A War Fought by All:
A Brief History of the Sioux Experience during World War II—Abstract

Donald Keifert

Great sacrifices were made by the Sioux people in order to contribute to the war effort during World War II, both willingly and forcefully. Not only did many give their lives but some had no choice but to give their land and way of life as well. The Sioux even received the attention of the enemy itself. The German government believed that the violent history between the Sioux and the United States created a lasting animosity between the two and saw this as an opportunity to try and lure them to the Nazi cause and fight against the United States rather than with them. Not only did their plan fail but many Lakota would volunteer to proudly fight the Axis powers in different branches of the military and even perform secret operations for the armed forces. This effort would even spur a revival in Sioux culture that had been repressed on the reservation for years before the war due to a religious ban plead by the U.S. government after the Ghost Dance craze. After the war, while the rest of the country enjoyed affluence, South Dakota’s reservations plummeted into greater poverty and their wartime effort would be forgotten or ignored. However, the Lakota and the rest of the Sioux played a very active and interesting role in World War II and stories of their bravery and patriotism deserve to be heard.
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The Second World War was one of the most significant periods in American history; sacrifices were made by men and women both overseas and on the home front. From generation to generation, stories of patriotism during the war are told by family members and educators. Unfortunately, credit is not always given where credit is due. When many people discuss Native American contributions in the war today, the famous story of the Navajo code-talkers is one of few stories brought up. However, many other tribes showed their bravery and patriotism in the war, including the Sioux nation.

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After the war, while the rest of the country enjoyed affluence, South Dakota’s reservations plummeted into greater poverty as their wartime effort was forgotten and ignored. However, the Lakota and the rest of the Sioux played a very active and interesting role in World War II; stories of their bravery and patriotism deserve to be heard.

Like much of the country before the war, South Dakota’s Indian reservations were coping with the devastating effects of the Great Depression in the 1930s. Widespread poverty, joblessness, and low
prices for agricultural goods left many people on the reservation hurting. The average annual income for a family living on the Pine Ridge reservation was only $152.80.\textsuperscript{31} Federal New Deal programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps Indian Division (CCC-ID) created jobs for many reservation residents building dams, working on other projects improving infrastructure, and even providing education.\textsuperscript{32} The laborious projects provided work experience as well as training in operating machinery, which these men would later use in attaining industrial jobs once World War II had begun.

When war broke out in 1939 with Hitler’s invasion of Poland, some CCC programs attempted to adjust to war production but essentially failed due to the hiring practices of emerging local industries. Funding for the program was completely cut in 1942.\textsuperscript{33} Unfortunately, even with the experience the Sioux men gained in the CCC, many of those who found jobs in these local industries could only find work as lower paid, unskilled laborers. A select few were lucky enough to find jobs as carpenters or heavy equipment operators.\textsuperscript{34}

Over two hundred Lakota Sioux were employed at two major defense construction projects near Pine Ridge;\textsuperscript{35} one of these projects was the airfield in Rapid City,\textsuperscript{36} and another was the Black Hills Ordinance Depot at Fort Igloo, located outside Edgemont.\textsuperscript{37} Due to the close proximity of these jobs, many could work during the day and return to their home on the reservation at night, rather than having to camp at the job site.\textsuperscript{38} However, many of the jobs available were in urban areas like Rapid City, and dozens of families began to move from the reservation to the city.\textsuperscript{39} Even though the jobs were benefitting

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{35} Alison Bernstein, \textit{American Indians and World War II: Toward a New Era in Indian Affairs}, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 71.
\textsuperscript{36} Lazarus, 165.
\textsuperscript{37} Clow, “Tribal Populations in Transition,” 378.
\textsuperscript{38} Bernstein, \textit{American Indians and World War II}, 79.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
these Lakota workers and their families, many fell on hard times or simply felt homesick and started moving back-and-forth from the city to the reservation throughout the war years.\textsuperscript{40}

The situation on Pine Ridge and other reservations was harsh, to say the least, and farming was nearly impossible. The small allotted farmlands the Sioux had were half as big as neighboring white farms, and what goods they could grow there sold for only half as much.\textsuperscript{41} Most Lakota and other Sioux who decided to stay on the reservation received some sort of federal relief, while some could only reside on subsistence farms where they grew just enough to feed their families during the wet months.\textsuperscript{42}

In order to find the best opportunity for their families, some of the more ambitious Sioux ventured to distant industrial jobs hundreds of miles away in urban areas, such as Minneapolis and Omaha, where they hoped they would face less discrimination and earn larger salaries.\textsuperscript{43} Much to their dismay, many were unable to escape the racial biases placed upon them. After spending nearly all their money just to pay for the trip to their new jobs, many anxiously awaited their first paycheck to give them some relief, only to be disappointed when they found they were being paid a substandard wage.\textsuperscript{44} When they sought help from social institutions, they were denied under the false pretense that they were already receiving aid from the federal government; in fact, some were even denied medical care. Generally, the only financial help that anyone would provide them was enough to move them back to the reservation.\textsuperscript{45}

The violent history between Native Americans and the United States government was well known around the world; the discrimination they still experienced during this time was not a secret. From overseas, the German government and Nazi organizations saw this disconnect between white Americans and Native Americans as an opportunity to foster Nazi sympathy among American Indian tribes.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{41} Clow, 375.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{44} Franco, \textit{Crossing the Pond}.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
American organizations with rather curious names such as the German American Bund and the Silver Shirts of American Christian Patriots were pro-Nazi and anti-Semitic, yet also claimed to support Native American rights and fight for their justice.\textsuperscript{46} These organizations opposed the Indian Reorganization Act and vowed to protect Native people from other “communist programs perpetrated by Roosevelt,” even though many were benefitting from these programs.\textsuperscript{47} Some Native Americans agreed with the propaganda. Even members of the American Indian Foundation became linked with pro-Nazi groups including the organization’s secretary, a Seneca woman named Alice Lee Jemison, and traveled the country speaking on pro-Nazi issues; when Jemison went on tour around the Great Plains, the German American Bund and other sympathizers paid for her car, funneled money to her, and gave her the interesting codename of “Pocahontas.”\textsuperscript{48}

The German government itself also got involved. Since Native American languages had been used as communication code in World War I against Germany, agents disguised as anthropologists, authors, and movie-makers were sent to America to learn Native languages and also to spread Nazi propaganda.\textsuperscript{49} One of these agents was Dr. Colin Ross, who traveled to America multiple times under the guise of being an author and movie-maker on Native Americans.\textsuperscript{50} He even became close to the Commissioner of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, John Collier, who set up visits for him in many Native communities.\textsuperscript{51} When suspicion arose toward Ross and an investigation finally deemed him a Nazi agent, he was barred from ever returning to the U.S.\textsuperscript{52} In reality, some of his writings gave him away: in one of his books, \textit{Unser Amerika} (Our America), he made claims that democracy would fall, Nazis would take control, and Native Americans would “look forward to [Nazi] intervention.”\textsuperscript{53} He also supported the

\textsuperscript{47} Rosier, \textit{Serving Their Country}.  
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid, 75.  
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid, 76.  
\textsuperscript{50} Franco, 22-24.  
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
Indian Reorganization Act and hoped further action would take place to make reservations autonomous, which he hoped would make Natives more susceptible to Nazi propaganda.\textsuperscript{54}

In a radical attempt to recruit Natives to their cause, the Nazi government in Germany specifically targeted the Sioux people in their propaganda efforts. In 1938, the German government extended citizenship and Aryan status to any immigrant whose grandmother was Sioux.\textsuperscript{55} German officials soon declared that all Sioux Indians were part of the Aryan race, thinking that they and other Native Americans would unite with the Nazis and resist American influence.\textsuperscript{56} Nazi propaganda vilified “Jewish controlled America” for the “destruction and degeneration of the Indian Nation” and described Americans as “European outcasts, morally bankrupt scoundrels bent on the ruination of anything or anyone in their path toward land and wealth,” which seems quite a hypocritical claim coming from Nazis.\textsuperscript{57} German propagandists even went so far as to promise the return of expropriated lands to Native Americans if they assisted the Nazi order.\textsuperscript{58} The ways in which the German government attempted to justify this assertion is almost as absurd as the claim itself: they believed that true Germans shared similar characteristics with the Sioux, especially the belief that both were fierce warriors.\textsuperscript{59} The idea was also put forth that a lost Germanic tribe had wandered to America and mixed with the Sioux and possibly other Native tribes.\textsuperscript{60} Upon hearing these claims, John Collier, the BIA Commissioner, jokingly stated “previously the Mormons had been denominating the Indians as ‘The Lost Tribe of Israel,’” and now “Hitler is kidnapping them.”\textsuperscript{61}

Despite the hard efforts by the Nazis, all of their propaganda fell flat. After the attack on Pearl Harbor and the United States’ official entry into World War Two, patriotism soared on the reservation. The tribal councils of multiple Sioux reservations made their own declarations of war against the Axis

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid, 21.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid, 21, 41.
\textsuperscript{58} Franco, 41.
\textsuperscript{59} Townsend, 32.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid, 33.
\textsuperscript{61} Franco, 22.
powers.\textsuperscript{62} The Sioux were eager to enter the fight on America’s behalf and more than happy to contribute to the united war effort.

Eager Sioux volunteers flooded the registration office in Rapid City.\textsuperscript{63} Some were so excited to fight in the war that they brought their own rifles to the registration center.\textsuperscript{64} The draft under the Selective Service Act was applied to Native Americans as well, although it wasn’t necessary on the Great Plains due to the fact that there were twice as many volunteers than there were draftees, and there could have been many more if not for some age and health restrictions.\textsuperscript{65} An age limit of thirty-five and under was placed on volunteers and draftees, which angered some of the older Sioux who wanted to join the fight.\textsuperscript{66} The Army had to reject nearly half of prospective volunteers who came from the Fort Totten and Standing Rock reservations in North Dakota due to poor health contracted from harsh reservation life.\textsuperscript{67} Lakota women also joined the war effort by enlisting for women’s programs such as the Women’s Army Corps (WAC) and Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES) and were reported to adjust to life in the military easier than other women due to the similarly in lifestyle to Indian boarding schools.\textsuperscript{68} In the end, around 2,000 or so Sioux would fight in the war.\textsuperscript{69} Around nine hundred of whom would come from the Pine Ridge Reservation alone.\textsuperscript{70}

The Sioux, as with many other Native Americans, seemed to be welcomed into military service much more readily than African Americans, who were treated harshly. Most white soldiers’ exposure to Native Americans came from romanticized western movies; therefore, they saw Native soldiers as more of a curiosity. The Indian wars were viewed as being long in the past and the damage caused by them was

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid, 67.
\textsuperscript{63} R. Douglas Hurt, \textit{The Great Plains during World War II}, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 364.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid, 365.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid, 364.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid, 365.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid, 364.
\textsuperscript{70} Lazarus, \textit{Black Hills White Justice}, 180.
considered to be nothing compared to the destruction and divides that the Civil War caused, which many soldiers still took out on African American soldiers.\footnote{Townsend, 149.}

Another reason for white soldiers embracing the Sioux was due to the fact they already had a reputation as fierce warriors, believing that they “were the descendants of the band which whipped Custer.”\footnote{Bernstein, 35.} The reported fighting skills of Native Americans, which included marksmanship, endurance, and even the ability to handle lack of nourishment for longer periods of time than white soldiers led one officer to declare that, “the Indian is the best damn soldier in the Army.”\footnote{Thomas D. Morgan, “Native Americans in World War II,” *Army History: The Professional Bulletin of Army History*, No. 35 (Fall 1995), pp. 22-27.} One Sioux soldier named Kenneth Scisson once “added ten notches to his Garand rifle” and gained the reputation as his commando unit’s fiercest fighter.\footnote{Ibid.} Reports even reached the Secretary of the Interior, Harold L. Ickes, and prompted him to commend Native Americans for their “inherited talents” that “make him uniquely valuable,” going on to say that the “rigors of combat hold no terrors for him; severe discipline and hard duties do not deter him.”\footnote{Ella Deloria, *Speaking of Indians*, (Lincoln: university of Nebraska Press, 1998), 140-141.}

Sioux soldiers would not only help on the battlefield but also on secret assignments outside of combat. One unique job that some Lakota men had specifically during World War II was that of a “code talker.” Often associated with the Navajo, code talkers were radio communicators who spoke in their respective Native American language in order to confuse the enemy listening in. Clarence Wolf Guts and about a dozen other Lakota speakers were recruited by Major General Paul Mueller, the mastermind of the project.\footnote{Bernie Hunhoff, “The Last Lakota Code Talker,” *South Dakota Magazine*, May/June, 2007, http://southdakotamagazine.com/clarence-wolf-guts.} Working with officials, these Lakota speakers created a code that related Lakota words to the tools of war such as tanks and jeeps.\footnote{Ibid.} The code that the Lakota used was mostly incorporated in the Pacific Theatre, fighting against the Japanese.\footnote{Ibid.}

Clarence was so happy to do it that he is quoted as saying,
“I don’t want no rank, I don’t want no money. I just want to do what I can to protect America and our way of life.”

Back on the reservation, a very interesting side-effect of the war became apparent. The families of the men and women sent off to war were sparking a cultural revival. Practicing Native American religion was prohibited by the U.S. government in the 1890s when the “Ghost Dance,” which was believed to return the land to Native Americans and make whites disappear, was practiced by some Sioux bands. Religious freedom would not be fully granted again until the 1970s. However, John Collier, with the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, lifted the prohibition of Native religious ceremonies. This allowed Native tribes to honor their warriors sent off the war the way their ancestors had. For the first time in over fifty years, the Sioux from the Pine Ridge and Standing Rock reservations began conducting Sun Dances, War Dances, and prayer ceremonies to help ensure a safe return for their “braves” and a quick victory over Germany and Japan. “Give away” ceremonies also became common; these were ceremonies in which the family member of a service man or woman would give presents to other families upon him or her leaving in order to give them respectful recognition in the community.

Patriotic fervor spread to nearly everyone on the reservation. The Sioux writer Ella Deloria described the attitude by saying, “There’s a job to be done. So let’s get at it. Never mind about us now.” Some South Dakota Sioux conducted war bond drives and some donated what they had available such as poultry, horses, or homemade goods to be auctioned off for money to buy the bonds. One drive on the Lower Brule Reservation raised $22,000, which would be around $300,000 today. Deloria also recalls multiple stories of sacrifices made for the war effort including one where, in order to conserve gas and tires for “the boys,” the speed limit was reduced to thirty-five miles-per-hour on the road from the

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79 Ibid.
81 Ibid, 108.
82 Hurt, 366.
83 Franco, 65.
84 Deloria, 140.
85 Hurt, 367.
86 Ibid.
Rosebud reservation to Rapid City. This resulted in a very long, and sometimes cold, car ride but was willingly obeyed despite the lack of enforcement.\textsuperscript{87} “It was not smart to cheat,” Deloria said.\textsuperscript{88} In an even greater show of support, after the Pine Ridge tribal council won an eighteen year-long lawsuit against the federal government, they decided to delay receiving their five million dollar reward until after the war, declaring “we will wait patiently for a few more years if it will help our country.”\textsuperscript{89}

This ardent patriotism shown by the Sioux Nation during this time seems quite ironic, and one can’t help but ask the same question as the Nazis: how could such a people now fight and give their lives for the very country that had betrayed and oppressed them for generations? Peter Dillon, then the Chairman of the Black Hills Sioux Nation Council who championed the Lakota’s claim to the Black Hills, had his own difficulty comprehending the loyalty shown by the Sioux and other tribes across the United States. However, after contemplating for a time, he concluded that, “All past history shows that a conquered people has to take what the conqueror gives, just or unjust, but the present will be worse if the boys who are now at the front who are fighting for what is just and right, not only for our rights, but for the rights of this continent, fail.”\textsuperscript{90}

John Collier saw the positive effort by the Sioux people in the war as an opportunity to bury the hatchet between them and the U.S. military. Delegates from Pine Ridge were guests of honor at a dinner in Washington D.C. held by the Order of Indian Wars, a group consisting of white veterans of the wars, some even veterans of the Wounded Knee Massacre.\textsuperscript{91} The dinner, Collier believed, was a sign of changing times where they could now all unite under the ideal of “the preservation of Democracy.”\textsuperscript{92}

Though South Dakota’s Native Americans seemed to be giving what they could for the war effort, the government and the military would demand more from the Sioux, including land. Some of these encounters were positive, such as on the Cheyenne River Reservation where the War Department

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid, 139.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{89} Bernstein, 69-70.
\textsuperscript{90} Lazarus, 181-182.
\textsuperscript{91} Bernstein, 35.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid.
paid for and leased almost 350,000 acres of land in order to build an aerial gunnery range on the condition that it “did not materially interfere with the use of lands for grazing.”93 But not all these transactions were mutually beneficial. The Army looked to build a similar aerial range on the Pine Ridge Reservation, not invoking the same interference restrictions as they did on Cheyenne River, and forced residents to sell over 300,000 acres of land for its use, forcing the 128 families living in the area to relocate.94 These families received the lowest value price of seventy-five cents per acre and were given only thirty days to vacate.95 This short notice neither gave residents enough time to harvest their fields nor make arrangements for relocation.96 Out of desperation, some sold all their livestock and other goods in order to pay for the cost of moving.97 Only ten percent of those families had the ability to return to the ranching lifestyle at the end of the war.98 Peter Dillon was extremely distraught by this, stating that “The whole world is at the present time fighting for land and that very thing has been taken from us in the past and present time.”99 This was especially egregious now that the Sioux and the American governments were “fighting side-by-side for the same cause.”100 The Sioux fought bravely to protect their home in the past, and in World War II they fought bravely to protect the whole United States, only to again be betrayed for the sake of their land.

When the war was over, the Pine Ridge Sioux sent President Truman a peace pipe as a tribute to him and hoped it would be “symbolic to future peace.”101 To honor certain national war heroes – such as Admiral William Leahy, who received the name “Leading Eagle” – the Sioux inducted them into the tribe.102 Veterans who returned used their respected status to gain positions in public office. A nineteen

93 Franco, 103.
94 Bernstein, 81.
95 Ibid.
96 Ibid.
97 Franco, 103.
98 Ibid.
99 Lazarus, 180
101 Franco, 135.
102 Ibid, 135.
year-old successfully used his military experience to be elected chairman of the tribal council on the Lower Brule Reservation.103 “They respected my courage,” he said of the voters.104

Harsh after-effects of the war began to show soon after the fighting stopped. The Sioux were less than one tenth of the Native American population in the United States in 1940.105 Despite this, they contributed some of the highest numbers of enlisted Native Americans fighting in the war and also suffered the most deaths. Out of the 550 Native Americans killed in World War II, over 100 of them were Sioux, making up nearly one-fifth of Native American casualties.106

Many Native Americans hoped that their sacrifice in the war would bring attention to the hardships many faced back home, similar to the “Double Victory” campaign by African Americans, which meant victory in the war and a victory against racism in the U.S. The Sioux specifically hoped their claim that the United States broke the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 and illegally stole the Black Hills would be brought to the national stage. Soon after the war, Congress created a new court to give specific attention to claims made by Native Americans against the United States called the Indian Claims Commission.107 The creation of this commission gave hope to the Sioux, but the Black Hills claim would not be heard by the Supreme Court until 1980. The war was still used as a talking point years later when the Bradley Bill was presented to Congress in 1985 that proposed to return some land and give monetary compensation to the Lakota.108 Phil Stevens, a millionaire descendant from Oglala Chief Standing Bear, argued that the U.S. government awarded one billion dollars to Japanese Americans for being relocated to internment camps during the war and, therefore, the Lakota should receive just compensation of 3.1 billion dollars.109 This claim was also unsuccessful.

103 Bernstein, 134.
104 Ibid.
105 Ibid, 61.
106 Ibid.
107 Ostler, 151.
108 Ibid, 185.
109 Ibid, 186.
While the rest of the country celebrated an economic boom and enjoyed affluence in the postwar years, returning Sioux veterans returned home to reservations experiencing economic turmoil and deplorable conditions. Now that many of the war industry jobs were gone, work outside of the government was practically nonexistent, and unemployment on the reservations ranged from an astonishing 40 to 90 percent – and even higher during the winter months.\(^{110}\) Living conditions on South Dakota’s reservations were deplorable; many families lived in tents or log cabins, hoping one day to finally be able to move into a frame house. Unfortunately, though, this was out of reach for many families.\(^{111}\)

As a gesture of goodwill and to help the plight many veterans faced when returning home, the Cheyenne River Reservation gave each returning veteran – of which they were approximately 350 – a $25 bonus upon returning.\(^{112}\) This was not enough, though, and many of the Sioux veterans of the war sought loans to purchase cattle or farming and ranching supplies to make a living.\(^{113}\) However, the local banks believed that they would not be able to repossess the property if payments were not made due to the fact that so many applying for the loans lived on federally-protected property.\(^{114}\) This led members of the Standing Rock Reservation to protest the federal government to release restrictions on lands held in trust for Indian veterans so they could use the land how they saw fit; they claimed that Indian veterans “have earned their rights and not restrictions,” but no changes were made.\(^{115}\) Due to the difficulty of succeeding in an agricultural economy, only a quarter of native families were able to support themselves cattle ranching while some others made small amounts leasing their land to white farmers and ranchers.\(^{116}\) Those who were able to continue farming and ranching were still in severe poverty, averaging only around five hundred dollars annually.\(^{117}\) Some tribal governments themselves created programs to try to

\(^{111}\) Ibid, 339.
\(^{112}\) Bernstein, 133.
\(^{113}\) Ibid, 144.
\(^{114}\) Ibid.
\(^{115}\) Ibid.
\(^{116}\) Schell, 339.
\(^{117}\) Hurtt, 372.
help the terrible situation but to no avail. All of these factors led to the “demise” of Indian agriculture by the 1950s.\(^\text{118}\)

The hardships on the reservation caused a massive exodus that dwarfed the migration seen during the war. Around sixty-five families from Pine Ridge moved to Rapid City during the war, but only three years after the war, that number grew to around 2,000.\(^\text{119}\) This sudden rise in Native population led Rapid City to be dubbed “the state’s third largest Indian reservation.”\(^\text{120}\) Due to an inadequate amount of affordable housing, many of the Sioux families who migrated to Rapid City created a “shantytown” on the outskirts of the city along Rapid Creek.\(^\text{121}\) Rapid City was not the only place where this happened; in fact, nearly half of the Indian population in South Dakota left the reservations.\(^\text{122}\) Some went to other cities around the reservations, such as Yankton and Scotts Bluff, in the same fashion, residing in “living dump heaps” trying to find work. Unfortunately, many were unsuccessful.\(^\text{123}\) These families found themselves in an increasingly sad situation, stuck in the middle between reservation and city life, yet feeling disconnected from both without knowing where to go or what to do. Many returned to the reservation only to, again, return to the city, following the same pattern seen during wartime.\(^\text{124}\)

In the 1950s, half of the Sioux population was receiving welfare.\(^\text{125}\) Of the residents that stayed on the reservations, 60 percent of them were landless and unable to receive credit.\(^\text{126}\) The net worth of the entire Sioux tribe was $121 per member.\(^\text{127}\) Among these shocking conditions, one third of the state’s prison population was Native American, all the while only making up five percent of South Dakota’s

\(^\text{118}\) Clow, 379.
\(^\text{119}\) Ibid, 149.
\(^\text{120}\) Schell, 340.
\(^\text{121}\) Bernstein, 149.
\(^\text{122}\) Schell, 340.
\(^\text{123}\) Berstein, 149, 150.
\(^\text{124}\) Schell, 340.
\(^\text{125}\) Ibid, 339.
\(^\text{126}\) Clow, 385
\(^\text{127}\) Ibid, 385.
The Sioux people on the reservations in South Dakota were suffering. The problems that they were facing were “invisible” to much of the white population, causing them to be uninterested in helping; this contributed to an increase in discrimination and ignorance toward the Sioux peoples. Some members on the Pine Ridge Reservation were outraged that the government would refuse to help the tribes even when the nation was gaining more and more power and wealth from postwar prosperity, and even went so far as to blame the U.S. for the war itself. “It seemed logical to us,” one man recalled, “that if we were unhappy with the United States Government for what they had done to us, other countries would be angry at the United States for the same reason.” This inspired many writers among the Sioux such as Vine Deloria, Jr. to speak out and raise awareness about the prevalence of deplorable conditions and injustices toward Native Americans. These writings raised consciousness among Native Americans and would inspire them to come together to form a louder voice. This attitude would eventually inspire individuals such as Russell Means – who grew up in San Francisco after his parents left the reservation to find wartime employment – and others to form what would be called the American Indian Movement.

The proud effort seen by South Dakota’s reservations and the Sioux population during World War II in regards to service members, workers on the home front, and generosity from tribal governments, both symbolically and monetarily, proves that they felt just as much patriotism as the rest of the country and that they felt proud that it was their duty to help in the fight. Though they were ready to make many sacrifices for the United States, this was not always enough and, unfortunately, even more would be asked of them in terms of their land and livelihoods. After the war, their efforts went unrewarded, forgotten, or ignored. The end to a wartime economy spread horrible poverty among the population. These statistics show just how hard postwar life was for the Sioux people while the rest of the country enjoyed prosperity.
reservations’ residents and, when many tried to escape, they found themselves stuck between two worlds. These stories would inspire others, however, who would fight for their rights, not only as human beings, but as proud Americans.

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