Lakot Woman Essay, Research Paper

In the book Lakota Woman, Mary Crow Dog writes of the many struggles that she faced in everyday life as an American Indian woman. The Lack of running water or electricity, the poverty and oppression found on and around the Indian reservation, are just a few examples of the problems that she had to deal with on a continuing basis. She describes in detail the violence and hopelessness that her people encountered at the hands of the white man as well as the “hang around the fort Indians”. Mary Crow Dog tells of horrors she had to endure while attending the missionary school and of facing the discrimination found outside the reservation. Growing up, one of the hardest trials faced by Mary Crow Dog was not only that of being a Native American but of being a female in a world predominately dominated by Caucasian men.

Since the white man came to “America” he has done nothing but take and take and take. He has lied to the point where one cannot tell where one lie ends and another begins. The United States government signed more than four hundred treaties with Native Americans and managed to violate every single one. The white man systematically forced the American Indians unto reservations, where he/she was forced to live.

Life on the reservation was not easy. Families lived in small cabins sometimes consisting of only one room, which served as a kitchen, living room, dining room and bedroom. Children run around with no shoes most of the time. Much of the money that came into the home went into the stomachs of most in the form of Alcohol.

Alcohol was hemmed into the Native American culture by the white man sometime during the middle to late 1800’s. By the 1960’s, alcoholism had a firm grasp on the Native American. As a matter of fact, a family history of alcoholism in first and second-degree relatives is twice as common among American Indians and Alaska natives than any other ethnic background. In Lakota Woman, Mary Crow Dog devotes a portion of a few chapters to this subject. In one such chapter she states, “I started drinking because it was the natural way of life…I think I grew up with the idea that everybody was doing it…I started drinking when I was ten.” All of this is rather ironic when you consider the fact that liquor is forbidden on the reservation, and drinking it is illegal.

As if life on the reservation was not hard enough, there came a time in a child’s life when he/she was taken away from their families and sent to a boarding school. The Annual report of the Department of Interior, 1901 wrote:

“…Gathered from the cabin, the wickiup, and the tepee, partly by cajolery and partly by threats; partly by bribery and partly by force, they are induced to leave their kindred to enter these schools and take upon themselves the outward appearance of civilized life.”

These schools were filled with impersonality instead of the close human contact these children were used to. Mary Crow Dog attended the mission school at St. Francis, just as her Grandmother, mother and sisters did. In these boarding schools, the girls and boys are separated from one another. Beatings were commonplace, and sexual molestation from the priests was not unheard of, in fact these boarding schools were ran much like a penitentiary.

Racism both inside and outside of the reservation runs rampant. The Native Americans were thought of as savages. They were killed at the hands of soldiers. Turned into farmhands, laborers and such by the missionaries. The police turned away when an American Indian was in trouble, only to arrest him when the odds turned in his favor.

Being a Native American was not easy by any means, and being a Native American woman wasn’t any easier. The women have the added pressure of just being a female, which at times is hard enough even if you are white. Among the Native Americans, some men think that all a woman is good for is having sex with and watching the children. Some men would come home drunk and beat their wives. Mary Crow Dog’s best friend Annie Mae Aquash a young, strong-hearted woman was found dead in the snow with a .38 caliber slug in her head. A drunken man beat another woman, Mary Crow Dogs’ sister-in-law; she was left with a broken arm and leg to die in a blizzard. Women were sterilized against their will. Outside the reservation the white mans attitudes towards the American Indian woman only worsen. Remarks such as, “Look at the tits on that squaw. Watch her shaking her ass at us. I bet we could show that Injun squaw a good time,” was commonplace outside of the reservation.

Whether inside the reservation or outside of it, being an American Indian was and still isn’t easy. The life of a Native American is filled with poverty, oppression and violence (Usually at the hands of a white man.). The women have to deal with this and much more including harassment both physically and sexually. Even today, the white man cannot stay out of the affairs of the Native American Indian. The white man has elections as to see what exactly is right and wrong for the American Indian to do on his own land. It seams as though that the white man will never leave the Native people of this land to their own business. To this day he has tried to find ways of keeping control over what he should have no control of to begin with.