

Reserved Inequality: A Study of Inequality on the Wind River Indian Reservation

The history of Native Americans has been incredibly turbulent since the introduction of Europeans to their lands. It is a commonly known fact that colonizers of the Americas had disastrous effects on all of the Native communities that they came into contact with. These effects were various and interrelated, from the epidemics of foreign diseases, the enslavement of peoples, and the many different processes of assimilation like Indian boarding schools. Of all of the impacts that Euro-Americans had on the indigenous populations, perhaps the most well-known and most enduring was the introduction of the Reservation system, which still exists within the U.S. today. There are several Reservations spanning from the Mid-West down to the South-West and up to the North-Western regions of the United States. Each one is home to people of different tribes with rich cultures and histories of their own, but the focus of this paper will be on the Wind River Indian Reservation (WRIR) in Wyoming. The WRIR is nestled in the Northeastern part of the state of Wyoming and is home to two Native American tribes: the Eastern Shoshone and the Northern Arapaho. The tribes have been living on the WRIR since the late 19th century, during the height of the implementation of the Reservation system by the United States Government. Like many others, the WRIR is home to a great deal of inequality among the residents. This is evident in different statistical areas, personal accounts, and primary documents from the Reservation and those who have lived on it. The inequality that has been experienced by those living on the WRIR has had great effects on the individuals and community as a whole.

When looking at the WRIR, it is important to consider how the Reservation came to exist. One of the unique factors about the WRIR is the fact that it is home to two distinct tribes. Both tribes have special cultures of their own, and it is imperative to understand their individual

histories when considering the beginning of the WRIR. Of the two tribes, the one that held the claim to the Reservation first was the Eastern Shoshone. This is because there are Shoshone legends claiming significance of the region dating back by millennia.¹ This relation to the land has played a special part in the migration and rituals that the Shoshone participated in throughout the coming centuries. The Eastern Shoshone regarded the land surrounding the Wind River Canyon in very high esteem, so much so that in the nineteenth century when the Reservation system was starting to be implemented, their leader, Chief Washakie, worked tirelessly with the United States Government in order to preserve the sacred land of his peoples. Although the Shoshone found the land in Wyoming very sacred to their history and rituals, they were nomadic in the years leading up to 1800. Based off of the claims that the Shoshone originated around the Great Basin region, there were several aspects of change that influenced their migration and eventual settlement into the Wyoming region.² These changes varied in degree, intensity and time of impact but included climate, eco-system, language and the introduction of Europeans and eventually non-Native settlers.

One of the earlier influencers of change was a climate shift that resulted in the introduction of big game onto the plains area of the continent. This shift influenced many different groups of Native Americans, but it especially impacted the Shoshone. This was one of the greatest impacts on their shift from the Great Basin to the Plains because the Shoshone were following the food sources.³ Another impact of the climate change was the change in their social organization structure. Upon starting a more nomadic lifestyle, their management system

¹ Stamm, Henry E. 1999. *People of the Wind River: The Eastern Shoshones, 1825-1900*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press. p 3.

² Stamm, *People of the Wind River*. p 3.

³ Stamm, *People of the Wind River*. p 4.

contained four integral aspects.⁴ The first and smallest group was the nuclear family, and the second was the extended family. These two groups made up the different familial bands within the social structure. This structure was also well known to the Shoshone because it was their typical structure when they were centralized within the Basin area. When they became more mobile, they established local bands which consisted of multiple family groups. The local bands were then further grouped into political divisions. There was a very clear order and structure within their society which started with the smaller groups and continuously grew as more bands were combined until there was eventually multiple divisions of the same peoples, like different sections.

For several Native American Plains tribes, there was special importance placed on spiritual and medicine power. These powers were often intertwined within all aspects of the society. The leaders of the political divisions were often associated with the possession medicine power.⁵ This kind of power was considered a special gift to be used in order to benefit the wellbeing of the entire tribe, and not just the individual who was in ownership of it. Something that was undeniably different between the Great Basin Shoshone and the Plains Shoshone was the way in which an individual was gifted with medicine power. Among those from the Great Basin, the power was often gifted to the individual through their higher power, whereas those in the Plains groups had to seek out the power through the process of fasting in sacred areas. One of these areas that many men went to seek the medicine power was the Wind River Mountains, which clarifies why that region was held in such high esteem to the Shoshone both ritually and culturally.

⁴ Stamm, People of the Wind River. p 4.

⁵ Stamm, People of the Wind River. p 5.

The Shoshone held a strong presence on the Plains throughout for the majority of the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. They had a strong advantage due to their connection with the Comanche tribe and the ownership of horses that came with it. The Comanche are a well-known tribe because of the extensive trade network that they were able to set up across a majority of the southwestern region of the current day United States. The fact that the Shoshone were involved within that trade network speaks volumes to the amount of power that they had throughout the height of the trading. This power came to an end eventually, as the Comanche remained in the more Southern region of the country, leaving the Shoshone to compete with several other tribes on the plains. Of all of the other groups that they interacted with; they had the strongest feelings of contention towards the Blackfeet. This resulted in numerous wars between the two groups in the late 1700s.⁶ Concurrent with the consistent fighting came the initial introduction of Europeans, who brought diseases. As is common knowledge, the European explorers brought many problems to the Native Americans, the most significant short term of which were illness and disease that their immune systems had no way of fighting. This resulted in the deaths of millions of people for centuries as they faced several epidemics, especially small pox. The combination of wars and epidemics greatly reduced the size of the Shoshone nation throughout the 1700s, along with their power throughout the Plains. This reduction resulted in the establishment of what is now known as the Eastern Shoshone tribe.⁷ They came together as the many tribes and bands of the nation to combine their numbers and also their different cultures. The new group had a mixture of cultures from the Great Basin and the Plains bands which meant that they understood aspects of both. The combination of the two regional groups resulted in the introduction of a new identity within the Shoshone that is still known to this day.

⁶ Stamm, People of the Wind River. p 7.

⁷ Stamm, People of the Wind River. p 8.

There are several aspects of the Eastern Shoshone identity that are unique to their cultural identity, but a particularly important one is their Sun Dance. While the action of such a dance is not unique to the Eastern Shoshone, they established their specific Sun Dance ritual in the early 1800s because of the vision of one of the members, Yellowhand.⁸ There are different accounts of how the vision came to him, but the performance and logistics are the same. Their Sundance includes a specific arrangement of poles and lasts a total of three days and three nights with no food or water. Over the years that it was established and implemented the ceremony was typically held in the summer, usually June, with the location varying.

Following the early nineteenth century came the time of treaties and eventually the move to a permanent location on the Wind River Reservation, and the introduction to some familiar faces. The Northern Arapaho tribe is also known to have occupied the Northwestern area of present-day America. Today, there are three known divisions of Arapaho: The Astina, the Southern, and the Northern,⁹ who currently reside on the WRIR. In their early contact with Europeans, the Arapaho were known by many names due to the different interpretations. Because of the multiple names that they were classified under, it is more difficult to trace the exact origins of the tribe. It can be inferred, however, that some of the same changes that affected the Shoshone tribes also affected the Arapaho tribes. The movement of big game onto the prairie lands was impactful for several Plains tribes, including the Arapaho whose way of life was centered around the nomadic patterns of the animals. This way of life would have also introduced them into some of the trade networks, whether they were between tribes or

⁸ Stamm, *People of the Wind River*. p 11.

⁹ Scott, Hugh Lenox. "The Early History and the Names of the Arapaho." *American Anthropologist*, New Series, 9, no. 3 (1907): 545-60. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/659540>. Pg. 545.

Europeans. Essentially, the Arapaho held very similar lifestyles to the Shoshone throughout the height of the Native American presence on the plains.

At some point in the early nineteenth century, the Northern and Southern Arapaho tribes ended up separating from one another.¹⁰ This provides insight into why the Northern band eventually ended up on the WRIR because of their decision to stay in the more northern area of the plains at the time. Another similarity that the Arapaho held with the Shoshone tribes was the fact that they had enemies. Ironically, one of their known enemies was the Shoshone tribe. It is documented that both the Comanche and Shoshone would refer to the Arapaho as “Sariet-tethka i.e. ‘dog eaters’, a term of reproach”.¹¹ The fact that these two tribes had contention with one another foreshadows the difficulties that they would soon face when they were placed on the same Reservation.

In addition to the intra-tribal conflicts that the Shoshone and Arapaho tribes were dealing with came conflict with the incoming non-Native settlers. The introduction of European explorers resulted in many things for the numerous Native American tribes, both positive and negative. Trade flourished between them, but the destruction via disease was quickly followed by death. This escalated as the years passed and more people started migrating West. The increased population of settlers in the West is well known in American history. Thousands of people traveled the Oregon and California trails drawn by the promise of land, gold, or the makings for a better life. This resulted in the complete destruction of life for the Native American tribes, specifically with the near extinction of the Bison herds. With their only known way of life disappearing so quickly, many tribes came into conflict with the settlers and the federal government.

¹⁰ Lenox, Early History, p 550.

¹¹ Lenox, Early History, p 551.

One of the results of these conflicts was the introduction of the Treaty System between the United States government and the Native American tribes. The Treaty System was intended to be a way to establish peace between the Native Americans and the increasing number of settlers entering the West at that time. There were hundreds of treaties made with the different tribes, although many of them were never upheld by the United States. Both the Shoshone and Arapaho tribes entered into several different treaties with the government.

One of the first major treaties that simultaneously impacted both tribes was the Treaty of Fort Laramie in 1851.¹² This treaty brought together several tribes outside of Fort Laramie for negotiations and proposed that the US government be allowed to build roads and permanent posts through what was known as Indian Territory at that point. It also assigned different tribes to different areas of the territory, which can be seen as a very loose reservation system. Although the tribes were assigned to different areas, they were allowed to move about, hunt, and even live in a location that was not assigned to them as long as they remained peaceful and civil with one another and the settlers. In return, the tribes who signed were promised annual payments of \$50,000 in goods for 50 years, but this was reduced to only 10 years in an 1852 amendment.¹³ The amendment coming so soon after the resolution of the Treaty shows clearly that the US Government did not care deeply about the Native Americans within the country. If they had been serious about providing the annual payments, they would have acted on that instead of implementing an amendment within a year.

A decade later came the Homestead Act.¹⁴ This 1862 act allotted 160 acres of land to non-Native men and families for a small price and the agreement that if they were able to

¹² "The Arapaho Arrive: Two Nations on One Reservation." WyoHistory.org. <https://www.wyohistory.org/encyclopedia/arapaho-arrive-two-nations-one-reservation>.

¹³ "The Arapaho Arrive: Two Nations on One Reservation." WyoHistory.org..

¹⁴ "Two Nations." ThinkWY. Handout. <https://www.thinkwy.org/twonations/>.

maintain it for five years, the land would belong to them. The greatest issue with this giveaway was the fact that much of the land being sold technically belonged to the Native American tribes. This resulted in an even greater flood of white settlers into Indian territory, except this time they were there to stay right in the middle of the Native lands. This close proximity of the settlers and Native Americans resulted in years of massacres and violence. In the aftermath, many peace attempts were made through further treaties. The resolution of several of those treaties ended up being the creation of the first Indian Reservations.

The Shoshone tribe signed the Fort Bridger Treaty in 1868 which resulted in the creation of the Wind River Indian Reservation.¹⁵ With the movement onto the Reservation, they were also expected to give up the nomadic lifestyle and attempt to farm the land that they had been allotted. This complete lifestyle change was soon followed by an even greater change. As mentioned before, the Shoshone and Arapaho tribes had been known to have conflict with one another during their times on the plains. This came to an ironic full circle in 1870 when the Northern Arapaho joined the Eastern Shoshone on the WRIR. There are divided oral accounts on why and how this happened.¹⁶ According to the Arapaho, Chief Washakie of the Shoshone agreed to a temporary settlement of the two tribes while they continued to work with the US Government for their own reservation. On the other hand, the Shoshone oral story recounts that Washakie did not agree for any kind of settlement, temporary or not on the reservation. Every account of the settlement of the Arapaho tribe onto the WRIR makes note that it was to be temporary and the cohabitation was to last for one year only. Regardless, in 1871 the Treaty System came to an end when Congress stopped recognizing Native American Tribes as

¹⁵ "Two Nations." ThinkWY. Handout.

¹⁶ "Two Nations." ThinkWY.

independent nations.¹⁷ This resulted in the permanent stay of the Northern Arapaho on the WRIR with the Eastern Shoshone. This situation was not accepted without anger and violence between the tribes as they had to come to terms with living with an enemy. The two groups fought constantly for decades on several different matters, and they also had to fight with the State of Wyoming and the United States Government. Throughout all of the contention and conflict, the WRIR has consisted of the two tribes since 1871, and that has played a major part in the inequality that both have suffered throughout the past 150 years.

Inequality can be defined as “The quality of being unequal or uneven, such as: social disparity, disparity of distribution or opportunity, lack of evenness, and the condition of being variable.”¹⁸ When looking at inequality in a social construct it becomes clear that the United States is no stranger to the concept. From the very moment Europeans set foot on the land, they had a view point based on inequality of others. They saw themselves as civilized people and automatically classified all of the Natives they encountered as “savages” and inherently lesser beings. This ideology emerged time and time again as America was established and expanded throughout the centuries. The concept of inequality is unique because it can be measured in specific areas with certain criteria. In today’s society there are general amenities and expectations that are considered necessary to be successful in life, like the idea of having a successful job and a family. However, there are differing levels of this “success” and people on the WRIR have an even lower level than most people in the state of Wyoming. Inequality on the WRIR, is apparent in educational attainment, median annual earnings and income, housing characteristics, employment status, and poverty levels.

¹⁷ “Two Nations.” ThinkWY.

¹⁸ “Inequality.” Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/inequality>.

The first thing to consider when looking at different sets of data is to consider the characteristics of the sample size that provided the results. For this kind of analysis, an important aspect is the actual size of the sample. For the state of Wyoming, the total number of people living on the WRIR was 26,490 with 8,445 being American Indian.¹⁹ In other words, the number of Native Americans living on the Reservation only makes up 31.9% of the population. When compared to the total population of Wyoming, which is 563,626, the number of Native Americans living on the WRIR is only 0.015% of the total state population.²⁰ These percentages show just how small the population of Native Americans is in the state of Wyoming and even on their own Reservation. Such low representation shows that the Native Americans in the state are already at a disadvantage against the majority of the non-Native population. This is important to remember because this general disadvantage leads to greater levels of inequality.

Education

Education is one of the most valued concepts in America. In many aspects it has been considered a right for all citizens because it is one of the corner stones of becoming successful within society. In reality, however, there are varying degrees of inequality throughout all levels of the education system from school funding, number of proficient educators, and cost. It seems like one of the most expensive items to obtain for the general public in America today is a college degree. Because of the rising cost for universities, it is becoming more difficult for many people to continue their education without going into excessive debt due to student loans. For some people this, along with cultural and statewide impact, could mean that college is not seen as or considered as an option. In Wyoming, the percent of Native Americans that have a

¹⁹ NCAI Policy Research Center. (2014). NCAI Rocky Mountain Region Profile. Available at: http://www.ncai.org/policy-research-center/research-data/prc-publications/Rocky_Mountain_Region.pdf

²⁰ NCAI Policy Research Center.

bachelor's degree or higher is 10%, while the percent of those who have a Masters or higher is 3%. This is in comparison to the state total of 24% for a bachelor's and 8% for a Masters.²¹

These numbers are both incredibly low for the population of Wyoming, but especially so for the Native Americans.

When it comes to looking at factors of inequality, education plays a large role. It has been proven multiple times in different studies that poverty indicates inequality and that the higher education an individual possesses, the lower chance they have of being in poverty. The lower quality of education on the WRIR is attributable by a number of things, but one of the greatest impacts is likely the fact that the Reservation was not in charge of their own education for several years. When the WRIR was initially made, it was for the process of assimilation that the United States government was enacting for Native groups nationwide, but as it has been proven, the process was more for the eradication of Native cultures. This concept was focused on cultural extermination of the Native Tribes through several strategies.

The primary way in which the Native culture was removed was through the education of the Native Children. The concept of the Indian Boarding Schools is infamous and does well to highlight the inhumane treatment of the Native children during this time period. The Boarding schools were not the only ways in which the Native children were educated, as many religious schools were established on the different reservations. This is no different for the WRIR, as there were two different school established, one for each tribe. The two schools are attributed to the fact that the tribes interacted with different denominations of Christianity. The Northern Arapaho tribe was closely linked to Catholicism²² and the Eastern Shoshone was closer to the Episcopal

²¹ NCAI Policy Research Center.

²² Fowler, Loretta. *Arapahoe Politics: 1851-1978: Symbols in Crises of Authority*. Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Pr., 1982.

Church.²³ The influence of the religions was felt with the construction of schools that focused on religious teachings. This is important because religious teachings are not the same as purely academic teachings because they focus on a way of life instead of academic concepts. The tribes did not gain access to the education of their own children until many decades later. This is important because religious education does not equate to academic education and explains why there are such severe disparities in the education between the tribal members and the other Wyoming residents today.

Income Security

Of all the concepts that guide modern day life in America, there is an overarching cultural concept that individuals need to work hard and in return they will gain monetary success, which connects back to the religious teachings of working hard in the “American way” to be successful in an American way. The aspect of monetary success can be measured in several ways, but one of the easiest is to look at annual earnings and income. When it comes to median household income of Native Americans within the state of Wyoming, the average is \$40,519. This total pales in comparison to the total of the state which is \$53,802.²⁴ Both incomes are low²⁵, but the state median income can be explained by the lower cost of living in Wyoming. Because of the lower population and rural aspect of the state, the overall cost of living is lower than that of more

This book outlines the changes in politics that the Northern Arapahoe experienced as they were introduced to non-natives and eventually the WRIR. Although the book looks more at the specifics within the tribe’s political system, it does provide other details of their life on the WRIR and how they interacted with members of the Catholic Church.

²³ 0037, John Roberts Papers, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

This collection focuses on the life of Father John Roberts. He was a religious figurehead on the WRIR in the late 1800s through the mid 1900s. He worked very closely with the Eastern Shoshone tribe in his attempts to convert them to Christianity.

²⁴ NCAI Policy Research Center.

²⁵ "U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Wyoming." Census Bureau QuickFacts. Accessed May 1, 2019. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/wy>.

densely populated and urbanized states. However, that does not account for the over \$13,000 difference between the Native Americans and the rest of the state.

That difference can be explained through a copious theories, but one of the most prevalent is the stereotyping of Native Americans as “lazy”. This stereotype originated long before the introduction of Reservations and persists to this day. The concept of stereotyping can be incredibly detrimental to individuals and groups of people because of the negative connotations that come attached with them. When it comes to the specific stereotype of Native Americans being lazy or not willing to work as hard, that could easily affect their employment status. By having less employment, that would be directly correlated to the overall median income. This is only one of many reasons why there is such a difference in median incomes, but it is a prevailing example.

Another issue that affects the earnings of anyone within the United States is the gender gap. This affects people of all races and all ages throughout the nation, and Native Americans are no exception when it comes to this issue. On average in Wyoming, a Native American male makes \$34,036 while a Native American female makes \$27,210.²⁶ This comparison, although atrocious, is not surprising with the known difference in earnings between men and women throughout the United States.²⁷ What is even more alarming though is when these averages are compared to the white men in the state, who on average, make \$50,047 per year. This means that they make over \$16,000 more than Native American men and more than \$22,000, almost double, than Native American women. A comparison of the median annual earnings further shows the

²⁶ NCAI Policy Research Center.

²⁷ Mandel, Hadas, and Moshe Semyonov. "Gender Pay Gap and Employment Sector: Sources of Earnings Disparities in the United States, 1970–2010." *Demography* 51, no. 5 (2014): 1597-618. doi:10.1007/s13524-014-0320-y.

difference between the three groups. Native men make 32% less than white men and Native women make 46% less than white men.

The gender gap between Native men and women is just a small part of the inequalities that Native women face. Native women throughout the United States are more than twice as likely to be sexually assaulted or raped than any other victim in the United States.²⁸ This statistic is perpetuated by several factors, both social and legal, and the gender pay gap could very well be one of those factors. This is because Native women do not make much money in comparison to their male counterparts, they have less resources available to them for protection or even help and support. This is directly related to how if there is a lack of financial security, then there is a lack of overall well-being which is important for an individual to feel safe. This is a prime example of a sub-section of inequality within an already established minority group, and shows that even within a disadvantaged group, there can still be structured inequality.

Housing

A further indication of inequality are different characteristics of housing. The concept of a house is imbedded thoroughly within American culture. This has been shown throughout American history in different concepts like the Homestead Act or the American Dream ideal. Essentially, to be truly successful, a person needs to have their own permanent home. This goes against the nomadic culture of both the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho tribes, and they fought this concept for as long as they could until they had no choice but to become permanent fixtures of the WRIR.

When it comes to housing today, there is a heavy mixture of people who buy and people who rent. Those who do not have the means to buy or mortgage a house are left with the option

²⁸ Urban Indian Health Institute. Our Bodies, our Stories. 2018. http://www.uihi.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/UIHI_sexual-violence_r601_pagesFINAL.pdf

of renting. Economically speaking, it is better to be an owner rather than a renter but not everyone has that option. Owning a house requires having the money to either buy the property completely, or to be able to put down a down payment on a mortgage. This in turn calls for either substantial savings or an adequate income, and as previously shown, the Native Americans in the State of Wyoming have a much lower income than their white counterparts.

When it comes to owning a house in Wyoming, 52% of whites are owners with a mortgage or a loan, with 21% being complete owners, leaving 27% as renters. Among Native Americans, 25% are owners with a mortgage or a loan, and 30% are complete owners, with 45% being renters.²⁹ There are two striking aspects about this data, the first being that the percentage of Native Americans owning a house without any sort of loan is higher than that of the percentage of white residents who are the same. This is interesting because it would be assumed that the white residents of the state would be the ones who have a higher percentage within that category, but this could possibly be explained because of the WRIR. Since the reservation is land that belongs to the two tribes, it would make sense that the people who live there own their land, and therefore own the houses that have been constructed on that land. The second factor is not as shocking, which is that the white residents of the state overall have a higher percentage of homeownership of 73% compared to the Native Americans at 55%. This could be due to the several factors of inequality already mentioned thus far, but it is nowhere near surprising.

The fact of owning or renting a house is not the end of housing characteristics, however. There is often the responsibility of ensuring that the house itself is functioning and in proper order. This can prove to be difficult for those struggling with money to keep up with what are deemed as necessities in today's standard of living, which includes indoor plumbing, functioning

²⁹ NCAI Policy Research Center.

kitchens, and telephone services. When it comes to housing in Wyoming, both the white residents and the Native Americans comprise the 1% of those who lack complete plumbing facilities and complete kitchen facilities. When it comes to the telephone services, there is more of a difference. The percentage of whites who have no telephone service is 3% while the percentage of Native Americans is 9%, three times as much.³⁰ There could be several reasons for this, as previously discussed. With the current way in which society views telecommunication, it seems incomprehensible that people do not have access to a phone. But in rural areas like Wyoming and especially the WRIR, it is dependent on utilities being able to provide infrastructure for those amenities, and that could be seen as a luxury that some do not have the means to afford or provide.

The final characteristic to housing being considered is the aspect of occupants per room within a house. This is based on a standard that for adequate housing, there should be no more than one person per room and a household with a higher ratio is considered to be overcrowded. With housing in Wyoming, the white homes with 1.01 to 1.50 people per room are at 1%. In comparison, the Native American households with 1.01 to 1.50 per room is 9%.³¹ This is a drastic difference in percentage but could be explained through the cultural differences between the two groups. It is well known that the United States is a very individualistic nation, with emphasis placed on the individual person and their responsibility to ensure their success in life. This is directly contrasted by the group emphasis of both the tribes on the WRIR. In the time before contact with non-Natives, many Native tribes placed a heavy emphasis on the importance of family and the tribe as a whole. They would ensure the success of everyone no matter what the situation, and they kept this mentality throughout all of the assimilation attempts.

³⁰ NCAI Policy Research Center.

³¹ NCAI Policy Research Center.

The United States government attempted several times with different strategies to force the Native Americans into a more individual lifestyle. One of the most well-known tactics that they used was the Dawes Act, or the Allotment Act of 1887 which was used to parcel off individual plots of Native American land for the Natives to farm.³² This went against everything that both tribes practiced in terms of living and community situations, and was only truly accepted when buffalo hunts were no longer an option.³³ The concept of overcrowding, however, could be a way in which that sense of family and community obligation is still prevalent within the culture of both tribes on the WRIR. When analyzed in that specific context, it raises the question of if this aspect is an aspect of inequality or not. It is important to remember the different cultural aspects that still hold a presence in society today, no matter the attempts to eradicate it in the past.

Employment

A factor that is incredibly important in modern society today, no matter the cultural background is employment. Employment is the primary way in which individuals are able to make and maintain their lifestyle. Society places a very high importance on employment which is not aided by the increasingly competitive job market. Currently it is difficult for many people to find work in a field that is deemed acceptable within the eyes of society, and that prospect is even worse for Native Americans. In Wyoming, the rate of unemployment for white residents is 4%. This pales in comparison to the 12% unemployment rate for Native Americans and the 14% unemployment rate for rural Native Americans.³⁴ As with all of the previously listed aspects of

³² Stamm. People of the Wind River.

³³ Stamm. People of the Wind River.

³⁴ NCAI Policy Research Center.

inequality, this is explained by several factors. Of the many, there are three specific ones that could have the most impact.

When it comes to employment, one of the most important aspects for gaining a job or career that ensures success is education. Throughout the past few decades in the United States, education has quickly grown to be a requirement for the job field, specifically higher education. This is seen across the nation with most career fields in the way that they look for individuals with an undergraduate degree as a minimum requirement. As already explained, education attainment is a provision of inequality for the Native Americans within the state of Wyoming. Due to their lower education rate they are at an immediate disadvantage when it comes to employment. This disadvantage lessens their availability to even know about job listings or consider themselves qualified.

Another explanation is the power of stigma and stereotypes. This relates to the sociological theory of Labeling theory cultivated by Howard Becker and looks at how stereotypes and stigmas can be “sticky” and further perpetuate behavior that could maintain or increase inequality.³⁵ This theory is primarily used in the study of deviance but can be utilized in this context as well. As previously discussed, Native Americans have been perpetuated as being “lazy” or they are not seen as hard workers. Much of this stemmed from the struggles that many of them had with changing from a nomadic hunting and gathering society to a permanent farming society. This is also linked to the stereotype of alcohol being a reason for them not wanting to work. All of these assumptions are entirely false, yet still have an effect today. Potential employers within Wyoming could see the hiring of a Native American employee as a negative thing and decide not to based purely off of an assumption. Because of the stickiness of

³⁵ Turner, Jonathan H., Leonard Beeghly, Charles H. Powers, and Jonathan H. Turner. *The Emergence of Sociological Theory*. 7th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2012.

their stereotypes, Native Americans could be passed over for jobs which results in their high percentage of unemployment, especially in comparison to the whites.

A final explanation is the rural aspect of Wyoming. This is seen already in the fact that there is a higher unemployment rate in rural located Native Americans. The definition of rural was not explained in regard to this study from the NCAI Policy Research Center, so it could be either the WRIR specifically, or the distance from cities within the state. Regardless of where the rural boundary is, there is going to be a limited amount of jobs due to the smaller population. This is an automatic disadvantage to the Native American residents because in addition to the other factors that they would have to compete with, they would also have the issue of sheer availability. No matter what the explanation is, the fact remains that Native Americans in the state of Wyoming experience a much higher rate of unemployment than their white counterparts. This, along with all of the inequality factors analyzed, set the stage for the concept of poverty.

Poverty

Poverty is commonly known as not having sufficient funds to maintain what is considered to be an adequate quality of life. It is mostly thought of in monetary terms, especially when the poverty line is calculated. In society it can be used as a factor that dictates access to governmental or state aid, but it can be very difficult for people to overcome, no matter the aid that they receive. With Native Americans in Wyoming, poverty can be measured in two ways: family and individual. The total family poverty in Wyoming is 6% and for families with children under 18 it is 11%. For Native Americans the family poverty is 23% and 29% for families with children under 18.³⁶ There is little difference when looking at the rates of individual poverty as well. For white residents, 10% are in poverty and 12% are people under 18. For Native

³⁶ NCAI Policy Research Center.

Americans, 24% are in poverty and 28% are under 18.³⁷ This is a striking difference in percentages, with the rates for Native Americans being more than double that of the whites, no matter the category of poverty. Everything discussed up to this point can be used to explain this situation and does well to show how and why the data shows this.

Statistically speaking, the Native Americans residing in Wyoming, no matter if they live on the Reservation or not, suffer from inequality compared to the white residents. This is due to many factors ranging from the historical set up of the reservation system, the differences in cultures, and the way in which society views Native Americans. All of these continue to perpetuate the inequality of these people but looking at these through pure facts does not convey the entire story. It is important to consider personal stories and opinions of living on the WRIR, and how time has affected the treatment of the two tribes.

Personal Narratives

The WRIR has been home to thousands of people for over 150 years, and each person had a unique experience. The residents have obviously included members of the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho, but they have also included government and religious officials who lived on the reservation and had close interactions with the Native Americans. These people experienced difficult relations with one another, but continuously attempted to work together. One of the more well-known religious figureheads on the Reservation was Father John Roberts. John Roberts was born on March 31, 1853, in North Whales. By 1878 he had been ordained to the Deaconate and spent some time working in the Bahama Islands in the British West Indies. However, Roberts was looking for more of a challenge and requested to be sent to a place that struggled the most with Christian Conversion. Soon after, he arrived in Wyoming at the WRIR in

³⁷ NCAI Policy Research Center.

1883.³⁸ Roberts spent the rest of his life living and working with the people on the Reservation. This work included several components with the first being education. He was placed in charge of the education of the children of the Reservation and was responsible for building the Shoshone Episcopal Mission school in 1889.³⁹ He also helped with the overall teaching of the children and seemed to look out for their overall well-being.⁴⁰ When looking at Roberts, it can be complicated to analyze his impact on the WRIR. He seemed to have close relationships with several members of both tribes, especially with Chief Washakie. However, he was there with the sole intention of assimilating the Native Americans. The experiences that he held though, shed some light on reservation life in the late 1800s and into the 1900s.

With all of his time on the reservation, it is easy to see that Roberts put constant effort into making sure that all of the members of both tribes understood his Christian teachings. This is evident in the translations of his religious work and teachings into the Shoshone and Arapaho languages. A specific example of this work is preserved at the American Heritage Center at the

³⁸ Markley, Elinor R, and Beatrice Crofts, *Walk Softly, This Is God's Country: Sixty-Six Years on the Wind River Indian Reservation: Compiled from the Letters and Journals of the Rev. John Roberts, 1883-1949* (Lander, WY: Mortimore Pub, 1997), Foreword.

This book is a compilation of letters by John Roberts, and includes commentary from his daughter, Elinor Markley. The book was put together by Beatrice Crofts, the granddaughter of Roberts. It needs to be regarded carefully because neither were professional historians and did not attempt to provide accurate citations if they cited anything at all. However, this book holds personal memories from both different experiences they had growing up with Roberts on the reservation and how he treated the people around him. It is important to acknowledge the bias that might also come with these memories, but they show how they wished to portray how people around him regarded his actions throughout his lifetime.

³⁹ Historical Notes and Manuscripts, Washakie, No Date, Box 2, Folder 29, 0037, John Roberts Papers, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

⁴⁰ Markley and Crofts, *Walk Softly*, 59.

It is important to acknowledge that the intent of the Mission Schools was to fully assimilate the children of the Shoshone nation through education and religion. The negative aspects of schools like this have been thoroughly researched and investigated, and this is not to take away from the gravity of the situation and how it affected hundreds of people. See for example, Rombough, Shirley, and Diane C. Keithly. "Native Americans, the Feudal System, and the Protestant Work Ethic: A Unique View of the Reservation." *Race, Gender & Class* 12, no. 2 (2005)., Benson, Todd. "The Consequences of Reservation Life: Native Californians on the Round Valley Reservation, 1871-1884." *Pacific Historical Review* 60, no. 2 (1991): 221-44., and Ficken, Robert E. "After the Treaties: Administering Pacific Northwest Indian Reservations." *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 106, no. 3 (2005):442-61.

University of Wyoming in the John Roberts Collection. It is a Shoshone Church Service Manuscript, dated 1895.⁴¹ It was entirely handwritten by John Roberts in both English and Shoshone. The English line is above the Shoshone translation with penciled edits to the Shoshone translation that must have been added after the original document was penned in black ink. Because it was written by John Roberts himself, it can be inferred that it was to be utilized for a church service on the Reservation at some point in 1895, at which point he had been living on the Reservation for twelve years.

Roberts' use of language and translations brings up many questions of the dual usage of language within the manuscript. Primarily about the use of two distinct languages. There could be several explanations for this, but evidence points to the reasoning that John Roberts was attempting to translate Christian doctrine into Shoshone in order for members of the tribe to better understand what was trying to be conveyed to them. This is supported by the numerous number of edits made to the overall document. In almost every line of the manuscript, specifically with the lines in Shoshone, there is some kind of edit made in Roberts' handwriting. This shows the overall time and care that went into the translation of the English version of the service. This is important because translating something like a Church service into another language provides a look at how Christianity was presented to the people of the Reservation. If it was not presented in English, then it shows that John Roberts cared enough to translate his message into a language that everyone understood, instead of making them learn the colonial English language.

Of all of the experiences that Roberts had on the WRIR, the most important would be the relationships that he formed with the residents. Especially with Chief Washakie of the Shoshone

⁴¹ Manuscript, 1895, Box 2, Folder 4, 0037, John Roberts Papers, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

tribe. Chief Washakie is a well-known historical figure because of the way in which he continuously fought for the best life for his people. For being so familiar on a national level, the knowledge of his early life is murky and more linked to Shoshone lore than historical fact. The best example of that is how it is difficult to determine the specific date of his birth. Previously there has been debate on when he was born, with several scholars claiming that it was either 1798 or 1804. Because information that Washakie shared with an Indian agent relating to when he met Jim Bridger, others have claimed that he would have been born between 1808 and 1810.⁴²

While this and many other aspects of Washakie's early life are not well known or not completely proven, what is well known about him, however, is the work that he did for his people, especially relating to the WRIR. Washakie negotiated with the United States government several times throughout his life, primarily dealing with the reservation. His greatest accomplishment of negotiation was securing the land for the Wind River Reservation with the Fort Bridger Treaty of 1868.⁴³ Even after establishing the reservation, he constantly tried to keep the best interest of his people and their culture at the forefront of his consultations with the U.S. government. This was seen specifically with how the Eastern Shoshone were able to continue to hold buffalo hunts for several years following their implementation onto the WRIR, and how they avoided farming during that time as well.⁴⁴

Eventually, the buffalo were eliminated to the point where the Shoshone could not conduct their hunts and they were forced to turn to living off of the reservation land permanently through attempts of farming and government aid. This is when Washakie and Roberts began the real cultivation of their relationship. One of the greatest examples of their friendship is the fact

⁴² Stamm, *People of the Wind River*. p 25-26.

⁴³ Stamm, *People of the Wind River*.

⁴⁴ Stamm, *People of the Wind River*.

that Roberts supposedly penned the last words Washakie dedicated to the white people. This is documented in the John Roberts collection from the AHC in a piece of paper covered in his hand writing which includes, “I am dying. I pray on Father on High to have mercy on me. I pray on our Father’s Son to have mercy on me. Tell my white friends – those who are near and those who are far off – that I’m dying. Shake hands with them all.”⁴⁵ These last words hold great significance. Firstly, Washakie is depicted as praying to the Christian God and Jesus. This suggests that at some point in his life he converted to Christianity. By mentioning it in his last words, that shows a strong devotion to the faith that he had chosen. Further, in this small speech, Washakie references his “white friends”. By purposely acknowledging them this way, his speech illustrates the likely way in which he came to view the relationships that he held with them. This could have been directly influenced by the relationship he held with John Roberts and the respect that they held for each other over the years. The final aspect of his words is his request for Roberts to “shake hands with them all”. This is a direct request for the relations of the Shoshone tribe and their white “friends” to continue even after the death of Washakie. This action alone shows the kind of relationship that Roberts had with people living on the Reservation, or at least how Washakie seems to have perceived it.

Something important to acknowledge with Roberts is that although he lived among both the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho on the WRIR, he seems to have been closer to the Shoshone tribal members than the Arapaho. This could be because of the difference in religion that the two tribes held, the Arapaho leaned more towards Catholicism rather than the teachings of the Episcopal Church that Roberts was involved with. When it comes to religion and the

⁴⁵ Photographs: Washakie, No Date, Box 3, Folder 8, 0037, John Roberts Papers, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

Although this document is very important, it is imperative to remember that it is a record made by someone with a certain level of bias towards Christianity.

Arapahoe tribe, they were accepting of Christianity, but in a way in which it did not interfere with their native religion. This was seen in the way in which Christian teachings were retold by Arapaho members with certain twists in the story:

A white woman who was with child kept it secret. When she was about to give birth she went to the barn and delivered it there, while her husband was away tilling the soil. She left the child there. But the other man (the Indian) was subsisting entirely on game, living at ease. When the white man came back he went to the barn and found the boy running about. This was the son of Above White Man, Hixtcaba Nih'anOaan [the Arapahoe word for Creator, applied also to the God of Christians]. He was known to be truly the son of Above White Man, for his skin was yellow and his hair long. Other people heard of him and came and killed him and buried him, but he returned to his mother, telling her: "Thus I have returned." Then the people heard of him again, and bound and buried him. He became ashes, but returned to his mother. Again, the people heard of him and took him, now a full-grown man, and nailed him on a cross. How he went up is not known, but nevertheless he went up. The Indians had lives in accordance with the teachings of the man (the Creator) until this son of Above White Man was killed. Then among them also death and bloodshed occurred.⁴⁶

This excerpt is the retelling of a familiar Christian story, the birth and death of Jesus Christ, but in a way that incorporates aspects of the Arapaho religion as well. This is seen in the way in which they mention the Indian man as living off of entirely game while all of this is happening. This is a very important detail within the retelling because it shows that the Arapaho people did not discredit the possibility of the Christian stories, they just saw them as happening in a parallel way to their own creation stories as another way to live. Another detail that sticks out in this retelling is the use of the Arapaho word for creator. Although they made a distinction with calling it "Above White Man" they compared it to their own creator which placed the Arapaho on the same level in a hierarchical structure of spirituality and religion. This illustrates the

⁴⁶ Fowler, *Arapahoe Politics*. 126.

openness that they held for Christianity. They were obviously willing to consider it as a possibility as long as it did not interfere with their own religion. They succeeded in this mindset by being able to rewrite the stories in a way that the entire tribe would understand and associate with their own stories and values.

The differences that the tribes felt with their religious adaptations pales in comparison to the differences that they both felt when it came to their tribal governments and dealing with the United States Federal Government. The right to self-government and overall sovereignty is something that is still fought for by all Native Americans on reservations to this day, and it is not something that would be considered a new issue to those presently living on the WRIR. Both of the tribal governments have gone through constant changes and shifts throughout their time on the WRIR, but from the very beginning things were segmented. As with all of the reservations, the WRIR was governed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) upon its creation. This immediately placed the tribes in an unfamiliar situation where they had to be governed by and answer to a distant authority than they had ever experienced. This was incredibly different for both the Arapahoe and the Shoshone because they both had much different governmental structures.

Of the two tribes, the Arapaho felt more pressure with the United States Government because of their late placement onto the WRIR and the difference of their governing system. Their government system is complicated in the way in which it is closely intertwined with several other aspects of their tribe like their values, traditions and religion, but the most important aspect of their governing system was the age-grade division. An age-grade system is formatted into different categories of life with each stage having different roles and

responsibilities associated with it.⁴⁷ This particular age-grade system helped to ensure that the Arapaho tribe maintained their unity as they dealt with the different aspects of adjusting to reservation life. The way in which they were able to maintain this system in a way that the United States would recognize was the formation of a council. The council played two parts for the Arapahos. First, it was a way for them to formally communicate and work with the United States Government and their own reservation Indian Agent. Secondly, and more importantly for their tribal identity, it was a way for them to maintain their age-grade system. Before reservation life, the Arapaho age-grade system was dependent on a man's ability to prove himself as a warrior.⁴⁸ This could have been in several different situations like horse raids, attacking other tribes, or protecting his own tribe in an attack. When the reservation system was set in place, all of those abilities vanished for the young men of the tribe. The men adapted to having council seats act as an equivalent to the status of a war chief. They also adapted to life in a new language.

It is a well-known fact that members in all Native American tribes experienced several atrocities from the United States government in the time leading up to and throughout the implementation of the reservation process, specifically in two distinct ways: physical and cultural. The physical acts were evident in the massacres and conflicts committed against the different tribes for decades leading up to the reservations and even after. The cultural aspect can be seen best with the implementation of Boarding Schools. Although the Boarding Schools had multiple functions for the Native youth, their primary aspect was to erase the culture of Native Americans throughout the nation. The most effective way in which this was accomplished was the erasure of the Native languages. The Arapaho and Shoshone tribal members were no strangers to the concept. Like all the tribes surrounding them, the inhabitants of the WRIR

⁴⁷ Fowler, *Arapahoe Politics*. 3.

⁴⁸ Fowler, *Arapahoe Politics*. 8.

slowly lost the ability to communicate in their native tongue as the elders continued to die without communicating the language to the younger generations. This was a popular assimilation tactic that held success for several years.

In recent years, however, the Arapaho tribe has been trying to rebuild their cultural identity, including their Native language. The Arapaho tribe on the WRIR has made several attempts to bring back knowledge of their Native language, one of which was the establishment of the Arapaho Language and Culture Camps from 1987-1993.⁴⁹ These were day camps held in the summer. The funding came almost entirely from the tribal government with other funding coming from outside organizations or individuals. The camp started small but grew exponentially as it continued to be in operation. The days were filled with activities and learning about the Arapaho culture and traditional values and language. Some campers would head home for the night, but the older campers and the counselors would stay the night and listen to Arapaho stories. The camps were deemed as a major success, especially in revitalizing Native culture, but due to budget issues, they were discontinued after 1993. Following the discontinuation, smaller camps have continued to be held, but not to the same level of the original ones.

The concept of these camps for the Arapaho youth can truly be deemed as something revolutionary. It was the tribe's way of taking back not just their own culture and traditions, but also the teaching of their children. For decades, the children were the main means of implementing assimilation. They were forced to forget everything that they had been told by their families and the tribe as a whole in order to fit into a mold of what was deemed to be acceptable by the United States government. By taking the teaching back through the means of

⁴⁹ Wiles, Sara, and Frances Merle Haas. *Arapaho Journeys Photographs and Stories from the Wind River Reservation*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011. Pg. 43-47.

This is a book of personal accounts, stories, and photographs of members of the Arapaho tribe on the WRIR. It was compiled by Sarah Whiles who lived on or near the reservation for decades.

the children, the Arapahos were essentially taking back what was lost from them in the upcoming generation. Not only were they managing to rebuild a cultural connection, but they were also managing to rebuild knowledge almost entirely lost.

In addition to reintroducing the Native language back into the tribe, members of the Arapaho tribe have continued to bring back other traditions through education. Another tradition that incorporates the children of the reservation is a cultural education program at Wyoming Indian High School. One function of this program is a visit to a local ranch where bison are raised. The site of the ranch was known well by the Arapaho tribe when they were still nomadic as a seasonal migration route for buffalo hunting. With the cultural program, the land is still being used in relation to hunting buffalo. According to Whiles:

Within sight of the Ni'inone', a teacher from WIHS named Leo Her Many Horses killed a small bull with a rifle, while student remained a safe distance away. An elder prayed over the animal's body to indicate respect and to thank the animal for its life. Then, led by their teachers, the students participated in the butchering process. The animal was quartered, and the parts loaded in the bed of a pick-up to be taken back to the reservation. All external body parts and internal organs were saved, and students took turns squeezing the bowels to empty them of their contents.⁵⁰

This teaching and interaction with the students are incredibly important for the cultural revitalization of the tribe. For centuries, the Arapaho were entirely dependent on buffalo. Like several other tribes on the great plains, their entire migration revolved around the movements of the bison herds. Their hunts were entrenched in religious and spiritual aspects and meaning, and much of their income from trading with other came from the buffalo hides that they cultivated. The most important aspect of the buffalo hunts, however, was the food and supplies that they would provide for the entire tribe. Essentially, Arapaho life was entirely centered around buffalo

⁵⁰ Wiles, *Arapaho Journeys*. Pg. 176.

and with the reservation system, that way of life completely changed. With the removal of bison from their lifestyle, the Arapaho also lost much of their cultural values intertwined with the bison of the plains. Because so much of the Arapaho culture was tied up in this lifestyle, it is incredibly important for the youth of the tribe to remember and acknowledge the importance of the hunt. It also provides them with the chance to understand the spiritual importance and aspect of the hunt which ties directly into their traditional lifestyle. By introducing it and reinforcing it with the younger generation, it ensures that it will continue to be passed down.

Another way in which the Arapaho culture is remembered is with what is called the warrior's horse race. This used to be a common way in which men and women would showcase their horsemanship skills and served as a way in which to bring everyone in the tribe together for a day or so.⁵¹ This ties back to the skills that the Arapaho learned on the great plains in the use of horses. For many plains' tribes, the introduction of the horse completely changed their way of life. They were able to hunt bison much easier and travel greater distances. Becoming a horse tribe also ensured that the members became skilled in horsemanship with breeding and training. This was important especially for the value that horses quickly gained as a means of currency and a symbol of status on the plains. After being resigned to reservation life, horses were not needed nearly as much as they had been. In fact, "Although you still see lots of horses on the reservation, according to Annin fewer and fewer families seem interested in training and working with horses in more traditional Indian ways."⁵² Obviously, the change in the use of horses altered the ways in which the tribe would utilize them on the reservation, but that also meant that their values and traditional customs associated with them would also be lost. By performing the

⁵¹ Wiles, *Arapaho Journeys*. Pg. 168.

⁵² Wiles, *Arapaho Journeys*. Pg. 168

warrior horse races, they have found a way to remember the culture that used to be so intertwined with the horse.

The WRIR has experienced a turbulent period of change throughout the 150 years. The two tribes on the reservation, the Eastern Shoshone and the Northern Arapaho have had to adjust to different lifestyles and dealing with the United States government. Over the time spent on the reservation, they have been introduced to several aspects of inequality that can be measured in statistical data, personal accounts and primary documents. The findings of those measurements are that in all fields, Native Americans in the state of Wyoming currently experience constant inequality compared to the white residents of the state. Throughout the constant struggles and challenges over the years, the tribes have been resilient. They have managed to hold on to their core values and are slowly taking back their autonomy and cultural knowledge. This is seen most in the way that they are revitalizing their culture with the upcoming generation. When it comes to general inequality of Native Americans in the state of Wyoming, however, it is clear and evident.