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# ELLA DELORIA: A DAKOTA WOMAN'S JOURNEY BETWEEN AN OLD WORLD AND A NEW

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ELLA DELORIA: A DAKOTA WOMAN'S JOURNEY  
BETWEEN AN OLD WORLD AND A NEW

by

Susana Dalena Geliga-Grazales

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska  
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Arts

Major: History

Under the Supervision of Professor Margaret Jacobs

Lincoln, Nebraska

May 2014

ELLA DELORIA: A DAKOTA WOMAN'S JOURNEY

BETWEEN AN OLD WORLD AND A NEW

Susana D. Geliga-Grazales, M.A.

University of Nebraska, 2014

Advisor: Margaret Jacobs

The subject of this thesis is a Yankton Dakota Sioux woman named Ella Cara Deloria who lived from 1889 to 1972. The intent of this thesis is to use her own construct of an educated Indigenous woman to examine her personal and professional life as a middle figure between a world of Dakota traditionalism and a modern academic arena during an era of intellectual curiosity about Native Americans. She flowed between these worlds to become a distinguished author and accomplished Dakota woman who built bridges of understanding between cultures. Ella initially set out to follow the patriarchs in her family by adopting Christianity and pursuing a formal education, yet her gender enabled her to learn from her female ancestors as well, and to convey the traditional stories of her people, the Sioux. When she arrived at Columbia University, she intended to become a teacher. However, surrounded by an environment of intellectuals studying Native Americans, Ella grew alarmed by what she considered discrepancies and inaccuracies in the production of literature on Native Americans, the Sioux in particular. She decided to devote her life to create an understanding between cultures. It was through the academic world of anthropology that she found a medium to develop her unique vocation. Known for such works as *Speaking of Indians* and

*Waterlily*, Ella used her writing skills to serve as a cultural mediator between her people and the rest of the world.

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family, especially . . . .

To my Ohitika, you are the sunshine of all my days

To my sweet children Ohitika, Kimimila, Ohiyesa, Wiyaka, and Olowan for your patience,  
and for your encouragement to finish what I start.

To my late grandmother, my greatest teacher

To my late mother

To my dad for keeping me focused on my education

To Luz Guerra my mentor and support

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I want to thank my son Ohitika for helping me to think about things in different ways. I would also like to extend my deepest gratitude to Dr. Margaret Jacobs. You have been so much more to me than an advisor, and instrumental in the development of my scholarship. I would also like to thank Rebecca Wingo, my maske (sister) for all of your guidance and support. I would like to thank Philip Deloria for your time, appreciation, and encouragement. I want to acknowledge and thank Shirley Bad Wound for all of her support and encouragement for my family. Another giant thank you must go to Dr. Victoria Smith for all of your support throughout my program. I want to also send a warm thank you to Dr. James LeSueur, and to my graduate committee: Dr. Margaret Jacobs, Dr. Victoria Smith, and Dr. Katrina Jagodinsky. You have all been most helpful.

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Dakota Indian Foundation

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## A NOTE ON TERMS

The Sioux are comprised of three different bands and thirteen sub-bands. Below is a list of sub-bands next to the reservations where those bands have been headquartered.<sup>1</sup>

The Nakota and Dakota dialects are more similar to each other than the Lakota dialect.

The Santee (Eastern Sioux) are Dakota speakers, and their sub-bands are:

Mdewakanton            Crow Creek (Kangi Wakpa), and Flandreau (Wakpa Ipaksan)

Wahpeton                Flandreau (Wakpa Ipaksan)

Wahpekute              Flandreau (Wakpa Ipaksan)

Sisseton                Sisseton- Wahpeton

The Yankton (Middle Sioux) are Nakota and speakers, and their sub-bands are

Yankton                 Yankton, Crow Creek (Kangi Wakpa)

Yanktonais              Standing Rock (Inyan Woslatan)

The Teton (Western Sioux) are Lakota speakers, and their sub-bands are

Oglala                    Oglala (Wazi Paha)

Sicangu                 Rosebud (Sicangu Oti), Lower Brule (Kul Wicasa Oyate)

Hunkpapa                Standing Rock (Inyan Woslatan)

Mnikowoju              Cheyenne River (Wakpa Waste)

Sihasapa                Cheyenne River (Wakpa Waste)

Oohenunpa              Cheyenne River (Wakpa Waste)

Itazpico                 Cheyenne River (Wakpa Waste)

Ella's grandfather Francis Deloria (Saswe) was French and Yanktonais, her father Philip

was Yanktonais and French from his father, Francis, and Sihasapa from his mother,

Sihasapawin. Ella was Yanktonais, Sihasapa and French from her father, and Yankton

and Irish from her mother, Akicitawin or Mary Sully.<sup>2</sup> Vine Deloria, Jr. explains that at

some point after Ella's father was born, his father Francis moved the family close to

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<sup>1</sup> Oglala Lakota College, *Hecetu Yelo: Student Manual* (Kyle: Oglala Lakota College), 1989, 2.

<sup>2</sup> Vine Deloria Jr., *Singing for a Spirit: A Portrait of the Dakota Sioux*, (Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers, 1999), 7, 8,29,59.

where Lake Andes, South Dakota is today. He said that that his great-grandfather's camp was, "directly across the river from Fort Randall at what became known as White Swan Landing. Eventually Saswe became the recognized leader of one of the smaller Yankton bands that was related to Chief White Swan, who headed the western division of the tribe."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Vine Deloria Jr., *Singing for a Spirit: A Portrait of the Dakota Sioux*, 30.

## ELLA DELORIA: A DAKOTA WOMAN'S JOURNEY

### BETWEEN AN OLD WORLD AND A NEW

#### INTRODUCTION

A Dakota Sioux, Ella Cara Deloria was born in Yankton, South Dakota in 1889. She came into the world during a turbulent new era, but her family raised her in an old way to fit into a new time. She was born just one year before U.S. soldiers massacred over three hundred defenseless and ravaged children, elders, women and men at Wounded Knee. The government inflicted intensive assimilation policies upon all Sioux people during Ella's childhood. She grew up a living witness to the changes of her people. Later in life she reflected on the assimilation process: "It came, and without the [Sioux] asking for it- a totally different way of life, far reaching in its influence, and awful in its power, insistent in its demands. It came like a flood that nothing could stay. All in a day, it seemed, it had roiled the peacefulness of the Dakota's lives, confused their minds, and given them but one choice- to conform or else! And this it could force them to do because, by its very presence, it was even then making their old way no longer feasible."<sup>1</sup> She came from a family considered progressive by Christian standards, but they remained heavily influenced by the behavioral and social protocols of their Dakota culture.

The Dakota bands of the Sioux had begun altering their life ways in the eighteenth century. Since the 1770s, relations with European fur traders had changed their environment, customs, language, intimate relationships, and religion. By the time

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<sup>1</sup> Ella Deloria, *Speaking of Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 76-77.

Ella's grandfather Saswe or Francis Deloria, born in 1816, was an adult, Roman Catholic and Episcopalian agents resided throughout Dakota communities to proselytize a new religion. By the early 1860s, Episcopalian missionaries in particular had initiated a government-endorsed civilizing program through education. They converted few Dakota at this time, however.

In 1851, the Dakota negotiated a treaty in which they traded land for annuities. The government rarely provided sufficient quantities of the promised annuities, which led to hardship, starvation, and, ultimately, the Dakota War in August of 1862. After the Dakota War, from 1862 to 1864, the government restricted and detained over eighteen-hundred Dakota in stockades in Minnesota and Iowa, where missionaries redoubled their conversion efforts.<sup>2</sup> In 1863, the government released them from the stockades but expelled them from Minnesota and Iowa to Crow Creek, South Dakota. Missionaries accompanied them to South Dakota and set up churches and mission schools for them to attend. The Dakota also had to contend with an influx of English speaking settlers into their new settlement. Many families sent their children to schools to learn English to become translators. Education and religion went hand in hand, and Ella's grandfather and father assumed Christianity as a peaceful transition into modernity. After her grandfather, in the capacity of a chief of his community, invited the Episcopal missionaries to the Yankton reservation and became a regular churchgoer, her father

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<sup>2</sup> Roy W. Meyer, *History of the Santee: United States Indian Policy on Trial* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press), 137.

initially became a teacher in the Episcopal schools on different reservations.<sup>3</sup> Converting to Christianity fostered their abilities to mediate between cultures.

While the men in Ella's family led their homes to Christianity and American education, some of the women remembered and shared the knowledge of their cultural traditions with her. These women in Ella's life were instrumental in shaping her perceptions of the old way of Dakota life, which ultimately influenced her personally and in her scholarship. Author and scholar Susan Gardner interviewed Joyzelle Gingway Godfrey, a descendent of Ella, who explains, "These were some of the 'aunties' who assumed the Dakota role of mother to Ella in her youth and who exposed her to the traditional beliefs and customs."<sup>4</sup> Her nephew Vine Deloria, Jr., also discussed how family members ensured Ella learned cultural stories. He writes that her grandmother and "several older family relatives lived to be quite old, so Ella knew many things from the very olden times."<sup>5</sup> Gardner quotes Godfrey, "Although our family was one of the first to be leaders in the American Indian Episcopal Church, there is also a large contingent who did not become Christian because they [were] Sans Arc, the people who are from the 'Keeper of the Pipe' band."<sup>6</sup> While her female relatives held on tightly to the old ways, her family as a whole learned to be cohesive with religions.

The Deloria men who adopted Christianity still maintained many aspects of traditional Dakota culture through behavior protocol. All members of the Deloria

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<sup>3</sup> Vine Deloria Jr., *Singing for a Spirit: A Portrait of the Dakota Sioux*, (Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers, 1999), 45, 48.

<sup>4</sup> Joyzelle Gingway Godfrey, Preface to *The Dakota Way of Life*, by Ella Deloria, (Rapid City: Mariah Press, 2007), vii.

<sup>5</sup> Vine Deloria, Jr., introduction to *Speaking of Indians*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), xii.

<sup>6</sup> Joyzelle Gingway Godfrey, Preface to *The Dakota Way of Life*, vii.

household spoke the Dakota language frequently. Gardner writes too, that, “Ella also writes in her personal papers of how her father, Phillip Deloria, infused traditional beliefs and customs into the Episcopal services that he performed on Standing Rock.”<sup>7</sup> Ella’s grandfather, Francis Deloria (Saswe) had a vision foretelling a prophecy in which four generations (including himself) would undergo significant hardships throughout their lives in the service of their people. Thus, the combination of belief systems practiced by both genders of her family heavily influenced her as a young Dakota woman. Since Ella would be the third successive generation in her grandfather’s prophecy, she had her path laid out for her.

Ella’s family history led her to assume many traditionally male responsibilities. Her father Philip married three times, which produced nine children. Her oldest half-brother Francis Philip passed away in 1883, at the age of six, a few years after his mother, Philip’s first wife, passed away.<sup>8</sup> Philip’s second wife gave birth to her oldest half-sister Minerva in 1884 and her second half-sister Lyma in 1887, but Lyma only lived for ten days and her mother passed away a month later (no records were found indicating what happened to Minerva).<sup>9</sup> In 1888, Philip married Mary Sully, and she gave birth to Ella in 1889. Ella’s younger brother, Philip Ulysses, was born in 1893, and her sister Susan Mabel in 1896.<sup>10</sup> Her youngest brother Vine was born in 1901; just a year later, her middle brother Philip Ulysses passed away.<sup>11</sup> Her mother Mary had two

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<sup>7</sup> Joyzelle Gingway Godfrey, Preface to *The Dakota Way of Life*, vii.

<sup>8</sup> Vine Deloria Jr., *Singing for a Spirit: A Portrait of the Dakota Sioux*, 47-66.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

daughters from a former marriage when she married Ella's father. Through these many tragedies, Ella became her father's oldest child. After her mother passed away, she became an alternate son figure and assumed a lot of family responsibilities until she left for All Saint's school in Sioux Falls, South Dakota at the age of fourteen.<sup>12</sup>

Ella left South Dakota in 1910 to attain a broader education, and she was open to new experiences. She continued, however, to be rooted in her family's traditions of Christianity and Dakota custom. When she enrolled at Oberlin College in Ohio in 1910 and eventually transferred to Columbia University in 1911, her intent was to become a teacher and follow her father's example by working as a mediator to assist her people in transitioning into modernity. Her interest in and desire to protect her culture became stronger as she grew older and became more educated and active in non-Indian communities. Once she began her career in anthropology, she viewed the world through her Dakota cultural lens. The experiential education of her Dakota childhood was her point of reference. Moreover, with a quiver full of stories from an older world, combined with a new set of skills from a modern education, she possessed the abilities to articulate her culture eloquently through her ethnological work.

Ella's knowledge of Dakota language and culture coupled with her modern education also made her a unique woman of her generation. She never married nor had children. Thus, she did not conform to the ideal role for Sioux or white women during that time. Traditionally, though the Dakota expected most women to marry, they also created a valued space for unmarried women within their families, as Ella would

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<sup>12</sup> Vine Deloria, Jr., introduction to *Speaking of Indians*, x.

illustrate in her novel, *Waterlily*.<sup>13</sup> Throughout her life, Ella served an important role in the Dakota family structure as that of an aunt. The Lakota word for mother and maternal aunt are the same: *ina*. The word for paternal aunt is *tunwin* or woman who gives birth. Customarily the Dakota believed that if something happened to a mother and she was no longer able to care for her children, the aunt stepped in to assume responsibility of the mother role. Until then she treated her nieces and nephews as though they were her own children. Ella carried out this role and made it her life's work to document this intricate kinship system as a testament to the acute importance of the family structure.

As a Native American woman in the early twentieth century, Ella had a noteworthy educational experience, particularly in college, which ultimately reset her course from teacher to ethnographer. While at Columbia, she met Dr. Franz Boas, a leading scholar of American cultural anthropology and head of the anthropology department. Ella's meeting with Boas would eventually change her life course. When he discovered she was a fluent Dakota and Lakota speaker he wanted her to work with him on translating material. In the spring before she graduated and left Columbia, he arranged to have her work with his students who were studying Lakota stories from the George Bushotter collection of texts.<sup>14</sup> Author and anthropology professor Raymond J. Demallie states, "She found the process of translation and grammatical analysis

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<sup>13</sup> Ella Deloria, *Waterlily*, (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 137.

<sup>14</sup> Ella Deloria, *Waterlily*, 235.



fascinating and later wrote that she had enjoyed the work under Boas.”<sup>15</sup> He says that Boas was equally excited to work with her because she “was the fulfillment of a long search to find a native speaker who could help him in his study of the Sioux language. With her command of Lakota, appreciation for scholarship, sharp intellect, and literary skills, she was the perfect collaborator.”<sup>16</sup> While working with Boas’s students, she discovered many errors and misrepresentations in the anthropological literature on Native Americans. Her concerns over the perceptions of Native Americans changed her life’s course from teacher to ethnologist, storyteller, and Dakota historian.

Aside from working with Boas’s students, Ella found an audience curious about her culture, and she discovered a platform from which she could serve the Sioux by explaining their life ways to non-Indians. She took advantage of speaking engagements available to her and began building what she considered necessary bridges between her people and non-Indians. “Confronted with competing belief systems,” author John Prater explains, “Ella attempted to find commonalities instead of rejecting one in favor of the other.”<sup>17</sup> When presenting her dilemmas from this perspective, her choices and actions are hauntingly similar to those that her grandfather and father faced when they converted religions. Like them, Ella had lived through and witnessed the impacts of changing federal policies, colonization, assimilation, and the collision between the life

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<sup>15</sup> Raymond J. DeMallie, afterward to *Waterlily* by Ella Deloria (University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 233.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>17</sup> John Prater, “*Ella Deloria: Varied Intercourse: Ella Deloria’s Life and Work*,” *Wicazo Sa Review* 11(1995): 43.

ways of two different peoples. Like them, too, she was eager to share an Indian's perspective on their condition.

Ella fully understood what her people went through as well as their current conditions resulting from federal policies and forced assimilation. As she writes in *Speaking of Indians*, "The Indians' progress has been slow and discouraging at times; but *there are reasons why*. I never hear a speaker who tells about the depressing aspects of the problem in detail and then stops there, but that I want to ask, *Why?* For the American people need to understand *why*, so that they will not blame the people unduly, as if there were something congenitally wrong with them, but will understand the causes."<sup>18</sup> She conveyed that her culture had experienced a dramatic and poignant struggle. "Reservation life is a moving picture in still another sense," she writes, "moving to those who watch it thoughtfully and sympathetically and who are naturally sensitive to the struggles of men against heavy odds. It moves me; I wistfully hope it will move you."<sup>19</sup> She believed she had the skill to humanize Native Americans, and what better place to start than in the open-minded arena of academia.

Ella went to Columbia at an opportune time, during the heyday of Boasian anthropology. Boas had created and implemented his ground breaking four-field concept to anthropology which combined the fields of physical and cultural anthropology, linguistics, and archaeology to examine cultural differences not as part of

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<sup>18</sup> Ella Deloria, *Speaking of Indians*, 151.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

an evolutionary hierarchy, but as culturally relativist.<sup>20</sup> Boas distinctively redefined American anthropology and created a strong interest in applying a new methodology of fieldwork in which anthropologists observed their Indigenous subjects within their own cultural environments.<sup>21</sup> Historian Margaret Jacobs explains that within the new American anthropology, “Cultural relativists tried to illustrate that different cultures developed divergent, but not inferior, standards. The [new combined field] also rejected the notion of the inheritance of certain racial traits, declaring, as Ruth Benedict did, that ‘what really binds men together is their culture.’”<sup>22</sup> Ella had come to Columbia to train as a teacher, but she became interested almost immediately in this stimulating academic environment.

Upon meeting her, Boas recognized that Ella was a valuable source who could provide deeper insight into the culture of the Sioux, one of the tribes he studied. Ella’s expertise in the Dakota and Lakota dialects as well as her cultural knowledge confirmed to those in anthropological academia that she was a valuable resource as a middle figure between academic anthropologists and her people. The most famous anthropologist of the era, Margaret Mead, writes of Ella, “During her years at Columbia, through her unpublished manuscripts, and her generosity in helping other students, Miss Deloria assumed a new role, a sort of parallel teaching role to other graduate students approaching for the first time the complexities of comparative culture which to

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<sup>20</sup> New World Encyclopedia contributors, “Franz Boas,” *New World Encyclopedia*, [http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/p/index.php?title=Franz\\_Boas&oldid=966970](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/p/index.php?title=Franz_Boas&oldid=966970) (accessed March 24, 2014).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Margaret Jacobs, *Engendered Encounters: Feminism and Pueblo cultures 1879-1934* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 14.

her were part of the very fiber of her being, informing every perception, qualifying every judgment.”<sup>23</sup> Boas’s training helped Ella to sharpen her skills as an ethnographer and to develop a methodical approach. Scholar Susan Gardner writes that he “helped her to understand the scientific way of collecting and cataloguing information.”<sup>24</sup> Her expertise as a middle figure made her an indispensable tool for legitimizing other anthropologists’ work on the Sioux.

Many Indigenous people seized this middle role and used it as a vehicle to move between both cultures. Author Margaret Connell Szasz refers to these middle figures as cultural intermediaries, which she defines as, “the people between the borders- [who] juggle the ways of different societies with apparent ease.”<sup>25</sup> She explains that cultural intermediaries had different roles and served different purposes: “Some were interpreters, others mediated spiritual understanding. Many served as traders; others, as diplomats. Some bridged native worlds marked by separate and distinct identities. Others forged bonds between native and outside cultures . . . . Intermediaries became repositories of two or more cultures; they changed roles at will, in accordance with circumstances. Of necessity, their lives reflected a complexity unknown to those living within the confines of a single culture.”<sup>26</sup> African historian Nancy Rose Hunt coined these terms to refer to a social group of skilled and knowledgeable people who could

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<sup>23</sup> Margaret Mead, introductory Forward to *Dakota Way of Life* by Ella Deloria (Rapid City; Mariah Press, 2007), v.

<sup>24</sup> Susan Gardner, “Speaking of Ella Deloria: Conversations with Joyzelle Gingway Godfrey, 1998-2000, Lower Brule Community College, South Dakota,” *American Indian Quarterly* 24(2000), 460.

<sup>25</sup> Margaret Connell Szasz, *Between Indian and White Worlds: the Cultural Broker*, Ed. Margaret Connell Szasz, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), pg. 3.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

move back and forth between their own Indigenous cultures and that of incoming missionaries.<sup>27</sup> Like other Native Americans, Ella used her formal education to assist her community as a “middle” or “middle figure.” Throughout her life, she epitomized the cultural intermediary as defined by Szasz or the “middle” as conceptualized by Nancy Rose Hunt.

After receiving a Bachelor of Science degree in Education from the Columbia Teachers College in 1914, she did not immediately set out to pursue her ethnological interests but returned to South Dakota and became a teacher at All Saints School in Sioux Falls until 1916.<sup>28</sup> In 1918, she returned to New York through a scholarship to receive a year’s training at the YWCA. The organization ultimately sent her in 1924 to the Haskell Institute to implement a health education program, and by 1926, her job became a faculty position. Then in the summer of 1927, twelve years after she left Columbia, Boas came to visit her at Haskell about completing the work on the Bushotter texts, which he had not yet completed.<sup>29</sup> DeMallie explains that Boas, “stayed there a few days to establish a routine, showing her exactly what he wanted done by way of revision, rewriting, and translation of the texts, and then hired her for the summer to continue the work. This was the beginning of her long association with anthropology.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Nancy Rose Hunt, *A Colonial Lexicon: of Birth Ritual, Medicalization and Mobility in the Congo* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 12.

<sup>28</sup> Ella Deloria Archive, “Ella Deloria: A Biographical Sketch” ed. American Indian Studies Research Institute (AISRI), Indiana University in the Dakota Indian Foundation, [http://zia.aisri.indiana.edu/deloria\\_archive/about.php?topic=ella](http://zia.aisri.indiana.edu/deloria_archive/about.php?topic=ella) (accessed November 2, 2012).

<sup>29</sup> Raymond J. DeMallie, Afterword to *Waterlily*, 235.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

Her reunion with Boas was a pivotal moment for her as it redirected her focus towards ethnology.

Other scholars of Ella have focused on the financial hardship she endured throughout her life. It is true that the Deloria family struggled financially. Ella's father was a single parent, and his salary as a priest was not enough to support their family. Since he and other Native American priests were not seminary trained they made less than half of what other priests made, and they were in continuous negotiations with the church. Ella and her siblings could only attend school through scholarships from the church. Once she graduated from Columbia University, she could not continue her education, and once she returned home she had to help her father with financial responsibilities.

Yet Ella made a conscious choice to leap from her secure job at Haskell into a world of professional uncertainty. Her choice demonstrates her courage to pursue her passion and her faith in her ability to succeed despite any challenges. By the end of 1927, she had quit her teaching job at Haskell. She then made her work with Boas a full-time job in which she translated and did field work for him until 1942. In 1929, she published her first ethnological article.<sup>31</sup> Despite all of the hardships and challenges throughout her life, Ella wrote prolifically:

1924, "*Health Education for Indian Girls.*" *Southern Workman* 53(1924): 63-68.

1928, "*Indian Progress*" (Pageant). Haskell Institute. Lawrence, Kansas.

1929, "*The Sun Dance of the Oglala Sioux.*" *Journal of American Folklore* 42(1929): 354-413.

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<sup>31</sup> Agnes Picotte, introduction to *Waterlily* by Ella Deloria (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), vi

- 1932, "Dakota Texts." *American Ethnological Society* 14(1932).
- 1939, "The Navajo Indian Problem." New York: Phelps-Stokes Fund, 1939.
- 1940, "The Life Story of a People" (pageant). Pembroke State College for Indians. Pembroke, North Carolina.
- 1941, "Dakota Grammar." Ella Deloria and Franz Boas. *Memoirs of the National Academy of Sciences* (1941).
- 1944, *Speaking of Indians*. New York: Friendship Press, 1944.
- 1953, Guest Editorial. *The Amerindian. American Indian Review* (1953).
- 1954, "Short Dakota Texts: Including Conversation." *International Journal of American Linguistics* 20(1951).
- 1960, Study, Sioux Indian Exhibit and Crafts Center, Commissioned by the Indian Arts Board.
- 1961, "The Origin of the Courting Flute." *Museum News* 6(1961): 6-7.
- 1962, "Easter Dat at a Yankton Dakota Church." *Museum News* 23(1961): 1-3.
- 1967, "Some Notes on the Yankton." *Museum News* 28(1967): 32, and "Some Notes on the Santee." *Museum News* 28(1967): 23.
- 1988, *Waterlily*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press. Published posthumously.
- 2007, *The Dakota Way of Life*, Rapid City: Mariah Press. Published posthumously.

At this time there were only three other Native American women who had published their writing. Unlike Ella though, authors Mourning Dove (Christine Quintasket), Sophia Alice Callahan, and Zitkala- Sa (Gertrude Bonnin) tended to write fiction and did not have the anthropological training that Ella did.<sup>32</sup> Her ethnological approach to writing about Sioux culture eventually hoisted her into the history of her people as one of a unique group of ancestors who observed, documented, and passed on the knowledge of the people.

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<sup>32</sup> Gary Lee Sligh, *A Study of Native American Women Novelists: Sophia Alice Callahan, Mourning Dove, and Ella Cara Deloria*, (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2003), 20-21.

Ella's ethnological contributions reflect the techniques that designated tribal storytellers or historians used in retaining and passing on tribal histories, traditions and stories. She writes:

My sole aim was to give the thought content as clearly as possible with the best English tools at my command. Nor have I tried to find equivalents for the idiomatic short-cuts and graphic figures that pepper the language and give it its best sparkle. Effective as they seem in the original they generally go flat in literal translation anyhow. But I have translated certain words in their figurative usage, rather than in their absolute sense, if so intended in Dakota. Finally, it was not for me to manipulate this source material; to untwist, isolate and classify its various elements and then give them impressive scientific names. Rather, I have kept to human, every day terms and have rigorously avoided technicalities, leaving it to the social anthropologists who, with practiced eye, will soon spot and label them as polygamy, endogamy, amitate, tort, crime, and all the rest, for they are all here. It was enough for me if I could show what specific uses the Dakota made of many common cultural phenomena by adapting them to the peculiar demand of their way of life.<sup>33</sup>

Her approach diverged from that of non-Dakota anthropologists because she experienced and lived what she wrote. Janette Murray's unpublished dissertation asserts that Ella's work "differs from other histories in being more concerned with the feeling and reactions of the Indian people than with the actual events. She does not try to describe 'objectively' the behavior of the Dakota. It is a personal and moving account of people who are human and real."<sup>34</sup> Her ethnographical work such as *Speaking of Indians* ultimately developed into an effort to demonstrate to the non-Indian world that

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<sup>33</sup> Ella Deloria, *Dakota Way of Life*, (Rapid City: Mariah Press, 2007), 7.

<sup>34</sup> Janette Murray, "Ella Deloria: A Biographical Sketch and Literary Analysis." (PhD diss., University of North Dakota, 1974). 8



her people came from a culture with substance regardless of their indifference to acclimatization with the new world.

Unfortunately, a lot of her work did not reach its full potential during her lifetime, and worse, some has been lost forever. Gardner writes that a lot of Ella's work was, "damaged or lost in blizzards, tornadoes, fires, and storage facilities where she [could not] afford to reclaim them, or disappear[ed] into poorly catalogued archives of others' work."<sup>35</sup> After she passed, her family attempted to reclaim as much of her work as possible. As a result, posthumous publications such as *Waterlily* and *the Dakota Way of Life* as well as several other manuscripts exist today.

For the past several decades, scholars have written about Ella's ethnographical work, in particular her focus on kinship systems in *Waterlily*, and examined her writings within the broader contexts of their academic fields. Various scholars have underscored her experience with Columbia's anthropology department and always in association with Franz Boas. Yet, some scholars such as Roseanne Hoefel ventured beyond Boas, and comparatively examined Ella with others such as fellow researcher Zora Neale Hurston.<sup>36</sup> Hoefel suggests that like Zora, Ella's cultural distinctiveness influenced her writing so that she permitted her subjects to be multidimensional and complex.<sup>37</sup> Hoefel also discusses the race, class, and economic politics that these women contended with because they lacked the proper academic credentials. Hoefel says that

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<sup>35</sup> Susan Gardner, "Though It Broke My Heart to Cut Some Bits I Fancied": Ella Deloria's Original Design for *Waterlily*, *American Indian Quarterly* 27 (2003): 668.

<sup>36</sup> Roseanne Hoefel, "Difference by Degree": Ella Cara Deloria, Zora Neale Hurston, and Franz Boas Contend with Race and Ethnicity, *American Indian Quarterly* 25(2001): 181.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

their expertise made no difference as they led impoverished lives in obscurity while those with academic credentials reaped the benefits from their labor.<sup>38</sup> Scholar Janet L. Finn's work on Ella is also noteworthy as she highlights Ella's multiple personal responsibilities, and suggests that her work, "raise[d] questions about the 'truth' value of the novel and the ethnographic text in representing cultural experience."<sup>39</sup> Although these scholars acknowledged the importance of the cultural aspect of Ella's work, they focused on her contributions within an academic framework.

Within the last few decades Native American women scholars and intellectuals have called for more research on Native American women within their own contexts. Scholar Bea Medicine argues that, "Socioeconomic status, residence patterns, and educational achievements as well as gender remain fuzzy. Indian tribes, urban conglomerates, and females and males have often been lumped together and glossed into pathological parameters."<sup>40</sup> When examining women such as Ella, Medicine suggests that their "truths" as Indians challenge conventional western thinking. Medicine argues that in order for studies of Native American women to be more accurate, "constructs and tentative hypotheses based upon [a Native woman's] own unique experiences and observations" are needed.<sup>41</sup> Other Native American

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<sup>38</sup> Sally Cole, "Ruth Landes and the Early Ethnography of Race and Gender" in *Women Writing Culture*, ed. Ruth Behar and Deborah A. Gordon, 166-185 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) 181-182.

<sup>39</sup> Janet L. Finn, *Ella Cara Deloria and Mourning Dove: Writing for Cultures, Writing against the Grain* in *Women Writing Culture*, ed. Ruth Behar and Deborah A. Gordon, 131-147 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 133.

<sup>40</sup> Beatrice Medicine, "Native American (Indian) Women: A Call for Research," in *Learning to Be an Anthropologist & Remaining "Native,"* ed. Sue-Ellen Jacobs, 108-114 (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 108.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

intellectuals ask for more inclusion of cultural background and oral histories when writing about Native women. In 2009, Scholar Dian Million introduced a new context for Native women studies called the “felt theory.” Million explains, “A felt analysis is one that creates a context for a more complex ‘telling,’ one that illuminates a deeper meaning.”<sup>42</sup> She argues that, “academia repetitively produces gatekeepers to our entry into important social discourses because we *feel* our histories as well as think them. How is it that our oral traditions and our literary and historical voices are suppressed? Our voices are still positioned in a particular way, definitely reminiscent of the past silences we know so well.”<sup>43</sup> Native American scholars unanimously agree that women such as Ella need to be identified and written about within their own cultural and traditional contexts. Only then can we see them for the women that they are.

Ella was one of the first scholars to write about Native American women in this fashion. She dedicated her work to demonstrating that Dakota women enjoyed considerable agency within their traditional and cultural roles and that they were multifaceted active participants in shaping their environments. She showed, too, that individual Indian women could not be separated from their webs of kinship and their cultural environments. Author and scholar Gary Lee Sligh, who wrote a comparative study on Native American women authors, emphasizes that, “these Native American women learned from their mothers and grandmothers, and from a whole community of

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<sup>42</sup> Dian Million, “*Felt Theory An Indigenous Feminist Approach to Affect and History*,” *Wicazo Sa* 24 (2009): 54.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-55.

mothers and grandmothers in a traditional tribal setting.”<sup>44</sup> Laguna Pueblo author Paula Gunn Allen has written that within Indian country it is not standard to separate a person from the matrix of her life.<sup>45</sup> Allen also discusses the difficulties of writing about Native women due to their surrounding influences. She explains, “in Native traditional life stories, the subject of the biography . . . is situated within the entire life system. . . . What is emphasized is the interactive nature of that person’s life, as a given. Thus the personhood is not seen as a product of economic forces, politics, divine providence, or any forces that operate entirely outside that person. This means that traditional biographies make privileging the subject as a victim or oppressor, sinner or saint, impossible.”<sup>46</sup> Ella’s scholarship on Dakota women epitomized this approach. She legitimized a space for Native American women, on their own terms, in literary discourse. It is only fitting then that in writing about Ella, I, too, should embed her within her culture and be attentive to other influences that affected her. As Ella conveyed through her scholarship and other writing, it is important to observe a Native American woman within her own settings if we are to understand the complicated questions about her life.

This thesis thus creates a new interpretation of Ella’s history outside of the contexts of literature and ethnography. I examine how she used her role as a middle figure between an old and traditional Sioux way of life, and a new world of Christianity,

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<sup>44</sup> Gary Lee Sligh, *A Study of Native American Women Novelists*, 2.

<sup>45</sup> Paula Gunn Allen, *Pocahontas: Medicine Woman, spy, Entrepreneur, Diplomat* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004), 3.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

twentieth-century American life ways, and shifting federal Indian policies. This thesis examines the ways in which she worked to build bridges with her writing to give the new world insight into the old world of her people. She aimed to clarify misperceptions of her people so that Americans would understand Sioux culture. She never made excuses for the ways of her people, but she sought to show that her culture was full of a beauty that was non-threatening and had a moral system that was universally applicable to anyone. In Sioux fashion, she wove connections between events, people, culture, and language to create stories of multi-dimensional Indians.

By examining her journey, this thesis highlights how she stepped forward and used her war shield of education to change the minds of non-Indians about her people. In Chapter one, I examine her family background to understand how their experiences ultimately shaped her ideologies about both cultures. I begin with her grandfather, Francis (Saswe) Deloria, who came of age during the era when missionaries arrived in Dakota country and federal policy forced traditional Indians to adapt to a new way of life. He grew up with traditional ways, and became a medicine man and leader. In 1858, he participated in a delegation to visit President Andrew Johnson at the White House to renegotiate the 1858 Land Cession Treaties with the Dakota.<sup>47</sup> He then realized that the old way of life was now behind them and that they needed to learn how to fit into a new time. I also examine Ella's father, Philip, who had trouble within his own community as he also assumed a role as a middle figure within a religious context. Philip's father was convinced that an intermediary position was his best chance at

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<sup>47</sup> Vine Deloria Jr., *Singing for a Spirit: A Portrait of the Dakota Sioux*, 30.

success, so he pressed him to find peace with it. As he got older though, he yearned to return to the old way of life, and his perspective affected his children. Understanding how these changes shaped the Deloria family provides more insight into Ella's perceptions of both cultures.

Chapter two analyzes how the federal policy of boarding school and mission education undermined generations of Indians, but enabled Ella to discover how to utilize her role as a middle figure to build bridges of understanding. After having gone through mission and boarding school, she left home for college and entered into a space between both cultures, a borderland, which for many Native Americans caught between worlds, became a lonely place. Ella, however, used that space to move between cultures with fluidity. Chapter three discusses Ella's economic challenges as well as her struggle for credibility within a world of scholars. She created a space for herself within the academic world of anthropology and found ways to support herself and her family during the Great Depression. She learned the skills of grant writing and was very resourceful in order to meet her financial needs. The fact that she experienced economic hardship was not an individual phenomenon as millions of people throughout the country were jobless. Moreover, reservation life already functioned in poverty. Ella relied on family and community networks to weather hard times. As Ella wrote about and provided for her people when her grant money allowed, her people fed her in return, whether it was in the form of information, food, transportation, or lodging. This thesis concludes by refocusing on her role as a middle figure, and continues the

discussion of scholarship and trends existing in the development of Native American history. It is my hope that this thesis will contribute more insight into Ella as a Dakota woman. This is her story.

## Chapter One

### TIWAHE TAWA KIN TUWEPI HE? Who Was Her Family?

From what she had lived, learned and witnessed, Ella believed that the only way for the Sioux to survive was to conform. She declared, “It was clearly the better part of wisdom to try adjusting to the new way.”<sup>1</sup> She was not alone in this philosophy within her family. Her father and grandfather, the Deloria patriarchs, had already established a course of reconciliation between the old way of life and the new. Her grandfather Francis Deloria (also known as Saswe) demonstrated the most distinct process of conversion because he actively sought out a new way of life.<sup>2</sup> In 1819, just three years after he was born, the military constructed their first fort in Dakota Territory, and he grew up watching U.S. representatives constantly occupying Dakota communities.<sup>3</sup> By the time he was an adult, he witnessed his people’s land diminished by multiple treaties. The Dakota shared the small tract of land that remained with Catholic, Episcopalian, and Presbyterian missionaries engaged in converting their communities.

Ella’s grandfather was a powerful and influential man among his people as a traditional Dakota medicine man. For the Deloria family, the cultural significance of his life as a medicine man was what he foresaw happening to the subsequent generations

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<sup>1</sup> Ella Deloria, *Speaking of Indians*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 84.

<sup>2</sup> Janette Murray, “*Ella Deloria: A Biographical Sketch and Literary Analysis*”, 26.

<sup>3</sup> Gwen Westerman and Bruce White, *Mni Sota Makoce: the Land of the Dakota*, (Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2012), 85.



of his line, including Ella. In his book *Singing for a Spirit: A Portrait of the Dakota Sioux*, Vine Deloria Jr. described the vision his great grandfather had in which he entered into the House of the Dead and had to choose which path in life to take. Since he was a medicine man, he had responsibilities to the people, and whatever decision he made would affect either his people or his family. Vine explains:

he went into the tipi. Inside, the road continued for a short distance and forked, one branch going to the left and the other to the right. . . After some time the hawk spoke to him, saying that he had to make a decision. . . (In Plains Indian visions, the four skeletons and four tents would be understood to represent four generations of descendants who would be bound by this choice.). . . Finally he motioned to the right, then took several steps on the red road. . . Had he chosen it, the left-hand road with the four skeletons would have meant. . . four generations of prosperous descendants, but the people following him would be no more than skeletons with flesh who would contribute virtually nothing to the world. It would have been a safe but completely nondescript family that nonetheless would have luck and would prosper. The red road was fraught with danger but filled with life.<sup>4</sup>

Francis's decision to follow the red road predestined his descendants to live hard lives but contribute to their people. As a traditional healer and leader of his people, Francis was very involved in the overall care and maintenance of his community, which prompted him to assume a role as a middle figure. For instance, as one of the seven delegates in Washington in 1858, Francis assisted in successfully negotiating a small piece of land for his community, though the treaty required large land cessions from their territory.<sup>5</sup> By 1860, this tract of land became the Yankton Reservation. Murray

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<sup>4</sup> Vine Deloria Jr., *Singing for a Spirit: A Portrait of the Dakota Sioux*, (Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers, 1999), 17-18.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

also describes an instance that reflected his Sioux values of caring for his community. She explains that, while in Washington, the delegates were given spending money, and a received tour around the city. Then, “afterwards he was asked what he saw and what he thought of the city. He answered, ‘I went about your great city and saw many people. Some had fine clothes and diamonds; others were barefoot and ragged. No money to get something to eat. They are beggars, and need your help more than the Indian does. I gave them the money you gave me. All people are alike among the Indians. We feed our poor.’”<sup>6</sup> As a traditional medicine man, Francis increasingly became a middle figure who negotiated figuratively as well as literally for the sustainability of his people.

The Deloria family history documents that Francis committed four murders throughout his life. Consumed by these offenses, as he grew older, he could not find solace in his native religion. Vine Deloria Jr. discusses how his grandfather turned to Episcopalian missionaries to address his dilemma, and that he came to view their religion as one in which the Dakota people had a future.<sup>7</sup> He writes, “Saswe and three other Yankton chiefs asked the Episcopal missionary at the Santee Reservation across the river to begin church work on the Yankton reservation. . . . When a church was set up, Saswe became a regular churchgoer. He began advising his son [Philip] to consider the white man’s religion . . . there was no doubt that he wanted Philip to follow a religious life but not necessarily the traditional Sioux religion.”<sup>8</sup> Baptized in 1873, Francis found peace in the new religion, and the establishment of a church on the Yankton

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<sup>6</sup> Janette Murray, “*Ella Deloria: A Biographical Sketch and Literary Analysis.*” 35.

<sup>7</sup> Vine Deloria Jr., *Singing for a Spirit*, 35.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 35-36.

reservation marked the beginning of the Deloria family's transition of moving out of the old world and into the new.

Once the Deloria family converted to Christianity, Francis ensured that his son received a formal education. When Philip became a young man, his father encouraged him to attend school at the mission. Janette Murray states that he was "one of the first to do so at the request of his father. His coming into the Mission proved a tremendous personal advantage to him and an ultimate source of great service to his people."<sup>9</sup> However, it was not an unusual or new incident for Dakota people to send their children to missions for an education during that era. In her article, "*We Find It a Difficult Work: Educating Dakota Children in Missionary Homes, 1835-1862*," Linda Clemmons describes how, beginning in 1835, Dakota people sent their children to non-Indian missionaries to become educated.<sup>10</sup> According to Clemmons, there were two reasons that Dakota parents did this. First, some Dakotas had fully converted and renounced their old religion, and they welcomed a Christian education willingly. Second, with the influx of settlers coming into Dakota country, some Dakota people thought it was an advantage for their children to learn English and become useful mediators.<sup>11</sup> The increasing number of children attending schools demonstrates how the Dakota people actively sought to negotiate this new world through education.

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<sup>9</sup> Janette Murray, "*Ella Deloria: A Biographical Sketch and Literary Analysis*," 38.

<sup>10</sup> Linda Clemmons, "*We Find It a difficult Work: Educating Dakota Children in Missionary Homes, 1835-1862*," *American Indian Quarterly* 24(2000): 570.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 574-575.

Philip grew up attending many of his father's traditional healing ceremonies and had his heart set on living a traditional way of life, but his father encouraged him to embrace Christianity. The path of a middle figure was a difficult one. Once he converted, he suffered ridicule and ostracism from other Dakotas in his community. When he attended school, he was required to cut his hair and give up his Dakota clothing.<sup>12</sup> Vine Deloria Jr. quotes his grandfather as saying, "It was far from easy to go back and face my people, many of whom were disappointed and jeered at me. 'Coward, he fears warfare. See he chooses an easy life.' And many similar taunts were flung at me."<sup>13</sup> Moreover, he renounced his tribal responsibilities, which was another act of severing ties to the old ways of Dakota cultural protocol. He said, "When I saw my way a little clearer, I decided to lay aside my Chieftainship and work for the spiritual uplift of my people."<sup>14</sup> Philip's decision to follow his father's path thrust him into the role of a cultural mediator.

Philip's middle role enabled him to help his people navigate new federal policies. In 1883, Congress passed the Religious Crimes Code that forbade Native Americans from practicing any religion not approved by the Indian Office and gave agency superintendents authority to stop practices with force or imprisonment.<sup>15</sup> Since Philip had already embraced Christianity for over a decade, perhaps the code did not affect him, but not all of the Dakota members in his community had converted or understood the new laws forced upon them. They looked to him for assistance. Philip attempted to

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<sup>12</sup> Vine Deloria Jr., *Singing for a Spirit*, 43.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>15</sup> "Canton Asylum: For Insane Indians," *South Dakota*, 1902, (2012)

[http://cantonasylumforinsaneindians.com/history\\_blog/tag/religious-crimes-code-of-1883](http://cantonasylumforinsaneindians.com/history_blog/tag/religious-crimes-code-of-1883) (accessed March 29, 2014)

focus his efforts and attention towards the Episcopal religion. Vine Deloria Jr. writes that, “the people of Band Eight re-elected him as a chief because his knowledge of white society was needed by them in their dealings with the government.”<sup>16</sup> He accepted this position and continued in his middle figure position until he received orders from the church for a transfer. Church policy forbade Indian men from ministering to their own communities, resulting in Philip’s transfer to an Indian mission far from his home: the Hunkpapa on the Standing Rock Reservation.<sup>17</sup> When Philip arrived there in 1887, he was ordained a deacon. By 1888, the church had placed him in charge of the Episcopal missions on the reservation, and he had married Ella’s mother, Mary Sully Bordeaux.<sup>18</sup> He resided at St. Elizabeth’s church with his family when Ella was born in 1889.<sup>19</sup>

Standing Rock in the late 1880s proved to be a very challenging place for the Deloria family as well as for the Lakota people who lived there. Tension ran high as news spread throughout the communities of the Ghost Dance. Then Sitting Bull arrived at Standing Rock in May 1890 with his band.<sup>20</sup> After residing in Canada for three years, then detained at Fort Randall for two years, he had finally returned to his homeland. Author James Welch explains that Sitting Bull arrived at Standing Rock expecting to assume chieftainship, “but when he stepped from the steamboat, he stepped into an alien world.”<sup>21</sup> He did not expect to return home to converted Indians and such a large population of settlers. Initially Philip encountered resistance when attempting to

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<sup>16</sup> Vine Deloria Jr., *Singing for a Spirit*, 49.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Vine Deloria Jr., *Singing for a Spirit*, 60.

<sup>20</sup> James Welch, and Paul Stekler, *Killing Custer*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1994), 258-259.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.

“civilize” the local community because of Sitting Bull.<sup>22</sup> According to Olden, Philip said, “Here and there an individual or a family showed an interest in my efforts. But Sitting Bull and his people had very recently been brought in from the wild life and their hostility and influence were strong. My work was therefore a difficult one.”<sup>23</sup> A series of tragic events would soon make the Standing Rock Sioux more receptive to Philip’s ministry.

The events of late 1890 devastated the Sioux. Dakota reservation police killed Sitting Bull on 15 December. The Wounded Knee Massacre followed just two weeks later on 29 December. The enraged and grieving Dakota realized that the old way of life that Sitting Bull represented no longer existed. The Plains people ultimately had to reconcile in some way to the new U.S. Indian policies. Many chose Philip’s path; by 1900, more than 12,000 Sioux belonged to the Episcopal Church.<sup>24</sup> When examining his grandfather’s work, Vine Deloria Jr. says, “In view of Philip’s continuing work as a chief of Band Eight and his interest in renewing the old ways after his retirement, it seems to me that, like his father, he saw Christianity as the only viable alternative for his people in those early reservation days. Saswe [Francis] had directed him down the road just as Philip later got my father to travel the same road. They created a family heritage that has been a heavy burden but one that seemingly could not have been avoided once Saswe chose the red road.”<sup>25</sup> The environment in which Philip worked as a middle figure

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<sup>22</sup> Janette Murray, “*Ella Deloria: A Biographical Sketch and Literary Analysis*,” 47.

<sup>23</sup> Sarah Olden, *The People of Tipi Sapa, The Dakotas: Tipi Sapa Mitaoyate Kin (1918)* (Milwaukee: Morehouse Publishing Co., 1918), 14.

<sup>24</sup> Vine Deloria, Jr., *Singing for a Spirit*, 84.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

proved extremely difficult as he stood at the cross roads where both the old and new world collided with violence, death, and trauma.

Perhaps some of what ultimately contributed to Ella's father's success with helping to Christianize the local community was that he was fluent in the Lakota dialect of the Sioux language (there are three dialects: Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota). Philip himself was a fluent Dakota speaker from the Yankton reservation, but after having lived and worked among the Lakota speaking bands along the western portion of South Dakota for over two decades, he learned how to speak their language, too. Janet Murray discusses the necessity of Philip's use of the Lakota language within the church: "Although Mr. Deloria had known English for several years, it is not likely that he would have found many English speakers among the Hunkpapa or other bands—certainly not enough to form a congregation."<sup>26</sup> Although English was now the preferred language for the new religion, Philip often had to translate or speak Lakota to newcomers, thereby incorporating elements of the old world into the new religion. Likewise, when Philip worked to put his sermons together he incorporated elements of Lakota culture in them, if not directly, then into his methodology of developing and delivering them. Vine Deloria, Jr. said his grandfather, "devoted the whole of Saturday afternoon to preparing his sermons by going to an isolated spot, lying down, and watching the cloud formations passing by. Relying on Saswe's wisdom, Tipi Sapa [Philip] thought that by intensely studying the formation and dissolution of clouds, he could train himself to give sermons with a particular cadence and could determine how to create complete thoughts within

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<sup>26</sup> Janette Murray, "Ella Deloria: A Biographical Sketch and Literary Analysis," 48.

one set of phrases,” in similar fashion to the rhythm of Lakota language.<sup>27</sup> This cultural influence not only trickled into his sermons and resonated in his memory, but also lingered in the Deloria household.

Philip encouraged his children to receive their formal education from the church, but Dakota usage at home and the constant immersion in the Lakota language and culture within the community formed a bridge for his daughter Ella to the old ways. Susan Gardner, a scholar of Ella writes, “In their general activities, and when they were at work, in school, they spoke Lakota . . . but in their home . . . spoke Dakota.”<sup>28</sup> Ella herself also said that due to the nature of living among the people, their exposure to language and culture was inevitable.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, her father was faithful to the ways of the church and wanted his children to follow his lead. Murray writes that, “Ella Deloria spoke of her father and said that he had been very strict and tried to eliminate old Indian ways as fast as he could- ceremonies, dances, dress and languages. She felt that perhaps he had been in too much of a hurry but he was a truly spiritual man who sought happiness in a very turbulent world.”<sup>30</sup> Despite his wishes, the culture remained embedded in their family.

From her childhood, Ella always had to learn to go back and forth between her culture and the new expectations brought by missionaries and government agents. Since childhood, she lived between cultures, and as a result believed she could

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<sup>27</sup> Vine Deloria Jr., *Singing for a Spirit*, 60-61.

<sup>28</sup> Susan Gardner, *Speaking of Ella Deloria*, 461.

<sup>29</sup> Agnes Picotte, introduction to *Waterlily*, vi.

<sup>30</sup> Janette Murray, “Ella Deloria: A Biographical Sketch and Literary Analysis,” 97.



communicate with, and operate in the world at large with ease. In a letter to Bishop Hugh Latimer Burleson, a close friend of her father and family, she expounded a little about her upbringing between both Christian and Dakota cultures. She says, “From a thorough Indian life, where it was not decent even to play very openly, and where we had to always ‘set an example’ we were plunged into the cultured atmosphere of school, and then thrust back again each vacation. There was [sic] so much conflicting influences . . . . [I]t was a hard thing to go through. Vine and I managed pretty well, because we were not bashful.”<sup>31</sup> She credited her confidence of moving between worlds to her exposure to both cultures as a child.

The intimate relationships during Ella’s formative years exposed her to both Lakota and Dakota dialects of the language as well as traditional gender protocols. Although both of her parents were faithful Christians, each continued to raise her in a distinct Dakota fashion. Her father provided for her based on his male duties while the responsibilities of raising her and her siblings belonged to her mother.<sup>32</sup> Author Agnes Picotte writes that, “There is this clear-cut division in the household . . . the male Delorias were becoming seminarians, becoming ministers, and in later generations scholars and attorneys, but . . . what validates Miss Ella’s ethnography is the teachings

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<sup>31</sup> Ella letter to Bishop Hugh Latimer Burleson 9 January 1927, “The Center for Western Studies of Augustana College,” Box 2, Folder 19 of the Hugh L. Burleson Papers in the Archives of the Episcopal Church, Sioux Falls, SD.

<sup>32</sup> Beatrice Medicine, “*Child Socialization among Native Americans: The Lakota (Sioux) in Cultural Context*,” *Wicazo Sa Review* 1(1985): 23.

<sup>33</sup> Susan Gardner, *Speaking of Ella*, 461

<sup>34</sup> Beatrice Medicine, “*Child Socialization among Native Americans*, 23.

that she was imbued with from the female side of the family.”<sup>33</sup> Scholar Susan Gardner also examines gender roles and socialization within Ella’s family, and writes, “All of their daily activities were supervised by their mother. It was a traditional way of being.”<sup>34</sup> When she became an adult, Ella realized that the survival of Sioux cultures depended on the women. According to scholar Roseanne Hoefel, Ella once told Boas, “I notice that in the Sioux country children of white men and Indian mothers are steeped in folk-lore and language, but children of white mothers and Indian fathers are often completely cut off from the tribal folk-ways.”<sup>35</sup> Since Ella learned the cultural ways from the women in her family, she understood the importance of their roles within the kinship family system. The cultural education she received from them ultimately paralleled that of her modern education.

Ella maintained her family’s tradition of receiving an education from the church and becoming a Christian, but her gender created a different space for her. She filled that space with stories of her people and continued the success of her family using those stories in her ethnological work. Her formal education began at St. Elizabeth’s Mission School at Standing Rock. She continued at All Saints boarding school for Indian girls in Sioux Falls on the eastern side of South Dakota. Her secondary education at Oberlin, and then Columbia University Teacher’s College fashioned her to become a teacher.<sup>36</sup> Her father raised her as an Episcopalian, and wanted a modern life and

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<sup>35</sup> Susan Gardner, *Speaking of Ella*, 461

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 460.

<sup>35</sup> Roseanne Hoefel, “*Difference by Degree*”, 181.

<sup>28</sup> Beatrice Medicine, *Learning to Be an Anthropologist & Remaining “Native”*, 275.

education for her. While she achieved those goals, the cultural education she received as a child ultimately provided for her unique ethnographical skills. The story of the entire Deloria family is a prime example of adaptation and survival with integrity. Instilled with Christianity since birth, Ella followed the Deloria tradition of becoming educated and becoming a teacher. Yet her curiosity and Dakota virtues of integrity and compassion steered her back to the path of her ancestors, and she found a way in which she could honor both her modern and old cultures through her writing. Never at any point did she turn her back on either culture; instead, she learned to walk between both worlds and build bridges between them. This was Ella.

## Chapter Two

### TUKTETU KEYAS UNSPEKIYE

#### She Learned from Everywhere

When Francis sent Ella's father to school, his intent was for Philip to continue on a spiritual path and assume the traditional male duties of leading the people in a religious manner. Later, her father Philip urged her younger brother Vine to continue with seminary education. Ella's father also expected her to receive a religious-based education and work within the church. Yet, since she could not assume a formal leadership role within the church and community, she had more freedom to discover the various dynamics of education. However, she was Philip's oldest child so she carried many responsibilities such as caring for her younger siblings and passing on family information and cultural stories. Vine Deloria Jr. discusses how her father Philip treated Ella like a surrogate son.<sup>1</sup> Aside from caring for her siblings, she had to take care of the household that included masculine duties. He explains, "Many of the stories that my father and my aunt Susie knew about the old days were given to them by Ella, not their father."<sup>2</sup> She became a teacher with a desire to work within the church, yet her curiosities and educational experiences led her to the role of a middle figure between two cultures. She discovered the relevance of her cultural education from her old world

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<sup>1</sup> Vine Deloria Jr., *Singing for a Spirit: A Portrait of the Dakota Sioux*, (Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers, 1999), ix.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

and the importance of her education from the new one. She learned how to combine them, and braved all challenges to create a unique space for herself in the middle.

From early on in her life, Ella learned to overcome challenges. Her unique characteristics could have hindered her, but she learned to make the most of her struggles. She had an accident when she was young that permanently disabled her. In the introduction to *Speaking of Indians*, her nephew Vine Deloria, Jr. writes, "At the age of twelve Ella was driving a team of horses for her father and something spooked them, causing the team to bolt and run away. The wagon tipped, and Ella was injured. She lost her right thumb in the accident."<sup>3</sup> She did not let the incident deter her though; instead, she pushed to excel, particularly in education. From 1906 to 1910, she attended high school at All Saints School in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, a boarding school for Indian girls, where she took English, French, Latin History, Mathematics, Science, and bible classes, and earned mostly A's and B's.<sup>4</sup> Ella demonstrated from early on that she was a scholar who took well to academia. When she was older, she reflected on some letters written from some Sioux children in mission schools from 1892 to 1910, around the same time she was in primary school: "Those papers indicate happy, eager children, alert to whatever subject was introduced to them. They talk of going to church as an exciting experience."<sup>5</sup> Perhaps this was an indication of her mission school experience being a positive one also.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ella Deloria Archives. *Ella Deloria: A Biographical Sketch* ed. American Indian Studies Research Institute (AISRI), Indiana University in the Dakota Indian Foundation, [http://zia.aisri.indiana.edu/deloria\\_archive/about.php?topic=ella](http://zia.aisri.indiana.edu/deloria_archive/about.php?topic=ella) (accessed November 2, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Ella Deloria, *Speaking of Indians*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 114.

Since Ella attended a mission school within her community, and not a federal boarding school, her experience might have been more positive than that of many Indian children. Other children such as Zitkala-Sa (Gertrude Bonnin) went through extremely traumatic experiences in mission or federally run boarding schools. Zitkala-Sa discusses her first days at boarding school, "I remember being dragged . . . I was carried downstairs and tied fast in a chair. I cried aloud, shaking my head all the while until I felt the cold blades of the scissors against my neck, and heard them gnaw off one of my thick braids. Then I lost my spirit."<sup>6</sup> Still, others like Charles A. Eastman and Luther Standing Bear battled with transitioning into the modern world of education but endured at the behest of their families. Coming from a traditional extended family, Eastman wrote that he initially resisted school and even ran away, but his father essentially gave him no choice but to accept a new way of life.<sup>7</sup> Author Michael Coleman explains Eastman's father's perceptions on the new world, "'Here is one Sioux who will sacrifice everything to win the wisdom of the white man! We have now entered upon this life, and there is no going back.' Eastman accepted his father's view, and the next day, his hair cut, he returned to school."<sup>8</sup> Many Indian children who attended school lived long distances from their families and communities.

Ella was fortunate that she did not have to leave her home and community to attend school as she lived in a cozy white cottage with her school on one side of her

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<sup>6</sup> Zitkala-Sa, "The School Days of an Indian Girl, The Cutting of my Long Hair," *Atlantic Monthly*, (New York, NY), Vol. 85, 1900, 185. <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/ZitGirl.html>. (accessed March 29, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Michael Coleman, "Motivations of Indian Children at Missionary and U.S. Government Schools," *The Magazine of Western History* 1(1990), 32.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

house and the church that her father cofounded on the other.<sup>9</sup> She was not subjected to forcible removal by authorities who threatened Indian families with starvation or the withholding of annuities if they did not surrender their children to schools.<sup>10</sup> She lived within the same vicinity of her teachers, and liked them, one in particular, so much so that she dedicated her first book, *Speaking of Indians*, to her: “Dedicated to the Memory of Mary Sharp Francis a beloved teacher and a great missionary.”<sup>11</sup> In *Speaking of Indians*, Ella specifically addressed a Christian reader; therefore, her comments on formal education mostly highlighted its benefits for Sioux children.

Ella believed that learning to speak, read, and write in English constituted the most miraculous aspect of a formal education.<sup>12</sup> She explained that with the early phases of formal school, the gaining of literacy signified a clear distinction of the education: “He can write. He can’t.”<sup>13</sup> She wrote that eventually aspirations of attaining these skills spread like wildfire throughout the Indian communities: “Learning to write was laborious but fascinating. The most promising and eager men and women came to the mission centers (this was true everywhere) and were systematically taught, and then they turned around and taught others, informally, in camp . . . . If they had been riding, they would just as likely stop anywhere on the prairie and drop the bridle reins to

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<sup>9</sup> Sarah Olden, *The People of Tipi Sapa, The Dakotas: Tipi Sapa Mitaoyate Kin (1918)* (Milwaukee: Morehouse Publishing Co., 1918), xvi.

<sup>10</sup> David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience 1875-1928* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 63.

<sup>11</sup> Vine Deloria, Jr., Introduction to *Speaking of Indians*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), v.

<sup>12</sup> Ella Deloria, *Speaking of Indians*, 116-118.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

let the horses graze, while they flopped down on the ground and began writing.”<sup>14</sup>

Regardless of age, every Dakota person who entered mission or boarding school went through a complex process of learning to speak, read, and write English. Ella relished literacy, and appreciated how other Dakota people valued literacy as well.

Like all native speakers, Ella understood the difficulty with learning a new language and appreciated the process of how Dakota speaking children learned to understand the intricacies of using English.<sup>15</sup> She wrote about how expressing ideas and culture with the English language proved a most difficult task, and it often got students in trouble in school, and hindered their communication with teachers and other staff. She called it a clash between old and new ideas.<sup>16</sup> For example, when students called each other by their cultural kinship terms, which did not concur with American customs, they got into trouble for lying. Teachers also often misunderstood Dakota students’ use of language and sentence structure. Ella says,

Language peculiarities also played havoc with a Dakota child in school. ‘You won’t do that again, will you?’ asked a teacher, correcting a child. ‘Yes,’ said the child each time the question was repeated. ‘Well, of all perversity!’ thought the teacher, and perhaps punished the child. But the trouble was that in Dakota you say ‘yes’ to a question like that, when in English you say ‘no.’ English says, ‘No (I will not).’ Dakota says, ‘Yes (you are right that I will not).’ Other language snags, just as simple if understood, made complications.<sup>17</sup>

She also suggested that learning to use English in the classroom was just as difficult for Dakota children to apply to their cultural life ways, particularly when interacting with

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 110-111.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 117.



adult members of their families who spoke Dakota. Once Dakota children entered schools they had to learn quickly to communicate in both worlds.

Ella shared some educational experiences with other Dakota children, but her family's unique position also set her apart from other students. From an early age, she exhibited a special interest in history at St. Elizabeth's co-ed mission school. However, she quickly learned about class differences and the intricacy of interactions with her peers. Scholar Susan Gardner describes some of Ella's experiences: "In a fourth grade essay, in prim and proper handwriting, she wrote; 'I like to read my History better than any of my other books, be-cause [sic] it is very interesting to read about other people and countries so many thousands of miles away. In some of the countries the people have very strange ways, and are very queer themselves. I like to read about Holland, tis [sic] such an interesting country'."<sup>18</sup> Her ancestry included European lineage, so perhaps this made her curious about other cultures and countries. Within the social dynamics of school, however, Ella learned quickly to never draw attention to herself as a student. Gardner writes about Ella disclosing this to Margaret Mead: "'I soon realized in that mission school that it was improper to be too smart. So even when I knew the answers, which was almost always except in arithmetic, I knew enough to keep still unless pressed.'"<sup>19</sup> On one occasion, a teacher:

told me to construct and parse a sentence [A]nd so I wrote on the board, 'Indians have copper-colored skins,' the whole room turned against me, and I could hear hostile whispers of 'And what does she think *she* is?' as

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<sup>18</sup> Susan Gardner, "Though It Broke My Heart to Cut Some Bits I Fancied": Ella Deloria's Original Design for Waterlily, *American Indian Quarterly* 27 (2003). 685.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 687.

though by stating it objectively I had tried to separate myself from the others. After that I knew better! But once you learned to live under the spell of the average, you were all right. Everyone liked you then, and you had many friends.<sup>20</sup>

Perhaps she attributed her differences to her preexistent fluency in English and literacy from attending church, her aptitude for academia, or that she was a preacher's daughter. In any case, her social interactions in school made her aware of the differences between her lifestyle and that of other Lakota children.<sup>21</sup> Her family lived up on the hill within the domain of the church and St. Elizabeth's Mission School alongside non-Indians overlooking the Lakota community. The church drew attention to her grandfather and father by using them as emblems of successful conversions.<sup>22</sup> She learned from a young age that the distinctiveness of her family made her different from other children.

Ella excelled at the mission school, but she also became an avid learner of Dakota culture and its protocols. As a young girl, she grew fond of listening to the stories of her people. Her observations of the traditional Lakota people intrigued her so much so that she paid special attention whenever she heard elders tell stories and speak of the old way of life.<sup>23</sup> Her fascination with all she heard built the foundation for her lifelong interest in the culture of her people. Although Christian, she grew accustomed to the traditional cultural characteristics of the community through daily exposure. She

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Vine Deloria Jr., *Singing for a Spirit*, 69.

<sup>23</sup> Susan Gardner, *Though It Broke My Heart*, 685.

grew up understanding the importance of the kinship system as the core of Lakota cultural values. Cultural protocol was such that everyone was related, if not through blood then, in a communal fashion. The Sioux highly valued sharing and giving, including the exchange of knowledge. Often times those that became educated in the schools shared and taught members of their family or peers in the community when they returned home. Sharing and relating by way of kinship was what shaped the communal and familial bonds of the Sioux. Even though many of the Dakota valued literacy, they balked at boarding and mission schools, as they did not want their children taken from their family environments and close communal relationships. To detach children from their close families, communities, and cultures made it more difficult for them to adjust to the new environment of schools and the use of English.<sup>24</sup> Ella's ability to remain nestled within her family while attending mission school enabled her to thrive in both worlds. Her experience stands as a counter example to that of so many Indian children who authorities separated from their kin and community, and struggled to a greater extent.

After returning from schools, adolescents, and young adults often had difficulty readjusting to life among their people and communities, and ultimately mission or federal boarding schools permanently affected all of those who attended in one way or another. Tim Giago, a Lakota journalist and author, who found healing in writing about his boarding school experiences says, "Without the lessons to be learned from our parents and grandparents because of the forced separation, Indian students had no role

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<sup>24</sup> Ella Deloria, "Health Education for Indian Girls," *Southern Workman* 53(1924): 64.

models to emulate.”<sup>25</sup> Boarding school education made it difficult for many former students to forge bonds and maintain relationships throughout their lives. This was an indelible result of their educational experience, and it produced continuous spirals of intergenerational trauma that affected entire families. Far too many instances occurred in which students were unable to reacclimatize. Many left their communities and built lives elsewhere. Historian Carol Devens, for example, highlighted Zitkala-Sa’s dilemma: “after three years at the mission school she felt that she had no place in the world, that she was caught in between two cultures. Four uncomfortable years as a misfit among her people prompted her to return to school and go on to college without her mother’s approval.”<sup>26</sup> Instances such as this illustrate how formal education could rip entire families apart. Ella did not have to endure this rupture in her relations that Zitkala-Sa and so many other Indian children who attended remote boarding schools did.

School continued to be a pleasure for Ella. When she attended All Saints School in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, she worked hard and her accomplishments eventually took her to the East Coast. Janet Murray explains that when Ella was a senior she won a scholarship for an essay she wrote, which she used to attend Oberlin College in Ohio in 1911.<sup>27</sup> There one of her professors noticed her hard work and suggested she continue her education at Columbia University in New York.<sup>28</sup> Her experience at Columbia

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<sup>25</sup> Tim Giago, introduction to *Children Left Behind: The Dark Legacy of Indian Mission Boarding Schools* (Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishing, 2006), 5.

<sup>26</sup> Carol Devens, “If We Get the Girls, We Get the Race”: Missionary Education of Native American Girls, *Journal of World History* 3(1992): 237.

<sup>27</sup> Janette Murray, Janet Murray, “Ella Deloria: A Biographical Sketch and Literary Analysis.” (PhD diss., University of North Dakota, 1974). 91.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

ultimately shifted her course in life. While attending college there, surrounded by an environment of intellectuals studying Native Americans, she became concerned with the accuracy of the production of literature on Native Americans. Her mentor, Franz Boas had recently published a book titled, *The Mind of Primitive Man* (1911), in which he emphasized the importance of linguistic analysis from within the linguistic structure of cultures.<sup>29</sup> His work attracted non-Indian students such as Alfred Kroeber, Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, and others interested in Native cultures who avidly collected and published materials on various Indigenous peoples. Ella became concerned about anthropological representations of Indian people.<sup>30</sup> Within the constructs of academia, she gained a perspective of how people objectified and type-caste Indian people. Murray described the initial ways in which Ella responded: "While she was at Columbia she taught Lakota language to students under the direction of Dr. Franz Boas . . . . She also gave speeches on Dakota culture and various church groups, and sometimes she demonstrated Indian dances as well."<sup>31</sup> She was concerned with how the world viewed Native Americans, and ultimately she made it her life's work to provide understanding and insight into the old world from which she came.

Despite her newfound interest in anthropology and its representations of Indians, Ella did not immediately dedicate her life to this endeavor. She had been away from her family for over five years, and sought to reconnect with them when she

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<sup>29</sup> Columbia University, "Franz Boas": C250 CELEBRATES COLUMBIANS AHEAD OF THEIR TIME, COLUMBIA 250 (2003), [http://c250.columbia.edu/c250\\_celebrates/remarkable\\_columbians/franz\\_boas.html](http://c250.columbia.edu/c250_celebrates/remarkable_columbians/franz_boas.html), (accessed march 30, 2014).

<sup>30</sup> Beatrice Medicine, "The Emic Voice." *Ethnic Women Writers II "Of Dwelling Places"* MELUS 7(1980), 29.

<sup>31</sup> Janette Murray, "Ella Deloria: A Biographical Sketch and Literary Analysis," ix, 92.

finished school. Her cultural upbringing reminded her of the centrality of family bonds and obligations. In 1914, Ella completed her B.A. the Teacher's College at Columbia, and received their special diploma for "professional ability" upon graduating.<sup>32</sup> She then returned home to South Dakota to be closer to, and eventually care for her family.<sup>33</sup> She wrote that receiving a formal education often conflicted with the duties and responsibilities of kinship.<sup>34</sup> She uses the example of a boy who:

runs away, not necessarily because he dislikes school, but because someone has said that his mother is sick, and so he cannot rest until he knows for sure. Or a student in advanced training at one of our larger government schools might receive just before his final examinations a letter reporting that his father is dying. The successful passing of those examinations would place the student in a good position. But he insists that he must go . . . That old ideal, that relatives and their needs and happiness come first, now enters in. The student knows he will be thought a fool. But he can stand that much better than he can resist the pull to go home. 'If my father is sick, I must go to him . . . What price my graduating and getting on top, if, to do it, I must ignore my filial duty?'<sup>35</sup>

Although she wrote about schoolchildren, Ella could have been describing her own life experience. Initially she returned to Sioux Falls and taught at her old school, All Saints School, until her sister graduated in 1916. Then she and her sister had to return home due to her mother's incurable illness. At this point Ella assumed care taking responsibilities for her other family members, which remained a constant throughout her life.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Application for Grant-In-Aid or Fellowship for the Bollingen Foundation 1952, *The Ella Deloria Project*, Dakota Indian Foundation

<sup>33</sup> Janette Murray, "Ella Deloria: A Biographical Sketch and Literary Analysis," 102.

<sup>34</sup> Ella Deloria, *Speaking of Indians*, 117-118.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Janette Murray, "Ella Deloria: A Biographical Sketch and Literary Analysis," 102

After her mother passed away in 1916, Ella essentially became a single mother as she inherited the care of her younger sister Susie and her brother Vine.<sup>37</sup> Her father Philip was still alive, but she continued to be their primary support just as she had when they were younger. While she attended to her family, she also adhered to her communal responsibilities by assisting her father with his work. Sarah Olden, a teacher at St. Elizabeth's School, writes, "On December 14, 1916, Mr. Deloria held a service in St. Elizabeth's Church . . . Paul Yellow Bear and his family from North Dakota were present, as they were visiting St. Elizabeth's Mission during the holidays. His wife made a little speech. After he had interpreted the Arickara into Dakota to Ella . . . she in turn translated for us."<sup>38</sup> Moments such as this were pivotal in Ella's life since her commitment to familial and communal kinship eventually defined her career and guided her throughout adulthood. Moreover, these examples of kinship responsibility brought her closer to the destiny of her grandfather Francis's vision, and therefore connected her more to her culture. Ella had just returned home that year, experienced the traumatic loss of her mother, and gained responsibility for her siblings, and now she was assisting her father in the church.

Many other adult Dakotas who returned home after a formal education struggled to combine two different ways of life and find places for themselves within their communities. This was a problem not only for students returning home, but also for educators, administrators, and policy makers involved with the system of formal

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<sup>37</sup> Ella Deloria Archive, "Ella Deloria: A Biographical Sketch," Dr. Agnes Picotte, Ed. American Indian Studies [http://zia.aisri.indiana.edu/deloria\\_archive/about.php?topic=ella](http://zia.aisri.indiana.edu/deloria_archive/about.php?topic=ella) (accessed November 2, 2012).

<sup>38</sup> Sarah Olden, *the People of Tipi Sapa*, xvii, xix.

education.<sup>39</sup> Historian David Wallace Adams writes of, “Ralph Feather, who, after three years at Carlisle, was moved to write home: ‘Father, I think of you all, but I don’t like your Indian ways, because you don’t know the good ways, also you don’t know a good many things.’”<sup>40</sup> Adams describes another student, Margaret Napawat, who, “wrote in her graduating essay: ‘Think of all the temptations and influence of my people I have to face. This is the commencement of a hard life for me. Alone, in the midst of wickedness I have to struggle.’”<sup>41</sup> While Ralph Feather and Margaret Napawat represent students who rejected the old ways of life, there were others who wanted to embrace their cultures but did not know how. Tim Giago confirmed Ella’s philosophy about the importance of kinship and culture, but from the perspective of not having it. He says, “To be torn from the loving homes of our Lakota parents and then to be placed in a cold, cold institution was in and of itself extremely traumatizing . . . . How to interact with their peers as they matured . . . in later life would have been a part of their natural, cultural growth in an Indian community.”<sup>42</sup> Perhaps the circumstances of Ella’s family, particularly her father’s profession as a mediator between the Sioux and non-Indians, provided her with a niche for an easy transition back home. In any case, she discovered a way to find a place in her cultural community using her newfound skills.

Now at home in Sioux county, and with two years of teaching experience under her belt, Ella became re-immersed in the Lakota language, culture and community.

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<sup>39</sup> David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 275.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Tim Giago, *Children Left Behind*, 5-6



While assisting her father with translation at the church, she began to walk the fine line between both worlds, finding a place for herself somewhere in the middle. She had already received her formal education in the megalopolis of New York where she witnessed a new world. She experienced independence, and making her own money. Within academia, she also gained a perspective of how people objectified and typecast Indian people.<sup>43</sup> Now, with all her experience, she found a way she thought she could help her people. Teaching enabled her to merge her new and old identities. Living in the gray area of a middle world, between the old and new, could have become an intimidating state of isolation as it perhaps was for many Native Americans returning to an old culture with a formal education. Yet she learned to use this space as an advantage to build connections between both of her worlds and believed that education was a crucial tool for success in the modern world.

Ella believed that Indians needed education to be successful in society, but she was concerned that their boarding school regimes consisted of too much labor that affected their learning. She explains that there were many hurdles for Indian students to overcome in formal education: "The fact that [they] had to learn industrial work too and could attend classes only half a day was among them."<sup>44</sup> Her observations of education for Indians eventually led her to construct a very keen theory about conceivable outcomes for Indian students. She asserts, "Some of the educational planning was directed to a very special kind of life . . . the assumption always being that there is little

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<sup>43</sup> Janette Murray, "*Ella Deloria: A Biographical Sketch and Literary Analysis*," 92.

<sup>44</sup> Ella Deloria, *Speaking of Indians*, 116.

need of training them for the outside world since they will not be in it. The course of study and training was thus devised for the limited, expectable needs of reservation life.”<sup>45</sup> She believed that the best chance Indians had for success in the non-Indian world was an equal education. She also asserts, “As it looks now, that idea of a special course of study set up for Indians alone show up a bit negatively as a kind of race discrimination. What is right and necessary for the majority of American school children and is made available to them ought not to be denied to other American Children.”<sup>46</sup> She believed the domestic education the girls received in Indian boarding schools limited their chances to be successful once they left the schools.

Mission and boarding schools depended on student labor outside of the classroom to make up for school budget deficiencies and staff shortages.<sup>47</sup> School officials justified the use of student labor as acquiring skills to become civilized and domesticated. Carol Devens discusses how much Indian girls worked outside of the classroom at the Sisseton [Dakota] mission school: “the thirty-six girls . . . produced 400 pieces of student clothing, 50 sets of sheets and towels, and 80 pairs of socks. They also spun and wove 100 pounds of wool and 40 yards of rag carpet, churned 800 pounds of butter, made 600 pounds of cheese, 2½ barrels of soap, and 100 pounds of candles. In addition, they did daily housekeeping, laundry, cooking, and cleaning.”<sup>48</sup> Devens suggests that in many instances schools only trained girls in housekeeping and

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 142-143.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>47</sup> Carol Devens, *If We get the Girls*, 228.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 229.

pressured them to find employment as domestic servants once they left school.<sup>49</sup>

Martha Riggs Morris, a teacher at the Sisseton mission school claims that, “book learning is after all not so important for them [Indian girls], at least after they have learned to read and write fairly well. But to take care of themselves- learn to keep body and mind pure and clean, to learn to keep house comfortable, these are most important- for the advancement of the people.”<sup>50</sup> Ella was a living example of educational success, yet her ideas of education for Indian students differed from school administrators.

After Ella’s mother passed away and she gained primary responsibility for her siblings, she needed to find ways to support her family. In 1918, with her brother Vine at school in Kearney, Nebraska, Ella accepted a scholarship to attend the YWCA National Training School based in New York.<sup>51</sup> She took her sister Susie with her, caring for her while she herself attended school for one year and worked to support them both. After completing her program, Ella worked as the National Secretary of the YWCA from 1920 to 1925, making somewhere between one hundred twenty-five and one hundred seventy-five dollars per month.<sup>52</sup> In 1920, Mr. H.B. Peairs, Supervisor of Indian Education, asked the Y.W.C.A. to conduct an experimental camp for the Haskell Institute’s Indian female students who stayed in residence for the summer. At the end

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 231.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>51</sup> Ella Deloria Archive, [http://zia.aisri.indiana.edu/deloria\\_archive/about.php?topic=ella](http://zia.aisri.indiana.edu/deloria_archive/about.php?topic=ella) (accessed November 2, 2012).

<sup>52</sup> Application for Grant-In-Aid or Fellowship for the Bollingen Foundation 1952, “*The Ella Deloria Project*,” Dakota Indian Foundation.”

of the program, he was convinced the school needed a health program for the girls.<sup>53</sup>

Ella writes that,

He asked for a physical director to spend six weeks in January and February of the following winter to demonstrate a physical-education program for girls in Indian schools. As a result of this request I was sent to Haskell Institute. The entire schedule was temporarily recast- a radical procedure in an Indian school where, as a rule, no deviation from the daily routine takes place- and each girl came to a gymnasium class twice a week for forty minutes. A request came later to the National Board that, instead of traveling and staying in each place a few days, I be located at Haskell for eight months, in order to help in starting a physical education department there which should so demonstrate to the Indian Bureau the value of physical education in the school life and the subsequent life of the Indian girls that it would be made a part of the curriculum of every Government school in the country. As yet there is no such position created as that of physical director in the Indian school.<sup>54</sup>

She had never been to a government school before, asserting, "I cannot present the government school picture . . . but of mission schools I know whereof I speak," but soon became familiar with the environment that so many other Indian children had experienced.<sup>55</sup> She worked at the Haskell Institute as a Y.W.C.A. employee until 1925 and, in 1926 became their health education teacher for \$150.00 per month with free room and board.<sup>56</sup> Although she was not a physical education teacher, she was nonetheless a teacher with empathy towards the Indian girls and spoke up on their behalf.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ella Deloria, *Health Education*, 64-65.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 65-66.

<sup>55</sup> Ella Deloria, *Speaking of Indians*, 116.

<sup>56</sup> Application for Grant-In-Aid or Fellowship for the Bollingen Foundation 1952, *The Ella Deloria Project*, Dakota Indian Foundation.

<sup>57</sup> Janette Murray, "Ella Deloria: A Biographical Sketch and Literary Analysis," 95.

At Haskell Ella observed the rigidity of the girls' program and how it resembled a military operation. As she assessed their daily schedules, she says, "If occasionally the girls had a gymnasium hour in which to play, exercise, relax, and be themselves, there would not be so many reactions as there are when school is over and they find themselves suddenly free from bugles, captains, and protracted periods of silent formation."<sup>58</sup> She assumed the reason for such a militarized environment was due to the school's financial predicament. She says, "This handicap of lack of funds has meant a military system of government in which the individual girl is lost in the mass; it has also meant only a half-day of academic work daily, as the girls are needed for all the housework of the school the other half-day."<sup>59</sup> Clearly, Ella was not pleased with how the administrators viewed and taught Indians and how lack of funding hindered the students' ability to learn. In a later publication she writes, "Far from blaming the Dakota child for being behind in his grades, one should give him credit for making such headway as he did make under the circumstances."<sup>60</sup> She was a physical education teacher, but she saw this as an opportunity to advocate for the Indian girls at the schools.

After Ella witnessed the condition of the Indian girls at the Haskell Institute, she could not leave their circumstances unnoticed, and fortunately, she was in the unique position of a physical director whose responsibility was to demonstrate the need for a physical education program. In her article "Health Education for Indian Girls", Ella used her typewriter to address such issues in the Indian boarding schools as overcrowding,

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<sup>58</sup> Ella Deloria, *Health Education For Indian Girls*, 66.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>60</sup> Ella Deloria, *Speaking of Indians*, 116.

budgetary constraints, mediocre education, child labor, and poor health conditions, and she demonstrated the need for a physical education program. She did so in such a manner that it would not be so offensive to boarding school authorities or her superiors. Nevertheless, Ella's essay still critiqued the government's treatment of Indian girls.<sup>61</sup> She writes, "All of these girls are being trained in domestic science or sewing or office work at the present time . . . These schools would do well to have health programs for those children who have little brightness in their lives, either in school or at home."<sup>62</sup> Whether she was being protective of her students as a teacher or of her people as a Dakota woman, she intervened with her writing to speak the truth about the suffering of Indian children at the hands of government education.

Ella incorporated an element of cultural history education in her critique of the boarding schools. She discusses the unmerited comparison of physical endurance between a young Indian girl who had to adjust and function in a new world and her great-grandmother. Ella asserts that, "She differs from her great-grandmother in her mental attitude. While her great-grandmother accepted things as they were (since they had always been so and no alternative was in sight) and saw life simply, recognizing her duty in it and playing her part gladly, the girl of today is baffled and confused, and is struggling, consciously or unconsciously, to find her rightful place in the new scheme of things."<sup>63</sup> For instance, in talking about the children's great-grandmothers she writes:

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<sup>61</sup> Ella Deloria, "Health Education for Indian Girls," 64-65.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 63,66.

<sup>63</sup> Ella Deloria, *Health Education for Indian girls*, 64.

Under her conditions of life . . . , she had continuous exercise from her childhood to her grave. Yet she exercised, not because she knew that it would increase her circulation and induce deeper respiration, but because camp had to be moved every third day or so, the tepee taken down and erected again, the wood gathered and chopped for fuel, the water carried from the spring or river, the fur scraped off the buffalo hide, the corn hoed, and mushrooms, berries, wild turnips, and rice provided for the winter if her family was to live.<sup>64</sup>

She explained the complete difference of lifestyles between the boarding school girl and her great-grandmother. Whereas physical strength and endurance meant life or death for the great-grandmother, the girl no longer lived in that environment and did not possess the agility her great-grandmother needed to survive. Through this text, Ella subtly critiqued the reservation policy that had confined Indians to fixed territories and the Allotment Act that had made Indian life even more sedentary. In 1877, Congress passed the General Allotment act to promote farming on separate nuclear family units on small tracts of land. The act shattered communal ways of life and, like the boarding schools, threatened to dismantle Indian cultures. It also promoted an American model of gender roles that relied on women's confinement within the home in a domestic role.<sup>65</sup> This phenomenon affected almost every family within Indian country, thereby contributing to the inactivity of the girls before they arrived at the school.

Ella believed that it was not necessary for Indian people to give up their cultures and communities in order to participate in modern America. They could maintain their beautiful cultures and co-exist in the new world. She critiques efforts at forced

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>65</sup> Indian Land Tenure Foundation, General Allotment Act, Act of Feb. 8, 1887, Wallinga Design & TEN7 Interactive, 2014, <http://www.iltf.org/resources/land-tenure-history/historical-allotment-legislation/general-allotment-act> (accessed April 2014).

assimilation and instead articulated a philosophy about the learning process of Indian people: "All human beings learn from each other, we have been saying. The Indians, belonging to the great human family, have the same innate powers, inborn intelligence, and potentialities as the rest of mankind. They have imagination and inventiveness. They can copy what they see and adapt it to their own special needs. These are all common human traits."<sup>66</sup> She encouraged the exploration of Indians within their own contexts. She says, "Somehow we have to get inside that area and explore with unprejudiced mind its workings, or we cannot understand the people who are the direct product of it."<sup>67</sup> She urged onlookers to disregard stereotypes and to empathize with Indians as they struggled to fit into the new world.

During her teaching stint at Haskell Ella sought to bring cultural awareness to the campus community and surrounding area by writing two pageants. She titled her first pageant *Indian Progress: Commemorating a Half Century of Endeavor Among the Indians of North America* for the Second Annual Home-Coming to Haskell Institute, Armistice Day, 1927. In it, she used her typewriter to feature the intrepid journeys of Native American youth who endured the hardships of the Indian education policy. Her eloquent formulation offered lessons of history, culture, motivation, and an example of the ability of children to adapt. She writes:

From distant cities came stern officers  
Demanding children to be sent to school,  
Away from parents, friends and favorite haunts  
To spend long years in strange environments,

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<sup>66</sup> Ella Deloria, *Speaking of Indians*, 9.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.



All unacquainted with that alien tongue  
 Which must be theirs till they came home again.  
 Piteous the partings, then, and brave the heart  
 That beat in terror neath that lowly garb.  
 Fearful they ventured. Oh, how brave a thing.  
 That courage that goes forth in spite of fear!  
 We are their debtors, for they blazed the trail  
 O'er which today we speed with thoughtless ease.  
 Endowed with gifts to nurture mind and soul.  
 The children of the Red Man forged ahead.  
 From effort on to effort, step by step,  
 In spite of much to puzzle and dismay.<sup>68</sup>

This was perfect poetry underscoring the history of the Indian student's entry into education to a non-Indian audience. However, it was also a powerful call to Indian students to remember those ancestors who formed the path on which they walked. Although she intended both of her pageants to create cultural awareness, her first reflected more of the experiences of the people. She geared her second pageant *The Wohpe Festival*, which she wrote in 1928, toward a younger audience.<sup>69</sup> Intended for schools and summer camps, the pageant consisted of ceremonials, games, dances and songs throughout an all-day celebration.<sup>70</sup>

Ella's pageants underscored and intersected with other efforts at the time by both Indian and non-Indians to revise the curriculum of the boarding schools. The

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<sup>68</sup> A Pageant, "Indian Progress: Commemorating a Half Century of Endeavor Among the Indians of North America by Ella Cara Deloria, Especially Written for the Second Annual Home-Coming to Haskell Institute, Armistice Day, 1927." III The Schools At Work, scene 1 Fifty Years Ago. Ella Deloria's Scrapbook, 15. *Ella Deloria: A Biographical Sketch* ed. American Indian Studies Research Institute (AISRI), Indiana University in the Dakota Indian Foundation, [http://zia.aisri.indiana.edu/deloria\\_archive/about.php?topic=ella](http://zia.aisri.indiana.edu/deloria_archive/about.php?topic=ella) (accessed October 25, 2013).

<sup>69</sup> A Pageant, "The wohpe Festival" by Ella Cara Deloria. Ella Deloria's Scrapbook, pg. 15. *Ella Deloria: A Biographical Sketch* ed. American Indian Studies Research Institute (AISRI), Indiana University in the Dakota Indian Foundation, [http://zia.aisri.indiana.edu/deloria\\_archive/about.php?topic=ella](http://zia.aisri.indiana.edu/deloria_archive/about.php?topic=ella).

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

Brookings Institution published the Meriam Report in 1926, a survey of conditions of Indian communities conducted by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior.<sup>71</sup> The report consisted of its findings and recommendations on social concerns such as economic developments, family and community life, and education, and was the basis for the 1934 Wheeler-Howard Act that changed federal Indian policy.<sup>72</sup> In regards to Indian education, Margaret Jacobs explains that the report, “called for more monies for Indian health and education, promoted more day schools instead of boarding schools, and recommended a reorientation of Indian policy away from assimilation and toward tolerance and appreciation of cultural differences.”<sup>73</sup> Ella wrote to Boas describing the success of her last pageant and telling him that it raised one thousand dollars for the school from the hundreds of spectators. Ella was successful in creating a physical education program for the Indian girls at Haskell, and reforming the curriculum so that children would take greater pride in their cultures.

Ella used speaking engagements as another occasion to encourage Indian students to take pride in themselves and to strive for success. She believed that growing up as a middle figure between two worlds gave her the wisdom and confidence to be successful, and she wanted to pass her advice on to youth. She once shared her thoughts about her abilities to communicate between both cultures with Bishop Burleson. She says, “I don’t brag, but I know that I have been fortunate enough to have

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<sup>71</sup> The Meriam Report (1928) investigates failed U.S. Indian policy, Wisconsin Historical Society 1996-2014, <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints/search.asp?id=952>, (accessed April 2014).

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Margaret Jacobs, *Engendered Encounters: Feminism and Pueblo cultures 1879-1934* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 19.

the natural ability to get people to do things, and that with my Dakota, and knowledge of church affairs, and of changing customs among the white people, I can make a success.”<sup>74</sup> In a speech to Indian students at St. Mary’s Episcopal School, she encouraged them to learn to live in both worlds, and to be strong, hold on, and persevere regardless of little matters. She also told them that success resulted from endurance and persistence, and that they needed to remain sharp and punctual with all they did.<sup>75</sup> Her message remained consistent throughout her life. She held several of her last speaking engagements at St. Mary’s School where she continued to encourage students to strive to be the best they could be.

The combination of Ella’s formal and cultural education shaped her abilities for her ethnological work. Her religiously based formal education provided her with a teacher’s accreditation, and travel to new places. Her undergraduate college education was scholarship based, and if her father had more access to funds, there was no doubt he would have sent Ella to graduate school, according to Vine Deloria, Jr.<sup>76</sup> Yet aside from her training with Boas, the traditional education she received from her family and community is what she relied on throughout her life for her ethnological work. The ethnography work she created for herself encompassed all of her traditional and formal skills. Her multifaceted education provided her with the skills to advocate for her people. She became a necessary buffer, a warrior in her own right, who fought to

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<sup>74</sup> Ella Deloria letter to Bishop Hugh Latimer Bursleson, 8 July 1927.

<sup>75</sup> St. Mary’s Episcopal School, *The Bugle Quarterly Bulletin*, Vol. XV no. 3, June 1976, p. 2, *Ella Deloria: A Biographical Sketch* ed. American Indian Studies Research Institute (AISRI), Indiana University in the Dakota Indian Foundation, [http://zia.aisri.indiana.edu/deloria\\_archive/about.php?topic=ella](http://zia.aisri.indiana.edu/deloria_archive/about.php?topic=ella) (accessed October 25, 2013).

<sup>76</sup> Ella Deloria, *Speaking of Indians*, xii.

preserve and protect the integrity of her peoples' culture from the ravaging effects of assimilation. She used her typewriter to speak the truth about her people in many different facets, and with her ability to understand both worlds she withstood financial hardship to navigate her way through academia. All the while, she maintained her integrity and carried the stories of her people.

## Chapter Three

### WICOH'AN KIN IYOKOGNA TI

#### She Lived between Two Cultures

Ella's ability to mediate between cultures became a way of life as she grew into adulthood and sought to fulfill multiple obligations and dreams. She discovered her literary strength through the success of her pageants, and with her preferential emphasis on Sioux language and culture, she looked to the field of anthropology as a vehicle to carry out her myriad responsibilities. She spent several years at the Haskell Institute, and by 1928, she began her career in anthropology. Her lack of proper academic credentials hampered her scholarly potential, but she was determined to accomplish her goals, and she continued to translate and write her ethnography of the Sioux. Throughout her life, she struggled for financial stability and professional credibility. Yet this remained secondary to her commitment towards her family, which was constant throughout any circumstance she endured.

Scholars who have researched and written about Ella attest to her commitment towards family. In one such speaking engagement about Dakota values, she shared her convictions on family. She says, "Concerning relatives . . . depend on one another; cooperate. Never let one have to stand alone. No one is alone. All are involved."<sup>1</sup> To Ella, she considered matters pertaining to her family members as pertaining to her. Sometimes she physically nurtured them, at other times she used her typewriter to take

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<sup>1</sup> St. Mary's Episcopal School, The Bugle Quarterly Bulletin, Vol. XV no. 3, June 1976, p. 2, [http://zia.aisri.indiana.edu/deloria\\_archive/about.php?topic=ella](http://zia.aisri.indiana.edu/deloria_archive/about.php?topic=ella) (accessed October 25, 2013).

care of them. For instance, in 1924, she was looking for a way to make sure her brother and sister received their tribal monies in the most expedient way possible, and so she composed a letter to Mr. E.D. Mossman, the Superintendent of Standing Rock at Fort Yates. She writes, "In the interest of my brother and sister . . . I am writing to say that if, as has been customary in past years, the Standing Rock Indians get a spring payment, it will facilitate matters exceedingly for both of them if the checks are sent directly to them from that office. Vine V. is at St. Stephen's College, Annandale-on-the-Hudson-New York, while Susie is here in Lawrence . . . May I impose upon your kindness to the extent of asking your personal attention to this for us?"<sup>2</sup> In the Dakota culture Ella was, for all purposes, a mother to them, always concerned, and looking to take care of them.

Although she believed that she and Vine were able to manage the many conflicting influences of both cultures, she was concerned for her sister Susie and was very protective of her. Like Ella, Susie attempted to attend college in Chicago for a brief time but had health and memory loss problems that she later had diagnosed as benign brain tumors.<sup>3</sup> Her nephew Vine Deloria Jr. explains her deterioration, "It started to become clear that someone would have to provide for her most of her adult life. She became increasingly self-conscious and hesitant to appear in public, eventually with anyone except old and close friends."<sup>4</sup> Ella took responsibility for Susie and always kept

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<sup>2</sup> Ella Deloria letter to Mr. E.D. Mossman, Superintendent of Stand Rock at Fort Yates, 27 March 1924 *The Ella Deloria Project*, Dakota Indian Foundation.

<sup>3</sup> Vine Deloria Jr., Introduction to *Speaking of Indians*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), xiii.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

her with her. She explained her circumstances with Susie in a letter to Dr. Boas. She said:

I have never told this, but besides my nieces and nephews for whom I am guardian, I am responsible for providing the roof for my sister as well as for me . . . I can not just leave her and go off. That would not be right; besides we have no home at all. I live in my car, virtually; all our things are in it. And if I go anywhere, I find it cheapest to go in my car; and take my sister with me. I love her, I can not do otherwise than give her a home of sorts.<sup>5</sup>

In many circumstances, she also assumed her sister's affairs for her. For instance, in a situation regarding a land dispute, Susie attempted to manage the situation herself, but when unresolved, Ella stepped in to take care of the matter. She wrote,

I am attempting to answer your letter to my sister. . . In the early part of 1920, Susie gave a deed of her individual allotment, number 715827 to Mr. W.E. Lamont, for \$3500.00 . . . of which he paid her cash for \$500.00 . . . From time to time, he paid her in small bits. . . . Meantime, we have learned that Mr. Lamont sold that land before he finished paying for it. Does the fact that he sold the land let him out of making his payments? Surely that does not sound straight to me . . . so I am writing to make sure. . . . I am trying to see Susie through college and it is uphill work. Such a restitution would help materially, I am sure.<sup>6</sup>

Ella's words were succinct and eloquent, and although she seemed gracious and inquisitive, this was a matter pertaining to her sister and she was not about to retreat on the matter.

Her familial responsibility matured her from a young age, and with her family's distinction as successful intermediaries and her religious beliefs, she strove to carry

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<sup>5</sup> Ella Deloria letter to Boas, 7 February 1936, "Franz Boas Professional Papers," LH-B-14-2, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>6</sup> Ella Deloria letter to Mr. E.D. Mossman, Superintendent of Stand Rock at Fort Yates, 11 December 1925.

herself with decorum. When she met the new principal, Mr. William Chapman, at St. Elizabeth's School in 1958, he comments on her caliber by saying that, "he was surprised to find a woman of such style and refinement."<sup>7</sup> At one of her last lectures at St. Mary's Episcopal Church in 1976, she advised students on achieving success in the new world. She tells the audience, "Here then is the great obligation: To succeed in an all-round development- physical, mental and spiritual. And Why? So that we may belong with those who have readied themselves in order to be of use in God's world."<sup>8</sup> This was clearly a testament of how she herself strove to be.

As early as 1926, Ella was ready to leave her position at Haskell, but between her personal and professional responsibilities, she was concerned about making the right decisions. In a letter to Bishop Burleson, she wrote about the dilemma of being true to one's self or of making other people happy. She indicated that she had been unhappy for quite some time with her position as a physical education teacher. Boas came to visit her at Haskell in the summer of 1927, with a proposal to continue the translation project of the 1887 George Bushotter texts, which they had initially worked on together while she was a student at Columbia University over a decade earlier.<sup>9</sup> Dr. Boas wanted to publish some of the manuscripts, which were located in the James Owen Dorsey collection at the Smithsonian Institution's Bureau of American Ethnology, but he needed

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<sup>7</sup> William Chapman, *Remember the Wind: A Prairie Memoir* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Company, 1965), 57.

<sup>8</sup> St. Mary's Episcopal School, *The Bugle Quarterly Bulletin*, Vol. XV no. 3, June 1976, [http://zia.aisri.indiana.edu/deloria\\_archive/about.php?topic=ella](http://zia.aisri.indiana.edu/deloria_archive/about.php?topic=ella) (accessed October 25, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> Raymond J. DeMallie, afterword to *Waterlily*, 235.



her help because they were written in the Lakota language.<sup>10</sup> She told Boas of her plans to quit Haskell and that she would receive her last check in January. She indicated what she was contemplating different employment and thought her other alternatives could be another teaching job, or some church work somewhere, but she did not want to get involved with any organizations.<sup>11</sup> Yet she had not acted on any of those choices from the time of her letter to Bishop Burluson to her letter to Boas. She also told Boas that she enjoyed translation work and asked if he could guarantee her funding of \$125.00 at least for a couple of months.<sup>12</sup> Here is where Ella saw the opportunity to solve her dilemma as she believed that her meeting with Boas would enable her to leave the teaching profession and embark on a new career.

When she had translated for Boas at Columbia in the 1910s, she had worked with and watched Boas's anthropology students, such as Ruth Benedict, Gladys Reichard, and Margaret Mead, who now were at the forefront of fieldwork in Indigenous communities. Boas had nurtured a generation of women anthropologists who often added their female voices to their ethnological observations.<sup>13</sup> Ella's fluency, experience in translation, and knowledge of cultural stories uniquely qualified her for her position, and like his other female anthropology students, she wanted to assert her voice about her people. She made the decision that translation and ethnography work was what she wanted to do, and in December of 1927, she resigned from her teaching

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ella Deloria letter to Franz Boas, 25 December 1927.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> *Women Writing Culture*, Edited by Ruth Behar and Deborah A. Gordon (Berkeley: University of California), 92-93.

position at Haskell. By January 1928, she was working for Boas. At the beginning of her new career and after several months of negotiation, Ella secured an employment contract with Dr. Boas, which was one of the few instances in which she would have financial security without a traditional degree. Though not directly in her area of translation, she accepted a full-time salary that he offered her in an eighteen month-contract at two hundred dollars per month to do field work, plus additional money for field expenses, for a psychological study of Dakota girls.<sup>14</sup>

Ella took her job very seriously and considered it a genuine and credible position with the anthropology department at Columbia. In the occupation section of a Grant-in-Aid application for the Bollingen Foundation that she wrote in 1952, Ella described her duties as Research in Indian Ethnology for the Department of Anthropology at the University of Columbia in New York from 1929-1945, indicating that she viewed herself very much a part of the academic community there.<sup>15</sup> She wrote that her annual salary was two thousand four hundred dollars plus extra for fieldwork and that several sources funded her work.<sup>16</sup> Clearly, Ella reveled in her newfound profession.

Yet, from the beginning of her work with Boas, her family obligations conflicted with her professional responsibilities. After spending a year in New York with Dr. Boas translating Lakota language material, her father became ill so she returned to South Dakota to care for him. Boas wrote to her several times inquiring about her return to

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<sup>14</sup> Janette Murray, *Ella Deloria: A Biographical Sketch and Literary Analysis*, 98.

<sup>15</sup> Application for Grant-In-Aid or Fellowship for the Bollingen Foundation 1952, "The Ella Deloria Project," Dakota Indian Foundation."

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

New York to complete her work, but she wrote back explaining that she could not specify a date; she needed to wait until he was better. She says, “But as I see it, this matter of making a comfortable home for my father looks like my immediate duty which would go undone or ill-done if I should leave it to come in now. . . . I like the work and hope always to come back, but I have been unable to. I know white people leave their parents and go off, but we are not trained that way, and I can’t bring myself to do it, till I have things arranged as I plan and am working on.”<sup>17</sup> Returning to South Dakota to assume familial and economic responsibilities became a repetitive pattern throughout her life.

Ella’s new career did not resolve her financial problems. After her eighteen-month contract, she struggled with Boas to obtain adequate funding for her work. Ella worked for Dr. Boas for fifteen years, but she could not always rely on his funding. Author and scholar María Eugenia Cotera wrote about one instance when Boas refused to pay Ella for her work. Cotera says that Ella “was alarmed by the fact that he was holding her funding hostage until she produced corroborative data.”<sup>18</sup> There were also instances where Ella experienced miscommunication with Boas about which material he expected her to work on. One example is where she had to inquire about her job responsibilities and pay:

I did not know, you did not tell me, that I was not working for you this summer but for Ruth Benedict. . . . Then there came up the question of my check. I understood you to say that since you realized I had no place

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<sup>17</sup> Ella Deloria letter to Franz Boas, 4 October, 1929, “Franz Boas Professional Papers.”

<sup>18</sup> María Eugenia Cotera, *Native Speakers: Ella Deloria, Zora Neale Hurston, Jovita González, and the Poetics of Culture*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 58.

to go, and must pay my way as I go, you would continue my salary at the same rate as while I am in New York—Two hundred dollars a month. So I told you that that was very good—but that aside from my living expenses, I should have twenty-five dollars a week to get about, and do the socially correct things—provide meat and such presents, on paying my visits to my informants—so you said that aside from the one hundred dollars you were allowing for my travel out here and back, you would take four hundred dollars—the equivalent of four months' needs, at twenty-five dollars a month, from the May and June salary of next year. And you gave me that five hundred dollars, fifty of which I have already used to get out here, and am using it right along to make my contacts. But Mrs. Benedict said you told her—or she understood you to say I was to have only one hundred dollars while in the field. She told me that she and anyone else who went on the field did it at their own expense, and made me feel very uncomfortable. I think if she and Gladys and other do go out on their own, it is because they wish to. I thought my coming out was a sort of commission, and I know Dr. Klineberg had a salary and travel fund, because I was with him. I can see how some people, who are trying to raise their standing as anthropologists etc., might be willing to go out at their own expenses for their own advancement. But I do not like the way she made me feel; I resent it, and would like very much to “Wacinko” [pout] but I shall not! . . . . I feel that I should have my full salary, and I was counting on it, for various things I have to do. I hope you will be able to get word to Mrs. Benedict . . . about it all, because I need it.<sup>19</sup>

Ella's letter illustrates that there was a class division between her and other Boasian anthropologists who came from a higher socio-economic status than her and had their own money to pay informants or go out into the field as they wished. By contrast, she was dependent on Boas for funding in a timely manner to continue the momentum of her work. Her letter also illustrates a class division in accreditation. Her discussion of Dr. Klineberg's salary and travel fund versus hers demonstrates that others in the department viewed her employment position as inferior to theirs. These types of

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<sup>19</sup> Ella Deloria letter to Boas, 11 June 1932.

perceptions of her work must have hindered her prospects for her anthropological career. For a prideful woman such as Ella, it must have been frustrating and even humiliating to have to haggle with Boas over money.

Without the proper academic accreditation, she underwent a continuous struggle to gain respect and legitimacy within the anthropological field. This becomes apparent in a letter she wrote to Boas asking for a reference letter of reference:

There is another hitch. Since talking to Mrs. Benedict, I feel the precariousness of my position, without you. I should be very grateful if, sometime when convenient, you would write a statement, setting forth what you think of my knowledge of things Dakota. Some day, I must work further with Indian material, but in another field, when the time comes that you can not continue the Dakota work, because of other language demanding attention. When that happens, I wish people to know that you considered me worth something as an informant on Dakota customs etc. I asked you this before you went abroad last year; and then didn't follow it up, due to other matters. But now I must ask you again.<sup>20</sup>

The conversation with Benedict must have shaken Ella and left her feeling disrespected and vulnerable to the extent that she felt she needed validation from Boas about her credibility. While it appears that Boas had articulated his respect for her, others, particularly Benedict, had not.

Sometimes Ella found that Boas assigned her to other scholars. In this instance, Boas assigned her to Ruth Benedict but neglected to inform her. From the quotes above, it is clear that Ella and Benedict had a strained relationship. Benedict seems not to have taken Ella's dire financial straits seriously. On 7 November 1944, Ruth Benedict writes to

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

her, "Your two checks came all right and I was slow about depositing them."<sup>21</sup> In her letter, Benedict inconsequentially laid that matter aside to let Ella know that she received a fellowship renewal.<sup>22</sup> This exchange of letters reveals that Ella remained something of an outsider in the anthropological profession. Her family responsibilities and the financial burdens that accompanied set her apart from other anthropologists in Boas's circle.

Ella traveled throughout many reservation communities for her work making it difficult for her to keep track of her mail. As a result, she had post office boxes in several communities, yet she experienced problems with late or missing mail. Reoccurrences of late mail led her to write to the post office making sure the business of her post office box was in order. She writes, "It does not make a great deal of difference because Box 45 is my sister's and so there was little chance of my checks going astray. But I realize that it is important to have my own address on file. . . . I enclose a post card which I hope you will return to me so that I will be sure this reaches you and that the change has been made. . . . My work goes on pace, very greatly helped by my checks, for which I am eternally grateful."<sup>23</sup> Since Ella traveled so much throughout South Dakota for her work, the fact that she had several post office box addresses in different communities is easy to understand. It also sheds light on how important it was for her to receive her funds in a timely manner, as traveling was such a big component of her work.

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<sup>21</sup> Ruth Benedict letter to Ella Deloria, 7 November 1944.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ella Deloria letter to Miss Gallagher, 9 December 1954.

Since Ella began her work in linguistics and ethnology she no longer had the reliability of a teacher's pay, she had to assess her resources on a constant basis. In one instance, she wrote to Mr. Mossman at Standing Rock to assist her in collecting on an old bill,

My dear Mr. Mossman: Years ago, Samuel Little Elk's mother bought a bed, dresser, and commode set belonging to me for thirty dollars, one time. She bought it especially for Sam, because I was going away to school and did not need it any more. I need not say it was in very good condition, and worth more than thirty dollars. It has been many years and although Mrs. Little Elk wanted to pay for them at various times she was not able to do so and I did not press her. But I need money so much and so constantly now with my father an invalid--- we have to take him to the doctor for treatments twice a week, and I am where I can not earn money rapidly enough to keep up the pace. I wonder whether there is any fund from the estate of the man or wife who I understand have died within the last four years. And if so, I wonder whether I might not be able to realize something from that transaction. . . . Mr. James Cedarboy also owes me fifteen dollars.<sup>24</sup>

No documentation exists to show whether she was successful in getting back this money, but her letter to Mr. Mossman and others like it indicate the seriousness of her financial situation.

She was no stranger either to inquiring about employment, and during her multiple trips to the East Coast, Ella made many friends and acquaintances interested in Indian issues. From time to time she would ask about possible work from them. In one instance, she approached one such friend, a person she called Rosebud, about employment possibilities. In her letter to Rosebud, she explained her creativity in procuring various ways to make ends meet:

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<sup>24</sup> Ella Deloria letter to Mr. E.D. Mossman Rock at Fort Yates, 23, May 1929,

You see, Columbia couldn't keep putting all its eggs in one basket, as it were; it couldn't concentrate on Sioux forever when there are about a hundred languages still untouched. I always knew the time was coming; it came last summer, and I am working only half time now on writing up my stuff of which there is still worlds! And then I am writing in a small way, and making something on the side with that. Also I have somehow or other unknown to myself, got into manuscript reading for a couple of publishing houses, for material submitted about Indians. And the check for each such is also a help. But none of these require my time definitely, and I could work with you, if you should consider me. How about it? . . . Think about it, won't you? And if you have to have an assistant, pick on me, if you like. I assure you I can give it all I've got, ethnologically.<sup>25</sup>

This time she also inquired about the possibility of her sister making money with the potential for a mutually beneficial situation:

By the way, they are making some exquisitely perfect tipis, with all the old time decorations complete, six feet high, tall enough for children up to ten. They retail for \$50. . . . It occurred to me that you might know how and where to put such things across. . . . My sister and her group make them. They have only placed six so far, but she says if you or Arthur could help put them before the public, and get them sold, there is a 25% commission on them, after the transportation costs are paid.<sup>26</sup>

She draws attention to the tipis as great gifts for children who wanted to play Indian, and how fifty dollars would be nothing at all for the wealthy to pay.<sup>27</sup> Since Susie travelled with Ella, Ella assisted her with her projects. She and Susie used every opportunity to increase their income.

Procuring funds was not her only problem. Explaining the process of her work and activities out in the field to funders and scholars presented a challenge too. Ella constantly explained in her letters to Boas that her credibility among the Sioux required

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<sup>25</sup> Ella Deloria letter to Rosebud, 27 May, 1938,

<sup>26</sup> Ella Deloria letter to Rosebud Frantz, 27 May, 1938.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.



her to follow cultural protocol. Some non-Indian professionals recognized and lauded her unique abilities. They recognized that her fluency in Siouan languages enabled her to gain the trust of communities and therefore to produce more detailed and accurate accounts. They commented that her abilities to translate cultural nuances and conceptual inflections gave her work more profound substance. Frederic H. Douglas, a Native Art Curator for the Denver Art Museum, recognized her unique qualities in a letter he wrote. He states, "No white anthropologist could ever succeed in obtaining the information which Miss Deloria can, and because of her unique endowment and amount of work already done I feel as strongly as possible that every support should be given to her in her endeavor to gather information which otherwise will be soon lost forever. Situations which combine so many unusual and desirable factors rarely develop in anthropology and somehow the means must be found for using them to the fullest!"<sup>28</sup> Within Boas's circle of anthropology students at Columbia, she was the only one of his students who was a member of the Native culture he studied.

One of her greatest attributes with the work that she did was that she came from the culture. Being a Dakota, especially a woman and a fluent speaker, she understood the complexities of social interactions. Sioux women ran the home so she knew the protocols for visitors who called upon them in their homes. The women also handled the community business in terms of feeding people or caring for the sick, elderly, and the children. Therefore, she knew when visiting an informant or an elder that there was a certain way to approach them. A few of her letters to Boas explain the

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<sup>28</sup> Frederic H. Douglas letter to Miss Nancy Russ, 19 August 1952.

importance of bringing food and tobacco to people she intended to meet with. She writes in a letter:

I can not tell you how essential it is for me to take beef or some food each time I go to an informant—the moment I don't, I take myself right out of the Dakota side and class myself with outsiders. If I go, bearing a gift, and gladden the hearts of my informants, with food, at which perhaps I arrange to have two or three informants, and eat with them, and call them by the correct social kinship terms, then later I can go back, and ask them all sorts of questions, and get my information as one would get favors from a relative. It is hard to explain, but it is the only way I can work. To go at it like a white man, for me, an Indian, is to throw up an immediate barrier between myself and the people.<sup>29</sup>

Her letter demonstrates to Boas that her position in the field was a delicate, time consuming, and expensive process in which she had to adhere to cultural protocols in order to maintain trustworthy relationships with communities.

Ella's training as a Dakota woman often conflicted with academic customs. While academics made their careers by promoting their work, it was not Dakota protocol to take credit for anything. In her writing, for instance, she states, "This writing is about the Dakota-speaking Indians of the Plains and all its material comes directly from them."<sup>30</sup> She apologizes when she violated this cultural code: "I have given incidents out of even my own experience wherever I thought they might be of help. This I have done with a total disregard and lack of Dakota reticence, for which I hope to be forgiven."<sup>31</sup> In order to protect her status as a respectable Dakota woman and sustain her community

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<sup>29</sup> Ella Deloria letter to Boas, 11 June 1932.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 7.

relationships she sought to follow all cultural protocols, even when they undermined her standing in the academic world.

Unlike many of her colleagues in academia, her anthropological work was more than a job to her; it was a way of life. She never outwardly embraced the traditional ways of her people, but her grandson, Philip Deloria, Vine Deloria Jr.'s son, said that she considered herself a Dakota woman and came back full circle to her people.<sup>32</sup> She once wrote that she believed her father was too quick to disregard the old ways. Still, he knew the cultural ways, and Ella's grandnephew Philip credits him with teaching her ethnology. He taught her how to interpret a Sioux worldview with an ethnographic lens. Philip said that, "Boas sent her out on her first trip out in the field but he did not give her the tools. She had her technical training from Boas and Benedict, but she was kind of lost and did not know what to do."<sup>33</sup> She began by collecting stories from her father, then he introduced her to people, and he told her about cultural protocol, like bringing food and tobacco. Her informants were tied through kinship, and the elders taught her how to be an oral storyteller.<sup>34</sup> Ella's nephew and Philip's father, Vine Deloria, Jr. wrote how Ella's father, in his old age, spoke of missing the old ways. Like her father, once she got older she became more protective of her people, and throughout her work, she encouraged those learning about Indians to be *waunsila* or to have "pity" on the traditionalists. The word for pity in Lakota or Dakota has a somewhat different meaning than its English counterpart; it means having compassion, and understanding and being

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<sup>32</sup> Susana Geliga phone interview with Philip Deloria, 13 December 2013.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

nonjudgmental. Her personal and professional actions reflected her love and empathy for her people and her culture. Her anthropological work required that she extract information, but she worked to safeguard the integrity of the sources and to be responsible with the information.

At times, she disagreed with credentialed scholars. For example, in 1938, she incurred Boas's displeasure when she could not or would not substantiate James R. Walker's material on the Sioux, since so much of anthropological literature based their work on Walker as a source. Ella tells Boas, "The material . . . strikes no responsive chord anywhere. 'That must be from another tribe'—'That may be from the Bible'—'Somebody made that up according to his fancy,'—'That's not Dakota!' Not once, so far, has anybody said of this part that 'Maybe it was so believed in the past'."<sup>35</sup> Cotera writes, "She also reported that she tracked down Walker's interpreter, 'an orphan white boy, Charley Nines,' who had been educated at a mission school with Indian children. While 'old time white men say he talked like a native. . . the old Indians didn't think him so good.'"<sup>36</sup> In true Dakota storytelling fashion, Ella remained neutral, honest, and as accurate as she could.

Boas and his associates did not seem to understand fully the cultural logistics of fieldwork in Indian country. In fact, he seemed distrustful at times of her techniques. For instance, in the case of the Walker Manuscripts where Boas wanted Ella to verify Walker's sources, he suggested that she was not doing all she could. She responded

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<sup>35</sup> Ella Deloria letter to Franz Boas, 28 June 1938.

<sup>36</sup> Cotera, *Native Speakers*, 56.

with her frustrations, “I have known all along that you couldn’t be satisfied; I am not either. But when I can not find any of it what can I do? I could only keep trying at every chance I had; and that is what I did.”<sup>37</sup> She conveyed that she understood his disappointment with her results, yet she could not confirm false information. Cotera writes, “While both Boas and Benedict recognized the utility of Deloria’s methods, lingering doubts regarding her objectivity often undercut her credibility as an anthropologist. Indeed, though he never clearly voiced his suspicions, Boas often implied in his letters to Deloria and to his colleagues that her research might be tainted by her personal biases.”<sup>38</sup> Boas’s personal and professional opinions of her work were important to her; thus when there was miscommunication between them, she attempted to resolve the matter.

Ella’s lack of a PhD in anthropology made it difficult for her to gain legitimacy in the field. She had the academic rigor necessary to undertake her tasks, yet she did not receive substantial support or respect from those she worked with in academia. Cotera points out how Boas, as well as the anthropologist Ruth Benedict, failed to mentor Ella:

While both Benedict and Boas were always able to find funding to support her field research for their own linguistic and ethnographic projects, there is no evidence that they ever tried to help Deloria get the credentials she needed to become an independent anthropologist. This lack of mentorship seems especially glaring in light of the fact that both Boas and Benedict had reputations for mentoring and finding financial support for other women interested in the field. Surely Boas could have arranged to fast-track her through the PhD program at Columbia, as he did for Benedict some years before, especially given the fact that Deloria had more field experience than most of his graduate students. Benedict

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<sup>37</sup> Ella Deloria letter to Boas, 28, June 1939.

<sup>38</sup> María Cotera, endnotes to *Native Speakers*, 53.

often arranged scholarships for her favored graduate students, including Margaret Mead, but she apparently never attempted to do so for Deloria.<sup>39</sup>

Despite her lack of academic credentials and support, Ella was able to publish some of her material and gain some academic and popular respect.

By the late 1930s, Ella's abilities and work came into the spotlight. The government hired her to carry out research on other American Indian groups. In 1938, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and the Phelps-Stokes Fund asked her to conduct a study of the Navajos, which she published as a report titled *The Navajo Indian Problem*.<sup>40</sup> In 1940, the BIA also commissioned her to go to North Carolina to do a study of the Lumbee Indians to determine their recognition status.<sup>41</sup> After she was finished with the report, she and her sister Susie produced two pageants for the tribe in 1940 and 1941.<sup>42</sup> She wrote to Boas describing her project. She said she studied a group of mixed blood Indians and created pageants funded by the Farm Security Administration.<sup>43</sup> She explained that everyone involved was excited and wanted her to start immediately.<sup>44</sup> Author John Prater also commented about her dilemmas with writing the pageant as tribal history or cultural information were non-existent. He writes, "While Deloria grappled with the fact that her pageant would not be based on documented cultural history but rather her own creation, she understood the benefits

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 238.

<sup>40</sup> Vine Deloria Jr., *Intro to Speaking of Indians* xv.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., xvi.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ella Deloria letter to Franz Boas, 18 July 1940.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

of the production. Some of these benefits stem from its influence on the group becoming recognized by the federal government 'so as to enjoy the benefits of schooling in government schools, and student loans for college, and the right to go into the Indian service.'"<sup>45</sup> She believed that a pageant consisting of a history, a culture, and a language would assist the tribe with their federal recognition status.

Although Ella's work gained momentum by the early 1940s, she experienced the loss of Boas, her mentor. In 1941, she co-authored the *Dakota Grammar* with Boas, and within a year, he passed away. She kept a scrapbook with several articles containing information of his life and death. For a time she was alone in her ethnological work, but later developed working relationships with Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead, and began to write grants to continue her work. Her nephew Vine Deloria Jr., explains an instance where, in 1943, she received recognition for her work. He writes, "Ella received the Indian Achievement Award from the Indian Council Fire in Chicago. At the time this was the most prestigious award an Indian could receive."<sup>46</sup> In 1944, the Friendship Press published her book *Speaking of Indians* in which she asks, "What can I do, then, to help you understand the Indians? I could try to entertain you by skipping from tribe to tribe and giving you a surface picture of them all. I could give statistics and records and tell you about a 'quaint custom,' now and then, whenever I despair of holding your interest to the end. But I don't believe that is where my contribution lies."<sup>47</sup> Instead, she used

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<sup>45</sup> John Prater, "Ella Deloria: Varied Intercourse: Ella Deloria's Life and Work," *Wicazo Sa Review* 11(1995), 43.

<sup>46</sup> Vine Deloria Jr., intro to *Speaking of Indians*, xvii

<sup>47</sup> Ella Deloria, *Speaking of Indians*, 20.

the book as an opportunity to assume the role of a middle figure to provide insight into the current issues of the Sioux, and to discuss how earlier policies such as the allotment had affected Native Americans.

Of all her publications, *Speaking of Indians* most enabled Ella to share her own perspectives of the Sioux people in a style of writing that appealed to any reader. As her platform was for her people, she always maintained a friendly demeanor while getting her message across. Murray quotes Gardner, “In every way possible—in her speeches, writings, personal friendships—she promoted the understanding of the Dakota way of life among Indians and non-Indians.”<sup>48</sup> One of the biggest misunderstandings Ella found to be was that of Sioux names. She says,

Consider the case of ‘One-Skunk,’ for instance. He volunteered for the first commando raid on France. Yet the publicity he received was not primarily because he was a brave American but because his Indian name was humorous, not to say ludicrous. Radio commentators had a field day over it. Why was he called that? I do not know, but anyone versed in the ethnology of such matters can hazard a safe enough guess as to the reference. Quite likely that animal played a part in some religious ancestor’s vision experience. But who in a fast-moving army can stop to learn the reference and allow for it? The titter at daily roll call can well be imagined. A soldier might have the qualities of a MacArthur or an Eisenhower, but could he ever demonstrate them with a name like One-Skunk. Many Indian boys, I am sure, have potentialities for leadership and rank but hold back because people laugh at their names.<sup>49</sup>

She explains that cultural misunderstandings hindered potential success that would be beneficial for people of both cultures. She also explained that names are as significant to Native Americans as actions of people are across all cultures.

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<sup>48</sup> Janette Murray, “Ella Deloria: A Biographical Sketch and Literary Analysis,” 6.

<sup>49</sup> Ella Deloria, *Speaking of Indians*, 155.



Ella gained the most popularity with her book *Waterlily*. Posthumously published sixteen years after she passed away, *Waterlily* is an edited version of her longer manuscript, the *The Dakota Way of Life*. Although it is a fiction based on her ethnographical work on Sioux kinship systems, what makes the book unique is that it represents a female's perspective. Contemporary scholars have used the book to examine gender roles and kinship systems within a traditional Lakota society. Published in 1988 by the University of Nebraska Press, *Waterlily* sold more copies than any of her other publications, including its more comprehensive predecessor, *The Dakota Way of Life*.

Some scholars have been concerned with whether the stories she recorded were authentic. Author Julian Lewis, who edited a series of Ella's unpublished manuscripts, suggests that, "Readers may wonder if Deloria broke tradition by synthesizing episodes that oral narrative separate in shorter version," as Ella indicated that, "she did not transcribe or record the stories while they were told but wrote them down later from memory."<sup>50</sup> He said what made Ella's work unique was that she wrote down her own versions of the stories she heard.<sup>51</sup> Indigenous scholars argue that the maintenance of oral histories and storytelling from rote memory within a cultural context was a most arduous task that involved the development of sustained personal relationships. For example, former teacher and member of the Indigenous Women's Network, Luz Guerra explained, "When I would meet Indigenous women for the first

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<sup>50</sup> Julian Rice, introduction to *Iron Hawk* by Ella Deloria (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993), 1.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

time, they would ask me if I was a mother, not if I was married, but if I was a mother.

Because if I WAS a mother then I had something in common with them. They would ask me about my family, then tell me about theirs. We would sit down and have a meal together, and I would wash their dishes to say thank you for preparing the meal. An entire day could go by with us interacting without even having got down to business.”<sup>52</sup>

The experiential processes in which Ella received information created a more thorough imprint into her memory. In this sense, she found a way to transform oral history into a legitimate literature.

Ella lacked academic credentials so she learned how to apply for grants to support her work. In 1952, she applied to the Bollingen Foundation for a grant to support her work titled, *Religious Concepts and Practices of the Native Dakota Religion*.<sup>53</sup> In the section of her application titled, “Concise statement of project,” she writes, “To prepare as full a report as possible on the concepts and practices of the Native Dakota religion; with other, secular ceremonials which have a religious bearing.”<sup>54</sup> Her application to the foundation in 1952, included references such as Dr. Margaret Mead of the American Museum of Natural History in New York, Dr. Frederick H. Douglas of the Denver Museum in Denver Colorado, and Dr. Royal Hassrick of the Museum of the Southwest in Anadarko Oklahoma. She received funding and worked on

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<sup>52</sup> Susana Geliga personal communication with Luz Guerra, 19 March 2014.

<sup>53</sup> Letter from Royal B. Hassrick, Assistant General Manager from the Department of the Interior to Nancy Russ, Assistant Secretary, Bollingen Foundation, 30 October 1952.

<sup>54</sup> Ella Deloria, Application for Grant-in-Aid or Fellowship.

her project, but by 1955, she disappeared from the academic spotlight to tend to a communal obligation that required her attention full-time for the next three years.

In 1958, she attempted to resume her career and once again sought financial support. On December 16, she wrote a letter to the Committee on Grants for Anthropological Research at the Bollingen Foundation, which had funded her six years before. She requested a grant for eight hundred dollars to incorporate additional material for her Dakota Way-of-Life manuscript that she envisioned as an encompassing view of Dakota life that focused on the social patterns and kinship systems of the people.<sup>55</sup> She describes her sabbatical in her application, “Before I could complete the work, however, a prior commitment—to serve the little mission school where I got my start—had to be fulfilled because the school was without a head at a critical time and I was asked to take over the principal-ship of it. Rather than let the school close and thus deprive the children of schooling on which the parents were counting, I had to lay aside my work.”<sup>56</sup> Now that she had finished her commitment she wanted to return to her manuscript, she explains: “The three years are now over and I am at last able to resume my writing. That those three years were far from wasted. For, situated as I was in the midst of rapid change in the life around the school, I was able to observe and take notes on these changes, and to judge the exact spots where the culture has been irretrievably broken, and what the effect of that is on the people. It is on the whole a sad story, but

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<sup>55</sup> Ella Deloria letter to the Committee on Grants for Anthropological Research, Bollingen Foundation, 16 December 1958.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

one that must be recorded.”<sup>57</sup> She explains that her position provided insight that she could use in her manuscript. She stressed the importance of funding: “Unless I can be assured of the help I seek very soon, I shall be able to afford only to put on the last touches on my manuscript, and then find other work to do. So I wistfully hope that you will find merit in my request, and let me hear from you as soon as might be.”<sup>58</sup> As always, family and community took priority over Ella’s career. Unlike many of her academic colleagues, however, she saw no incompatibility between these aspects of her life.

Few other scholars- even anthropologists who studied Indian cultures— understood or supported Ella’s need to fulfill family or community obligations. This became apparent in a behind-the-scenes debate about whether to fund her research in the late 1950s. Little did she know that from the time she submitted her grant request, a debate ensued among several men affiliated with the Bollingen Foundation, some supportive and some antagonistic about her credibility. Perhaps her biggest adversary associated with the foundation at the time was Dr. Paul Radin, a previous student of Boas and now the Chairman of the Anthropology Department at Brandeis University. Only a few years earlier Radin had written to the foundation to praise Ella, “With regard to Miss Deloria’s letter, I would like to say that she is probably the greatest authority on the Dakota Indians living. . . . I cannot imagine a better person for writing a work on the religion of her people. . . . As far as I know she is a very responsible individual; besides, it

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

would be very nice to help out a trained American Indian to write on her own tribe.”<sup>59</sup>

Now in 1958, he had changed his tone. This time he writes, “It is perfectly clear to me what Miss Deloria has done. She has really obtained very little new material but has simply used the material she got many years ago and for which she was paid, and revamped it. Unless she is willing to send us a copy of the manuscript in its present shape, I would strongly advise against giving her any more money, even \$800. It must be remembered that she was given \$6,000. I do not think she has been quite honest about the whole matter. . . . She has apparently thrown together in a superficial manner, what she could do most easily.”<sup>60</sup> Ella had carefully explained that she could have finished the manuscript already, but she was now requesting support so she could add new material that she gathered in the intervening three years and make the book all the richer.

Margaret Mead, in fact, who had written the preface for her, had suggested she approach the foundation to request more funding.<sup>61</sup> The evaluation of Ella’s 1958 grant request demonstrates the scrutiny she withstood when endeavoring to educate others about the work she did out in the field of Indian communities. Her financial stability clearly lay in the hands of many who did not understand her work or how she carried it out. She maintained her priorities and obligations: family and community.

For over two decades, Ella never let her financial hardship deter her from her goals. She was determined to continue her scholarly work. On October 4, 1960 Ella

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<sup>59</sup> Dr. Paul Radin letter to the Committee on Grants for Anthropological Research, Bollingen Foundation, 23 January 1952.

<sup>60</sup> Dr. Paul Radin report to board, 19 December 1958.

<sup>61</sup> Ella Deloria letter to the Committee on Grants for Anthropological Research, Bollingen Foundation, 16 December 1958.

approached the University of South Dakota to sponsor her so that she could finish a dictionary.<sup>62</sup> Robert L. Hall, Director of the Institute of Indian Studies at the university wrote a letter to the Bollingen Foundation, Inc. inquiring about funds to assist them with their support of her.<sup>63</sup> Within the same month, Dr. Siegfried Kracauer immediately responded to a board decision for support.<sup>64</sup> He writes, “Mr. Hall, Director of the Institute of Indian Studies at the University of South Dakota, requests a \$4,500 Bollingen contribution enabling Miss Deloria who is joining his institute at the beginning of 1961. . . . In a sense this project would be a continuation of the research she did on the concepts and practices of Dakota religion under the auspices of a 1953 Bollingen grant. There is no doubt that Miss Deloria, an Indian by birth, is fully qualified to do the planned study in the area of linguistics anthropology. If Dr. Miles [Suzanna Whitelaw Miles] finds the project and its author worthy of support, as she well may, I would consider acceptance.”<sup>65</sup> This time, Ella received the Bollingen grant through the University of South Dakota and created a position for herself.

Despite all of her accomplishments, credibility with non-Indian academics was still important to her. She appeared to feel the need to validate her work by associating herself with Columbia University rather than simply through her expertise within her own culture. For instance, in a newspaper article, “Indian Translation,” she writes, “Perhaps I can help clear up the question as to whether or not ‘Crazy Horse’ is the best

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<sup>62</sup> Robert L. Hall letter to the Bollingen Foundation, October 4, 1960.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Dr. Siegfried Kracauer letter to Bollingen Foundation, October, 1960.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. Dr. Suzanna Whitelaw Miles worked for the foundation who specialized in South American ethno-history.

translation of Tasunke-witko. As it happened, I grew up bi-lingual. But if that is not qualification enough, I have to add that I was one of the collaborators in an intensive study of Dakota, for the Anthropology Department of Columbia University in New York. The grammatical portion of that study has already been published, in the memoirs of the Nation Academy of Sciences, Washington, D.C.”<sup>66</sup> The rest of her article provided an explanation about the Crazy Horse name for which her cultural and linguistic expertise could have sufficed without the extra credentials. Despite institutional credentials, only a Native speaker with the cultural and historic background such as herself could have provided such a detailed explanation of Crazy Horse’s name.

Ella depended heavily on others within the field of anthropology. She came from a lower socio-economic background compared to other Boasian students. She had relied on scholarships for her undergraduate education and she could not have attended graduate school without financial support. She continuously relied on Boas for various forms of support, but when he passed away, she built relationships with Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict, who eventually helped her to create her most publicized work, *Waterlily*. As in the fashion of the communal environment of traditional Dakota women in which she grew up with, Mead and Benedict worked with Ella to exchange knowledge and assist her with the development her *Dakota Way of Life* manuscript and *Waterlily*.

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<sup>66</sup> Ella Cara Deloria, U.S. Indian School, Flandreau, S.D. “Ella Deloria Concerning the Name Crazy Horse,” Material Received from Vine Deloria, Sr., Oct 19, 1979. Ella Deloria Archives. *Ella Deloria: A Biographical Sketch* ed. American Indian Studies Research Institute (AISRI), Indiana University in the Dakota Indian Foundation, [http://zia.aisri.indiana.edu/deloria\\_archive/about.php?topic=ella](http://zia.aisri.indiana.edu/deloria_archive/about.php?topic=ella) (accessed October 25, 2013).

Her constant battle to work, produce, and publish her work illustrates that she believed there was no other way she wanted to live her life.

Historian Margaret Connell Szasz discusses the people who moved between the borders of cultures, that their lives were complex, and unknown to those living within the confines of a single culture. She defined them as people who had different roles and served different purposes. Ella strove to do her best within each world. Her role was to help a dominant and modern culture understand an older one so that they can live in peace and flourish together. She dedicated her life to creating this understanding. Her work and her personal life intertwined to the extent that is impossible to comprehend in a singular cultural context. She was a remarkable Dakota woman for her time, and deserves remembrance outside of the social boundaries she worked to eliminate.



## CONCLUSION

On one occasion during a speech about traditional life, Ella asked the question, “How could the best features of such a successful way of life be carried over into general American society so that such values would not be lost and how could they be modified to fit modern times?”<sup>1</sup> I believe it is a question she spent her professional life attempting to answer. As an adult, she constantly worked as a middle figure between cultures. To the modern world, she was a spokesperson, not a token Indian but a cultured Dakota woman educating audiences about Native Americans, and encouraging support and understanding. She writes:

“To quote John Stuart Mill, ‘a state which dwarfs its men in order that they may be more docile instruments in its hands *even for beneficial purposes* will find that with small men not great things can really be accomplished.’ In a way, I believe that this is what has happened to the Indian people. They have always been so supervised . . . it has been hard to ‘try their wings’ without self-consciousness. And they have been so remote from general American life that they don’t always know what to try. ‘Very well,’ you say, ‘if that’s all, it can be taken care of.’ But not so fast. That isn’t all. Unfortunately, these many decades of paternalism . . . have left their mark. . . . It will take time. . . . I believe it can be accomplished. In the old days the Indians had dignity and pride. They still do. An appeal to their pride, their manhood, their tribehood, would bring a response. But they must be approached with dignity and sincerity. . . . I am optimistic enough to think they would respond, especially if they are told to go ahead *in their own way*- that too is important.”<sup>2</sup>

This quote clearly illustrates her multifaceted perceptions of the Indian-White social dynamics. It also demonstrates her idealism on creating social change and elevating

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<sup>1</sup> St. Mary’s Episcopal School, The Bugle Quarterly Bulletin, Vol. XV no. 3, June 1976, [http://zia.aisri.indiana.edu/deloria\\_archive/about.php?topic=ella](http://zia.aisri.indiana.edu/deloria_archive/about.php?topic=ella) (accessed October 25, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Ella Deloria, *Speaking of Indians*, (New York: Friendship Press, 1944. Reprinted, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 151-153.

Indian people to a better circumstance while maintaining their cultural identities. Her middle figure role within Indian communities consisted of similar advice. She stressed the need to meet challenges head on without fear and to take advantage of opportunities. She then used her space in between both worlds to create literature valuable to both cultures. If we examine how she used her middle figure role within these different spaces, we can see that she was a very busy and dedicated woman.

Many scholars have concentrated on Ella's perpetual financial struggle rather than on her considerable achievements. In this thesis, I have concentrated on creating a space for her within her own construct of an educated Dakota woman. I wanted to keep her actions at the forefront of her incessantly shifting environment. My goal was to examine how she lived her life based on decisions she made instead of falling to the background of history on Indian women. I believe that if we peel off the labels of gender, poverty, homelessness, and such, we can discover and appreciate how she grew into a distinguished author and an accomplished Dakota woman. We can also appreciate how her ethnological and literary efforts built bridges of understanding between her Dakota world and a modern America. Furthermore, if we examine her life and accomplishments within the scope of federal Indian policy, we will see that she felt the impacts of the policies also. For instance, when she graduated from Columbia University in 1914, she was not even considered a U.S. citizen as Congress had not passed the Indian Citizenship Act until 1924. Her personal and professional life experiences spanned out across several different federal Indian policies that shattered the cultural lives of her people. At the height of her momentum in the early 1940s, she

began to lose her modern audience as the national focus shifted to WWII, and new trends began to emerge in the field of anthropology. In 1944, Ruth Benedict, who helped Ella to edit *Waterlily*, wrote to her with suggestions about some revisions and told her there was no hurry to get the book done because publishers were not accepting books that did not pertain to the war until after it was over.<sup>3</sup> Yet, Ella had determined her task in front of her, and set out to put them in motion.

From 1924-1967, with only nine fingers, a typewriter she carried in the trunk of her car, and her sister Susie next to her, Ella produced sixteen different publications. These were great accomplishments, as Native American authors struggled to create a genre for themselves in literature. Gardner discusses this in an article suggesting that, "As late as 1964, many publishers thought, first, that Indian could not write books, and furthermore, that any book written by an Indian would be 'biased' in favor of Indians."<sup>4</sup> Despite her challenges, Ella continued working towards her goals, achieving major accomplishments while remaining focused on what was important to her.

Ella kept everything she cared about at the center of her life, and for her there was no separation between her personal and professional spheres. In a professional sense she wrote about what was important to her, her people. In a personal sense, she traveled with her family (her sister Susie) while she did her field work, communicated with informants within the intricacies of cultural protocols, and made family along the way. Agnes Allen Ross, a Dakota from Flandreau, South Dakota explains how she

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<sup>3</sup> Ruth Benedict letter to Ella Deloria, 7 November, 1944.

<sup>4</sup> Gardner, *Though it Broke my Heart*, 668.

became related to Ella, “Ella’s brother Reverend Vine Deloria met my mother at a church convocation. The first remark he made to Ella and Susie was, ‘She looks like our sister who had passed away. The sisters agreed, and according to Dakota tradition they adopted my mother as their sister.’”<sup>5</sup> Ella based her entire ethnography on the value of a kinship system, and in her *Dakota Way of Life* she writes that the most fundamental principal of survival and that was to adhere to family. With her focus on family, it is a terribly unfair to celebrate her writing accomplishments but then discuss her own familial responsibilities and duties as a hindrance to her professional growth. Her sister Susie was not just a responsibility for her, but her closest companion. Who else witnessed Ella’s every struggle, and experienced so many journeys alongside her? Ella could communicate with Susie in Dakota and Lakota, and in a sense, Susie was similar to a touchstone for her while she moved about in the newer world.

Research illustrates that Ella was a woman of limited means, and she said herself that she could fit everything she owned in to the trunk of her car. Yet, as a Dakota woman, she never valued material wealth as much bringing honor to her family or living an ethical life by demonstration. Author Jeannette Mirsky writes about the cultural value of material wealth in Native cultures: “The only prestige attached to property was in giving it away;” therefore “it is impossible to live the true Dakota life and accumulate possessions.”<sup>6</sup> Ella was never one to boast about herself, and her colleague, Margaret Mead once wrote a letter explaining her modesty, “Ella Deloria is an extraordinarily

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<sup>5</sup> Agnes Allen Ross, Flandreau, South Dakota, 1981.

<sup>6</sup> Margaret Mead et al., *Cooperation and Competition among Primitive Peoples*. Revised ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961. Reprinted, Beacon Press, 1967), 386-387.

gifted person, one of those people who span the world of the arts and sciences as well as the gap between the life of the Indian and the life of modern America. She has sensitivity, imagination, warmth, combined with the meticulous standards of ethnographic and linguistic work. . . . Everything she writes thus gives a double insight, from inner experience and outer analysis. . . . From previous experience I know that she is inclined to understate her plans and qualifications.”<sup>7</sup> Although Mead stated Ella had a habit of understating herself, she highlighted her skills as a middle figure. Mead also touched upon Ella’s compassion for her people. She writes, “Miss Deloria... has kept in close and intimate touch with her own people, speaking their language and following their thought at the same time that she shared in the sophistication of the modern graduate school and modern techniques of linguistic and cultural analysis.”<sup>8</sup> Mead described Ella like a woman during harvest time, as one who harvested her academic skills to take back to her people and use in their service. As a Dakota woman, she maintained the cultural values of modesty, perseverance, integrity, honesty, bravery, and being a good relative. Her financial status was secondary to her primary goals of family and her writing.

In my introduction, I acknowledge the call of Native American scholars for a new kind of history of Native Americans, of women in particular. I mention author Paula Gunn Allen’s theory of creating a history for Indigenous women based on their own constructs, which is inclusive of everything in their environment that has shaped them

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<sup>7</sup> Margaret Mead letter to Nancy Russ, 27 August 1952.

<sup>8</sup> Margaret Mead, introductory Forward to *Dakota Way of Life* by Ella Deloria (Rapid City; Mariah Press, 2007), v.

into the women they are. Other noteworthy scholarship that has contributed to the development of this thesis is William J. Bauer Jr.'s *We Were all Like Migrant Workers Here: Work, Community, and Memory on California's Round Valley Reservation, 1850-1941*. His work is extremely important because he actively takes a different approach to examining and writing Native American history when presented with two different dilemmas. The first is the reality that Native American history is extremely painful for Native Americans themselves. From that perspective, we have to undergo the pain and mourning of learning what happened to our ancestors. There is absolutely no way to disconnect from it. The second dilemma is how to write our histories within an academic arena. In his work, William acknowledges that Native American California history is a painful disgrace to the development of this country. Yet, as a Native American scholar, he made the choice to use his work to acknowledge the traditional and cultural teachings of the relationships with the environment and each other to take a more "positive" approach to writing his narrative. He asserts that his top priority is that his historical narrative acknowledges his peoples' strengths and presents his people in a way they can understand. His perspective might conflict with the traditions of academic scholarship, but his primary concern is that his people can be proud of something in their histories and cultures.

Ella's work, economic strife and familial responsibilities are what has defined her history. When I began writing, I decided to examine those variables through a different lens. I understood that she suffered chronic economic strife, but that was a national

phenomenon as the country headed towards the Depression era. I understood that she had familial responsibilities, but family was the most important element to her, so it was not a hindering factor to her. I also understood that her ethnographic work has existed in various fields of academia for the last few decades. I wanted to understand how her familial and cultural history defined her as a Dakota woman, how she used her education beyond her ethnographic work, and what her contributions were to both cultures. I learned that she was an assertive woman who lived her life based on her own decisions more than being reactionary to the elements around her. As a result, I wanted to examine sources that illustrated the ways in which she chose to work with challenges. For example, when she had her misunderstanding with Benedict she wrote to Boas and said Benedict made her feel so degraded that she was upset and wanted to pout about it, but chose to handle the matter in a better situation. In the long term, she established a productive relationship with Benedict. I wanted to use my thesis to highlight the ways in which she handled the many challenges she endured. By doing so, I could better understand the kind of woman that she was. The research and development of my thesis has been a process of reexamining older scholarship and resources and then recreating a more current history of Ella that fills in the missing gaps. My hope is that this thesis lends a broader scope to her story that illustrates her strengths and presents a more holistic picture of her as opposed to a reactionary figure who happened to be a great writer.

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