

LIVING TRADITIONS

Dakota, Nakota, Lakota Art



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Oceti Sakowin

The Sioux Nation is made up of seven groups collectively called *Oceti Sakowin*, or "Seven Council Fires." The seven groups identified themselves as Dakota, Nakota, or Lakota depending upon which of these three dialects they spoke. The largest group, the Teton, split into seven bands.



The Sioux moved into South Dakota from the Upper Mississippi woodlands in the east. Warfare with eastern tribes and the promise of plentiful buffalo drew them westward. By 1776, an Oglala war party had reached the Black Hills.

The tiospaye, a group of two to three hundred related family members, gathered once a year for ceremonies, visiting relatives, and the Sun Dance.



Sioux Council, 1940, Oscar Howe, Yanktonais Nakota.



Detail from tipi liner, ca. 1890, Standing Bear, Minneconjou Lakota.

The Sioux had horses by 1770. They became outstanding riders. Horses served as a source of wealth and status and pervaded Sioux lifestyle, culture, and religion.

Life depended on tatanka or buffalo. According to legend, the buffalo came from inside the earth to give its life so the Sioux people would survive. Food, clothing, and shelter all came from the buffalo.



He Would Give Up His Life, 1994, Don Montileaux, Oglala Lakota.

Bringing out Beauty

“Art” is a European concept used to describe decorated objects of Sioux culture. When the Sioux refer to artistic quality, they speak of “bringing out the beauty” in an object. Men and women decorated items with painting, quillwork, beadwork, and carving to bring out the beauty hidden in everyday objects.



Detail from tipi liner depicting Battle of Little Big Horn, ca. 1885, Chief His Horse Looking, Minneconjou Lakota.

Sioux men painted tipi liners, hides, and shields. They carved pipes and personal sacred items. Men's work used recognizable human and animal figures. Their art celebrated hunting and battle exploits, and it shared tribal history.



Detail from quilled gauntlets, ca. 1890, Brave Thunder, Dakota.

Eastern Sioux women used floral motifs and western Sioux women used abstract geometric patterns to decorate items with quills, beads, and paint. A skilled artist was an important asset to her family and tribe.



Detail from tipi bag, ca. 1915, Angela Larvie Roberts, Lakota.

Today, Sioux artists use both traditional and modern materials. With no gender restrictions, men can do quillwork and beadwork, and women are free to paint and carve.



Quilled earrings, 2006, Tony Horse Road, Oglala Lakota.



Buffalo hide painting, 2003, Sonja Holy Eagle, Lakota.

Art of the Sioux

This exhibit examines Sioux art in three historic periods.



Detail from tipi liner, ca. 1890, Standing Bear, Minneconjou Lakota.



Parfleche, ca. 1890, maker unknown, probably Hunkpapa, Lakota.

Nomadic Era

Possessions had to be easy to pack and carry to follow the buffalo. Quills, beads, and paint made everyday items beautiful. With no written language, the tribe shared history and culture with images, songs, and stories.

Reservation Era

White settlement forced the Sioux people to give up the buffalo hunt and move onto reservations. Much-needed income came from making items for sale to whites. Beadwork proved the most popular sale item.



Beaded bottle, ca. 1900, maker unknown, probably from the Cheyenne River Reservation.



Fully beaded purse, ca. 1900, maker unknown, Lakota.



That Morning, 2002, Dwayne C. Wilcox, Oglala Lakota.

Modern Era

Like all modern artists, Sioux artists today work in all styles and mediums. They are not restricted to making only "Indian" art. Their work may reflect their cultural heritage, or not, as they choose.

Painting

Early peoples recorded their history and culture by painting or etching rock surfaces. Sioux hide painting, ledger art, and modern painting stems from these ancient roots.



Rawhide was prepared by staking a hide and scraping off the flesh. After bleaching in the sun, the hide was scraped again to make it even and remove the hair. Soaking, stretching, and curing the hide created strong, stiff leather for parfleche bags, drums, and moccasin soles. To create soft buckskin for clothing and bedding, the hide was rubbed with fat and animal brains before being dried and stretched.



Elk antler scraper, ca. 1880, owned by Emma No Fat, Oglala Lakota.



Bone fletcher, ca. 1860.

Red, yellow, white, and black paint came from dirt, plants, and animal parts. Bones and sticks were used as brushes, and turtle shells held paint. White traders brought paintbrushes, brightly colored paints, ledger paper, and other materials.



Buffaloberry



Turtle-shell paint bowl, ca. 1880, maker unknown, from the Standing Rock or Cheyenne River Reservations. Bone paintbrushes, ca. 1940.



Upright coneflower

Nomad Era

Both Sioux men and women painted hides during the nomadic period. Men used human and animal images to show hunts, battles, and tribal history. Women painted colorful geometric designs.



Winter Count, 1800-1871, Lone Dog, Yanktonais, Nakota.

Winter counts recorded tribal history. One memorable event from each year was painted onto the count. Winter counts passed from one generation to the next. When a count deteriorated, its symbols were drawn on a new surface and the count continued.



"The winter many died of small pox" (1801-2). A man's body is covered with red blotches to indicate that smallpox killed many people in the tribe.



"The winter the stars fell" (1833-4). A great meteor shower was seen across the continent on November 12, 1833, and it was recorded on all Lakota winter counts. It became the event by which winter counts could be accurately dated forwards and backwards.



"Peace with the Crows" (1851-2). Two men exchange peace pipes in this pictograph. The image records the signing of the Fort Laramie Treaty in 1851.



Shield, ca. 1890, Fat Bear, Hunkpapa, Lakota.

Men often painted animals or symbols they had seen in visions. These symbols held sacred meanings. The act of painting them onto personal items transferred their power to the artist. Women used geometric patterns in their painting. Inspired by nature, their designs were decorative and pleasing to the eye.



Painted robe, ca. 1890, maker unknown, from the Standing Rock or Cheyenne River Reservations.



Reservation Era

Ledger drawing developed in the 1860s. American Indian men in prisons were encouraged to draw on scraps of paper from old ledger books. The men brought ledger drawing with them to the reservations. They drew scenes of daily reservation life, tribal history, and hunts and battles from earlier times.



Government policies and the extinction of the herds forced the Sioux to give up the buffalo hunt. Since hides were not available, paper replaced hide as a painting surface.

These Ledger drawings were collected by Mary C. Collins, a missionary on South Dakota reservations from 1875-1910.



The new art materials were easier to use than bone brushes on hide. Crayons, pencils, ink, and watercolors on paper made drawing more realistic images possible.



Modern Era



Oscar Howe was one of South Dakota's premier artists. He graduated from the Santa Fe Indian School Studio Art Program in 1938. Over his lifetime, Howe created over 400 paintings and painted large murals in the Mobridge Auditorium and the Mitchell Carnegie Library.



Elk Game, 1946, Oscar Howe, Yanktonais Nakota.

Howe's early paintings were done in the realistic Santa Fe style.



Origin of the Sioux, ca. 1970, Oscar Howe, Yanktonais Nakota. Copyright, Adelheid Howe, 1983.

In the 1950s, Howe began experimenting with bold colors and strong geometric patterns. He saw his work as an extension of Sioux traditional style and referred to his geometric paintings as a spiderweb linked to Iktomi, the trickster. His bold new style forced critics to rethink what was "Indian" art.

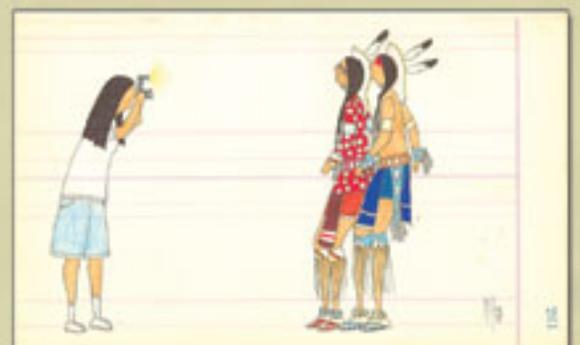


We Made a Life, 2001, Arthur Amiotte, Oglala Lakota. Courtesy of Arthur Amiotte and the Akta Lakota Museum, St. Joseph's Indian School.

The work of modern Sioux painters incorporates a variety of materials, themes and styles. Limits on what is considered "Indian" art no longer apply. Many artists still use traditional elements in their work.

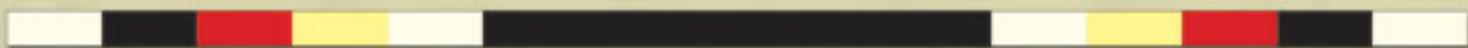


Great Spirit Skan, 1994, Don Montileaux, Oglala Lakota.

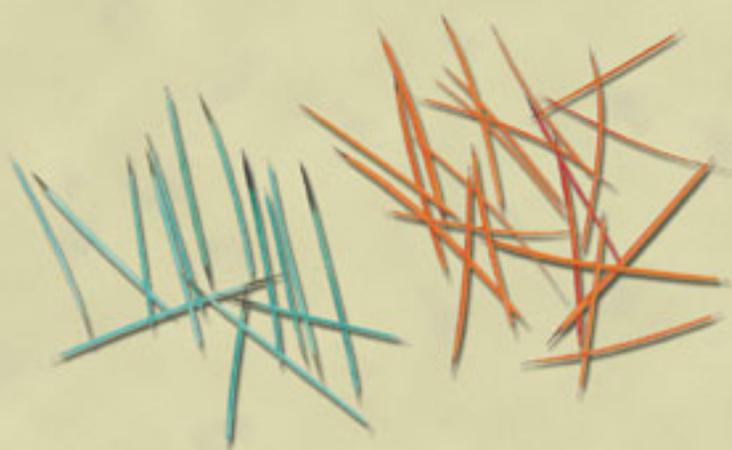


Smile, 1998, Dwayne C. Wilcox, Oglala Lakota.

Quillwork & Beadwork



A Sioux woman's social standing depended on her industry, virtue, and generosity. Many hours went into decorating clothing and household objects with quillwork and beadwork. Creating beautiful objects reflected good character and brought honor to a woman's family and tribe.



Different sized quills come from different parts of the porcupine. Women sorted their quills by size and stored them in bladder pouches. Quillworkers kept quills soft as they worked by holding them in their mouths. The quills hardened as they dried.

Before traders brought dyes, women boiled plants, roots, berries and flowers to color quills red, yellow, and black. When it became available, blue trade cloth was boiled to make blue dye.



Porcupine quillworker, ca. 1893.



Detail of plaited quillwork on pipe stem, ca. 1880, maker unknown, Blackfoot Lakota.

Porcupine quills could be wrapped, plaited, or sewn to objects. Long, thin pieces such as pipe stems were wrapped. Plaiting, or braiding, the quills created a diamond pattern. Quills were wrapped around sinew and the sinew sewn to objects.

Bones, seeds, and animal teeth served as early beads. Making natural beads took a long time and the materials were not easy to get. When traders brought glass beads in the 1800s, Sioux beadworkers quickly adopted them.



Horse tooth and trade bead necklace, ca. 1895, maker unknown, Standing Rock Reservation.



Pony beads, ca. 1830.

Seed beads, ca. 2007.

Large glass beads called pony beads were among the first beads to come to the plains. Pony beads – named for the trader's pony packs that brought them – were twice the size of the seed beads that came around 1840.

Nomad Era

Quillwork predated beadwork for decorating objects. Quillwork was considered *wakan*, or sacred. It required delicacy and patience. Trade with other tribes and whites brought shells, beads, and trade cloth to the Sioux, and women began incorporating these materials into their work. By 1860, beadwork had practically replaced quillwork for decoration.



Quilled, beaded, and painted shirt, ca. 1880, maker unknown, Lakota.

In Sioux legend, Double Woman came to a young woman in a dream and taught her quillworking. The young woman then taught other women the art. Exclusive quillworking guilds were formed, and members taught young girls the craft. Each quillwork artist owned her designs since they came from her dreams.



Quilled breeches, ca. 1890, maker unknown, probably Dakota.

Different decorating patterns developed among tribes. The western Lakota preferred geometric patterns. The eastern Dakota and Nakota used more curved and floral patterns. Styles mingled due to intertribal marriage, trading, and warfare.



Beaded and quilled pipe bag, ca. 1890, maker unknown, Lakota. Women continued to do quillwork after the introduction of seed beads.



Dentalia shell cape, ca. 1900, Ellen Thunder Horse, Yankton Nakota.

Trade flourished on the plains before the arrival of whites. The Sioux bartered for a wide variety of items including shells and beads. Dentalia shells like those on this cape came from the Pacific coast.

Reservation Era

During the reservation era, beadworkers began making heavily beaded items. Men's vests and children's clothes were often entirely covered in beads. More realistic images began to appear along with geometric patterns. Beadwork offered Sioux women a way to hold onto their culture as their lifestyle changed. Beading items for sale to whites also brought in much-needed income.



Dress, ca. 1920, Jennie LaFramboise Claymore, Minneconjou Lakota. Dresses with fully beaded yokes were made using two or three hides and could weight 12-16 pounds.



Beaded moccasins, ca. 1900, maker unknown, Lakota.

In lazy stitch beadwork, six to twelve beads are strung together. The ends of the beaded strand are then stitched down to the object being decorated. As rows of beads are added, they arc slightly and create a ridged pattern.



Beaded gauntlet, ca. 1905, maker unknown, Nakota or Lakota.



Beaded vest, ca. 1920, maker unknown, probably Dakota.



Quilled pouch, ca. 1910, maker unknown, Lakota or Nakota, probably from Lower Brule Reservation.



Back view of beaded vest, 1927, maker unknown, Oglala Lakota.

Modern Era

Quillwork declined in popularity when beads arrived in mass quantities, but it never died away completely. In recent times, quillwork has seen a revival, and beadwork continues to be popular. Modern quill- and beadworkers are creating pieces that help maintain Sioux culture, expand the limits of their art, and generate income for their communities.

In earlier days, babies spent their first two years in a cradleboard. The cradleboard on a wood frame could be worn on the back, strapped to a horse, or staked in the ground.



Beaded cradle cover, 1993,
Todd Yellow Cloud, Oglala Lakota.



Beaded pipe bag, 1994,
Rosalie Little Thunder and
Barbara Kills in Water,
Brulé Lakota.

Today's artists combine modern materials such as cotton thread, chemical dyes, and plastic beads with traditional materials. In earlier times, quillwork and beadwork were almost exclusively women's artwork. Today, there are many accomplished male artists working with quills and beads.



Quilled pouch, 1980s,
Alice New Holy Blue Legs, Oglala Lakota.



Beaded moccasins and leggings, ca. 2006,
Dorothy Ann Little Elk, Lakota,
Rosebud Reservation.



Beaded bracelet, 2006, Leonard Good Bear,
Lakota, Cheyenne River Reservation.

Sculpture

Carving is an ancient art form. Before trade brought them metal tools, Sioux sculptors used stone and bone tools. Metal tools made it easier to carve detailed designs. Skilled carvers were admired and paid well for their work. Carved designs and sculpture had no strong tradition, so carvers could use their imaginations to create whatever they liked.



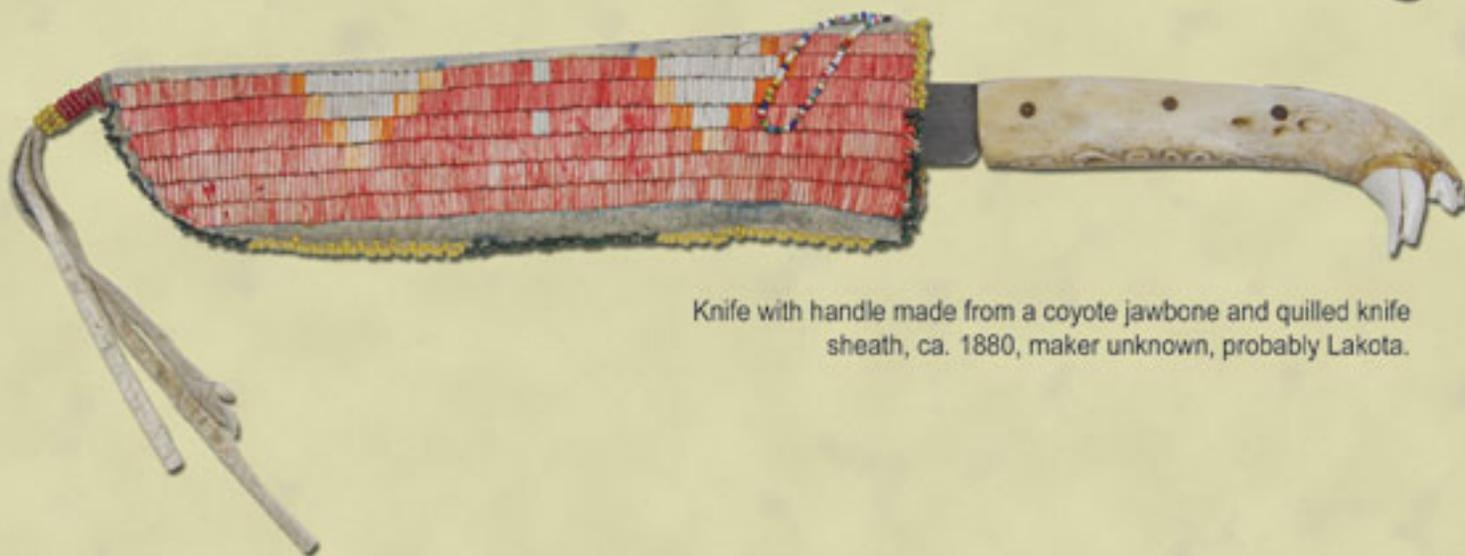
The Sioux people say "We are known by the tracks we leave behind." For thousands of years, people have left their marks on the caves, cliffs, and rocks of the Black Hills. Ancient people chipped hands, birds, and other symbols into prayer rocks.

Sculptors carved wood, stone, bone, antler, and horn. Pipes and war clubs were often enhanced with paint, beads, quills, feathers, and other decorations.

Ceremonial effigy club, ca. 1880, Kills Many, Hunkpapa Lakota.



Gunstock club, ca. 1885, Two Crows. This gunstock-style club made by Two Crows had three blades of bone or steel. Detail of bear claw carvings.



Knife with handle made from a coyote jawbone and quilled knife sheath, ca. 1880, maker unknown, probably Lakota.

Nomad Era

In nomadic times, carvings had to be small and portable. Sioux sculptors created useful objects such as horn spoons, toys, dance sticks, pipes, and flutes. Skilled artists made realistic carvings of buffalo, eagles, horses, bears, and other animals.



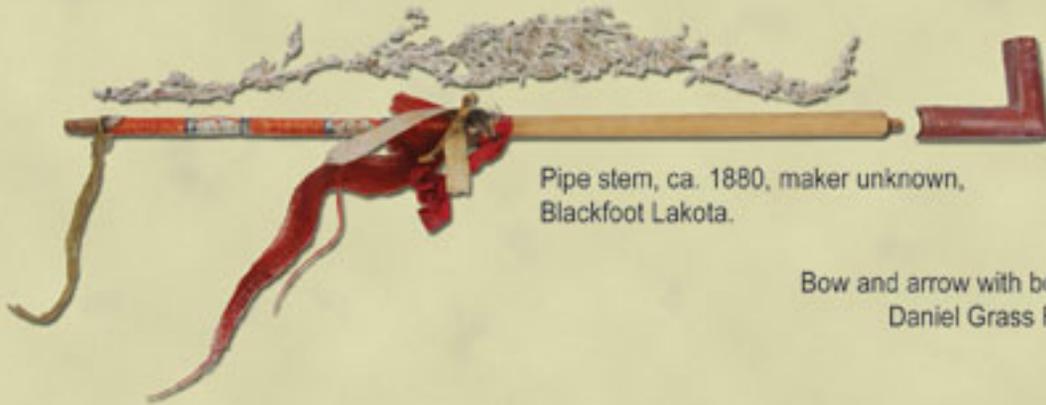
Horse effigy dance stick, ca. 1850-1870, unknown maker, Lakota.

War ponies were honored for their speed and courage. Warriors carried carved horse effigies in dances to honor their brave companions. A Lakota warrior carved this effigy around 1870 to honor a horse killed in battle. It is an internationally recognized masterpiece.



Pipe, ca. 1890, maker unknown, Two Kettle Lakota.

The pipe, or cannupa, is central to all sacred ceremonies. White Buffalo Calf Woman brought the people the first pipe and showed them how to use it in seven sacred ceremonies. Pipes were smoked in times of peace and war. A powerful object, the pipe provided protection and blessings.



Pipe stem, ca. 1880, maker unknown, Blackfoot Lakota.

Bow and arrow with bone point, ca. 1880, Daniel Grass Rope, Brule Lakota.

Early carvers created realistic human and animal figures long before such imagery showed up in painting, quillwork, or beadwork.

Buffalo-head effigy spoon, ca. 1890, maker unknown, Lakota.



Human effigy ladle, ca. 1880, maker unknown, Minneconjou Lakota.



Reservation Era



During the reservation period, Sioux sculptors created objects to sell. Animal statues, paperweights, crosses, and letter openers were popular souvenirs. Many carved or sculpted items became solely decorative rather than functional.



Pipe with carved snake and mouse, ca. 1890, maker unknown, probably Lakota from Lower Brule Reservation.

Pipes have two pieces, the pipe bowl and the pipe stem. Almost all Sioux pipe bowls are made from catlinite, a soft red stone found near Pipestone, Minnesota. The Brule Sioux used gray limestone. Pipe bowls can be carved or left plain. Although most pipe stems are made from wood, some are carved from catlinite. Stems were often decorated with quills or beads and trimmed with feathers, ribbons, and other materials.



Pipe tomahawk, ca. 1890, Martin Blue Shield, probably from Lower Brule Reservation.



Pottery, ca. 1935, Ramona Wounded Knee, Oglala Lakota.



Miniature shoes, ca. 1900, maker unknown, Sisseton or Wahpeton Dakota.



Horse pipe bowl, ca. 1900, maker unknown, Sisseton or Wahpeton Dakota.

Modern Era

Modern Sioux sculptors use new tools and techniques as they practice an ancient art form. New influences combine with Sioux tradition and designs in contemporary work. Today's sculptors are no longer inhibited by the size and weight limitations that nomadic sculptors faced.



Blue Star Horse, 2007.
Nathan James Little Wounded,
Minneconjou Lakota.
The 1870 horse effigy inspired this modern piece.
Both pieces share a common tradition - the original honors a fallen horse, the modern honors the original and its maker.



Courtship flute, mallard duck effigy, 1994,
Bryan Crawford Akipa, Sisseton-Wahpeton Dakota.

According to legend, two bull elk gave a shy young man a flute. The beautiful music he played won the heart of the woman he loved. Thereafter, men carved elk whistles or flutes for playing love songs. Birds were also popular motifs for courting flutes because they sang sweet songs.



Pottery, 2002,
Randall Blaze, Oglala Lakota.

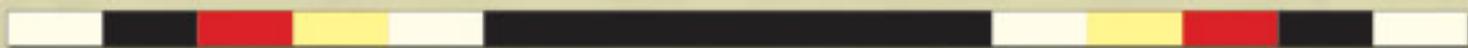


Wood figurine, Untitled, ca. 1945,
John and Tom Saul, Yanktonais Nakota,
Crow Creek Reservation.



Wood figurine, *Teaching Child*, ca. 1945,
Tom Saul, Yanktonais Nakota,
Crow Creek Reservation.

Ceremony & Celebration



The Sioux people have a rich spiritual and religious life. Having good relationships with both earthly and spiritual beings is important. Ceremonies and celebrations help maintain these bonds and keep the world in balance.



Sun Dance, ca.



Sioux Dancer, ca. 1940,
Oscar Howe, Yanktonais Nakota.



Ledger drawing collected by Mary C. Collins during her time in South Dakota, 1875-1910.



Powwow dancers at the Fort Laramie Pageant,
Eagle Butte, 1968.



The drum is considered a living being with a heartbeat all its own. The musicians who play a large box drum are collectively referred to as the "drum." Drums provide music for dancers, accompany singers, and are an important part of curing ceremonies.

Nomad Era

The Sun Dance is the most important form of thanksgiving, prayer, and sacrifice. During the dance, a few men are pierced with wooden skewers and attached by thongs to the Sun Dance pole. They try to pull themselves free during the dance. This offering of flesh for the benefit of all the tribal people is the most generous act that can be performed.



Sun Dance, ca. 1890.



Drum, ca. 1890, Of Many Geese, Hunkpapa Lakota.

Strong Heart Society rattle, ca. 1880, maker unknown, Hunkpapa Lakota.



Eagle bone whistle, ca. 1880, maker unknown, Minneconjou Lakota.



Sun Dance, ca. 1940, Oscar Howe, Yanktonais Nakota.

Eagle bone whistles were used during the Sun Dance and on the warpath.



The Dancer, ca. 1940, William Nelson. The Oglala Lakota invited artist William Nelson to record their sacred Sun Dance Ceremony.



Pipe, ca. 1880, Martin Charger, Sans Arc Lakota.

White Buffalo Calf Woman visited the people and gave them the sacred pipe. She taught them seven ceremonies to mark important life milestones. The ceremonies were Namegiving, Sweat Lodge, Healing, Making-of-Relatives, Vision Seeking, Marriage, and the Sun Dance. The Sun Dance was the most sacred.

Reservation Era

During the early reservation period, the Sioux people were forced to give up their ceremonies and public rituals. The federal government outlawed such gatherings, including the Sun Dance.



Ghost dance shirt, ca. 1890, maker unknown, Hunkpapa Lakota.



Ghost Dance on the Pine Ridge Reservation, ca. 1890.

The Ghost Dance developed in the late 1880s. Followers believed that dancing would make the whites disappear, cause the buffalo to return, and restore Indian culture. Ghost Dance clothing was painted with sacred symbols, and the Lakota believed it to be impenetrable by bullets. The Wounded Knee Massacre on December 29, 1890, effectively ended the Ghost Dance movement.

After the Sun Dance was banned, the Sioux adopted celebrations like the Fourth of July. They held parades, feasts, mock battles, sporting events, and give-aways to make the celebrations their own.



Reading of the Declaration of Independence at a Fourth of July celebration, 1897.

Generosity is a great virtue in Sioux culture. Public "give-aways" let everyone witness generosity. A family publicly gives away possessions to honor relatives or important life events. In earlier days, women made many of the give-away gifts.



Quilt, 1994, Pauline Wirlwind, Brule Lakota. Quilts were popular items for give-aways.



Give-away, ca. 1897.

Modern Era

The powwow is the biggest public celebration of American Indian culture today. Powwows give everyone the chance to see family and friends, dance, and socialize. Rituals and ceremonies are often part of the celebration. Dancing, both competitive and social, is an important part of the powwow.



Rows of silver cones sewn onto jingle dresses create a pleasant jingling noise when the dancer moves. Jingles are made from the metal tops of chewing tobacco tins.

Child's jingle dress, 1994,
Gabrielle Tateyuskaskan,
Sisseton-Wahpeton Dakota.



Jeffrey Red Tomahawk, 2004,
Wasta, South Dakota.



Oliver Janis performing the hoop dance, ca. 1973.



Singing Men, 1998, Dwayne C. Wilcox, Oglala Lakota.



Poster, 1993, print by Rich Red Owl, Oglala Lakota.