Chapter 7

Comanche Historical Ethnography and Ethnohistory

7.1 Introduction

The earliest mention of the Comanche in the historical record date to 1706. Comanche ethnogenesis took place about two centuries earlier, after their separation from the Shoshone near the Wind River region. In a step-wise migration bands left the parent society and moved south along the eastern flank of the Rocky Mountains. Initially Comanche bands inhabited the central plains along the Platte, Republican, and Arkansas rivers in eastern Colorado. According to numerous scholars, the Comanche quickly transitioned from a Great Basin culture to a Great Plains life way, although the Comanche retained many Great Basin cultural beliefs and practices.[1]

However seeking greater trade opportunities and horses, along with the rapidly changing political economic conditions, Comanche bands migrated southeast.
By the latter part of the eighteenth century the Comanche consolidated their position on the southern Great Plains after a series of territorial and economic conflicts various tribes and the Spanish.[2] Strategically employing warfare, treaty negotiations, and alliances the Comanche controlled the region between the Arkansas and Pecos rivers, an area comprising present-day western Texas and Oklahoma, eastern New Mexico, southeast Colorado, and southwest Kansas.[3] By 1820 the Comanche occupied primarily the territory south of the Arkansas River, while the Cheyenne and Arapaho occupied the lands north of the river.[4] They controlled this region until the reservation period.

The Comanche were never a tribe, unified under a centralized political structure. Rather Comanche ethnicity and social unity was based on common cultural traditions,

language, history, and political economic goals. Linguistically, the Comanche speak a Central Numic language, which is dialectically related to Eastern or Wind River Shoshone.[5] The Comanche call themselves *Numunuu*. The term Comanche appears in the early eighteenth century Spanish documents. The ethnonymn may derive from the Ute word for enemy, *komancia*, which was applied to all Shoshone enemies.[6]

Comanche territory has been described as a "paradise" for equestrian pastoralists.[7] The tablelands and grasses were some of the richest bison country on the southern Great Plains. The primary organizational social structure was bands. Bands, affiliated through social and political ties, made up social divisions that occupied distinct territories. Although bands fluctuated socially and demographically through time, four social divisions historically had demographic, political, and geographic stability. These principle bands were the *Yamparika* or "Yap Eaters," which is the northern most band and the last to migrate to the southern plains. The *Kwahade* or "Antelope band," inhabited the Staked Plains. The largest band was the *Penatika* or "Honey Eaters." This band occupied the southern portion of Comanche lands. It was the first band to migrate south. The "Wanderers" or *Noyeka* band held the center territory of Comanche lands.[8]

7.2 Subsistence Economy

Critical to the Comanche were bison, which provided food, clothing, and shelter. Bison was the foundation of Comanche subsistence economy. How bison became the center of Comanche subsistence is explained in oral tradition explaining the liberation of bison.[9] Communal hunts took place in the fall and summer. Communal hunts were under the direction of a hunt leader, usually a bandleader or noted warrior. Apart from the communal hunts, individual hunters used a stalking method to subsistence hunt.[10]

Bison herd movements also partially determined band movements through the landscape. Bison were hunted year round by individual hunters. After the introduction of the horses, hunters ran down bison killing them with a lance or bow and arrow. The hunters used buffalo runners, especially trained horses. Hunters often took advantage of

the natural features driving a portion of the herd into a blind canyon or draw. They also took advantage of bison behavior, using the natural tendency of bison bulls to circle around cows and calves as a defense.[11]

Men butchered bison immediately after the animal fell. The women packed the meat back to camp. The soft organs were consumed immediately, except the bison heart, which is left on the prairie as an offering.[12]

Although bison provided the greatest proportion of meat, elk, deer, antelope were actively hunted for their meat and skins. Bears also were hunted, but largely for their oil. Some Comanche had a taboo against consuming bear, but others did eat bear. Smaller animals were considered emergency food or not eaten at all because of taboos. A strict taboo by all Comanche was against eating dogs or coyotes that were relatives to the mythological creator, Coyote.

After trade relations and raiding European settlements, the Comanche ate cattle, but the meat was held in low esteem to bison. Pigs were never eaten as they were considered filthy animals and were associated with the sedentary life of Euro-Americans, which was held in contempt.[13]

Supplementing bison and other game, the Comanche gathered a wide variety of plant foods. An early ethnobotanical study listed twenty-seven edible plants, which is most likely a partial inventory.[14] Women would seasonally gather food as the band moved from location to location. Some of the plant foods were immediately consumed either raw or cooked, but other plant foods were sun-dried and stored for future use. Some plants items were mixed with pounded meat to make pemmican.

A number of plants were obtained through trade with other tribes or Europeans and were incorporated into the Comanche diet. Maize, watermelon, squash, and other cultivars were obtained through exchange. However, similar to foreign animals used, the Comanche considered some plant foods undesirable. Rice for example, was not

consumed because of its resemblance to maggots. The word for rice is *wo'arɨhkapɨ* or "worm meat."[15]

Central to the post-contact Comanche economy is trade. After positioning themselves to control the major New Mexico trade routes, the Comanche regularly visited Spanish settlements, and exchanged goods with *viageros* ("travelers") who visited their camps.[16] Although the primary mode of exchange would be through the Comancheros, the Comanche also participated in trade fairs.

As early as 1598, the Spanish begin enslaving Indians.[17] Comanche trade in captives was actively practiced prior to European contact. The Spanish demand for indigenous slaves only intensified the activity. At the Spanish settlements, the *rescate* or "ransoming," the Spanish slave markets, were held at Taos and Picuris Pueblos. *Rescate* referred to the primary commodity for exchange, captured indigenous people for the growing Spanish slave market. Throughout the eighteenth century, the Comanche traded slaves and indigenous products for guns, ammunition, and other articles of European manufacture.[18]

Away from Spanish settlements, trade rendezvous sites occurred on the Bosque Redondo on the Pecos River, Canon del Rescate, near Lubbock, Texas, and Palo Duro Canyon on the Prairie Dog Town Fork of the Red River. At the indigenous trade fairs, the Comanche exchanged bison robes, tallow, bison meat and tongues, horses, as well as beeswax. In return, they received Native slaves, maize, tobacco, cloth, vermillion, brandy, mirrors, beads, guns, and ammunition.[19]

After the intrusion of Anglos into the region, the Comanche became suppliers of horses for the Saint Louis, Natchez, and New Orleans markets.[20] Prior to the horse's introduction, the Comanche remained dependent on dogs to move across the landscape. The Comanche were one of the earliest tribes to acquire horses. During the 1680 Pueblo Rebellion, the Comanche gained greater access to horses. Through

breeding, capturing wild stock, and raiding the Comanche by the eighteenth century commanded large horse herds, the surplus livestock feeding the Anglo-American market.

7.3 Technology and Material Culture

Material culture was similar to other Southern Plains tribal-nations. Lodges were constructed of bison hides erected with 12 up to 30 lodge poles. Lodges were highly portable and taken down within minutes. The tipi interior was furnished with an inner liner, bedding of skins, and colorful willow backrests. Some lodges had bison hide partitions to afford a degree of privacy. In the lodge's center a small hearth was constructed for warmth. The tipi flaps could be manipulated to draw the smoke out or bring cool air in, depending on the lodge temperature. In hot weather, the lodge was abandoned and people slept under brush arbors constructed of willow boughs.[21]

Adapting to the requirements of Plains life all possessions were portable and few in number. These included parfleches, bowls of shell or wood, horn spoons, and bone needles. Comanche also women made crude basketry for specific functions.[22]

Comanche weaponry consisted of bows about three feet in length made from wood, horn, and sinew. Bows were made from either solid wood or laminations of wood, horn, and sinew. Arrows finely were crafted from straight-grained wood, fletched with wild turkey or turkey vulture feathers, which were impervious to blood.[23]

Another weapon was a wooden lance about seven feet long. The lance was never thrown, it was only used in close combat, symbol of a warrior's bravery. Even after the introduction of muskets and rifles, warriors preferred to use traditional weapons to fight on horseback available.[24]

Most stone implements were manufactured of obsidian, cherts, or flints. Despite the introduction of metal goods, some Comanche preferred to use stone points. Saddles resembled Spanish stylistics, but during war Comanche warriors went without saddles

using only a pad stuffed with grass enabling the warrior greater mobility in the saddle and to perform tricks to demonstrate his horsemanship during the battle.[25]

As with other tribes, the introduction of European trade goods altered clothing and adornment. Glass beads, along with German silver, trade cloth, hairpipes, bells, and paints, became widely available to the Comanche by the late eighteenth century. Comanche made buckskin clothing. Prior to the reservation period, children of both sexes remained naked until about five years of age. Young boys went naked until about age ten and then began to dress-up. Young girls until puberty only wore breechclouts, once they began to dress-up at the appropriate age, the boys were called *turbitsi* and the teenage girls *naipi* [26]

The daily dress of adult men included a short, breechcloth, moccasins, legging with long fringe, and a *sarvi*; a hide or after the introduction of trade goods a cloth worn around the waist. Moccasins were with an angular rather than rounded toe. Men's footwear was decorated with fringe along the instep from laces to the toe, often decorated with beads or tin cones.

Shirts were only worn in the later part of the nineteenth century or in extremely cold weather. Bison robes, bear robes, skunk robes, and occasionally wolf robes were also made and worn. Feather war bonnets were not worn by men, except by a select few. Instead most men wore buffalo horn caps or otter skin turbans.[27]

Comanche women, similar to Kiowa and Southern Cheyenne women, wore a three-skin dress, composed of a skirt and poncho-like blouse. The buckskin tops was suspended by shoulder straps. Beads, cowrie shells, and elk teeth were used to decorate the dress. Women wore leggings and moccasins.[28] By the late nineteenth century, trade cloth replaced buckskin.

Similar to the men's *sarvi*, women also wore an apron. It was belted at the waist. Hung from the woman's belt were her tools, knife, and awl case. Later Comanche dress

included shawls that were fastened around the neck with German silver broaches. Moccasins were knee-length with bison hide soles. During the winter month's bison robes were used for warmth, some bison robes were painted.[29]

The Comanche held a strict sexual division of labor. Women were responsible for gathering plant foods and firewood, manufacturing clothing and household implements, and processing game and preparing food. Although men owned lodges, women were charged with erecting and transporting the lodge and maintaining it. Men's labor included hunting, war, raiding and supervision of the horse herds. Men also were responsible for making and maintaining war and hunting equipment as well as horse equipment. Some men although delegated these chores to older men or Mexican captives.[30]

Aside from sex in the determination of labor, age also played a role in defining social life and responsibilities The Comanche recognized five sex specific age categories during an individual's life cycle.[31]

7.4 Life Cycle

At the commencement of labor, the mother isolated herself in a separate lodge. A midwife and other female relatives assisted her through he labor. Male babies were preferred, but any newborn was welcomed as long as the band could provide for the infant. Unmarried women performed mechanical abortion. Women, unmarried and married, also practiced infanticide through neglect if the child was deformed or she had twins. During the birth, the child's grandfather would wait outside the natal lodge. If the newborn were a girl he would publicly announce it, but if it were a boy he would be told, "it's your close friend."[32] If it was a first birth, especially a boy, the mother's parents gave gifts to the father.

For several months the baby was kept during the day in a slat-back cradle. Infants were confined to the cradleboard until they could crawl. Afterwards the baby was

allowed to explore. At night the infant was transferred to an oval cradle of buffalo hide. The child slept with the mother for the first three to five years. After that age, the child was allowed to sleep with other children.[33]

By age three or four children were separated into sex groups, girls playing near home while boys were allowed to rove seeking adventure. All boys were honored by not having any labor duties, as it was believed they would soon die for the Comanche. Both sexes were encouraged to learn horseback riding at an early age –as soon as they could walk. Sex play began early and was tolerated as no premium was placed on virginity. No puberty ceremonies existed for either sex, although a wealthy family may run across the plains hanging from the tail of a fast horse so she would be agile and active.[34]

Children were indulged until adolescence. By early adolescence boys and girls began to participate in family labor activities. Boys herded the horses, watered them, and started to hunt. When a boy made his first kill, he was honored by praise and giving gifts in his honor. They were expected to accept the duties of warriors and acquire skills to begin their own families.

Older adolescent boys slept in a separate lodge with in the family camp to facilitate brother-sister avoidance imposed on adolescent siblings. The lodge also was used to entertain the love making activities of older girls who would initiate the act by visiting him. It is at this time they went on their first raid or war party with their father's permission. Young men also considered seeking personal medicines, usually vision questing by the age of 20. Some individuals although never received power. Without medicine no great deeds could be accomplished.[35]

At the onset of menstruation, girls were isolated to avoid contaminating the medicines of their male relatives. During this time they had to avoid eating red meat, as it was "bad for the blood."[36] Afterwards she was expected to learn all the skills necessary to become a wife and maintain a family household.

It was not proper for a young man to meet openly with a young woman to court. The couple met in remote locations arranged by a mutual friend or his female relatives.

Marriage among the Comanche was arranged either between the couple or their parents. Parents often acted as marital advisors if they wished to arrange a linkage with an important family. Girls married at age 15 or 16. Boys married ideally after they earned a war reputation, usually in the twenties. The young man approached her father, brother, or male guardian with the proposal. On occasion he would send a mediator. The young man usually offered a horse or bride service. If the gift was accepted, the couple was regarded as married.

Marriage between consanguinial relatives to any known degree was forbidden. There was no mother-in-law taboo; rather husband and mother-in-law relations were cordial and helpful. Mutual respect existed between the relations of in-laws in different generations. Women were expected to act as a watchful older sister to their sister-in-law, while brothers were on the warpath they assisted their brother-in-law's camp. Wife's brother also had a coarse joking relationship with brother-in-law.[37]

Marriage occurred largely within the band. Post-marital residence was patrilocal. Son-in-laws who continually delivered a portion of his hunt to his wife's mother's lodge could expect to receive the wife's younger sisters as additional wives. Non-sororal polygyny was permissible, but sororal polygyny was desirable as it created deep bonds of cooperation between two families. One wife was recognized as the favorite, she was his primary sexual partner and confidant. She also held sway over the "chore wives." In polygynous marriages husband and favorite wife lived together, chore wives and their children had other lodges.[38] With the emphasis on cooperation between families, often brothers and sisters would exchange brothers and sisters with the same family in marriage to strengthen familial ties.

The Comanche did practice the levirate. The institution approached polyandry as brothers often lent each other their wives. No sexual jealousy also existed between two

“warrior brothers,” who shared wives. Women although could not freely engage in sexual liaisons. Adulterous men could be sued for property, but women faced disfigurement or potential death by her husband.[39]

Divorces occurred with some frequency. If the couple contemplated divorcing, the fathers of the couple often intervened to prevent the break-up. If they could not solve the situation, sometimes the bandleader would be called on to act as an intermediary. The woman’s male relatives could reclaim her from a bad husband with payments of property. Grounds for permanent separation was husband-wife incompatibility, excessive physical abuse, or co-wife difficulties. A woman with no kin support could escape to another band or find a warrior strong enough to challenge her husband.[40] With a divorce, men and women took their own property and the children traditionally stayed with father’s family.[41]

An adult man’s status was connected to his war raiding successes. A wife would support his quest because her status connected through him. Passive attitudes, especially in men, were not tolerated. The berdache, found in other Plains societies, was not known among the Comanche. One acceptable role was the *pukutsi* or “Crazy One.” The *pukutsi* adopted the behaviors of reckless bravery and did everything backward but did not form a fraternity such as contraries. There were few *pukutsi* in Comanche society.[42]

Aging in Comanche society resulted in a marked decline in social status, especially for men. Men too elderly to war and denied a warrior’s death, joined the Smoke Lodge, where they met and recounted their past accomplishments and talked over the days events. Such men were often teased and harassed by younger men. In defense, the older men held public parodies of the younger men reciting their love affairs and divorces as counting coups.[43] His last recourse against the young men was to practice sorcery against them.

Post-menopausal women faired better. As elder women lost status, they were now permitted to voice a public opinion, participate in ceremonies more actively, and had

the right to practice shamanistic curing.[44] However, both sexes existed out of the kindness of their children. In some instances, the elderly, men and women, were thrown away, left on the plains to die in a state of abandonment.[45]

The origin of death was explained through a Coyote tradition. In a council with the people, Coyote lead them to the water's edge. Picking up a rock he proclaimed; "Behold, our dead people shall do as this rock!" Coyote threw it into the water. "This rock," he said, "will not come back. Similarly our people will not return."[46]

After a person died, the deceased was buried as soon as possible. The corpse was washed, painted, and dressed in finery. The preferred burial location was west of the dead person's lodge in a crevice, cave, or head of an arroyo. The body was deposited facing eastward. If the death occurred on the high plains a scaffold burial took place with the corpse in a supine position. The dead person's personal effects were left with corpse.[47]

There was no prescribed period of mourning for kin. With death, men and women could mourn, from a single day up to years. The mourners cut their hair, some gashed their arms or legs, and a few may cut off an ear. Mourners were excused from dancing. On occasion, a favorite mount was killed and left at the gravesite. As a substitute, a horse's mane or tail was shaved off as an offering.

Throughout family member's lifetime, a renewal of mourning took place if approaching near to the dead person's grave, although relatives and friends normally would avoid the gravesite and had a taboo of never speaking the dead person's name. Usually the dead person's property was destroyed, including livestock. A person could bequeath property before death, but brothers and sisters have the greatest claim to any property, including sons and daughters.[48]

7.5 Marriage, Family, and Kinship

Each nuclear family lived in a separate lodge. The Comanche did practice sororal polygyny. Among polygynous households, the first wife lived in the main tipi with the husband, the other wives in adjacent lodges. Adolescent males had separate lodges within the family camp. The domestic work area, out of the lodge, consisted of meat drying racks and storage racks.

Extended families occasionally camped alone, but most often camps were composed of 50 or more lodges. On occasion, nucleated camps were done, but usually for a specific purpose.[49]

Descent was bilateral. Terminologically, the kin group was limited to the third generation ascending and descending from ego. In one's own generation, cousins were classified as siblings, although cross nieces and nephews are distinguished from parallel cousins. Using sibling kin terms, kinship relations can extend beyond cousins. For example, a great-great grandmother was called *patsi*, "older sister." In turn she would call a male ego, *tami* or "younger brother." In the parental generation, father and his brothers are equated terminologically as *ahpɨ'*. Mother and her sisters were called *pia*, but father's sister and mother's brother were separate kinship terms. Ego's husband and brothers-in-laws were called *kumahpɨ* and ego's wife and wife's sisters were referred to as *kwɨhɨ*.[50] Four terms were used for grandparents. These same four terms were used to refer to grandchildren, although the distinguishing feature was the sex of the speaker rather than the intervening relative.[51]

The line of kinship ceases when it passes through two marriage relationships between the speaker and the person under consideration, with no other blood ties to bridge the kin gap.[52] Kinship horizontally was not as limiting. The Comanche could extend and retract to cultivate relationships or censure someone. Switching address terms signals changes in appropriate behavior.[53]

Outside of the kinship network, the Comanche created fictive kin using an institutionalized form of friendship called *haitsI* or a close bond between brothers. The *haitsI* extended to male cousins or non-kin. A similar, but weaker bond between women existed called *tii*. Such friends seek sometimes sought to marry brothers or sisters to express their life long closeness to one another.[54]

7.6 Social and Political Organization

During pre-reservation period the Comanche had four levels of social and political organization. The first was the nuclear family. The second was the bilateral extended family or the *nininahkani* ("people who live together in a household"). The band was the third level of socio-political organization. Bands formed around a prominent extended family, whose headman was noted for military prowess, hunting skill, and political savvy. Other extended families, both relatives and non-relatives, would attach themselves to him. Succession to the status of bandleader went to the most able man. There was no pattern of inheritance for leadership.[55]

Finally, bands made up a division of the Comanche tribe. Divisions were tribally organized groups of local bands linked together through kinship ties, common cultural traditions, and political purpose. Divisional principle chiefs were elected from among the bandleaders.[56] The primary role of division chief seems to have been representing political interests in relations with Europeans and other tribes.

Among extended families and between related extended families of the same band, relations and discussions were conducted in kin terms, with the term "brother" implying the strongest bond. Among extended family leaders, they dealt with domestic affairs, marriage arrangements, divorce, adultery, and murder.[57]

Village movements, maintaining community peace, conducting large-scale hunts, matters of warfare, peace, and international relations were the affairs of bandleaders. To exercise their authority about decisions, they could impose sanctions. These included

corporal punishment, property confiscation, and under extreme circumstances, capital punishment.[58]

For a man, social status and prestige was through acquiring a war record. The most valued members of Comanche society were young males who were skilled in war and horsemanship. In camp they were given comfort and afforded many privileges, as it was commonly believed they would die early. The ultimate honor was death at the hands of an enemy.[59] Individual warriors desired to distinguish themselves in war and raiding, to become a *Tek*^{w}*Iniwapl* or "warrior." To be considered a *Tek*^{w}*Iniwapl* by the community was the ideal. A *Tek*^{w}*Iniwapl* was one who faced the enemy, even when dismounted.[60]

Leaders with a record of success became "war chiefs," which entitled them in some bands to wear feathered headdress as emblematic of their many war coups. War chiefs were obligated to never retreat in battle and to demonstrate bravery in dangerous situations. They had the authority to negotiate truces on behalf of the band. Fathers of slain sons would look to war chiefs to lead a vengeance party to honor their sons.[61] War chiefs held no authority in camp except when under attack. Internal matters were relegated to civil chiefs and older men with influence, usually retired war chiefs served as counselors.[62]

This status had to be achieved to become a *Paraivo*, "Leader." Bandleaders were also warriors, as there was no separation between military and civil authority. Political and public activity determined whether the leader was *Iriri Paraivo*, a "Good" or "Peaceful" Chief or a "Mean/ Dangerous" Chief or *Mahimiana Paraivo*, "War Chief." "The choice of role at a particular time," according to Kavanaugh, "depended on situational evaluation of the power differential."[63]

Paraivo made decisions about moving camp, trade, the allocation of scarce resources, and scheduling ceremonies. Individuals settled most conflicts, but peace chiefs could act as an arbitrator if asked to do so, but his opinion held no authority.[64]

The scheduling of communal hunts fell to a council of elder men. As a symbol of authority the elder men wore a bison robe emblazoned with the rays of the sun. Council decisions were based on a dignified procedure where every person had the right to speak in turn on a matter before the council offered a decision.[65]

There were several men's societies. The Crow Tassel Wearers and Big Horse Owners were established to pledge unceasing warfare, but exercised no authority in camp social control. The "Big Horse People," (*Piviapukuni*), the "Little Horse People," (*Tiipukuni*), "Black Knife People" (*Tu-wihikani*), and Lobo had their own traditions, regalia, leadership, and dances and all had semi-military functions. The primary function of each society was to organize ceremonies at which they would recruit volunteers for revenge war expeditions.[66] Men's societies regulated travel, enforced proper behavior, and patrolled the line of march when the band moved camp. Sometimes they would use physical force to maintain order.[67]

7.7 Warfare and Raiding

Aside from trading, raiding was a central component of Comanche political economy. Horse and cattle raids enabled Comanche men to acquire wealth and prestige. Further the redistribution of raiding items to kin members as well as non-kin was the basis to gain political power and supporters.

Men often took risks seeking glory and status. Horse stealing and revenge were common reasons for conducting a raid to take plunder, captives, and war trophies. Any man could organize a raid, but usually he had to have a reputation to gather a sufficient following. Raid leader had absolute authority during the raid. The raid spoils belonged to the raid leader, who would divide the plunder to demonstrate his generosity and enhance his reputation.[68]

Warfare among the Comanche involved coordinated attacks. Similar to all Great Plains tribes, warfare was conducted to acquire new territory and resources or to defend those assets against invasion. The Comanche routinely fought with the Ute, Tonkawa, Pawnee, Osage, various Pueblos, the Jicarilla and other Apache societies. The Comanche during warfare did count coup. The Comanche, after the introduction of firearms and horses, allowed two men to count coup on an enemy.

Prior to 1790, the Comanche fought with the Kiowa and Plains Apache, but through the Spanish, a peace was concluded that evolved into one of firmest alliances among Southern Plains tribes.[69] A half-century later, the Comanche and Kiowa, in 1840, would conclude a relative durable peace with the Southern Cheyenne. By doing so, the Comanche protected their northern and eastern flanks, freeing them to continue to fight the Ute, Apaches, Pueblos, and Europeans.[70]

7.8 Religion and Ideology

A few origin traditions have been recorded about the creation of the Comanche universe. The majority of oral traditions include renditions of war-hero histories, origin of powers, ghost encounters, and encounters with mystic animals.[71] The traditions have explanatory power, often using symbols and metaphors. One tradition recounts the sighting of the first "White men," or the *Motosotaibos* ("Bearded White Men").

> Two warriors saw dust in the air away off. They know the dust cloud was too straight to be from a buffalo herd. One of the warriors had medicine to make people invisible, so they became invisible and waited to see what was coming. They laid down and watched the wagons go by, and the wheels of the wagons went right by their heads. But they were not seen; they were invisible.[72]

The Comanche did have Trickster traditions, involving Coyote, Fox, Indians, and sometimes "White men."[73] In one tradition, Coyote and Snowbird in a great council set

the regulation of the seasons; deciding that there will six winter months and the remainder will be warm.[74] Hence setting the primary seasonal division of the Comanche seasonal cycle. Other traditions relay how the buffalo were liberated and the origin of peyote.[75]

Comanche religion was individualistic, incorporating wide variation in belief and practice. Despite the variation, the foundation of Comanche religion was held in common. *Niatpo*, the Creator, was called "My Father." Some ethnographic sources equate *Niatpo* with the Sun, but other sources relate that they are distinct. The earth, *Ne'pia* (referred to as "My mother," shared with the Sun the ability to judge oaths. In smoking, the first smoke was always offered to the Sun, the second breath was offered to the "Earth."[76]

Similar to many other indigenous religions among Great Plains and Rocky Mountain societies, the universe was filled with potential powers. Among the Comanche various aspects of nature and animals could reveal their power to humans to assist them. One recorded tradition explains how Left-Handed received his shamanistic curing power.

> A woman was traipsing [committing adultery] while her husband was on the warpath. When he returned, he found out, and decided to kill her. One day he took her away from camp; she wondered where he was taking her. He took her down by a creek bed and killed her; and left her there. She woke up and heard a voice telling her to use a certain root [as a cure]. Then a buffalo cam along and licked the wound closed. Her husband took her back, because he was sorry he killed her. She had power; she gave it to her ten-year old son, who cured another boy who was gored by a buffalo, by licking the wound closed. The son was a storyteller and he was famous because he had power. When he died, his stuff was thrown in the river, and he had a real Indian burial.[77]

Religious practice centered on acquiring "medicine power" or *puha* from supernatural beings. Medicine power resides nearly everywhere, but not in equal amounts. Some sources, such as the sun, earth, or *Niatpo*, the "Father," have intrinsic power. Peyote and cedar also have an intrinsic power as do animals with exceptional physical strength or abilities. Thus eagles, bears, coyotes, skunks, bison, wolves, antelopes, and opossums are considered especially endowed with intrinsic power, although any animal conceivably could be a source of *puha*, but cannot give the same amount.[78] Other sources of medicine power could be unusual natural phenomena and substances, deceased ancestors, ghosts, and plants.[79] The unequal amount of power is evident in the source of the medicine power. Aside from the intrinsic *puha* of peyote and cedar, other plants as an example of the inequality of power merely absorb their power from the sun and earth.[80] Carlson and Jones listed 21 plants that held medicinal value, and Jones added more botanical medicines to Comanche pharmacopeias. Most of the plant medicines were believed to have had some direct curative effect apart from any general spiritual or sacred quality associated with the plant.[81]

Acquiring *puha* was available to men and women. Both sexes could become a "possessor of power" or *puhakatl*. Power could be obtained by vision questing, by transfer, inheritance, purchase, or training. Young people would begin to seek power in late adolescence, visiting certain places on the landscape known to be powerful. They would "lie down for power," or vision quest. Vision questing was conducted at high locations as these places are the abode of power-giving spirits. The seeker would fast, stay awake, and remain in isolation, but did not use flesh sacrifices. If the spirits visit the seeker, they would offer choices of power.[82] In Comanche society, vision questing is more an act of negotiation to acquire medicine power.

Another way to achieve power is to visit the grave of a *puhakatl* to seek their personal power. Sun Dance leaders also sought visions, particularly when seeking information about the future or lost relatives. *Puha* could also be obtained in dreams.[83]

Along with the power, the seeker received the rituals, songs, prayers, and prohibitions that are associated with that medicine power. *Puha* does heal, but the medicine power may protect a person from bodily or spiritual danger, or assure success in war, hunting, or controlling the weather. The rituals included specific mechanisms on contacting the spirit, shield designs, and other insignia particular to that power.[84] *Puha*, to effectively use and direct it, the person must act responsibly and live an ideal life. *Puha* as medicine power is distinguished from *natsu*, "medicine," which is plant material or other natural substance used to treat physical illness.[85]

Individuals with medicine to cure were often called on with an offer of tobacco and an agreed payment. After contact, black silk handkerchiefs were frequently used in curing, which involved sucking horns for object intrusion, prayers, songs, as well as specific botanical medicines.[86] Josiah Gregg, in the 1830s, remarked that they "have great faith in their medicine 'medicine men,' who pretend to cure the sick with conjurations and charms…"[87] Gregg went on to observe that bloodletting was frequently practiced for curing specific diseases.[88] Edwin Eastmen also obtained a blood syrup from the Comanche.[89]

Sharing power among those with similar power led to the formation of medicine societies. Composed of four to 12 members, medicine societies would meet regularly to renew their power. Besides individual treatment and medicine society curing, there were larger religious events. One ceremony involving large scale doctoring was the Beaver ceremony or *Pianahuwait*.[90] The *Pianahuwaitl* was for curing "wasting away" disease or tuberculosis. The ceremony also conferred health benefits on all who witnessed the ceremony.[91] Aboriginally, the Comanche also held a Deer Dance ceremony. Captain W. P. Clark wrote that the dance involved swallowing red beans (*Sophora secundiflora*) and then extracting the mescal beans through their breast.[92] Despite the extinction of the ceremony after the introduction of peyote (*Lophophora williamsii*) and its associated ceremonies, mescal remained a powerful plant medicine.[93]

Another ceremonial that had community involvement was the Sun Dance. The Sun Dance, also called *Piakahni nihka*, “Big House Dance;” combined several ritualistic actions. The ceremony-included animal calling ceremonies, the use of masked ritual clowns, mock battles, mocks buffalo hunts, curing, and foretelling the future. The ceremony also had public announcements, demonstrations of spiritual powers, and the transfer of medicine power. Every ceremony was spiritually sanctioned by a medicine man.[94] The eight-day ceremony was always held mid-summer. The first four days was devoted to erecting the lodge and ritual preparation. The final four days was devoted to the public dance. Bands traveling to attend the Sun dance were required to make four over-night camps before reaching the location selected by the medicine man for the ceremony.

After the camp circle made, the material were gathered for the lodge. Cottonwood was used for the center pole and posts. The surrounding brush covering was either cottonwood or cedar. Men and women, wearing wreaths of sage on their heads gathered together the lodge materials. The cutting and transportation of the center pole was left last. A virtuous Comanche woman, a virtuous captive woman, and a captive man who had war deeds to his credit took turns cutting the center pole.[95] After the lodge is built a buffalo robe was placed on top of the center pole. The lodge was said to represent an eagle’s nest and the bison robe food for the eagle. In movements and whistling the dances were said to be symbolic of young eagles not yet able to fly.[96] The primary purpose of the Sun Dance however was to improve the well-being of society, especially their physical health. The dancers, through their participation, would increase their power.[97] Unlike other Great Plains societies, the Comanche Sun Dance was held at irregular intervals. The last ceremony was held in 1878.[98] According to Comanche people interviewed in 1933, “…soon after the buffalo disappeared, the dance was given up.”[99]

There were several ceremonies connected to warfare. The *nawaps pinar* (“stirring up”) was conducted in an encampment away from the main village. The warriors would periodically ride through the main camp singing and making public statements about their

prowess. In the evening they danced in the warriors camp. The night before they departed their women would join in the dance.

There were no ceremonies for a returning war party that lost a man. The warriors would return quietly with out celebration and resume their daily activities. If however, the party returned victorious, especially with was trophies, they would hold a victory ceremony. In the Shakedown Dance, women praised the returning warriors and would receive gifts from the war spoils.[100]

7.9 Conclusion

Within two years after signing The Treaty of Medicine Lodge in 1867 in Kansas Comanche life ways would be quickly altered. The Comanche agreed to cease raiding, permit the construction of rail routes, and agree to live on a reservation. Approximately 38.5 million acres (60,000 square miles) were ceded for a reservation that contained just over three million acres or about 4,800 square miles. Despite attempts to pursue bison and remain independent, by 1880 the buffalo and a way of life for the Comanche were gone.

[1]. See, Thomas Gladwin, "Personality Structure in the Plains," Anthropological Quarterly. 30(1957):111-124; Reginald Laubin and Gladys Laubin, The Indian Tipi: Its History, Construction, and Use. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 160-162; Robert H. Lowie, "The Northern Shoshone," American Museum of Natural History Anthropological Papers. 2(2, 1909):165-206; Robert H. Lowie, Indians of the Plains. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982); Ernest Wallace and E. Adamson Hoebel, The Comanches: Lords of the South Plains. (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1952).

[2]. See, Rupert N. Richardson, The Comanche Barrier to South Plains Settlement. (Glendale: Arthur H. Clark, 1933); William W. Newcomb, Jr., The Indians of Texas from prehistoric to Modern Times. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1961); Wallace and Hoebel, The Comanches: Lords of the South Plains.

[3]. To further solidify their political economic position on the Southern Plains, over the next three decades the Comanche along with the Ute, raid heavily the Plains Apache tribes. In 1716 for example, repeated Comanche and Ute raids force the Jicarilla into mountains of New Mexico. By the 1730s the Comanche successfully displace the Plains Apache. They now commanded a dominant position in the Southern Plains trade network, particularly the New Mexico trade. Realizing the benefit of maintaining good relations with the Comanche in preventing further French intrusions into Spanish lands, the Spanish by the late 1740s intensified their economic relations with them. Using the Comanche as a buffer against French incursions, relatively good relations existed between the Comanche and Spanish over the next two decades. Despite Spanish intentions to use the Comanche through economic relations to maintain their colonial foothold in Texas and eastern New Mexico, Comanche-Spanish relations remained unstable, especially in Texas. In an effort to strengthen peaceful relations, the Spanish negotiated and concluded a series of treaties with various Comanche bands. The 1785 treaty was signed in San Antonio and the year after, another at Santa Fe, see, Thomas W. Kavanagh, "Comanche," In. Handbook of North American Indians. Volume 13. Part 2 of 2. Raymond J. DeMallie, volume editor. (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2001), 886; Alfred B. Thomas, Forgotten Frontiers: A Study of the Spanish Indian Policy of Don Juan Bautista, Governor of New Mexico. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1932), 305.

[4]. Steve E, Cassells, The Archaeology of Colorado. (Boulder: Johnson Books, 1983), 197.

[5]. Cassells, The Archaeology of Colorado, 196; Kavanagh, "Comanche," 886.

[6]. Morris K. Opler, "The Origins of Comanche and Ute," American Anthropologist. 43(1943):158.

[7]. Wallace and Hoebel, The Comanches: Lords of the South Plains, 13.

[8]. Daniel J. Gelo, Comanche Belief and Ritual. (Ann Arbor: UMI Dissertation Services, 1986), 15.

[9]. H. H. St. Clair, "Shoshone and Comanche Tales," The Journal of American Folklore. XXII(LXXXV, 1909):280-181.

[10]. Kavanagh, "Comanche," 889.

[11]. Gelo, Comanche Belief and Ritual, 18; Wallace and Hoebel, The Comanches: Lords of the South Plains, 61.

[12]. Gelo, Comanche Belief and Ritual, 18.
[13]. Gelo, Comanche Belief and Ritual, 19.
[14]. Gustav G. Carlson and Volney H. Jones, "Some Notes on Uses of Plants by the Comanche Indians," Papers of the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts and Letters. 25(1940):517-542; Kavanagh, "Comanche," 889.
[15]. E. Canonge, Comanche Texts. (Norman: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1958), 129.
[16]. Kavanagh, "Comanche," 889.
[17]. Refer to, Edward H. Spicer, Cycles of Conquest: The Impact of Spain, Mexico, and the United States on the Indians of the Southwest, 1533-1960. Sixth Printing. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1976).
[18]. Kavanagh, "Comanche," 890; Charles H. Lange, "Plains-Southwestern Inter-Cultural Relations during the Historic Period," Ethnohistory. 4(2, 1957):161; Spicer, Cycles of Conquest: The Impact of Spain, Mexico, and the United States on the Indians of the Southwest, 1533-1960, 161.
[19]. Kavanagh, "Comanche," 890; Thomas, Forgotten Frontiers: A Study of the Spanish Indian Policy of Don Juan Bautista, Governor of New Mexico, 306.
[20]. See, Dan Flores, Journal of an Indian Trader: Anthony Glass and the Texas Trading Frontier. (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1985).
[21]. Gelo, Comanche Belief and Ritual, 21-22.
[22]. Gelo, Comanche Belief and Ritual, 22.
[23]. Wallace and Hoebel, The Comanches: Lords of the South Plains, 98-111.
[24]. Gelo, Comanche Belief and Ritual, 22.
[25]. Gelo, Comanche Belief and Ritual, 22-23.
[26]. Gelo, Comanche Belief and Ritual, 23-25.
[27]. Gelo, Comanche Belief and Ritual, 23-24; Wallace and Hoebel, The Comanches: Lords of the South Plains, 77-86.
[28]. Wallace and Hoebel, The Comanches: Lords of the South Plains, 85.
[29]. Kavanagh, "Comanche," 891.
[30]. Gelo, Comanche Belief and Ritual, 27; E. Adamson Hoebel, Political Organization and Law-ways of the Comanche Indians. Memoirs of the American Anthropological Association, 54. (Menasha: American Anthropological Association, 1940):118.
[31]. Wallace and Hoebel, The Comanches: Lords of the South Plains, 145.
[32]. Wallace and Hoebel, The Comanches: Lords of the South Plains, 144.
[33]. Kavanagh, "Comanche," 895.
[34]. Wallace and Hoebel, The Comanches: Lords of the South Plains, 126.
[35]. Gelo, Comanche Belief and Ritual, 29.
[36]. Kavanagh, "Comanche," 895.
[37]. Gelo, Comanche Belief and Ritual, 30.
[38]. Gelo, Comanche Belief and Ritual, 29-30.
[39]. Gelo, Comanche Belief and Ritual, 29.
[40]. Gelo, Comanche Belief and Ritual, 30.
[41]. Kavanagh, "Comanche," 895.
[42]. Gelo, , Comanche Belief and Ritual, 35.
[43]. Hoebel, Political Organization and Law-ways of the Comanche Indians, 40-44.
[44]. Gelo, Comanche Belief and Ritual, 28.

[45]. Gelo, Comanche Belief and Ritual, 36.
[46]. St. Clair, "Shoshone and Comanche Tales," 280.
[47]. Wallace and Hoebel, , The Comanches: Lords of the South Plains, 149-154.
[48]. Gelo, Comanche Belief and Ritual, 36; Kavanagh, "Comanche," 895.
[49]. Kavanagh, "Comanche," 894.
[50]. Gelo, Comanche Belief and Ritual, 31.
[51]. See, Gerald Betty, Comanche Society Before the Reservation. (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2005); Kavanagh, "Comanche," 893-895.
[52]. Thomas Gladwin, "Comanche Kin Behavior," American Anthropologist. n.s. 50(1, 1948):76-77.
[53]. Gladwin, "Comanche Kin Behavior," 92.
[54]. Gladwin, "Comanche Kin Behavior," 92.
[55]. Over the years, there has been considerable debate on whether the Comanche had a complex social organization, see, Daniel J. Gelo, "On a New Interpretation of Comanche Social Organization," Current Anthropology. 28(4, 1987):551-555; Kavanagh, "Comanche," 896.
[56]. Kavanagh, "Comanche," 896.
[57]. Hoebel, Political Organization and Law-ways of the Comanche Indians, 49.
[58]. Kavanagh, "Comanche," 895-896.
[59]. Gelo, Comanche Belief and Ritual, 32-33.
[60]. Kavanagh, "Comanche," 896.
[61]. Hoebel, Political Organization and Law-ways of the Comanche Indians, 21-36.
[62]. Hoebel, Political Organization and Law-ways of the Comanche Indians, 18-20.
[63]. Kavanagh, "Comanche," 896.
[64]. Gelo, Comanche Belief and Ritual, 34.
[65]. Gelo, Comanche Belief and Ritual, 34; Wallace and Hoebel, The Comanches: Lords of the South Plains, 213-216.
[66]. In most ceremonial dances, the possessor of a *pia ni-pa?I* or "Big Club" acted as whip man.
[67]. Kavanagh, "Comanche," 893-894.
[68]. Gelo, Comanche Belief and Ritual, 33.
[69]. Wallace and Hoebel, The Comanches: Lords of the South Plains, 276-277.
[70]. Lange, "Plains-Southwestern Inter-Cultural Relations during the Historic Period," 161.
[71]. See, St. Clair, "Shoshone and Comanche Tales," 280-281.
[72]. Cited from, Gelo, Comanche Belief and Ritual, 119.
[73]. A structural analysis is Comanche Trickster traditions is found in chapter five of Daniel J. Gelo's dissertation, see, Gelo, Comanche Belief and Ritual, 88-117.
[74]. St. Clair, "Shoshone and Comanche Tales," 280.
[75]. Kavanagh, "Comanche," 891; St. Clair, "Shoshone and Comanche Tales,"; Wallace and Hoebel, The Comanches: Lords of the South Plains, 344.
[76]. Kavanagh, "Comanche," 892; Wallace and Hoebel, The Comanches: Lords of the South Plains, 195.
[77]. Cited from, Gelo, Comanche Belief and Ritual, 119-120.
[78]. Animal powers are specific, each species possessing a quality or qualities that are inherent in that species. Coyote's for example are considered clever, bears are strong,

and certain bird species are eloquent. Each of these qualities is played out in the animal world as each species uses its power to take advantage of other species. Men who acquire animal *puha* in competition, war, and sorcery play out analogous conflicts. Each man using his animal power strengths in the conflict, attempts to take advantage of his opponent's animal power weaknesses. See, Gelo, Comanche Belief and Ritual, 128.
[79]. According to Daniel J, Gelo, Comanche religious belief exhibit tendencies toward relying on ritual and mythological constructs as the foundation. They also exhibit a tendency to pursue sacred power from ghosts of ancestors as well as animal spirits. Also their symbolic representation of religious concepts via topography is most directly correlated with Great Basin belief systems, especially among the Shoshone and Ute, see, Danield J. Gelo, "The Comanches as Aboriginal Skeptics," American Indian Quarterly. 17(1, 1993):78 and; Ake Hultkrantz, Belief and Worship an Native North America. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1981), 105-106.
[80]. See, David E. Jones, Sanapia Comanche Medicine Woman. (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1972), 54-55.
[81]. Refer to, Carlson and Jones, "Some Notes on Uses of Plants by the Comanche Indians"; Gelo, Comanche Belief and Ritual, 20; David E. Jones, "Comanche Plant Medicine," Papers in Anthropology 9(1968):1-13; Jones, Sanapia Comanche Medicine Woman.
[82]. Gelo, Comanche Belief and Ritual, 131; Kavanagh, "Comanche," 892.
[83]. Wallace and Hoebel, The Comanches: Lords of the South Plains, Jones, Sanapia Comanche Medicine Woman, 156.
[84]. In Comanche ritual, ceremony, and oral traditions, the number two, four, five, and seven are portrayed. The number the symbolically represents brotherhood, real of fictive. Four, which appears in all ritual and mythic situations, is representative of the four directional powers. Five is a sacred number reflecting their Basin Shoshonean origins. Five usually is located at the cosmological center point where the four directions intersect. Seven is a sacred number as it totals the four directions, plus the center, zenith, and nadir see, Gelo, Comanche Belief and Ritual, 121; Kavanagh, "Comanche," 892.
[85]. Gelo, Comanche Belief and Ritual, 126.
[86]. Refer to, Jones, Sanapia Comanche Medicine Woman.
[87]. Josiah Gregg, Commerce on the Prairies. In. Early Western Travels, Vols. XIX-XX, Reuben Gold Thwaites, editor. (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1905), 334.
[88]. Cited in, Virgil J. Vogel, American Indian Medicine. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982), 181.
[89]. Cited from, Vogel, American Indian Medicine, 140.
[90]. Wallace and Hoebel, The Comanches: Lords of the South Plains, 175.
[91]. Kavanagh, "Comanche," 892-893; Ralph Linton, "The Comanche Sun Dance," American Anthropologist. 37(3, 1935):420-428.
[92]. W. P. Clark, The Indian Sign Language. Reprint of 1885 edition. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 141.
[93]. For an ethnological overview of the mescal bean cult among select central and southern plains tribes refer to, James H. Howard, "The Mescal Bean Cult of the Central and Southern Plains: An Ancestor of the Peyote Cult," American Anthropologist. 59(1, 1957):75-87. Contemporary Comanche beliefs and practices involving the use of mescal

are found in David E. Jones' Sanapia Comanche Medicine Woman. (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1972).
[94]. Kavanagh, "Comanche," 893; Linton, The Comanche Sun Dance."
[95]. Linton, "The Comanche Sun Dance," 421.
[96]. Linton, "The Comanche Sun Dance," 426.
[97]. Linton, "The Comanche Sun Dance," 426-427.
[98]. Linton, "The Comanche Sun Dance," 420.
[99]. Cited from, Kavanagh, "Comanche," 893.
[100]. Several other ceremonial dances have been ethnographically noted, including the Gourd Dance, Round Dance, Two-Step Dance, and Buffalo Dance, see, Kavanagh, "Comanche," 893; Wallace and Hoebel, The Comanches: Lords of the South Plains.