

**Západočeská univerzita v Plzni**

**Fakulta filozofická**

**Bakalářská práce**

**The Blackfoot Tribe: The Past and the Present of  
American Indian Tribe**

**Petra Tůmová**

Plzeň 2020

**Západočeská univerzita v Plzni**

**Fakulta filozofická**

Katedra anglického jazyka a literatury

**Studijní program Filologie**

**Studijní obor Cizí jazyky pro komerční praxi**

**Kombinace angličtina-němčina**

**Bakalářská práce**

**The Blackfoot Tribe: The Past and the Present of American  
Indian Tribe**

**Petra Tůmová**

Vedoucí práce:

Mgr. Tomáš Hostýnek

Katedra anglického jazyka a literatury

Fakulta filozofická Západočeské univerzity v Plzni

Plzeň 2020

### **Čestné prohlášení**

Prohlašuji, že jsem práci zpracovala samostatně a použila jen uvedených pramenů a literatury.

*Plzeň, květen 2020*

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## **Poděkování**

Touto cestou bych chtěla poděkovat vedoucímu této bakalářské práce, panu Mgr. Tomáši Hostýnkovi, za jeho odborné vedení, cenné rady, trpělivost a optimismus, které psaní mé práce doprovázely.

Ráda bych zde vyjádřila poděkování za podporu i své rodině.

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# 1 Introduction

The bachelor thesis covers the topic of Blackfoot, one of the Native American tribes living in North America. Its purpose is to put forward a detailed description of their way of life, culture, traditions, language, religion, social organization and natural environment. Besides, it compares Blackfoot reservations in the past to their current homes and it describes the development of their cohabitation and relationships with white men and the attitude of the American government towards them. The thesis presents major problems of coexistence with other Indian tribes as well.

The first four chapters of the thesis contain basic facts of the Blackfoot tribe, their population, etymology and predominantly history. They describe Blackfoot relations with white men from the beginning of their stay in the United States, their influence on Native Americans' lives, and the attitude of the US government towards Blackfoot. The thesis is also focused on their natural environment of northern parts of America, natural conditions, fauna and flora inside their reservations and their forming in the course of time.

The majority of the work features the Blackfoot culture covered by the fifth chapter, subdivided into several subchapters. First, it contains information about their appearance and clothing. The next part introduces building tribe lodges, tipis, its decorating and painting, obligatory furnishings, features of a tipi of exalted Indians and frequency of moving their camps. Besides, it covers the topic of hunting techniques, weapons, and the Blackfoot diet. The following section briefly characterizes Blackfoot language and its contemporary usage.

Another part of their culture compares different versions of their legends, summarizes their contents and presents the most important thoughts together with their main points. The legends are usually connected to the various animals worshipped by Blackfoot - this part therefore presents their relations with buffalos, beavers, etc. and a role of these wild animals in their life. Ceremonials follow this section, for dances, songs and prayers have its basics right in Blackfoot stories. Significant rituals are described more in detail. Furthermore, marriage customs among Blackfoot take place in this part, followed by

position of women and men in their society. Another significant part of Blackfoot culture is their religion, Blackfoot conception of death and strong belief in afterlife connected to their legends and ceremonials as well. The thesis includes the arrival of Christianity to their society.

The main source for the thesis is Walter McClintock's work *The Old North Trail - Life, Legends and Religion of the Blackfeet Indian* which was first published in 1910. In the book, the author used his own experiences earned during his stay among the Blackfoot in the north-western Montana as a member of a U.S. forest service for four years in 1886. Along with many photographs taken by the author himself it is one of the most credible works which specializes in the Blackfoot tribe.

Another source is *Mythology of the Blackfoot Indians (Sources of American Indian Oral Literature)* written by Clark Wissler and D.C. Duvall, first printed in 1908. The major part of the book covers Blackfoot mythology and their legends. A similar source bears the name *Blackfoot Lodge Tales: The Story of Prairie People* published in 1892, written by George Bird Grinnell, ethnologist and protector of Yellowstone National Park. It covers especially the legends and stories of Blackfoot, translated and simplified by Grinnell from Blackfoot to English. The last third of the book deals with description of the Blackfoot history, their culture, social organization, traditions and lives of Blackfoot members in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The next work *Rebirth of the Blackfeet Nation 1912-1954* by Paul C. Rosier in contrast to previous sources studies relations between Indians and white men. The book is focused on political and economic details of the Blackfoot Reservation in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the meaning of democracy in America. Comprehensive work *From Wilderness to Statehood, a History of Montana 1805-1900* by James McClellan Hamilton, completed in 1940, concerns especially with general historical facts of Montana in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as the golden age of mining, agriculture and business development, educational, social and religious institutions, etc., nevertheless, there are parts concerning Native Americans, also Blackfoot.

Since most of the books featuring the topic of Blackfoot were published in the last century, remaining information containing facts about the current situation of the Blackfoot tribe and their reservations are obtained from Internet sources.

## 2 Blackfoot tribes

### 2. 1 Division

Blackfoot is a term referring to the three Native American Blackfoot Indian branches of one nation, formerly known as Siksika people, one living in the United States and three in Canada. The expression Siksika is currently used only by one of these three divisions, the Northern Blackfoot. The other two tribes are known as Bloods or the Kainai, living in Canada and Piegans who are subdivided into the Northern Piikani and the Southern Piikani<sup>1</sup>. Although they speak the same language, have similar traditions and religion, these branches are independent of each other and each of them has its own head chief, sun-dance and council (McClintock 1999, p. 1).

### 2. 2 Population

Early explorers claim, that the Blackfoot tribe had once from 30,000 to 40,000 members (McClintock 1999, p. 4). In 1809, according to the explorer Alexander Henry, the population of Blackfoot was estimated at 5,000. By 1840, the number of the tribe members reached 16,000<sup>2</sup>.

Unfortunately, in the second half of the 19th century white men brought to Blackfoot many contagious diseases such as small-pox and measles, together with alcohol, which contributed to the decreasing number of the tribe members (McClintock 1999, p. 3). In 1865 the Blackfoot nation had approximately 10,000 members (Hamilton 1970, p. 184). In the late 19th century, the last of the great herds of buffalo<sup>3</sup> annihilated, which had led to the starvation of the Indians and a great number of them perished. In 1910, the number

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<sup>1</sup> AAA Native Arts Gallery, 1999-2006, <https://www.aaanativearts.com/blackfeet/>, accessed on 12.11.2019.

<sup>2</sup> Countries and their Cultures, 2006, <https://www.everyculture.com/multi/A-Br/Blackfoot.html>, accessed on 12.11.2019.

<sup>3</sup> *Correctly American Bison, nevertheless, they are popularly known as buffalos - in the thesis buffalos refer to bisons*, Montana, 2020, <https://www.visitmt.com/things-to-do/outdoor-and-adventure/watching-wildlife/hooves/bison.html>, accessed on 05.04.2020.

of full-blooded Blackfoot ranged around 3,500 together in Canada and the USA (McClintock 1999, pp. 3-4).

Currently, the population of Blackfoot is over 17,300 members living in the United States, therefrom around 10,000 residing in the Blackfeet Nation<sup>4</sup>; in Canada there live approximately 13,000 Blackfoot inhabitants, together more than 30,000 members of the nationality. Nevertheless, there are also Blackfoot descendants, who are not tribal members<sup>5</sup>.

## 2. 3 Etymology

There are several explanations for the origin of the term Blackfoot. Most likely it comes from the black colour of their leather moccasins which were coloured by Indians moving across the dark fertile soil typical for lands far to the north in North America where they used to live before they moved to the south (McClintock 1999, p. 2). Another possibility is that the name was first used by French fur traders who were crossing the prairie where the Blackfoot people were spotted wearing the blackened bottoms of their trousers, therefore the French called them “black feet”. The third option is that the expression might have its origin in the buffalos’ black hooves, as it was one of the most important and worshiped animals for the Blackfoot<sup>6</sup>.

The plural form of Blackfoot, Blackfeet, was made up by Americans and it is now used worldwide. Nevertheless, most of the members of the tribe refuse this designation<sup>7</sup>.

The English term Bloods refers to their clothes painted with an ochre colour. Nonetheless, the original name Kainai is a derivation of word Akainai which is translated as “many chiefs” in Blackfoot language. The phrase has its origin in a story of a visitor once walking

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<sup>4</sup> Blackfeet Nation, 2019, <https://blackfeetnation.com/>, accessed on 12.11.2019.

<sup>5</sup> Native languages of the Americas, 1998-2016, [http://www.bigorin.org/blackfoot\\_kids.htm](http://www.bigorin.org/blackfoot_kids.htm), accessed on 12.11.2019.

<sup>6</sup> Indian Country Today, 2017, <https://newsmaven.io/indiancountrytoday/archive/10-things-you-should-know-about-the-blackfeet-nation-yp18fvBzJEWXBDtP7oFQ5Q>, accessed on 13.11.2019.

<sup>7</sup> AAA Native Arts Gallery, 1999-2006, <https://www.aaanativearts.com/blackfeet/>, accessed on 12.11.2019.

through the camp of Kainai looking for a meeting with their head chief, while everyone acting like one. After that, the traveller called them Akainai<sup>8</sup>.

The Piegans, in Canada formerly called Peigans, were said to get their name for scruffy clothes they made in hurry, therefore Peigans looked poorly dressed, especially women (Duvall, Wissler 1995, p. xii). The meaning then probably comes from the Blackfoot equivalent Apikuni, which is literally translated as “scabby robes”<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> AAA Native Arts Gallery, 1999-2006, <https://www.aaanativearts.com/blackfeet/>, accessed on 12.11.2019.

<sup>9</sup> AAA Native Arts Gallery, 1999-2006, <https://www.aaanativearts.com/blackfeet/>, accessed on 13.11.2019.

### **3 History**

According to the archaeological findings by the University of Alberta in Edmonton, the Blackfoot ancestors were inhabiting the campsites in the St. Mary River already 13,000 years ago, therefore they rank among the oldest prehistoric residents of the north-western plains<sup>10</sup>.

By the half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Blackfoot were members of the group of Native Americans called Plains Indians, the term referring to the several tribes of Indians inhabiting the Upper Missouri. The former domain of Blackfoot was located between the Rocky Mountains, and the Yellowstone and Upper Missouri Rivers (McClintock 1999, pp. 2-3).

#### **3. 1 Blackfoot as a warlike tribe**

The history of the Blackfoot tribe before the arrival of white men is basically unknown, nevertheless it is assumed Blackfoot and other tribes such as the Sioux, the Snakes and the Crows lived in peace until horses appeared among them. Once Blackfoot had realized the value of a horse, they began to attack their neighbouring tribes. At the time, horses were the most precious thing an Indian could possess, for if a man had horses to trade with, he could afford various valuable articles, e.g. a pretty wife, a strong bow or a luxuriantly decorated women's dress (Grinnell 1962, pp. 242-244).

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the members of the Blackfoot tribe generally left their camps in the spring, going far south to secure great herds of horses, and returned first next winter, occasionally they were gone for two years. Presumably, Blackfoot did get as far as Mexico on their journeys, or at least the New Mexico, as they managed to obtain branded horses which could only be found in the Spanish American settlements at that time, moreover, they brought axes, swords or spears. It is also said Blackfoot reached the Great Salt Lake far on the west (Grinnell 1962, pp. 254-255).

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<sup>10</sup> Indian Country Today, 2017, <https://newsmaven.io/indiancountrytoday/archive/10-things-you-should-know-about-the-blackfeet-nation-yp18fvBzJEWXBDtP7oFQ5Q>, accessed on 13.11.2019.

Blackfoot Indians had many enemies including the Sioux, the Crow or the Shoshone<sup>11</sup>, nevertheless, their arch-enemies were white men. According to Mad Wolf, one of the Blackfoot chiefs born in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the greatest mistake the Blackfoot had made was to allow white men to live in their territory. As he wrote in one of his letters, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Blackfoot had desired to move away from civilisation, nonetheless, there was nowhere to go, since the white citizens of the United States had already occupied most of the land to the west. Also, he complained about high prices set by the white men in trading stores (McClintock 1999, pp. 171-172). Blackfoot did not fight directly with white men (except for small skirmishes, e.g. Marias Massacre, chapter 3. 2. 2), nevertheless, they waged a silent war against each other, as a white men desire to dominate new territories was enormous, moreover, they usually did not take into account the indigenous people living there.

Regarding Indian tribes, one of the greatest enemies of the Blackfoot were the Cree. Although they were initially trading partners, at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century they had waged war against each other. The last of their battle, the Battle of Belly River occurred on 25<sup>th</sup> October in 1870, as the Cree tribe decided to destroy a smallpox-weakened Blackfoot and expand their territory into the Cypress Hills. The war party formed by Cree, Salteaux Indians, and Young Dogs Indians was unfortunately poorly armed, and therefore they were defeated by well-armed Piegans. Approximately three hundred members of the Cree died in the battle. One year later, in 1871 the Cree and the Blackfoot made peace<sup>12</sup>.

### **3. 2 The 19th century**

In the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, first white men visited the Blackfoot country to encourage the Indians to trade their furs at the York Factory<sup>13</sup>, nonetheless, they refused to travel so far east, therefore the company decided to come to them. The first trading post in the Blackfoot country was built by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1780, and by

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<sup>11</sup> Native American Indian Tribes, 2017, <https://www.warpaths2peacepipes.com/indian-tribes/blackfoot-tribe.htm>, accessed on 25.03.2020.

<sup>12</sup> The American Cowboy Chronicles, 2018, <http://www.americancowboychronicles.com/2018/04/canadas-battle-of-belly-river.html>, accessed on 27.03.2020.

<sup>13</sup> *A post on the Hayes River near Hudson Bay*, The Canadian Encyclopedia, 2017, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/york-factory>, accessed on 25.03.2020.

1810, more than two hundred white men were living in the Blackfoot territory on the Canadian side. Fort Piegan, the trading post on the Missouri river was built in the American Blackfoot Country in 1831 (Hungry-Wolf 2006, p. 18). Since the white men were consecutively spreading west, Native Americans were slowly losing control over their territories.

### **3. 2. 1 The 1850's**

On September 17, 1851 the Indian reservation system was introduced in the Fort Laramie treaty. It was an agreement concluded with the head chiefs of the tribes inhabiting the land between the Missouri River on the east and north, the Rocky Mountains on the west and Texas and New Mexico on the south. The American government engaged they would not request any part of the lands covered by the treaty and it guaranteed the protection of the Indian parties signed in the contract from the violence of the whites. On the other hand, Indians were obliged to punish each of their offences against white men, who were legally living in the land (Hamilton 1970, p. 177). Moreover, the Fort Laramie treaty was to ensure peace between the Sioux and their enemies, including the Crows, the Shoshoni, and the Blackfoot tribe as well, thus the tribes participated in the treaty were to receive 50,000 USD annually for following fifty years. Nevertheless, after the discussion of the US government, the period of fifty years was reduced to ten. This amendment was not presented to the Indians until 1853 (Anderson 1956, pp. 201-202).

The treaty also assigned boundaries between Blackfoot and their neighbours, the Crows, on the east and south, despite their tribes were not represented. The borders between them led along the Musselshell River, a tributary of the Missouri River, down the Shields River to the Yellowstone. At that time, the Blackfoot domain amounted to nearly 25 million acres, including the land between Canada and the Musselshell River (Hamilton 1970, pp. 177-178).

As Blackfoot were a warlike and powerful tribe, they detested any infringements of the reds and the whites on their hunting-grounds. In the Bitter Root, Flathead and Clark Fork valleys, they were frequently stealing horses, capturing women and killing men. Their crimes led to the negotiation of a peace treaty among the Indian tribes led by Isaac I.

Stevens, governor of the Washington Territory<sup>14</sup>. The goal was to get the privilege to construct railroads and telegraph lines and to build agencies headquarters, schools and other facilities in the territory held by the Indians and to put an end to the continual rivalry of Blackfoot and Flatheads for buffalos which number was rapidly decreasing (Hamilton 1970, pp. 179-180).

The Fort Benton conference took place in October 1853, which resulted in the creation of the boundaries of a common hunting-ground with the western tribes. Even though the domains north of the Musselshell River to Canada remained in the possession of Blackfoot, they lost thousands of acres of their lands (Hamilton 1970, pp. 179-180). As compensation, they were promised to get 20,000 USD annually on food and provisions for the following ten years. The treaty of Lame Bulls' was concluded in 1855, named by one of the Blackfoot chiefs called the Lame Bull. Despite Americans' promises to not encroach in the territory, seven years later, in 1862 there was found gold in the middle of the common hunting-ground and later within the Blackfoot Reservation as well, thus the white men were the first to breach the treaty<sup>15</sup>.

### **3. 2. 2 The 1860's**

In 1865, the US government negotiated another agreement with the confederated Blackfoot tribes, the Fort Benton treaty, concerning the confiscation of their lands south of the Missouri and Teton Rivers. In the treaty, new boundaries of their territory had been defined and the Indians were promised to get paid 5,000 USD annually for the following twenty years and that no white men were to disrupt and dwell in their new home. This was not paid in money, instead the US were to provide them useful supplies, such as food and clothing and the instructions to teach the Indians how to take care of their farms. Also, each principal chief was promised to obtain 500 USD every year as long as they hold peace among their tribal members. In return, Blackfoot were to obey the rules of the US government. The Government was thus to get the right to construct roads across the

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<sup>14</sup> American battlefield trust, 2019, <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/biographies/isaac-i-stevens>, accessed on 18.11.2019.

<sup>15</sup> Image courtesy of Smithsonian Institution, 1855, <https://trailtribes.org/greatfalls/making-treaties.htm>, accessed on 18.11.2019.

reservation which were to allow white men to travel on these roads (Hamilton 1970, pp. 181-183).

Despite the objections of some hostile tribes, the treaty was eventually signed. Nevertheless, the treaty was never presented to the Senate for approval, since the US administration did not believe the treaty would be observed neither by white men, nor the Indians; the American government moreover alleged the Indian war was unleashed, although it was a myth (Hungry-wolf 2006, p. 48).

Consequently, Fort Benton was held under siege, which forced the Government to action. American Governor Meagher declared a state of emergency, nonetheless, the US did not have enough money to take care and build camps of the volunteer soldiers who were to defend the settlements in the Indians territory (Hamilton 1970, p. 184). The main cause of the unrest on the Blackfoot territory was the Civil War, since the most capable government administrators were busy with war affairs, therefore, for eighteen months the Blackfoot had had no agent responsible for protecting them from white men chasing after gold through the Blackfoot country. Intolerance between white men and Blackfoot persisted (Ewers 1958, p. 236).

Between the years 1867 and 1869, Piegians relationships with white settlers in Montana became more strained, since Piegians were with impunity stealing their horses and murdering people, whites therefore repeatedly asked the Government for protection. The murder of Malcolm Clarke, fur trader, by group of Piegians resulted in the Baker battle on the Marias in 1870. American soldiers attacked one of the Piegians camps on the Marias River in the morning of the 23<sup>rd</sup> of January; 173 people were killed, of which at least 50 were women and children, and 300 horses were slaughtered (Ewers 1958, p. 250). Only two or three soldiers were killed and about twenty were wounded. Although many were critical of the battle, for there exist testimonies that the Clarke's murderers did not belong to the killed group of Piegians, and the whole massacre was unnecessary, the Government claimed, that the Piegan tribe had to be punished for their previous crimes committed against innocents (Hamilton 1970, pp. 185-189).

### 3. 2. 3 The 1870's

In 1871, during the reign of President Ulysses S. Grant, Grant's Peace Policy changed the method of dealing with Indian tribes. The treaties negotiated by the representatives of the Government with the chiefs did not have to be ratified by the US Senate any longer, but had to be legalized by the law of the Congress (Hamilton 1970, pp. 189-190). Furthermore, the House of Representatives decided that each tribe of the Plains Indians was no longer considered an independent nation. This enabled the United States to take away the Indian land much easier, besides, Indians could no longer establish treaties with the Government<sup>16</sup>.

After the failure of the Fort Benton treaty, no agreements were concluded until 1873. Since neither Indians, nor white men knew exactly the position of boundaries negotiated by the Lane Bull's treaty, the Commissioners of Indian Affairs made a decision to distinctly specify the reservation borders; the Canadian border on the north, the Dakota line on the east, the south banks of the Missouri and Sun River on the south and the Rocky Mountains on the west. The treaty was adopted on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July whereby Blackfoot lost a large region between the Musselshell and Missouri Rivers (Hamilton 1970, p. 190).

In 1874, another large part of the Indian land was taken by the Government without any Indian approval or an opportunity to protest. The south boundaries of the reservation were shifted to the Marias River and Birch Creek and the Blackfoot agency was left on the Upper Teton River, many miles outside their homeland. This act of Congress was confirmed on the 15<sup>th</sup> of April. One year later, in April 1875, president Grant ordered to set aside additional hunting-grounds with the boundaries up the Musselshell River and down to the Missouri, nevertheless, in 1880, the boundaries were adapted to those set out in the 1874 (Hamilton 1970, pp. 190-191).

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<sup>16</sup> National Archives, 2016, <https://www.archives.gov/research/native-americans/treaties>, accessed on 26.02.2020.

### **3. 2. 4 The 1880's**

Since 1865, Blackfoot tribes did not obtain any of the promised treaty annuities, they did not obtain neither the food, nor the clothing, farm implements and the instructions and furthermore, they had been treated as outlaws. Moreover, due to the construction of the Northern Pacific Railroad in Montana in 1870, the rapid extinction of buffalos beckoned and many other animal species nearly disappeared from the plains, therefore Indians were suffering from the lack of food, thus they became completely dependent upon the US government. The only means of their support were the government rations, and by 1883, there were nearly 3,000 Blackfoot people dependent on them (Harrod 1971, p. 46). Finally, in the same year, the Montana legislature formed the committee to investigate the conditions of the Indians attached to the Blackfoot agency. It turned out, the Indians were willing to concede another part of their reservation to obtain food, farm implements and men to teach them to farm, as they desired to learn to work and to become self-supporting. In 1885, after the report of the living conditions of these northern tribes, the US government received many petitions upon Congress asking for help for the starving Indians (Hamilton 1970, pp. 191-194).

Two years later, in February 1887, an agreement featuring the sale of 17,500,000 acres of the Indian lands was signed. The remaining territory of 6,000,000 acres was to be divided into three separated reservations and the United States were to obtain the right to build railroads and telegraph lines across the area. The treaty entered into force on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May in 1888, and since then the new Blackfoot territory included all of the lands between Birch Creek and the Canadian borders, from the estuary of the Cut Bank River to the summit of the Rocky Mountains. In compensation for the taken territory, Blackfoot, Piegans and Bloods were to receive 150,000 USD which were to be expended for clothing, food, medical service, shops and farm instructions, besides, the part of territory were to allocate to Indians - 160 acres for the heads of families, 80 acres for single people over 18 and 40 acres to children under 12 years (Hamilton 1970, pp. 194-195).

### 3. 3 The 20th century

In 1885, only 18 mixed-bloods lived among approximately 2,000 full-blooded Blackfoot. Nevertheless, fur trade, the construction of the Northern Pacific Railroad and gold fever led to the massive wave of white men flowing to the Blackfoot land, and it produced a high rate of intermarriages between Blackfoot women and white men. Hence, in 1914, with the arrival of natural resource development, the number of mixed-bloods reached 1,452 individuals, and one year later, in 1915, the owners of more than one hundred stocks on the reservation were predominantly mixed-bloods. Blackfoot Indians were therefore starving while the half-bloods and white traders were living in wealth, supporting the land sale to increase the reach of their markets by expanding their private sphere (Rosier 2001, pp. 13-20).

According to one of the defenders of the Blackfoot tribe interests, R.J. Hamilton, white men had derived more benefits from the reservation than the Blackfoot did. His idea was to change this condition by the development of mines, beet raising and grazing which would give many Blackfoot members an employment, for Blackfoot sought to become independent.

Hamilton convincingly explained:

*“Blackfoot full-bloods are of the old Indian system. They only know of property as held in the Indian custom, the family property held by the wife and mother, and the lands in common by the tribe. The change to the modern idea of civilized property ownership, titles, mortgages, loans, taxes, sales, leases and foreclosures, are not known to them and cannot be taught to them in a few days, weeks, or months of an allotment period wherein the change is made. The change as to them should be a matter of development... As soon as the realization is acquired of the value of agricultural effort, and of cattle raising, the individual ambition will assert itself and there will be many who will make a start on their own account.”* (Rosier 2001, pp. 25-26)

### **3. 3. 1 WWI**

It is estimated that more than 10,000 Native Americans served in the First World War, usually as explorers, code-talkers and snipers, although they were not considered citizens of the United States. Those who operated as code-talkers played an important role in the war, as they translated Allied officer's commands into their native languages, and therefore German soldiers could not decipher their instructions<sup>17</sup>.

The recruitment of indigenous people was launched in 1916. Concerning Blackfoot Indians, the only one Siksika soldier, Mike Foxhead, who served overseas, was killed by a sniper in France during the Third Battle of Ypres in 1917. Mountain Horse brothers, Kainai members, Joe, Albert and Mike were participated in a cadet program of St. Paul's Anglican Boarding School. In 1915, Albert died of sickness after the Second Battle of Ypres in Belgium, subsequently, the misfortune had forced Mike to enlist in the armed service. Another soldier, George Strangling Wolf, prayed and buried a piece of his flesh to perform a traditional ritual made by Blackfoot. He was sent home in 1917 after he was to be gassed at Lens. Nick King of the 50<sup>th</sup> Battalion brought his traditional regalia to France with him. His father Bumble Bee had refused to cut his hair, therefore was not enlisted in the army<sup>18</sup>.

After the war, American Indians earned high praise for their service, some of them were awarded the highest honors<sup>19</sup>.

### **3. 3. 2 1920 - 1934**

In the early 1920s, an "oil excitement" broke out in Montana on the boundaries of the reservation, therefore Blackfoot desired to take advantage of it, since the post-war failure of the livestock industry and the collapse in wheat prices led to the destabilization of the reservation economy. Nonetheless, by 1926 the excitement had virtually disappeared in

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<sup>17</sup> Time, 2018, [time.com/5459439/american-indians-wwi/](https://time.com/5459439/american-indians-wwi/), accessed on 15.01.2020.

<sup>18</sup> Retroactive, 2018, <https://albertashistoricplaces.com/2018/11/07/blackfoot-soldiers-in-wwi/>, accessed on 16.01.2020.

<sup>19</sup> Time, 2018, [time.com/5459439/american-indians-wwi/](https://time.com/5459439/american-indians-wwi/), accessed on 15.01.2020.

the reservation. Between years 1921 and 1926, Blackfoot received only less than 3,000 USD from oil leasing (Rosier 2001, pp. 41-49).

In June 1924, the US government signed the Indian Citizenship Act which granted citizenship to all American Indians born in the U.S., nonetheless, until 1957, some states of the United States excluded Native Americans from voting<sup>20</sup>.

Four years later, in 1928, the Meriam Report, the most comprehensive study of the conditions of Indians in the United States, was published. The treatise recognized the economic potential of Indian arts and crafts which were seen as a way of improving the economic and social conditions on the Indian territory, and it strongly denied the philosophy of Indian policy adopted by the US president in 1871 (Rosier 2001, p. 54). The Report recommended to bring an end to the allotment policy, to increase a support of health and education, and it promoted tribal self-government<sup>21</sup>.

Many of the report's recommendations for reform were included in the Indian Reorganization Act signed in June 1934 by president Roosevelt. The Act concerned with the development and the preservation of the Indian lands and resources, the creation of tribal political and economic organizations, the establishment of a credit system for Indians and the provision of vocational education. It legislated an end to the process of allotment and extended the trust period of remaining allotments, besides, it confirmed the return of reservation surplus lands to tribal control (Rosier 2001, p. 93). The outcome of the so called Indian New Deal was the improvement of political, economic and social conditions of Native Americans. Over 250 Indian tribes had accepted the Indian Reorganization Act. Nevertheless, 77 tribes had rejected it, consequently, they had been obliged to cede a part of their valuable land to non-Indians<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> Library of Congress, 2019, [loc.gov/item/today-in-history/june-02/](https://www.loc.gov/item/today-in-history/june-02/), accessed on 16.01.2020.

<sup>21</sup> Native American Netroots, 2010, <http://nativeamericannetroots.net/diary/575>, accessed on 20.01.2020.

<sup>22</sup> Living New Deal, 2018, <https://livingnewdeal.org/what-was-the-new-deal/new-deal-inclusion/american-indians-and-the-new-deal>, accessed on 16.01.2020.

### **3. 3. 3 The 1930's**

After the adoption of the Reorganization Act in 1934, the Blackfoot Nation embarked on the management and modernization of its economy in the reservation. The following year was marked by an endeavour of the political and economic reorganization of the Blackfoot tribe, moreover, the nation required expanded authority and power to moderate the Government interference in tribal affairs. Therefore, during the summer of 1935, a first draft of the Blackfoot constitution concerning the reorganization process was produced, nevertheless, the document was not approved by Blackfoot people until the second half of November, as the endorsement was preceded by an acquaintance of the tribe with every paragraph and line of the Constitution (Rosier 2001, pp. 105, 110-114).

An argument against the Constitution emerged primarily from full-blooded Blackfoot members due to the high number of mixed-bloods who profited from economic programs established by the Reorganization Act. The frustrated minority of full-bloods was anxious that part-bloods would share in tribal income and was afraid of an exploitation of their minority status to acquire access to their trust patents and the oil rights possessed by the allottees; they thus had asked for the protection and maintenance of their rights and property to their heirs. Nonetheless, in the election of 1936, most of the representatives of full-bloods were overwhelmed by the number of mixed-blood candidates. The failure was caused predominantly by a thrilling demographic disadvantage of the full-blooded Blackfoot members, yet some of them voluntarily voted for the representatives of mixed-bloods, since they considered them more capable to develop the economic interest of the nation (Rosier 2001, pp. 115-117).

#### **3. 3. 3. 1 The Constitution**

The Constitution and By- laws for the Blackfeet tribe of the Blackfeet Indian reservation of Montana adopted by Blackfoot on the 13<sup>th</sup> of November 1935 signed by Joseph W. Brown, the chairman of election board and Chairman of Blackfeet Tribal Business Council, comprise of ten articles, including the territory, membership and land. The by-laws section includes another seven articles, e.g. meeting, judges and clerks and the duties

of officers. Since its adoption, the Constitution was revised several times and last amended in 1998. The validity of the document lasts to the present day<sup>23</sup>.

### **3. 3. 4 WWII**

In the spring of 1945, there were nearly 25,000 Native Americans in the Army, Navy, the Coast Guard and Marines. It is estimated that during each of the war years 40,000 Indian people left their homes to take jobs in ordnance depots, on the railroads and in other war industries or in food production. Thousands of women signed up to work on ranches and farms, they joined the Red Cross and the American Women's Voluntary Service, besides, Indian women learned to take over many tasks in the Indian forests. In some reservations, there were organized War Mothers clubs which were founded by mothers of the soldiers; every fighter received letters and gifts while he was in the service<sup>24</sup>.

Regarding Blackfoot members, Robert K. Paul received the Silver Star, an award for valour, Ernest DuBray was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and another Blackfoot soldier Myron W. Anderson received the Bronze Star Medal. Other Blackfoot were honoured for their service only after death, among them e.g. Murry L. Williamson and George B. Magee Jr.<sup>25</sup>. Minnie Spotted Wolf was the first female American Indian enlisted in the Marine Corps Women's Reserve in July 1943. She served as a heavy equipment operator and driver<sup>26</sup>.

After the war, and especially since the September 11 attacks, Native Americans have served in the army of the United States at higher rates than other ethnic groups. There are more than 30,000 American Indian men and women serving in the U.S. military today<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> National Indian Law Library, 1998, <https://www.narf.org/nill/constitutions/blackfeet/>, accessed on 22.01.2020.

<sup>24</sup> Naval History and Heritage Command, 2018, <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/i/indians-in-the-war-1945.html>, accessed on 17.01.2020.

<sup>25</sup> Naval History and Heritage Command, 2018, <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/i/indians-in-the-war-1945.html>, accessed on 18.01.2020.

<sup>26</sup> Blackfeet Nation, 2018, <https://blackfeetcountry.com/minnie-spotted-wolf-hwy>, accessed on 17.01.2020.

<sup>27</sup> Time, 2018, [time.com/5459439/american-indians-wwi](https://time.com/5459439/american-indians-wwi), accessed on 15.01.2020.

### **3. 3. 5 The second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century**

After WWII, Indians were still the victims of discrimination which excluded them from economic participation in society. In some ways, the Blackfoot tribe was in a worse situation than others. At the beginning of the 1960s', the condition of Blackfoot Indians was desperate, diseases were spreading and people were hungry since the majority of buffalos had disappeared. In 1958, 50% of the Blackfoot population was unemployed, by 1962 it was 75%. An income of an average family was estimated at about 500 USD. In a program of employment assistance, the unemployment had fallen to 38% by March 1967 (Harrod 1971, pp. 157-164). The main source of Blackfoot income became farming; there were established Blackfoot owned businesses, such as the Blackfoot Writing company, yet it was transferred to a private entrepreneur in the late 1990s', and a group making clothing and moccasins. Nonetheless, there were not enough jobs, thus many members of the tribe had left the reservation to search for work beyond the borders<sup>28</sup>.

Blackfoot suffered from prejudice and discrimination as well; they were seen as lazy, drunken and sexually promiscuous. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the 1960's, drinking was one of the most serious problems not only in the reservation but also in the whole continent. Concerning promiscuity, living in polygamy relationships was a Blackfoot tradition, the Indians thus resisted to attempts of white people to destroy their habits<sup>29</sup>.

### **3. 4 The 21<sup>st</sup> century**

Currently, the largest Blackfoot reservation, an area of approximately 1,5 million acres officially called the Blackfeet Nation, is located in northwest Montana bordered by Canada to the north and Glacier National Park to the west<sup>30</sup>. Another Blackfoot reservation is situated in Alberta, Canada, located 80 km from Calgary<sup>31</sup>.

The governing body of the Blackfeet Nation is the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council which is responsible for supervising the management of tribal lands and resources,

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<sup>28</sup> Tribalpedia, 2020, <https://www.tribalpedia.com/?s=blackfoot>, accessed on 15.01.2020.

<sup>29</sup> Tribalpedia, 2020, <https://www.tribalpedia.com/?s=blackfoot>, accessed on 17.01.2020.

<sup>30</sup> Blackfeet Nation, 2019, <https://blackfeetnation.com/lands/>, accessed on 18.01.2020.

<sup>31</sup> The Canadian Encyclopedia, 2008, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/blackfoot-siksika>, accessed on 26.02.2020.

business enterprises, and programs and services of the tribe. The council consists of nine members who serve four-year terms and they are elected by tribal members<sup>32</sup>.

In 2017, an announcement of the retirement of all illegal oil and gas leases from 1982 in sacred Badger-Two Medicine region was made. Blackfoot members have been fighting to protect their cultural homeland for 30 years. The Badger-Two Medicine sacred area is a practically unroaded region of mountains, river valleys and wetlands along Rocky Mountain Front, which is used by Native Americans for cultural, historical and religious purposes; it has helped to shape down the cultural identity of the Blackfoot people, as Chief Old Person once said:

*"For thousands of years Badger-Two Medicine has shaped the identity of our people. I have always been told by our elders that our responsibility was to save those lands for our children and all future generations of Pikuni People."*<sup>33</sup>

More than 150 years ago the buffalo nearly came to extinction, since the white settlers were hunting them regardless of their decreasing number, and therefore the phrase "go the way of the buffalo" derives from this period. In 2009, the leaders of the four divisions of Blackfoot people introduced the Iinnii Initiative which was launched to protect the Blackfoot culture, and to create a home for the buffalo to return to. Its main purpose is to create the Iinnii-Buffalo Spirit Centre located near the east entrance of the Glacier National Park, the centre is to include e.g. educational centre, archives, and a ceremonial lodge. Since the buffalo is an integral part of the Blackfoot culture, every year they honour the buffalo through the Sun Dance ceremonial (see chapter 5. 6. 1), as they strive to preserve their story with the buffalo for future generations. In 2016, 88 buffalos were residing the Blackfoot reservation<sup>34</sup>. Three years later, in May 2019, the Sacred Horn Society welcomed twelve new buffalo calves in the Browning, the capital of the Montana reservation<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> Blackfeet Nation, 2019, <http://blackfeetnation.com/government/>, accessed on 18.01.2020.

<sup>33</sup> Blackfeet Nation, 2019, <http://www.badger-twomedicine.org/>, accessed on 18.01.2020.

<sup>34</sup> Blackfeet Nation, 2019, <https://blackfeetnation.com/iinnii-buffalo-spirit-center/>, accessed on 30.03.2020.

<sup>35</sup> Great Falls Tribune, 2019, <https://eu.greatfallstribune.com/story/news/2019/06/01/blackfeet-welcome-return-bison-montana-reservation/1313209001/>, accessed on 30.03.2020.

## 4 Blackfoot reservations

### 4. 1 Nature

In the Blackfeet Nation in northwest Montana, there can be found almost 520 miles of streams with the largest one being the St. Mary River, Two Medicine River, Milk River, Birch Creek and Cut Bank Creek, and 180 bodies of water. The area is home to many species of wildlife and fish<sup>36</sup>. There are eight lakes, the largest are Alkali Lake in the southwest of the reservation, Duck Lake in the northeast, and Lower Saint Mary Lake<sup>37</sup>. In the Blackfoot territory, there are moderate winters, and although it is not regularly raining on the prairies in summer, the grasses are rich (Grinnell 1962, p. 226).

In Alberta one of the most popular tourist destinations and a very sacred place for the Blackfoot people is the so-called Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park located in about 100 kilometres southeast of Alberta. The park got its name from an ancient rock art called petroglyphs<sup>38</sup>. The carvings portray sacred people, spirits and battles. Not only Blackfoot members have been coming here for at least 4,000 years to pray, perform ceremonies and go on vision quests. In 2019, the park was named a UNESCO World Heritage Site<sup>39</sup>.

Another UNESCO World Heritage Site, Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump is located in south-west Alberta where the foothills of the Rocky Mountains meet the Great Plains and it preserves and interprets over 6,000 years of Plains Buffalo culture. It portrays the communal hunting techniques which were used by Indians, and the way of the life of Plains Indians; there can be seen the drive lanes which led the animals toward a cliff to jump. The landscape thus conceals numerous undisturbed layers of buffalo bones and the butchering camps established over time<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> Blackfeet Nation, 2019, <https://blackfeetnation.com/>, accessed on 10.01.2020.

<sup>37</sup> Blackfeet Nation, 2019, <https://blackfeetnation.com/watercompact/map/>, accessed on 10.01.2020.

<sup>38</sup> *Images created by removing parts of a rock surface by incising and carving among the sandstone cliffs:* Geology, 2005-2020, <https://geology.com/articles/petroglyphs.shtml>, accessed on 15.01.2020.

<sup>39</sup> Travel Alberta, 2019, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5WfG\\_Snovdg&t=55s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5WfG_Snovdg&t=55s), accessed on 10.01.2020.

<sup>40</sup> UNESCO, 1992-2020, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/158/>, accessed on 10.01.2020.

### **4. 1. 1 Rocky Mountains**

Rocky Mountains, mountain range forming the boundaries of the Blackfoot Nation, dominating the western North American continent, covers approximately 3,000 miles and stretches from Alaska to New Mexico. On the east, the Rockies are bordered by the Great Plains and on the west by the Interior Plateau and Coast Mountains of Canada. Rocky Mountains are divided into more than one hundred separate mountain ranges<sup>41</sup>. The Indians have given to the main range the name “Backbone-of-the-World” which continues to serve as an important location for spiritual retreats for the Blackfoot Nation. Some of the highest peaks which can be seen from the reservation are Mt. James on the west, Mt. Blackfoot together with Blackfoot Glacier on the north-west, and Mad Wolf, Going-to-the-Sun and Almost-a-Dog on the north (McClintock 1999, pp. 13-14).

### **4. 1. 2 The Glacier National Park**

The Glacier National Park was established in 1910. The park’s east side penetrates the Blackfoot Nation. It got its name from the many glaciers and glacial forces that shaped its landscape over two million years. Currently, the park is home to 25 glaciers, massive U-shaped valleys and granite peaks carved by ancient ice flows. It is estimated that there were approximately 150 glaciers at the park after its foundation and the remaining ones are expected to disappear within a few decades. One of the biggest tourist attractions is a 50-mile long Going-to-the-Sun Road which was constructed in the 1930s’ during the Great Depression by the Civilian Conservation Corps workers. Other significant places are an ancient hemlock-cedar forest in the Avalanche Creek and a so-called Two Medicine part of the park where Blackfoot Indians once undertook the sacred rites of passage<sup>42</sup>. The area around and within the boundaries of the park was once utilized by numerous Native American tribes for hunting, fishing, ceremonies and gathering plants<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>41</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Rocky-Mountains>, accessed on 11.01.2020.

<sup>42</sup> National Geographic, 2019, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/national-parks/glacier-national-park>, accessed on 11.01.2020.

<sup>43</sup> Glacier National Park Montana, 2016, <https://www.nps.gov/glac/learn/historyculture/tribes.htm>, accessed on 13.01.2020.

The Glacier National Park is a home for a wide range of animals. There are 276 species of birds, e.g. eagles, ospreys and ptarmigans, and 71 species of mammals such as beavers, bats, bears or wolverines. Nevertheless, there are only three species of reptiles in the park, namely garter snakes, western painted turtles and western terrestrial garters<sup>44</sup>.

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<sup>44</sup> Glacier National Park Montana, 2019, <https://www.nps.gov/glac/learn/nature/animals.htm>, accessed on 11.01.2020.

## **5 Culture**

Despite the fact that Indians are described as silent people who never joke nor laugh, Blackfoot members were generally talkative and cheerful (Grinnell 1962, p. 181). According to George Catlin, an American author, painter and traveller living in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Plains Indians inhabiting the Upper Missouri were the finest looking, best equipped and most beautifully costumed. He described their atmosphere as pure, which produced good health and a long life, and them as the happiest and the most independent tribe of Indians (McClintock 1999, pp. 2-3).

### **5. 1 Blackfoot Indian**

The Blackfoot man was well formed, tall and straight. They had large eyes, generally a big and thin nose. Women were quite tall, nonetheless, they were usually not much pretty, since they had big noses and large wrinkled hands marked by hard working in the camp (Grinnell 1962, p. 197).

#### **5. 1. 1 Clothing and accessories**

The primitive clothing was made of the dressed skins of animals such as buffalos, elks, deer or mountain sheep. Formerly, women wore the shirts of cowhide with long sleeves knotted at the wrist, leggings tied above the knees and skirts reaching to the shin. Later they were dressed in gowns or smocks reaching from the neck to below the knees, there were no sleeves and the armholes were made of a sort of cape which reached to the elbow. On their feet they wore moccasins made of tanned buffalo cow skin, often decorated over the instep or toes with a three-pronged figure representing the three divisions of the nation. In winter, they used moccasins made of buffalo robe. Men used to wear a breech-cloths, leggings reaching to the thighs, shirts and moccasins. In cold weather, both men and women wore a robe of tanned buffalo or beaver skin. In summer, they wore a lighter robe made of buckskin or cowhide from which the hair had been removed (Grinnell 1962, pp. 196-197).

Blackfoot also wore belts which confined the robes, and to which e.g. knife scabbards were attached. Necklaces and ear-rings were made of bone, shells and the teeth and claws of animals. Women dresses were often embellished by elk tushes which were highly prized by the Blackfoot people, thus a gown decorated with them was worth two horses. Eagle feathers were used to garnish shields, weapons and to make headdresses worn by men who usually wore their hair in two braids, one on each side of the head. Occasionally, the hair of the forehead was cut off square and brushed up, consequently, it was made into a huge topknot and wound with otter fur. Women did not care much for their hair, they generally wore two braids (Grinnell 1962, p. 197).

## **5. 2 Blackfoot lodges**

Indian lodges were always made of tanned cowhide which was cut and sewn together to form an upside-down cone shape. At the top of the tipi were two so called “ears” for facilitating the upward draught for the inside fire. Buffalo skins were formerly used as a covering but because the buffalos have practically died out, canvas replaced them. The covering was supported by eighteen straight pine or spruce rods. For an average-sized tipi about eighteen skins were used and the lodge was about five meters in diameter. The door was about one meter high and was covered by a flap of skin (Grinnell 1962, pp. 198-199).

Blackfoot moved their camps constantly to be close to collecting the plants that grew in different parts of their land or to follow animals such as buffalos, thus they never used up all the resources in a particular area; they always travelled with a purpose. Moving the camp was usually the responsibility of women. They took down the tipis, loaded the rods and led the dogs and horses to the new location. The men headed the group making sure the path was safe<sup>45</sup>. Generally, the erection of the dwelling in the new location took only around 30 minutes<sup>46</sup>.

The design and furnishing of the tipis of the plains tribes never change. Nevertheless, no two tipis may be identical, as their paintings represent prominent events in the history of

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<sup>45</sup> Glenbow Museum, 2020, <https://www.glenbow.org/blackfoot/EN/html/index.htm>, accessed on 25.01.2020.

<sup>46</sup> Ducksters, 2020, [https://www.ducksters.com/history/native\\_american\\_teepee\\_longhouse\\_pueblo.php](https://www.ducksters.com/history/native_american_teepee_longhouse_pueblo.php), accessed on 26.01.2020.

the tribe, of the owner, or a symbolical design of religious meaning. The owner can, however, pass his tipi to others in the fulfilment of vows in the time of peril, or on behalf of the sick. The ceremonial of transfer must be performed according to strict rules, since Blackfoot believe that any rule violation would cause sickness or a loss of property. Generally, the new owner and his relatives then make payment to the original holder with e.g. horses and other gifts. Once the painted tipi is no longer usable, a new one can be constructed only after the destruction of the original tipi whose owner sacrifices it to the Sun by sinking it in the lake. The Yellow Buffalo Tipi, Otter, Cross Stripe or Black Buffalo tipis have been handed down through many generations since Indians believe that these tipis have strong protective power. Their ownership was guarded by the head men of the Blackfoot tribe (McClintock 1999, pp. 207-213).

If a chief died, his wife made a Death-lodge using new poles fastening the bottom of the lodge to the ground and tightly lacing the front with raw-hide so as for no wild animal to enter (McClintock 1999, p. 164). The man was consequently placed on a prepared bed, and his weapons, war clothing, and the pipe were positioned near him. Some of his horses were killed in front of the tipi, so the dead chief would ride into the realm of the dead (Grinnell 1962, pp. 193-194).

Inside the tipi, the space was divided into couches or seats. At the foot and head of every couch, there was a mat fastened side by side at an angle of forty-five degrees so that between each seat there was a space to store articles which were not in use. The owner of the dwelling always occupied the seat at the back of the tipi, directly opposite the door; on his right, the places were reserved for his wives and daughters, on his left sit his sons and visitors. The rarer the guest, the closer they sat to the host (Grinnell 1962, p. 199).

### **5. 2. 1 Painted tipis**

Pencils made from buffalo bones were used for the paintings, as the bones easily absorbed and held the paint; willow sticks were used for ruling the lines. The paints were dug from the soil. The black paint was made from burned wood, green was obtained from the scum taken from the surface of water and dried, and yellow was generally made out of the

buffalo gall. The sacred red paint used in ceremonials was made by a yellow clay roasted on a hot fire of coals (McClintock 1999, pp. 215-216).

The decorations of all of the painted tipis are appropriately and logically arranged. Generally, there is a strip of dark colour representing the earth at the bottom. Within the strip there are so called “dusty stars” symbolizing the puffballs which grow upon the prairies, and in the upper part of the strip, there are usually rounded or pointed shapes signifying rounded ridges or pointed mountain peaks. Above the bottom line, there is typically portrayed the design of animal, sacred rock, the symbols of the Blackfoot religion or other emblems which ensure the protective power to the dwelling; e.g. a procession of otters is painted on the Otter Tipi, the War Tipi of Running Rabbit<sup>47</sup> shows the paintings of tribal victories representing battles with Sioux, Snakes or Crow, its bottom encircling band is red. In the upper part, there is generally a broad encircling band of black colour symbolizing the night sky, the sun, the moon, certain constellations and a Maltese cross which is believed to have great power that lets the owner dream undisturbed. These tipi representations of the sacred animals such as otters, buffalos, elks, beavers or antelopes state the belief of the Blackfoot people. Some of the paintings and decorations have their origin in Blackfoot legends (McClintock 1999, pp. 217-224).

### **5. 2. 1. 1 The legend of the Horse Lodge**

Once, there was a poor man who had only a white mare and a white foal. In the course of time, the man had become rich and owned many horses, thus he did no longer ride the white mare, although he took care of her. One day, she told the man the next day he would find a new lodge outside which he was to paint as the mare commanded. On the right side of the lodge he painted a white mare, on the other side a white foal. At the top, there were seven stars and a morning star, at the bottom he painted a broad encircling red band signifying the earth and the hills, and white fallen stars. Eventually, the white mare invited the man inside the lodge and taught him various songs and a ritual (Duvall, Wissler 1995, p. 94).

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<sup>47</sup> *A prominent South Piegan* (Dempsey 2007, p. 235).

### **5. 2. 1. 2 The legend of the Snow Tipi**

The Snow or Winter Tipi is believed to have a great power as whenever it is set up, winds and cold weather are sure to come. Once, there was a Blackfoot Indian hunting a buffalo with his son when suddenly a terrible storm came. As they stayed hidden in a low shelter made of the dead buffalo hide, the Indian fell asleep and dreamed that he was travelling alone on the plains where he discovered a large decorated tipi. At the bottom, there was a broad yellow band, green circles representing holes in ice, and the rounded tops of the rolling ridges of the prairies. At the top, there was a yellow paint symbolizing the sunlight, and clusters of seven stars on both sides of the tipi. Within the two yellow encircling bands four green claws with yellow legs signifying the Thunder Bird<sup>48</sup> were painted. At the back, there was a red circle representing the sun. Above the door, there was a red buffalo head with green eyes and black horns (McClintock 1999, pp. 133-135).

Inside the tipi, there was a man clothed in a long white robe. He told the visitor that he was called the Cold Maker, the one who had brought the cold storms, snow and winds and that he requested the visitor to help him. He gave him the tipi together with its decorations and medicines. The visitor then woke up, returned to the camp and built the same tipi as he saw in his dream. After time, there was a harsh winter, thus the man prayed to the Cold Maker asking him for the protection of the man's family. Consequently, the clouds drew back and the blue sky was seen in all directions. Since then, Blackfoot believe in his dream and in the power of the Cold Maker's Snow Tipi (McClintock 1999, pp. 135-138).

### **5. 2. 1. 3 The legend of the Yellow Buffalo Tipi**

Another legend of painted tipi is related to Ma-sto-peta, a prominent chief of Blackfoot. After he brought down a large bull, it rose suddenly to its feet and caused serious injuries to the hunter. Nevertheless, the chief refused any treatment and instead he asked his friends to paint him all over with yellow paint and to wrap his body with his pipe in a

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<sup>48</sup> *A figure of Native American mythology, a symbol of power protecting Indians from evil spirits:* Legends of America, 2020, <https://www.legendsofamerica.com/thunderbird-native-american/>, accessed on 27.02.2020.

yellow buffalo robe and consequently, to throw him into the river, as the chief believed the bull had supernatural power. As soon as they fulfilled his wishes, Ma-sto-peta walked unharmed from the river. After his resurrection, the bull appeared in his dreams giving him the Yellow Buffalo Tipi. At the bottom of the tipi there was a black band with a single row of puffballs, the top was painted black with many small stars, around the middle there were two yellow buffalos, and the door flap was made of a yellow buffalo calf skin (McClintock 1999, pp. 162-164).

### **5. 3 Hunting**

In the Blackfoot country, there were different types of landscape that were home to a number of animal species; buffalos and antelopes living in large grassy prairies, climbing mountain sheep in badlands, mule and white-tailed deer inhabiting wooded areas, marshy valleys hosting moose, and white goats dwelling among the mountain peaks (Grinnell 1962, p. 226).

Formerly, Blackfoot people depended on buffalos, as these animals provided them with many practical things they needed. The skin protected them from cold weather in winter, and without hair it was used for moccasins, leggings, women's dresses, and shirts; the hair was used to stuff cushions. Their lodges were made of tanned cowhide, and many other small articles were crafted from the buffalo hide, such as cradles, whips, bow cases, gun covers and also ropes. Horns were used as spoons and ladles; from the hooves they were producing glue (Grinnell 1962, p. 227).

One way of buffalo hunting was called "deep-kettle" or "deep-blood-kettle" which was a large enclosure formed of natural rocks, logs, or brush under a cliff. On the top of it, there were two long lines of rocks resembling the shape of the letter V. A medicine man then prayed, and together with other tribal members went hunting (Grinnell 1962, pp. 228-229). First, the medicine man gained attention from the grazing buffalo. As the animal followed the man toward the escarpment, the other members had jumped from behind rocks and bushes and started to shout and wave, so the frightened herd of buffalos were

soon running straight into the abyss. Many were killed by the fall; others had broken legs or backs and the rest of them were killed by the arrows of the Indians<sup>49</sup>.

Antelope skins were used for women's dresses. These animals were hunted in a similar way as buffalos, nevertheless, at the end of the V shaped lines of rocks and logs were dug deep pits covered with slender sticks, grass and a little dirt. As the antelopes were frightened of the shouting people hidden behind the rocks, they fled directly into the traps. Other animals, such as deer and elks were typically killed singly. They used either deadfalls or a trap made of stakes placed at an angle of forty-five degrees in a circle around a corpse of a buffalo, so the hungry wolfs and coyotes jumped into the trap but were unable to get out of it<sup>50</sup>.

### **5. 3. 1 Weapons**

Blackfoot tribe used a variety of tools for hunting and fighting including knives, longbows, war clubs and mauls. After the arrival of the white men, they used also firearms such as the Winchester repeater<sup>51</sup>. Shields for war were made of a tough thick hide found on the buffalo's neck. The glue obtained from the buffalo's hooves served for fastening the heads and feathers on the arrows which were made of the sprouts of the shadbush wood for they were very heavy and could not be easily broken. Each member of the tribe marked his arrows by painting them. Knives were formerly made of stone, the handles of wood (Grinnell 1962, p. 200). War clubs made of a hard stone were close contact weapons, some of them had a decorated horse hair at the end used mainly for ceremonials<sup>52</sup>.

### **5. 3. 2 Food**

Ninety percent of the Blackfoot diet was meat. Buffalo meat was included in almost every meal, they even crushed the dried meat to create a meat flour mixed with berries and an

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<sup>49</sup> All About Bison, 2009-2020, <https://allaboutbison.com/natives/blackfeet/>, accessed on 07.02.2020.

<sup>50</sup> Access Genealogy, 2020, <https://accessgenealogy.com/native/blackfeet-hunting-customs.htm>, accessed on 07.02.2020.

<sup>51</sup> Reference, 2020, <https://www.reference.com/history/weapons-were-used-blackfoot-indians-194965d9617abb08>, accessed on 26.01.2020.

<sup>52</sup> Cisco's, 2018, <https://ciscogallery.com/blogs/library/native-american-stone-war-clubs>, accessed on 26.01.2020.

amount of melted fat called Pemmican<sup>53</sup>. Meat needed to prepare a bread eaten by Blackfoot was taken from a bison's backbone and smoked up. Other ten percent was filled with wild berries, eggs, vegetables, and camas root. Camas root was gathered at the beginning of summer and cooked in a large pit. Blackfoot did not consume wheat nor grain, as they were not farmers but hunter-gatherers. Nevertheless, after buffalo came close to extinction, Blackfoot diet has changed, as they replaced their traditional tribal meals with an unhealthy food of the current time<sup>54</sup>.

## **5. 4 Blackfoot language**

Blackfoot is an Algonquian language. All three divisions of Blackfoot people - Siksika, Kainai and Piikani - speak the same language. Nevertheless, over time various forms of the Blackfoot language emerged, therefore they occasionally use different words for the same thing or the pronunciation is different. The frequency of using the language decreased when the U.S. government forced the children of Blackfoot people to attend the residential schools<sup>55</sup>. Nonetheless, in 2013, the members of the Blackfeet Community College developed the first Native American language application where basic words and phrases can be found, as the native speakers desire to protect their language from its complete disappearance<sup>56</sup>.

### **5. 4. 1 Grammar**

In the Blackfoot grammar, it is essential to distinguish between words and stems. A stem is the core of a word and therefore it needs a prefix or suffix to create a word. All Blackfoot noun stems belong to one of the two basic grammatical gender classes - animate and inanimate. Nonetheless, as in many other languages, grammatical gender is a classification of the noun stems themselves, it does not refer to the described objects, i.e.

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<sup>53</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/pemmican>, accessed on 27.02.2020.

<sup>54</sup> American Indian Health and Diet Project, 2006, <http://www.aihd.ku.edu/foods/Blackfeet.html>, accessed on 27.02.2020.

<sup>55</sup> Glenbow Museum, 2020, [https://www.glenbow.org/blackfoot/EN/html/our\\_world.htm](https://www.glenbow.org/blackfoot/EN/html/our_world.htm), 2019, accessed on 27.01.2020.

<sup>56</sup> Tribal College, 2013, [https://tribalcollegejournal.org/bcc-develops-montanas-first-native-language-app/?fbclid=IwAR3M4e2Wdn54IWXu-sJ99a49MmtRmFRe\\_aaX4AzcjTY79H6z9eeX6Wnth\\_w](https://tribalcollegejournal.org/bcc-develops-montanas-first-native-language-app/?fbclid=IwAR3M4e2Wdn54IWXu-sJ99a49MmtRmFRe_aaX4AzcjTY79H6z9eeX6Wnth_w), accessed on 27.02.2020.

although some inanimate words like knives or balls have an animate grammatical gender, it does not mean these are living beings (Frantz 1991, pp. 7-8).

Many Blackfoot sentences contain only a single word. Generally, words are formed by a number of prefixes and suffixes, therefore a sentence containing both a subject and verb, and also the object, may be expressed by only one stem complemented by a number of prefixes and suffixes; e.g. the verb “think” does not mean anything itself in Blackfoot, as the speaker has to express *who* the subject is, and thus it is necessary to add the certain affix to the verb. Nouns and verbs further distinguish five different persons referring to *who* is performing some action, the subject. 1st, 2nd and 3rd refer to the same subject as in English, it means *I* do something, *you* do something, and *he/she/it* does something. In Blackfoot, there are two other persons, 4th, obviative, and 5th, subobviative which refer to non-speech act participants as they are not involved in the conversation. In the sentence “*It was the wolf that chased the hen’s chickens,*” the *wolf* is the 3rd person, the *hen* is the obviative 4th person and the *chickens* are subobviative 5th person, since they indicate a possession<sup>57</sup>.

Here is the Blackfoot translation of the part of Genesis I:

*“I.-1 Ap’istotokiua spots’im ki ksök’kum istsits ap’istu tsīmēsts.*

*2 Ki ksök’kum mats’itutuisūppitūkkii’atsaie, ki ksīs’tapiu; ki okké spots’i ikōnūsski’natsiu: ki Ap’istotokiua Osta’aw spots’I okkēists itap’auauo.*

*3 Ki Ap’istotokiua an’iu ūnanīstsiksīstsikui’natsit ki ai’ksīstsikuinatsiu.*

*4 Ki Ap’istotokiua nan’īmaie ksīstsikuinatsi ōkhsiu; ki Ap’istotokiua ai’aketaipīxīmēsts ksīstsikui’natsi ki ski’natsi.*

*5 Ki Ap’istotokiua nitsīn’nikōttomaie ksīstsikui’natsi ksīstsikui’, ki ski’natsi nitsīn’nikōttomaie kokui’. Ki autūk’kuyi ki aponōk’kuyi matom’iksīstsikuaiaiu.”*

(Tims 1890, p. 1)

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<sup>57</sup> University of Montana, 2009, <http://www.umt.edu/blg/projects1/information.php>, Denzer-King, accessed on 27.01.2020.

*“1-1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.*

*2 And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.  
And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.*

*3 And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.*

*4 And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.*

*5 And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.”*

(The King James Bible 1611, Genesis I)

## **5. 5 Blackfoot legends**

Blackfoot legends form an essential part of the Blackfoot culture, as they have given rise to rituals performed since ancient times. Nevertheless, most of the legends have several variations, for each of the three branches of the Blackfoot nation tells their stories differently, therefore it is not possible to present only one version of the story (Duvall, Wissler 1995, p. 5). The thesis covers primarily the legends which laid the foundation for the performed ceremonials, nonetheless it contains also other stories told by Blackfoot for centuries. The Blackfoot mythology (chapter 5. 7. 1) features, consecutively, tales of the Old Man<sup>58</sup> concerning the Blackfoot interpretation of the creation of the world, an order of life and death, and other mythological stories.

### **5. 5. 1 The Beaver Medicine**

There are at least three completely different variations of the Beaver Medicine legend, nevertheless, in all of these adaptations the beaver is the major character, and the discovery of tobacco occurs in each of them as well.

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<sup>58</sup> Also known as Napi or Sun, culture hero of the Blackfoot tribe: Mysteries of Canada, 2014, <https://www.mysteriesofcanada.com/first-nations/blackfoot-legends-napi/>, accessed on 28.02.2020.

One of the tales tells the story of two orphan brothers Akaiyan and Nopatsis. Nopatsis wife compels her husband to take his brother to a desolated island and to let him there to starve. Nopatsis obeys his wife and fulfils her wish. One day, abandoned and starving Akaiyan had discovered a beaver lodge and began to whine when a little beaver came out of the lodge and invited Akaiyan to see his beaver father, the Beaver chief. He had offered the man to stay in his lodge until winter was over, and Akaiyan accepted the offer. The beaver family taught the man their habits and manner of living, they taught him the names of roots and herbs which are commonly used among Blackfoot, and gave him the seeds of tobacco. Finally, beavers taught Akaiyan their medicine songs, prayers and dances, for the ritual helps people to recover even from a severe illness (McClintock 1999, pp. 104-109).

Before Akaiyan left the Beaver chief, he had asked the little beaver to leave the lodge with him. Once Nopatsis came to the island to find his brother's bones, Akaiyan had stolen his raft, and returned to his people who received him with a greatest honour. Akaiyan and his little animal companion taught the people in the camp all the songs, prayers and dances, so they were able to perform the beaver medicine ceremonial whenever a disease occurred. Finally, Akaiyan and the little beaver gathered the skins of other animals to create the beaver bundle necessary for the ceremonial, and added the medicine pipe. Akaiyan continued to perform the ceremonial as long as he lived, and after his death the ceremonial had been handed down ever since that (McClintock 1999, pp. 109-112).

Another adaptation of the legend takes place in ancient times and tells the story of a young poor man called Ápi-künni who fell in love with the youngest of the three wives of an old chief. Since the young Indian was ashamed that he could not offer nothing but love to his secret love, he had left the camp and wandered the prairies as one day he came across a beaver lodge. As in the previous version of the legend, there was the Beaver chief who had invited Ápi-künni to stay with him for a while, taught the young man various prayers, songs and dances, and offered him a plant of tobacco. Moreover, he provided him with a stick of aspen wood, so he could use it as a weapon in war against a hostile tribe, and

consequently ingratiates himself to the chief's youngest wife. And indeed, after some time Blackfoot were in war (Grinnell 1962, pp. 117-121).

Therefore, Ápi-künni had sung a song the old Beaver taught him, dived into water and killed a man from the hostile tribe using the beaver's weapon. Ápi-künni thus became the first man to kill another man in war, since by then people had not killed one another. The old Blackfoot chief had acknowledged the young Indian and gave him his lodge and his three wives as well. Afterwards, Ápi-künni became a Blackfoot chief, hence he taught his people the beaver prayers, songs and dances which had been handed down ever since that (Grinnell 1962, pp. 121-124).

The third version of the Beaver Medicine legend features a Blackfoot man and his wife whose lover was the young beaver living in a lodge near the lake. One day, the woman had become pregnant, and gave birth to a beaver. Nonetheless, her husband looked after the animal as it was his own child, thus the father beaver decided to teach the Indian the beaver songs necessary for performing the beaver medicine ceremonial. In exchange for the beaver's generosity, the young Blackfoot provided him with numerous animal skins the beaver had asked for, and so the beaver bundle was created. Besides, the Indian received the seeds of tobacco which were to be sown every year (Duvall, Wissler 1995, pp. 75-76).

### **5. 5. 2 The Medicine Pipe**

The medicine pipe is a ceremonial pipe smoked on ritual occasions such as the beaver medicine ceremonial. One adaptation of the medicine pipe legend tells the story of a man whose wife was stolen by the Thunder. For no one knew where the Thunder lived, the young Indian had to leave his home to search for his wife. During his journey, he came across a chief of Ravens whom he had asked for help, and since the chief was a powerful medicine man, he gave him a raven's wing and an arrow made of elk-horn which were the only things the Thunder was afraid of. As soon as the brave Indian had arrived at the place the Thunder lived, he saw his wife's eyes hanging on his house. He pointed the raven's wing at the Thunder and shot the arrow through the lodge. The Thunder therefore found out the young Blackfoot had a great power, so he allowed the man to take his wife

away, and offered him a medicine pipe which was to fill and light when the first thunder strikes in the spring. It was the first medicine pipe Blackfoot had ever known (Grinnell 1962, pp. 113-116).

Another version of the medicine pipe legend features the Thunder as well, nonetheless, in this story, a young Blackfoot woman had desired to marry him, therefore one day the Thunder took her away from her family, and they lived together at his lodge somewhere in the mountains. The woman gave birth to two children. One day, the Thunder decided to provide her wife's parents with a medicine pipe, hence they visited the camp the Thunder's wife had dwelled in, and the ceremonial of transfer was performed. Afterwards, the woman stayed in her parents' lodge with one of her children. Nevertheless, the Thunder said that if a dog hurt them, both the woman and the boy would disappear. One day, one of the dogs indeed attempted to bite the child, so the mother and the child vanished. Ever since that, the owner of the medicine pipe has been afraid of dogs (Duvall, Wissler 1995, pp. 89-90).

### **5. 5. 3 The Buffalo Rock**

The legend of the buffalo rock has only one more or less the same version. Once, there was a Blackfoot woman gathering the food outside the camp when she heard a strange sound coming out from a poplar. As she moved closer to the tree, she saw a few buffalo hairs along with a rock stuck in the tree trunk. The rock was singing a song, therefore the woman got frightened at first, nonetheless, the rock told her to take it to her lodge and to teach her husband and other tribal members the song she had heard. At the same time, it asked her to pray for the buffalos to return to their territory. The woman did as the rock commanded, and soon the great herd of buffalo had really approached their land, hence the people knew the rock had a great power. And they had prayed to it and had taken care of it ever since that (Grinnell 1962, pp. 125-126).

### **5. 5. 4 Why dogs do not talk**

Once, there was a Blackfoot couple who had a dog that was able to speak. The woman had a secret lover she met every time she went out to gather food. One day, the dog

followed her, and since he found out the truth about its master's wife, he told the man what he had seen. The husband was so angry, he had not struck only his dog but also his wife, and then left. The woman had enraged and as she was the medicine woman, she compelled the dog to eat the human excrement. Hence, nowadays the dogs are not able to speak, although it is said they still understand some words (Duvall, Wissler 1995, p. 133).

### **5. 5. 5 The woman without a body**

In this story, once, there was a woman whose husband cut her head off. For the woman did not die, her head followed her husband wherever he went. It took care of their lodge at the camp, and was tanning hides just as before, nevertheless, the head demanded to stay alone while doing it. Unfortunately, there was a curious boy who once looked in the lodge, hence the head beat him to death. As people were frightened, they fled across the river, so the head had pursued them, jumped in the water, and drifted down the stream (Duvall, Wissler 1995, p. 154).

## **5. 6 Blackfoot ceremonials**

For Blackfoot were a religious nation, they often prayed to their mythological spirits to which they were grateful for their lives, their beautiful land, the sky and their families and health. Moreover, these spirits were those who gave them the first medicine pipe and the sacred medicine bundles, thus, such articles were sacred to the Blackfoot tribe. To acknowledge the power of the mythological spirits, they performed various ceremonials - each of them had specific songs, dances and prayers<sup>59</sup>.

### **5. 6. 1 The Sun Dance ceremonial**

One of the most religious events of the Blackfoot tribe was the Sun Dance ceremonial, also known as the Medicine Lodge ceremonial. If a Blackfoot woman had a seriously sick child, or she had her son or husband at war, and was afraid they were in danger, she prayed to the Sun that her family would survive. While praying, the woman was standing

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<sup>59</sup> railtribes.org, 1993, <https://trailtribes.org/greatfalls/all-my-relations.htm>, accessed on 20.03.2020.

outside her lodge at the camp and was repeating her plea loudly over and over so the people could hear her voice. The Medicine Lodge, also the Sun Dance lodge was always built in summer. Before the construction of the lodge, other tribe members erected their tipis in a circle about the suitable location for the lodge. Meanwhile, in a day and a half, nearly a hundred buffalo tongues had been placed in a lodge of the woman who gave a feast to the elder men. One of them then prayed again to the Sun that he would take care of their people and would give them food supplies and success in war. Then, more than one hundred songs were sung (Grinnell 1962, pp. 263-264).

While the young men were constructing the Medicine lodge, the woman had to follow a four-day fast, moreover, during the day she was not allowed to come out of her lodge. A medicine man, the high priest of the ceremonial was sitting at the Medicine lodge and he had been painting the members of the tribe with black colour, for he was praying for their lives and health. As soon as the four-day fast of the woman ended, she went to the Medicine lodge, so she could pray to the Sun again, thus offered him a part of the dried buffalo tongue. Other tribe members did the same. Later, Blackfoot warriors had come to the lodge, as they had to fulfil their vows made the previous year that they would swing at the Medicine lodge if they survived either a war or a disease. Therefore, the ropes were drawn through holes in the skin on their chests, so the men had been swinging at the Medicine lodge, sometimes screaming in pain, until the skin loosened and they fell down. On the final day of the ceremonial, the Blackfoot people prayed to the Sun, offering him various gifts which were placed in the Medicine lodge (Grinnell 1962, pp. 264-267).

## **5. 6. 2 The Beaver Medicine ceremonial**

The Beaver Medicine ceremonial had been performed since the legend of the Beaver Medicine began to spread among the Blackfoot Indians. The ritual was initiated by seven songs accompanied by various gestures performed by the head chief of the tribe. The first of them was dedicated to the Sun and each song was repeated four times. Other members of the tribe started to imitate a beaver as it builds its lodge, and subsequently, they prayed to the spirit of the beaver. After the initial phase of the ritual, people in the lodge first had to unroll hides from the sacred medicine bundle, for later the priests beat buffalo raw hides which should represent the way the beaver drummed by striking the water with its

tail. The chief then sang several songs, such as Moose, Elk, Antelope or Crow song accompanied by gestures that characterized all the animals mentioned (McClintock 1999, pp. 78-86).

The chief then brought the sacred pipe, thus two Pipe songs and four Pipe Dancing songs had to be sung. After the chief had given the cry of the beaver, he started to dance around the fire and imitated a swimming beaver. Subsequently, a sacred woman unrolled the beaver skin slowly and with respect, as for Blackfoot these bundles were sacred. Again, four dancers started to imitate beaver's movements. Meanwhile, others prayed to the spirits of animals whose skins had been removed from the beaver bundle, imitating the movements and sounds of the animals, e.g. a flying duck, a weasel hunting for food or mating buffalos. The ceremonial ended with a Dog dance, a dance of women in which all women were expected to join, laugh and joke with each other. Before they separated, everyone joined a feast of serviceberry stew - the men were provided first, then their children, and the women ate what was left (McClintock 1999, pp. 86-102).

### **5. 6. 3 Sowing tobacco**

Generally, every year in early May, women and children had cleared the earth from grass, leaves and sticks and built a large flowerbed in a forest, for seeds mixed with crushed deer, elk and mountain sheep droppings could be sown there later. Then, the men gathered to make holes in the ground with sharp-pointed sticks, subsequently, while the tobacco song was sung, they dropped in the seeds together with a sacred serviceberry. Afterwards, they made another hole thirty centimetre in front of the previous one and dropped in other seeds. The men repeated the process until the entire flowerbed was filled with seeds. The sowing was ended by a tobacco dance (Grinnell 1982, pp. 268-269).

During summer, a medicine man returned to the flowerbed at least three times, each time building a fire and praying for the growing plants. He pulled out one of the plants, so as for the other members of the tribe to see the plant grow. Sometimes, the men assembled in some lodge to perform a ceremonial, as they prayed to the Old Man and the Sun that grasshoppers, worms and other insect would not harm their plants. As soon as it was time to gather the harvest, the Blackfoot Indians moved their camp near the flowerbed,

nevertheless, none of them were allowed to approach it except for the medicine man who brought only a part of the plant and handed it to a chosen six or eight-year-old boy. The boy carried the tobacco tied to a stick together with a baby's moccasin to the centre of the camp and put it into the ground. The next day, a feast was arranged, while people prayed and sang four songs. Subsequently, they went to gather the tobacco which was dried and put in satchels, and the seeds were collected to be planted the next year (Grinnell 1962, pp. 269-271).

#### **5. 6. 4 Marriage customs**

Formerly, chastity was the most valuable in the Blackfoot family life, therefore women generally began most of the prayers with an announcement of their purity. If a woman was unfaithful to her husband, he could either summon a council to pass a judgement or had the right to kill her or cut off her nose. Women often chose death, for such a humiliation as a nose chopped off was a disgrace. Despite these facts, polygamy was common in the Blackfoot society, as it was practical for their tribal organization - men were in the role of hunters and protectors, women took care of manual labour, such as tanning hides, making clothes and lodges and taking care of children and food, and therefore, if a man was married to more women, each of them could do a different work. It was no exception that a man married several sisters (McClintock 1999, pp. 184-185, 188-190).

Generally, the girl got married when she was fourteen years old, sometimes she was only eight. As she was young, her parents decided whom she was to marry, or, if a young man fell in love with her, his parents had to ask hers, nonetheless, it was very unusual among the Blackfoot. Once the girl's parents decided upon their daughter's husband, every day for a month she was tasked to carry food to the young man's lodge. Subsequently, the girl's parents gave a pair of decorated moccasins to each member of the boy's family and arranged a feast in a lodge of the boy, nonetheless, only the relatives of the boy were invited, and also the bride's-to-be mother was not allowed to enter the lodge. After the feast, the boy gave to his future wife many presents which were to be distributed among her relatives. Once the tribe moved to another location, the girl's mother built a tipi for

the new couple, furnishing it with buffalo robes, blankets and mountain lion skins (McClintock 1999, pp. 185-187).

As long as the young couple resided in the lodge beside the girl's father's, his duty was to build their fire in the morning, and her mother carried food for them. Nevertheless, she could not enter the lodge nor speak with her son-in-law, as it was inappropriate in the Blackfoot society, thus she could visit her daughter only once the husband left the lodge. Regarding the relationship of the girl's father and his son-in-law, every time the young man went on a hunt, he was expected to share the prey with his father-in law (McClintock 1999, pp. 187-188).

## **5. 7 Religion**

### **5. 7. 1 Blackfoot mythology**

Before the introduction of Christianity to the Blackfoot society, people believed the creator of the universe was the Apistotoke, a divine spirit who was never personified by Blackfoot members. Naato'si represents the god of sun, the ruler of the Above-People who live in the Sky World above clouds. Naato'si's wife is the moon goddess called Ko'komiki'somma who is the mother of the Iipisowaahs, the Morning Star, and other stars as well<sup>60</sup>. One of the most important characters of the Blackfoot mythology is the Old Man or Napi who is described as a charlatan, a troublemaker and a foolish entity; he is often associated with the Old Woman and together they represent the first man and woman created by the Apistotoke<sup>61</sup>.

#### **5. 7. 1. 1 The Old Man**

Regarding Blackfoot mythology, at the beginning of everything there was a flood caused by the Above-People. As the Old Man was staying at the highest mountain, he sent an otter into the water to find some earth, nevertheless, it drowned. Afterwards, the Old Man sent a beaver which was also unsuccessful, and died as well. Finally, he sent a duck, and

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<sup>60</sup> Legends of America, 2020, <http://www.native-languages.org/blackfoot-legends.htm>, accessed on 04.03.2020.

<sup>61</sup> Mysteries of Canada, 2014, <https://www.mysteriesofcanada.com/first-nations/blackfoot-legends-napi/>, accessed on 04.03.2020.

despite the fact that it drowned, it had some earth on its feet, therefore the Old Man dropped it on the water, and suddenly it started to rain and everything sprouted on the earth (Duvall, Wissler 1995, p. 19).

Once, the Old Man concluded he would create a woman and a child from clay, thus he had formed it in a human shape and commanded it had to be people. After four days, the Old Man told the clay to walk, so it did. The woman asked the man if people would die or would live forever. The Old Man told her that he would throw a buffalo chip to the river, and if it floated, people would die only for four days and afterwards would live again. Nevertheless, if the chip sank, people would die forever. He had thrown the chip into water, and it floated. But the woman said, she would throw the stone into the river, and it would decide about their destiny. The stone immediately sunk under water. Hence, once people die, they die forever (Grinnell 1962, pp. 138-139).

Once, the Old Man had mixed water with different colours, and summoned all people on the highest mountain in the Montana reservation. He gave one cup of this liquid to each of them, and all, the Blackfoot, Piegan and Blood people obtained black water. Afterwards, the Old Man told them to drink it and to speak. They all spoke differently, only those who had drunken black water, spoke the same language (Duvall, Wissler 1995, p. 19).

### **5. 7. 2 Death and afterlife**

As in other cultures, Blackfoot believed in ghosts and afterlife as well. The presence of a ghost was recognized by dogs' ghost-bark which was an unusual sniffing bark Blackfoot were scared of. Allegedly, some of the tribe members were capable of seeing and hearing ghosts. It was believed that the spirit may cause death to the living by touching them, despite the fact that the person was kind and good while alive. It was also said that the spirits of the dead appeared in a form of an owl, therefore Blackfoot Indians were afraid of them (McClintock 1999, pp. 139-142).

When an Indian died, their spirit felt lonely. They were not prepared to leave neither their family nor friends, therefore the dead could not move to another world - the spirit world. It took nearly two months for the spirit to leave the world of the living for good, although

some of them were often returning to their old homes to haunt their relatives. The spirit world was said to be eastwards to the Sand Hills where the spirits of dead people resided together with the spirits of animals, and for it was surrounded by quicksand, it was impossible for a living person to enter (McClintock 1999, pp. 144-148).

As the Indian died, the body was prepared for burial by a woman closely related to the deceased. It was wrapped in a couple of garments and placed in a lodge erected in a thicket or on platforms positioned on the tree. If a Blackfoot woman died, she was buried with her implements for tanning hides and kitchen utensils; men were buried with their weapons and medicine. If a Blackfoot member deceased in their tipi, their lodge was never used again, for the Indians were afraid of their ghost (Grinnell 1962, p. 193).

Afterwards, Blackfoot went into mourning to express their deep sorrow which often lasted for several months (McClintock 1999, p. 150), nevertheless, George Bird Grinnell writes: *“I once came across an old wrinkled woman, who was crouched in the sage bush, crying and lamenting for some one, as if her heart would break. On inquiring if any one had lately died, I was told she was mourning for a son she had lost more than twenty years before”* (Grinnell 1962, p. 194). When a woman lost her husband or son, she cut her hair on a level with the eyes and generally, she chopped one or more joints of her small finger. If an adolescent boy died, his parents led his horse through the camp, moaning, they were wearing old clothes and went barefoot. They did not participate in any ceremonials, nor dances, moreover, they cut the manes and tails of their saddle-horses. After some time, the mother was purified with sage during a specific ceremonial, for her sadness was over and she was ready to begin a new life (McClintock 1999, pp. 151-152).

### **5. 7. 3 The arrival of Christianity**

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the main priority of Christian missionaries working in government-sponsored boarding schools was to convert as many native children as possible. Consequently, those who had refused their mythology were considered

traitors<sup>62</sup>. Nonetheless, these days many Blackfoot are Christians. Other members of the tribe keep to their traditional religion. The cooperation with elders contributes to the renewal and development of traditional Blackfoot ceremonials which are considered essential to preserve a long tradition of the Blackfoot society (Dahl, Gabriel 2008, p. 69).

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<sup>62</sup> MPRNEWS, 2013, [https://www.mprnews.org/story/2013/11/13/american-indians-balance-native-customs-with-christianity?fbclid=IwAR0g\\_UNROg6yF92-6Hvodj144kBmLrfvpYKyG42f40NMaKUgX7VlSk2ij4o](https://www.mprnews.org/story/2013/11/13/american-indians-balance-native-customs-with-christianity?fbclid=IwAR0g_UNROg6yF92-6Hvodj144kBmLrfvpYKyG42f40NMaKUgX7VlSk2ij4o), accessed on 11.03.2020.

## 6 Conclusion

The main purpose of the bachelor thesis was to describe the culture of the Blackfoot tribe, the transformation of their lands over time, and to focus on the most important historical events in the United States that influenced not only the lives of the Blackfoot but also other Native American tribes.

The first four chapters focused on the general information of the tribe, its history and reservations. In the past, the Blackfoot tribe who was divided into three divisions counted nearly 40,000 members, nevertheless, with the arrival of white men, their number rapidly decreased, as white settlers brought with them diseases indigenous people were unable to face. Moreover, at that time, buffalos were on the verge of extinction, thus many Blackfoot were dying of starvation, for ninety percent of their diet were buffalo. Consequently, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Blackfoot counted less than 5,000 members. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the number of tribe members has increased, and therefore, currently there are more than 30,000 Blackfoot living either in their reservation in Montana or in Alberta.

Regarding the history of Blackfoot, before white men encroached their territory in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, they had waged war only against the neighbouring tribes to steal horses from them. Nonetheless, in 1851, the Indian reservation system was introduced by the US government, and since then, several treaties negotiating the borders of the Indian territories have been concluded, therefore the Blackfoot tribe was forced to move further to the west. There were several reasons for the occupation of the territory. First, gold was discovered there during the gold rush, second, in 1920s areas suitable for an oil extraction were found there, and third, the Americans simply longed to enlarge their empire, and they believed Blackfoot would adapt to the new way of life. Nonetheless, since the US government infringed the majority of treaties, Blackfoot did not obtain neither money nor supplies to take care of themselves, and thus, until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they were facing unemployment and economic problems in the reservation.

Despite the fact white settlers crucially undermined the Blackfoot culture in the course of time, the tribe can be proud of it. Their cultural wealth is enormous, starting with a variety

of legends that include both life stories and religious myths, their lifestyle, numerous rituals complemented by hundreds of songs and dances, ending with their housing and clothing. Before the arrival of white settlers, Blackfoot frequently moved their camp without restraint, they were hunting buffalo, antelopes, elk or coyotes and gathering all sorts of herbs. They were performing various ceremonials, such as the Beaver Medicine or the Sun Dance ritual, since they believed worshipping their “creator” in such way would bring them harvest and luck, and heal the sick. Blackfoot legends gave rise to these ceremonials, since they are telling stories featuring the first Medicine Pipe, the sacred Beaver bundle, or the origin of many painted tipis, e.g. the Yellow Buffalo Tipi or the Snow Tipi. Each of the three Blackfoot divisions has its own version of certain legends, nevertheless, the essential idea of the story is preserved.

Before the arrival of Christianity to the Blackfoot society, on one hand, their religion had significantly differed from the Christian belief, as their most worshipped beings were sacred animals, such as a beaver, a buffalo or an otter; they had no “god”, although they believed there were several spirits residing the sky above clouds. On the other hand, their mythology describing the creation of the world is quite similar to the Bible, since despite there was no “god” at the beginning of everything, there was a flood, there was also a “creator” who made a woman and a child from clay and also, the origin of the Blackfoot language has a similar story as the tale of the Babylonian Confusion of Tongues. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, due to an insistence of Christian missionaries, some Blackfoot members converted to Christianity, although it was considered a betrayal.

Despite the unfavourable conditions the Blackfoot tribe has managed to restore its society. Currently, the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council is the governing body of the Blackfeet Nation in Montana, and its nine members are predominantly responsible for managing tribal lands and resources. Blackfoot also did not abandon their culture, quite the reverse. Since the 1980s, the tribe had fought to abolish an illegal oil and gas leases in the Badger-Two Medicine region which has been one of the sacred areas not only for the Blackfoot but also for other Native American tribes since time immemorial. Thirty years later, in 2017, they succeeded in protecting the land and all the illegal activities were cancelled. Moreover, since 2009, the leaders of the three branches of the Blackfoot,

Piegans, Kainai and Siksika, endeavour to create the Iinnii-Buffalo Spirit Centre to protect their culture and to pass it on, for future generations would not forget who their ancestors were. Last year, the reservation also welcomed a new herd of buffalo calves, as the tribe desires to increase the number of buffalo in their land.

With the efforts the Blackfoot tribe has made to protect and further spread their culture, they are well on the way to achieve their target - to preserve their history and pass their cultural wealth on their descendants. It is admirable how they managed to stand on their own feet again, since during the last two centuries they had to tackle an endless relocating of their reservation, poverty and starvation.

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## **8 Abstract**

This bachelor thesis covers the past and the present of the American Indian tribe Blackfoot. The objective of the thesis is to describe its culture, tradition, religion and the way of life of its members in detail. The first mention of the Blackfoot tribe goes back to time before Christ, nevertheless the thesis is focused on the later history of the tribe, starting with the arrival of white settlers to their territory in the middle of the 18th century. They significantly contributed to the disruption of the Native American lives, since the US government had introduced the Indian reservation system in the United States in 1851. Like other Native Americans, the Blackfoot was forced to leave their land and to move westward. The Americans who had been constantly longing to expand their territories did not treat the Blackfoot honestly, and therefore they often breached the concluded treaties. In Indian reservations it had led to economic problems which were persisting more or less to the end of the 20th century.

Currently, the Blackfoot tribe is growing again. Its members spare no effort to preserve their cultural wealth. In 2009, the leaders of the tribe launched the project which aims to build a spiritual centre which is to present the culture and traditions of the tribe. At the same time, its target is to create a new home for the herds of buffalos which are imported to the reservation for the purpose of restoring the original fauna.

## 9 Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce pojednává o historii a současnosti amerického indiánského kmene Černonožců. Cílem práce je detailně popsat jeho kulturu, tradice, náboženství a způsob každodenního života jeho členů. První zmínky o kmeni Černonožců sahají již do dob před Kristem, nicméně tato práce je zaměřena na pozdější historii kmene, počínaje příchodem bílých osadníků na jejich území v polovině 18. století. Ti v roce 1851 přispěli k výraznému narušení života rodilých Američanů, neboť americká vláda zavedla systém indiánských rezervací na celém území Spojených států. Černonožci byli tedy stejně jako ostatní americké indiánské kmeny donuceni opustit svou zemi a posunout se směrem na západ. Američané, toužící neustále rozšiřovat svá území, nejednali s domorodými obyvateli čestně, a tudíž sjednané dohody často porušovali. To v indiánských rezervacích vedlo k ekonomickým problémům, které přetrvávaly víceméně až do konce 20. století.

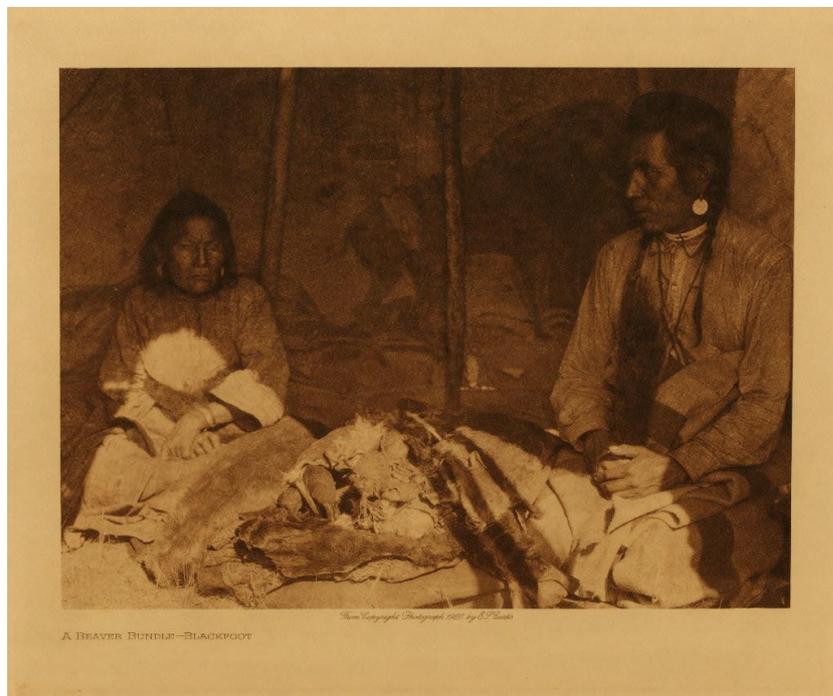
V současné době se kmen Černonožců opět rozrůstá. Jeho členové usilovně bojují o zachování jejich kulturního dědictví. V roce 2009 spustili lídři kmene projekt, jehož cílem je na území rezervace vybudovat duchovní centrum, které by mělo sloužit k prezentaci kultury a tradic kmene. Zároveň má za úkol vytvořit v rezervaci domov pro nová stáda bizonů, která sem jsou za účelem znovuoživení původní fauny dovážena.

## 10 Appendices



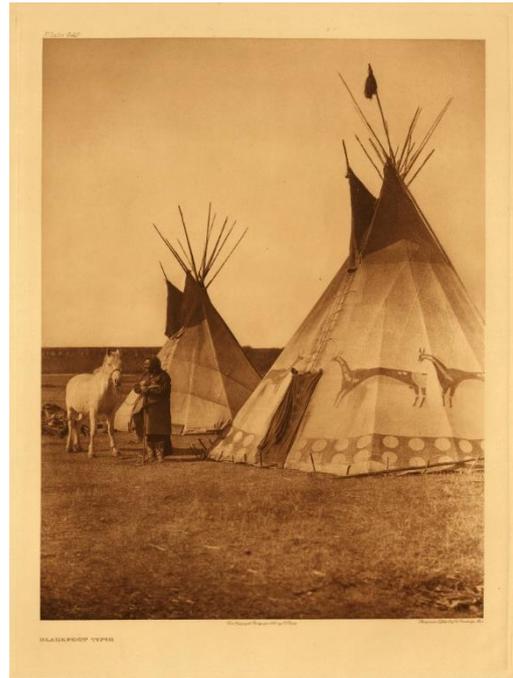
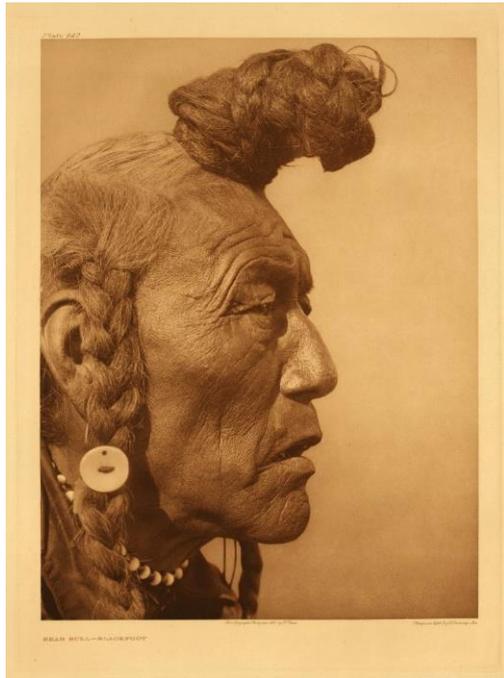
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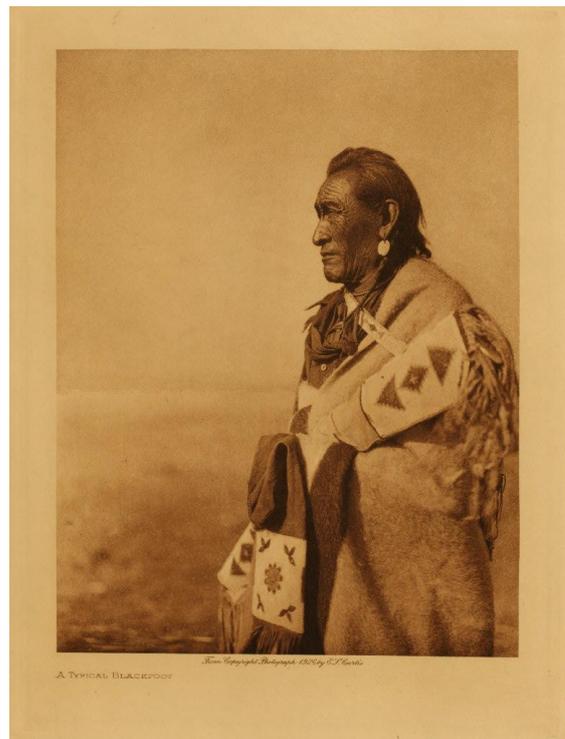
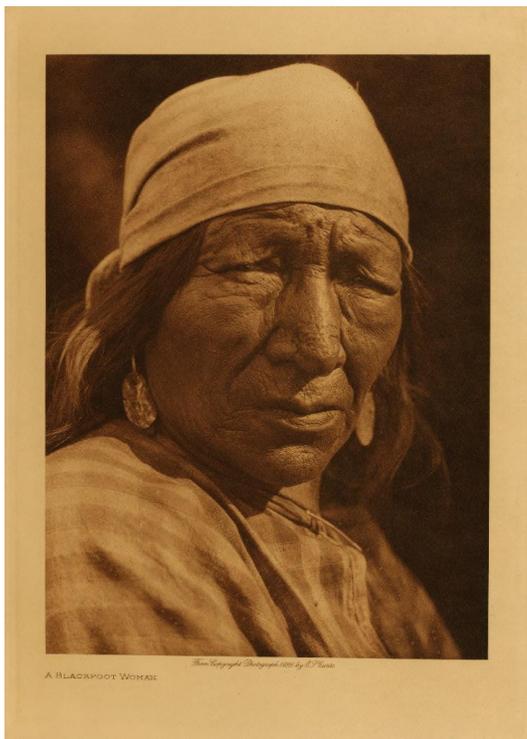
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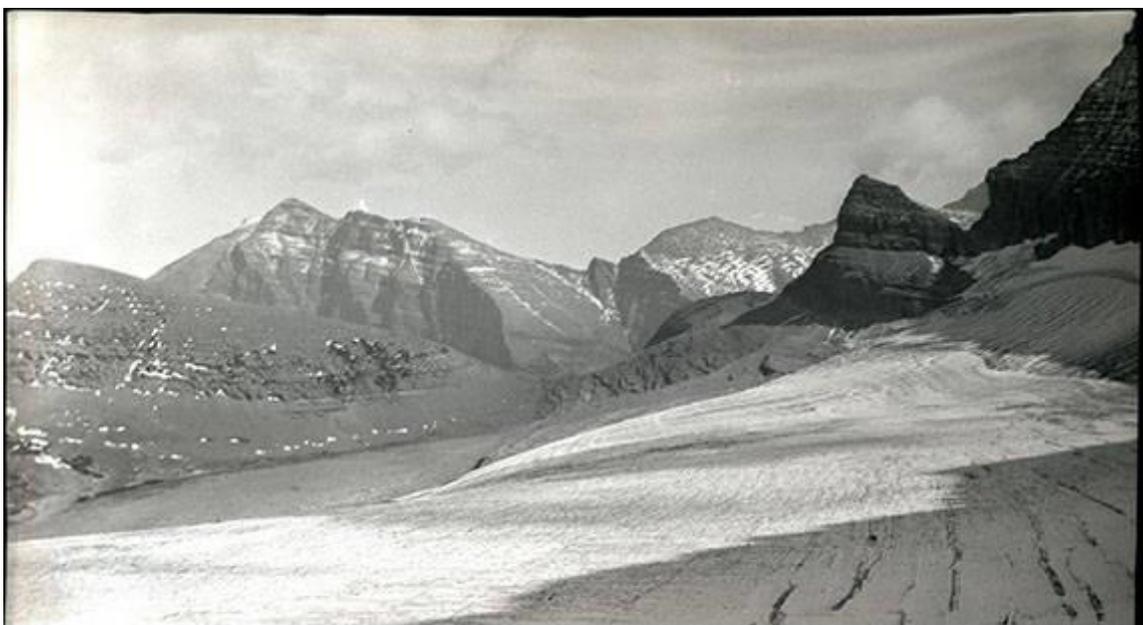


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