BEVERLEY CRUM, Shoshone

October 29, 1975

Salt Lake City, Utah

This transcript is one of a series of interviews with American Indian people throughout much of the United States by S. I. Myers of the History Department of St. Louis Community College at Florissant Valley, St. Louis, Missouri, 63135.

The purpose of these interviews is to bring the Indian peoples' own comments to students in classrooms, and to foster greater understanding among the peoples of the United States by providing Indians the opportunity to express their ideas and opinions to a wider audience.

This transcript has been edited for clarity and ease of reading, but every effort has been made to preserve the original feeling. Conversations and opinions were encouraged on any subject of interest to interviewees; questions and responses do not necessarily reflect the viewpoint of the interviewer, the National Endowment for the Humanities, or St. Louis Community College.

This transcript series was made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, and by support from St. Louis Community College.
THE NEW YORK TIMES ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

LISTENING TO INDIANS

No. 92

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Glen Rock, New Jersey
Microfilming Corporation of America
1978
Sam Myers:

I'm at the University of Utah today, talking with a young woman from Nevada, and her name is Beverley Crum. Are you a Shoshone from that part of the country?

Beverley Crum:

Yes.

SM: Are you familiar with a film that was made over there? Could you tell me anything about that?

BC: I really hate questions that are structured like that. It puts me on the spot.

SM: Well, how would you like it?

BC: I mean, if it isn't a tooth to tooth thing, I feel like an artifact, saying, well, "spel out this and that," and I can't.

SM: You say it the way you want to.

BC: That film, yeah. We were kinda manipulated into it. You know they had the camera trained on us, and we didn't know what they'd go into, this particular movie. And then they just took parts of it and took out what they felt, you know, was needful to prove their point. They really commercialized it and it seemed terribly one-sided to have the group say this is a traditional group and this is a non-traditional one, and the traditional group doesn't want to sell Mother Earth and the non-traditional one wants the money. But I'm feeling, who the hell is gonna give back Nevada to the Shoshones, even if we scream good and loud, say, "Hey, that's our land, we don't wanna sell Mother Earth." What the hell's that gonna prove? I have two feelings about this. And on the other hand, since it's been stated
that way, and the movie has travelled throughout the United States, you know, receiving that money, if it were $20,000, $50,000, $100,000, I have really negative feelings toward even accepting it. Even if it's not gonna prove anything. Ownership of Nevada was over with as soon as the soldiers marched in, and Rutherford B. Hayes said, "Well, this reservation is set apart for you, we circled it, you stay there."

SM: So you didn't like the way the film was edited?

BC: I know, it made it as if we had a choice. There never was a choice.

SM: Yes?

BC: You know we were not citizens until what ... 1924 or '26 or somewhere, that we became United States citizens. Up to that time we were just kind of prisoners of war on that reservation. You had to have a pass to get out, you had to return that pass back, it was signed by the superintendent, you returned it to the guy when you got back in. It was stuff like that.

SM: That's the way it was operated there?

BC: It was true of Owyhee, I don't know about the other places. I can't say it was not for other places, but this was true of our place.

SM: That surprises me, because I haven't encountered that.

BC: You've never lived on a reservation?

SM: No.

BC: Well then, you shouldn't be talking that way. Some of the things that went on there weren't very nice. Sometimes the people that live closest
to it, the white people, are the most prejudiced, most opinionated about this and that.

SM: True. The subject of the film was the damaging of the pinion trees, wasn't it? And the destroying of them, in fact?

BC: Yeah, right.

SM: Well, did they ever get any settlement?

BC: Was there ever a settlement to be given?

SM: Well, they were trying to stop them from destroying the trees. Did they ever make it?

BC: Well, that film probably embarrassed them. If it did anything, it probably embarrassed the BLM. And sometimes a pressure thing like this could, you know, put an end temporarily to that type of a project.

SM: In the film they showed that monstrous chain being dragged by the bulldozer and tearing down the trees. Now I didn't know about pinion trees, because I've never lived in a country where they've been growing, but I learned the other day. I tasted pinion nuts and they're delicious.

BC: And they're about $3.00 a pound.

SM: Last year when we saw the film we were all actually in sympathy with the people who were losing the trees, and we were wondering what was the outcome. What was it, if there was any?

BC: You've got two things mixed up. The destroying of the pinion trees
was something of the BLM's own bag. My impression was they're trying to clear it up so there'll be more range land for the cattle.

SM: That's what was said in the film.

BC: Yeah. Which is the truth, because the cattle people in Nevada are kinda hoggish, and some of them are terribly rich, and I imagine if they paid taxes to the county, well then the county would probably think, "This is a top cooky, he's a very important man, therefore we should do things to please him."

SM: Do the Indian people use it for grazing also?

BC: No. It's against the law.

SM: They don't want it for grazing?

BC: But this cousin of mine did, and so she's saying, "This is Indian territory, therefore I'll drive my cattle out there, and so, you know, she tried that and that's the case that's on court right now.

SM: So it hasn't been settled then?

BC: The lawyer that is on the case lives here in town, and I talked to her a week ago and it was not. I guess it's still pending or whatever. I don't know about law procedure enough to say one way or the other.

SM: But so far as you know it's still in the courts?

BC: So far as I know it's not been settled.

SM: Now if that whole situation had been worked out someplace, in some way, to the satisfaction of either side, then would it change the
use of that film? On the other hand, I gathered you didn't like the film especially either.

BC: It had values. I had negative feelings for it one way or the other, but the real evidence, I think, of a positive thing that it did was to expose what the BLM was up to. That I felt was a really positive piece of evidence against the BLM, and, you know, just to have the Indians scream and say, "We're being hurt," that's one thing. But to base it on actual fact, and the evidence was there, the ripping down of the pinion trees.

SM: It was dramatic too. The way we looked at it, from our point of view, was that it was decidedly helpful to the Indians' point of view. That's why I thought you would have liked it better.

BC: I'm not saying I didn't like it. You didn't hear me out. Had the Indian people just hollered, "This is a way of life. You're hurting something that's very important to our religion," then I think the white Christians would have been put off because they would have said, "Why, heathen worship anyway, these people are heathens, they don't worship Jesus Christ or God the Father who made heaven and earth, and they're worshipping this and that, things that they can see, and worshipping nature." They would have said all of this had we hit it from the religious thing, but when they see BLM, white people themselves, ripping up with great, big, powerful machinery, modern-day advancement and technology, ripping up land, and, like that, I mean, that's another thing. That's where you, as a white person, it would probably hit you in a certain spot, right?

SM: Yes, it did. We were disturbed by it. And not only that, but there was the example of the BLM's officers there to answer questions, and they couldn't answer the questions because they had no authority they said, and they had to go to somebody else.
BC: Well, they're almost right, because in the United States Government it seems that that's the way it is. It's kind of a cyclic thing. Who do you stop at?

SM: It's a tough thing to find out.

BC: If you go to the President, then he passes it on the Congress and so forth and so on and so forth.

SM: Quite a few young Indian people say they are going into law for this very reason, that they see it as one way to get these kind of things resolved with a chance at winning. Would that be a wise thing for some of them to do, if they're so inclined, of course?

BC: I think it's very important.

SM: Many are doing it in fact, because they see that this is the best way to accomplish the most, given the Claims Courts and the whole system and everything, to use it, instead of, as some others would do, complain or protest or something, which accomplishes less, perhaps.

BC: Well, you know, the protest might be really legitimate, but like I say, you people can't see it until it's put on your own thinking. Like your modern technology ripping up land like that senselessly. You people don't understand until it's on your every-day level. If we had said, "Our protest is for this reason," and it sounded terribly unreal to you, to your vintage point in life, then it would have been, "Well, gee, those people are always fussing, why aren't they happy with what the government is doing for them," and so on, which we hear so often from the non-Indians.

SM: If you had put this on a basis that this is something that's sacred to you, it's a religion, then we wouldn't have paid attention?
BC: Then you would have been more insistent that you send more priests out or ministers of the gospel would have been even put to us, not for conversion, but for manipulation and for power control, as a power weapon, as has been done in the past.

SM: When we saw it being destroyed as a physical thing, then we reacted.

BC: Yeah, ecology. Because white people are going whole hog with something that we've been knowin' right along. You know, preserve the land, live with it, appreciate it, and make it part of your total existence. But white people have to control it, manipulate it. If it don't mind, why beat the hell out of it, and whip it into your own mold, the way you want it. This has been the white man's attitude and its actions toward the United States, and that's why you see your polluted water. We've been here for thousands of years, and there was no polluted water when you guys came. Now you put your poop into it, your oil, name it! That's just a garbage disposal in some areas, you know, the streams, the lakes.

SM: Until it's catching up with us. Now we've got to do something about it.

BC: And see, so I think this movie hit you guys from an ecological point of view. Now as I talk to you I'm gettin' to see things more clearly.

SM: Well, I was hoping something good would come out of this.

BC: Right. I wanted our conversation to be this way, because I felt that a give and take would have been much better for both of us. I feel that it's unfair when, you know, the white man always has to understand the Indians, and, you know, I need to understand you people too.
SM: Yes, but some Indian people say that we do understand you because we've been having to do that for 20, 50, 100 years.

BC: I don't think ... in school it's utterly geared to white people. In material, we must study white psychology, the Freudian view, anthropology is completely structured from the white man's point of view. He categorizes it from his mentality, his rationalization, his logic constructs linguistics the way it is, to the point that if I'm looking at Shoshone linguistically then I'm lost at certain periods. It took me almost two years before I could comprehend what he was trying to say to me why I should do this one way or not do it another way.

SM: He?

BC: No, I'm using that gender in the place of professors. In our conversation, and the way I talk, I suppose, I'm going into my own jargon.

SM: Well, we're doing something else here. We're pointing up the difficulty of a mutual understanding.

BC: Right. The communication. Which should add variety and spice to our conversation, and not ambiguity or misunderstanding.

SM: About yourself now. Are you Shoshone also like your husband?

BC: Yes.

SM: And you both come from the same area out there in Nevada?

BC: Well, my husband was there last week-end, and he said the snow was a nuisance, it was really snowing. It's much colder, a higher elevation in our area of Nevada. Don't get the idea that all of Nevada is like that, because we have our Las Vegas and our very, kind of desert end of our state, but we're way up there in the mountains.
SM: There's a town by the name of Battle Mountain, right out here on the highway going directly west.

BC: On the other side of Windover? Near the Utah and Nevada border?

SM: You go straight west from Salt Lake City across Nevada, and about half way across on the highway there's a town of Battle Mountain.

BC: Well, here's the way Nevada is, and here's Utah, and here's where our reservation is, up here, and Battle Mountain is way down here. Salt Lake's over here, so that you would have to . . . oh, wait.

SM: You have it right. But the road goes right straight west through here. Is that the location of that movie?

BC: Yeah.

SM: But the reservation is north of it, up here on the northern boundary?

BC: Our reservation is north of there. (North of Battle Mountain)

SM: What is it called?

BC: Duck Valley Indian Reservation.

SM: Now if I do get a chance to go out there, Beverley, do you suppose there might be someone there who might talk with me, or do you think they would resent my coming?

BC: Gee, it's so far out of the way that I wonder. You could find Shoshones in Elko, that's right on the main route. There's an Indian colony there.
SM: 'Course I found a couple right here--you and your husband.

BC: Yeah, right.

SM: And you have intense feelings about the whole thing.

BC: I hope you're not misunderstanding. My feelings are not just one-sided. I wouldn't want it to be, because I am involved in this, you know what I mean? One of the things that they hope to do is, instead of accepting the money somehow if they were able to prove that that land was never turned over to the white people, that it was never given to the United States Government, but rather just as a route to be used by people who were gonna mine in California, they were just gonna use Nevada as a trail, a way to get to California, just to cut across. If this was the only reason that the Shoshones signed the treaty, saying, "Well, we're giving you permission to use our territory in getting to your point and then going back again." The treaty is very unclear itself.

SM: I dug it out. I got copies of it and I can't figure it out either.

BC: It never did say, "We're giving it, we're selling you our land." This was never in the treaty, so this is what they're fighting, and they're saying, "Well, rather than accepting money, why couldn't we just ask for another chunk of land in Nevada that would belong to Indian people, Shoshone people, and there seems to be an uncleanness about the Duck Valley Indian Reservation. In those days they didn't have airplanes, so when they took the aerial view of Nevada and the place where the Shoshones live, the land the reservation that we finally got out of the whole works was outside of the treaty. So they're saying, "Why you people never did, United States Government, you never did give these Indian people land anyway, so why couldn't you give them another piece down here and just forget this one,
because this was illegal." This is one technicality that we may get them on. This is just among lawyers, and a way to manipulate.

SM: What are the outlines of the land described in this treaty? It mentions points, but the points are not on the maps.

BC: There is a map that was hand drawn. Those things are really unbelievable, they're really unbelievable. They had things like "a first-class snake Indian," stuff like that. Maps were drawn, from the guy who was drawing the map, each one had their own opinion. I mean, this was what they said about the Idaho group of Shoshones, "first class snake Indian." If Indians were first class they must have had something second class, third class, fourth class and bottom class. And this is not the way the Indian people themselves looked at their life situation. You know it was not a structured, layered thing, say like the Aztecs.

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I'm sorry our conversation had to come to an end so suddenly. We were using a room in which a meeting was scheduled. The people arrived to convene their meeting and we had to give up the space.