

Title

Lakota culture and preservation at the Duhamel Sioux Indian Pageant, 1934-1955.

Grade Level

College juniors, seniors, and graduate-level seminar students in History, Political Science, or American Indian Studies are best suited for this plan.

Theme

By focusing on the Duhamel Sioux Indian Pageant, students will broaden their understanding of Lakota cultural preservation in the mid-twentieth century. From this example and the contextual readings and lecture based on Black Elk's history as a Medicine Man, "Show Indian," and his relationship with Alex Duhamel, students will critically discuss the economic, social, and cultural incentives inherent to pageant performances. Students will also familiarize themselves with several Lakota customs and rituals, and gain an understanding of their complexity and religious/cultural significance. Students will also consider the positive and negative cultural consequences of pageant-style performances.

Duration

Two, three-hour seminar blocks would be ideally conducive for developing an active, dynamic discussion. The first class period should focus on the pre-lesson free write exercise, the contextual lecture, and the readings, and should be presented in a traditional classroom setting with the instructor at the front of rows of students. The second class period should be an open critical discussion, with desks aligned in a circle, intended to open dialogue amongst the students.

Goal

To use a brief lecture and several readings about a single historical event to broaden students' understandings of Lakota culture, and to bridge their understanding of Lakota life between the end of the Indian Wars period (approximately 1890) and the mid-twentieth century (generally before the events commonly associated with the American Indian Movement in the 1960s).

Objectives

- Students will learn about Black Elk's life, focusing on his efforts to expand knowledge of Lakota customs and rituals through the Duhamel Sioux Indian Pageant.
- Students will become familiar with specific Lakota rituals and ceremonies, including pipe ceremonies, healing ceremonies, mourning and burial ceremonies, the Sun Dance, etc.
- Students will develop a broader understanding of Lakota cultural preservation in the early decades of the 20th century, including the preservation of certain dances and ceremonies through their demonstration at pageants.
- Students will work to understand the social, political, and economic incentives that may have driven Black Elk and his fellow performers to participate in the Duhamel Sioux Indian Pageant.
- Students will analyze the Duhamel Sioux Indian Pageant as an extension of the "Show Indians" era and a venue for carrying forth some aspects of Lakota culture.

- Students will become aware of ethnocentrism and anti-Indian language often used in advertisements for events like the Duhamel Sioux Indian Pageant, analyzing them accordingly.
- Students will examine the Duhamel Sioux Indian Pageant for its flaws – potential cultural erosion, non-Indian exploitation and/or criticism, etc.

South Dakota Standards

The course should be designed in accordance with departmental and university requirements.

Cultural Concept

Despite the challenges of the Indian wars and assimilation periods, Lakota cultural concepts, specific rituals, and ceremonies (including the Sun Dance, Crow Dance, burial ceremonies, etc.) were not extinguished. Rather, these ceremonies were adapted to different venues, and survived the assimilation period and the Great Depression, in part, due to their reenactment at demonstrations (like the Duhamel Sioux Indian Pageant) whose chief prerogative was entertainment.

Cultural Background

Traditional Lakota life involved a number of highly complex customs, rituals, and ceremonies, each transferred generationally and executed by specific, highly trained individuals. These included a variety of dances and ceremonies, many of which were described in *Black Elk Speaks* and *The Sacred Pipe*. Through the cultural oppression of the assimilation movement, these customs and rituals were preserved, in part, through their demonstration at different events throughout the middle of the twentieth century. This preservation embodied the character of adaptation that has ensured the longevity of portions of traditional Lakota culture, and their transfer into the contemporary.

Student Activities

The course should begin with an open free write assignment (20-30 minutes), in which the students write a narrative of their current knowledge of Lakota history between 1890 and 1960. During the second class period, students and the instructor should discuss the assigned readings and the lecture in an open seminar-style discussion.

Resources

Lecture materials for the instructor and copies of printed reading materials as needed.

Assessment

Students will write a brief (3-5 pages) response to the lecture, readings, and discussion. This response should include explanations of what students learned about Lakota culture specifically, how their interpretation of modern Lakota culture and history changed from the knowledge they possessed during the initial free write exercise, and some critical analysis of positive and negative aspects of cultural demonstrations like the Duhamel Sioux Indian Pageant.

References

- Excerpts from *Black Elk Speaks*, by John Neihardt.

- Pages 151-156 and 172-187 from *Black Elk: Medicine Man, Missionary, Mystic* by Michael Stallenkamp.
- Excerpts from *The Sacred Pipe*, by Joseph Epes Brown.
- Pages 1-9 and 252-279 from *Wild West Shows and the Image of American Indians, 1883-1933*, by L.G. Moses.
- “Black Elk and the Duhamel Sioux Indian Pageant,” by David O. Born. *North Dakota History*, volume 61, number 1, winter, 1994, 22-29.

Note on this lesson plan

This plan is intended to be a template for lessons on other Indian pageants and related topics. By researching a pageant other than the Duhamel version, instructors could assign readings and organize a lecture addressing similar topics for various tribes, cultures, and events.

Developer

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