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ENTERING SACRED LANDSCAPES CULTURAL EXPECTATIONS VERSUS LEGAL REALITIES IN THE NORTHWESTERN PLAINS

GREGORY R. CAMPBELL AND THOMAS A. FOOR

The spiritual part of this earth is as powerful, maybe more powerful than the physical life that we have—that we understand. We have lived in the spiritual environment, and are very much aware of its powers. The certain power places that have certain gifts to man, such as the Covenants, the many Teachings, the many blessings that come from these places—these places we call the Holy Places. The Holy Places are the spiritual environment that we have come to understand, that here is a place that the teachings, the Covenants, are received.¹

KEY WORDS: Cultural Resource Issues, Native American Religion, Sacred Lands.

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A Northern Cheyenne religious leader who eloquently described his intimate relationship with sacred places spoke these words. Sacred and cultural geography is a universal feature of indigenous religious practices across Native North America.² However, in a growing number of cases, conflicts have developed between Native North American religious practitioners and land-managing federal agencies. The contentious situations often come down to Indian peoples struggling to reassert their religious rights within an environment of “due process, federal and state statutes, and administrative policies.”³ Here we take a case study, the Big Horn Medicine Wheel, and examine the problem of weighing a value system based on inextricably associating a spiritual world and physical geography against a system that inherently separates the two.

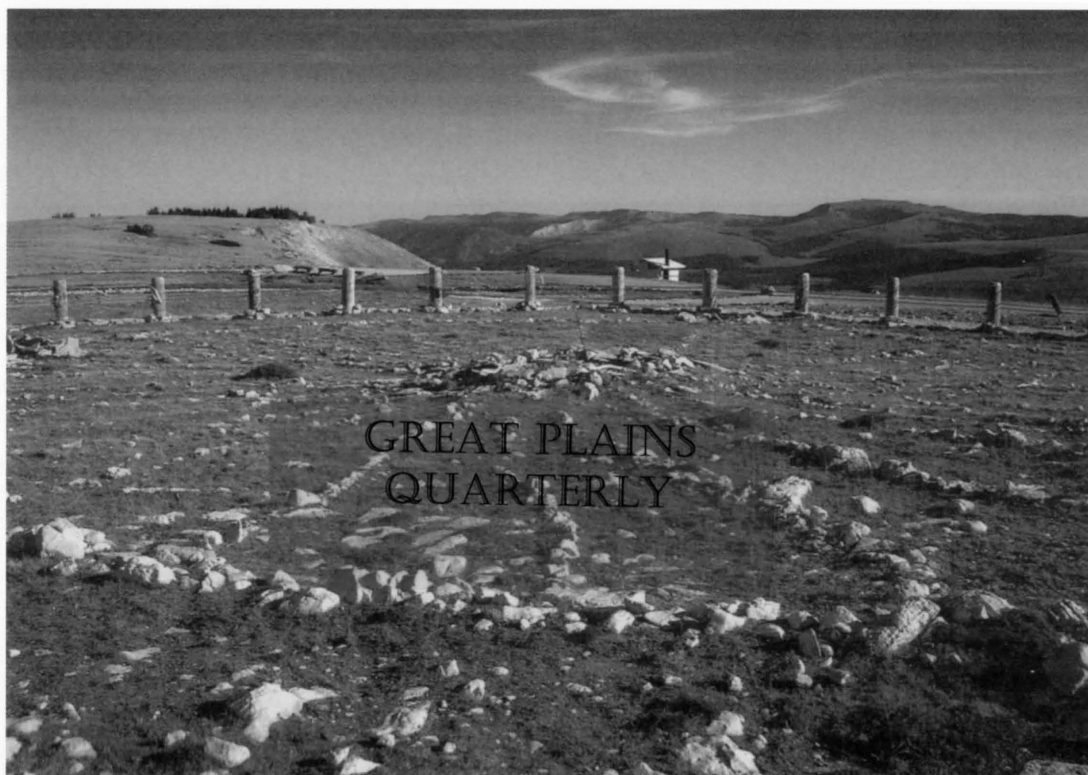


FIG. 1. View of Bighorn Medicine Wheel facing east. Outer ring, spokes and central cairn are visible.

To fully comprehend religious beliefs and practices associated with cultural landscapes, it is necessary to examine Native North American conceptions of the sacred.⁴

Traditional northwestern Plains religions, similar to other indigenous religions of Native North America, are cosmotheistic. Within such a worldview, humans, animals, plants, natural objects, and natural phenomena are animated by spiritual power. These animated beings are interrelated through kinship and reciprocal obligations. Through reciprocal kin relations, spirit beings interact with each other, including human beings. Those interactions involve the transfer of power, and they establish a dialogue that must be maintained by ritual prescriptions.⁵

These cosmotheistic principles extend themselves as an integral part of the landscape. For traditionalists there exists a complex web

of relationships, if not a unity, between ecology, humanity, and supernatural beings. Those relationships require sustained reciprocity and moral acknowledgment. Thus, spirit beings “are fully integrated into all aspects of social, cultural, and environmental activity.”⁶ A cosmotheistic view of the universe encompasses the entire landscape, including all the conceptual levels and elements of that ecological system.⁷

Within northwestern Plains religious ideologies, a basic frame of reference is sacred power. Traditional religions, as articulated and practiced, conceive of sacred power as a quality that pervades the universe and all the beings that inhabit the world. Ethnologist Clark Wissler captured this belief among the Blackfoot in his classic ethnographic description of ceremonial bundles. In “the Blackfoot theory . . . there functions in the universe a

force (natoji = sunpower) most manifest in the sun but pervading the entire world, a power (natoji) that may communicate with individuals, making itself manifest through any object, usually animate.”⁸

That sacred power, among all northwestern Plains religious systems, is a force that gives life and movement to the universe and to the beings that inhabit it. Thus, a central expression of sacred power is animation. All things within the landscape that embody animation, defined by movement or speech, are living entities, imbued with power. Power, therefore, is necessary not only for life but for action.

In their creations and placements on the landscape, all beings are endowed with a specific sacred power. All animals and animated natural objects possess sacred power. Humans also can possess it through ceremony, ritual, prayer, and sacrifice. These religious actions require interaction with the landscape, as it is the source of those powers, or “medicines.” Sacred power therefore requires a landscape that is intact, alive, and filled with animation. These qualities are as important today as they were in the past.

Traditional Indian peoples trace the origins of their current religious beliefs and practices back to their distant past. Scholars of Native American religions have noted the differences among religious beliefs, but also the underlying common symbols in Plains Indian religions and worldviews. Enrico Comba observed that “the ceremonies of the Plains Indians which engender a ritual representation of the cosmos . . . [share] a number of features which recur in each of the cultures”⁹ Comba then cites how some sacred sites on the Northern Plains, particularly medicine wheels, provide an arena of recurring symbolic features of Plains religions, as they represent “a circular model of the cosmos connected with the idea of a compliance between the human world and the cosmic cycles, which seems to be fairly ancient.”¹⁰ Harold Harrod also suggests ideological continuities between ancient and historical Plains ways of life:

The revelatory power of nature and animal life in the experience of the people in historic times may have quite ancient roots and may have been reflected as well in the experience of their predecessors. . . . These institutions and life ways surely arose as a consequence of a long evolutionary process.¹¹

That is, each tribal-nation, as it migrated to the northwestern Plains, integrated “institutions and life ways present among the more ancient residents,” including the recognition of certain geographical locations and cultural features as sacred sources of spiritual power.¹²

Each indigenous society embedded those geographical and cultural “portals” to the sacred within the unique context of their own worldviews—the symbolic and social processes that structure an interpretation of a particular society’s identity. A society’s worldview organizes the conceptualization and expression of time, space, and causation, as well as cultural being. For Native Americans, especially among those still practicing aspects of their indigenous religions, there exists a dynamic relationship between their society’s worldview and their social construction as a people.¹³

Despite the centrality of landscape and its qualities to the continuation of indigenous religious practices, across Native North America sacred sites on public and private lands have been under siege by lumbering, mining, recreational, and development interests. Over the course of nation-building, numerous locations have been either destroyed outright or altered to the point of rendering them useless for the continuation of indigenous religious use. This assault currently continues.

The intimate relationship that northwestern Plains religious leaders and their beliefs have with the landscape stands in contrast to Anglo-America’s vision of land use. In an essay entitled “Sacred Lands and Religious Freedom,” Vine Deloria Jr. writes about the fundamental differences between indigenous conceptions of lands, especially sacred lands, and those held in general by non-Indians.

Those differences, he argues, are encapsulated in the current body of environmental and resource management laws:

The ironic aspect of modern land use is that during the past three decades, Congress has passed many laws which purport to protect certain kinds of lands and resources from the very developers who seek to exclude Indian religious people from using public lands. The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, the Environmental Protection Act, the Clean Air Act, the National Historic Preservation Act, and several other statutes all take definite steps to protect and preserve the environment in a manner more reminiscent of traditional Native American religion than that of uncontrolled capitalism or the domination of land expounded by world religions.¹⁴

The manner by which the non-Indian worldview is ingrained into current laws involving the sacred is illustrated by the definition of sacred sites written into President Clinton's Executive Order no. 13007, which pertains explicitly to sacred places:

"Sacred sites" means *any specific, discrete, narrowly delineated location on Federal land* that is identified by an Indian tribe or Indian individual determined to be an appropriately authoritative representative of an Indian religion, as sacred by virtue of its established religious significance to, or ceremonial use by, an Indian religion; provided that the tribe or appropriately authoritative representative of an Indian religion has informed the agency of the existence of such a site.¹⁵

Aside from who is an appropriate representative of an Indian religion, what exactly do such constructs as "specific," "discrete," and "narrowly delineated" mean in identifying sacred sites?¹⁶ The 1996 executive order, while moving toward the full incorporation of indigenous religions into the policy fabric of

public lands, is somewhat antithetical to traditionalist conceptions of sacred sites as integrated, boundless, and interactive with their surrounding landscape. A recent case study—the Big Horn Medicine Wheel of Wyoming—illustrates the extent to which federal law and policies affect traditional religious practices on public lands of the northwestern Great Plains. It is an arena filled with controversy, manipulation, and ambiguities.

GOVERNMENTAL POLICIES AND NATIVE AMERICAN RELIGIOUS OPPRESSION

Native American peoples never have enjoyed the same legal and cultural rights as other US citizens. Despite the First Amendment clause of the US Constitution, for more than two centuries indigenous peoples have suffered numerous religious persecutions. These limits to the free exercise of religious beliefs and practices extend back before the drafting of the Constitution to the colonization of Native North America. Prior to the founding of the nation, the early colonists perceived indigenous peoples as living in a state of "savagery." One defining feature of existing in a savage state, living outside of the grace of God, was demonstrated by "heathenish" dances and religious practices.

During every phase of nation-building, the federal government denigrated almost everything indigenous, including religious and cultural practices, to justify the appropriation of Native American lands and resources.¹⁷ During the period from 1776 until the placement of surviving Native Americans on reservations, their cultural practices and beliefs increasingly were viewed as impediments to any movement toward "civilization."

As part of the reservation experience, indigenous lifeways faced overt persecution as governmental officials engineered the "Indian's" progress toward "civilization." Secretary of the Interior Henry M. Teller in 1883 created the Court of Indian Offenses to quell, by force if necessary, the "continuance of old heathenish dances," ceremonies, and the enduring influence

of aboriginal priests that are a “hindrance to civilization.”¹⁸ For northwestern Plains aboriginal peoples, reservation life meant the active oppression of traditional rituals and ceremonies. By threat of imprisonment or the withholding of their rations, the Sun Dance, sweat lodge, indigenous medical practices, and other aspects of religious life were either suppressed or forced underground.¹⁹ Commissioner Thomas J. Morgan encapsulated Indian policy since the establishment of reservations in 1889 when he wrote that the “Indian must conform to the white man’s ways, peaceably if they will, forcibly if they must.”²⁰ Moreover, Native American religious and medical authorities could no longer travel freely to sacred locations that lay off-reservation. During this era, Native American people found off-reservation without a pass could be jailed for their transgression.

Open suppression of Native American religious practices continued officially until the passage of the 1934 Wheeler-Howard Act. One tenet of that law guaranteed Native Americans the right to practice their Native religions, ending nearly a half century of overt attempts to erase any vestiges of their religions. To that end, Commissioner John Collier directed all Indian Bureau field workers to halt any interference with Indian religious life.²¹

Despite the passage of the so-called New Deal, the law did not alter many discriminatory behaviors of Anglo-Americans or halt determined Christian denominations from their conversion efforts among Indians. Native religions continued to be targets of suppression, if not outright oppression. Over the next three decades, Native American religious leaders and their respective traditional communities struggled to maintain their religions. This was not an easy task. The loss of indigenous religious knowledge under the forced assimilation era, combined with the continued social oppression of indigenous religious practices, made “free” religious expression a tenuous affair across “Indian Country.”²²

Any promise of greater religious tolerance did not occur until the advent of the Civil

Rights era. Amidst the shifting political and sociological landscape of that period, the federal government issued a number of reports about the deplorable conditions of Native American life. Those reports, along with the emergence of Indian activism, culminated eventually in the policy of self-determination. On January 4, 1975, Congress passed the Indian Self-Determination and Educational Assistance Act.²³ While the act addressed health, social, and political issues, Native American religious practices continued to be attacked to the fullest extent of the law. Federal authorities, a year later, arrested the Cheyenne and Arapaho for possession of eagle feathers under the 1976 Bald Eagle Protection Act. State authorities continued to arrest Native American Church members for peyote use. Across the country, tribal peoples routinely were denied access to sacred lands by federal and state agencies as well as private landowners.²⁴

Responding to these actions, Native Americans lobbied for a bill to protect Native American religious rights. On December 15, 1977, the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (AIRFA) was introduced into the Senate.²⁵ Approximately eight months later, President Jimmy Carter signed the bill into law. The act states, in part, that

it shall be policy of the United States to protect and preserve for American Indians their inherent right of freedom to believe, express, and exercise the traditional religions of the American Indian, Eskimo, and Native Hawaiians, including but not limited to access to sites, use and possession of sacred objects, and freedom to worship through ceremonies and traditional rites.²⁶

Framing a policy around inherent rights to exercise “traditional religions” did extend federal trust responsibilities and, in principle, aspects of tribal sovereignty to public lands. The federal mandate to consider tribal religious practices on public lands was implicitly outlined in section 2 of the act. That section

stipulates that various federal agencies, departments, and other entities evaluate their current policies and procedures in consultation with Native American leaders to determine changes necessary to preserve cultural rights and practices.

To discover any discriminatory practices embedded in federal policies, a task force examined the extant cultural differences between Native Americans and Anglo-Americans under the belief that this "cultural gulf" generated most discriminatory practices by federal agencies. The *American Indian Religious Freedom Act Report*, delivered to Congress in 1979, made several key suggestions that federal agencies "could" implement.²⁷ But as President Carter acknowledged from the outset, the law would "protect and preserve" the inherent right of the American Indian, Eskimo, Aleut, and Native Hawaiian people to believe, express, and exercise their traditional religion, but it was not intended to "override existing law."²⁸

Even before the task force finished its report, AIRFA was tested in a number of arenas. In most instances, especially with regard to land development involving federal and state agencies, the law failed to protect indigenous religious practices. One of the most devastating Supreme Court decisions was the 1988 *Lyng v. Northwest Indian Cemetery Protective Association*. The case involved a challenge by three northern California tribal-nations, who believed that the intent of the US Forest Service to construct a road and conduct developmental activities in the Six Rivers National Forest through a sacred area, would destroy the core of their religious beliefs and practices.²⁹ Ignoring critical ethnographic data collected from Yurok, Karok, and Tolowa religious authorities by a US Forest Service anthropologist, who conceded that the failure to conduct these ceremonies will result in great harm to the earth and to the people whose welfare depends upon it, the court majority in *Lyng* concluded that "to accept the Indians' free exercise claims would amount to establishing a 'religious servitude' on public lands, thereby divesting the government of its 'right to use what is, after all, its land.'"³⁰

The *Lyng* decision set a number of precedents for the future "protection" and "access" of all Native American sacred sites on public lands. Foremost is that the tribes' lack of title to the lands in question precluded their right to advance First Amendment claims. Also, federal agencies have the final decision in the disposition of any lands under its charge, despite indigenous concerns or claims.³¹

These legal parameters surrounding indigenous religious practices stand in contradiction to the evolving body of laws concerning the preservation of our national heritage. Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 specified that sites associated "with significant traditional events in the history (which may be folkloric) of the group that values them" is eligible for listing in the National Register.³² Further clarification of "traditional events" associated with specific places was detailed in a 1990 National Park Service bulletin. At that time, the label Traditional Cultural Property (TCP) was assigned to such locations.³³ Two years later, after demands by various federal agencies to specify the criteria to assess the significance of sites, Congress amended the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, explaining the criteria for the inclusion of a Traditional Cultural Property on the National Register.³⁴ Despite an evolving body of laws crafted to strengthen indigenous concerns, there remains, according to Steven Moore,

an unmistakable fear, paranoia, or distrust by federal personnel of the motives of Native people and their desire to protect the spiritual value of physical place. The net effect is to make clear to Native people that agencies and the resource management "experts" ultimately call the shots. So while "they" will talk to "you," the import of the policy is that "they" define the process and "they" make the final decision by "their" rules. From the Native perspective, it is "business as usual."³⁵

The established policy implications and the legal alternatives for the protection of sacred

sites are clear. Native American consultation may be mandated under current policy guidelines, but federal agencies do not have to implement any management goals that may support indigenous practices or concerns. In recognition of how policies are being implemented and the inability of AIRFA to protect indigenous religious rights, on May 24, 1996, President Clinton issued Executive Order no. 13007. The executive order requires federal land managers to “accommodate access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites by Indian religious practitioners, where such accommodation is not clearly inconsistent with law or essential agency functions.”³⁶ The law also requires managers to avoid adverse effects to the physical integrity of sacred sites, “but subject to the same caveats.”³⁷ The order was intended as a supplement to strengthen protections afforded under the 1993 Religious Freedom Restoration Act and the 1994 AIRFA amendments, while avoiding any acrimonious legislative debate.³⁸

Despite the accumulating body of laws, regulations, executive orders, and policies on cultural resources and their protection, indigenous issues remain either largely ignored or a low priority in most land management decisions. During the height of the Big Horn Medicine Wheel controversy, for example, the Bighorn National Forest federal archeologist correctly proclaimed that the site “can be a landmark and a federal agency can destroy it. . . . There’s nothing in the law that physically stops you from destroying this site.”³⁹ His proclamation, then, remains legally correct today. It is against this legal environment that indigenous religious and cultural leaders of their respective communities struggle with sacred site issues.

BIG HORN MEDICINE WHEEL: BALANCING THE SACRED AGAINST THE PROFANE

Resting on the western border of Medicine Mountain in the Bighorn Mountains of Wyoming is the Big Horn Medicine Wheel (archeological site 48BH302). The site lies at an elevation of approximately 9,460 feet in the

Arctic/Alpine zone.⁴⁰ Native American peoples have used the Medicine Wheel and surrounding region for spiritual and ceremonial activities for centuries, despite the seasonal climatic severity.

After its “discovery,” Euro-Americans viewed the Big Horn Medicine Wheel as a “curious relic” with little economic or cultural value. With little regard to the site and its surrounding location, extractive industries such as mining, timber, and ranching developed in the Bighorn Mountains. The local communities of Lovell, Cowley, Byron, and others grew along the base of the Bighorn Mountains along strategic commerce routes or in rich agricultural districts, incorporating these extractive industries into their local economies.

Today an extractive and service economy continues to dominate the Bighorn Mountains and the local region. Sheep and cattle grazing still continue in the mountains, along with logging, hunting, fishing, and numerous outdoor pursuits. In addition to many summer outdoor activities, snowmobiling is an important winter pursuit, with one route traveling over Medicine Mountain near the site.

A growing industry is tourism. Since the Bighorn Mountains lay on a scenic route to Yellowstone National Park, the local regional communities sought to attract tourists. Recognizing the Big Horn Medicine Wheel has economic benefit, local Anglo citizens attempted as early as 1915 to have the site designated as a national landmark. That landmark status was achieved in 1970 under the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act in sole recognition of its archeological value.

The landmark designation set the stage for the controversy. Ignoring the surrounding landscape, the Medicine Wheel site alone was demarcated as the landmark. The landmark designation also allowed for multiple uses of the area. Public use of the area would be potentially intensified by implementing plans to improve the road and parking lot, construct a visitor’s center, and build a raised viewing platform around the sacred site. Those plans remained dormant until 1989 when they were

revived in conjunction with the Elk Draw and Tillet's Hole timber sales.⁴¹

The prospect of the site becoming a tourist mecca, along with the timber sales, would effectively destroy Medicine Wheel as a sacred site. In response to the growing threat, Gary Kimble of the Association on American Indian Affairs proclaimed that the Big Horn Medicine Wheel "is a sacred site and should be protected as such."⁴² Locally, Native American religious authorities formed grassroots organizations—the Medicine Wheel Alliance and Medicine Wheel Coalition—to contest the land development plans.⁴³ For the Native American participants it meant sharing vital cultural and religious information in an attempt to halt the annihilation of one of the most sacred sites in the northwestern Great Plains. The ensuing controversy poignantly illustrates the inherent tensions that develop between indigenous concerns surrounding "the sacred" and the realities of multiple-use land management policies on public lands.

IDEOLOGICAL CONTINUITIES OF TRADITION: LINKING THE PRESENT WITH THE PAST

One of most striking cultural manifestations to appear during the Late Prehistoric period is the stone architectural feature labeled "medicine wheels." Of the approximately 135 known medicine wheels across the Great Plains, the Big Horn Medicine Wheel is an anomaly in complexity and in composition.⁴⁴

Although first "discovered" by Anglo-Americans in the 1880s, archeological investigations did not occur until the late 1950s under the auspices of the Wyoming Archaeological Society. The excavations reveal the presence of fire hearths, chipped stone artifacts, leather, bone, wood, a brass bead, various glass trade beads, a perforated shell bead, and a potsherd. Many of the items came from within the excavated cairns.⁴⁵

Other investigations reveal that the initial construction of the Big Horn Medicine Wheel began during the Late Prehistoric. The data

also suggest strongly that the Medicine Wheel is a composite structure with the radials younger than the central cairn.⁴⁶ The structural alterations to the site over time represent each society's attempt to establish a relationship with the spiritual powers that inhabit the site itself and surrounding landscape.⁴⁷

Despite the inability of archeologists to establish direct connections between the site and contemporary indigenous societies, the Big Horn Medicine Wheel reveals striking cultural continuities that transcend ethnic differences over time. Foremost, the Medicine Wheel architecturally reflects social conceptions of the sacred. Regardless of who the original builders were, every indigenous society that encountered it contributed to the site's structural and ideological complexity. The Crow recognized that the wheel was made by "people who had no iron," but used the site for vision questing.⁴⁸ Elk River, a Northern Cheyenne elder, told George Bird Grinnell that the Medicine Wheel

represented the wall of the Medicine Lodge; the lines leading toward the center, the rafters—or, as he called them, the lodge poles—of the Medicine Lodge; and the small circle in the center of the large one, from which the spokes radiate, represented the center pole of the Medicine Lodge. He added that the building to the northwest of the entrance, and within the circle and touching it, was the place from which thunder came; and by this I understood him to mean what I call the altar—the place in the Cheyenne Medicine Lodge which is especially sacred, and in which is the buffalo skull.⁴⁹

Accumulating ethnological data from northwestern Plains societies about other medicine wheels reveal a multiplicity of sacred uses for medicine wheels. They served as vision quest sites, memorials to prominent leaders and events, navigational aids, ethnic boundary markers, a means of clocking astronomically

important religious observances, a place to receive spiritual healing, as well as possible Sun Dance and Thirst Dance structures.⁵⁰

The multiplicity of uses for medicine wheels recorded in the ethnology indicates how each indigenous society incorporated the structures into their unique cultural traditions. They did so because they recognized the sacred nature of the medicine wheel and the surrounding landscape. Moreover, prehistoric and historic Native American societies who lived in or passed through the region incorporated the Big Horn Medicine Wheel into their worldviews as a sacred entity.⁵¹ The Medicine Wheel clearly served as a religious destination for various tribal-nations over many centuries, a cultural practice that continues to the present day.

Contemporary religious authorities continue to view the Big Horn Medicine Wheel and its surrounding landscape within a framework of a shared symbolism. They acknowledge the site as a source of sacred power. Through this recognition, religious authorities integrate Medicine Mountain and the Medicine Wheel into their unique worldview—the symbolic and social processes that structure an interpretation about a particular society's identity.⁵² Despite their distinct worldviews, northwestern Plains religious practitioners from different tribes have a universal understanding that the Medicine Wheel, as a sacred site, is a place by which humans relate to nature, to the spiritual environment, and to the cosmos. It is a place to which people journey specifically to seek medicines, renew their relationship with the spirits, and find a sense of renewal. An elder from Fort Peck spoke to this issue:

We have many different tribes here, you know. They're all from the Plains Indians, like Lakotas, and they developed their own language and they lived their own ways. And there was only one instruction—for the pipe, for the vision quest, for the Sun Dance, for the Sweat Lodge. And now, throughout my travels, there's many differ-

ent versions, many different legends came about among them. But basically, they're the same. . . . This is what we want to try to preserve for our future generations. We come up here [to the Medicine Wheel] to get our directions.⁵³

Viewed in this manner, many Indian peoples recognize both the diversity of their various traditions as well as common underlying elements of belief and practice. The essential point is that the Big Horn Medicine Wheel is a symbolic form that remains alive, spiritually vital in ongoing Plains religious practice and ceremonial life. The Medicine Wheel constitutes a crucial link between contemporary Plains Indian religious symbolism and practice, and its own distant past.⁵⁴

Contemporary tribal traditions also view the Big Horn Medicine Wheel as a sacred arena where peoples who once were enemies can congregate without conflict. A number of oral traditions relay that conflict is antithetical to worshipping at the site. One Crow elder recounted a tradition told to him by his grandfather. While at the Medicine Wheel his relative encountered two Sioux. Even though they were traditional enemies, all three prayed at the site.⁵⁵ In meeting each other at Medicine Mountain they knew that they shared a common spiritual purpose, to obtain their medicines. Any conflict would violate the sacred nature of the landscape.

Avoidance of conflict because of the sacred nature of the Big Horn Medicine Wheel extends to other social arenas. A Northern Cheyenne elder often remarked how difficult it was in "fighting" administrative "battles" for the preservation of the site:

As a traditional community, we do not like to see the Medicine Wheel drawn into an area of debate. It's a religious issue. In fact, every time we talk about the Medicine Wheel or any areas of this nature we say a prayer. A very solemn discussion is had.

I find it difficult to talk about the Medicine Wheel when the Forest Service

is listening. They have no idea of what I am saying. I have enlisted the help of people who can debate. I will not debate the issue, we don't do that. This is strictly a religious issue.⁵⁶

In the "Cheyenne way," one does not debate or dispute sacred issues. Other elders noted that physical or verbal conflict of any kind should be avoided at the Medicine Wheel. In this manner, disparate cultural communities merge into "one" in relation to the sacredness of the location.

Because of the common ground of the sacred underlying contemporary Plains Indians religious experiences, the Big Horn Medicine Wheel transcends individual and tribal religious practices. The site emerges as a unifying symbolic arena that simultaneously connects tribal heritages through disparate religious beliefs and expressions. The Big Horn Medicine Wheel, similar to the Black Hills, Sweetgrass Hills, Devils Tower, and Valley of the Chiefs, signifies the willingness of northwestern Plains peoples to selectively incorporate sacred landscapes as they encountered them.⁵⁷ The Big Horn Medicine Wheel, like other sacred sites, provides an immediate well-spring for living tribal religious traditions—sacred traditions that are manifested through ritual, prayer, or ceremony. Once these traditions are acquired, they are institutionalized through the passing of that religious knowledge to others.

While the site itself may be the ultimate destination, the connections to the site extend beyond to incorporate the surrounding landscape. This point is illustrated in a comment made by a Wind River Shoshone elder who said, "To my understanding this whole range, the Bighorns, is sacred. And when you first begin seeing the range, that was the beginning of your quest."⁵⁸ In all northwestern Plains religious ideologies, entering the sacred is in itself a sacred act. Approaching the site must be done with a sincerity of purpose and action. Contemporary religious practitioners consciously draw parallels between going to

the Big Horn Medicine Wheel at present and the ritual preparation of pre-reservation times. Approaching a sacred landscape is an endeavor that requires that "things be done in the right way."⁵⁹ The pilgrimage to the site by Native American religious practitioners relates to the sacred attributes of the wheel, namely, the Medicine Wheel as a cosmological directional center and temporal guide.

In the historical and contemporary accounts, the Big Horn Medicine Wheel and other major sacred sites play an essential role as a symbolic template for ceremonial people. Sacred sites are an integral part of the larger cosmological order by which people orient their movements and activities. Elders from various northwestern Plains tribal-nations report traditions and practices in which the Medicine Wheel figures as a directional marker in space and time. The journey to the site and prayers at the Medicine Wheel are directionally linked through the site's architectural structure. In their explanations, the wheel itself is a center that symbolically shapes the meanings of the land or a tribe's connections to it. A Wind River Shoshone elder expressed that principle of symbolic centrality:

I was told that in one of our ceremonies you stand right in the center of the Wheel. . . . You're in the center there with God. And you want God to send that power to your people . . . To give them plenty of food, and good health. . . . Well, there's these spokes point the way . . . that you came, toward your area, where you came from. Where the passageway was. . . . [That way] you send it [your prayer] from God straight to your people. And that way, you can bring your people into the Wheel itself. With the direction. Because, remember, we're all based on direction.⁶⁰

According to traditional understanding, each spoke symbolically connects the sacred actions of individuals at the Medicine Wheel with their people. The radiating "spokes" are conduits that integrate individual actions with



FIG. 2. Path to Medicine Wheel is in lower left foreground. This is the preferred route for many of the Native American religious practitioners.

the cosmological social orders. Prayers and spiritual powers may originate from the sacred, but they emanate to those who are in need. Northern Cheyenne elders also associate the Medicine Wheel with a locality that is part of a larger sacred order guided by celestial events. Their contemporary interpretations are corroborated by ethnological evidence.⁶¹

For Northern Plains Native peoples, the rhythms of life, including major ceremonials, are governed by movements of the seasons, in which space and time must be intimately interrelated. Temporal as well as spatial orientation is a religious context that has a moral dimension. Scholars of Plains Indian religious beliefs and practices observe that humans must be responsible participants in the patterns, cycles, movements, and processes of nature. Deward Walker notes the intimate relation-

ship between religious responsibilities and sacred landscapes:

In reviewing some 300 sacred sites I have noticed that all groups tend to hold sacred the boundaries between cultural life and geological zones. In addition, all groups possess a body of beliefs concerning the appropriate sacred times and rituals to be performed at such sites. It has also become apparent to me that sacred sites serve to identify fundamental symbols and patterns of American Indian cultures.⁶²

To religious authorities who use the Big Horn Medicine Wheel, it has important associations not only with earthly space but also with cosmological and seasonal time. In particular, the Medicine Wheel plays a role in

orienting the seasonal rounds of acquiring traditional medicines and scheduling ceremonial activities.

A Wind River Shoshone elder connects directly the Medicine Wheel to the timing of the Sun Dance. For the Shoshones, "The Medicine Wheel . . . would tell . . . about when you were going to have your Sun Dance . . . and it would tell you the times of season."⁶³

Other elders and religious authorities associated the Medicine Wheel's use with astral knowledge. To use medicine wheels, Crow religious leaders had to have considerable knowledge of important spring constellations. That astral knowledge is remembered and passed on through the Old Woman's Grandchild oral tradition. The tradition related how an orphan boy, the sacred product of a union between the Sun and a Hidatsa woman, makes the earth safe for human habitation. Orphan Boy, along with the actions of a set of twins who appear later in the tradition, slaughter various beings. Through their maiming and killing of the beings, the stars are created related to the use of the wheels. Of the stars and constellations created, three are central to the function of medicine wheels: *Ikyā Deaxe*, the Pale Star; Rigel, which is part of *Ikyā-ische*, or Orion's Belt; and Aldebaran. Interestingly, Aldebaran, Sirius, and Rigel played a central role in the timing of Cheyenne ceremonials, especially the Massaum ceremony before its eradication during the early reservation period.⁶⁴

Lakota medicine men acknowledged that they "had to have a knowledge of the galaxies. . . . And they know how many days it's going to take them to get from here back to Bear Butte, by looking at the stars and knowing the seasons from how the galaxies are."⁶⁵ Of course, archeoastronomical investigations reveal evidence that the Big Horn Medicine Wheel was used to observe culturally significant astronomical movements.⁶⁶

To fully comprehend the contextual dimensions of the Big Horn Medicine Wheel, it is necessary to examine the relationship between the landscape and religion, that is, integrate the historical and symbolic meanings with

present cultural interpretations, symbols, and religious practices. Major sacred sites among northwestern Plains Indians tend to be high or on dramatically up-thrusting landforms. It is here that symbolic linkages can be articulated, connecting the earth with innumerable aspects of the cosmos. These sites become primary cosmological and terrestrial anchor points, connecting all the spatial and temporal symbols in Native American religious life. Across the northwestern Plains, sacred sites comprise a constellation of fixed points on the landscape that, along with the star constellations and the seasonal progressions, serve to orient the physical and spiritual movements and activities. Sacred sites like the Big Horn Medicine Wheel connect contemporary peoples with their persistent, long-standing religious traditions.

Living oral traditions reveal a consistent, detailed, interrelated complex of beliefs and practices relating to the Big Horn Medicine Wheel. The general features of this complex are shared widely among different northwestern Plains religious authorities. The shared religious expressions across time and cultural boundaries are derived not only from the site's architectural structure, but also from the manner by which each tribe integrated their beliefs into the landscape. These symbolic connections, in association with each other and with other sacred aspects of the cosmology, form a temporal as well as spatial construct that is always constant, but continuously dynamic. Crow, Northern Cheyenne, Eastern Shoshone, and Northern Arapaho religious leaders drew symbolic associations with the Medicine Wheel as a cosmography.⁶⁷

Within this shared cosmographical framework of religious understandings, many specifics of practice, oral tradition, and belief vary between tribes and individuals. Indigenous religious practitioners recognize and mutually respect these differences. In other words, a core of beliefs and practices are not just shared in common, but also form the basis for an interactive set of interrelationships between the distinct indigenous societies.

Sacred sites such as the Big Horn Medicine Wheel, Bear Butte, Devils Tower, Valley of the Chiefs, or the Badger—Two Medicine area connect and merge the sacred and profane worlds in a manner that affects human relationships as well as the cosmos. There is in northwestern Plains belief systems and religious performances a never-ending transformation from secular to sacred and from sacred to secular. This spiritual transformation and movement establishes the connection between supernatural and natural things in the universe.⁶⁸

Another dimension of this spiritual transformation is the merging of the temporal with the spatial. As William Powers notes for the Lakota, "All temporal statements in Lakota are simultaneously spatial ones."⁶⁹ Conversely, he continues, all spatial statements are temporal.⁷⁰ These dynamic temporal and spatial relationships are expressed in the origins of their cosmology.

In other words, alterations in the spiritual domain impact directly the profane realm. The sacred domain, in turn, can also have profound implications in the profane world. The Big Horn Medicine Wheel and its associated landscape form a set of collective symbols that evoke transcendent passageways between sacred and profane worlds. Overall, sacred sites create "a conceptual and emotional parallelism between the objective order of the universe, the realm of spirits, and the construct of human cultures."⁷¹ They are, according to Deward Walker, "places of communication with the spirits, portals where people enter the sacred."⁷²

The controversy that arose over the Big Horn Medicine Wheel as a sacred site continues. In 1991 the US Forest Service began the process of identifying it as a Traditional Cultural Property under section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. For six years, the Bighorn National Forest, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the Big Horn County commissioners, the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office, and Federal Aviation Administration worked with the

Medicine Wheel Coalition and Medicine Wheel Alliance to resolve indigenous concerns about the Medicine Wheel and Medicine Mountain. The result was a Medicine Wheel Historic Preservation Plan, approved and completed in 1996. The plan established a 23,000-acre "area of consultation" around the site, permitted traditional cultural use at certain times of the year, restricted livestock grazing and timber harvesting, prohibited vehicular traffic to the site, and developed a system to monitor adverse impacts. Moreover, the plan proposed projects that would extend the National Historic Landmark boundaries.⁷³

As these multiple parties moved constructively toward implementing the historic preservation plan, a number of political maneuvers began to erode, if not challenge, Native American religious concerns. A year before the Medicine Wheel Historic Preservation Plan was approved, the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office was removed from the section 106 process because of the termination of its Native American Affairs Program. For the Native Americans involved, it meant the loss of an ally, if not an advocate.⁷⁴

The Mountain States Legal Foundation, on behalf of Wyoming Sawmills, Inc., filed a lawsuit on February 16, 1999. The foundation, which views the protection of American Indian sacred sites as a violation of the First Amendment's establishment clause, supported the lumber company's desire to harvest timber in the area of the Medicine Wheel. The lawsuit directly challenges the Medicine Wheel Historic Preservation Plan signed by the US Forest Service, alleging that "the Programmatic Agreement and the [Historic Preservation Plan] unconstitutionally require the Forest service to establish and promote Native American religious practices."⁷⁵ Further, the closing of the Horse Creek timber sales was "undertaken for the sole purpose of furthering of furthering Native American religions." Four other claims were outlined in the lawsuit.⁷⁶

The Bighorn National Forest includes more than a million acres of which about 40 percent

contains harvestable timber. The landscape set aside under the Medicine Wheel Historic Preservation Plan is less than 1 percent of the total national forest acreage. Of the acreage set aside, only 60 percent contains harvestable timber.⁷⁷ Yet under the establishment clause, which says that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion," the lawsuit questions the preservation plan under the Federal Administrative Procedures Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, the National Forest Management Act, and the Federal Advisory Committee Act.⁷⁸ Although the local court ruled in favor of the US Forest Service, upholding the historic preservation plan, Wyoming Sawmills, Inc., appealed the decision.⁷⁹

As the appeal moves through the court system, the effort to establish an "appropriate" landmark boundary proceeds. Despite the fact that US Forest Service accepted Medicine Mountain as a whole as critical to indigenous concerns, their recent landmark boundary proposal only included an area around the site.⁸⁰ Once again, indigenous religious concerns are being directly challenged by non-Indian economic concerns, but with indigenous resistance.

POLITICS OF THE SACRED: PUBLIC POLICY
AND THE STRUGGLE FOR NATIVE AMERICAN
RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Contemporary Native American efforts to protect geographic locations that they deem sacred dramatize some of the most painful contradictions between Native American and Euro-American values regarding the landscape. The prevailing ideological paradigm of Euro-American society is that land, even wilderness areas, is an economic commodity to be used in some productive manner as defined by Euro-American value systems. Land, despite any aesthetic or spiritual dimensions, often is conceptualized and utilized as a source of potential personal or corporate profit. Even tourism and recreational values are embedded

in a paradigm of profane extraction and use. Unfortunately, much of those value systems are written into federal policies regarding public lands. The "multiple use" and landmark boundary designations of public lands, particularly designations with unlimited public access, inherently views land as inert, an alienable commodity, to be appropriated for the public good. These sentiments were echoed by Susan Shown Harjo, director of the Morning Star Institute, a national organization for Native peoples' cultural and traditional rights: "What usually happens when Native sacred places are looked at for some level of protection, they are not looked at because they are Indian sacred sites, they look at environmental impacts, at the physical impact on the site itself, not at the impact it would have on the ceremonial use and the efficacy of the religious activity as well as the site itself."⁸¹

For northwestern Plains indigenous peoples, the appropriation of sacred landscapes began during the advent of Euro-American colonization. That appropriation continued with the permanent settlement of the region. Historically, religious uses of sacred areas by indigenous authorities were severed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The early reservation period, with its restrictions of off-reservation movements and policies of forced assimilation, severed direct interactions with many off-reservation sacred arenas.

Simultaneously, Euro-Americans saw value in many of these areas. Resource extraction, grazing, and tourism feed local Anglo economies. Anglo-Americans quickly incorporated these areas, just as they appropriated other features of the national landscape. In doing so, Euro-American society enfolded them into their own systems of meanings and patterns of use with relative freedom from any residual "burdens" of original indigenous cultural meanings. In this new cultural framework, sacred sites became valued for a variety of reasons, but rarely for their sacred nature derived from Native perspectives. As the Big Horn Medicine Wheel example illustrates, the site

first became a local curiosity, then an archeological relic and scientific enigma, and finally, a tourist attraction to infuse capital into the local Anglo economy. While indigenous sacred concerns have been accommodated, that accommodation remains a contested aspect of the site's multiple-use management plan.⁸²

Almost all other accessible or visible sacred landscapes have undergone similar ideological and political-economic transitions. One only needs to examine the legal and cultural issues surrounding Devils Tower, the Badger-Two Medicine area, Bear Butte, the Black Hills, the Sweetgrass Hills, and the Valley of the Chiefs to realize the parallels. All have, in short, evolved into an artifact, a symbol of appropriation within a Euro-American framework of meaning. By assimilating these sacred landscapes as artifacts, relics of the past, Euro-American society is able to distance these locales from their indigenous context. At times they have invented their own traditions about these areas to refute indigenous use or concerns. By doing so, Euro-American society asserts its own dominion over it.

Despite the establishment of legal mandates to incorporate indigenous concerns and perspectives into public-land policy management, Anglo-America continues to interpret and view Native American religious beliefs and practices either with a degree of scorn and derision or with avid, romantic curiosity. This contradictory mixture of derision and romantic attraction is expressed vividly every summer as countless Euro-Americans and Europeans invade "Indian Country" to satiate their appetites for experiencing an authentic Native American cultural experience or religious revelation.⁸³ At the Big Horn Medicine Wheel, sacramental and religious offerings are regularly taken or those seeking some religious experience leave items such as Barbie-doll heads. Such incidences are not uncommon. Many non-Indians, especially practitioners of New Age philosophies and others attempting to make a tenuous spiritual connection using Native American religious philosophies, often appropriate or distort in-

igenous items or beliefs for their own purposes. These distorted perceptions and appropriations of aspects of Native American religions are as much acts of violence against them as acts of direct physical violence. Typically, symbolic and physical violence go hand in hand in our relations with the "Other."⁸⁴

Even amidst today's multicultural rhetoric for diversity and respect, contemporary Native American religious practices rarely are treated with simple dignity and respect, on equal footing with other religious traditions. Most often, indigenous religious practitioners find that their needs are routinely ignored or they are alienated from critical components of their belief systems, making it nearly impossible to conduct rituals and ceremonies.

As Indian peoples struggle to reassert their religious rights by recapturing and reviving their religious traditions in this legislative environment, the open expression of Native American religious concerns surrounding sacred sites conflicts strongly with Euro-American social and economic interests. Moreover, the cultural meanings of these sites differ. Sacred sites, by Euro-American standards, are either cultural artifacts or hold a socioeconomic benefit. Euro-Americans, especially local non-Indians, often perceive open and governmentally mandated Native American religious uses of such locations as threatening, if not disorienting.

The indigenous view of the landscape as a source of spiritual knowledge, inseparable from the process of living, remains a foreign construct by Anglo-American standards.⁸⁵ Most Euro-Americans have no real, grounded analogs in their cultural constructs for the Native American concept of sacred place set in natural landscapes. Nor do the rituals and ceremonies at these locations as a means for promoting harmony and balance in the world order correlate with a Euro-American's conceptual framework for experience. Native American perceptions of the environment as a "living entity," with certain locations possessing a "sacred" nature, is viewed as anti-progress and

anti-capitalist.⁸⁶ Thus, the idea of a “sacred geography” remains an alien construct for most Euro-Americans. How could a natural area or site be a culturally recognized wellspring of spiritual knowledge?

Among indigenous northwestern Plains societies, sacred landscapes, whether natural or human-made, require continual dialogue. Human action and speech are essential to communicate with the sacred beings. Through prayer, song, and oral evocation, those seeking “medicines” activate and connect with the spiritual world. The importance of religious praxis as a vehicle for spiritual revelation is characteristic of the majority of tribes who use these sacred arenas. Contemporary northwestern Plains religious authorities recognize these sacred sites as places of pilgrimage, prayer, vision questing, ritual, and ceremony to carry out that dialogue. It is a dialogue that requires, if not demands, an animate, pure, unspoiled ecology with a degree of solitude.

Contemporary Indian religious practitioners continue to emphasize continuously to federal authorities the religious importance of sacred areas and the requirements for religious practice at such locations. At the Native American Sacred Lands Forum held in Denver and Boulder, Colorado, in October 2001, Chris Peters (Pohlik-lah/Karuk), executive director of the Seventh Generation Fund, summarized the centrality of sacred landscapes for all Native North Americans:

[B]ased upon . . . astute observations of the earth, we recognize that there are certain places within the natural ecosystem that . . . have power, spiritual power, natural forces above and beyond other places in the world. These places are indispensable and are central to our cultural, our spiritual life as Indian people. Without these sacred places or through the destruction of these sacred places, there will be certain death.⁸⁷

These contrasting views among Native Americans, federal officials, and the Euro-American public not only affect political and

public policy decisions about the use and value of landscapes, especially “sacred landscapes,” but are written into environmental and cultural resource management laws. While most controversies surrounding indigenous concerns over sacred sites will never completely be resolved to accommodate fully Native American religious requirements, it is evident from the bureaucratic position of defining the “sacred,” religious meanings are subsumed behind “governmental power and legalities, and public support.”⁸⁸

The Big Horn Medicine Wheel and the Badger-Two Medicine area, as well as other sacred-site issues across the northwestern Plains, illustrate that any site deemed sacred can fall prey to religious oppression. Federal policies regarding public lands and their uses, resources, and values can play a pivotal role in providing the free exercise of indigenous religion or they can provide a platform for further Euro-American cultural domination. These issues manifest themselves in battles for control of Traditional Cultural Properties in the context of AIRFA, and such acts as President Clinton’s Executive Order no. 13007.⁸⁹

Most recently, Interior Secretary Gale Norton spoke to the Senate Indian Affairs Committee in February 2001. During her testimony she assured the committee that she would execute a mission that sought to meet the many challenges related to American Indians and Alaskan Natives and identify those programs that will best serve Indian constituents. Shortly after that testimony, the Bush administration announced that it would renew Executive Order no. 13007.⁹⁰ In addition, the Bush administration’s assistant secretary of Indian Affairs was directed to appoint a task force to oversee management of public lands that Indians have used. The task force would work directly with various Indian nations to identify sites, giving them direct access to the administration. When announced, American Indian leaders expressed skepticism, suggesting that present problems were more a consequence of lack of enforcement of existing law.⁹¹ Arguing for a need for

greater control of management of federal lands, Congressman Ben Nighthorse Campbell introduced a bill entitled the "Indian Contracting and Federal Land Management Demonstration Project Act."⁹² One centerpiece of the proposed legislation is to "better accommodate access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred land by Indian religious practitioners; and . . . to prevent significant damage to Indian sacred land."⁹³

A close examination of the Big Horn Medicine Wheel issues suggests that the disputes today seldom revolve around the reality of indigenous traditional concerns or use. In reality, they center on two issues: competing land uses by different stakeholder groups, and the question of how to establish boundaries that acknowledge traditional Native American values. Landscapes are designated to recognize that events tied to the use of the specific features are connected. These controversies point to the problems involved in weighing a value system based on inextricably associating a spiritual world with a physical geography against a system that inherently separates the two. The economics of a location may always outweigh indigenous religious freedom. But as Chris Peters asks, "What's more American: the right to drill for oil or the right to pray?"⁹⁴

NOTES

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3. Kari Forbes-Boyte, "Litigation, Mitigation, and the American Indian Religious Freedom Act: The Bear Butte Example," *Great Plains Quarterly* 19 (1999): 33.

4. Walker, "American Indian Sacred Geography," vi.

5. Howard L. Harrod, *Becoming and Remaining a People* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995), and Harrod, *The Animals Came Dancing: Native American Sacred Ecology and Animal Kinship*. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2000).

6. Howard L. Harrod, *Renewing the World: Plains Indian Religion and Morality* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1987), 38-41.

7. Refer to Keith H. Basso, "'Stalking with Stories': Names, Places, and Moral Narratives among the Western Apache," in *On Nature: Nature, Landscape, and Natural History*, ed. Daniel Halpern (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1987), 95-116; Joseph E. Brown, *The Spiritual Legacy of the American Indian* (New York: Crossroad Press, 1982); Catherine L. Albanese, *Nature Religion in America: From the Algonkian Indians to the New Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); and Donald J. Hughes, "A Native American Environmental Ethic," in *Religion and the Environmental Crisis*, Eugene C. Hargrove, ed. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986).

8. Clark Wissler, "Ceremonial Bundles of the Blackfoot Indians," in *American Museum of Natural History, Anthropological Papers* 7, pt. 2 (New York: Order of the Trustees, 1912), 103.

9. Enrico Comba, "Inside a Circle: The Structure of the Cosmos among the Plains Indians," *Temenos* 23 (1987): 91-94.

10. *Ibid.*, 92. See also Kurt Almqvist, "The Three Circles of Existence," *Studies in Comparative Religion* 17 (1987): 24-29; and Brown, *Spiritual Legacy of the American Indian*, 35-38.

11. Harrod, *Renewing the World*, 20.

12. *Ibid.*, 18-20.

13. Alfonso Ortiz, *The Tewa World: Space, Time, Being, and Becoming in Pueblo Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969); Walker, "American Indian Sacred Geography," vi.

14. Vine Deloria Jr., "Sacred Lands and Religious Freedom," in *American Indian Religious Freedom Coalition* (New York: Association on American Indian Affairs, 1991), 11.

15. Cited from Thomas F. King, *Cultural Resources Laws and Practice*, Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, 1998), 158; emphasis ours.

16. *Ibid.*, 158-59.

17. Reginald Horsman, "United States Indian Policy, 1776-1815," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 4, ed. Wilcomb B. Washburn (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1988), 29-39; Francis Paul Prucha, "United States Indian Policy, 1815-1860," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 4, ed. Wilcomb B. Washburn (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1988), 40-50; Speaks Lightning, *Suppressing American Indian Spirituality: A Winter Count* (Browning, MT: Spirit Talk Press, 1997).

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19. William T. Hagan, "United States Indian Policy, 1860-1900," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 4, ed. Wilcomb B. Washburn

(Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1988), 51-65.

20. See *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1889), 3.

21. See *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1934* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1934), 90.

22. Russel L. Barsh, "The Illusion of Religious Freedom for Indigenous Americans," *Oregon Law Review* 65 (1986): 363-412; Vine Deloria Jr. and Clifford M. Lytle, *American Indians, American Justice* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983); John Gillingham, "Native American First Amendment Sacred Lands Defense: An Exercise in Judicial Abandonment," *Missouri Law Review* 54 (1989): 93-115; Margot Liberty, "The Sun Dance," in *Anthropology on the Great Plains*, ed. W. Raymond Wood and Margot Liberty (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), 164-78; Omer C. Stewart, "The Native American Church," in *Anthropology on the Great Plains*, ed. W. Raymond Wood and Margot Liberty (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), 188-96; Stewart, *Peyote Religion: A History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 128-47, 213-64; Stewart, "Peyote and the Law," in *Handbook of American Indian Religious Freedom*, ed. Christopher Vecsey (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1991), 44-62; Fred W. Voget, *The Shoshoni-Crow Sun Dance* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1984).

23. Sharon O'Brien, *American Indian Tribal Governments* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), 86-90.

24. Sharon O'Brien, "A Legal Analysis of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act," in *Handbook of American Indian Religious Freedom*, ed. Christopher Vecsey (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1991), 29; see also Donald Falk, "Lyng v. Northwest Cemetery Protective Association: Bulldozing First Amendment Protection of Indian Sacred Lands," *Ecology Law Quarterly* 16 (1989): 515-72.

25. Ellen M. W. Sewell, "The American Indian Religious Freedom Act," *Arizona Law Review* 25 (1983): 429-72.

26. *American Indian Religious Freedom Act*, Public Law 95-341, "95th Cong., 2nd sess." (August 11, 1978).

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31. Donald Falk, "Lyng v. Northwest Indian Cemetery Protective Association: Bulldozing First Amendment Protection of Indian Sacred Lands," *Ecology Law Review* 54 (1989): 777-96; O'Brien, "Legal Analysis of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act," 40.

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35. Moore, "Sacred Sites and Public Lands," 88-89.

36. Cited from Thomas F. King, *Cultural Resource Laws and Practice: An Introductory Guide* (Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira, 1998), 157.

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40. See William C. Prentiss, *Variation of Paleoenvironments in the Nebraska National Forest* (Missoula, MT: Cultural Heritage Office, n.d.).

41. United States Forest Service, *Medicine Wheel National Historic Landmark: Environmental Assessment*, unpublished draft report (Lovell, MT: Big Horn National Forest, Medicine Wheel Ranger District, 1989).

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43. For a more comprehensive history of the controversy, refer to James P. Boggs and Gregory R. Campbell, "Medicine Mountain Ethnographic Project" (unpublished report, Department of Anthropology, University of Montana, Missoula, 1996).

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Bird Grinnell, "The Medicine Wheel," *American Anthropologist* 24 (1922): 307; and S. C. Simms, "A Wheel Shaped Monument in Wyoming," *American Anthropologist* 5 (1903): 107-10. For a comprehensive review of medicine wheel definitions, see John Brumley, *Medicine Wheels on the Northern Plains: A Summary and Appraisal*. Manuscript Series no. 12 (Calgary: Archaeological Survey of Alberta, 1988); Thomas P. Newcomb, "Some Fact and Much Conjecture Concerning the Sun River Medicine Wheel, Teton County, Montana," *Archaeology in Montana* 8 (1967): 17-23; David E. Vogt, *An Information Analysis of Great Plains Medicine Wheels* (PhD diss., Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC, 1990); and Don Grey, "Big Horn Medicine Wheel Site, 48BH302," *Plains Anthropologist* 8 (1963): 27-40. For a broad perspective on the uniqueness of the Big Horn Medicine Wheel, see Ray A. Williamson, *Living the Sky, the Cosmos of the American Indian* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984), 211.

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46. Refer to Grey, "Big Horn Medicine Wheel Site, 48BH302," 27-40; Allan Fries, "Vision Quests at the Big Horn Medicine Wheel and Its Date of Construction," *Archaeoastronomy* 111 (1980): 20-24; Michael Wilson, "In the Lap of the Gods: Archaeology and Ethnohistory in the Big Horn Mountains, Wyoming," *Archaeology in Montana* 17 (1976): 33-34; and Wilson, "Sun Dances, Thirst Dances, and Medicine Wheels: A Search for Alternative Hypotheses," in *Megaliths to Medicine Wheels: Boulder Structures in Archaeology; Proceedings of the Eleventh Annual Chacmool Conference*, ed. Michael Wilson, Kathie Road, and Kenneth Haury (Calgary: University of Alberta, 1981), 333-70.

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48. Simms, "A Wheel Shaped Monument," 107-8.

49. Grinnell, "The Medicine Wheel," 307.

50. Brumley, *Medicine Wheels on the Northern Plains*; Hugh A. Dempsey, "Stone 'Medicine Wheels'—Memorials to Blackfeet War Chiefs," *Journal of the Washington Academy of Sciences* 46 (1956): 177-82; John A. Eddy, "Astronomical Alignment at the Big Horn Medicine Wheel," *Science* 184 (1974): 1035-43; Eddy, "Probing the Mystery of the Medicine Wheels," *National Geographic*, 151 (7)1977, 140-46; Eddy, "Medicine Wheels and Plains Indian Astronomy," *Technology Review* 80 (1977): 18-28; Eddy, "Archaeoastronomy of North America: Cliffs, Mounds, and Medicine Wheels," in *In Search of Ancient Astronomy*, ed. E. C. Krupp (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1978), 133-64; Fries, "Vision Quests at the Big Horn Medicine Wheel," 20-24; Thomas F. Kehoe, "Stone 'Medicine Wheels' in Southern Alberta and Adjacent Portions of Montana: Were They Designed as Grave Markers?" *Journal of the Washington Academy of Sciences* 44 (1954): 133-37; Thomas F. Kehoe, "'Stone Medicine Wheel Monuments' in the Northern Plains of North America," *Atti del XL Congresso Internazionale degli Americanisti* (Roma-Genoa) 3 (1972): 182-89; Thomas Kehoe and Alice Kehoe, "Stones, Solstices, and Sun Dance Structures," *Plains Anthropologist*, 76(1): 85-95; V. N. Mansfield, "The Big Horn Medicine Wheel As a Site for the Vision Quest," *Archaeoastronomy* 3 (1980): 26-29; Matthew Liebman, "Demystifying the Big Horn Medicine Wheel: A Contextual Analysis of Meaning, Symbolism, and Function," *Plains Anthropologist* 47 (2002): 61-71; Wilson, "Sun Dances, Thirst Dances, and Medicine Wheels."

51. Refer to Liz Bryan, *The Buffalo People: Prehistoric Archaeology on the Canadian Plains* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1991), 57; and Harrod, *Renewing the World*.

52. Alfonso Ortiz, *The Tewa World: Space, Time, Being, and Becoming in Pueblo Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969).

53. Boggs and Campbell, "Ethnographic Field Interviews," 1992, unpublished.

54. See, for example, William Tall Bull and Nicole Price, "The Battle for the Bighorn Medicine Wheel," in *Kunaitupii: Coming Together on Native Sacred Sites*, ed. Brian O. K. Reeves and Margret A. Kennedy (Calgary: Archaeological Society of Alberta), 97.

55. Boggs and Campbell, "Ethnographic Field Interviews," 1992, unpublished.

56. Tall Bull and Price, "Battle for the Bighorn Medicine Wheel," 96.

57. This "selective borrowing," as Joseph Brown calls it, is rooted in common shared religious understandings. It is these shared religious beliefs that made possible the survival of Northern Plains Indian religions through generations of cultural disruption and oppression. See Brown, *Spiritual Legacy*

of the American Indian, 14-18; and Ake Hultkrantz, "A Decade of Progress: Works on North American Indian Religions in the 1980s," in *Religion in Native North America*, ed. Christopher Vecsey (Moscow: University of Idaho Press, 1990), 168.

58. Boggs and Campbell, "Ethnographic Field Interviews," 1993.

59. Ibid.

60. Ibid.

61. Among the Cheyenne there are a group of religious practitioners who had spiritual control over the *Oxzem*, a spirit or wheel lance. The *Oxzem* is a spiritual gift to the *E'ehyo'm*, or shamans. The *Oxzem* is a small braided spirit wheel attached to the spirit lance. The symbolic connection between the *Oxzem* and the Big Horn Medicine Wheel is that each serves as a catchment for spiritual power and guides individuals and groups, giving them a sense of place or locality. The spiritual power of *Oxzems* to direct the movement of the Cheyenne is recounted in oral tradition, which relays how a great medicine man led the Cheyenne out of the north after being continuously overpowered by an enemy. In his right hand the medicine man held an *Oxzem* horizontally in front of him with the spearhead of the hoop pointing forward to show the way. The *Oxzem* guides the Cheyenne to new territories. Given this interpretation, it is significant that John Stands in Timber stated that the Big Horn Medicine Wheel served as a central marker to define the original territory claimed by the Cheyenne and Arapaho. See George A. Dorsey, "The Cheyenne," in *Field Museum of Natural History, Anthropological Series*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Field Museum of Natural History, 1905), 37; Karl H. Schelsier, *The Wolves of Heaven: Cheyenne Shamanism, Ceremonies, and Prehistoric Origins* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 16-17, 87, 119; and John Stands in Timber and Margot Liberty, *Cheyenne Memories* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 124.

62. Walker, "Protecting American Indian Sacred Geography," 262.

63. Boggs and Campbell, "Ethnographic Field Interviews," 1993; Demetri B. Shimkin, "The Wind River Shoshoni Sun Dance," *Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 151, Anthropological Papers*, no. 41. (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1953), 409.

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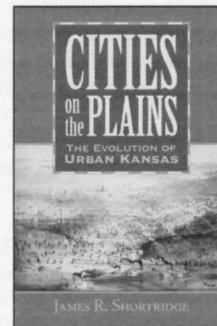
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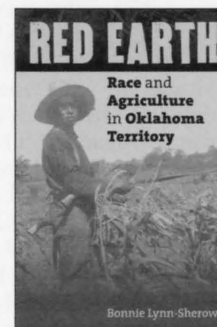
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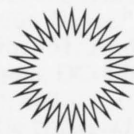
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