



THE ENLIGHTEN  
FOUNDATION

**Rosebud Sioux Tribe and Reservation**  
*Phase I Report*

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*“Let us put our minds together and see what life we will make for our children.”*

- *Sitting Bull, Honored Chief of the Lakota Nation*<sup>1</sup>

**The Great Sioux Nation**

*Little Snake or Enemy*

The Rolling Plains of the Southwestern United States, and more specifically, the Sacred Black Hills of South Dakota, have been home to The Great Sioux Nation, also known as the Očhéthi Šakówiŋ, for hundreds of years. The Sioux are Native American and First Nation peoples known for their rich heritage and deep spiritual traditions. The term, ‘Sioux’, is presently a recognized name for The Great Sioux Nation. But, historically, the word, “Sioux” (translated from the Chippewa word, “Nadowessioux”), was a pejorative used by The Chippewa Tribe to refer to their longtime enemy. The literal translation of the word, “Sioux”, is “Little Snake” or “Enemy”. Tradition maintains that the Chippewa Tribe warned the French settlers of the dangerous *little snake* tribe, in an attempt to gain favor with the white settlers and further disrupt relations between the settlers and The Sioux<sup>2</sup>.

*The Seven Council Fires*

Traditionally, the Sioux were divided into seven groups (also referred to as “Bands”), properly known as The Seven Council Fires. The Seven Council Fires were banded into separate tribes according to geographic proximity and shared dialects<sup>3</sup>. The groups were classified as follows:

- Upper Yanktoni: The People of the Little End
- Tetonwan: The People on the Plains
- Sisseton: The People of the Marsh
- Mdewakanton: The Dwellers by the Sacred Lake
- Wahpekute: The Shooters Among the Leaves
- Wahpetonwan: The Dwellers Among the Leaves
- Yanktonai: The People of the End

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<sup>1</sup> Driver, H. E., *Indians of North America*, (1969), 9.

<sup>2</sup> Decker, Doug, *Analysis of ‘The Bradley Bill’ Proposal to Return the Black Hills to Sioux Nations*, (1987), 32-37.

<sup>3</sup> Brown, Dee, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West*, (2001), 97-98.



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Presently, the confederacy of the Great Sioux Nation is divided into three groups, differentiated by linguistic and regional variances. While the geographical territories of the Great Sioux Nation are largely located within South Dakota, many Sioux Nation peoples have established communities in several Northwestern regions of the United States (North Dakota, Nebraska, and Montana), and in a few southwestern provinces of Canada. The Nations and their corresponding geographic divisions are represented as follows:

- The Dakota Nation: Largely established in the Eastern regions of South Dakota.
- The Nakota Nation: Largely established in the Central prairies of South Dakota.
- The Lakota Nation: By far, the largest group of the Sioux Nation, and mostly settled to the west of the Missouri River in the Black Hills of South Dakota.<sup>4</sup>

*An Oral Tradition*

The history of the Sioux (and specifically in Lakota culture), their customs, traditions, and histories, have largely been transferred from the elders to the younger generations via storytelling. The dependence upon an oral tradition is common amongst many Native American tribes; a tradition which remains an important aspect of Native American culture.<sup>5</sup> The art of storytelling has served as a conduit for all Sioux to communicate the relationship between the Sioux and surrounding tribes, the history of their interactions with the settlers of early America, and the Sioux spiritual way of life. For example, a memorate, or a personal account of a spiritual encounter, was often the precursor to the development of significant Native American legends; in fact, Lakota tradition has often depended upon first person testimony to celebrate their connection to Wakan-Tanka (the Creator in Sioux cosmology).

Despite differing dialects, various independent tribal governments, and Band-specific customs, the tradition of storytelling have also served as a means to preserve the groups connection to their native homeland. The Sioux, their interaction with the white settlers, and the changes which would result from these interactions, a key theme within their oral tradition. These stories, memorates, legends, and historical accounts, have since been transcribed into

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<sup>4</sup> Hans, *The Great Sioux Nation*, 42.

<sup>5</sup> Hans, *The Great Sioux Nation; A Complete History of Indian Life and Warfare in America*, (1964), 112-116



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various Sioux dialects, ensuring future generations will have access to the depth and breadth of their ancestor's culture.

*The War of 1812*

The early 1800's were a tumultuous time in American history. America was in its infancy, as a country, and settlers were mostly populated in the eastern regions of the country. Prior to the War of 1812, Native Americans and the lands on which they had lived for thousands of years, were secured primarily via partnerships between Native American tribal leaders and the British government. Many incursions were fought during this time between the Native Americans and their British allies, and the American settlers.<sup>6</sup> But, the inevitability of the expansion of American settlements onto previously Native American held lands, would soon become a reality. The American settlers had witnessed this strategy in the southern states, specifically in relation to the Cherokee Nation.

After the War of 1812, the tribal leaders, and their substituents, suffered many losses of land and autonomy. One such example was that of the Cherokee Nation. The Cherokee Nation attempted to adopt the settler's traditions and embrace a similar lifestyle to that of the settlers, in attempt to maintain peaceful relations. In the end, it was a futile venture. The white settlers of the south could not reconcile the traditional Native American way of life with the culture of new America. White settlers began to petition the government to seize Cherokee land, allowing for the expansion of American settlements, and resulting in the removal of the tribes from the region<sup>7</sup>. And, in 1828, gold was discovered on land belonging to the Cherokee Nation, near the state of Georgia. The discovery brought multitudes of miners onto Cherokee lands. The Cherokee were greatly disturbed by the inflow of settlers onto their lands. The complaints regarding the Native American land rights, made by settlers and miners, encouraged prominent southern politicians (notably Andrew Jackson) to force the federal government to enact "The Compact of 1802."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Champagne, Duane., *Native America: Portrait of the Peoples*, (1994), 13-39.

<sup>7</sup> Pratt, Adam J., *Violence and the Competition for Sovereignty in Cherokee Country: 1829-1835*, (2016), 179.

<sup>8</sup> Pratt, *Violence and the Competition for Sovereignty in Cherokee Country*, 197-201.



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*The Compact of 1802*

The “Compact”, also referred to as the “Articles of Agreement and Cession”, was a previously defunct accord which would revoke any land titles held by Native Americans and culminate in the complete removal of the people of the Cherokee Nation from the state of Georgia.<sup>9</sup> Glen, 1971, noted the following, “The Georgia legislature wasted little time turning up the heat, passing a law on December 19, 1828, that the state claimed “preempted” all Cherokee claims to national independence previously granted by treaties. The law also prohibited the Cherokee National Council from assembling within the state and declared that “no Indian or descendant of Indian ... shall be deemed a competent witness in any dispute or litigation involving a white person.”<sup>10</sup>

*The Indian Removal Act of 1830*

The “Indian Removal Act of 1830”, authorized the US government to move the Indian settlements east of the Mississippi River to the other side of the American frontier. This policy of removal would eventually be developed into a relocation plan for Indian tribes onto federally designated reservations. After, the incidents involving the Cherokee Nations in the eastern states, and the implementation of the “Indian Removal Act of 1830”, uprisings and battles between other Native American tribes and the American settlers escalated. These uprisings are now referred to as the “Indian Wars”.

*The Indian Wars and The Treaty at Fort Laramie in 1851*

By the late 1850’s and 1860’s, the Indian Wars had become a serious issue for the American government and Native American peoples. In 1854, a Treaty was initiated between the American government and the tribal leaders of nine Native American people groups, including the Sioux. The Treaty would have ensured the sovereignty of the Naïve American Nations, in addition to land-ownership rights. In exchange, the Native American tribal leaders agreed to allow safe passage of settlers throughout the Oregon Trail, allowing roads to be built in an effort to ease travel for the settlers. But, there was an immense history of animosity amongst several of

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<sup>9</sup> Pratt, *Violence and the Competition for Sovereignty in Cherokee Country*, 181–197.

<sup>10</sup> Fleischmann, Glen, *The Cherokee Removal, 1838: An Entire Indian Nation Is Forced Out of Its Homeland* (1971), 21.



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the nine tribes represented in the treaty. Within two years, the Cheyenne and Lakota Nations executed various attacks on the Crow Nation, breaking a key element of the Treaty. Additionally, the gold rush of 1858 at Pikes Peak led to further incursions of settlers onto Native American lands. The American government did not enforce the agreements of the Treaty, which would have penalized the Native American tribes for the attacks on the Crow Nation, and prosecuted American settlers for encroaching on the sovereign territories of the Native Americans. These events led to a series of violent battles between American settlers and Native American tribes.<sup>11</sup>

### *The Indian Peace Commission*

In 1865, a congressional committee was formed to investigate the Indian uprisings of the 1860's. The Committee was tasked with researching the issues surrounding the discontent between the settlers and Indians, culminating in a written report of their research. The report included recommendations for a mutually beneficial plan of action to end the bloodshed and turmoil. In 1867, "The Report on the Condition of the Indian Tribes", was officially released. This Report would be the catalyst for the establishment of the "Indian Peace Commission."<sup>12</sup>

The Commission was established as a resolution to the Indian-American battles. Through the Commission, the United States government created and enforced a series of accords which resulted in a significant reduction of previously held Native American lands and the migration of most tribes onto government assigned settlements or reservations.

### *The Treaty of Fort Laramie: 1868*

The belief in and precedent of manifest destiny had been set decades before "The Indian Peace Commission" was established. For a brief period of time, because of the Treaty of Fort Laramie in 1868, the Sioux, and their lands, were protected from the expansion of the settlers. The Treaty of Fort Laramie, in 1868, was an agreement between several Native American tribal representatives (including the infamous Red Cloud, renown for leading the war against the settlers of Wyoming and Montana), and the committee responsible for the creation of "The Indian Peace Commission." The Treaty, if enacted in accordance with its terms, would have

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<sup>11</sup> Anderson, Terry, *Sovereign Nations or Reservations: An Economic History of American Indians* (1995), 59-82.

<sup>12</sup> Hans, *The Great Sioux Nation*, 123-27.



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resulted in the development of the Great Sioux Reservation: a land-ownership agreement between the United States government and multiple Native American tribes, which should have guaranteed the Sioux tribes retained ownership of the entire Sacred Black Hill regions of South Dakota, and specific regions in Nebraska, Montana and Wyoming. The ownership of the Sacred Black Hills and corresponding lands would have guaranteed the Sioux could maintain their traditional way of life; as semi-nomadic farmers and ranchers. The Great Sioux Reservation would have also protected the buffalo population (which were the main source of income- via trade- food, and fur production for the Sioux).<sup>13</sup>

Additionally, through the Treaty, the United States government, agreed to close local military forts which bordered several Indian lands. The government would continue to retain the right to prosecute settlers and Indians alike for any crimes committed- on or off of the reservations. Both sides were appeased by these terms, and so in the late summer of 1868, the Treaty was signed. Nevertheless, the animosity between the two groups was too potent, and violations of the Treaty- by both parties- occurred within weeks of the initial signing ceremony.<sup>14</sup>

Animosity between the government, settlers, and Native Americans continued to grow. And Less than two years after the Treaty signing at Fort Laramie, gold was discovered in the Sacred Black Hills of South Dakota. Miners and settlers quickly amassed in the Black Hills, destroying the sacred lands with their equipment and temporary camps. The Sioux Nation retaliated against the settlers, initiating the great wars of the 1870's. By 1889, the Indians were alliance with the British was tenuous, as the British continued to lose control over the American pioneers. The large tribal lands once held by the Sioux, were eventually overrun with settlers. The battles between the settlers and Native Americans would end with a greatly diminished Native American militia, in large part due to technology of the settler's weapons and their vast resources. The government relocated the Sioux tribes to a much smaller area of land (a new version of the "Great Sioux Reservation"). In total, the government would apprehend over 7.7 million acres of land from the Sioux; transplanting the Sioux to a much smaller region of arid

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<sup>13</sup> Canby, William, *American Indian Law*, (2004), 24.

<sup>14</sup> Philp, Kenneth R., *Termination: A Legacy of the Indian New Deal*, (1983), 13-15.

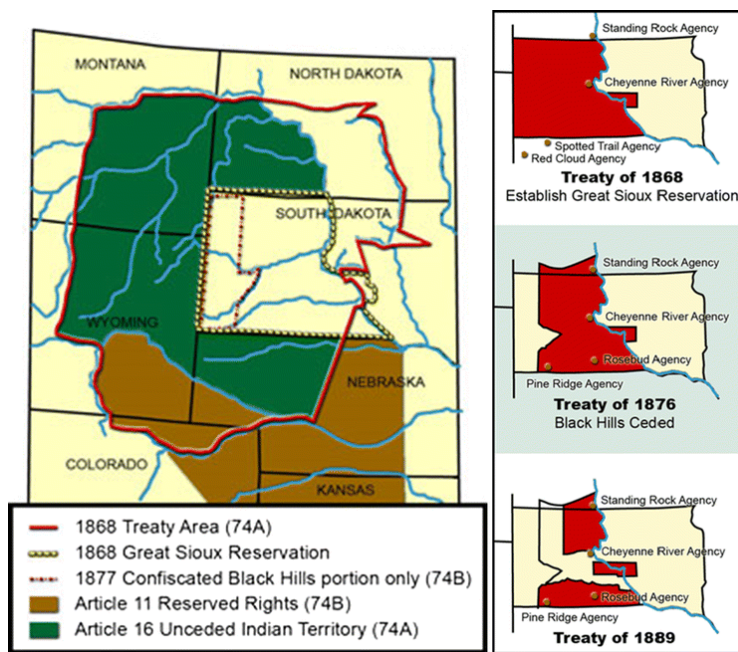


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land.<sup>15</sup> The land was extremely difficult to farm, and lacking in livestock; their children were sent to government run boarding schools, and thus the sacred traditions of the Sioux were lost to a new generation of American Indians. Moreover, many of the spiritual rites and traditions of the Sioux people were banned by the government. These events would become known as the Partition of the Great Sioux Reservation.<sup>16</sup>

### The Establishment of the Rosebud Reservation



### *History in Brief*

Established in 1889, shortly after the “Partition of the Great Sioux Reservation”, the Rosebud Reservation is located throughout the entirety of Todd County, South Dakota, and spreads into regions of four other South Dakota counties. The mutual violations of the Treaty at Fort Laramie, the Partition of the Great Sioux Reservation, and the relocation of the Great Sioux Nation in 1889, directly coincide with the establishment of the Rosebud Reservation. As such,

<sup>15</sup> Philp, Kenneth, *Termination: A Legacy of the Indian New Deal*, (1983), 165-180.

<sup>16</sup> Hassrick. Royal B., *The Sioux: Life and Customs of a Warrior Society*, (1964), 58-72.



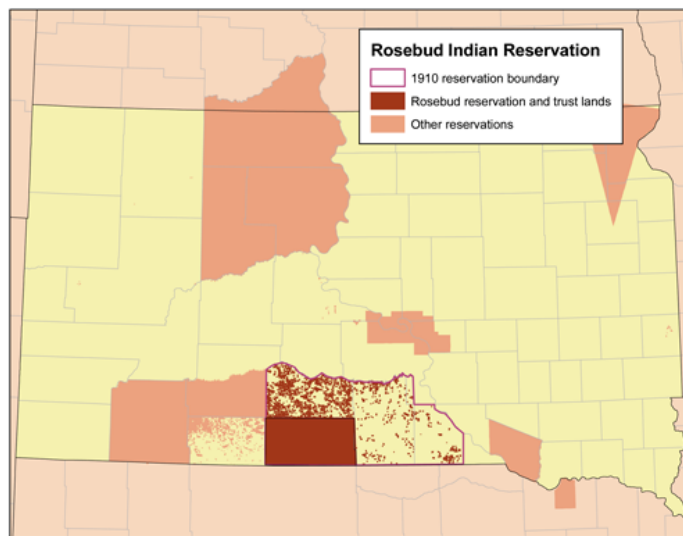
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there continues to be a great distrust amongst most of the Sioux Nation tribes towards the United States government.

The Rosebud Sioux Tribe, also known as the Sicangu Oyate (literal translation: “Burnt Thigh” nation)<sup>17</sup>, are a branch of the Lakota Nation. Located in the Sacred Black Hills of South Dakota, Rosebud Reservation stretches to nearly 100,000 acres of land, and is home to 20 Lakota communities. There are an estimated 32,000 tribal members on the reservation, and approximately 5,000 members whom have migrated to other states or reservations.<sup>18</sup>

The transition to Rosebud was difficult for the Lakota. The winter months were brutally cold; the land was nearly impossible to farm; and the summer months brought extreme drought. But, most significantly, the isolation of the tribes from one another, and the distance between the communities within Rosebud, produced much discontent and loneliness amongst the traditionally close-knit Sicangu Oyate.<sup>19</sup> The repercussions of these initial hardships have become critical handicaps which continue to stifle progress on Rosebud in present times.

### Rosebud Reservation: Present Day



<sup>17</sup> Hassrick, Royal B, *The Sioux: Life and Customs of a Warrior Society*, (1964), 44-49.

<sup>18</sup> U. S. Census Bureau, *Quick facts, Todd County, South Dakota*, (2015).

<sup>19</sup> Pickering, Kathleen Ann, *Lakota Culture, World Economy*, (2000), 16-23.



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*Culture and Values*

Within the Rosebud Reservation, the Lakota cultural traditions are still widely practiced. The Lakota history has traditionally been passed down from the tribal elders to younger members via the art of storytelling. Many of the stories highlight one of four values, each of which are sacred to the Lakota Nation. The first concept is that of generosity or contributing to the well-being of other people. This tradition includes financial generosity, emotional kindness, and the giving of one's time to another person. The second principle is the importance of family, which includes even distant relatives. In fact, it was an expectation that family members would make extreme sacrifices to care for (and often house) extended family members. For the Lakota, one's wealth is not measured by physical possessions, but by the support and love of one's family members. The third and fourth tenants of the Lakota values system are fortitude (often referred to as "strength of heart") and the pursuit of wisdom. The Lakota firmly believed wisdom to be a journey; something which could only be attained through experience. Because of the value placed on wisdom within Lakota culture, elders were revered and respected.<sup>20</sup>

*Religious Beliefs*

The Lakota are a deeply spiritual people. The spiritual traditions amongst the Lakota cannot be defined as a "religion". For the Lakota, spirituality is not a separate tradition or event. Spirituality is life itself; the fulcrum which enabled all other aspects of life to function. Spirituality is ingrained into every aspect of the Lakota lifestyle. In fact, the depth in which spirituality intertwined with the identity of the Lakota is often referred to as the "rhythm of life." Many elders describe this rhythm as "Wakan-Tanka", often translated to mean "Grandfather" or "Great Spirit." Wakan-Tanka is the Creator power in Sioux cosmology. Traditionally, an ethereal concept of a creator force; many present day Lakota use the name, "Wakan-Tanka" to refer to God. It is believed that one can connect- and even transmit messages to- Wakan Tanka through the Sacred Pipe; a tradition that is still active in many Lakota communities today.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Hassrick. Royal B, *The Sioux: Life and Customs of a Warrior Society*, (1964), 79-82.

<sup>21</sup> Champagne, Duane, *Native America: Portrait of the Peoples*, (1994), 177-191.



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Lakota spirituality incorporates many religious beliefs, such as reincarnation, pantheism, and animism. The Lakota believe that all life is cyclical. Upon dying, the Lakota believe that each person will meet a holy woman who will determine the virtue of the person's soul. Once the woman has measured the soul's virtues, she will either send the soul to the spirit world or back to the earth, where they will be reincarnated into a new body. The belief in a cyclical life inculcates a respect of birth and death amongst the Lakota.

In order to further maintain and reinforce these sacred beliefs, the Lakota practiced a tradition known as the "Seven Sacred Rites." Many of the Seven Sacred Rites are still practiced today. They are as follows:<sup>22</sup>

1. The Renewal of Life: typically performed in a sweat lodge and purposed to promote health and vitality.
2. The Vision Quest: traditionally a four-day spiritual journey (guided by a holy man) during which the seeker forgoes food and water in an attempt to find communion with the spirit world.
3. The Keeping of the Spirit: the third rite is more of a tradition than a rite of passage. It denotes the one year grieving process one undergoes upon losing a loved one. The Lakota believe that a person's spirit will remain amongst their family and community after they have died for up to one year. The family honors the wandering spirit by setting an extra place at each meal and abstaining from typical community activities.
4. The Sun Dance: noted as the most important of the seven rites, the Sun Dance was an annual gathering of all Lakota tribes, generally held in the summer months. During the Sun Dance, dancers are given the opportunity to make an offering of their flesh in order to gain favor for their Nation. The "offerings" were violent in nature, although not in intent. During the ceremony, a holy man would pierce the flesh of the dancer with two pieces of dried buffalo bone, tie a rawhide thong to each bone, and then attach the thong onto a ceremonial pole. As the participants danced, they would

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<sup>22</sup> Young Bear, Severt, and R. D. Theisz, *Standing in the Light: A Lakota Way of Seeing*, (1994), 14-22; 26-31.



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attempt to release all evil from their bodies by tearing the bones free from their flesh.<sup>23</sup>

5. **The Making of Relatives:** The Lakota value family so deeply that the fifth rite was a tradition in which families could adopt others into their family- at will. The adoption rite was not necessarily a custom for those without a family of their own; rather, this custom was a way for the Lakota to expand their families, and in doing so, reflect the ways of Wakan-Tanka.
6. **The Puberty Ceremony:** typically held for girls upon receiving their first menses, the ceremony involved a gathering of family members to pray over the girl. The Lakota would pray for the girl's fertility and for her to remain faithful to the virtues of a Lakota woman. The Puberty Ceremony also allowed for the family of the girl to formally announce her eligibility as a bride and mother to the rest of the community.
7. **Throwing the Ball:** during the seventh rite, a girl would stand in the middle of a circle, surrounded by young men, and throw a ball high in the air, whomever caught the ball gained favor in the community and was thought to have a promising future.

### *Economy*

The Rosebud Reservation is the second most impoverished Reservation in the United States, with unemployment rates often reaching over 80%.<sup>24</sup> Todd County (the county in which Rosebud is located) is the second poorest county in the United States. The most common occupation on the Reservation is cattle ranching or farming. Alarmingly, even amongst the employed residents, 75% of the labor force live below the national poverty line, and an estimated six out of ten residents live in sub-standard housing. Current estimates also indicate that over 30% of Rosebud residents are homeless, living entirely off the land, and constantly exposed to dangerous weather conditions.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Holler, C., *Black Elk's Religion: The Sun Dance and Lakota Catholicism*, (1996), 74-77.

<sup>24</sup> "Databases, Tables & Calculators by Subject," U.S. Department of Labor, <https://data.bls.gov/timeseries/LNS14000000>, (2016)

<sup>25</sup> IBID, U.S. Department of Labor



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Most of the 20 communities dispersed throughout the Reservation, are not located near the Community Center (located in the “Rosebud Community”). As such, most residents have little or no access to healthcare or basic food provisions. Even amongst the fortunate few residents who do have access to a vehicle, there are other obstacles which often prevent them access to such resources.<sup>26</sup> Most of the roads on the Reservation are in dire condition. As such, all vehicles must have four-wheel drive in order to safely traverse the terrain. Moreover, infighting within the communities often inhibits travel, as the opportunity for violent interactions increases when traversing through rival communities.

### *Issues and Interventions*

The median age on the Reservation is 21.5 years old. Rosebud contains a population of largely young adults and children. Most of whom have not completed more than 8 years of education, and have been witness to the myriad problems faced by their elder family members. Such disillusionment has resulted in escalating suicide rates, widespread depression, the formation of violent gangs, and rampant drug and alcohol abuse.<sup>27</sup> Factors, such as the diminished elder population, has led to a lack in leadership for the young Lakota. High school aged students are more inclined to join gangs than they are to attend high school. As such, high school graduation rates are amongst the lowest of any population in the United States, with a graduation rate of less than 50% for Native students.<sup>28</sup>

Other urgent issues within Rosebud Reservation are as follows:

- Estimates states that more than 120,000 tribal homes lack access water sanitation services.
- Internet access is estimated to be less than 6%.
- Black mold (a dangerous health risk that can cause extreme health issues) is rampant amongst the existing homes throughout the entire reservation.

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<sup>26</sup> South Dakota Department of Health, *South Dakota Vital Statistics Report: A State and County Comparison of Leading Health Indicators*, (2015).

<sup>27</sup> South Dakota Department of Health, *South Dakota Vital Statistics Report*, (2015).

<sup>28</sup> U. S. Department of Labor, *Economy at a Glance*, (2016).



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- Due to a lack of health services and proper nutrition, the occurrence of diseases (such as diabetes and tuberculosis) are two times higher on the Reservation than the national average.
- Fetal alcohol syndrome, miscarriages, and various birth defects are common- largely due to widespread alcoholism and drug abuse.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> U. S. Department of Labor, *Economy at a Glance*, (2016).



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