

Price, Catherine. *The Oglala People, 1841-1879: A Political History*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996, ISBN 0-8032-3710-3 Cloth USA \$40.00.

In her book Catherine Price illustrates how the United States government attempted to change the political workings of the Oglala people and influence their leadership. Price examines the time frame from 1841 to 1879, dates corresponding with the death of Bull Bear and the establishment of the Pine Ridge Agency in the winter of 1878. Price's study "examines Lakota concepts of leadership and decision making authority, highlighting the fluid political relationship among several forms of Oglala leadership such as the *itancan* (symbolic fathers of the bands), headmen and warriors" (p.ix). Price pieces together the story by making use of the manuscript collection of James Walker. Walker was a doctor at the Pine Ridge Agency from 1896-1914 (p.ix) and recorded the history and culture of the Lakota. He was eventually regarded as a relative. She also made use of interviews done by Judge Eli Richer in the early 1900s and by Stanley Vestal, the pseudonym of Walter Stanley Campbell, best known for his biography of Sitting Bull. To supplement these materials Price also made use of the records of the U.S. Army and those of the Office of Indian Affairs.

In most instances Price makes use of Lakota terms for the political positions that individuals held within the Oglala political structure. This choice made the reading somewhat confusing as one had continually to flip back to remind oneself what particular terms meant. This was a necessary inconvenience, however, as the translation of the one word Lakota term would have also resulted in confusion. Perhaps a table listing the Lakota term with an English translation would have been useful. The book is broken down into seven main chapters that trace in a chronological fashion the attempts by the U.S. government to destroy Oglala political customs.

Price is able to demonstrate that even after the American government began to have some influence on Oglala life, the Oglala "continued to recognize all the roles associated with the various forms of Oglala leadership" (p.172). It becomes evident that the Oglala depending on circumstances, would shift decision making authority from any one of several types of leadership positions. Such positions included but were not limited to positions such as "the *wakiconza* (camp administrators), the *akicita* (the enforcers of decisions), the *blotahunka* (war party leaders), the *zuya wicasa* (warriors), the headmen, holy men, head shirtwearers, and band *itancan*, or chiefs" (p.172).

As circumstances warranted, decision making authority shifted from nonfighting leaders to warriors in order to deal with impending threats to

Oglala well being. One of the most important points that Price illustrates is that decision making authority depended very much on the occasion. This was something that was very hard for U.S. government authorities to comprehend. These officials could not grasp the idea that they would have to deal with different Oglala decision makers depending on the circumstances. The fact that different decision making leaders were sometimes replaced by others did not represent a weakness in the form of a lack of dependable leadership but rather illustrates how adaptive Oglala political organization could be when necessary.

I would highly recommend this book to anyone interested in United States government policy as it was applied to Indians. It is a unique book because it gives the reader an understanding of how one group (the Oglala) were able to adapt their political customs to fit into negotiations with a foreign government. The reader gets a better understanding of the Oglala perspective of events as they pertained to the influx of White Americans into the western reaches of the United States.

Price has done an excellent job of explaining a complex political system during a very complex time in its history. The book is very detailed and well documented, although the notes appear at the end of the book rather than at the bottom of the pages which is somewhat cumbersome. However, this is a moot point and more an issue of style than of content. Catherine Price has presented an excellent account of Oglala political history and should be commended for her attention to detail. This is a well documented and presented work that should prove useful in future attempts to understand the relations between Euro-North Americans and First Nations people as well as relationships among First Nations peoples as they were faced with White expansion.

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