

## 8 FOUNDATIONS OF LAKOTA SOVEREIGNTY

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### INTRODUCTION

In March of 2007, the South Dakota state legislature voted for Lakota language and culture to be taught in all public schools.<sup>1</sup> This is a decision of great significance, given the history of federal and state orchestrated efforts to assimilate and/or annihilate Lakota culture, language, economic, and spiritual practices.<sup>2</sup> As several of this volume's essays have described in some detail, full sovereignty depends on a thriving culture and language, practiced across generations. Legal solutions alone are not enough. In responding to a study by Thomas Biolsi on legal dimensions of Lakota-Euro-American interactions on the Rosebud reservation, Vine Deloria Jr. asserted that "history has nearly vanished from law, culture is being torn apart by law, religion stands outside law for the most part. Without a context in which law can function, it is a farce and resolves issues by brute force."<sup>3</sup>

The present chapter features two conversations with Lakota elders on the traditional foundations of Lakota sovereignty. We chose the interview format to acknowledge the importance and culturally appropriate protocol of oral communication in traditional contexts to assert truth, teach values, and share view points. This choice, an evocation of intellectual sovereignty in dialogue with Euro-American scholarship, is one of several models to work against discursive displacement strategies. As the discipline of the humanities transforms itself to become multi-perspectival and inclusive, academic discourse by necessity is broadened to include a wealth of meta-academic discursive styles.<sup>4</sup> Both Lakota contributors to this chapter grew up as fluent Lakota speakers, learned English as a second language while removed from their families, and have taught Lakota language classes.<sup>5</sup> Harry Charger (Sans Arc Lakota) works as a ceremonial leader, cultural educator, and wisdom keeper in Eagle Butte, South Dakota. Ione V. Quigley (Sicangu Lakota) is the chair person of the Department of Lakota Studies at Sinte Gleska University in Mission, South Dakota. Trained as an anthropologist, she teaches numerous courses on Lakota history, geography, biology, and culture, and is actively involved in revitalizing Lakota governmental structures through her participation in the process of rewriting the Sicangu Oyate (Sicangu Nation) constitution and by-laws. Both elders stress the meaning of sovereignty not as an abstract concept, but as a lived reality expressed through distinct values, spirituality, and behaviors. It is manifest in an education for personal independence and a sense of communal responsibility capable of supporting the well-being of the Lakota nation. The participants underscore the contributions of Lakota women in the struggle for sovereignty, and address contemporary themes such as the historic role of AIM

(American Indian Movement), efforts to move towards a model of restorative justice, and spiritual and environmental revitalization.<sup>6</sup>

SOVEREIGNTY IS OUR THOUGHTS, OUR WORDS,  
OUR CEREMONIES: A CONVERSATION WITH HARRY CHARGER

UW: How would you like to begin?

HC: This is about sovereignty. You know, to a lot of Lakota, it is something that is kind of strange to us because we are already sovereign. If you want to use the word sovereign... it is god given: it is our thoughts, our words, our ceremonies. Everything is free. We did not feel that we had to satisfy anybody when we were sovereign. We were just a very strong, balanced, harmonized people. Then of course with the coming of the people that did not belong on this continent, or came to this continent from other countries, they brought something with them that was not sovereign in this sense, it wasn't even—they were tied to their religion, you know. So that wasn't sovereign in our understanding. They were tied to their language, which wasn't our definition of being sovereign. They were tied to their culture. That was not an expression of sovereignty either in that they did not recognize everybody as brother and sister. They did not recognize kinship obligations—they called each other John, Bill, Joe, and Bob, but they did not call each other Little Brother, Older Brother, Little Sister, Big Sister and Uncle, Grandfather, Grandmother, something like that, you know. There was a big gap we noticed right away—how they did away with their relationships, even in their families. They called their boys Joe, Bob, Bill, or sometimes they would call them son, but it seemed like it had a hollow ring to it, instead of recognizing a real son or a real grandson. The deeper meaning was not there. Oh, that's my grandson over there, or that's my son. As if he was just a piece of property or a thing, not very important. Our relationships to each other were very important. They were one of the bases of our culture, our freedom.

*The same contrast holds true for religion. Although the newcomers talked about the Great Spirit, which they called God, it did not sound real. They only went to church one day, one hour a week. That is how they tried to do everything, cram it all in at once. But when they got out of church, they were the same old people again, you know, showing the same old greed—how to cheat your neighbor, how to nibble at your neighbor so you can get some money or some material gain out of it. Well, we were not like that. When we came out of a ceremony, we were at peace. We felt deeply, deeply conscious of our re-*

lationship to one another, but also to the Great Spirit. And we had to do that and be that way, because we knew, too, that we were not anything, we were nothing.

Without spirituality, there is no sovereignty. To us, sovereignty exists in spirituality. And spirituality is an expression of sovereignty, a god-given innate freedom, that feeling that you have that hey, I am a part of things, I am a part of something – but still a part of something, instead of wanting to be all of it. We pray as we do, being part of something. We were satisfied with that, you know.

So sovereignty to us is not a form of government, but yet it expresses itself in a form of government. When you are free, you can freely interact with your neighbors, freely, for real, instead of having to reenact shallow rules. For example, I know that this is an expression of respect, but people will see the governor or the president, and they fall all over themselves. It is truly happening, but it is not real. These men and women do not know that governor, that president that much. I don't. I have heard of him, but I don't know him that much. Whereas all of my relatives, my uncle, my dad, my relatives, my brothers, my cousins—I take time to talk to them. You know that we are genuinely—I don't know if you can see that or not, but we are genuinely glad to see one another. If we weren't cowboys, we'd probably cry [chuckles]. So anyway, I am just touching very briefly, very lightly on what sovereignty means to me.

And sovereignty is something you have to not just talk about, or read about, or write about, but you have to live it. And that is one of the big aspects of it, you have to live it. And if you don't, then you have got something else. You have another kind of control, or government, and it is not good.

UW: What needs to be said to the next generation of Lakota?

HC: It would be a message of different meanings, or different points, because all of those things that we just talked about have to be strengthened and in some cases rediscovered. Take our ceremonies as an example. Whatever ceremony it is, it has to be rediscovered and it's a little bit difficult when you don't speak the language. So that brings up the point of language, which is all important. And before we get into that, we have to practice compassion. I mean full compassion, not just good acts or good deeds, and that kind of thing, but full god-given compassion—love, unrequited love for your fellow man and woman and all things god-given or god-created.

And then there is the respect for these things, these people, these relatives, and everything created. And related to it are responsibility and account-

ability. We have to be responsible for our self. This is me; I have to be responsible for my words, my actions, as they have to as well. This is what relationship, kinship, responsible interaction means. And accountability refers to my person as well. And if I am trying to hold myself to be responsible and accountable, then of course the other fellow should be expected to do the same. When they do that, we are all at the same level, we feel good, we do not feel fear of one another, we do not feel resentment. Rather, we feel comfortable in each other's presence, and we feel we are real; he is real; she is real. And I know that he or she is real, as real as we can get.

And it is no longer that way. We are just a little bit leery of one another, even relatives. So there is not much of that original sovereignty there. I do not know if it is really even the same word anymore, if we can apply it to that or not, but sovereignty to me is god-given freedom of equality. That is very important, equality, because I am equal to everybody, but no better and no worse. I feel that. And that is the message that I have to give to our young people, because we not only have to give it to them, we have to show them how.

We must show them how to be free, or it would be just that much more talk. So somehow we have to get up groups, maybe in school. Maybe the American Indian classes that they have in the schools nowadays could pick up on that, or American Indian Studies groups at universities. Instead of just teaching a block system type of Indian Studies, they should really get into it and do these things, if they really want to get the concept of sovereignty across. Otherwise it's just a stuffy old class.

Of course, young people were all important [in traditional Lakota society]. *Wakanheja*, children, means that 'sacred they, too, are', or, 'mysterious they, too, are' because of their innocence and inexperience. So everything belongs to them, or must belong to them. And as far as political maneuvering goes, it existed not in the western sense, if you will, or in the European sense of politics. Politics did exist, but only in kind of a fun way. My brother-in-law's a chief, so you know that I will make a play of getting away with mischief. In actuality, I am still just as subject to any of the rules and regulations. The mischief is a way to tease him and for him to tease me.

Governance is based on respect. Respect people, do not turn them one way or another, because that is disrespectful. You can tell them about some things, but let them make up their own mind. And I think that was where we differed in our definition of sovereignty: we had a choice. We had a choice to make our own decisions, good or bad, and we made them. And we were given

that respect, you know. And so I think that we did not practice "politics." We learned that when organized government came on the scene. And they divided our people to gain power. To be in power. To gain a vote. There was no voting back in those days when we were free. There was mutual consent as to who was going to be the thinker of thinkers, the *naca*, the chief, for example. And he was chosen because of his compassion, respect, responsibility, and accountability. He had to live those values, you see. And he was chosen on those merits.

And then of course there are derivatives. Compassion means to be able to share things, and never expect anything in return. And the people depended on him so much that when they made him a *naca*, then for four days there was grieving because they had done him a terrible injustice. He was no longer his own man. He belonged to the people, everything that he is, and owned, and knew belonged to the people, forever. It was not just a four-year term, a five year term, but forever. And they were men who could make these decisions for the people. But it goes back further than that even. From the time that he was born until the time that he died, there were rules to follow in each corner of his life as in the four different directions. Each corner had 111 rules of behavior. So in all there were 444 rules of behavior for how the individual ought to behave toward god's creations. And if that person lives accordingly, he is then noticed by the elders and by the people, who say, hey this guy might be worthy of being a *naca*. And so if that's politics, we knew it was superior to what was brought over here.

UW: I am interested in women's roles.

HC: The women, let me see now, who are they? [laughs] No, the women are very important. They were not possessions, certainly; they were partners; they were a part of everything; they were equal. Yet they did not have the masculine kind of voice, but they had the feminine voice. Because the Lakota were very aware of that—the male and female energy, and that one cannot do without the other. They have to complement one another, in a family circle, in decisions as a camp, decisions that affect teaching, many decisions. Although there are some decisions that are made by men only, for example, when to go to war or when to go on a raiding party, or on the hunt. But the women accompanied them on these journeys for other purposes, to tend to them or to do the butchery. Yet they did not do it alone, but the men helped. In the hunt the men killed a buffalo, and they helped with the butchery, but the women did the refined work, if you will. They decided who would get what—if a hunter killed four buffalo, for example, each woman would think of the wel-

fare cases back home, the elderly, the young, the orphan, and they would set aside, this one here, and this and this, for those in need. In other words, it was kind of a welfare system, to take care of those people. And the women would decide this hide here will make a teepee for old stick-in-the-mud, or whoever he is, you know, an old guy who is not able to hunt anymore. And he might even be a relative. So we would put these hides aside and prepare them for him and make him a teepee, so he can take care of his grandchildren or himself or even other villagers. It took a whole camp to raise youngsters. It was not just one family, although you knew which family you belonged to. If you happened to be at a certain family's camp during the night, then you slept there, but everyone knew it was normal. It took the whole camp to raise youngsters. And this was how our sense of extended family responsibility came about. Everybody cared for everybody else.

And all of these kids listened, and they learned from this uncle, that uncle, and all of the relatives. What was happening then was that each youngster would have several doctors, several masters, several professors, teachers, and so on. They did not have a degree and did not want one. They passed on what they knew to this child. And then as they got older, these young people got older, the old ones passed away, and they in turn passed it on. There was a continuance of knowledge that was shared, which was very good. There was no need for books. They did not have to put their knowledge in books. They taught everything in tellings, in words, and in songs. The women played a big part in this; they passed on many of the finer points of camp life, of personal life, interactive knowledge, stories, all that was the women's job to do in addition to keeping and holding the family together. So they were very important; they were partners; they were not possessions, like in some societies, but they were equal partners. And then of course like everyplace else, there were abusers. But they were dealt with by the laws of the Lakota. They were banished.

UW: Or killed.

HC: Or killed. If somebody mistreated my sister badly, or even struck her or cut her, it was my right to stand up for her and to kill the abuser. The camp was not going to say anything. It happened on occasion, but rarely, because of our belief in compassion. You first went to talk to him and ask him to leave; if he resisted, then you took other measures.

Of course, compassion, respect, responsibility, and accountability are just human characteristics or attributes. They govern any human being, or should, but some human beings choose not to. The reason lies in their upbringing, ge-

ography maybe, culture, religion, government maybe, and education. All of these might have steered them away, and were replaced by negative things. The most important are greed, anger, and guilt. Why do you think in some parts of the world, especially here in South Dakota, do white men hate us? Now why is that? Is that because of guilt? Is that because of greed? That hatred, that stupidity, that ire against the Lakota still exists among these people. And I often wonder is that because they feel guilty? Because this land for which they have a piece of paper saying it's theirs is not theirs? Do they know that intuitively? The land that was given to the white people on our reservation has been declared "surplus" by a foreign government, the United States government, and given to their citizens.<sup>7</sup> That is a crime against humanity, against the treaties that were written. Is this what European Americans feel? What is it? We are the only nation in the world where a foreign government says, hey, your land is surplus. We will give it to our own people—in our own country. It is for the Lakota to determine what constitutes "surplus land" because it is our land. European Americans came into our land uninvited. The language of the treaty stipulates only three white people on any reservation, especially on the Cheyenne River Reservation. This includes a superintendent, the chief clerk, and a member of the clergy. And a clergy member is to only teach the English language. The treaty did not say to educate the Lakota, it did not say to convert the Lakota. We already had our educational and religious resources in place, and we already had our Black Hills, which is rich in mineral resources. You name it, and it was there. Our land was our storehouse and they stole it. And it's still stolen. The Black Hills are still stolen now.<sup>8</sup> No matter how long, no matter who has title to it, the title belongs by law to the Lakota.

UW: Can there be sovereignty without the land?

HC: Can you grow without your mother? It would be very hard. But with land and spirituality, not either one or the other, it takes those two main ingredients, big ingredients. I should say, spirituality and *uncí maka*, Mother Earth. Land, like you use the word, is a possession type of thing, but we look at it as Mother Earth, *uncí maka*. And the great essence, you know, is spirituality. And without those two, it would be pretty hard, almost impossible. Without those two it would be hard, hard to have sovereignty because I think people would be suffering for a lack of those two. In fact, we are lost when we kick spirituality aside and only take it up one hour a week. It would be awfully hard. When we tear up Mother Earth, that's like hurting your mother, you take knives and tear her open. It's what we're doing today to Mother Earth. You do that too many times to your Mother and she will die. This is what Mother Earth is beginning

to feel—the destructiveness that we are imposing upon her. The air is getting bad, the water is not very good anymore. The land is not very good anymore. The animals are not very good anymore. The people are not very good anymore. The plants are not very good anymore. The fliers, the crawlers, the borers are not very good anymore. They are losing their strength. And when you come to that point, it brings you up against a whole new chapter of history which, if you are without spirituality, you are not going to believe.

- UW: Today, over sixty-five percent of American Indians live in cities and not in the countryside.<sup>9</sup>
- HC: Well, when they live in cities, they went perhaps out of necessity, or perhaps to get a job and make a living for their families. So necessity might be a part of being in a city. The other part is perhaps due to some kind of attraction that city life might hold for them. Some might be there because of a loss of identity, but some made a free choice to go there, to live there. And of course the sovereignty is not taken away from them, the innate sovereignty, the god-given sovereignty that they have within them. Collectively, if they try to form something, perhaps they can arrive at some peace. But it is hard in the city. I have had a brother in a city—I have even lived in big cities myself for a while. I have lived in Cleveland, Ohio, I have lived in Indianapolis, Terre Haute, Indiana, Portland, Oregon. I lived in Austin, Texas, different places. When you get in that hectic mainstream, it is hard to maintain any sort of spirituality, because you are going for a fast ride. And it is just almost impossible for spirituality to emerge out of that. You got to slow down and there is no time for that in the big city. I have heard people say that so many times when they come to South Dakota. All of a sudden, an old guy says, “[sighs] I feel so good, what is it about this place here?” I respond, “nothing.” It is slower, a slower place. The clock is not king anymore. It is, but not controlling every second of your life, you know. So if the Indians in the big cities, those urbans, if they would slow down ... I think that’s why a lot of them come back to the rez for a few days to catch their breath [chuckles], but then they go right back into that. Because there is something there that attracts them, I don’t know what it is, but a lifestyle that they see or live there attracts them. They have to go back to it. But they come back every now and then to strengthen themselves.
- UW: AIM activism began in the city. What is your view of its legacy in support of sovereignty?
- HC: Of course, Wounded Knee number two in the 70s did one thing. It drew attention to the plight. It showed the world that all was not a bed of roses for the



American Indian here in America. We were forgotten, we were abused, we were all of these things. There again, because of guilt, I don't know what it is, but there was hatred for us. So then the movement started to retaliate, maybe avenge. And of course the beginning of it was perhaps to come back to the rez and learn whatever you need to know, perhaps. And I think maybe most of all spirituality, because they did not know anything about spirituality. But like their Caucasian brothers, they just wanted it in a lump sum. They did not care to be patient, there was not much respect there because they did not take the time to learn the language. So then they cut across a lot of these things I spoke of earlier. And then when you realize that this quick fix is not the real thing, you are going to get angry. You are getting mad at somebody, at yourself perhaps, at your brothers, for not knowing. And you know that what you are pursuing was real for a while to you, but then you found out that it was not all that real after all. The reason is that now, you are doing ceremonies, or whatever you will call it, in English.<sup>10</sup> It was not intended that way. This caused a lot of confusion back in those days and still does to this day. Pipes are a good example. People are saying that [ceremonial] pipes are for Indians only, Sun Dances are for Indians only. At one time, when there were only Indians on this continent, that might have been true. But now we got relatives who are half this and half that, and yet we are still blood relatives, you see. What does that indicate to me? It indicates that we are all relatives and that all things are intended to be shared. But it must be grounded in the Lakota language, in the Lakota life ways.

## LAKOTA STUDIES AS SOVEREIGNTY STUDIES:

### A CONVERSATION WITH IONE V. QUIGLEY

The vision of Lakota Studies at Sinte Gleska University embraces seven areas vital to the strengthening of Lakota sovereignty, thus following the definition of sovereignty as developed by the United Nations.<sup>11</sup> Of premier importance is an intimate knowledge of the homeland, *otiwota*, both as the place of birth and the home to which a human spirit returns after death. Language revitalization and preservation programs include the development of online courses, immersion language camps, and regular classes ranging from the introductory level to Lakota oratory. The Lakota Studies Department sponsors several major ceremonies throughout the year, including the "Welcoming Back the Thunders" ceremony at every spring equinox at Harney Peak in the Black Hills. Meals, meetings, and other gatherings are begun with a Lakota prayer. Leadership training across the university analyzes and encourages the practice of the traditional four Lakota values of bravery, *woohitika*, generosity, *wacantognaka*,

wisdom, *woksape*, and fortitude, *wowacintanka*. Lakota Studies classes are offered on the topic of tribal social systems with particular instruction in Lakota educational and family support systems, past and present. Sinte Gleska University has also become a leader in the economic development of tribal resources by offering courses and research in traditional tribal economic systems, economic values, and their relationship to the environment. A consistent effort is being made to apply traditional practices, principles, and insights to contemporary problems.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, Lakota Studies supports the development of tribal self-governance and self-determination by offering courses on traditional forms of Lakota government and the history of the IRA government, especially as it relates to the *Sicangu Oyate*, the Sicangu Nation. Lakota citizens are thus empowered to work toward positive changes in tribal self-governance. Non-Lakota students benefit from Lakota Studies by learning holistically about regional and national history in the midst of a vibrant Lakota educational environment that offers cultural and spiritual windows into the Lakota past, present, and future. In the following conversation, Ione Quigley presents her view of the relationship between the seven Lakota Studies themes and the issue of Lakota sovereignty for the *Sicangu Oyate*.

UW: How would you like to begin addressing the issue of sovereignty in the context of Lakota Studies at Sinte Gleska University?

IQ: I gave the issue of sovereignty a lot of thought. I have been looking at it from every angle that I could think of. Sovereignty is an issue that every one of us faces, no matter who we are or where we come from, no matter what background and history we have. We all face this. Even as we speak, the United States faces the issue of sovereignty. Are we a true sovereign nation? I have my own thoughts on that issue. But for now, I would like to focus on Lakota sovereignty and how we view it.

To understand sovereignty, we must start at the individual level. As individuals, we should ask, are we truly sovereign? Can we answer that question on an individual level and ask ourselves, am I happy? Do I have enough? Am I completely responsible for my own self, for my emotions, for my mental well-being, and for my physical well-being? Am I comfortable with my life, which is truly the time that I am to live on the land that I was born on? Am I truly living a sovereign life where I am my sole sovereign, and am I able to let others be sovereign in the same sense?

At one time, over one hundred years ago, we were a strong and sovereign nation. Each individual, each social unit, each band or nuclear family unit was

actually given the choices implicit in the questions posed above. So we look at sovereignty as actually having the freedom of choice.

I have also given thought to the counter or opposite of sovereignty. What is that? I have begun to think of the different ways in which you are not free to choose. On the opposite side of your right to choose we find oppression, which takes away the right to make choices.

UW: The Lakota Studies Program at Sinte Gleska University is rooted in a long struggle to regain sovereignty.

IQ: We actually started with a movement of our own right here. We started trying to find out what land and resources we actually have. Before we began our own search, all of that information was kept from us. All of that information was kept within United States government agencies. The government declared itself a guardian of us, the Lakota, a sovereign nation. Considering themselves a guardian of our land as well, they also took it upon themselves to have the land measured and surveyed and explored for its resources. The government decided who could have access to our land and who could come in and choose to do what they pleased. What is our land worth? Where are the borders of our land base? What resources do we really have here? This information has been made publicly available more and more. And there are certain Sinte Gleska programs and departments that are increasingly addressing these questions.

The United States guardianship took away a lot of our power as a sovereign nation. For the United States government, oppression of our nation and the sovereignty of the United States go hand in hand. It is important to understand that oppression takes away power as well as responsibilities. For example, consider our society and our culture. We had to think twice whether we should speak our language. Should we allow our children to speak the language or allow them to get beaten?<sup>13</sup> Today, these and other destructive aspects of United States government policies are coming out into the open.

The greatest of oppression we faced, however, was the destruction of gaining our livelihood and the food, when they took that away. The threat of starvation puts people into a vise. You have them where you want them. That was only the starting point, however. The people were suffering, and then they were given this medicine that was going to make them feel better. That's when they introduced *mni wakan*, the sacred water. It is said that in the beginning, only the men of our people drank. Yet like any kind of disease that spreads, drinking spread to everybody. This particular tool, alcohol, was probably the strongest weapon that the government had.<sup>14</sup>

Another tool that it used against us was education. The United States imposed a completely new language upon us. It imposed a completely new system of education upon us. Yet we already had a fully functioning system of education. Our mothers, grandmothers and grandfathers, they were our educators. All of a sudden, a completely different system was forced on us. Instead of family members, strangers educate us. The Western system is impersonal and hierarchical. You get children into a classroom and tell them that this is the way it is. Our family-based system of education was different. We were taught lessons through life experiences, and then we were given the choice to interpret, explore, and apply our lessons. In the rigid education system that we have now, we are learning abstractly. We are given only one version of the way things are, even when it comes to history. This is what happened, and we were never really given any other option.

UW: The Lakota encountered Western education first in religious schools.

IQ: The education that was imposed on us was rigid and impersonal. From there we move on to the question of spirituality. We have had the Catholic Church and the Episcopal Church, but the major church coming in was the Catholic Church.<sup>15</sup> Personally speaking, I have always thought that Catholicism is not a system of teaching about the good things in life. And these are the important matters. Life is to be loved and appreciated. Life is to be lived. You know, these are the rules to live by. That was always my ideal. Lakota spirituality teaches that through living life fully, you will have many experiences. All of these experiences are your own immersion into the process of creation. In contrast, in Catholicism you look for external attributes and symbols that everybody recognizes. We still look for those attributes and confuse them with spiritual values. For example, consider the belief that you are not a good person until you have a good job, a nice home, beautiful children—the ideal family, the ideal Mr. and Mrs. Jones if you like. The Lakota people say no to this view. Enjoy life, live life—even if society is concerned with materialism.

Our social systems at one time worked in harmony with our spirituality. We lived in a kinship system in which relatives were never addressed by their name. When you address a person through our kinship terms, the person knows her responsibilities and how she will be taken care of by her relatives. I never quit using kinship terms. I still say to my children, “tell your grandfather, go visit your grandmother.” In the past, we lived our lives with each other in camps where we were able to take care of each other. Now we have to cope with another culture’s social system. I am forced to drive across town

to where my mother lives, and she has to live by herself. We have been living with this foreign system for the past one hundred years, adjusting to a program of education and values that the United States government has forced on us. What does that do to the spirit, what does that do to the family?

When you have relatives, you will always have care, you will always have that. Our social systems are still intact in that we care for each other. So we do have a course on the kinship system here at Sinte Gleska's Lakota Studies. It's called *LS 221: Lakota Social Systems*. The instructors have done a wonderful job of having everybody learn and appreciate what behaviors are appropriate for each kinship role and how to fully participate in the family unit and beyond. This knowledge allows our children to feel that they belong and that they are an important part of the family. It is one of several cultural projects we have created. It is exciting to be a part of it all, because it is going to be a good thing for the people. Kinship ways were so natural and they are still meaningful today.

When the *canupa* (sacred pipe) was brought to us by White Buffalo Calf Woman, the pipe came with responsibilities. The goal was to live in peace with all people.<sup>16</sup> You know there are always stories within the families, within the kinship that you know and belong to. Where language is concerned, at one time, our language was such that it carried the larger cultural, social, and spiritual meaning in all these specific kinship terms. At the time of the worst oppression of our culture, our language came to almost a standstill. And because of that we have had to work hard on not only teaching the language, but on the meaning behind the words. This affects all that we face in trying to revitalize our culture. So we actually have multiple bumps.

In the Lakota system, kinship relations are deeply connected to economic survival and well-being as well.<sup>17</sup> The United States government tried to destroy this link as well. If you are allowed welfare benefits, for example, it amounts to yet another form of oppression. We have a lot of lost people out there because of state welfare. If you are on welfare, it can quickly happen that a social worker looks into whether a child needs to be placed outside of her biological family. The child grows up without learning who she is in the larger kinship system and what it means to be Lakota.

Take another example, the Native American Graves Repatriation Act.<sup>18</sup> It allows us to bring home our relatives, our ancestors. The flip side of that is that it is only applied to federal travel, and not regionally. That restriction actually helps keep us oppressed. True sovereignty will not come about until we can educate and unite the Lakota who live here.

UW: To accomplish all of this takes a strong group effort.

IQ: We actually have a group of women who have begun all of this, one of the best things that could have happened to us.<sup>19</sup> It was a group of women that finally stood up and said, "we want positive change for ourselves and for our children." The women actually went about to start the change by gathering information. They started a movement within the tribe. They are also one of several groups that I have been working with in writing our constitution. During our work on the constitution, we have accepted several proposed amendments. With all of the decisions we make, we have to remember that we are not making them for ourselves. For example, we are working to set up our own judicial system. You know, having the understanding that "this is wrong, let's fix it," not, "this is wrong, let's put him away for two years and let him think about it." Rather, "this is wrong, let's fix it, right here." At the university, Marlise Whitehat leads a movement called "Restorative Justice."<sup>20</sup> We had a judge who made all the decisions without allowing us to apply our own justice system. He said, in top-down fashion and without knowing the community, "ok you're wrong and you're not and you're the one that needs to go sit in jail." It is another form of oppression to not be allowed to fully deal with legal issues through our own justice system. I think we need to work with a model to allow everybody involved to resolve the crime and to give everybody a sense that this is what needs to be done. This is where the government courts fail. It has brought a lot of grief, a lot of anger. And it is just another example of denying sovereignty to the Lakota.

I truly believe that we can be economically sovereign. When people do not have something they need, it constitutes an imbalance. It is in the nature of things that are unbalanced that they attract that which will bring back balance. That is possible for economic sovereignty as well. What we need to do is take an inventory of what we have here on the reservation and say, "okay, this is what we each have. Now what do the tribes in Montana have, what do the tribes in Arizona have?" We practiced a bartering system in the past that worked. Many archaeologists have said that our area was a trade center. A bartering system can be brought back today. It is happening for our language, our justice system, and our kinship system.

## CONCLUSION

In her study of the origins of the Lakota Nation, Ione Quigley writes that Lakota oral traditions point to the emergence of the Lakota during the Pleistocene Period about

20,000 to 40,000 years ago. An ice age bison kill in Colorado from about 13,000 years ago suggests strong similarities with a Lakota buffalo hunt/kill site in the 1600s, thus suggesting ancestral links.<sup>21</sup> At the other end of the historical spectrum, efforts are being made to heal the trauma of boarding schools,<sup>22</sup> relocation, and other forms of colonial oppression through culturally appropriate means that center on the reappearance of *Pte Oyate*, the buffalo nation, traditional ceremonies, and other cultural and economic activities.<sup>23</sup>

Both Lakota elders affirm the viability of their traditions in shaping the necessary conditions for a full exercise of sovereignty now and in the future. Both work with the knowledge that the process will not be a "quick fix," that it will take the patient labor of many to heal and revitalize legal systems in tandem with cultural, economic, and spiritual systems. The fact that the State of South Dakota has made one significant step toward supporting the efforts of tribal colleges such as Sinte Gleska University and the teachings and ceremonial work of elders such as Harry Charger render their conversations timely and relevant to their students, their communities, and other tribal nations.

## NOTES

The notes are intended to guide the reader to further information on the subjects discussed in the chapter.

<sup>1</sup> "Public schools in South Dakota to include American Indian education" posted March 19, 2007 by David Melmer, *Indian Country Today* Web site. "PIERRE, S.D.—Students in South Dakota will hear different approaches to the state's history in the next school year: [T]hey will be exposed to American Indian culture and the language of the Lakota. Much like Montana, which has implemented an Indian Education for All program, South Dakota will attempt to bridge educational achievement gaps between American Indian and non-Indian students, lower dropout rates, and bring about a better understanding of the cultures. Gov. Mike Rounds has signed a bill into law that will include curriculum changes that will teach about American Indian culture and language, and require teachers to upgrade their skills with American Indian studies courses. The new law also officially creates the office of American Indian Education."

<sup>2</sup> For an introduction to the many cultural strategies to undermine Indigenous sovereignty in European-American contexts, especially in the academy, see Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, *Anti-Indianism in Modern America: A Voice from Tatekeya's Earth* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2001). On the impact of boarding schools, see Debra K. S. Barker, "Kill the Indian, Save the Child: Cultural Genocide and the Boarding School," in *American Indian Studies: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Contemporary Issues*, edited by Dane Morrison (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 47–69.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Biolsi, "Bringing the Law Back in: Legal Rights and the Regulation of Indian-White Relations on Rosebud Reservation," *Current Anthropology* 36.4 (August-October 1995): 543–71, quotation p. 561.

- 4 For an academic analysis of the inherent tensions involved in negotiating a relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous discursive practices, see Chadwick Allen, *Blood Narrative. Indigenous Identity in American Indian and Maori Literary and Activist Texts* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), and Thomas W. Cooper, *A Time before Deception: Truth in Communication, Culture, and Ethics* (Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers, 1998).
- 5 On the resurgence of oral knowledge and traditions in American Indian Studies, see Donald L. Fixico, *The American Indian Mind in a Linear World: American Indian Studies and Traditional Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 2003), especially chapter two, "Oral Tradition and Traditional Knowledge," 21–41.
- 6 For background information on Lakota women, see, for example, Marla N. Powers, *Oglala Women: Myth, Ritual, and Reality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986) and Mark St. Pierre and Tilda Long Soldier, *Walking in the Sacred Manner: Medicine Women of the Plains Indians* (New York: Touchstone, 1995); on AIM, see Joane Nagel, *American Indian Ethnic Renewal: Red Power and the Resurgence of Identity and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); on Lakota history and political structures, see *Unit Three: Makoce*, and *Unit Five: Itancan, Curriculum Materials Resource Units*, designed by Vivian One Feather, Oglala Sioux Culture Center, Red Cloud Indian School, Inc., Pine Ridge, South Dakota, 1972–1974.
- 7 For a survey on the constitutional foundations of the relationship between United States Federal Government and Tribal Nations, see Vine Deloria Jr. and David E. Wilkins, *Tribes, Treaties, and Constitutional Tribulations* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999).
- 8 See Edward Lazarus, *Black Hills, White Justice: the Sioux Nation Versus the United States, 1775 to the Present* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991).
- 9 See Susan Lobo and Kurt M. Peters, *American Indians and the Urban Experience* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press), 2001. On the multiple dimensions of exile for American Indians, see Vine Deloria, Jr., "Out of Chaos," in D. M. Dooling and Paul Jordan-Smith, *I Become Part of It: Sacred Dimensions on Native American Life* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1989), 259–70.
- 10 On Lakota vocabulary used in ceremony, see William K. Powers, *Sacred Language: The Nature of Supernatural Discourse in Lakota* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986).
- 11 Thanks to several global initiatives, including efforts by the United Nations, the concept of a "Fourth World" of Indigenous Peoples is steadily gaining momentum. For an overview, see Jeffrey Sissons, *First Peoples: Indigenous Cultures and Their Futures* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005).
- 12 For an example of the culturally appropriate integration of all these elements, see Ronal *Lakota Star Knowledge: Studies in Lakota Stellar Theology* (Mission, SD: Sinte Gleska Universi
- 13 The scholarship on the vital link between Indigenous languages and environmental health is steadily growing, thus supporting Sinte Gleska's holistic vision. See, for example, Nettle and Suzanne Romaine, *Vanishing Voices: The Extinction of the World's Languages* (Oxford: University Press, 2000).
- 14 Indigenous Sobriety and Wellness Programs are spreading; for an academic contextualized generational trauma and culturally appropriate healing, see Eduardo Duran and Bonnie *Native American Postcolonial Psychology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).
- 15 On the cultural and theological dynamics of missionary activity among First Nations, see Tinker, *Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide* (Minneapolis: University Press, 1993).
- 16 See D. M. Dooling and Paul Jordan-Smith, "White Buffalo Woman," in *I Become Part of It: Sacred Dimensions on Native American Life*, edited by D. M. Dooling and Paul Jordan-Smith



- HarperSanFrancisco, 1989), 204–6, and James R. Walker, *Lakota Belief and Ritual*, edited by Raymond DeMallie and Elaine A. Jahner (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980, 1991), 109–12.
- 17 See Dean Howard Smith, *Modern Tribal Development: Paths to Self-Sufficiency and Cultural Integrity in Indian Country* (Lanham, MD: Altamira Press, 2000) for a succinct and optimistic model of integrating culture and economic development.
- 18 See Winona LaDuke, “Quilled Cradleboard Covers, Cultural Patrimony, and Wounded Knee,” in *Recovering the Sacred. The Power of Naming and Claiming*, edited by Winona LaDuke (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2005), 87–113.
- 19 For further discussion of women’s contributions to the reclamation of full sovereignty, see Andrea Smith, “Native American Feminism, Sovereignty, and Social Change,” *Feminist Studies* 31.1 (Spring 2005): 116–32.
- 20 The concept of restorative justice is gaining global momentum in and beyond Indigenous communities. See Elizabeth Elliott, Robert M. Gordon, eds., *New Directions in Restorative Justice: Issues, Practice, Evaluation* (Portland, OR: Willan, 2005). For a Canadian First Nations comparison, see Wayne Warry, *Unfinished Dreams: Community Healing and the Reality of Aboriginal Self-Government* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), chapter five, “Restoring Justice: Conflict with the Law,” 163–205. Warry concludes that at least for the Canadian context, “the idea that alternative justice programs can serve as a locus for community healing and development is greatly underestimated by non-Native policy-makers who continue to compartmentalize law” (p. 202).
- 21 Ione V. Quigley, “An Evaluation of True Sovereignty of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe,” unpublished paper, n.p.
- 22 Sharon Waxman, “Sioux Allege Abuse at Church Boarding Schools,” *Washington Post*, June 2, 2003, <<http://www.rickross.com/reference/ckergy/clergy164.html>> (accessed October 18, 2004).
- 23 See Winona LaDuke, “Buffalo Nations, Buffalo People,” in *All Our Relations. Native Struggles for Land and Life* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1999), 139–67.

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