All-American Indian Days *and the* Miss Indian America Pageant

by Gregory Nickerson

The announcer's voice echoed over the loudspeaker, filtering through the dust of the arena and alerting the audience in the wooden grandstands that it was time to select the rodeo queen. For many Sheridan County residents, this was a highlight of the annual Sheridan WYO Rodeo. On this Saturday afternoon, July 26, 1951, a dozen would-be queens waited their turn to ride before the grandstands. Typically, a panel of judges selected the winner, but this year's rodeo organizers added a twist: the audience's cheering, measured by applause meters from KWYO radio station, would determine the contest's outcome.

On her cue, queen contestant Lucy Yellowmule from Wyola, Montana, charged into the arena and galloped her white horse back and forth as the crowd cheered and rodeo cowboys hooted, hollered, and whistled.[1] She rode all out, then expertly pulled the horse to a stop to wave before the audience. Few expected this dark-haired cowgirl to stand a chance against Sheridan County contestants, but after seeing her command of the horse, the audience gave a thundering ovation that plainly showed their favor.[2] Lucy Yellowmule, a member of the Crow Nation, became Sheridan, Wyoming's first ever Indian rodeo queen.[3]

Don Diers Collection, THE Wyoming Room, Sheridan County Fulmer Public Library, Sheridan, Wyoming

Crow tribal member Lucy Yellowmule, a sixteen-year-old barrel racer from Wyola, Montana, won over the crowd to become the first Native American Indian rodeo queen of the Sheridan WYO Rodeo in 1951. Above, U.S. Representative William Henry Harrison (R-WY), Lucy Yellowmule, Alta Driftwood, Mary Elizabeth Newton Harrison, Regina Spotted Horse, Joy Old Crow, Delores Little Coyote, and Howard Sinclair pose at the first All-American Indian Day held at the Sheridan WYO Rodeo in 1953.

Sheridan County Museum, Sheridan, Wyoming

The crowning of Lucy Yellowmule set in motion a series of events that transformed Sheridan. A public relations campaign with her at the center called attention to the damaging effects of anti-Indian prejudice. This education effort aimed at fostering better cross-cultural relations—combined with a healthy dose of boosterism—inspired the first All-American Indian Day and National Miss Indian America Pageant in 1953. The annual celebration in Sheridan, Wyoming, combined a beauty pageant with dance performances, a tipi camp, craft competitions, races, athletic games, and art shows. To explain the underlying purpose of these events, newspaper columnist and founder Howard Sinclair described them as "an interracial project in human relations."[4]

All-American Indian Days (AAID) became an important site of collaboration among tribal leaders, and the Miss Indian America Pageant (MIA) offered young Native women a platform for public engagement and leadership. Many were profoundly influenced by the opportunity to represent and advocate for Native people. At its peak in the 1950s, the celebration annually drew an estimated four thousand Indians from sixty tribes.[5] The show itself evolved during a critical period that saw a postwar cultural resurgence among Native groups, the federal government's turn toward Termination policy, and the rise of the Red Power movement.

While the history of the civil rights movement is today most vividly remembered in dramatic moments

All-American Indian Days drew thousands of participants from tribal nations across the United States. For three decades, the events stimulated friendship, goodwill, and cross-cultural appreciation between Indian participants and non-Indian spectators. This scene shows the Sunday morning interdenominational and interracial Christian service in 1955 led by William A. Petzoldt, longtime Baptist missionary to the Crows in Lodge Grass, Montana.

of confrontation and resistance, All-American Indian Days and the Miss Indian America Pageant demonstrated how Native people and small-town citizens worked together to pursue the ideal of equality in the mountain states of Wyoming and Montana.

Although the rodeo crowd had elected an Indian rodeo queen, Sheridan was a town in which many Indians did not feel welcome. Located in a region that had seen bloody fighting during the nineteenth-century Indian wars, the town took its name from General Philip Sheridan, who directed campaigns against the region's tribes throughout the 1870s. Some of the most famous episodes of these conflicts—the Battle of the Little Bighorn, the Fetterman Massacre, and the Rosebud Battle—unfolded in the hills and valleys below the Bighorn Mountains in the decade before Sheridan was established.

These conflicts had a direct effect on the location and composition of the nearby reservations, as the region's Native tribes saw their historical territories diminished over the second half of the nineteenth

Since the late 1890s, Cheyennes and Crows traveled to Sheridan for the annual Sheridan rodeo and stampede, where they competed in races and rough-stock events, reenacted the Battle of the Little Bighorn, and rode their fine horses in the parade. The event provided a brief opportunity for Indian and white cowboys to mingle and for white spectators to admire the athleticism, skill, and artistry of regional tribes.

Anita Nichols Collection, Sheridan County Fulmer Public Library, Sheridan, Wyoming

century and into the twentieth. To the north of Sheridan and across the Montana state line, the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation was established along the Tongue River in 1884. The Crow Indian Reservation, considerably reduced in size from its original 1851 boundaries, took its final shape in 1904 after several significant cessions. Federal allotment policy allowed non-Indians to take possession of thousands of acres of tribal lands formerly secured by treaty.[6]

From the beginning of white settlement in the 1880s, Sheridan grew into a commercial center with an economy centered on ranching, farming, railroading, and coal mining. Incorporated in 1884, the town soon had all the vices of prostitution, gambling, and saloons typical of most western communities. Beginning in the 1890s, ranches welcomed paying visitors seeking the area's spectacular scenery and its storied cowboy culture. By the 1920s, a robust dude ranch industry had emerged, and Sheridan served as a hub for some of the most famous outfits, including the Bones Brothers Ranch along the Tongue River and Eaton's Ranch in the foothills of the Bighorn Mountains. For so-called dudes, skillful displays of riding at summertime rodeos proved a source of fascination, and such events became premier attractions and economic boons to towns across the West.[7]

Sheridan County staged numerous rodeos, starting with a "Cowboys Reunion" in the town of Dayton in 1896. These events gradually became more organized, and the first Sheridan WYO Rodeo was held in 1931. The rodeo attracted Sheridan-area residents, dudes, Indians, Yellowstone Park tourists, and rodeo cowboys as spectators and participants—all there to enjoy horses, roping, western pageantry, and the excitement of competition. Local tribes paraded to display their horses and regalia, set up tipi camps, and competed in races and rough-stock events. Indian dancers held public performances sponsored by downtown merchants. At night, rodeo-goers visited the glowing Crow camp west of the fairgrounds or the Cheyenne encampment to the north.[8]

Downhill from the rodeo arena, Sheridan's Main Street stretched for blocks, flanked by wide sidewalks and two-story brick buildings. Shoppers gazed through awning-covered windows at displays of western wear, jewelry, and sporting goods. They could go to a movie theater, stop in at a soda fountain, or enjoy a drink at a watering hole such as the famous Mint Bar. Bob Totman's Frontier Shop sold Indian crafts. Main Street was the pride of Sheridan County and the largest business district between Billings, Montana, and Casper, Wyoming. Yet by the 1940s, Indians were excluded from some businesses by front window signs that read "No Indians or dogs allowed" and "No Indian trade wanted." The origin of such signs is unknown. They may have first appeared at bars banning Indians from entering to buy alcohol and then spread to restaurants, hotels, movie theaters, and other businesses.[9]

Marion Post Wolcott, photographer. FSA/OWI Collection, Library of Congress, 1941

Founded in 1882, Sheridan grew into a busy town supported by agriculture, railroading, mining, and the area's many guest ranches. For Native Americans, however, Main Street reflected the region's legacy of conquest. Until the All-American Indian Days (AAID) and Miss Indian America Pageant (MIA), visiting Indians often found themselves unwelcome except during the annual rodeo.

Although the Crow and Cheyenne reservations were dry, and federal law prohibited the sale of liquor to Indians until 1953, alcohol was available in Sheridan from bootleggers during Prohibition and later through back-alley deals behind bars. Some Indians drank heavily while in Sheridan, occasionally bedding down by the banks of Little Goose Creek or in a backyard garden to sleep the night away. At least one young boy raided his family's liquor cabinet and took the contraband down to the creek where he sold it to Indians. Such episodes shaped non-Indian perceptions of Native people, enduring in local memory some fifty to seventy years later.[10]

Crows who frequented Sheridan remembered the prejudiced treatment, the suspicious looks of shopkeepers, and the shame they endured walking down Main Street. Joe Medicine Crow, grandson of White Man Runs Him and Chief Medicine Crow, said that Sheridan had a reputation as "the worst Indian-hating town in the country." When he returned from World War II after fighting the Nazis, to secure, as he put it, "freedom and a brotherhood of man throughout the world," he was dismayed to find "right here in my own Crow Country—hatred, bigotry."[11]

One of the few restaurants where Indians could receive service with no hassle was Hot Tamale Louie's,

Fremont County Pioneer Museum, Lander, Wyoming

Signs like these greeted Shoshones and Arapahos visiting Main Street in Lander, Wyoming, in 1935. In the 1950s, such signs still appeared on storefronts in reservation border towns throughout the West. For returning Native American World War II veterans like Joe Medicine Crow, who once declared Sheridan to be the "worst Indian-hating town in the country," the blatant anti-Indian prejudice in Montana and Wyoming was particularly stinging.

Don Diers Collection, THE Wyoming Room, Sheridan County Fulmer Public Library, Sheridan, Wyoming

Sheridan newspaperman Howard Sinclair, standing, developed many long-lasting relationships with Native Americans, beginning with his adoption by a member of the Yanktonai Dakota Nation as a child. As an adult, Sinclair sought to improve race relations by fostering cross-cultural friendships and mutual respect. In this undated photograph, Sinclair works with Northern Cheyenne tribal members (left to right) Charles Sitting Man, Arthur Monteith, Charles Sitting Man Jr., and Arthur Blackstone to record an oral history interview with Sheridan resident Robert Helvey (far right).

a hamburger stand and lunch counter run by Zarif "Louie" Khan, a Muslim immigrant from Bara, Pakistan.[12] But such treatment was not the rule. Alma Hogan Snell, a fair-skinned young Crow woman from Crow Agency, Montana, recalled visiting a restaurant in Sheridan in the years after World War II. She ordered and paid for ten hot dogs for her friends. After noticing a sign banning Indians, she attempted to walk out, leaving the food behind, but the waitstaff insisted that she take it. Snell noted that employees typically blamed their managers for discriminatory policies. She had a similar experience at a restaurant in Billings, Montana.[13]

The post–World War II era stirred the beginnings of change. During these years, some members of the Sheridan Chamber of Commerce and other community leaders expressed concern about discriminatory practices on Main Street. Writing under the pen name "Neckyoke Jones," Francis Howard Sinclair resolved to do something about the situation by composing regular columns drawing on his knowledge of Indian history and his experiences living among Native people.[14]

Born in Glendive, Montana, in 1889, Sinclair earned a business degree equivalent at Harvard in 1912. He returned to the West to head up a ranching operation for a number of years and then left for New York to work in the publishing industry. In 1939, Sinclair moved to a ranch near Broadus, Montana, and, two years later, to Sheridan, where he worked as a newspaper columnist and public relations consultant while keeping some cattle on the side. Sinclair used his skills to communicate with wide audiences and shape public opinion on behalf of the American National Cattleman's Association, the Montana Stockgrowers, and other organizations. His column in livestock trade journals and the *Sheridan Press* offered western-style commentary under the pen name Neckyoke Jones.[15]

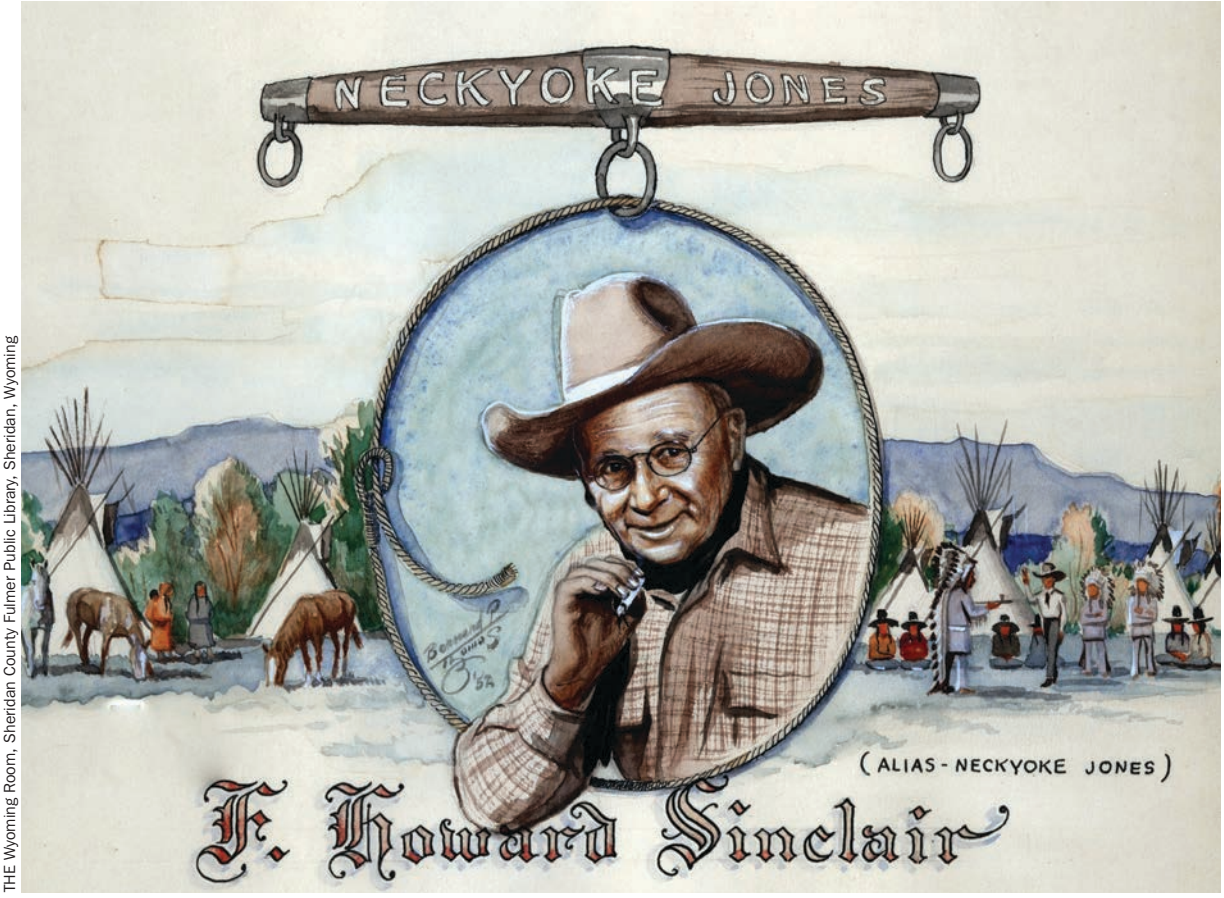
Growing up, Sinclair had become acquainted with the Assiniboine and Sioux of the Fort Peck Reservation in northern Montana, including a Yanktonai chief named Grizzly Bear Standing, who adopted Sinclair in 1906 after his own grandson died from being kicked by a horse. Sinclair spent several summers with the Yanktonai people who came south to the Glendive area. Immersed in a foreign culture, Sinclair learned both sign language and Dakota and encountered new modes of living. The experience profoundly shaped his view of race relations and American ideals.[16]

During his years in Sheridan, Sinclair met Native veterans, who, like Joe Medicine Crow, had received poor treatment in white-owned businesses. He was particularly bothered when Indians who had served in the armed forces were refused service. Such injustices offended Sinclair's deep commitment to egalitarianism. He considered the racist signs affronts to the values of freedom, justice, and equality. After encountering a hungry veteran who had been denied service at a Billings restaurant, he observed that it "seemed paradoxical that this country was advocating the equality of all men, regardless of race or creed, in every part of the earth, while here at home discrimination against minority groups was prevalent."[17]

On July 3, 1951, Sinclair wrote a Neckyoke Jones column using the persona of "Greasewood," Neckyoke's cowboy pal, in which he compared the treatment of Native veterans to racial segregation of the South. Sinclair noted that dancers at the Crow Sun Dance were praying for an end to the Korean War because "there is quite a bunch of Crow warriors over there dodgin' Commie lead." Amid the sacrifices of sending their sons to war, people on the reservation were "pretty riled up" because a Sheridan "eatin place" denied service to a young Crow woman because she was "Injun."[18]

Refusing service to Indians could be bad for business, Sinclair suggested: "The Crows say they buy in Sheridan—an' they come into the rodeo—but if Jim Crow is goin' to be the rule here—they aint no law which will make 'em come here." Sinclair concluded by poking a hole in the idea that past behavior of a few Indians justified prejudice toward all. "An' as far as behavin' is concerned, I've seen some whites that don't bear too much associatin' with."[19]

The column was still fresh when Lucy Yellowmule won the rodeo queen contest. Sinclair seized on Yellowmule's popular election as an opportunity to promote Sheridan while transforming the community. In subsequent columns, he became less careful



THE Wyoming Room, Sheridan County Fulmer Public Library, Sheridan, Wyoming

Writing in the voice of his colorful, plain-speaking "Neckyoke Jones" persona, Sinclair used his columns as a platform to address racism and discriminatory business practices, reminding *Sheridan Press* and livestock journal readers that Indian servicemen had fought and died for the United States. Sheridan artist Bernard Thomas painted this image of Sinclair.

about his claims, stating incorrectly that Yellowmule was the first American Indian to be elected rodeo queen anywhere. Other rodeos had crowned Native queens before Sheridan: the Pendleton Roundup in Oregon had selected an Indian woman queen in 1926 and then again in 1948. Arlene Wesley (Yakama), who would become the first Miss Indian America, was queen of the 1951 Pendleton Roundup. Sinclair noted, however, that these Native rodeo queens had been chosen by judges.[20]

Yellowmule's election proved to be a watershed event in Sheridan and caught many locals by surprise. Historian Margot Liberty later observed that the town was in no way prepared to become a focal point for Indian Country and a bastion of racial idealism. Although Sinclair declared in a Neckyoke column that Yellowmule's selection was proof "there ain't no race prejudice in Sheridan" and that "the town will git some good advertisin'" as a result, he was well aware that there remained considerable room for improvement.[21]

Sinclair thought non-Indian people would develop empathy if Indians could tell them firsthand about their culture and their experiences with prejudice. He crafted a shrewd and successful campaign that relied on Lucy Yellowmule and her court, which originally included four other Crow women, plus the later addition of one Northern Cheyenne. With Sinclair's assistance, Yellowmule attended numerous meetings of Sheridan women's clubs, civic groups, veterans' organizations, and gatherings hosted in residents' homes.

According to Sinclair:

> The campaign was conducted with restraint—and no attempt was made to cram the race question down any person's throat. . . . An appeal for understanding and goodwill was answered, and the public was ready to acknowledge that Indians are people—and not apart from other Americans. . . . It was emphasized that Indians have no more

AAUW Collection, Sheridan County Fulmer Public Library, Sheridan, Wyoming

In 1953, Secretary of the Interior Douglas McKay (center) presented the Silver Anvil Award to Lucy Yellowmule, second from right, recognizing the efforts by Yellowmule and Sinclair to reduce racial prejudice. Participating in the award trip were Crow tribal members Alta Driftwood (far left), Regina Spotted Horse (center right), and Joy Old Crow (far right) joined by Northern Cheyenne tribal member Delores Old Coyote (second from left). Evangeline Whiteman was an additional Crow attendant during the public relations campaign but did not travel to Washington, D.C.

Don Diers Collection, THE Wyoming Room, Sheridan County Fulmer Public Library, Sheridan, Wyoming

Howard Sinclair worked with Sheridan photographer Don Diers to create a series of portraits he hoped would lead people to view American Indians in a new and positive light. Inspired by this 1953 photograph of a radiant Yellowmule, Sinclair conceived of an all-Indian beauty pageant as a means for improving Indian-white relations and celebrating Native cultures.

> virtues nor no more vices than their white contemporaries. As soon as the public became aroused, considerable publicity in the press and on the air developed—and gradually the signs in the windows came down, and Indians who were well behaved became as acceptable in hotels, motels, and motion pictures theaters as any other citizen.

Sinclair's friend Hila Gilbert observed, "Soon restaurant owners realized that they had been keeping some nice people out of their eating places. The unwelcome signs were taken down."[22]

By autumn 1952, Sinclair began working to ensure this transformation attracted national recognition. In 1953, the Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, awarded the community a George Washington Medal. The award recognized Sheridan for "outstanding achievement in preserving the American way of life by promoting better understanding between American Indian and White Races, and the elimination of racial discrimination."[23]

Sinclair and Yellowmule's campaign also won the Silver Anvil National Award from the American Public Relations Association. Sinclair and his wife Ida raised money for Yellowmule and her attendants to travel to Washington, D.C., to receive the award from Secretary of the Interior Douglas McKay at the Mayflower Hotel on March 3, 1953. Lucy gave a statement for the *Voice of America* radio program, and on the way back, they made a stop in Chicago to appear before a Westerners International Corral. This chaperoned goodwill tour set the precedent for future travels by winners of the Miss Indian America Pageant. During the time they served, Miss Indian Americas participated in the inaugural parades of John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, and Ronald Reagan. They also met celebrities and national leaders, including Johnny Cash and Robert Kennedy.[24]

Hoping to maintain the progress achieved by Lucy Yellowmule's campaign, Sinclair worked with Sheridan leaders to establish the first All-American Indian Day and National Miss Indian America Pageant, to be held during the Sheridan WYO Rodeo in 1953. The idea for a pageant had occurred to Sinclair when he and photographer Don Diers traveled to Wyola, Montana, on a cloudy day to photograph Yellowmule for the publicity campaign.

Sinclair later recalled the scene that played out on the banks of the Little Bighorn River:

> Lucy greeted us wearing the traditional rodeo outfit, fringed leather jacket, cowboy hat,

Grunkemeyer Studios, photographer. All-American Indian Days, THE Wyoming Room, Sheridan County Fulmer Public Library, Sheridan, Wyoming

In 1953, more than three thousand American Indians attended the inaugural All-American Indian Day and Miss Indian America Pageant, where Arlene Wesley of the Yakama Nation was crowned the first Miss Indian America. The following year, AAID became a multiday event.

> and all the rest. Her poses were natural and charming and we did all the usual sitting on the corral type poses, but there was something wrong besides the weather. Finally, in desperation I yelled at her "Lucy, go put on your Indian outfit and get your horse!" She came back riding a white horse all decked out with beautiful, beaded trappings, and an Indian saddle. She wore an heirloom Crow, beaded buckskin dress. Just as she appeared, the clouds lifted, the sun came out, and every bead sparkled like a diamond.[25]

This was the picture of youthful Crow womanhood that Sinclair was looking for—one rarely encountered by the non-Indian public and one that he thought could break down barriers. "How could anyone ever feel prejudice toward a girl so beautiful, gracious, and accomplished?" Sinclair wrote. "Then I realized, these Indian girls are never seen, most people don't know they exist. On the way home, Don Diers and I began to dream and wonder if we really could turn this experience into something that would help Indian-white relations."[26]

Indian women in regalia became a central feature of the Miss Indian America Pageant, generating popular interest and widespread participation in the event. To be sure, the approach tapped into a common stereotype dating back to Pocahontas and the earliest encounters between Native people and Europeans: the trope of the mythical "Indian princess" in which indigenous women embodied allure, beauty, and femininity. Nonetheless, this image proved effective as a means of reshaping popular opinion, as the non-Indian public perceived such women as innocent of the kind of behavior associated with more negative stereotypes of Indian men.

Sponsored by the Ford dealers of the Rocky Mountain Empire, All-American Indian Day with the Miss Indian America Pageant as its headliner was held in 1953 in conjunction with the Sheridan WYO Rodeo. Both events separated from the rodeo celebration the following year. The inaugural summer, an estimated 3,100 Indians descended upon Sheridan to participate in the pageant and show, making it one of the largest gatherings of tribes on the northern plains since the nineteenth century. Arlene Wesley of the Yakama Nation was crowned the first Miss Indian America.[27]

It wasn't lost on Sheridan's business community that AAID attracted a significant number of summer tourists to town, presumably stimulating commerce

Courtesy of David Eppen

The 1955 third annual All-American Indian Days parade transformed Sheridan's Main Street into a throng of spectators enjoying the floats, admiring Indian horses and regalia, and celebrating tribal veterans and the reigning Miss Indian America. Above, AAID founder Howard Sinclair rides in a convertible with honored Sioux guests.

and the economy. Businesses welcomed this development, particularly in 1953, the year the underground coal mine in nearby Monarch closed. The boosterism driving the Sheridan WYO Rodeo easily aligned with a celebration of Indian cultures.[28] Sinclair, a thirty-second-degree Mason, enlisted the members of the Kalif Shrine Temple, many of whom had been on the Sheridan WYO Rodeo Board and participated in the organization of the 1951 rodeo. Sinclair hoped AAID ticket sales might generate enough revenue to run the event and to provide funds for Shriner children's hospitals nationally.[29]

Most importantly, AAID required the support of local tribes. On the Crow Reservation, a new generation, including Joe Medicine Crow and Don and Agnes Deernose, were reviving dancing traditions, and they embraced the chance to promote Indian culture to non-Indian audiences. At Sinclair's request, Don

Emmie Mygatt Collection, Sheridan County Museum, Sheridan, Wyoming

All-American Indian Days relied on support from local organizations and awarded certificates of recognition to individuals who contributed to the event's success. This certificate was given to Emmie Mygatt, who helped author AAID event booklets and served as an MIA pageant judge.

Despite pressures to assimilate, Indians maintained traditional dances, practices, and ceremonies and used events like local fairs and rodeos to showcase their cultures. At AAID, tribal elders served as judges for athletic and dance competitions and often demonstrated dances, songs, and languages specific to their own tribal nations. Controversially, the judging panel for the Miss Indian America contest was composed entirely of non-Indians until 1971.

Don C. Diers, photographer. Elizabeth Lochrie Collection, MHS Photograph Archives, Helena, Pac 79-37 (top), Pac 79-37 (below)

Events at All-American Indian Days included a variety of athletic contests, dance competitions, tipi races, juried arts and crafts shows, and a tipi village, ensuring plenty of opportunities for Native people of all ages and talents to participate.

Deernose encouraged Indian participation in AAID by contacting tribal leaders around the country.[30]

Initial celebrations of AAID revitalized traditional dances and ceremonies in the format of a narrated show. Oftentimes, these productions focused on a nostalgic reenactment of the pre-reservation era, inviting the audience to picture a time when bison still roamed the plains. Some of the connections to the past were quite direct. In 1953, a Cheyenne veteran of the Battle of the Little Bighorn named Yellow Robe attended and raised an American flag. World War II veterans also played key roles. In 1954, Joe Medicine Crow and the Pawnee artist and humorist Brummett Echohawk from Oklahoma, who both served with distinction in the European theater, performed as emcees.[31]

Tribes staged Indian kickball games, hoop dances, and tipi-pitching contests. Judges presented awards for the best camp, and dozens of Indian artists displayed their works. On Sunday, a guest Indian pastor hosted an interdenominational Christian church service, which attracted attendees from Sheridan's various congregations. On more than one occasion, a young Native woman interpreted the Lord's Prayer in Indian sign language.

All of these activities and performances were sanctioned by a panel of Sheridan organizers, in loose

Rochford Studio, photographer. Elizabeth Lochrie Collection MC 291, MHS Research Archives, Helena

Howard Sinclair believed that American Indian people needed to be meaningfully involved in AAID and MIA for the events to succeed. From early on, AAID leadership included a General Indian Committee. Standing, left to right: Black Beaver, Louis Tellier, Tom Harwood (vice chair), Peter Red Horn, Howard Sinclair (secretary), Ella McCarty, Martin Cross, Joe Medicine Crow, Tom Yellowtail, Jesse Old Man, Brummett Echohawk. Seated, left to right: Amy McCurdy, Mrs. Tom Harwood, Sandra May Gover (Miss Indian America IV), Matilda Grant, William Shakespeare (vice chair), Arthur Montiac, George Harris (general chairman).

collaboration with a national Indian board composed of members from different tribes, many of whom were progressive leaders in their own communities. Despite the broad representation, it was often Crow leaders like Deernose who recruited participants by visiting reservations and extending personal invitations. This dynamic, and the prominence of Crow emcees, sometimes caused individuals from other tribes to characterize AAID as "a Crow show."[32]

The events were designed both to foster the continuation of cultural practices and to entertain and educate the non-Indian audience. Many historical pageants, such as the Hiawatha Pageant in Pipestone, Minnesota, repackaged aspects of Indian history and myth as a way to bolster the non-Indian's sense of place and community. In contrast, All-American Indian Days did not revise Sheridan's history by spinning legends. While the event sometimes romanticized the pre-reservation era, it maintained its focus on the Indian-narrated show and preserving the vitality of Native cultures. The appeal relied on presenting Indian culture while highlighting the accomplishments of the pageant candidates, veterans, clergy, and the annually selected "Outstanding Indian of the Year."[33]

Attendance records from 1954 showed this format was more popular for out-of-town visitors by a factor of ten to one. AAID attracted participation from historians, reenactors, and amateur anthropologists. Authors Stanley Vestal and Mari Sandoz attended, with Vestal serving as a judge for the Miss Indian America Pageant. Hobbyists Gladys and Reginald Laubin, authors of *The Tipi Book,* won the prize for "best camp." Some Indians who saw the lodge said it closely resembled the lodges of the pre-reservation era. Crow families like the Real Birds and the Medicine Crow spent time in the Laubin's lodge, which Laubin noted was trenched so it stayed dry during a torrential downpour.[34]

Despite the popularity of the events, the organizers' attempt in 1955 to raise $7,000 in local ticket sales at $1.50 each fell short of the goal. From the beginning,

Rochford Studios, photographer. Elizabeth Lochrie Collection, MHS Photograph Archives, Helena, Pac 79-37. Quote: MIA pageant 1954 competition rules, ibid.

Delores Racine (Blackfeet), center, was crowned Miss Indian America in 1959. MIA contestants had to be "at least one-half Indian blood," and contest rules informed judges that "facial contour, straight black hair, braids, complexion, stature [and] carriage should be definitely Indian." Another criterion was authentic Indian dress." Racine wore an elaborately beaded dress passed down to her from her great-grandmother Julia Wades-In-The-Water, who had posed in the same dress when artist Winold Reiss painted her portrait for a Great Northern Railroad calendar.

the pageant was chronically short of cash and sometimes at cross-purposes, as the Kalif Shriners hoped to fund the event and its medical charity. The Kalif Shrine Management Corporation withdrew after the 1956 event, transferring the project to a new entity called All-American Indian Days Incorporated. The pageant recessed in 1958 due to its large debts and set about reorganizing. Sinclair resigned from the board with bitterness. He later said that the AAID board owed him money.[35]

The new board postponed the pageant until 1959 while beginning the work of securing sponsorship and paying down the debt. A group of AAID volunteers called the "Sheridan Tribe," along with the Sheridan Woman's Club and the American Association of University Women, aided this effort for years, raising thousands of dollars and selling souvenir booklets. For the 1959 pageant, the organization hired Floyd Tetrault, a rancher and former manager of the Wyoming State Fair, to take over the leadership. He built a working relationship and deep friendship with Donald Deernose, and the two men drove in a station wagon to reservations around the country promoting the event. At the same time, Tetrault sought out new sources of funding, exploring arrangements with wealthy families in Cody, Wyoming, and companies like Disney, which went on to pay for Miss Indian America to appear at Disneyland. The North American Indian Foundation became an umbrella organization and money-raising arm, but ultimately, AAID attempts to enlist sponsors failed to secure long-term financial stability for the pageant.[36]

At the news of the Disney sponsorship, Sinclair seethed at what he saw as a corruption of the Miss Indian America Pageant's original purpose. "I think they have abandoned all of the high objectives," Sinclair told an interviewer in 1960. "They send a girl out to Disneyland and all she is, is a ballyhoo for a funny Indian show out there. . . . The objectives are all lost. The high plane on which it was conceived was lost entirely."[37]

Such questions about representations and treatment of Indians greatly influenced AAID. The event emerged at the same time that political developments

threatened to transform Indian Country. During the 1950s, conservative politicians such as Sheridan's own United States representative William Henry Harrison (R, 1951–1955) advocated ending the trust relationship between tribes and the federal government. Termination policy, proponents said, would facilitate individual and tribal economic self-sufficiency and ease Indians' transition into non-Indian society. Critics argued it threatened to destroy the last bastions of Indian sovereignty, upend tribal economies, and eliminate reservation land bases. Vine Deloria Jr. later characterized Harrison's introduction of Termination legislation in the Eighty-Third Congress as "the opening shot of the great 20th Century Indian war."[38]

In particular, the American Indian Movement (AIM) used radical and militant methods to attract attention to the plight of Indian peoples. Members staged armed standoffs and protests at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, and in Washington, D.C., actions that were anathema to AAID promoters, who preferred their own model of genial diplomacy. The question of whether Indian interests were better pursued through cooperation or confrontation was a long-standing source of controversy in many Native communities, but it took on added volatility during the 1960s and 1970s, with activists and scholars lining up on both sides.[39]

While AAID did not support the more confrontational advocacy efforts of the civil rights era and the Red Power movement, the executive committee acknowledged the political struggles of Native Americans when they chose an outspoken Indian rights champion and Idaho's first Indian legislator, veteran Joe Garry (Coeur d'Alene), as the "Outstanding Indian of the Year" in 1961. Selected Miss Indian America in 1960, Vivian Arviso (Navajo) became one of the most politically active women to hold the title. During her reign, Arviso traveled throughout the country meeting with tribal leaders and community members. In 1961, she attended the annual conferences of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) and the Native American Indian Youth Council, two organizations working to change federal Indian policies and advocating for tribal self-determination. At the American Indian Chicago Conference that year, Arviso joined more than seven hundred Indian advocates in developing the seminal "Declaration of Indian Purpose" outlining steps necessary to achieve tribal self-determination and encouraging the United States to honor treaty obligations, to end Termination, and to pay greater attention to issues like poverty, unemployment, and civil rights. The declaration was formally presented to President John F. Kennedy, whose inauguration Arviso attended, and it became the foundation

Miss Indian America booklet collection, THE Wyoming Room, Sheridan County Fulmer Public Library, Sheridan, Wyoming

Miss Indian America 1956, Sandra May Gover, and Miss America 1957, Marian Ann McKnight, make a public appearance in Atlantic City, New Jersey. The Miss America Pageant enjoyed widespread popularity during the 1950s and served as a model for the Miss Indian America competition. As a guest of honor, Gover was expected to appear before the press and on television, attend social functions, and address the convention attendees.

Dick Lenz, photographer. Sheridan County Museum, Sheridan, Wyoming.

Miss Indian America Vivian Arviso (Navajo) rides in the 1961 AAID parade. Throughout the 1960s, All-American Indian Days and the Miss Indian America Pageant attracted prominent Native leaders and activists from across Indian Country, including Sioux Episcopalian deacon Vine Deloria Sr. and his sons Vine Deloria Jr. and Sam Deloria, both of whom would become influential scholars and policy advocates in their own right. When he saw Vivian Arviso in the parade, Sam Deloria later recalled thinking, "That's the one I have in mind." The pair married thirty-five years later, and today continue their work to improve the lives and opportunities of Indian people.

for self-determination legislation passed during the Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon administrations.[40]

The potential influence of the Red Power movement on Miss Indian America was a source of concern to All-American Indian Days organizers. Reverend Ray Clark and shoe store owner Dorothy Enzi, both AAID board members, recalled rumors that AIM leader Russell Means planned to disrupt AAID or use it to build support for his cause. "We informed the local police and the leaders of the Indian board as to what we had heard about Means' plans," Clark recalled. "They [AAID's Indian leaders] didn't want him to take it over either. He was going about it radically, and we were doing it in a peaceful way." In the end, Means never appeared in Sheridan, or if he did, he did not make his presence known. Nonetheless, Dorothy Enzi remembered several instances when AIM members encouraged the reigning Miss Indian America to adopt confrontational politics. Enzi was proud of how these women handled such situations, and she appreciated their commitment to work alongside non-Indians to improve race relations.[41]

As the pageant matured in the late 1960s, the collaborative process of setting up the event, selecting pageant winners, and orchestrating their schedules, travel, and living arrangements produced moments of tension between the involved parties. One recurrent conflict was the mandatory yearlong residency in Sheridan. While some women enjoyed meaningful and warm relationships with their host families that led to lifelong ties, others found themselves being

Miss Indian America booklet collection, THE Wyoming Room, Sheridan County Fulmer Public Library, Sheridan, Wyoming

Several MIA winners attended presidential inaugurations during their yearlong goodwill tour. Here, 1969 Miss Indian America Margery Haury (Cheyenne-Arapaho-Navajo-Sioux) meets President Richard Nixon and Senator Cliff Hansen (R-WY), the former governor of Wyoming, in 1970. The previous year's MIA winner, Thomasine Hill (Crow-Pawnee), attended Nixon's inaugural parade accompanied by chaperone Susie Walking Bear Yellowtail, a nurse and cultural ambassador from the Crow Tribe. Nixon, continuing the Johnson-era approach to federal Indian affairs, formally ended Termination policy.

The Monitor, Aug.-Sept. 1960, Elizabeth Lochrie Collection, MC 291, MHS Research Archives, Helena

Miss Indian America VI, Delores Racine of Montana's Blackfeet Nation, modeled the new "Princess phone" on the cover of a Mountain States Telephone and Telegraph Company publication in 1960. While discouraged from engaging in commercial enterprises during their reign, winners were urged to embrace opportunities to promote the pageant and their cultures. Traveling to Montana fairs and cities to market the phone, Racine met with radio and press to encourage positive Indian-white relations and often demonstrated Blackfeet prayers in sign language. The arrangement may have covered some of her travel expenses at a time when AAID was struggling financially.

asked to clean the house or nanny the children. On several occasions, the women changed host families partway through the year. Some objected to the demanding schedule of the travel program and to the rigid guidelines pertaining to their dress and public presentation. When they felt homesick for Native communities, the women of Miss Indian America sometimes traveled to the Crow Reservation to spend time with Crow elders like Susie and Tom Yellowtail and Don and Agnes Deernose, who also served as chaperones to the pageant winners.[42]

During a particularly pivotal period of time that saw the end of Termination policy and the climax of the Red Power protests, the Miss Indian America Pageant crowned one of the most vocal women to hold the title, Virginia Stroud (Cherokee-Muskogee Creek). Stroud, who was Miss Indian America XVII from 1970 to 1971, openly criticized the event's organizers, saying, "They don't want an outspoken, educated Indian girl with goals as Miss Indian America. They want me to play the stereotype Indian." The *Washington Daily Times* quoted her as saying, "I became, in effect, Sheridan's Miss Indian America, and that certainly isn't the way to represent the country's 600,000 Indians."[43]

Grunkemeyer Studios, photographer.
All-American Indian Days/Miss Indian America Collection, THE Wyoming Room, Sheridan County Fulmer Public Library, Sheridan, Wyoming

Miss Indian America XVII, Virginia Stroud from Tahlequah, Oklahoma, posed in contemporary clothes with a copper crown and a traditional Cherokee feather cape for her 1971 portrait. Stroud refused to wear a Plains-style beaded buckskin dress, opting instead for trade cloth dresses and this cape, created from more than one thousand feathers sewn to a net backing. Stroud asserted that every Miss Indian America should be allowed to appear in contemporary clothing because regalia was not worn as daily dress. Stroud went on to become an accomplished painter in the ledger art style—once considered a solely male art form—and has served on the Indian Arts and Crafts Association board of directors.

In particular, Stroud protested that the dress code had not evolved with the times and reinforced stereotypical assumptions among non-Indians. "The contract states that Miss Indian Americas must wear tribal dress," Stroud wrote.

> In spite of the fact that modern Indians do not wear these tribal clothes except for ceremonials, the contract has not been changed in 17 years. Indians, themselves, have changed a great deal in attitudes toward dress since those early years. The young Indian who is struggling to take his place in modern America does not set himself apart by costume.[44]

Stroud's statements set off a major debate in Sheridan. AAID board members brought her to a radio station for a surprise live broadcast that became heated. Numerous letters to the editor defended the good intentions of the Miss Indian America volunteers and

Rochford Studios, photographer. Elizabeth Lochrie Collection, PAc 79-37

The women pictured here wear their party dresses and modern hairstyles to a dinner for Miss Indian America contestants and judges at Sheridan's Shrine Mosque. The reigning Miss Indian America would be expected to wear tribal regalia throughout the coming year while serving in her official capacity as a goodwill ambassador.

emphasized the amount of money Sheridan had invested. In the end, Stroud delivered a list of suggested changes to the AAID board, calling for "more active Indian participation in making plans for MIA and for the pageant" and "more working directly with Indian people."[45]

Significantly, Stroud's criticisms came at a time when beauty pageants faced increasing scrutiny from the women's movement. Protestors at the 1968 Miss America contest in Atlantic City, New Jersey, railed against the pageant's presentation of "woman as spectacle, woman as object, woman as consumer, woman as artificial image."[46]

Calls for reform came from previous titleholders, including Vivian Arviso, who had worked at Disneyland's Indian Village during her reign as Miss Indian America in 1961. In a 1970 letter to the *Sheridan Press,* Arviso suggested that AAID was "failing to meet the approval of Indian people." She felt that the program was designed for a white audience, that the camp was disorganized, and that young Indian women were not treated well. Arviso denounced the "powerlessness of the so-called Indian executive board," arguing that there was not enough Indian participation in the organization of the event.[47]

Perhaps most critically, Arviso objected to the selection of Miss Indian America by an all "white" board of judges. Over the years, the judges included people like Elizabeth Lochrie and historians Herbert Brayer and Emmie Mygatt (all three of whom collected extensive archives of the pageant); western writer Walter Campbell (pen name Stanley Vestal); and Father Peter Powell, a longtime minister at the Chicago American Indian Center, chronicler of Cheyenne religious practices, and adopted member of the Crow and Cheyenne. "The selected Miss Indian America deserves the highest compliment, that of being selected by a respectable board of judges which includes those of her own race," Arviso wrote. She suggested that the pageant might be better off if it moved to a reservation or an urban Indian center, where Indians would be more likely to view it as a crucial event to attend while riding the powwow circuit. "Finally," Arviso wrote, "Indians must be allowed to have a firm voice in an event which promotes their historical heritage and their position in society today."[48]

An editorial in the *Sheridan Press* characterized the criticism as leading to "a good honest discussion." The people of Sheridan seemed willing to address the

Rochford Studios, photographer. Elizabeth Lochrie Collection, MHS Photo Archives, PAc79–37

Mary Louise Defender (Yanktonai) was born and raised on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation in a traditional Dakota family. As Miss Indian America, she attended the 1955 Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City, where she spoke with confidence on national television before the convention's twenty thousand attendees. Defender went on to teach Dakota language and culture at Sitting Bull College in Fort Yates, North Dakota. A renowned storyteller, she is the author of two Dakota language spoken-word albums, *The Elders Speak* and *My Relatives Say*. The latter won a Native American Music Award in 2002. She is also the recipient of the National Endowment for the Arts' National Heritage Fellowship and was named a National Women's History Project honoree. In 2015, at the age of eighty-five, Mary Louise Defender Wilson became the first storyteller (and first North Dakotan) to be honored as a United States Artists Fellow.

Rochford Studios, photographer. Elizabeth Lochrie Collection, MHS Photo Archives, PAc79–37

Rita McLaughlin was a descendant of Hunkpapa Chief Mad Bear and Major James McLaughlin, who ordered the arrest of Sitting Bull, one of the Lakota leaders who fought at the Battle of Little Bighorn in 1876. Selected as Miss Indian America in 1955, Rita McLaughlin later worked as a U.S. Public Health Service dental technician on the Crow Reservation, then as an emergency foster parent and environmental specialist for the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe.

Rochford Studios, photographer. Elizabeth Lochrie Collection, MHS Photo Archives, PAc 79-37

Voted Miss Indian America in 1956, **Sandra May Gover** (Skidi-Pawnee) worked as the AAID executive committee secretary after her yearlong residency. Fluent in Indian sign language and well-educated, Gover was considered by the AAID executive committee an ideal spokesperson to promote the work of Shriner hospitals and other charitable programs. Of Crow and Skidi-Pawnee descent, she later found employment at Fort Washakie, Wyoming, and married a policeman from the Wind River Indian Reservation. In 1956, Gover, wearing an elk-tooth dress, interpreted Psalm 23 in sign language at the annual interracial church service, a well-attended tradition on the last day of All-American Indian Days.

Rochford Studios, photographer.
Elizabeth Lochrie Collection, MHS Photo Archives, PAc 79-37

Mayella Morrison (Haida) of Portland, Oregon, was one of the very few contestants from the Pacific Northwest when she earned first runner-up at MIA in 1959. Her silver accessories reflect the importance of the killer whale in Haida culture. Haida art and wood carvings frequently contain images of the fishes, birds, and sea mammals that figure prominently in the tribe's oral traditions.

Rochford Studios, photographer.
Elizabeth Lochrie Collection, MHS Photo Archives, Pac 79-37

Delores Racine (Blackfeet) grew up on a ranch on the Blackfeet Reservation, where she was raised by her grandparents. She attended Flandreau Indian Boarding School in South Dakota and Chemawa Indian High School in Salem, Oregon. Like many of the MIA contestants, she competed multiple times in the pageant, earning third place in 1956, honorable mention in 1957, and first place in 1959. Observers remembered Racine standing out among the contestants for her joyful, outgoing personality—evident in her bright smile—that made it easy for her to make friends. While serving as Miss Indian America, she was invited by First Lady Mamie Eisenhower as a guest of honor to the White House Conference on Children and Youth addressing issues of poverty, childhood hunger, and education.

Grunkemeyer Studies, Miss Indian America Collection, THE Wyoming Room, Sheridan County Fulmer Public Library, Sheridan, Wyoming; Quote: "Years Later, Miss Indian America Pageant Winners Reunite," NPR *All Things Considered* radio program, July 12, 2013

Although the pageant was billed as a "Plains Indian" event, MIA contestants hailed from nearly every part of the country. The MIA winner in 1966, **Wahleah Lujan** (Taos Pueblo), pictured here on a collectible MIA postcard, dressed in the style specific to her tribal nation. Rather than wearing the requisite headband with a single feather, she fashioned her hair in a style that blended a 1960s aesthetic with a traditional Puebloan one. Lujan collaborated with AAID promoters Joe Medicine Crow and Don Jones to record a Pacific Records album titled "The Story of Miss Indian America" featuring her on the cover. She later said that participating in the competition strengthened her confidence as an advocate for her tribal nation, culture, and lands. At the 2013 reunion of pageant winners, she reflected on the MIA experience, saying, "My greatest concern was to show the world we have a wonderful culture. . . . Finally, we were being given the spotlight, and it was an extremely challenging—and at the same time rewarding—time for me."

The Miss Indian America Fiftieth Anniversary Reunion

In 2013, sixty years after the first All-American Indian Day, twelve Miss Indian America titleholders returned to Sheridan for a reunion planned to coincide with the Sheridan WYO Rodeo. At the reunion, the women relived memories, visited with their host families, and rekindled what they described as a "sisterhood." They received a standing ovation at the rodeo, danced in an afternoon powwow hosted by members of the Crow Tribe, and attended a luncheon in their honor. As grand marshals of the WYO Rodeo, they paraded down Sheridan's Main Street past thousands of onlookers. Sarah Ann Johnson Luther (Navajo), Miss Indian America 1967, was touched by the reception:

> So many of them just came up and just were so happy that we were back. . . . [T]hat meant something that only can be heartfelt. I was just very emotional going down the street with people yelling, "Welcome home!" I had several women who came up to me following the parade and said, "We miss this. We miss the girls. We miss the celebration. Thank you for making it happen once more."[49]

Yet the Miss Indian America winners observed behavior that gave them pause. Reacting to the "Cowboys and Indians" parade theme, chosen as a nod to the old WYO Rodeo slogan of "Cowboy Days and Indian Nights," some non-Indian participants donned war paint, feathers, and loincloths and brandished bows. On one float, a man in a cowboy costume with a toy rifle pantomimed shooting an "Indian."[50] Others reacted to the scantily clothed women in "Indian costume." Melanie Tallmadge-Sainz (Winnebago-Minnesota Sioux), Miss Indian America 1980, recalled that such sights made her uncomfortable:

> Are they dressing up like Indians because they love us? Are they doing it because they are making fun of us? That's the question that I have, and it's a conversation that I'd like to have with a person.[51]

One highlight of the reunion was Dr. Joseph Medicine Crow, who, at the age of ninety-nine, stood before a banquet room of rapt listeners to tell his firsthand story of Lucy Yellowmule's selection as rodeo queen in 1951 and the subsequent founding of AAID. A World War II veteran himself, he had experienced Sheridan's transformation from a town distrustful of Indians to a place that hosted All-American Indian Days and asked him to serve as emcee and organizer of the event for many years.[52]

Sarah Ann Johnson Luther saw the reunion as a continuation of Sinclair and Yellowmule's 1950s efforts at reconciliation and perhaps a sign that something new was taking shape:

> There is healing when there is communication, when there are relationships established, which I think we did in the last few days. . . . And I think we have put the right foot forward. I hope that in the future we can continue to move on because there is so much that we can do as a people. . . . So, I think this is like the beginning, this is like the seed, and I am so appreciative to be a part of this. . . . It doesn't matter what race you are, there is a lot of work to be done. Through this, I think we can make a difference in our everyday lives for the world.[53]

Courtesy the author

In 2013 and 2015, Miss Indian America winners reunited at the Sheridan WYO Rodeo to celebrate their shared history and experiences. Pictured here in 2015, front row, left to right: Arlene Wesley (Yakama), MIA 1953; Annita Jo Wolf Black representing her mother, Brenda Bearchum (Northern Cheyenne-Yakama), MIA 1961; Williamette Youpee (Sisseton-Yankton Sioux), MIA 1963; Sharon Ahtone Harjo (Kiowa), MIA 1965; Sarah Johnson Luther (Navajo), MIA 1967; Deana Harragarra Waters (Otoe-Kiowa), MIA 1975. Back row, left to right: 1954 Miss Indian America runner-up Annie Grace Strange Owl (Northern Cheyenne); Jewel Medicine Horse Williams (Crow), secretary to Howard Sinclair.

Miss Indian America Title Holders *The pageant recessed in 1958, 1974, 1979, and 1983.*

1989	Wanda Johnson	Navajo
1988	Bobette Kay Wildcat	Shoshone
1987	Linda Kay Lupe	White Mountain Apache
1986	Audra Arviso	Navajo
1985	Jorja Frances Oberly	Osage-Comanche-Nez Perce
1984	Deborah Secakuku*	Hopi
1984	Anne Louise Willie	White Mountain Apache-Paiute
1982	Vivian Juan	Papago
1981	Jerilyn LeBeau	Cheyenne River Sioux
1980	Melanie Tallmadge	Winnebago-Minnesota Sioux
1978	Susan Arkeketa	Otoe-Missouria-Creek
1977	Gracie Welsh	Mohave-Chemehuevi-Yavapai
1976	Kristine Rayola Harvey	White Mountain Apache
1975	Deana Jo Harragarra	Otoe-Kiowa
1974	Claire Manning	Shoshone-Paiute
1973	Maxine Norris	Papago
1972	Louise Edmo	Shoshone-Bannock
1971	Nora Begay	Navajo
1970	Virginia Stroud	Cherokee
1969	Margery Haury	Cheyenne-Arapaho-Navajo-Sioux
1968	Thomasine Hill	Crow-Pawnee
1967	Sarah Johnson	Navajo
1966	Wahleah Lujan	Taos Pueblo
1965	Sharon Ahtone	Kiowa
1964	Michele Portwood	Arapaho
1963	Williamette Youpee	Sisseton-Yankton Sioux
1962	Ramona Soto	Klamath
1961	Brenda Bearchum	Northern Cheyenne
1960	Vivian Arviso	Navajo
1959	Delores Racine	Blackfeet
1957	Ruth Larson*	Gros Ventre
1957	Delores Shorty	Navajo
1956	Sandra Gover	Skidi-Pawnee
1955	Rita McLaughlin	Hunkpapa-Sioux
1954	Mary Louise Defender	Yanktonai-Sioux
1953	Arlene Wesley	Yakama

**The reigning Miss Indian America stepped down in this year. See note 58.*

concerns of Indian participants, and the debate led to a reorganization. In time, AAID divided the responsibility of selecting Miss Indian America among three panels. The first panel consisted of two Indians and two non-Indians who judged the candidate on her general qualities. The second panel consisted of three non-Indian members of the media who judged the candidate's ability to communicate. A third panel made up of three Indians judged the candidate's knowledge of Indian culture.[54]

By the late 1970s, All-American Indian Days and the Miss Indian America Pageant had lost the level of Native participation and relevance they enjoyed only a few decades earlier. In 1979, the events recessed, and in 1980 the Miss Indian America Pageant came back as a solo event, with no mention of AAID, even as the backing organization and leadership remained essentially unchanged.

In many ways, the decline stemmed from the growing resolve of Native communities to represent their cultures on their own terms and in their own cultural spaces. For many decades, tribal communities had pushed for the transfer of powwow sponsorship and planning from non-Indian to Indian control.[55] The Miss Indian World Pageant, first held in 1984 as part of the Native-organized Gathering of Nations Powwow in Albuquerque, exemplified this trend, as did the National Miss Indian USA pageant launched in Washington, D.C., in 1985.[56] When Indians did participate in events organized by non-Indian promoters, they found that lines between cultural celebration and performance blurred. For many, it became far less complicated to celebrate dancing and regalia traditions within an Indian context, particularly at powwows. If they did perform for white audiences at rodeos or other entertainment events, many Indian dancers expected a professional arrangement that included payment.

In 1983, the board postponed that year's pageant and decided to relinquish control of the event, hoping to find another community willing to take it on. After more than thirty years, business sponsors and organizers could not muster the human and financial resources to keep the events going. A generational shift in the Sheridan also sapped enthusiasm for the pageant, as the coal-mining boom of the 1970s brought a number of new young families to town, transforming the priorities of local leadership. "[This] beautiful child has outgrown the humble means of our home where it has been hosted for the past 30 years," stated

AAID board president Jack Booth. He argued it was time for the pageant to achieve "new heights" in a new community. Further, he wrote that the pageant's goal to "promote understanding and cooperation between Indians and non-Indians" might be better achieved elsewhere with a new format.[57]

Rather than dissolve the pageant, the board set up a process to solicit applications for new host sites. Three top proposals emerged out of twenty-two requests for information: the Navajo Generating Station in Page, Arizona; Rogers State College in Claremore, Oklahoma; and the communities of Bismarck-Mandan, North Dakota. In 1984, the board of the North American Indian Foundation (NAIF), which held the legal copyright for the Miss Indian America Pageant, voted to transfer the intellectual property of the pageant to Bismarck's United Tribes International Powwow for five years. The Bismarck powwow regularly hosted ten thousand participants at its annual Labor Day event, making it ten times the size of the Sheridan gathering at that time. In the summer of 1984, Sheridan hosted the pageant for the final time, during which Vivian Juan transferred the title of Miss Indian America to Anna Louise Willie (White Mountain Apache-Paiute). After winning the crown, Willie received gifts from thirty-four Sheridan businesses as a sign of their appreciation.[58]

By 1990, the North American Indian Foundation was dissatisfied by efforts to promote the event in Bismarck and decided not to renew the copyright license. The growth of other similar pageants, such as the Miss Indian World competition, further diminished boosters' ability to bring the Miss Indian America Pageant back to its original home. The NAIF remained a registered nonprofit entity in the state of Wyoming until 1999, at which time it was dissolved.

In the twenty-first century, All-American Indian Days and the Miss Indian America Pageant have been largely forgotten, but they have left behind an important legacy. From the start, organizers earnestly sought to honor and promote Native culture, encourage better race relations, address injustices, and foster egalitarian ideals. Natives embraced the opportunity to celebrate their cultures and cultivate intertribal friendships, while non-Indians forged lasting connections with their Indian neighbors. Sheridan's All-American Indian Days and the Miss Indian America Pageant carried lifelong personal significance for many participants because it created a sense of shared humanity, a spirit felt by participants, organizers, and observers alike.

Elizabeth Lochrie Collection, MC 291, MHS Research Center, Helena

MIA Vivian Arviso, of Navajo, Pueblo, and Spanish descent, credited her traditional Navajo upbringing and rural life with having inspired her to appreciate Navajo culture. She hoped the MIA pageant would become a platform for celebrating the diversity of America's indigenous cultures. Following her MIA reign, Arviso taught at several tribal colleges, served as vice president of Diné College, and was the Navajo Nation's Executive Director for Education.

Gregory Nickerson is a writer, historian, and filmmaker. He holds a master's degree in history of the American West from the University of Wyoming. Originally from Big Horn, Wyoming, Gregory conducted interviews with Miss Indian America organizers and Crow Fair participants as a student at Carleton College and later while curating an exhibit on All-American Indian Days for the Sheridan County Museum. In 2015, he produced the short film *No Indians or Dogs Allowed? Sheridan, Wyoming, and the Miss Indian America Pageant* for Wyoming PBS. He is grateful to the many, many people who helped preserve the story of All-American Indian Days.

Notes

Abbreviations used in the notes include Montana Historical Society Research Center, Helena (MHS) and *Montana The Magazine of Western History* (*Montana*). Unless otherwise noted, all newspapers were published in Montana.

All-American Indian Days and the Miss Indian America Pageant

1. Born in 1935, Lucy Yellowmule learned to ride at the ranch of her uncle, Tom LaForge. By her teenage years, she had become a capable barrel racer and horse trainer, taking part in many riding events on and around the reservation just as barrel racing evolved into a competitive sport. The Crow Roping Club sponsored her Sheridan rodeo queen entry. Michael Dykhorst and Judy Slack, *Miss Indian America 60th Anniversary Reunion, Sheridan Wyoming, July 11–13, 2013,* copy in THE Wyoming Room, Sheridan County Fulmer Public Library, Sheridan Wyoming (hereafter SCFPL); *Sheridan (WY) Press*, July 14, 21, 1951.

2. Tom Ringley, *Rodeo Time in Sheridan, Wyo.: A History of the Sheridan-Wyo-Rodeo* (Greybull, WY, 2004), 21, 216. Stories later circulated that Yellowmule might not have been the favorite of the local crowd, but that dude ranch guests and out-of-town cowboys seated near the applause meter had stomped their feet to tip the contest in her favor. Vivian Arviso, Miss Indian America in 1960, suggested that the boisterous cheers of these visitors could explain how a town fraught with racial tensions managed to elect an Indian rodeo queen. Lucy won the title after a three-way tie and two run-offs, in which she bested Joy Old Crow and then Kathleen Michelena. Three people checked the applause meter and found it to be functioning properly. *Sheridan (WY) Press*, July 21, 1951.

3. On rodeo queens see Renee M. Laegreid's *Riding Pretty: Rodeo Royalty in the American West* (Lincoln, NE, 2006). Laegreid's book traces the evolution of the community-sponsored rodeo queen at events in Pendleton, Oregon, Cheyenne, Wyoming, and Texas. She argues that by the 1950s rodeo queen contestants lobbied for greater consideration of their riding talent, educational background, and professions while also staying true to the domestic virtues expected of young cowgirls. In doing so, rodeo queen contestants, like Miss Indian America, actively sought to reshape their roles as representatives of communities and cultural values. Wendy Kozol has analyzed the imagery in publicity photographs of Miss Indian America and interprets the images as evidence of the changing relationship between Indians and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. See Kozol, "Miss Indian America: Regulatory Gazes and the Politics of Affiliation," *Feminist Studies* 31, no. 1 (2005): 64–94.

4. *Sheridan (WY) Press,* Aug. 3, 1955. The pageant was formally titled the National Miss Indian America Pageant in organizational documents, a sign of the board's vision for the event to have a nationwide reach.

5. *Sheridan (WY) Press,* Aug. 5, 1957.

6. In Wyoming, a similar process took place for the Eastern Shoshone after the 1868 establishment of the Wind River Indian Reservation. In 1878, Northern Arapaho leaders made an agreement with the federal government to move to the same reservation, placing two traditional enemy nations in close proximity. Several cessions of reservation land, along with the 1906 opening of the Wind River Reservation to white settlement and the arrival of the railroad, eroded the reservation land base. Despite being the only two tribes in Wyoming, the Shoshone and Arapaho did not participate in Sheridan rodeos in the early 1900s, preferring instead to appear in events at nearby Riverton, Lander, and Casper. With the founding of AAID, the Arapaho and Shoshone sent candidates to the Miss Indian America Pageant, while elders like William Shakespeare (Arapaho) served on the pageant's General Indian Committee. Michelle Portwood (Arapaho) became the only MIA from Wyoming when she won the title in 1964, although Sandra May Gover (MIA 1956) lived in Fort Washakie after her term ended. Gover's husband, Darwin St. Clair Sr., and son, Darwin St. Clair Jr., both chaired the Eastern Shoshone Tribal Council.

7. Lawrence R. Borne, "Dude Ranching in the Rockies," *Montana* 38 (Summer 1988): 14–27; Joan L. Brownell, "The Bones Brothers Ranch," ibid., 63 (Autumn 2013): 18–33.

8. Newspaper accounts document interaction between Indians and non-Indians at the rodeo. See *Sheridan (WY) Press,* July 19, 20, 1951. The July 23 headline noted that nearly thirteen thousand people attended the three-day rodeo. Another news item noted no Indians were among those arrested that week.

9. Today, people are reluctant to name which businesses excluded Indians.

10. Mary Ella Hando, phone interview with the author, 2011. In summer 2006, a visitor to the Sheridan County Museum told the author about selling his parent's liquor to Indians when he was a boy.

11. Joseph Medicine Crow, interview with the author, Lodge Grass, MT, July 2003; Joe Medicine Crow remarks during Miss Indian America Reunion, July 13, 2013; Joe Medicine Crow, *Counting Coup: Becoming a Crow Chief on the Reservation and Beyond* (Washington, DC, 2006).

12. Louie Khan remains a revered character in Sheridan. See Kathryn Schultz, *Citizen Khan: Behind a Muslim*

Don C. Diers, photographer, Lochrie Collection Pac 79–37, MHS Photograph Archives, Helena

Little girl dancers at All-American Indian Days

Community in Northern Wyoming Lies One Man, and Countless Tamales, New Yorker, June 6 and 13, 2016.

13. Alma Hogan Snell, *Grandmother's Grandchild: My Crow Indian Life* (Lincoln, NE, 2001). On the pervasiveness of such discrimination, see Sarah Deutsch, *No Separate Refuge: Culture, Class, and Gender on an Anglo-Hispanic Frontier in the American Southwest, 1880–1940* (New York, 1989). A similar scene featuring discrimination in an ice cream shop was depicted in the 1971 independent film *Billy Jack*, inspired by the filmmakers' experience of anti-Indian discrimination in Winner, South Dakota, in 1954.

14. *Sheridan (WY) Press,* Aug. 3, 1955.

15. Evelyn Barkley, "Neckyoke Jones, Happy Warrior," *Denver Post,* Aug. 1. 1954. Sinclair attended high school at Phillips Exeter Academy and while at Harvard worked as a cowboy in Montana during the summer. He later pursued a law degree at the University of Minnesota. In the late 1930s, Sinclair wrote a comic note to a friend, a speaker of the Montana House, which became the basis of his Neckyoke Jones persona. He wrote the biweekly Neckyoke Jones column for nineteen years. Sinclair grazed cattle on the Crow and Cheyenne Reservations. He was also charter member of the Wyoming Historical Society and a Continental Chief in the Continental Federation of Adopted Indians, an organization for whites who were adopted into Indian tribes. Though he had been distanced from AAID for a decade, Sinclair coincidentally died on the evening of August 2, 1968, the first day of the AAID pageant that year, at age 79. See *Sheridan (WY) Press,* Feb. 11, 1958; ibid., July 13, 1968; ibid., Aug. 3, 1968.

16. "A Tribute to Neckyoke," All-American Indian Days Program 1968, p. 15, Miss Indian America booklet collection, THE Wyoming Room, SCFPL. Sinclair was also adopted by the Northern Cheyenne and Arapaho. *Sheridan (WY) Press*, July 13, 1968.

17. *Wyoming: The Feature and Discussion Magazine of the Equality State* 1, no. 5 (Aug.-Sept. 1957), 4.

18. *Sheridan (WY) Press,* July 3, 1951.

19. Ibid.

20. See Joan Burbick, *Rodeo Queens and the American Dream* (New York, 2002), 86.

21. Margot Liberty, conversation with the author, Sheridan, WY, 2006; *Sheridan (WY) Press,* July 23, 1951.

22. *Sheridan (WY) Press,* Aug. 3, 1955; Hila Gilbert, *Making Two Worlds One; And the Story of All-American Indian Days* (Sheridan, WY, 1986), 9.

23. *Sheridan (WY) Press,* Aug. 3, 1955.

24. Gilbert, *Making Two Worlds One,* 9; *Chicago Tribune*, Jan. 21, 19, 1953.

25. Hila Gilbert, "All-American Indian Days—The Beginning," *The Country Journal* 4, no. 21, 1–12, copy in THE Wyoming Room, SCFPL. Sinclair seems to remember a white horse, but the horse in the photographs is a sorrel.

26. *Sheridan (WY) Press,* Aug. 3, 1955.

27. Similar sized crowds from multiple tribes also gathered in Anadarko, Oklahoma, at the American Indian Exposition, which began in 1935, and at the Gallup, New Mexico, Inter-Tribal Indian Ceremonial, first held in 1922. See Clyde Ellis, *A Dancing People: Powwow Culture on the Southern Plains* (Lawrence, KS, 2003).

28. Laegreid, *Riding Pretty.* In a Dec. 2015 conversation with the author in Laramie, Wyo., Laegreid said that across the West rodeo "was a way to pull cash out of people's pockets."

29. *Sheridan (WY) Press,* Oct. 26, 14, 1953; ibid., July 19, 1951.

30. Deernose and others went on a State Department–sponsored international tour during which they did Crow dances for audiences. The effort was a Cold War project to show that—contrary to Communist criticisms—Native Americans were treated well in the United States. See Fred W. Voget, *They Call Me Agnes: A Crow Narrative Based on the Life of Agnes Yellowtail Deernose* (Norman, OK, 1995), 133–34. Lucy Yellowmule's appearance on *Voice of America* was made with the same intention according to a 1952 letter written by Howard Sinclair in the Emmie Mygatt Collection, Sheridan County Historical Society.

31. Gilbert, *Making Two Worlds One,* 21. Echohawk was AAID master of ceremonies in 1956 with Medicine Crow and again in 1969. Echohawk designed the letterhead that the Sheridan AAID board used for decades. See Kristin M. Youngbull, *Brummett Echohawk: Pawnee Thunderbird and Artist* (Norman, OK, 2015).

32. Margot Liberty conversation. Northern Cheyenne leaders like John Stands in Timber did share the AAID stage with Medicine Crow. Significantly, such meetings at AAID helped forge friendships between members of historically antagonistic tribes and contributed to the pan-Indian movement.

33. Sally J. Southwick, *Building on a Borrowed Past: Place and Identity in Pipestone, Minnesota* (Athens, OH, 2005), 1–11. It is not clear to what degree key Indian personnel or advisory board members were paid for their work or whether Indians received payment for dancing or a travel stipend. Sheridan organizers did arrange for beef to be delivered to the Indian camp to be slaughtered on site. Photographs of AAID show elderly Indian women working meat with a butcher knife and drying the meat in the sun.

34. Reginald Laubin and Stanley Vestal, *The Indian Tipi: Its History, Construction, and Use* (Norman, OK, 1989), 304–6.

35. Gilbert, *Making Two Worlds One,* 25; *Sheridan (WY) Press,* Nov. 16, 1956.

36. *Sheridan (WY) Press,* Oct. 7, 1959; Floyd Tetrault, interview with the author, Sturgis, SD, Jan. 2007. Howard Sinclair, interview by Robert Helvey, June 25, 1960, TS, Robert T. Helvey Papers, 1902–1963, Mss 01465, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie, WY.

37. Helvey interview.

38. Kozol, "Miss Indian America," 73–74; Vine Deloria Jr., *Custer Died for Your Sins* (Norman, OK, 1988), 62. Vine Deloria Jr. was elected executive director of the National Congress of American Indians at 1964 a meeting held in Sheridan that led up to the opening day of AAID. Vine Sr. family often visited AAID organizer and fellow clergyman Rev. Ray Clark while in Sheridan.

39. As a mixed-blood Native scholar and journalist, Gerald Vizenor criticized AIM's confrontational tactics as benefiting the movement itself instead of achieving gains for reservation communities. See Vizenor, *Tribal Scenes and Ceremonies* (Minneapolis, 1976), 52–55. See also Peter Nabokov, *Native American Testimony: A Chronicle of Indian-White Relations from Prophecy to the Present, 1492–2000* (New York, 1999).

40. All-American Indian Days Program 1961, Miss Indian America booklet collection, Elizabeth Lochrie Collection, MC 291, MHS.

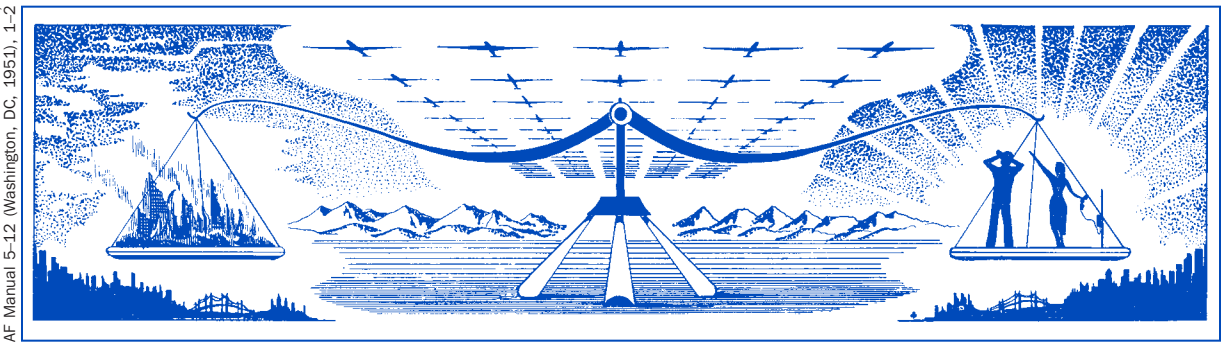
41. Ray Clark, interview with the author Sheridan, WY, July 2003. At other times in his career, Russell Means did show up. At a 1988 commemoration at the Little Bighorn Battlefield, he took to the microphone to promote his purpose of creating an Indian memorial on the site.

42. Claire Manning, interview with the author, Sheridan, WY, July 14, 2013. Manning recalled: "I have all the memories of Susie Yellowtail and Tom, going into their homes. They took me in. And Donald Deernose and Agnes. . . . We went on trips. Donald Deernose, he would get in that van, and he would just sing all the way. It was so much fun. He would sing songs—round dance songs and powwow songs—all the way to the powwow, and we'd have a wonderful time and then they'd bring me back."

43. *Denver Rocky Mountain News,* May 21, 1971.

44. *Sheridan (WY) Press,* May 22, 1971.

45. Kozol, "Miss Indian America," 73–74; Helen Joyce, "Suffering Slow Burn," *Sheridan (WY) Press,* n.d. copy in



United States Air Force Ground Observers' Guide, AF Manual 5–12 (Washington, DC, 1951), 1–2

"Operation Skywatch: They also serve . . . who stand and watch"

THE Wyoming Room, SCFPL; Virginia Stroud, "Suggestions Given by Virginia Stroud—May, 1971," n.d., All-American Indian Days Collection, THE Wyoming Room, SCFPL; *Sheridan (WY) Press,* Aug. 3, 1955.

46. Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York, 2000), 159.

47. *Sheridan (WY) Press*, n.d. 1970, copy in author's collection.

48. Arviso, "AAID Must Be More Involved with Indians," *Sheridan (WY) Press*, Mar. 13, 1970. Judging of the Miss Indian America pageant was initially entrusted to a panel of white judges with experience in communication or connections with Indian people. They were expected to select young women by filling out ballots that evaluated traits such as speaking skills, traditional knowledge, and the ability to effectively represent Indian people to non-Indian audiences. Examples of such ballots are located in the Miss Indian America collection at THE Wyoming Room, SCFPL.

49. Sarah Johnson Luther, interview with the author, Sheridan, WY, July 14, 2013.

50. For more on cultural appropriation, see Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven, CT, 1999).

51. Melanie Tallmadge-Sainz, interview with the author, Sheridan, WY, July 14, 2013.

52. Joseph Medicine Crow lived another three years, passing away on April 3, 2016.

53. Sarah Johnson Luther, interview with the author, Sheridan, WY, July 14, 2013.

54. "Opinion—All-American Indian Days Is in a Good Discussion," *Sheridan (WY) Press,* n.d., copy in THE Wyoming Room, SCFPL; Nimi McConigley, "A Culture Lives in Miss Indian America Pageant," *Casper (WY) Star-Tribune,* August, 1984, SCFPL.

55. The desire for self-determination in the 1930s was a major motivator in the creation of the American Indian Exposition in Anadarko, Oklahoma, as an event independent of the Caddo County Fair. The Indian-managed event in Anadarko increased in popularity partly at the expense of the Craterville Indian Fair, a predecessor show in the region organized by the non-Indian Frank Rush as a commercial venture on his private land. Starting in 1924, the Craterville, Oklahoma, event attracted thousands of Indians and non-Indians with its dances and reenactments of Indians attacking stagecoaches. Rush put on the event with the help of an Indian advisory board that some criticized as a "figurehead" group of elderly tribal members, many of whom couldn't speak English. The event ended after Rush's death in 1933, around the time that Indian participants flocked to the Indian-led Anadarko Indian Exposition. In many ways, the non-Indian boosterism and modest level of Indian control at the Craterville event in the 1930s parallel the negotiations over cultural agency and self-representation that emerged at All-American Indian Days in Sheridan on the Northern Plains some thirty to forty years later. See Ellis, *A Dancing People,* 135–162, 168–70.

56. American Indian Heritage Foundation press release, Sept. 11, 1985, Miss Indian America Collection, SCFPL.

57. *Sheridan (WY) Press,* June 9, 1983; Jack Booth, National Miss Indian America Pageant board president, letter, c. July 1983–Feb. 1984, Miss Indian America Collection, THE Wyoming Room, SCFPL.

58. Minutes of National Miss Indian America board, Feb. 21 and Apr. 17, 1984, Miss Indian America Collection, THE Wyoming Room, SCFPL; *Billings Gazette,* Aug. 14, 1984; *Sheridan (WY) Press,* Aug. 11, 1984. Anne Louise Willie resigned as MIA 1984 at the request of the Bismarck board of AAID, and Deborah Secakuku took on the title. Similarly, Ruth Dee Larson finished the 1957 MIA term of Delores Shorty, carrying it during the recess year of 1958 until the 1959 AAID. Claire Manning took on the title of MIA after Maxine Norris resigned in 1973. Arlene Hirschfelder and Paulette F. Molin, *The Extraordinary Book of Native American Lists* (Lanham, MD, 2012), 446–48.

Operation Skywatch

All *Aircraft Flash* issues came from MHS microfilm copies.

1. *United States Air Force Ground Observers' Guide*, AF Manual 5–12 (Washington, DC, 1951), 1–2.

2. David W. Mills, *Cold War in a Cold Land: Fighting Communism on the Northern Plains* (Norman, OK, 2015), 136, 138; Denys Volan, *The History of the Ground Observer Corps*, ADC Historical Study no. 36 (Washington, DC, 1968), 109; David F. Winkler, *Searching the Skies: The Legacy of the United States Cold War Defense Radar Program* (Chicago, 1997), 94–95.

3. Winkler, *Searching the Skies*, 10, 21; *Ground Observers' Guide*, 4; Volan, *History of the Ground Observer Corps*, 108–9; Bruce D. Callander, "The Ground Observer Corps," *Air Force Magazine* 89 (Feb. 2006), 80–83; Kenneth Schaffel, *The Emerging Shield: The Air Force and the Evolution of Continental Air Defense, 1945–1960* (Honolulu, HI, 2004), 120, 15.

4. Winkler, *Searching the Skies*, 21.

5. *Aircraft Flash* 4, no. 8 (Mar. 1956), 6, microfilm copies, MHS.

6. Volan, *History of the Ground Observer Corps*, 130, 134; Schaffel, *Emerging Shield*, 156.

7. Volan, *History of the Ground Observer Corps*, 131.

8. Schaffel, *Emerging Shield*, 109, 119, 120; Volan, *Ground Observer Corps*, 108, 130, 132.

9. Volan, *History of the Ground Observer Corps*, 154–55.

10. Ibid., 126, 152–55, 173; Schaffel, *Emerging Shield*, 157–59; Mills, *Cold War in a Cold Land*, 141. Formed in 1942, the Advertising Council is a nonprofit