

WHO'S IN A NAME:
IDENTITY MISAPPREHENSION ON THE
NORTHERN PLAINS

A cursory observer of Cree Indians in the small Canadian community we will describe would conclude that they are an "acculturated" but "deviant" company of persons.¹ They give the appearance of being acculturated in that there is little in evidence of the distinctive culture they once had. White members of the community see nothing in visible Indian behavior which evokes the image of Charles Russell's noble warrior savages. To the contrary, whites regard Indians as social outcasts and renegades, and base this judgment on that Indian behavior they choose to see. Indians drink to excess, men and women alike; they get in fights and get arrested by the police; they panhandle; and they break all sorts of rules governing the conduct of respectable people in respectable public places. All of this whites abhor, and use to explain Indian authorship of Indians' social and economic marginality. If they wished to,

¹ Research upon which this paper is based was done over a period of eight years, in the summers of 1963 and 1971, and during the years 1966-1967. Financial assistance came from the Doris Duke Foundation, through the Department of Anthropology at the University of Illinois, and from a National Institutes of Mental Health pre-doctoral research grant and fellowship. A Brown University Summer Faculty Stipend also supplied some funds.

Short Grass is a pseudonym. With the exceptions of several historical characters, the names of identifiable individuals are also pseudonyms.

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so the argument goes, Indians could easily better themselves—they merely and simply want in initiative.

But there is much which does not meet the white eye. Indians actively retain their language, religion, and a large inventory of the sorts of “traditions” which might decorate the pages of a traditional ethnographic monograph. As we shall show, all of these are ingredients of an Indian identity which has not impressed itself upon Indians’ white neighbors. We wish to inquire into how and why this is so. We begin by looking at a seemingly inconsequential fragment of contemporary Indian culture and the ways it is implicated in day-to-day, face-to-face relations between Indians and whites. This part has to do with personal names, the ways people get names, and what these various names mean to them. Finally, we attempt to indicate how all of this is bound up in a status quo marked by the generalized deprivation of Indians.

THE SHORT GRASS COMMUNITY

In western Canada, twenty miles from the town of Short Grass, a little more than a hundred Plains Cree Indians inhabit a reserve of about three thousand acres, one of numerous such small tracts of land scattered throughout a vast territory. Indians are not able to support themselves independently on this inadequate parcel. Indeed, a white ranching family would find this hardly sufficient for survival—the very smallest ranches around are larger than this. So Indians derive their livelihood from a number of other sources. Government relief payments is the principal one, supplemented by occasional agricultural labor on ranches and farms, cutting and curing poplar fence posts for whites, and selling hay crops harvested by whites on Indian land on a share basis.² A few Indians periodically go off to work a month or so on commercial truck farms several hundred miles to the East. But they never stay for very long—

² A typical arrangement might be for a rancher to agree to cut and bale hay from, say, 40 acres of land. He keeps for himself one-third to one-half of this. Since most Indians do not have cattle to feed, the Indian(s) with whom he has made the deal will generally sell the remainder for cash. There is some

only enough to pay for an old truck, or to finance a trip to a powwow or Sun Dance.

The reserve community is isolated from the white world, a physical condition which has increased in recent years, owing to a trend of larger ranches and farms incorporating smaller ones: many fewer whites live close to the reserve now than a generation ago. No whites live on the reserve. A small school, operated for about a decade by a run of white teachers, was closed down ten years ago (1967). Visits to the reserve by whites are infrequent and limited, an occasional Indian Affairs Branch (IAB) agent, a public health official, or Royal Canadian Mounted Police on official business. Now and then there is the presence overnight of some white man with whom Indians have been drinking in town. Added to this physical isolation is the bands' perception of a lack of concern for them by white society, particularly the IAB. Since the late 19th century, the government has made repeated efforts to remove the band to a larger reserve to the East, so that it might be more easily supervised. In the face of the bands' obstinate refusal to be uprooted, the IAB has over the last several decades taken sporadic measures to improve reserve conditions, apparently resigned to the reality that Short Grass Indians are determined to remain where they are.

Each of the fifteen households occupies a building constructed by the IAB.³ Electricity was introduced in 1968 (although most homes soon after had their power cut off for nonpayment), and gravel roads were laid out connecting the two main "camps" on the reserve. Even so, roads to town are often impassable in winter or after a rainfall. Houses do not have the modern conveniences of bathrooms/toilets, running water, heating by

ambiguity and tension over this within the reserve community: land is supposed to be held communally, each person using what he needs on a first-come, first-served basis. An Indian who appropriates a piece of land for himself does so at the potential resentment of others who would use it. Open disputes, however, occur rarely.

³ Most of the houses have been built by local whites under contract with the IAB. The majority were built in 1957; more recent ones are prefabricated. Indians say the houses, even the newer ones, are shoddily and cheaply built: foundations sink, plywood walls are poorly insulated, and windows will not open or close.

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other than wood-burning kitchen stoves, and are sparsely furnished by white standards. There are no telephones on the reserve. Several times, the government has tried to encourage Indians to breed cattle, but these enterprises came to little. In the summer of 1971 only two households possessed small herds. It is too early to tell whether these ventures will succeed (our irregular correspondence with Short Grass residents indicates that the two herds survive up to now, but without significant growth).

Adult band members are little involved in either white roles or white institutions. A few men work irregularly for some specific rancher, and one man has permanent, full-time employment with the provincial highway department (he fills a quota requiring that the department hire an Indian). No Indian has a job of any type in town. Saving one special case, no Indian couple is legally married. There has been no intermarriage between Indians and whites with the exception of one man who had a white common-law wife for a brief time, during which he did not live on the reserve. No band member is Christian, even nominally. No Indian has served in the military. Elderly people do not speak English, younger adults are uncomfortable using the language, and children learn Cree as their first tongue. In sum, Indians do not participate in the large number of social institutions and establishments that animate life in the region. True, Indians do use the Post Office, and sometimes go to the hospital when ill or injured, just as they buy food at the local co-operative general store, and go to the movies. But they are not members of the Co-Op, or of the Town Council, the Savings and Loan Association, any roping and saddle club or womens' auxiliary, any church or other white organization.

Without pressing timetables or routines to meet on the reserve, Indian go to town frequently, seeking goods and diversions to be found there. Short Grass, like so many western towns, is the service center for a fairly large, thinly populated area, of approximately 5,000 square miles. A third of this region's population—2,500—live in town, many of them retired ranchers and farmers. The remainder are the personnel of Short Grass' business/service establishments and their families. In town there

are a half-dozen churches, two small hotels (each with its associated beer parlor) two supermarkets and some smaller food stores, and sundry other shops and offices. The town has a RCMP detachment of about six officers, often not up to force. Unlike very small hamlets scattered throughout the west, Short Grass is relatively self-contained. Numerous professionals live there, offering their skills to rural people: veterinarians, lawyers, doctors, teachers, bankers and accountants, government representatives trained in farm and ranch management, and other sorts of advisors. As we have suggested, Indians have little or no contact with these.

Ranching and farming are the economic mainstays of the entire region. While the average ranch is five times the size of the average farm, there are about ten times the number of farms as ranches. Farms are either of the straight grain type or mixed (grain plus some livestock). Though their numbers are small in proportion to the rest of the population, cattlemen contribute greatest to the "ethos" or tone of local culture. Short Grass emphatically has that western "cattle town" atmosphere. The prevailing mode of dress is western (among non-ranchers too), and the most conspicuous ceremonial events do not celebrate farming but ranching. These are stampedes (rodeos), horse races, roping contests and other fetes. Weekly horse and cattle auctions held in good weather are well attended, including by people who do not come to buy or sell but to watch the show and talk with friends. Everywhere, emblems of this western culture are evident: a sign at the entrance to Short Grass gives the greeting "Welcome To The Old Cow Town." One of two banks prominently displays brands of district ranches, handsomely burned into wood plaques. All three drugstores carry paraphernalia for the care of livestock, as well as privately printed books/pamphlets on the region's colorful history; every store selling clothing has cowboy ware, some of it quite expensive and dressy. The town's weekly newspaper similarly contributes to local lore by regularly publishing photographs and reminiscences of old-timers about the not-so-distant frontier days. Predictably, movie fare offered by the single small theatre consists mostly of "westerns." Short Grass folk are incurable nostalgics.

Desirable attributes of the ideal man (and woman) fit this familiar lifestyle. He should be able to succeed in face of the long odds nature stacks against him, through the application of native intelligence, knowledge, experience, and hard physical exertion. He is above all independent and self-sufficient. As one rancher said to us: "Hell, we know for sure that we could survive in this country even if the rest of the world goes down the drain altogether." Though accustomed to long hours and days of solitude, this ideal type is friendly and neighborly, ready to drop what he is doing and help others when they are in need. He must also be scrupulous and straightforward, and what is more prepared to defend his property, his rights, and his good name to the point of physical violence when these are challenged. At the same time, a morally worthy man must be capable of sentiment and gentleness, especially toward the weaker sex.

It is not here at issue that few men realize all of these fine character traits (or women complementary values). What is important is that they are pervasive and persuasive standards in the community. Hallowed in ceremonial and interpersonal ritual, these ideals figure into daily discussions about what people do and how they do it. People evaluate the merits and failures with these standards: they enter into the *sens moral* which accompanies stories circulated about real and imaginary, living and dead celebrities. As in any small community, they are the standards which frame the context of overlapping information networks. The possibility—or the certainty—of being the subject of discrediting gossip acts as a potent social control in Short Grass. Some individuals have left the community for good because they could not tolerate the shame that some damning event, made common knowledge, brought to them.

Another reason why these character standards are important is that they also constitute a set of criteria that whites use in evaluating Indians, in addition to one another. There is, expectably, a great diversity in the climate of opinion regarding Indians' character. Nevertheless, even among those who claim to like Indians personally, the same defects of character are enumerated as one hears from people who are openly antagonistic toward band members. Indians steal and are unreliable.

They are idle and will not take care of themselves or their property. The list of indictments is a long one: Indians have bad sexual morals; they do not really love their children or care about their families; they are cruel to animals; they squander money and time. In all of these ways Indians are believed to evince negligible self-possession. They constitute a category of profane persons. We will return to these matters and their implications.

REAL NAMES

The Plains Cree term for name is *wihuwin*. At Short Grass reserve, all adults and children over the age of about two have Indian names.⁴ People distinguish between two kinds: *uⁿkeče wihuwin* (or *tapwe wihuwin*) and *kunita wihuwin*. The former refers to a person's real (or "good") name, the latter to nicknames (or "nonsense" names). The two kinds of names are acquired by significantly different procedures.

As in English, real names serve to identify particular individuals, to locate them uniquely. But they do much more than this. By their meaning, names also indicate a specific guardian spirit under whose protection a person rests. To receive a name is thus to establish a personal relationship between the person and one of the indefinite number of spirit members of the Cree pantheon. Persons who are named *očo* (fly), *wakayuš* (bear), *kisikawasis* (day child) have specific guardian protectors (*pa-wakan*). This is no trivial matter: one relies on one's guardian for both good fortune and good health. An individual makes periodic gifts to his/her guardian, though there is no proscribed schedule for doing so. Usually, this involves taking a yard or so of brightly colored cloth to hang somewhere in the bush.

⁴ Most band members have only one real name, with a couple of exceptions. For example, one woman was given two names as a child: *kisikawapu* (sitting in the sunlight) and *kuwikimakanau* (the one I am Always With). The last is similar to the reciprocal term used by spouses *niwikimakan*, and she explained that the name was given to her to insure that she would find a good husband when grown. When one does receive a new name, the old one is retained, and the person is known by both.

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Sweetgrass may be burned, tobacco and prayers and songs offered to one's namesake. Prestations are intensified during a crisis, such as an illness or at the start of some difficult undertaking. Certain ritual occasions, like the Sun Dance, are also appropriate times at which to celebrate this sacred relationship. Many people of the band can tell of times when they have been visited by their guardians, especially at times of danger, who spoke to them, reassuring them and giving instructions to make some specific sacrifice.

A name is a truly sacred thing. It links one to an indispensable source of supernatural power, without which good fortune is impossible. A name signifies a dependency relationship between an Indian and the supernatural which profoundly affects the entire course of his life.

The warrant to confer names, as with other ritual and ceremonial matters, is possessed by only a few. At Short Grass there are people who are empowered to conduct Give Away Dances or to cure sicknesses. There is one man who may "put up" a Sun Dance, and he is also the one most sought after as a name-giver (there is one other man, not much liked on the reserve, who may do so).

This holy man is demonstrably respected by all band members. He is blind, in his mid-sixties, and he lives with and is cared for by various households for a month or so in turn. He acquired his powers in the course of a vision quest at about age fifteen. On the fourth day of fasting, alone and naked on the prairie, he was visited by Thunder Spirit, taken by him to the spirit world. Received by a gathering of deities, he was told that henceforth he had the power to cure, to tend to certain ceremonies, including the Sun Dance, and to bestow names. He was himself given a new name: *piyesikanib tapwe*, which he translates as "Thunder Good Talker," signalling his ability to communicate easily with the spirit world. This was given to him on top of his original name *kasukapisut* (noise of swift lightning). Upon his return to the earth's surface, he apprenticed himself to several old men who knew the minute procedural details of the Sun Dance, the songs, prayers and ritual acts demanded. All of this took place on a reserve quite distant from Short Grass. About ten years ago, members of the band who

are his remote kinsmen asked that he come there to live, the reserve being at the time without anybody qualified to put up the Sun Dance. There had to be such a specialist: all band members know that it is gravely dangerous to conduct solemn rites without the necessary qualifications. So, during the few years that there was no priest present, there was no annual Sun Dance on the reserve; nor could children get their names at home. *Piyesikanin hapwe* came, and has remained.

Normally, children are given names at any time from about age two to four. Until then they are under the general protection of the Great Spirit, *kebče manitu*, and are called by a kin term, an endearment, or more rarely by their English name.

Having made the decision to seek a name for a child, the father approaches the person with the power to confer it. The holy one (who may be a woman) prays for a revelation from his/her guardian, and may learn the child's name in a dream, or during a special trip to the spirit domain. When this has happened the parents are informed, who then prepare to sponsor a small "baptism" for the little one. The father presents the name-giver with offerings for the spirits (usually cloth and tobacco) and makes a personal gift to the namer (perhaps tobacco and a small amount of money). He, in turn, prays to the spirits, including *kebče manitu*, to the spirit who revealed the child's new name, and to his own spirit helper, all to secure enduring blessing for the child, to insure its health and safety. The namer takes the child in his arms, pronounces the new name, and blows four times on the nape of the child's neck, making the sound *bu!* This is the place where the soul resides, that part of the person which enters the body at birth, and departs at death (or during dreams or trance). In blowing on the child's neck, the holy person infuses its soul with the spirit of the guardian indicated by his name. At this time, the namer may briefly instruct the parents about their boy or girl's guardian, telling them, for example, the various ways in which the spirit may make itself manifest.

A special relationship exists between a person and his name-giver throughout their lives. They use the reciprocal term *nikweme* which *piyesikanib tapwe* translates as "person the same as me," or "person of the same body as mine." In later

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years it is often the name-giver who is called upon when sickness strikes his *nikweme*.

The ceremony proper concludes with the passing of the child from the arms of one to the others of all those present, who in turn say its name, making brief prayers for its welfare. The cloth offerings are placed in the bush at a later time. Should the parents be so inclined and have the financial resources, they will give a feast; it is up to them whether the occasion is made a social one.

A child may be given a name to assist it through an illness. One little boy was given the name *kapesakewit pisim* (sunrise) to return it to health. Another man had been named *petabun* (daylight) as a child, to help correct for his small size. People can acquire additional names and spirit helpers all through life especially during a vision experience, though most at Short Grass have only a single *kunita wihuwin*.

Band members have nicknames in addition to their sacred ones. Some of these are nonsense words, a string of syllables with no lexical meaning at all. One fellow, for example, is called *doman*, just as in English one could be called *bobo*. In the case of such names, people do not always recall how they came to be, though in the instance of one woman she was known by a nonsense name she invented for herself as a little girl.

Unlike real names, nicknames may change for a person over his lifetime, especially if the name recalls some special event, often a comical one. Or they may refer to a physical characteristic of the person such as *nahawis* ("shorty") or *kačakos* ("slim"). When these are used, however, it is generally as terms of affection not of ridicule. Other people are known by words like *napisis* (boy) or *kesyineu* (old man). Still another man is called *gamistet*, a corruption of his real name made by his five-year-old daughter.

Nicknames, besides supplying people a way to express endearment also figure into the etiquette of name usage. In earlier days, it was considered a breach of good manners to ask anyone his name directly, or to use it in his/her presence. The reason given is that, while one's spirit helper is a source of good, it can also cause misfortune, if only by refusing to heed prayers

when insulted. Casual use of the persons (and the guardian's) name constitutes just such an affront. Most likely as well, to utter a name inappropriately was a sort of invasion of personal privacy, though we have no direct evidence for this.

So, instead of using someone's real name it was formerly correct to employ a nickname or a kinship term. This usage is largely still in force among the Short Grass band, especially for well-mannered adults. In a community this small most people can trace some sort of kinship relationship to most others and use the right term. And, failing this, a term may be used fictively. Two men may call each other *nistau* (my brother-in-law). An old one may call a younger man *nosisim* (grandson). A man may address a woman *ničimus* (my female cross-cousin). Since cross-cousins are marriageable *ničimus* is sometimes used jokingly to mean "sweetheart." (The reciprocal term is *nitim*, "my male cross-cousin.") In any case, it is always possible to refer to or address any other member of the band without using his or her real name, employing a nickname, a kin term, or the English name. Older people seem to follow this rule more consistently, as we have heard several times younger ones use another's real name in his presence.

The rule against asking a person his/her real name is still in effect at Short Grass. To illustrate, before we knew this, when we asked someone for his or her name, or their child's name, we were told politely to ask someone else, with no denial that the person had a name. It is not considered impolite to inquire of some third person the name of somebody else not present. Often we were directed to *piyesikani^b tapwe*, who had given so many band members names. Further, we asked the proper procedure for two strangers (Cree) to follow to introduce themselves to one another. The consensus was that one begins by asking first where the stranger is from, then searching to see if some kinship relationship exists between them. One might also ask for or receive a nickname, but would wait until some third person was available to consult about the stranger's real name. Real names are not secrets, but circumspection is required.

Another interdiction exists: one may not say the name of a dead person, excepting reknowned warriors or chiefs. The rule

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is strictly adhered to. In collecting genealogies, for example, we did not get the names of dead kinsmen—only their English names or nicknames. Similarly, when people reminisced about dead relatives or friends, real names were never used.

Finally, a striking convention in the use of names by band members is their absolute segregation. English is not spoken on the reserve, unless some non-Cree speaker is present, in deference. Not once did we hear an English name used in a flow of conversational Cree. And in the same way, when Indians talked English, never did we hear any Indian real name or nickname used. We believe that this reflects a general compartmentalization of Indians' identity. One's identity vis-à-vis other band members is kept separate from one's identity vis-à-vis whites. We shall have more to say about this later.

WHITE NAMES

We have described something about naming practices of the band, about the attributes of different kinds of names, their ritual and supernatural significance. Now we wish to add to this another set of names, superimposed on Indian ones. These are the English names people receive, the names used in all interaction with whites. English names appear on birth and death certificates, drivers' licenses, health insurance cards, and upon all other means of identifying a band member to white officialdom, the IAB, of course, particularly. On the computer print-out list for the band, which indicates all persons who have a right to call themselves Indians and live on the reserve, English names only are used.

For the entire population of the reserve, there are only five surnames. Three of these are the names of adult heads of households, recorded at the time the reserve was established nearly sixty years ago: Badger, Willow, Antelope. The two others—Wilson and Scott—are of English origin, though nobody remembers how they happened to get assigned to Indian families. In all cases, the adoption of surnames for Indians was clearly out of necessity for bureaucratic record-keeping, so that no person who was or is not properly related to a band member

(by Canadian reckoning) would be included on the band list. Obviously, since Cree children do not inherit a parental Cree surname, the Indian name alone does not designate individuals who are "legitimate" offspring of a band member.

According to older Indian and white informants, Indians received their English names a generation ago in several ways. One was to be allotted a "school name." There are a few old Indians who, when they were children, were literally abducted by RCMP and deposited in distant Indian boarding schools. Although parents hid their children in the bush during such raids, Mounties did sometimes capture little ones. An elderly man relates that, once at school, he was asked what his name was and, intimidated, gave his Indian name (he was about ten at the time). Asked what his father's name was, he supplied that also. An interpreter gave a rough gloss of the latter in English. "Then they said," he continued, "We'll call you George, too. It took me a long time to get used to that."

Some men a half-century ago and more were given nicknames by whites which stuck as their only English names. For example, a man, now dead twenty years, was called "Peeper" after his wont to peer through the windows of white houses to indulge curiosity. Another of about the same age was called "Tea Coffee John," since these were the items he most frequently requested from whites, words which nearly exhausted his English vocabulary. Other oldtimers were known by translations of their Indian names, rather than of their father's names. People remember men named Red Bone Skunk, Buffalo Head, Crooked Legs, etc.

These English names were always received after an individual had acquired a real name. Indian and white informants concur that a child did not receive an English name until he needed one—that is, until, he began to interact with whites on some grounds. A white informant reports for the period of the 1920's and 1930's:

This is how it usually happened. Say old John would come around to fix fences in the spring and camp here with his family a few weeks. He'd have his wife and kids with him, and them that was old enough would help, and I'd begin to recognise. We'd be workin'

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and I'd say, "What's that boy's name?" Old John would scratch his head and say, "Well, let's call him Charlie." The kid didn't have a name until then, he really didn't have a use for one.

In the last fifteen years, since mothers have more routinely gone to hospital to bear their children, youngsters have received their white names shortly after birth, so that birth certificates may be filled out. Most mothers, in our experience, do not select names for children before delivery. They do not settle on something to call the boy or girl until after they have consulted with relatives visiting them at the hospital. Even then, mothers do not seem to take these names too seriously:

Grace, her husband and sister came by our place on the way home from the hospital to show us the new baby. We all admired it, and chatted about infant care in general over tea. When I asked her the child's name, Grace could not remember it, and consulted with her sister. They argued for a minute whether it was Elsie or Dorothy, and agreed after a little that it was the former.

It also happens that a six or seven year old child does not go by the same name recorded on the band list at birth. In this interval the parents, or the child itself will have decided that some other name is preferred, and begin to use it. A child entered as Robert on the list may use the name Roy, a Margaret may become a Mary. This was the situation for at least a dozen people (on the 1962 band list).

In recent years English names have become more exotic, probably because of exposure to television and films. Now there are names like Priscilla, Delvina, Geoffrey, Bernard. For older children and adults, however, the repertoire of names is more limited. Well over half the band members share a first name with at least one other person. Some names have been very popular: there are six Charlies, five Marys, four Douglasses, four Gordons. There are even two girls of about the same age—cousins—both named Margaret Scott. We should remind that no two people share the same Indian name.

Occasional confusion arises. A white person may discuss with an Indian the activities of some other Indian for some minutes, only to discover that they are talking about two dif-

ferent Charlies. This can be avoided when whites use Indians' full names: Mary Antelope vs. Mary Scott, for example. Awkwardness comes also over what to call married women: whether to call Irene, née Antelope, Irene Antelope, Irene Scott, or Mrs. Gordon Scott, in order to separate her from Irene Antelope (née Scott). Part of the problem here lies in whites' uncertainty about what constitutes Indian marriage, at what point a couple who are living together may be considered husband and wife. Note that this issue does not arise in Cree-speaking contexts, where a woman does not change her name at marriage.

More rarely, difficulty follows in other connections:

[An agent] came to the reserve with a health card for Johnny Wilson, one he'd applied for. For some reason he'd given his Indian name, *misčikumin*. The agent asked at the band meeting, "Who does this belong to? There's nobody like this on the band list." He tried to pronounce the name (which was "misspelled"), then showed the card around. At last Johnny said, "Oh, that's me." The agent said, "Why didn't use your right name, what's this? I'll take it back and get it changed for you." Johnny said nothing.

To summarize thus far: typically a band member will have a number of names, each used in different interractional situations. He has a sacred name which identifies him uniquely to every other Indian and to the spirits. This name is used in certain ritual contexts, but not in mundane social intercourse. He may also have an Indian nickname, frequently humorous, used with affection by his fellows. And he has a white name, restricted for the most part to interactional contexts which include whites, which does not inherently tag him as Indian. In Short Grass, to know that Archie Scott is an Indian, you must share the common knowledge that Scott is an "Indian" name.

CONCEALMENT AND IGNORANCE

Now, a most impressive thing is that, with some exceptions, white residents of Short Grass are ignorant of all of this, the

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business about Indian names. We can arrange whites on a scale according to the extent of their ignorance.⁵

1. The largest number of whites, including farmers/ranchers living distant from the reserve and many townspeople, such as bank clerks, beauty parlor operators, wives of businessmen, and so on, do not know any Indian by any name whatsoever. They may recognize an Indian on the street as a local, placing him or her into that category of profane persons mentioned earlier, but they have no way of labeling that Indian exclusively.

2. A smaller proportion of persons know Indians because of dealings with them of varying frequency, e.g., grocery store keepers, RCMP officers, bartenders, ranchers near the reserve. These know specific Indians by name, but English name only. And many know only family names, i.e., "That's an Antelope girl." This general category includes town school teachers who have had Indian pupils in their rooms in the last few years. Whites of this sort are unaware even of the existence of Indian names. For example, we know a rancher, born in town, who has employed Indian men for years, some of whom lived on his property. When we once mentioned that a certain man who had worked for him had an Indian name, he expressed great astonishment. There are also a few Indians who are fairly "notorious" in Short Grass, having been involved in repeated misdemeanors, whose names are well known. Age and sex are factors, too: Indian children and Indian women whose contacts with whites are minimal are less likely than adult men to be known by name.

3. The smallest group of white people comprises those who know or have a vague idea that Indians have Cree names. At rough estimate this is about 25 persons, certainly less than 50. Most of these are older people who either live on ranches close to the reserve, or once did. The majority do not know any specific Indian by name. We encountered only four whites who knew any Indian by his or her Cree name, and two of these

⁵ This classification is not the result of any precise sampling or survey, but based on our conversations with a great many Short Grass residents on the subject. Though impressionistic and qualitative, we are confident that it is a correct one.

spoke a little Cree. All four were adults who had played with Indians as children; they knew the names of their former playmates but not of Indians of succeeding generations. A rancher, for example, knew the name of Margaret Badger, *skakits* (white feather), but not the names of any of her children or grandchildren.

What this means, we think, is that no white person can identify any Indian in quite the same way that an Indian identifies himself or is identified by other Indians. We use "identify" in both the narrow sense of marking a person off as a special biographical individual, distinct from all others, and in the broader sense of apprehending that "Indian" or Cree part of the named one's identity. Literally, whites in Short Grass do not know who their Indian neighbors are.

The point is this. Ignorance of names reflects a blanket unawareness on the part of whites regarding Indian life. This is manifest in numberless ways. Just one: to whites the reserve itself has no name, and for the IAB, only a number. Canadian reserves are often known by the name of the chief of the band at the time of its settlement. At Short Grass this was a man named *nikanit* (he stands in front). In dusty records of the Canadian government, he is described as a Cree chief, distinguished by his adamant refusal to sign any treaty and his determined resistance to every effort to remove the band from the area. The reserve does not bear his name officially, but Indians all over western Canada recognise this as a place name for the band's home. We discovered no white who knew that the reserve had a name. It was simply the "Short Grass Reserve."

Parenthetically, Indians know that whites have misunderstood the names of other reserves: one which is called Poor Man whites take to mean "impoverished man." The Indian name is *kawa^bkačus*, which means "skinny" or "lean" man. Indians find this funny, but make no effort to correct white error.⁶

⁶ Similar misunderstandings occur with respect to the names of individuals. For example, we were once talking with an elderly Indian and a rancher about a chief long dead called Bearskin. We elicited the Cree version of this and a translation, which means "naked man." The rancher said, "Well, I'll be

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The issue of the reserve's name gets more revealing, and convoluted. Six or seven years ago, one of the many agents who has had temporary charge of the band attempted to have the place called Sitting Bull Reserve, to lend it a little glamour, no doubt. His rationale was that Short Grass Indians are in fact descendants of this illustrious figure, who remained behind after their leader was deported to America in 1881. Local Indians' forebears killed Custer a century ago, and they remain in hiding still, pretending to be what they are not. That Sitting Bull was Sioux (traditional enemies of the Cree) does not seem to have deterred him. Of course, none of the band would accept the new name. Nevertheless, this is an area of common misconception among whites. We are impressed that a great many do not know, or care to know, the tribal affiliation of "their Indians." And some whites do insist that these are indeed Sioux, whether they will own up to it or not.

Some go still further, believing that these are not even real Indians. One hears statements like, "Hell, they ain't anymore Indian that I am: we both had white grandfathers." Or, as one ranch wife said to us, "The last pureblood Indian here died years ago." These, of course, are allusions to the white presumption that Indian women have long been giving birth to children whose genitors are white men, and that their racial impurity matches their cultural impoverishment. Perhaps the strongest comment made was, "These guys aren't Indians at all, they're just a bunch of drunks."

That whites are unaware of the existence of Indian names and naming practices clearly is symptomatic of their ignorance of the balance of contemporary band culture. Whites do not know about the esoteric facets of Indian custom: that Indians individually own a large number of sacred and secular songs; that Indian women may not attend religious events during menstrual periods; that Indians have herbal cures (known only to them); that Indians have a way of writing their own language.

This ignorance of whites supports for them the idea that

damned! I *knew* that man forty years ago, an' I always thought it meant he wore a bear skin on his back."

Indian culture is vacant. White people, it must be emphasized, are fascinated by Indians, but not living ones. Many ranchers and farmers own relics of bygone tribesmen—arrowheads, rocks from tipi rings, other memorabilia. But they cannot see Indians in their midst as inheritors of this romantically glorious past. At the start of fieldwork, we were told that if we wished to know about real Indian things we would do better to talk with white oldtimers. These men and women remember what real Indians were like.

In effect, there is a closed circle. Convinced that Indian culture is completely gone, whites insist that there is no sense in asking Indians about it. What little ethnographic knowledge whites have is gleaned from the memoirs of frontiersmen and *Real West Magazine*. It is, we all know, a familiar pattern that superordinate groups are blind to any cultural integrity of the subordinated. But, significantly, Indians themselves contribute to white ignorance. They do not volunteer information about their culture, and are evasive about it when asked. We know a farmer, favorably disposed to Indians, who tries to engage the Indian men he hires in talk about quaint Indian customs. The response to him is either to plead ignorance, or to insist that all these things are gone now. Indians, it seems, are reluctant to reveal their “superstitions” to whites, including well-meaning ones. Once for example, an Indian who had been working for the same man above injured himself, and refused to see a doctor in spite of his boss’ pressure. The man said to us:

I just knew Joe was trying to doctor himself with some kind of Indian “medicine.” I asked him about it but he kept denying it. He just kept acting like he didn’t know what I was talking about. I couldn’t get him to let me take him to a doctor in town, even though it wouldn’t have cost him a cent. He would rather keep doing some sort of Indian hocus-pocus, but he wouldn’t admit it.

Joe, like the rest of the band, keeps quiet about his Indianness. His beliefs and “lore” are shared only with other Indians. The consequence of this is that, for whites, the reserve is a rather mysterious place, where at best its inhabitants’ behavior is characterised by indolence, debauchery, and self-constructed squalor.

Trying to understand the significance of this jointly enforced ignorance, we could say that it is an "ethnic boundary maintaining mechanism," or a marker of social distance, and leave the matter at that. To do so, we think, would be a failure to grasp some instructive underlying processes. First, if we ask what this ignorance does for whites, an answer is readily at hand. Whites know Indians as moral outcasts, persons who not only fall short of the identity-values whites prize, but who always behave deplorably. Insofar as Indians can be seen to lack cultural integrity, this view is shored up: they are simply not real Indians and have nothing to redeem themselves. Not being Indians, they can not lay claim to a different set of standards to explain and justify their behavior, but must be considered failures on white terms. The fact that Indians are poor, that they have no political power, that they are excluded from ordinary social intercourse, and that they suffer outright discrimination is their own fault. The moral worth of whites is at stake in all of this, too. It is to their indispensable moral advantage to disregard cultural differences between themselves and Indians. To whites, Indians are liable to white standards, and the obvious failure of Indians to meet them takes the responsibility for Indian subordination out of white hands.

When we turn to Indians' reasons for contributing to this state of affairs, things are less immediately clear. It is certain that Indians do not accept white judgment of their moral worth. Again, names are illustrative. Those whites with whom Indians have greatest social intercourse have Cree names, given them by Indians. In some cases these are put-on terms, pointing to some physical or other attribute: "Can't Talk Right," for a man with a slight stutter; "Got No Teeth," for another; "Strawberry Nose;" and so on. Other nicknames single out specific whites for failings on Indian terms. Many of these jab at stinginess in various ways: "Closed Pocket," or "Tight Fist." Once more, as whites are ignorant of Indian names, they do not know that Indians have such names for them. There were two exceptions (the same men mentioned on page 89, above). One of these knew that Indians had a name for him, but not what it meant. The other had asked long ago the meaning of his name and was given the false translation "Tall

Man." Really, his name means "Squaw Man," or "Skirt Chaser." Thus, the names Indians have for whites reflect a moral counter-challenge, but not an open one.

The reverse is not so. Indians know very well that whites regard them as profane, and this is unambiguously expressed in countless ways. They have been refused hotel rooms in weather 35 degrees below zero. Indian children are told that they may not take their schoolbooks home because "they would get ruined there." We once saw Indians sit placidly at a stampede while an announcer described a horse as "black as the inside of a squaw's moccasin." We know an Indian woman who does not like to go out of her home alone in town because, as she explained:

I just can't stand it... they [whites] are lookin' at me all the time, I can feel 'em staring at me when I go downtown. I just don't go out without Doman [her husband].

Indians, then, conceal from whites all of those things they consider unalterably Indian. We have asked Indians why they do not reveal their names to whites, receiving such answers as, "They couldn't pronounce it right," and more tellingly, "They wouldn't understand." When pressed, however, nearly everyone said that they would be "embarrassed," or that they feared whites would laugh at them. This does happen. An Indian whose name is *piwapiskwswissis* (iron child) has had his name bastardized by a white man to "piss-piss."

Similar reasons are given by Indians when we have discussed the hiding of other parts of Indian culture. Indians say that whites are not invited to the Sun Dance because "We are too shy." We know that whites did once occasionally come to witness the ceremony, as recently as ten years ago, for diversion, making clearly audible and derisive mockery of the antics of Indian participants. Realizing that whites equate Indianness across the board with moral decay, Indians are unwilling to display to whites those things which they themselves consider most crucial to their identity as Indians. We can suggest, as an aside, that while this might appear to be an assimilative move, the reverse effect is produced. It does not make Indians any

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more acceptable to whites— or less unacceptable—but helps to solidify whites' condemnation of them. It makes it all the more easy for whites not to perceive that there is anything Indian left about Indians.

Unsuccessful at rescuing moral worth in white eyes, Indians are still left with the task of maintaining a measure of self regard. The alternative they have chosen up until now is to retrench into the reserve community, to envelop themselves self-consciously in the very real set of values that constitutes "reservation culture." We have heard Indians remark upon naming customs that "This is *our* way, the Indian way to do it." In showing generosity to others; when weeping at the centerpost of the Sun Dance lodge; by participating in the lengthy and expensive funerals of band members; in showing correct avoidance of a (man's) mother-in-law; in all of these acts, Indians project to one another the qualities which secure esteem of other and esteem of self. Part of one's ticket, so to speak, is one's *tapwe wihuwin*.

Finally, this patterned and mutually enforced ignorance has other consequences on a community-wide level. As of the mid-1970's, Short Grass Indians have not yet begun to dispute openly the moral indictment against them, though we do not doubt this day will come. But until now, a clear result of all we have described is that potentially shattering conflicts have been shelved. Indians have not repudiated the established interpersonal relationships which eradicate dignity to the profit of whites, who remain convinced that things are as they ought to be.