

Pawnee

Data source: eHRAF

Secondary source

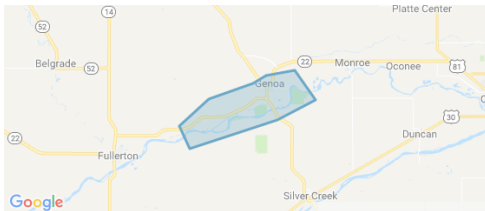
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** Data Source entry, prepared based on data sourced from an external project.*

** Secondary Source entry, prepared from a literature review by a Ph.D. RA*

Entry tags: Native American (North American) Religions, Religion

The Pawnee are an American Indian group now living in the state of Oklahoma. Historically, the Pawnee inhabited the Loupe, Platte, and Republican River valley region of what is now Nebraska. The Pawnee were relocated to their current reservation lands by the Pawnee Indian Agency in 1874, following over four decades of land cessions and treaties with the U.S. Federal Government. This entry focuses more specifically on the Skidi band (one of the four Pawnee bands of the time) around the time of 1867--prior to the reservation era. Religious beliefs and practices permeated many aspects of Pawnee life, consequently, this entry considers the religious group to be coterminous with the society at large. Traditional Pawnee religion was characterized by a series of ceremonies throughout the year, which were largely associated with subsistence activities such as planting, harvesting, and hunting. Priests and medicine men functioned as religious practitioners who communicated with the supernatural, led ceremonies, and performed healing rituals.



Date Range: 1842 CE - 1870 CE

Region: Skidi Band Territory

Region tags: North America, United States of America

Banks of the Beaver Creek (northern tributary of the Loup River near what is now Genoa, Nebraska), circa 1867. Focus on the Skidi Band villages, which were located in the westernmost portion of this area.

Status of Participants:

✓ Elite ✓ Religious Specialists ✓ Non-elite (common people, general populace)

Sources

Print sources for understanding this subject:

- Source 1: Divale, W. 2004. Codebook of Variables for the Standard Cross-Cultural Sample. *World Cultures: The Journal of Cross-Cultural and Comparative Research*.
- Source 2: Tuden, A. & Marshall, C. (Oct., 1972). Political organization: Cross-cultural codes 4. *Ethnology*, 11(4), 436-464.

Online sources for understanding this subject:

- Source 1 URL: <https://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=nq18-000>
- Source 1 Description: Reid, G. F., & Beierle, J. (1998). *Culture Summary: Pawnee*. New Haven, Conn.: HRAF.

– Source 1 URL: <https://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=nq18-005>

– Source 1 Description: Dorsey, G. A., Murie, J. R., & Spoehr, A. (1940). Notes On Skidi Pawnee Society. Anthropological Series. Chicago: Field Museum Press.

– Source 2 URL: <https://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=nq18-002>

– Source 2 Description: Lesser, A. (1933). Pawnee Ghost Dance Hand Game. Contributions To Anthropology. New York: Columbia University Press.

– Source 3 URL: <https://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=nq18-014>

– Source 3 Description: Weltfish, G. (1965). Lost Universe: With A Closing Chapter On "The Universe Regained." New York: Basic Books.

Notes: Weltfish (1965) provides a reconstruction using extensive research and authenticated accounts from informants who were alive during the focal time (1861-1875). Lesser is the former husband of Weltfish, and did his fieldwork with Weltfish. Spoehr compiled field notes that were left unpublished at the death of Dorsey (an ethnologist) and Murie (a Pawnee informant).

General Variables

Membership/Group Interactions

Are other religious groups in cultural contact with target religion:

– Yes

Notes: "By the treaty of 1833, the Pawnee ceded land in return for compensation, but were left an independent people; with the treaty of 1857 they relinquished all their lands to the United States, abrogated their freedom, and became wards of the government" (Lesser, 1933:6).



Is there violent conflict (within sample region):

– No

Notes: SCCS Variable 1649, Frequency of Internal Warfare (Resolved Rating), indicates that internal warfare seems to be absent or rare (original code 1) (Ember and Ember, 1992; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).



Is there violent conflict (with groups outside the sample region):

– Yes

Notes: SCCS Variable 1650, Frequency of External Warfare (Resolved Rating), indicates that external warfare occurs almost constantly and at any time of the year (Ember and Ember, 1992; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).

Does the religion have official political support

– Yes

Notes: The Pawnee religious sphere of life is not distinguished from that of the political. Religious beliefs and practices are tied into the functioning of society at large. Consequently, this entry considers the religious group to be coterminous with the society itself.

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↳ Are the head of the polity and the head of the religion the same figure:

– No

Notes: SCCS Variable 1745, Religio-political Overlap, indicates that religious specialists have no influence on decision making at the level of maximal political authority (Lang, 1998; Retrieved from Divale, 2004). Additionally, SCCS Variable 757, Political and religious Differentiation, indicates that the political and religious leaders are distinct from one another (Ross, 1983; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).

↳ Are political officials equivalent to religious officials:

– No

Notes: SCCS Variable 1745, Religio-political Overlap, indicates that religious specialists have no influence on decision making at the level of maximal political authority (Lang, 1998; Retrieved from Divale, 2004). Additionally, SCCS Variable 757, Political and religious Differentiation, indicates that the political and religious leaders are distinct from one another (Ross, 1983; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).

Size and Structure

Number of adherents of religious group within sample region (estimated population, numerical):

– Estimated population, numeric: 1760

Notes: "In 1867 the Skidi had four distinct villages, Tuwahukasa (Village-across-a-Ridge), Tuhitspiat (Village-in-the-Bottomlands), Tskirirara (Wolf-in-Water), and Pahukstatu (Pumpkin-Vine). The villages were made up of ten to twelve earth lodges, each a high spacious dome-shaped building housing thirty to fifty people" (Weltfish, 1965:4).

Are there recognized leaders in the religious group:

– Yes

Notes: "In the nobility were to be found the leaders in the material affairs of the band—the chiefs, braves, and warriors; those who looked out for the larger religious interests—the priests; and those who kept the band free from sickness and drove out disease—the medicine-men. The duties of these three groups were quite separate and distinct. Occasionally, however, one individual might at the same time be chief, priest, and medicine-men" (Dorsey, Murie, and Spoehr, 1940:111).

↳ Are leaders believed to possess supernatural powers or qualities:

– Yes

Notes: "The medicine-men derived their powers from supernatural beings who were usually identified with animals" (Dorsey, Murie, and Spoehr, 1940:115).

↳ Powers are culturally transmitted from a supernatural being:

– Yes

Notes: "At birth a child came under the influence of a supernatural being—a particular star shining especially bright—who was supposed to manifest himself later in the

child's life. Usually this manifestation occurred when the child fell ill, at which time medicine-men were sent for. When the right one appeared, he could cure the child, for he possessed the power from an animal which in turn had received its power from the star noted above. Thus the child was made aware of the particular animal guardian which was to influence his career. When he grew to be a young man he might become a medicine-man through a supernatural experience during which power was given him directly by his guardian, or, as was more common, he applied for instruction to some medicine-man who had received power from the same guardian. With the latter's consent, the young man became his pupil, paying for the knowledge received" (Dorsey, Murie, and Spoehr, 1940:115).

↳ Powers are culturally transmitted from another human (e.g. teacher):

– Yes

Notes: "When he grew to be a young man he might become a medicine-man through a supernatural experience during which power was given him directly by his guardian, or, as was more common, he applied for instruction to some medicine-man who had received power from the same guardian. With the latter's consent, the young man became his pupil, paying for the knowledge received" (Dorsey, Murie, and Spoehr, 1940: 115).

↳ Are religious leaders chosen:

– Yes

↳ A leader chooses his/her own replacement:

– Yes

Notes: "Inasmuch as the office of priest required above all an extraordinarily retentive memory and a deeply religious attitude of mind, the priests often encouraged young men possessing these qualifications to become their pupils and ultimately admitted the students to the priestly class" (Dorsey, Murie, and Spoehr, 1940:114).

↳ Communication with supernatural power(s) believed to be part of the selection process:

– Yes

Notes: "The medicine-men derived their powers from supernatural beings who were usually identified with animals" (Dorsey, Murie, and Spoehr, 1940:115).

Scripture

Does the religious group have scriptures:

Scripture is a generic term used to designate revered texts that are considered particularly authoritative and sacred relative to other texts. Strictly speaking, it refers to written texts, but there are also "oral scriptures" (e.g. the Vedas of India).

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of scriptures among the Pawnee.

Architecture, Geography

Is monumental religious architecture present:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of monumental religious architecture. Historically, the Pawnee were nomadic, making the presence of large, permanent buildings unlikely.

Are there different types of religious monumental architecture:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of monumental religious architecture. Historically, the Pawnee were nomadic, making the presence of large, permanent buildings unlikely.

Beliefs

Burial and Afterlife

Is a spirit-body distinction present:

Answer "no" only if personhood (or consciousness) is extinguished with death of the physical body. Answering yes does not necessarily imply the existence of Cartesian mind/body dualism, merely that some element of personhood (or consciousness) survives the death of the body.

– Yes

Notes: "We may first consider the Skidi conception of the soul. All living beings have souls, which are closely associated with the wind. After death those of some people ascend to the heavens and become stars. The souls of others, including those who die of disease or die cowardly in battle, travel the dusty Milky-Way to the village of the spirits in the south. The souls of warriors who die bravely on the battlefield and of those who die in sacrifice travel a bloody trail to the village of the warriors. Anyone who tries to make the human sacrifice and fails, or does not perform the rite correctly, becomes burning flint under the feet of the Morning Star. The souls of chiefs and priests travel a road of flowers until they come to the guardian spirit who influenced them upon earth...The souls of medicine-men wander over the land visiting the lodges of animals and eventually reach the spirit-village of the medicine-men" (Dorsey, Murie, and Spoehr, 1940:101).

Belief in afterlife:

– Yes

Notes: "...[the land of the dead] is conceived to be in the western sky...In the land of the western sky, the deceased relatives of the living are dancing and singing while the dance goes on upon the earth" (Lesser, 1933:73).



Is the spatial location of the afterlife specified or described by the religious group:

– Yes

↳ Afterlife in vaguely defined “above” space:

– Yes

Notes: "...[the land of the dead] is conceived to be in the western sky...In the land of the western sky, the deceased relatives of the living are dancing and singing while the dance goes on upon the earth" (Lesser, 1933:73).

↳ Afterlife in vaguely defined “below” space:

– No

Reincarnation in this world:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of a belief in reincarnation.

Are there special treatments for adherents' corpses:

– Yes

Notes: The Pawnee typically buried their dead. See questions below for more details.

↳ Cremation:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of cremation.

↳ Mummification:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of mummification.

↳ Interment:

– Yes

Notes: "As a rule, the preparation of the body for burial began immediately after death, and the burial followed within two or three hours" (Dorsey, Murie, and Spoehr, 1940:102).

↳ Cannibalism:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of cannibalism.

↳ Exposure to elements (e.g. air drying):

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of exposing corpses to the elements.

↳ Feeding to animals:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of feeding corpses to animals.

↳ Secondary burial:

– No

Notes: SCCS Variable 1850, Secondary Bone/Body Treatment: Original Scale, indicates that secondary contact with the body or bones of the deceased does not occur (Schroeder, 2001; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).

Are grave goods present:

– Yes

Notes: "Reference has been made to the fact that personal belongings were buried with the dead. However, there were certain exceptions to this practice. Personal war bundles containing meteorites or any objects supposed to have had their origin in the heavens were not buried. This was in accordance with the belief that these objects belonged in the heavens and not in the ground. Hence, when an individual possessing such objects died, and if the relatives did not want them, the bundle was unwrapped and the objects were placed on a high hill, whence they returned to the heavens. Such objects were supposed to be the children of stars, watched over by them, and it was believed that when people had no further use for these 'children,' they would return to their parents in the sky. Also, if a medicine-man died during the time he was giving instruction to his son, his medicine bundle was retained for the boy's use when he became of age" (Dorsey, Murie, and Spoehr, 1940:106).

Are formal burials present:

– Yes

Notes: For a detailed description of Pawnee burial practices, see Dorsey, Murie, and Spoehr, 1940: 101-106.

↳ In cemetery:

– I don't know

Notes: Insufficient ethnographic information regarding the location of burials.

↳ Family tomb-crypt:

– I don't know

Notes: Insufficient ethnographic information regarding the location of burials.

↳ Domestic (individuals interred beneath house, or in areas used for normal domestic activities):

– I don't know

Notes: Insufficient ethnographic information regarding the location of burials.

Supernatural Beings

Are supernatural beings present:

– Yes

Notes: "The Pawnee had a highly integrated system of religious beliefs that resisted European missionization well into the nineteenth century. In this system of beliefs all life was understood to have derived from the meeting of male (east) and female (west) forces in the sky. The supernatural power at the zenith of the sky where these forces met was known as Tirawa. Tirawa produced the world through a series of violent storms and created star gods, who in turn created humanity. In 1891, along with other Plains Indian groups, the Pawnee participated in the Ghost Dance, a revitalization movement envisioning the return of the dead from the spirit world and the disappearance of the white man from the land. The two most prominent star powers were the Evening Star, the goddess of darkness and fertility who lived in the western sky, and Morning Star, the god of fire and light who was located in the eastern sky. Next in rank to Tirawa, Evening Star and Morning Star were the gods of the four world quarters in the northeast, southeast, northwest and southwest who supported the heavens" (Reid and Beierle, 1998).

↳ A supreme high god is present:

– Yes

Notes: "The supreme god and First Cause of all was Tirawahat, The Expanse of the Heavens. Beyond all others, he directed everything and to his power there were four direct paths leading from the house to the sky in the four semicardinal directions—northwest, northeast, southeast, and southwest; offerings were made from these positions in the house so that they would be readily received" (Weltfish, 1965:64). SCCS Variable 238, Religion: high gods [Note: Identical to Ethnographic Atlas Column 34], indicates that a high god is present but otiose or not concerned with human affairs (Murdock, 1962-1971; Retrieved from Divale, 2004). Because the high god is otiose, limited ethnographic information is available concerning further characteristics of this supernatural being.

↳ The supreme high god is fused with the monarch (king=high god):

– No

Notes: There is no monarch present among the Pawnee.

↳ The monarch is seen as a manifestation or emanation of the high god:

– No

Notes: There is no monarch present among the Pawnee.

↳ The supreme high god has deliberate causal efficacy in the world:

– No

Notes: SCCS Variable 238, Religion: high gods [Note: Identical to Ethnographic Atlas Column 34], indicates that a high god is present but otiose or not concerned with human affairs (Murdock, 1962-1971; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).

↳ The supreme high god exhibits positive emotion:

– I don't know

↳ The supreme high god exhibits negative emotion:

– I don't know

↳ The supreme high god communicates with the living:

– No

Notes: SCCS Variable 238, Religion: high gods [Note: Identical to Ethnographic Atlas Column 34], indicates that a high god is present but otiose or not concerned with human affairs (Murdock, 1962-1971; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).

↳ Previously human spirits are present:

– I don't know

Notes: Based on descriptions of the afterlife (see Lesser, 1933:73), it is clear that the Pawnee believe the souls of deceased humans continue to exist in another realm. Further, spirits of men who were scalped by an enemy cause fear, and are said to capture women and steal whatever they can (Weltfish, 1965:72). However, there is no additional ethnographic evidence that spirits of the deceased interact with the living, or that a cult of the dead exists. No evidence for the presence of ancestor worship.

↳ Non-human supernatural beings are present:

– Yes

Notes: "The two most prominent star powers were the Evening Star, the goddess of darkness and fertility who lived in the western sky, and Morning Star, the god of fire and light who was located in the eastern sky. Next in rank to Tirawa, Evening Star and Morning Star were the gods of the four world quarters in the northeast, southeast, northwest and southwest who supported the heavens" (Reid and Beierle, 1998). Additional supernatural beings include mother corn, and the wolf star Sirius, who is a god of war and death (Weltfish, 1965:327). Principal ethnographic authorities do not provide further details on these beings.

↳ These supernatural beings can be seen:

– I don't know

↳ These supernatural beings can be physically felt:

– I don't know

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have knowledge of this world:

– I don't know

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have deliberate causal efficacy in the world:

– I don't know

- ↳ These supernatural beings have indirect causal efficacy in the world:
 - I don't know
- ↳ These supernatural beings exhibit positive emotion:
 - I don't know
- ↳ These supernatural beings exhibit negative emotion:
 - I don't know

Supernatural Monitoring

Is supernatural monitoring present:

This refers to surveillance by supernatural beings of humans' behaviour and/or thought particularly as it relates to social norms or potential norm violations.

– I don't know

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of supernatural monitoring. However, supernatural beings were not described in enough detail to be certain.

Do supernatural beings mete out punishment:

– I don't know

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of supernatural punishment. However, supernatural beings were not described in enough detail to be certain.

Do supernatural beings bestow rewards:

– I don't know

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of supernatural reward. However, supernatural beings were not described in enough detail to be certain.

Messianism/Eschatology

Are messianic beliefs present:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of messianic beliefs.

Is an eschatology present:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of a belief in an eschatology.

Norms and Moral Realism

Is there a conventional vs. moral distinction in the religious group:

– No

Notes: "[The Pawnee] were a well-disciplined people, maintaining public order under many trying circumstances. And yet they had none of the power mechanisms that we consider essential to a well-ordered life. No orders were ever issued. No assignments for work were ever made nor were over-all plans discussed. There was no code of rules of conduct nor punishment for infraction. There were no commandments nor moralizing proverbs" (Weltfish, 1965:5).

Practices

Membership Costs and Practices

Does membership in this religious group require fasting:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of required fasting.

Does membership in this religious group require forgone food opportunities (taboos on desired foods):

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of food taboos.

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of adults:

"Adults" here referring to an emic or indigenous category; if that category is different from the popular Western definition of a human who is 18-years-old or older and who is legally responsible for his/her actions, then please specify that difference in the Comments/Sources: box below.

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the sacrifice of adults.

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of children:

"Children" here referring to an emic or indigenous category; if that category is different from the popular Western definition, please specify that different in the Comments/Sources: box below.

– No

Notes: Up until the year 1838, the Pawnee gave sacrificial offerings of young, out-group girls (usually captives). "However, when our ethnological narrative takes place (1867) it seems pretty certain that no further sacrifices were being carried out" (Weltfish, 1965:116).

Does membership in this religious group require self-sacrifice (suicide):

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for required self-sacrifice.

Does membership in this religious group require participation in large-scale rituals:

I.e. involving two or more households; includes large-scale "ceremonies" and "festivals."

– Yes

Notes: "But the thing that made life most worthwhile to the Pawnees was their elaborate round of ceremonies. This was based on a complex philosophy of the creation of the universe and of man and of their ongoing nature. The ceremonies were considered as the means for keeping the cosmic order in its course and the continuance of the earth and its life processes...The ceremonies were more than religious observances. They were the whole focus of Pawnee aesthetic life, particularly in the performing arts" (Weltfish, 1965:8).



Are there orthodoxy checks:

Orthodoxy checks are mechanisms used to ensure that rituals are interpreted in a standardized way, e.g. through the supervisory prominence of a professionalized priesthood or other system of governance, appeal to texts detailing the proper interpretation, etc.

– Yes

Notes: "As was their practice, it was the chiefs, priests, and medicine men that took the first formal steps toward initiating each new round of activities through the year so that the people were taught and reminded of what lay ahead. In the village, priest and chief shared almost equally in keeping life on an ordered course" (Weltfish, 1965:130).

Society and Institutions

Levels of Social Complexity

The society to which the religious group belongs is best characterized as (please choose one):

– A chiefdom

Notes: The Pawnee have one level of jurisdictional hierarchy beyond the local community, which is indicative of a petty chiefdom (Ethnographic Atlas column 33, Murdock, 1967; retrieved from Divale, 2004). Additionally, "The Skidi formed one of the four bands comprising the Pawnee tribe, the others being the Chaui, the Kitkehahki, and the Pitahaurat...Politically the Skidi were a federation of villages, of which at least thirteen are known to have existed, though there were probably others which have been forgotten. The federation was held together by a governing council of chiefs and by a ceremonial organization involving the participation of the band in a round of ceremonies associated with sacred bundles" (Dorsey, Murie, and Spoehr, 1940:75).

Education

Is formal education available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group:

– Yes

Notes: As a part of the Pawnee's 1857 treaty with the United States Government, "The Pawnee agreed to send their children between the ages of seven and eighteen to school nine months of the year" (Lesser, 1933:16).

↳ Is extra-religious education open to both males and females:

– Yes

Notes: Lesser, 1933:20

Enforcement

Does the religious group in question provide institutionalized judges:

– No

Notes: According to Tuden and Marshall (1972; Column 9: Judiciary), "supreme judicial authority is lacking at any level above that of the local community."

Does the religious group in question enforce institutionalized punishment:

– No

Notes: "[The Pawnee] were a well-disciplined people, maintaining public order under many trying circumstances. And yet they had none of the power mechanisms that we consider essential to a well-ordered life. No orders were ever issued. No assignments for work were ever made nor were over-all plans discussed. There was no code of rules of conduct nor punishment for infraction. There were no commandments nor moralizing proverbs" (Weltfish, 1965:5).

Does the religious group in question have a formal legal code:

– No

Notes: "[The Pawnee] were a well-disciplined people, maintaining public order under many trying circumstances. And yet they had none of the power mechanisms that we consider essential to a well-ordered life. No orders were ever issued. No assignments for work were ever made nor were over-all plans discussed. There was no code of rules of conduct nor punishment for infraction. There were no commandments nor moralizing proverbs" (Weltfish, 1965:5).

Food Production

Does the religious group in question provide food for themselves:

– Yes

Notes: "In the historic period until the latter part of the nineteenth century the Pawnee subsistence pattern consisted of farming and hunting, with a minimal amount of gathering. The principal crops were maize, beans, squash, and pumpkins; the principal game animal was the bison" (Reid and Beierle, 1998). Additional source of information: Ethnographic Atlas (Murdock, 1962-1971), retrieved from Divale, 2004; Variables 203-207, 232.

↳ Please characterize the forms/level of food production [choose all that apply]:

– Gathering

– Hunting (including marine animals)

– Small-scale agriculture / horticultural gardens or orchards

– Large-scale agriculture (e.g., monocropping, organized irrigation systems)

Notes: "In the historic period until the latter part of the nineteenth century the Pawnee subsistence pattern consisted of farming and hunting, with a minimal amount of gathering. The principal crops were maize, beans, squash, and pumpkins; the principal game animal was the bison" (Reid and Beierle, 1998). Additional source of information: *Ethnographic Atlas* (Murdock, 1962-1971), retrieved from Divale, 2004; Variables 203-207, 232.