

Through the Eyes of an Indian Looking In

Barbara Little Whiteman

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. Consider the following vocabulary words and phrases: corruption, nepotism, “in-crowd,” and “goes out the window.”
2. Share what you know or have experienced regarding corrupt politicians. What can we do to fight corruption in government?

Introduction

Growing up on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, I can say that our lives are as hard as any of the poorest communities in America.

My name is Barbara Little Whiteman, and I am a strong Lakota woman. I am Hunkpapa and Oglala Lakota Sioux. As a young girl, I enjoyed the teachings of “the old ways” passed down by my grandmother. She taught me the traditional dances. She guided me into womanhood. I especially loved the stories of how our tribes lived before we were forced to be “civilized.” There is not much difference between Hunkpapa and Oglala, just the dialect. We have similar prayers and teachings. But today we are at risk of losing our traditions because the politicians who govern how we use our resources are not protecting our Native ways.

Now: Corruption and Greed

The political system on our reservation is similar to the political system of the U.S. It is filled with corruption and greed, and it is heavy with nepotism. On the reservation, you need to be part of the “in crowd” to hold any position of power. Our tribe has a president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, and a fifth member. When they are running for office, they talk about all they will do. Once they are in office, all that talk goes out the

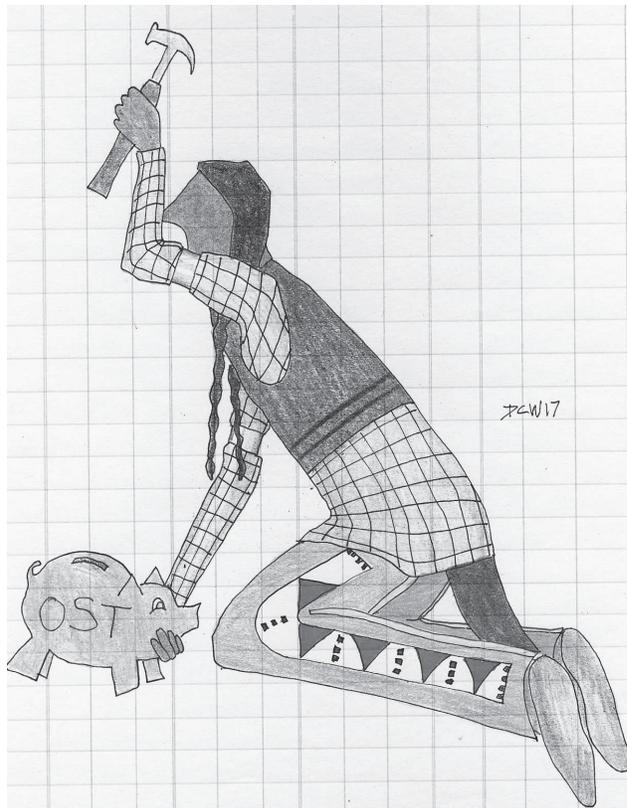


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window, and they use their elected position to better themselves and their family members.

Then: No One Left Out

The Hunkpapa and Oglala have a tradition that no one should be left out. But this tradition has disappeared. Long ago, one tribe never made any decisions that would affect the plains as a whole. The seven plains tribes known as *Oceti Sakowin*



Red Cloud, Chief of the Oglala Sioux from 1869-1909.

(Seven Campfires) would gather during the summer. The chiefs of each tribe would meet until they agreed about what would benefit the tribes as a whole. For example, they would decide when to conduct one large buffalo hunt, which would provide food for all seven tribes. No one was ever

left out. There was plenty for everyone.

Another sacred tradition was the Sundance. We used it to offer sacrifices of body, mind, and soul. Only men participated in the Sundance. They danced until they literally fell down. Then the women would come and bring juice from berries and buffalo meat for every man that was dancing. According to our tradition, there was a spirit on the other side, dancing along with him. The Sundance gave us a sacred way to maintain the connection between the living and the dead.

Prayer was a central part of every day. We prayed and gave thanks for the buffalo, whose meat gave us food and whose skin gave us clothing. We prayed to Mother Earth for the plant life, which offered food and medicine, and for trees, which gave wood so we could build our homes. The sweat is how we prayed daily and gave body sacrifice, so *Tunkasila** could hear what the soul speaks. Through these traditions, the *Oceti Sakowin* grew stronger.

Bringing Back Traditions

I grew up in a home where we spoke Lakota. We prayed, and we learned the teachings of Sundances and sweats. Back then, everyone wanted to be

** Tunkasila (also known as Wakan Tanka) is the Creator or the Great Spirit or the Great Mystery Spirit.*

involved. Our people were once a proud, strong, and independent people. Here in our community we have a few men and women who are stepping into the role of “elder” and working towards making a change. More young people are participating in our traditions. With more community involvement, we can fight the corruption in our political system, and we can make our society better.



Barbara Little Whiteman grew up on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. She is 32 years old with one daughter and one on the way. She has been happily married for six years. She is in the Adult Education program at American Horse School in Allen, South Dakota, and is currently getting her GED at the Oglala Lakota College.

Take It Further

Describe what is going on in the illustration on the previous page. (Note: OST stands for Oglala Sioux Tribe.)

According to the author, what is a key way to fight corruption in the political system? And what “old ways” are examples of this?

Make a connection to your life. How would increased community involvement make a difference in your life?

Look up Chief Red Cloud. Share his story and some of his quotes. What do you learn about U.S. history from the perspective of Chief Red Cloud?