

Bethany Lutheran College

Seminar Paper

*Building Knowledge About the Unknown World Around Me*

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Native American Culture and Government

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Reservations? Native Americans? Tribes? These words were almost foreign to me before this course began in early January. Looking back at the little knowledge I knew before and the amount of knowledge I have gained is outstanding. Not only will this information be useful in my future, it will help me in my classroom as a future educator. It is an essential aspect that the children of today's generation know and understand that there are other children living on reservations and who attend different schools that are unlike their own. However, throughout this course, I have gained valuable information that will stay with me for a long time.

Many of the origin stories began that this all began from them "falling from the sky." From studying DNA and the shape of people, historians can attempt to identify who the first Native Americans were. They found, however, that they were closely related to the East Asians. In the Southwest, there were many dry climates and droughts. It was essential that the Native Americans found seeds that do best for the climates in which they lived in. In 2000 BC, they began to plant corn, beans, squash, etc. The Southwest was heavily dependent on their environment.

On the other hand, the Eastern Woodlands were in a Mississippian culture and had an organizing labor force. They emphasized trade networks and had a strong confederacy of over 10,000 troops. The men would dominantly hunt while the women would fish. Farming and gathering was also essential as the women would primarily "take over society." One interesting fact I learned from this portion of the course was that when the woman would want a divorce, she would wait for the male to go hunting and she would then take all of the male's belongings and throw it outside. When the male then got home after a long, tiring day of hunting, he would find out he got dumped!

Going along with the previous two, the Pacific Northwest was by far the wealthiest as they had an abundance of food. Cedar trees were used to their advantage as they used them for building and burning materials as well as using the bark for diapers and clothing. Seafood was primarily the foundation of their diet, however. One of the main questions amongst the tribes was to farm or not to farm. It was important that they also consider their type of government, environment, and languages within the tribe.

Minnesota was claimed by the Ojibwe in the North and the Dakota Sioux in the south. The split is along the I94 corridor. The Ojibwe, also known as the Chippewa, call themselves the “first men.” They are commonly known for the houses in which they live in. The Ojibwe are mostly woodland people with a Northeast culture. Primarily, the Chippewa are sedentary people as they use birch bark for building and use skin for clothing. The Ojibwe are mainly farmers. They plant corn, beans, squash, pumpkins, and wild rice. To absorb the nutrients, they would plant the crops close to each other. However, they did hunt and fish, as well. During the summer months, men would hunt while women would plant seeds and watch the crops. In the 1700’s, trade connected with the French in which the Chippewa traded fur for guns. This was a war path to attack the Dakota with guns.

Traveling south, you will find the Dakota Sioux who were primarily into hunting and arrived in Minnesota around 1500-1600. They would, however, plant a little “here” and a little “there.” The culture between the Dakota Sioux and the Chippewa clashed as they portrayed different languages. The Dakota Sioux had seven council fires in which used different terminology. The Dakota Sioux lived in an environment where needles, acorns, and walnuts were common. This type of environment would draw the animals to the location for successful

hunting. The Dakota Sioux were able to set up and take down T-pees quickly. All in all, this was a constant battle between the north and south of Minnesota- the Ojibwe and Dakota Sioux.

One of the most memorable massacres that were discussed in class was Woundnee which was essentially described as a “blood bath.” The white people decided to arrest the chief which had many mixed emotions carried along with it. There was accidental gunfire in which both sides obviously blamed each other for the act. Within this massacre, 31 United States soldiers were killed along with 39 United States soldiers wounded. Many of the people attacked were women and children. By 1890, almost all of the tribes were under government held reservations.

Many battles and wars were discussed in this course that is vital to today’s history. However, as the course is coming to a close, one of the important factors that I find intriguing as a future educator is the boarding school movement. Captain Richard Henry convinced the public that anyone can be educated. It was thought that one should kill the Indian and save the man. This means that one needs to take the Indian out of man. The first boarding school was a brutal experience as the Native Americans were forced to change their language, clothes, and lifestyle. Corporal punishment was a brutal punishment in which a military school discipline like process was enforced. As they had three meals a day and a steady diet, their psychological development was damaged. It came down to one main question: Is it torture? Their meals were on a hard surface and were often slapped, knuckle hit, kicked, beaten, etc. This was intended, as mentioned previously, to kill the Indian and save the man underneath. While at the boarding schools, you were not allowed to go home for years and years. Students were partially assimilated. They didn’t exactly have a “real” place to call home. When they would return to their tribes, they were often not accepted due to their long absence as well as their dramatic lifestyle changes. This, more often than not, gave the students a sense of loneliness.

Due to this brutal, long, enduring process of boarding schools, the schools were failing. There were big classes in which another common question arose: Who are you? They would often punish students when they would fall behind which was not all their fault. This was overall just a shocking experience. In 1973, boarding schools continued, however, in 2007, only 9,500 children were involved. There is proven to be a dramatic learning style gap and deficit. Looking back, this was a terrible experience for the Native Americans to experience.

Native Americans underwent many hardships and continue to still overcome hardships and battles in today's society and world that we now live in. Many people overlook the outstanding culture and traditions that the Native Americans have brought to our world today. It is sometimes hard to imagine what life would be like on the reservation, however, it is essential that each generation is aware of Native Americans and the culture that they live in. Young children often gain their knowledge of Native Americans through very stereotypical portrayals found in television, toys, Halloween costumes, and legends. Teachers, as a result, need to be sure to understand exactly what misconceptions and background knowledge their students hold. As a future educator, I believe it is important for students to learn that there are different "atmospheres" around them- no far away from their home or school!