

## ABSTRACT

Negotiating Stronghold Table: Figuring the Badlands in National and Local News

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In 2012, the Oglala Sioux Tribe and the National Park Service published their joint proposal to create a Tribal National Park in the South Unit of the Badlands National Park. In this study I compare the narrative told by two nationally recognized papers, The New York Times and The Washington Post, and two locally based papers, The Rapid City Journal and The Lakota Country Times. While the stories told by the national newspapers square with one another and those told by the local sources are similar as well, the narrative represented by the national papers is entirely dissimilar from the local narrative. I then compare the stories told by media in the mid-2010s to stories told by the media in the 1890s and the 1970s, concerning interactions between the Oglala Sioux Tribe and the federal government. In each instance, national newspapers rely primarily on already-established characterizations of the members of the tribe. The connections between the perceived reality of the American public concerning the Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890, the occupation of Wounded Knee in 1973, and the vote to reject the proposed Tribal National Park in 2015 show that racial reconciliation is a cyclical process that has yet to be resolved. While the way that national newspapers figure the events within Badlands National Park has value because it shows the way that Americans figure themselves within a narrative, it restricts the ability to utilize real data to practically solve present problems, prolonging a cycle of ineffective communication.

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NEGOTIATING STRONGHOLD TABLE: FIGURING THE BADLANDS IN  
NATIONAL AND LOCAL NEWS

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction to the Politics of Badlands National Park

In 2015, the Oglala Sioux Tribe officially withdrew from an agreement to create the nation's first tribal national park in the South Unit of the Badlands National Park. This decision came after nine years of deliberation between the Tribe and the National Park Service. In that time leaders of the Tribe met with leaders of the National Park Service to create a General Management Plan for the South Unit of Badlands. The goal of this plan was to allow the Oglala Sioux Tribe to dictate the use of the land to a greater extent. For the plan to be put in place, the two entities needed to ensure that congress approved a new agreement to replace a Memorandum of Agreement between the Oglala Sioux Tribe and the National Park Service written in 1976. The Oglala Sioux Tribe and the National Park Service never got this far. By 2015, three years after the General Management Plant was published, the Tribal Council passed an official resolution to halt the process of creating a tribal national park.

For some, this was viewed as a tremendous defeat. Those most disappointed by the failure of the plan saw it as a step back for the Tribe and the members of Pine Ridge, the reservation upon which the South Unit sits. They believed that this idea, if properly implemented, would help the Tribe gain better control of the land within the South Unit. For them, the Tribe lost its opportunity to develop and maintain the land as its own once again.<sup>1</sup> For others, however, this action held a victory for the Oglala Sioux Tribe. The

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Zach, "Hopes for the First Tribal Park Are Fading," *The New York Times*, December 18, 2016, Late edition, sec. Travel.

group that supported the Tribe's decision believed that a tribal national park would, in fact, limit tribal members' freedom in the ways they chose to use the land.<sup>2</sup> They saw the decision to back out as a move which kept the land in the hands of the tribe. These two disparate viewpoints on the same action speak to underlying narratives surrounding Badlands National Park and Southwestern South Dakota. They evidence that the very same action can be perceived by one group as a giving back of lands which were rightfully the Oglala Sioux Tribe's and as the U.S. taking more liberties over the land and further restricting the tribe's power over what is rightfully theirs. Celeste Michelle Condit describes this phenomenon as polysemy or multitudinous readings given a particular text.<sup>3</sup> In this thesis, I argue that a monosemic reading of an event that reflects only the dominant voice hinders the representation of marginalized groups.

The purpose of this chapter is to identify the key components of the agreement between the Oglala Sioux Tribe and the National Park Service to create a tribal national park. The history of southwestern South Dakota, specifically that of the diplomatic relationship between the Oglala Sioux Tribe and the United States government, lays a foundation for the disagreements that arose between the Tribe and the Park Service in the early 2000s. This, therefore, is the foundation of the Oglala Sioux Tribe's relationship with the National Park Service in 2006, the year they agreed to work together to plan the management of the South Unit of the Badlands. Of particular importance was the Treaty of Fort Laramie of 1868 and the Memorandum of Agreement of 1976. These documents,

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew J. Trask, "Tribal Nat'l Park Could Be Setback for Ranchers," *Tri-State Livestock News*, April 9, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Celeste Michelle Condit, "The Rhetorical Limits of Polysemy," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 6, no. 2 (June 1989): 103–22.

paired with the official changing-hands of the land throughout the twentieth century contextualize the 2012 General Management Plan for the South Unit of Badlands National Park. In 2013, before the new General Management Plan had even received any support from congress, the Tribal Council decided to introduce 1000 head of bison to the South Unit of the park. This further informed the referendum vote three years later. These documents interact to create a narrative that is entirely open to polysemy.

The 2012 General Management Plan of the South Unit of Badlands National Park was an answer to disputes dating back to 2001. The relevant history of the Badlands South Unit goes much further back, however. The Oglala Sioux Tribe is one of seven tribes that make up the Lakota People. The Lakota, along with the Dakota and Nakota (each group being named for dialects of the Siouan language that these Tribes hold in common) form the Great Sioux Nation. In 1868, the United States and the Tribes of the Great Sioux Nation signed the Treaty of Fort Laramie, which gave over the land that now includes the Black Hills, Custer State Park, Pine Ridge Reservation, and the South Unit of Badlands National Park to the Sioux Nation.<sup>4</sup> The treaty declares the desire for peace on the part of both the United States and the Sioux Nation. It then lists the expectation for the Sioux Nation, as well as for the American government. One of these expectations was that any violent action on the part of either the members of the Sioux Nation or the United States would not be tolerated.<sup>5</sup> Catherine Price, a scholar who studies the history of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, writes that the treaty was dysfunctional from its inception. The United States stringently held the Lakota people to the terms of the treaty, but it was

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<sup>4</sup> Indian Peace Commission, "Treaty of Fort Laramie," 1868.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

often far more lax in regard to violence inflicted upon members of the tribe.<sup>6</sup> The inequitable maintenance and application of the treaty of 1868 set the tone for diplomacy between the Sioux Tribe and the United States for many years to come.

As short-lived as it was problematic, the treaty acted as a working device for diplomacy for just six years. In 1874, the year that gold was discovered in the Black Hills, the United States dispatched the army to force those Indigenous communities residing in this area onto reservations after they turned down the federal government's request to buy the Black Hills.<sup>7</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Custer and his troops met a group of Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapahoe in what would become one of the most famous battles of the West: The Battle of Little Bighorn.<sup>8</sup> The Indigenous army won the Battle of Little Bighorn, but they did not enjoy their victory for long. The U.S. relocated the Oglala Lakota from the Black Hills and revoked much of the territory promised in the Treaty of Fort Laramie. Sixteen years after the Battle of Little Bighorn, in 1890, the United States broke the Treaty of Fort Laramie again, massacring at least 200 people near Stronghold Table, a plateau within the borders of the established Pine Ridge Reservation, and now also part of the South Unit of Badlands.<sup>9</sup> The men, women, and children who died there are now buried on the plateau.<sup>10</sup> Recently, the Supreme Court determined that the United

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<sup>6</sup> Catherine Price, *The Oglala People, 1841-1879: A Political History* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> Edward Lazarus, *Black Hills White Justice: The Sioux Nation Versus the United States 1775 to the Present* (United States: Bison Books, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Brenda Norrell, "Keepers of the Stronghold," *The Native Press*, April 15, 2012.

<sup>10</sup> Norrell, "Keepers of the Stronghold."

States unjustly took the Black Hills from the Lakota, and offered them what is now worth more than \$1 billion as retribution. The Lakota People refuse to take the money, waiting to be given back the land, instead.<sup>11</sup> Conflicts between the United States and the Lakota People that began over 150 years ago still go unresolved and are therefore significant to the narratives and conflicts of interest at play in the consideration of a Tribal national park.

### *Makeup of the Badlands*

Badlands National Park is divided into two units: The North Unit and the South Unit. These are connected by a thin stretch of land, which marks the county line of Pine Ridge Reservation. The South Unit is entirely part of the Pine Ridge Reservation, and it is newer than the North Unit. In 1939, when it was opened as a national monument, Badlands was made up of only the northern part of the park.<sup>12</sup> Even though many of the requirements and appeals made in the Treaty of Fort Laramie had not been honored, the Oglala Sioux Tribe still retained full claim of the land that would later be the South Unit.<sup>13</sup> In 1942, the Tribal Council of the Oglala Sioux Tribe agreed to allow the United States Air Force to use the area as a practice site for bombing operations.<sup>14</sup> The people who lived on the stretch of land were forced to move, and they were given two weeks'

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<sup>11</sup> Lazarus, *Black Hills White Justice: The Sioux Nation Versus the United States 1775 to the Present*.

<sup>12</sup> "Final General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement, Badlands National Park, North Unit, South Dakota," Federal Register, April 24, 2007.

<sup>13</sup> Lazarus, *Black Hills White Justice: The Sioux Nation Versus the United States 1775 to the Present*.

<sup>14</sup> Norrell, "Keepers of the Stronghold."

notice to do so.<sup>15</sup> After World War II, The U.S. created a “buy back” program through which those who had inhabited the land before World War II could reclaim their land. Not all of those people who lost land in 1942 decided to buy it back. The Tribal Council of the Oglala Sioux Tribe agreed to allow the National Park Service to incorporate whatever land that was not rebought—133,000 acres of it—into Badlands National Park in 1968.<sup>16</sup>

Because it was still part of Pine Ridge, members of the Oglala Sioux Tribe had special privileges to the South Unit, ensured by the Memorandum of Agreement between the Oglala Sioux Tribe and the National Park Service in 1976.<sup>17</sup> The Memorandum lays the groundwork for the relationship between the National Park Service and the Oglala Sioux Tribe. In Section 1 of the memorandum it states that in allowing the NPS to use the 133,000 acres of land that would become the South Unit of Badlands National Park, the Tribe would not be losing ownership of the land and members would be able to use it for hunting, fishing, and livestock grazing lands.<sup>18</sup> The Tribal Council had the responsibility of distributing hunting permits to its members—the only people who have that privilege within the borders of Badlands National Park. Despite the fact that the memorandum denies that the Oglala Sioux Tribe would be losing land in allowing the Park Service to

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<sup>15</sup> Lazarus, *Black Hills White Justice: The Sioux Nation Versus the United States 1775 to the Present*.

<sup>16</sup>Norrell, “Keepers of the Stronghold.”

<sup>17</sup> Oglala Sioux Tribe and National Park Service, “Memorandum of Agreement Between the Oglala Sioux Tribe of South Dakota and the National Park Service of the Department of the Interior to Facilitated Establishment, Development, Administration, and Public Use of the Oglala Sioux Tribal Lands, Badlands National Monument,” 1976.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

add it to the National Park system, it does make it clear that members of the Tribe would not be able to develop it or manage it outside of providing for public recreation in the park.<sup>19</sup> Depending on how the benefits and losses to the Tribe as a result of giving over managerial authority to the National Park Service compare with one another, Section 1 of the memorandum could be either constraining to the Tribe or helpful. As a replacement to the memorandum, therefore, the General Management Plan ought to be measured against this document to discover it would allow greater prosperity to the Tribe or less.

The Memorandum of Agreement acts as a list of what both the Oglala Sioux Tribe and the National Park Service can expect concerning the South Unit, particularly land use and the economics of the tribe. The memorandum is clear that those who chose to buy the land back from the government after 1968 will not be required to forfeit it in the future.<sup>20</sup> Ranchers who are tribal members will be able to use the land to graze their livestock as they had before the memorandum, under the condition that the Tribe considers phasing this out in the future.<sup>21</sup> Members of the Tribe will have extended opportunities to fill employment positions in the Badlands South Unit, and the Service agrees to train members in the fields of interpretation, conservation, fire protection, search and rescue, law enforcement, and local history, so that Tribal Members have better chances at attaining the careers they would like to pursue within the park.<sup>22</sup> Also, the memorandum

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<sup>19</sup> "Final General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement, Badlands National Park, North Unit, South Dakota."

<sup>20</sup> "Final General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement, Badlands National Park, North Unit, South Dakota."

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 221.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 222-224.

states that, as soon as can be reasonably expected, the Park Service will build the White River Visitor Center, which the Tribe will run. The document expresses hope that the Oglala Sioux Tribe's control will extend to the management of the whole South Unit with time.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, the memorandum holds the Service to assisting the Tribe in pursuing grants and loans, as well as creating recreation facilities in Pine Ridge, even outside the South Unit.

The most concrete benefit of the Memorandum of Agreement is that Oglala Sioux Tribe receives money from the North Unit entrance fees. Half of what visitors pay to enter the park is paid to the Oglala Sioux Parks Board twice a year.<sup>24</sup> The money that the Parks Board receives, and the way that the board uses the money, must be recorded and submitted to the Parks Service every year.<sup>25</sup> In 2012, these receipts added up to \$650,000, about four times the National Park Service's annual budget for the South Unit itself.<sup>26</sup> This money, though it is meant to go directly back into tribal parks and recreation projects, is a significant source of income to the Tribe.

The 1976 Memorandum of Agreement, though over forty years old, is still a powerful document. When encountering disagreements, the Oglala Sioux Tribe and the National Park Service both refer to the memorandum as their primary source. In 2001, when members of the Oglala Sioux Tribe protested the paleontological dig that the NPS

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 228.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Brendan Borrell, "Making Good on the Badlands," *Utne Reader: The Best of the Alternative Press* 180, no. 6 (n.d.).

created after finding bones of ancient mammals in the South Unit, they called upon the Memorandum of Agreement. One protester, Jim Toby Big Boy, said, “The 1976 Memorandum of Agreement between the Oglala Sioux Tribe and the National Parks Service is dead... The Land must be returned to the Lakota People.”<sup>27</sup> His drastic wording about the death of the Memorandum of Agreement comes from Section 14 of the document itself, which says, “Members of the Tribe shall have unrestricted access in perpetuity to all areas of spiritual importance, which are identified in Appendix B, and which shall not be developed by the Service except with the Tribe’s consent.”<sup>28</sup> Stronghold Table, the mountain where 200 Lakota people were massacred in 1890 and the area where the National Park Service discovered these bones, is one of those areas of spiritual importance listed in Appendix B.

The Badlands Superintendent at the time, William Supernaugh, believed the distance between the dig site and Stronghold Table was greater than warranted the approval from the Oglala Sioux Tribe. In fact, Stronghold Table sat seven miles from the site of the dig.<sup>29</sup> It did not stop groups like the Oyate Society and the Tokala Society, two Lakota organizations dedicated to protecting the history and culture of the Lakota people, from voicing their discontent with the National Park Service’s paleontological activity.<sup>30</sup> This disagreement led to the early discussions of creating a Tribal national park in the South Unit of the Badlands. In 2003, the National Park Service, together with the Oglala

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<sup>27</sup> Norrell, “Keepers of the Stronghold.”

<sup>28</sup> Tribe and National Park Service, “1976 Memorandum of Agreement.”

<sup>29</sup> Heidi Gease, “Badlands Fossil Dig Mired in History, Opposing Views,” *Rapid City Journal*, August 3, 2002.

<sup>30</sup> Norrell, “Keepers of the Stronghold.”

Sioux Tribe, decided to treat the South Unit of Badlands National Park as an entity separate from the North Unit, writing a General Management Plan strictly for this area and making provisions for what could be the nation's first Tribal national park.

### *The Making of a General Management Plan*

A General Management Plan is a required body of guidelines for the workings of a functioning park. It documents the vision that park leadership have in several ways, outlining the ways in which environmental resources, cultural heritage sites, education, and visitor access should be managed, and also addressing who should be involved in the decision-making process and how it may affect them. The document is updated, or rather done away with entirely after a new one is drafted, every 15 to 20 years so as to make way for new growth and ideas.<sup>31</sup> The National Park Service drafted the General Management Plan for the Badlands 26 years after the previous one, namely because it was working with new, unconsidered ideas. The plan is a framework, addressing general problems that park staff anticipate in the coming years, but it does not use specific language or address specific issues. As indicated in the document itself, "Park planning is a decision-making process, and general management planning is the broadest level of decision making for parks."<sup>32</sup> It is no more than an outline which all the partners of the park can refer to in the coming years, regardless of their seniority. It should act as a resource for cooperative efforts on the part of the staff and as a guide for newcomers to the park, but it is not a rubric that judges the success of a park, or even a blueprint for that

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<sup>31</sup> Frank Church, "National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978," Pub. L. No. 791 (1978).

<sup>32</sup> "Final General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement, Badlands National Park, North Unit, South Dakota."

park's next steps. The 2012 General Management Plan for the South Unit of Badlands National Park is uniquely important to understanding the problem because it is the first document which officially considers transitioning the South Unit from being a less developed part of Badlands National Park to an independent Tribal national park.

The 2012 Badlands General Management Plan addresses questions of education, the preservation of environmental and cultural resources, appropriate visitor use of the park, and management of the South Unit. To organize the issues that they would like to address, the NPS separates the park geographically, into "zones:" A Natural Area/Recreation zone, a Preservation Zone, a Research Zone, and a Development Zone.<sup>33</sup> Each zone is intended to fully address one or more issues without overlap. The plan then addresses seven possible methods of management for the South Unit. These range from making no changes and leaving the park as it is, to immediately deauthorizing the land and removing it entirely from federal controls. The plan lists Option 2, creating a tribal national park, as the Preferred Option, presumably on both the side of the National Park Service and the Oglala Sioux Tribal Council.<sup>34</sup> The writers of the plan make it clear that the National Park Service encourages the Oglala Sioux Tribe to involve itself in the workings of the park. As the plan mentions, "Two of the seven options discussed were brought to the table by members of the Tribe's Oyate group."<sup>35</sup> This alone shows that the

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<sup>33</sup> "Final General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement, Badlands National Park, North Unit, South Dakota."

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

National Park Service and the Oglala Sioux Tribe have communicated enough to compile a list of possibilities for future management cooperatively.

Under the definition of a tribal national park, the South Unit of Badlands would operate in the hands of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, with technical assistance from the National Parks Service. The General Management Plan lists the duties of the Oglala Sioux Tribe: The Tribe would be free to manage the park according to its own vision, as long as it does not conflict with federal laws or regulations.<sup>36</sup> The Tribe would also be able to determine an entrance fee to the park, with the condition that the money goes back to the park.<sup>37</sup> It would run the Lakota Heritage and Education Center, make decisions about education and leisure of tribal and non-tribal visitors, and it would be responsible for training employees and volunteers who work there. The Park Service would add the Oglala Sioux insignia to all the signs within the park. Tribal members would still be able to hunt on the land, as regulated by the Tribal Council. In all, the Tribe would be held to the General Management Plan and federal laws governing environmental and cultural preservation. Within these confines, they would have the freedom to determine the sites open to visitors and guide the treatment of historical and sacred sites, including the management of the fossils in the park. The plan clearly intends to give the freedom of control over to the Oglala Sioux Tribe with the implicit support and technical backing of the National Park Service.

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<sup>36</sup> "Final General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement, Badlands National Park, North Unit, South Dakota."

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

The General Management Plan lists the ways that the Oglala Sioux Tribe would be able to expect the National Park Service and the federal government to support them under the tribal national park. If those who were part of the planning process did agree carry through with a tribal national park, the National Park Service would continue to staff the park immediately after the decision. At the same time, they would members of the Oglala Sioux Tribe to take their places.<sup>38</sup> The goal would be to completely staff the park with tribal members by the end of the transition from national park to tribal national park. Congress would allot the Tribe an annual sum of money for use in the park, as well as, in the words of the General Management Plan, “allow [the Oglala Sioux Tribe] to compete for monies and technical assistance within the established NPS allocation process.”<sup>39</sup> Finally, the plan states that the Oglala Sioux Tribe could expect support in training the employees of the Lakota Heritage and Education Center, if they requested it. The Tribe would still be held to federal law, and if a tribal law or resolution was in disagreement to a federal law, the federal law would be automatically enforced inside the park. Finally, congress must approve a tribal national park before the Oglala Sioux Tribe can take over its management.

In making a tribal national park, the National Park Service and the Oglala Sioux Tribe wanted to allow the Tribe to have more control over the land than had been permitted historically. A national park is affiliated only with the national park system, and regardless of the cooperation between the Park Service and any other entities, the Park Service has the final say over what happens within its borders. The General

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

Management Plan for the North Unit of the Badlands, published in 2006, demonstrates the difference in the distribution of power between from a proposed tribal national park. The plan does consider the importance of the park to the Lakota people and invites Lakota contributions to the planning process, but it does not identify duties or opportunities for the Oglala Sioux Tribe in the way that management option to in the 2012 General Management Plan for the South Unit does. The provisions that the 2006 General Management Plan for the North Unit makes for cooperation with the OST are: to regularly communicate with the government of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, to pursue a more complete understanding of the importance of the Badlands through discussions with members of the OST, to identify and protect areas that are meaningful to the tribe, to ensure that the interpretive programs that the NPS creates are accurate and appreciative of the values of the tribes it represents, and to support Native American traditions within the park. These show the National Park Service's desire to represent the Lakota people fairly and accurately, but it does not give the level of power or freedom of decision as it concerns the use of the land over to the Oglala Sioux Tribal Council like the making of a tribal national park would.

The 2012 General Management Plan for the South Unit indicates that the National Park Service would like to involve the Oglala Sioux Tribe more fully in the park than it has historically. Under current management, the National Park Service is responsible for making all managerial decisions concerning the park, as well as implementing the General Management Plan, but the Oglala Sioux Tribe does receive certain benefits. The Oglala Sioux Parks and Recreation Authority (OSPRA) is responsible for staffing the White River Visitor Center and aids the park service in creating interpretive content for

the center in the summer, when the park is operational.<sup>40</sup> This provides some jobs to the members of the Tribe, and it also gives interpretive liberties to the Tribe itself, making the Oglala Sioux Tribe to be the final editor of any material that the center offers to visitors.

To best understand the attention that the National Park Service paid to the Oglala Sioux Tribe in the making of the 2012 general management plan, it is helpful to compare it to the 2006 general management plan for the North Unit. The 2006 plan identifies Pine Ridge Reservation as an area that would likely be impacted socioeconomically by the park service's choice of future management, but when identifying socioeconomic impacts of the alternatives it lists in the environmental statement, it determines the park's impact on the whole area's economics.<sup>41</sup> In comparison, the 2012 plan for the South Unit specifically mentions the effect that future alternatives would have on the Oglala Sioux Tribe, when appropriate.<sup>42</sup> This shows a difference in the relationship between the Park Service and the Tribe. In one scenario the Oglala Sioux Tribe is considered one group among many, but in the other, the Tribe is singled out as a primary demographic that should be considered when making decisions in park management. This is because of the fact that the South Unit of the Badlands sits on reservation land and the members of the Oglala Sioux Tribe played such a large role in the decision to create a General Management Plan unique to the South Unit.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

The General Management Plan leaves certain points of economic and diplomatic importance unaddressed, remaining ambiguous as to whether or not the plan would be beneficial to the Tribe in the future. Among the gray areas of the preferred option are the requirements that the Tribe adhere to environmental laws, the requirement that all collected monies go directly to the park, the vagueness of the competitions for funding and technical support in an already young experimental park, and the mention of doing away with the 1976 Memorandum of Agreement for a newer agreement between the Oglala Sioux Tribe and the National Parks Service. Three of these four characteristics of the new tribal national park are standard operation on the side of the Park Service. Every national park and open space run by the government has these same expectations placed on them.<sup>43</sup> It does, however, limit the freedoms that the Tribe would have over the land both fiscally and in how quickly or by what means the Tribe can develop the land. In suggesting the elimination of the 1976 memorandum, the 2012 General Management Plan does more than encourage a change to the diplomacy between the Oglala Sioux Tribe and the National Park Service: It recommends revoking a working treaty, with an attached list of promises to the Oglala Sioux Tribe, before it can ensure a realistic substitute that is agreed upon by both parties.

### *The Laws Constraining a Tribal National Park*

The laws explicitly mentioned in the General Management Plan are: The NPS Organic Act, the Endangered Species Act, the National Environmental Policy Act

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<sup>43</sup> "The National Park Service Organic Act," Pub. L. No. 535, 16 (1916).

(NEPA), and the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA).<sup>44</sup> The Organic Act states that all land in national parks, national monuments, and reservations are to be used according to their purpose— which is, in the words of the act, “to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”<sup>45</sup> It also requires that a director be appointed for each park, and that that director work under the Secretary of the Interior.<sup>46</sup> The National Environmental Policy Act requires that before carrying out any action that may affect the environment, the entity performing the act must publish an Environmental Impact Statement, consulting with experts on the issues at hand.<sup>47</sup> These statements are essential, but they are also costly, attaching certain constraints to the abilities of the Oglala Sioux Tribe if managing a tribal national park.

According to a report written in 2014, the average cost of conducting an environmental analysis is \$1.4 million.<sup>48</sup> Compared to the estimated income due to tourism in Badlands National Park and its surrounding communities of \$23 million, this is a significant cost.<sup>49</sup> In 2010, the NPS spent \$166,000 on the South Unit.<sup>50</sup> Any change

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<sup>44</sup> “Final General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement, Badlands National Park, North Unit, South Dakota.”

<sup>45</sup> “The National Park Service Organic Act,” Pub. L. No. 535, 16 (1916).

<sup>46</sup> “Final General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement, Badlands National Park, North Unit, South Dakota.”

<sup>47</sup> “National Environmental Policy Act Review Process,” in *Environmental Protection Agency*, n.d.

<sup>48</sup> “National Environmental Policy Act,” Report to Congressional Requesters, April 2014.

<sup>49</sup> “Final General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement, Badlands National Park, North Unit, South Dakota.”

that the Oglala Sioux Tribe would plan to make on the land of the South Unit would likely more than double the current budget. The General Management Plan omits the costs of following these laws and in doing so, it leaves out any discussion of which entity would bear the financial burdens or how they would be distributed between the two governments. Furthermore, the North Unit, which is more developed and receives most of the park's income, would no longer financially support the South Unit.

Most importantly, the 2012 General Management Plan proposes leaving behind the 1976 Memorandum of Agreement for another document to govern the conduct of the OST and the NPS. The 2012 General Management Plan says, "A new agreement would be established between the OST and the NPS to clarify the administrative and procedural details necessary for the full transition of park management from direct NPS oversight to the OST. Upon execution of the new agreement, the 1976 Memorandum of Agreement would be replaced."<sup>51</sup> Here the plan ensures that the document would be replaced, but it makes no assurances as to the agreements between the Park Service and the Oglala Sioux Tribe. The document does state that both the Tribe and the Service would have a say in what the new agreement would include, but the plan does not make any requirements for the contents of this new document. It is not particularly appropriate to include the contents of another document which would exist only under the condition that the Oglala Sioux Tribe, the National Park Service and congress agreed on working together to create a tribal national park. Nonetheless, when the 2012 plan mentions leaving it for another

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<sup>50</sup> Borrell, "Making Good on the Badlands."

<sup>51</sup> "Final General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement, Badlands National Park, North Unit, South Dakota."

agreement, it adds another layer of uncertainty to the process of establishing a Tribal national park. The Memorandum of Agreement has been broken both the OST and the NPS since its creation. As with the tensions that the OST and the NPS had in 2001, the document leaves some points up to interpretation, allowing for them to become points of contention. Despite its weaknesses, it has remained a constant in the negotiations between the two groups. To suggest doing away with it for a new agreement, rather than an updated version of the same document, is to do away with one of the most stable documents to dictate relationships between the Oglala Sioux Tribe and the National Park Service in Lakota history while making a monumental change to the management of the Badlands.

A year after they published the 2012 General Management Plan for the South Unit, the Tribal Council of the Oglala Sioux Tribe published an ordinance to introduce 1000 head of bison to the South Unit of the Park. Included in the ordinance are preparations for the tribal national park that is to come. The document reinforces the duties and powers that the Oglala Sioux Tribal Council has, as established by the Tribal Constitution. It can negotiate with federal, state and local governments to manage the economy of the Oglala Sioux Tribe.<sup>52</sup> The Land Committee is specifically chosen to oversee the use of land within the reservation.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, the document states, the 1000 head of bison will add to the health of the land and the income of the Tribe, creating jobs and adding an educational element to the South Unit of the park. Because of the

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<sup>52</sup> Bryan Brewer and Rhonda Two Eagle, "Ordinance 13-21: Ordinance of the Oglala Sioux Tribal Council of the Oglala Sioux Tribe" (The Oglala Sioux Tribe, June 2014).

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

benefits of adding buffalo to the landscape of the South Unit, the Tribal Council authorized the Bureau of Indian Affairs to create a herd on the land. The document states that those who wish to sell their land would receive a favorable price,<sup>54</sup> and that the Badlands National Park, as well as park donors will pay the final year of grazing fees for ranchers who graze their cattle in the area. Those permits, however, would no longer be in use on October 31, 2015. The document makes no mention of the 1976 Memorandum of Agreement, but it does elicit memories of the agreement's promise that landowners would not be called upon to give up their land in the future. The Tribal Council passed the ordinance with 15 votes for, two against, and zero abstaining from voting, on June 19, 2013. In 2015, the council put the decision to create a tribal national park up to a referendum vote. The council voted the idea down, and the plans for creating a tribal national park were put to a halt.

In this thesis, I report on and evaluate the methods used by news media to tell the story of the effort to make the South Unit of Badlands National Park into a tribal national park. I separate these sources geographically, discussing the importance of proximity to the story that journalists tell. To do this, I discuss two national news sources and three more localized or niche sources. I follow each source from the first mention it makes of Badlands National Park in 2002 up to 2016, after the Oglala Sioux Tribe officially declared that it would no longer work toward a tribal national park. When pieced together, each news source tells a story that displays its own logic and narrative fidelity. There is little contradiction between the attitudes and objectives of these news articles within a news source. Furthermore, news sources of similar size and targeting similar

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

audiences show distinct similarities in the stories they choose to tell—as well as what they tend to leave out. With this information, I tell the years-long narrative of the process to create a tribal national park from the perspective of national media, and then from the perspective of local or niche news outlets.

I then evaluate the quality of reporting within these stories, based on the assumptions that the journalists make concerning the key actors in the negotiations, the means by which they demonstrate the value of the land and of the people connected to it, and whether they discuss the issue at hand by utilizing the facts unique to the situation or by calling upon deeply ingrained archetypal roles. I find that those news sources more closely connected to the Badlands, in location or in chosen subject material, identify the National Park Service, members of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, and to some extent, cattle ranchers as the main actors in this situation. In contrast, national news coverage identifies the National Park Service as a key actor, but typically views the Oglala Sioux Tribe as subjects the tribal national park would affect, and not decision makers. They entirely exclude cattle ranchers as actors or subjects. I find also that national news sources place the value of the Badlands National Park in its appeal and educational value to visitors both culturally and geographically removed from the area. It is a site that Americans visit to reimagine the Western Frontier, and it has value inasmuch as it provides leisure and identity to travelers. Comparatively, local and niche papers describe the Badlands as a cultural center for the residents of the area and a product of the long history of interactions between the Lakota Nation and white settlers. These views impact the stories that these sources tell, and whether they report on the issues involved in the planning of

the tribal national park, or simply reinforce the understandings of identity that their readers likely have.

Finally, I compare this pattern of storytelling to news of two other historical events that occurred in the same area. I discuss the media surrounding the Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890 as well as that concerning the occupation of Wounded Knee in 1973. Using these events, I identify a pattern of reporting wherein journalists make assumptions based on the prevalent stereotypes and then shape their depictions to fit these assumptions. I argue that, though national news sources have become somewhat more open to the perspectives of Indigenous groups, the problematic methods of utilizing stereotypes of people groups, rather than their own voices, still exists. This shows that the way that news is reported now is the result of a long pattern of media coverage that hinders progress for marginalized groups.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Badlands in the Eyes of America

Newspaper articles are uniquely useful for understanding the public opinion on the topics they cover because they often provide focused explanations of current events relevant to a diverse audience. In the words of Lindsay Hoffman and Michael Slater, "... newspapers provide a unique opportunity to study opinion expression of the citizenry, as well as of professional journalists across the United States."<sup>55</sup> These articles simplify complex issues into short, to the point stories that offer up a manageable way for readers to understand and discuss the world around them. They identify what is important in a situation and they frame it in a way that informs the perspective the reader should take when analyzing the event for him or herself, and in doing so evidence the foundations upon which the identities of the target audience are based. Just as importantly, their brevity demands omission of all the details of the situation except those necessary for the story the publishers of the newspaper want to tell. These omitted details, and even the stories that are left out of print, show what a journalist does not see as important, or what does not fit comfortably into an already established narrative.

A prime example of this is the way that American newspapers cover the cooperative effort between the Oglala Sioux Tribe and the National Parks Service in Badlands National Park. Journalists fashion a story out the attempt to create a tribal

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<sup>55</sup> Lindsay H. Hoffman and Michael D. Slater, "Evaluating Public Discourse in Newspaper Opinion Articles: Values-Framing and Integrative Complexity in Substance and Health Policy Issues," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 84, no. 1 (March 2007): 58–74.

national park in South Dakota based on their own understanding of its context and on the preferences and ideologies of the audiences for which they write. Journalists' stories about Badlands National Park change, therefore, based on the locality of their newspaper. In order to investigate this, I will analyze articles concerning Badlands National Park from two nationally acclaimed news sources, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. I will then look at articles coming from various smaller newspapers immediately in the area of Badlands National Park. In comparing the stories that these articles tell about the park, a reader can identify the motives, concerns, and needs of the groups of people involved.

In the national newspapers I analyzed, Badlands appeared mainly in either section "A" or the travel section. Those pieces in section "A" concerned issues of air quality and the budget of the NPS. Those in travel celebrated Badlands National Park as a beautiful landscape that holds aesthetic value and historical significance for the American people. However, while these newspapers acknowledge the important part that the Badlands had in American history, they often focus more on the Badlands' natural value, delegating any historical significance to areas outside the park. In excluding historical events from their stories of the Badlands, journalists tacitly deny that any human history occurred at all on this land. This characterizes the land within the Badlands as an area void of any human interference except when it became dependent upon Euromericans for its conservation. Further, it all but ignores the Native Americans who have had significant cultural and geographical connections to this land, rejecting any thought of Native Americans as actors within the borders of the National Park.

### *Tourism Journalism*

“Dive Into the Past” is a list of historical sites across the nation.<sup>56</sup> The author, Penelope Green, suggests an offbeat way a traveler can experience Badlands: homesteading. Green introduces her audience to South Dakota from the perspective of a 1930s settler, briefly describing the Homestead Act in 1862 that gave land free to settlers who would till it. She also mentions conditions that the settlers had to weather, like the Dust Bowl, and how many sold their land to the government.<sup>57</sup> One attraction among many, though, southwest South Dakota makes up a small part of the fabric of American history in this article. The authors make other suggestions to their readers—visiting Massachusetts and spending a night at the history museum in Plymouth, driving across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, or tour the gilded mansions in Rhode Island.<sup>58</sup> In this article, each destination holds a key to the American identity. South Dakota offers a view into America’s homesteading past.

Similarly, “America: The Center Cut” places the Badlands into a larger scene—the Midwest, this time, rather than the United States as a whole. Here, instead of listing the major players of American history, Seth Kugel tells a story of the Midwest, a region of the country that he deems unjustly overlooked.<sup>59</sup> He describes the oddities that he has

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<sup>56</sup> Bonnie Tsui et al., “Dive Into the Past,” *The New York Times*, July 4, 2010, Late Edition, sec. Travel.

<sup>57</sup> Tsui et al., “Dive Into the Past.”

<sup>58</sup> Tsui et al., “Dive Into the Past.”

<sup>59</sup> Kugel, “America: The Center Cut.”

encountered on his cross-country trip. In his article, Kugel begins on the coast of Louisiana and ending up on the border between the States and Canada.

The Badlands makes up the northmost attraction of a generally unassuming landscape. In the words of Kugel, “With notable exceptions like the Ozark hills and the picture-perfect main streets of places like Cottonwood Falls, Kan., and Pella, Iowa, the center swath of the United States is not visually riveting—unless you find soybean fields mesmerizing.”<sup>60</sup> Within the subcategory of “The Midwest,” the Badlands faces little competition as the most visually breathtaking swath of land. In fact, it is a welcome change from the more common landscape of farmland that makes up the rest of the central United States. Kugel mentions the Oglala Sioux Tribe in the story of his trip once. He says the Lakota-run radio station, KILI, got him through the sometimes-monotonous drives through South Dakota and Nebraska. He states that he learned that the tribe was trying to implement solar energy in Pine Ridge and that it is particularly difficult to work with the Bureau of Indian Affairs.<sup>61</sup> Outside of this information, the only other mention he makes of this corner of South Dakota is his documentation of Sturgis, a yearly motorcycle rally held northwest of the park. In framing Badlands National Park against the backdrop of the rest of the midwestern United States, Kugel implies that the Badlands is worth visiting but often forgotten in the public mind. In including it as a part of the Midwest, the region of the country known for homesteading, he pinpoints its place as a domestic wilderness. It is beautiful and reminds travelers of the past, but it is wholly dependent upon land managers and park rangers for its preservation.

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<sup>60</sup> Kugel, “America: The Center Cut.”

<sup>61</sup> Kugel, “America: The Center Cut.”

Another article, “South Dakota to the Extreme,” classifies the Badlands within the monuments and rock formations of South Dakota in particular. Here, far from being the forgotten beauty that breaks the monotony of the Midwest that Kugel describes, Paul Schneider places the Badlands among other natural and historical sites that he describes as “positively monumental.”<sup>62</sup> Schneider paints a portrait of mythical proportions for South Dakota, writing about figures carved in rock, alluding to the creation myth associated with Wind Cave, and describing the Badlands as Martian or post-nuclear landscapes.<sup>63</sup> Schneider is obviously writing an article that tries to encapsulate the depth and the intensity of the history of this area, while also describing the beauty that he sees in it. In the Badlands, he reserves his words for the natural scenery, seemingly untouched by human hands.<sup>64</sup> This, again, is significant. Like Kugel, Schneider glosses over the very existence of Native Americans within the Badlands. He looks past the centuries that the Lakota Nation spent on this land, evidencing a collective imagination of the land that entirely erases Native Americans from national parks.

Schneider places his description of the human history that happened in the same place under the header, “Wounded Knee.”<sup>65</sup> Here, he discusses the Massacre of Wounded Knee that occurred in 1890, lamenting the lack of funds given to support the memorial and observing that so little has been done to commemorate such horrendous event. He fails to mention, however, Wounded Knee is part of Badlands National Park, and has

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<sup>62</sup> Paul Schneider, “South Dakota to the Extreme,” *The New York Times*, August 26, 2005, Late edition, sec. F.

<sup>63</sup> Schneider, “South Dakota to the Extreme.”

<sup>64</sup> Schneider, “South Dakota to the Extreme.”

<sup>65</sup> Schneider, “South Dakota to the Extreme.”

been funded by the National Park Service, stating truly but inadequately that the memorial is a part of Pine Ridge Reservation. Juxtaposed against his failure to mention any relationship that the Lakota had with this land, it makes for a strange story. In the midst of Schneider's erasure of the Oglala Sioux Tribe within the park stands Wounded Knee. If set within Badlands, this sacred site, according to the article, would have no one who holds it sacred. His removal of the memorial from within the borders of Badlands National Park superficially smooths over the problematic aspects of his story. However, it speaks to a greater mythology in which Indigenous histories hold no value, and the Indigenous people who still live there remain unrecognized and unsupported.

An article in *The Washington Post* treats Badlands National Park similarly when it identifies the Badlands as a travel destination, in that it is one stop among many in a cross-country trek. This one though, rather than treating it as a tourist stop, identifies its role in the Cold War.<sup>66</sup> The author, Frank Bures, tours several missile facilities in the northern Midwest, including one near Badlands National Park. Bures states that there are still 450 active missiles ready to launch in the area. looks at Badlands National Park's history from the perspective of the Cold War. He notes the capabilities of mass destruction set within this part of the country, and he also describes the austere scenery in the Badlands.<sup>67</sup> In his conversation with the farmer, Bures asks whether the farmer feels unsafe living so close to active nuclear weapons. In response, the farmer says, "That's our security is how I look at it."<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Frank Bures, "The Washington Post," *The Washington Post*, March 24, 2013, Every edition, sec. Magazine.

<sup>67</sup> Frank Bures, "The Washington Post

Yet another writer, Cheryl Strayed, chooses to tell a story of her own encounter with the wildlife of the Badlands to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of the National Park Service.<sup>69</sup> Unlike the other articles that list Badlands National Park as one park among many, this article simply observes this single park. In doing so, Strayed identifies the Badlands' point of importance to her as an individual, but she also writes for a broader audience, anticipating what her readers would want to hear from a very short story in a national park. She recounts a confrontation with a male bison that she had in 1994: Leaving the tent after spending the night in a primitive camping area in the North Unit of the park, she greeted a bison too loudly. Strayed and her friend Aimee silently huddled inside the tent as the bison circled it several times before it disappeared in the hills.

These five articles are representative of one stream of media discourse concerning the Badlands. They also help situate Badlands National Park within a broader American history by identifying what the writers find important about the Badlands, which usually fits into one of two categories: the natural beauty travelers can find in the park or the immense history of southwest South Dakota. All of them marvel at the landscape, described by most of these articles as something otherworldly or post-apocalyptic. The bison are an attractive feature of the park as well, proving intimidating some cases,<sup>70</sup> and in others simply remaining part of the background.<sup>71</sup> This natural beauty, and the ecological diversity, gives value to the park. It sets it apart from the rest

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<sup>68</sup> Frank Bures, "The Washington Post."

<sup>69</sup> Cheryl Strayed, "Badlands: Bison Bison Bison," *The New York Times*, June 30, 2016, sec. Travel.

<sup>70</sup> Strayed, "Badlands: Bison Bison Bison."

<sup>71</sup> Schneider, "South Dakota to the Extreme."

of the Midwest because it is so different from the agricultural and ranching land which is predominant in the area.<sup>72</sup> It is set apart also, because of the stories have grown up around this area. The Badlands has an intense and multi-faceted history. Usually, a newspaper article is only long enough for the author to attack a single part of this history. Of these articles, one features the homesteaders who tried to conquer South Dakota in the 20<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>73</sup> one features the instruments of war that were housed here during the Cold War,<sup>74</sup> and one remembers the Wounded Knee Massacre.<sup>75</sup> Each article highlights a different reason that the Badlands National Park is valuable as a marker of the American past and as a beautiful American landmark.

Notably, the authors of these articles are not intentional about connecting the history of Native Americans to the Badlands itself. More often, it is one step removed. When Paul Schneider discusses the Wounded Knee Massacre, he locates it on Pine Ridge Reservation, leaving out the fact that the memorial is also in the South Unit of the national park.<sup>76</sup> He separates the scenic views that he finds at the North Unit from the graphic history connected to the South Unit by distancing them from one another geographically. Similarly, Frank Bures' tour of the missiles placed in Minnesota and North and South Dakota uses the Badlands as a marker to help determine where the Minuteman Missile National Historic Site is, but he never mentions that the United States

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<sup>72</sup> Kugel, "America: The Center Cut."

<sup>73</sup> Tsui et al., "Dive Into the Past."

<sup>74</sup> Frank Bures, "The Washington Post."

<sup>75</sup> Schneider, "South Dakota to the Extreme."

<sup>76</sup> Schneider, "South Dakota to the Extreme."

government used land that is now part of the park as a missile testing site.<sup>77</sup> Both of these writers remain factually accurate in their accounts of the histories that surround Badlands, but they choose to leave out the parts of the story that directly explain the land within the park in relation to the people who hold it sacred. All of these authors value Badlands National Park for its scenic beauty, but they relegate its history—particularly the history of the Native Americans who live there—to somewhere far removed from the park itself. Badlands is told as a way to understand American identity, not necessarily the identities of Native Americans.

Only Penelope Greene’s suggestion to try homesteading in the Badlands area connects the history to the land firmly within the borders of the park.<sup>78</sup> In her contextualization of the Badlands, she discusses the Homesteading Act of 1862, of which the Badlands were a part. Even her history of the Badlands does not necessarily define it as anything to which anthropogenic importance should be connected. She notes that the Badlands made up some of the poorest land where pioneers tried to make a living, and that most of them left in the 1930s because they simply could not survive there.<sup>79</sup> Unlike Schneider and Bures, who totally separate the anthropogenic history of the Badlands from the geological history, Greene affirms that people did live within the borders of the park. She does not leave them there, though. Those people who could not survive on this land sold it to the government, and that became Badlands National Park.<sup>80</sup> In writing the

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<sup>77</sup> Tsui et al., “Dive Into the Past.”

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

history of the Badlands in this way, Greene identifies the Badlands as a natural force that could not be subdued by humans. It is a national treasure, then, not simply because it is connected to American history, but because it a relic that could not be developed. Therefore, it remains in its pristine form, a site that comes as close as possible to being untouched by human hands.

The way that these newspaper articles characterize Badlands National Park also shows how they define the purpose, and therefore, the goals of the park. None of these articles focus on the social history of the park, even though there is a great deal connected to it. They place what history they do discuss outside the borders of the park, or they use it to show the strength of the natural world. Moreover, in removing humans from the Badlands national park, they put the Lakota People in a precarious position, rhetorically. Either the Oglala Sioux had nothing at all to do with the land in the national park, or their goals must coincide completely with its goals. When news articles separate human history from the Badlands, it suggests that in the minds of these journalists, and likely in the minds of their broader audiences, that Badlands National Park is a pristine refuge and best used for geological and ecological education. Whether or not the word, “pristine,” can be rightly assigned to the landscape of Badlands National Park, it lives in American public memory as a place unsullied by history, or at least a place that has not changed since before Euromerican settlers brought agriculture and technological development to the area. Indeed, many articles focus on the environmental impacts that Badlands faces, pitting it against the continued industrialization of the western United States and hoping for a restoration of the native flora and fauna. Of particular interest on a national level is the reintroduction and management of the American Bison in the park. The giant herd

animal receives great attention and is a symbol of the American West, and the park leadership of Badlands has been working to manage the herds of bison that lives there.

*Section A News: An Ecological Take on Badlands*

*The Washington Post* has given the presence of bison within the Badlands special interest—but the natural state of the park as a whole is deserving of national news on more than this occasion. Since 2003, *The Washington Post* has reported on aspects of the Badlands ecological health including the charismatic megafauna reintroduced to the area, the air quality, and the ability that the leadership of the park has to make important decisions about the system as a whole. In 2003, Robert E. Pierre reported on the type of job that a park ranger has.<sup>81</sup> The whole article simply showcases the life of a ranger, the many responsibilities that are all a part of the job description, and the goals that rangers in the badlands are working toward. Of the Badlands itself, Pierre states, “The badlands’ nickname came about because the place was considered inhospitable to life.”<sup>82</sup> Notably, Pierre then discusses the numerous plants and animals growing in the park: 600 bison, bighorn sheep, and the black-footed ferret among them.<sup>83</sup> It is not wildlife, then, that the Badlands does not support, but people—and those who can live there must be an integral part of the natural world. This method of reporting is similar to other forms of erasure enacted upon Native Hawaiian women as described by LK Hall. She describes “multiple and overlapping strategies of erasure that have rendered Hawaiian women invisible” and

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<sup>81</sup> Robert E. Pierre, “The Office? 244,000 Acres of Badlands; Ranger Uses ‘Every Aspect of Outdoor Skill,’” *The Washington Post*, January 17, 2003, Final edition, sec. A.

<sup>82</sup> Pierre, “The Office? 244,000 Acres of Badlands; Ranger Uses ‘Every Aspect of Outdoor Skill.’”

<sup>83</sup> Pierre, “The Office? 244,000 Acres of Badlands; Ranger Uses ‘Every Aspect of Outdoor Skill.’”

lays a groundwork for the ways of resistance against colonial amnesia.<sup>84</sup> Much in the same way as those who tell stories concerning the Indigenous people of islands occupied by the United States, those reporting on the Badlands remove colonialism from the map, actively forgetting the history of these occupied areas and therefore actively forgetting the people most affected by these histories.

Aside from this article, two others, published in the mid-2000s, bring up how important it is that the natural beauty of national parks everywhere remains uncorrupted. One, published in 2004, blames the EPA for falling short on a thirty-year-old promise to clean the air of haze and criteria pollutants.<sup>85</sup> The article bases its assessment of air quality on the visibility in national parks like the Badlands. Here, the view is the important factor, mainly because it is what travelers to the park want. This article introduces the need that all national parks have to appeal to the general public, because this is where their income comes from. Two years later, another issue concerning the public arose in the parks system: a reduced budget is threatening the function of the parks.<sup>86</sup> Here, the main function of the parks system is again directed toward a public that resides outside and apart from the park. The article states that the first provisions that the Park Service will no longer be able to protect are public safety, the natural resources, and maintenance of the existing infrastructure.<sup>87</sup> Similar to the article concerning air quality,

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<sup>84</sup> Lisa Kahaleole Hall, "Strategies of Erasure: U.S. Colonialism and Native Hawaiian Feminism," *American Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (June 2008): 273–80.

<sup>85</sup> Juliet Eilperin, "U.S. Park Views Still in Haze; EPA Criticized for Not Doing Enough to Clear the Air," *The Washington Post*, May 19, 2004, Final edition, sec. A.

<sup>86</sup> "Washington in Brief," *The Washington Post*, June 16, 2006, Final edition, sec. A.

<sup>87</sup> "Washington in Brief."

it implies that the goal of national parks is to appear attractive to tourists. While they fall into a different category from other tourist sites and they are expected to be dangerous and stark to an extent, they are also spaces for education and conservation. As a national park, then, the Badlands must be expected also to be a site of education and conservation.

For the Badlands, the two goals of education and conservation are manifested in a more concrete objective to reintroduce bison into the area. It is fitting that the first time that a Tribal-National park is mentioned in *The Washington Post* is through the lens of the conservation of the American bison.<sup>88</sup> While there is a large herd of bison in the North Unit,<sup>89</sup> they were yet to be reintroduced to the South Unit, as of 2013.<sup>90</sup> “Helping buffaloes reclaim a place to roam” identifies the concept of a Tribal-National park as a tool to better accommodate the bison herd that would, hopefully, be introduced into the South Unit. The journalist, Juliet Eilperin, briefly describes the history of the Badlands. This article is unique in that it is one of the few articles published by *The Washington Post* or by *The New York Times* that identifies a human history within the park. Eilperin states that in 1942, the U.S. government forced 800 Oglala families off their property in order to use the land for bombing practice.<sup>91</sup> Yet even with this preface, the writer never discusses the families’ potential return to the South Unit. “The land has partially recovered,” she says, “but the bison have yet to return.”<sup>92</sup> Even while she concedes that

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<sup>88</sup> Juliet Eilperin, “Helping Buffaloes Reclaim a Place to Roam,” *The Washington Post*, June 24, 2013, Suburban Edition edition, sec. A.

<sup>89</sup> Pierre, “The Office? 244,000 Acres of Badlands; Ranger Uses ‘Every Aspect of Outdoor Skill.’”

<sup>90</sup> Juliet Eilperin, “Helping Buffaloes Reclaim a Place to Roam.”

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

Oglala families lost their land, Eilperin never discusses the consequences for the members of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, or if they were ever able to return to the land that was taken from them. Rather, she defines the path to recovery for the land as the return of bison.

Eilperin's assessment that bison must return to Badlands demonstrates that she puts greater value in the ecological restoration of the South Unit than she does the health of the community from which the land was taken. In choosing to discuss the history of the Badlands to the extent that she does, Eilperin shows how the South Unit is important to the Oglala Sioux Tribe and proves that they must be a part of the conversation if leaders of the park want to lead the South Unit to recovery. She also includes the value of the bison to the Lakota People both economically and culturally. She cites a venture-capitalist who is developing a method to slaughter grass-fed wild bison and sell the meat so as to create a source of capital for the tribe, as well as a supervisor at the White River Visitor Center who wishes to see the dying Lakota culture rejuvenated through the return of the bison.<sup>93</sup> She agrees that the negotiation process for introducing bison to the South Unit is tense, and it should not be over-simplified. However, she neglects to tell about the state of recovery of the families affected by the U.S. Army's decision to use reservation land for bombing exercises. This omission is telling. In jumping from the U.S. government taking Lakota land in 1942 to the effort to return bison to the land, it shows an assumed connection between the health of the land as is exhibited by the presence of a bison herd and the health of the Oglala Sioux Tribe as a whole community. Therefore, Eilperin paints a portrait of the OST in which the people are tied directly in with the land.

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<sup>93</sup> Juliet Eilperin, "Helping Buffaloes Reclaim a Place to Roam."

Even after pointing out the OST's significance to the decision-making process concerning the South Unit, Eilperin assumes the decision that they should make based on her beliefs about their relationship with the land. She ascribes importance to the tribe, but she leaves them no room for real negotiation. She instead assumes that the tribe's decision has already been determined by the state of the land.

The hope for a tribal national park is based on a desire to give the Oglala Sioux Tribe a portion of undeveloped land that looks the way it did before American settlers entered the area, as is demonstrated by Elizabeth Zach's article in *The New York Times*, "Hopes for the First Tribal Park are Fading." Like Eilperin, Zach acknowledges the history of the Badlands, bringing her readers' attention to what she describes as "Migrations and massacres and cultural treasures lost and rediscovered."<sup>94</sup> While Eilperin discusses the prospect of creating a tribal national park from a conservationist viewpoint, Zach takes a perspective that focuses more on the perspective of preserving the history of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, and more broadly, the Lakota People.<sup>95</sup> Zach supports the adoption of a tribal national park management plan for the South Unit of Badlands, but for different reasons than Eilperin. Instead of healing a decades-old conflict by renewing the ecology of the area, she supports an area that employs tribe members while acknowledging the wrongs that Euromericans committed against the Lakota.

Combined, the articles presented in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* tell a story that spans from a mythic past free of human interference to a broken

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<sup>94</sup> Elizabeth Zach, "Hopes for the First Tribal Park Are Fading," *The New York Times*, December 18, 2016, Late edition, sec. Travel.

<sup>95</sup> Zach, "Hopes for the First Tribal Park Are Fading."

present that must return to a time before Euromerican settlers destroyed the land. In this context, the North Unit of Badlands National Park is a symbol of what the midwestern plains were like before early settlers tried to use the land for agriculture and ranching. Sometimes journalists try to evoke a memory of a past devoid of all human contact, including the Native American peoples that called the northern plains of the Midwest home long before European settlers.<sup>96</sup> Now, the Badlands houses an almost-wild ecosystem—an exhibit of what the landscape would be if it remained unsettled altogether.<sup>97</sup> The articles concede that Badlands National Park does have an anthropocentric past—but it was a short one. Euromerican settlers did try to inhabit the area. According to Greene, they attempted to develop it and begin farming on the land, but the environment was so harsh and the soil so thin that the settlers could not survive.<sup>98</sup> In the struggle on the frontier between man and nature, Badlands National Park won.

Badlands National Park now stands apart from the rest of the Midwest because it earned a title as an American landscape that will remain wild. Even while the area is inhospitable to humans, it hosts many species of wildlife and boasts a herd 600 bison.<sup>99</sup> The North Unit of the Badlands is an example of a successfully managed natural system, one that preserves the geological and ecological integrity of the landscape. It fits into the narrative established by the articles printed in these papers because it continues, relatively unchanged since the early twentieth century, as a wild and inhospitable place.<sup>100</sup> Though

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<sup>96</sup> Schneider, "South Dakota to the Extreme."

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Tsui et al., "Dive Into the Past."

<sup>99</sup> Pierre, "The Office? 244,000 Acres of Badlands; Ranger Uses 'Every Aspect of Outdoor Skill.'"

it is subject to human management, it is also an undeveloped wilderness where travelers can interact with a mythic American past. The South Unit, however, creates tension in this narrative because it is not a picture of what the land looked like before humans. People have shaped both the land and its history more violently, and because the land demonstrates such a variance from a pristine landscape—as is modeled in the North Unit—it is difficult to reconcile the past with its current status as a national park.

Many of the journalists I have studied have chosen not to address this problem at all. The matter seems far too complex for the small amount of space allotted to a newspaper article. The Wounded Knee Massacre and the bombing tests that the American government sanctioned in 1942 are well-known and vital to the character of the land,<sup>101</sup> but unless they are also necessary to a journalist's story, he or she usually chooses to exclude events like these from his or her survey of the park. They do this by either lumping the South Unit in with the North Unit, assuming a congruity of character between the two areas and ignoring the particularly poignant history connected to the South Unit, as with Kugel's assessment of the Midwest,<sup>102</sup> or they ignore the historical significance of the South Unit itself, choosing instead to frame these histories from a different perspective. Bures excludes the South Unit of Badlands from a more a more widespread narrative, discussing the various missiles in South Dakota while overlooking the army's bombings of the South Unit.<sup>103</sup> Schneider does this by reframing the plot of

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<sup>100</sup> "Final General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement, Badlands National Park, North Unit, South Dakota," Federal Register, April 24, 2007.

<sup>101</sup> Paige Baker, "Badlands National Park-- South Unit General Management Plan," Winter 2008.

<sup>102</sup> Kugel, "America: The Center Cut."

<sup>103</sup> Frank Bures, "The Washington Post."

land when he discusses Wounded Knee. He says, truthfully, that the Oglala Sioux Tribe runs a memorial to the Wounded Knee Massacre, which occurred in the middle of Pine Ridge Reservation, but he omits the fact that this is still part of the national park.<sup>104</sup> These discussions of the park tacitly acknowledge the tension that the South Unit causes when it is placed into the narrative of a national park.

The South Unit of Badlands National Park has a painful history that has affected the people around it and that has disfigured the land. Events like Wounded Knee and the government sanctioned bombings estrange the South Unit from the North Unit and create an uncomfortable tension within the narrative of what a national park should be. To discuss this history would be to acknowledge that the environment is not free of anthropogenic interference, and more importantly, it would add a level of ambiguity to a site of national importance. The South Unit cannot support as diverse an ecosystem as the North Unit because it was so recently added to the national park system and its budget is so low.<sup>105</sup> Here, it cannot hold the same reputation as having “won” against the Euromericans who tried to use it for their own purposes. This makes it less available to tourists for education and recreation. It does not fit the norm as a national park, and until this problem is fixed, journalists for national newspapers seem to handle the issue lightly, if at all. Furthermore, it would be difficult to establish it as a site of national pride because of all the wrongs that the Lakota People suffered at the hands of the whites. If it is to be a part of public memory, then it has to first be reconciled with history. Within the

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<sup>104</sup> Schneider, “South Dakota to the Extreme.”

<sup>105</sup>“Final General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement, Badlands National Park, North Unit, South Dakota.”

narrative of the national park, this characterizes itself as a problem of immediate importance. The South Unit of the Badlands has been destroyed and must be healed before it can take its place as a place of memory.

Those who acknowledge the historical tensions of the South Unit exhibit a more varied approach to characterizing the park than those who do not. As long as journalists ignore the historical complexity of the Badlands National Park and keep those important events outside its borders, their assessment of the Badlands itself is similar: it is an object of American pride. It becomes more complicated when it is fraught with violence and the marginalization of Native American groups. Those who do frame South Dakota's history inside the borders of the park must simplify a very complex and immediate problem into an understandable problem with a workable solution. Each makes an attempt to rectify a very large problem in the space of about 1000 words.<sup>106</sup> This is why the two articles that do discuss the possibility of a tribal national park frame it in such different ways, with one focusing almost solely on the hope to return bison to the park,<sup>107</sup> and the other focusing on the welfare of the Oglala Sioux Tribe.<sup>108</sup> Both place the current status of the South Unit within the larger, more available narrative, but they highlight different facets of the same problem.

While the two articles concerning a tribal national park have different focuses, both create a similar storyline for the park. They adhere to the broader view that the other

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<sup>106</sup>Juliet Eilperin, "Helping Buffaloes Reclaim a Place to Roam;" Zach, "Hopes for the First Tribal Park Are Fading."

<sup>107</sup> Juliet Eilperin, "Helping Buffaloes Reclaim a Place to Roam."

<sup>108</sup> Zach, "Hopes for the First Tribal Park Are Fading."

articles evidence, in that they both establish that the South Unit has slipped away from the norm of a national park and must be restored to a status more in line with the landscape that existed before white Americans entered the area. They acknowledge that the South Unit is problematic in the national understanding of what a national park is, but for different reasons. While Eilperin compares it to the North Unit, showing how its infrastructure and ecology falls short of what it could be as a national park,<sup>109</sup> Zach notes that the deep and painful connection that the Oglala Sioux Tribe has with the land discourages the American people from calling the area a place of national pride at all.<sup>110</sup> Eilperin, then, supports a tribal national park because it would involve a group that she believes will support the renewal of the ecosystem, thus returning the South Unit to a status of a successful American icon.<sup>111</sup> Similarly, Zach believes that a tribal national park would return some power over the land to the tribe.<sup>112</sup> Eilperin writes that a tribal national park can right the wrongs done to the land, and Zach writes that it can do the same for the people who suffered at the hands of the American government. Both see the creation of a tribal national park as a return to a mythic past and therefore as a resolution to the tensions that the South Unit currently creates.

The view of Badlands National Park presented in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* shows what the journalists for these newspapers anticipate will resonate most with the very broad audience of the whole United States. They include stories that

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<sup>109</sup> Juliet Eilperin, "Helping Buffaloes Reclaim a Place to Roam."

<sup>110</sup> Zach, "Hopes for the First Tribal Park Are Fading."

<sup>111</sup> Juliet Eilperin, "Helping Buffaloes Reclaim a Place to Roam."

<sup>112</sup> Zach, "Hopes for the First Tribal Park Are Fading."

already fit into a much deeper narrative that describes the value of national parks and natural spaces. Here, they illustrate that national parks are valuable because they showcase an American landscape that exists without human interference and that evokes images of a great American past. This idea of what a national park is also shows why the South Unit is a problem. It has been destroyed by bombing practices, and it records a bloody massacre inflicted by the American government on the Lakota. These newspaper articles suggest that the way to resolve this problem is to return to the past, ecologically or culturally. This establishes a more solid idea of the expectations that America had for the South Unit of Badlands National Park by identifying what its value is, how it has strayed from the ideal of a national park, and how this can be resolved.

## CHAPTER THREE

### A Closer Look: The Unique Perspective of Local Papers

It is not surprising that the story local newspapers tell is different from the story that national papers tell. After all, their geographic proximity to the Badlands gives the writers of these stories a different understanding of history. The future of Badlands National Park carries personal significance to the readers of the local papers of South Dakota. Therefore, these news sources ought to cover the proposal or a tribal national park with more depth than national newspapers. The difference between the stories told by local media and by national media only becomes troubling when the national news stories fail to match the local news stories at all. A general overview of local papers as they concern Badlands National Park presents more emphasis on the diplomatic relationships between the two governments earlier in the process of creating a tribal national park than national papers. These papers also give more background for the conflict between the federal and tribal governments, allowing for a more nuanced approach to the issue. The national papers include none of this. This minimizes their ability to make educated evaluations of the final results of the cooperative efforts of the Oglala Sioux Tribe and the National Park Service.

In their longitudinal coverage of the situation of the Badlands, local papers can fashion a narrative that is not contextualized to fit within the familiar mythic narrative of the West, like the national papers do. Instead, they pinpoint the specific instances of success and failure in a long-term process of negotiation. In this chapter, I will discuss

articles from *The Rapid City Journal* and *Lakota Country Times* as local sources with two different foci for their content. *The Rapid City Journal* is a city paper that discusses local current events, and the *Lakota Country Times* is a Lakota-based newspaper, published in Martin, South Dakota. *Lakota Country Times* advertises itself as “The Only Official Legal SD Indian newspaper located on Tribal Land.”<sup>113</sup> Geographically, these papers are situated much closer to Badlands National Park than *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. While they have different budgets, write for different audiences, and have different goals, they still present a similar story behind the attempt to create a tribal national park.

The newspapers have different priorities in their reporting because they sell to different—though overlapping—audiences. *The Rapid City Journal* gives the most in-depth account of the Badlands by far. As a city one hour northwest of Badlands National Park, the events within the park are certainly local news, and while they may not affect the citizens of Rapid City personally, the state of the park, its South Unit, and Pine Ridge Reservation are familiar to residents of the city. Home to about 68,000 people, Rapid City is the largest township in western South Dakota and its newspaper reflects its size.<sup>114</sup> It has the funds and the interest to designate several dozen articles on the movement to create a Tribal National Park in the Badlands. *Rapid City Journal* follows the story of the tribal-national park since before it was even proposed. I traced pertinent articles in the *Journal* back to 2002, building a foundation for the park’s beginnings. This sets up a far more robust background to the reasons behind the suggestion of a tribal national park.

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<sup>113</sup> “Lakota Times Home Page,” *Lakota Country Times*, n.d.

<sup>114</sup> United States Census Bureau, “QuickFacts: Rapid City, South Dakota,” April 1, 2010.

*Lakota Country Times* offers a different perspective from *Rapid City Journal* because it is published on the Pine Ridge Reservation. Like the *Rapid City Journal*, *Lakota Country Times* follows the story of the Badlands because it is a landmark of great importance to the local community. Unlike *Rapid City Journal*, the writers of the *Lakota Times* are more likely directly impacted by the outcome of the Badlands negotiations. Of the news sources I am studying, the *Lakota Country Times* is the newest. First published in 2004, the paper is not as old as the Badlands discussions themselves.<sup>115</sup> However, it brings the perspectives from the same actors to the table as *Rapid City Journal*. It is published every week and has won the South Dakota Newspaper Association Award, the Native American Journalist Association Award, and the National Newspaper Association Award in its time in print.<sup>116</sup> *Lakota Country* readership is likely somewhat lower than the others because it operates as the official newspaper for Bennet County and Oglala Lakota County,<sup>117</sup> whose combined population is 17,808, according to the July 1, 2017 census.<sup>118</sup> Its smaller readership gives it a more focused area of study, which can aid in identifying the areas of greatest interest to the intended audience of the Bennett and Oglala Lakota counties.

In this chapter, I analyze the stories told by the two news sources, identifying the key players and priorities that they portray concerning the park. I start with the *Rapid City*

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<sup>115</sup> "Lakota Times Home Page."

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> United States Census Bureau, "QuickFacts: Oglala Lakota County, South Dakota;" United States Census Bureau, "QuickFacts: Bennet County, South Dakota;"

*Journal* and then compare the story that it tells to the story told by the *Lakota Country Times*.

### *The Rapid City Journal*

The *Rapid City Journal* follows the issue of a Tribal National Park from the beginning of its discussion. The first article concerning negotiations between the Oglala Sioux Tribe and the National Park Service was published in 2002 and concerns a dispute over the National Park Service having excavated a set of fossils near Stronghold Table in the South Unit.<sup>119</sup> Another article, published a week later, covers the viewpoints of those involved with more specificity.<sup>120</sup> These articles, the first in a series of stories on the controversy of fossil excavation in the South Unit of the Badlands, look at the plans that the National Park Service has to excavate fossils from the South Unit of Badlands National Park and the backlash of some of the members of the Oglala Sioux Tribe. These tribal members are angry because the Park Service is digging on what they state is sacred ground.<sup>121</sup> They say that the Park Service is digging too close to the burial ground of those of the Oglala Sioux Tribe who were killed at Wounded Knee in the massacre of 1890. If this is so, then it violates the 1976 memorandum of agreement that states that the Oglala Sioux Tribe has full control over land that it deems culturally, spiritually, or historically significant.<sup>122</sup> It supports the protesters' assertions that the excavation is yet another illegal

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<sup>119</sup> Christensen, "Tribe Continues Dig Protest."

<sup>120</sup> Gease, "Badlands Fossil Dig Mired in History, Opposing Views."

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Tribe and National Park Service, "1976 Memorandum of Agreement."

move to weaken the tribe's hold on their land.<sup>123</sup> Yet, the superintendent of the park, Bill Supernaugh, argues that the excavation is seven miles away from Stronghold Table, the site of the Wounded Knee Massacre.<sup>124</sup> This is cause of some frustration to the employees of the national park. Fossils are being stolen from the park, and they believe it is lawful that they protect them by excavating them and storing them elsewhere.<sup>125</sup> In 2002, the Oglala Sioux Tribe and the National Park Service came to a disagreement over who had rightful control over the land.

At first glance, the controversy over the fossils found in the Badlands has nothing to do with the Tribal National Park idea. Of the seven articles published in the Journal concerning relations between the Oglala Sioux Tribal Council and the National Park service between June of 2002 and September of 2003, none mention the possibility of the two governmental organizations collaborating in the management of the South Unit. In fact, not until 2007, in an interview with the Badlands superintendent, Paige Baker, does the possibility of a collaboration appear in the literature at all.<sup>126</sup> The term, "Tribal National Park," is not part of the conversation until the 2010 article, "Proposal would create tribal national park in Badlands."<sup>127</sup> However, the *Rapid City Journal* puts the idea of a Tribal National Park into context by drawing off the disagreement between the tribe and the Park

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<sup>123</sup> Gease, "Badlands Fossil Dig Delayed."

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Sam Hurst, "Future of the Badlands' South Unit May Be Baker's Legacy," *Rapid City Journal*, July 7, 2007.

<sup>127</sup> Wayne Ortman, "Proposal Would Create Tribal National Park in Badlands," *Rapid City Journal*, September 6, 2010.

Service as the exigence that prompted discussions between the Oglala Sioux Tribe and the federal government. The Oglala Sioux Tribe and the National Parks Service were at odds in 2002 because they disagreed over who had rightful control over the land. The tribal national park, proposed years later, hoped to fix this problem. None of this was ever mentioned by national sources, and yet it is crucial to understanding the purpose of a tribal national park. Its goal was to give over greater control of the land to the Oglala Sioux Tribe.

The articles prior to the suggestion of a Tribal National Park show, by way of interviews with Tribal members and Park Service authorities, the priorities and concerns of both sides. The Park Service demonstrates a desire to preserve the resources of the land within their jurisdiction—this time, the fossils they found in the South Unit of the Badlands National Park. Officials told *Journal* reporter Heidi Bell Gease that the site was being looted. In order to protect the fossils that had been found there, they had to remove them from the area and store them in a safer place.<sup>128</sup> This article in particular portrays the Park Service as trying to do a service for the tribe. Gease states that the National Park Service consulted the Oglala Sioux Parks and Recreation Authority, the Badlands Bombing Range Project Office, and the Grey Eagle Society of tribal elders before deciding to dig there.<sup>129</sup> Furthermore, the members of the Park Service are careful to say that the fossils still remain in the possession of the Oglala Sioux Tribe.<sup>130</sup> Other articles exhibit a Park Service that wants public participation in the decision making process of the park. When members of the Oglala Sioux Tribe protested the excavation of the remains, the Park Service listened,

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<sup>128</sup> Gease, “Badlands Fossil Dig Mired in History, Opposing Views.”

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

delaying the dig until they could meet with those most invested in the South Unit.<sup>131</sup> A year later, in March of 2003, the National Park Service published a notice that they were hosting an open house in order to gain the input of the public on the newest environmental impact plan for the national park.<sup>132</sup> By the time that the term, “tribal national park” gained any traction, the Park Service had repeatedly postponed its decision to dig, despite the real threat of poaching.<sup>133</sup> However, officials also repeatedly stated that their hands were tied when it came to negotiating returning any of the land of the South Unit to the Oglala Sioux Tribe—the wish that some of the protesters expressed for their tribe.

The members of the Oglala Sioux Tribe who were most involved in the events in Badlands over the course of the early 2000s showed a visceral reaction to the Park Service’s wish to excavate the fossils that were found near Stronghold Table. They drew their frustration and anger largely from two events in the past: the forceable removal of 125 families from the South Unit in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the 1976 Memorandum of Agreement, which they believed had failed. They based their assertion that the Park Service’s actions were inappropriate by citing the facts that Stronghold Table is sacred land to the Oglala Sioux Tribe and that it is far too close to the site of the Wounded Knee massacre for the Park Service to use the land.<sup>134</sup> *Rapid City Journal* identifies these protesters as major actors within the Badlands in the early 2000s. It identifies the other major actor as the National Park Service. In acknowledging the personhood of the Lakota

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<sup>131</sup> Heidi Bell Gease, “Badlands Fossil Dig Delayed,” *Rapid City Journal*, August 7, 2002.

<sup>132</sup> “Park Service Seeks Input on Badlands,” *Rapid City Journal*, n.d.

<sup>133</sup> Steve Miller, “Officials Fight Fossil Hunting,” *Rapid City Journal*, September 20, 2003.

<sup>134</sup> Heidi Bell Gease, “Badlands Fossil Dig Delayed,” *Rapid City Journal*, August 7, 2002.

protesters, the *Rapid City Journal* draws from a greater pool of resources to understand the problem at hand. A key difference between this local paper and the national papers I studied previously is that local journalists interview a variety of community leaders and activists in Pine Ridge, adding their voices to the news story they write.

The interviews with the members of the Oglala Sioux Tribe who are protesting the excavation of the fossils found near Stronghold Table show that they are wary of the 1976 Memorandum of Agreement, that they are concerned about the Service's ability to maintain the sanctity of the historical site of Stronghold Table, and that they are bitter that the South Unit was ever held by the NPS. Several of the protesters that journalists from the newspaper interviewed cited the 1976 Memorandum of Agreement as a problematic document that makes the relationship between the OST and the NPS even more unclear. The first article published on the matter, "Tribe continues Dig Protest," states that the tribe owns the land but gave over its management to the Park Service, causing confusion amongst its members as to what the Park Service ought to be able to do in the South Unit of the park.<sup>135</sup> The next article published on the subject, just a week later, expands on the frustration that the members of the OST felt over the 1976 MoA. It cites the memorandum, pointing out that, under it, the National Parks Service is responsible for the management of all points of interest on the South Unit, whether or not it is on tribal lands.<sup>136</sup> However, it also points out that the protesters at Stronghold blame the National Park Service for failing to develop the White River Visitor Center, a facility promised in the memorandum.<sup>137</sup> Leaders of the

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<sup>135</sup> Christensen, "Tribe Continues Dig Protest."

<sup>136</sup> Heidi Gease, "Badlands Fossil Dig Mired in History, Opposing Views," *Rapid City Journal*, August 3, 2002.

<sup>137</sup> Gease, "Badlands Fossil Dig Mired in History, Opposing Views."

Oglala Sioux Tribe acknowledge their own hand in the failures of the memorandum, but it is a shared burden. Neither entity has totally honored the agreement, and there have been no penalties on either side, making it clear to the protesters that it lacks teeth.

In the next two years, the articles in the *Journal* showcase the increasing lack of trust in the 1976 Memorandum that the Indigenous protesters display. In August of 2003, protesters stated that they no longer wanted to negotiate the terms of the memorandum, fighting instead for the repossession of their land.<sup>138</sup> A month later, 40 people met at Pine Ridge to discuss the Park Service's proposal to excavate near Stronghold Table.<sup>139</sup> At the meeting, the most problematic point of discussion was the 1976 Memorandum. Frank Ecoffey, a Tribal member, asserted that the memorandum did nothing for the Lakota People because the Park Service continually violated it.<sup>140</sup> A year later, Lovey Two Bulls, another member of the tribe, said that she wanted nothing to do with the memorandum.<sup>141</sup>

The *Rapid City Journal* says very little about the 1976 Memorandum of Agreement in the six years between the excavation disagreements and the invitation to attend on of 13 open-house meetings to discuss the new General Management Plan in 2008. However, the articles that do feature the memorandum in the mid-2000s tell a unified story. They identify a group of protesters who, spurred on by the threat of excavation near Stronghold Table, have come to the conclusion that the document that

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<sup>138</sup> Heidi Bell Gease, "Oglala Sioux Tribe at Odds with National Park Service over Fossil Dig," *Rapid City Journal*, August 31, 2003.

<sup>139</sup> Jomay Steen, "Resolution on Badlands Plan Eludes Park Service," *Rapid City Journal*, September 30, 2003.

<sup>140</sup> Steen, "Resolution on Badlands Plan Eludes Park Service."

<sup>141</sup> Bill Harlan, "Badlands Gets Two National Media Hits," *Rapid City Journal*, March 25, 2004.

has determined the relationship between the Park Service and the Oglala Sioux Tribe since 1976 is unethical and must be put to an end. In its place, these members of the tribe want to take the land back into their own control. On the other side is a Park Service who wants to cooperate with the Oglala Sioux Tribe to the best of its ability, but whose hands are, for the most part, tied.

The article that best links the fossil excavation discussions and the prospective Tribal National Park is the 2007 interview with Paige Baker, “Future of the Badlands’ South Unit may be Baker’s legacy.”<sup>142</sup> In it, Sam Hurst interviews the superintendent of Badlands National Park at the Time, Paige Baker. They discuss Baker’s history as a leader in the Park Service and as a member of the Mandan-Hidatsa Tribe of North Dakota, while also exploring Baker’s perspective on the park and how the land of the South Unit should be used as a tool for reconciliation between the Park Service and the tribe.<sup>143</sup> In this article, Baker is portrayed as willing to do whatever the tribe thinks best to restore and manage the South Unit. Neither Baker nor Hurst refers to the problems between the tribe and the Service that sprang up five years prior to the interview, nor does either mention the excavation of fossils in the South Unit, but both are working with an understanding that there is a certain level of animosity between the two governments which must be resolved if either wants a more peaceful, prosperous future. Baker asserts, “The key to reconciliation was for the tribe to determine what was best for the future of the land, not to have a solution imposed from Washington.”<sup>144</sup> In saying this, Baker asserts that autonomy for the tribe

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<sup>142</sup> Hurst, “Future of the Badlands’ South Unit May Be Baker’s Legacy.”

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

would require some ability to manage the South Unit as well. Though they do not speak of the disagreement over the use of the South Unit faced in 2002, they readily accept the implications of the events. For Baker the 2002 disagreements shed light upon the fact that the next step toward rectification for the tribe would be the ability to manage the South Unit of Badlands National Park. He chose to give some control of the land to the Oglala Sioux Tribe immediately simply by giving them a say in its future, and giving them the option of managing it as a park.

The idea of a Tribal National Park does not reach the *Rapid City Journal* until 2010. However, for the newspaper, the discussions took a new perspective in October of 2005. The *Journal* paints the switch between the excavation debate and the introduction of the idea of a Tribal National Park as being tied to a new superintendent of the Badlands: Paige Baker. Baker, born in North Dakota, is enrolled in the Mandan-Hidatsa culture and has served with the National Parks Service and the Bureau of Indian Affairs.<sup>145</sup> When he came to the Badlands, Baker was highly qualified for the job. By the time he reached this post, he had earned his PhD in education from Penn State, served as superintendent at Casa Grande National Monument and served as superintendent at Fort Berthold in North Dakota.<sup>146</sup> When first interviewed as superintendent of the Badlands, he stated,, “I hope to work with all communities vested in the park—Anglo and tribal—and keep the visitor in the conversation. We need to expand communications and give voice to those who are not always heard.”<sup>147</sup> In the *Rapid City Journal* narrative, Baker

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<sup>145</sup> Sam Hurst, “Sam Hurst, 1-15: Badland’s Baker Building Bridges,” *Rapid City Journal*, January 14, 2006.

<sup>146</sup> Hurst, “Sam Hurst, 1-15: Badland’s Baker Building Bridges.”

<sup>147</sup> “Paige Baker to Head Badlands Facilities,” *Rapid City Journal*, October 24, 2005.

is, hopefully, the keystone to reconciliation in the Badlands. A member of the of the Three Affiliated Tribes of Fort Berthold Reservation in North Dakota, this superintendent of the Badlands would be able to bring the Oglala Sioux Tribe and the National Park Service by virtue of his understanding of both entities. Still five years before the *Journal* announces the possibility of a tribal national park, the paper shows a shift in negotiation practices from friction between the Oglala Sioux Tribe and the National Park Service to a hope of collaboration between them.

Notably, the *Rapid City Journal* published no articles on the protests at the Badlands, the excavation of fossils near Stronghold, or the tensions between the Oglala Sioux Tribe and the National Park Service between the years of 2004 and 2008. Sam Hurst, writer for the *Rapid City Journal*, interviewed Paige Baker twice in this time, once when he moved into the position of superintendent for the Badlands, and another time two years later.<sup>148</sup> While Baker does mention policies he would like to enact and conversations he would like to have, these are mainly goals of his—not-yet-enacted hopes that Hurst uses to highlight Baker’s character and aims as a leader. The *Journal* published one other article Badlands National Park policy in the four year window, and it is similar to the two interviews, in that it highlights Baker’s goals for the park, rather than anything that has been put into action.<sup>149</sup> While these three articles only discuss the hopes that Baker has for the future of the Badlands and not the policies that he has already put into play, they do not evidence that the journalists who wrote them have misplaced their

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<sup>148</sup> Sam Hurst, “Sam Hurst, 1-15: Badland’s Baker Building Bridges,” *Rapid City Journal*, January 14, 2006; Hurst, “Future of the Badlands’ South Unit May Be Baker’s Legacy.”

<sup>149</sup> Kevin Woster, “Badlands Staff Seeks to Make South Unit More Accessible to Public,” *Rapid City Journal*, September 15, 2007.

hope in the new superintendent of the park. They do, however, signify the sheer amount of hope that they place in him as a leader. These articles make Baker into a hero of sorts, who can unite two entities that have been at odds with one another since the middle of the 1800s.

In the articles to come, Baker plays a larger role in the *Journal's* narrative than William Supernaugh, the previous superintendent to the Badlands, ever did. Outside of the two announcements heralding thirteen open-house meetings in thirteen different areas in thirteen different towns across southwest South Dakota, Paige Baker, and the new perspective he is bringing to Badlands National Park, features in the news concerning the park until 2010.<sup>150</sup> Both Sam Hurst and his colleague Kevin Woster draw attention to the fact that Baker is making plans to develop the South Unit.<sup>151</sup> Baker is always careful to include the Oglala Sioux Tribe in his discussion on the park's future. He states that he wants the perspectives of the people and he acknowledges the spiritual significance that the land holds for the tribe.<sup>152</sup> Later in 2008, the *Journal* mentions the fossils in the South Unit of the park for the first time since 2004, noting that Baker is planning to bring in more law enforcement personnel in order to stop the string of fossil thefts.<sup>153</sup> While the author, Sarah Reinecke, never mentions the explosive disagreements between the NPS and the OST over this very topic years before, Baker's choice to bring in more law

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<sup>150</sup> Journal Staff, "Have a Say on Badlands Management," *Rapid City Journal*, March 15, 2008; Journal Staff, "Meetings on Badlands Future Start This Week," *Rapid City Journal*, April 5, 2008."

<sup>151</sup> Hurst, "Future of the Badlands' South Unit May Be Baker's Legacy."; Woster, "Badlands Staff Seeks to Make South Unit More Accessible to Public."

<sup>152</sup> Woster, "Badlands Staff Seeks to Make South Unit More Accessible to Public."

<sup>153</sup> Sarah Reinecke, "Baker: Badlands Resources Must Be Protected," *Rapid City Journal*, July 4, 2008.

enforcement rather than to excavate the fossils shows yet another instance where he is bringing in a new perspective to the park, and with it a new hope for unity.

The Journal even tells the story of the meeting in which the members of the community are to discuss the new General Management Plan for the South Unit in a different light from those meetings four years before. The single article on the management open-houses identifies disagreements and doubts, but speaks of no protests and no anger between members of the tribe and members of the National Park Service. In fact, one member of the OST states, “We’re hearing from ranchers and tribal elders, young people, everyone. And they all have different opinions. It’s just awesome.”<sup>154</sup> The *Rapid City Journal* paints 2008 as a year of resolution. Even in the moments of disagreement, the general atmosphere is one of collaboration. The hopeful timbre that the paper adopts by the initiation of Baker as superintendent, and the interpretation of a meeting in which the attendees express opposing views as collaborative rather than antagonistic, points to a belief that, through his whole tenure, Baker has lived up to his casting as the hero of the story of the Badlands. At the end of Baker’s position as superintendent, the *Journal* finally announced the proposal of a Tribal National Park in the Badlands.<sup>155</sup> The announcement stated that this was the first step to giving the tribe the responsibility for the land, and that it may be a way to begin the process of

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<sup>154</sup> Kevin Woster, “Parks Officials Urged to Move Slowly in Badlands Management,” *Rapid City Journal*, April 8, 2008.

<sup>155</sup> Wayne Ortman, “Proposal Would Create Tribal National Park in Badlands,” *Rapid City Journal*, September 6, 2010.

reconciliation for the injuries that the Oglala Sioux Tribe sustained dating back to the 1800s.<sup>156</sup>

After Paige Baker's retirement, plans for America's first tribal national park began to move toward two ends. One of the goals of the new General Management Plan was to restore management of the land back to the Oglala Sioux Tribe.<sup>157</sup> The other, tied in with the idea for a tribal national park, was to return bison to the South Unit.<sup>158</sup> For ranchers and for those who lived in the area, the latter proposal changed the promise of land for the Oglala Sioux Tribe to another threat that members of the tribe would lose both their land and their livelihoods.<sup>159</sup> Once the idea of a Tribal National Park became intertwined with the possibility of a 1000 head herd of bison being introduced to the South Unit, the *Rapid City Journal* started publishing increasingly more articles on the backlash of those who lived on or near the South Unit of the park.<sup>160</sup> While there was economic promise in creating a park managed by the tribe, the ranchers who grazed their cattle on the land in the South Unit were moved more by the assured loss of pastureland than they were by uncertain belief in a monetarily successful tribal national park. In the articles presented in the *Journal*, the ranchers affected by the move to evict them in favor of adding bison to the park saw it as yet another land grab on behalf of the federal

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<sup>156</sup> Ortman, "Proposal Would Create Tribal National Park in Badlands."

<sup>157</sup> Ortman, "Proposal Would Create Tribal National Park in Badlands;" Ruth Moon, "Tribe to Take Active Role in Managing Park," *Rapid City Journal*, March 24, 2012.

<sup>158</sup> David Montgomery, "Badlands Eyed for Yellowstone Bison," *Rapid City Journal*, December 15, 2011; Jim Holland, "Bison May Return to Badlands South Unit," *Rapid City Journal*, September 27, 2013.

<sup>159</sup> O'Sullivan, "Opponents Voice Concerns about Reservation Park."

<sup>160</sup> Holland, "Bison May Return to Badlands South Unit."

government.<sup>161</sup> Whether the members of the tribe blamed the federal government or the Tribal Council, as was the case of the Two Bulls family, who were fighting the council's decision to evict ranchers in order to carry out the plan, the idea that was meant to be a step toward reconciliation became derisive.<sup>162</sup> This was the point that a tribal national park lost much of its local support. It may have been a move toward tribal autonomy in 2008, but by 2013, the Badlands Tribal National Park became yet another example of governmental inadequacies to Lakota people who wanted greater control over their land.

*Rapid City Journal* does portray the dissolution of the tribal national park in the Badlands as a thing to mourn, but its journalists are not surprised by it, as those who write for national papers were. This paper traces out how an idea meant to add a level of control to the individuals and the community of Pine Ridge gradually became another threat to their livelihoods. It frames the conflict as one of land management. Focusing mainly on Paige Baker as an agent of change—particularly because he is both a leader in the federal government and a Native American—finds a solution in the cooperation between tribal leaders and park leaders. The paper does, at some points, view the tribal national park with unpared support, but not for a mythic ideal that its journalists have in mind. The support that *The Rapid City Journal* gives to the tribal national park is based in the hope that the Oglala Sioux Tribe can find greater autonomy through working with the federal government to begin managing the South Unit.

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<sup>161</sup> Joe O'Sullivan, "Opponents Voice Concerns about Reservation Park," *Rapid City Journal*, April 22, 2014.

<sup>162</sup> Andrea J. Cook, "Oglala Sioux Tribe Evicting Tribal Ranchers to Make Way for Bison Park," *Rapid City Journal*, December 5, 2013; Andrea J. Cook, "Lakota Minister Takes on Oglala Sioux Tribe over Park Plan," *Rapid City Journal*, February 16, 2014.

### *Lakota Country Times*

The *Lakota Country Times* is a much smaller paper than the *Rapid City Journal*, but it is similar in that it is a local news source and the news it covers is of immediate and concrete interest to its readers. The paper employs twelve people, and, while it has been in business since 2004, its searchable archives only date back to 2008.<sup>163</sup> It publishes several articles every issue that are not written by its own staff, but rather are borrowed from other newspapers, one of which is the *Rapid City Journal*. While these articles do not directly illustrate the point of view of *Lakota Times* newspaper employees, their inclusion in the paper builds a framework for how the paper interprets and evaluates the events of South Dakota. As a smaller paper that publishes a new issue weekly, the *Lakota Country Times* creates a sparser telling of the narrative of the negotiations of the Tribal National Park in the 2000s. The viewpoint it presents is equally useful to that of the *Rapid City Journal*, however, and it tells a story that, while similar to that of the *Journal*, is unique and valuable in fashioning an understanding of the problem of the Badlands' failed tribal national park.

The first article published in the *Lakota Country Times* concerning Badlands National Park was written in 2008 and was published first by the *Rapid City Journal*.<sup>164</sup> The main point of the article is not about negotiations for the national park itself, but it does tell about a swath of land that was part of the same area in the historic past. The United States government took this 2,486 acre piece of land at the same time as the South Unit of the national park, and it plans to clean up this former bombing range and return it

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<sup>163</sup> "Lakota Times Home Page."

<sup>164</sup> Associated Press, "Bombing Range Cleanup Promised," *Lakota Country Times*, July 3, 2008.

to members of the tribe in the future.<sup>165</sup> The article mentions the South Unit as well, noting that the National Park Service is considering returning it to the tribe.<sup>166</sup> The next article on the subject, published over a year later and also an article from the associated press, again announces the possibility that the Oglala Sioux Tribe may have the opportunity to manage the land in the future.<sup>167</sup> The article features Paige Baker, who states that he will do his best to hear what the tribe is saying and implement a plan that will suit the hopes of the tribe.<sup>168</sup> The article also notes that, as a member of the Hidatsa-Mandan culture, Baker's family lost its own land because of a federal project in their area.<sup>169</sup> Combined, these two articles begin the story of the Badlands, as it pertains to the *Lakota Country Times*, with a collaborative bent. They both showcase how the Oglala Sioux Tribe lost its land to the United States federal government and the collaborative steps that the National Park Service and the members of the Oglala Sioux Tribe are taking to give the tribe a more powerful position in the park.

Badlands National Park also operates as a community heritage space in the *Lakota Country Times*. The paper announces several celebrations and gatherings inside of Badlands National Park. Under the title, "Rez Happenings," the paper publishes the events in the community in the upcoming months. These updates highlight celebrations that take place within the national park. They include events like National Park Week,

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Carson Walker, "OST Gets Say in How Badlands South Unit Managed," *Lakota Country Times*, August 7, 2008.

<sup>168</sup> Walker, "OST Gets Say in How Badlands South Unit Managed."

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

Native American Day, and the Badlands Astronomy Festival as important days that the people in the community would want to attend.<sup>170</sup> The paper also announces a Badlands Heritage Celebration in 2010, which would showcase the traditional culture of the Lakota People.<sup>171</sup> These announcements show how close Pine Ridge is to Badlands National Park. It is close enough that the paper publishes festivals and commemorations in the park in the section of the paper for community announcements. Moreover, the events in the park do often highlight Native American history and culture. Badlands national park is important to the residents of Pine Ridge Reservation because of its geographical proximity and because of the historic connection that the community has to the land. While the Oglala Sioux Tribe's history is heavily dependent on the southwest portion of South Dakota, and while the federal government's decision to revoke the tribe's right to the land has left deep wounds which can still be seen today, the *Lakota Times* makes no certain connection between the ecologic health of the South Unit of Badlands National Park and retribution to the tribe, as the national newspapers do.<sup>172</sup>

The next time that the paper mentions the intergovernmental negotiations over the South Unit is in September of 2010. The paper publishes an announcement that the draft of the South Unit will be available for comment for the next 60 days.<sup>173</sup> The article gives the date and location of each meeting. Two weeks later, the paper publishes another

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<sup>170</sup> "Rez Happenings," *Lakota Country Times*, October 6, 2009; "Rez Happenings," *Lakota Country Times*, April 25, 2012; "Rez Happenings," *Lakota Country Times*, August 8, 2012.

<sup>171</sup> "Badlands Heritage Celebration," *Lakota Country Times*, July 28, 2010.

<sup>172</sup> Eilperin, "Helping Buffaloes Reclaim a Place to Roam."

<sup>173</sup> "Badlands South Unit Draft Plan Available for Review and Comment," *Lakota Country Times*, September 1, 2010.

announcement inviting its readers to the open houses to be held. Somewhat problematically, this announcement is published the day after two of the meetings and the day of two more.<sup>174</sup> This demonstrates one weakness of a small local news source such as *Lakota Country Times*: without the funding and man-power of larger organizations, it cannot spread news as quickly or as accurately as papers like *Rapid City Journal* or national papers. It does, however, feature the thoughts of local readers who have valuable input on the park that may not otherwise be accessed.

The week after it publishes its announcements of an open house, the paper publishes a letter to the editor on the topic of the tribal national park. In it, the writer, Charles Trimble, a member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, eloquently expresses the tensions between supporters and opponents of the tribal national park.<sup>175</sup> He writes about a very similar opportunity that the tribe had to refashion Wounded Knee into a national tribal memorial. Like the proposed tribal national park, the memorial would have been managed by the tribe and funded by the National Park Service. Trimble states that the Wounded Knee Survivors Association and their supporters refused the plan on the grounds that it was sacred land—but that this halted any hope of development on the South Unit, stunting the creation of jobs and keeping anyone from the upkeep of Wounded Knee itself.<sup>176</sup> Trimble urges his readers to consider the meaning of sacred land as well as the meaning of progress for the Lakota people when making the decision on a tribal national park. In recounting a similar historic event and its outcome, Trimble

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<sup>174</sup> Tom Crash, "Hearings Set for Potential Tribal National Park," *Lakota Country Times*, September 15, 2010.

<sup>175</sup> Charles Trimble, "Suspended in Evolution," *Lakota Country Times*, September 22, 2010.

<sup>176</sup> Trimble, "Suspended in Evolution."

argues for the creation of a tribal national park in interest of jobs for residents of Pine Ridge and in interest of preserving Lakota history and culture.

In 2012, Tom Crash wrote an article on the new director of the Oglala Sioux Parks and Recreation Authority, Gerard Baker—Paige Baker’s brother.<sup>177</sup> Baker, like Trimble, notes the possibilities for new jobs in a tribal national park. He lists the industries he wants to bring to the South Unit with the new agreement: college internships, bed and breakfasts, cabins, and park interpreters.<sup>178</sup> Another letter to the editor, this time from the Editorial Board of the Daily Republic, supports the tribal national park on ethical and practical grounds: the land already belongs to the Oglala Sioux Tribe, and thus far the National Park Service has done very little good for the land.<sup>179</sup> In 2012, the Oglala Sioux Tribal Council and the National Park Service agreed on the general management plan to create a tribal national park.<sup>180</sup> The paper posted one more article, also from the Associated Press, voicing some of the doubts that tribal members had concerning the park. The article states that it is difficult for a tribe whose very language and culture was outlawed to open up its borders to tourism, even with the promise of economic development.<sup>181</sup> This article also noted that one of the goals of the

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<sup>177</sup> Tom Crash, “Baker Sets Sights on First National Tribal Park,” *Lakota Country Times*, March 28, 2012.

<sup>178</sup> Crash, “Baker Sets Sights on First National Tribal Park.”

<sup>179</sup> Editorial Board, The Daily Republic, “Dear Editor,” *Lakota Country Times*, April 4, 2012.

<sup>180</sup> Associated Press, “Oglala Sioux, Feds Sign Deal on 1st Tribal Park,” *Lakota Country Times*, June 6, 2012.

<sup>181</sup> Kristi Eaton, “Impoverished SD Indian Tribe Debates Development,” *Lakota Country Times*, August 8, 2012.

tribal national park was to introduce a 1000 head herd of bison onto the land.<sup>182</sup> The *Times* remained silent on the issue of a tribal national park for over a year after the decision.

Meanwhile, the paper continued posting articles on the day-to day goings on of Badlands National Park. In August of 2011, the *Times* published an article from the Associated Press stating that a visitor to the park was given a prison sentence for illegally butchering a bull bison in Badlands.<sup>183</sup> Two more articles boast a youth camp and award-winning kids in the park.<sup>184</sup> Only after an article announcing the Oglala Sioux Tribe's intention to bring 1000 head of bison to the park do the responses of the residents of Pine Ridge become more ambivalent toward the prospect of the tribal national park. The move to make the South Unit into a bison sanctuary is more than controversial, as the *Lakota Country Times* tells it. The paper reports on the community's attempt to impeach the Oglala Sioux Tribe's president over the matter.<sup>185</sup> Community members compared the tribal national park to the federal government's actions in the 1940s when the United States took land from Oglala Lakota families.<sup>186</sup> The consequences of creating a tribal national park were too great to the people of the Oglala Sioux Tribe: they lost land, leases

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<sup>182</sup> Eaton, "Impoverished SD Indian Tribe Debates Development."

<sup>183</sup> "Wisconsin Man Sentenced In Unlawful Taking Of Wildlife," *Lakota Country Times*, February 13, 2013.

<sup>184</sup> "Second Annual Badlands Youth Camp Fosters Cultural Exchange," *Lakota Country Times*, March 27, 2013; "Interior School Students Win National Kids to Parks Contest," *Lakota Country Times*, May 1, 2013.

<sup>185</sup> Tom Crash, "Brewer Survives Two Impeachment Complaints," *Lakota Country Times*, December 19, 2013.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

and livelihoods with little explanation from anyone in power.<sup>187</sup> Rather than feeling better heard, the community members felt as though they were being slighted by their government once again.

In a town hall meeting on May 22, 2014, a local Lakota rancher argued that he would lose the land he needed to sustain himself. That day, the Tribal Council passed a motion to start work on a resolution opposing a tribal national park on the South Unit of the Badlands National Park.<sup>188</sup> Interestingly, articles in the *Lakota Country Times* typically blame the Oglala Sioux government for the issues arising in the making of the tribal national park, not the federal government or the National Park Service. The paper is unique in this perspective. Articles from other news sources find some fault in the federal government, or they simply do not choose to pass blame. The *Lakota Country Times* pinpoints the complaints of residents of Pine Ridge in a way that other papers do not.

#### *What They Tell Us*

I find that both sources see the proposal for a tribal national park as a solution to a very old problem. The *Rapid City Journal* identifies this problem in the events of 2002, wherein a group of Pine Ridge residents protest the excavating of fossils within the South Unit of the park, claiming that it is taking place on land of historical significance to the Lakota people and therefore forbidden by the 1976 Memorandum of Agreement between the Oglala Sioux Tribe and the National Park Service. The *Lakota Country Times* seems to place the problem much earlier, dating back to the 1940s, when the federal government

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Cora White Horse, "Shannon County Commissioners Set up Meeting on Proposed Tribal National Park," *Lakota Country Times*, May 15, 2014.

took the land of the South Unit to use as a gunner range. Regardless of when the conflict started, both papers agree it is over land. The tribal national park is a hope expressed on the parts of both the National Park Service and the Oglala Sioux Tribe to give some more control to the tribe.

The two papers both publish stories that eye the new plan with hope for several years but also chart the steep loss of support in later years. *Rapid City Journal*, in particular, attributes this hope to Paige Baker, superintendent of Badlands National Park, a member of the Mandan-Hidatsa Tribe of North Dakota, and one who once lost land to the federal government, much like the Oglala Sioux families in the 1940s. *Journal* reporter Sam Hurst sees Baker as a builder of bridges and a bringer of hope to the South Unit.<sup>189</sup> Both papers highlight the voices of local leaders. These voices sway the decisions more than ideals or myth, as the national papers might suggest. It is these voices, as well, who aim the plan toward its end when members of the community find that it may threaten their livelihoods. Unlike the portrayal of the national news, it is not the hope that Badlands may return to a mythic ideal that effects change, but the goals, fears, and plans of people within the community.

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<sup>189</sup> Hurst, "Sam Hurst, 1-15: Badland's Baker Building Bridges."

## CHAPTER FOUR

### History Repeating Itself

In 2004, the National Park Service started work on the next General Management Plan for the Badlands National Park. By 2010, the same General Management Plan, having been split into a plan for the North Unit of the park and another for the South Unit, became the proposal for America's first tribal national park. This plan, had it been put to action, would have been a groundbreaking intergovernmental feat, giving the Oglala Sioux Tribe full authority on the management of the South Unit of the Badlands National Park while continuing its funding through the national park system. In its earliest years, local and national newspapers alike heralded the Tribal National Park as a move to restoration for the impoverished Oglala Sioux Tribe, the first step to economic autonomy for the tribe. However, by 2015, the Oglala Sioux Tribal Council put the tribal national park to a referendum vote and withdrew its support from the plan entirely.

National newspapers like *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* portrayed the dissolution of the tribal national park as an utter travesty. They saw the new idea as a way to return to a past ideal, in which a wild ecosystem could thrive under the care and protection of a Native American tribe. This imagined past never really happened, but it was a vivid image in the minds of many American journalists far removed from South Dakota. This idealized hope for a return to a past that never existed became a powerful support for a tribal national park in the minds of these journalists.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Zach, "Hopes for the First Tribal Park Are Fading."

In creating a tribal national park, the National Park Service would be restoring stolen land to its rightful state—under the ownership of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, but still pristine.<sup>191</sup> The papers told a unified narrative that once the tribe left the plan, the shining beacon of hope that was the tribal national park had been entirely extinguished. Local newspapers told the same story in a different light. In their interpretation, the Oglala Sioux tribe's decision to discontinue their work toward a tribal national park was a result of poor communication and bad management practices on the parts of both the National Park Service and the Oglala Sioux Tribal Council. Local papers more explicitly connected this to a cycle of miscommunication and broken treaties between the United States government and the Oglala Sioux Tribe that was far older than this single negotiation.

Both national and local newspapers saw the tribal national park as a step toward restoration of the quality of the life for the tribe, but local newspapers were more quick to acknowledge the problematic aspects of the plan, highlighting members of the tribe who went so far as to call the idea a third taking of the land. Journalists for *The Rapid City Journal* and *The Lakota Country Times* paired their optimism with doubt and caution.<sup>192</sup> They even published articles voicing total opposition to the tribal national park. The journalists for national papers voiced only support for the tribal national park, which added to their confusion it did not come to fruition. Had they taken the time to explore some of the intricacies of the proposal, they likely would have been less blindsided by its dissolution. Instead, these journalists reported more on their own beliefs concerning what a national park ought to be, how Indigenous tribes live, and how the Badlands fit into

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<sup>191</sup> Eilperin, "Helping Buffaloes Reclaim a Place to Roam."

<sup>192</sup> Trimble, "Suspended in Evolution."

their own American identity than they reported on was occurring in South Dakota. They reported just enough facts of the case for their audience to form an opinion, basing its values in the social imagination rather than the real happenings of the negotiation.

### *Comparing Sources*

*The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Rapid City Journal* and *The Lakota Country Times* historically and geographically contextualize the Badlands differently because of their location, intended audience, and scope of circulation. Those stories written for a national audience place the Badlands within a broader narrative of America or of the American West, whereas the smaller newspapers that exist in a place where the Badlands are of greater importance do not attempt to fit the national park into any larger narrative. This changes the value that they give to the park. National newspapers leave out a great deal of context for any local story; the paper must reach a vast audience in which only a select few are aware of all the intricacies of the park's long past. With such a broad audience, and with such a vast base of news to cover, papers like the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* must create a salient and understandable story out of the complex issue facing the National Park Service in Badlands National Park. The newspapers do so by relying on narratives that are already likely well-known to their audiences. In the case of Badlands National Park, these narratives concern the wildness and the pristine ecology of the American West, the Badlands' flagship as a symbol of America, or even the Cold War.<sup>193</sup> Very rarely, if at all, does either of the two papers create a story out of the Badlands, rather than fitting it into a larger narrative. This

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<sup>193</sup> Eilperin, "U.S. Park Views Still in Haze; EPA Criticized for Not Doing Enough to Clear the Air;" Schneider, "South Dakota to the Extreme."

demonstrates the importance that the two national newspapers place on Badlands National Park: it serves as an exemplar, but cannot stand alone within its own narrative at the national level of journalism.

By the estimations of national news, Badlands is a pristine landscape that proves inhospitable to humans and is a prime example of the untamed American frontier. While dominating all human attempts to subdue the landscape, the Badlands is, all the same, now dependent upon human help, in the form of the National Park Service. The park serves the function of providing for the recreation and education of travelers. This story does not include the Lakota Nation, a people who has inhabited the northern Midwest for hundreds of years. It does not remind its audience that the Badlands, or Mako Sica in Lakota, is sacred land to an entire people group.<sup>194</sup> It instead establishes a dichotomy between land that is inhabited and managed within the Euroamerican tradition and wilderness, leaving no room for the history of the Lakota in this area. The stories told by these national newspapers totally erase the Lakota from history.

Humans do feature in news articles about the Badlands, but they typically fall into the category of the ranger or of the traveler. Robert E. Pierre describes the difficult job of a park ranger in 2003.<sup>195</sup> He describes a romantic, but dangerous, career in the wilderness. Cheryl Strayed captures the same wildness from the point of view of a tourist.<sup>196</sup> Here, she recalls a terrifying moment when she says good morning to a lone male bison in the park somewhat too loudly, and having to hide in her tent, contemplating

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<sup>194</sup> Holland, "Bison May Return to Badlands South Unit."

<sup>195</sup> Pierre, "The Office? 244,000 Acres of Badlands; Ranger Uses 'Every Aspect of Outdoor Skill.'"

<sup>196</sup> Strayed, "Badlands: Bison Bison Bison."

what her gravestone should look like. These two articles name the two types of people in any national park: the caretaker, and the tourist. National parks are built by one type, for the other. Both are often from areas entirely divorced from the communities that surround and depend on these parks. Hence, even when people are incorporated into the narrative created by national media, the Oglala Sioux Tribe is not. Unless they are caretakers of the land, individual members of the Oglala Sioux Tribe have almost no representation in national coverage of the Badlands.

The national news coverage warns that there is danger in crossing the line between civilization and wilderness. One article that makes this evident discusses the disastrous consequences of one park employee's decision to take a baby bison home with them.<sup>197</sup> As features of the story that the national newspapers tell about the Badlands, these articles are significant. They create a boundary at the border of the park that divides modern, developed America from an almost mythologized, dangerous world.<sup>198</sup> The national news sources justify their inclusion of the Badlands in their paper by marking it as an indomitable space deserving of celebration, and at the same time, protection. Most often, when the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post* chooses to publish an article on the Badlands, it is because the apparently untouched nature of the Badlands has been corrupted in some way, or later in the 2000s, because new legislation promises to return the land to wilderness.<sup>199</sup> The Oglala Sioux Tribe, a tribe that successfully lived on the

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<sup>197</sup> Lisa Rein, "S.D. Park Employee Takes Baby Bison Home," *The Washington Post*, July 25, 2016, Suburban Edition edition, sec. A.

<sup>198</sup> Schneider, "South Dakota to the Extreme."

<sup>199</sup> Eilperin, "U.S. Park Views Still in Haze; EPA Criticized for Not Doing Enough to Clear the Air."

land for decades, is figured out of this equation. These articles force them to take the role of caretaker, should they wish to be included in the narrative at all.

Local news sources need no justification for including the Badlands in their daily news, giving them more space to flesh out the story of the Badlands. Its proximity to both Rapid City and Pine Ridge, the two publishing bases of the local newspapers I have mentioned, its importance as a local landmark and a source of publicity and income, and its central role in the histories both of Lakota People and Euromericans living in western South Dakota make the stories of Badlands National Park a permanent fixture in local newspapers. It is expected that these papers include more details on the current events nearest them. The story that the local papers tell, however, is very different from that which the national newspapers present.

In newspapers based in South Dakota, the push toward a Tribal National Park begins years before such a park finds a title or a plan. The local newspapers stitch together a story that can reasonably be connected to the General Management Plan of 2012 beginning in 2002. This decade of coverage, beginning in the protests of a group of Pine Ridge residents against the National Park Service's excavation of fossils found a few miles from Stronghold Table, tracing the efforts of superintendent Paige Baker (and in doing so, implicitly contrasting a successful position as superintendent against a previous unsuccessful tenure), and involving the local community in the planning process, is all entirely lost at the national level.<sup>200</sup> Here, the news sources differ in more than just the context that they give for the idea of a Tribal National Park. The local

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<sup>200</sup> Christensen, "Tribe Continues Dig Protest;" Gease, "Oglala Sioux Tribe at Odds with National Park Service over Fossil Dig;" Hurst, "Sam Hurst, 1-15: Badland's Baker Building Bridges."

sources present the park as a hopeful, though far from perfect, next step in a process that has been in motion for years.<sup>201</sup> With no context and no history, the national sources write the idea of a Tribal National Park more as a spontaneous innovation than the result of a years-long process. The noted difference between the narrative that these local news sources present and the story fashioned by the national newspapers shows what each paper prizes as newsworthy.

Moreover, the local newspapers identify individuals with tribal affiliations as having decision-making authority in the park. The papers show a community that is vocal about its desires for the park, announcing meetings and open houses to discuss the park's future and giving voice to the thoughts of readers in the editorial section.<sup>202</sup> They also highlight Paige Baker, a member of the Mandan-Hidatsa culture in North Dakota, as the superintendent of the park. Time and again, his interviews stress listening to the members of the Oglala Sioux Tribe when planning for the Badlands' future.<sup>203</sup> This is a far cry from the national papers, wherein journalists fail to gather very many, if any, perspectives from tribal members. The difference between these sources cannot be overstated. One erases the autonomy—and often the very existence—of the tribe. The other sees it as a given that the tribe has a stake in the future of the park, highlighting the thoughts and concerns of the tribal members as valid input from human beings whose livelihoods and history is connected to the land.

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<sup>201</sup> Woster, "Parks Officials Urged to Move Slowly in Badlands Management."

<sup>202</sup> Eaton, "Impoverished SD Indian Tribe Debates Development."

<sup>203</sup> Hurst, "Future of the Badlands' South Unit May Be Baker's Legacy."

The spontaneity that national newspapers ascribe to the idea of a Tribal National Park coming into being also shows that Badlands National Park is understood as a frontier of ideas. That frontier still does not imagine Indigenous people as part of the development of the frontier or as full citizens. Framed at the national level, the story of Badlands National Park is no longer about two groups trying to work out hundred-year-old problems. It is now the setting of ideas that will bring the wilderness back to the West.<sup>204</sup> This forces the contributions and the needs of Native Americans out of the grasp of the park. It assumes settlers first came to a desolate and uninhabited land and that the Lakota People practically did not exist. In leaving hardly any evidence of the years-long debates that led to the idea of a tribal national park, these nationally read articles demonstrate a desire to improve the circumstances of the Badlands without acknowledging the voices or the history of the people who have been living there for centuries.

Both the stories of national papers and more local papers agree that the present situation is not ideal, though for different reasons. They look to their understanding of the past as a measure by which to test the values of decisions. The national newspapers demonstrate a desire to return to a mythic past in which the wilderness of the Badlands becomes once again wild. The local newspapers do not demonstrate a desire to return to the past so much as a wish to commemorate it. Local papers highlight the protests on Stronghold Table when tribal members discovered the plans to excavate fossils near the site of the Wounded Knee Massacre.<sup>205</sup> They then invite readers to contribute to the new

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<sup>204</sup> Eilperin, "Helping Buffaloes Reclaim a Place to Roam."

<sup>205</sup> Gease, "Badlands Fossil Dig Mired in History, Opposing Views."

proposals for the park.<sup>206</sup> They report on and involve the people around the Badlands. None of the articles published in the local papers suggest that it is possible or even wanted for the park to return to a mythic past, void of human life, or any other past time. The argument that brought the National Park Service to suggest forming a General Management Plan specific to the South Unit began when paleontologists tried to begin excavation of fossils several miles from Stronghold Table. This desire for commemoration, along with economic stability, places local identity further from, rather than closer to, the national myth of the West. The national papers find an American identity in the “uninhabited” West, a testing ground for American ingenuity. The local pieces are less taken with building a model of American identity. These two remembered histories cannot coexist. In fact, the dominant myth still exerts a destructive force on the local desire for commemoration, entirely denying the history of the Lakota people.

Much of the Lakota Country Times features careful deliberation over what decision would be best for the Tribe. Charles Trimble’s letter to the editor reminds readers of a similar attempt to involve members of the Oglala Sioux Tribe in the management of Badlands National Park that failed because of the factionalism arise from within the tribe.<sup>207</sup> An earlier article discusses the reactions of the tribal members at the planning meeting in 2008. It lists the options with the most tribal support, including making it a Tribal National Park as well as giving land back to the families who were displaced when the federal government used the land of the South Unit as a bombing

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<sup>206</sup> “Rez Happenings.”

<sup>207</sup> Charles Trimble, “Suspended in Evolution,” *Lakota Country Times*, September 22, 2010.

range in the 1940s.<sup>208</sup> The act of creating this park is certainly not an innovation in the way that the national news tells it. It is not exactly a step forward—or a step back to an idyllic past. The papers paint it more as a righting of wrongs happening too late.

National newspapers simplified the proposal for a tribal national park in South Dakota so completely that they effectively changed the narrative that they were telling. They erased the viewpoint of the Native American community most affected by the making of this new park. National newspapers characterized the Oglala Sioux Tribe as being affected by the decisions of entities like the National Park Service, but having little power to make their own decisions.<sup>209</sup> Furthermore, they shifted their explanation of the necessity of the tribal national park and their diagnosis of why the proposal failed in trying to define the members of the Oglala Sioux Tribe as keepers of the natural world and educators to the rest of America.<sup>210</sup>

The importance of a misrepresentation of events in a small national park in South Dakota goes further than a simple need to incorporate a greater level of detail into articles about less well-known events. National news sources are often the only sources that reach the public about these issues, and because of this, they play a major role in shaping the attitudes of their readers. These portrayals of the story of the tribal national park demonstrate how the interests of a marginalized community, in this case the Oglala Sioux Tribe, can be entirely overshadowed when well-meaning journalists make statements

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<sup>208</sup> Carson Walker, “OST Gets Say in How Badlands South Unit Managed,” *Lakota Country Times*, August 7, 2008.

<sup>209</sup> Zach, “Hopes for the First Tribal Park Are Fading.”

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*

based on a single perspective. Even when papers like the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post* had the best interests of the tribe in mind, they overlooked so many details that they twisted the issues facing the Badlands National Park. Understanding the effects of an oversimplified story is key to making future decisions. An oversimplification by which media outlets fit complex events and entities into a set of familiar archetypes halts future growth. Moreover, it speaks to a rhetorical cycle in which media outlets misidentify the real issues at hand and exacerbate the problem of racial injustice.

*Misrepresentation: a historical cycle*

The flaws in reporting displayed by national news sources when discussing the Badlands are troubling, but left here, the full significance of the divorce between real reporting and the communication of mythic ideals is lost. The fact is, this is just one example of a systemic problem of misrepresentation that has targeted the Oglala Sioux Tribe for decades. The rift between the national news and local news as it pertains to the telling of the events in South Dakota does not stand alone. Stories told by marginalized groups are overpowered—and hence silenced—by mainstream media today because they were overpowered years ago. In this chapter, I will further contextualize the problem of the tribal national park in the Badlands of South Dakota. Linking this event to historical events similar in nature will show the ways that the proposal, planning, and deterioration of the idea of a tribal national park is simply the most recent in a chain of unsuccessful intergovernmental negotiations between the two governments. This will give valuable historical insight into the cycles of marginalization that the Oglala Sioux Tribe face, as

well as the best steps for escaping future cycles of marginalization in journalistic representations of Oglala interactions with the federal government.

While media from places far removed from South Dakota fit the struggles between the Lakota Nation and the federal government into roles that already lived in the minds of the American public, the real story went much deeper than what journalists chose to represent in newspapers. Two events—both within the South Unit of Badlands National Park—evidence that, while the dominant narrative has changed over the years, the difference between the stories told at a national level and those told with a greater understanding of the local background is pointed. In both the Wounded Knee Massacre in 1890 and the occupation of Wounded Knee in 1973, the dominant narrative was the one written by whites who were often far removed from the tragedy.<sup>211</sup> Even those sources that were geographically close to the scene defined the actors in way that placed the Lakota People into strict, unforgiving categories of war-like savages.<sup>212</sup> Through years of work by Indigenous rights groups and the education of story-makers in American news, the dichotomy between white “civilization” and Indigenous “barbarism” has been softened in the narratives of mass news media, but the effects of this storytelling tradition remain a powerful factor. This shows particularly that “progress” as it concerns human rights is not a straight line, but cyclical in nature, collapsing in on itself in new iterations of the same story.

This undermines the facts of the event and effectively erases Indigenous history in two ways. First, it defines the Oglala Sioux Tribe through the lens of the dominant

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<sup>211</sup> J. Marshall Beier, “Grave Misgivings: Allegory, Catharsis, Composition,” n.d.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*

group, white America, giving the members of the tribe little to no autonomy in making their own history or joining themselves to any identity other than that which has been assigned to them. Second, it cuts off the ability to utilize real data to solve issues that will arise in the area in the future, closing the system of problematic communication in South Dakota and barring the way to move forward in a way that would both honor history and promote real economic and social growth for the Oglala Sioux Tribe. We can draw off of these better studied events in the history of race relations in South Dakota to understand the historical context of modern events, and to gain an understanding of the tangent of white representation of the Lakota Nation in history. With a better basis of the autonomy, or lack thereof, historically granted to the Oglala Sioux Tribe by the American Nation, scholars can more successfully assess modern agreements that the Oglala Sioux Tribe and the National Park Service have made, and fit the representations of these negotiations that national newspapers make into a grand narrative.

### *The Wounded Knee Massacre*

One early example of the unrealistic stories that the Oglala Sioux Tribe faced is the national coverage of the Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890. In much the same way as newspapers have to today, the news sources of the 1890s had to justify their decision in including the events of South Dakota in their papers at all. They did this by fitting the Lakota Nation into a question of white identity. In the 1890s, the most available avenue by which Native nations found their way into the public imagination was through the narrative of race war. Newspapers painted a civilized America that was at war with the forces of savagery and barbarism, represented by the Indigenous nations who did not support the western push of the United States. This was a deep-seated understanding of

the events of the American West that repainted every military move concerning Native tribes.<sup>213</sup> News sources never collected the perspectives of the members of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, establishing them as human beings and shaping a story based on their experiences. Instead, they fit these people into a preestablished narrative.

While there were, in fact, battles playing out in the American West, the newspapers showed that the American public saw this not simply as a push for land, but as an ideological stronghold, atop which the American nation could spread the saving grace of civility. When the Lakotas gained victory over General Custer at the Battle of Little Bighorn in 1876, the vision that the American Nation, a sentinel of Christian civilization and order, must always have the upper hand over the disorderly barbarity that America imagined in Indigenous nations was thrown into question.<sup>214</sup> While the events of Wounded Knee cannot be seen as a direct retaliation against Custer's defeat because of the fourteen years that passed between the two events, it was certainly an answer to any doubts that Americans had concerning the efficacy of the United States Army.<sup>215</sup> The media of 1890 reinstated the power of the American military by reframing reality. They did this through photography and prose and by repurposing the two events to work together in a cohesive narrative. One example of this in play is the photography of George Trager.

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<sup>213</sup> Beier, "Grave Misgivings: Allegory, Catharsis, Composition."

<sup>214</sup> David W. Grua, *Surviving Wounded Knee: The Lakotas and the Politics of Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>215</sup> Grua, *Surviving Wounded Knee*.

George Trager worked in South Dakota as a photographer, capturing scenes from Pine Ridge Reservation in fall of 1890.<sup>216</sup> His work overlapped with the growing worry of Americans, and ultimately, the Wounded Knee Massacre. His choice of framing in this scenario points to the story that the rest of the United States was telling of Wounded Knee. Trager did not include the women and children who were killed at Stronghold Table in his photographs.<sup>217</sup> This backed the popular conception that Wounded Knee was not a massacre of hundreds of unharmed Lakota men, women, and children, but a legitimate extension of the Indian Wars of the times. American attitudes concerning the Lakota People was growing steadily more uneasy by the end of the 1880s, in part because of the already familiar connection that Americans made between Indigenous nations as savages, and in part because of a new religion that was gaining popularity among tribes in western America: The Ghost Dance. While the Ghost Dance was a peaceful religion that preached the restoration of game and the promotion of freedom to the dancers, news media on the eastern coast defined the Ghost Dance as an outbreak of militant Native Americans.<sup>218</sup>

Moreover, the composition of Trager's photographs silently speaks of a moral code which places the Indigenous people murdered at Stronghold Table into the realm of the Other. In the position of the Other, the bodies pictured in Trager's photos occupied an amoral position. As living people American society placed them into the realm of the Immoral Other, hostile not only to the progress of the United States but to its spoken

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<sup>216</sup> Beier, "Grave Misgivings: Allegory, Catharsis, Composition."

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

values.<sup>219</sup> This belief that Native people must be educated and converted justified federal decisions to send Indigenous children to boarding schools, do away with the cultures and languages of these people, and, ultimately kill hundreds of people at Wounded Knee.<sup>220</sup> The dead bodies that Trager pictured, manipulated into positions that would highlight a sense of chaos and surrounded by the soldiers that shot them, were now fully subject to the sensibilities of the American public.<sup>221</sup> Trager inked out the exposed genitalia of one figure in his pictures, “Medicine Man,” so as to abide by the Victorian sense of morality.<sup>222</sup> Trager had no qualms with picturing dead bodies, as long as they ascribed to the standards of modesty set in place by broader America.

In fashioning a narrative out of the photographs of the bodies of Lakota people, and particularly in manipulating their bodies in order to adhere to the moral and narrative protocol of Victorian America, Trager demonstrates the extent to which media utilized Lakota people as an accessory to white identity. They were not a people group with an independent identity or social structure, but a placeholder, defining what a true American was not. Where the Indigenous man or woman was a savage, the American was noble and orderly. Even the character of the Noble Savage, an idea admired by the American Public, was a character who was close but not successful in developing the social graces and spiritual learning to needed to become a true Christian American.<sup>223</sup> This outlook set

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<sup>219</sup> Grua, *Surviving Wounded Knee*.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>221</sup> Beier, “Grave Misgivings: Allegory, Catharsis, Composition.”

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*

Indigenous groups apart from Americanness in a way that could not easily be reversed. The interests of Native tribes were now wrapped up in the characterizations that broader America had set before them. Indigenous groups would never be fully American, and therefore their interests would always fall short of those in power.

This view is the main contributor to the cyclical nature of the problems that the Lakota people faced after Wounded Knee. Their problem was not an American problem, as they were characterized in opposition to the American ideals. The Lakota Nation received no help in this regard because the only problem that the American people ascribed to them was their lack of Americanness. Any issue outside the realm of Americanizing the Lakota People, then, fell to the wayside. Furthermore, the dominant view of the Lakota politics was that those who supported the actions of the United States were seen as friendly—and in this way, “Noble Savages”—while those in opposition to the actions of the United States were hostile, and therefore dangerous.<sup>224</sup> This once again sorted out the voices of Indigenous tribal members on the basis of how American they were. The degree to which they complied to the narrative set before them by the American government determined how dangerous they were, and how much support they received in the eyes of American society. Their positions in the realm of the Other, whether in support or opposition to the federal government’s actions, gave the American press, and subsequently the American people license to disregard the nuances of Lakota society, prolonging the conflict within South Dakota for decades.

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<sup>224</sup> Grua, *Surviving Wounded Knee*.

### *The Wounded Knee Occupation*

The auditor can draw several connections between what the media published in 1890 and what it published in 1973. Unique to the occupation of Wounded Knee is the active part that Indigenous protesters played in the goings on in 1973—as opposed to their total lack of agency at Wounded Knee in 1890. Activists in the American Indian Movement (AIM) reworked the public memory of Wounded Knee in order to force dialogue. This was, in part, a response to the 1953 decision to do away with lands held for Native tribes.<sup>225</sup> While the document was phrased in such a way to suggest that reservation lands held in trust by the government were, in fact, impeding tribal members from enjoying the full rights and privileges of American citizenship, many Indigenous leaders were outraged by this decision to no longer recognize Indigenous nations as sovereign, and to subsequently renege the United States' commitment to the many treaties made between the government and Indigenous tribes in the last two hundred years.<sup>226</sup> In protest, a group of about 300 Native Americans gathered at Wounded Knee and declared the Independent Oglala Nation.<sup>227</sup> AIM leaders utilized areas of meaning for the American people—Wounded knee and Alcatraz, namely—to serve two purposes. They forced moments of negotiation between the federal government and Tribal

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<sup>225</sup> Dean J. Kotlowski, "Alcatraz, Wounded Knee, and Beyond: The Nixon and Ford Administrations Respond to Native American Protest," *University of California Press* 72, no. 2 (May 2003): 201–27.

<sup>226</sup> John Sanchez and Mary E. Stuckey, "The Rhetoric of American Indian Activism in the 1960s and 1970s <sup>1</sup>," *Communication Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (March 2000): 120–36.

<sup>227</sup> B. D'Arcus, "Contested Boundaries: Native Sovereignty and State Power at Wounded Knee, 1973," *Political Geography* 22, no. 4 (May 2003): 415–37.

members, and they served as symbols of what Indigenous peoples had suffered at the hands of the American nation.

Yet, in the 1970s, as with the 1890s, media outlets twisted the message that AIM leaders were conveying by attempting to make it something familiar to the general American public. Newspapers characterized these protesters as ‘warriors’ or ‘braves,’ fitting them comfortably into the narrative that Native Americans were seen as the Other.<sup>228</sup> Sometimes, members of AIM used the images that Americans closely associated with Indigenous cultures, but these images often further enmeshed AIM members and their causes in a system of stereotypes that distracted audiences from the real issues.<sup>229</sup> The use of stereotypes as ways of understanding was double-edged. On one hand, they reached the audiences that AIM members were targeting in a way that they could understand, but on the other, they allowed those who were not their imagined audiences to settle into a pattern of thought that produced little dissonance in their own ways of life.<sup>230</sup> While the stories told by media outlets had evolved since the Wounded Knee massacre, they still relied heavily on stories circulating within white communities about Indigenous groups, and not on the perspectives of Native Americans themselves. This slowed progress for members of AIM and left marginalized communities virtually unseen.

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<sup>228</sup> D’Arcus, “Contested Boundaries.”

<sup>229</sup> Sanchez and Stuckey, “The Rhetoric of American Indian Activism in the 1960s and 1970s <sup>1</sup>.”

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

*Wounded Knee Now: Still Misunderstood*

These patterns have not left us. News sources from the 1890s saw the Lakota Ghost Dancers as savages deserving death. They fit the Lakota People what they already knew, drawing from sources like the Indian Wars and earlier accounts of Native culture and history, and using Lakota identity as a tool against which to measure white identity. News sources in the 1970s no longer used the dichotomy of civilization and barbarity so heavy-handedly when following the actions of AIM, but they once again called upon characterizations of Indigenous people that were familiar and easy to access for non-Indigenous Americans, whether or not they squared with the perspectives of the protesters themselves.<sup>231</sup> In 2012, journalists created a storyline in which members of the Oglala Sioux Tribe were tied to a pristine landscape. They suggested that the tribe would prosper if bison were introduced to the land that they were to comanage with the National Park Service. In just the same way as those papers a century ago, these show a misunderstanding of the core identities and priorities of the Lakota People and Indigenous tribes overall.

Marginalized communities like the Oglala Sioux Tribe cannot make satisfactory progress in gaining the rights and the land owed to them until the non-Indigenous people in America can look carefully and intentionally at the real issues facing this tribe. As demonstrated through the various news stories of the history of South Dakota, the misrepresentations of Indigenous people simply lead to worse misunderstandings, a lack of trust, and ultimately rights and land lost to an already impoverished community. News outlets, particularly those that receive national readership, hold tremendous responsibility

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

in portraying communities like the Oglala Sioux Tribe as realistically and with as much attention to the priorities of tribal members as possible. This attention to detail, regardless of the length of the articles devoted to the topic, can re-educate readers rather than perpetuating misguided stereotypes. As stated by one scholar, “It has been said that reporters write the first draft of history.”<sup>232</sup> Accounts of historical points like the negotiations concerning a Tribal National Park must prioritize the issues at hand and eschew stereotypes. These stories should document history frankly rather than simply prolonging a dangerous set of characterizations that lend little to present negotiations, and less to the hope that tribes and treaties will be respected in the future. However, as they are written now, the stories in national newspapers show how little emphasis is placed on solving problems in the interest of Indigenous tribes, and how much these tribes are still simply used as tools to define white history and identity.

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<sup>232</sup> Grua, *Surviving Wounded Knee*.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Conclusion and Final Thoughts

In studying a reality that is easy to ignore, if not totally invisible to most Americans, it is hard not to become overwhelmed. I certainly was many times. The affairs of Indigenous tribes are often wrapped up in the travel section or the environmental section of the larger newspapers, forcing big issues into very small boxes. Even though they do not affect so many people as other current events may, they certainly deserve a place of their own in national news—not as an addendum to our concerns about the natural state of things or the way travelers may experience America. Local papers tell a story that shows just how complicated it is to treat communities who have suffered a long history of violence and broken treaties in a fair and equitable way. They paint a portrait of a community that deals with corruption, a lack of communication, and general distrust in the federal government.<sup>233</sup> Even if these factors did not exist, it would take a great deal of time and effort to agree on a plan that would give more to everyone involved. The way that we talk about it, particularly in the news shows what the American public prioritizes, how it views American history, and how the way it defines progress. In brief, this thesis has demonstrated that newspapers, tools of disseminating current events to the American public, also work as gauges to test the health of democracy.

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<sup>233</sup> White Horse, “Shannon County Commissioners Set up Meeting on Proposed Tribal National Park.”

### *In Summary*

In Chapter 1, I introduced the proposal to create a tribal national park out of the South Unit of the Badlands National Park, sharing the relevant history of the land. The general management plan for the South Unit, which the National Park Service began planning in 2004, was a response to the land disputes between the Oglala Sioux Tribe and the federal government in the early 2000s.<sup>234</sup> It was set to replace the Memorandum of Agreement, signed in 1976, which dictated the land use policies that both the Oglala Sioux Tribe and the federal government had to abide by when working with the South Unit of the Badlands. Because these 133,000 acres of land were once owned by Oglala Sioux families and is still the property of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, the National Park Service was bound to observe the tribe's wishes on areas that the tribe marked as culturally, spiritually, or historically significant.<sup>235</sup> The memorandum also stated that tribal members had the right to graze their cattle on the land of the South Unit, and that the Tribal Council could issue hunting permits to tribal members as well.<sup>236</sup> Added to that, the Memorandum stated that National Park employees would train tribal members to take over the jobs required to run a portion of a national park, hopefully the tribe another means of employment. The memorandum promised half of the North Unit's entrance fees to the Oglala Sioux Parks and Recreation Authority as well as a White River Visitor Center on the South Unit as soon as possible, but the document required the Oglala Sioux

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<sup>234</sup> "Final General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement, Badlands National Park, North Unit, South Dakota."

<sup>235</sup> Tribe and National Park Service, "1976 Memorandum of Agreement."

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*

Tribe to publish its budget for parks and recreation and to consider using the South Unit as a bison range.

The 2012 general management plan did have some shortcomings if it was to be a template for a new tribal national park. It stated that it would replace the 1976 Memorandum of Agreement but it did not make the same economic or developmental promises that the 1976 Memorandum did. There was no agreement to send any of the income of the North Unit to the South Unit, which would need a robust budget if it was to become a successful park.<sup>237</sup> In 2012, the South Unit had three fulltime employees, compared to over forty employees of the North Unit.<sup>238</sup> Not only does this show how great an effort would be needed to raise the South Unit to a level that could compare to the North Unit—it also shows that the promises of the 1976 Memorandum of Agreement had faltered in the almost forty years since the memorandum’s signing. The White River Visitor Center was still unfinished, there was sign of tribal members gaining opportunities for employment within the park, and even if they were being trained, the South Unit’s budget was so small that the economic impact would be next to nothing. The general management plan made many of the promises that the Memorandum of Agreement made, but there was still little to show for those promises made forty years prior. This is where Badlands National Park stood during the planning of this new park. It was wrapped up in controversy, broken promises and economic insecurity.

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<sup>237</sup> “Final General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement, Badlands National Park, North Unit, South Dakota.”

<sup>238</sup> Pierre, “The Office? 244,000 Acres of Badlands; Ranger Uses ‘Every Aspect of Outdoor Skill.’”

The national newspapers that I studied, *The New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, mentioned none of these constraints when describing the hope for a new tribal national park. Their articles in the mid-2000s, when the general management plan was in its first stages of planning, focused on travel and ecology, without much mention of the prospect of a tribal national park until 2013.<sup>239</sup> Without any background for the general management plan, it is more or less expected that journalists for these national news sources would be unable to understand how such a promising plan for half of a small national park in a small western state could fall through with such little warning. The problem that they encounter here is simply one of information. With more time and more interviews, journalists would have been able to report on these events with more fidelity to the facts of the matter. What is far more difficult to correct, and far more dangerous is the overarching belief that the Badlands are and always were a pristine wilderness, a landscape that conquered human civilization—and that there is no human history within the borders of the park.

The news articles I read all functioned on the myth of the American Frontier. They set up the Badlands as a momentous wilderness that cannot be conquered. Unfortunately, instead of acknowledging that this belief is not entirely true, most of the national news articles tacitly rearranged history in order to fit this narrative. Those articles that did tackle the history of South Dakota observed the border of the Badlands as a rhetorical border as well as a geographical one. That history which did happen inside the confines of Badlands National Park could not be talked about. This led journalists to remove historical events either from the Badlands or from history itself. Paul Schneider

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<sup>239</sup> Eilperin, "Helping Buffaloes Reclaim a Place to Roam."

did this by placing Stronghold Table, the site of the Wounded Knee Massacre, on the Pine Ridge Reservation and not mentioning that it was also inside the national park.<sup>240</sup> Juliet Eilperine did this by constraining her discussion of the hopeful tribal national park to the ecological benefits that bison would give to the land, not the benefits it could give to the Oglala Sioux Tribe, the group that would be managing the land.<sup>241</sup> When journalists remove the history from the land, they also remove the people who have history there. Most of the journalists in these national papers totally overlooked the Oglala Sioux Tribe and its influence on the South Unit of the Badlands.

This divorce between the national park and its history systemizes the oppression the Oglala Sioux Tribe faces. It allows journalists to disregard their own need to collect more research and to hear more perspectives on the issues facing this community, allowing a problem that should be an easy fix, the need to gain more information before evaluating the issue, to go unsolved for decades—perhaps even centuries. The reporters of large news sources dehumanized the members of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, a group that has more influence of the South Unit of the Badlands than anyone except the National Park Service, collecting few to none of their perspectives on the issue and taking into account none of their concerns. Instead they told a story that was already familiar to them without bothering to check for the truth.

Local news sources were already familiar with the story of the Badlands, many of their readers were already personally invested in its future. They had much more to work from than their larger counterparts. Both the *Rapid City Journal* and the *Lakota Country*

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<sup>240</sup> Schneider, "South Dakota to the Extreme."

<sup>241</sup> Eilperin, "Helping Buffaloes Reclaim a Place to Roam."

*Times* had unique perspectives on the proposal for a tribal national park in the Badlands, and while these coincided much of the time, they did not always. Both papers found that the tribal national park was trying to solve a very old problem. The *Rapid City Journal* stressed the 2002 disagreement between some of the members of the Oglala Sioux Tribe and the National Park Service over fossil excavation near Stronghold Table.<sup>242</sup> The *Lakota Country Times* stressed the fact that the National Park Service had taken the land for the South Unit unfairly in the 1940s.<sup>243</sup> Both are valid, and both emphasize that the tribal national park is not simply a spontaneous idea created by the National Park Service and meant to increase the biological diversity of a small stretch of land. It is a cooperative effort between two actors, the National Park Service and the Oglala Sioux Tribe, meant to answer to a shared difficulty.

These sources are valuable for the study of the practical steps that leaders in the future can take to give more power to the Oglala Sioux Tribe. The papers trace the path that the tribal national park took from its inception to its eventual dissolution. One major point that the *Rapid City Journal*, in particular, belabors, is the importance of good leadership. The *Journal* publishes five articles on Superintendent Paige Baker, whose main hope is that, during his tenure, he can give authority of the South Unit back to the Oglala Sioux Tribe. In one interview, Baker repeats over and over again, “Whatever the tribe wants.”<sup>244</sup> He states that there must be communication between the tribe and the National Park Service if the tribe is to gain any justice. This sentiment should be remembered as

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<sup>242</sup> Gease, “Badlands Fossil Dig Mired in History, Opposing Views.”

<sup>243</sup> White Horse, “Shannon County Commissioners Set up Meeting on Proposed Tribal National Park.”

<sup>244</sup> Hurst, “Future of the Badlands’ South Unit May Be Baker’s Legacy.”

the tribal national park's biggest strength. In its earliest days, it sought out a way for the tribe and the Park Service to communicate, cooperate, and find common ground.

The tribal national park began to dissolve when tribal members felt like they were no longer being heard by their own government. When the Tribal Council moved quickly from publishing a general management plan to publishing a resolution to add 1000 head of bison to the South Unit, they also ended the leases of the tribal ranchers who used the land for their cattle. One rancher called what they were doing a "third taking of the land."<sup>245</sup> This was a popular comparison. Another rancher said it was a repetition of the federal land grab of the 1940s.<sup>246</sup> Many Lakota dissenters blamed their Tribal Council moving too fast and not communicating with members of the tribe. None of these perspectives were mentioned in the national news sources. For an issue of national importance, one that puts the American values of equality and democracy into question and that has been an issue for hundreds of years, it is perplexing that none of this made it into national media.

While perplexing, it is not unexpected that even well-respected publications would miss many of the most important pieces of the story when it comes to Indigenous rights. In fact, some may say it is longstanding tradition. The news after the Wounded Knee Massacre made no mention of the fact that the Lakotas were people. Instead, news sources manipulated facts, and photographers like Joseph Trager manipulated the bodies of dead tribal members to fit within the story that they wanted to write.<sup>247</sup> The same

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<sup>245</sup> O'Sullivan, "Opponents Voice Concerns about Reservation Park."

<sup>246</sup> White Horse, "Shannon County Commissioners Set up Meeting on Proposed Tribal National Park." Many

happened when AIM occupied Wounded Knee in 1973. National news outlets made assumptions concerning the messages that AIM was sending and the audience it was targeting. They captured the most familiar aspects of AIM's messages, using these to strengthen the assumptions that they had already made concerning the group.<sup>248</sup> I am not arguing against the opinions that journalists hold. I am, however, arguing that an opinion made without making a reasonable effort to gather all the perspectives present in any scenario is unethical.

The news holds unique responsibility in the public sphere. When done right, the news holds people in power accountable, it reminds readers of their values and their identities as Americans, and it educates its readers in areas that they may not yet understand. However, it is easy for journalists to continue on the comfortable narratives that only prolong the cycles of injustice in our systems. In erasing Indigenous communities from the narrative of Badlands National Park, these news outlets show that they still find it acceptable for those in power to enact their will on those without power. It is absolutely necessary that governments and community leaders communicate and acknowledge the diverse perspectives of those most affected by the decisions they are to make. It is also absolutely necessary that newspapers do the same. This could break the cycle of misrepresentation and frustration in South Dakota, and give the Oglala Sioux Tribe a toehold to seek justice for itself.

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<sup>247</sup> Beier, "Grave Misgivings: Allegory, Catharsis, Composition."

<sup>248</sup> Sanchez and Stuckey, "The Rhetoric of American Indian Activism in the 1960s and 1970s <sup>1</sup>."

### *Final Thoughts*

This study is a stepping-off point for me. With this knowledge, I will be able to continue my study of Indigenous activism, recording and evaluating the actions of activists and the reactions of the non-Indigenous viewers. In doing so, I can add information to a pool that, compared to many other fields, is sorely lacking. I see an American public that, like the national news sources, simply needs more information to build attitudes and to make decisions that promote equality and justice. This cannot be done, however, by forming opinions in an echo chamber. In the course of my study, I have not been able to test my opinions with leaders or members of the Oglala Sioux Tribe. For a study like this to be complete, I must be able to revise the conclusions at which I have arrived against the knowledge of those people who understand the situation best.

In writing this thesis, I started from the ground up. I had never learned Indigenous history in school. Even those events that I now see as immeasurably important in American history—the Wounded Knee Massacre, the Occupation of Wounded Knee and of Alcatraz, to name a couple—were foreign to me until this year. It is clear now that building up an entire knowledge base out of nothing in twelve months is no simple task. That may be why I felt like I had no idea what I was doing most of the time. In my study, I had to encounter my own ignorance time and again. This process was uncomfortable and, in many ways, scary. The affair of creating a general management plan that encourages inter-governmental cooperation and steps toward justice for the Oglala Sioux Tribe is a labyrinthine prospect to begin with. For a senior college student living somewhere in Texas who has never heard of any of this before, it is nigh impossible to

fully grasp. In writing this, I did not want to form opinions on matters I did not understand, and yet I had to if I was to evaluate the methods that newspapers take to report on events like this.

If anything, I learned that it should not be as hard as it is to educate oneself about the affairs of Indigenous communities in America. Even major newspapers showcase just how entrenched we are in a pattern of utilizing myth and unsupported stereotypes to explain what we do not know. I mourn the loss of Indigenous histories from our education systems. It speaks to the fact that we still have a long way to go as a nation that pursues equality, liberty, and autonomy. And yet, I have hope that the present erasure from history that Indigenous leaders, communities, and cultures face will not always be the norm. The proposal to create a tribal national park in the South Unit of the Badlands started out as a hopeful step toward a better future for the Oglala Sioux Tribe, and I firmly believe that if we study the strengths and shortcomings of this failed attempt closely, it will lend itself to a successful plan in the future.

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