

On the Path of Seeking Peace

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During my reflection years, I try to focus on minimizing poverty among human centers of suffering. My journey in working with Native People has become a journey of searching and observation. At the same time, I have tried to overcome my own claim to entitlement and the racism that I now realize I inadvertently acquired through my culture and upbringing.

My wife and I try to understand people in their own culture and make an effort to visit and observe local third world cultures twice annually. We have become sensitized to the needs of people in poverty in their own homelands. We literally observed people dying in the streets and felt so hopeless, unable to provide meaningful help in alleviating the root causes of poverty. Too frequently it appeared to be the people with darker skin that were at the lower reaches of economic sustainability.

While working on my personal transformation and seeking discernment, my attention has been narrowed to reservation poverty issues in the United States. I studied the historical realities of conquest in the Americas and am trying to understand the consequences in today's world. My personal attention is drawn to the issues of the Black Hills and the many broken treaty violations by MY government. The issues of restoration and corrective action for these broken contractual agreements have not been resolved today.

In my dream for restorative justice, I see the following path to achieving an acceptable solution. This path includes the following components:

1. Gather support from a significant number of civic and national leaders to understand the need for immediate solution to the unresolved treaty issues involving immoral and illegal taking of land in the Black Hills from the Native People.
2. Establish a blue-ribbon committee to issue findings of fact and recommendations for ultimate solution
3. Identify land which would be acceptable to Native Americans as resolution of the land illegally taken in violation of legally enforceable treaty provisions.
4. Identify legislative sponsors to marshal an appropriate bill through the two houses of congress, granting designated land to the Native Americans in substantial compliance with the broken Fort Laramie Treaties' provisions.
5. Encourage Native leaders to appropriately use the land as designated by Native People, thereby providing a means of living and minimizing poverty among the People
6. Encourage many others to transfer, without restriction or condition, lands to Native People.
7. Affirmatively assist Native People in their control over their resources in developing appropriate ways to sustain Native People wishing to live upon this land.

While on my personal journey to focus on seeking Peace while trying to eradicate poverty on Native American Reservations, I stood with my Native brothers and sisters to protest racism directed toward Native people. On October 6, 2007, I was arrested with about eighty-five others

in Denver, Colorado, trying to stop hate speech as expressed in the Columbus Day Parade. I suffered about ten hours of incarceration, with about half the time in hand cuffs, and was exposed to mental and minimal physical abuse.

Why did I choose this course of action? Many people of many cultures suffer in this world. An outcome of my study and reflection at Iliff School of Theology and my world travels has sharpened my instincts to focus on helping to alleviate human suffering.

The protest action I took at the Columbus Day parade reflects that I am serious with this direction, and I feel a personal calling to this objective. I believe the issues of domination over Native people continues today as a direct result of the continual history of taking lands, massacring many Indians thereby committing physical and cultural genocide, and leaving Native People on some of the poorest quality land. I believe contemporary issues of poverty, alcohol, and drug use directly stem from many of these atrocities.

I am trying to understand the root cause of extreme poverty and work on ways to alleviate the impediments to achieving equality. The dreams I have will probably never be realized in my lifetime, but I hope to help move the continuum in the proper direction. Standing with the Native People on October 6th was my way of expressing solidarity with them. Dominant-culture people and their historic practice of domination are a huge part of the poor living conditions of the Native People. I believe it will take a change in the understanding and actions of "white people" to help bring solutions to poverty, racism and an end, in the "Columbus" issue, to hate speech.

Currently I am providing pro-bono business and financial advice to local Lakota People developing business plans for new industry on the Pine Ridge Reservation. These projects provide some hope for new employment of Native People on the Reservation that will help eradicate poverty.

I committed myself to becoming fully engaged in this effort while incarcerated in jail. Yes, I was intentional in being in the street to protest injustice and racism to Native People, but I made a stronger commitment while in jail to further the voice against injustices to my First People cousins and to strive to help make progress for all people. My dream is seeking peace while eradicating poverty on Native American reservations.

The extended version of this article can be found at <http://www.peacesupportnetwork.org/papers4.cfm>

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