Preserving America's Original Values

**Abstract**

This research project examines factors that contribute to cultural and economic deprivation experienced by the Oglala Lakota resulting in internal problems within the community that affect education, health, and life at home. The understanding of the current challenges the Oglalas face stems from their history of competing with a larger group of outsiders whose culture quickly became the dominant force as the United States was established. These two opposite worldviews came into conflict and led to the cultural genocide of Native Americans everywhere. It is argued that reconnecting with Lakota culture is the most essential factor in fixing the problems. From this alarming statistics on alcoholism can be found and it is deeply imbedded in the Oglala plains. Alcohol with the addition of drug use affects domestic life which robs children of a safe environment and makes it more challenging to succeed in school. Educating the children therefore in an updated, safe environment along with appreciation of their culture is paramount. Solutions can be found in the acts of kindness that volunteer organizations do to help the Oglala community. Although these volunteers may repair many run down homes and give food to the many homeless, they need community leaders to invest in long term solutions that will fix the problems internally. Practical solutions can be found in tribes across the country who have implemented practices that are preserving their culture and their land. This research is about creating concrete answers that can be applied to the modern Sioux.

**Why Our Natives Matter**

We cover a lot of issues in America and debate heavily on how to solve them from immigration to civil rights, to fair pay, alternative energy and so on. They all are very important and are deserving of our attention but a dilemma that is not brought to our attention often are to those that came before us, before any of these debates emerged. Our native populations are fighting their own battles between a country that ignores them and the problems the worldly pleasures that have stunted their progress as a people. We fail to see the endless cycle of poverty because it is hidden away on reservations across the country. Each tribe has assimilated to their new surroundings differently but some better than others. Our focus will be on a people that continue to face the consequences of history throughout their daily lives. The Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota is home to the Oglala Sioux tribe and is at many times the poorest place in the country. The Oglala Sioux tribe suffers from alcoholism affecting eight out of ten families[[1]](#footnote-0) and with forty-eight to fifty-two as the average life expectancy, it speaks to the dire need for a change in terms of economics and culture. This change of culture is not about conforming to the mainstream American culture, but to become more deeply rooted in Lakota philosophy. It begins with the children changing the course of Pine Ridge and encourage the emergence of more leaders for the other eight Sioux Reservations in the state and for other tribes across the country. The revival of the Sioux people means the revival of their culture. Returning to the Lakota worldview is not a primitive action but one that constructs a future for their people. Lakota philosophy is what has sustained the Sioux throughout history despite intense discrimination, mass murder, and human rights violations from a government that prides itself on freedom. Cultural survival is the essential factor because it is the Sioux that must rebuild themselves with minimal US government support. Obtaining countless subsidies and government programs goes against their cultural beliefs as well as the will of the Oglalas. Here we will clear up misconceptions of the Sioux and Native Americans in general in order to break down who they are and why they are important in today’s world. An understanding of Sioux traditions and beliefs is also essential to understanding what average people like you and I can do to help and how community run programs should be developed. Efforts happening now and in other parts of the country should be used as examples to create and expand current ones. Tribes are handling their economics, government, religion, and cultural survival differently and it is important to evaluate how and its level of effectiveness. This is an important issue for America to discuss and to act on along with the others because it speaks to the integrity of our country and the value it places on its moral standards listed by our founding leaders. If the United States wants to remain a truly free and prosperous place for all people willing to work hard, it will pay attention to the Pine Ridge reservation.

 As much as we like to think that our history is centered around us versus Indians, it is far from the truth. Despite there being many moments colonists were in conflict with the native population, American Indians were just as involved in building the United States as those who came before us. We can see their legacy in the many types of American Indians living in Chicago, who helped build the city and protect the country in every war in our history. Our military operations were protected from the Japanese thanks to the famous Navajo code talkers who used their language to help win World War Two.[[2]](#footnote-1) Their influence has even shaped the values of America by influencing the makeup of the US Constitution. In 1744, Benjamin Franklin on the topic of freedom said, “if a nation to the north can form a near perfect union, that has endured for centuries, why cannot we form a more perfect union?”**[[3]](#footnote-2)** The ‘nation to the north’ that Franklin referred to was the Haudenosaunee Kaianerrkowa, or the Iroquois Great Law of Peace; we know them as the Iroquois Confederacy.[[4]](#footnote-3) Concepts of freedom, peace, democracy, equal representation, checks and balances, and impeachment came from Iroquois and our country would not be the same without it.[[5]](#footnote-4) In 1988, the 100th Congress thanked the Six Nation Iroquois Confederacy for their contribution to the constitution in H. CON. RES 331.7 Franklin’s quote demonstrates that face that Native American cultures are sustainable and have endured them through time before and after the arrival of colonists. After all, if their beliefs are not, our constitution cannot last either. When we look at Sioux culture, we find beauty and stories that teach valuable lessons on how to live life successfully that is not just for the individual but for those around them. The Lakota have twelve values which comprise of bravery, fortitude, generosity, wisdom, respect, honor, perseverance, love, humility, sacrifice, truth, and compassion.[[6]](#footnote-5) The lessons that teach these values are not just found through stories passed down from generation to generation but from the world around them. This is the difference between Sioux culture and American culture in the past and present. When Lewis and Clark explored the West, they saw the landscapes as an avenue for opportunity and development whereas the Sioux and other Native Americans would see the connections to human life, gratitude, and its sacred value. One culture is not better than the other but the mindset of Capitalism and Imperialism can foster an attitude towards others that exploits. A prime example of this difference is the hunting abuse of bison during the twentieth century. During the time that Native Americans did not worry about where their next meal came from, there were sixty million bison roaming the plains. In the span of sixty years, a mere two hundred bison remained.[[7]](#footnote-6) Hunting for the Sioux was based on their belief that they should be grateful for the resources given to them and thus not take more than they need. On the other side, the white man for lack of a better term, massacred the bison based on their belief on the importance of money. While they took the hides, leaving the rest of the animal to rot in the fields, Native Americans honored every part, seeing value in every blessing given. Photos can be found of white hunters posing on mountainous amounts of bison hide, all for the money. This is one obstacle that the Sioux and other tribes had to face as Americans moved West. This war of attrition was only one wave of exploitation by Anglos to gradually take away what the native population had and take it for themselves. This history can explain the poverty and addiction that plagues the Pine Ridge Reservation. Although these problems occur among many other reservations, Pine Ridge is an example of what can happen when we allow things to spiral out of control for our fellow Americans.

 Pine Ridge covers three counties in South Dakota including territory in Nebraska and is the second largest reservation in the country. The Sioux is a confederacy that comprises of several tribes of different dialects called the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota. The tribe that will be discussed are the Lakota in general and within the Lakota, the band Oglala. They dominated the plains and once horses were introduced by the Spanish, it allowed them travel easier to follow the bison. Teepees were also used in order to make the nomadic lifestyle easier. Today the Lakota are far from living in teepees and hunting bison. These may be the first images that come to mind when thinking of the Sioux because this is some of the only things taught in schools about Native Americans. They are not a concept of the past but are living today among us, many still rooted in their heritage. The Oglalas try to make it like any other American in today’s society only now they grow up in an environment that places them at a disadvantage.

**Cultural Genocide**

On top of extreme poverty, addiction, gaps in education, women and child abuse, another shame has tormented the Lakota and this America’s war on Lakota culture. The US government and other colonists have attempted to kill off Native American culture to create more “civilized” citizens. This has killed off languages and made many that exist today, in danger of extinction. Because many tribes are struggling to connect young people to their own culture, it makes it increasingly harder to save what is left. They prefer not to put their language in English characters because it is seen by some as a betrayal to their culture. In the US Capitol is a painting by William Powell. It shows a scene of the Spanish conquistador Hernando De Soto and his people discovering the Mississippi. There around him are Native Americans who fought against them the day earlier. Around the Native Americans is a crucifix being brought up, a monk praying, and weary Spanish soldiers chugging along their weapons.[[8]](#footnote-7) This is one of several depictions of the interaction between Europeans and the native people, all leaving out a large chunk of the story. When touring the capitol, it is evident that many intern guides lack the knowledge to properly describe the context of each painting. This is because Native American history in non existent in schools. If we took out time to find what happened after the (normally inaccurate) paintings in the rotunda, we would see the picture in a whole new way. The Spanish who “discovered” the Mississippi would late construct boarding schools and monasteries which would force their culture out of Native Americans. They were punished for speaking their language, dressing in anyway other than that of Europeans, or following any other religion than Christianity.

The main cause of the termination of over 200 tribes and the fading of native cultures are due to the policies the United States has had towards American Indians for decades. Government relations with American Indians were guided by a “Assimilation and Allotment” philosophy. The golden age of this mindset was between 1880 and 1930 but it continued in the mid twentieth century where American Indians were relocated, separating important family ties.[[9]](#footnote-8) These events are directly related to the present condition of the Pine Ridge reservation and many others.

William Powers, a member of a tribe in the Lakota nation, puts the destruction of the Lakota language, the framework of his culture best. “Losing a Native language is like losing a relative. It is gone forever, never to return except in fond memories of words and phrases handed down...only scarcely used or understood by the current, bereaved generation. Gone the language, gone the tradition.”[[10]](#footnote-9)

There is a difference between an American Indian community that values its culture and a community that has fallen away from its roots. A study was done among the Lakota people which correlated mental health with the perception and level of participation of cultural values. To determine their results, a Native American Cultural Values and Beliefs Scale assesses the importance, frequency of practicing, and the amount of distress caused by not practicing their traditional values. A couple of findings were first, a Lakota “person who identifies values and beliefs as important and practices those norms will exhibit a significantly lower level of distress than a person who states that values and beliefs are important but does not practice those norms. Second a [Lakota] person who identifies values and beliefs as not being important to them and who does not practice those cultural norms will have a significantly lower level of distress than a person who states that [Lakota] values and beliefs are important but does not practice these norms.[[11]](#footnote-10) Although this study has only been the first of its kind, the researchers stated that more was being done to study the factors which “may contribute to high levels of physiological and psychological difficulties…”[[12]](#footnote-11) As with the problems we know that occur within the Pine Ridge reservation and others, they too have found that these difficulties have caused conditions such as diabetes, suicide, depression, and substance abuse. Perhaps a “cultural cure” can be a large part of the answer to cure it.

**Substance Addiction**

In August of 2013, members of the Pine Ridge Reservation voted to legalize alcohol. This is a controversial but perhaps desperate move to do something about the alcoholism that has broken up families and furthered poverty. This will not fix the problem but some hope that the new revenue will create a positive impact and go to youth programs and treatment counseling.[[13]](#footnote-12) Prohibition in the past has been proven not to work in our own history and banning it while the outside world freely consumes alcohol with the goal of an increased sober population is near impossible. When hearing about the high percentage of alcoholism on reservations it is easy to think that this is ‘their’ problem and they are responsible for their actions. The Oglalas do have to take responsibility for their addictions but alcoholism is not about their race or culture being more susceptible to addiction. Alcohol was introduced by the Europeans where it was used as an acceptable good to trade. It was sold in large quantities and Indians began to use it for the same reasons as anyone else only it became a crutch as they lost their homes and faced more hardships. One Menominee story describes one of the tribe’s first exposures to alcohol by the French in the 1660s.

“Then some of the strangers brought from the vessel some parcels which contained a liquid...finally offering some to the Menominee. The indians however, were afraid to drink...fearing it would kill them; therefore four useless old men were selected to drink the liquor, and thus to be experimented on...the men drank the liquid…[and] began to talk and grow amused...the four old men arose, and while walking about seemed very dizzy, when the Indians said, “See, now they are surely dying!”...the men dropped down and became unconscious...There were sullen looks directed towards the strangers, and murmuring of destroying them for the supposed treachery were heard...however, the four old men got up, rubbed their eyes, and approached their kindred saying, “The liquor is good, and we have felt very happy, you must try it too.””[[14]](#footnote-13)

 This Menominee who were a part of this story were located near Lake Michigan and their helps explain how and why this started to plague their nations. In recent decades members of the Pine Ridge buy their alcohol from another source. In a place about a mile south in Nebraska is the town of Whiteclay. Whiteclay is notorious among Native American activists and volunteers because it is home to a small liquor store making record profits off of the reservation inhabitants. No one has been successful in condemning the business for selling to the Lakota and encouraging alcoholism. If it was not for the reservation and its contribution, the business and perhaps the town would be non existent. Officially according to the U.S Census Bureau, the official population is ten and eight are American Indian. There are a total of four housing units with only half being occupied.[[15]](#footnote-14) Taking this into account, it is alarming the number of alcohol sales made in Whiteclay. For Oglalas alone, thirteen thousand cans are sold a day which is over four million a year. It is no wonder that an estimated eighty percent of adults on Pine Ridge are alcoholics. When going through the town, people can be seen sitting or laying on the ground among other groups of people there for the alcohol. The same can be said on the reservation where people who have lost everything due to alcoholism wander and sleep on the streets. Many problems such as domestic violence, school dropout rates, deaths of youth, and cultural depravity can be turned around back to alcoholism. What legalization would mean for Pine Ridge is that alcohol can now be sold on the reservation but many worry and with good cause that this selling on the reservation will make alcoholism worse. As if the Whiteclay is not close enough, it can be around the corner now. It is a deeply divided issue with the population voting almost 50/50 on the issue and has put a ridge between the members. Ron Duke, the chief of police at Pine Ridge stated that although he disagrees with alcohol being sold on the reservation, it would allow law enforcement to focus their time on other cases other than the constant calls of alcohol being present in someone’s home.[[16]](#footnote-15) On another note, easier access to alcohol will likely spur an increase in violence which is something else that the reservation has enough of. Supporters of selling alcohol on the reservation are eager to announce that its profits go to treating alcohol. It is an argument that turns around on itself and is slightly ironic. Even though every problem can be connected to alcoholism, the largest problem that causes the vicious cycle to continue is the lack of connection to Lakota culture. This logic makes sense because take a Christian minister at a church for example. If that minister followed Christ and the values of Christianity for years, would that minister be the same if he or she lost stopped using the bible as a moral compass? They would not because there is nothing gauging right or wrong anymore. This is the same for those living on Pine Ridge. The Lakota way teaches love, honor, respect, and wisdom which are all part of the larger scope of what it means to be a Lakota. One is connected to each other and the world around them, not taken away from reality, family, and friendship by alcohol. Addiction to alcohol breaks up families and increases the number of kids living under one roof with a stable guardian because one or both parents are out of their lives due to drugs. Home life on the reservation in a poor economy fosters two main problems, domestic abuse and school dropout rates.

 In addition to alcohol and other drugs, tobacco is also a problem. This may not seem like a product that would be preventing progress on the reservation but it is part of the overall substance abuse issue that is present. Some of the most important ways that younger generations receive information on their history and ways of life is through the elders. Their opinions on the current conditions of the reservations are very important because many come more from a Lakota perspective. It is true that there have been traditional tobacco use in the tribe historically but this versus commercial use have different purposes and effects. Research done by J Community Health studied elder’s views on traditional versus commercial tobacco use. According to their study, tobacco use is more prevalent among American Indians than any other population. Lung cancer is highest in the Northern Plains where the Latoka live and ninety percent of these cases are due to tobacco and smoking. High tobacco use correlates with high rates of smoking.[[17]](#footnote-16) Elders associated commercial tobacco use with diseases like lung cancer but also with crime, loss of control and self esteem, and lack of respect to self and others. What is not usually reported is the traditional tobacco use which elders hold different associations for. They described the traditional use as fostering spirituality, respect, health and wellness, humility, and thoughtfulness. Traditional tobacco, called Cansasa also seems to play a positive role because of these very reasons. Cansasa also is an important aspect in interpersonal communication within their cultural context.[[18]](#footnote-17)

 In the end, tobacco is a big deal and must be dealt with alongside all other substance abuse problems for the sake of improving the health of the Lakota and other nations as well. This is another example of how reinforcement of culture helps people be in touch with their traditions and helps eradicate negative influences simultaneously. Substance abuse is not an isolated issue that only hurts those who participate. It pours into life at home and teaches the next generations to not value the Lakota way and to follow in their footsteps.

**Domestic Life**

 This analysis is not written for the purpose of showing that all families at Pine Ridge are plagued with alcohol and abuse but it is common which at times overshadows the presence of the devoted parents and culturally connected families that are present. Many homes are deteriorating and are not suitable living conditions for a large family. They must make do with at times, many children competing for a small space. Members living on the reservation often contract lung diseases from the black mold in their houses or die of hypothermia during the winter.[[19]](#footnote-18)To give a real life image of this we can take a look at the life of one youth who is fighting hard against the odds to be the first of his family to go to college. Robert Looks Twice, now fifteen, lives with his eight cousins in his grandmother’s trailer where the floors are giving way in some areas and the leaky roof suffers heavy water damage. He shares a room with several of his cousins where the space is taken up with their clothes and other possessions. His grandmother has taken in all the children after their parents fell to addiction and neglected them. Robert shares the same story and he is there because his mother is an alcoholic. He hopes to make it into the Red Cloud Indian school, the only private school on the reservation, named after a strong leader of the Lakota during the nineteenth century. The schools are in a similar state of wear and tear and many of the children come to class hungry, where their biggest meal will come from the cafeteria at lunch.[[20]](#footnote-19)

Robert’s situation highlights the need for leadership among the adults to direct young people’s lives in the right direction with school and other aspects of life. His grandmother is a boetter role model than the children’s own parents and it reinforces the long Lakota thought on the emphasis of family commitment. Deborah Bowen from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington explains the importance of the roles that elders hold in the Lakota tradition. She points out that belief that “honoring the elders, commitment to family, and the connectedness to all creation are paramount are intrinsic to Lakota culture.”[[21]](#footnote-20) Her article includes two interviews from elders who offered their opinions and concerns on social issues and expressed hope for the future of Lakota children. They describe what it means to be Lakota by applying Lakota virtues and that “the concept of strength among the Lakota people means not only physical strength, but strength of character, strength of self sufficiency…”[[22]](#footnote-21) One of the most important parts of their advice is what they hope for the the next generations. Sylvan White Hat, Sr. said, “I want them to learn about our treaties, about their citizenship in both white and Lakota culture...I want them to learn to speak, read, write, and honor our language.” Albert White Hat, Sr. also responded, “I want them to master western culture and the English language in order to strengthen and fortify our own. We must learn to write for ourselves-translations of our language are misunderstood and misguide people.”[[23]](#footnote-22)

Their wisdom and knowledge is crucial to pass down because it is the beginning of creating a solid foundation among the youth. This is why substance abuse needs to be put to a halt not only for its own sake but for the sake of the next generation’s success which will impact the success of the Lakota people. The influence of the elders is also tied into the education among Lakota children and works alongside an education system which will also become a main vehicle in determining the success of the children.

**Education**

Schools in general are doing their best to educate and provide for the students with the resources they have. Some classes do offer Lakota language classes in early childhood education but many students lose their ties to their heritage as negative influences from the reservation and pop culture takes its toll over the years. Red Cloud Indian School, one of the revered schools on the reservation take in volunteers on a regular basis to teach and mentor kids from elementary to high school. Although the school has a foundation of Catholic ideology, mastering the Lakota culture and language is one of the goals of the school. The only drawback of volunteers that is voiced is that once volunteers come and make a difference and build a rapport with the community, they leave at the end of their commitment time. This criticism is less about the volunteer effort and more about the larger issue of needing more structure and a positive environment to for kids to succeed. The Pine Ridge needs those who will stay and continue the work that has been started. The ones who chose or can attend higher education have the Oglala Lakota College available. Here, they can major in a variety of degrees from nursing, pre-engineering, to Lakota studies.[[24]](#footnote-23) It is important for higher education institutions in tribal communities to mold youth that will use their talents to benefit their community. A report by the American Indian Higher Education Consortium, the Institute for Higher Education Policy, and the Sallie May Education Institute broke down in what field college graduates study in tribal colleges and found that nineteen percent majored in nursing and healthcare, thirteen in computer office technology, eleven percent in education and teaching, and eleven percent in psychology, social work, and human services.[[25]](#footnote-24) These findings are important because they tell us if the higher education system is properly serving their community properly.

 Social work and teaching in particular are important for the Pine Ridge reservation but there is a distrust and somewhat negative perception American Indians have for social services. Although there seems to be an interest in human services according to this report, many majors are reworded to titles such as ‘community health education’ or ‘alcohol and abuse studies’ because of the perception among reservations. Jim Bates, a member of the Yankton Sioux Tribes and a professor from Eastern Washington State University says that social services has not been seen as effective with American Indians because they were “just too complicated” for them to trust. He explains that there should be a “shadow curriculum” that would focus on core indigenous values and their own philosophical assumptions so American Indians can prepare for social work programs. This way it will parallel with the traditions of their own heritage.[[26]](#footnote-25) To put in perspective of why social work has not been compatible with indigenous people, a study by H.N. Weaver collected the obstacles Native Americans encountered within the social work field. There was a conflict between the “holistic spiritual community they came from and the hierarchical, bureaucratic educational system. The emphasis on written methods to communicate knowledge was also a struggle. Some felt that they must compromise cultural identity to succeed in school.”[[27]](#footnote-26) Because American Indians have to branch out to other universities in the US for this type of education, they commonly experience cultural shock in education, culture, and government systems much different from their own. “If [I] hadn’t been staying at [a nearby tribal college] the first year I went to [a social work program at a large university] I don’t think I would have made it.”[[28]](#footnote-27) Leaders in the tribal community suggest that there should be more discussion between tribal educators and US accredited colleges and universities to encourage a curriculum that is compatible with American Indian values.[[29]](#footnote-28) There is no reason for outside universities not to accommodate Native Americans better on their campuses because the field of social work is much needed on reservations. Native American learners need this to be able to help their homes and trust between the social work field and those that would benefit from its services must develop. The cultural conflict comes into play when the “unnatrual world” of the dominant culture affected by “how one feels” in contrast with living in the “natural world” that is based on spiritual understanding by doing the right thing.[[30]](#footnote-29) As new things are learned about the way Lakota culture and western culture interact, this helps the effort to improve Pine Ridge and other reservations by educating them on the Lakota perception and expectations. We can list a variety of ways that help those in the western culture and apply it to the Lakota but it is ‘how’ to do it that is the question to ask. If we cannot answer this question properly with an educated answer the results will fall short.

**Fixing the Problems**

 Pine Ridge’s problems may seem very deeply rooted from history and fixing the problems must be comprehensive commitment. Issues that are priority are cultural revitalization, education, rooting out drugs and alcohol, and improving living conditions. Revitalizing culture includes language and with this comes improvements in all other fields and this is the reasoning that saving Lakota culture is the top priority. Within each aspect of improvement there needs to be an emphasis with culture. Through education comes growing a youth that is in touch with the Lakota is a method of prevention in following in the cycle of alcoholism, drug use, and the dropout rate. Building effective addiction treatment centers and changing the mindset of the youth on what is important with help eradicate the problem. This improves living conditions by providing a safer, less substance driven home environment for children as they work for success in an environment that fosters cultural appreciation and giving back to the community. An improved domestic life can also be aided by many of the volunteers that are already working to reconstruct households so the handicapped have easier access to their homes and children have enough beds to sleep in. In many instances, the true poverty of the reservation can only be seen when going into homes and this economic situation can take its first steps in a positive direction through the actions above. A population needs to be healthy to be capable of working towards the common good of the community. To help lay out exactly what needs to change, we must first recognize the resources that already exist at the reservation which aid the people to achieve the priorities listed above. The backbone of the effort to improve Pine Ridge lies in the volunteer effort. Without people in and outside of Pine Ridge that care enough to devote their time to help the Oglala Lakota, fixing the problems would be impossible. A notable nonprofit organization is Re-member which provides volunteer opportunities for groups and individuals. Their projects focus on providing a better quality of life for those living on Pine Ridge. The list of their projects include, Bunk Beds for Children, Accessibility Improvements, Liveable Homes, Outhouse Construction, Trailer Skirting, and Wheelchair Ramps.[[31]](#footnote-30) With the amount of work this organization puts into the reservation, it is hard to imagine a world without Re-member.

 Another organization that works to empower members of the Oglala Lakota is Lakota Hope Ministries. Whiteclay Nebraska is just as essential to pay attention to as the reservation itself since it is the main source of alcohol for Pine Ridge. Because of the extreme homeless rate, their work focuses on those who need help the most spiritually and financially. A quote from their mission statement clearly lays out their intentions. “Our promise: To establish relationships, build trust, and restore dignity to the Lakota people. Our message: No one is forgotten.”[[32]](#footnote-31) Some may ask how they are really helping the Lakota if the organization helps those through belief in Christian thought. This does not take away from Lakota cultural identity but allows those benefiting from the program know their worth through their belief in God. The ministry actively encourages closeness to Lakota culture by bringing them together as a community of relationships, the trait that gives the Lakota Way strength.

 What is better is to teach young children to appreciate their culture and make use of their language. This is another fundamental way to prevent the issues found on the reservation from continuing onto further generations. A good example is at the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation which borders the North and South Dakota border. One culturally devoted Lakota is committed to carrying on their traditions to very young children through a licensed day care center. Tom Red Bird never uses English with those at the center, instead he speaks fast and fluent Lakota. Exercises are used to help kids understand the language just as they would for English at another school. He mentions that the language is most prevalent in the elders but the number of those who know it decreases as they pass away. Red Bird has devoted his time to preserving the Lakota language through his education and his participation in a Lakota dictionary project. The dictionary is always being updated and developed more thoroughly by other members who seek to add words. This knowledge he possesses is now being translated into his work with children. This “experimental program” takes place at Sitting Bull Community College on the Kids Kampus. The director of this language program, Sacheen Whitetail Cross says, “It’s who we are and it’s how we know each other” about the Lakota language. She hopes the program will expand if given more funding once it proves successful. Whitetail Cross also says that children enrolled in this program become better students and thus have better self confidence in their abilities. A couple who have their daughter in the program claims, “I really see in her hope, now. We have a drug- and alcohol-free home and she’s learning the language and the ceremonies. We’re breaking the cycle; that’s the hope. We’re willing to get up at the crack of dawn to get her there.”[[33]](#footnote-32) Because the Lakota language embodies the cultures and beliefs of what it means to follow the Lakota way, Red Bird believes that members of the tribe would be better individuals if Lakota was their only language. “They would be more respectful. The language is more sacred with core values. There are no curse words. In the language, it revolves around the family. These little ones we’ve got here, they’re the new breed, filling the gap between my age and people in their 40s and 50s who are not fluent.”[[34]](#footnote-33) Elders may have always been the ones to teach the young across the ages, but it is now time that the young will have to teach the rest of the community the example of what it means to be Lakota.

 These few initiatives are there to empower the Oglala economically and spiritually. The Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma did a study on the relationship of intellectual property law between the United States and its Native American populations. They argue this is another way their culture and economic sovereignty is being taken away. “Native American cultural and spiritual works, created by tribal artisans that learn techniques and designs passed down for generations, are exploited in the open market, duplicated by minimum wage workers or machines, traded at bargain basement prices created by the saturation of the market with cheap knock-offs, and dishonored and defaced by buyers and sellers that lack proper respect that should be afforded to culture with such deep heritage and tumultuous history.”[[35]](#footnote-34) We have all seen examples of these at airports, fairs, etc. It is due to people’s own ignorance whether intentional or not that encourages this. Respect for Native American culture needs to be restored on our end as well. Through efforts that are from informed minds, initiatives are making a difference that seek to defeat this behavior of our marketplace.

Recently, one couple decided to do what they could to make a difference on Pine Ridge by starting their own business which would employ members of the reservation. Kenny and Phyllis Bohling began hauling blankets and other necessities to the reservation after hearing about the extreme poverty. In the husband’s words, “I’ve lived in Peru, Argentina, Paraguay, and when I saw this, I couldn’t believe it was the United States...it’s deplorable.”[[36]](#footnote-35) As a long time banjo player, he recruited members who had experience in beadwork and leather so they could be employed to craft guitar straps. All are unique to each buyer and the owners are often in search for old decorative silver at antique stores that go back as far as the 1800s. When a strap made from buffalo or elk hide is bought, the tag reads, “The finest musical instrument straps available. Made exclusively from American Bison (Buffalo) Elk & Deer hides on the Lakota Sioux reservation. Pine Ridge, South Dakota.” They call their business Lakota Leathers and with it, the couple is happy that they are making a difference in the reservation although they admit overall, the poor environment on the reservation has continued. “I want to be clear that the company is not a charity. Our workers are earning a living, and they’re proud of the work they do. I can’t claim that conditions on the reservation have improved all at once, but there’s a new outlook on the future. There are families who can now keep the power turned on, put gas in their cars, and get medical care when they need it. The big issues have yet to be tackled, but the small things are starting to change.”[[37]](#footnote-36) The way the groups above are doing what they can to help, is exactly how change begins, with the people who care enough to sacrifice for others. Volunteering one’s time especially in a culturally different place is hard and any one of them could be doing something different.

 We live in a period and country where change can happen through the efforts of many voices. Just as President Obama says, “...despite the headlines, this is the best time in human history to be born, for you are more likely than ever before to be literate, to be healthy, to be free to pursue your dreams.”[[38]](#footnote-37) It is true that if I as a non-Indian can make it in our society, there should be no reason that our Native Americans cannot achieve success at home or among western society, where ever they choose. The condition of Pine Ridge is at a stage where we cannot ignore the problems the plague many people. If it is ignored, the cycle will continue for future generations, causing conditions to be that much tougher to eradicate. As a nation we seek to preserve our rich history so why are we not seeking to preserve a part of America that has been with us from the continent’s “discovery.” The Lakota do want and need to be self sufficient but it is important for the American people to care about their future. This can be done by teaching students what is known as American history is American Indian history as well. It is not about building US government support by increasing aid, it is about restoring the Lakota way among its people and community programs which reciprocate their values and needs. History shows resilience among Americans during times of hardships. Our natives are as American as we are and many of were born here so we too are considered “Native Americans.” We must care what happens to our native nations because we share a common history of people who built this country and now we are part of its future.

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