
Analysis of Chris Mcgreal's Article Myth Of Prosperity: The Lost Family Values of the Sioux Tribe

“Let us nurture the practice of family values, by embracing policies that value families”- Benjamin Jealous. Family is everything. It’s what molds a young soul entering this world and gives it perspective, morals, ethics, and a sense of responsibility and pride that you are in a family unit. Sadly when reading about the Oglala Sioux of South Dakota, it’s evidently clear what happens when a community lacks family structure, rapidly abuses alcohol, and receives little to no financial support from the government, turmoil. As I was reading Chris Mcgreal’s article, The Myth of Prosperity: Poverty among Native Americans, I was struck and in awe at my own privilege that has been bestowed upon me, and immediately filled with gratitude to be in the situation I am in. Being a Freshman at a financially well off, private University, I know that not everyone has the opportunity that I have been given. Especially in contrast to the teenagers of the Oglala Sioux tribe. In comparing my life to the experience of a modern Sioux teen, one major key difference between our upbringing is missing, family. Families are so broken in the Sioux tribe due to the horrible living conditions, that the youth feel they have no support, and in turn, have made headlines for a, “suicide state of emergency,” according to Sioux president, Theresa Two Bulls.

Two Bulls believes that the lack of Parental/Guardian support is killing these kids, “We must hug our children, we must tell them we love them. A lot of these youth do not get a hug a day. They are never told that they’re loved. We need to start being parents and grandparents to them.” Two Bulls recognizes that absence of familial structure is hurting the youth due to the loss of love and support that is not being given to these young children during times of stress and I agree ten-fold. Love is the answer, not fear, and the kids of Sioux need a better system to raise them in the society they were born into. This brings into question, why there is no parental or guardian support? What happened to the elders of Sioux that has caused the breakdown in parenting? A leading obstacle in the way of many Sioux parents or guardians, when it comes to maintaining any familial structure, is alcohol abuse.

Alcoholism is a major factor in the Sioux family being corrupted. Many of the parents and children abuse alcohol and it has sadly become a staple in the tribe that is killing the community. Delia Big Boy, a young Sioux girl, was at a breaking point when she put a rope around her neck and came within seconds of committing suicide, “It had a lot to do with my parents and alcohol abuse and what they say to you. The things they say make you think they don't love you.” I completely sympathize and support Delia as seeing and hearing what her parents were saying to her while abusing alcohol was very traumatic to her. No child should have to see their parents battle a crippling disease like alcoholism, it can be very disheartening to witness and harmful to the development of a young person. Alcoholism is only one bolt in the entire machine that is the current destruction of the Sioux family. Another huge factor is lack of financial stability. Limited finances can be incredibly toxic to a family; lack of food, electricity, clothes, health-care, and even shelter can be very troubling to a developing mind. Creating a sense of fear and scarcity that they think can never be won due to the system they’re in.

Large unemployment in a community can cause a feeling of hopelessness and anxiety because of the lack of faith in the future and not looking forward on what's to come. The Sioux tribe faces

all of these problems, Mcgreal stating, "Conditions on the reservation are tough. More than 80% unemployment. A desperate shortage of housing, on average, more than 15 people live in each home and others get by in cars and trailers. More than one third of homes are lacking running water or electricity. An infant mortality rate at three times the US national average. And a dependency on alcohol and a diet so poor that half the population over the age of 40 is diabetic." The statistics the author provides are sobering and unbelievable. The lack of wealth in the Sioux community has a dramatic impact. The scarcity of financial independence creates a ripple effect of negativity that is cast upon the entire community. Low income households, means choosing cheap unhealthy foods rather than the more expensive healthy alternative. Almost as if the government is trying to keep poor people unhealthy and uneducated, with little to no opportunities. Overall, financial stability is one of the most important aspects of caregiving. If you want to give your child the best life possible, with the most opportunities available, being financially secure gives you a much higher probability of doing so. Along with the many problems the Sioux tribe faces, it has been found that the tribe has fallen under the Myth of Prosperity, that is so prevalent throughout Native American history. Stereotypically, Americans view modern day Natives as wealthy casino owners, or living well off of the US government providing them with many benefits; such as subsidized housing, free healthcare and consistently receiving welfare checks. When in reality, tribes such as the Sioux, are the exact opposite.

Two Bulls believes this is all due to the the Sioux's treaties with the Us government in the second half of the 190th century. "The government wanted us to feel defeated and we played right in to their hands," says Two Bulls. "We were taught to feel defeated. Look how they brought welfare and our people lived on welfare and some of our people don't even know how to work. They're used to just staying home all day, watching TV and drinking and taking drugs. That's the state the government wanted us to be in and were in it. " I support what Two Bulls is saying by viewing the government casting Sioux in a sympathetic light, and giving them unlimited welfare checks, to sit around and not build the habitual practice of work, all while their local economy and school systems fall apart; is an absolute recipe for disaster. Instead I believe the US government should have supported small businesses in the Sioux Tribe and increased funding to their local school systems. This in turn, would have created a butterfly effect of productivity and upward momentum, that would have had a positive impact on the Sioux family structure and tribe as a whole.

Throughout the article I found little to no bias by the author. Instead I was treated to an informative piece, that highlighted the horrible and disheartening conditions the Sioux tribe is in. All in all I believe the Sioux Tribe is in good hands with president Theresa Two Bulls at the helm, but I think it will take many more decades of hard work and conscious growth of the people to get them out of the hole they're in. As long as they never give up I think they can make a full recovery to the original Great Sioux Nation that they were known to be.