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An Interpretation of the Determinants and Development of the Cheyenne Council of Forty-Four

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AN INTERPRETATION OF THE DETERMINANTS
AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE
CHEYENNE COUNCIL OF FORTY-FOUR

By

David J. Pfundt

A Thesis
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Faculty of The Graduate College
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David J. Pfundt

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	1
THE CHEYENNE COUNCIL OF FORTY-FOUR	5
THE ARIKARA COUNCIL SYSTEM	7
A COMPARISON OF THE CHEYENNE COUNCIL OF FORTY-FOUR AND THE ARIKARA COUNCIL SYSTEM	10
ASPECTS OF CHEYENNE HISTORY PRIOR TO 1800	11
ASPECTS OF ARIKARA HISTORY TO 1800	19
THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE COUNCIL OF FORTY-FOUR: AN ORGANIZATION OF DEFENSIVE UNIFICATION	22
THE CHEYENNE FROM THE MISSOURI VALLEY TO THE HIGH PLAINS	27
THE COUNCIL OF FORTY-FOUR: AN ORGANIZATION OF TRIBAL EXPANSION	28
Formal Structure and Duration	29
Men's Societies	30
The Council's Jurisdictional Concerns	31
Trade	31
Tribal war and peace	32
Alliances	35
Cheyenne Expansion	36
CONCLUSIONS	39
BIBLIOGRAPHY	41

INTRODUCTION

The Cheyenne of the North American Great Plains are of continuing anthropological interest. Their transition from a settled farming existence to nomadic bison hunting presents a classic example of rapid culture change in response to varying environmental conditions. Inferences drawn from their case are frequently used to support conclusions concerning similar change situations in world history. However, Wood (1971:3) calls attention to the lack of firm documentation for Cheyenne movements and adjustments; and as the question remains open, inferences based on their example are suspect.

One way of addressing Cheyenne culture history to elicit further information concerning their transition is by analyzing the development of their Council of Forty-Four. Because the council's existence predates and postdates their cultural shift, it presents an organizational link between the sedentary and nomadic phases of Cheyenne culture. As political systems are both continuous and adaptive, it follows that a processual analysis of the council's development should be indicative of specific adjustments the Cheyenne made in leaving their Minnesota-Wisconsin homeland and ascending the high plains. Thus, this examination undertakes to determine the origin of the council, its determinants, and its role in Cheyenne culture change.

Cheyenne tradition offers little explanation of the council's derivation. Four stories relate that the council was given them by

their culture hero, variously called Sweet Medicine, Motsiiuiv or Motzeyouf (Dorsey 1905:51; Grinnell 1923:1,344-345, 1962:263-278; Stands in Timber and Liberty 1967:42-45). Another attributes its inception to an orphaned Cheyenne girl who was endowed with power to organize the council by visitations from a series of supernatural animals (Hoebel 1960:39-44; Llewelyn and Hoebel 1961:69-73). Mooney (1905-1907:371-372) records a story relating the Council of Forty-Four's founding to a captured Owuqeo woman (a tribal designation with no present meaning) who told the Cheyenne of her people's system. Two stories maintain that a Cheyenne woman, upon her escape from the Assiniboin, informed her people of the Assiniboin council, whereupon they adopted it as their own (Grinnell 1923:1,345-347). Valuable as such renditions are in their own right, metaphysical accounts are not ascertainable; the Owuqeo system is undefinable; and the Assiniboin had no similar council (Hayden 1863:385-389; Smith 1925:20-21).

Curtis (1911-1930:6,157) states that the institution was introduced by the Suhtai, a small cognate Algonquian group met by the Cheyenne after the latter crossed the Missouri River. However, this is untenable in light of the indices of Cheyenne history. Although the two groups eventually became one tribe, the Suhtai retained their own tribal organization and spoke their own dialect as late as 1832 (Curtis 1911-1930:6,109; Grinnell 1923:1,10). The council's existence predates Suhtai incorporation and, therefore, they could not have supplied its model.

Commonly accepted referents to the council's origin allude to the general association between sedentism, horticulture, and formal political organization (e.g., Anderson 1951; Oliver 1962). Although it is well established that the Cheyenne were settled farmers once, it does not necessarily follow that this general association of features was the cause of the Council of Forty-Four. In fact such reference draws attention to only one apparent hypothesis, and thereby attenuates others concerning phenomena also known to be generative of political developments. Warfare and competition between groups are such phenomena (Damas 1969:160-161; Goldschmidt 1959:128-130; Sahlins 1960:390-415, 1961:326-327; Carneiro 1960:157; Fried 1967:170). Indeed, as Service (1971c:103-104) states the issue:

It seems likely that without foreign-political problems overall tribal integration would not take place; it is always such problems that stimulate the formation of larger political bodies. . . . external strife and competition among tribes must be the factor that provides the necessity for internal unity (his emphasis).

The historic existence of the council in Plains Cheyenne culture is likewise generally accounted for by reference to culture continuity from their sedentary, horticultural past (Oliver 1962). Continuity of itself, however, is not a sufficient explanation, as the reasons for its persistence are apt to be reduced to the inherent stability of cultural forms. In light of the cultural homogeneity of Plains groups during the historic period, it is apparent that the plains were a great leveler of cultural differences. Societies with different organizational backgrounds made similar organizational adjustments to similar environmental conditions.

Continuity under such conditions must have been dynamic and adaptive. Therefore, the explicit analysis of the microenvironmental variations encountered by the Cheyenne on the high plains which conditioned the Council of Forty-Four's maintenance must form a necessary correlate of the continuity postulate.

This analysis, according to the foregoing contradistinctions, views the Council of Forty-Four's formation and persistence as organizational responses to the changing defense-offense requisites of intertribal warfare as incurred by the Cheyenne during their transition from sedentism to nomadism.

I submit that the council was formed or re-formed on the model of the Arikara council system during the time the Cheyenne lived in association with them along the Missouri River between 1730 and the 1790s. Through the early stages of this development the Council of Forty-Four is seen as a unifying organization for the confederation and common defense of previously disassociated Cheyenne villages. Furthermore, I propose that with their shift to nomadism, the council's functional emphasis shifted to that of an organization for tribal expansion into the high plains.

Previous to undertaking the processual analysis of these developments the structural comparison of the Council of Forty-Four and the Arikara council system is necessary.

THE CHEYENNE COUNCIL OF FORTY-FOUR

The Council of Forty-Four was the most highly developed political organization engendered by any nomadic group in the historic Plains culture area (Eggan 1965; Llewelyn and Hoebel 1961; Oliver 1962; Service 1971a). The criteria defining this distinction were the council's formal structure and its pervasive jurisdiction over matters of tribal concern.

From each of the ten Cheyenne bands, four council members were selected through appointment by the retiring chiefs. Retiring councilmen would often select their son as a successor, provided he held the necessary qualifications, which were: ". . . an even-tempered good nature, energy, wisdom, kindness, concern for the well-being of others, courage, generosity, and altruism" (Hoebel 1960:37). Office was held for ten-year terms. Four (Grinnell 1923:1,336-358; Dorsey 1905) or five (Hoebel 1960; Service 1971a) chiefs were retained for a second ten-year term through election by the four or five retiring leaders to serve as the head chiefs of the council. One of these was also chosen to be Sweet Medicine Chief or the presiding officer at all meetings of the council and "head priest-chief of the tribe" (Hoebel 1960:44-45). The chiefs' renewal was a sacred event under the direction of the head chiefs. Council leaders were sacerdotal and they performed religious duties as well as civil functions. Two novices served as messengers to the warrior societies. All forty-four councilmen were peace chiefs; and although they were allowed to maintain their membership in warrior societies, they were

required to resign any office they held in those societies before assuming their position on the council (Llewelyn and Hoebel 1961: 67-98). Moreover, council members were band leaders and often the headmen of extended families as well as tribal leaders.

The functional scope of the council included any matter that concerned itself with the well-being of the tribe. Its specific powers included: authorization of tribal war (as against individual expeditions); formation of intertribal alliances; sanction of intergroup trade relations; ultimate jurisdiction for criminal acts against the tribe; decisions concerning the time and place of tribal movements; and the appointment of warrior societies to police tribal encampments, movements, and communal buffalo hunts. In implementing the above, the council exercised primary executive, judicial and legislative authority over the Cheyenne at the tribal level (Hoebel 1960:47).

The Council of Forty-Four was the primary civil authority of Cheyenne society. The council and the warrior societies formed the primary non-kin agents for the secular unification of the tribe. As Hoebel (1960:49) put it:

The Cheyenne concern with the threat of internal disruption and their compensatory drive toward tribal supremacy and unity on all crucial matters have resulted in the centralization of legal control in the tribal council and the military societies.

This synopsis is characteristic of the Council of Forty-Four as it was after 1840, as extant observations date to this period.

THE ARIKARA COUNCIL SYSTEM

By the time recorded observations were made of the Arikara council system several occurrences had altered its composition vis-à-vis the period of Cheyenne contact. Smallpox epidemics between 1772 and 1780 greatly reduced the Arikara population (Secoy 1953:74). Increasing warfare and increasing participation in northeastern plains trade appear to have had a dissipative effect on Arikara social structure in the 19th century (Deetz 1965:24-37). Political components were affected as well (Nasatir 1952:299). Thus, the material on which this analysis is based is often contradictory, as accounts of the council vary with the time and context of observation. Moreover, the sources only implicitly mention the Arikara council. For these reasons the following construct must be considered provisional.

There were twelve Arikara villages prior to 1794. Each had its own political lead in particular affairs (Gilmore 1927:333, 1928:411, 1931:34). These villages:

. . . were also organized for united deliberation and cooperative action upon matters of more general concern. To this end the twelve villages were disposed into four divisions of three each, one of which was designated as the head of its group. The village chiefs governed in local affairs, and the chief of the head village had, in addition, authority in matters affecting the three communities within that group. There was a principal chief of the nation, supported by a board of four associate chiefs, one from each of the divisions. This board was charged with the governmental affairs of the nation (Gilmore 1931:34).

There were at least forty-two chiefs composing the Arikara assembly (Abel 1968:124). The tribal head chief was always from the Awahu village (Chalfant 1951:8). He and the division chiefs inherited their positions (Gilmore 1928:415; Brackenridge 1906:6:111). Personal attributes such as courage, altruism, and generosity were emphasized as qualifications for ascension to those offices (Denig 1969:61-62). Except for the five prominent leaders, it appears the remaining councilmen were undifferentiated among themselves (Denig 1969:61, Abel 1968:126; Nasatir 1952:299). In 1804 there were three Arikara villages composed of ten bands having equal representation on the council (Abel 1968:124,128-129; Hyde 1951-1952:19,49-50; Mails 1973:145).

The council was convened " . . . for any public tribal business, whether legislative, judicial, or diplomatic" (Gilmore 1928:412). Its explicit functions included: the regulation of intervillage warfare (Smith 1925:57; Nasatir 1952:305-309); regulation of intergroup trade (Bradbury 1906:5,132; Brackenridge 1906:6,113-114; Jablow 1950:31); the formation of alliances (Abel 1968:127-128); and criminal acts against the tribe fell to the jurisdiction of the council (Abel 1968:118-127). The council's decisions were enforced by the Blackmouth society (Mails 1973:145).

Prior to their arrival on the Upper Missouri, the Arikara were part of the Skidi Pawnee (Deetz 1965; Hodge 1912:1,83). Assuming that the Skidi system was parental to the Arikara council, information concerning the former should be useful in filling out this construct.

The Skidi council was " . . . composed of hereditary chiefs and leading men" (Hodge 1912:2,215). They were peace chiefs and village guardians rather than active warriors (Dorsey and Murie 1940:112). The Skidi Pawnee were held together by two forces: "The ceremonies . . . and the tribal council composed of the chiefs of the different villages. . . . The council determined all questions touching the welfare of the tribe . . . " (Hodge 1912:2,215).

A COMPARISON OF THE CHEYENNE COUNCIL OF FORTY-FOUR
AND THE ARIKARA COUNCIL SYSTEM

The most apparent comparison between the councils is their gross numerical similarity: The Cheyenne's was composed of forty-four members and the Arikara's of at least forty-two. Both had four or five head chiefs, one of whom was paramount. Elements of oligarchy were present in both systems, although ascension to office was tempered by personal, charismatic qualifications. Band and village headmen were incorporated within the systems as tribal officials. Both councils referred administrative tasks to warrior societies.

Their functional equivalents were the powers to sanction tribal warfare, set the terms of trade, form alliances, and hold jurisdiction over criminal acts against the tribe.

There is one other parallel between the councils: They were organizations of similar cultures which shared a common, competitive environment between 1730 and the 1790s. Because of this it is logical to propose that the councils were more homologous during this time than the foregoing synchronic juxtaposition of attributes indicates.

ASPECTS OF CHEYENNE HISTORY PRIOR TO 1800

The traditional Cheyenne homeland was the Minnesota River Valley (Mooney 1905-1907:364; Will 1914:68-69). Their first historical referent located them on the east bank of the Mississippi below the mouth of the Wisconsin River in 1678 (Wood 1971:58). By 1700, they had founded at least one village (Biesterfeldt) on the Sheyenne River in eastern North Dakota. The Cheyenne were occupying sedentary villages along the Missouri River between 1730 and the 1790s. By 1800, they had migrated onto the high plains (Berthrong 1963:3-26; Wood 1971:52-68).

The rapid displacement and accordant transition of the Cheyenne is obviated by the foregoing chronology. The initiating determinant of these developments is well known:

It seems entirely plausible that the Cheyenne considered it expedient to withdraw from their territory to avoid continued depredations, if not by the Sioux, then at the hands of the latter's enemies (Jablow 1950:3).

The prime cause of the upheaval and westerly migration . . . appears to have been the increasing pressure from the Cree and other tribes of the northeast after the establishment of the English trading posts on Hudson Bay, beginning in 1668 (Mooney 1905-07:364).

The warfare which involved the Cheyenne was primarily between groups that were participating in the northeastern fur trade and those which were not; between those that had access to European weapons and those which did not. Groups involved in the trade expanded west and south in order to extend their trapping territory and thereby increase the amount of furs they could exchange

for European commodities; in this intrusive process they employed large, gun-equipped expeditions that inexorably displaced societies in their path (Secoy 1953:42).

Societies which could not cope with the pressures of warfare were either destroyed as a group or forced into territorial retreat (Secoy 1953:94). Territorial retreat was the Cheyenne's only alternative. They were unable to effectively defend against the intrusion because they lacked adequate weaponry, they had a relatively small population, and they had no effective organizational means for internal unification above the level of autonomous villages.

First, the intrusive groups (primarily the Cree, Assiniboin, Dakota and Chippewa) possessing firearms formed a barrier against the armament of those they subjugated. The Cheyenne were among the unfortunates. Grinnell (1923:1,48) synthesizes their condition as a result of this:

. . . when the Cheyennes were constantly in fear of the Ho he /Assiniboin/, . . . each evening the crier /directed/ the women to put mocassins on the children so that if . . . they were attacked and had to run out, they would not be obliged to go barefoot. . . . all about the camp were breastworks or places of defense, where young men watched all night to warn the people if an attack was threatened. These young men were armed with bows and a few lances. . . . but very few guns.

Ordinate defense against armed groups without similar weapons was impossible.

In the second place, there were only 3,500 Cheyenne. The intrusive groups far outnumbered them; the Assiniboin alone were 10,000 strong at this time (Lowie 1954:10). In their withdrawal, the Cheyenne were scattered between the Minnesota and Missouri

Rivers from the late 1600s until the 1780s, and their tactical position was reduced accordingly.

Finally, it appears there was no organization in Cheyenne society capable of uniting their various villages for common defense and/or unified, protective retreat. This follows from the fact that the Cheyenne withdrew from Minnesota-Wisconsin " . . . in no sense as a tribal body" (Grinnell 1923:1,2). This strongly suggests that the Council of Forty-Four was not part of pristine Cheyenne political structure, since it is only subsequent history that acknowledges the council's ascription of measures disposed to tribal defense. The logic here is that if the council were operative in pristine Cheyenne society, it would have been employed to counter increasing warfare in much the same way it was employed historically.

On the other hand, the operation of an intervillage organization may have been disrupted by the voracity of war, leaving individual villages to flee as refugees. However, the fact remains that individual village movements rather than mass, contemporary tribal migration characterized the Cheyenne exodus. This means that from the time they were forced from Minnesota-Wisconsin in the late 1600s until such time as the majority of Cheyenne villages settled proximately together for a period of sufficient duration for the formation or re-formation of such an organization to occur, there was no pan-village organization operative in Cheyenne society. And the only area so occupied by the Cheyenne dating from their demise in Minnesota-Wisconsin until historical knowledge embraces them on the high plains (with the council present) was the Missouri Valley.

The indices of their occupation there are 1730 to the 1790s, a period of sixty or so years during which the formation or re-formation of the council could occur. Mooney (1905-1907:372) gives 1750 as the approximate date for the adoption of the council as historically known. This intercepts the foregoing parameters perfectly.

The archeological record of Cheyenne removal to and occupancy of the Missouri Valley is exceedingly sparse. The Biesterfeldt site near Lisbon, North Dakota is the only archeologically investigated Cheyenne village in or between the Minnesota and Missouri River Valleys. Excavations were conducted by Strong (1940:370-376), and the material has been reanalyzed by Wood (1971).

Biesterfeldt was occupied from 1700 to 1770 (Berthrong 1963:8; Strong 1940:371) or 1790 (Wood 1971:49). It was composed of at least sixty-two earth-lodges surrounded by a fortification ditch. Trade goods had replaced the majority of chipped stone tools indicating that the inhabitants were participating to some extent in European trade channels. However, as only one gun part was recovered, their participation must have been indirect and restricted. There is little evidence of their involvement in native trade networks, although they possessed some horses and catlinite (Wood 1971:48-49). Pottery attributes at the site " . . . are most like those of the Arikara on the Missouri; there are no clear prototypes for them in Minnesota" (Wood 1971:69).

Indeed, the overall index of comparability between the Biesterfeldt assemblage and contemporary Arikara manifestations

was pervasive to the extent that Wood (1971:70) states that the Sheyenne River village may have been occupied by a group " . . . related to the . . . Arikara . . . "

Wood's hypothesis concerning the relation of the Biesterfeldt and Arikara manifestations are briefly that the Biesterfeldt occupants:

. . . were subjected to forces and processes analogous to those in the Missouri Valley. By direct contact they borrowed specific elements from the Missouri Valley. . . . we are postulating a parallel development there (with some borrowing) rather than a linear one (Wood 1971:59-60).

He concludes that in this development the Biesterfeldt site most closely approximates the changes that took place among the Arikara.

The Cheyenne who withdrew to the Sheyenne River gained short respite from their enemies. Accounts by Thompson and Henry cited in Wood (1971:55-57) and Swanton (1930) indicate that the Chippewa destroyed the village between 1770 and 1790. All excavated lodges had been burned (Wood 1971:11). Tradition cited by Will (1914:71) states that the Biesterfeldt occupants " . . . were in constant terror of their various enemies . . . [and after the destruction of their village they] . . . fled to the Missouri River and sought the protection of the Arikaras and Mandans" (my emphasis).

Although several traditional Cheyenne village locations in the Missouri Valley have been investigated (e.g., Grinnell 1918; Scheans 1957; Strong 1940; Will 1924; Will and Hecker 1944; Wood 1971), it has been impossible to archeologically classify any as Cheyenne sites (Wood 1971:64-68).

The villages and their occupation dates are: Porcupine Creek Village, 1730/1733-1779/1784; Slabtown, 1770; Heart River Village, 1786-1790; Dirt Lodge Creek Village, 1795; Grand River Village, 1779/1784-1840; Farm School Village, 1770-1795; a village opposite Farm School; Cheyenne Creek Village or Villages; and Four Mile Creek Village. Only the Heart River, Dirt Lodge Creek and Grand River Village locations are not now inundated by the Oahe Reservoir; and as yet, their locations are undefined (Wood 1971:60-68). Therefore, historical sources are employed to establish the Cheyenne occupation of the Missouri Valley and their direct contact with the Arikara.

The first Cheyenne village in the Missouri Valley was located at the confluence of Porcupine Creek and the Missouri River about eight kilometers north of Fort Yates, North Dakota (Will 1924:311-312). It was occupied from approximately 1730 to 1784 (Grinnell 1923:1,22-28, 1918:373). The Sieur de la Verendrye's sons mentioned a Cheyenne village located between the Arikara and Mandan near Porcupine Creek in 1742 (Will 1914:75-76). Lewis and Clark passed the area on October 15 and 16, 1804, in the company of an Arikara chief who stated that abandoned villages on both sides of the river had been Cheyenne (Thwaites 1959:1,190,195). On October 16, Clark noted passing " . . . a circular work, where the Shar ha or Chien, or Dog Indians formerly lived . . . " (Thwaites 1959:1,195). Grinnell (1918:378) was satisfied the villages mentioned on those occasions were either Porcupine Creek Village or Slabtown. Bushnell (1922:24) noted the upper Arikara village (near Fort Yates) was " . . . not far below the old Cheyenne village mentioned in the journal of the expedition . . . "

Although specific village sites have not been identified, it is nevertheless obvious that the Cheyenne did live on both sides of the Missouri near Fort Yates between 1730 and 1800. "These settlements were between the Mandan-Hidatsa villages and those of the Arikara to the south" (Wood 1971:62).

The Missouri Valley was no haven from warfare.

The upheaval that displaced the Cheyenne also dislodged the Dakota, Assiniboin, Plains Cree, Plains Ojibwa, Oto, Iowa, Omaha, Ponca, Osage and Kansa. These societies relocated on the eastern plains and its periphery. Simultaneously, the interior plains were being inhabited by the Shoshone, Ute, Comanche, Kiowa, Kiowa-Apache, Crow, Blackfoot, Sarsi, Arapaho, Suhtai and Gros Ventre. Midway between these opposing areas of intrusion lay the Missouri Valley and the Village societies including the Cheyenne. Competition was severe--warfare was both a means of achieving and maintaining territory and access to essential resources.

The distribution of guns and horses from opposite margins of the plains met in the Missouri Valley in approximately 1750, and as the weapons of war became more available, warfare itself, increased (Secoy 1953:39-44,65-77,105).

However, there was no logistic parity among the area groups because these commodities enveloped the entire plains only after 1790 (Secoy 1953:106). Until that time, a particular society's logistic capabilities heavily depended on the proximity to the sources of supply in the southwest (horses) and northeast (guns).

This resulted in an imbalance of power that engendered trading and raiding imperatives aimed at the accumulation of sufficient stores for defense.

Glory and revenge seeking motives were outward manifestations of the struggle to achieve adequate territory and weaponry; and in tandem these permutated a constant state of warfare on the north-eastern plains.

ASPECTS OF ARIKARA HISTORY TO 1800

The Arikara were militarily strong previous to their devastation by smallpox between 1772-1780 (Hyde 1951-1952:18,216-217,19,25). Although there is little relevant information concerning the Arikara prior to 1795, it is possible to discern three factors which were operative in establishing their strength: Their population was located in large fortified villages; they were relatively well armed and mounted early in the developing scramble for territory on the north-eastern plains; and they had a unifying tribal council.

There were apparently between forty-three and fifty Arikara villages scattered along the Missouri River prior to 1717-1723 (Hyde 1951-1952:18,203). After this, these villages were consolidated into twelve large fortified compounds (Gilmore 1927:332-333; Hyde 1951-1952:19,49). By concentrating their population in a few villages, the Arikara better suited themselves to withstand armed and/or mounted attacks. The other Village tribes similarly consolidated their villages early in the 18th century in response to the increasing pressure of warfare (Willey 1966:328). Lehmer (1954:152) writes of this development:

The size and permanence of the villages . . . and the evidence of group projects presented by the elaborate fortifications indicate well integrated communities with a considerable degree of social control.

In the case of the Arikara, I propose that the authority and control necessary for the incorporation of their villages must have originated with the council of chiefs. Only through such a tribal body could intervillage incorporation have been achieved without the divisive effects of intravillage rivalry. This follows because in the Arikara procedure of incorporation " . . . the big settlement did not count as one village but as many" (Hyde 1951-1952:18,204). The leaders of the small villages were councilmen (tribal officials) with tribal concerns. This facilitated harmonious incorporation because the impetus of sub-village concerns were overridden by those of the larger settlements and the tribe. The comparability in numbers of the chiefs composing the council (at least forty-two) and the villages previous to consolidation (forty-three to fifty) attest to this conclusion.

The twelve villages were also confederated at the divisional and tribal levels. Questions of varying concern and inclusiveness were referred to the council through all levels of Arikara organization. Similarly, directives emanating from the council were promulgated to all segments of Arikara society. Thus, the Arikara council was a multidimensional organization capable of controlling their population in situations that fell within its jurisdictional scope.

The Arikara (as well as the Mandan and Hidatsa) were middlemen in native trade networks which facilitated the distribution of guns and horses throughout the plains (Jablow 1950:22-23; Will and Hyde 1917; Ewers 1954,1968; Deetz 1965:33). The salient mechanics of this process were the following: Guns were received from northeastern

societies who traded them for horses; horses were obtained from societies to the southwest who exchanged them for guns. The Village tribes redistributed firearms to the southwest and horses to the northeast on the barter basis of guns for horses and horses for guns.

Because of their trade middlemen position, the Arikara were reasonably well equipped with both horses and guns as they became available. They were, therefore, able to keep pace with competing societies as the patterns of warfare on the northeastern plains changed to increasingly favor groups that were mounted and/or armed.

The Arikara council of chiefs was also operative in the development of logistic strength. Through its authority various trade alliances were struck establishing dependable sources from which horses and guns could be obtained. Further, the chiefs established equitable prices for the commodities to be exchanged and often the trade was conducted in their lodges (Bradbury 1906:5,130-132; Jablow 1950:31). In doing these things, the council regulated trade so the Arikara would not incur military liabilities on account of deficits created by inequitable trade.

The result of their consolidation, confederation, and logistical soundness under the direction of the council was that the Arikara were militarily strong between 1717-1723 and 1772-1780; and for approximately the same period of time the Cheyenne were in direct contact with them.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE COUNCIL OF FORTY-FOUR:
AN ORGANIZATION OF DEFENSIVE UNIFICATION

The situational exigencies that conditioned the development of the Council of Forty-Four in the Missouri Valley between 1730 and the 1790s resulted from the relation of five factors: The relatively high military posture of the Arikara; the general cultural similarity between the Cheyenne and Arikara; continued and increasing endemic warfare and the selective virulence it bore; continued low Cheyenne military posture; and geographical and cultural barriers against continued Cheyenne migration.

Shortly after the first Cheyennes arrived in the Missouri Valley they achieved peace with the Arikara (Grinnell 1923:1,8-9). This was probably facilitated by the similarity between their cultures as demonstrated by Wood's (1971:59-60) determination of the comparability of contemporary Arikara manifestations and the Biesterfeldt assemblage. Later history often records the Cheyenne visiting " . . . their old and faithful allies, the Ricaras" (Abel 1968:152; also Coues 1965:375-397; Nasatir 1952:304-305,379-380) which intimates the antiquity of their relations. They also shared a mutual hatred:

The long-distance raids made on the Arikaras even before 1750 were mainly the work of the Eastern Sioux of the "D" and "N" dialects. . . These Sioux were the Wicheyelas of Cheyenne tradition, and the Cheyennes and probably the Arikaras had a special hatred for the Wicheyelas - the Sioux who first obtained guns in quantities, and used them in making murderous raids on tribes like the Cheyennes and Arikaras . . . (Hyde 1951-1952:18,32).

It should be remembered in this regard that the Biesterfeldt occupants fled to the Missouri River and sought the protection of the Arikara and Mandan.

As Cheyenne groups began arriving in the Missouri Valley, they no longer found withdrawal a viable means of coping with warfare. There was no place to retreat. Their economy was based on horticulture at this time. Hunting was secondary. The Missouri Valley at a point slightly west of the 99th meridian marks the twenty-inch annual precipitation line and the applicable western boundary of aboriginal horticulture (Wedel 1941:7; 1947:5-6). The predominantly horticultural Cheyenne were compelled to remain where their economic mode was feasible. Moreover, their characteristically independent village movements farther west (even if economically possible) would have been as indefensible on the high plains as they had been to the Missouri River. They were still disassociated and poorly equipped. The result of these constraints was that Cheyenne groups became pocketed in the valley where they were surrounded by hostile intrusive societies.

Another effect was that incoming Cheyenne groups accrued to the area and extant kin villages. This resulted in the expansion of contemporary, local Cheyenne villages--at least nine were occupied between 1730 and the 1790s. Ten bands are known to have comprised the historic Cheyenne tribe, one of which was composed of the Suhtai upon their incorporation by the Cheyenne proper in the 19th century (Hoebel 1960:31-32). Therefore, it is likely there were nine Cheyenne bands prior to the 19th century. Conjecturing that these bands were also village units, it appears that most (if not all)

Cheyenne villages/bands occupied the Missouri Valley for some period of time between 1730 and 1790. Supposing that the Cheyenne were similarly localized in Minnesota-Wisconsin, this development reaffirmed a pattern that had been defunct for at least fifty years. Moreover, it established the format which made the formation or re-formation of the Council of Forty-Four possible--the proximal location of Cheyenne villages.

Cheyenne contact with the Arikara was the other side of the equation making the development of the council possible. The Arikara had coalesced their villages shortly before the first Missouri River Cheyenne village was founded in 1730. Based on the Arikara council's example of parlaying intervillage consolidation and confederation, incoming Cheyenne groups adopted a similar organizational stratagem. They thereby effected the confederation of their villages and established a unifying grid upon which extant and subsequently arriving Cheyenne groups could stand against continuing intrusion. In this development the Arikara supplied the model from which the Council of Forty-Four and Cheyenne unification were drawn.

Some of the specific jurisdictional concerns of the Arikara council may also have been translated into the Cheyenne's councilar development. Although there is insufficient information to warrant a wholesale conclusion concerning their functional equivalents in this regard, the Council of Forty-Four's prerogative concerning trade bears scrutiny.

Viabile defense was a two-sided process entailing both tactical unification and logistic acumen. Certainly the Cheyenne witnessed the efficacy of centralized authority in Arikara trade as well as the soundness of their confederation. And it is logical that they would borrow patterns from the Arikara in both areas of defensive concern. Therefore, the chief's authority to oversee trade was a reciprocal development of the Council of Forty-Four. Sahlins (1960: 411) states this relation precisely:

. . . military competition normally enhances the chief's political position since they organize the tribes defense. But defense . . . demands economic support; hence, the stimulation of production ordinate trade. The chief's role as military leader has a logistic side; viz., accumulating the goods required by the military effort.

In this regard, Jablow (1950:86) states that Cheyenne trade was " . . . conducted through the authority of chiefs both in band and tribal organization, especially when guns and horses were involved in the exchange." He concludes, "The Cheyenne must . . . have learned their obstinate trade practices from the Arikaras . . . " (Jablow 1950:34).

The Council of Forty-Four developed because Cheyenne survival was at stake. Gun-equipped societies were penetrating the Missouri Valley from the east and equestrian nomads butted it from the west. Continued retreat would have ushered individual Cheyenne villages to the high plains and to economic and military problems with which they were not yet able to cope. Thus, the exigencies of defense continually placed on the Cheyenne dating from their removal from Minnesota-Wisconsin culminated with the temporary cessation of retreat and envelopment by intrusive societies in the Missouri Valley.

Warfare " . . . was primarily defensive, but groups that did not respond . . . were often wiped out" (Eggan 1966:63). The Cheyenne had to respond. One means of defense was unification; and the primary organization responsible for Cheyenne unification was the Council of Forty-Four. Through its formation in the Missouri Valley, deficits that had plagued the Cheyenne to that point (disunity, small size and logistical inferiority) were minimized.

It is impossible to ascertain by what specific means Cheyenne acculturation occurred. Likewise, it is impossible to ascertain whether the council was founded through acculturation or whether borrowed elements were incorporated within an existing (but disrupted) system. Nonetheless, given the comparison of the Arikara and Cheyenne councils as well as the situational, temporal and spatial indices of their respective culture histories, it is apparent that acculturation did occur. The result was the Council of Forty-Four as it became known historically.

THE CHEYENNE FROM THE MISSOURI VALLEY
TO THE HIGH PLAINS

Intrusive Dakota groups obtained increased amounts of arms and ammunition with the renewal of the Montreal fur trade after 1770 (Secoy 1953:74). They intensified their expansion as a result, and the Cheyenne who were directly in their path experienced much of their direct military pressure. The Dakota also plundered Cheyenne gardens and exploited the Missouri River's bison ranges, which probably forced the Cheyenne to depend more heavily on herds west of the river (Wood 1971:68). In seeking buffalo and respite from the Dakota, the Cheyenne wandered farther and farther from the valley and increasingly closer to primary supplies of horses. This eventuality led to their involvement as trade intermediaries between the interior nomads and the Village tribes. The profits to be gained from this situation drew the Cheyenne ever deeper into the plains.

The Cheyenne had become fully equestrian nomads by about 1790 because of the foregoing reasons. Although individual groups may have crossed the Missouri River as early as 1680 (Wood 1971:60-68), it was not until the last third of the 18th century that the Cheyenne took to nomadism and the high plains as a tribe.

THE COUNCIL OF FORTY-FOUR: AN ORGANIZATION
OF TRIBAL EXPANSION

The Council of Forty-Four was operative in the Cheyenne's successful removal to the high plains. This determination is based on the following logic: In a contested environment, more cohesive tribal units will expand at the expense of more amorphous tribal units (other things being equal). The Cheyenne were the most united Plains tribe (Oliver 1962; Hoebel 1960; Llewelyn and Hoebel 1961; Service 1971a; Mails 1973:318). This distinction is predicated on the centralization of legal control in the tribal council (Hoebel 1960:47). Therefore, the council was the organizational vehicle of Cheyenne expansion into the plains.

The difference in terms of cohesion between the Cheyenne and other Plains tribes was a matter of degree. Llewelyn and Hoebel (1961:67) emphasize this:

One reputed trait in the polity of the Plains Indians is its amorphous character. But in this thinking the category 'Plains' is taken too broadly. If one takes the Plains in terms of the Comanches, or even the Crows, then the formlessness of government may be marked indeed. This is not so, however, if such a tribe as the Cheyenne is under consideration. . . . The Council of Forty-Four formed the formal facade of government in the tribal constitution, and had real powers.

The criteria determining Cheyenne cohesion via the council are: Its formal structure and relatively active duration through yearly periods of tribal segmentation; the subordinate position of the military societies; and its unifying cogency in areas of its authority.

Formal Structure and Duration

The prevalence of band organization throughout much of the year had a potent disintegrative effect on all Plains tribes. Because bison dispersed in winter, tribes similarly dispersed along band and kin lines in order to procure sufficient game. They came together only in summer when the herds rejoined.

The Cheyenne conformed to this pattern. However, all Cheyenne bands were equally represented in the council, and the chiefs were band leaders and the headmen of extended families. It was, therefore, with the authority of tribal officials that the chiefs spoke to their bands and families concerning trade imperatives, camp movements, and the like during yearly periods of tribal segmentation. The council's authority, if not the council, remained intact throughout the year.

Information gathered during these periods was carried to council by the chiefs when the tribe came together in summer. Thus, information vital to the council's decisions concerning such matters as the time and place of tribal movement was readily available; viz., potential buffalo concentrations and the location of hostile societies.

The council's formal structure gave it permanence. Periodic Cheyenne segmentation did not disrupt its operation. The chiefs were the same as they had been in previous years; therefore, when tribal camp was pitched, there was no re-positioning of council members nor was there any delay in dealing with the matters at hand. Obversely, when the Cheyenne split up in winter, the position of the chief endured with the band.

Men's Societies

The Cheyenne's societies probably developed in the third quarter of the 18th century in the region between the Missouri River and the Black Hills (Wissler 1911). They assumed the administrative/police functions of Cheyenne government. Their duties included policing tribal encampments, movements and hunting expeditions, guarding against attack, and the punishment of offenders against the public welfare (Hoebel 1960:31-36; Mails 1973:42). They also had an active role in situations of tribal war and peace (Hoebel 1960:47).

Nevertheless, these societies had as much potential to divide the Cheyenne along associational lines as they did to overcome the separatism of kin groups (Wells 1961). They had great influence over their members and each of them endeavored to become the foremost society of warriors, camp guardians, etc. This fostered intense intersociety rivalry; hence, the cooperation necessary for effective tribal unification could be estranged. Such potential divisiveness, however, ". . . can be overcome if the several organizations are subject to the control of a single authority" (Lowie 1962:102).

In Cheyenne society, this control rested with the Council of Forty-Four. It selected different societies to police specified activities for a determinate time (Hoebel 1936:434). One might be chosen to police tribal hunts one year and to guard the camp the next. Selection rotated and prestige (a breeding ground of divisive rivalry) also rotated from society to society. Cooperation in administrative functions was the result.

The Council's Jurisdictional Concerns

The council's duties were much the same as any group of elders among the Plains tribes (Anderson 1951:271). However, the Cheyenne chiefs promoted a degree of tribal unanimity beyond the others in areas of its concern. The most important of these fields for present purposes were trade, tribal war and peace, and intertribal alliances.

Trade

The authority of the chiefs in trade and the interrelation of trade and military ability has been discussed. These conditions remained constant through the period of Cheyenne expansion into the plains. Therefore, their intrusive ability was intimately involved with trade. Accordingly, the chiefs' capacity in trade was operative in Cheyenne expansion.

A brief digression is necessary for clarity:

In the case of the Cheyenne . . . it was through the chief that the presence of a trader was announced to the people, who, at the same time, might be informed of the kinds of goods available and acceptable in exchange. This type of centralized authority functioned, as far as we can see, both in the band and tribal organization Intertribal trade was . . . conducted through the authority of chiefs, especially when guns and horses were involved in the exchange. . . . From here it is but a short step to the making of peace between tribes, for trade purposes, through the authority of the chiefs (Jablow 1950:86).

Jablow (1950) has studied Cheyenne trade patterns in depth and the subsequent sketch is derived from his work.

The Cheyenne had become the major supplier of horses to the Village tribes by 1795. They were most often engaged in trade with the Arikara. In exchange for a horse, the Cheyenne were given

" . . . a gun, a hundred charges of powder and balls, a knife and other trifles" (Abel 1968:158). Horses were procured by the Cheyenne primarily by raiding from the Pawnee, Kiowa and Comanche and through trade with the Arapaho.

A vigorous trade developed among the interior tribes in addition to that in the Missouri Valley. The Cheyenne became the middlemen of trade between these areas. "In this situation, the exchange was limited and specific . . . , the Cheyenne brought European goods which were bartered only for horses" (Jablow 1950:59).

The Cheyenne came to be well possessed of guns and horses because of the exchange rates at both ends of their network. Their expansive potential and the ability to maintain the position they had achieved increased accordingly:

The Cheyenne . . . , with a constant supply of arms and ammunition available, effectively controlled the plains between the Platte and Arkansas and succeeded in containing their enemies the Kiowa and Comanche below the latter river (Jablow 1950:80).

Tribal war and peace

The mode of Cheyenne warfare conformed to the general pattern typical of the Plains tribes (Mishkin 1940; Hoebel 1960:69-72). The Cheyenne also waged war en masse on at least six occasions; against the Shoshone in 1817, the Crow in 1820, the Pawnee in 1830, the Shoshone in 1834, the Kiowa and Comanche in 1838, and the Pawnee in 1853 (Grinnell 1956:72). The tribes attacked and the dates correspond with time and areas of Cheyenne intrusion indicating that their expansion was the cause of these expeditions.

There is an analogy between Cheyenne and Blackfoot warfare in this regard. Lewis (1966:52-53) writes:

The Blackfoot utilized the large scale pattern of tribal warfare during the fifty year period of territorial expansion, beginning in the 1730s, whereby they moved across the western Plains driving the Shoshone, Kutenai and Flathead before them. In addition to the horse and gun, we must now attribute a good part of this successful conquest to the military strength made possible by their well developed political system. . . .

The process of tribal war proceed along these lines: A men's society organized the expeditions and policed the tribe's movement toward the adversary to guard against overzealous warriors alerting the foe. Before any action was taken, however, the responsible society petitioned the Council of Forty-Four for approval of the endeavor. Given this, the attack was launched. In all cases, the motivation for this type of expedition was revenge oriented (Grinnell 1956:48-69; Llewelyn and Hoebel 1961:3-6).

There was a balance of power between the council and the military societies in these movements. Although the council held the final word in such cases, the societies could nullify the council's decision by taking to the warpath on a smaller scale (Hoebel 1960:47). The council had no authority over private or fraternal war expeditions. It was cognizant, however, of the divisive effects that could befall the Cheyenne in intertribal relations if the military societies were to nullify its decisions and follow their own lead. Therefore, if there were especially strong sentiment for such an endeavor, the council left the issue for the organizing society to decide. Its undertaking, of course, was thereby sanctioned. Jurisprudent concessions such as this on the part of the council resulted in nonopposition

to specific decisions and bound the Cheyenne to a tribal course of action. The same procedure was employed in concluding peace with other tribes. An example illustrates this.

In the 1830s the Cheyenne expanded into the southern plains in order to obtain cheaper supplies of horses. "As a consequence . . . they came into open and bloody conflict with the Kiowa and Comanche. . . ." (Jablow 1950:79). Forty-two Bow-string Society members were killed in 1837 when they endeavored to steal horses (Grinnell 1956: 46-48; Powell 1969:1,58-59). The Cheyenne attacked the Kiowa and Comanche in the summer of 1838 according to the foregoing outline of tribal war.

In 1840 the southern tribes sued for peace. Their proposal was given to a Cheyenne war party which was visiting an allied Arapaho camp. The leader of the war party declined the proposal, saying:

. . . you know we are not chiefs; we cannot smoke with these men nor make peace with them. We have no authority; we can only carry a message . . . to the chiefs. They must decide what shall be done (Grinnell 1956:63-64).

The council left the decision to the Dog Soldiers because they were the "strongest and bravest" society at the time (Grinnell 1956:64). This was logical because if the council itself had decided for peace, it would not have lasted long had the societies any desire to continue hostilities. Leaving the decision to the Dog Soldiers circumvented this difficulty. They decided for peace; and it was promulgated " . . . that the chiefs and Dog Soldiers had agreed to make peace with the Kiowas, Comanches, and Apaches, and that no more war parties should start out against them" (Grinnell 1956:65). The peace then made was never broken.

Alliances

Alliances were the extension of peaceful relations between tribes for purposes of achieving mutual goals primarily related to trade and military assistance. They were effected through the Council of Forty-Four in the same manner as peace was established.

Cheyenne allies were the Arapaho, the Sioux (after 1800), the Kiowa, Comanche, Kiowa-Apache and Plains Apache (after 1840) and of course the Arikara, Mandan and Hidatsa.

Alliances were important in Cheyenne expansion for two reasons. First, patterns of preferred trade were established through them which assured the Cheyenne of constant, dependable supplies of fire-arms and horses. Agreements with the Arikara and Arapaho were significant in this regard. Later, their alliance with the Kiowa and Comanche was similarly effective: They could trade for horses directly with the southern tribes or safely pass through their territory in order to raid the Spanish in the southwest (Jablow 1950: 75-77).

Military support was also an important aspect of Cheyenne alliances. The Arapaho and Sioux are especially noted for mutual campaigns with the Cheyenne. Equally important was the buffering effect created by their allies who partially surrounded the Cheyenne perimeter. They would never attack the Cheyenne, and they formed a line of defense against outlying hostile tribes. Cheyenne alliances, therefore, helped ameliorate the negative bias inherent in their small tribal size.

Cheyenne Expansion

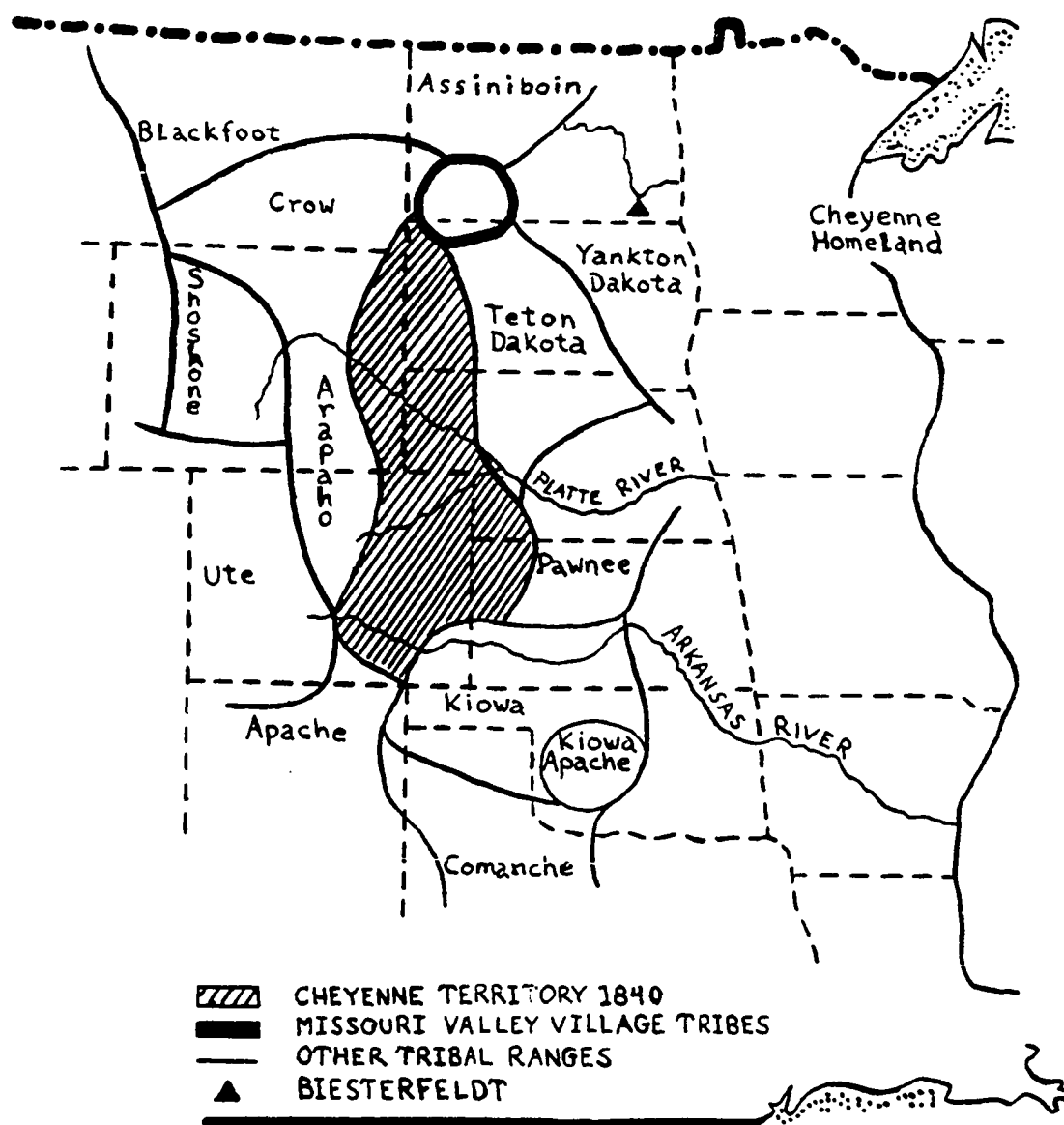
Intertribal relations determined the success of all Plains tribes in territorial acquisition and territorial maintenance. Cheyenne expansive capabilities were accordingly in direct relation with the effectiveness (cohesiveness) of their patterns in trade, war and peace, and alliances. Their ability to expand was, therefore, measured by the relative degree of Cheyenne cohesion in intertribal relations as compared to those against whom they expanded.

The Council of Forty-Four's role in intertribal relations and its unifying cogency in Cheyenne society have been discussed to the point of distinguishing between Cheyenne cohesion and the cohesiveness of other Plains tribes. In the case of the Cheyenne, intertribal relations fell to the jurisdiction of the council. The Council of Forty-Four was the medium through which Cheyenne policy toward other tribes was enacted. Internal Cheyenne unity was generated by the council because it allayed the divisive effects of the men's societies and the segmentation of periodic dispersion; hence, external Cheyenne solidarity in the intertribal relations meant success in their ascension of the high plains.

The Cheyenne entered the plains relatively late; therefore, they were forced to establish territory and access to essential resources at the expense of existing tribes. In the process of their intrusion:

/The/ . . . Kiowas and Comanches were gradually pushed south and expelled from their former range /about the Black Hills/, until at the beginning of the historic period the range of the Kiowas was about the North Platte River. . . . The Cheyennes . . . in like manner forced the Crows westward toward the mountains (Grinnell 1956:36-37).

Continuing Cheyenne expansion forced the Kiowa and Comanche below the Arkansas River by 1830. The Shoshone, Ute and Pawnee were pushed from portions of their range as well. The result of Cheyenne expansion was this: The center of the Great Plains was undisputed Cheyenne territory by 1840.



Tribal confederations such as embodied in the Council of Forty-Four are usually ephemeral. "When the competitive objects that induce confederation have been accomplished, the confederation de facto dissolves into its several segments . . ." (Sahlins 1961:327). However, the council survived the transition to nomadism and the disintegrative tendencies inherent in tribal life on the plains. The system of unification which allowed the Cheyenne to survive intrusion before they migrated into the plains became the unifying system employed in their own intrusive push: The council persisted because competition persisted. The Council of Forty-Four remained operative because it provided the Cheyenne with an organizational edge that allowed them to expand into yet another contested environment.

CONCLUSIONS

One effect of EuroAmerican expansion in North America was the increased organized warfare among indigenous peoples. Societies close to the white frontier obtained superior weapons, became militarily strong, and carried war to outlying groups. The result of this intensified warfare ranged from the actual extinction of some native societies and refugeism to the formation of tribal and intertribal confederacies (Service 1967:161; 1971b:152). Concerning the impact of such disequilibrium, Lattimore (1962:475-476) writes:

There are important social consequences when weaker peoples retreat . . . before the advance of a stronger culture. In such retreats the retreating people lose, but their chiefs gain; the tribal structure is tightened up and the authority of the chiefs is enhanced.

The range of effects induced by intensified warfare, from refugeism to confederation, were encountered by the Cheyenne. They became refugees when forced from Minnesota-Wisconsin. During the period of association with the Arikara (who also consolidated in response to increasing warfare), the Cheyenne confederated to withstand the vicissitudes of continuing intrusion.

World history is replete with occurrences of political consolidation in response to intercultural competition. This approximates a general cause and effect relationship with power to explain the occurrence of particular political developments:

. . . the degree to which political consolidation proceeds typically depends on circumstances external to the tribe. The existence of a . . . predatory neighbor, or, conversely, the opportunity to prey on a nearby society, will give impetus to confederation (Service 1961:326).

Therefore, the development of the Council of Forty-Four is seen as a particular occurrence of a general response to specific conditions: The response is political consolidation; the condition is hostile competition among societies.

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