

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Lakota Myth And Government: The Cosmos As The State

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3f31p0m1>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 4(3)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Melody, Michael E.

Publication Date

1980-06-01

DOI

10.17953

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

Peer reviewed

Lakota Myth And Government: The Cosmos As The State

MICHAEL E. MELODY

The cultural commonplaces concerning Native Americans evoke images of the Cigar Store Indian, a passive figure immersed in an enervating quietism. Recent events, however, have shattered this debilitating stereotype. The "Trail of Broken Treaties" destroyed the image of the passive, drunken Indian while the "Longest Walk" demonstrated an increased sophistication in the manipulation of mass media.

The "Red backlash" seems to preoccupy Indians as well as their supporters. Fueled largely by their recent successes in the courts, the report of the American Indian Policy Review Commission as well as the dispute over water rights in the western states, the drive to deny Indians the spoils of their victories has been mounting in intensity. A significant portion of the dispute has become centered on the meaning of the term tribe.

As is well known, various Indian groups are bringing suit to recover lands that they allege were illegally taken from them. Unlike the cases before the Indian Claims Commission, these groups are not seeking compensation, but title to the land itself. The Mashpee case, the first to come to trial, was decided on the grounds of tribal identity. Basically, the jury found that the group was not really a tribe as defined by the Supreme Court in *Montoya v. U.S.* (circa 1901).

Michael E. Melody is an assistant professor at Barry College, Miami, Florida. The article is grounded upon a dissertation, "The Sacred Hoop: The Way of the Chiricahua Apache and Teton Lakota," completed in 1976 for the Department of Government at the University of Notre Dame. The generous assistance of Professors Edward Goerner and (Rev.) Harold Bump is gratefully acknowledged.

Due to the advantages of Federal Recognition many Indian groups are now seeking such recognition. Proposed guidelines written by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and published in the *Federal Register* insist upon tribal identity as indicated by the existence of a government that can trace its evolution to the aboriginal period. Government, according to the proposed guidelines, is understood as a decision-making apparatus that can authoritatively act for a group. Issues regarding the nature of aboriginal tribal government have, thus, become of major import.

Aboriginal Indian government, however, differs radically from the phenomenon as experienced by the White man. To select the Declaration of Independence as a symbol of the White man's experience, government is understood to rest upon consent and is established to secure certain rights. The right to life is considered paramount since it is the necessary condition for any of the others. Theoretically, this view is grounded upon the social contract teachings propounded in the main by Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Kant. These "theoreticians" posit alienation and struggle as the core of human experience and argue that self-interest is the fundament of human behavior. Though interests can be conjoined so as to form a common interest, there is no sharable good for the term itself is ineffably subjective. In other words, there are only shared opinions concerning the good. Government, in this sense, is a mechanism of social peace which acts through legal sanctions which are designed to effect self-interested calculations. It seeks to promote rational behavior through a calculus of pleasures and pains. Ultimately, this is the view that influenced Jefferson and more recently the Federal Courts as well as the BIA.

Aboriginal Indian government, however, rests upon myth, a story of the god or gods which symbolically inserts the people into the larger cosmic order and, thus, establishes the pattern of cosmic governance. This is certainly the case of the Western Sioux or Lakotas (Friends).¹

WHITE BUFFALO CALF WOMAN AMONG THE LAKOTAS

The Western Sioux or Lakotas

The Siouan linguistic family is the second most populous group north of Mexico. The Sioux proper, allies or Friends as they called themselves, form the largest division within this linguistic group. Though they called themselves friends (Lakotas) the common epithet applied to them was Sioux, a term derived from the Chippewa word meaning an adder, i.e., an enemy.

The earliest known location of the Sioux nation was along and near the Mississippi River in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and adjacent parts of Iowa. Sometime during the eighteenth century they began a slow westward migration. Pressure from the Chippewas provides the probable cause for this movement. Some of the Friends such as the Santees and Yanktonais remained near the ancestral homelands while others such as the Lakotas crossed the Missouri River and discovered the high plains. The year that the Lakotas crossed the Missouri is not known, but it is generally accepted that this did not occur before 1750.

The Lakotas crossed the river in groups, the Oglalas and the Brulés were first. By 1795 the Oglalas were camped near the Black Hills (western South Dakota), and the Brulés, though only in small numbers, were beginning to hunt on the White River (also located in western South Dakota). The remaining groups were called the nations of the north by the Oglalas and the Brulés. At a later time they also crossed the Missouri and formed five disparate tribal groups: The Miniconjous, Two Kettles, Blackfoot (Sioux), Sans Arcs, and Hunkpapas. These groups moved westward, to the north of the Oglalas and Brulés. Thus, though the Lakotas or Western Sioux formed seven new tribes, they remained one people in their dialect and customs.

Nomadic hunters and gatherers, the Lakotas did not plant or farm to any significant extent. They lived by the fruits of the chase, especially savoring the buffalo. Though nomadic, they usually hunted and camped in the same areas.²

The Text

Several accounts described White Buffalo Calf Woman's appearance among the Lakotas.³ Differences of detail and nuance occur throughout the various recountings of the story. This reflects the fact that the Lakotas, like other Native American peoples, lived within an oral tradition. Significantly, however, the various stories of this miraculous intervention have yet to be collated. More importantly, the teachings of White Buffalo Calf Woman are politically interesting in that her visit initiates a *periagoge*, a turn from disorder and chaos to order and harmony. This radical turn is mediated by a divine graciousness that represents a manifestation of the salvific cosmos.⁴ The myth, a wondrous thing, embodies a cosmological understanding of the governance of the world and illustrates man's proper place within the system of relationships that govern the cosmos.⁵

The Visitation of White Buffalo Calf Woman

At one time the Sioux lived together in the east. They were camped in a large circle, and chiefs led every tribe as well as every band. All of the people spoke one language. It was, however, a time of troubles. In some versions the people were destitute and starving at this time. In another version the Lakotas were at war among themselves as well as with other tribes.⁶

One day two young men went hunting. While hunting they saw a beautiful woman coming toward them. In her left arm she carried a pipe.

According to some accounts the maiden visited the Sans Arcs band. Densmore's informant is much more specific in regard to the pipe that the maiden carried. In her account the maiden carried the stem of the pipe in her right hand and the bowl in her left. In one version of the story the maiden carried a bundle of sticks from a sage brush in her left hand. In the camp she took one stick from the bundle which then turned into a small, red pipe. According to O-Jan-Jan-Win she carried a fan of sage. When the maiden came to the camp she carried a pipe instead of the fan. The bowl was in her left hand, and she carried the stem in her right hand.⁷

One of the hunters was overcome with lust.

"Let us outrage her."

"No, it is not well that you should do anything of the sort, for she is of mysterious appearance."

The men now blocked the woman's way. Hearing what had been said, the mysterious woman replied:

"I heard what you were saying."

"Let us leap upon her."

"No, you must not harm her."

"You may, but I will stand aside."

Once again the woman replied.

"I do not wish to stir up any strife, since I am on a special errand from the Great Medicine (*sic* Mystery)." ⁸

The woman stepped aside and laid the pipe on a buffalo chip with its stem towards the east. Then she laughed and sat down. The lustful hunter was about to rape her when a mist surrounded the place. When the mist cleared away only the bones of the man remained. The other hunter immediately became frightened. He started to run away, but the mysterious woman called to him. She told him to go to his camp and say: "A sacred pipe is coming to you, which will furnish you abundance in the Spirit Land."

The sub-plot of the attempted rape forms almost a universal feature of this story. Mooney, however, provides a contrary example. In his account one of the hunters proposes killing the woman since she is not of their tribe. Rape, as such, does not provide the motive for the proposed action. In Price's account, marriage appears to be the man's motive. "The first brave rushed to her and laid hands on her as though to claim her."⁹

The hunter delivered the message and, accordingly, the people prepared to receive the woman. As she appeared on a nearby hillside, lightning flashed around her and the dogs were afraid to bark. Using a red blanket, the chiefs carried her into the camp and took her to the center of a large tipi which had been specially prepared. Then she spoke and instructed the people.

In each version the instructions vary for the preparation of the ceremonial tipi. In Densmore's account the woman tells the hunter to "Go home and tell the chief and headmen to put up a special lodge in the middle of the camp circle, with the door of the lodge and the entrance into the camp toward the direction where the sun rolls off the earth. Let them spread sage at the

place of honor, and back of the fireplace let a small square place (alter)¹⁰ be prepared. Back of this and the sage let a certain frame, or rack, be made. Right in front of the rack a buffalo skull should be placed. I have something of importance to present to the tribe, which will have a great deal to do with their future welfare."

In O-Jan-Jan-Win's account the ceremonial tipi and the camp circle faced westward. In the tipi, sage was to be spread in the place of honor (*chatku*). A small square (alter) was to be prepared behind the fireplace and a rack for the pipe located near the altar. A buffalo skull was to be placed in front of the rack. According to Price the opening of the camp circle and the tipi faced northward.¹¹

The mysterious visitor told the people that the pipe was to be handed down from generation to generation until the end of time. She then placed the pipe on a buffalo chip and continued: "There shall be but one nation, and by that nation this pipe must be kept sacred, it must be used in time of war, in time of famine, in time of sickness, in time of need of any sort, as an instrument for preservation. This pipe will be your chief deity." She told them that the pipe had to be kept by the best chief of the tribe and that special implements had to be used in caring for and using the pipe. She also told them that an ear was to be cut off from the first enemy killed through the power of the pipe. This ear was to be attached to the pipe stem. The first scalp taken was to be treated in the same way. "Whenever you are hungry my instructions must be followed. Ten men shall open the pipe (remove it from its protective wrappings), to plead to the Great Owner of the pipe." As long as the holder of the pipe, the best chief, conducted himself appropriately the keeping of the pipe was to be hereditary.

In many of the other accounts White Buffalo Calf Woman is also credited with establishing the ceremonies which are central in Western Sioux religion. In Curtis's account, "she explained that the Great Mystery had sent her to reveal to them his laws, and teach them how to worship, that they might become a great and powerful people." These customs include the Vision Quest, Instructions for Girls Reaching Maturity, Punishment for the Evil of Heart, Care for the Sick, and the Sun Dance. According to Black Elk only the *Inipi* (Sweat Lodge) and *Hanblecheyapi* (Crying for a Vision) antedate the arrival of White Buffalo Calf Woman. The Keeping of the Soul, the Sun Dance, the Making of Relatives, Preparing a Girl for Womanhood, and the Throw-

ing of the Ball all resulted from the visit of the maiden. In the Sword manuscript White Buffalo Calf Maiden is credited with establishing the form and procedures of government. Ella Deloria notes, however, that Sword's version "is at some variance with most of the accounts that I know." In several accounts the maiden is also associated with maize. Mallery, for example, reports a variant in which corn comes from the milk of White Buffalo Calf Woman's udder, and thus, is the flesh of the buffalo. This detail, however, is dubious since calves do not give milk. According to O-Jan-Jan-Win, the maiden tells the people: "My dear brothers and sisters; Wakantanka smiles down upon us today we have met as belong to one family. The best thing in a family is good feeling toward every member of the family. The sun is the grandfather of us all. Because you all feel good toward each other and never allow any injustice in your tribe, the Buffalo People have told me to bring you this pipe. This pipe with the red stone bowl shall be used by you and all Indians as a peacemaker." In Price's account the maiden "gave the tribe a code of morals and forms of prayer and ceremony all of which included the use of the Peace Pipe." Densmore's informant is much more specific in regard to the particular gestures used by White Buffalo Calf Woman in establishing the ritual of the pipe. She lit the pipe and pointed its stem towards the sky saying, "I offer this to *Wakañtanka* for all the good that comes from above. (Pointed to the cardinal points:) I offer this to the four winds, whence come all good things.' Then she took a puff of the pipe, passed it to the chief and said, 'Now my dear brothers and sisters, I have done the work for which I was sent here and now I will go, but I do not wish any escort. I only ask that the way be cleared before me.' " 12

As she was leaving the maiden said that she was going to stop four times on the way to a nearby hill. She instructed the chief to smoke the pipe while she departed. Then she walked, stopped, and looked back. The fourth time this happened she turned into a five-year-old white buffalo which then disappeared into the hills.

Dorsey does not report this detail. According to Black Elk the woman was successively transformed into a red, brown, white and then black buffalo. Price presents a variant account as well as "Told by Short-Feather." 13

The visit of White Buffalo Calf Woman, an eruption of the sacred into the profane, presents a drama of two acts, that of

the meeting with the hunters and the events in the camp. According to several accounts the Lakotas were experiencing a serious time of troubles; destitution, starvation, and civil war marked the lives of the people. At this particular time, one of disorder, White Buffalo Calf Woman came among them. The text, undifferentiated as it is,¹⁴ only notes her beauty and the fact that she carried a pipe. Unlike her entrance into the camp, her first appearance is not marked by the symbols often associated with dramatic confrontations with the sacred. Almost immediately the issue becomes one of lust, an overflowing *eros* directed towards an inappropriate end. As the other hunter notes when invited to indulge himself, "It is not well . . . for she is of mysterious (*wakan*) appearance." In a confrontation with unbridled passion an experiential suggestion of primal mysteriousness serves as a check. Apparently, the lustful hunter is not open to this same perception. The text at this point suggest that the experience of the sacred is mediated by the individual. Though the same phenomenon confronts both hunters, predispositions of character, virtue perhaps or its lack, determines the response. This is reminiscent of the Biblical suggestion that though all men have ears only some will hear the message. The text emphasizes the importance of the revelation of the lustful hunter's character. Relatively little is said about the other hunter except that he reacts to the *wakan* presence differently. The text merely suggests that self-seeking, an acting out of private interest or desire at the expense of another, somehow precludes the perception of the aura of sacred mysteriousness. In effect, self-interested gratification and the sacred are mutually exclusive, and such calculation blinds a man to the wondrous nature of reality.

Politically, the exchange between the hunters further differentiates, at least by implication, the meaning of the time of troubles. There being only two hunters, the text may imply an equal division of the people into both character types. In this sense the attempted rape becomes the symbolic focus for an analysis of politics among the people. Given the presence of desire the hunter seeks satisfaction. Significantly, in his brief comments the lustful hunter articulates, in a rudimentary fashion, the premises of the categorical imperative gone wrong.¹⁵ This is indicated by the phrase "There is no one around." This becomes a third principle of action. Thus, the text presents three aspects of action: existence of desire, an

object for satisfaction, and publicity. The other hunter's response: " 'You may but I will stand aside.' " This comment gives further testimony concerning the other hunter's character. Interestingly enough, the other hunter neither responds to the implicit argument nor participates in the attack. At this point the full meaning of the time of troubles becomes transparent. The people, by implication, are divided into those who stand aside and those who respond to desire and self-interest. The rape itself symbolizes the degeneration of the common life of the people. Rape is the violation and use of another, an objectification of another as a mere use object. Publicity, given the aspect of self-interested gratification, defines the limit case. In this light the existence of a civil war among the people is not surprising. Following the dialogue between the hunters White Buffalo Calf Woman identifies herself as an emissary of *Wakantańka*. In response to the hunter's lustful intent she only laughs. The hunter then "leaps upon her" and becomes by his act a pile of bones. As the other hunter runs in fright White Buffalo Calf Woman reveals the nature of her mission. " 'A sacred pipe is coming to you, which will furnish you abundance in the Spirit Land.' "

White Buffalo Calf Woman's visit to the camp, the second act of the drama, includes the panoply of the sensory apparatus of a divine visitation. At this point the purpose of her visit becomes clear — the gift of the sacred pipe to the people. Besides the actual gift of the pipe White Buffalo Calf Woman instructs the people in its care and proper use.

The pipe, per se, forms the core element of Western Sioux religion. "Nothing of importance, good or bad, takes place . . . without the pipe." ¹⁶ Without it no altar was complete and no ceremony effective. It was the "commonest daily expression of thanks or 'grace,' as well as an oath of loyalty and good faith when the warrior goes forth upon some perilous enterprise, and it enters even into his 'hambeday,' or solitary prayer, ascending as a rising vapor or incense to the Father of Spirits."¹⁷ The importance of the pipe can be partially discerned in the fact that one would never borrow a ceremonial pipe and that it served as a fundamental force for peace within the tribe.¹⁸

Before performing a ceremony a shaman would fill and light a pipe.

Friends of *Wakinyan* (Winged one, Thunderstorm). I pass the pipe to you first. Circling I pass to you who

dwell with the Father. Circling pass to beginning day. Circling pass to the beautiful one. Circling I complete the four quarters and the time. I smoke with the Great Spirit. Let us have a blue day (a cloudless or successful one).¹⁹

The opening gesture of the invocation consists of pointing the mouthpiece towards the west. "Friends of *Wakinyan*, I pass the pipe to you first." Thus, a shaman offers the pipe to the West Wind who lives in the tipi of *Wakinyan*.²⁰ The Shaman now moves the pipe towards his right hand with the stem towards the horizon. Thus, it points toward the north. "Circling I pass to you who dwells with the grandfather." In this manner the pipe is offered to the North Wind. Now, the pipe is moved in the same way until it points towards the east. "Circling pass to beginning day." After the offering to the East Wind the pipe is moved until it points toward the south. "Circling pass to the beautiful one."

This invocation refers to Wohpe who lives with the South Wind. The South Wind prefers to be addressed through his companion.²¹ Following this, the pipe is moved in a similar manner until the stem points once again towards the west. "Circling I complete the four quarters and the time." In this way, through the circling of the pipe, it is offered to all the gods.²² The shaman now points the mouthpiece toward the sky. "I pass the pipe to the Father with the sky." This is an offering to the Wind. When the four Winds left their father, Wind went to live with the sky. The Wind should be supplicated when good weather is desired. While smoking the pipe the shaman says: "I smoke with the Great Spirit. Let us have a blue day."

The pipe, the gift of White Buffalo Calf Woman, represents the "tangible, visible link that . . . joins man to *Wakan Tanka* and every puff of smoke that ascends in prayer unfailingly reached his presence."²³ In fact, the pipe itself represents "in some deeply indefinable sense, a mystic token of man's union with nature."²⁴ It is a link between the gods and men, an *omphalos*.²⁵ In this sense the pipe, the stem specifically, 'forms a bridge from earth through man through our own bodies, to the sky, to *Wakan Tanka*.'²⁶ The pipe, thus, represents man's participation in the *wakan* reality of nature. As a gift of Wohpe "the pipe smoked in communion has the potency of the feminine god (Wohpe or White Buffalo Calf Woman) who mediates between godkind and mankind, and propitiates the godkind."²⁷

In another sense the pipe ritual is a rite of sacrifice. The red bowl of the pipe, formed from a rock known as Catlinite, represents the blood of the people; the stone is part of their flesh.²⁸ The tobacco, in turn, represents all the things of the earth which are symbolically encompassed within the bowl of the pipe. All space is represented by the offerings to the directions. Thus, all of reality, the cosmos, is centered at this one point. In this sense the smoker is at the center of reality. His particularity, his separateness, is resolved into the totality, the whole, the shining cosmos. While remaining one, he is all.²⁹

As an *omphalos*, the locus of the interpenetration of the sacred and the profane, the pipe is surrounded or enveloped in a zone of absolute power. As a consequence, proper care must be taken when utilizing a ceremonial pipe, especially the White Buffalo Calf Pipe. Awesome in itself, the pipe must be approached humbly and reverently.³⁰

Many of the accounts make it clear that White Buffalo Calf Woman also established the other rituals of the Way. Thus, her visit represents the insertion of the people into the larger cosmic order, the establishment of the proper relationship of a part to the whole. Politically, the text suggests that the Lakotas, after a period of disorder, successfully became part of the cosmic governance. This is also suggested by the accounts which emphasize her role in the establishment of the "laws"/mores among the Lakotas.

COMMUNION AMONG FRIENDS

White Buffalo Calf Woman can be further identified as Wohpe. The Lakotas' cosmogony presents Wohpe as the reconciler of the gods to each other and of the gods to men. She is the cosmic harmonizer, a fundamental force for peace and reconciliation. Interestingly enough, she also is the consort of Ksa, Wisdom. Though Wohpe is linked to Wisdom in the cosmogony, Ksa remains a distinct cosmic personality. In this light the text suggests that reconciliation and harmony function as a variable of beauty and not knowledge *per se*, though knowledge is associated with process. In the text itself the woman is merely identified as beautiful and of mysterious appearance. Upon the perception of this by one hunter, White Buffalo Calf Woman reveals her mission which leads to the

insertion of the people into the larger cosmic order. According to the Western Sioux cosmogony created (except for the primal "ether," Inyan) reality is marked by spirit, and the various acts of the creation coincide with a plan of the chief god. Though the various lesser divinities struggle to achieve their own ends — such as Earth's desire for adornment — things still work out according to a plan. In fact, the theme of the story centers on Earth's change of heart from selfishness to generosity. Overall, the primary experience of the cosmos was one of a sacred wondrousness (summed up in the phrase *Wakantańka*) in which selfishness and selfseeking tend to be replaced by generosity and graciousness. Politically, the task of government was to locate the Friends within this larger order. In fact, the Lakotas replicated this order and, thus, formed a microcosm. This understanding illuminates the fundamental meaning of the Sun Dance and accounts for the cultural emphasis upon circularity. As Seven-Rabbits put it "a circle meant a camp: and the sun: and the world." ³¹

Knowledge understood as the quest for private satisfaction is represented by the lustful hunter. Knowledge, in this very narrow sense, leads only to the pile of bones. Interestingly enough, the perception of beauty and sacred mysteriousness defeats egocentric gratification, at least for those who are open to the *wakan* experience. The text also suggests that such actions, even when publicity is not a factor, remain self-defeating. In the face of primal mysteriousness such actions lead only to the pile of bones. The text could also be read to suggest that the life of gratification is itself that of the bones. This is evidently the case for the people enmeshed in a time of troubles. The perception of cosmic mysteriousness, the *wakan* experience, and not reason *per se* defeats such calculation. Thus, openness toward the *wakan* experience serves as the prerequisite of right order.

The pipe, the token of White Buffalo Calf Woman's visit, serves as the tangible link that locates the Lakotas in reference to an omphalos. Symbolically, all of reality is centered in the pipe when it is smoked in communion. In the very act of smoking an individual or a group place themselves at the center of reality in a zone of absolute power. Due to this the sacred pipe is awesome. In all of this the pipe represents and establishes the proper relationship between the part, the people, and the whole, the cosmos. It is the token of beauty, reconciliation, and harmony.

Politically, the visit of White Buffalo Calf Woman locates the people within the cosmic government through the establishment of a sacred center, a place of reference. Through her visit and the establishment of the ceremonies, the Way for the people is delimited. The task of Lakota government — the process of steering — is to maintain the people along the Way. Black Elk refers to this very thing in his symbol of the good red road along which the people should travel. Or, as he notes, "nothing can live well except in a manner that is suited to the way the sacred Power of the World lives and moves."³² Though White Buffalo Calf Woman delimits the Way, she does not reveal a system of rituals or moral principles that guarantee success in the tasks of life. Even if the people celebrated the Sun Dance and all the other rituals, the buffalo might not return. To put this another way, the Western Sioux cosmogony recognizes the importance of the malevolent forces within the cosmos. Though such forces are frustrated on a fundamental level, many of the acts of creation flow from initiatives begun by these forces. Black Elk presents this same teaching as a tension between the red road of life and the black one of death.³³ By implication, the task of government consists of making choices among alternatives in which the end is given but the means remain problematic. Thus, choices are made in the tension between the red and black roads, one marked by beauty and the other by death.

On another level of analysis the visit of White Buffalo Calf Woman serves as the symbolic vehicle by which the Lakotas are re-formed as a people, a special group. Since they lived in a proper relationship with the whole, all other men are differentiated as lesser beings, existentially disordered or inauthentic. As a people who shared in the graciousness of the cosmic wondrousness they called themselves Friends, i.e., Lakotas, and lived in communion with each other as well as the gods. *Odacotah* is the Lakota's term for the friendship and good feelings which existed among the people. To select another example, in the Lakota language natural objects cannot take the possessive pronoun. Similarly, the term for food is not used with the possessive pronoun except for *tawotw*, his food supply. Yet, this term literally means "his means of extending hospitality."³⁴ Similarly, an individual undertook the Sun Dance not only to receive a personal communication from the Sun, a special revelation, but also to ensure the welfare of the people. Thus, to be a friend in the highest degree meant to lie on one's

back and accept the scars so that the people might live. The public friendship, as the Lakotas understood it, demanded great hearted sacrifice, even to the ripping of one's flesh in the Sun Dance.³⁵ Understanding a constitution to be a way of life as well as a particular distribution of offices, the visit of White Buffalo Calf Woman is the constituent act which forms the people. This understanding of the constituent act radically differs from the modern one in which a people form themselves by means of an agreement, i.e., a contract. In fact, in the American understanding the gods are specifically excluded by means of the first amendment (as interpreted by the courts).

ON COSMOLOGICAL GOVERNMENT

As previously suggested, the visit of White Buffalo Calf Woman is the vehicle by which the Friends are inserted into the larger cosmic order and, accordingly, form a microcosm. The Sun Dance and the pipe ritual renew and re-present this original insertion. They also represent the Friends' participation in the ongoing life of the cosmos. In the Sun Dance, the great hearted sacrifice of one's own flesh, an individual overcame the demands of self-interest and publicly accepted the way of graciousness and generosity. In this magnanimous act an individual replicated the divisive struggle that lay at the very heart of the cosmos. Thus, an individual, like Earth (Maka) herself, could shine as the paradigm of virtue. In the Lakotas' understanding, the task of steering consisted of maintaining the Friends along the way, a road marked by self-sacrifice and generosity.

The Friends, as the cosmogony demonstrates, perceived nature as a whole, a divine totality, that was prior to any of its parts. The human task, by implication, centered on living in harmony with this natural order. The conventional view, given its emphasis on a struggle for power and the necessity for rule adjudication, seems to draw upon the liberal-bourgeois tradition of political thought as represented by Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Kant. This school posits alienation not communion as the primary human experience, and it builds an understanding of politics upon the fundament of self-interest, however conjoined. Theoretically, this approach to political

reality, however embedded in the western consciousness, does not adequately account for the experience of the Friends.

In a time of troubles White Buffalo Calf Woman came among the Friends. She established the ceremonies which delimit the Way. The task of government is to steer the people along the Way while the state is the macroscosmic order itself. Thus, government among Friends is intimately bound up with religion; they are of one fabric. Given these considerations, a tribe can be considered a spiritual association that transcends narrow issues of territory. In this sense, to be a member of a tribe is to live a sacred Way, to be of a certain type of heart. The Indians recognized this in their ancient adoption ceremonies; a White man can even become a Friend.

Cosmological government is, thus, akin to what political scientists term theocratic government. They are similar in that the task of steering, i.e., governing, is delimited by the god or gods. Theocratic governments, however, differ in that nature itself does not embody the divine totality; the god is transcendent. In addition, nature is not experienced and understood as a microcosm. In fact, the human task is to transcend nature.

In the time of troubles White Buffalo Calf Woman came among the Lakotas. Through her visit and the establishment of a sacred center the Friends became a part of the larger cosmic governance. Her visit is the vehicle by which the Friends constituted themselves as a special people distinct from all others. As in other cosmological societies, including African ones,³⁶ agreement itself is not a sufficient principle for government; reference must be made to the larger cosmic forces that permeate reality. In fact, such societies vary as a function of the perceived nature of these forces.

The Lakotas did recognize that a struggle for power formed a part of political life, but they also knew that this struggle was centrifugal, destructive of political life. They understood the central part of politics to be the contrary, i.e., the activity which harmonizes the participants with a pre-existing cosmic order. Government, thus, refers to those activities (of which defense and dispute adjudication are not even the most important parts) which establish a microcosmic replication on the human level of the macroscosmic order. The central struggle of politics, then, is not one for power but for this microcosmic replication of the cosmic order (as in the Sun Dance). If one speaks then of the state *vis-a-vis* the public order of the Friends, the state is the microcosmic order itself.

NOTES

1. For a more elaborate discussion of these issues see Michael Melody, "On Cosmological Government" (Paper presented at the 1978 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, New York City, September 1-4, 1978), and "Assimilation Policy Revisited" (Paper, 1979 Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, April, 1979).

2. Among many others see Frederick Hodge, ed., "Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico," *Bulletin 30*, Bureau of American Ethnology, 2 vols. (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1907-1910); George Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk, A History the Oglala Sioux* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1937); and *Spotted Tail's Folk A History of the Brulé Sioux* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961).

3. Several versions of the visit of White Buffalo Calf Woman have been reported. Agreement, however, exists only in regard to the major details, minor variations abound. In this recounting of the story I have relied primarily upon George Dorsey's "Legend of the Teton Sioux Medicine Pipe," *Journal of American Folklore*, 19(75) (October-December 1906): 326-29. By means of notes within the text I will call attention to the major variations from Dorsey's account.

For other recountings of this story see Ella Deloria, "Dakota Texts from the Sword Manuscript (1876-1909; 1938)," Franz Boas Collection MS, American Philosophical Society Library (Philadelphia); John (Fire) Lame Deer and Richard Erdoes, *Lame Deer Seeker of Visions* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), p. 130; Aaron Beede, "Western Sioux Cosmology and Letting Go of the Ghost," Ayer Collection MS, Newberry Library (Chicago); Edward Curtis, *The North American Indian*, ed. Frederick Hodge, 20 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1907-1930), III: 56-59; James Mooney, "The Ghost Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890," *Fourteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology*, 2 Parts (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1896), II: 1062-63; Hartley Alexander, *The World's Rim, Great Mysteries of the North American Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1953), p. 23; Frances Densmore, "Teton Sioux Music," *Bulletin 61*, Bureau of American Ethnology (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1918), pp. 63-66; Joseph Brown, ed. *The Sacred Pipe* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1953), pp. 3-9; O-Jan-Jan-Win (Hayette Westbrook), "Interesting Sioux Legend of the White Buffalo Calf Pipe," *The American Indian* (Tulsa), 4 (6), (March 1930): 8; Samuel Price, *Black Hills, The Land of Legend* (Los Angeles: De Vorss and Company, 1935), pp. 39-41; and "Told by Short-Father," June 6th, 1898, J.R. Walker Papers, American Museum of Natural History (New York). Fragmentary accounts include Norman Knox and Jack Kills in Sigh, "Calf Pipe," American Indian Research Project, University of South Dakota, MS 118; and Gordon MacGregor, *Warriors Without Weapons: A Study of the Society and Personality Development of the Pine Ridge Sioux* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946), pp. 87-88. MacGregor's account of the story is grounded upon the earlier versions.

Frances Holley's *Once Their Home, or Our Legacy from the Dahkotahs*, 3rd ed., (Chicago: Donohue and Henneberry, 1890) presents an account heavily influenced by Christianity. For example, the maiden floats down from the sky on a cloud born by "invisible hands." On her "queenly head" there was a crown

of twelve stars and she wore a white dress covered by a blue blanket. If this is not sufficient to make one wonder: her feet "resting upon a half moon, and beneath which, she was trampling a huge, live snake. In one of her exquisite hands she held a string of beads, and in the other a large pipe" (*Ibid.*, pp. 207-208). In Roman Catholic iconography this is a conventional depiction of the Virgin Mary.

4. For the only extensive recounting and analysis of a Lakota cosmogony see Michael Melody's "Maka's Story: A Study of a Lakota Cosmogony," *Journal of American Folklore* 90 (356), (April-June 1977): 150-67.

5. See Henri Frankfort, et al., *Before Philosophy* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1946), especially pp. 11-36, and Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, trans. Willard Trask (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963), especially pp. 1-20. The cosmos is understood as tensionally closed; all is immanent, there is no transcendence. See Eric Voegelin, *Order and History*, 4 vols. presently (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1956-), I: ix-115.

6. See Beede, "Western Sioux Cosmology and Letting go of the Ghost," p. 37; Curtis, *North American Indians*, III: 56-57; and Mooney, "The Ghost Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890," p. 1062.

7. See O-Jan-Jan-Win, "Interesting Sioux Legend of the White Buffalo Calf Pipe," p. 8; Densmore, "Teton Sioux Music," p. 64; and Price, *Black Hills*, pp. 39-40.

8. A disagreement exists in the literature concerning the proper form of *Wakantanka*. In my own usage I have followed the strictures of Densmore. See "Teton Sioux Music," p. 85, note 2. For an analysis of the nature of *Wakantanka* see J.R. Walker, "The Sun Dance and Other Ceremonies of the Oglala Division of the Teton Dakota," *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History* 16, Pt. 2 (1917), hereinafter cited as Walker, "Sun Dance." See also Melody's "Maka's Story." *Wakantanka* is the general name which refers to the primary experience of the cosmos itself, one of a sacred mysteriousness or wondrousness.

9. Price, *Black Hills*, p. 39. See also Mooney, "The Ghost Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890," p. 1062.

10. For a description and brief analysis of the importance of such altars see Alice Fletcher, "Indian Ceremonies," *Sixteenth Annual Report of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology* 3-4 (1884): 284, note 6.

11. Densmore, "Teton Sioux Music," p. 64. See also O-Jan-Jan-Win, "Interesting Sioux Legend of the White Buffalo Calf Pipe," p. 8; and Price, *Black Hills*, p. 40.

12. O-Jan-Jan-Win, "Interesting Sioux Legend of the White Buffalo Calf Pipe," p. 8; Densmore, "Teton Sioux Music," p. 66, italics hers; Deloria, "Dakota Texts from the Sword Manuscript," p. 10; Price, *Black Hills*, p. 40; and Curtis, *North American Indians*, III: 59. See also Brown, ed., *The Sacred Pipe*, pp. 3-9; Mooney, "The Ghost Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890," p. 1063; and Alexander, *The World's Rim*, p. 23.

13. See Lame Deer and Erdoes, *Lame Deer Seeker of Visions*, p. 130; Mooney, "The Ghost Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890," p. 1062; Densmore, "Teton Sioux Music," p. 66; O-Jan-Jan-Win, "Interesting Sioux Legend of the White Buffalo Calf Pipe," p. 8; Brown, ed., *The Sacred Pipe*, p. 9; Price, *Black Hills*, p. 41; and "Told by Short Feather," p. 10.

14. For a discussion of this concept see Voegelin, *Order and History*, I: 5-6.

15. See Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Lewis Beck (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1959), especially pp. 18-20 (pp. 402-404 in the Akademie edition).

16. Lame Deer and Erdoes, *Lame Deer Seeker of Visions*, p. 256.

17. Charles Eastman, *The Soul of the Indian, An Interpretation* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911; reprinted, Spearfish, SD: Fenwyn Press Books, 1970), pp. 82-83.

18. See Lame Deer and Erdoes, *Lame Deer Seeker of Visions*, p. 250; Chief Standing Bear, *Land of the Spotted Eagle* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1933), pp. 201-202; and David Miller, *Ghost Dance* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1959), pp. 264-65.

19. Walker, "Sun Dance," pp. 156-57, italics his. See also Doane Robinson *A History of the Dakota or Sioux Indians* (reprinted ed., Minneapolis: Ross and Haines, Inc., 1974), p. 72.

20. For an explanation of the nature of the various gods and their order or precedence see Walker's "Sun Dance" and Melody's "Maka's Story."

21. "The Four Winds are the *akicita* or messengers of the gods and in all ceremonies they have precedence over all other gods and for this reason should be the first addressed" (Walker, "Sun Dance," p. 157, italics his).

22. "To our way of thinking the Indians' symbol is the circle, the hoop. Nature wants things to be round. The bodies of human beings and animals have no corners. With us the circle stands for the togetherness of people who sit with one another around the campfire, relatives and friends united in peace while the pipe passes from hand to hand. The camp in which every tipi has its place was also a ring. The tipi was a ring in which people sat in a circle and all the families in the village were in turn circles within a larger circle, part of the larger hoop which was the seven campfires of the Sioux, representing one nation. The nation was only a part of the universe, in itself circular and made of the earth, which is round, of the sun, which is round, of the stars, which are round. The moon, the horizon, the rainbow — circles within circles, with no beginning and no end" (Lame Deer and Erdoes, *Lame Deer Seeker of Visions*, p. 112). See also John Neihardt, ed., *Black Elk Speaks* (New York: Pocket Books, 1972), pp. 164-65.

23. Standing Bear, *Land of the Spotted Eagle*, p. 201.

24. Alexander, *The World's Rim*, p. 23.

25. See Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, trans Willard Trask (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), pp. 13 and 16-21; and Voegelin, *Order and History*, I: 27-29.

26. Lame Deer and Erdoes, *Lame Deer Seeker of Visions*, p. 250.

27. Walker, "Sun Dance," p. 157.

28. Among the Sioux there is a story of a great flood which destroyed all the people except a beautiful woman. The blood of the victims congealed into the red stone (Catlinite) from which the bowls of the pipes were fashioned. See Lame Deer and Erdoes, *Lame Deer Seeker of Visions*, p. 247; and George Catlin, *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of North American Indians*, 2 Vols. (reprint ed., New York: Dover Publications, 1973), II: 166.

29. See Brown, ed., *The Sacred Pipe*, p. 21, note 9; and Lame Deer and Erdoes, *Lame Deer Seeker of Visions*, p. 250.

30. See for example Ed McGaa, "Indian Religion, Visions," *American Indian*

Research Project, University of South Dakota, MS 197. See also Lame Deer and Erdoes, *Lame Deer Seeker of Visions*, p. 251.

31. "By Seven-Rabbits," J.R. Walker Papers, Colorado State Historical Society (Denver), Folder 61. See also Melody's "Maka's Story" and his "The Lakota Sun Dance: A Composite View and Analysis," *South Dakota History* 6 (4), (Fall 1976): 431-55.

32. See Neihardt, ed., *Black Elk Speaks*, especially p. 176.

33. See *ibid.* See also Melody's "Maka's Story."

34. See Melody's "The Sacred Hoop: The Way of the Chiricahua Apache and the Teton Lakota," pp. 352-53 and 377-79; Franz Boas and Ella Deloria, "Dakota Grammar," *Memoirs of the National Academy of Science* 23 (1941), and Franz Boas, "Miscellaneous Dakota Notes," American Philosophical Society MS, Franz Boas Collection.

35. See Melody's "The Lakota Sun Dance."

36. See for example Colin Turnbull, *The Forest People: A Study of the Pygmies of the Congo* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962).