



STATUS and HEALTH HISTORY OF LIFE OF THE PEOPLE ON THE PINE RIDGE RESERVATION

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INTRODUCTION

The Lakota formerly identified themselves as The People of the Seven Council Fires, or Oceti Sakown Oyate. The term Oyate signified their existence as a Nation. This Nation spoke 3 dialects including Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota. The Nation consisted of Seven Bands, the largest being the Tituwan or Teton Band. Their primary dialect was the Lakota.

The nation has existed for thousands of years developing a Culture existing and interconnected with all of Creation in an understanding that all were related to one God, known as Wakan Tanka, Tunkasila, meaning of Sacred Enormity, Grandfather. The culture was articulated by a language given by Wakan Tanka, to be used in the development and understandings of the philosophy of life and spiritual connections. Nurturing continued to be measured in the ages of time perfecting the qualities of life through values; moral, ethical, and spiritual, including understandings of one God, the manifestations of God, of the existence of the soul or spirit which was eternal. A quality of life expressed in a totality of purity to body, mind, and soul paramount to a nation's existence amongst all of humanity as one of those of the highest physical and spiritual levels.

ASSIMILIATION

As time moved forward, people of many cultures arrived on this land. They came with many different cultures. An edict known as the "Doctrine of Discovery", validated their arrival. The land acquisition began with the notion of ownership, rather than interrelationship. Laws, Treaties, and Weapons were used during the period 1492-1890, 500 years to acquire land holdings resulting in separation of land interrelationships of the First Nations of 98%. The remaining 2% became known as Federal Reservations from 1890 to present, of which the remnants of the People of the Seven Council Fires now reside.

After 122 years of Reservation life experienced by the People of the Seven Council Fires, significant changes are evident. The Language is now in danger of extinction in similarity to the loss of the Bison, Tatanka or Pte. Our health has deteriorated astronomically, in comparison to U.S.A. statistics. Without our language we lose our ability to think (Lakota Thought) in the same manner as our ancestors.

Overall, assimilation has been in progress for 5 or 6 generations creating a life that has become a highly dependent society, largely taking away the previous lifestyle of self-sufficiency, self-reliance, those qualities of life so integral to the People of the Seven Fires for thousands of years.

THE APPROACH

After 122 years, the choices of a better life require an evaluation, assessment and comparison of the qualities of life between the two cultures that have been experienced by the People of the Seven Council Fires.

This approach to the task can be the work of an entity of people from both cultures. The process would incorporate the use of traditional Lakota knowledge, technical and organization expertise. In this consideration, we will establish a consortium of traditional knowledge elders known in identity as “Ikce Wicasa”, meaning “The Common Man or People”, for they have experienced life in both worlds, and are fully capable of rendering a valid assessment. They will join in discussions with people who possess medical expertise, and people who have the technical and organizational capabilities to make the necessary and needed changes for a better way of life. The goal articulated in the Lakota language as “Wicozani yuhapi kta ca”, meaning “To seek and attain the wholeness of well-being: spiritual, physical, mental, and economic”, in similarity to that which existed before 120 years ago.

Cangleska Wakan, means “The Sacred Hoop”, a collective way of life wherein totality, represents a circle of life, where Wakan Tanka exists along with all that has been created, in the universe. As a people, and as integral within this sacred circle the, values of respect and kinship are integral. Thus, all are no better than others of creation. To this day we see the “Blue Dome” above us to remind us on a daily basis.

The quality of life that currently exists for the People of the Seven Council Fires is reflected in the list (s) presented:

Demographic Information

- The Pine Ridge Reservation is home to approximately 40,000 persons, 35% of which are under the age of 18. The latest Federal Census shows the median age to be 20.6 years. Approximately half the residents of the Reservation are registered tribal members of the Oglala Lakota Sioux Nation.
- According to the most recent Federal Census, 58.7% of the grandparents on the Reservation are responsible for raising their own grandchildren.

Employment Information

- Recent reports vary but many point out that the median income on the Pine Ridge Reservation is approximately \$2,600 to \$3,500 per year.
- The unemployment rate on Pine Ridge is said to be approximately 83-85% and can be higher during the winter months when travel is difficult or often impossible. According to 2006 resources, about 97% of the population lives below Federal poverty levels.

Life Expectancy and Health Conditions

- Some figures state that the life expectancy on the Reservation is 48 years old for men and 52 for women. Other reports state that the average life expectancy on the Reservation is 45 years old. These statistics are far from the 77.5 years of age life expectancy average found in the United States as a whole. According to current USDA Rural Development documents, the Lakota have the lowest life expectancy of any group in America.
- Teenage suicide rate on the Pine Ridge Reservation is 150% higher than the U.S. national average for this age group.
- The infant mortality rate is the highest on this continent and is about 300% higher than the U.S. national average.
- The rate of diabetes on the Reservation is reported to be 800% higher than the U.S. national average. Recent reports indicate that almost 50% of the adults on the Reservation over the age of 40 have diabetes. As a result of the high rate of diabetes on the Reservation, diabetic-related blindness, amputations, and kidney failure are common.
- The tuberculosis rate on the Pine Ridge Reservation is approximately 800% higher than the U.S. national average.
- Cervical cancer is 500% higher than the U.S. national average.
- It is reported that at least 60% of the homes on the Pine Ridge Reservation are infested with Black Mold, Stachybotrys. This infestation causes an often-fatal condition with infants, children, elderly, those with damaged immune systems, and those with lung and pulmonary conditions at the highest risk. Exposure to this mold can cause hemorrhaging of the lungs and brain as well as cancer.

Health Care on the Pine Ridge

- Many Reservation residents live without health care due to vast travel distances involved in accessing that care. Additional factors include under-funded, under-staffed medical facilities and outdated or non-existent medical equipment.
- Preventive healthcare programs almost non-existent. Contract Health Care Funds pays for access to health specialists and health care equipment not available at local hospital , but only on the basis of Life-Threatening conditions. Contract Health Care Funding is perennially under-funded, usually depleted after 6 months of funding cycle.
- In most of the treaties between the U.S. Government and Indian Nations, the U.S. government agreed to provide adequate medical care for Indians in return for vast quantities of land. The Indian Health Services (IHS) was set up to administer the health care for Indians under these treaties and receives an appropriation each year to fund Indian health care. Unfortunately, the appropriation is very small compared to the need and there is little hope for increased funding from Congress. The IHS is understaffed and ill-equipped and can't possibly address the needs of Indian communities. Nowhere is this more apparent than on the Pine Ridge Reservation.

Alcoholism on the Pine Ridge Reservation

- Alcoholism affects 8 out of 10 families on the Reservation.
- The death rate from alcohol-related problems on the Reservation is 300% higher than the remaining US population.
- The Oglala Lakota Nation has prohibited the sale and possession of alcohol on the Pine Ridge Reservation since the early 1970's. However, the town of Whiteclay, Nebraska (which sits 400 yards off the Reservation border in a contested "buffer" zone) has approximately 14 residents and four liquor stores which sell over 4,100,000 cans of beer each year resulting in a \$3,000,000 annual trade. Unlike other Nebraska communities, Whiteclay exists only to sell liquor and make money. It has no schools, no churches, no civic organizations, no parks, no benches, no public bathrooms, no fire service and no law enforcement. Tribal officials have repeatedly pleaded with the State of Nebraska to close these liquor stores or enforce the State laws regulating liquor stores.

Hope

- There are a few reputable small non-profit organizations attempting to sincerely assist the people of the Pine Ridge Reservation in their efforts to resolve and mitigate existing problems. However, funding for these programs is currently highly limited.
- The People of the Seven Council Fires, and within the Tetonwan (Teton Band), the Lakota are a determined, intelligent, and proud People who are working hard to over-come their Reservation problems. Even against all odds, and with minimal resources, they must work diligently to re-claim their self-reliance, self-sufficiency, their culture, and their life for betterment.
- In decisions to be made for the betterment of the People we must consider the options of allowing the continuation of **Assimilation**, "Kill the Indian, save the Man", as designed by the edicts of Papal Bulls issued by the Pope in the 1700's that also validated the "Doctrine of Discovery" or consider **Enculturation** processes to restore the Language loss, the Values, and the Spirituality as understood from Lakota Thought. Through which a balance can be achieved that provides true **Acculturation** for the People of the Seven Council Fires striving to achieve the best qualities of both worlds, now and for the future. The United Nations Declaration of Indigenous Peoples Rights will affirm any processes, and avenues to be chosen.
- Although the Pine Ridge Reservation is represented with the specific concerns, the issues are applicable to the rest of People of the Seven Council Fires.
- Collective understandings through transcultural exchange, and support is needed and required. Otherwise, we, as a people are in danger of the loss of our way of life.

United Nations Declaration of Indigenous Peoples Rights

On September 7, 2007, The General Assembly of the United Nations, adopted this Declaration by majority vote. The United States cast a descending vote, one of four nations that voted against the passage. On December 16, 2010, President Obama, changed the vote to support the Declaration. He stated, "The aspirations it affirms - including respect for the institutions and rich cultures of native peoples - are ones we must always seek to fulfill," Mr. Obama said at the conference, held at the Interior Department. "But I want to be clear: What matters far more than words - what matters far more than any resolution or declaration - are actions to match those words."

As an Annex Statement, The General Assembly established the following preface. The entire Declaration can be reviewed at: <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/declaration.html>

The General Assembly,

Guided by the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, and good faith in the fulfillment of the obligations assumed by States in accordance with the Charter,

Affirming that indigenous peoples are equal to all other peoples, while recognizing the right of all peoples to be different, to consider themselves different, and to be respected as such,

1. See

Article 23

Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for exercising their right to development. In particular, indigenous peoples have the right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programs affecting them and, as far as possible, to administer such programs through their own institutions.

Article 24

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to their traditional medicines and to maintain their health practices, including the conservation of their vital medicinal plants, animals and minerals. Indigenous individuals also have the right to access, without any discrimination, to all social and health services.

2. Indigenous individuals have an equal right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. States shall take the necessary steps with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of this right.

The "**Ikce Wisasa Ta Omniciye**", meaning, "**The Common Man/Person's Gathering/Meeting**", can consider exploring, and exercising their Indigenous Rights through this Declaration. In 1995 and 1996,

Gerald One Feather and Leonard Little Finger presented testimony in behalf of the People of the Seven Council Fires, representing the Tituwan "Teton" Band for passage.

The Ikce Wicasa Ta Omniciye seeks not to replace any organization, federal, state, or tribal. But, only to advocate to needs of The Common Man to reach the highest quality of life. To say it in a prayerful way, "Wicozani he oga Waceunkiyapi, Wicomani Heca, yelo", meaning to "Walk with us as we seek the Wholeness of Well-being; spiritually, physically, mentally, and ecobomically".

Wopila Eciciyapi, Yelo. Ho He Cetu.

Saste He Miye,

Dr. Leonard Little Finger