

**Paula L. Wagoner.** *"They Treated Us Just Like Indians": The Worlds of Bennett County, South Dakota.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002. xiv + 155 pp. \$50.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8032-4800-7.



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## Between Lakota and White

The population of Bennett County, South Dakota, is notable in at least a few ways. Even though approximately a quarter of the county is tribal trust land, people of Native descent finally outnumbered whites by the end of the 1990s. This shift also altered the balance of political power: Sioux candidates in the 2002 elections won the positions of county sheriff and county commissioner, as well as a seat on the county school board.[1] (These victories are significant since Martin, the county seat, currently contains more non-Indians than Indians.) In addition, Census 2000 reported that, with the exception of northeastern Oklahoma and the White Earth Indian Reservation, Bennett County now has the highest percentage of mixedblood Indians in any U.S. county.[2] Paula L. Wagoner's recent book provides a nuanced anthropological study of race relations and identities in this unique region—both before and during this demographic transition.

Wagoner observed that in Bennett County, racial identities are not particularly salient during everyday interaction. Residents casually recog-

nize each other as "fullblood," "mixedblood," or "white." However, during times of crisis, members of the community "articulate their social identities in very explicit and deliberate ways" (p. 15). Wagoner witnessed two of these incidents in the mid-1990s: protests over the Indian culture and symbolism used during the high school's homecoming pageant, and racism unleashed after a local non-Indian rancher shot and killed a respected Lakota man. These flashpoints occurred during the two and a half years she spent in the county trying "to get beneath the surface appearances of the community crises" (p. 76). Through ethnographic fieldwork, a teaching position at Oglala Lakota College, and archival research, Wagoner deciphered what she calls the "worlds" of Bennett County.

"I came to realize," Wagoner wrote, "just how complicated individual, group, and regional identities really are here, especially when viewed at different times and through different lenses" (p. 123). This awareness brought historical depth to her analysis and an exploration of how these various identities unfold within "social fields" and

"dynamic relational networks"--family, tribe, community, state, region, nation, race, social class, etc. (p. 12). Wagoner also insightfully observed that academic conclusions about these social identities are "dependent upon the fields that an observer chooses to analyze" (p. 12). Notwithstanding this encouragingly broad approach, her use of census data is perplexing. For instance, how would Wagoner reconcile her statement that "most people in the area" are known as mixedbloods (p. 1) with the report from Census 2000 that only 5.7 percent of county residents self-identified as being of both Indian and white descent?[3]

Chapter 2 explained how the controversies surrounding the 1996 high school homecoming resulted from the competing historical identities and interpretations of fullbloods and their non-Indian and mixedblood opponents. Still, Wagoner's analysis of the "Warriors" team name and homecoming ritual could have been extended further. She noted differences between Bennett County High School and Juanita College, but a more fruitful comparison might have been with reservation high schools that use the same or similar team names. Moreover, it is doubtful "[n]o one was surprised that ... the most phenotypically 'Indian' mixedbloods" were chosen as the 1996 "Warrior Princess" and "Big Chief" (p. 27) if in fact the 1994 and 1995 homecoming royalty were all non-Indian.[4]

The third chapter discussed "the social fields internal to Bennett County, especially in relation to land and kinship" and explained how the above-mentioned death was racialized (p. 51). This involved briefly sketching the histories and characteristics of the three social categories in the region, analyzing the creation and imposition of allotment and blood quantum, and explaining the stereotypes that often arise because of different values and worldviews. Wagoner's analysis in this chapter succeeds on several levels. Nevertheless, some questions go unanswered: What role did mixedbloods play during the crisis that followed

the killing? How did cultural encounters and social identities change and evolve between the allotment era and the late twentieth century?

Wagoner echoed the concern of Bennett County residents that "newspapers from the eastern part of the state and national newspapers had portrayed race relations in the county unfairly" (p. 76). Committed to incorporating non-Indian and Native perspectives, she conducted interviews and, according to her bibliography, consulted three newspapers: *Bennett County Booster I*, *Bennett County Booster II*, and *Indian Country Today*. However, this reviewer wishes Wagoner had dug a little deeper and consulted other newspapers that were once published in Martin, such as *The Bennett County News* (1900s-1944), *The Martin Messenger* (1912-1952), and especially *The Lakota Times* (1983-1989). In addition, she could have uncovered additional Indian reports on race relations had she read through the *Rosebud Sioux Herald* (1963-1971), *Lakota Eyapaha* (since 1977), and *The Oglala War Cry* (since the late 1960s).

The problematic intersections of jurisdiction, land, and blood were considered in Wagoner's next chapter. With numerous quotations, it effectively compared and contrasted the views of long-time white residents, a deputy attorney general, county law enforcement, tribal police, and a highway patrolman. Wagoner's themes of racism, cooperation between Lakota and white officers, crime rate disparities between Indians and non-Indians, and mutual economic dependency upon the federal government added an important dimension to this study.

The concluding chapter and epilogue put a positive spin on Bennett County's race relations. The concurrent powwow and rodeo discussed here undoubtedly reflected a level of goodwill between residents. Yet the community's interracial harmony was hardly lasting; these events actually took place between the crises of chapters 3 and 2. Wagoner ends, though, with a mainly upbeat account of improvements she observed on a visit to

the county in 2001. In a book that was probably too short, Wagoner nonetheless made a valuable contribution to the literature on Indian-white relations and identities. Perhaps she or someone else will write a follow-up study once the Lakota finish their takeover of Bennett County.

#### Notes

[1]. Gwen Florio, "Indians Show Political Clout; Natives Throng Polls in 'White' S.D. County," *The Denver Post*, January 8, 2003, LexisNexis Academic, via LORA, <http://libraries.ou.edu>.

[2]. U.S. Census Bureau, "TM-P012. Percent of Persons Who Are of Two Races: White, and American Indian and Alaska Native: 2000," *American FactFinder*, "Census 2000 Summary File 1 (SF 1) 100-Percent Data," <http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DatasetMainPageServlet> (accessed January 1, 2004).

[3]. Wagoner included accurate but incomplete census data, mistakenly claimed "[t]here is no category for mixedblood," and left out 85 individuals from her population total for the town of Martin—slightly more than the number who identified themselves in Census 2000 as being of both white and American Indian descent (p. 134). U.S. Census Bureau, "QT-P4. Race, Combinations of Two Races, and Not Hispanic or Latino: 2000," "QT-P5. Race Alone or in Combination: 2000," and "TM-P012. Percent of Persons Who Are of Two Races: White, and American Indian and Alaska Native: 2000," *American FactFinder*, "Census 2000 Summary File 1 (SF 1) 100-Percent Data," <http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DatasetMainPageServlet> (accessed January 1, 2004).

[4]. Rosemary White Shield, "'Indian' Homecoming Restored at BCHS: Local, National Leaders Express Outrage; Pledge Support to Stop the Program," *Indian Country Today*, May 28, 1996, Ethnic NewsWatch, via LORA, <http://libraries.ou.edu>; David Melmer, "Homecoming Ceremonies Slammed by Protesters," *Indian Country Today*,

October 19, 1994, Ethnic NewsWatch, via LORA, <http://libraries.ou.edu>.

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