



Generous Man Holds High Status Among Plains Indians

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overcrowded. Low incomes are strained. It is difficult for the Indian supporting two families to get aid, said a spokesman for the Lincoln Indian Center.

The non-Indian may regard the Indian sharing as "a good Indian being dragged down by his shiftless relatives." But Mrs. Barbara Schneider, a Rosbud Sioux who lives in Lincoln, says Indians still believe in caring for their own. "We've had one relative or another living with us for years. When one leaves, another moves in," she said.

Generosity is an important part of the Plains Indian culture. Particularly among the Omahas, the generous man holds high status, said Earl Dyer, executive editor of the Lincoln Star who for many years worked with the Omahas as a volunteer. The Omaha definition of generosity, he said, goes beyond charity, which is considered obligation. Giving should be spontaneous, without expectation of reward, the Omahas believe.

Membership in a traditional Omaha secret society was based on the custom of giving, Dyer said. A candidate was required to have given 100 minor gifts—such as horses or a tipi and cooking utensils. On occasions such as pow-wows, food, clothing, cash and traditional Indian dancing shawls are example of gifts given publicly, with great ceremony.

Gift-giving event

Like the pow-wow, the handgame is an Indian social event which is an opportunity for gift-giving. Handgames take place at least once a week in the Lincoln Indian community. After the handgame is a feast as elaborate as the host family can afford. The feast is displayed, then participants, who have brought their own

eating utensils, are served until all the food has been portioned equally. If a portion seems too large, it nevertheless is accepted and saved to take home.

It is another indication of Indian generosity, says Roger Welsh, that everyone is welcomed at the handgame feast, even if he has not contributed food in years.

Some aspects of the gift-giving custom are curious to non-Indians. Gifts may be given on credit, and it is not improper to ask for change from a gift of cash. It is not uncommon for an Indian to borrow money for gift-giving. Dyer recalls a summer pow-wow at Macy when an Indian friend borrowed \$50 from a bank to buy gifts.

On occasions of great importance, an Omaha may give away all he has, Dyer said. He remembers attending a funeral for a respected tribal elder. During ceremonies which lasted more than an hour, the widow gave away food, shirts, lengths of fabric, dancing shawls and cash to show her appreciation to her husband's mourners. Afterwards she was forced to sell her land to pay for the funeral.

As the customs of sharing and gift-giving cause financial problems for the Indian, so do his traditional attitudes toward time, saving and work. If the tradition-minded Indian takes a job, he often is handicapped by his idea of time. "The Indian has a wider latitude of lateness," Roger Welsh said. "He feels that being late doesn't matter as long as he gets the job done."

Indians themselves joke about "Indian time." Their social events start when everybody gets there, and no one is uneasy about a couple hours' delay. The Christmas handgame in Lincoln was about two hours behind schedule, Dyer said.

Another cultural influence on the economic plight of the Indian is his attitude toward saving, Dyer believes. "The Indian tends to live for today, and let tomorrow take care of itself."

Among tradition-minded Indians it is not considered to be a man's job to work and provide for his family. In the

old days it was the woman who gathered food, and the man was the ceremonial head of his family, the warrior and hunter.

Although the modern Indian man is adopting the breadwinner role, the warrior is not gone from Indian society. The armed forces veteran has the prestige once held by the tribal warrior, and many customs have been altered to honor him.

There are special dances in which only veterans may participate. Only a veteran may wear a feather for the headband (worn as part of the dancing regalia) of a young female relative, such as a niece. If a piece of regalia should fall during a dance, it is left in place until the dance is finished. At that time, only a veteran may return the object to its owner. Handgames are often given in honor of returning Indian GIs and funerals for those killed in action are conducted with great ceremony.

Indians show great respect for the American flag. At the summer pow-wow in Macy, there is a formal flag-raising every morning conducted by veterans, who often are members of the American Legion. Traditional warrior songs are sung, as well as the Flag Song, the Omaha National Anthem made (Omaha songs are never written) in honor of tribal members who served in World War I, Dyer said.

Symbol of homeland

Roger Welsh says that he at first was puzzled by the Indian patriotism toward a government which had betrayed them so often. "Then I asked someone, and I was told that to the Indian the flag is an important symbol of his homeland."

The sentiment was expressed by Clarence White, an Omaha who is a member of the Macy School Board and an Army veteran. "This is our country and we're going to protect it the best way we know how," White said, even as he criticized the Vietnam War.

Another Omaha institution which is a blend of Indian tradition and white man's influence is the Native American Church, which uses Indian ritual in Christian worship. Since the ritual

includes the sacramental use of peyote, a dried cactus bud containing mescaline, the church has been criticized by traditional Christian denominations.

The Native American Church has many followers among the Omaha and Winnebago tribes, but it is not as common among the Sioux tribes of the Dakotas, where strict traditionalists regard it as a recent, somewhat artificial development in Plains culture. (It was introduced in the Nebraska tribes in about 1911 by southern tribes.)

Because of these criticisms members of the Native American Church are reluctant to discuss it. But in 1962, Dyer not only was invited to an all-night prayer meeting, but permitted to describe the ritual in a series of articles for the Lincoln Star.

Prayer services are held in a tipi when the weather permits. Participants kneel or sit in a circle throughout the night, singing prayer songs in the Omaha language. Prayer cigarettes are passed during the night, in keeping with the tradition that smoke helps carry the prayers upward.

According to Dyer, "Participants in the all-night ceremonies... commonly eat four of the peyote buttons ritually, and may take more by preference during the night."

Sacred articles used in the service include eagle feathers and an eagle bone whistle, a gourd rattle, a staff symbolizing Christ, cedar burned for everlasting life, fire, water, and food for celebrating communion at the morning conclusion of the prayer service.

Dyer described the ceremony as having "... a reverence and a solemnity equalling or surpassing any other church service, and with a kind of informality based on the fact that the actions are individual..."

In Macy, a school board of Indian parents working with curriculum coordinator Mrs. Loretta Mickel of Lincoln and School Supt. Simon Orta, has instigated the teaching of Indian traditions in the elementary school. Dancing, crafts, tribal myths, and the Omaha language are taught by members of the tribe.

At the University of Nebraska, Indian students have formed an organization to promote their culture. They study tribal myths and legends in their spare time and have asked the University to allow them to fulfill the foreign language requirement by studying tribal languages.

Indians in Lincoln and Omaha maintain traditional social activities such as the weekly handgames. Indian centers in both cities provide a base for social action and cultural activity. In Lincoln the Little Warriors Club, the Lincoln Indian Club and the Gourd Society, a dancing society of the Omaha tribe, help to keep the Indian way alive.

Summer pow-wows, which are days of dancing, ceremony and reunion, have always been important to the widely scattered Plains Indians, but to younger Indians today they are a time of renewal, a time to reaffirm their "Indian-ness."

Some change desirable

Mathew Sheridan, a young Omaha who is community organizer for the Lincoln Indian Center, said, "The Indian will have to adopt some of the white man's ways to get along in his world, but we will keep our identity."

He sees that some changes in attitude are desirable, however. "The extreme dependency on relatives is not good. The young Indian should learn to stand on his own two feet."

Sheridan also says that the position of elders as leaders of the community is changing as the younger members of the tribe seek a more active voice in improving the conditions of the Indian.

Welsh has a suggestion for the white man's side of the cultural adjustment: "It is arrogant to assume that our culture is superior in all aspects. Non-Indians need to be better educated to understand the Indians."

Perhaps the most impressive aspect of the Indian way, Welsh says is the Indians' forgiveness of the white man. "They have every reason to despise us, but white people are always welcome. We constantly violate their tribal etiquette, yet they are unwilling to embarrass us."

Steve Gaines As Macbeth Dominates NU Repertory Theatre Production

By Howard B. Norland
NU Professor of English

A tormented soul stalks the stage at Howell Theatre in the third production of the Nebraska Summer Repertory Company. *Macbeth*, which opened Friday night, promises to be an unforgettable portrait of a man who looked into his heart and found a blackness that overwhelmed him. Steve Gaines in the title role plays the Scottish usurper with verve and at times a brilliance that upstages Lady Macbeth and his chief adversaries, Macduff and Malcolm. The play is conceived from the beginning as the personal tragedy of Macbeth against which all the other characters are cast in merely supporting roles.

To establish the humanness of the action, the witches in their initial scene are presented as battle-ground scavengers, old women who have become birds of prey, not instruments of fate or the devil. The elimination of the other worldly quality is maintained by omitting the references to the strange and unnatural happenings that accompany the murder of Duncan, such as the horses eating each other and a mousing owl killing a falcon. The specter of Banquo at the banquet and the apparitions in Macbeth's second meeting with the witches appear to be, like the dagger, only in the mind of Macbeth.

One may object to director Robert Hall's interpretation of the tragedy as a reduction of Shakespeare's cosmic drama to the strictly human realm, but Hall's view is imaginatively developed and basically

consistent. The stark and dark-stage as well as the drab medieval costumes focus the attention on the characters and heighten the internal drama of Macbeth himself. However, a more varied use of lighting to reflect the emotional qualities would more effectively create the desired atmosphere than the mood slides which too often prove distracting and at times disconcerting. The ritualization of the action by slow-motion movement enhances the surrealistic quality of the production and calls attention to the violence without evoking fear of physical danger to the actors (a common problem in Shakespearean productions), but the technique demands a synchronization of movement that was occasionally lacking at the final dress rehearsal. Perhaps reserving this device for the moments that particularly express Macbeth's perspective and mental state would be more appropriate to the production scheme adopted.

Since the play is conceived as the personal tragedy of Macbeth, stripped of political and cosmic implications, greater demands are made on the actor playing Macbeth, but Steve Gaines usually measures up. His booming voice and sensitive portrayal of the tormented soul create both a sense of greatness and sympathy. However, it appears rather indecorous for him to assume the position of a crop-shooter on the apron of

the stage. Lady Macbeth, played by Margaret Hawthorne, seems almost insignificant. Her lack of strength from the beginning strains the credibility of the scene in which she convinces Macbeth to pursue the assassination of Duncan after he has talked himself out of it. Miss Hawthorne has apparently allowed the sleep-walking scene, which she performs very well, to dominate her interpretation of the character. Perhaps Lady Macbeth is played down intentionally to emphasize the responsibility of Macbeth alone for the evil he embraces, but the result is an imbalance in the dramatic conflict in the first half of the play.

The roles of Banquo and Macduff are ably played by Mitchell Tebo and William Szymanski respectively, but they are so overshadowed by Macbeth that the audience may lose sight of their significance as foils. Most disappointing are Steve Bradford as Ross and James Bartz as Malcolm. Ross' function as a choric commentator is impaired because Mr. Bradford does not at times appear to understand the lines he delivers. Malcolm also has difficulty rendering the sense of Shakespeare's poetry, and substitutes volume for a depth of understanding, a trap that several of the minor character's fall into.

Pre-opening jitters marred a few scenes in the final dress rehearsal, and a few of the actors occasionally lost the

sense of the characters they were playing, but as they become more secure in their rolls, they will no doubt improve. Perhaps this will also make the play less a one-man show and more a balanced dramatic conflict. Regardless of the minor imperfections, the play is imaginatively staged and exciting. The over-lapping of scenes insures continuity and creates a fast pace. In slightly less than two hours playing time we witness the agonizing struggle of a man who gives up his very self for that bitch goddess, worldly success, which though set in the distant past is performed with the haunting quality of the modern nightmare. This production was wisely chosen for the outstate tour because it ultimately proves more relevant and more disconcerting than "the impossible dream" of Don Quixote or the pretentious topicality of Joseph Heller. It has the potential to become the finest production in summer repertory history at the University of Nebraska, but that will happen only if Lady Macbeth and other major characters emerge from the shadow of Steve Gaines' Macbeth. Only then will the tormented soul stalking the stage become the tragic everyman that Shakespeare created and that Rober Hall so imaginatively aspires to revive.

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