lakota women.

Importantly these are not real flags, hanging from flagpoles, draped over coffins, or waving in front of boarding schools. These are representations of flags by Lakota women, in Lakota art forms, used in Lakota spaces and a Lakota meaning should be assigned to these symbols. Patriotism has no place in Lakota culture in this time, patriotism is an expression of pride in belonging. Lakota people even when choosing to acquiesce and assimilate could not and did not fully belong in the larger settler colonial society. These flags may signal many meanings, but belonging to the United States as full shareholders was not a possible meaning.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

What are the real-world consequences, harmful or beneficial, that resulted from the appropriation of this symbol? Most of our speculation is an exercise in imagining the perspectives of people who did not have the opportunity to speak for themselves. We imagine their intentions and look for confirmation in the material record. One dramatic and documented event can tell us what the consequences were for one Lakota family. At the Massacre of Wounded Knee in December of 1890 about 300 Lakota people were slaughtered by troops of the 7th Calvary under command of Col. James W. Forsyth.[126] In the aftermath of this violence military personnel and later civilians contracted to bury the frozen bodies in a mass grave found as many as four infants somehow still alive, wrapped in shawls and sheltered beneath the frozen murdered bodies of their mothers.[127] One infant girl was wearing a beaded bonnet with a geometric design, and another girl a beaded bonnet with a geometric design that included American flag motifs. (FIGURE 15) In Figure 15 we see another example of a baby bonnet fully beaded and incorporating flag designs.

In the aftermath of the massacre Lakota bands came from nearby communities to search for relatives, provide care, and to try to triage the disaster. These communities found nursing foster mothers that could take the infants in and provide homes and families in the absence of any

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[126] Smith, *Moon of Popping Trees,* 4.

[127] Renee Sansom Flood, *Lost Bird of Wounded Knee, Spirit of the Lakota.* (New York, NY: Scribner, 1995), 7.

known living relatives. In a menacing twist of fate Brigadier Gen. Leonard W. Colby became obsessed with the idea of the flag on the girl's bonnet as somehow implying she was meant to become his property. He defied his superiors' orders and took the infant that had been wearing the bonnet with American flags as a personal trophy of war. In protest the tribe rescued the infant and attempted to flee. Colby surrounded the group and threatened them with annihilation should they not hand her back over to him. With the massacre only a few days old this threat was not in the least abstract. Reluctantly they handed Zintkala Nuni to Colby and sealed her fate as his unwanted, but symbolically useful trophy "daughter."[128] (FIGURE 16) Figure 16 is a portrait taken of Zintkala Nuni and Colby within a year of Wounded Knee. The name Zintkala Nuni means Lost Bird in Lakota, this child had been deprived of all family members because of the violence of the military and had been named Lost Bird. Now she would be deprived of family, culture, safety, and bodily autonomy due to the attention brought upon her by the presence of the American flag. Perhaps Zintkala Nuni's mother made the bonnet thinking it would signal her docility, her family's peaceful intentions, that this family was industrious but no threat to the settlers encroaching on her tribal land. Instead, this one small example of the settler colonial dialogue imploded with violent ramifications. Colby would insincerely continue to use the child as evidence of his affinity for and sympathy for Native tribes and this advantage led to him having the position of Assistant US Attorney General and paid special counsel for tribes. He continued to profit while she suffered abuse and alienation, eventually dying in a state of physical and mental collapse in San Francisco at the age of 29 after periodically performing as a vaudeville dancer in faux native costume for tourists.[129] In his essay Pohrt mentions the infant

[128] Sansom Flood, *Lost Bird of Wounded Knee,* 77.
[129] Sansom Flood, *Lost Bird of Wounded Knee,* 299.

with the beaded flag bonnet, though he tellingly neglects to finish the story and does not speak of the horror of her abduction and tragic life.[130]

Most interactions in the settler colonial spaces of South Dakota had more seemingly neutral endings, though I would argue the violence endured by the Lakota is illustrated by the wearing of the flag of the oppressor. As example Red Cloud was a war leader of the Lakota, the purported mastermind behind the resistance and war to close the Bozeman Trail. It was his leadership and strategy that succeeded in securing the Treaty of 1868, closing the Bozeman Trail and establishing Lakota rights to large areas of land. Though he organized and fought bravely no amount of effort would have permanently stopped the advance of the resource extraction and settler colonial pressures. By the late 1880's Red Cloud had come to a personal, political, and spiritual decision that capitulation and assimilation were the only means of saving any remnant of the Lakota people and culture. Red Cloud underwent a conversion to Catholicism, though this may not have excluded all Native belief practice. He also visually adopted the practice of literally wrapping himself in American flags. Flags are hung all over the walls in his cabin and in many photos, he is posed with a flag draped around his shoulders. (FIGURES 17 and 18) He is often with a downcast gaze and flat affectation or expression, what we today might call dissociation. Let us remember that this is the real flag that Red Cloud wears, rarely does he wear beadwork with flags, though surely this would have been available to him. Against this extreme example of a Lakota person wrapping the flag as an obvious symbol of alliance or surrender we have the profusion of flags in beadwork. The flags in beadwork are not a true rebellion, but also not a true assimilation. The flag in beadwork is a unique Lakota expression of a set of experiences in a specific time we cannot exactly duplicate or understand from this distance. This is an expression

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[130] Other notable authors and experts also edit the story of Zintkala Nuni from their versions. Rex Alan Smith in his comprehensive book on the massacre of Wounded Knee, *Moon of Popping Trees* fails to mention the child or Gen. Colby.

of the settler colonial experience, and a form of commentary, opinion and action happening in these spaces, a thoroughly Lakota women's space.

Lakota people were not becoming American, nor were they invited to become American, they were employing American symbols in beadwork, in a manner that signaled of their unfitness to be Americans. The Sundance was proof that the Lakota were not striving to become Christian, giveaways were proof that generosity was more valued than capitalistic competitiveness and rendering flags in beads in a way no white woman would ever think of is directly subversive act by Lakota women. The symbol rendered, but never quite right, never in the right manner, never in the right context. This phenomenon is thoroughly Lakota, thoroughly engaging, and worthy of our reassessment on Lakota terms with Lakota women as the main character, always. (Figure 19.)

I would close with an image of four young Lakota girls, lovingly adorned with extensive beadwork made by Lakota women, lined up and radiating the high esteem of their community, ready to become the future artists of the Lakota. This is an image of hope, continuity, and an expression of the very high esteem children were held in this society. These girls are revered as full members in their own rights, from the time of childhood, their personhood and individuality protected, nurtured, and celebrated. This is a type of Lakota expression that our mother in FIGURE 1 for unknown reasons could not embrace, the unapologetically full tribal identity in dress and art, but she did retain her own version. This is a type of expression and joy that was taken from Zintkala Nuni, that she needed but could not replicate cut off from her people. This is the manner in which beadwork should be understood, made by Lakota women, for Lakota people, as an expression of Lakota joy and worldview.

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APPENDICES

Figure 1

Figure 1 Lakota Woman and three children, Rosebud Reservation, South Dakota, 1895-1899. Denver Museum of Nature and Science, BR61-309. Photo by Jesse H. Brantley, © Denver Museum of Nature and Science.

Figure 2

Figure 2. Photography by Molly Murphy Adams, Jan. 2023, Object number 1995.25.31, Ethonogarphic Collection, Philbrook Museum, Tulsa, OK.

Figure 3

Figure 3 Indian women's Handiwork, Photograph by Frank Bennet Fiske, Collection – 1952 Frank Bennett Fiske, Number 05847-negative, North dakota Heritage Center & Museum, © North Dakota Heritage Center & State Museum.

Figure 4

Figure 4 Squaw Dance at Rosebud Agency, South Dakota. Photograph by John A. Anderson, 1893. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs online catalog, call number Lot 3328, Reproduction number LC-USZ62-61450, Copyright john A. Anderson.

Figure 5

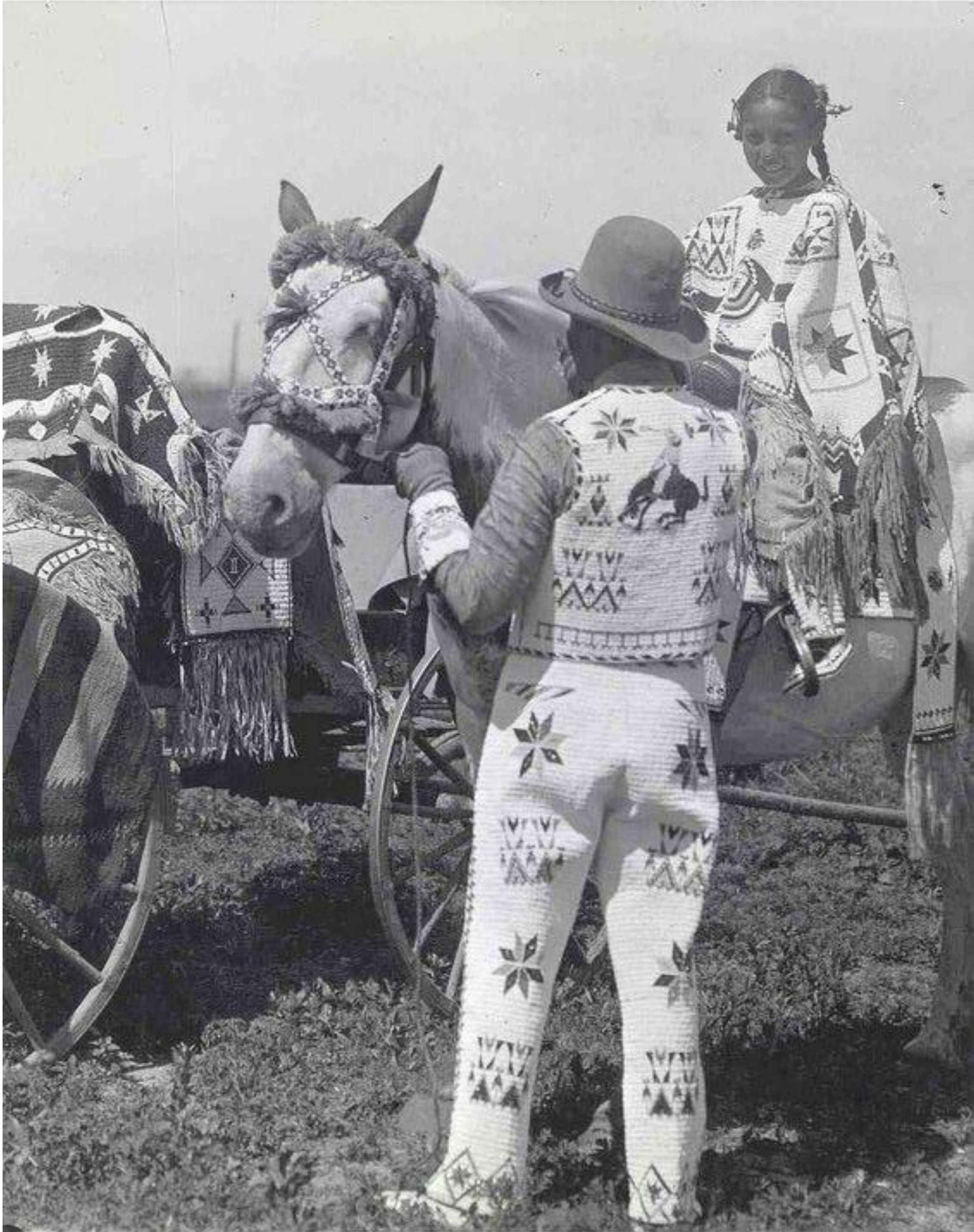

Figure 5 Albert Six Feathers and Eva Roubideaux in beaded regalia for honoring ceremony, 1924. Gelatin dry plate photograph by joseph Zimmerman. Department of Special Collections and University Archives, Marquette University Libraries.

Figure 6

Figure 6 Lakota/Santee Sioux vest, Heritage Auctions, Dallas TX, ©Heritage Auctions.

Figure 7

Figure 9, Central Plains Pictorial Beaded and Quilled Hide Pipebag, Lakota, Photography by Bonhams/Skinner Auction House, 2010. © Bonhams/Skinner.

Figure 8

Figure 8 Sioux Squaws waiting for rations at comisary, Pine Ridge Agency, SD., Photography by Clarence Grant Morledge, February 1891, Number x31305, Denver Public Library Special Collections.

Figure 9

Figure 9 Photography by Molly Murphy Adams, Jan. 2023, Object number 1995.25.31, Ethonogarphic Collection, Philbrook Museum, Tulsa, OK.

Figure 10

Figure 10 Photography by Molly Murphy Adams, Jan. 2023, Object number 1995.25.31, Ethonogarphic Collection, Philbrook Museum, Tulsa, OK.

Figure 11

Figure 11 Photography by Molly Murphy Adams, Jan. 2023, Object number 1995.25.31, Ethonogarphic Collection, Philbrook Museum, Tulsa, OK.

Figure 12

Figure 12 Photography by Molly Murphy Adams, Jan. 2023, Object number 1995.25.31, Ethonogarphic Collection, Philbrook Museum, Tulsa, OK.

Figure 13

Figure 13 Photography by Molly Murphy Adams, Jan. 2023, Object number 1995.25.31, Ethonogarphic Collection, Philbrook Museum, Tulsa, OK.

Figure 14

Figure 14 Photography by Molly Murphy Adams, Jan. 2023, Object number 1995.25.31, Ethonogarphic Collection, Philbrook Museum, Tulsa, OK.

Figure 15

Figure 15 Baby's Cap, beadwork with American flag designs, Photograph by the Smithsonian, National Museum of the American Indian, Catalog Number 15/3248.

Figure 16

Figure 16 "Zintkala Nuni, Lost Bird, found on the field of Wounded knee on the fourth day after the battle by the side of her dead mother and adopted by me. Yours L.W. Colby," Caption on the back of uncredited photograph in the family collection of Bea Kendall, Beatrice, SD.

Figure 17

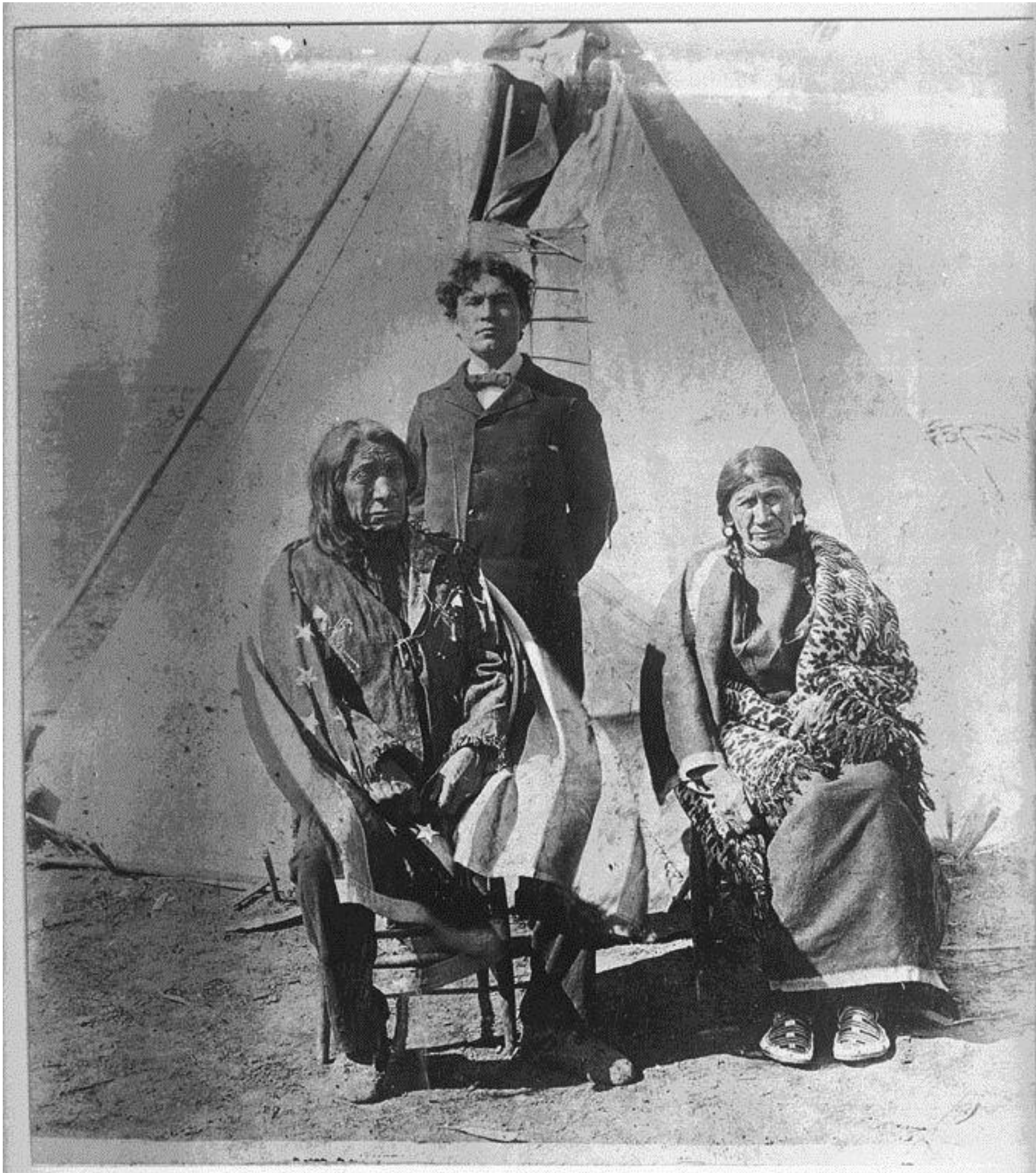

Figure 17 Chief Makhpiya-Luta or Ma-Kpe-Ah-Lou-Tah (Red Cloud or Scarlet Cloud) with His Wife, We-Tamahecha (Lean Woman), Red Cloud Wearing American Flag, and with Raymond J. B. Smith); All Near Tipi, photographer not recorded, 1901. Smithsonian Institute, National Anthropological Archives, NAA.PhotoLot.176, Item BAE GN 03244 06537100.

Figure 18

Figure 18 Uncredited Image of Red Cloud's bedroom, Nebraska State Historical Society Photograph Collections Wounded Knee Collection, negative no. RG2845:8-17.

Figure 19

Figure 19 Four Lakota Girls, Photograph by Vincent Mercaldo, no date, McCracken research Library, Buffalo Bill Center of the West, Vincent Mercaldo Collection, P.71.1182.

VITA

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