Chapter 5

The Citizenship of Dance

Politics of Music among the Lakota, 1900–1924

John Troutman

Native people resisted the federal government’s allotment and assimilation policies in manifold ways (see table 1). Individuals, including boarding school graduates, tried to influence public opinion or filed suit to prevent allotment. Revitalization movements, such as the Ghost Dance, the Redbird Smith and Chitto Harjo movements, and the peyote religion, offered hope for a future in which Indians could live life on their own terms. Within communities, much of the resistance took the form of dissemblance as Native leaders indigenized American institutions of Christianity, fairs, and rodeos and camouflaged traditional rituals. John Troutman contributes to the discussion of Native resistance to assimilation by focusing on returned Lakota students, many of whom served in World War I. While older Lakotas used direct tactics, such as delegations to Washington DC, these young men employed dancing activity as a vehicle to assert Lakota values. Drawing upon symbols of American patriotism, they defied oppressive regulations against dancing and articulated their own definition of what it meant to be a citizen.
believed that American Indian survival necessitated their undergoing perhaps the greatest of personal salvations: they would have to shed their “savage” cultural traits of Indianness and transform, under the reformers’ terms and definitions, into members of a “proper,” Christian, civilized American citizenry. This belief served as the cornerstone of an assimilation philosophy that rushed Native children to off-reservation boarding schools, where they fell under intense pressure to replace their stories, languages, political and military allegiances, economic and subsistence practices, clothes, religions, dances, and songs with those deemed suitably “American.” Meanwhile, the liquidation of tribal landholdings via allotment endeavored to “break up the tribal mass” by providing individuals with the most cherished of American ideals, that of private property. To facilitate the citizenship agenda, local Office of Indian Affairs (OIA) employees attempted to control the resources, the cultural practices, and the very meaning of citizenship for Native people.

Although OIA officials went to great lengths to dictate the economic and cultural practices of American Indians, Native people disillusioned with or disgusted by the directives of the allotment and assimilation policies challenged them through a series of inventive political acts of revitalization and resistance. For reservation-based peoples, protesting on the public or national level proved nearly impossible. The Indian Affairs office controlled the resources necessary for subsistence, and local agents could and frequently did retaliate by withholding rations for such “trouble.” Even though Indians on reservations often found traditional avenues of expressing dissent in the American political system closed to them, many did effectively challenge the economic and cultural mandates of the allotment and assimilation policy, as well as the meaning of American citizenship. Rather than present speeches before the American public, testify in congressional hearings, or use mass media, they engaged in local-level struggles that revealed the adaptability of alternative methods of resistance.

Musical performance represents one, often overlooked example. Like fairs, rodeos, and syncretistic spiritual movements, music acted as a form of everyday resistance that contained, in the words of political scientist James C. Scott, “hidden transcripts” that were often disguised and located “behind the scenes.” For the Lakota, as well as many other American Indian people, the dance ground became “a social space in which offstage dissent to the official transcript of power relations [could] be voiced.” Musical performance, then, served as an unexpected and highly political medium of political engagement that combined the subterfuge of “hidden” acts of resistance with blatant and effective challenges to federal Indian policy. In the first three decades of the twentieth century, many Lakotas used drumming, singing, and dancing to engage in the cultural politics of American citizen-

ship and, in so doing, to disarm the more culturally insidious, local manifestations of federal Indian policy.

It should be recognized, however, that dancing, singing, and drumming are extremely powerful, important, and complex acts. In addition to being transformed into methods of protest against the presence of oppressive outside forces in daily life, these continued to function internally as ways of articulating individual, clan, and community identities, communicating with the sacred, and, in some cases, providing entertainment. As it continues to do today, musical performance fostered intense competition at intertribal powwows, mediated tensions, and healed or reconstituted individuals and communities. No less than in the present, the practice of music within Native communities, in other words, simultaneously took on many layers of meaning that derived from multiple sacred and secular systems of knowledge. Acknowledging the profound complexity of music, this chapter focuses on one aspect of the political function of dance, specifically, on how Lakotas recognized in music a means of shaping the local implementation of federal Indian policy.

In many ways, dance lay at the heart of the matter for employees of the Office of Indian Affairs as they set about implementing federal policy prerogatives among the Lakota. These officials, as well as missionaries, generally considered all “Indian” dances “heathenish” and antithetical to their assimilation and citizenship campaign and struggled feverishly to eradicate them. Despite the collective horror they expressed at “Indian dancing,” they never really established a list of characteristics that differentiated an “Indian” from a “white” dance—primarily because they had assumed that anyone who witnessed these could tell them apart. Furthermore, they rarely distinguished between specific so-called Indian dances, such as side-step dances, grass dances, war dances, or others, or even between secular and sacred dances.

Correspondence between OIA reservation superintendents and the commissioner’s office, however, suggests some of the basic organizational principles through which they racialized performative practices. The OIA maintained a polarized view of Native performance in this period: “Indian” dances were typically organized by Native people, usually those considered the “traditionalists” or “conservatives” least prone to accepting the tenets of the federal government’s assimilationist citizenship agenda. These dances were deemed either completely heathen or plainly problematic because they incorporated purportedly “non-Christian” elements. Sometimes the participants would wear feathers and/or paints and would sing unrecognizable phrases in unrecognizable melodies—certainly not the acceptable melodies or modes of European or white American composers. The dances would
also typically feature drums and voices as the primary instruments, and dance gatherings could last for days or sometimes weeks. All of these characteristics directed the OIA to conclude, time and time again, that any tolerance for such dancing would hinder the “uplift” of Native people.

OIA officials and missionaries, though repelled by Lakota dance, were more than aware of its central role in sustaining Lakota society, and for both reasons they went to great ends to destroy the practice of Lakota music. Since the 1880s the federal government had nearly, but not completely, suppressed the public performance of dances such as the Sun Dance and the Ghost Dance. Deeming “all similar dances and so-called religious ceremonies... Indian Offenses,” the OIA established punishment by “incarceration in the agency prison for a period not exceeding thirty days” (see table 1, 1883). On the Lakota reservations, OIA personnel forbade and “vigorously repressed” dances through insidious penalties of withholding rations and making arrests. On the Standing Rock Reservation, missionary Father Barnard reported that dancing was “universal” until the Messiah craze came on and Sitting Bull and some of his followers had been killed on December 15, 1890, when point the dances were “entirely annihilated.” The massacre of Ghost Dancers and their families two weeks later at Wounded Knee crippled the Lakota’s ability to hold large dances or gatherings of any sort.

In addition to the assimilation mandate and the enforced suppression of Indian dances by the Indian Affairs office, a vision of the utter economic and agricultural fiasco of allotment surrounded the Lakota in the fields and prairies of their lands. Through the late nineteenth century, the Lakota became increasingly destitute; starvation due to the lack of rations, because local agents withheld them or were unable to secure sufficient amounts of them, was partially responsible for the uprising that culminated in the Ghost Dance and the massacre at Wounded Knee. The Lakota, by necessity, became dangerously dependent on an exceedingly undependable distribution of rations. In addition, the OIA did not provide enough tools or supplies for farming. To make things worse, what land remained in the hands of Native people, particularly the Lakota, was practically useless for farming.

By the early twentieth century, most agency officials maintained the view that the only hope economically for Indians lay in training them, especially the young men, in low-wage labor and agricultural skills. This was due, in part, to the failures of the allotment and assimilation policy to produce self-sufficient farmers or even harvestable crops, usually blamed on the Indians’ lack of abilities rather than on the real obstacles that doomed the outdated agrarian policy from the start. The OIA’s plan to deliver “civilization” through ranching and seasonal wage labor failed before it could even begin: ranching required more capital than the Lakota could raise, the amount of land allotted to individuals was vastly insufficient for the enterprise, and few jobs existed on or near the reservations.

The Lakota were thus led into a misguided agricultural economy and philosophy that could not sustain them or foster self-sufficiency. Rather, in practice, the allotment policy established and reinforced an economy of practice, the allotment policy established and reinforced an economy of practice, the allotment policy established and reinforced an economy of practice, the allotment policy established and reinforced an economy of practice.

American citizenship was the key to solving the economic crises of the reservations. It did not acknowledge that the very policies of allotment and assimilation had exacerbated if not entirely created them.

The early twentieth century found Lakota people in dire circumstances. Yet despite the concerted assimilationist efforts of agents, white farmers, missionaries, and even some tribal members, Lakota youths and young adults began dancing and singing with an urgency and a determination not witnessed in decades. The Indian Affairs office became quite concerned and grew convinced that the performance of these “heathen” Indian dances signified unabashed resistance to the official assimilation policy and citizenship agenda. Believing that Native youths represented the future and the potential success of allotment and assimilation, the OIA had sent them to distant boarding schools. Far removed from the cultural influence of home, they were to become “proper” American citizens. But when they came back to the reservation, these so-called returned students seemed to adopt a cultural agenda of their own—they began to use dance as a means of reinserting themselves into the families and communities that assimilationists had hoped they would abandon.

How did a renaissance of Lakota dance become possible in the face of such tremendous physical and philosophical opposition? Confronted with local superintendents and missionaries who fought vigorously to dismantle any cultural practice emblematic of Lakota identity, residents of many reservations developed strategies to maintain certain dances and teach these to their younger community members. This often began with the older generations’ disarming their local agents by making promises to exclude the youth from participating. Although the Sun Dance, War Dance, Scap Dance, Horse Dance, Kiss Dance, Mothers of the Brave Sons Dance, and Ghost Dance had been forcefully suppressed since 1883, older Lakotas in the Hunkpapa camp and the Lower Yakonai camp in North Dakota convinced their local agents to allow periodically a dance that had recently swept the Lakota reservations, called peji wacipi (Grass Dance), under the stipulation...
that "no returned students or pupils of the reservation schools" could participate. Indian Affairs agents typically succumbed to the repeated requests by elder Lakotas to hold dances, particularly because they tended to see the elders as "lost causes" when it came to assimilation. However, Standing Rock Agency superintendent James McLaughlin observed a steady increase in dance participation between 1902 and 1922 and reported that it had begun to include "nearly every male adult of the reservation."17

Despite OIA agents’ efforts to the contrary, American Indian youth began publicly dancing en masse on several reservations. Bishop Burleson noted among the Lakota that the revival of the dances in the early twentieth century was not a continuation of old customs or traditions, but rather a particularly new creation fostered by the Native youth. "My own observation is that the majority of the dancers are not over thirty and in some cases are under sixteen," he added. "The old people are on the outside and the young people are in there dancing."18 Noting that "dancing is on the increase" at the Sisseton Reservation, Superintendent Whillihan witnessed "one small boy some three or four years of age keeping step just as nicely as the elder Indians."19 Although the grass dances before 1901 at the Standing Rock Reservation were held mostly by the older Indians, since that time young men had taken up the dance and given Superintendent Mossman the most "trouble."20

It seems that a cultural renaissance taking place on the Lakota reservations was designed, in large part, to oppose the imposition of the assimilation policy and that it was led not by the older generation, but by youths. Teenagers and other Lakotas who had left the reservations for boarding schools returned with a desire to rejuvenate pride in Lakota performative practices. The participation of the students also demonstrated to OIA officials and missionaries the very failure of the "civilization" program. The curriculum of the boarding schools—designed to break tribal and communal ties, eradicate Native religious beliefs and languages, and foster Christianity, individualism, and economic independence through instruction in the arts of industry and thrift—was having unexpected results.

Native missionary Dallas Shaw keenly observed the consequences. "A good many of my brothers and friends have been to school. I teach them that they must not go back to the blanket but on the Rosebud Reservation all the returned Carley [sic] students have returned to blankets. They are the cause of a great deal of this trouble..." he reported. "I went to a dance at Black Pike] and saw a number of men who had on war bonets [sic] and there was one young man there dressed just like the old men and this man came near and I seen that this young man had a mustache on—it looked so funny. And I was ashamed of myself. I felt so ashamed of myself. He talked better English than I do and I was ashamed. The outward look of him was more like a white man. He spoke the English language and yet he was all painted up. And so there is a great problem."21

Shaw's comments at once reveal the complex meaning and at times the seemingly contradictory signals sent by the young dancers. These returned students brought an array of cultural influences from the schools—for example, they read and wrote English as well as they danced. The schools, often filled with Native students from reservations all across the country, inadvertently served as a "hotbed" of new and foreign Native customs, songs, dances, and traditions that the students could adapt and bring back to their reservations. Also, dance offered a way for returned students to gain the acceptance of their older peers and elders. For these reasons, the off-reservation boarding schools, ironically, fostered the on-reservation dancing renaissance of the early twentieth century. Furthermore, as the students developed increasingly sophisticated understandings of the English language and American culture, so too did Lakota dance take on political meanings in entirely new and expanded contexts.

The Lakota's victories in the local cultural politics of an oppressive federal Indian policy were due, in part, to their growing participation in and adaptive interpretation of national and global events such as World War I. Indeed, war and the intensified tropes of patriotism and nationalism that followed factored heavily into their growing cultural and performative vocabulary. Indian Affairs agents and missionaries believed that proper American citizenship rested upon the acceptance of a singular political allegiance to the United States—not to tribes, bands, or customs. However, much to the consternation of many an OIA agent, the language of cultural citizenship was not univocal and could not be contained or controlled. In other words, Lakota dancers and singers began to appropriate the language and the monikers of what the OIA would consider "proper" Americanism, such as national holidays and service in the armed forces, to foster and legitimate their own dance in terms beyond the challenge of the OIA. They used tenets of the federal government's citizenship agenda to enhance their own cultural agenda. Indeed, by the end of World War I, it was unclear on the Lakota reservations just who was on which "side" and who had succeeded and who had failed in controlling the language of American cultural citizenship.

Because Native students and their parents were quite cognizant of the OIA officials' desire to inculturate a patriotic spirit within reservation communities, they effectively used these tropes for the express purpose of establishing and maintaining Native song and dance traditions. Throughout the country, organizers of Native dances made requests to their local superintendents for permission to hold particularly important and well-attended
agents thought those weren’t dangerous occasions, so we got to dance. We also were allowed to dance at fairs in late summer or early fall because there would be displays of vegetables, rodeos, and other signs that we were becoming good modern citizens instead of sticking to all that old ceremonial and warrior stuff,” he recalled. “But we still got to dance.”

These acts of appropriation and resistance called the very ownership of concepts like patriotism and Americanness into question. Furthermore, they quite possibly indicated that the cultural agenda of the dancers was gaining more headway than that of the OIA. Of course, many agents recognized that the Fourth of July was more of an excuse than a reason to dance. In 1922 Dean Ashley, a missionary of the Cheyenne River Reservation, reported that since 1916 the Independence Day dances had grown larger and larger and were led by the Teton Lakota for reasons other than the celebration of the United States. “The 4th of July celebration in the Indian Country and the 4th of July celebration by the whites are two totally different things,” he fumed. “It is proper and eminently fitting that our Indians should be called together and impressed with the ideals of our government, but I am going to ask how many of you present here have ever heard the ideals of our government set forth at a 4th of July celebration? Have heard the principles for which our government was founded? The Indians celebrate the 4th of July with a regular Indian Pow wow [sic] with all its frills and fixings that go with it.”

Ashley’s abhorrence of the dances, even when held on a national holiday, was shared by many of his peers. One white visitor to a dance at Little Eagle on the Grand River in 1920 was horrified at the sight of a dancer “dressed in imitation of the American flag!” A celebration conducted under the rubric of nationalism became threatening in the minds of these officials only when they realized that they could not contain the symbolism of the holiday they wanted the Indians to observe. This symbolic appropriation by the Lakota demonstrated their ability to wield the politics of dance in very creative ways, succeeding even when the agents questioned the sincerity of the dancers’ patriotism.

However unpatriotic these dances may have seemed to some, the missionaries and federal officials could not deny the fact that an estimated seventeen thousand American Indians served in World War I: “Indians volunteered and...inducted at a rate nearly twice as high as the rest of the American population.” The war provided the chance for many Indians to fight for the United States, perhaps to demonstrate their value and patriotism to the country. More significantly, they fought to gain status within their own communities. Commissioner of Indian Affairs Cato Sells (1913–1921), who originally thought that Indian military service would demonstrate their
preparation for eventual US citizenship, was discouraged when he heard that recently returned Indian veterans "had counted coup, taken part in victory dances, watched as their sisters, mothers, and wives performed Scalp Dances, and had been ritually cleansed of the taint of combat by medicine people." Cherokee scholar Tom Holm argues that the military "Indianized" more than Americanized these veterans, that Native participation in World War I prompted a rejuvenation of warrior societies, and that these veterans received the honor and status granted warriors "one hundred years before.... In short, he was a warrior and, whether clad in traditional dress or in olive drab, he had reaffirmed his tribal identity." 29

The World War was a transformative event for Indian soldiers and reservation communities. As service in the armed forces contributed to the increase of Native dances on reservations across the country, the young returning soldiers became both the subjects of and the participants in dances. Around the Pine Ridge Agency, Indians held the Crow Dance "on the order of a victory dance, the words of the song being exultation over victory, real and supposed, over [their] late enemies in the World War." This was one of the most popular dances at Pine Ridge by 1923. 30 Although the Sun Dance had been strenuously suppressed on the reservations by government officials and missionaries, the Lakota held at least three Sun Dances at Kyle between 1917 and 1919, the first two in dedication of the war, the last to the Allied victory. 31 The veterans who danced the Grass Dance at the Standing Rock Agency were "among the more enthusiastic participants of the dance, which ex-soldier element gives it increased prestige." 32

During the war, entire communities on reservations gathered together and held "giveaway" dances to honor the local men who had enlisted and to raise money for the war effort. Superintendent Mossman, of the Standing Rock Agency, stated that the Indians "gave a large amount of money to the Red Cross and other kindred causes but as a rule this money was raised at Indian Dances." He continued:

Had it been given outright or raised in any other way the volume of patriotism would have been wonderfully diminished. The method of raising this money is as follows: The Indians are congregated in the dance hall, the women and children on one side, the men on the other. The master of ceremonies makes a speech in Indian in which he depicts the German army being destroyed by the valiant Indian soldiers. An old man rises and says, "I give ten cents in honor of my grandson." The grand son [sic] rises and goes to the old man and shakes his hand and probably puts the ten cent piece on the drum. The six or more men sitting around the drum then sing in a loud voice the merits of the donor,
or as they express it "honor him." When the song is done every one [sic] dances chanting and making motions of killing Germans. By the time the entire crowd has worked itself into a frenzy of excitement, horses, cattle, machinery and all kinds of property are given away.... That is the way the war funds were raised.

It did not matter to Mossman that they were raising money for the war effort. Because they did so through a medium that pooled community resources, he defined them as communistic and recommended that Commissioner Burke forbid the Indians from raising funds for "fairs, [the] Red Cross, and any other proper purpose at heathen dances." 33

The irony of the government's precluding the raising of relief funds through dances was not lost on the Lakota. They took full advantage of arguing the politics of such "patriotic" dance before the higher-ups within the Office of Indian Affairs. In 1919 a group of Standing Rock Sioux urged Commissioner of Indian Affairs Cato Sells to reprimand school superintendent James Kitch and the local missionaries for banning the giveaways. "The only time that we do give anything at dances is when there are donations to be made to the Red Cross, War Work Fund and Liberty Loans," they wrote, "and we feel that it is our duty to do so." They felt that the missionaries who complained about the giveaways would not have done so if they had given the dance proceeds to the churches and not the war effort and that they were therefore considered "German sympathizers." 34

The Standing Rock Sioux were particularly proud of their participation in World War I, on the home front and abroad. They believed, however, that Superintendent Kitch, a man who truly despised all forms of Native dance, impeded their efforts to serve in the war effort and to honor local veterans. Kitch imposed a laundry list of bans, rules, and prohibitions regarding dances. Although he claimed to have reduced Indian dance on "his" reservation to a bare minimum, his correspondence indicates that he was constantly thwarted, if not outmaneuvered, by Lakota people determined to have their dance. Thomas Frosted and John Brown of Standing Rock also protested Kitch's dance prohibition by petitioning Commissioner Sells. 35 They held Red Cross giveaway dances, they argued, because Lakotas wanted to "do [their] part and be true Americans in every way." 36

The side-step giveaway dances, which were only occasionally approved by Kitch, were absolutely necessary, according to Frosted and Brown, to "do [their] part as true Americans in helping get the Kaiser." They reminded the commissioner that 150 Standing Rock Sioux were soldiers at the time, "doing their part in patriotism." To maintain optimism and hope throughout the war, they argued, the Lakota needed these dances—which they
made a point of calling Christian instead of heathen. Finally, they stressed to the commissioner that "the persons opposing these simple dances [sic] are unconsciously opposing a good work and without intending it, are pro-German to the extent that they are hindering the full efficiency with which we must all work together to win the war." Whether or not we take the seemingly pro-American pleas of Frosted and Brown at face value, their arguments demonstrate a sophisticated understanding and use of the contested language of American cultural citizenship.

"It's funny," Seven Young Bear wrote, "when you think of the Christian principle of charity, that once we were put on reservations, both the missionaries and the [Bureau of Indian Affairs] opposed the sharing of material goods because it kept us from becoming modern, self-supporting American citizens." Indeed, Mossman and Kitch abhorred giveaways because they believed that the patriotic purpose was undermined by the way in which the funds were raised. After all, they were giving away the very commodities that the Office of Indian Affairs had been using to teach Indians how to accumulate and cherish as individuals. For the Lakota, these giveaways represented a modern adaptation of a long-standing tradition by which communities could honor their warrior soldiers, as well as their commitment to helping one another through difficult times and maintaining an expressive sense of pride in their Lakota identity. The struggle over the giveaway dances and their meaning vibrantly demonstrates the political nature and evocative power of performance.

The Lakota became increasingly creative and focused on their use of dance, which seemed a particularly adaptive tool to engage the local implementation of the assimilation policy. In 1908, for example, a group of men from the Oak Creek district of Standing Rock formed a singing association for the ostensible purpose of raising money to buy a threshing machine. Forbidden to sing by their local agent, association member Ignatius White Cloud directly petitioned the commissioner of Indian Affairs. The Standing Rock agent refused to believe the singers or acknowledge the hardship of farming without a threshing machine. Instead, he informed the commissioner that he believed they were raising money for more song meetings and feasts that subsequently interfered with their tending of crops. Consequently, the agent took away their drum. Regardless of the association's intentions, this correspondence provides still another example of the way dance and music had become enmeshed within the implementation of federal Indian policy, particularly in the wake of allotment.

White Cloud and his group did not succeed in gaining permission to sing, but other Lakotas persistently thwarted their agents' efforts to ban giveaways. Just a few years later, Standing Rock superintendent Kitch, who was clearly outmaneuvered on many occasions, expressed frustration at the defiance of Lakotas who held giveaways so that they could send delegations to Washington DC to petition for the return of the Black Hills. The giveaway dances, sharply politicized and narrowly focused, prompted Lakota participants to amass hundreds and even thousands of dollars to fund these diplomatic meetings. The political and economic adaptability of dance proved for the Standing Rock Sioux to be the most effective mechanism for raising material goods or money, not only to feed themselves when the allotment policy's agrarian economy failed them but also to challenge the federal government's theft of the Black Hills.

Likewise, the Lakota, and particularly the returned students and veterans, utilized their education in myriad ways to assault the assimilation policy further. Those granted US citizenship through the assumption of allotments in fee simple title realized that their activities on the land were not as restricted as these had been when their legal status was that of a ward. Some Lakotas, understanding the new limitations of this control, exercised their prerogative of holding public dances under the newfound status that private property and US citizenship granted. Others even hired attorneys to defend their right to hold these dances when the local superintendents forbade them. Superintendent Kitch reported in 1920 that the dance trouble was "caused mainly by fee patent or citizen Indians, who claim that they are not under the jurisdiction [wardship] of the United States and that they have the right to dance or costume themselves as they deem advisable." In 1922 Commissioner Burke lamented that his officials could not legally prevent citizen Indians from dancing on allotments, acknowledging that citizenship, one of the most lauded goals of the assimilation and allotment policy, had actually provided the Lakota with the capability to defy the Office of Indian Affairs legally.

The Lakota people's struggle continued to shape their modern political vision in many ways. After the General Citizenship Act of 1924 bestowed US citizenship on the remaining one-third of Indians who had not yet assumed it, the implications of this new legal status for dances was foremost on many Lakota people's minds. Superintendent Mossman reported that at a meeting of the Standing Rock Business Council following the act, "the new citizenship proposition was discussed vigorously." With distress, he noted, "the only thing about it which seemed to interest the larger portion of the council was its effect upon the regulations against the dance and the giving away." The daily hardships confronted by Lakotas, as well as their acts of resistance, found expression in performance. To be sure, dancing and singing contained complex, multifaceted internal meanings for Lakota communities. But these also served as political weapons that could be wielded.
against local agency superintendents and their policies of cultural destruction. Through musical performance, Lakotas subverted the meanings the federal government and its agents assigned to a host of assimilative concepts such as allotment, emprovement, education, civilization, acquisitiveness, and even citizenship.

A consideration of cultural performance as an everyday form of resistance reveals the simultaneous expression of overt political action and hidden transcripts. Sometimes obvious and sometimes well disguised, this technique fits neatly within a much more expansive array of tactics that Native people utilized to engage in and often combat the cultural and geographic dispossession embodied in the US government’s vision of (Indian) American citizenship. Of course, the political message of music represents only one of many possible layers of meaning Lakotas attributed to each performance, and they were not the only people to utilize performance in such a manner. Indeed, indigenous peoples across North America, and beyond, experienced similar challenges in this period, and dance represented one avenue of resistance among many.

Dance may have operated particularly well as a catalyst for change on the reservations of the Northern Plains. Faced with policies of assimilation on all fronts, Native peoples used dance to redistribute food and other resources to those in need, to incorporate boarding school students into their reservation communities, and to honor and recognize their soldiers and veterans—their warriors—of World War I. Ironically, Native dancing became more prevalent on reservations in the early 1900s as a direct result of the increased deployment of boarding school education and the recruitment of young men into the armed forces. The meanings of the dance transformed, as well, to reflect an expanded incorporation of shifting cultural, social, and economic influences. Dance became an arena of selective cultural brokerage that fostered the community understanding, meaning, and healing needed in the wake of the dire social and economic toll of the citizenship agenda. A medium of resistance, adaptation, and incorporation, dance was imbued with political resonance and meaning that sparked a series of culture wars on reservations throughout the country. The tools of assimilation—boarding schools, the legal status of citizenship, service in the armed forces—became, through dance, tools of Lakota revitalization and celebration.


4. Citizenship was granted to American Indians in a haphazard, case-by-case manner from the 1870s through 1924. An exception to the general rule of a case-by-case bestowal of citizenship before 1924 was the Citizenship for World War I Veterans Act of 1919, which permitted those Indian veterans to receive a because of their patriotic service overseas.

6. There are, of course, important exceptions, the most prominent being the output of Native writers such as Charles Eastman or Carlos Montezuma and the development of organizations such as the Society of American Indians. Certainly, such opportunities were fewer and farther between for reservation-based, non-urban Indians.

7. These hidden transcripts represent “a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant.” Scott goes on to suggest that such transcripts are “typically expressed openly—albeit in disguised form.” James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), xi–xiii.


9. Quoted in Harry James, *Pages from Hopi History* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1974), 186. These efforts continued through the 1920s with the dissemination of circulars in 1921 and a supplement circular in 1923 that maintained a prohibition of dance.


11. Transcript of proceedings, Investigation into the Practices of the Sioux Indians on the Dakota Reservations with Particular Reference to the Indian Dance, conducted by Commissioner Charles H. Burke, Pierre, SD, October 24, 1922, p. 18, file 10429-1922-003, general service, central classified files (CCF), record group 75, National Archives, Washington DC. Hereafter cited as Transcript of proceedings. Barnard is referring to the murders, committed by Lt. Bull Head and 2nd Sgt. Red Tomahawk, of Sitting Bull and eight others from his camp in front of his house. Six policemen were also killed, including Bull Head. Sitting Bull was heavily involved with the Ghost Dance movement that had taken form within many Sioux communities. The Wounded Knee massacre occurred shortly thereafter, on December 29, 1890. See Mooney, The

23. James H. McGregor to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 20 January 1923, file 71-4-23-063, Rosebud Agency, CCF.

24. Young Bear and Thieisz, Standing, 55.

25. Transcript of proceedings, p. 11, file 10429-1922-063, general service file, CCF.

26. Mary Patterson Lord to John Barton Payne, secretary of the interior, 5 October 1920, file 109123-17-063, Standing Rock Agency, CCF.


28. Quoted in Holm, Strong Hearts, 99, 101. Here Holm also states that “there can be little doubt that the veterans’ separation pay or their pensions helped finance these rituals.”


30. Superintendent of the Pine Ridge Indian Agency to Burke, 5 April 1923, file 10429-1922-063, general service file, CCF.


32. "Memorandum on Reports of Superintendents of Sioux Reservations in North Dakota and South Dakota Relative to Dancing among the Indians of Their respective Reservations," James McLaughlin, inspector, Office of Indian Affairs, to Burke, 27 February 1922, file 10429-1922-063, general service file, CCF; Standing Rock Indian School superintendent James Kitch stated that about 130 boys from this school alone served in the army during World War I. Britten, American Indians, 65.

33. Messman to Burke, 10 February 1922, file 10429-1922-063, general service file, CCF.

34. No Heart et al. to Cato Sells, 7 June 1919, file 109123-17-063, Standing Rock Agency, CCF.

35. James B. Kitch to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 8 September 1919, file 75420-19-063, Standing Rock Agency, CCF.

36. Thomas Frosted and John Brown to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 7 October 1918, file 109123-17-063, Standing Rock Agency, CCF.

37. Thomas Frosted and John Brown to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 7 October 1918, file 109123-17-063, Standing Rock Agency, CCF.

38. Young Bear and Thieisz, Standing, 58.

39. File 71473-08-751, Standing Rock Agency, CCF. Stealing, destroying, or otherwise mishandling a drum is practically unthinkable among Lakota singers and would almost certainly devastate the singers, which was probably what the agent intended.

40. James B. Kitch to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 9 January 1920, file 109123-17-063, Standing Rock Agency, CCF.

41. Transcript of proceedings, pp. 50, 55, file 10429-1922-063, general service file, CCF.
42. James B. Kitch to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 9 January 1920, file 109123-17-063, Standing Rock Agency, CCF.

43. Transcript of proceedings, pp. 56-57, file 10429-1922-063, general service file, CCF.

44. Mossman to Farmers, 1 July 1924, file 60373-24-062, Standing Rock Agency, CCF. Mossman to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 12 August 1924. ibid.