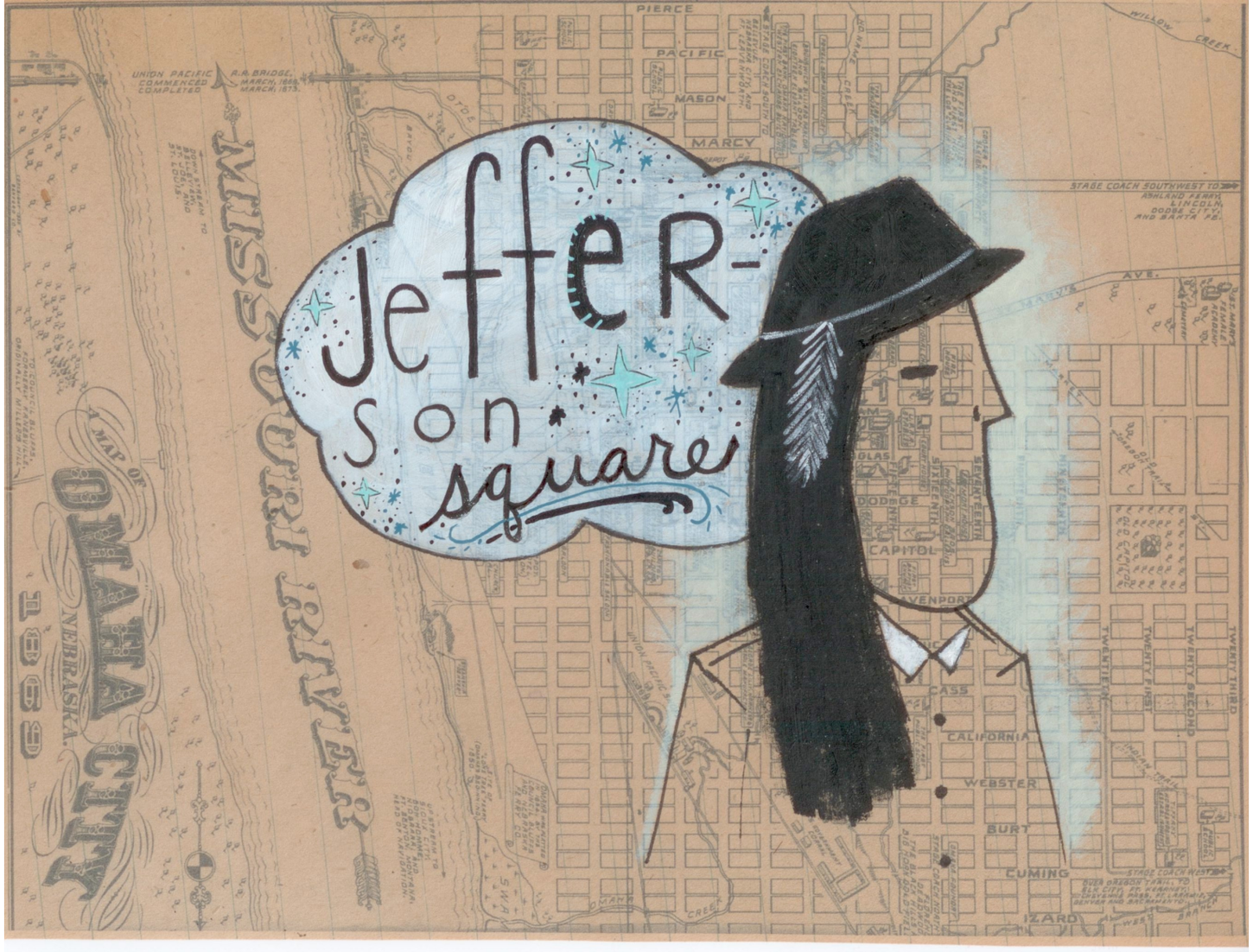


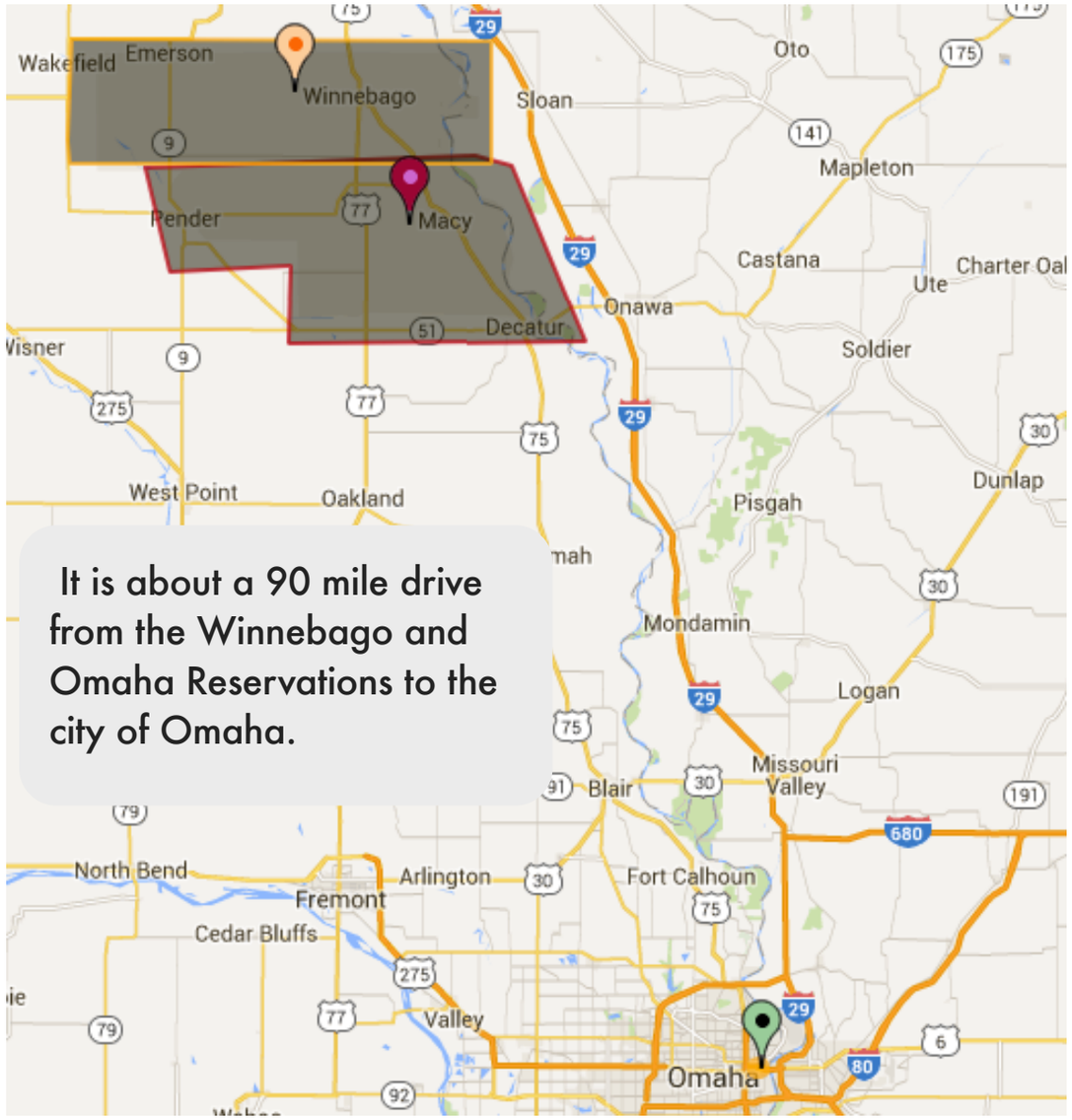

# JEFFERSON SQUARE:
## OMAHA'S INDIGENOUS NEIGHBORHOOD

WRITTEN BY SARAH PIERCE
ILLUSTRATED BY SARAH ROWE

DEVELOPED BY OCTAVIA BUTLER

JEFFERSON SQUARE

This version of the Jefferson Square iBook has been customized for PDF viewing.




# JEFFERSON SQUARE:

# OMAHA'S INDIGENOUS NEIGHBORHOOD

## URBAN INDIAN RELOCATION PROGRAM: 1948-1980

From 1948 to 1980, the U.S. government ran the Urban Indian Relocation Program to move Native Americans from **reservations** to cities.

Native Americans moved from reservations, such as the Omaha and Winnebago reservations, into the city of Omaha for jobs and hope for a good life. Since there were only certain areas in the city Native Americans could live, they built a very strong community. Though life was hard, many who moved to Omaha have very happy memories.

Have you ever moved to a new home?

What were you worried or nervous about?

What would you miss about where you live now if you had to move?

# JEFFERSON SQUARE

## A STORY BY SARAH PIERCE

## ILLUSTRATIONS BY SARAH ROWE

Mia, a member of the Omaha (pronounced Uh-mah-ha) tribe and accomplished **fancy dancer**, breathed a sigh of exhaustion as she finished the third consecutive song at the local **pow wow**. Although she had been dancing all summer long, her endurance was no match for each of the long drum songs.

As she walked back to take her seat next to her Grandpa, Steve, Mia was greeted by her friend Cora, a **Ho-chunk**, or member of the Winnebago tribe, who came to sit with Mia and her Grandpa Steve.

Cora was a **jingle dress** dancer who wore a purple dress similar to the one her grandma wore when she was a young girl back in Winnebago.

Why do you think Cora wears a dress like her grandma wore?

What traditions does your family have? Have they changed over time?

The jingle dress originated in the Ojibwe tribe. The jingles are placed close together so they make a beautiful sound.

Photo Courtesy of Sarah Pierce

Fry bread is a traditional staple dish for celebratory dinners including a pow wow

Photo Courtesy of Sarah Pierce

Star quilts are a symbol of honor for many Native American tribes

International Quilt Study Center & Museum, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2008.012.0001.

www.quiltstudy.org

## Cultural Symbols

Pow wows and other ceremonies are full of cultural symbols.

What are some cultural symbols or traditions from your family's culture?

Why are these symbols and traditions important to you and your family?

Jingle dress dances feature light footwork close to the ground. Dancers carry a fan, sometimes made of eagle plumes to honor the beat of the drum.

Photo Courtesy of Charlie Cuny, Oglala Lakota

The Jingle Dress dance came from a father's vision as he was searching for a way to heal his sick daughter. This dance is used as a healing dance, and performed in competitions.

Photo Courtesy of Charlie Cuny, Oglala Lakota

Cora's Grandparents were originally from the Winnebago Reservation but moved to Omaha as part of the Relocation Program. Unlike many Ho-Chunks, who returned to the reservation a few years after being relocated to Omaha, Cora's Grandparents decided to make a permanent life for their children by remaining in Omaha (in the same way Grandpa Steve remained in Omaha).

Cora and Mia had been friends since they were toddlers. Despite never having lived on a reservation, both girls were taught their cultural ways by their parents and Grandparents.

Cultural pride was very much present at the pow wow that afternoon as Mia and Cora drank their Gatorade and watched the boys' fancy dance exhibition. The girls loved the boys' fancy dance because it is a very flashy dance that required the dancer to have lots of energy and coordination. Some of the most flamboyant dancers could even do cartwheels or the splits. The girls always had a great time together—there was always something to laugh about when the two were together.

As the two girls sat and laughed, Mia's Grandpa Steve began to remember his childhood days with his friends in downtown Omaha's Jefferson Square.  He then turned to Mia and Cora and said, "You know, when I was your age, Omaha used to have a Native American neighborhood."

"What! Where is it?" asked Mia excitedly.

"Well," Steve began, "It used to be downtown, near Central High School… but it was torn down in the 1960s when the city built Interstate 480.  It's now a parking lot under the interstate overpass, next to the Hilton hotel."

"That's so sad," Cora exclaimed, "Why would they tear it down?"

"I'm not sure.  I guess at that time, the city of Omaha thought it was better served as an interstate," Steve answered.

What benefits would there be to living in a Native American neighborhood?

How does this support the protection of culture and heritage?

As Steve answered the questions about Jefferson Square, he sat back and reminisced about his childhood and the time he spent there.  Steve remembered the apartment building where many Native American residents, including he and his family, had lived. The apartment building used to be a hotel called "Chicago Hotel."  It was not the greatest place to live, but the memories of living, working, and playing in Jefferson Square made Steve grow to appreciate the once-was Native American community.

Some housing for Native Americans was not well cared for. Jefferson Square provided a bright spot for this community.

Kids playing, adults watching at Jefferson

—World-Herald Photos.

Kids outside after apartment fire near Hobo Park

1962 Omaha World Herald

## Jefferson Square: A Cornerstone of Community

The photographs on the following pages show the Jefferson Square neighborhood at the time Grandpa Steve lived there. Like the park itself, these storefronts

A group of kids and a woman hosing down and sweeping up a playground at Jefferson Square Park near 16th and Cass Street.

Photo Courtesy of Durham Western Heritage Museum
June 1950

Life in Jefferson Square, as Steve remembered, was much like small town living. In 1858, Omaha's first school, the Jefferson Square School, opened there. The square was officially dedicated in 1865, and the school moved to Cass Street a few years later. At the center of the square was a park, Omaha's oldest, which was surrounded by many shops with vibrant storefronts. Steve's dad worked at the Butternut Coffee Factory, and his mother worked in a bakery, which was one of the storefronts he remembered so vividly.

Among other vivid memories was Steve's time spent in Jefferson Park. Jefferson Park was known by the Native American residents as "Hobo Park" because of all of the homeless people who took shelter there. Despite having a not-so-pleasant reputation, the park was a place where the children—and usually the mothers and grandmothers—would come together.

Over the years, Jefferson Square has been the site of a circus ground, a skating rink, a playground and recreation center, and more. It was at the park that Steve realized just how important it was for the Native American families to have a central location where they could come together as a community, with a great support system. For Steve and many of the other Native American families, Hobo Park and the Omaha Baptist Center nearby were two very important community gathering places for the residents of Jefferson Square.

The center was very kind to the Native American people living in Jefferson Square. They opened their doors, allowing people to use their basement for grandmother sewing circles, pow wows, **handgames**, and other social events. The center was also very instrumental in providing the residents with clothing and other household items as they made their transition from life on the reservation to life in the city.

For lesson plan and PowerPoint for Native American Hand Games, please go to the link below and search "Hand Games":
http://www.humanitieslearning.org/resource/

North 16th Street
16th and Chicago Street
Photo Courtesy of Durham Western Heritage Museum
January 1952

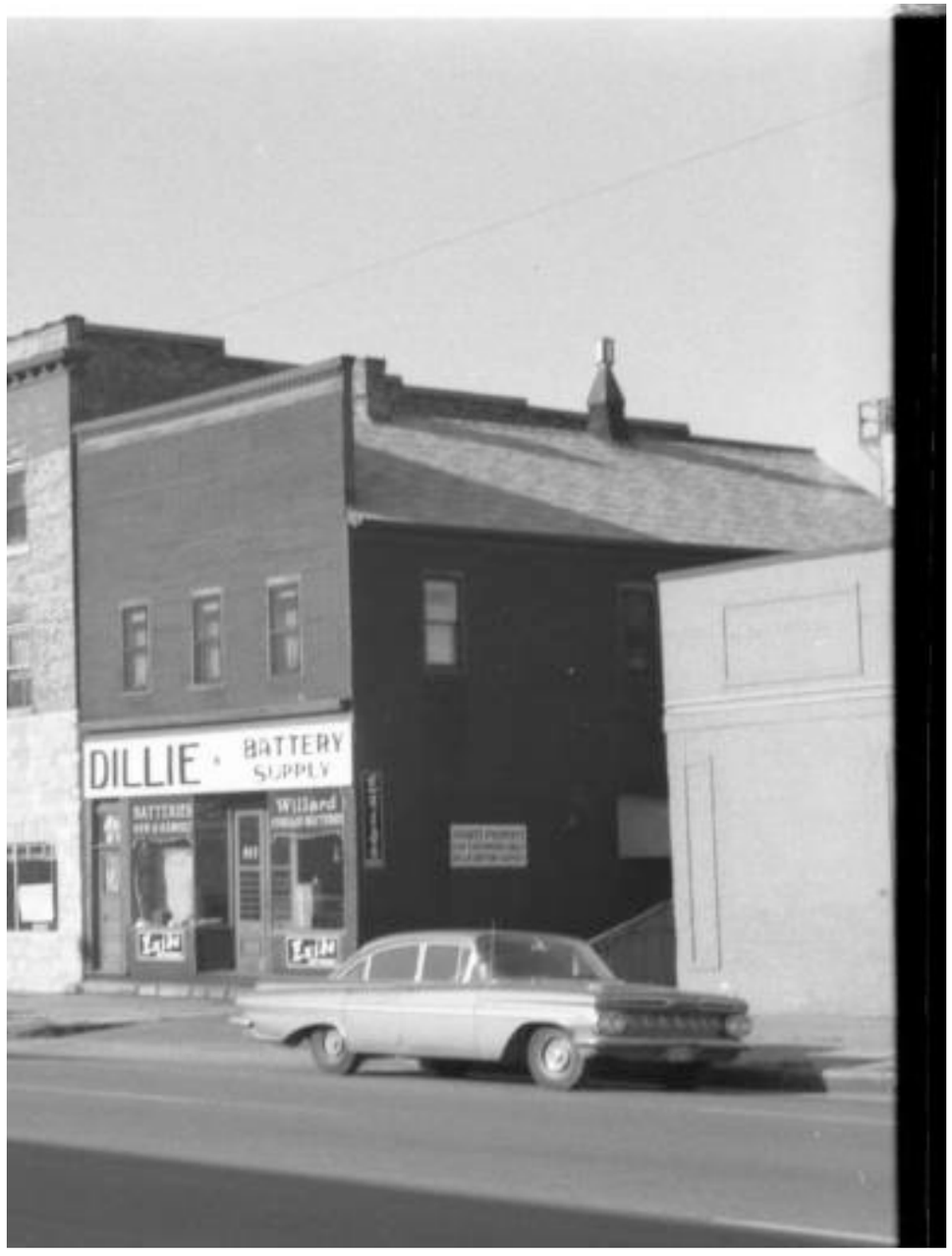
As Steve happily recalled his childhood in Jefferson Square, he suddenly felt a sense of loss and longing for his childhood community. The once-was Native American community was gone as fast as it was established. Despite many failed efforts to **preserve** the 100-year-old square, Jefferson Square was demolished on March 19, 1969 to make way for Interstate 480.

As a result of the **demolition** Jefferson Square, Steve, along with many other members of the Native American community, were forced to move to neighborhoods scattered throughout the Omaha metro area, or return to their reservations. For Steve and his family, the demolition of Jefferson Square was more than just the flattening of some buildings; it was the loss of home and support system that was—and still is—very important to the Native American community.

With all of his childhood memories flooding his mind, Steve suddenly realized that Cora and Mia were standing as an honor song was being sung. In standing for the honor song, he realized the song was on behalf of a Native American college graduate, who had returned to Omaha to work for a local Native American organization. It was then that he realized how **resilient** his people are and how much he still has to teach Mia about their Omaha (Uh-mah-ha) history.

A man sits on a bench in Jefferson Square looking facing 16th Street.
Photo Courtesy of Durham Western Heritage Museum
January 1954

Streamline Hotel
813 North 16th Street
Photo Courtesy of Durham Western Heritage Museum
July 1964



Shops on North 16th Street
602-612 North 16th Street
Photo Courtesy of Durham Western Heritage Museum
July 1964

Landon's for Men at 113 North 16th Street
Photo Courtesy of Durham Western Heritage Museum
July 1964

## RETELL

How were Mia and Cora's families affected by moving to Omaha?

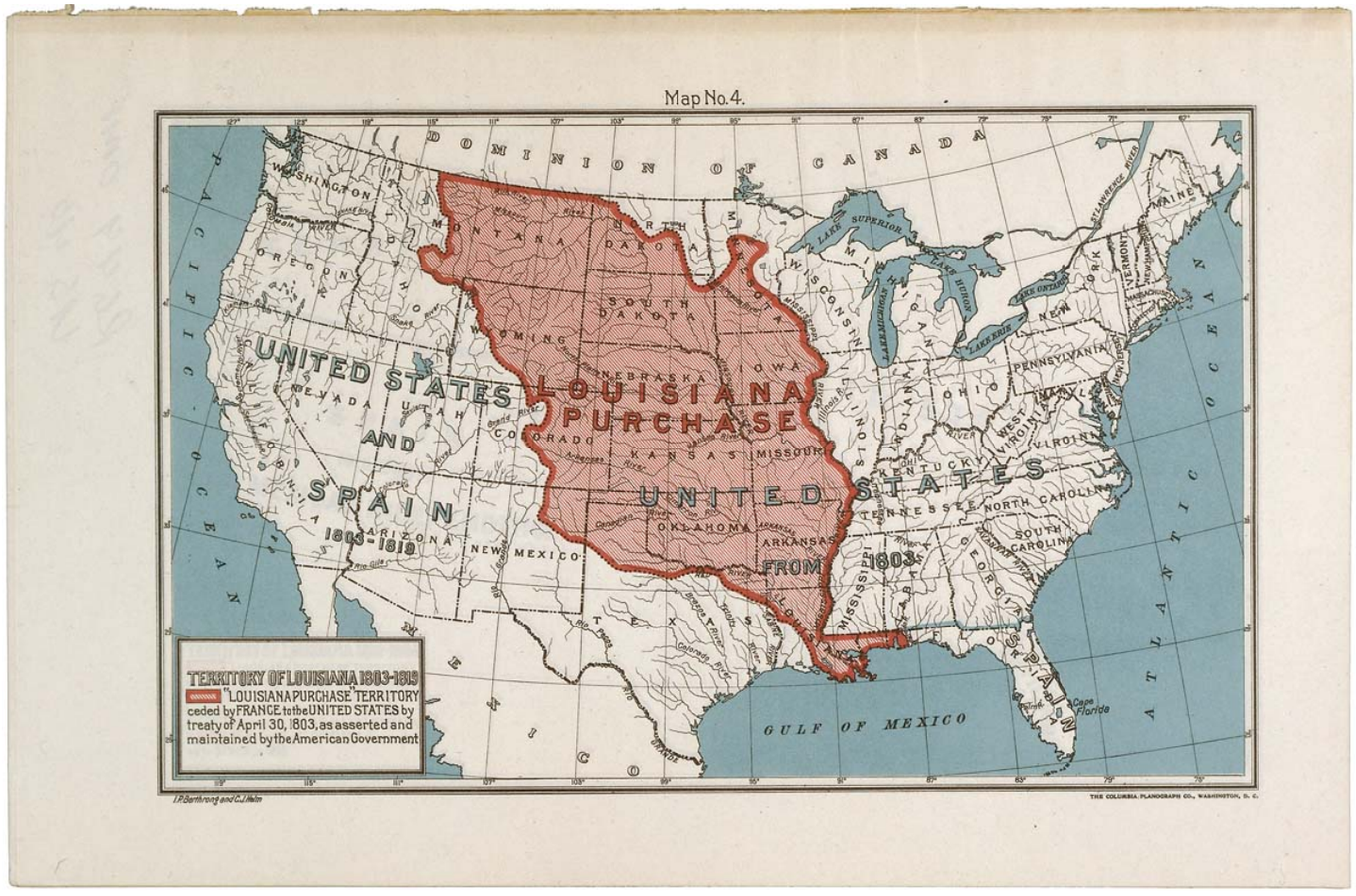
What did they do to maintain and express their culture?

Why do you think this was important to the girls and their families?

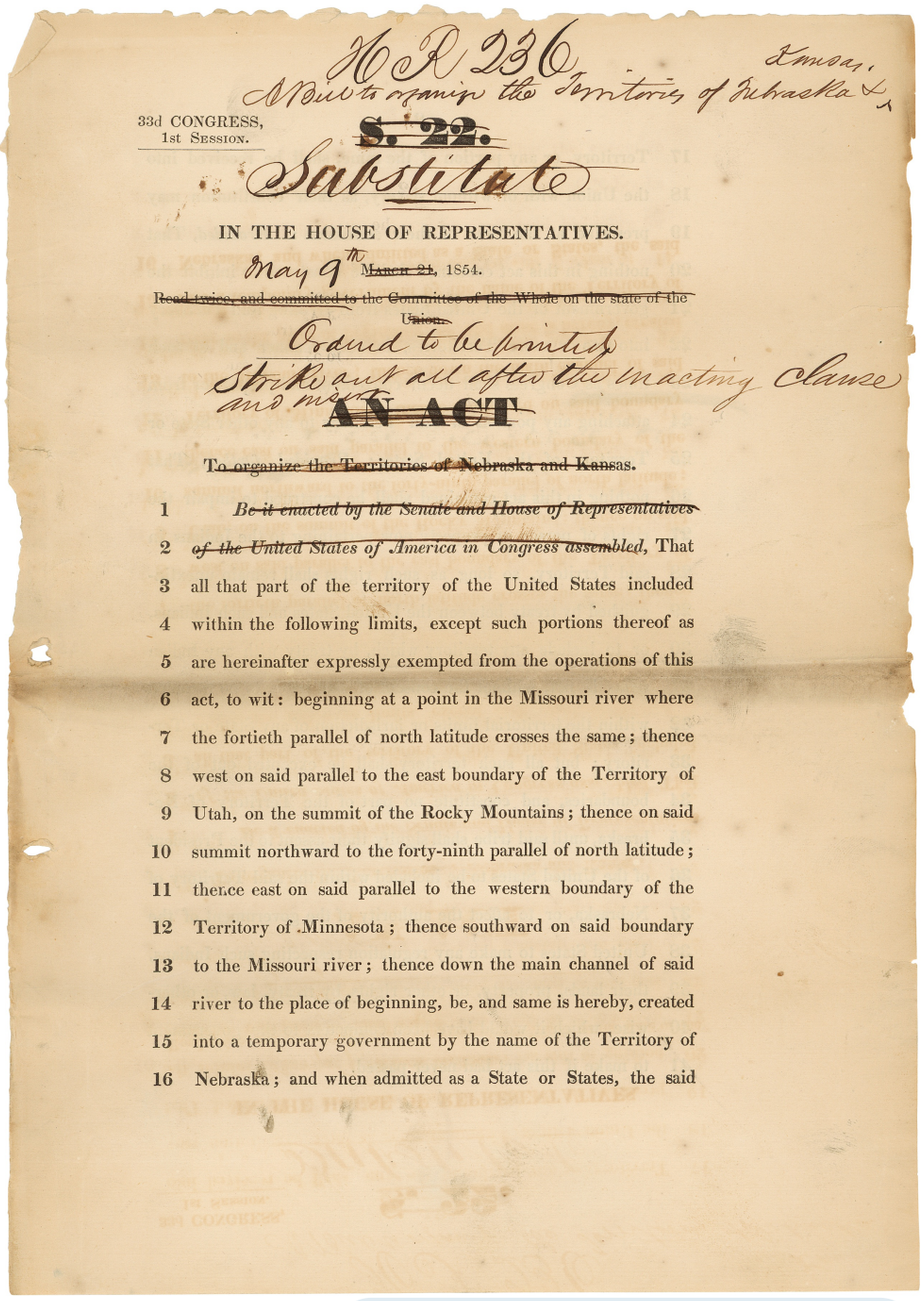
# Historical Events Affecting U.S.-Indian Relations:

## Historical Images

To view the interactive timeline: Historical Events Affecting U.S.-Indian Relations, please go to:
http://timeglider.com/t/ee663a4d4a700c80?min_zoom=1&max_zoom=100




Map of the Louisiana Purchase Territory 1803-1819
National Archives, Department of the Interior. General Land Office. Surveying Division. 9/1/1867-3/1947



H. R. 236
A Bill to organize the Territories of Nebraska & Kansas.

33d CONGRESS, 1st SESSION.

S. 22.

Substitute

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

May 9th ~~March 21~~, 1854.

~~Read twice, and committed to the Committee of the Whole on the state of the Union.~~

Ordered to be printed

Strike out all after the enacting clause and insert

AN ACT

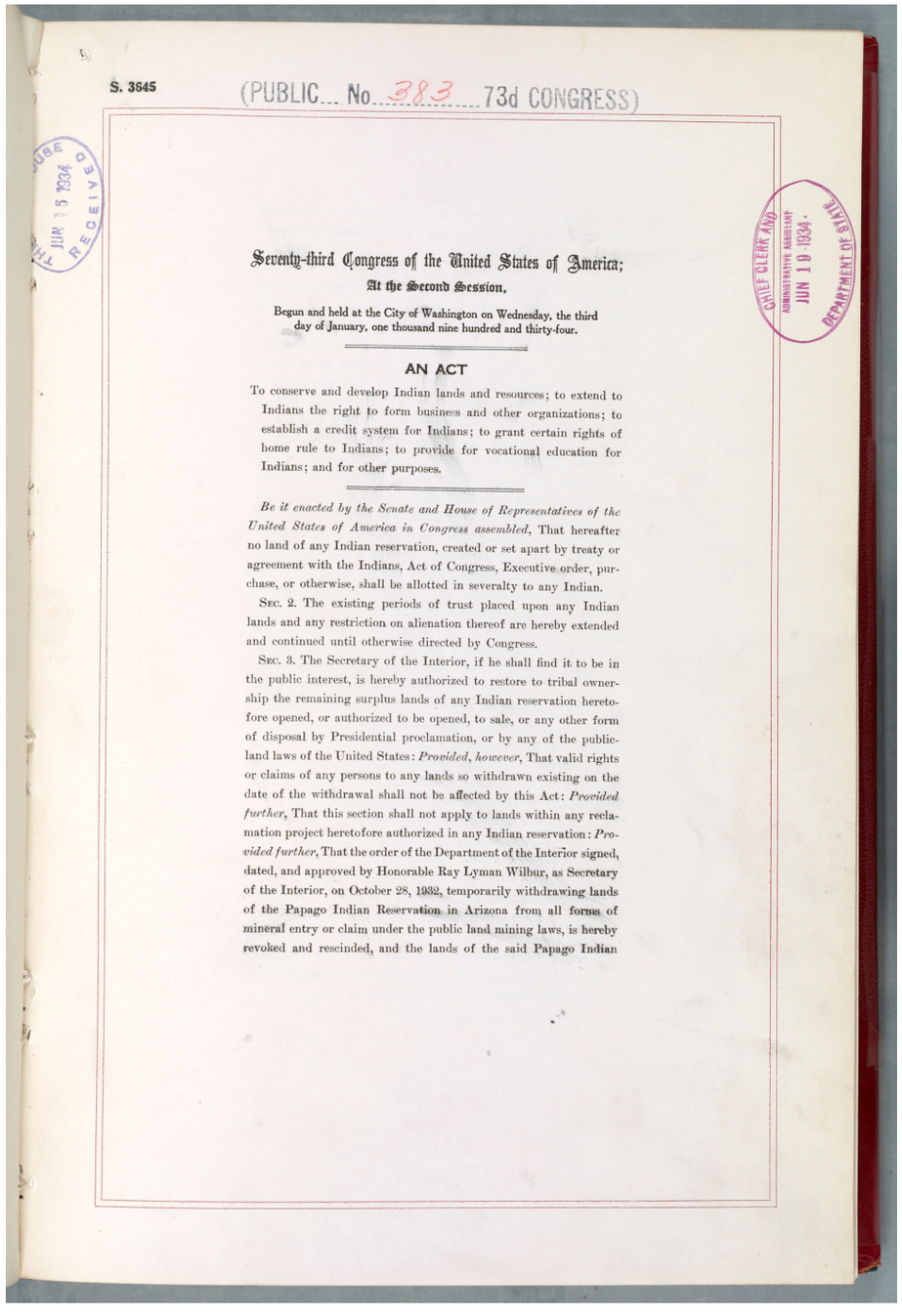
To ~~organize the Territories of Nebraska and Kansas~~.

~~Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled~~, That all that part of the territory of the United States included within the following limits, except such portions thereof as are hereinafter expressly exempted from the operations of this act, to wit: beginning at a point in the Missouri river where the fortieth parallel of north latitude crosses the same; thence west on said parallel to the east boundary of the Territory of Utah, on the summit of the Rocky Mountains; thence on said summit northward to the forty-ninth parallel of north latitude; thence east on said parallel to the western boundary of the Territory of Minnesota; thence southward on said boundary to the Missouri river; thence down the main channel of said river to the place of beginning, be, and same is hereby, created into a temporary government by the name of the Territory of Nebraska; and when admitted as a State or States, the said

1854: Kansas-Nebraska Act

## 1934: Indian Reorganization Act

National Archives and Records Administration. Office of the Federal Register.



S. 3645 (PUBLIC No. 383 73d CONGRESS)

RECEIVED JUN 18 1934

CHIEF CLERK AND ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT JUN 19 1934. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Seventy-third Congress of the United States of America;
At the Second Session,

Begun and held at the City of Washington on Wednesday, the third day of January, one thousand nine hundred and thirty-four.

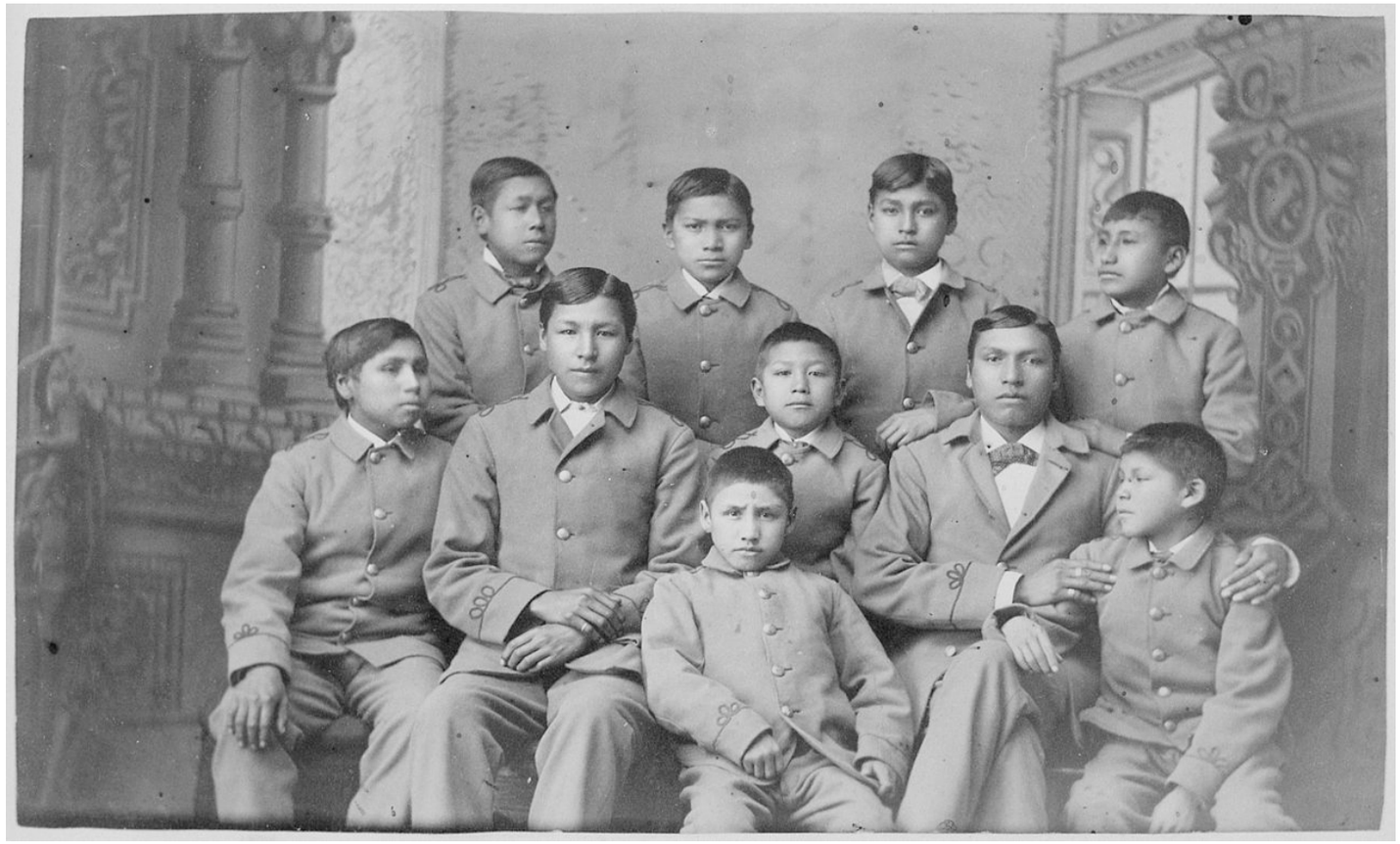
AN ACT

To conserve and develop Indian lands and resources; to extend to Indians the right to form business and other organizations; to establish a credit system for Indians; to grant certain rights of home rule to Indians; to provide for vocational education for Indians; and for other purposes.

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled*, That hereafter no land of any Indian reservation, created or set apart by treaty or agreement with the Indians, Act of Congress, Executive order, purchase, or otherwise, shall be allotted in severalty to any Indian.

SEC. 2. The existing periods of trust placed upon any Indian lands and any restriction on alienation thereof are hereby extended and continued until otherwise directed by Congress.

SEC. 3. The Secretary of the Interior, if he shall find it to be in the public interest, is hereby authorized to restore to tribal ownership the remaining surplus lands of any Indian reservation heretofore opened, or authorized to be opened, to sale, or any other form of disposal by Presidential proclamation, or by any of the public-land laws of the United States: *Provided, however*, That valid rights or claims of any persons to any lands so withdrawn existing on the date of the withdrawal shall not be affected by this Act: *Provided further*, That this section shall not apply to lands within any reclamation project heretofore authorized in any Indian reservation: *Provided further*, That the order of the Department of the Interior signed, dated, and approved by Honorable Ray Lyman Wilbur, as Secretary of the Interior, on October 28, 1932, temporarily withdrawing lands of the Papago Indian Reservation in Arizona from all forms of mineral entry or claim under the public land mining laws, is hereby revoked and rescinded, and the lands of the said Papago Indian



Group of Omaha boys in cadet uniforms Carlisle Indian School Pennsylvania, 1880

Department of the Interior. Office of Indian Affairs

# Bulldozers Move In, Bums Move Out of Park

Omaha World Herald
March 18, 1969

# Bulldozers Move In, Bums Move Out of Park

By Al Frisbie

The bulldozer, engine snarling, gouged at the soft, damp ground around the tree.

It backed off, then with giant scoop extended, attacked again. The trunk swayed, roots stubbornly resisting. But machine won. Grudgingly the tree bent and fell, joining others upended on the grass of Jefferson Square.

On the sidewalk, a little man in a shabby coat, oversized trousers belted against his slim waist, looked on quietly.

He was watching the death throes of Omaha's oldest park — one dedicated in the first plot of the village of Omaha in 1854.

It's possible that once the square-block area bounded by Cass, Chicago, Fifteenth and Sixteenth Streets, was an Omaha showplace. Horse and buggies may have circled its exterior as children played on its grass.

But in later years it became a haven for the vagabond, the man down on his luck and the aged living out their years on pension checks.

## Shade, Sun

It provided an oasis on the neon-lit fringes of the business district where a man could find shade in summer, sun in spring, and where those weary of life's race could retreat.

It was a sanctuary where a man could find in sleep a few hours escape from reality in a setting where broken bottles symbolized, in part, broken dreams.

Jefferson Square was a place of violence and compassion.

Children from crowded tenement hotels and apartments found a touch of beauty in the park. There they could bend in wonder over a tiny flower or, on visits of the city-sponsored Playmobile, catch a momentary glimpse of carefree happiness.

Perhaps some learned a lesson from a pensioner who made daily rounds through the park, leaving a piece of bread for the squirrels at each tree.

## Night Violence

A place of rest and tranquillity by day, Jefferson frequently was the scene of violence at night. Fights, beatings, shootings and knifings are part of its history.

There were efforts to upgrade the park.

In 1946, for example, there were ceremonies dedicating an illuminated fountain from which water fell into a wading pool.

For a time children splashed happily and down-and-outers watched multi-colored lights play on the water.

The pool, made possible through a bequest of Simeon Bloom, an Omaha attorney who died in 1909, quickly deteriorated. The lights were broken, the pool became a receptacle for cigarette butts and for bottles. By 1949 the water was not turned on and in 1953 the fountain was demolished.

## Stones Remain

Now, all that remains of the project are a few stones and the pool's concrete floor. Grass and weeds sprout through the cracks in the covering. A marker bearing the legend "Simeon Bloom Memorial Fountain" remains.

It, too, will disappear.

For the park is in the path of the Interstate Highway and must go. In 1967, the city received $302,000 for it. The money, said Public Property Director Clarence Shafer, went into a land acquisition fund.

Since then the park has lived on borrowed time. Its time is up.

—World-Herald Photo by Robert Paskach.

**Passerby watches bulldozer at work . . . The uprooting of a park.**

Omaha World Herald
March 18, 1969

# ARTICLE ANALYSIS

- When was the article written? Who published the article?
- List three things the author said that you think are important.
- Why do you think this document was written?
- List two facts you learned from the article.
- Take a Stand: Should the park have been torn down?
- Make 3 arguments for or against tearing down the park.
- Write a question to the author that is left unanswered by the document

For a digital template for document analysis, go to:

https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/written_document_analysis_worksheet.pdf

# REFLECT

Think of a place that is important to you, or where you spend a lot of time.

What would it feel like to not be able to go to that place?

What would it be like if that place was destroyed or replaced?

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR: SARAH PIERCE

Sarah Pierce is the Lead Teacher of Omaha Public Schools' Native Indigenous Centered Education (NICE) Program. She grew up in Rockyford, South Dakota- a small community in the badlands of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. She is a proud Oglala Lakota and passionate advocate of Native American education. She currently resides in Louisville, Nebraska with her husband, Tyrell, and their four sons, Thomas, William, Richard, and Tyrell Jr.

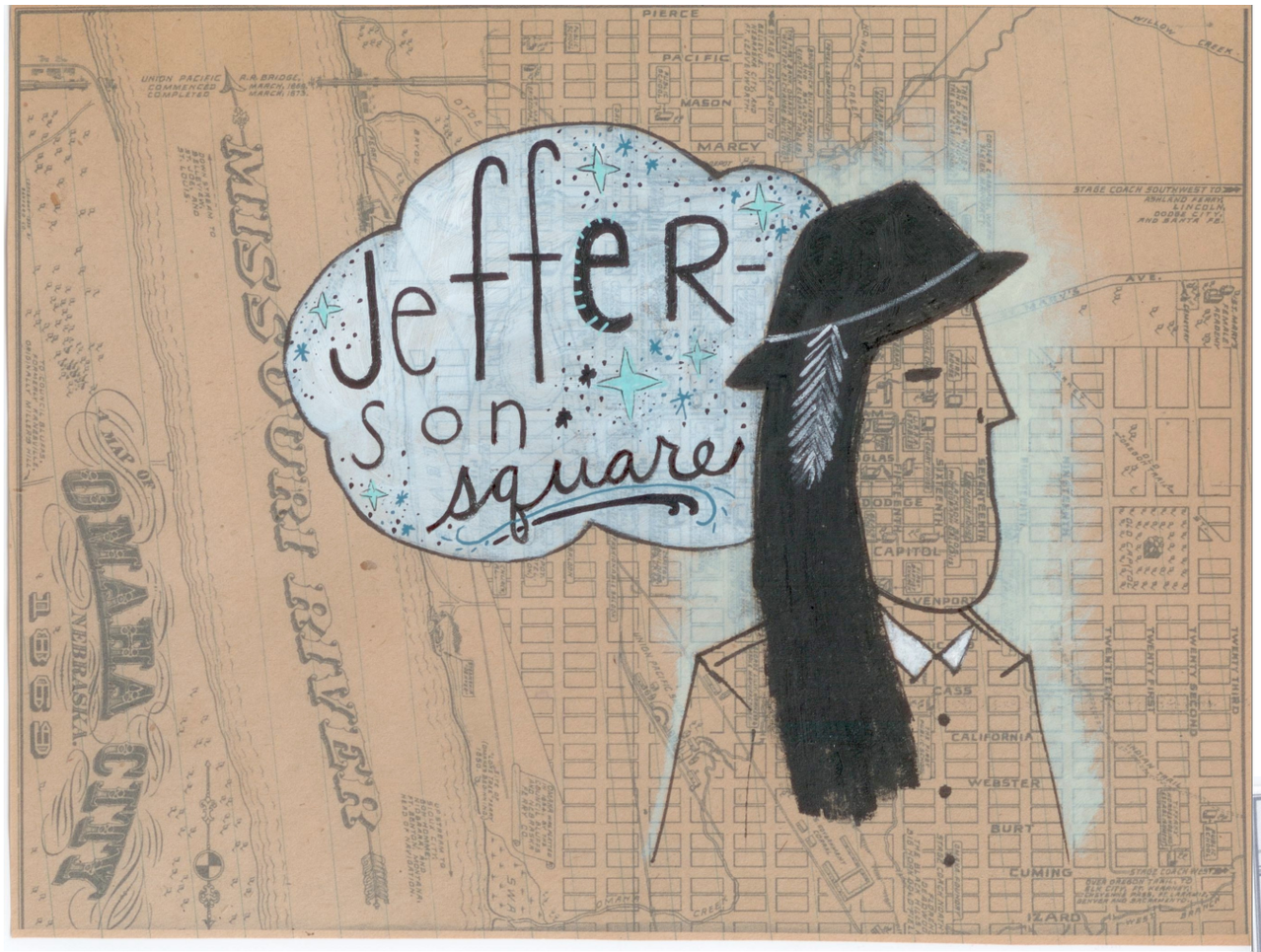
Pow Wow
This illustration shows a fancy shawl dancer (left) and jingle dress dancer (right). Fry bread is a traditional staple dish for celebratory dinners including a pow wow.

# ABOUT THE ARTIST: SARAH ROWE

Artist Sarah Rowe is from the Lakota Nation. Her work is colorful and bold, combining traditional Native American symbology and her own dream images. She received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Webster University, studying in St. Louis, Missouri and Vienna, Austria. Her work has been featured in many galleries around the world and was recently exhibited at Joslyn Art Museum, where she teaches workshops on personal symbolism. Sarah lives in Omaha with her ten year old daughter, Lyla.

Signs
This illustration shows the division of the tribe, and how people felt forced to go one way and then another.

Baptist Church
Star quilts are a given as gifts of celebration or honor.




Grandpa
The background image is a map of Jefferson Square.

Businesses
Jefferson Square was originally dedicated November 20, 1865 and was demolished for the construction of I-480 March 18, 1969.

## ABOUT THE DEVELOPER: OCTAVIA BUTLER

Octavia Butler is an elementary teacher for Omaha Public Schools. Octavia previously developed the iBook: Great Migration as part of a series on local and state African American history for Making Invisible Histories Visible: http://www.education.ne.gov/nebooks/ebook_library.html. She is a Teacher Leader for the Oxbow National Writing Project. Her love of nature has led her to develop educational opportunities for students to authentically experience nature, and she is involved in community garden projects across Omaha.

# This book created in partnership with:

Minnesota Humanities Center

Making Invisible Histories Visible

Directed by: Emily Brush

Historical Consultant: Dr. Jared Leighton

A Special Thanks to Barry Thomas

Making Invisible Histories Visible is an initiative of the Omaha Public Schools

# DEMOLITION

When something is torn down or destroyed

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**Related Glossary Terms**

Drag related terms here

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**Index** Find Term

**Section 1 - Jefferson Square**

# FANCY DANCER

Male Fancy Dancers wear heavily beaded regalia adorned with brightly colored feathers. Often, they use face and leg paint. Many carry a dance stick, hoops or other items in their hands. Fancy dancers are known for their stamina, high jumps, quick footwork and beautiful regalia.

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**Related Glossary Terms**

Drag related terms here

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**Index** Find Term

**Section 1 - Jefferson Square**

# HANDGAMES

A Native American guessing game

## Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

## Index

Find Term

### Section 1 - Jefferson Square

# HO-CHUNK

A member of the Winnebago tribe

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**Related Glossary Terms**

Drag related terms here

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**Index** Find Term

**Section 1 - Jefferson Square**

# JINGLE DRESS

Jingle Dress Dance has been termed 'jingle' for the metallic clacking noise the dress makes when in movement.

Originally, the jingle dress dancers were called upon to dance for a sick or injured community member.

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**Related Glossary Terms**

Drag related terms here

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**Index** Find Term

**Section 1 - Jefferson Square**

# POW WOW

A ceremony or meeting among Native American Indians.

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**Related Glossary Terms**

Drag related terms here

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**Index** Find Term

**Section 1 - Jefferson Square**

# PRESERVE

To save, protect, or keep something the way it is

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**Related Glossary Terms**

Drag related terms here

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**Index** Find Term

**Section 1 - Jefferson Square**

# RESERVATIONS

An area of land set aside by the United States government that is managed by a Native American tribe

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**Related Glossary Terms**

Drag related terms here

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**Index** Find Term

**Section 1 - Jefferson Square**

# RESILIENT

Strong

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**Related Glossary Terms**

Drag related terms here

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**Index** Find Term

**Section 1 - Jefferson Square**