

Our Struggle, My Dream

Today I walk in the path of hardship. Many of our youth have forgotten who we are, while some choose not to remember. Assimilation seems more powerful than our own traditional medicine. When I look around me, at the oppressed land that was left to us, I can hear my ancestors cry. Then I look toward the north where our sacred Black Hills lay desecrated in every way. In our hearts and deep in the United States government's guilt, the Black Hills still belong to the Lakota people. This is our struggle.

The Black Hills are the heart of the Lakota people. The area itself includes many sacred sites. It is where our people went for ceremonies, vision quests, meditation, gatherings, sun dances, and prayer. Religion is still practiced in the Black Hills but permission from "land owners" must be granted, entrance fees must be paid.

A Lakota legend recounts that it was the birth place of the Lakota nation. It was told that the people climbed out of what is known as Wind Cave, now a tourist attraction near Hot Springs, South Dakota. This is one of the creation stories that some people believe.

In 1868, a treaty was signed at Fort Laramie, between the leaders of the Lakota and the United States government, promising the Black Hills to us "as long as the grass grows and the river flows." Non-Indians were never

to touch the land. Up until that point the United States government had taken away almost all the land the Lakota people had. Its greed was not fed then.

In 1874, General Custer and his cavalry illegally trespassed into the Black Hills in what became known as the "Custer Expedition." They discovered gold in the Black Hills. This started a gold rush where White settlers mined the Black Hills and claimed property. Small towns were created throughout the hills. This violated the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty, but nothing was done to stop it. Instead, more and more land was restricted to the Lakota until the reservations are what they are today. In 1875, an offer of 1.7 million dollars for the Black Hills to become the legal property of the U.S. was made to the Lakota Nation and was refused. Through our history it has been a struggle to keep the land, where some corrupt leaders almost sold the Black Hills, while many had fought to return them. No real progress has been made to reclaiming them. The Black Hills are not for sale, and hopefully they will never be.

Today the Black Hills are a popular tourist attraction. Millions of people a year come to see Mt. Rushmore, a facial tribute to four presidents, whom each had their own share of Native American hate. Their faces carved into the side of a mountain. People also come to see Deadwood, a miniature Las Vegas, and one of the first settled towns in the Black Hills. Trillions of

dollars are made off of our land, and yet my people live in poverty. Now Uranium is the greatest resource of the Black Hills. This sacred land is still beautiful, despite the desecration, defacing and continuous mining. The occupants of today, as before, will not let go of the land until they have sucked out every valuable resource, and make it a barren wasteland.

On my reservation, ninety miles south of the Black Hills, the people live deprived of a real future. The unemployment rate stays at eighty percent. There is a shortage of housing and in many cases several families are crammed into one shabby house or trailer. Alcohol and drugs are more common than the people smiling. The Indian Health Service clinics and our only hospital are understaffed and inadequately supplied. The life expectancy rate is thirty-five years old. We are in a deep hole of debt, mainly from embezzlement and corrupted government. To this day, it hasn't improved.

My goal, my hope, and my dream is to relinquish the Black Hills from it's occupants and give it back to my people as it should be. By doing this, it would greatly help to put an end to the poverty that has inflicted my people since the beginning of "civilization." I am working hard to receive the best education, I can receive. For my post secondary education, I want to attend the University of California, Los Angeles. After the required four years college, I will attend the law school there and become a lawyer, then a

politician. I will continue the fight to reclaim what is rightfully my people's land, and to relieve the oppression and hopelessness my tribe has suffered for so long. This is my struggle that I hope will end in success.

Reference:

Lakota Archives.com

<http://www.lakotaarchives.com/lakland.html>

Archives of the West

<http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/resources/archives/four/ftlaram.htm>

Cankú Lúta (Red Road, Inc.)

http://www.canku-luta.org/PineRidge/laramie_treaty.html

Hanksville.org

<http://www.hanksville.org/daniel/timeline2.html>

Wasi'chu: The Continuing Indian Wars

By Bruce Johansen and Robert Maestas