THE PERSISTENCE OF HOPE IN INDIAN COUNTRY:

THE LAKOTA/DAKOTA OF SOUTH DAKOTA

By

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to all the strong indigenous women who have impacted their communities despite incredible odds: those who are well known and those who have contributed in quiet, seemingly simple ways. You have been life-givers, nurturers, activists, teachers and supporters. Your strength and wisdom will inspire and encourage generations to come. Cante wasteya nape ciyuza pe.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

The intent of this study is to research the existence of hope and its manifestation among the Lakota and Dakota communities of South Dakota, despite centuries of oppression, marginalization, cultural disruption and structural violence. It will be shown that these communities of the Great Sioux Nation exhibit courage and resilience, and that something vital has sustained them for centuries – the element of hope.

Utilizing a multidisciplinary approach, this study will first explore historical multigenerational trauma and the theoretical approach of Dr. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart. The impacts of historical trauma lend to better understanding of the present situation among these communities.

Additionally, the issues of violence and abuse are researched in the context of women and youth, those appearing to suffer the greatest impacts. The effects of this violence have produced secondary issues such as critical suicide rates and the emergence of gang activity.

Finally, the element of hope is explored as it is manifested among these communities through resistance. Demonstrated in various forms, resistance is a key component in the persistence of hope and possibility. The strength and commitment generated by such efforts address the critical issues impacting these reservation communities, especially the highlighted target groups – women and youth.

Interviews among generous participants from Pine Ridge, Crow Creek, Cheyenne River and Lower Brule Reservations in South Dakota lend to the overall substance and credibility of the assertions in this study. They are invaluable in clarifying that, despite incredible odds and what is seemingly interminable crisis, hope exists. Questions asked included: How is hope maintained? How is it manifested? How did it sustain people in the past and what force keeps people moving forward in the face of the paradigm of continued oppression in contemporary societies?

The conclusion reached is that despite the impacts of poverty and despair among the Lakota and Dakota, there is a tangible and pervasive element of hope that sustains these communities and has allowed for their continued existence as unique and distinct nations.

CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

The impetus for this study is credited to many years of living and working with the Lakota and Dakota in South Dakota, as well as insights gained through the accompaniment of marginalized people in El Salvador during and since their twelve-year civil war. It has become clear that, despite suffering histories of implausible injustice, which were characterized by oppression, marginalization, and subjugation, something integral and remarkable characterized the persistence of these societies. They have not succumbed to nor been consumed by dominance but rather have sought ways to confront injustice, armed with courage and ideals inherent in their particular cultures.

Ernst Block has discussed the concept of possibility and how it contributed to hope. Possibility and action allow for the potential for change, and thus hope remains tangible. "But since in man active capacity particularly belongs to possibility, the display of this activity and bravery, as soon as and in so far as it takes place, tips the balance in favour of hope."[1]

The tribes of the Great Sioux Nation, including the Lakota and Dakota continue to exist despite a history of incredible confrontation. If they had not resisted their oppressors, if they had lost hope in the face of sustained injustice, they would not be surviving today. This confrontation has at moments in history been corporeal, exhibited in battles, wars and massacres. However, the confrontation of these indigenous nations is

far more profound in that it involves the spirit of the people – their courage, their bravery, their determination, and their will. This is spurred by possibility.

Hope is completely visceral in the human condition. Bloch writes:

> Even disappointed hope wanders around agonizing, a ghost that has lost its way back to the cemetery and clings to refuted images. It does not perish through itself, but only through a new form of itself. The fact that we can thus *sail* into dreams…often of a completely uncovered kind…indicates the great space of the still open, still uncertain life of man.[2]

The Lakota and Dakota people of South Dakota have been fighting for centuries, physically, economically, culturally, and spiritually. They have endured multifarious oppressive acts that have impacted the historical development of their communities. The consequences have been contemporary societies characterized by extreme poverty, substance abuse, violence, and in some instances, a diminishment of culture and traditions. Through exploration of the resultant contemporary issues, it becomes apparent that the most vulnerable segments of these populations are the women and the youth.

However, the far too common despair of those engulfed in an endless chasm of alcohol abuse and poverty, marginalized by the racism and ignorance of others, is overshadowed by the struggle to retain their beautiful, cultural traditions as well as a sense of dignity as a strong and vital people. Possibility is central to the struggle – the possibility that life will improve, that individuals and communities have the competence to make necessary changes, and the wisdom to know what those needed changes are.

Paolo Freire contends in *Pedagogy of Hope*:

> …While I certainly cannot ignore hopelessness as a concrete entity, nor turn a blind eye to the historical, economic, and social reasons that explain that hopelessness – I do not understand human existence, and the struggle needed to improve it, apart from hope and dream. Without a minimum of hope, we cannot so much as start the struggle. But without

> the struggle, hope, as an ontological need, dissipates, loses its bearings, and turns into hopelessness.[3]

The struggle of the Lakota and Dakota people continues. It is apparent that women and youth are especially vulnerable and exhibit the symptomatic results of unresolved historical trauma. Those who lend their voices to this study as interview participants are living the realities discussed, and their experience and wisdom lend veracity to this content.

The foundational approach to this study is based on the theories promulgated by Dr. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart. Her theoretical approach involves the concept of intergenerational or multigenerational unresolved historical trauma that continues through centuries and is key to the lingering grief that appears to haunt contemporary societies. Dr. Brave Heart's work will be explored as it is manifested in Lakota and Dakota individuals and communities.

Additionally, this study will show that hope is persistent among these communities, and that endeavors spurred by resistance keep possibility alive. Despite what could seem to be, insurmountable despair, there is an impetus to life that keeps people moving forward. Ella Deloria states:

> There is an undeniable choice here. Which picture shall it be? The picture of despair or the picture of hope? There is no alternative. Now that the people know what they need and want, they are going to be disillusioned, forever this time, if they cannot have it.[4]

CHAPTER 2:

INTERGENERATIONAL HISTORICAL TRAUMA AND HEALING:

THE THEORETICAL APPROACH OF MARIA YELLOW HORSE BRAVE HEART

> But the war goes on. And for many years to come we shall be bandaging the countless and sometimes indelible wounds inflicted on our people by the colonialist onslaught. Imperialism, which today is waging war against a genuine struggle for human liberation, sows seeds of decay here and there that must be mercilessly rooted out from our land and from our minds.[5]

There comes a moment when an historically oppressed people can either choose to allow a tragic past to dictate their future or to confront those memories in order to change the course for coming generations. The confrontation is a painful one, remembering events that altered a civilization and the lives of its people. However, Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, PhD., Hunkpapa/Oglala Lakota, professor and clinical social worker, would contend that this is a necessary process in order to become what the Lakota call a "takini," a survivor, or more literally, "one who is brought back to life." The ritual ceremony of recounting this past and moving through the grief toward the healing is reminiscent of counting coup. With great courage, the confrontation begins, and the coup stick is planted.

Brave Heart promulgates the theory that unless indigenous people face the past with all of its destruction and oppression, and grieve over those memories, healing will not occur and this intergenerational historical trauma which has been handed down from prior generations will continue to impact their descendants. She further contends that this historical trauma is a "cumulative emotional and psychological wounding across

generations, including one's own lifespan, because everything up to a minute ago is history."[6]

Indigenous people have begun embracing the trauma of their particular history and planting coup sticks in defiance of its continued destruction. For the Lakota and Dakota of South Dakota, it is a history replete with historical trauma from Wounded Knee to reservations, the disappearance of the buffalo to boarding schools, psychologically and emotionally impacting the lives of individuals and communities.

Interview participants speak with a sense of hope in the future, seeing a return to traditional ways, including language and spirituality as a road to becoming once again, strong and vital nations. Others see despair as a pervasive factor of life on the reservations and have encouraged their children to go and make their lives elsewhere. The sadness and sense of loss that results can only be imagined. A young woman from Pine Ridge shared:

> Around here, people don't want to admit it but just about – I'd say 90% of the population suffers from PTSD. I think hopelessness is probably a major factor in PTSD. I said that to somebody once and …they thought differently but when you really think about it, PTSD is like fight or flight, and the majority of people will fight around here. (Pine Ridge, July 2010)

The impacts of historical trauma have resulted in communities that are often fractured. In reflecting on the myriad issues Lakota communities face, one participant commented: "Seems to be a lot of things that have started way back when we were first put on the rez. Historical violence seems to be the cause of a lot of problems." (Rapid City, March 2010)

Native historical accounts have been transmitted through the oral tradition since the beginning of time. Traditional and spiritual teachings are the substance of the individual and the community. Clifford E. Trafzer has written in "Marrow Memory:"

> Since the time of creation, American Indian people have known that memory is stored in the blood and bones of the people. For thousands of years before the arrival of the non-Natives, elders passed on traditions in the language of the people, recording bone memories through oral traditions and on material objects made of wood, skins, rocks, textiles, basketry, and ivory. These items reminded the people of their memories, brought them to light again. The source of this knowledge is found in the bones of the people…[7]

Just as the wonderfully rich elements and teachings of Native traditions have been handed down through oral storytelling, so too, have the crises of historical traumas. Trafzer continues: "Through the oral tradition, my mother taught me about the great epidemics that killed so many Indian people. She told me about the smallpox, measles, influenza, and other plagues Europeans brought to Native America."[8]

Oral accounts of traumatic events such as these are handed down from generation to generation and become "stored in the blood and bones of the people." Brave Heart contends that this generational trauma is cumulative, severe and chronic, and "contributes to the current social pathology of high rates of suicide, homicide, domestic violence, child abuse, alcoholism, and other social problems among American Indians."[9]

The trauma of land, culture, and loved ones taken, without sufficient time to mourn the losses, has created an unresolved grief that is enduring. The assimilationist policies of this century have resulted in the continued fracturing of traditional societies, leaving many without a solid base of support and often living in abject poverty.

American Indian people are victims of a history that has been viewed by many as genocidal in nature, and continues to plague them with physical, social, and psychological wounds. Article 2 of the United Nations General Assembly's Convention on Genocide (1948) states:

> Genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group, and includes five types of criminal actions: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; and forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.[10]

Brave Heart addresses the specifics of cultural genocide of Native peoples, which among other things includes the abolition of ceremonial practice and spirituality, an element so vital and pervasive to American Indian cultures that its destruction is especially insidious. One interview participant, when asked if a return to cultural and spiritual traditions would begin to heal wounds, responded:

> Culture and traditional spirituality are not practiced in a good way on my reservation. You just don't know who to trust. When the people holding the ceremonies aren't "good people" in their everyday lives, why would you trust them, especially for cultural/spiritual reasons? (South Dakota, October 2009)

Genocide fractures once healthy societies. It is an element of history that has affected many nations. However, the American Indian apocalypse has not received the attention that others have. Eduardo Duran states, "The Native idea of historical trauma involves the understanding that the trauma occurred in the soul or spirit…" supporting Brave Heart's theory of a "soul wound."[11] Rarely has an apology been offered for events that wounded the soul of Native nations.

The attack on the World Trade Center could be likened to this communal wound, although the losses of Native nations essentially encompass a depth and breadth that involves not only loss of life and security, but also an attempt to destroy the very soul of the people. However, as the American people view the events of September 11, 2001 over and over, the trauma replayed again and again, there is an understanding of communal grief. Some would contend that this is contemporary history and what happened to American Indian people was so long ago as to hold lesser significance. However, as Tina Deschenie points out, the pain has not diminished among descendants of the American Indian genocide. "There were no Red Cross or crisis response teams to deal with the aftermath." This history was not one horrible event; it has been a long one filled with injustice that continues to be precipitated by policies of a dominant ruling power. Deschenie continues, "While they have survived, Indian people continue to exhibit the aftereffects, as evidenced by high rates of alcohol and substance abuse, suicide, broken families, poverty, and mental health issues."[12]

Lawrence Gross supports this premise but goes further in his contention that the postapocalyptic period is more profound than even Brave Heart recognizes. He has termed the resulting symptomatic state of American Indian people, "who have seen the end of their worlds" as Post Apocalyptic Stress Syndrome or PASS." Dr. Gross further states, "…a postapocalyptic period will see an abandonment of productive employment; an increase in substance abuse; an increase in violence, especially domestic violence; an abandonment of established religious practices; the adoption of fanatical forms of religion; a loss of hope; and a sense of despair on the part of the survivors."[13]

Studies by researchers including Brave Heart reference the additional manifestations of "identification with ancestral pain and deceased ancestors, psychic numbing and poor affect tolerance" leading to elevated suicide rates.[14] The incidence of suicide among the Lakota and Dakota on the reservations of South Dakota is at a critical level. One interview participant from a small community of about 1000 on the Pine Ridge Reservation shared that in the last year, they suffered thirty-nine suicides, thirty-seven of which were women. The youngest was twelve years old (Pine Ridge, July 2010). Eduardo Duran refers to this "spirit of suicide" as "a misinterpretation of the soul's desire to transform," in which "power and control are lost."[15] Suicide becomes an outlet for the need to transform the wounded soul. Brave Heart cites a connection to a high incidence of loss over the span of a lifetime as an indicator of suicidal tendencies.[16]

Additionally, Brave Heart addresses the abuse of women and children and other aggressive behaviors as indicative of what Paolo Freire refers to as "internalized oppression."[17] The oppressed begin to identify with the oppressor resulting in what Brave Heart terms "lateral oppression" or "lateral violence," aggression acted out upon each other within the community.[18]

Interview participants were questioned about the increase of abuse, rape, and suicide among women on the reservations of South Dakota. Respondents attributed the increase to the following:

> Female 1: Alcohol and drug abuse [are the causes] as well as a corrupt/broken legal system and law enforcement services.
>
> Male 1: The greatest cause, I believe would have to be alcoholism.
>
> Female 2: The lack of strength to be strong enough to stay on the Red Road so that they can be in their clear right mind.

> Male 2: Historical violence is what's killing Lakotas now. Abuse and rape are bad on the rez, but if you look into stats, it's men of other races that are doing more of the rapes, and abuse our women. We have our bad men too, but they don't show the races of the abusers; just show how many cases there are against Lakota men. (Interviews conducted October 2010)

Through Brave Heart's process of healing, past events that have impacted the present situation are confronted, encouraging dialogue, sharing, and personal and communal reflection. An interview question was posed to Lakota participants pertaining to the growing incidence of rape and violence among young people and the availability and effectiveness of services. The following responses were shared:

> The people who come to "save us" don't know anything about us or how we live, think, relate or handle problems. So the services always fail and we get blamed for it – labeled untouchable or stubborn. The white clinical model doesn't work for Lakota people, so we fail in the white man's eyes again. (Male participant)

> When you go to IHS (Indian Health Service), you have to sit and wait. When someone wants or is ready to talk, they want to talk NOW, not when time is convenient for the professional. (Female participant) (Interviews conducted October 2010)

In contrast, Brave Heart's Takini Network offers an intervention model based on specific principles including education to increase awareness of trauma, sharing the effects of trauma, and grief resolution through communal mourning and traditional healing practices. In conducting her 4-day workshops, Brave Heart concludes with the Lakota purification and Wiping of the Tears ceremony (Washigila). This rite follows a period of mourning the loss of a loved one, and signifies the release of the spirit after which the mourning ends.[19] Through various interviews, elders have shared their belief that a return and adherence to sacred religious teachings and practices is of critical

importance for overcoming unresolved grief, and that hope lies in the renewal of traditional spirituality. Gross expressed support for this theory when he stated that, "Unless a people's religion can be maintained, it is not likely the rest of the culture can survive intact."[20]

Brave Heart is not without her critics. Charles Trimble, Oglala Lakota, was the principal founder of the American Indian Press Association in 1970, served as executive director of the National Congress of American Indians from 1972-1978, and is a columnist for *Indian Country Today*. Trimble contends that in order for tribal communities to move from "victims to victors" they must shed the "chains of victimhood." His contention is that the cry of poverty and oppression has become so deeply rooted, it would seem that Indian people "treasure their victimhood."[21] While Brave Heart promulgates the need to embrace the wounds of the past so as to heal them, Trimble cites Philip "Sam" Deloria in urging professors to stop perpetrating the theory that Indians are victims of multigenerational suffering. Deloria contended that Indian people must get over the trauma, and referred to theories espousing multigenerational trauma as self-fulfilling.

Likewise, Devon Abbot Mihesuah in *Indigenous American Women: Decolonization, Empowerment, Activism* brings Brave Heart's analysis of "historical trauma" and "unresolved intergenerational grief" into question. She addresses the abuse of Indian women by Indian men who may have "absorbed the particular mindset that colonialism brought to the New World."[22] However, rather than focusing on the abrogation of societal norms of Native tribal nations and the resulting wounds that have

led to internalized oppression, she refers to this as the "colonialism excuse,"[23] seemingly supporting Deloria's contentions.

Russell Thornton, Cherokee and professor of anthropology, has stated: "Memories of trauma do not have to be kept alive through conscious awareness."[24] They remain, despite attempts to let them go. Even if left undisturbed, evidence shows that they are passed from generation to generation. Brave Heart would contend that American Indian people share a similar experience.

In spite of her critics, Brave Heart's theories are espoused and utilized in a number of venues. Her verbiage has been absorbed into the consciousness and language of Native people and those working to heal the soul wounds. Therapists like Eduardo Duran demonstrate Brave Heart's principles in what is termed "a hybrid or community clinic model, [that] uses staff that are trained in both western and Native American treatment and epistemological systems." This allows for a psychological approach that addresses historical implications as well. Duran's process offers suggested appropriate behaviors focusing on "internalized oppression and adoption of negative stereotypes, thereby creating space for reimaging the self."[25]

A second model, based on communal healing rituals, involves in-group treatment. This process is typified by, "sharing experiences, providing hope, collective mourning, and social support."[26] Brave Heart's communal model of grief resolution is one that has the potential to offer relief to other communities characterized by a history of oppression and historical trauma. Relying on collective memories and mutual identification has similarly been used in the treatment of Nazi Holocaust survivors, which would seem to indicate that this model is effective despite cultural differences.

An online publication entitled *Minority Nurse.com* features commentary by health practitioners from around the country supporting and utilizing Brave Heart's interventions in their healing practices. John Lowe, RN, PhD, Cherokee, states, "If you are Native and born into a Native family, your community's past is a part of who you are."[27]

American Indian people themselves are embracing Brave Heart's theoretical healing process and are planting coup sticks in their own manner. Winona LaDuke writes of a program coordinated by a group of women on the Yankton Reservation in South Dakota, the Braveheart Project Learning Circle (Inhanktunawan Winyan). Working with traditional societies, this program was designed to restore culture by mentoring women in their roles as "buffalo callers." Coordinator Faith Spotted Eagle shared these observations:

> In traditional buffalo society…the primary role that women had was dividing up the buffalo, once the buffalo was killed. There were some women who were buffalo callers…The third role was to be the ultimate environmentalist, to be able to use everything in the buffalo. Finally, there was the role of mentoring younger women to realize the primacy of our relationship with the buffalo.[28]

This approach allows for healing through communal resolution of the past by restoring traditional practices.

Don Coyhis, Mohican, followed his vision through his organization White Bison Inc., which sponsored a bicycle ride from Alaska to Washington, D.C. for the purpose of bringing a Sacred Hoop and Forgiveness Staff to each of twenty active and closed boarding schools throughout the country. The purpose was to allow Native people to

forgive the trauma associated with boarding school experiences and begin the healing of unresolved grief. The ride is the subject of the documentary film, *Way Home Tour*.[29]

Birgil Kills Straight, Oglala Lakota and traditional leader, helped initiate the memorial ride to Wounded Knee to commemorate the 1890 massacre called the Tatanka Iyotake (Sitting Bull) and Wokiksuye (Big Foot) Ride, or more commonly, The Big Foot Ride. Their first journey by horseback was in 1986 and follows the December 1890 route across South Dakota taken by Minneconjou leader Big Foot and his followers. They arrive in Wounded Knee to commemorate the December 26th anniversary.

The Sacred Sites Run was begun as a national effort to petition Congress to allow American Indians the right to access and perform ceremonies on ancient sacred sites, and focuses on different areas of the country. It simultaneously encourages education about cultural heritage and the importance of healthy, traditional diets. On speaking of the Great Plains Run, Ben Yahola, leader and initiator, commented, "There is a need for truth telling [on the genocide of the Dakota] before reconciliation can take place."[30]

In the same manner, an annual ride from South Dakota to Minnesota commemorates the 1862 execution of the Dakota 38, hung in the largest mass execution in the history of the United States by order of President Abraham Lincoln. From September 28 to November 3, 1862, approximately four hundred Dakota men were subjected to criminal proceedings by a United States Military Commission for the murder, rape, and robbery of white settlers in southwestern Minnesota. All of the trials were hastily prepared and executed, and only sketchy records were kept. Three hundred and three prisoners were sentenced to death. President Lincoln, recognizing the irregularities of the proceedings pardoned all but thirty-eight. On December 26th, at ten o'clock in the

morning, thirty-eight prisoners were led to the gallows in Mankato, Minnesota, heads covered and singing Dakota death songs. They stood on the platform in their assigned places and all were hung at the same moment. One, whose rope broke, had to be restrung. At the moment of the executions, thousands of spectators cheered loudly. The bodies were buried in a mass grave until area doctors, one of whom was Dr. Mayo, came to collect cadavers for research.[31]

> Questions abound as to the justice of these cases. The evidence demonstrates that the trials of the Dakota prisoners were objectionable in a number of respects. The speed of the proceedings, the nature of the evidence, and the identity of the judges all combined to preclude judicious decisionmaking and to guarantee an unjust outcome.
>
> Based on the historical and legal views prevailing in 1862 and the years that followed, the Dakota were a sovereign nation at war with the United States, and the men who fought the war…should have been tried only on charges that they violated customary rules of warfare, not for the civilian crimes of murder, rape and robbery. Judged by those standards, few of the convictions were supportable.[32]

Given that only four months after the executions, Congress enacted a law providing for the forcible removal from Minnesota of all Sioux, the ultimate objective of the trials is called into question. The Sioux Wars that began in Minnesota, resulting in the execution of the Dakota 38, culminated twenty-eight years later on the same date in 1890 with the massacre at Wounded Knee.

In December of 1986, Governor Rudy Perpich of Minnesota declared 1987, the 125th anniversary of the Dakota Conflict, to be the Year of Reconciliation, an effort at healing the past wounds of the Dakota Nation.[33] However, the events leading up to and including the executions persist as a historical wound for the Dakota.

In the spring of 2005, Jim Miller, Dakota and member of the Cheyenne River Tribe, had a dream of a series of horseback rides that would unite the Dakota people in a communal effort. In establishing this event, his objective also involved creating awareness of the residual wound from the Dakota 38 mass executions and the surrounding events. The ultimate goal was "…to bring reconciliation among all people of the region so that we may move forward and live in a good way." In addition, Miller states that the ride also memorializes the Dakota people who were forced on foot across the frozen prairies either to witness the executions, or to be placed in the concentration camp in Fort Snelling, Minnesota.[34]

Physically making the journey encourages the process of confronting the trauma of the past in order to promote healing. It is, as Eduardo Duran suggests, liberation.

> One challenge for healing the Lakota historical trauma response is the subjugation and distortion of historical facts about our genocide and the lack of awareness and sensitivity in the general population. As validation of the trauma and giving testimony are germane to the healing process, the lack of acknowledgement of our trauma is a barrier to our liberation from the effects of our historical legacy and the trauma response.[35]

The ride begins at Lower Brule Reservation, and covers the 330 miles to the site of the hangings in Makato, completing their journey at Reconciliation Park on the anniversary of the executions. This year (2010) marks the sixth ride and this annual event will culminate in 2012, the 150th anniversary of the executions.

In an interview, one of the riders who has taken part each year contributed the following remarks:

> On December 10th 2010, the Dakota 38 Memorial Ride will begin at Lower Brule, SD. The Ride will continue on until December 26th ending up in Mankato, MN. This is the 6th year that this ride has been happening. And as in the past everyone is welcome to come join us as we ride for

> Healing, Reconciliation and the Remembering Our Relatives who were hung on that December Day in 1862. (Crow Creek, December 2010)

These culturally-based reconciliatory efforts, arising from within the indigenous communities themselves, illustrate Paolo Freire's notion of the need for "conscientization" in order that the oppressed may free themselves from their wounded past.[36] Eduardo Duran further contends that this liberation requires a transformative process.

> Through a gradual transformation of consciousness via ongoing deconstruction of the life experiences of oppressed persons, the entire community that is adversely affected by systemic forms of oppression and injustice can begin to liberate itself and, in that process, liberate the oppressor.[37]

Brave Heart's theoretical model reinforces these concepts through a culturally and spiritually based process by which American Indians liberate themselves from the traumatic consequences of their particular holocaust. "The connectedness of past to present to future remains a circle of lessons and insights that can give us both the consciousness and the conscience to heal ourselves."[38] Individuals and communities can then face the realities of radically new circumstances and find meaning in their world. Having the psychological resources to not only survive, but to retain cultural traditions in spite of centuries of traumatic events indicates a formidable strength of spirit. American Indian people across this continent are in the process of counting coup on a long history of destruction. They not only have survived, but also remain as distinct and vital nations.

> The crux of our argument has far reaching implications for other colonized, oppressed peoples throughout history and those being oppressed, as we write… Wherever peoples are being decimated and destroyed, subsequent generations will suffer. We need only heed the traditional American Indian wisdom that, in decisions made today, we must consider the impact

upon the next seven generations. Hecel lena oyate kin nipi kte – that the people may live![39]

CHAPTER 3:

LAKOTA AND DAKOTA WOMEN CONFRONTING CRISIS

> More than one in three Native American or Alaska Native women will be raped at some point in their lives. Most do not seek justice because they know they will be met with inaction or indifference. None of this is inevitable or irreversible. The voices of indigenous women who have come forward to speak about these issues send a message of courage and hope that change can and will happen.
>
> *Violence Against Women Act, VAWA 1994*

American Indian women have undergone a significant transformation in their traditional roles within tribal society due to colonial influences. In many instances, women have emerged intact and with an optimism that is formidable in the face of the obstacles of dominance and subjugation. Feminist models such as the late Wilma Mankiller and Paula Gunn Allen, Winona LaDuke and Andrea Smith, activists, writers and educators, have provided hope to a generation of women who often face significant crises resulting from the disruption of traditional societies. Despite this spirit of hope and courage however, there are many American Indian women who are suffering the impacts of historical trauma and unresolved grief.

Ruppert Ross has addressed the fracturing of the natural order of indigenous societies:

> I only wish to indicate my present view that the plague of sexual (and other) abuse that afflicts so many Aboriginal communities is not a "natural" event within what the settler nations called a "pagan" society. On the contrary, I see it as an almost inevitable consequence of historically labelling *everything* Aboriginal as pagan, of declaring at every step and in every way that every aspect of traditional life was either worth less than its European equivalent - or just plain worthless.[40]

It is interesting to note that Ross qualifies this abuse as not necessarily physical abuse such as was inflicted by colonizing forces in boarding schools for example, but the abuse precipitated by the abrogation of "language, spirituality, culture and worldviews," an abuse of "Indian-ness."[41]

A National Violence Against Women Survey complies with an earlier study by the Department of Justice in stating that Native Americans are more than two times as likely to be violently victimized as other minorities.[42] While there is abundant information on family violence among dominant society in the United States, studies among American Indians is scant, and has resulted in limited resources for Indian women suffering abuse.

Research among the Lakota and Dakota of South Dakota has indicated that although non-Indians are the perpetrators of most sexual crimes, gender violence has pervaded the lives of these tribal nations, causing a critical level of abuse from within.[43] This is a contemporary phenomenon for communities historically gynocratic or matriarchal, precipitated by colonialist attitudes and policies that have altered the landscape of the feminist position within tribal society.

In addressing the issues concerning women, Victoria Ybanez, a Diné/Apache/Mexican activist and executive director of Red Wing Consulting, Inc. in Minnesota has noted:

> …Most experts generally agree that since the arrival of colonizers, violence against Native women has become a common occurrence across Indian Country. Violence against Native women is not considered natural in indigenous societies and is a fairly new phenomenon. The most commonly held belief is that, while many Native nations had some experience with women being mistreated or battered by intimate partners, the practice was not common nor was it tolerated prior to colonization.[44]

Women traditionally held esteemed roles among Lakota and Dakota tribal nations. However, the impacts of colonization and historical trauma have so fractured traditional societies that many women are left in a state of desperation, exhibited by substance abuse, violence, increased health issues and often, suicide. In light of this, it is important to explore traditional roles of gender in the Lakota and Dakota communities.

Ella Deloria writes of Dakota society:

> All peoples who live communally must first find some way to get along together harmoniously and with a measure of decency and order. This is a universal problem. Each people, even the most primitive, has solved it in its own way. And that way, by whatever rules and controls it is achieved, is, for any people, the scheme of life that works. The Dakota people of the past found a way: it was through kinship.[45]

This kinship organization or "tiospaye," encompassed certain mores defining the roles of those in the community. Women were expected to develop self-control, both physically and emotionally as a foundation to the inner strength of the community. Men were to achieve maturity and strength, in order to provide for the physical and spiritual needs of the people.

> The testing of a young man occurred in various physical ordeals from the hunt to the Sun Dance. The testing of a young woman required her to protect herself from emotional turmoil and to preserve her strength of mind and body for the next generation of children.[46]

It is clear from statistics like those in Pine Ridge, that in many cases, this preservation of mind and body by women has been altered by a disruption of traditional life ways. The genocidal practices of colonization have impacted what were once vital and healthy social structures, and led to a disintegration of social constructs.

It was customary among the Lakota and Dakota that young men respected young women, and adhered to ritual courting. Those young men who strayed from these tenets of society and kinship were considered less than trustworthy and young women understood their vulnerability and were taught to make "self-preserving choices."[47]

Many versions are told of the story of the notorious "tipi crawler," who could claim a woman if he saw her naked. In order to protect young women from seduction by lecherous men who would sneak around at night entering tipis to lie with them, mothers would tie up their pubescent daughters in a "rawhide chastity belt" or "tahasaka ojuha."[48] "A young woman also had to be careful of a man who asked her one question with his lips but had another question in his mind."[49]

More commonly however, young men adhered to the rituals that honor and respect not only the woman he courted, but her family as well. He was required to prove himself mature and prepared for the responsibilities of being husband and father. Additionally, a young woman was not without the freedom to make decisions with regard to her domestic situation.

> It is important to emphasize that no one, not even a father or brother, could force a woman to stay in a marriage where, for whatever reason, she was unhappy. That Sioux women could, and frequently did, leave spouses under their own volition is an important indication of their autonomy.[50]

The respect and regard accorded women as being powerful in Lakota/Dakota traditions is evident in the fact that the Sacred Pipe, as well as the spiritual teachings, was presented to the people by the White Buffalo Calf Woman. Black Elk, Oglala Lakota Wicasa Wakan or Medicine Man, recounts this story to Joseph Epes Brown:

> Early one morning, very many winters ago, two Lakota were out hunting with their bows and arrows, and as they were standing on a hill looking for

> game, they saw in the distance something coming towards them in a very strange and wonderful manner. When this mysterious thing came nearer to them, they saw that it was a very beautiful woman, dressed in white buckskin, and bearing a bundle on her back. Now this woman was so good to look at that one of the Lakota had bad intentions and told his friend of his desire, but the good man said that he must not have such thoughts, for surely this is a *wakan* [holy] woman. The mysterious person was now very close to the men, and then putting down her bundle, she asked the one with bad intentions to come over to her. As the young man approached the mysterious woman, they were both covered by a great cloud, and soon when it lifted the sacred woman was standing there, and at her feet was the man with the bad thoughts who was now nothing but bones, and terrible snakes were eating him.[51]

It is noteworthy that the values instilled in Lakota culture were "rationalized through the prophetization and mystification of a woman."[52]

Through research and engaging in dialogue with Lakota and Dakota participants, it becomes increasingly clear that history has adversely impacted their lives. An elder shared that the traditions that sustained them as tribal nations have been lost. She stated:

> …You hear children talking English – my little kids talk English. It's not them, because they're not talking the language – an identity of who they are. So they're mixed up. Our children are really mixed up. They can't…say, "Yes, I'm Lakota and I have a life of my own." (Pine Ridge, July 2010)

Another participant stated, "There are not anymore male or female roles in Indian country. We follow the white way of always trying to be better than others and obtaining more material stuff to make ourselves feel better." (October 2010)

The complexity of the societal impact owing to the loss of a traditional or spiritual foundation is evidenced in the level of violence on the reservations. "We cannot limit our conception of sexual violence to individual acts of rape – rather it encompasses a wide range of strategies designed not only to destroy a peoples, but to destroy their sense of being a people."[53]

Institutional mistreatment such as that emanating from boarding school experiences, which involved physical and psychological abuse perpetrated on young women as well as young men, has been implicated in the contemporary issue of sexual violence. The separation of young girls from mothers, grandmothers, and other female relatives, left them without the guidance vital to assuming their place as women in their own cultural and spiritual traditions. Andrea Smith states: "While not all Native people view their boarding school experiences as negative, after the establishment of boarding schools in Native communities, abuse seemed to become endemic within Indian families."[54]

Historically, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) has also played a role in the institutionalization of abusive practices. Former Secretary of Indian Affairs of the United States Department of the Interior offered the following statement in 2000 at the Ceremony Acknowledging the 175th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Bureau of Indian Affairs:

> This agency forbade the speaking of Indian languages, prohibited the conduct of traditional religious activities, outlawed traditional government, and made Indian people ashamed of who they were. Worst of all, the Bureau of Indian Affairs committed these acts against the children entrusted to its boarding schools, brutalizing them emotionally, psychologically, physically, and spiritually…[55]

Abuse of this sort has the capability of violating the individual not only on the physical level, but its insidiousness lies in its ability to also do damage on a spiritual and psychic level.

The stereotypical image of the Indian woman by dominant society was one of degradation, a subservient "squaw." Reformationist thinking held that "only when

women were reformed could the entire Indian race be uplifted from savagery."[56] Unfortunately, this reform involved "training" that was often punitive and damaging, not only to females, but to males and thus the community as a whole. "Proper training for young Indian women…exemplified the federal practice of organizing the obedient individual, while federal policy aimed to disorganize the sovereign tribe."[57]

Through her theoretical study of historical intergenerational trauma, Dr. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart noted the particular responses of Lakota male and female participants, and found the following:

> Degree of traditional presentation-of-self, including phenotype, appeared to interact with gender to place male participants at greater risk for being traumatized over the lifespan and perhaps subsequently utilizing more rigid defenses against the conscious experience of the trauma...[58]

Lakota and Dakota tribal nations, have suffered far-reaching consequences through genocidal histories that have influenced traditional behavior and societal characteristics. Ruppert Ross has addressed the adverse transformative process that occurs:

> At some point people brought to this position stand up and demand to be noticed, to be recognized as being alive, as having influence and *power*. And the easiest way to assert power, to prove that you exist, is to demonstrate power over people who are weaker still, primarily by making them do things they don't want to do. The more those things shame and diminish that weaker person, the more the abuser feels, within the twisted logic of victimization, that they have been empowered and restored themselves. Further, nothing is more attractive to those who need to feed off the denigration of others than the road of sexual abuse, and the safest and easiest abuse is of children.[59]

The Native American Women's Health Education Resource Center addresses this as evidence of internalized oppression, which originates in subjugated peoples living among a dominant society that views men as superior to women and children, with the

right to exhibit violent behavior. "Violence against women and children in Native communities is a result of this internalized oppression."[60]

A young female participant shared the following:

> I have PTSD but mine – I'm sure it's probably from growing up in the Porcupine area…but it's also been things that have come – it all comes from who I am. I'm a Native American woman. And so you get out there. No matter where you're at, there's Native American men (and it's not just the Native Americans – it's just very common) and they think it's okay to treat your woman with disrespect and it shouldn't be like that. I mean, men – they come from women.
>
> There should be a respect for Mother Earth. Then it goes on to women and those who give life which are women. But a lot of that is overlooked or just isn't taught anymore. (Pine Ridge, July 2010)

It should be noted that approximately seventy percent of violent sexual assaults of Indian women are perpetrated by those of a different race.[61] Lee Maracle writes, "We have been the objects of sexual desire for white males whose appetites are too gross for their own delicate women."[62] The indication is that accurate data is difficult to obtain due to underreporting to tribal officers as well as federal authorities. According to the National Institute of Justice, underreporting of criminal activity, in many instances, is associated with a lack of trust in police, shame or humiliation associated with crimes such as domestic violence, and fear of retaliation.[63]

Brenda Hill, who works with the South Dakota Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, addresses the reality that many rape victims rarely find justice in the courts, especially on reservations. "The rates of prosecution of rapes in this country are horrendous to begin with, and in Indian Country, they're far worse."[64]

Historically, federal policies have weakened the protections that should be afforded American Indian women in their respective tribal nations. Policies such as those

established during the eras of forced adoptions and forced sterilization, genocidal in nature, set the stage for the diminished status of American Indian women as well as their continued victimization.

> In our Native communities, the problem of domestic violence is complicated by struggles against institutional racism and oppression. Many solutions designed to protect women from domestic violence have been crafted by institutions that historically have been oppressive and **punitive** to Native peoples. Native women who are victims of domestic violence often find themselves being revictimized by the child protection system and the civil or criminal legal systems. While these mainstream institutions may appear supportive, historically they have minimized or ignored issues battered Native women face.[65]

Additionally, jurisdictional issues arose in reaction to the case of ex Parte Crow Dog, 109 U.S. 556 (1883), in which the Supreme Court recognized tribal sovereign authority over Indian on Indian crimes in Indian Country.[66] However, the BIA provoked public outrage to the decision that allowed for resolution according to Sioux tradition.[67] Utilizing the principles of the Marshall decisions, citing Indian nations as "wards" of the federal government, and consistent with the general trend toward diminishment of sovereignty, Congress enacted the Major Crimes Act of 1885, *United States Code*, 18 U.S.C.A. Sec. 1153 (Supp. 1968), granting jurisdiction over several serious crimes committed in Indian Country, including rape, to the federal government.[68] These crimes are often committed with impunity.

Public Law 280, granting certain states jurisdiction over tribes, further diminished Native sovereignty, leaving tribal nations stripped of the ability to prosecute crimes in Indian Country. The Indian Civil Rights Act amended provisions of PL-280 by requiring tribal consent in advance of state assumption of jurisdiction.[69] As a result of the period of

self-determination, some jurisdictional power was returned to tribal governments, however rape is designated as a "Major Crime" and so remains under federal jurisdiction.

Oliphant v. Suquamish Indian Tribe 435 US 191 (1978) established that Indian tribal courts do not have jurisdiction over non-Natives who have committed crimes in Indian Country as this "was inconsistent with the domestic dependent status of the tribes."[70] Complicating matters further, tribal police generally cannot pursue and arrest non-Natives committing crimes on reservations and, in non-PL-280 states, state law enforcement holds no jurisdiction on reservation lands. This creates a void, leaving many crimes unresolved and perpetrators unpunished.

Where tribal agencies do have jurisdiction, they are usually understaffed and under-funded resulting in delays in response to sexual violence against women. In 2006, Standing Rock Reservation Police Department information indicated that there were six or seven officers and two investigators with responsibility for 2.3 million acres to patrol. Often, two officers were on duty during the day, and three at night. However, at times, there was one officer for the entire reservation area.[71]

Pine Ridge Reservation, which covers an area of nearly three million acres, is plagued with similar issues of law enforcement being understaffed, making the reporting and prosecution of violent crimes, including rape, difficult. Additionally, according to Federal Attorney Brendan Johnson, a tribal court system that is underfunded and understaffed, results in victims rarely finding relief in these courts.[72]

The Indian Civil Rights Act of 1968 placed limitations on the sentence that can be imposed by tribal courts for any offense – including rape or murder – to a maximum of on year of imprisonment and a fine of $5000.

> The message sent by this law is that, in practice, tribal justice systems are only equipped to handle less serious crimes. While this limitation on the custodial sentencing powers of tribes (and resource limitations) substantially limits the ability of tribal justice systems to hold offenders accountable, an increasing number of tribal courts are prosecuting sexual assault cases due to the inadequate rate of federal and state prosecutions of sexual assault cases.[73]

Gray v. United States 394 F.2d 96 (9th Cir. 1968) upheld a prior statute of the Major Crimes Act, which essentially stated that capital punishment is authorized when an Indian rapes a non-Indian woman in Indian Country. However, in the case of an Indian who rapes an Indian woman, the perpetrator will be imprisoned at the discretion of the court.[74]

Violence perpetrated from outside of one's own community is unacceptable and devastating. However, when violent abuse emanates from within one's own communal circle, it is especially tragic and demoralizing. Ruppert Ross, in documenting the testimony of an Ojibway woman given in the presence of her community, who had returned from boarding school only to be exposed to abuse from her own people, noted that: "I could almost feel everyone being jolted into sharing her realization: her abusers, Aboriginal people all, did not abuse because they were Aboriginal people, but because they were changed Aboriginal people.[75]

A woman in Kyle, who alleged that her daughter and granddaughter, ages 16 and 17, were raped by an adult male from their own community, stated that the investigation was corrupted when tribal police allowed the crime scene to be cleaned rather than collecting evidence. Federal investigators then declined to bring the case forward for federal prosecution for lack of evidence. A prosecutor for the Oglala Sioux Tribe opted to try the case in tribal court. In the meantime, the accused perpetrator and his family

began to harass his accusers. The woman who made the allegations stated, "We can't go out in public without being chased. It's like stalking. These are the reasons these fall through the cracks."[76]

How does hope have a place in the midst of such injustice, sadness and destruction? What is the path toward re-establishing the respect once accorded women, and the way of resistance? Amnesty International cites the Institute for Women's Policy Research statistics, stating that South Dakota has the highest poverty rate for Native American women in the United States at 45.3 per cent.[77] Additionally, FBI figures indicate that in 2005, South Dakota ranked fourth in the nation for "forcible rapes" of women.[78] Information obtained from interviews among participants on various reservations indicates that some efforts are being made among tribal communities to address these issues, but there is still much work to be done.

> The legacy of historic abuse persists. The fact that Native American and Alaska Native women have been dehumanized throughout US history informs present-day attitudes. It helps fuel the high rates of sexual violence perpetrated against them and the high levels of impunity enjoyed by their attackers.[79]

One of the interview participants who contributed to this research study had worked in a counseling agency dealing with the prevalence of abuse on the reservation and in the urban area of Rapid City. His response to the issue of services available to reservation communities was that there is little that is effective. This participant has since left the agency, as the approach utilized was based in mainstream practices and procedures, and it was felt that this was doing little to address the particular needs of the Indian communities.

This is supported by findings by Amnesty International indicating that Indigenous women face not only discrimination as women, but with the added element of being indigenous. "It is therefore extremely important that freedom from violence as defined by Indigenous women themselves informs, and where necessary transforms, the human rights discourse."[80]

In spite of critical levels of violence impacting Lakota women, there is hope in their own ability to organize. "While men have traditionally held the sanctioned offices of power in Lakota politics, women have guided the development of various policies and spurred men on to action…"[81] With the passage of the Violence Against Women Act in 1994, funding was made available to tribal nations to address violence against women on reservations. Various programs were established, one of which is Cangleska, Inc. located in Kyle, South Dakota on the Pine Ridge Reservation. This is a tribally chartered non-profit providing domestic violence services to the Oglala Lakota tribe. It simultaneously operates Sacred Circle, National Resource Center to End Violence Against Native Women.[82]

Other organizations include the Native Women's Society of the Great Plains, comprised of a coalition of programs focused on domestic violence and/or sexual assault, as well as to the sacredness of women.

> The Society offers a vision that ends domestic and sexual violence against Native women, in all aspects - a vision of change. The Society works to support and strengthen sisterhood and local advocacy and program development efforts through culturally specific education, technical assistance training and resource implementation. Member organizations of the Native Women's Society are committed to ending all forms of violence and will actively support the mission of this organization.[83]

However, even before the VAWA was passed, Lakota women were organizing themselves to address the issues of violence against women on their reservations. At the time of this writing, Bernice Ione "Unci" (Swallow) Stone, TaCanku Iyoyumpe Win (Her Path is Shining Woman), Lakota/Northern Cheyenne, passed away in Pine Ridge at the age of 84. Her obituary read:

> In the late '70's, she founded the first domestic violence shelter for women on the Pine Ridge Reservation - Sacred Shawl Women's Society, Inc. In the mid-90's the Grey Eagle Society honored her for her work with women and families. She wrote the legislation for the Oglala Sioux Tribe for family violence.[84]

There is great concern that the violence that impacts women on the reservations will continue to have adverse effects on future generations. The need for organization and mutual support among Lakota and Dakota women has spurred efforts like those mentioned among others, striving for a return to traditional cultural thinking and to restore the status of women as sacred. Bernice Stone shared the following:

> Today, we have fallen away from a lot of traditional values and beliefs. A man can beat his wife to near death and not receive punishment. Almost every day, women whose husbands or boyfriends beat them up are brought into the hospital in Pine Ridge. These men are rarely prosecuted in a court of law. We feel that the problem of wife beating is of vast importance to the Oglala Lakota people, as it affects our prime natural resource - our children. The violence that they see and experience is not forgotten and is often repeated when they have families of their own...If our children do not grow up healthy in mind as well as in body, there is no hope for the Oglala Lakota people.[85]

CHAPTER 4:

LAKOTA YOUTH – WAKANHEJA:

THE FUTURE

> I was born in a Lakota way. I was born to my mother, and my grandmother was the midwife – and her cousins, they gathered. They talked to my mother. They talked quietly to encourage her – the pain, the pain that's coming to her because of…the gift of love that was given to her to continue the Lakota generation. So they talk to her, sometimes these old ladies – they sing a lullaby while the baby is coming.
> (Female elder, Pine Ridge, July 2010)

Of all the elements of life for the Lakota, none is more treasured than the youth – the Wakanheja, "children who are sacred beings." "All children, particularly during their first year, were considered wakan, 'sacred.'"[86]

Traditionally, Lakota and Dakota children are seen as intelligent and capable. It was customary that they were expected to take part in the responsibilities of daily life. Along with all other community members, they too received instructions from the White Buffalo Calf Woman.

> My little brothers and sisters: Your parents were once little children like you, but in the course of time they became men and women. All living creatures were once small, but if no one took care of them they would never grow up. Your parents love you and have made many sacrifices for your sake in order that Wakantanka may listen to them and that nothing but good may come to you as you grow up.[87]

Family and community continue to encompass life. Joseph Bruchac writes: "When you ask a Native American person about himself or herself, they will often begin by talking about their family. That is because our families make us who we are."[88]

Despite this adherence to traditional philosophy, the historical trauma promulgated by Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, has impacted Lakota communities for generations. While many have found their way through the grief toward a spirit of hope and determination, critical indicators of intergenerational trauma continue to be exhibited in young people. Many are born into lives of despair. "Nationwide, Native children [are] almost twice as likely (at 31.6 percent) to be growing up in poverty as the average American child... Reservation poverty is not only high; it is severe and persistent."[89]

Nevertheless, in spite of growing up in abject poverty and difficult community and social circumstances, Lakota youth are bright and resourceful. They often exhibit exceptional artistic talent that is expressive of their cultural traditions. Some are scholars. Some are educators. They are organizers. They are caregivers. They are dancers and musicians. They are comedians. They are traditionalists. They are children who find identity in family, in ceremony, and in the land. One Lakota youth shared the following:

> All of your life you search for an identity, who you really are. And this is who I am, and this is my identity, my culture. That is how I was born, that is how I was raised… I really love these ways. That's why I live, I keep going.[90]

Steve Young, reporter for the Sioux Falls Argus Leader, conducted research for a series of articles in late 2010 entitled the "Growing Up Indian Project." Young visited reservations across the state of South Dakota, meeting with youth, as well as tribal officials, educators, law enforcement, health care workers, and parents. Over the past thirty years in which he has written articles about life for American Indians of South Dakota, he has been especially touched by the stories of the young people and the difficulties with which they are often confronted.

> I was reminded of how many smart and talented and incredibly ambitious youth there are on the reservation who, with just one person showing an interest in their lives, emerge from the poverty and joblessness and all the forces of despair, and become perhaps some of the strongest and most vibrant individuals this state produces.[91]

In speaking with various interview participants, the question of hope inevitably focuses on the children – the wakanheja, the takoja (grandchildren) – the future. There is a deep understanding that the children are in need, and that family is of utmost importance in helping a child to grow healthy and with a strong identity.

> So first of all, I wanted my takojas, children, families to know "tuwahe kipi," "tuwahe heca," you know, my grandmother is so and so, and my grandfather, my father is so and so, my mother… That's where I come from so I am who I am. And with respect, they understand the relationship – with respect. And be generous. Love, faith, hope, whatever. Be generous with that to share with your relationships. It makes a child grow stronger. (Female elder, Pine Ridge, July 2010)

This hope however is challenged by the realities of reservation life for Lakota and Dakota youth. In a Dakota Roundtable conducted by Cheryl Medicine Horse in 1996 entitled, "Issues that Young Native American Women Face as Mothers and Teenagers," the participants shared defining features of their personal lives that they felt resulted in their current situation as teenage mothers. Among them were alcoholism, physical violence, assumption of parental roles in caring for siblings when parents are absent, and lack of affection in the home.[92]

Teen pregnancy is a pervasive reality of life on the reservations of South Dakota. A study of South Dakota County Health Rankings indicated that the rate of unwed mothers in Shannon County, in which Pine Ridge Reservation is located, is the highest in the state, with Todd County, home of Rosebud Reservation, ranking second.[93] "To a

child of the reservation, hungry and worn down by peer pressure and family dysfunction, life can be neither idyllic or simple."[94]

A Pine Ridge female interview participant shared the following:

> I see young kids but it's hard to understand. I think they need guidance – they're looking for something. They're looking for help; they're looking for a role model; they're looking for someone they can emulate. It's really sad on the reservations. I lived in the cities over twenty years, and I came back and nothing changed at all. Kids – people just got older. But, the parents are not great role models. (Pine Ridge, July 2010)

The Suicide Crisis

Throughout this study and within the discourse shared with community members from the reservations of South Dakota, it became clear that a critical and escalating level of suicide among young people is of primary concern. This is a tragic and incomprehensible reality of life. Dysfunction within the home, violence, substance abuse, teen pregnancy, high dropout rates, and gangs often characterize the lives of many young people. The leading cause of death among youth on Pine Ridge Reservation is due to driving while under the influence of alcohol. The second is suicide.[95]

> All across Indian country, from Pine Ridge to Lower Brule, St. Francis to Sisseton, there is nothing idyllic or simple about a life worn down by peer pressure, family dysfunction and sexual abuse. And nothing more troubling than the gunshot or rope used to make the pain go away.[96]

Children, some as young as twelve years of age have considered suicide or have taken their own lives. Some of these deaths are very unexpected, and others are characterized by a slow decline into the depths of despair. One young man, who along with his eleven siblings, was being raised by his elderly grandparents after the death of his parents in an automobile accident, found it difficult to submit to the rules of the

boarding school to which he was sent. He was ultimately dismissed. He had kind and loving grandparents who lived in desperate poverty, with children sleeping in abandoned cars around the home. He bore much responsibility for the care of his younger siblings. He began a slow descent into depression and despair, intensified by drug and alcohol use. At the age of sixteen, he hung himself. (Rosebud, 1978)

> The suicide contagion has plagued South Dakota's reservations for years. In 2007, the Rosebud Reservation's suicide rate soared to 141 per 100,000 people – and a staggering 201 per 100,000 for males ages 15-24 – in what experts called the highest incidence rate in the world.[97]

These statistics are supported by a New York Times investigation which reported that, "In the Great Plains, the suicide rate among Indian youth is the worst: 10 times the national average."[98] A young woman, in response to a study that took place in March of 2010, stated that everyone she knows has considered suicide at least once.[99]

This critical issue has been explored by various sources, including Tim Giago, Oglala Lakota from Pine Ridge, journalist and founder of the *Lakota Times*. He supports Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart's theory in citing the history of boarding school experiences as a significant contributing factor.

> Some would place the problem at the doorstep of the boarding schools where children were oftentimes forcibly taken from their traditional homes and placed in institutions designed to strip an Indian identity from their psyche. Shorn of hair, stripped of all cultural markers, forced to learn English and physically abused for speaking their own language, indoctrinated into a religion foreign to them, and forced to cut their ties to their tiospaye (traditional family group), in many cases the boarding school children grew up uncertain of their own identity.[100]

Unable to cope with their own feelings of inadequacy and steeped in anger and depression, they often succumb to substance abuse. As these young people began to have

children of their own, they passed the trauma characterized by feelings of shame, and loss of culture and identity to their children, and subsequently on to future generations.

> The problems then became generational and the guilt and anger, enhanced by the abuse of alcohol and drugs, was visited upon the children and even the grandchildren of the ensuing generations. The abuses included sexual, spousal and child abuse that has brought so many dysfunctional families to the forefront in Indian Country.[101]

Eduardo Duran promotes "7th Direction Psychotherapy," in order to become centered in the emotional as well as physical world. He addresses suicide, the idea of wanting to die, as a "misinterpretation of the soul's desire to transform. Unfortunately, the ego interprets transformation as a physical death, which really serves no purpose in the soul's quest for fulfillment."[102]

Given that the unemployment rate on Pine Ridge is between eighty and ninety percent according to residents, and that poverty is ubiquitous, sadness and despair are simultaneously inescapable. In this technological age, where visions of advantaged young people are portrayed in movies and on television as beautiful and "deserving," reservation youth often feel even further marginalized.

> The children are mixed up. In today's world, our children are really mixed up. They want to be [like others]. They speak it, they dress it, everything, but they're not accepted. When they go out – "There's an Indian child." "There's an Indian." (Female elder, Pine Ridge, July 2010)

This marginalization leads to depression and hopelessness, which in turn lead to seeking an escape, a "transformation of spirit." Young people often do not visualize the end-result as final. Duran states, "I tell patients, 'You cannot "unkill" yourself,' and that therefore power and control are completely lost if they decide to take that avenue."[103]

Loss of cultural identity in a young person already riddled with the self-doubt and insecurities that typify their stage of life, leads to greater identification with those seen as historical oppressors. When this is heightened by physical and emotional abuse, they begin to internalize the attitudes of the oppressor. "I am worthless." "I am hopeless." "I am deserving of the abuse I am experiencing."

> We've had a number of suicides. One in particular was a young lady who should have had a lot of hope because her family has some spiritual aspects from the Christian perspective. But then they're – traditionally, they had some cultural spirituality, so from those perspectives, she should have been hopeful. She comes from an environment where we deal with death all the time so she should know the reality of death and what that means.
> …Anyway, she was very young, 15 or 16 – got involved with a boy, and then broke up and lost this person who brought her whatever – they get an emotional thing from having a relationship at that young age. And then they separated and broke up and she was devastated. How do you feel so strongly about somebody at that age…you know that you feel so devastated that you take your own life? (Female participant, Pine Ridge, July 2010)

Another issue that pervades the lives of Indian youth is that of identifying with the dead. Copycat suicides are prevalent. Steve Young noted the sentiments of Albert White Hat, a retired Lakota Studies Professor from Sinte Gleska University, who shared that, "…reservation leaders need to focus on youth achievement instead of the kind of glorification that comes with elaborate memorials for suicide victims." White Hat added, "I heard a story of one boy who committed suicide, and other boys were standing around his funeral saying, 'I can draw an even bigger crowd than this.'"[104]

Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart cites various studies in her discourse on historical unresolved grief, which have identified certain characteristics such as "obsessive rumination about the deceased" and "searching and pining for the lost object

with fantasies of reunification." There have been repeated instances of young people unable to cope with the loss of a loved one, exhibiting what theorists like Brave Heart would contend are symptoms of "delayed or distorted grief."[105]

A fifteen year old from Lower Brule, Robbie Colombe, shot himself with a .22 caliber rifle in his home in March of 1992. "He'd been despondent over the deaths of his two friends, who had committed suicide the year before."[106] These final acts of desperation tragically exemplify the "ego identity that is bereaved, victimized, and traumatized."[107]

A female participant in Pine Ridge shared the following:

> Anyway, I think about this and ask young people and one of the things I wonder about is the duality that we live with. That complication of a "do as I say and not as I do" sort of business. And it doesn't just impact here - it impacts the entire United States. The problem here is that because of our culture, it should always be actions speak louder than words. We should know that we've been immersed in this duality for such a long time, it's so easy to fall prey to it, so one of the things is we have people saying, "Don't drink, don't do drugs," yet those very same people often are participating in the behavior that we don't want. So what do the kids see? They don't see any reality – they don't see any truth to what the words are so that again impacts how they might perceive their own world. If I'm supposed to have hope and yet people behave in a hopeless manner, how is there really hope? (July 2010)

In spite of the stark picture of life for youth on the reservations and the staggering level of suicides, signs of hope are emerging as community members seek ways to address this tragic issue. The Sweetgrass Project on Pine Ridge was developed through a $50,000 grant form the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) of the United States Department of Education. Its focus is suicide prevention through fostering community awareness and support, as well as strengthening resources to recognize youth-at-risk. A survey among reservation youth indicated the

need for better parenting skills as well as a return to traditional spirituality. The title was given by Jess Taken Alive, Hunkpapa Lakota, member of the tribal government of Standing Rock Reservation, who stated, "…The answers for our youth are amongst us within our culture. Understanding the use of sweetgrass with prayer alone could save a youth, by teaching them to acknowledge oneself and the world we are in through prayer."[108]

The Sweetgrass Project has recruited more than seventy-five volunteers and provides training by cultural and spiritual leaders. Ethlene and Rick Two Dogs present a Lakota Mental Health Model. Leonard Little Finger offers a program entitled, "Connecting the Whole Spiritual Belief." Sam Moves Camp provides instructions on discipline through Sundance, and learning from research. Additionally, Philomene Lakota teaches about Lakota traditional roles. Project goals include: improved reporting of suicide attempts, strengthening of processes for referral and follow-up of suicide attempts, fostering greater involvement of teachers, professionals and social workers in early identification and response, and training to school and college faculty members. The Project has a weekly radio show on KILI Radio of Porcupine on Pine Ridge Reservation, and has established two suicide hotlines.[109]

Allie Bad Heart Bull, manager of dormitory and residential life at Pine Ridge School states, "We want to make sure they are receiving services… We'll work with their parents. We'll do prevention, like peer counseling. The thing is, so many times, they get lost in the system. There is no follow-up. Hopefully, this will help change that."[110]

Crow Creek Reservation, which has also experienced an increase in suicides and attempted suicides, not unlike all reservations in South Dakota, has similarly developed a

suicide task force involving the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Crow Creek Circles of Care, and an Indian Health Services suicide prevention team.[111] Additionally, a summer program in Fort Thompson on the Crow Creek Reservation called Peers Helping Peers, involves training youth to assist suicidal friends as well as offering financial compensation to those who bring other young people into the program. The program also provides after-school and holiday activities.[112]

The Emergence of Gangs

> Identity development from an Indigenous perspective has less to do with striving for individualism and more to do with establishing connections and understanding ourselves in relationship to all of the things around us. The perspective of the world is the basis for a strong sense of self.[113]

Another contemporary phenomenon occurring among youth on the reservations, not only in South Dakota, but also around the country, is the rise of gangs. A 2009 New York Times article indicated that on Pine Ridge Reservation, there are approximately 5,000 gang members involved in 39 gangs, among which are the Wild Boyz, TBA, Tre Tre Crips, Nomads, and Indian Mafia. Despite the fact that the level of violence exhibited is not typical of that in large cities, it is blamed for an increase in theft, vandalism, assaults, and general fear.

> The Justice Department distinguishes the home-grown gangs on the reservations from the organized drug gangs of urban areas, calling them part of an overall juvenile crime problem in Indian country that is abetted by eroding law enforcement, a paucity of juvenile programs and a suicide rate for Indian youth that is more than three times the national averages.[114]

In the community of Kyle on Pine Ridge Reservation, an elder shared that young people are emulating the MS-13 or Mara Salvatrucha, a violent gang which emanated

from the Salvadoran immigrant population living in the gang-ridden Pico Union area of Los Angeles.[115] Many of the original MS-13 leaders had been trained in guerilla warfare during the years of the civil war in El Salvador, giving their particular tactics a sophistication and level of violence that is unprecedented. That the youth in the tiny hamlet of Kyle would identify with this particular gang is alarming.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention compiled a 2004 report entitled, "Youth Gangs in Indian Country" which cites varying influences for the rise of gangs on the reservations.

> These factors include frequency with which families move off and onto the reservation; poverty, substance abuse, and family dysfunction; the development of cluster housing instead of traditional single-family housing; and a waning connection to Native American culture and traditional kinship ties among cousins.[116]

The conditions are not unlike those influencing gang activity in larger areas. In a survey conducted by the National Youth Gang Center (NYGC), the majority of respondents indicated that the nature of gang activity on the reservation is influenced by tribal members who have experienced gang activity in large cities, as well as having had contact with gang members in prison.[117] Additionally, media plays a significant role exemplified in movies about gangs as well as "gangsta" rap music that tend to idealize and sensationalize the gang culture.

To illustrate lack of identity and the need for "family" as an impetus to gang involvement, in Bogota, Colombia, "gamines" are street youth who have no support system. They are homeless and exist by stealing, and are often exposed to violence and abuse. Characteristic of these gangs however, is their solidarity and mutual support.

> Yet in spite of their problems, those working with the gamines are amazed at their camaraderie, their pride, and their sense of independence and group identity. They call one another nero (a shortened term for compañero) and stand together in fierce loyalty against a hostile world. One cannot help but see the resilience and strength in these youth.[118]

For a child at-risk due to social dysfunction and poverty, the camaraderie of gang life offers solace to wounded souls and broken identities. A female interview participant shared the following:

> There's a lot of girl gangs too, because their mom's aren't in the picture. You see that in Wanbli. It's really bad. Now, last night I was coming home and there were like twelve guys all in red walking around trying to start trouble and that was 11:00 at night. They'll tell you, "All we have is each other." 'Cause my boys will tell you that. I lost them to a teen gang in Rapid. My house was a gang house. The kids knew my house. When I left…they said there was no more trouble. I'm not kidding you…they hit on my house. They broke all my car windows, all my house windows. (Pine Ridge, July 2010)

An elder in Pine Ridge spoke of the lack of traditional culture and spirituality as a cause for gang involvement. For a young person with low self-esteem, a sense of "superiority" is evoked by gang affiliation. However, this is typically accompanied by the elements of crime and violence.

Although the crime associated with gangs on Pine Ridge Reservation does not reflect the level of violence attributed to gangs in urban areas, assault is not uncommon. One of the practices unique to reservations is that of pelting each other with cans of commodity foods distributed by a federal food program. This is known as "commod-squadding."[119]

Youth gangs on the reservation take pride in mimicking the behavior of gangs from larger areas, including dress, colors, violent initiations, graffiti, tattoos, and hand signals. Chris Eagle Hawk, elder and cultural consultant throughout Indian Country has

shared that young people involved in gangs are lacking not only personal but also cultural identity. "They need to belong somewhere, to be part of something. They don't know anything about who they are and where they come from. We have our own colors, our own songs, our own language. We have our own signs."[120]

Hope in the Midst of Crisis

A 2002 National Indian Child Welfare Association report written by Charlotte Goodluck, PhD, offers the following three domains of American Indian well-being:

1) Helping each other (social connections)
2) Group belonging (extended family, clan, tribe and community)
3) Spiritual belief system and practices (rituals and ceremonies)[121]

Despite staggering statistics related to suicide and violence, there is hope for Lakota and Dakota youth, as parents, elders and community members seek to address the particular needs of young people in order to develop a sense of wellbeing. Some parents have shared that they encourage their children to become involved in sports. There is a sense of pride and accomplishment in the skill related to sports, as well as team efforts that lend to the sense of community. One parent in particular shared that his daughters are involved in sports all year round, keeping them occupied, off the streets and out of trouble. He also stated that he encourages them to invite friends who may be experiencing trauma to come and stay with them. It is this kind of mutual support that is both critical, as well as traditional in its approach.

There is some disparity in opinions as to the best avenue to help children deal with issues on the reservations. As was indicated repeatedly in interviews in the summer

of 2010, elders and community members in Pine Ridge strongly urge the return to traditional cultural and spiritual practices, teaching children language, ceremony, and the concept of tiospaye, as an extended communal family that cares for the needs of all. It is within this approach that many believe hope lies. It is commonly shared that youth suffer from a loss of identity and that a return to cultural ways will aid in reinforcing their unique individual and communal sense of self as young Lakotas.

> So you know, I find it very difficult. And I'd like to give that to my children – to my grandchildren and have them have hope. So we try to be very spiritual and so we try to draw from that spirituality and accept the realities of our lives knowing that sometimes you just can't change a situation. But it doesn't mean it has to destroy you. So we work very hard at being spiritual, not only because we're culturally spiritual but because we can draw on the spirituality of foreign entities like Catholicism. (Female elder, Pine Ridge, July 2010)

Other community members believe that hope for their children lies in their moving away from the reservation. One elder shared that his daughter had won a scholarship to Stanford and was studying there. He encouraged her to remain in California or at least away from the reservation. He expressed his feeling that there is nothing for her in their small community, and it would only serve to drag her down.

Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart has developed a Lakota crisis prevention curriculum called "Wakanheja," recognizing "the sacredness of children in conjunction with the Woope Sakowin, The Seven Sacred Laws."[122] Its goal is to encourage American Indian people to move away from their victimhood and to focus on traditional parenting, as well as spirituality. This reinforces what is expressed by those in Pine Ridge as the path to healing and wholeness.

> So, I'm still holding hope that my takojas will find themselves. And you see we have all those Sundances going on and there's some little kids

> there. You see young kids sitting there, singing, using Lakota words you know. They're singing. Although they say the word, there's a lot of meaning behind it – a lot of good understanding. The language is beautiful, sacred. One of the things Grandma told me – never speak bad about anybody because you can hurt people. You can say something nice, say it with love and faith. You can change them. (Female elder, Pine Ridge, July 2010)

Martin Broken Leg, Lakota from Rosebud Reservation and professor at Augustana College in Sioux Falls, South Dakota has worked on behalf of his people for decades. In a book he co-authored with Larry Bendtro and Steven Van Bockern, he recognizes the need for fostering self-esteem in young people in order to overcome the damaging characteristics defined as destructive relationships, climates of futility, learned irresponsibility and loss of purpose.[123] Brokenleg notes four characteristics of self-esteem as defined in traditional cultures: the spirit of belonging – to family and community, creating needed connections and nurturance; the spirit of mastery – in order to achieve and obtain a sense of competence, as well as being able to appreciate the success of others; the spirit of independence – creating a sense of internal discipline and responsibility, leading to greater autonomy; and the spirit of generosity - encouraging care and service to others in the community, and thereby reinforcing self-esteem.[124] These are values that are seen as fundamental in the creation of the healthy and whole person as young Lakota or Dakota.

Non-profit organizations have made efforts to combat issues affecting youth on reservations such as crime and substance abuse and to restore healthy identities. On Pine Ridge, the SuAnn Big Crow Boys and Girls Club is a non-profit corporation supporting and providing services to Lakota youth. It was founded in honor of a young woman who had a dream of establishment of a facility to provide youth on Pine Ridge Reservation

with a safe place, free of drugs, alcohol and violence, and where all could work together toward harmony and wholeness. The program encompasses five main areas of focus. The Character and Leadership Program is intended to teach young people the principles of a democratic process while incorporating traditional Lakota values and culture in order to become responsible and caring community members. The Education and Career Program encourages academic progress and success, helping young people to define their goals and providing support to meet those. Additionally, it addresses the significant level of dropouts, working with case managers to assist students when they are having problems staying in school. The Health and Life Skills Program teaches youth the basics of living a healthy lifestyle, addressing problems such as drug abuse, as well as providing support to young men and women in developing responsible and positive behavior. The Arts Program provides opportunities to explore creative outlets, while simultaneously fostering cultural tradition. It incorporates not only visual arts, but performing and literary arts as well – areas that are critical to fostering self-esteem in young people who might otherwise have nothing. The Sports, Fitness, & Recreation Program help promote physical fitness, a positive use of leisure time, reduction of stress, appreciation for the environment and social and interpersonal skills. [125]

A Lakota school administrator on one South Dakota reservation shared the following on the role of education in this process:

> As you are probably already aware, the issues involving violence are also linked to historical trauma. Our education system should encompass realistic goals that include outcomes other than college. Too many high school graduates hang around the reservation and become targets for gang related involvement. Violence on the reservation impacts every aspect of society; it permeates the culture our kids are growing up in. As educators,

> we know that our role is to provide a culture for our youth. (Interview participant, October 2010)

There is a strong movement in South Dakota to incorporate Lakota language into school curricula. The Lakota Language Consortium (LLC) is a revitalization movement with the goal of fostering a 21st century generation of fluent native Lakota speakers.[126] It involves teacher training and standardizing Lakota writing and speaking, reinforced by the publication of a new Lakota dictionary. The LLC combines the knowledge of elders with the expertise of linguists in creating a Lakota as a second language curriculum. It also encourages other methods, such as the Sacred Hoop School immersion program founded by Leonard Little Finger. Additionally, Albert White Hat, a Lakota elder, who is determined to revitalize the language, authored a textbook entitled *Reading and Writing in the Lakota Language*, which is utilized by teachers in the revitalization effort. Movements such as this underscore the words of elders who contend that a return to traditional cultural and spiritual ways is the hope of the future, and the key to reinforcing a strong and health identity among young people.

Despite the continued struggles on the reservations of South Dakota, many Lakota youth are succeeding and developing into strong and spirited individuals. They are striving for personal fulfillment and often express a commitment to return to the reservation to contribute to strengthening their home communities.

Autumn White Eyes, Oglala Lakota from Pine Ridge, a graduate of Red Cloud Indian School, and a 2010 Gates Millennium Scholar, is attending Dartmouth College. She shared the following:

> I've seen the toughness I guess, the hard part of life here…like down at the park you even see it, the people who are just tough and like, I've seen

> that but then I've also seen…things around the reservation that are good – like ceremonies and language and learning and stuff. I think that... there's stuff that's hard about living here. I think that's made me strong. Like I'm just …I feel like I'm a person who has a lot of courage and who… I can handle a lot more – like I'm …like I get afraid at times, especially because I'm about to go to college. I'm afraid but at the same time… I just know I could handle it – and like the good things I think they…inspire me to want to do good – to want to come back – to know that it's worth it. And I do love it here, so I think people should know about Pine Ridge. It's a…it's like a whole other atmosphere here. And growing up here is hard and it's challenging but then there's also all these positive and beautiful things – that you can still live here and still have a good life, but you… I just want people to know that…there's this community of Native people…it's here.[127]

A poem written by Autumn illustrates the struggles and dreams of contemporary Lakota peoples, especially those of the youth.

> Mothers' weapons and fathers' blood
> Some would stay and some would run
> Fighting over discrepancies
> Lives were born and lives were freed.
> The youth is dismayed easily.
> Hiding…
> Dreams to hold their own
> Frightened by future aspirations
> And never wanting to leave their nations.
> Working up courage to make decisions
> And in our mind we form humble opinions
> It is hard for us out here.
>
> Struggles, suffering, challenges and adversities
> Where is all the positivity?
> Fighting over discrepancies
> Lives were born and lives were freed.
> They will rise - as will we.[128]

CHAPTER 5:

THE PERSISTENCE OF HOPE

> …Hope is not simply a feeling or a mood or a rhetorical flourish. Hope is the very dynamic of history. Hope is the engine of change. Hope is the energy of transformation. Hope is the door from one reality to another. Hope unbelieved is always considered nonsense. But hope believed is history in the process of being changed.[129]

The Crow Chief Plenty Coups expressed the sadness created by the appropriation of the ethos and spirit of the Plains people in the disruption of their societies and traditions. "But when the buffalo went away the hearts of my people fell to the ground, and they could not lift them up again. After this nothing happened. There was little singing anywhere."[130] However, Plenty Coups did survive and things did happen. The spirit of the man, the spirit of the people would not be assimilated or terminated. They persist.

As Jonathan Lear pointed out in his work, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation*, all human beings, by our very nature and vulnerability, are confronted with the possibility of the demise of our way of life or of "things ceasing to happen," remote as that may seem.[131] The indigenous people of this continent have come to understand that the plausibility of cultural devastation can in fact become reality. However, they persist. The tribal nations of this country, more specifically for this study the Lakota and Dakota have emerged from attempts at termination of their way of life, their culture and spirituality, their very essence as a people, not completely inviolate, but with spirits and traditions that have endured. The hubris of dominant nations has failed to

conquer or terminate these vital Indian communities, despite centuries of exploitation and abuse.

The history of the Lakota and Dakota is replete with injustice. These proud and spirited nations were brought to their knees by the practices of dominance and subjugation.

> [Imagine] a non-Aboriginal…worker whose job was taken away by all-powerful outsiders. Imagine that he knew he had no realistic chance of ever qualifying for another one. Imagine he was unable to go for comfort and help to his own churches and his own psychiatrists and hospitals, because those same outsiders had made them illegal. Imagine that, whenever he went to their versions of such helping places, the professionals who staffed them could not speak his language, but demanded that he learn theirs. Imagine, as well, that all those powerful outsiders held him, his language and his culture in such low esteem that they forcibly removed his children, to raise them to be just like them. Imagine…waking up to silence throughout your entire community where only the week before there had been the raucous voices of new generations.[132]

The element of hope that persists in the face of such oppression, marginalization, cultural disruption and structural violence is powerful, and questions arise surrounding the tenacity of the Lakota and Dakota people. In light of the critical issues raised regarding contemporary life on the reservations of South Dakota, how is hope maintained? How is it manifested? How did it sustain people in the past? What keeps people moving forward in the face of the paradigm of continued oppression in contemporary societies? How can other communities of people and the world at large benefit from the lessons learned about survival of indigenous societies with shared histories of oppression? Is resistance through organizing key to fueling hopefulness?

Ernst Bloch speaks of the self-preservation drive as most concretely demonstrated by the state of hunger. "…Self-preservation – with hunger as its most obvious expression

is the only basic drive among the several which consistently deserves this name, it is the last instance of the drive and the one most concretely related to the bearer."[133] The hunger that Bloch refers to however, can take many forms – the hunger of the spirit, the hunger of the self, the hunger of the most basic nature of each human being. Self-preservation is innate and constant. The history of the individual, the history of the community, inherent in generations of indigenous peoples has not been extinguished. Adaptability to change is inexorable, however the hunger for preservation of the integral authentic self is relentless. "Thus self-preservation ultimately means the appetite to hold ready more appropriate and more authentic states for our unfolding self, unfolding only in and as solidarity."[134]

Solidarity is a term often used in reference to work with the poor. In El Salvador, the meaning is pervasive in all aspects of national and international accompaniment of marginalized communities. It conjures images of unity, harmony, and camaraderie. However, among indigenous communities, it also signifies commonality with reference to shared histories, cultures, traditions and values. The need or hunger to preserve and maintain these elements pervades the life of the individual and the community. Bloch speaks of the "hiding place" – a place of protection and concealment – "a narrow space [where]…we know we can do what we want…"[135] For many on the reservations of South Dakota, comfort is found in community, in family, in tradition. Much like the communities in El Salvador, a shared history and understanding offers a hiding place. Once outside of this place of protection, life can be threatening and onerous. An elder in Pine Ridge spoke of familial relationships and the family circle. "They were very strong.

And you know when the child grows within that they're strong too because of all the wisdom and the respect and the generosity, and they bloom with that. They grow up so." (July 2010)

Indigenous communities like the Lakota and Dakota are familiar with the experience of fear; fear of the losses of tradition and language, land and rights; fear of the appropriation of culture, children and societal mores; fear of extinction. It is a tangible fear with its foundation in history. However, fear can be simultaneously the impetus for an innate struggle for self-preservation.

Ernst Bloch continues his analogy of fear and hunger when he writes:

> Hunger cannot help continually renewing itself. But if it increases uninterrupted, satisfied by no certain bread, then it suddenly changes. The body-ego then becomes rebellious, does not go out in search of food merely within the old framework. It seeks to change the situation which exists, the Yes to the better life that hovers ahead, is incorporated by the deprived into *revolutionary interest.*[136]

Resistance

Contemporary American society is intent on creating a reality of life and history steeped in patriotism and dependent on the eternal "truths" of Manifest Destiny – a reality of life that has been procured at the expense of the first peoples of this continent.

> The effort to obfuscate Indian history is a modern American compulsion, apparently that cannot be resisted. While the exploration of the actual meaning of the relationship modern Indians would *like* to have with the United States of America would be a fruitful area of inquiry, it has never been part of the official discourse and it was only casually given credibility… Colonialism, assimilation, imperialism, and oppression, it seemed were as much a part of contemporary Indian life as ever.[137]

The self-preservation referred to earlier as hunger, can be fueled by fear – fear of extinction. However, it could also be said that the impact of this discordant and discriminatory history has often resulted in anger. What role does anger play in the continuance of a subjugated person or society? Like fear, does anger fuel hope? Does it prevent surrender? Is it always destructive?

Anger is often palpable on the reservations of South Dakota. Karen Artichoker, a women leader in Pine Ridge has stated, "…To start thinking about being an Indian and being a woman, and that they were both who I am, was an awakening. I started hearing sexism everywhere. I remember being really angry. Of course, I was angry as an Indian, but now I was angry as a woman."[138]

Revolutionary interest can be exhibited in varying forms such as militancy, activism, resistance, or a combination of such responses. The ability to confront the injustice with some form of action contributes to avoiding a sense of powerlessness and maintaining hope.

> Hope, as it happens is so important for our existence, individual and social, that we must take every care not to experience it in a mistaken form, and thereby allow it to slip toward hopelessness and despair. Hopelessness and despair are both the consequence and the cause of inaction or immobilism.[139]

Resistance becomes fodder for the continuation of hopefulness. Through an active response, people feel energized and empowered. When injustice becomes intolerable, they seek an avenue to make their voices be heard. The "empty stomach" becomes a force for change and hope. Resistance is fueled by what Dylan A. T. Miner has defined as the "fundamental propositions put forth by radical indigenous

movements." This involves the recognition that Native people are humans with rights as such, which include; their right to self-determination; the sustenance of their epistemologies, languages, cultural practices, and governance; and control of their homelands.[140]

By resisting what has been thrust upon them by centuries of oppressive action on the part of a dominant structure, indigenous communities begin a process of deconstruction. By taking steps toward self-sufficiency, by addressing problems and issues in a manner that is consistent with their own cultural and societal conventions, by creating space for leadership and organization within their particular societies, indigenous peoples are attempting to satisfy their own hungers.

Simultaneously, these movements create a new reality for the perpetrators of oppressive actions.

> The unraveling or deconstruction of hierarchy in social, cultural, or other thought systems is thus part and parcel of the endeavor to dismantle hierarchy itself. Within their own discursive construction, such thought systems are untransgressible until deconstructed. False priorities and prohibitions are real only as given reality through their acceptance by the subjugated people subjected to them and by the people who enforce them.[141]

Many examples of resistance by indigenous communities around the world have supported the concept that these movements often do not seek change through conquering and exterminating, as is the European model. They are movements aimed at empowerment as opposed to destruction. They seek to build from within and address needs in a manner that strengthens weakened social systems. They give voice to the voiceless.

> Resistance does not seek power, but an alleviation of the effects of dehumanizing power.
> Resistance is the sign that one's request and need for respect has fallen on deaf ears. For that reason, resistance always implies a certain crisis, and a certain desperation; it is the absence of alternative to a silencing social structures in the face of an absolute need for an alternative – if only because one's words go unheard.[142]

Paolo Freire has suggested that oppression can cause a people who have been diminished and made to feel less than human, to become oppressors themselves. "In order for this struggle to have meaning, the oppressed must not, in seeking to regain their humanity…become in turn oppressors of the oppressors, but rather restorers of the humanity of both."[143]

Taiaiake Alfred offers a supportive argument through his illustration of the discrepancy in the ideology of power between indigenous nations and dominant society: "Power in the Western sense involves the imposition of an individual's will upon others," while the traditional indigenous view of power and justice "…has nothing to do with competition or status vis-à-vis others. It focuses on whether or not power is used in a way that contributes to the creation and maintenance of balance and peaceful coexistence in the web of relationship."[144]

The nature of this power requires a reconciliatory spirit – the ability to admit wrongdoing and extend the request for and the granting of forgiveness. Given the history of the Lakota and Dakota nations with regard to contact with dominant society, this would seem to be insurmountable. How does one forgive centuries of aggressive dominance; of the creation of fear and hunger, both physically and spiritually; of the attempts at termination by those fueled by the arrogance of the principles of Manifest

Destiny? How does this occur when the perpetrators of the wrongdoing cannot admit their complicity, nor see the need for forgiveness?

It often requires the guidance and strength of leaders capable of strong organization – who can instill confidence and speak on behalf of the people they represent, and thereby offer a hopeful avenue to address the injustice.

Leadership and Politics

> Little by little, the indigenous peoples of the world have undertaken a process of resistance in various forms according to their respective realities. These indigenous struggles have thrown up heroes on every continent, even if they are not recognized by official histories.[145]

Leadership in the colonial sense is characterized by personal aggrandizement and often a modicum of arrogance, promulgating the superiority of Europeans as "the chosen people" by way of the principles of Manifest Destiny. Their duty is to lead the efforts toward proliferation of democracy among the "less fortunate" based in Christian principles of "God-given rights."

The Lakota traditionally used the phrase "ikce wicasa" for a leader, which literally translates to "common man." Leadership roles are characterized as "I am no better or worse than the people." Dehumanizing efforts by dominant society designed to conquer has disrupted the natural order of traditional societies, often leaving them seeking vital leadership. Vine Deloria, Jr. commented:

> After the warchiefs had been killed or rendered harmless, Indians seemed to drift into a timeless mist. There appeared to be no leaders with which the general public could identify. The status of the Indian became a nebulous question which seemed familiar and important but for which there was apparently no answer.[146]

This vacuum of organizational guidance created space for such militant leaders as the authors of the American Indian Movement (AIM). Rejecting the notion of negotiation as a means to address issues impacting Indian nations, AIM leadership chose instead, public confrontation. The "Red Power" movement would galvanize American Indians throughout North America and Canada. This gave impetus to AIM and its commitment to radical political action in defiance of assimilationist practices of dominant society.

The late 1960's and early 1970's in Indian Country were years characterized by a politically charged reawakening and dissonance, leading to acts of political resistance against colonizing efforts such as the occupation of Alcatraz, the Trail of Broken Treaties, the takeover of the BIA offices in Washington, D.C., and in South Dakota, the siege at Wounded Knee. "We've had enough" became a fundamental theme for American Indian activists in the United States and Canada. Prominent figures such as Russell Means and Dennis Banks took leadership, calling for rebellion by Indian people and the need to do whatever was necessary to capture the attention of dominant non-Indian society. This action often took the form of militancy.

> The movement's three and a half years in the spotlight were, however, more than a show of guerilla theater tactics. It was also a season of struggle for power and respect, for treaty rights and personal vindication, for economic and political justice… Indians found a way to be more than a footnote and to force fundamental reassessments of what it meant to be Indian, of American history, of each other, and of their communities… That a few thousand who fought to bring power and visibility to the most ignored population in the United States failed to win all they dreamed can hardly be surprising. That they came so close is the miracle.[147]

In the midst of this, the message offered by Vine Deloria, Jr., supported by that of the traditionals, was fundamentally a call to return to the roots of Native tribal culture and

spirituality, a position that could be and often has been construed by dominant society as radical. This has been a recurrent message promulgated by elders interviewed for this study. They seek their rights as a sovereign nation and contend that hope lies in the ability, as well as the necessity to build identity as Lakota and Dakota individuals and communities.

Leadership figures like Deloria, who questioned militant confrontation, instead chose the intellectual arena as the venue for bringing about the desired goal of self-determination. "Militants shoot their arsenal merely to attract attention and are left without any visible means to accomplish their goals. Hence, militancy must inevitably lead on to more militancy."[148]

Despite his scathing criticism of white society in *Custer Died for Your Sins*, Deloria did not encourage militant action, but added an academic voice to the growing resistance movement, advocating the need for educating the younger generation in order to provide a competitive voice in the political arena. However, Deloria simultaneously recognized that this education needed to be grounded in the value system of the Indian as opposed to non-Indian educational criteria.

> That is the key to understanding how to transcend the attitudes and perspectives of non-Indian education, so that Indians can determine for themselves and by themselves what they want to be, even if they are wholly within the confines of American society.[149]

In a 1976 article, Gerald Vizenor posed questions as to the effectiveness of AIM and its tactics. Citing the successful changes that had been implemented through education, legal avenues, and economic development, he challenged the violence promulgated by AIM leadership. "The militant leaders are dedicated men who have

given many years of their lives to a cause. But it takes more than a rifle and the symbolic willingness to die to bring about institutional changes that will benefit tribal people."[150]

Competent leadership also contributes to sound tribal governments that posses the capacity to better answer to the needs of their citizens. However, federal regulation and interference continue to undermine the ability of tribal nations to govern themselves and to create their own policies. The inherent sovereignty assured to Indian nations by treaty and supported by legislation is continually threatened by Supreme Court decisions and Congressional acts, such as PL 83-280 in South Dakota, which abrogate the rights of tribal councils and courts.

> Whereas the national mood in the 1950's made the United States' termination policy seem inevitable, the mood of the Lakota was toward a greater political and economic activism, challenging the status quo of U.S. colonialism. Because termination's professed goal was to "emancipate" Native Peoples – an attempt to cover the real landgrab motives – a Termination Era law like PL 83-280 conveniently provided South Dakota with an effective means to suppress if not outright eliminate Lakota resistance and to promote even greater white encroachment into Lakota affairs.[151]

Public Law 83-280, establishing state jurisdiction over criminal activity on reservations, with termination an underlying goal, was rejected first by the Rosebud Sioux Tribe and subsequently by Standing Rock and the remaining tribes of South Dakota. Governor Grubbard signed House Bill 791 into law in 1963, but by the concerted efforts of the United Sioux Tribes, the Indian Civil Rights Act amended PL 83-280 to require tribal consent. The United Sioux Tribes of South Dakota Development Corporation, incorporated in 1970, continues to advocate for the Lakota/Dakota/Nakota through such programs as Employment Assistance and the Workforce Investment Act.[152]

Such communal organizing is often viewed as revolutionary in nature. It necessitates the courage to speak out even at the cost of one's life. Leaders in these movements are not only the impetus to demand change, but often become critical symbols of hope in the unrelenting struggle for justice and dignity. They hold a crucial place in the collective memory of the rebelling oppressed.

Lakota/Dakota self-determination efforts were subsequently defined as South Dakota's "Indian Problem," needing to be addressed by diminishing and further marginalizing the tribal nations as "other." The impacts of colonialist governmental policies have disrupted traditional methods of governance. Kathleen Ann Pickering states, "The imposed form of democracy…weakens traditional forms of deeper participatory, consensus-based government."[153] She notes that voting is a foreign concept within the traditional parameters of tribal governance and that extended debate to attain consensus was more commonplace. "By truncating the decision-making process, outside interests in government and business can more easily obtain 'tribal approval.'"[154]

This has resulted in instances of unethical tribal chairmen supported by corrupt tribal government structures. For the Lakota, this was exemplified in the tribal government of Chairman Dick Wilson of Pine Ridge. As the sovereignty movement grew, so too did criticism of tribal leaders who were viewed as dishonest, and who adhered to the policies of the United States government for their own personal gain. Wilson, with the aid of his "GOON" (Guardians of the Oglala Nation) squads, terrorized tribal members who disagreed with his politics. When his adversaries sought his impeachment, the foundation was set for the United States intervention at Pine Ridge, the

division between the "hostiles" and the "friendlies," and the subsequent siege at Wounded Knee.[155]

In the 1990's, Pine Ridge political organization shifted to one "that was based on the principles of diffusion and circumscription of leadership," and a sovereignty agenda was adopted, citing a "general pattern of state violence toward Indians."[156] Advocacy groups evolved to address issues related to women's rights, treaties, and the development of tribal colleges. Additionally, Standing Rock Reservation adopted a constitutional government consisting of elected tribal officers, both at-large and from each of eight districts. Committees hold responsibility for programs and activities on the reservation, including the defense of treaty rights.[157] This spirit of self-determination permeated other reservations in South Dakota as well, making organizing a viable cornerstone of political life. It offered hope to those who had been marginalized and seemingly rendered powerless, by creating space for active participation in political affairs within their communities.

Land and Sacred Sites

> Native Nations are still here, but our peoples have suffered mightily in the process. We must understand the message used against us by our brothers from across the sea. They are fierce and unrelenting in their quest to wrest from us the title to our lands. As long as we remain who we are and keep our languages, cultures and lands we will continue to stand and fight for the next seven generations.[158]

The purpose of legislative actions such as PL 83-280 was clear; to advance termination in an effort to control ownership and use of the millions of acres of land owned by the Lakota and Dakota. "The story of Indian land is a story of smothering of

earth as person beneath the bureaucratic weight and economic utilitarianism of earth as property, a contrivance of colonial design."[159]

We, as North Americans are often oblivious of and unresponsive to the ubiquitous injustices surrounding us. Our contemporary world is confronting a plethora of issues that are potentially devastating to future generations. Our environment is suffering from centuries of imprudent attitudes and reckless treatment. The number of poor is rising in economies that favor the wealthy and powerful. As the lives of individuals and communities are increasingly impacted, other issues surface such as war, illness and marginalization. John Womack wrote in his article entitled, "Rebellion in Chiapas:"

> Our problem is… our entire evasive and mendacious culture, which to the enormous profit of the megacompanies that feed it, makes our selfish decadence entertaining to us, sells us headsets that deafen us to crying injustices in our own country, and changes a very real, complicated, painful struggle into a brief sensation of stars, or meteors, gloriously noble or wicked, always somehow erotically intriguing today, dead boring tomorrow.[160]

Our insistence on the thoughtless, opportunistic and indefensible misuse of the environment and its resources toward the acquisition of more and more entertainment and possessions is reminiscent of the inception of this nation. This history has been characterized by a wanton disregard for those who inhabited this land prior to the arrival of Europeans, allowing for the devastation that has impacted tribal nations of this continent. For Lakota and Dakota communities such as those on Pine Ridge Reservation, the extant poverty is unlike any most citizens of this country of wealth and excess could comprehend. It is a consequential element of the historical trauma that continues to plague indigenous nations to this day. Dominant society's thirst for land and its products

has intruded on the rights of others, caused devastation to indigenous peoples and their traditional cultures, and trampled promises made in treaties long ago.

This was exemplified by the Pick-Sloan Plan for flood control and navigation on the Missouri River, which resulted in the construction of six large dams. The projects inundated over five hundred and fifty square miles of Indian land and displaced more than 900 families. The 1948 Oahe Dam Project alone, destroyed more Indian land than any other single project in the United States, flooding 21,593 acres on the Yankton, Rosebud, Lower Brule and Crow Creek Reservations and displacing more than 150 families. The Pick Sloan Plan ignored legal precedents and treaty rights and did nothing to protect tribal interests. On the Yankton Reservation, the devastation to the White Swan community has had a lasting impact. The Army Corps of Engineers seized their property by the right of eminent domain and the government failed to offer compensation that would allow them to reestablish themselves. "Many community members never fully recovered either emotionally or financially from the obliteration of White Swan."[161]

The anger referred to by Karen Artichoker arises from historical events such as this as well as a continued undercurrent of racism that permeates life in South Dakota. Dominant society often refuses to concede that injustices continue. This was demonstrated in the efforts of the Minneconjou and Oglala Lakota people toward construction of a memorial at the mass gravesite of the Wounded Knee massacre on Pine Ridge Reservation. The Lakota additionally sought a formal apology from the United States government for the massacre along with compensation for the survivors.

> This effort, taking place at the close of the twentieth century, is in recognition of the fact that there is no national monument anywhere in the United States that honors the history of an indigenous nation's *defense of*

> *itself*. There is no place for Lakota tribal heroism to be recognized by the United States. The failure to take note of this indigenous inalienable right is at the heart of America's racism.[162]

Additionally, a battle rages to protect Mato Paha, Bear Butte, from the intrusion of recreational facilities to accommodate tourists, especially the crowds at the annual Sturgis Bike Rally, including bars, concerts, and helicopter rides. The disrespect exhibited by the approval of alcohol consumption so near a sacred site is telling. The latest development concerns an application by Nakota Energy, LLC, to begin oil drilling one and one-half miles from Bear Butte.[163] The debate continues.

The ongoing historical dispute over the Black Hills is also a divisive and charged issue in Indian-white relations in South Dakota. Leadership like that of Mario Gonzalez, attorney and trusted and tireless advocate/activist working on behalf of his Sioux people, provides hope in a struggle in which the Lakota refuse to concede. The Sioux Nation filed suit on July 18, 1980 "…on behalf of the Oglala Sioux Tribe against the United States challenging 'ownership' of the Black Hills for 103 years as guaranteed by the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty."[164] The money awarded the Great Sioux Nation remains untapped in the United States Treasury in lieu of recovering at least a portion of the land they believe has been theirs from time immemorial. According to Gonzalez:

> I believe that the tribes would like to resolve this claim in a fair and honorable manner. The only way that can be accomplished must include land restoration as well as monetary compensation for the denial of the absolute and undisturbed use and occupation of the Black Hills as guaranteed under Article II of the 1868 Treaty.[165]

However, the courts closed off any further negotiations when in 1985, the Court of Claims finalized its monetary compensation award, essentially cutting off any further

recourse the Sioux Nation might seek in the courts. Despite this, the case itself and the process undertaken by the Lakotas offered something else.

> …The legal route did mark solid achievements in other areas: Pursuing it demonstrably kept alive a strong sense of hope, unity, and fighting spirit among the Lakotas that might otherwise have diminished over time. Further, the more than sixty years of litigation had forced a range of admissions from the federal government concerning the real nature of the Black Hills expropriations; the Supreme Court, for example, termed the whole affair a "ripe and rank case of dishonorable dealings" and "a national disgrace."[166]

In 2009, the Internal Revenue Service auctioned off 7,112 acres of Crow Creek Reservation land; land that had been earmarked by the Tribe for a new wind energy farm, in order to pay off more than $3,000,000 in unpaid employment taxes reportedly owed by the Tribe. Efforts by the Tribe and supporters to pay off the debt and have their land returned have repeatedly failed. Brandon Sazue, Tribal Chairman stated:

> The IRS auction was downright shameful and contrary to the Government's trust responsibility to the Tribe. The lands were purchased with Infrastructure Development Trust Funds and should have been exempt from an IRS levy. In addition, the lands should have been exempt under the 1834 Non-Intercourse Act, which requires tribal consent before any tribally owned lands can be conveyed. We regard our lands as sacred and they are and never will be for sale.[167]

In an effort to recover Crow Creek land, other tribal nations offered to assist the Tribe, including the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Nation of Minnesota, as well as others from Florida and California. However, the BIA and the IRS rejected any offers. Crow Creek tribal member Norman Thompson, Sr. stated, "Our tribe asks for the help of all the tribes, because if this can happen to us, it can happen to any tribe."[168] Brandon

Sazue offered prayer and fast on the site during the cold of the South Dakota winter months. Moses Brings Plenty, a member of the Strong Heart Warrior Society (Cante Tenza Okolakiciye) supported Sazue's efforts saying:

> Brandon Sazue is a True Warrior and has a lot of love and compassion for all people. He is handling this in the best manner possible by making a stand for the cause, but he does not stand alone. He has the support of the Strong Heart Civil Rights Movement and others who care about their human rights. All of us as people need to understand that this is not just about the Crow Creek Reservations land, it is about our rights as human beings, sovereign nations and most of all, our future generations.[169]

The courage and determination required to fight these battles characterizes the hope that exists among these tribal nations. Tribal leaders and organized efforts such as the Black Hills Coalition, the Inter-Tribal Coalition to Defend Bear Butte and the Strong Heart Warrior Society, illustrate the conviction and dedication to future generations that pervades the lives of the Lakota and Dakota people. Mutual support, strong and dedicated leadership, and unified efforts in voicing opposition inspire and animate community members when confronting injustice.

> …The fact is that the term "Indian land" is highly charged, carrying with it a history of takings and mistakes, with consequences both intended and unintended. Its legal reality now lies there, heaved over mother earth like a wet blanket… For Indians the land is kin first – it is *Indian* before it is an object, a legal entity of foreign (i.e. white) persuasion.[170]

Economic Development

Efforts to promote business development on the reservations of South Dakota have been met with significant challenges. In areas where poverty is profound and physical infrastructure is severely limiting, economic development projects have historically proven to be unproductive and often unsuccessful. What is seen as "need" by

the federal government is in many cases a very different view of the "needs" that tribal communities recognize for themselves. "Economic development programs sponsored by the federal government have consistently resulted in minimal improvements for the local economy but in direct benefits for outside interests of core capital..."[171]

Funding for tribal governments and projects generally comes from the federal government through grants. However, this is often clouded by ambiguity, and is encumbered by the need to comply with a myriad of requirements by agencies such as the BIA. Funding may be available for programs for a certain period of time and then rules may change or the availability ends entirely. A tribal program officer from Rosebud Reservations is quoted as saying:

> When you work for the tribe, you have to show progress every couple of years or, even if there's no money, you got to show some progress or you'll lose your program. Even if you don't get anything, you have to use your ingenuity and try to serve more people.[172]

This dependency allows for government interference in the determination of what programs are most needed, how they will be run, and how long they will exist. In contrast, the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe has developed numerous enterprises, making it the largest source of employment on the reservation. Corporations include The Golden Buffalo Casino and Motel, The Lower Brule Sioux Farm Corporation, Lakota Foods, marketing the products produced by the Farm Corporation, and The Lower Brule Sioux Tribal Employment Enterprise.[173]

The Lower Brule Sioux Farm Corporation, with a governing board of both tribal and non-tribal members ranks as one of the world's largest producers of popcorn on its 10,000-acre farm. Employing ten full-time people, including its own agronomist, the

Corporation also produces a variety of beans, yellow corn, wheat, sunflowers and potatoes. The staff also tends to herds of Angus cows and bison.[174]

Similarly, on Pine Ridge Reservation, Lakota Funds: Investing in the Oyate is a "community development financial institution leading an economic resurgence of the Oglala Lakota Oyate…through culturally appropriate strategies reigniting the traditional Lakota spirit of productivity, commerce and trade."[175] When the fund was started in 1986 with the assistance of Oglala Lakota College and the First Nations Development Institute, eighty-five percent of borrowers had never had a checking or savings account, seventy-five percent never had a loan and ninety-five percent had no business background. Prior to its establishment, there were only two Indian-run businesses on Pine Ridge. Today there are more than 328 licensed businesses. Through its many efforts at establishing a successful entrepreneurial environment, Lakota Funds has helped to elevate the economic status of the Pine Ridge Reservation.[176]

Despite significant unemployment rates on the reservations of South Dakota, and a political climate, both on and off the reservation that often impacts employment, the ability to address economic needs in a culturally specific manner is seen as critical to the success of reservation-based businesses. While some programs continue to be dependent on governmental agencies, such as the Indian Health Service, the impetus to needed change is the ability of the people to organize themselves through programs that emanate from and invest in the community.

> Defining and satisfying needs is a profoundly political process. A century of federal Indian policy, ostensibly designed to meet the needs of the Lakotas, has usually satisfied instead the needs of core interests outside these reservation communities. Improvements in Lakotas' well-being will come only when the political will of the core is changed to allow

> economic control and growth for these peripheral reservation communities.[177]

The South Dakota Indian Business Alliance consists of community partners dedicated to the generation of Indian business in South Dakota. The SDIBA holds a biannual conference involving government officials, federal program representatives, non-profit organizations, and Indian business professionals to strategize ways of furthering Indian business development in South Dakota. Recently, the SDIBA formed a partnership with the Corporation for Enterprise Development, a national non-profit, which strives to create economic opportunity. With the aid of a $50,000 award, combined efforts will execute the Native Entrepreneurship Investment Research Project, which involves a market analysis of the possibilities for small business development on the nine reservations of South Dakota. The results will be utilized in creating an investment strategy with the goal of addressing Native entrepreneur financing and capacity building.[178]

Language Revitalization

> So to me…I know who I am. I was born Lakota, and I got my language in Lakota and I got my wisdom in Lakota. I got my respect in Lakota. I got my generosity in Lakota. And I have the courage to live that life. Which is very, very hard. (Female elder, Pine Ridge, July 2010)

Lakota language revitalization efforts on South Dakota reservations have gained momentum in recent years. This critical element of traditional life was essentially relinquished through coercion. In response to boarding school experiences in which children were beaten for speaking their language, parents conceded and no longer taught their children to speak Lakota. The campaign by the federal government toward

elimination of indigenous languages has resulted in a significant loss of Lakota and Dakota speakers.

Despite this, it should be noted that language has survived and revitalization efforts abound. Dr. Beatrice Medicine has noted:

> Although it is recognized that legislated policies have had a great effect on Indian learning systems, it is within the nexus of sociolinguistic manifestations in diverse Native communities that the essence of Native culture flourishes and exists despite generations of pressure to change. The very persistence of languages speaks immensely to the vitality of Native life in the United States.[179]

Interview participants and others have strongly supported the need for children to learn their language, as this is critical to the development of healthy identities as young Lakotas. Albert White Hat, Sicangu Rosebud Lakota educator, writer and spiritual leader shared the following about his introduction to a Catholic boarding school in St. Francis, South Dakota:

> I came from a community where we sang and danced and did everything in our language. I walked in that institution and my peers were making fun of us, the ones from the country, for being big Indians, savages. And they were all Indian kids. Many years later I found out that they had been in that institution since they were 5. By the time they were teenagers they were conditioned to deny their Indian heritage.[180]

An essential aspect of language revitalization is the desire to maintain oral traditions that are key to maintenance of cultural traditions. Language imparts nuances that are sometimes difficult to translate. Therefore, the most complete manner for stories to be handed on would be through the Lakota and Dakota languages.

Waziyatawin Angela Wilson explores this issue in her dialogue with Dakota elder Eli Taylor.

> Our oral traditions have survived thousands of years, and my elders fluent in our languages and traditions have conveyed a complete confidence in our oral traditions. They also view our stories as essential to the cultural survival of our people, but they see them being severely threatened in the face of cultural domination and oppression.[181]

Efforts at Dakota language revitalization are underway. Diane Merrick teaches at Marty Indian School and Ihanktonwan Community College on the Yankton Reservation. She stated, "Language is very central to who we are. It's part of our cultural identity. Reaching out in any way we can with our language is very important."[182]

In support of these efforts, each year, the "Lakota Dakota Nakota Language Summit – Uniting the Seven Council Fires to Save the Language" is held in the Black Hills and strives "to unite the Oceti Sakowin, Seven Council Fires of the Lakota Dakota Nakota Oyate, also known as the great Sioux Nation…"[183]

Lakota language programs are an important aspect of education on Pine Ridge, and there is an effort toward developing immersion programs to better address the critical loss of fluent speakers. Additionally, through funding by The Endangered Language Fund, Jace Decory and Rosalie Little Thunder of Rosebud, have instituted Wicoiye – An Institute in Native Language: Teaching Methods for South Dakota Instructors of Lakota. This program offers summer trainings for Lakota teachers to more effectively address the needs of students in learning not only to speak the language, but also to understand the underlying cultural values expressed in Lakota.[184]

This form of resistance in response to the historic trauma precipitated by the colonial experience of boarding schools and other efforts aimed at assimilation and termination, is helping to re-create identity and strengthen autonomy. It is an aspect of culture that can only be imparted by those who are Native speakers, to fully internalize

the nuances and meanings inherent in language. It brings communities together in an effort to not only save their language, but to ensure that their children benefit from the knowledge and wisdom of traditional elders and community members.

Education

Education among the Lakota and Dakota has become an avenue of resistance as efforts are made to include traditional culture and language in educational programs with an eye to revival and retention. The activist movement of the 1960's advocated for a deeper awareness of cultural diversity within university curricula and the need for inclusion of ethnic study programs on the post-secondary level. This not only became the impetus for Native American studies programs within universities, it also saw the rise of tribally owned and operated colleges, as well as elementary through high school curricula that addresses the particular needs of American Indian children.

According to statistics by the South Dakota Department of Education, American Indian students constitute approximately eleven percent of the enrolled student population in the state, with only sixty-one percent actually graduating from high school. On Pine Ridge Reservation, roughly seventy percent have received a high school diploma, and approximately twelve percent have graduated from college.[185]

In South Dakota, the Bureau of Indian Affairs operates day schools on reservations, as well as a boarding school on Pine Ridge. While these schools generally provide for the basic academic skills of reservation youth, they are most often, staffed by non-Indian teachers and administrators, leaving them lacking the cultural awareness and content needed to reinforce Indian student identities. Dropout rates are significant.

In response, the Indian Education Council was created through South Dakota's Department of Education, and consists of American Indian educators from throughout the state representing the various tribal nations. This Council is committed to improving the academic standing of Indian students. A subcommittee, the Oceti Sakowin Standards Work Group, addresses the core concepts of the history and culture of the Oceti Sakowin (Seven Council Fires) in order to foster greater understanding and content standards for educational programs.[186]

Tribal colleges in South Dakota comprise a portion of the Lakota-based NGO's. These include Oglala Lakota College on Pine Ridge Reservation and Sinte Gleska University, with campuses on Rosebud and Lower Brule Reservations. The Rosebud campus offers an accredited four-year degree program.

> The tribal colleges attempt to meet the special cultural needs of the Lakota community while complying with the requirements of the broader, nonreservation society. In addition to mainstream departments such as mathematics, computer science, and business, they offer courses in history, government, and culture that are unique to the Lakota experience. This focus provides the opportunity for salaried positions for members of the local community who are outstanding Lakota speakers, part of historically significant families, or firsthand participants in the struggles for tribal self-determination and civil rights.[187]

Other tribally run NGO's offering education and living skills with Lakota tradition as their foundation include the White Buffalo Calf Women's Society, the Sacred Shawl Women's Society, and the SuAnne Big Crow Youth Center. Programs offered by the Sicangu Youth Camp for the children of Rosebud Reservation, teach Lakota values, history, arts and crafts, and ceremonies.[188]

Additionally, students are flourishing at schools like Red Cloud Indian School on Pine Ridge Reservation. Operating under the auspices of the Jesuits and with the

cooperation and participation of the Pine Ridge community, Red Cloud promotes Lakota language and culture. At the time of this writing, news from Red Cloud indicated that nine students from the 2011 high school graduating class had been awarded the Bill and Melinda Gates Millennium Scholarship to support their college educations. Students from Red Cloud have attended such schools as Stanford, Princeton, and Dartmouth and study in various programs including pre-med and law, most hoping to return to the reservation to assist in the needs of their community. In addition, six students from Pine Ridge High School received the award.

This is testament to the ability and resourcefulness of young Lakotas who embody hope for the future of the Lakota nation. Robert Brave Heart, Sr. shared, "This scholarship exemplifies and celebrates our student's accomplishments these past four years… I know I speak for everyone at Red Cloud, and across the Lakota nation, when I say we are truly proud of them."[189]

The imperative from Indian educators is the need for incorporation of traditional values and educational practices into academic programs designed for Indian youth in order to advance self-esteem and self-worth. Central to programs are the traditional values of belonging, mastery, independence and generosity – values that are the "cultural belonging of Native peoples."[190] By creation of culturally pertinent programs, education becomes a source of resistance to dominant structures that have not successfully addressed the needs of their children, and communal empowerment is reinforced.

Art and Literature

Native cultures have been stylized and stereotyped to fit the image that dominant society not only desires, but also demands. This is evident in every aspect of life, including creative expression.

> The traditional art of Indian people may have many different meanings depending on one's point of view. For the museum curator or collector the object may be an example of fine craftsmanship, for the dealer a marketable product, or for the tourist a souvenir of a trip to the West. For a Native people today, the object speaks to the spirit and endurance of tribal cultures and provides a key to understanding the past, the present, the people who went before them, and their own generation.[191]

Often what is termed "Native art" has been molded to fit this image in order to bring in a profit within the tourist market. However, Lakota artisans are moving away from production purely for sale as income. The arts of beadwork and quillwork are being taught within families to protect and carry on the skills associated with Lakota traditions. "Lakotas regard the practice and process of creating traditional items, and not just the objects themselves, as bound up with distinctly Lakota values."[192] Passing this knowledge on to future generations ensures the perpetuation of Lakota traditions and subsequently, reinforces identity and pride.

Additionally, artists such as Oscar Howe, Yanktonai Dakota, whose work was rejected from the Philbrook Museum's annual Indian artists exhibition for not being traditional Indian paintings, have been marginalized by mainstream society and its definition of what defines a true Indian. Howe's response included the following:

> There is much more to Indian art, than pretty, stylized pictures. There was also power and strength and individualism (emotional and intellectual insight) in the old Indian paintings.

> Are we to be held back forever with one phase of Indian painting, dictated to as the Indian always has been, put on reservations and treated like a child, and only the White Man knows what is best for him?
> I have tried to keep the fine ways and culture of my forefathers alive. But one could easily turn to become a social protest painter.[193]

While Oscar Howe's work often illustrated the beauty of Lakota/Dakota culture and life, such as in his paintings, "Sundance" or "The Wood Gatherer," he also depicted the horror of the history of contact with dominant society with his interpretation of "Big Foot at Wounded Knee." This type of work gives voice to the "social protest" to which Howe refers. The reality of how these events impacted a nation needs to be expressed as a critical step in the healing process.

Likewise, Native literature has been categorized and defined by standards dictated by dominant society. There is a rich history of literary discourse and rhetorical resistance in American Indian literature that has impacted contemporary writing and allowed for the evolution of activist voices. At times, these voices were heard through the efforts of historians who imparted oral traditions through translators, such as the work of John G. Neihardt and his writings on the life of Nicholas Black Elk. Despite critical analysis of these translations, they have preserved essential voices in the development and advancement of Native literature and cultural protection. Storytelling has been a vital element of Lakota/Dakota social structures and the avenue by which traditional teachings are passed on. While history has impacted the oral tradition, what has been altered or silenced through policies associated with contact is given voice through contemporary arts and literature.

MariJo Moore shares the reality that, much like the attitudes evident in the world of fine arts, most Native writers live on the fringes of what the Western world defines as literature. She states:

> The wisdom gathered here cannot by any means be considered anechoic. These expressions will continue to reverberate extensively because we choose to stand on our bridges to tell the world who we are, how we think, and how we live in modernity yet incorporate ancestral knowledge.[194]

Literature not only teaches but also records for future generations the very essence of the people. Additionally, works such as *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* by Vine Deloria, Jr. become a means of providing social commentary and protest. Craig S. Womack writes, "…We are not mere victims but active agents in history, innovators of new ways, of Indian ways, of thinking and being and speaking and authoring in this world created by colonial contact."[195]

Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Dakota and founder of *Wicazo Sa Review*, noted in her speech at the Great Plains Writers Conference in 1993:

> If history is to tell us anything, it tells us that land seekers are, and always have been, the dangerous ones. And, if the study of literature tells us anything, it is that the stories hold the secrets to our lives as much as does the land. That is the dilemma in American literature and particularly in the Great Plains, and that is why the question, "Who gets to tell the stories?" is not only never far from out thoughts, it is the political question of our time.[196]

To illustrate, Cook-Lynn's "The Power of Horses" utilizes a rhetorical flourish to conjure images of the joys and pains of contemporary reservation life against the backdrop of a history replete with injustice and suffering. She gives voice and lends poignancy to the conflict felt by many Lakota and Dakota.

> The girl dressed quickly, and just as dawn was breaking, she and her father, each leading two horses, with the others following, set out over the

> prairie hills. These were the hills, she knew, to which the people had come when the Uprising was finished and the U.S. Cavalry fell to arguing with missionaries and settlers about the "Indian problem." These were the hills, dark blue in this morning light, which she knew as repositories of sacred worlds unknown to all but its most ancient tenants.[197]

As was illustrated by the poetry of Autumn White Eyes, Lakota and Dakota youth find expression and an emotional outlet through the creative process of writing. Oglala Lakota College has published a book entitled *Wicoicage: The Future*, which highlights the works of students in order to give voice to the issues impacting youth on the reservations of South Dakota. Jamie Lee, professor of English, and editor of the anthology wrote in the introduction: "The prompts were the seeds for the garden enclosed in these pages. The compost for the garden is life itself – in all its glory and all its pain. Through the words on these pages, I hear strong voices emerging – important voices with much to say."[198]

Humor and Celebration

> White people depict us in their books and movies as stony-faced folks with the corners of our mouths turned down, always looking grim. But we are not like that. Among ourselves we joke and laugh. With all that suffering and poverty our people can survive only by laughing at misfortune. That's why we have the sacred clown, heyoka…he makes us laugh through our tears.[199]

Critical issues that seem to pervade the lives of individuals, families and communities could seem insurmountable and are often fodder for racist characterizations of Lakota and Dakota peoples. Generalizations are common regarding the level of substance abuse and violence, although these continue to be very real issues with which the reservations of South Dakota are confronted. However, diametrically opposed to the

impacts of historical trauma and the resultant issues, is the strength found in the traditional kinship of community and family, the tiospaye.

Joseph Bruchac addresses the European image of the Indian as "humorless" and "stoic," stating that humor is cultural and often does not work outside of the context from which it originates. He adds that the "people who wrote about Indians either knew them not at all… or were so without humor themselves that they failed to see its vital place in Native American life." [200]

Among Lakota and Dakota communities in South Dakota, joy in communal sharing, laughter and celebration are pervasive and as Vine Deloria, Jr. has contended, it is vital to life. "Indians have found a humorous side of nearly every problem…Humor has come to occupy such a prominent place in national Indian affairs that any kind of movement is impossible without it."[201]

Gerald Vizenor speaks to the healing power of humor for Indian people. He writes:

> The tribes have seldom been honored for their trickster stories and rich humor. The resistance to tribal humor is a tragic flaw. Laughter over that comic touch in tribal stories would not steal the breath of destitute children; rather, children would be healed with humor, and manifest manners would be undermined at the same time.[202]

Humor is a fundamental element of Lakota and Dakota culture, providing not only social commentary, but often serving as an educational tool. Dry wit and sarcasm characterize responses in situations where a lesson needs to be taught, or even to comment on one's own or someone else's shortcomings. This may seem irreverent at times, however, the point is not to embarrass, but to teach. Teasing is common and makes a point without diminishing the other.

Charles E. Trimble, Oglala Lakota from Pine Ridge, states:

> …In my tribe, the Oglala Lakota, as in other Sioux tribes, one of the important roles in the camp was that of Heyoka, the "contrary," and among his various roles was that of making fun and laughter… Humor was important to preserving civility and order in the community, especially in the confinement of the long winter camps.[203]

The Heyoka, while playing the role of clown in Lakota society, was also a teacher, reminding people not to take themselves too seriously so as to place power in the hands of the Creator. Felix Cohen, legal scholar discussed the Heyoka or trickster as one whose role it is to ridicule when necessary. He writes: "A chief who forgets that he is a public servant and tries to order others around has always been an object of ridicule, and Indian laughter has rippled down the centuries and upset many thrones."[204]

Humor is not only cultural to the Lakota and Dakota, it is therapeutic in reviving the self, and in turn supplants fear by creating a sense of community and solidarity. Daniel Grassian, in commenting on the work of Sherman Alexie recognizes that the author often utilizes humor to "make poverty and despondency bearable. It is a tool that Alexie uses frequently in his writings. Ultimately, Alexie suggests, humor – along with creativity and athletics – can help restore pride in self, culture, and community in Indian reservations."[205]

Humor gives sustenance to resistance by reinforcing the vital cultural need for laughter and the bond between Indian people, not only within tribal nations, but throughout Indian country as well.

> Wherever you go in "Indian Country" you will find laughter – a laughter which may be bawdy one minute, sacred the next. But whichever it is, you can be sure that it is a humor which makes its point clearly to Native Americans, and those points include the importance of humility and the affirmation that laughter leads to learning and survival.[206]

The joy of celebration is clearly evident in events such as Powwows. The sense of pride in the exhibition of dance, music and art is tangible. The communal feeling is ubiquitous and uplifting. The humorous verbal banter of the emcee is a key component and laughter is pervasive. Feasting, gift giving, and recognition of important events and persons such as veterans all lend to the reinforcement of pride and the communal spirit.

It was once expressed in a very poor community in El Salvador during the war years by a North American visitor, that it was difficult to understand how people could celebrate in such an atmosphere of devastation and poverty. A Salvadoran woman responded that the community needed the expression of joy in their cultural traditions as a means of alleviating the suffering they faced each day. This sentiment is evident among the Lakota and Dakota as well. Preparing for a Powwow – working on elaborate regalia, practicing songs and drumming, teaching children to dance – brings families and communities closer while instilling a sense of pride. Similarly, the Giveaway is representative of communal sharing among Lakota and Dakota peoples. This reinforcement of the vital life connection between members of the community is key to the spirit of generosity and sharing. "The giving of material gifts symbolizes the giving away, the sharing of joy, honor, or sorrow. When the gift is accepted, the recipient also accepts the joy, the honor, or the burden of sorrow."[207] Lakota/Dakota traditional ceremonies such as the Sundance, the Yuwipi (sweatlodge), and Giveaways affirm and strengthen cultural tradition and spirituality. This is seen as critical to developing a healthy identity in the young.

Humor and celebration among the Lakota and Dakota could also be said to contribute to an undercurrent of social protest. That which cannot be readily understood

by outsiders, is protected within the constructs of a cultural tradition that has survived despite contact. Celebration and joy continue to pervade the lives of the Lakota and Dakota. Thomas Peacock shares that which is common among tribal nations:

> And so many of us wear that wound and it shows in our hearts, and it shows in everything we do. Triumph and tragedy exist together. Love and self-hatred form part of the same circle. We are joyous. We grieve. My friend Linda LeGarde Grover once said that for Native people, even in times of great happiness, there is great sadness. Even in times of great sadness, there is great happiness.[208]

Spirituality

Perhaps the most important cultural aspect of Lakota and Dakota societies, and that which has been the greatest source of comfort, tradition, and courage throughout history, particularly since contact, is spirituality. Pete Catches, respected medicine man and elder shared:

> How is it that ages and ages ago – and no one had to tell us this – the Indian knew that there is a Wakan Tanka, a Great Spirit, whom other people call God? Our Wakan Tanka is right here as I talk. He is right here listening to what I am saying so He knows that what I am saying is the truth. In the message that is going out to the world from this moment, I ask Wakan Tanka to bless those people that receive it, and learn something from it, that maybe even one word from it will cure people of the problems they have.[209]

The Oglala Lakota social construct embraces values that are essential to the human condition. Fundamental to everyday life, they include: Humility (Unsiiciayapi), Perseverence (Wowacintanka), Respect (Wawoohola), Honor (Wayuonihan), Love (Cantognake), Sacrifice (Icicupi), Truth (Wowicake), Compassion (Waunsilapi), Bravery (Woohitike), Fortitude (Cantewasake), Generosity (Canteyuke), and Wisdom (Woksape).

> When life for us was forever altered by the arrival of Europeans – when entire populations were devastated by disease, alcohol, war and dispossession – we survived by living by the virtues we learned from our stories. We relied on being the kind of people our stories told us our ancestors had been, and thereby we remained true to ourselves and to them, and we are still surviving. [210]

Interview participants for this study have repeatedly spoken of the need to return to traditional spiritual practices and values in order to heal the wounds of historical trauma. An elder in Pine Ridge shared:

> Going back to the original blessing, to return to the original message, to return to the impulse and to recognize that through our senses in a deeper way, not physical but spiritual – because it all boils back to a spiritual relationship. (Male participant, Pine Ridge, July 2010)

Clara Sue Kidwell supports the intellectualism of indigenous people when she counters the opinion that the elements of Indian cosmology and spirituality are based in myth. She promulgates that American Indians find their foundations in scientific observation and knowledge. "American Indians observed the world around them with keen and scientific interest. They explained their relationship with that world in personal terms, and they saw themselves as agents in the process in the environment."[211]

Unlike the Christian framework, American Indians do not choose a particular religion. The Lakota/Dakota believe that they are born into a life of spiritual practice and grow within the traditions and ceremonies of their community. Historically, for these tribal nations and many others, there was no religious controversy or competition given that all in the community "shared a common historical experience and cultural identity was not separated into religious, economic, sociological, political, and military spheres."[212]

The appropriation of religious practices by New Agers and others who romanticize and often misuse this spirituality is seen as disrespectful and further evidence of colonization. It is critical to understand that one cannot simply decide to "join an Indian religion." Believing that spirituality is the means by which Lakota/Dakota people, especially youth, can begin to find their voice and return to the virtues that have been disrupted by history and dominance, ceremonies are justifiably protected. One community member shared:

> We were made dependent in so many aspects of our lives. It has done serious damage. And one of the most important things in our nation – our spirituality – has been damaged as well, swept away by the churches and the government. In some of our communities now, there's a spiritual wasteland. (Male participant, March 2010)

While this has caused outrage among some, it has also served to galvanize many in the Lakota and Dakota communities to confront this disrespect and misappropriation. To think that one can fully understand what it means to be Indian simply by study or attending the occasional powwow, or even a public sweat lodge is ludicrous and serves only to undermine the tangible disparity in the actual every day lives of Indians and non-Indians in this country. Avis Little Eagle, Lakota, shares:

> They want to become Indian without holding themselves accountable to Indian communities. If they did, they would have to listen to Indians telling them to stop carrying around sacred pipes…and to stop appropriating our spiritual practices. Rather, these New Agers see Indians as romanticized gurus who exist only to meet their consumerist needs… They trivialize Native American practices so that these practices lose their spiritual force… Their perceived need for warm and fuzzy mysticism takes precedence over our need to survive.[213]

In 1993, at the Lakota Summit V, the Lakota/Dakota/Nakota spiritual leaders, along with the National Congress of American Indians issued the "Declaration of War

Against Exploiters of Lakota Spirituality. This document is supported by the tribal nations comprising the AICS (American Indian Cultural Support Council). It addresses not only the outrage at expropriation of traditions, desecration of sacred objects and sites, but also cites academic disciplines in colleges and universities that have "institutionalized the sacrilegious."[214] What has resulted is a renewed and revitalized restoration of spiritual practices on the reservations of South Dakota, nurturing the hope that Lakota and Dakota people will return to traditional ways, and hold sacred their traditions and practices.

> We have a word at the end of our prayer – it says, "Mitakuye Oyasin" - you know what that means? Everything is related and connected. We're really getting disconnected. We're disconnecting from our original blessing – original social spirituality. That's how I see it. To regain that, my hope is that children will come back…to be guided by elders to their spiritual grounding. (Male elder, Pine Ridge, July 2010)

CHAPTER 6:

CONCLUSION

The Lakota and Dakota of South Dakota exemplify the unique ethos of the first peoples of this continent. Their history is replete with examples of the impacts of hubris and structural violence, creating extreme disparities in quality of life in the name of progress. There does remain however, a remarkable element of hope, not only for the present generation, but also for their children and their children's children and on to the Seventh Generation.

> So that's my way of understanding hope…the hope that I can't lose. I wanted to go home – it's life for me, for my takojas (grandchildren). You know there's still hope for them. So it's something that is in life. Faith, hope, love – we always look forward to. That's the courage that will last – hope of courage that we can bring back all these. (Female elder, Pine Ridge, July 2010)

Suffering has characterized the history of the Lakota and Dakota since the arrival of Europeans on this continent, yet they have not perished. They remain communities of struggle, but with determination and hope. They hunger physically, spiritually, emotionally, but adhere to a self-preservation that will not be vanquished. Much can be learned from indigenous peoples such as these with regard to what we consider of great consequence.

There is something remarkable that encompasses the very essence of the Lakota and Dakota people – something that sustains them and gives them reason to celebrate. The world is imbued with inequality and it would seem that those forced by dominance and repression into lives of need would be bitter and vengeful. However, more often,

these communities are characterized by strength, resolve, and commitment. Despite centuries of subjugation and marginalization, the Lakota and Dakota people hypostatize interminable and defiant hope.

> Life goes on, it continues to cycle. The sun comes up each morning and with it comes new opportunity, new hope. No matter what kind of mess I've made of the day before, no matter what victories I've celebrated, each new day is a chance to set the record straight, atone for a mistake, achieve another victory, and take another step on my journey. Each new day is a *inikigapi*, a chance to be renewed and reborn – another opportunity to be part of the circle that is life, knowing that it is a journey, not a race, and that one doesn't travel it alone.[215]

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