

## A Lakota View of Pté Oyáte (Buffalo Nation)

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Almighty God has made all things. He made the ground, and all that is on it. . . . He gave me the buffalo. . . . I have lived on the buffalo—I was raised on it, and I have raised all my children on it. The buffalo I wish above all other things. . . . All that the good God gives me is the buffalo; and all that I have that is good I wish for them.—Two Lances<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

In 1500 there were some thirty million bison in North America, and herds could cover 200 to 300 square miles during the summer mating season.<sup>2</sup> By 1883 the bison were all but exterminated, stemming ultimately from the expansion of the United States, the settlement of the western frontier, and the clash of cultures. Environmental historians have discovered that the causes of the near extinction of the bison were complex. The reintroduction of horses into North America in 1680, the connection of Plains tribes to the world market economy and market hunting in the early 1700s, the international demand for buffalo hides and tongues that developed in the 1820s, and the growing Indian dependence on Euro-American trade goods all negatively affected bison populations.<sup>3</sup>

Beginning in 1846 continent-wide droughts ravaged the Great Plains, signaling the death knell of the Little Ice Age, a wet cycle that had allowed the plains to flourish as a prairie utopia for bison and other wildlife for three centuries. According to Dan Flores, “During the nineteenth century . . . droughts of more than five years duration struck the Great Plains four times at roughly twenty-year intervals.”<sup>4</sup> But by midcentury ancient bison drought refuges in the tall-grass prairies and Rocky Mountains were flooded with emigrants and homesteaders traveling west along the overland trails. Domestic cattle and horses increased competition for forage and water and brought new bovine diseases that infected bison. Euro-Americans competed with Indians for bison and other resources, while introducing diseases

that left death in their wake. Natural processes such as wolf predation also exacerbated bison population decline on the northern plains.<sup>5</sup>

By the 1830s bison—the staple of Plains Indian life—were disappearing.<sup>6</sup> When the demand for bison robes fell in the 1870s their trade value plummeted, inducing Indian hunters deeply dependent on Euro-American trade goods to increase their efforts. White hide hunters and Canadian Métis with modern rifles flooded the plains. The final blows came quickly and decisively: with no attempt at conservation by the US government, hunters shipped some ten million bison hides east from the Great Plains in the 1870s and 1880s and destroyed the last herds in Montana in the early 1880s.<sup>7</sup> Flores writes that an “unprecedented confluence of historical forces” led to the decline of the bison, and that “a quarter century before the hide hunters . . . counted final coup on the northern plains, that agglomeration of forces had been assembled.”<sup>8</sup>

Contemporary scholars have thus come to a new understanding of the near extinction of the plains bison herds. But what was the Lakota perception of their relationship with the bison?<sup>9</sup> Given the animal’s core ecological, economic, social, and cultural significance as a key and enduring symbol, what was the Lakota perspective on the bison’s decline? What is the continuing role of bison in contemporary Lakota life? Without understanding and appreciating the significance of bison in Lakota culture it is imprudent to posit Native theories about bison decline.

Raymond DeMallie notes that nineteenth-century written sources “present outsiders’ viewpoints on the course of events that, in less than a century, transformed the Sioux from independent bison hunters to reservation dwellers.”<sup>10</sup> Euro-American accounts reflect different cultural values based on divergent ontological and epistemological systems. While these accounts are valuable, they place significance and meaning on different aspects of events than would Native accounts. Indeed, even the concept of narrative is culturally relative: each culture interprets its past in its own way. The Lakota past is consequently different from the Euro-American past, especially when analysis and reconstruction occur in the present. DeMallie reminds us that, “just as we are outsiders to other cultures, we are also outsiders to the past.”<sup>11</sup> Documents written by Lakota people, particularly in their own language, and speeches recorded in translation at councils and other public events provide the ideal entrée into Lakota perspectives. Bringing these two types of historical information together is the challenge of ethnohistory.<sup>12</sup>

As the Lakotas pushed farther west onto the Great Plains and adopted nomadic hunting during the late 1600s and early 1700s, bison emerged as a foundational social, cultural, and religious symbol.<sup>13</sup> This transition was, according to Flores, “a kind of ethnogenesis, recreating themselves around new, richer possibilities.”<sup>14</sup> As early as 1660 explorer Pierre Esprit Radisson called the Sioux “the nation of the

Beef” because of their close association with and dependence upon bison.<sup>15</sup> Plains Indian uses of bison are well documented.<sup>16</sup> “When our people killed a bison,” explains Lakota author Luther Standing Bear, “all of the animal was utilized in some manner; nothing was wasted.”<sup>17</sup> Bison provided for nearly every Lakota subsistence, material, and economic need. For many generations bison was the staple food, the ultimate provider of all the necessities of life, and the means allowing for the perpetuation of future generations.<sup>18</sup>

The bison was a fundamental Lakota social, cultural, and religious symbol. For the Lakotas the bison was and is much more than an ungulate. It was the lifeblood of the people and a foundational institution, not only the major food and subsistence source, but also a centerpiece of social, religious, and magico-ritual life. Within the Lakota worldview the bison was what Mircea Eliade labels a *hierophany*, an “act of manifestation” of sacred, superhuman power or energy that Lakotas call *wakǰáŋ* (sacred, mysterious, holy, powerful, incomprehensible).<sup>19</sup> Eliade writes, “By manifesting the sacred, any object becomes *something else*, yet it continues to remain *itself*, for it continues to participate in its surrounding cosmic milieu.”<sup>20</sup>

The bison was a “key symbol” for the Lakota: a focus of public cultural concern and interest playing a key role in relation to other elements in the cultural system of thought.<sup>21</sup> Key symbols are “objects of reverence and/or catalysts of emotion” that sum up and express in emotionally powerful ways the totality of a given cultural system.<sup>22</sup> Bison were sacred comprehensive symbols and objects of attention and cultural respect that synthesized and ordered diverse experience, connecting it back to the foundations of Lakota culture. The symbol of the bison, a natural form with social and cultural significance, fused the Lakota ethos—the emotional tone or core normative values—and worldview—the distinct, culturally constituted understanding of the world or existential conceptions of the ultimate reality of the universe.<sup>23</sup>

## Mitákuye Oyás’iŋ: The Ecological Relationship between Bison and the Lakotas

The Lakota worldview was relatively void of fragmentation and separatism, the “us and them” that demarcates and categorizes modern western existence. The Lakotas’ close interaction with animals was the result of both material and spiritual necessity.<sup>24</sup> DeMallie takes this realization a step further, writing, “the Indians, the animals, and the land were one.”<sup>25</sup> Kinship was perhaps the most fundamental category in American Indian life, binding all together and defining accepted patterns of interaction. The concept of relationship, symbolized by the Sacred Pipe, another



fundamental Lakota religious symbol, united all life—human and nonhuman persons alike—in a great circle of existence without beginning or end.<sup>26</sup>

First and foremost the Lakota people depended on their relatives, the bison.<sup>27</sup> According to Black Elk, “We, [the] Indian race, and the beings on this earth—the bison, elk, and birds in the air—they are just like relatives to us and we get along fine with them, for we get our power from them and from them we live.”<sup>28</sup> Since the emergence of humans and bison onto the surface of the earth in mythical times the two have been relatives. Through the bison, Black Elk continues, “we send up our voices and get help from the Great Spirit. It was his intention at that time to put us together so that we would be relatives-like. We got powers from the four-leggeds and the wings of the air. . . . The first thing an Indian learns is to love each other and that they should be relative-like to the four-leggeds.”<sup>29</sup> Both the Lakotas and the bison adapted to and altered the plains environment in which they thrived. The bison provided all the elementary needs of human survival: food, clothing, and shelter. It should come as no surprise then that the bison became an important symbol of great cultural and religious significance.

Bison hunting was the central Lakota mode of production, providing for the majority of their material demands and desires (fig. 12.1). It was their way of life, and only through the bison could the people survive and prosper. As Ella Deloria writes, each Lakota family or camp circle was on “an eternal quest for bison.”<sup>30</sup> Bison consequently influenced nearly every domain of Lakota life and society. Newborns were wrapped in the soft hide of a bison calf, and the dead were buried or laid on scaffolds wrapped in finely beaded or quilled bison robes. Lakota accounts of an afterlife (*wanáǵiyata*—the place where the spirits gather) include green plains and an abundance of free-roaming bison. Months, or moons, were named after characteristics of the bison annual cycle, and years were often commemorated by events pertaining to bison, such as scarcity or a particularly successful hunt.<sup>31</sup>

Joseph Epes Brown writes that the harvest of the rich resource of the bison “required patterns of living which placed the Indians continually close to the ever-moving herds. It is understandable that the Oglala should know, in great detail, all the characteristics and habits of this animal.”<sup>32</sup> Consequently, the Lakotas had detailed terminology for bison at various ages and stages of development. By extension, butchering bison also provided detailed knowledge of mammalian biology and physiology.<sup>33</sup>

The Lakota people shadowed the herds of the bison people throughout most of the year, often traveling along bison trails.<sup>34</sup> When the creek and river ice broke in the spring, Sioux winter camps dispersed and the men went out hunting in small



Figure 12.1. *Sioux Indians Hunting Buffalo, 1835*, by George Catlin.

parties. The bison migrated west onto the plains and the Sioux followed them. During the summer the bison congregated together in large herds, and the Lakotas did likewise, gathering together for their annual Sun Dance and other summer religious ceremonies. At the height of summer, the Lakotas embarked on communal hunts, which provided meat and hides for the winter, as well as the surplus bison products that fueled inter- and intratribal trade. Throughout the spring and summer months the Lakotas hunted bison on the plains. Fall was a time to hunt and procure excess meat for the lean winter months. During harsh plains winters Lakotas frequently camped along wooded rivers or streams for shelter from the wind and to ensure access to water and firewood; when the weather was coldest, bison also sought shelter along waterways. The Lakotas recognize the Black Hills in present-day South Dakota as the sacred center of their territory in part because bison frequently congregated there.<sup>35</sup>

Bison hunting was a social, political, and economic activity. It encouraged and reinforced the social organization of the Lakotas into *thiyóšpaye* (tipi/lodge groups)—small bands comprised of one or more extended families, usually related

through a set of brothers and other male relatives. Lakota *thiyóšpaye* were also extremely effective hunting units.<sup>36</sup> Aside from providing food, clothing, shelter, tools, and other subsistence requirements, bison hunting functioned much like a ritual performance uniting the Lakota people. The hunt and subsequent feasting and processing of meat and hides served as a collective ritual and vehicle for enculturation that transmitted and perpetuated traditional knowledge, techniques, beliefs, values, norms, and practices, while simultaneously strengthening social solidarity, reaffirming individual and collective identity, and reinforcing a sense of community. The demands of the labor-intensive communal hunt required specific modes of technical and social cooperation, serving as a powerful public reminder of the social, political, and economic interdependence of individual Lakota families and *thiyóšpaye*.<sup>37</sup> According to Brown, “the quest for game” was a “religious activity to be prepared for and concluded by ritual.”<sup>38</sup>

Bison robes and other products of the hunt served as forms of wealth and media of exchange in Lakota society. The Lakotas traditionally traded bison products with their eastern relatives, the Santees, Yanktons, and Yanktonais, for horses and European-manufactured goods, especially firearms and ammunition. The Lakotas also traded bison products with the sedentary horticultural tribes along the Missouri River for corn and other garden produce, particularly with the Arikaras, and also with Euro-Americans directly. This robe trade led to relative economic wealth, stability, and independence and was a major force in the Lakota ascension to power on the Upper Missouri in the late 1700s and 1800s.<sup>39</sup>

The bison was a model for Lakota life and social organization. As Stanley Vestal phrases it, the Sioux “imitated the bison.”<sup>40</sup> Bison are seasonally migratory herd animals, basing their movements on supply and accessibility of forage, water, and other resources.<sup>41</sup> According to Mary Meagher, “Bison are gregarious, forming herds according to sex, age, season, foraging conditions, and habitat. Females of all ages, calves, most males 2 to 3 years old, and one to a few older males form mixed (sometimes called cow) groups throughout the year.”<sup>42</sup> Male and female bison, referred to as bulls and cows respectively, generally live and travel in small separate bands, congregating into large combined herds only during the summer mating season. Cows with calves cluster, while bulls are solitary or travel in small groups. When cows and calves sleep at night, however, protective bulls encircle them.<sup>43</sup> Meagher writes, “Mothers commonly defend young calves from perceived danger.”<sup>44</sup> Some refer to bison social organization as matriarchal.<sup>45</sup>

Nomadic Lakotas based their seasonal migratory patterns on the bison; on the availability of forage for their horse herds; and on access to water, firewood, and other resources. In many ways the Lakota *thiyóšpaye* lodge-group system was similar to the small-herd social organization of bison. The Sioux, like the bison,



congregated into large bands or conglomerations of *thiyóšpaye* for their annual summer Sun Dance and communal hunts. Lakota people of the same generation remained divided along gender lines throughout much of the annual cycle, except for courting and reproductive purposes. The bison-hunting lifestyle and the distinction between male and female roles and responsibilities reinforced a gendered division of labor. Adult males occupied themselves with activities outside the village, such as hunting, warfare, and raiding. Consequently, men were often isolated from women and children, whose duties focused on the village and household: child rearing; gathering roots, vegetables, and fruits; processing hides; and tipi maintenance. Some Lakotas refer to their society as matriarchal.<sup>46</sup> Through annual and life cycles bison ecology and social organization were models for Lakota society, and gradually the relationship between people and bison diffused into nearly every aspect of Lakota culture.

### Pté Oyáte: The Buffalo Nation from a Lakota Cultural Perspective

The Great Spirit made us, the Indians . . . He gave us the buffalo . . . for food and clothing. . . . We told them [the whites] that the supernatural powers, *Taku Wakan*, had given to the Lakotas the buffalo for food and clothing. We told them that where the buffalo ranged, that was our country. We told them that the country of the buffalo was the country of the Lakotas. We told them that the buffalo must have their country and the Lakotas must have the buffalo. —Red Cloud<sup>47</sup>

Thátháŋka (Buffalo Bull Spirit) was one of sixteen manifestations or refractions of the unified entity Wakháŋ Tháŋka (Great Mystery), the entirety of all *wakháŋ* energy or power in the cosmos. The Buffalo Spirit, friend of the Sun and associated with the north, was a material spirit whose substance or essence was visible according to his will.<sup>48</sup> When visible, his physical form was that of a large beast, but he could also appear as a natural bison or as a man. He lived beneath the earth with the bison people. Thátháŋka was the patron of sexual relations, the family, generosity, virtue, industry, fecundity, and ceremonies. His *thúŋ* (spiritual potency or essence) prevailed especially in ceremonies pertaining to the Sun.<sup>49</sup> The Bison Spirit symbolized and glorified those actions that literally maintained the Lakota population, perpetuating the generations. Thátháŋka sanctified and encouraged the basic human instincts to eat and reproduce, two drives that preserve the individual and the group.

In 1896 Buffalo Dreamer and Oglala chief Little Wound said:

The Buffalo gives all game to the Lakotas. He is pleased with those who are generous and hates those who are stingy. An industrious woman pleases him. He gives many children to the women he likes. He protects maidens. . . . He controls all affairs of love

. . . He cares for pregnant women. A young woman should have his mark on her head. A shaman should paint a red mark at the parting of her hair. He should perform a ceremony when doing this. A woman who wears this mark will be industrious. She will bear many children. She will not quarrel. . . .

If a man sees the Buffalo in his boy vision, he should paint the picture of a buffalo on his shield and on his tipi. He will be a successful hunter. . . . He will get the woman he wishes for his wife.<sup>50</sup>

The Oglala consultants of James R. Walker, Pine Ridge Agency physician from 1896 to 1914, selectively differentiated the bison as a natural species from the bison as a nonhuman person or spirit being. They held that the animal bison, itself considered an especially *wakháŋ* animal, was the *huŋká* (relative) of the Bison Spirit, who, as a manifestation of *Wakháŋ Tháŋka*, was the ruler of all animals and patron spirit of the hunt, providing the Lakotas with bison and all other game. *Thátháŋka* controlled the chase and gave or withheld success to hunters.<sup>51</sup>

Lakotas conceived of bison as an *oyáte* (people, nation, tribe) of nonhuman persons who lived beneath the earth. Walker's consultants explain:

The Buffalo People are those who dwell in the regions under the world, and are the people of the Sun . . . they chose the Buffalo God to be their chief and He is so. They have the power to transmogrify and may appear on the world as animals or as of mankind, and may mingle with the Lakota and become their spouses. They can transmogrify their spouses and take them to the regions under the world. The offspring of a buffalo person and a Lakota has the powers of its buffalo parent and controls its other parent. A Lakota espoused to a buffalo person, or having buffalo children, can be freed from their control only by a Shaman whose fetish has the potency of the Buffalo God.<sup>52</sup>

In Lakota ritual language bison people were also known as the Sun's people and "the Ceremonially Red People" and were differentiated from the Bison Spirit. The Sun's People act as intermediaries between humans and *Thátháŋka*, the mediating substance being the *thúŋ* of the Pipe and sweetgrass.<sup>53</sup> As Little Wound explains, "the *Tatanka* . . . is the *Wakan* of the bison," meaning that the Bison Spirit is the sacred, underlying, timeless, superhuman being of whom the earthly bison is a reflection or manifestation.<sup>54</sup>

For nineteenth-century Lakotas, bison were more than mere physical forms. They were *wakháŋ* spirits with transformative capabilities. The animal and all its parts expressed some aspect of the *wakháŋ* or sacred. There was a triadic distinction between (1) buffalo as a natural species; (2) the *pté oyáte* (buffalo people/nation), spirit beings who dwelt beneath the earth and could take the shape of buffalo or humans; and (3) *Thátháŋka*, the Buffalo Spirit and chief of the buffalo people, also capable of transformation. All were ultimately conceptualized as manifestations or refractions of *Wakháŋ Tháŋka*.<sup>55</sup>



As important symbols of various core normative cultural values and ideals buffalo provided individual models for both men and women. The mythical mediator Ptesáŋwiŋ (White Buffalo Woman/Maiden) came to the Lakotas as a representative of the Buffalo Nation. On their behalf she gave the people the Sacred Pipe and instructed them on its use, saying, "When you are in need of buffalo meat, smoke this pipe and ask for what you need and it shall be granted you."<sup>56</sup> White Buffalo Woman symbolized purity and ideal womanhood and established the relationship between Wakháŋ Tháŋka and the Lakota people. With that relationship secure, the land, the animals, and the people became one—fixed in a single harmonious system symbolized by the circle.<sup>57</sup> According to High Eagle, "The impression left upon the people by the Maiden and her extraordinary good qualities were things that were much admired by every parent as a model for his children."<sup>58</sup>

Buffalo became closely associated with bundles of traits and normative values—cultural symbols—that applied to both males and females and provided a model for what Jeffrey Anderson refers to as life movement, "the aim to generate long life, blessings, and abundance for self, others, family, and the tribe."<sup>59</sup> The Buffalo Spirit was the patron spirit of many Lakota values, including generosity, hospitality, abundance, health, provision, fecundity, virtue, industry, persistence, the family, strength, courage, and endurance. He was the guardian of young women and women during menstruation and pregnancy and was the patron of vegetation and things that grow.<sup>60</sup>

The buffalo and the earth, both symbols of fertility and life-giving potency, were often considered as one. Alice Fletcher writes of a Lakota man who told her that "in some religious festivals the buffalo and the earth were spoken of as one and so regarded. Therefore if anyone should revile or ridicule the buffalo ever so softly the earth would hear and tell the buffalo and he would kill the men!"<sup>61</sup> The idea of offending the buffalo as spirits provided an explanation for game scarcity at any given time and a justification for buffalo medicine men and callers—Buffalo Dreamers with the power to locate herds. From Lakota perspectives when the Buffalo Spirit or his *akíčhita* (messengers), the natural bison, were offended they retreated into the earth whence they originated, causing game scarcity.<sup>62</sup>

Brown writes, "The values of generosity, creativity, and strength seem not to be projected onto the bison but to emanate from it."<sup>63</sup> Through the guidance and example of the bison, males became successful hunters, providing health, an abundance of food, hides, and other necessities, and a material basis for generosity and hospitality. Females became industrious, virtuous, and fecund, caring mothers, diligent keepers of the tipi, and gifted creators and producers of beautiful crafts. As the patron of abundance and plenty Thátháŋka provided Lakotas with meat, hides, moccasins, sinew, bladder bags, and other products. But for nineteenth-century

Lakotas the symbolic abundance epitomized by the Buffalo Spirit went beyond physical products. Bison represented life itself.

The Buffalo Spirit was also the patron of the hunt. For Lakota males, hunting was essential, and being a successful hunter was a prerequisite for generating life movement. Hunting success earned men social prestige and made them desirable as husbands and dependable as fathers. Lakota medicine men presiding over the *Huŋká* (Making of Relatives) Ceremony, in which bison symbolism predominated, harangued *Huŋká* candidates: "The Buffalo will cause your women to be industrious and to bear many children. . . . If you listen to the Buffalo He will aid you in the chase so that you will have plenty of meat and robes."<sup>64</sup>

The Buffalo Spirit was also central to the female ideal, driving women to be honorable, industrious, and generous and causing them to be fertile, bearing many healthy children.<sup>65</sup> Brown writes, "The association of the bison with the feminine creative powers of the Earth clarifies the associations of the bison with the ideal virtues of chastity, fecundity, industry, and hospitality which are valued in Oglala women."<sup>66</sup> The relationship and attentiveness of bison cows to their calves was a model for Lakota motherhood.<sup>67</sup> Deloria describes the intimate connection between women's roles and buffalo and the close connection between ecology, economy, and culture:

A garment stiff with grease and grime from being worn while tanning hides and caring for much meat was an admirable symbol of its owner's industry and skill. The garment was then not called unclean but *slót'a* "surfeited with grease." The word was even a popular epithet in olden times to compliment a woman or girl and meant simply that she was, in the opinion of the speaker, possessed of all womanly arts and skill, as well as of character. In this idiomatic usage, now obsolete, the literal meaning was forgotten and *slót'a* meant approval, not dissimilar to our colloquial "She's a number 1," or "She's O.K."<sup>68</sup>

Displeasing *Tháthánka* could be disastrous for individuals and society as a whole. The year 1799, for instance, was known among the Oglalas for the deaths of many pregnant women. Community leaders and medicine men conferred and decided the deaths were due to actions that had displeased *Tháthánka*. Life movement would cease if the people failed to live in a manner pleasing to the Buffalo Spirit and in accordance with the values he epitomized. The bison would laugh at a lazy, cowardly, or dishonest man, a common ritual phrase meaning that such a man would have no success in the hunt, and he and his relatives would suffer from hunger.<sup>69</sup>

Because bison were nonhuman persons their origins were inherently *wakhán* (mysterious).<sup>70</sup> Most Lakota accounts of bison origins indicate that, like humans, they were created within the earth where *Tháthánka* had his lodge and danced with his bovine relatives, causing bison as a natural species to regenerate and pop-

ulate the earth's surface.<sup>71</sup> The famous Ghost Dance leader Short Bull claims bison were a gift from Makhá, the feminine Earth Spirit.<sup>72</sup> "The buffalo were given by the Spirit of the Earth to the Indians. The Spirit of the Earth and of the Buffalo are the same. . . . An Indian went to a hole in the ground and found the buffalo. They were given to him for his food. He drove some of them up on the earth. From these came all the buffalo."<sup>73</sup>

Hoka-chatka told Walker another story explaining the mysterious origins of bison. In it, the buffalo people were ruled by a powerful evil buffalo and his wife. With supernatural aid a human was able to kill the mysterious buffalo and his wife. In thanks for freeing them from their captors a group of the buffalo people agreed to travel east to give their flesh for the benefit of the people of the earth. The Buffalo Ceremony commemorates the generosity of the buffalo people.<sup>74</sup>

Tháthánka and other animal spirits could be likened to unbounded latent spiritual entities, conceptualized as symbols, embodying collective meanings in the minds of Lakota people. These ageless, timeless animal spirits and nonhuman persons could intervene on the human plane, manifesting any natural form. Thus any natural species could be a manifestation of the *wakháŋ*. Transformation—in the form of a *hierophany* or manifestation of the sacred in a natural, physical form—is a crucial Lakota religious concept. These manifestations or interventions usually occurred through culturally established rituals such as the Vision Quest.<sup>75</sup>

The Hunkpapa Brave Buffalo related his buffalo dream to Frances Densmore in the early twentieth century. In his vision a spirit bison took him to a sacred lodge containing many other spirit buffalo: "The chief buffalo told me that I had been selected to represent them in life. He said the buffalo play a larger part in life than men realize."<sup>76</sup> Brave Buffalo then received a sacred song through which he acquired power to heal and practice medicine. Charging Thunder's buffalo vision led him to become a scout frequently sent out in search of bison. Lakota scouts were entrusted with the sacred and essential duty of locating bison herds, so intimate knowledge of topography and the habits of buffalo were central requirements. Those who had visions or dreamed of bison were considered to be their friends and often became members of the Tháthánka Ihánblapi (Buffalo Dreamers), a dream society of those recognized by the Buffalo Spirit or one of his *akíchita* in the Vision Quest.<sup>77</sup>

For these individuals the bison was a potent religious symbol indicative of the triadic relationship between human beings, nature and natural species, and Wakháŋ Thánka. The relationship between Buffalo Dreamers and Wakháŋ Thánka, represented by the bison as a natural species, led to a symbolic fusion of Wakháŋ Thánka and bison. For some Lakotas bison as a natural species were distinguished from the Buffalo Spirit. For members of the Buffalo Society, however,



natural bison were fused with the Buffalo Spirit and perceived as manifestations of *wakháŋ* power on earth. For Buffalo Dreamers bison embodied the fusion of macrocosm and microcosm (fig. 12.2). Buffalo Dreamers directed and participated in a number of rituals that commemorated and reinforced the relationship between the Lakotas and the buffalo, including the Wanáŋi Yuhápi (Ghost Keeping), Iníkaŋapi (Sweat Lodge), Hurká (Making of Relatives), Thátháŋka Alówanpi (Buffalo Sing), Wiwáŋyang Wačhípi (Sun Dance), Hanbléčheyapi (Vision Quest), and White Buffalo Ceremony. These and many other rituals invoked bison potency.<sup>78</sup>

An Oglala myth describes how the buffalo people dwelling beneath the earth taught the people the religious significance of dance. A young man witnessed the buffalo people dancing because “they wished the sun to do something for them, and that when they pleased the sun in this manner, the sun would do that which they wished to be done.”<sup>79</sup> Dance as a vehicle for propitiation is an ancient, significant, and enduring Lakota religious and magico-ritual form.<sup>80</sup> DeMallie writes, “dance was a highly charged symbol. For the Lakotas the dance was a symbol of religion, a ritual means to spiritual and physical betterment.”<sup>81</sup>



**Figure 12.2.** *Buffalo Dreamer*, by Standing Bear, Minneconjou. Image courtesy of Buechel Memorial Lakota Museum Photo Archives, St. Francis Mission, South Dakota.

Walker provides a detailed description of the formal regalia of an Oglala Buffalo Dreamer around the turn of the twentieth century:

The Shaman went into his tipi and donned his regalia. This was a headdress consisting of a cap made of buffalo skin with the long shaggy hair on it and a small buffalo horn attached to each side so that it would stand out from the head as buffalo horns do; from each side hung a pendant made of white weaselskins and hawk quills. From the rear hung a strip of buffalo skin with the hair on and a buffalo tail attached to it so as to come below his knees when standing. This was the formal regalia of a buffalo medicine man. His only clothing was a breechclout, leggings, and moccasins. His hands, body, and face were painted red, symbolizing his sacred powers as a Shaman; there were three perpendicular black stripes painted on his right cheek, this being the sign of his authority on this occasion. When he came from his tipi he held in his right hand his Fetish [sacred bundle] and two small wands, each having a small globular package wrapped in soft tanned deerskin attached near the smaller end; in his left hand he carried his ceremonial pipe, and a staff made of chokecherry wood.<sup>82</sup>

Those who had spiritual contact with the Buffalo Spirit participated in the *Thátháŋka Wačhípi* (Buffalo Dance), a cultural performance of religious significance. In this dance participants sang songs of power received from *Thátháŋka* through the Vision Quest and reenacted on earth events from visions of the *wakháŋ* realm, recreating sacred time/space and activating and intensifying *wakháŋ* powers.<sup>83</sup> Participants in the dance “enacted the Buffalo Spirit” by imitating bison, bumping into one another, grunting, pawing the earth, and raising thick clouds of dust.<sup>84</sup> According to George Bushotter, a Lakota man born in 1864 in Dakota Territory, “These men regarded themselves as mysterious and holy . . . they took the hide from a buffalo bull; and they sewed two of these together, and wore it over their head, and whenever there was a buffalo dance then, these men danced in it, and they declared themselves as being en rapport with the buffalo spirit.”<sup>85</sup>

In these performances the Buffalo Dreamers ritually *became* bison, leaving bison tracks in their wake as proof of their transformation, efficacy, and power, so that, according to Bushotter, “even their tracks are holy.”<sup>86</sup> Deloria describes the scene when a Buffalo Dreamer first emerged from his tipi to begin the Buffalo Sing Ceremony:

Soon the buffalo-man came out of another tipi and parted the crowd as he advanced towards the ceremonial tipi. He was made to look like a buffalo; he wore horns on his head. He was painted, and looked fierce. His tail hung limply behind; he crawled on all fours, from his tipi, towards the ceremonial tipi. He was very *wak’á*. He growled as he advanced, and shook his head angrily from side to side, just like a bull.<sup>87</sup>

As another Deloria consultant notes, “He didn’t seem human.”<sup>88</sup>

In a harangue during the same performance, the Buffalo Dreamer declared to

the ritual gathering, "The buffalo horns are on my head and I speak for the Buffalo God. The buffalo tail is behind me and this makes my word sacred. I am now the buffalo bull and you are a young buffalo cow."<sup>89</sup> A ritual transformation had occurred, and the dancer now *was* the bison. Clark Wissler also describes a Buffalo Society ritual:

There was a group of men and occasionally a few women, known as the buffalo dreamers. When they had their dance, a shaman would appear in the head and skin of a buffalo. As he ran about the camp a nude young man stalked him, while the cult followed singing. At the proper time the hunter discharged an arrow deeply into a spot marked on the buffalo skin. The shaman would then stagger, vomit blood and spit up an arrow point. The wolf cult would then pursue him. Later, another shaman would use medicine (pejuta), pull the arrow out and at once the wound was healed.<sup>90</sup>

A vision of the Buffalo Spirit could give a man endurance and make him immune to gunshot and arrow wounds, both useful in warfare, another central male undertaking.<sup>91</sup> According to Bushotter:

They say that a man who enacts the buffalo role has within his body a buffalo, and that the "flat part of his body near the shoulder blade" contains a whirlwind which is lodged there.<sup>92</sup> That is what makes him hard to kill, and no matter how many times they shoot him he does not die, they say. . . . The people know the buffaloes live in the earth, and they never dance the buffalo dance without a warrant, and they never enact the buffalo-spirit in vain; but always their reason is that they are cognizant of their ways—that they live sacredly and they have sacred, supernatural deeds and powers.<sup>93</sup>

Deloria describes the exploits of a powerful holy man and Buffalo Dreamer named Thí Wakhánj. In a public demonstration of his powers Thí Wakhánj "Remembered the Buffalo-bull," which Deloria describes as recalling "his identification with the spirit" of the buffalo, and so becoming one for the time being: "And so, as a buffalo, he was shot at by the warriors, but whenever an arrow stood impaled in his side, he sent the arrow head out from his mouth. So they could not kill him. Then he reached around, and drew the wound together and it was as if it had never been."<sup>94</sup>

The buffalo-skull altar was a ritual element essential to nearly every Lakota ceremony (fig. 12.3). A bison skull with the horns still attached, purified and consecrated in the proper prescribed manner, transformed into a sacred space occupied by the potency of Tháthánjka.<sup>95</sup> According to Walker's consultants, the potency of Tháthánjka "abides in the skull of the animal buffalo and can be imparted to anything that has been a part of a buffalo."<sup>96</sup> The skull of a bison with the horns still attached was revered as the spirit being itself, because "the spirit of the buffalo is as one with the God, the Buffalo."<sup>97</sup>

Bad Wound reports, "The spirit of the buffalo stays with the skull until the horns





Figure 12.3. Hunká Lowáŋpi bison-skull altar. Image by Edward S. Curtis, 1907.

drop off. If the horns are put on the skull, the spirit returns to it. The earth eats the horns and when they are eaten the spirit goes to the buffalo tipi in the earth."<sup>98</sup> "Grandmother is the ceremonial appellation for the God the Earth," Walker elaborates, "who removes the horns from the skull of a buffalo after the beast has been dead for some time and then its *wakanla*, that is, its immaterial self, leaves the skull. When the skull is honored by replacing the horns on it, its *wakanla* returns to it and will serve the one who so honors it."<sup>99</sup> One of Deloria's consultants said the bison skull "represents the meat foods of the people."<sup>100</sup> Deloria also writes of a *wakháŋ* man named *Wakháŋ Hinážiŋ* (He Comes and Stands in a Sacred Manner), who taught the people that, "The buffalo skull shall symbolize life to you; for from the buffalo will come your main source of life and hence the buffalo will be of primary use to you and your children."<sup>101</sup> A medicine man or honored individual ritually carried the bison skull at the beginning of the Sun Dance and other ceremonies, placing it on a bed of sage at the place of honor in the west, where it served as an altar and pipe rack. He stuffed sage into the skull's orifices to banish malevolent spirits and please the Buffalo Spirit. Participants left ritual altars to the elements after ceremonies.<sup>102</sup> As Standing Bear recalls, "It was also polite custom

to walk around the buffalo skull when one came upon it, since it was a sacred object. Mothers and fathers took little children by the hand and led them around the skull in reverence."<sup>103</sup>

Dried buffalo chips, another essential Lakota ritual element, were symbolic of bison and often burned as incense in ceremonial altar fires. Lakotas believed that buffalo chips had a *wakháŋla* (spirit-like) of their own, released in the smoke, which ascended into the sky, placating and pleasing the Buffalo Spirit and functioning as an intermediary between him and the people on earth.<sup>104</sup> In 1896 the Oglala holy man George Sword said:

In any ceremony that pertains to hunting, or the Buffalo, a Lakota should make incense with buffalo chips in this manner. He should make a fire of anything that will burn easily, and when there are burning coals he should put dried buffalo chips on them so as to make a smoke. This is because the spirit of a buffalo remains in dried buffalo chips and it is in the smoke from them. This spirit goes to *Wakan Tanka*, and pleases him so that he will help in the chase.<sup>105</sup>

According to Walker's consultants, during the ritual address before the meat offering phase of the *Huŋká*, the medicine man conducting the rite addressed the "spirit in the skull . . . as *Hunka* of *Tatanka*, the Buffalo God." He blew tobacco smoke from pipes into the nostrils and cavities of buffalo-skull altars to "arouse the favor of" and to smoke "in communion with" the Buffalo Spirit.<sup>106</sup> The medicine man presiding over a *Huŋká* Ceremony handed a Pipe to the candidate and said, "Smoke with the spirit of the buffalo, for you are now as its brother. He will help you that you may have plenty of meat and hides."<sup>107</sup> The buffalo-skull altar with horns attached was truly a *hierophany*: a manifestation of sacred, *wakháŋ* power. Offending it could bring disaster, game scarcity, and famine.

## Offended Spirits: The Decline of the Buffalo from Lakota Perspectives

The white man will never know the horror and the utter bewilderment of the Lakota at the wanton destruction of the buffalo. What cruelty has not been glossed over with the white man's word—enterprise! —Luther Standing Bear<sup>108</sup>

Underlying the triadic relationship among bison as a natural species, the buffalo people, and the Buffalo Spirit was a fundamental belief in a common interiority among those forms and the *wakháŋ* origins and nature of bison. Bison were nonhuman beings and ultimately their decline was *wakháŋ*, as were their origins and nature. As spirits or *wakháŋ* beings the bison could not die out. As Oglala religious leader Finger states, "The *Wakan* have no father or mother. Anything

that has a birth will have a death. The *Wakan* were not born and they will not die."<sup>109</sup> The people, animals, and earth were as one, united in a single system. So long as the people lived, talk of the extinction of the bison was devoid of meaning. To nineteenth-century Lakotas bison decline was not irreversible but could be resolved through the proper rituals.<sup>110</sup>

Recent scholarship assimilates Native modes of thought with those of Euro-Americans. Jeffrey Ostler, for example, suggests that "Indian thought did not always follow a fundamentally other cultural logic," and that "an over-emphasis on difference coincides with a tendency to regard cultural miscommunication as the source of conflict."<sup>111</sup> Ostler rejects the relevance of a symbolic and interpretive approach to culture, denying the constraining role of culture on worldview. He misrepresents Lakota epistemological, ontological, and cosmological perspectives, which were significantly different from those of non-Lakotas. While "the Sioux offered divergent accounts of why the buffalo were declining," the vast majority of Lakota explanations for bison decline included similar elements based on distinctive cultural modes of thought.<sup>112</sup> Most Lakota explanations involved nonhuman persons—namely, bison—and processes that westerners scoffed at or found incomprehensible.<sup>113</sup> Lakota perspectives differed from those of Euro-Americans in fundamental ways.

Essential to comprehending the Lakota view of bison decline is the ancient, pervasive, and fundamental belief that spirits, much like humans, could be offended. If spirits were offended rituals became ineffective and general misfortune and hardship followed.<sup>114</sup> As the Oglala Ringing Shield warns, "Men should be careful and not offend the spirits."<sup>115</sup> The major avenue through which humans could accumulate or tap into *wakháŋ* power was through the propitiation of the spirits, so it is logical that disrespecting and offending the spirits, the opposite of propitiation, would incur disaster.

Lakota hunting beliefs and animal ceremonialism reveal the disastrous effects of offending animal spirits:

To have game animals submit to their fate and become food for mankind, a Shaman should explain to a captured one that this is its destiny, then decorate it as a mark of friendship, and, freeing it, bid it tell its kind what he said and did to it. A man may so offend game animals that they will escape from hunters, and if so a Shaman should penalize the offending one by making taboo to him some portion of the offended animals.<sup>116</sup>

Brown writes, "when a buffalo was killed for its meat, a portion should be left as an offering to propitiate the spirit."<sup>117</sup> To honor and thank the spirit of freshly slain game animals tobacco smoke was blown into the nostrils and fresh sage inserted into the wounds.<sup>118</sup>



Black Elk relates a story about an intratribal murder that offended the Great Spirit, the earth, and the bison, causing the latter to retreat into the earth, leading to scarcity. Intratribal murder was considered the most heinous of crimes. As the medicine man enlisted to mitigate the breach of conduct explained to the two murderers, "Your Grandfather, the Mysterious One, you have broken his laws. He does not like it; he feels bad. Not only he feels bad, but the four-leggeds of the earth feel bad, too, and now the bad deed you have done will bring evil to our tribe because the four-leggeds of the earth fear what you have done and have left."<sup>119</sup> Intratribal murders made buffalo scarce not only because they went against the Lakota moral code and offended the Buffalo Spirit, but also because while a camp dealt with a murder it did not move, leading to food and other resource scarcity.<sup>120</sup>

In 1931 Black Elk recalled that Lakota seer Drinks Water had a prophetic vision in the mid-nineteenth century foretelling that bison or four-leggeds would return into mother earth, marking the beginning of an agonizing period of social and cultural change. Drinks Water acted out his vision publicly, and his performance emphasized maintaining the council fire, symbolic of the Lakota people.<sup>121</sup> "So you people should take this fire home and build fires in your homes," Drinks Water advised, "because this fire will retain our four-leggeds and if we don't take care of this fire, the four-leggeds will be gone."<sup>122</sup> Similarly, Buffalo Dreamer Red Dog told Black Elk that the people must "walk the right road, because if it is not done, in the future our relatives-like will disappear."<sup>123</sup> Walking the good red road is a symbolic ritual phrase referring to living in a way consistent with Lakota normative cultural values and ideals. Neglecting to do so could offend the animal spirits, leading to a variety of inauspicious consequences.

In many cases Lakotas blamed invading white men for offending the bison. Noises frightened bison and could be detrimental to the hunt, leading to misfortune and starvation.<sup>124</sup> Wissler writes, "If the braves discovered anyone going among the white people, they would intercept him and kill him and his horse. They were afraid that the smell of coffee and bacon (foreign smells) would scare the buffalo and make them stay away."<sup>125</sup> The roads and steamboats of the whites brought foreign smells and sounds along with strange technology that offended *Tháthánka*. Particularly offensive were steamboat whistles, the sharp crack of firearms, and the smell of gunpowder and coffee. Hunting buffalo with guns in general, as opposed to traditional bows and arrows, was considered a metaphysical slight unworthy of the Lakotas' bison kindred. For all these offenses, according to Walker's consultants, the buffalo retreated "back into the earth."<sup>126</sup> These beliefs were based on adept observations of bison behavior and framed by the Lakota ethos and worldview. Bison auditory and olfactory systems were both acute and important for detecting danger.<sup>127</sup> While both whites and Lakotas acknowledged

bison decline, they understood its causes in vastly different ways, both perfectly logical and sensible according to their distinct cultural frameworks.

At the 1865 treaty council at Fort Sully, Minneconjou leader Lone Horn said, "these white people . . . are fighting my people and scaring all the game off of my land . . . it is not because my Indians travel through their country that the buffalo is driven away; it is the fault of the whites."<sup>128</sup> In 1865 Two Kettle leader Two Lances identified the causes of bison scarcity as blood on the land, the cracking of guns, and the building of roads in Lakota country.<sup>129</sup> The conviction that Euro-Americans and things associated with them—foreign smells, guns, roads, forts, wagon trains, and steamboats—scared and offended bison, ultimately driving them away, was widespread among Plains tribes.

In 1868 Lone Horn stated explicitly that "extinction" was not irreversible from Lakota cultural perspectives, and that if whites left, the game would return: "I would like the soldiers to leave as soon as possible, that we may have plenty of game again."<sup>130</sup> That year, Hunkpapa Bull Owl reiterated Lone Horn's words: "We don't like to have the whites traveling through our country and bringing steamboats up our river. I hope you will stop this, so that the buffalo will come back again."<sup>131</sup> Lone Horn and Bull Owl reflected their people's belief that as soon as whites left, balance would be restored, and bison would no longer be offended and would return. For most nineteenth-century Americans, on the other hand, the extinction of the buffalo was as irreversible and unavoidable as Manifest Destiny.

Gut Fat, a Hunkpapa, and Gray Hair, a Sans Arc, believed that whites had the power to return diminishing bison to the Lakotas.<sup>132</sup> Conceptualizing the situation in such a way can hardly be characterized as similar to Euro-American or western, rationalist/secular thought. The 1866 treaty commissioners concluded that the Indians believed both they and the Great Father possessed supernatural powers: the "Indians are so ignorant of our national policy, and have such ideas of the supernatural powers of their Great Father, that it is hard to remove from some of their chiefs the impression that the absence of game and the coming of storms, may be attributed to a forgetfulness or disfavor on the part of their Great Father."<sup>133</sup>

Ringling Shield discusses the utopian times before the coming of the whites, when the spirits spoke with men. Around the turn of the twentieth century he confessed to Walker, "Now the spirits will not come. This is because the white men have offended the spirits."<sup>134</sup> In the early reservation period Afraid of Bear, brother of George Sword, said, "The spirits do not come and help us now. The white men have driven them away. I can bring the spirits sometimes now. But they will not come quickly as they did in former times."<sup>135</sup> The decline of the bison, nonhuman spirit beings, was understood as the logical result of offending the spirits. Ritual was the only logical means to reverse this trend and replenish the herds.

As the US government forced Lakotas onto reservations and whites continued to flood the plains throughout the late nineteenth century, bison decline continued unabated. At Standing Rock Reservation, the last public Sun Dance of the early reservation period took place in 1881 and the last bison hunts in 1882 and 1883. The Ghost Dance, which flourished in 1890, provides further insight into Lakota understandings of bison.<sup>136</sup> Discussing the Ghost Dance, Raymond Fogelson writes, "The disappearance of the buffalo represented a migration back to their origins within the earth. By proper ritual it was hoped that this migration might be reversed."<sup>137</sup> The deeply rooted belief that bison were essentially spiritual beings was a core assumption of Ghost Dance ideology among the Lakotas and essential to its popularity. Lakotas believed they could ritually "dance back the buffalo."<sup>138</sup> Black Elk poetically describes the utopian world promised by Ghost Dance prophets: "In this other world there was plenty of meat—just like olden times . . . all the buffalo that had been killed would be over there again roaming around."<sup>139</sup>

The US 7th Cavalry shattered the hope of a reunion between the bison and the Lakotas in the bloody massacre near Wounded Knee Creek on December 29, 1890.<sup>140</sup> With time the Lakotas accepted that they could no longer live by hunting, and that the bison were gone. Black Elk prophetically illustrates the strong connection between his people and bison, recalling how crew members threw a dead bison overboard as he traveled across the Atlantic to perform for European audiences as part of Buffalo Bill's Wild West show. "When I saw the poor buffalo thrown overboard I felt very sad," Black Elk recalls, "because right there it looked as though they were throwing part of the power of the Indian overboard."<sup>141</sup> Standing Bear emphatically echoes Black Elk's sentiment: "The fate of the buffalo foretold the fate of the Lakota."<sup>142</sup>

Relying on primary Lakota sources and maintaining an appreciation for a symbolic approach to culture provides a deeper understanding of bison decline. The bison's near extinction forced the Sioux to develop new methods of organization and interpretation of their world. The bison hunt could no longer feed, clothe, shelter, and support the people or strengthen and maintain society as it once had. The decline of the bison was an abysmal, life-altering, and heart-wrenching segue into reservation life.

## Recreating Regeneration: The Enduring Significance of Bison in Contemporary Lakota Culture

Because the bison was so essential to the Lakota economy and such an important cultural symbol, its decline created a social crisis and spiritual void. Ultimately, it signified the end of a way of life, the beginning of a long and difficult transi-



tion, and greater dependence on Euro-American goods and on the US government. The termination of the buffalo-hunting complex, which had been a central foundation for the unification of the people and reaffirmation of social and cultural identity, led to the disintegration of kinship networks, undercutting the economic and societal interdependence and cooperation that the hunt had stimulated and required.<sup>143</sup> Because of the interconnectedness between Lakota culture, religion, and bison, the bison's decline led to the erosion or truncation of many rituals. In 1917 Walker wrote, "The Buffalo ceremony is now almost obsolete among the Oglala, but certain rites relative to it are occasionally practised [*sic*]."<sup>144</sup> Walker foreshadowed a common contemporary trend of truncating elaborate rituals.

Due in part to lost interaction between humans and animals, Dream Societies disintegrated. Today the Buffalo Dreamers Society and nearly every other dream society are all but extinct.<sup>145</sup> In 1915 Walker wrote, "My most valued informants are all now dead, the two I most depended upon, George Sword and Thomas Tyon, have gone the way of all flesh."<sup>146</sup> Speaking of the ritualists who taught him the sacred esoteric knowledge of the Oglalas, Walker wrote in 1925, "My former instructors are now all dead."<sup>147</sup> He laments, "the holy men ceased to exist. . . . The last of the order of holy men among the Oglalas has gone before his final judge and the progress of civilization has extinguished the order."<sup>148</sup>

Despite the traumatic loss of the bison, forced relocation to dismal reservations, and a painful transition to a new and unfamiliar life, Lakotas continued to use the symbol of the bison to interpret the changing world around them, naming domesticated cattle *pteglěška* (spotted buffalo), for instance. Standing Bear recalls:

I remember when my father came home and reported to us that the white men had brought some "spotted buffalo" for us to eat. We all got on our ponies and rode over to see the strange new animals and as we drew near there came to us a peculiar and disagreeable odor. So we stayed off some distance looking at these long-horned, "spotted buffalo" and wondering how the white people could eat them for food. . . . However, conditions were such as to force it upon us. Our buffalo had perished and we were a meat-eating people, so we succumbed to the habit which at first seemed so distasteful to us.<sup>149</sup>

Despite dramatic social and cultural change throughout the twentieth century bison continue to be strong cultural icons today (fig. 12.4). All Sioux tribes are members of the Intertribal Buffalo Council (ITBC), receiving bison from Badlands and Yellowstone National Parks. Fort Peck, Standing Rock, Cheyenne River, Spirit Lake, Pine Ridge, Rosebud, Lower Brule, and other reservations that Sioux people call home maintain herds of varying sizes. The Rosebud and Cheyenne River Sioux Tribes, among others, sell hunting licenses for buffalo throughout the year, highlighting the continuing economic role bison play in Lakota life. Lower Brule



Figure 12.4. *Shaman Calling the Bison*, by Oglala artist Arthur Amiotte, 1981.

has two ranges of a combined 2,900 acres and promotes hunts that guarantee a shot at a buffalo. Standing Rock is home to the privately owned Brownotter Ranch that sells twelve “tatanka hunts” a year to hunters and tourists. According to Sebastian Braun, “bison revival has changed into a continuing economic resource for the tribes. I think to speak of ‘revival’ at this time is no longer accurate. This is

a sustained harvest of buffalo as a resource, although people still dispute how to ranch and best manage bison, some arguing for traditional methods. Buffalo herds are beneficial to many tribes in terms of tourism, hunting, and other economic enterprises."<sup>150</sup>

The bison is both persistent and pervasive as a core religious symbol and identity marker among Lakota people. Some reservation high schools slaughter a buffalo annually, hauling it to the school grounds for traditional butchering as youngsters look on enraptured. Before the event students learn about traditional Lakota bison hunting and butchering practices, associated myths and beliefs, and other social and cultural aspects of the Lakota-bison relationship. During the butchering process teachers identify various parts of the animal, speaking their Lakota names aloud to be repeated by the students, along with their use and significance. At Red Cloud Indian School on the Pine Ridge Reservation students even taste raw liver, a delicacy for their ancestors. The week after the butchering the school serves a traditional Lakota lunch, with bison soup as the centerpiece.<sup>151</sup>

Classes on Lakota ecology and foods are offered at tribal colleges on the reservations. It should come as no surprise that bison are central to the curriculum. Bison symbolism also remains central to Lakota ceremonial life. Although the last unabridged Buffalo Sing Ceremony took place in the 1950s, there have been recent efforts to revive the young women's first menstruation ritual at Pine Ridge. This community-wide effort garnered much support, led by female elders. At Pine Ridge the bison is the foundation for some alcohol, drug, and domestic abuse awareness and prevention programs.<sup>152</sup> Representing powerful continuities with the past, the bison remains a model for positive social change and cultural awareness.

In a recent exhibit at the Dahl Arts Center in Rapid City, South Dakota, titled *Pte Oyate (Buffalo Nation)*, Lakota artists explored the sacred bond between their people and the bison. "I was taught as a Lakota person that they're our brothers, they're our family. We come from them, we're related and they sacrificed themselves for us," curator Mary Bordeaux explains. "Our clothes came from them, our food, our utensils; they were vital to our survival on the prairie." "Tatanka is the male buffalo, and pte is the female," explains Lakota artist Roger Broer. "Our society is a matriarchal society. When you see a herd of buffalo, a female is in the lead. That's the way it is in our culture, as well: A grandmother or an aunt is the one in the family who makes the decisions."<sup>153</sup> The sentiments of these individuals reflect the Lakota past and highlight the enduring significance of bison in their culture.

The Oglala Sioux Tribal Council was planning to create a bison reserve at Pine Ridge. The tribe and the National Park Service were working together to make the South Unit of Badlands National Park, which overlaps with reservation land,



into the nation's first tribal national park. It would be home to some one thousand bison and provide economic opportunities for the Oglalas at Pine Ridge.<sup>154</sup> However, the success of this proposed endeavor remains uncertain.

Buffalo have been central to the Lakota people for generations, not only as an economic necessity and provider of food, clothing, and shelter, but also as a powerful spirit being and relative. The bison is a model for Lakota society, teaching individuals how they should act so that the people and generations might live on. This model has been effective, and there is no evidence that the foundational role of the bison in Lakota culture is fading away. To the contrary, it is growing stronger, as a Lakota friend's recent Facebook post illustrates: "Advice from a Buffalo: Stand your ground, have a tough hide, keep moving on, cherish wide open spaces, have a strong spirit, roam wild and free, and . . . let the chips fall where they may!"<sup>155</sup>

## Notes

1. *1865 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1865), 41–42.

2. Dan Flores, "The Great Contraction: Bison and Indians in Northern Plains Environmental History," in *Legacy: New Perspectives on the Battle of the Little Bighorn*, ed. Charles E. Rankin (Helena, MT: Montana Historical Society Press, 1996), 13; Elliot West, *The Contested Plains: Indians, Goldseekers, and the Rush to Colorado* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 72.

3. Flores, "Great Contraction," 10–16; Dan Flores, *The Natural West: Environmental History in the Great Plains and Rocky Mountains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 51–55, 62–66; Dan Flores, "Wars over Buffalo: Stories versus Stories on the Northern Plains," in *Native Americans and the Environment: Perspectives on the Ecological Indian*, ed. Michael Harkin and Lewis David Rich (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 160; Andrew C. Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison: An Environmental History, 1750–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); West, *Contested Plains*, 86–87. The robe trade reached its peak in the 1840s when eighty-five thousand to one hundred thousand bison hides went to Saint Louis from the Upper Missouri annually. Indian hunters often targeted breeding-age cows because their hides were softer and more luxurious, and hence more valuable, a pragmatic practice that exacerbated population decline.

4. Flores, *Natural West*, 57. Elliott West reports that the larger ancient ancestor of the modern American bison died off around 5000 BC and was replaced by the smaller species we know today. The cause of their extinction was a similar pattern of intense droughts that swept the prehistoric plains. West, *Contested Plains*, 21; Flores, "Great Contraction," 8–9.

5. Flores, "Great Contraction," 13–16; Flores, *Natural West*, 62, 65–66; Flores, "Wars over Buffalo," 162–65; West, *Contested Plains*, 87–91.

6. George Catlin, *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of the North American Indians; Written during Eight Years' Travel (1832–1839) amongst the Wildest*

*Tribes of Indians in North America* (New York: Dover, 1973), 1: 247–49; Edwin Thompson Denig, *The Assiniboine*, ed. J. N. B. Hewitt (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000), 11, 66–69; Flores, *Natural West*, 52; Flores, “Wars over Buffalo,” 153–70.

7. Flores, “Great Contraction,” 2, 8–17; Flores, *Natural West*, 52–53; Flores, “Wars over Buffalo,” 164; West, *Contested Plains*, 89–91, 261. After the Civil War Ulysses S. Grant, William T. Sherman, and Phillip H. Sheridan extended their total war of destruction or scorched-earth tactics to the Plains Indians. John F. Marszalek, *Sherman: A Soldier's Passion for Order* (New York: Free Press, 1993), 382. Scholars debate whether the destruction of the bison was official policy. See David D. Smits, “The Frontier Army and the Destruction of the Buffalo: 1865–1883,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (1994): 313–38; David D. Smits, “More on the Army and the Buffalo: The Author's Reply,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (1995): 203–8; William A. Dobak, “The Army and the Buffalo: A Demur; A Response to David D. Smits,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (1995): 197–202; Raymond J. DeMallie, “The Sioux in Dakota and Montana Territories: Cultural and Historical Background of the Ogden B. Read Collection,” in *Vestiges of a Proud Nation: The Ogden B. Read Northern Plains Indian Collection* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 57.

8. Flores, “Great Contraction,” 15, 18.

9. Lakota refers to the seven tribes of the Western or Teton Sioux, comprised of the Oglála (Oglala), Sičhánġu (Brulé), Húnġkpaġhaya (Hunkpapa), Mnikhówožu (Minneconjou), Itázipčho (Sans Arc), Oóhenujpa (Two Kettle), and Sihásapa (Blackfeet).

10. Raymond J. DeMallie, ““These Have No Ears’: Narrative and the Ethnohistorical Method,” *Ethnohistory* 40, no. 4 (1993): 515.

11. *Ibid.*, 525.

12. *Ibid.*, 516, 525.

13. Raymond J. DeMallie, *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 13, *Plains*, ed. William C. Sturtevant (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2001), 718–25.

14. Flores, “Wars over Buffalo,” 159.

15. Pierre Esprit Radisson, *The Explorations of Pierre Esprit Radisson: From the Original Manuscript in the Bodleian Library and the British Museum*, ed. Arthur T. Adams (Minneapolis: Ross and Haines, 1961), 134, 142.

16. Joseph Epes Brown, *Animals of the Soul: Sacred Animals of the Oglala Sioux* (Rockport, MA: Element, 1997), 3–4, 105–8; Luther Standing Bear, *Land of the Spotted Eagle* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 53–54; Stanley Vestal, *Sitting Bull, Champion of the Sioux: A Biography* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957), 14.

17. Luther Standing Bear, *My People the Sioux* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 30.

18. *1865 Annual Report*, 30–31, 37, 41–44; Raymond J. DeMallie, *The Sixth Grandfather: Black Elk's Teachings Given to John G. Neihardt* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 241, 265.

19. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1987), 11.

20. *Ibid.*, 12.

21. Sherry B. Ortner, “On Key Symbols,” *American Anthropologist* 75, no. 5 (1973): 1338–46.

22. Ibid., 1340.

23. Alan Barnard and Jonathan Spencer, eds., *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 604, 628; Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Harper, 1973), 127–28; Ortner, “Key Symbols,” 1338–46.

24. Brown, *Animals of the Soul*, viii.

25. Raymond J. DeMallie, “The Lakota Ghost Dance: An Ethnohistorical Account,” *Pacific Historical Review* 51, no. 4 (1982): 391.

26. Brown, *Animals of the Soul*, xiii; Raymond J. DeMallie, “Kinship: The Foundation for Native American Society,” in *Studying Native America: Problems and Prospects* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998); DeMallie, *Sixth Grandfather*, 81–82. Concerning the Ojibwa and relational ontologies, A. I. Hallowell writes, “in the metaphysics of being found among these Indians, the action of persons provides the major key to their world view. . . . While in all cultures ‘persons’ comprise one of the major classes of objects to which the self must become oriented, this category of being is by no means limited to human beings. In Western culture, as in others, supernatural beings are recognized as persons, although belonging, at the same time, to an other-than-human category.” Hallowell perceptively points out that, for the Ojibwas, as well as for many other American Indian tribes, “the concept of ‘person’ is not . . . synonymous with human being but transcends it.” Alfred Irving Hallowell, “Ojibwa Ontology, Behavior, and World View,” in *Culture in History: Essays in Honor of Paul Radin*, ed. Stanley Diamond (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 21. Hallowell’s view fits historical Lakota conceptions of being and personhood.

27. DeMallie, *Sixth Grandfather*, 312.

28. Ibid., 127.

29. Ibid., 288–89.

30. Ella C. Deloria, ed. and trans., *The Dakota Way of Life* (Bloomington, IN: n.p., 1995), 26.

31. Ibid., 33, 277; Alice C. Fletcher, “The White Buffalo Festival of the Uncpapas,” in *Annual Reports of the Trustees of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology*, vol. 3, 1880–1886 (Cambridge, MA: Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology, 1887), 271; Standing Bear, *Spotted Eagle*, 1, 157, 198, 211.

32. Brown, *Animals of the Soul*, 14.

33. DeMallie, *Sixth Grandfather*, 293; Deloria, *Dakota Way of Life*, 72.

34. Standing Bear, *Spotted Eagle*, 96. According to some Lakotas, buffalo followed the people. The mythical mediator Ptesáŋwíj (White Buffalo Woman) sent out hunters to find buffalo and “instructed that a white buffalo would be in the herd and that, if it was killed, the buffalo would always follow the camp”; Clark Wissler, “Societies and Ceremonial Associations in the Oglala Division of the Teton-Dakota,” in *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History* 11, part 1 (New York: Trustees of the American Museum of Natural History, 1912), 73.

35. DeMallie, *American Indians: Plains*, 731–32; Standing Bear, *Spotted Eagle*, 43.

36. Brown, *Animals of the Soul*, 9; DeMallie, *American Indians: Plains*, 734–35.

37. For a description of the communal bison hunt, see DeMallie, *Sixth Grandfather*, 143–49; Frances Densmore, *Teton Sioux Music and Culture* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 436–47; and J. R. Walker, *Lakota Society*, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie (Lincoln:



University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 74–92. The plains buffalo-hunt complex can be productively compared to Clifford Geertz's analysis of the Javanese *slametan*; see Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 148.

38. Brown, *Animals of the Soul*, 10.

39. DeMallie, *American Indians: Plains*, 727, 730, 732; David C. Posthumus, "Hereditary Enemies? An Examination of Sioux-Arikara Relations Prior to 1830," *Plains Anthropologist*, forthcoming; Edwin Thompson Denig, *Five Indian Tribes of the Upper Missouri: Sioux, Arickaras, Assiniboines, Crees, Crows*, ed. John C. Ewers (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), 35–36; John C. Ewers, *Indian Life on the Upper Missouri* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), 21–22; Preston Holder, *The Hoe and the Horse on the Plains: A Study of Cultural Development among North American Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970); James H. Howard, "Memoir 11: Yanktonai Ethnohistory and the John K. Bear Winter Count," *Plains Anthropologist* 21, no. 73 (1976): 6–7; Joseph Jablow, *The Cheyenne in Plains Indian Trade Relations, 1795–1840*, Monographs of the American Ethnological Society 19 (New York: J. J. Augustin, 1951); Douglas R. Parks, *Myths and Traditions of the Arikara Indians*, Sources of American Indian Oral Literature (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 1–10; Pierre Antoine Tabeau, *Tabeau's Narrative of Loisel's Expedition to the Upper Missouri* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1939), 3: 102–4; 121–23, 130–34; Richard White, "The Winning of the West: The Expansion of the Western Sioux in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *Journal of American History* 65, no. 2 (1978): 319–43.

40. Vestal, *Sitting Bull*, 15. Imitation and (re)enactment are central Lakota religious concepts. Rituals often consisted of (re)enactments or imitations of visions or specific details of encounters with nonhuman persons. James Owen Dorsey, "A Study of Siouan Cults," in *Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology* 11 (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1894), 497.

41. Mary Meagher, *Bison bison*. Mammalian Species No. 266 (American Society of Mammalogists, 1986): 5.

42. *Ibid.*, 6.

43. Brown, *Animals of the Soul*, 16.

44. Meagher, *Bison bison*, 6.

45. Brown, *Animals of the Soul*, 15; Dobak, "Army and the Buffalo," 197–202; Smits, "Frontier Army," 313–38; Smits, "More on the Army," 203–8.

46. Raymond D. Fogelson, "The Cherokee Ballgame Cycle: An Ethnographer's View," *Ethnomusicology* 15, no. 3 (1971): 327–38; Royal B. Hassrick, *The Sioux: Life and Customs of a Warrior Society* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964); David C. Posthumus, fieldwork interviews and personal communications, 2008–14; William K. Powers, *Oglala Religion* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982).

47. J. R. Walker, *Lakota Belief and Ritual*, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie and Elaine A. Jahner (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 137–39.

48. Some of James R. Walker's consultants claimed *Tháthánjka* was associated with the west, but the north is the more common association. According to Frances Densmore's consultant Šiyáka, Teal Duck, "when the buffalo come from the north, traveling toward the south, they bring news that *Wakan'tanjka* has provided food for the Indians and there will

not be famine"; *ibid.*, 185. The customary time for communal hunts was when bison came from the north, usually in the fall. In Black Elk's great vision, the buffalo represented the north, and today many Oglalas associate *Thátháŋka* with the north as well. DeMallie, *Sixth Grandfather*, 129, 286; Densmore, *Teton Sioux*, 437; J. R. Walker, "The Sun Dance and Other Ceremonies of the Oglala Division of the Teton Dakota," in *Anthropological Papers* 16, part 2 (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1917), 137.

49. Deloria, *Dakota Way of Life*, 5; Walker, *Lakota Belief*, xiii, 78–84, 121.

50. Walker, *Lakota Belief*, 67–68. A buffalo cow painted on a robe indicated that the wearer or the wearer's women would be fertile and have many children; Walker, *Sun Dance*, 136; Walker, *Lakota Belief*, 231, 252.

51. Walker, *Lakota Belief*, xiii, 50, 101, 216. Descriptions of the Buffalo Spirit by Walker's consultants are similar to ancient Circumpolar and Algonquian beliefs in Masters of Animals, powerful spirits representative of an animal species who gave or withheld game and controlled the hunt. These beliefs are often associated with animal ceremonialism, rituals concerning game hunting that seek to propitiate spirits of slain animals to avoid offending them; Åke Hultkrantz, *Native Religions of North America: The Power of Visions and Fertility* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1998), 137, 138. Some Oglalas believed that "the Buffalo God caused the spirits of the buffalo to give their meat to the Lakota; and that when a buffalo was killed for its meat, a portion should be left as an offering to propitiate the spirit"; Walker, *Sun Dance*, 130.

52. Walker, *Sun Dance*, 91.

53. Deloria, *Dakota Way of Life*, 5; Walker, *Lakota Belief*, 229–30.

54. Walker, *Sun Dance*, 179.

55. Brown, *Animals of the Soul*, 6; Walker, *Lakota Belief*, 124.

56. Densmore, *Teton Sioux*, 66.

57. *Ibid.*, 63–68; Nicholas Black Elk, *The Sacred Pipe: Black Elk's Account of the Seven Rites of the Oglala Sioux*, ed. Joseph Epes Brown (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), 3–9; Brown, *Animals of the Soul*, 74; DeMallie, *Sixth Grandfather*, 81–83.

58. Densmore, *Teton Sioux*, 70.

59. Jeffrey D. Anderson, *The Four Hills of Life: Northern Arapaho Knowledge and Life Movement* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 5.

60. Brown, *Animals of the Soul*, 109; DeMallie, *Sixth Grandfather*, 136; Walker, *Sun Dance*, 161; Walker, *Lakota Belief*, 50, 214, 222.

61. Alice C. Fletcher, "The Elk Mystery or Festival of the Ogallala Sioux," in *Annual Reports of the Trustees of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology*, vol. 3, 1880–1886 (Cambridge, MA: Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology, 1887), 282.

62. DeMallie, "Lakota Ghost Dance," 391.

63. Brown, *Animals of the Soul*, xii.

64. Walker, *Sun Dance*, 134.

65. *Ibid.*, 161; Walker, *Lakota Belief*, 214.

66. Brown, *Animals of the Soul*, 15.

67. *Ibid.*, xii.

68. Deloria, *Dakota Way of Life*, 130.

69. Walker, *Lakota Belief*, 203; Walker, *Sun Dance*, 134, 136.

70. Black Elk claims that the Lakotas used to refer to large herds of bison as *wašiču*, a term meaning spirit, but commonly used today to refer to whites; DeMallie, *Sixth Grandfather*, 150–51.

71. Ibid., 339; Dorsey, *Siouan Cults*, 538; Walker, *Lakota Belief*, 124, and Story 70 in Teton Myths, George Bushotter Collection, Ella C. Deloria, trans., 1937, Boas Collection, MS 30 (X8c.3), American Philosophical Library, Philadelphia (hereafter cited as APS). Depending on the source, bison were given to the Lakotas by Íŋyaŋ (Rock), Makhá (Earth), or Táku Škaŋškáŋ (Sky; Something Moving; Energy), all manifestations of Wakháŋ Tháŋka. Táku Škaŋškáŋ had power over everything that moved and presided over bison migration; Walker, *Lakota Belief*, 107–8, 124, 138, 144.

72. Clusters of symbolic meanings were associated with both the bison and the earth, such as fertility, abundance, and generosity. Makhá (Earth), the relative of all things, embodied creative potency, fertility, and reproductive potential. Makhá was a catalyst for the Lakota ecological system of relationship and relatedness: Makhá caused the earth to bring forth grasses consumed by the bison, making them fat and supple; they, in turn, feed and clothe people; Walker, *Sun Dance*, 100. According to James Owen Dorsey, “the buffalo is specially associated with the earth. Among the Dakota the buffalo and the earth are regarded as one”; Dorsey, *Siouan Cults*, 534.

73. Walker, *Lakota Belief*, 144.

74. Walker, *Sun Dance*, 183–90.

75. For more on the Vision Quest, see Black Elk, *Sacred Pipe*, 44–66, and Walker, *Lakota Belief*, 83–86, 129–35.

76. Densmore, *Teton Sioux*, 174.

77. Ibid., 174–77, 181, 284, 439; Dorsey, *Siouan Cults*, 497. For more examples of buffalo visions, see Dorsey, *Siouan Cults*, 173–76.

78. See E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 123–43. See Black Elk, *Sacred Pipe*; Brown, *Animals of the Soul*; Dorsey, *Siouan Cults*, 536; Fletcher, “Elk Mystery,” 276–88; Standing Bear, *Spotted Eagle*, 49; Walker, *Sun Dance*; Walker, *Lakota Belief*.

79. Walker, *Sun Dance*, 213.

80. Standing Bear, *Spotted Eagle*, 213.

81. DeMallie, “Lakota Ghost Dance,” 392.

82. Walker, *Sun Dance*, 144. The regalia of Buffalo Dreamers and Sun Dance intercessors was similar. See Densmore, *Teton Sioux*, 126.

83. The Buffalo Dance is also associated with the Chiefs Society or Big Bellies, an organization of leading men and chiefs. The Chiefs Society was originally called the Thátháŋka Wapháha Úŋ (Wearers of the Buffalo Headdress), and the Buffalo Spirit was its mythical founder and guardian. The Buffalo Dance, originally taught to a shaman in a vision, was sometimes called the “Dance of the Short Hairs,” referring to old bison bulls or the dancers wearing buffalo heads. Deloria, *Dakota Way of Life*, 313; Wissler, “Societies and Ceremonial Organizations,” 36–41.

84. Story 70, Teton Myths, Boas Collection, MS 30 (X8c.3), APS; Densmore, *Teton Sioux*,



173, 285–93; Standing Bear, *Spotted Eagle*, 219. Brown writes, “By dynamically acting out or dancing the inner, subjective experience, the power of the animal was intensified, and the larger social group was able to participate and benefit”; Brown, *Animals of the Soul*, xii.

85. For a biographical sketch of Bushotter, see Raymond J. DeMallie, “George Bushotter: The First Lakota Ethnographer,” in *American Indian Intellectuals*, ed. Margot Liberty (Saint Paul: West Publishing, 1978), 91–102. Story 70, Teton Myths, Boas Collection, MS 30 (X8c.3), APS.

86. Story 70, Teton Myths, Boas Collection, MS 30 (X8c.3), APS, 208; Deloria, *Dakota Way of Life*, 52. Bushotter claims that during the Buffalo Dance men enacting the Buffalo Spirit “have the acute sense of animals, for the time being,” and can sense which women are menstruating, so as to avoid them. In Lakota culture the creative forces of menstruation are powerful, and menstruating women are forbidden from participating in ritual activities because their feminine powers could conflict with the powers of the medicine men. See Powers, *Oglala Religion*, 63–64, and Walker, *Sun Dance*, 143.

87. Deloria, *Dakota Way of Life*, 56.

88. *Ibid.*, 50.

89. Walker, *Sun Dance*, 147.

90. Wissler, “Societies and Ceremonial Associations,” 91.

91. Densmore, *Teton Sioux*, 173–76.

92. The whirlwind or chrysalis is commonly associated with bison in Lakota culture; Brown, *Animals of the Soul*, 96–99, 109–10. Brown writes, “Those familiar with the habits of the bison bull know that before entering into a fight he will violently paw the earth, with appropriate bellowing, and throw clouds of dust high into the air. Associating this action with his own particular needs for warfare, the Oglala conceived that the bull was praying ‘to the power of the Whirlwind’ before going into a fight. By a kind of magical process involving associations and analogy, the Oglala conceived that the power represented by this act worked to confuse the minds of the enemy.” *Ibid.*, 16.

93. Story 70, Teton Myths, Boas Collection, MS 30 (X8c.3), APS.

94. Deloria, *Dakota Way of Life*, 192–193.

95. Walker, *Sun Dance*, 70.

96. *Ibid.*, 84.

97. *Ibid.*, 130.

98. *Ibid.*, 124.

99. *Ibid.*, 227–28.

100. Deloria, *Dakota Way of Life*, 47.

101. *Ibid.*, 28.

102. Densmore writes, “The use of sage around the buffalo skull was in accordance with the instructions given by the White Buffalo Maiden . . . sage was used because the buffalo sought for it on the prairie and rolled their great bodies on its fragrant leaves”; Densmore, *Teton Sioux*, 99, 122, 127, 150; Walker, *Sun Dance*, 98; Walker, *Lakota Belief*, 188, 214.

103. Standing Bear, *Spotted Eagle*, 156.

104. *Ibid.*, 177. According to Black Elk, parents used dried buffalo chips as an absorbent in babies’ diapers; DeMallie, *Sixth Grandfather*, 379–80. They were also the essential uni-

versal fuel of the plains, burning much like coal; Standing Bear, *My People*, 49. Shed buffalo hair was another common Lakota ritual element; Densmore, *Teton Sioux*, 458 (and references therein), 482; Walker, *Sun Dance*, 101; Walker, *Lakota Belief*, 37.

105. Walker, *Lakota Belief*, 77.

106. *Ibid.*, 46; Walker, *Sun Dance*, 70.

107. Walker, *Sun Dance*, 136.

108. Standing Bear, *Spotted Eagle*, 44.

109. Walker, *Sun Dance*, 156.

110. DeMallie, "Lakota Ghost Dance," 390–91.

111. Jeffrey Ostler, "They Regard Their Passing as Wakan': Interpreting Western Sioux Explanations for the Bison's Decline," *Western Historical Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (1999): 477, 496.

112. *Ibid.*, 478.

113. DeMallie, "Lakota Ghost Dance," 389, 403. DeMallie suggests that "native understandings frequently involve supernatural events that are causal and fundamental to the story but, from western rationalist perspectives, are not acceptable as true"; DeMallie, "These Have No Ears," 525.

114. Walker, *Lakota Belief*, 25, 75, 82, 85, 87, 170. See also David C. Posthumus, *All My Relatives: Exploring Nineteenth-Century Lakota Ontology, Belief, and Ritual* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, forthcoming).

115. *Ibid.*, 114.

116. Walker, *Sun Dance*, 92.

117. Brown, *Animals of the Soul*, 77.

118. *Ibid.*, ix; Densmore, *Teton Sioux*, 236.

119. DeMallie, *Sixth Grandfather*, 393.

120. *Ibid.* In Canada, following the Battle of the Little Bighorn, Black Elk witnessed a fierce fight between a number of buffalo bulls and a cow. By the end of the confrontation the cow and all of the bulls lay dead. Black Elk and his companions did not butcher them, however, because "they had murdered each other"; *ibid.*, 363.

121. *Ibid.*, 240, 337–39.

122. *Ibid.*, 339.

123. *Ibid.*, 240.

124. *Ibid.*, 151–52.

125. "Braves" refers to the *akíchita* or camp marshals who oversaw bison hunts and enforced rules associated with them; Wissler, "Societies and Ceremonial Association," 9–13.

126. Walker, *Lakota Belief*, 188.

127. Meagher, *Bison bison*, 6.

128. *1865 Annual Report*, 28, 36.

129. *Ibid.*, 41–44, 47–48.

130. *1868 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1868), 54.

131. *Ibid.*, 62.

132. *1865 Annual Report*, 78–79. The belief that the Great Father, the president of the United States, or whites in general could replenish the bison was widespread throughout the Plains; DeMallie, "Lakota Ghost Dance," 390.

133. *1866 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1866), 35–36.

134. Walker, *Lakota Belief*, 199, 206.

135. *Ibid.*, 202.

136. Densmore, *Teton Sioux*, 4. For more on the Ghost Dance, see Rani-Henrik Andersson, *The Lakota Ghost Dance of 1890* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008); DeMallie, “Lakota Ghost Dance”; Walker, *Lakota Belief*, 142–43.

137. Raymond D. Fogelson, “The Ethnohistory of Events and Nonevents,” *Ethnohistory* 36, no. 2 (1989): 144.

138. *Ibid.*, 145. Recall that in mythical times the buffalo people originally taught the Lakotas the spiritual significance of dance as a ritual means for regeneration, re-creation, and renewal.

139. DeMallie, *Sixth Grandfather*, 257.

140. For more on the Wounded Knee Massacre and its role in the termination of the Lakota Ghost Dance, see Andersson, *Lakota Ghost Dance*; Conger Beasley, *We Are a People in This World: The Lakota Sioux and the Massacre at Wounded Knee* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1995); DeMallie, “Lakota Ghost Dance,” 385–405; Robert M. Utley, *The Last Days of the Sioux Nation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1963).

141. DeMallie, *Sixth Grandfather*, 248.

142. Standing Bear, *Spotted Eagle*, 177.

143. DeMallie, *Sixth Grandfather*, 7; see Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 144, 148.

144. Walker, *Lakota Belief*, 46–50; Walker, *Sun Dance*, 141.

145. Posthumus, personal communication.

146. Walker, *Lakota Belief*, 36.

147. *Ibid.*, 43.

148. *Ibid.*, 50.

149. Standing Bear, *Spotted Eagle*, 57.

150. Personal communication; see Sebastian Braun, *Buffalo Inc.: American Indians and Economic Development* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008).

151. Posthumus, personal communication.

152. *Ibid.*

153. Deanna Darr, “Exploring the Buffalo Bond: ‘Pte Oyate’ Exhibit Links Art, Culture: Blackhillstogo,” *Rapid City Journal*, December 12, 2013, [http://rapidcityjournal.com/blackhillstogo/explore/on-the-cover/exploring-the-buffalo-bond-pteyoyate-exhibit-links-art-culture/article\\_a76dae7b-839f-5dfa-8313-e0a40218e753.html](http://rapidcityjournal.com/blackhillstogo/explore/on-the-cover/exploring-the-buffalo-bond-pteyoyate-exhibit-links-art-culture/article_a76dae7b-839f-5dfa-8313-e0a40218e753.html).

154. Associated Press, “Ranchers Oppose SD Tribe’s Plan for Bison Reserve, Say It Threatens Their Livelihoods,” *News Daily*, December 6, 2013, <http://www.newsdaily.com/united-states/9c4846d1f0f4b46fb92985cb6cde6f95/ranchers-oppose-sd-tribes-plan-for-bison-reserve>; Andrea Cook, “Oglala Sioux Tribe Holding Meetings on Proposed Tribal National Park,” *Rapid City Journal*, January 24, 2014, [http://rapidcityjournal.com/news/local/oglaala-sioux-tribe-holding-meetings-on-proposed-tribal-national-park/article\\_b1a6d9ef-abde-5343-abef-22108fa2dd11.html](http://rapidcityjournal.com/news/local/oglaala-sioux-tribe-holding-meetings-on-proposed-tribal-national-park/article_b1a6d9ef-abde-5343-abef-22108fa2dd11.html).

155. Posthumus, personal communication.