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Product of the Past:
The Struggle Between the Lakota Sioux Nation and the United States Government

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A little boy living on the prairie hears stories of when the West was free. While he may be too young to understand how he has been affected by promises to his people made and broken, he thinks, “Would the world even miss me?” He was a boy just like any other boy who laughed and cried, played baseball, got into trouble, and breathed life. Except that this boy, the late Tanner Gray, was born into a situation in which hope, if it exists at all, is in short supply, a situation where suicide seems a feasible option for children who oftentimes cannot imagine a future of anything but darkness and despair.¹ (See Appendix A).

There are those who despise the poor people around them, those who live in permanent sadness for them, those who try to shut poverty out, those who are motivated to act to improve the situation and those who are resigned to the fact that life is not fair. Tanner Gray is just one story of thousands; Lakota Indians surrounding him in La Plant, South Dakota (see appendix B). They suffer greatly and if taken one step further to the macro aspect, the people of the Lakota Sioux Nation undergo tremendous hardships. The devastation that many Lakota face is nothing new; it is embedded within their history, when their way of life was disrupted by immigrants invading the Americas.

Throughout United States history, Native Americans have been pushed and pulled, abused, overrun, and exploited. Within the Virginia colonies in the 1600s, colonists attempted to enslave the natives while infecting them with their deadly diseases, killing them by the masses. In 1829, President Andrew Jackson created a policy in order to relocate Native Americans east of the Mississippi River, in his attempts to expand the nation westward. The following year Congress passed the Indian Removal Act and between the years 1830 and 1850, roughly one hundred thousand relocated west of the Mississippi. The United States government used its

¹Tanner Gray, conversation with author in June 2012. Gray was a member of the Cheyenne River Sioux tribe in La Plant, SD. He was 12-years-old when conversation took place. That following November he sadly took his own life due to persistent bullying.

power to coerce treaties, as well as deploying the army against those resisting. During this process known as the “Trail of Tears” many were treated brutally; many were transported in chains and an estimated ten thousand natives died during their westward journey.²

In the Lakota Nation, the discrepancies did not begin until the 1860s with the battle over the Black Hills. The desire of Manifest Destiny that the government instilled in America created a greed for land and further western expansion. In 1868 the Lakota gained protection of the sacred Black Hills with the establishment of the Fort-Laramie Treaty. However, it inadvertently initiated a clash between the Sioux Nation and the United States Government. From that moment on, the struggle only worsened. The United States is known as the melting pot nation; it is a diverse country with numerous ethnicities and cultures. The country does however have a history of assimilating new immigrants as they become Americanized. This ideal holds true even for Native Americans. After the government confiscated the sacred land of the Lakota, they forced the natives to westernize through brutality and force.

Oftentimes it is said that history repeats itself; in some cases this is true through the acts perpetuated by memory and its relationship with history. History and memory are complex representations of the past influenced by different perspectives. The Lakota Sioux Nation is slowly healing from its history with the United States due to the fact that the memory is carried on through traditions. The feelings of exploitation and betrayal still linger throughout the reservations, not only through what the Lakota believe but by the actions of those that surround them. Through the eyes of the Lakota nation, the oppression inflicted by the US government has driven members of the tribe to lose a sense of hope in their lives.

²Ward Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas 1492 to the Present*, (San Francisco: City Lights, 1998), 144. He is a Native American, Cherokee and Muscogee, author and political activist, and previously taught Indian literature and affairs at the University of Colorado. His work is controversial of its topics, as well as 2006 plagiarism accusations.

The Lakota and the US Government

The Lakota Nation lived in and among the sacred Black Hills towering over the prairies of what is now South Dakota. Lakota is a portion of the much larger Great Sioux Nation which dominated the Northern Plains which covered most of modern-day Nebraska, parts of Wyoming and Montana, and both of the Dakotas.³ Westward expansion in American history has been romanticized, spreading from sea to shining sea, but over time the story of uprooting the Native Americans who once freely walked the lands has come to light. Their way of life was rudely interrupted in the nineteenth century, when the desire to move west from the East Coast became prominent. In 1803, the United States made the historic purchase of the Louisiana Territory that opened the door to the idea of westward expansion, putting the Lakota people's Black Hills and other tribes in danger. The exhaustion of the buffalo, an animal central to the Lakota way of life, became the first leading cause of discontent among the Lakota people; the buffalo, *Tatanka*, represented their lifeline; this animal was the giver of life providing both bounty and shelter.⁴ A battle for maintaining sacred traditions and spiritual lands became inevitable for the Lakota, and they were willing to put up a fight. Throughout this period of history, many famous leaders stepped forth and made great strides in what the Sioux Nation believed was their movement toward peace. Chief Red Cloud, Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse and Chief Seattle each had his own tactic for dealing with migrants. "Some Lakota Leaders believed it was best to negotiate and make accommodations with Americans in order to avoid bloodshed and prevent catastrophic

³Jeffrey Ostler, *The Lakotas and the Black Hills: The Struggle for Sacred Ground* (New York: Penguin, 2010), 25-38.

⁴Kathleen Pickering, *Lakota Culture, World Economy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 81.

losses, while others adopted a more militant approach and were willing to take up arms to roll back the threat from U.S. expansion,” writes anthropologist Kathleen Pickering.⁵

After some time the Fort-Laramie Treaty of 1868 was established granting the Great Sioux Reservation most of present-day South Dakota west of the Missouri River, including the Black Hills, and with that the US government pledged to keep settlers out.⁶ Unfortunately, soon thereafter gold was discovered in the Black Hills. In 1874 under the leadership of General George Custer the Gold Rush was on, creating the second leading cause of distress among the Lakota.⁷ The Lakota did what they could to protect their land and defeated US General Custer and his Cavalry, but the ongoing battle was soon lost. US Congressional legislation forced the Lakota off their lands, including the Black Hills, and in 1889 land allocations made by the government throughout the Sioux Nation created what is now the modern reservation system.⁸ While it then seemed harmless, it began to weaken the Sioux Nation both physically and mentally.

An American Indian reservation is an area of land managed by a tribe under the United States Department of the Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs.⁹ As it did with most minority groups affected by American nativism, the government wanted to encourage Native American assimilation into American society; they did so by creating reservations. The United States believed that giving Native Americans land ownership would launch the process of assimilation and disperse outrage throughout the Sioux Nation over the confiscation of their sacred land. In

⁵Pickering, 29.

⁶“Fort Laramie Treaty,” 1868, *United States Statutes at Large*.

⁷Ostler, 29.

⁸Churchill, 224.

⁹The Indian Affairs programs help improve tribal governments, community building, education, obtaining and training for jobs, and to provide employment opportunities. Overall, the BIA strives to develop and improve the quality of life for their members of the tribes. <http://www.bia.gov/>

actuality the government purchased Indian land that it saw as excess property and reduced Native American holdings by 35 percent.¹⁰

As seen through history, tactics that are used in order to assimilate various cultures into American society are harsh, aggressive and brutal. It was no different with the Native Americans; the United States forced Indian children to attend American boarding schools, attend Christian affiliated churches, speak English, and leave tribal traditions behind.¹¹ By popular belief, the term “Native American” was given to this group of people due to the conviction that the use of the word “Indian” was derogatory. However, the Lakota feel as though “Native American” is the white oppressors’ name for them: “We like to be called Indian; it is our culture and our way of life and we don’t want to be reminded of what the white people took from us,” says Mark Iron Wing (see Appendix C), a member of the Cheyenne River Sioux tribe.¹²

The Indians made an effort to preserve their traditional culture by practicing various rituals and traditional trades while living on the reservation. This for them was an outlet, but conversely, the dances, chants, ceremonial garb, etc, made outsiders looking in on the reservations nervous. Due to public perception, an escalation of rumors spread throughout the surrounding areas; fears and a misinterpretation of their ceremonies, led to the hatred and discrimination that is still seen today of the Lakota and other western tribes. Congress had split the Sioux reservation into six smaller reservations in hopes of separating power in the Lakota Nation: Pine Ridge in South Dakota and Wyoming, Cheyenne River Sioux and Rosebud in South

¹⁰Lewis Meriam, “The Problem of Indian Administration,” (1928): accessed September 1, 2013, <http://www.narf.org/nill/resources/meriam.htm>.

¹¹Churchill, 45.

¹²Mark Iron Wing, conversation with the author in June 2012. Ironwing was a member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation in La Plant, South Dakota. He recently passed away in March 2013. He described his emotions to visitors in regards to his family, traditions he follows, and his opinions on whites. He, among others on the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe Reservation, believes that whites suppressed his people and have allowed them to suffer for many years. His trust has been shattered by what history has done to his people, and he believes that only a select few are willing to help.

Dakota, Fort Peck in Montana, Santee in Nebraska and Standing Rock in North and South Dakota.¹³ The divide did not, however, slow resistance against the government until the infamous Wounded Knee Massacre. On December 29, 1890, Lakota resistance was halted after a series of events leading to the carnage of over 300 Lakota.¹⁴ After living a way of life close to nature and peace, the Sioux Nation was struck down with manslaughter and tragedy. Their feeling of expectation and desire for the return of their sacred land and the ownership of the Black Hills was taken from them. The Wounded Knee Massacre was their third and final breaking point, but it was also the Nation's final ounce of hope taken from them.

Today the Sioux Nation has undergone over a century of countless negotiations and attempts at reconciliation with the United States over land. They still however, they must live with the negative physical and psychological impacts of their people's tragic history. Their memories are engraved with the horrific acts of being scalped, trampled by horses, worked to death as slave laborers, and brutally killed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Ward Churchill writes that, though these horrendous incidences are no longer practiced, the U.S. government continues to infringe upon the Indians in a negative manner:

The settler population(s) which have "restocked" the native landbase with themselves, in various locales throughout the Americas... Insofar as native peoples retain lands in these latter regions, it is used as a convenient dumping ground for the toxic industrial waste by-products of the dominant society.¹⁵

Mount Rushmore, a famous tourist attraction built on the sacred land of the native people of the west, is a constant reminder of the subjugation inflicted on the Lakota by the United States. The vast plains and endless skies attract passers-by, and those looking to make a difference could be drawn west by more than an iconic tourist trap. But what people encounter

¹³Ostler, 165.

¹⁴Ibid, 68.

¹⁵Churchill, 1.

on the reservations in the West, could be described as a Third World country within the American borders. “The needs on the Reservation are staggering,” argues Bryan Nurnberger. “The cause of these needs equally so [is struggling]. A persistent problem can often only be solved when looked upon from a fresh angle. Everyone deserves a clean slate in someone's eyes; it is necessary to have any chance at success, to have any chance for change.”¹⁶

The idea that life on the reservation is inherently dismal is shocking to many US citizens; at least to the ones that ever learn the truth. Alcoholism, drug abuse, diabetes and depression are pandemic throughout the Sioux Nation. In the Midwest region, Native youth are five-to-seven times more likely to commit suicide.¹⁷ South Dakota has the lowest graduation rate for American Indian students in the entire United States, 30.4 percent.¹⁸ Devastation lingers within the Lakota reservations and it has become evident that the United States government plays a major role in the inflicted oppression upon the Indians that in turn inhibits a sense of hope from flourishing across the Sioux Nation.

The name “Lakota” translates to feeling affection, friendly, united and alive. The Black Hills are seen as sacred for multiple reasons; one of the most important being that the Lakota people descended from them. The creation story illuminates the important elements of the Lakota culture. As the story goes, the first people of the Sioux nation that arrived on earth were punished and turned into buffalo, and their purpose became to serve as food and shelter for human beings. Once the creator was ready to send humans to earth, the Lakota then emerged

¹⁶Bryan Nurnberger, email with author in 2011. Nurnberger is the president of the organization Simply Smiles that is dedicated to building brighter futures while improving the daily lives of impoverished children. Founded in 2003, Nurnberger has stretched his organization from where he started in Mexico to the South Dakota plains on the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe Reservation. His mission is to work with the tribal government in order to make improvements throughout the reservation without upset to their culture.

¹⁷United States Senate Indian Affairs Committee’s Hearing on Youth Suicide Prevention.
<http://www.yspp.org/>

¹⁸The dropout/graduation Crisis Among American Indian and Alaska Native Students- The Civil Rights Project at UCLA and Penn State University center for the Study of Leadership in American Indian Education.
<http://www.dropoutprevention.org/>

from the Black Hills, and they were told to hunt the buffalo as a way of life. Since this time, Lakota people and their ancestors hunted the buffalo.¹⁹ Their tribal colors represent the four races: black, red, yellow, and white, expressing their belief in equality.²⁰ As for any other ethnic group, culture is important to their way of life, and their view of other cultures is represented in that. In the meaning of their name, the Lakota strive to be united not with just their tribe but with all of mankind.

The Black Hills

Each year millions of tourists visit the Black Hills; a sanctuary of pine-crowned peaks spanning 120 miles along the Great Plains of South Dakota. But the beauty of the vast landscapes of the Midwest has often been overlooked by Americans since acquiring the region; it was not until the Black Hills became the home of Mount Rushmore in 1927 that onlookers poured in by the masses.²¹ In 1803, the Louisiana Purchase was the land deal between the United States and France, in which the United States acquired approximately 800,000 square miles of land west of the Mississippi River; but up until about the 1840s, this region was marked as unorganized territory. Though the Lakota have a deep spiritual history connected with the Black Hills, the tribe has not always dwelled in this region. A professor of Northwest History at the University of Oregon that specializes in the history of the American West with a focus in American Indian history wrote, “The earliest written evidence of the Lakotas comes from the mid- and late 1600s, when French explorers, traders, and missionaries arrived in the woodlands

¹⁹Joseph Marshall, *The Lakota Way: Stories and Lessons for Living; Native American Wisdom On Ethics and Character* (New York: Penguin, 2002). Marshall’s novel is filled with storytelling, history, and folklore, *The Lakota Way* expresses the heart of Native American philosophy and reveals the path to a fulfilling a meaningful life. Marshall is a member of the Sicunga Lakota Sioux and has dedicated his life to the wisdom he has learned from his elders.

²⁰Barbra Roach, conversation with author 2013. Roach is an elder of the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation in La Plant, South Dakota. She is a member of the town council and works closely with Simply Smiles in hopes for improving her town. She is a local artisan, beading, sewing etc, creating traditional artifacts. and takes pride in her people’s culture.

²¹Jerry Dunn, “Big, Bad, and Beautiful,” *National Geographic Traveler*, (1997), 2.

of the western Great Lakes and upper Mississippi River.”²² *Pahá Sápa* is the Lakota word for the Black Hills, literally meaning “the hills that are black.” The Lakota do not believe they have a right to any type of ownership over the hills; though they value them as their sacred land, they have no sense of entitlement, and this will be evident throughout history.

Fort-Laramie Treaty of 1868

On April 29, 1868 the Fort-Laramie Treaty was signed agreeing that the United States government forfeit the Black Hills and a generous portion of the Midwest in return for money compensation and the establishment of reservations across the area.²³ The treaty promised to keep settlers out of the territory as well as many efforts to provide for the Indians in numerous ways; clothing, food, protection, education, and politics. There was, however, a great stipulation that came with the promises made by the US government. In regards to industrialization and the development of the Midwest, the treaty threatened: “1st. That they will withdraw all opposition to the construction of the railroads now being built on the plains. 2d. That they will permit the peaceful construction of any railroad not passing over their reservation as herein defined.”²⁴ The treaty promises the Lakota return of their land, but under strict specifications that there shall be neither opposition to the government’s intentions nor any negotiations of this segment of the treaty. There are instances, however, that gives some leverage and protection to the tribe but still adheres to some conditioning:

6th. They withdraw all pretence of opposition to the construction of the railroad now being built, and they will not in future object to the construction of railroads, wagon roads, mail stations, or other works of utility or necessity, which may be ordered or permitted by the laws of the United States. But should such roads or other works be constructed on the lands of their reservation, the government will pay the tribe whatever amount of damage may be assessed by three disinterested

²²Ostler, 7.

²³Ibid, 34.

²⁴“Fort Laramie Treaty,” 1868, Article XI, *United States Statutes at Large*.

commissioners to be appointed by the President for that purpose, one of the said commissioners to be a chief or headman of the tribe.²⁵

This portion of the treaty states that the amount of monetary compensation the tribe receives for any industrialization occurring within the reservation is determined by a nonbiased committee; however, appointed by the US president. Though this appears to offer reparations, it is only at the government's discretion.

The wording of the treaty blurs the meaning of certain passages in order to convince the Lakota to agree to the bottom line being offered. What is at stake throughout the treaty and its entirety is not just the ownership of land. By playing on their naivety, the government was able to exploit the Lakota Nation. Their understanding of the language is limited and to them the big picture is what is clarified: the Black Hills are safe and their way of life can be intact. However, what is overwhelmingly made obvious in various parts of the accord are the accusations and assumptions the government makes toward the Indians. Within article eleven, the Fort-Laramie treaty touches on the idea of friendship between the tribe and the United States in various clauses: "3d. That they will not attack any persons at home, or travelling, nor molest or disturb any wagon trains, coaches, mules, or cattle belonging to the people of the United States, or to persons friendly therewith."²⁶ In regards to friendship, the language of this passage makes nothing but negative allegations towards the Indians and their so-called intentions while occupying the reservation. It goes on to read "4th. They will never capture, or carry off from the settlements, white women or children." and continues, "5th. They will never kill or scalp white men, nor attempt to do them harm."²⁷ The harsh language persecuting the Lakota is what gave

²⁵"Fort-Laramie Treaty," 1868, Article XI.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid.

the government the ability to penalize the Indians to obtain the Black Hills from them in the future.

Crazy Horse and His Legacy

Undoubtedly, following the Treaty of 1868 there were repeated violations of the otherwise exclusive rights to the land by gold prospectors that were led to the Great Plains. Subsequently, after the California Gold Rush in 1849, migrant workers crossed the reservation borders, in strict violation of the treaty. These migrant workers were referred to as “overlanders” by the Lakota; they were invaders that brought disease and destruction of their land and animals. Due to the violations, a split began to form across the Lakota nation Ostler writes: “Lakotas differed among themselves about how to deal with overlanders and the U.S. government, which supported its people’s activities.”²⁸ One well-known leader within the Lakota nation was Crazy Horse, who took a militant approach to the obstruction of the treaty. In 1876, at the start of the Great Sioux War, Crazy Horse led a group of over a thousand Lakota and Cheyenne in a surprise attack against General George Crook and his cavalry. Crook and his men had set out early that year on an expedition in search of gold in the area, and eventually joined Colonel George A. Custer and his 7th Cavalry. The battle, although not substantial in terms of human losses, delayed Crook’s efforts to unite with Custer and contributed to Custer’s subsequent defeat by Crazy Horse and his efforts.²⁹ On June 25, 1876, Colonel Custer attacked a large number of Lakota Cheyenne accompanied by Crazy Horse. As the cavalry was cut down, the natives stripped the wounded of their firearms and ammunition. The warriors closed in on the remaining troops for the final attack and killed every man in Custer’s command. Crazy Horse and his followers attempted to hold out in remote areas of the Great Plains, but due to their massacre of

²⁸Ostler, 29.

²⁹Ibid, 95.

the 7th Cavalry, soldiers sought them relentlessly. He, however, eventually gave up himself peacefully in exchanged for being assigned to a reservation. Although Crazy Horse gained tremendous popularity amongst young native warriors throughout the Lakota Sioux Nation, he was strongly disliked by the elders of the tribe; those who viewed negotiations and peace to be the answer. The discrepancies over his likeability lead to suspicions from US soldiers holding him and to an unjust arrest. The militant mind he was, Crazy Horse retaliated and was killed September 5, 1877.³⁰ The Memory of his bravery and the injustice it signifies, still lingers on the reservation today. Indians had assaulted gold prospectors, which violated the Fort-Laramie Treaty by both parties, but the war that had ensued gave the U.S. government the opportunity to seize the Black Hills and surrounding territory in 1877 with the 1877 Act of Congress.

1877 Act of Congress Deemed Unconstitutional

Since that the Executive Branch of the United States Government decided to abandon the Nation's obligation to the Fort-Laramie Treaty in order to preserve the integrity of the Sioux territory, the retaliation of the Lakota was inevitable. Passage of the 1977 Act, destroyed trust in the government: "The passage of the 1877 Act legitimized the settlers' invasion of the Black Hills, but throughout the years it has been regarded by the Sioux as a breach of this Nation's solemn obligation to reserve the Hills in perpetuity for occupation by the Indians."³¹ In 1980, the situation had finally come to the attention of the Supreme Court in the case of *United States v. Sioux Nation*. The struggle for justice had come to an end after endless years of fighting with the ruling:

³⁰"New Perspectives On the West," PBS, October 21, 2013, accessed October 10, 2013, http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/people/a_c/crazyhorse.htm.

³¹*United States v. Sioux Nation*, 378 U.S. 437 (1980). http://scholar.google.com/scholar_case?case=17619608569271514941&hl=en&as_sdt=6&as_vis=1&oi=scholar (accessed October 6, 2013).

Rather, the 1877 Act affected a taking of tribal property, property which had been set aside for the exclusive occupation of the Sioux by the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868. That taking implied an obligation on the part of the Government to make just compensation to the Sioux Nation, and that obligation, including an award of interest, must now, at last, be paid.³²

Said compensation equaled \$17 million, the value at which in 1877 the land was worth. The interest then amounts to one hundred years of five percent, creating a grand total of over \$100 million owed to the Sioux Nation. The Lakota people, however, do not believe in any entitlement over the Black Hills; they are sacred to their way of life and rich with their history and culture, and no money compensation can return to them what they have lost. The money then rests in a Bureau of Indian Affairs account gaining compound interest and contains a compound interest of over \$1 billion.³³

The Lakota Way

The philosophy that has been exercised throughout their history is based upon the structure in which the Lakota operate. Kathleen Pickering, a professor of anthropology, writes: “Each Lakota subdivision had an all-male council that consisted of the leaders of various *tiyospaye*: spiritual leaders, elders, accomplished hunters, and other excelling men.”³⁴ This council is not to be confused with the role the United States government has in America; the role this group has over the reservation is to make decisions based on the well-being of their people. They hold no distinct advantages over their fellow Lakota, but solely respect and generosity. In the Lakota way of life there are the twelve qualities that create their foundation of existence: bravery, fortitude, generosity, wisdom, respect, honor, perseverance, love, humility, sacrifice, truth, and compassion.³⁵ With this mentality, the Lakota value living in harmony with others,

³²*United States v. Sioux Nation.*

³³<http://www.bia.gov/WhoWeAre/BIA/>

³⁴Pickering, 3.

³⁵Marshall.

having a sense of belonging to one's community, valuing interpersonal relationships, and trusting one another; all of which have been brutally disrupted in the past.

Assimilation

The idea of buying Indian land and constantly uprooting the natives and sending them west began to change in the late 1840s. Most of the Indians by this time had been moved west of the Mississippi River, where it was thought there would be little-to-no further contact between the tribes and the overlanders. This idea, however, was proven to be just that, an idea. As the overlanders continued to invade the West for new opportunities and discoveries, the US began to realize that the old system of displacement would no longer work. In 1848 the commissioner of Indian Affairs stated that it would be “judicious ‘to colonize our Indian tribes beyond the reach, for some years, of our white population.’”³⁶ This then created the idea of the reservation system and then further discrimination against American Indians.

America is a unique country in that it holds a vast number of ancestries with rich cultures and tremendous diversity. There is an emphasis on celebrating the “melting pot” and celebrating individuals' ethnic backgrounds. This ideology was not always so in America's history; the act of assimilation was prevalent until the mid-twentieth century. Immigrant groups coming to the United States were forced to Americanize in order to be recognized as citizens. The discrimination that these groups had to face was astonishing compared to the values America holds today. This treatment held true to the native Indians as well; though they are not immigrants, they were not considered US citizens either.

As mentioned earlier, the term Native American is seen as disrespectful to the Lakota, they prefer to be called Indian because they are in fact not “American” at all. They personally do

³⁶Gregory Michino, “The Indian Trail of Broken Treaties,” *Wild West* (August 2006), 36.

not view themselves as Americans and they have never been treated as such.³⁷ The Lakota language is kept alive to this day despite the government-run schools that were established teaching them English. The Fort-Laramie Treaty it includes an article intended to assure the Lakota's success; the government intended to provide English education, and with a government agent living on the reservation. The article reads: "The United States hereby agrees to furnish annually to the Indians the physician, teachers, carpenter, miller, engineer, farmer, and blacksmiths, as herein contemplated, and that such appropriations shall be made from time to time, on the estimate of the Secretary of the Interior, as will be sufficient to employ such persons."³⁸ However, for the ten years that the treaty was "upheld" most of what the government promised was absent from the reservation; only the essentials for assimilating the Lakota were maintained. To this day the schools on the reservation are government-run, if they are open at all; the churches that are present are run by white Christians that were established during the late 1800s. The ultimate goal was to leave all tribal traditions behind and for the Lakota to accept American customs and assimilate. The Lakota sense of pride stood in the way of that goal ever being met. Even when forced to practice American ideals, they proceeded to carry out their culture. This unfortunately is a common downfall for outside groups living in America.

Throughout US history, various ethnic groups have strived to keep the culture of their home country intact. But as history repeats itself, their attempts were oftentimes mocked and squashed by the Americanization of immigrant groups. The Lakota's attempts resulted in humiliation and they were seen as barbaric. To this day, discrimination prevails. In the years following the 1877 Act of Congress and the formation of reservations in the Midwest, rumors began spreading about Indians among the surrounding whites, which eventually became a hatred

³⁷Mark Iron Wing.

³⁸Fort Laramie Treaty," 1868, Article V.

that was thrust upon them by those too ignorant to have an understanding. Even today, the act of going into town and stepping foot off the reservation is looked at as despicable to most non-Indians in the area. Barbra Roach (see Appendix D), an elder of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe reservation in La Plant, South Dakota, spoke of being spit on while shopping at a Pierre, South Dakota Wal-Mart.³⁹ Most Americans claim they are sympathetic toward local Indians and express their regrets over the past conflicts with the US government, but they have only a vague understanding of the problems that Indians still face today. Oppressed Indians have expressed at various points in their history with the US government up until the present that they believe they continue to face prejudice, mistreatment, and inequality in the broader society that is the United States.⁴⁰ The effects of the Lakota's past with the United States and their lack of assimilation linger still today, which directly correlates to the lack of hope on the reservation.

Poverty

Walking through the Great Plains of the Midwest, one can see for miles the beauty of endless skies and dazzling scenery. What most onlookers do not see is the immense amount of devastation before them. CNN reporter John King writes; "To spend a day crossing the reservation is to see a place stunningly beautiful and seemingly forgotten all at once, small, poor communities tucked into the hollows of western South Dakota's Cheyenne River Reservation. The poverty is all the more striking because of the richness of the setting: green and golden rolling hills, roaming horses and cattle, and tall corn and golden sunflowers sprouting from the fertile soil."⁴¹ Desolation is not only visual but it is also internalized by those inhabiting the reservation.

³⁹Roach.

⁴⁰Mark Iron Wing.

⁴¹John King, "King: Life Is Bare Bones On the Lakota Reservation," *CNN Politics*, September 13, 2009, accessed October 22, 2013, <http://www.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/08/13/king.sotu.economy/>.

A master bedroom, a living area with kitchen and stove, bunk beds, and a bathroom with slender shower: all items that make up a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) trailer. In case of a state of emergency, often times, caused by a natural disaster, FEMA offers assistance with temporary housing to victims. Each trailer is supposedly equipped with electricity, air conditioning, indoor heating, running water, oven, refrigerator, and a few pieces of furniture attached to the floor. FEMA aided in relief of victims during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina; they offered support after the tornados in Oklahoma, and so on. George Iron Wing (see photo in Appendix E), a lifetime resident of La Plant, South Dakota on the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe reservation, used whatever money he could save to purchase a left-over FEMA trailer from Louisiana that was left behind after Katrina. Hauled through the Midwest of the United States, the trailer was dropped on his property and left for him to sort out the rest: the plumbing, electrical, etc. It was stranded there on a slant; the shower poured into the living room and the wiring oftentimes fried due to the water damage. In order for the living area to be lit, the oven needed to be on and the insulation of the mobile home was by no means in shape for the brutal winters. This trailer is all that he could provide for his family to ensure their safety, but even that is not guaranteed.⁴²

As a whole, American Indians have an infant death rate forty percent higher than the rate for Caucasians. The health problems that are prevalent among them are diabetes, stroke, high blood pressure, and heart disease. Death rates due to unintentional injuries and suicide are prominent, as well as the risk of obesity, substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, liver disease, and

⁴²George Iron Wing, conversation with the author in August 2013. Iron Wing is a member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation in La Plant, South Dakota. He is the chair of the Powwow committee for the town alongside his wife, Sierra Iron Wing, who is the secretary. Together the couple has a three year old son, Nathaniel, and both have three children outside their marriage. Iron Wing was skeptical of the Simply Smiles organization in years prior but voiced his sense of acceptance and appreciation once he saw that the organization was there to stay and there to make a difference.

hepatitis.⁴³ The Lakota are not immune to these statistics. Many children come from broken homes and torn families due to alcoholism and drug abuse. The opportunities on the reservation are slim to none, and, moreover, transportation is lacking; the unemployment rate on his reservation is over eighty percent and climbing. Given these circumstances, morale is strikingly low among the Lakota. The lasting effects of oppression inflicted by the United States government are to blame. The recording of history and the recalling of memory may be a misrepresentation of the past due to deliberate omissions and fabrications.⁴⁴ The Sioux Nation has struggled for centuries to grapple with what their lives have become and in essence have become a product of their past.

Today, American Indians are commonly misconstrued as becoming rich due to gaming revenues and or their roles in the casino industry. However, not all tribes own tribal gaming operations; in fact that is only a minority of the US' American Indian population. The reality is many tribal groups face difficulties with members of their tribal ancestry not being able to support their families on their tribal paychecks or even obtain paychecks at all. Stereotypes and ignorance harm the victims affecting society at large. Those victims suffer the emotional distress; anger, frustration, insecurity, and feelings of hopelessness which is evident in the Lakota Nation. Unfortunately, those who are affected the most are the Indian children, who are exposed at an early age. During youth and adolescence, internalizing stereotypes can result in lower self-esteem, which then contributes to myriad of lasting problems throughout the lifetime of the American Indians. This action then, in turn, becomes discrimination: one assumes Indians are more prone to violence and alcoholism, they are incapable and under educated, and they are dirty and classless. With these thoughts in mind, American Indians are less likely to be hired

⁴³“Broken Promises: Rervations Lack Basic Care,” *NBC News*, June 14, 2009, accessed October 22, 2013, <http://www.nbcnews.com/id/31210909/#.Umb4rVO68SE>.

⁴⁴Edward Linenthal, “Trauma and the Memory of Politics,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, (2008).

outside their reservation. This then leads directly to Indians being viewed as less stable economically because in actuality, 29.1 percent of American Indians are in poverty as of 2012; this is the highest rate among any racial group in the US; whereas, the nation as whole has a poverty rate of 15.1 percent.⁴⁵ For those that maintain them, stereotypes prevent learning the truth about Indians and the true history of the United States and inhibit American Indians from excelling in their lives.

In the year 1924, US congress passed the Snyder Act was passed granting American Indians citizenship and debunked the ideals of Americanization; however, the natives were still seen as second-class citizens. As time moved forward and the US was faced with the repercussions of the Great Depression, the Indian Reorganization Act was passed and began to move policy away from assimilation and focused on autonomy. In the wake of these efforts, many Indians began taking action in bettering their lives by creating the National Congress of American Indians. The organization had two main goals: ensure American Indians the same civil rights that white Americans had and enable Indian reservations retained their own customs.⁴⁶ At the brink of World War II, many natives began to get involved in American affairs by enlisting and offering services for the war effort. However, this then introduced them to the extent of how bad discrimination against them really was. The bit of hope the Indians began to have quickly diminished with the end of the war and the termination policy of 1953. This piece of legislation declared the US government would give up its responsibility for American Indian tribes and eliminate federal economic support and discontinue the reservation

⁴⁵*U.S. Census of Population, 2012: Subject Reports: American Indians* (PC(2)-IF). Final Report. Washington: Government Printing Office, 2012.

⁴⁶Pickering, 89.

system.⁴⁷ Though this hands-off approach sounds as though it would satisfy the desires of the Indians and their negativity towards Americanization, it actually hurt them to a great extent.

Memory and its Effects on Healing

Memory is the mental capacity of retaining and reviving facts, events, or impressions by recalling or recognizing previous experiences one may have had. Forgiving does not erase the bitter past, and a healed memory is not an omitted memory. Instead, forgiving what one cannot forget creates a new way to remember. The Lakota Nation has passed this use of memory down through the generations; infecting their ancestry with dejection and hopelessness. In order to change the memory of one's past; one must translate that memory into a hope for the future. But unfortunately, the memories of the Lakota are too toxic to do so. Any type of cultural group tends to share in a collective memory of their past and rich history. The Lakota show evidence of many aspects of collective memory; Chris Weedon, a Professor of critical and cultural theory at the University of Cardiff, writes "[collective memory] focuses on aspects of the cultural politics of memory, in particular what motivates the ways in which nations remember the past."⁴⁸ Memory appears to be a personal matter that is created from one's own individual experience, but this is in the way that society as a whole remembers, and makes sense of things, thus creating a collective memory. When groups collaborate to share information, such as indulging in oral history, there tends to be a story, and in many cases, a tragedy. To keep the Lakota traditions alive, their histories were passed down through generations with stories of what their ancestors had to do to overcome the hardships.⁴⁹ Because of this focus the Lakota have on their past, it is inhibiting them from moving forward. A professor of applied linguistics from Penn State, Robert Schrauf, claims, "Where consistency seems appropriate, people have a tendency to align

⁴⁷Pickering, 95.

⁴⁸Chris Weedon, "Collective Memory: Theory and Politics," *Social Semiotics* (2012), 144.

⁴⁹George Iron Wing.

the past with the present. Where change is deemed appropriate, people have a tendency to recall the past as contrasting with the present.”⁵⁰ Many of the members of the Lakota’s focus on the present is their oppression from their past; they have yet to overcome the memory of what the US has put upon them.

Collective memory is not all negative, however; there are various positive actions that come from a collaborative recollection, such as memorials. The reason monuments and memorials are built is in order to honor and commemorate an achievement, a tragedy, or a heroic act. It inspires others, particularly to the young generation of what was, creating a lasting memory. The Lakota felt it necessary to take part in this idea of commemorating their past. In 1939, Chief Standing Bear wrote to a profound architect famous for his work on Mount Rushmore by the name of Korczak Ziolkowski in hopes that he would agree to design a monument on behalf of the Lakota Sioux, thus commencing the ongoing project of the Crazy Horse Memorial. Like Mount Rushmore, the Crazy Horse Memorial is a mountain monument that is under construction within in the Black Hills, in Custer County, South Dakota. It portrays Crazy Horse, a famous Lakota warrior, and his heroic actions while defending the Black Hills until his death.⁵¹ The Black Hills are sacred to the Lakota and the faces of four US presidents carved into the side of the mountain region marks an insult to the Sioux Nation. In Standing Bear’s letter to Ziolkowski he writes, “My fellow chiefs and I would like the white man to know the red man has great heroes, also.”⁵² Though the Lakota still face hardships, there is slowly more hope being restored to the reservations.

⁵⁰Robert Schrauf, “The Effects of Revisionism on Remembered Emotions: the Valence of Older, Voluntary Immigrants’ Pre-migration Autobiographies,” *Applied Cognitive Psychology* (2007), 898.

⁵¹Sam Antonio, “Crazy Horse Memorial a Tale of Two Stories Told in Stone,” 2012, 36.

⁵²Ibid, 35.

The Lakota Sioux Nation has been enveloped with misfortunes dating back to the mid nineteenth century. The loss of the sacred Black Hills was devastating to the Indians and commenced their battle with the government over territory. Their way of life was rudely interrupted by inhabitants of overlanders infringing on their land and eventually taking over their beliefs. Assimilation was upon them and they had no means to fight back except to practice their culture despite the actions the United States was taking. This then created an unfortunate typecast for the Lakota, labeling them as obscene and loathed by surrounding Americans. Cynicism was all but lost, a sense of hope is hard to find throughout the reservations. Through the eyes of the Lakota nation, the oppression inflicted by the US government has driven the tribe to lose a sense of hope in their lives. It is said that history repeats itself, but what is not known, is that often times, people become victims of their past.

*We have to stop with the idea of creating peace on earth and begin with creating peace with Mother Earth. We've tried the first alternative for thousands of years, but look where that has led us, now is the time of the Original Ways, the Native ways, after all ... it is coming this way that we all must make peace with Mother Earth—there is no more altering the native way.*⁵³

-Tiokasin Ghosthorse

⁵³Tiokasin Ghosthorse, "Host and Producer of First Voices Indigenous Radio," First Voices of Indigenous Radio, October 22, 2013, accessed September 14, 2013, <http://firstvoicesindigenousofradio.org/node/7>. Ghosthorse is from the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe reservation in South Dakota. He has had a long history in Indigenous rights activism and advocacy for the Lakota people. He is also a master musician and travels the country performing his traditional music.

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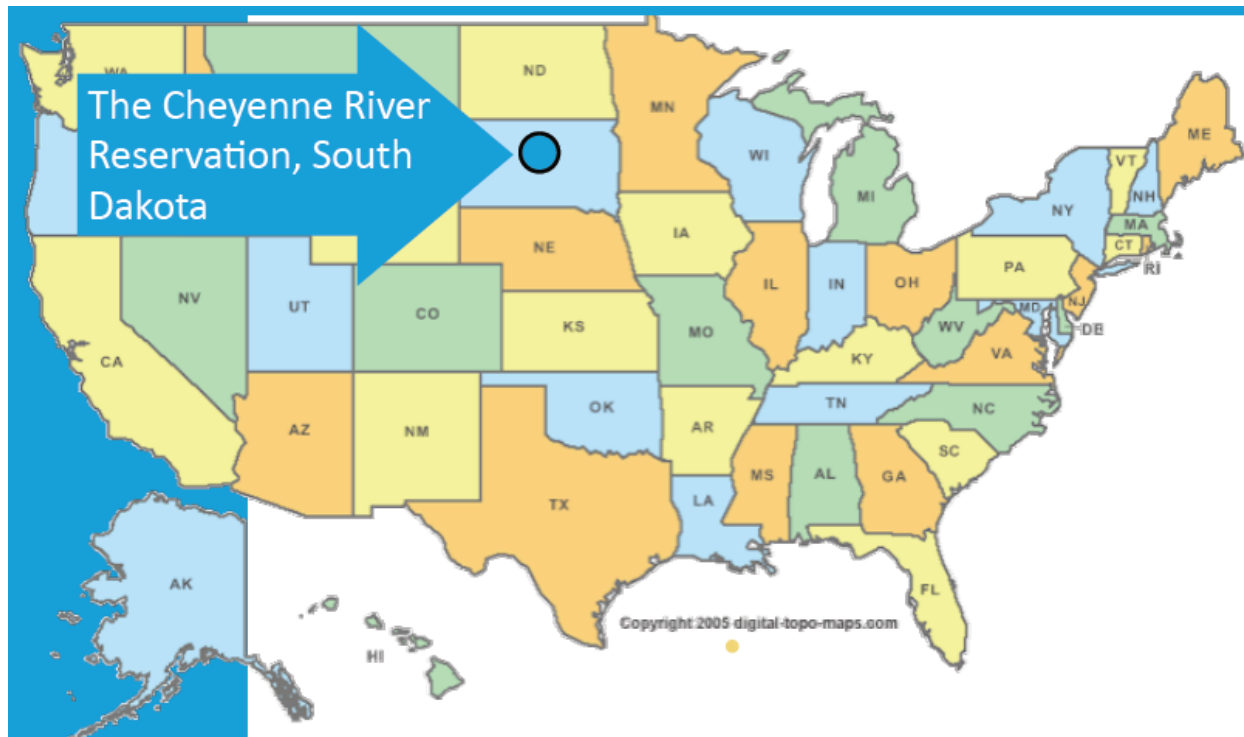
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Appendix A



Photograph taken by author: Tanner Gray Summer 2012

Appendix B



Map of La Plant, South Dakota from www.simplismiles.org

Appendix C



Photo taken by author: Mark and Roxanne Iron Wing summer 2012

Appendix D



Photograph taken by author: Roland and Barbra Roach summer 2013

Appendix E



Photograph taken by author: George Iron Wing Summer 2013