

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Inkpaduta: Dakota Leader. By Paul N. Beck

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3w01n00c>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 34(2)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Anderson, Carolyn R.

Publication Date

2010-03-01

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/>

country” in the minds of most present-day Americans, but a century and a half ago this was not the case. Native Americans dominated the scene at that time, and their diverse stories are worthy of retelling to modern generations of Indians and non-Indians.

Lance Foster, an enrolled member of the Iowa tribe of Kansas and Nebraska, has prepared this brief book to convey some of the cultural richness of the indigenous peoples who once resided in Iowa. Trained as an anthropologist, most of his focus is understandably directed at topics such as material culture, language, economic pursuits, spirituality, arts and crafts, kinship, and migration patterns. His targeted audience clearly is the group of general readers who have no in-depth knowledge of Iowa’s Native past or present. Serious researchers will find little that is not already well-known to them, and the lack of footnotes, extensive bibliography, and fresh analysis will preclude any chance of sparking new intellectual debates about the fascinating topic.

Despite these shortcomings, Foster has achieved what he set out to do. He has provided basic information about two dozen historical tribes and their travails and accomplishments during the last three centuries. His black-and-white sketches of historical and contemporary Indian scenes, inclusion of updated tribal Web sites and postal addresses, addition of a useful reading list, and descriptions of relevant sites to visit today eloquently speak to the needs of the general readers who will profit most from this book.

Michael L. Tate

University of Nebraska at Omaha

Inkpaduta: Dakota Leader. By Paul N. Beck. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008. 188 pages. \$24.95 cloth.

As author Paul Beck notes, the Wahpekute Dakota leader Inkpaduta (Scarlet Point) is an elusive and mysterious figure who played a major role in the events leading up to the Dakota War of 1862 in Minnesota and the subsequent Sioux wars on the plains. Because historians have focused on the Dakota War of 1862 and its aftermath, scholarship on the Wahpekute Dakota band on the Iowa-Minnesota-South Dakota frontier from the 1820s through the 1860s is limited. Beck’s stated goal is to counterbalance the overwhelmingly negative image of Inkpaduta as a bloodthirsty, villainous savage in the published accounts by presenting the Dakota view of him as a heroic warrior defending his people.

The Wahpekute Dakota engaged in prolonged warfare with the Sauk and Fox over hunting territory in northwestern Iowa in the 1820s and 1830s. Coupled with smallpox, this resulted in considerable population decline. Among the Dakotas the Wahpekutes were considered to be perpetual wanderers, and some early accounts from the 1800s indicate they were also seen as “lawless.” They were not subjected to missionaries, nor were they well documented in the European or American literature of exploration.

The band divided over treaties, resulting in a split between the followers of two leaders and the murder of one of them. Inkpaduta's father was the leader of the Wahpekutes who resisted the treaties. The nonresistant group, under the leadership of the son of the murdered leader, was relocated to the Minnesota River Reservation set aside in the 1851 treaties that ceded the rest of Dakota land in Minnesota Territory.

The resistant Wahpekutes, made up primarily of relatives of Inkpaduta, continued to hunt, camp, and trade within the ceded territory, including northwestern Iowa, which had become a state in 1846. The event that catapulted Inkpaduta into the role of public enemy number one on the western frontier was the so-called Spirit Lake Massacre in 1857. Apparently in retaliation for the murder of a close relative, anger over the authorities' refusal to do anything about it, and their dire circumstances, Inkpaduta and the remaining warriors in his small band attacked and killed a number of settler families living in the headwaters of the Little Sioux River, stealing as much as they could take with them. Four women were also taken captive. These events unleashed the wrath of the state and territorial authorities, as well as terror and hysteria among the settlers.

With word of mouth as the only means of communication, newspapers spread wild stories of Indian atrocities and sightings, demonizing Inkpaduta as evil incarnate. The ever-growing number of settlers on the frontier, including many of less than stellar repute, became increasingly unaccepting of the presence of the thousands of reservation Dakotas who were their neighbors. While soldiers from forts established to protect settlers searched for Inkpaduta, he and his band traveled widely, eluding their military pursuers. Finally, the reservation Dakotas were forced to send out a search party, led by Little Crow, who later spearheaded the 1862 war against white settlers and the military. Their annuities were being withheld until they brought in Inkpaduta and his warriors. A few members of Inkpaduta's band were killed, and several were taken prisoner. Although two of the captive women had died, two were rescued.

When Minnesota attained statehood in 1858, Inkpaduta was still at large. Perhaps more dangerous than the potential threat to settlers, the authorities' inability to punish Inkpaduta and his warriors, including his sons, demonstrated to the reservation Dakotas the ineffectiveness of the military. Inkpaduta moved his followers westward, living among the Yanktons, Yanktonais, and eventually the Lakotas. They took part in the warfare resulting from the military expeditions on the plains following the Dakota War of 1862. Inkpaduta was present in the encampments along the Little Bighorn River in 1876 when Custer was defeated and eventually followed Sitting Bull's people into Canada, where he died, probably in 1879.

Although nominally a biography of Inkpaduta, this book is primarily a chronicle of events in which Inkpaduta played a role, as well as quite a number of events in which he was thought to have been involved but was not. In reality, virtually nothing in Inkpaduta's life is entirely certain. The sources include only a few eyewitness accounts written at the time of the events, memoirs, newspaper accounts, and other historians' works, most of which

were written long after the events took place. Only a very small number of the non-Dakota actors in the events ever laid eyes on Inkpaduta. He is best known for his elusiveness and inscrutability, the very qualities that would have been admired by Dakotas and abhorred by Euro-Americans.

This book does not contribute substantially to the existing published literature on the Spirit Lake massacre, the Wahpekutes, or Inkpaduta. It is not a nuanced new historical interpretation that provides contextualized analyses of events or actors. It relies primarily on secondary sources, including those the author criticizes for vilifying Inkpaduta. Like its precursors, this history often strays from fact into supposition and surmise. Works by Dakota authors with elliptical references to Inkpaduta are cited, and the author also cites interviews with several Inkpaduta descendants and other Dakotas. However, the reader is left with a sense that the interviews were quite limited. It is not surprising that the Dakotas should revere Inkpaduta, Little Crow, or the thirty-eight warriors hanged at Mankato in 1862. The Lakotas, for example, similarly revere Crazy Horse, Sitting Bull, and other leaders and warriors who resisted Euro-American imperialism and colonialism.

In this book the author conveys only a superficial understanding of Dakota culture, in references to Dakota kinship and warfare practices, for example. The cultural background information provided relies upon uncritical use of older sources, not more recent ethnological ones (see Raymond J. DeMallie, "Sioux until 1850," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 13, 718–60, and "The Sioux at the Time of European Contact: An Ethnohistorical Problem," in *New Perspectives on Native North America*, 239–60). Erroneous understandings of Dakota culture are thus perpetuated. Moreover, standard orthography for the Dakota language has existed for more than one hundred and fifty years. Although the name Inkpaduta follows this orthography, nearly all of the other names do not, perpetuating misspellings used in period sources. Perhaps most egregiously, the author does not make reference to any of the considerable published literature about the mythology of the American frontier, including the imagery and symbolism of Indians and Indianness, or the extensive literature on captivity narratives.

Inkpaduta: Dakota Leader provides no new analysis of the role of Inkpaduta and the events in which he was engaged in setting the stage for the Dakota War of 1862 or the Sioux wars on the plains. Nor does it provide a nuanced analysis of Inkpaduta's role in frontier mythology or the eventual vilification of the Dakota as a people deserving of genocide and therefore subjected to the seemingly more humane treatment of imprisonment and exile. Perhaps it will, however, as Beck encourages, lead to further investigation by other scholars.

Carolyn R. Anderson
St. Olaf College