Layperson Summary

“Kill the Indian…Save the Man”:

Motives for the Assimilation of the Sioux and Sioux Responses to “Americanization”

The Sioux people faced upheaval in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Following defeat in the Great Sioux War, the Sioux faced a concerted attempt by the federal government and private forces to assimilate them into mainstream American culture. This process involved the dismantling of Sioux political, economic, and social systems. The breakup of Sioux tribes served as another goal of the assimilation movement. Although the assimilation movement failed to destroy the tribal organization of the Sioux, the movement created many challenges for Sioux culture and led to massive losses of Sioux land. The assimilation movement led to a deteriorating situation that the Sioux have never fully overcome.

My thesis will explore a subject that is relevant to modern discussions concerning the challenges faced by Native Americans in the United States. I will focus on the experiences of the Plains Sioux, since the Sioux are one of the largest and best documented tribes. By examining the movement to assimilate the Sioux and other Native Americans, I will seek to uncover the underlying motives of the assimilation movement as well as its effects on the Sioux people. I will then look at the disparate elements that made up the assimilation movement. In this context, I will analyze the ways in which government officials and private reform-minded individuals interacted and influenced each other. I will also seek to determine if these two groups differed to any extent in their goals. In particular, I will analyze the role that education played in the assimilation movement. Finally, I will look at the experiences of the Sioux people during the
assimilation movement. I will examine the responses of the Sioux to the attempts to remove them from their traditional culture.

Through my research of government records, tribal records, and other contemporary sources, I seek to contribute a clearer understanding of the motives and effects of the assimilation movement. Through an analysis of the methods of assimilation, I will also work to determine the extent of its success. The assimilation movement, while now a distant memory, is relevant to the current situation of the Sioux. Thus, an understanding of the assimilation movement allows for an understanding of the exact problems faced by the Sioux. Through an examination of the limitations of the assimilation movement, I seek to provide an account that will explain the historical causes of the poverty that the Sioux continue to face. By examining the motives and effectiveness of government and private forces, I seek to determine their success. By looking at the responses of the Sioux to assimilation, I seek to provide a clearer picture of Sioux mentality and the effects that the Sioux themselves had on the assimilation movement.