Lakota Woman

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF MARY CROW DOG

Mary Crow Dog was born Mary Ellen Moore-Richard on September 26, 1954. A member of the Sicangu tribe (one of the seven Lakota tribes), Mary grew up on the Rosebud Indian Reservation in South Dakota. Her biological father left Mary's mother before Mary was born, and Mary was primarily raised by her grandparents. As a child, she attended St. Francis Boarding School, a Catholic missionary school that forced its Lakota students to practice Christianity and assimilate to white American culture. Mary first encountered the American Indian Movement (AIM) in her late teens, when she heard Leonard Crow Dog (her future husband) speak at an event. She felt called to join the movement and participated in several historical events, such as the Trail of Broken Treaties and the 1973 Occupation of Wounded Knee, where she gave birth to her first child, Pedro. Shortly after the Occupation of Wounded Knee, Mary married Leonard. The couple later divorced, and in 1991, Mary married Rudy Olguin. In total, Mary had six children. Throughout her life, Mary went by several names. In addition to her birth name and the name she took after her marriage to Leonard Crow Dog, she is also known as Mary Brave Bird and Mary Brave Woman Olguin. She published *Lakota Woman*, her first book, in 1990 with the help of Richard Erdoes, an artist, writer, and activist who was a long-time friend of Mary's. Erdoes also helped Mary publish her second book, *Ohitika Woman*, in 1993. Mary died at the age of 58 in California.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Mary's memoir *Lakota Woman* recounts her involvement with the American Indian Movement (AIM). The movement was founded in 1968 in Minneapolis, Minnesota with the original purpose of addressing the police brutality and systemic poverty that urban Native Americans faced. It quickly grew to address the civil rights of indigenous tribes across North America. Mary participated in several historic protests with AIM, including as the Trail of Broken Treaties and the Occupation of Wounded Knee. The Trail of Broken Treaties was a car caravan organized by several Native American organizations, including AIM. The caravan ended in the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington, D.C., which activists occupied while demanding that the government respect Native Americans' rights. The Occupation of Wounded Knee took place in 1973 and was AIM's response to the corruption and violence of government-supported Pine Ridge tribal president, Richard Wilson. Wilson had come to power after the U.S. government's Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, which implemented a democratic government within Native American tribes. He was a particularly corrupt tribal president, and violently oppressed any opposition to his "regime." After the Oglala Sioux Civil Rights Organization (OSCRO) failed to impeach Wilson, AIM joined forces with OSCRO and occupied the town of Wounded Knee, the same site as the 1890 Wounded Knee Massacre, when U.S. soldiers massacred almost 300 Lakota people. The 1973 Occupation of Wounded Knee lasted 71 days, during which the town and activists were surrounded by U.S. Marshals, FBI agents, and police. The occupation ended when federal officials promised to consider the activists' demands, such as the restoration of tribal treaty-making authority.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Lakota Woman is one of two memoirs written by Mary Crow Dog. Her second memoir, *Ohitika Woman*, continues where the first left off, discussing her life after marrying Leonard Crow Dog in more detail. Mary wrote both memoirs with the help of Richard Erdoes, an artist and writer who wrote *The Sun Dance People: The Plains Indians, Their Past and Present* and *The Rain Dance People: The Pueblo Indians, Their Past and Present*. Erdoes also collaborated with several Native American activists and community leaders to write memoirs about their lives and experiences. These include *Lame Deer, Seeker of Visions* with John Fire Lame Deer, *Crow Dog: Four Generations of Sioux Medicine Men* with Leonard Crow Dog, and *Ojibwa Warrior: Dennis Banks and the Rise of the American Indian Movement* with Dennis Banks. In addition, Clyde Bellecourt, one of the AIM's co-founders, published an autobiography titled *The Thunder Before the Storm: The Autobiography of Clyde Bellecourt*. Both *Ojibwa Warrior* and *The Thunder Before the Storm* focus especially on the American Indian Movement, which plays a major role in Mary Crow Dog's own memoir.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Lakota Woman
- **When Published:** 1990
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Memoir
- **Setting:** North America, mainly South Dakota
- **Climax:** Judge Robert Merhige releases Leonard Crow Dog from prison.
- **Antagonist:** The U.S. government, Richard "Dicky" Wilson, and racism
- **Point of View:** First Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Historic Casting. Mary Crow Dog's *Lakota Woman* was adapted into a 1994 film titled *Lakota Woman: Siege at Wounded Knee*. The film starred Irene Bedard, an actress of Inupiat and Cree ancestry, making *Lakota Woman* the first U.S. film with a Native American lead actress.

Risky Illustrations. In *Lakota Woman*, Mary Crow Dog mentions how Richard Erdoes sent a humorously illustrated letter to the judge on Leonard Crow Dog's case in an effort to persuade him to release Leonard. Others saw this as risky, though the judge enjoyed the drawings. Before this, Richard had a history of making controversial drawings. When in Germany and Austria during the 1930s, Richard published political cartoons criticizing Hitler, who was in power at the time. When Nazi officials discovered Richard's illustrations, Richard had to flee Europe.

PLOT SUMMARY

Mary Crow Dog introduces herself as Mary Brave Bird, a Lakota woman. She says that being a Native American woman is not easy, and she describes how the government sterilized her sister, Barbara, and how her friend Annie Mae Aquash was murdered. The U.S. government and white society strip away Native Americans' cultures and force their communities into poverty. Mary commends the courage and resilience of Native Americans who have fought to maintain their traditions and their rights.

Mary was mostly raised by her grandparents, as her father, Bill Moore, left Mary's mother when she was pregnant with Mary. Mary counts herself lucky to have been raised by her loving grandparents—many Native American children are separated from their families by white social workers, which cuts them off from their culture. This is part of the government's efforts to force Native Americans to assimilate. Because Mary's mother and grandparents believed that Mary would be more successful if she assimilated to white society, they didn't teach her the Lakota language, religion, or traditions. To learn more about her heritage, Mary spoke with community elders.

One of the ways that the U.S. government forced Native Americans to assimilate was by taking children from their families and enrolling them in Catholic missionary schools. Mary's grandmother, mother, sisters, and Mary herself were all forced to attend the same Catholic boarding school, where the students were forbidden to speak Lakota or practice their religious beliefs. The children were undernourished, overworked, and abused.

After quitting school as a teenager, Mary was sucked into a lifestyle of drinking and fighting. Alcohol abuse is common on reservations, as the inhabitants often struggle with poverty and feelings of hopelessness—not only are reservations under-resourced, but Native Americans also face racism and cultural erasure.

At 17, Mary left home and started roaming with other Native American youths. Together they traveled across the U.S., drinking, doing drugs, and stealing food when they needed to. Casual sex was common among the group, with men often callously demanding sex from women. While Mary generally respects Native American men for their determination in fighting for Native American civil rights, she notes that they can be cruel to their female counterparts. Sexism has followed Mary throughout her life, from sexual violence to strict gender roles.

Mary found a sense of purpose with the American Indian Movement (AIM), which she first encountered in 1971. AIM received a lot of support from Native American youths and elders, the latter of whom taught cultural knowledge to the younger generation. In 1972, Mary joined AIM in the Trail of Broken Treaties, a car caravan comprised of many indigenous tribes traveling across the U.S. to converge at Washington, D.C. where they occupied the Bureau of Indian Affairs building. Although the U.S. government didn't agree to the activists' demands, the event was still significant in that Native Americans had united together to confront "White America."

AIM wasn't just a political movement—it was a spiritual one, too. Like many Native Americans during this time, Mary deliberately sought out ways to connect with her heritage and culture, such as by practicing indigenous religions. AIM's spiritual leader and Mary's eventual husband, Leonard Crow Dog, aided Mary in her spiritual journey.

Mary also participated in the 1973 Occupation of Wounded Knee, which was a response to the violence and corruption of Dicky Wilson, the tribal president of Pine Ridge at the time. Oglala Sioux Civil Rights Organization (OSCRO) and AIM activists occupied Wounded Knee for 71 days, during which they were surrounded by U.S. Marshalls, FBI agents, and police officers. During the occupation, Leonard Crow Dog hosted a Ghost Dance, which he saw as a means to revive traditional religious beliefs and promote unity between Native American tribes.

While at Wounded Knee, Mary gave birth to her eldest child, Pedro. Shortly after the birth, Mary left Wounded Knee and was arrested for participating in the occupation. She was separated from Pedro and jailed for 24 hours before she could reunite with her baby.

Shortly after the Occupation of Wounded Knee, Leonard began expressing romantic interest in Mary. Eventually, she agreed to marry him. Mary found married life difficult—she was expected to do all the housework in the Crow Dogs' home, where Leonard frequently entertained many guests. Additionally, Leonard's family wasn't welcoming to Mary, as they didn't think

that she was Lakota enough. A peyote meeting helped Mary feel more reassured about her new role as the wife of a medicine man.

Mary shifts to recount the suspicious death of her beloved friend Annie Mae. For months leading up to her death, Annie Mae told Mary that she knew the U.S. government would try to kill her—they had a history of persecuting AIM activists. When Annie Mae's body was found, the FBI needlessly cut off her hands to identify her. Although the FBI announced that Annie Mae had died from exposure, a second autopsy revealed that she'd been shot in the head, which suggests that she was executed.

Mary returns to describing her life after her marriage to Leonard, who helped Mary in her spiritual journey. She describes several of the ceremonies that Leonard leads, such as the sweat bath ceremony; yuwipi ceremonies, during which people can communicate with spirits with a medicine man who acts as moderator; and the Sun Dance, a ceremony in which participants pierce their flesh to help a loved one.

In 1975, two drunk men crashed a car into Leonard's yard and began fighting with guests who were staying with the Crow Dogs. Two days later, the FBI arrested Leonard for breaking one of the men's jaws, even though he hadn't done so. Leonard had suspected for years that the government would find a way to falsely imprison him, like they did with other Native American activists. Indeed, it turned out that the government staged the car crash to create a plausible reason to arrest Leonard. Nonetheless, Leonard was charged and found guilty in a series of sham trials. Thus began Mary and Leonard's efforts to free him from his unjust imprisonment. After two years, many legal battles, and local and international support and media attention, the judge on the case at last released Leonard from prison.

Mary ends the memoir by explaining that her and Leonard's relationship has become stronger after he returned from his imprisonment. They have three children together, and Leonard continues to fight for the rights of Native Americans across the United States.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Mary Crow Dog – Mary Crow Dog is the protagonist and co-author of her memoir, *Lakota Woman*, in which she recounts her experiences as a Native American activist during the mid-20th century. Mary grew up on Rosebud Indian Reservation, where she was primarily raised by her grandma and grandpa. Mary's father was "mostly white," while her mother was Lakota, and Mary's biracial identity was a major source of confusion during her early life—she felt neither white enough nor Native American enough. As a child, she was forced to attend a missionary school, the purpose of which was to convert Native Americans to Christianity and assimilate them into white society. Being separated from her family and traditions was traumatic for Mary, making her feel alienated from Lakota culture and even more confused about her identity. After leaving school, Mary spent several years aimlessly traveling, drinking, and fighting. Finally, she joined the American Indian Movement (AIM), which she felt gave her purpose. She followed AIM to historic demonstrations, such as the Trail of Broken Treaties and the Occupation of Wounded Knee, to advocate for Native Americans' civil rights. She describes how this activism is more rewarding than passively accepting the oppression she—and Native Americans in general—experience. She even stayed with the movement throughout her first pregnancy and gave birth to her son, Pedro, during the Occupation, showing her dedication to the cause. While she was AIM activist, Mary met and eventually married Leonard Crow Dog, who was AIM's spiritual leader. Leonard helped Mary learn more about Lakota and other indigenous groups' religions and traditions. Through her relationship with Leonard and her participation with AIM, Mary discovered that she felt complete and sure of who she was when she embraced Native American cultural traditions.

Leonard Crow Dog – Leonard Crow Dog, Mary's husband, was the American Indian Movement's (AIM's) spiritual leader. Leonard came from a family with a history of resistance against the U.S. government's efforts to oppress Native American people. In fact, Leonard's father, Henry Crow Dog, prevented Leonard from being taken to one of the many Christian boarding schools where Native American children were forced to give up their cultural traditions and assimilate to white society. This is why Mary believes Leonard was untouched by the "white-man intellectualism" that may have diminished his "unique, original" thinking or his extensive knowledge of Lakota cultural traditions. Because of Henry's resistance, Leonard was brought up to be a traditional medicine man, and it was in this role that Leonard aided many Native Americans in reconnecting with their heritage. Leonard was the spiritual leader of AIM, which meant that he participated in many of AIM's historic demonstrations, such as the Trail of Broken Treaties and the Occupation of Wounded Knee, where he revived the Ghost Dance. A strong advocate for intertribal unity, Leonard often hosted Lakota ceremonies—such as the Sun Dance—and allowed Native Americans from other tribes to join. After the Occupation of Wounded Knee, the U.S. government persecuted Leonard for his activism and imprisoned him on a phony charge. Leonard's friends and family (including Mary) rallied together to raise support and awareness to secure Leonard's release, which stands as testament to the power of unified efforts when fighting for justice.

Mary's Mother – Mary's mother is a Lakota woman whose

husband, Bill Moore, abandoned her shortly after she got pregnant with Mary. Mary explains that single-parenting is not uncommon for Native American women—many Native American men abandon their families due to the poverty and hopelessness that's common among indigenous people. Mary's mother became a nurse, but because she could only find work far from home, she recruited her mother and stepfather, Louise Flood and Noble Moore, to raise her children. Mary had a poor relationship with her mother for years, as her mother was convinced that assimilation to white society was the only way to prosper, while Mary longed to reconnect with her Lakota heritage and advocate for Native Americans' rights. After becoming a mother herself, Mary's relationship with her mother greatly improved, as she could better understand the pressures and challenges that Native American mothers face. Although Mary has no intention of letting go of her activism—which she finds more rewarding than her mother's passive acceptance of her circumstances—she better understands how the sexism and racism that Native American women experience can affect a person's thinking.

Louise Flood – Louise Flood was Mary's grandmother on Mary's mother's side. Louise and her husband, Noble Moore, raised Mary and her siblings because Mary's mother—who was the only financial provider after her husband, Bill Moore, left her—couldn't be home with her children because she worked in a hospital many miles away. Louise was a Lakota woman, but she had converted to Christianity and refused to teach Mary the Lakota language or any Lakota cultural traditions. She believed that "going to **church**, dressing and behaving like a [white person] […] was the key which would magically unlock the door leading to the good life, the white life." Louise's attitude was not an uncommon one on reservations, and the belief that Native Americans had to assimilate to white society in order to survive and prosper was one of the reasons that indigenous cultural traditions began to die out.

Henry Crow Dog – Henry Crow Dog is Leonard Crow Dog's father. Henry follows the precedent of traditionalism and resistance against white society that the first Crow Dog set. When Leonard was a young man, Henry chased away white missionaries who tried to force Leonard to attend the local missionary school—Henry, along with other Crow Dog elders, had noticed Leonard's spiritual gifts and had chosen him to become a medicine man. In the early 1900s, Henry experienced religious persecution when government officials chased him from the town where he and his family were living for holding a peyote ceremony. He refused to assimilate to white society and chose isolation instead, which allowed him—and his family—to maintain Lakota cultural traditions. He was such a traditionalist, in fact, that he did not accept Mary as Leonard's wife for some time. In his eyes, she was not Lakota enough. His unwelcoming treatment of Mary reflects an issue that is common among biracial and bicultural people: they often feel unaccepted by both sides of their identity.

Annie Mae Aquash – Annie Mae Aquash was a Micmac Native American woman and one of Mary's best friends. Mary describes her as a hard-working, determined, and energetic woman who was fully dedicated to the fight for Native American civil rights. In fact, Annie Mae was so devoted to the cause that she asked her sister to raise her children for her, which emphasizes how highly Annie Mae prioritized activism. Like many of the Native Americans whom Mary discusses in her memoir, Annie Mae sought out opportunities to engage with her indigenous heritage. Because "her Micmac people were losing their culture and language," Annie Mae learned Lakota traditions and some of the Lakota language as well. Annie Mae's engagement with Lakota traditions is an example of how intertribal cultural exchanges can help Native Americans feel more connected with their indigenous identity. As with several other American Indian Movement (AIM) activists, Annie Mae was persecuted by the federal government. When she went missing, and her dead body was discovered in the snow, Annie Mae's friends and family were immediately suspicious. The FBI mutilated her corpse, which showed signs of rape, and declared that she died from exposure, even though a second autopsy showed that she had been shot in the head, execution style. The circumstances of Annie Mae's death and the FBI's dismissal of the case imply that the government executed her. This betrays the government's racist policies and intentions to eliminate Native American activists, as well as the sexual violence that Native American women like Annie Mae are often subjected to.

Barbara – Barbara is one of Mary's sisters; she's the sibling that Mary feels closest to, because they shared many life experiences. Barbara, like Mary, was an activist with the American Indian Movement (AIM) and followed AIM around the country. Barbara's experience as a Lakota woman is riddled with instances of racism and sexism, often both at the same time. Like her mother, Barbara was sterilized against her will after giving birth to her child, who died only two hours after birth. This atrocity reflects the U.S. government's ongoing genocide against Native Americans. Barbara was also the victim of sexual harassment; Mary recounts a story where a group of white men shouted crude and racist comments at her. Through Barbara's experiences, Mary stresses that "It's hard being an Indian woman."

The First Crow Dog – The first Crow Dog, who is also called Kangi-Shunka, founded the Crow Dog clan. He was a contemporary of Spotted Tail, but the two leaders had very different approaches in how to deal with the threat of white society. While Spotted Tail believed it was useless to try resisting the white colonizers, Crow Dog resisted. Mary implies that Crow Dog's attitude set a precedent for his descendants, whom she describes as "a tribe apart." Cultural traditions are alive among the clan, which suggests that Crow Dog's resistance—and the continued resistance of his

descendants—are what allow them to hold onto their culture and lifestyle, even in the midst of encroaching white society.

Elsie Flood – Elsie Flood was Mary's grandmother's niece. Elsie was one of the Lakota traditionalists who had an enormous influence on Mary, who sought her out to learn more about Lakota culture. Elsie was a "turtle woman," or a resilient and independent person. She was also a medicine woman and a talented artist. In 1976, her naked and beaten body was found in her home. Her violent death, and the fact that the state never investigated her murder, speaks to the U.S. government and white society's. misogyny and racism. Mary still mourns the loss of the Elsie, with whom so much traditional wisdom died.

Old Grandpa Fool Bull – Old Grandpa Fool Bull was one of Mary's relatives. Before he died, Mary went to him to learn Lakota cultural traditions. He was a traditionalist; in fact, he was the last Lakota who knew how to make the tribe's "old-style flutes." He also lived through the Wounded Knee Massacre, one of the U.S.'s infamous acts of violence against Native Americans (he was nearby and heard the rifle fire). Old Grandpa Fool Bull brought Mary to her first peyote meeting when she was young; unlike Mary's grandmother and mother, he believed in the importance of maintaining Lakota traditions.

Cheyenne – Cheyenne is Buddy Lamont's sister. After Mary gave birth during the Occupation of Wounded Knee, Buddy's family asked Mary to leave Wounded Knee with them to help with Buddy's funeral. Government officials had promised not to arrest Mary as she left Wounded Knee, but they arrested her anyway. They separated her baby, Pedro, from her, and said that they'd give Pedro to a foster family because "being poor, unwed, and a no-good rabble-rouser from the Knee made [her] an unfit mother." None of these things actually preclude Mary from being a good mother, which suggests that they sought to take Pedro away from Mary simply because she was Native American. Mary refused to part with Pedro until Cheyenne offered to watch him while Mary was in jail. The officials relented, and Mary felt more reassured knowing that another Native American woman was watching her child. Cheyenne's offer is an example of Native American solidarity—she went out of her way to help another Native American woman, instead of letting Mary lose her child.

Noble Moore – Noble Moore was Mary's grandfather, Louise Flood's husband, and Mary's mother's stepfather. Bill Moore, Noble's son from a previous marriage, eventually married Mary's mother. Mary describes Noble Moore as "as good and sober and caring as his son was the opposite." Mary loved her grandparents, who raised her and her siblings with care and kindness. They lived in poverty, which is common on Native American reservations, as they are under-resourced by the U.S. government. But Mary staunchly believes that living in poverty with Native American relatives who loved her was better than a potentially wealthier childhood with white strangers who would force the children to assimilate to white culture.

Bob Burnette – Bob Burnette came up with the idea of having the Trail of Broken Treaties caravans meet in Washington, D.C. Bob Burnette had been a tribal chairman at the Rosebud Indian Reservation, so Mary feels very proud that someone from her reservation had such an integral role in planning the Trail of Broken Treaties. She does note that, while she is proud of him, she believes that "the feeling of pride in one's particular tribe is stand[s] in the way of Indian unity."

Martha Grass – Martha Grass is a Cherokee woman who participated in the Trail of Broken Treaties. For Mary, the "high point" of the Trail of Broken Treaties was watching Martha Grass speak to Secretary of the Interior, Rogers Morton. Mary says that Martha's powerful speech, which addressed the problems Native American women and children face, "[spoke] for all of us." The fact that it was a Native American woman's speech that resonated most with Mary suggests that other groups—such as Native American men or white women—often overlook the unique issues that Native American women experience, as they are subjected to both racism and sexism.

Pedro Bissonette – Pedro Bissonette was the leader of the Oglala Sioux Civil Rights Organization (OSCRO) during Wilson's regime until his (Pedro's) death. Pedro was also a close friend of Mary's, and he stayed by her side when she was in her third trimester of pregnancy during the Occupation of Wounded Knee. Pedro and other OSCRO members joined American Indian Movement (AIM) activists to occupy Wounded Knee, a demonstration that got a lot of media attention and helped raise awareness of the oppression that Native Americans experience. The uniting of OSCRO and AIM for this demonstration carried on the goal of intertribal unity that was established during the Trail of Broken Treaties. Later, Pedro was killed by police; he was just one of many Native American activists who were murdered by government officials.

Dennis Banks – Dennis Banks, an Ojibwe man, was one of the co-founders of the American Indian Movement (AIM). He participated in both the Trail of Broken Treaties and the Occupation of Wounded Knee. Although he said that "AIM was against violence," he did not hesitate to defend himself and his people. He is an example of someone who chose activism over passivity. With his activism, Dennis Banks created meaningful change in the fight for Native American civil rights.

Wesley Bad Heart Bull – Wesley Bad Heart Bull was a Native American man whose death served as one of the catalysts for the Occupation of Wounded Knee. When Wesley Bad Heart Bull was killed by a white man, American Indian Movement (AIM) activists gathered at the courthouse where his killer would be tried. After discovering that Wesley's murderer would only be charged with second-degree manslaughter, the AIM activists began to riot, after which Oglala Sioux Civil Rights Organization (OSCRO) activists asked them for help in protesting Wilson's violent regime. It was when AIM activists

joined up with OSCRO activists to plan a demonstration that they decided to occupy Wounded Knee.

Sarah Bad Heart Bull – Sarah Bad Heart Bull is the mother of Wesley Bad Heart Bull. While "her son's murderer was acquitted without doing any time at all […] Sarah actually spent a few weeks in jail" for protesting her son's death. The injustice of this situation—that a murderer walked free while a grieving mother was jailed—illustrates how the U.S. justice system discriminates against Native Americans.

Wallace Black Elk – Wallace Black Elk is a medicine man who assisted Leonard Crow Dog in performing religious ceremonies at the Occupation of Wounded Knee and elsewhere. Wallace was one of the medicine men who organized the Sun Dance of 1971, which was more traditional and less commercial than the one that took place at Pine Ridge. His traditionalism suggests that he believed in the importance of maintain and practicing Native American cultural traditions, rather than assimilating to white society.

Frank Clearwater – Frank Clearwater was one of the two Native American men who died at the Occupation of Wounded Knee. When he was shot by federal officers, American Indian Movement (AIM) activists communicated to federal officers that they had a wounded man who needed medical attention. Although the officers promised to hold their fire, they did not, thereby preventing him from getting the medical attention that he needed. Activists eventually got him out of Wounded Knee and to a hospital, but he died a few days later.

Buddy Lamont – Buddy Lamont was an Oglala Lakota man who was shot and killed during the Occupation of Wounded Knee. An ex-marine, he "received his honorable discharge from the Marine Corps just about the time a government bullet killed him." The fact that his work with the Marine Corps didn't stop the U.S. government from killing him speaks to how cooperating with one's oppressors may not save one from persecution later.

Leonard Peltier – Leonard Peltier was a leader of the American Indian Movement (AIM). The government arrested him and charged him for the death of two FBI agents. Mary notes that they arrested him "not because there was a good case against him, but because he was a radical AIM leader and a thorn in the government's flesh." In other words, Leonard Peltier was (and still is, as of 2021) a political prisoner. His imprisonment, which Mary argues is unjust, is evidence of the U.S. government's intentions to eliminate Native American activists.

Bill Eagle Feathers – Bill Eagle Feathers was a medicine man. When Leonard Crow Dog—along with several other medicine men—decided to hold a traditional Sun Dance in 1971, they were confronted with the problem of needing to move the Sacred Tree from one area (which government officials had banned them from) to another. Bill suggested that they adapt to the situation and ride in a truck with some white hippies who offered to take them and the Sacred Tree to their destination. Bill's decision to accept the hippies' offer is an example of how people can adapt to new situations without giving up their traditions.

Russell Means – Russell Means was one of the prominent members of the American Indian Movement (AIM). He was an advocate for activism and self-defense, and Mary once heard him say that "maybe the time has come when [they] need some Indian martyrs." He was dedicated to AIM's cause and fought even though he was aware of the potential consequences, choosing to risk his life rather than remain passive and safe.

Estes Stuart – Estes Stuart is a spiritual leader who helped Leonard Crow Dog host a peyote ceremony when Mary fell ill. Mary got sick shortly after she married Leonard Crow Dog, seemingly due to the stress of trying to connect with Leonard's family (who were not welcoming to her), adjusting to her new roles as wife and mother, and constantly tending to so many family members and friends. During the peyote ceremony, Estes said that Mary was suffering from a "sickening for want of love"—she felt unappreciated for all the work she was doing.

Richard "Dicky" Wilson – Richard "Dicky" Wilson was the notoriously corrupt tribal president of Pine Ridge Indian Reservation during the Occupation of Wounded Knee. He tampered with elections, misused tribal funds, and violently eliminated opposing individuals and groups, which lead to a shockingly high murder rate on the reservation. To protest Richard Wilson's regime, AIM and OSCRO activists occupied Wounded Knee.

President Nixon – President Nixon was the U.S. president at the time of the Trail of Broken Treaties. He had ordered all important politicians and officials to ignore the participating activists so, although the activists had originally planned a peaceful and collaborative discussion with officials, their mood quickly changed as they realized that no one—the president included—would pay any attention to them until they became rowdy. This situation is evidence that passivity and politeness rarely persuade oppressors to pay attention to the demands of those that they oppress.

Bill Moore – Bill Moore is Mary's biological father and Mary's mother's first husband. Bill Moore "was part Indian, but mostly white," and Mary inherited this biracial identity, which she struggled with for much of her life. Bill Moore left Mary's mother shortly after she became pregnant with Mary. Mary notes that this is not uncommon on reservations, where young men feel hopeless and demoralized from the poverty and lack of opportunities.

Mary's Stepfather – Mary's stepfather is an alcoholic who married Mary's mother. Mary despised being around him: he never took care of her and her siblings, and he stared at her in a way that made her uncomfortable, which suggests that he may have been a sexual predator. He also introduced Mary to

alcohol when she was just 10 years old, and she quickly developed a toxic relationship with alcohol, which she explains is a common issue on reservations.

Jancita Eagle Deer – Jancita Eagle Deer was Leonard Crow Dog's niece. While suing a South Dakota official for rape, she was mysteriously killed. She was last seen with her lover, who was later discovered to be a government spy. The implication is that the U.S. official who raped her saw her as a disposable obstacle to his career and had her murdered. His—and his accomplices'—lack of respect for her speaks to the misogyny and racism of the U.S. government and U.S. society as a whole.

Charlene Left Hand Bull – Charlene Left Hand Bull is one of Mary's best friends from missionary school. Like Mary, Charlene despised the missionary school and rebelled against the tyrannical rules of the school. A priest at the school sexually assaulted Charlene, which is one of many examples in the memoir of Native American women being targeted for both their race and their gender.

Bonnie – Bonnie is one of Mary's friends. Mary tells a story in which Bonnie was attacked by a drunken white man who made racist comments to her while she was trying to use a pay phone. Her story is representative of how physical violence against Native American women is a pervasive problem in the U.S.

Tom Poor Bear – Tom Poor Bear is an Oglala Lakota boy who came to Barbara's aid when she was harassed by a group of white men. Several other American Indian Movement (AIM) activists joined Tom in fighting the white men and defeated them. The white men returned to the scene of the fight with police officers, who tried to arrest the Native American men. The injustice of this situation speaks to the pervasive problem of racism of U.S. society.

The Priest – On Mary's last day at missionary school, she punched a new priest in the nose because he mocked a shy boy in the class for not pronouncing an English word correctly. She then demanded an early release from missionary school, which was granted. Her boldness suggests that standing up for oneself is preferable to passivity, as one can actually create change by taking action. Later on in life, Mary became friends with the priest, as he eventually became an advocate for Native Americans' civil rights, supporting the American Indian Movement (AIM) during the Occupation of Wounded Knee. He represents the idea that the fight for equal rights should be an inclusive one—anyone can join in and support causes like the AIM.

Grandmother Earth – Grandmother Earth, or *Unci*, is one of many female figures who are important in Lakota religion and lore. But Mary notes that, in the modern day, Native American women are not treated with the same respect that Native American men have for one another or for religious female figures such as Grandmother Earth.

White Buffalo Woman – White Buffalo Woman, or *Ptesan Win*, is one of many female figures who are important in Lakota religion and lore. The Lakota hold her in special regard because she brought them the sacred pipe from Buffalo Nation. When Mary was nervous about being a medicine man's wife—she had just married Leonard Crow Dog—Leonard reassured her by reminding her of the important role that women have in the Lakota religion.

Spotted Tail – Spotted Tail was a Sicangu Lakota chief in the 1800s (the Rosebud Indian Reservation, the reservation that Mary grew up in, is a Sicangu Lakota reservation). After being imprisoned in the eastern U.S., Spotted Tail returned to his people with the knowledge that white people had far more resources than the Lakota. He believed that "it was useless […] to try to resist the *wasičuns* [white people]," so he avoided war and tried to cooperate with the U.S. government in order to protect his people. Although this kept them from getting killed in battle, the government nonetheless forced his people onto under-resourced reservations and made them culturally assimilate. The implication is that trying to cooperate with oppressors does not lead to meaningful change and can, as in Spotted Tail's case, cause more persecution.

Horn Chips – Horn Chips was a yuwipi man who performed a yuwipi ceremony for doubtful white missionaries who wanted to "expose" Horn Chips as a fraud. The missionaries hoped that the attending Lakota would convert to Christianity if the missionaries could convince them that their traditional religious ceremonies were "hocus-pocus." The missionaries' efforts to convert these Lakota to Christianity is reflective of how many Native Americans are coerced or forced to assimilate to white culture. Horn Chips, however, proved the missionaries wrong and actually succeeded in converting Christian Lakota to the traditional Lakota religion.

Short Bull – Short Bull was the man who told the first Crow Dog about the Ghost Dance religion. He had heard about the Ghost Dance from Wovoka—in fact, the Ghost Dance was a religion that was spread to many different Native American tribes. Mary says that the Ghost Dance "brough them hope," which suggests that this cultural exchange was beneficial for the Lakota.

Wovoka – Wovoka was the Paiute spiritual leader who first preached about the Ghost Dance religion. He told many tribes of the Ghost Dance, and the word traveled quickly. Mary suggests that this cultural exchange was a beneficial one, as the Ghost Dance was "a religion of love" that brought many Native Americans hope.

Big Foot – Big Foot was the Lakota chief whose people were murdered at the Wounded Knee Massacre. He had surrendered to the U.S. soldiers, but they massacred him and his people anyway. The violent act exemplifies the U.S. government's cruelty toward Native Americans, as well the fact that Native Americans who cooperate with the government are

often still persecuted.

Black Elk – Black Elk is an Oglala holy man who wrote a book about the Wounded Knee Massacre, in which he mourned the loss of the "beautiful dream" that the Ghost Dance represented. One aspect of this "beautiful dream" is the goal of intertribal unity. Mary says that, by reviving the Ghost Dance at the Occupation of Wounded Knee, Native American activists also revived this dream of intertribal unity.

First Woman – According to Lakota religious beliefs, First Woman was the first human. Unlike in Christianity, in which Adam (the first man) precedes Eve (the first woman), First Woman precedes her male counterpart, First Man, who is born from her menstrual blood. First Woman is one of many powerful and important female figures in Lakota religious and cultural lore, which points to the important role that women play in traditional Lakota society.

Beck – Beck was one of two men who drunkenly crashed into Leonard Crow Dog's yard and started a fight with some of Leonard Crow Dogs' relatives. In the fight, the other man, McClosky, got his jaw broken. Government officials arrested Leonard for breaking McClosky's jaw, even though Leonard played no role in this skirmish. Later, Mary and Leonard discovered that the FBI staged Beck and McClosky's crash to create a plausible reason to arrest Leonard. This incident speaks to the U.S. government's dishonesty and corruption in their treatment of Native Americans.

McClosky – Along with Beck, McClosky was one of two men who drunkenly crashed into Leonard Crow Dog's yard and started a fight with some of Leonard's relatives. In the fight, McClosky's jaw was broken. Government officials arrested Leonard for breaking McClosky's jaw, even though Leonard played no role in this skirmish. Later, Mary and Leonard discovered that the FBI staged Beck and McClosky's crash and fight to create a plausible reason to arrest Leonard. This incident speaks to the U.S. government's dishonesty and corruption in their treatment of Native Americans.

MINOR CHARACTERS

First Man – According to Lakota lore, First Man was the second human. He was born from First Woman's menstrual blood. His secondary arrival speaks to the important role that women play in Lakota cultural traditions.

Pedro – Pedro is Mary's oldest child, whom Mary gave birth to while protesting at the Occupation of Wounded Knee with the American Indian Movement (AIM). In the memoir's Epilogue, Mary notes that Pedro now actively engages with Lakota and Native American cultural traditions.

Morning Star – Morning Star is Frank Clearwater's wife. When Frank Clearwater was brought to a hospital to treat his wounds from the Occupation of Wounded Knee, federal officials jailed Morning Star overnight for participating in the occupation.

Bessie Good Road – Bessie Good Road was a medicine woman whom Leonard Crow Dog asked to teach him. Leonard tells Mary of Bessie Good Road's power to reassure her that women are important in Native American religious ceremonies.

Richard Erdoes – Richard Erdoes and his wife, Jean Erdoes, were defense coordinators for Mary and Leonard Crow Dog's lawyers during Leonard's trial. Richard and Jean served as examples to Mary of "white people who were on [Native Americans'] side." Richard is also the editor of Mary's memoir.

Jean Erdoes – Jean Erdoes and her husband, Richard Erdoes, were defense coordinators for Mary and Leonard Crow Dog's lawyers during Leonard's trial. Mary became very close with the Erdoes family during the two years that they were engaged in the legal battle to free Leonard from prison.

Bill Kunstler – Bill Kunstler was a lawyer who defended many American Indian Movement (AIM) activists, including Leonard Crow Dog. Bill Kunstler was a white man, and it was through getting to know him that Mary "learned to like white people who were on [Native Americans'] side."

Judge Robert Merhige – Judge Robert Merhige was the judge on Leonard Crow Dog's case. He eventually decided to release Leonard from prison because he received such an influx of letters from around the world that advocated for Leonard's release.

Sandy Rosen – Sandy Rosen is a lawyer who, along with Bill Kunstler, worked to free Leonard Crow Dog from prison.

Delphine – Delphine was Mary's sister-in-law. She was beat to death by a drunk police officer, and her death was not investigated. Her violent death and the lack of investigation speak to the misogyny and racism that Native American women experience.

Gina One Star – Gina One Star is one of Mary's best friends from missionary school.

Sandra – Sandra is one of Mary's sisters. When Sandra was pregnant (and, Mary implies, unmarried), their mother berated Sandra for getting pregnant.

Ellen Moves Camp – Ellen Moves Camp is a Native American activist. Mary believes that she may have been the one to suggest occupying Wounded Knee to protest Wilson's violent regime.

Gladys Bissonette – Gladys Bissonette is a Native American activist. Mary believes that she may have been the one to suggest occupying Wounded Knee to protest Wilson's violent regime.

Cheryl Petite – Cheryl Petite is a woman who, like Mary, was pregnant during the Occupation of Wounded Knee. While Mary had her baby at Wounded Knee, Cheryl left to give birth in a hospital.

Josette Wawasik – Josette Wawasik is a Potawatomi woman

who acted as midwife for Mary when she gave birth at Wounded Knee.

Jake Maloney – Jake Maloney was Annie Mae's first husband who physically abused her.

Nogeeshik Aquash – Nogeeshik Aquash is Annie Mae's second husband who was both mentally and physically abusive.

Rogers Morton – Rogers Morton was the Secretary of the Interior during the Trail of Broken Treaties.

TERMS

American Indian Movement (AIM) – The American Indian Movement (AIM) was a political and cultural movement founded in Minneapolis, Minnesota in 1968. Its original purpose was to protest the police brutality and systemic poverty that affected urban Native Americans, but it eventually expanded to advocate for the civil rights of indigenous tribes across North America.

1973 Occupation of Wounded Knee – The Occupation of Wounded Knee (which **Mary** also calls the Siege of Wounded Knee) was an act of protest led by American Indian Movement (AIM) activists and members of the Oglala Sioux Civil Rights Organization (OSCRO). It was an attempt to impeach **Richard "Dicky" Wilson**, the notoriously corrupt tribal president of Pine Ridge Reservation. To protest Wilson's regime, AIM and OSCRO activists occupied Wounded Knee (the site of the 1890 Wounded Knee Massacre) for 71 days. During the occupation, U.S. marshals, FBI agents, and other law enforcement officers encircled the protestors, cut off their supplies, and exchanged fire with the activists.

1890 Wounded Knee Massacre – The Wounded Knee Massacre was a massacre of Lakota people by U.S. soldiers on Pine Ridge Reservation. In the late 1800s, many Lakota began practicing the Ghost Dance, a ceremony that white settlers and the U.S. government feared as a sign of impending attack. To stamp out the religion, the U.S. government sent soldiers to arrest the Dancers. In December of 1890, soldiers surrounded a group of Lakota led by a chief named **Big Foot**. On the morning of December 29, 1890, U.S. soldiers opened fire on the group of Lakota, murdering nearly 300 Lakota men, women, and children.

Ghost Dance – The Ghost Dance is a Native American religious movement that started in the late 1800s, and that multiple tribes incorporated into their beliefs. According to **Wovoka**, a Paiute spiritual leader who received the Ghost Dance in a vision, the Ghost Dance would allow the living to communicate with the dead and would end colonization to usher in a time of peace and prosperity for Native Americans.

Peyote – Peyote is a type of cactus that has psychoactive properties. Many Native American tribes smoke or otherwise consume peyote for spiritual and medicinal purposes.

Trail of Broken Treaties – The Trail of Broken Treaties was a 1972 caravan protest, in which multiple Native American groups drove across the country to converge at Washington, D.C. to advocate for Native American civil rights. The American Indian Movement (AIM) was one of several organizations that organized and took part in the Trail of Broken Treaties. Eventually, the U.S. government agreed to look over the demands and not press charges if the activists left the BIA building, though officials dismissed the demands shortly after the protest.

Yuwipi – Yuwipi is a Lakota ceremony that's performed when a person "wants to find something—something that can be touched, or something that exists only in the mind." In her memoir, **Mary** explains that people may request a yuwipi ceremony to heal an illness or to find a loved one who is missing. The medicine man who leads the ceremony is called a *yuwipi* man, and he acts as a medium between living people and the spirits of the dead.

Oglala Sioux Civil Rights Organization (OSCRO) – The Oglala Sioux Civil Rights Organization (OSCRO) was a group of Oglala Lakota who opposed **Richard "Dicky" Wilson** as tribal president of Pine Ridge Reservation. Along with activists from the American Indian Movement (AIM), OSCRO took part in the Occupation of Wounded Knee to protest Wilson's regime.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

ACTIVISM AND RESISTANCE

In her memoir *Lakota Woman*, Mary Crow Dog recounts her experience as an activist in the American Indian Movement (AIM). The movement advocated for Native Americans' civil rights and a revival of the indigenous traditions that the U.S. government had long been trying to suppress. While Mary acknowledges that many people saw AIM's radical—and sometimes violent—methods as controversial, she also believes that AIM "gave [Native Americans] a lift badly needed at the time. It defined [their] goals […] It set a style for Indians to imitate." AIM was a movement that particularly resonated with young people and elders in the Native American community. Middle-aged adults, on the other hand, were "a lost generation," a group that had generally given up trying to resist forced assimilation and violence committed against their people. Mary's mother and grandmother embodied this attitude, both believing that the

only way to succeed in a white-dominated society was to assimilate. But Mary makes it clear that such passivity only leads to continued oppression—activism and resistance are the only ways to bring about change for oneself and for one's people. And, even when one's actions don't achieve the desired change, resisting can foster a sense of empowerment in marginalized communities while also setting an example for future generations.

By depicting how assimilation and compliance have negatively impacted Native Americans, Mary shows that passivity does not mitigate oppression. Mary recognizes that many Native Americans assimilated to white society out of necessity, but that this choice nevertheless had devastating impacts. For instance, during the end of the 19th century, the chief of the Sicangu Lakota, Spotted Tail, decided to stop battling white settlers because he saw that he and his people were out-numbered and out-resourced. But while his passivity initially saved lives by avoiding war, his people were then forced onto reservations and forced to assimilate to white American culture. Once under the control of the U.S. government, future generations of Native Americans were burdened with poverty and ongoing cultural genocide. As an AIM activist, Mary witnessed how passivity often emboldened oppressors to continue oppressing others. During both the Trail of Broken Treaties and the Occupation of Wounded Knee (demonstrations that AIM took part in), U.S. government officials were dismissive of activists and their demands until the activists took extreme action. As she put it, "as long as [the activists] 'behaved nicely' nobody gave a damn about [them]."

Activism and resistance, on the other hand, can lead to meaningful change in the fight against oppression. Mary's experiences with the AIM show that in order to get the attention of those in power, one must actively fight against them. This was the case during the Trail of Broken Treaties and the Occupation of Wounded Knee. On both occasions, Native American activists initially tried to reason with U.S. government officials. But when it became clear that the officials would not respect the Native Americans' demands, the activists took more extreme action: taking over the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) building and occupying the town of Wounded Knee. The government—and the nation as a whole—only listened to what AIM had to say when the activists broke the government's expectations of quiet "respectability." Activism also led to several key legal victories for the Native American community. Among these was Mary's husband, Leonard's, legal battle, which occurred after the U.S. government imprisoned him for political reasons. The book implies that the government fabricated a reason to arrest Leonard because they saw him as a political threat, as he encouraged young people to resist complying with white society and the U.S. government. Neither Mary, Leonard, nor their friends accepted this injustice. By fundraising, raising awareness, and organizing a team of dedicated attorneys, Mary and Leonard's supporters secured Leonard's release.

Mary also argues that even when activism doesn't accomplish its aims, it empowers activists and boosts their morale while also setting a precedent for future generations to follow. Many of the fights—both ideological and physical—that Mary recounts in her memoir do not accomplish the fighters' goals. But this doesn't negate the positive impact that these events had on Native Americans. For example, when reflecting on the legacy of the Trail of Broken Treaties, Mary concedes that "from the practical point of view, nothing had been achieved." Yet AIM activists did achieve a great moral victory, for "[they] had faced White America collectively, not as individual tribes." By doing so, they set an example of unity between indigenous nations and resistance against the U.S. government, which future generations could look to for guidance and inspiration. Mary also stresses that activism feels more empowering than passively accepting one's oppression. In other words, part of the value of resisting lies in the fact that one is taking part in efforts to change an unjust situation. As a Native American woman, Mary knows that she will encounter racist and sexist persecution no matter what she does—so she might as well fight while she can. Marginalized people are generally limited to two difficult options: they can either assimilate to the system and accept their fate, or they can fight against it. At one point, Mary explains that if one tries to be "responsible [and] respectable [...] [one] get[s] nowhere. If [one] approach[es] [the oppressors] as a militant[,] [one may] get nowhere either [...] but at least [one] do[es]n't feel so shitty." And given that resistance *does* sometimes generate meaningful change, Mary makes it clear that activism—not passivity—is the preferred way to face oppression.

ASSIMILATION, TRADITION, AND IDENTITY

In *Lakota Woman*, Mary Crow Dog recounts her struggle to reconcile the two cultures that make up her biracial identity. Mary's father (who was "mostly white") had no hand in raising her, and her mother (who was Native American) didn't raise Mary with any Lakota cultural traditions, as she believed that the only way to prosper was to adhere to white American society's standards. Throughout her early life, then, Mary felt neither white enough nor Lakota enough—and her personal struggle is reflective of the broader conflict between assimilation and preserving traditions that many indigenous people face. Not only does the U.S. government force Native Americans to assimilate, but there is also pressure within indigenous communities to conform. But through her own and other Native Americans' experiences, Mary illustrates how assimilation has a devastating impact on indigenous peoples and their cultures. Not only does white society continue to reject and oppress Native Americans regardless of

their attempts to assimilate, but assimilation also destroys indigenous cultures and estranges Native Americans from their indigenous heritage. Therefore, Mary suggests that the only way for Native American people to feel whole—and for tribes to preserve their cultural identities—is to fully embrace their indigenous cultures and pass those traditions on to the next generation.

Throughout her memoir, Mary depicts how both the U.S. government and indigenous communities pressure Native Americans to assimilate to white society. One of the most notorious methods of assimilation that the U.S. government levied against Native Americans was the implementation of missionary boarding schools. At these schools, Native American children were separated from their families, banned from practicing their language and customs, and forcibly converted to Christianity and white American culture. Mary attended the local Catholic missionary school, as did her mother and grandmother when they were young. Mary calls the boarding school "a curse for [her] family for generations"—it convinced her grandma to abandon her Lakota culture. The boarding schools weren't the only way that the U.S. government waged war on Native American cultures. Mary describes how the U.S. government sent armed forces to stamp out the Ghost Dance and how the Bureau of Indian Affairs persecuted Henry Crow Dog, Mary's father-in-law, for being a member of the Native American Church. As she puts it, "all Indian rituals were outlawed as standing in the way of 'whitemanizing' the native peoples." But Native Americans also experience coercion from their own communities to assimilate. Some people shared Mary's mother and grandmother's beliefs that "going to **church**, dressing and behaving like a [white person] […] would magically unlock the door leading to the good life," a life without the poverty and hopelessness that plagued reservations.

But Mary makes it clear that this assimilation has negative effects. Between the government's concerted efforts to exterminate indigenous cultures and many Native Americans' resignation that assimilation is the only way to survive, many tribes are losing "much of their language, traditions, and ceremonies," and their cultures are threatened with extinction. As a result, identity crises are a common problem among Native Americans. Mary notes that the Native American children who were forced to attend missionary schools struggled to understand who they were and how they fit into society. Robbed of their language, religion, and culture, these indigenous children were "caricatures of white people […] that […] were neither wanted by whites nor by Indians." The fact that white society still rejected "assimilated" Native Americans betrays how assimilation doesn't spare Native Americans from racism or oppression. To highlight this point, Mary recounts the murder of Norman Little Brave, a Native American man who "had been a sober-minded churchgoer, but that had not saved him." Norman's murderer—a wealthy, white man—went unpunished. So, even though Norman tried to assimilate into white, Christian culture, the U.S. government (and white society more broadly) still racially discriminated against him.

As Mary takes the reader through her journey to reconnect with her Lakota heritage, she suggests that the only way for Native Americans to feel at peace with their identity is by embracing their indigenous culture and spirituality. From a young age, Mary knew that assimilation "was the wrong key to the wrong door […] it would not change the shape of [her] cheekbones […] or the feelings inside [her]." So, she sought out ways to learn more about her cultural heritage. She spoke with community elders who were "traditional people, faithful to the ancient rituals." Participating in various Native American religious ceremonies made Mary feel in tune with her heritage and secure in her Lakota identity for the first time. When describing her participation in a Sun Dance, Mary says that "it was at that moment that I, a white-educated half-blood, became wholly Indian. I experienced a great rush of happiness." By Mary's account, many Native Americans feel similarly. The revival of spiritual and cultural traditions was a major aspect of AIM (a Native American civil rights and cultural movement that Mary was a part of) and one that drew many Native Americans of all tribes to various AIM events. Mary describes how when her husband, Leonard, hosted a Ghost Dance in 1974, "native people from as far away as Alaska, Canada, Mexico, and Arizona suddenly appeared to participate," which indicates how strongly these indigenous people wanted to reconnect with Native American customs. As she put it, participating in traditional ceremonies—even those of other tribes—was "their way of saying 'I am an Indian again.'"

Reviving and embracing indigenous cultural practices doesn't just benefit individuals—it helps indigenous people as a whole. By passing on its traditions, a tribe ensures that their cultural identity will live on. Additionally, cross-cultural exchange strengthens intertribal relationships, which in turn helps indigenous nations fight together to protect their cultures and rights. As Mary puts it, reviving rituals "bring[s] back the sacred hoop—to feel, holding on to the hand of [one's] brother and sister, the rebirth of Indian unity."

UNITY, INCLUSION, AND EQUALITY

The American Indian Movement (AIM) is a central focus of Mary Crow Dog's memoir *Lakota Woman*. Although the AIM started as a localized movement that protested against the poverty and police brutality that inner-city Native Americans experienced, it grew to encompass the issues that indigenous people across North America faced. This shift in the movement's scope reflected its stance on indigenous unity: the movement began to advocate for the rights of all indigenous people, not only those of a few tribes. Throughout her memoir, Mary illustrates how AIM owed its

successes to this inclusiveness. In the political events that Mary depicts—from the Trail of Broken Treaties to the Occupation of Wounded Knee—AIM activists from a multitude of tribes joined together and stood against "White America" as a unified force. But this unity goes beyond political events: the Native Americans in Mary's memoir also participate in cross-cultural ceremonies. And, as Mary puts it, it is from "traveling and meeting many tribes [that] we learned a lot." Through historical legends and personal stories, she shows how intertribal exchange of cultural knowledge and traditions plays an important role in the preservation and development of Native American cultures. And with this, Mary illustrates that unity is imperative for all Native Americans in the ongoing fight for equal rights and cultural preservation.

Through the use of historical and contemporary examples, Mary demonstrates how division between Native Americans harms the indigenous community as a whole. Mary touches on how Native American tribes often fought against one another, both prior to and during westward expansion, when white people moved west across North America and settled on indigenous peoples' lands. During this time, tribes occasionally joined forces with white armies to fight other tribes. The tribes presumably worked with the U.S. for some gain, but this didn't pan out, as the U.S. government continued to enact policies that stripped all indigenous tribes of their rights. The implication is that working with the U.S. government to oppose other tribes hurts all Native Americans in the long run, as the government's goal is to suppress all indigenous people's autonomy and influence. Mary also illustrates how individuals can harm their communities by collaborating with white settlers in an effort to personally benefit from colonization. She describes how "half-bloods"— she defines a "half-blood" as any Native American who "acts and thinks like a white man"—sold their land to try to make money for themselves, even though this hastened white society's westward expansion. Once again, it is the U.S. government—and not the cooperating Native Americans—that benefits.

On the other hand, Mary shows how unity within and between indigenous nations benefits all Native Americans in their fight for civil rights. In fact, Mary believes AIM's influence owes itself to the combined power of urban Native Americans and isolated, reservation-based Native Americans who, by exchanging ideas and experiences, made AIM "a force nationwide." The Trail of Broken Treaties, one of AIM's most famous demonstrations, was considered a success primarily because it exemplified this unity. Tribes from all around the U.S. joined together in a caravan across the country to protest the government's treatment of Native Americans. Although government officials dismissed their political demands, "morally it had been a great victory," as the indigenous community "faced White America collectively, not as individual tribes." They effectively communicated that Native Americans were setting aside their differences to unite against the common enemy—the U.S. government and "the white man's system." The precedent for intertribal unity that activists set during the Trail of Broken Treaties was continued at the Occupation at Wounded Knee, where "Indians from Denver, New Mexico, and L.A. trickled in" to join the Lakota and AIM activists in holding Wounded Knee against U.S. government agents. The demonstration—which lasted for 71 days—was successful in raising awareness of the U.S. government's brutal treatment of indigenous peoples.

But intertribal unity isn't just important for political purposes—it also has a significant cultural impact, as it helps both preserve and enrich Native American cultures. The American Indian Movement was a cultural movement as much as it was a political one, as the cross-cultural exchange that took place between tribes and generations played a significant role in the revival of indigenous traditions and religious beliefs. At the time that the memoir takes place (the 1960s and 70s), many indigenous nations were "losing their culture and their language" because of governmental policies, like mandatory attendance of missionary schools and bans on traditional ceremonies. To preserve indigenous cultures, Native Americans visited spiritual leaders and traditionalists—sometimes from other tribes—to learn about their indigenous heritage. Mary notes that it was a "strange thing" to see people participating in rituals that were never practiced by their own tribes, but she recognizes that this "was their way of saying, 'I am an Indian again.'" Personally, Mary feels that intertribal differences melt away when participating in religious ceremonies with people of other indigenous nations. So, not only does cross-cultural exchange help preserve indigenous cultures among Native Americans, but it also fosters intertribal unity and cooperation. Mary provides several historical examples to demonstrate how Native Americans have a history of sharing religious ceremonies: for instance, both peyote ceremonies and the Ghost Dance religion were passed to the Lakota by way of other tribes. In both cases, Mary describes these religious elements as arriving "when [the Lakota] needed [them] most," which emphasizes how the exchange of religious ideas helped enrich various tribes.

Mary goes a step further and argues that the fight for equal rights is the most successful when people of all races, beliefs, and cultures work together. By recounting her and her husband, Leonard Crow Dog's, legal battle to free him from unjust imprisonment, Mary shows that his release was secured through the combined support of various religious and political organizations. In this way, she demonstrates that uniting together is what helps communities succeed in fighting for equality.

RACISM AND SEXISM

In the first paragraph of *Lakota Woman*, Mary Crow Dog states that being "a Sioux woman [...] is not easy." Throughout the memoir, she describes many ways in which Lakota women—and Native American women in general—face oppression. Native Americans have long suffered from poverty, police brutality, and unemployment at disproportionate rates. Moreover, Mary argues that the U.S. government (and white society more broadly) racially discriminates against Native Americans by stripping them of their civil rights, resources, and cultural traditions. Overlapping with this oppression is the sexism and sexual violence that Native American women face, both from within and outside of their indigenous communities. As Mary describes through multiple anecdotes, Native American women are often victims of gender discrimination, domestic violence, sexual abuse, and forced sterilization. Although the women's liberation movement was in force at the time the memoir primarily takes place (the early 1970s), Mary makes it clear that this movement was "mainly a white, upper-middle-class affair of little use to a reservation Indian woman"—the movement simply didn't address the unique issues that Native American women experience. Through her memoir, Mary suggests that Native American women face a more complex form of oppression than white women do, as they are subjected to both sexism *and* racism.

The U.S. government's racist policies create conditions for Native Americans that lead to widespread sexism and gender-specific hardships, often to a degree that is more extreme than what the average white woman experiences. The poverty that plagues Native American communities is the result of several hundred years of governmental policies designed to take land and resources from indigenous people for the profit of the U.S. government and white colonizers. Mary describes how the "reservation towns without hope" eat away at the inhabitants' morale. With "no jobs, [and] no money" available, many Native Americans develop a toxic relationship with alcohol that often results in domestic abuse. While domestic abuse is also a problem that white women face, studies show that Native American women experience it at a higher rate than white women. In addition, the U.S. government's attempts to dismantle cultural traditions drastically affected Native American family dynamics. For example, prior to colonization, Lakota society was structured around the *tiyospaye*, or "the extended family group." But "the government tore the *tiyospaye* apart and forced the Sioux into [...] nuclear famil[ies]," which were easier for the government to manipulate. Between the destruction of the *tiyospaye* and the conditions of poverty that often lead men to "live away from their children," women are often left with the financial burden of raising children alone, a situation that a disproportionate number of Native American women find themselves in. Mary also notes that these situations contribute to sexist expectations for women. She says that "among Plains tribes, some men think that all a woman is good for is to crawl into the sack with them and mind the children. It compensates for what white society has done to them." She links racism to the sexism that Native American women experience by suggesting that, in response to white society's dehumanizing discrimination against Native American men, they (the men) impose misogynistic expectations on Native American women because they want to feel like they still have power over another group.

The U.S. government and white society's racism also leads to targeted gender discrimination and sexual violence against Native American women. From the beginning of her memoir, Mary describes how Native American women suffer disproportionately from sexual assault and harassment from white men (including government officials), which indicates how white society treats Native American women as inferior. She notes how "the favorite sport of white state troopers and cops was to arrest young Indian girls [...] take them to the drunk tanks in their jails, and there rape them." Because Native American women "are seldom taken seriously" and are often unsupported by the U.S.'s legal and justice systems, the perpetrators get away with their violent crimes. Native American women are also targeted for forced sterilizations. Both Mary's mother and sister Barbara were sterilized against their will, which reflects the government's attempts to prevent Native Americans from populating. White women do not experience this same widespread violation of their reproductive rights, suggesting that Native American women are uniquely targeted due to a combination of their race and their sex.

Because the sexism that Native American women face is complicated by racism, the issues addressed by the mainstream feminist movement of the 1970s (which catered to white women) often felt secondary to the forms of oppression that Native American women are subjected to. Mary mentions several times that white women's form of "women's lib was a white, middle-class thing, and that at this critical stage we had other priorities." In other words, because the women's liberation movement centered white middle-class women—who already had many of the basic rights women of color were still deprived of—the issues that the movement addressed tended to exclude the problems faced by poor women and women of color. For example, while advocating for the right to abortion, white women neglected to protest the forced sterilizations that the government performed on indigenous women. Mary suggests that, for the Native American women, their allegiance and priorities lay with AIM and other indigenous civil rights movements, not with white women. At this time, indigenous women wanted to work with indigenous men to advocate against racism and for civil rights for Native Americans as a whole, not just women.

All the same, Mary agrees with some aspects of the mainstream feminist movement. She notes that, after spending time with her white feminist friends, she became more critical of how Native American men treated women, particularly where domestic abuse was concerned. But the point remains that, in many ways, the mainstream feminist movement of the 1970s did not support Native American women, as the movement did not address the mixture of racism and sexism that Native American women face.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

UPSIDE-DOWN AMERICAN FLAG

The upside-down American flag symbolizes white society and the U.S. government's upheaval of Native Americans' lives, as well as Native American activist's desire to upend "White American" in turn. Mary describes the upside-down American flag as "an international signal of distress. It was also the American Indian's sign of distress." Nineteenth-century Ghost Dancers "wrapped [themselves] in upside-down American flags, symbolic of the *wasičuns*' world of fences, telegraph poles, and factories which would also be turned upside down, as well as a sign of despair." In other words, as white settlers colonized indigenous people's land, the world as Native Americans knew it was corrupted, or turned upside down. As settlers and the U.S. government then began forcing Native Americans to assimilate to white, Christian culture, Native Americans' homes became hostile, unfamiliar places. The Ghost Dancers hoped that the "*wasičuns*' world [...] would also be turned upside down," which suggests that they inverted the American flag during their ceremony to symbolize their goal of undoing "the white man's system."

Mary mentions several other instances of when Native Americans—usually AIM activists—wore upside-down American flags. During the occupation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs building, "many [activists] wrapped themselves in upside-down American flags—like the Ghost Dancers of old." This act reflects the fact that indigenous people at this time (the 1970s) were still in a state of distress because of the U.S. government's mistreatment of them, but also that the activists hoped their resistance would undo white society, or turn it upside down. The upside-down flag therefore reflects Native American activists' belief that the way to end indigenous people's oppression was to undo the systems of "White America" that caused and perpetuated their suffering.

CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

In *Lakota Woman*, Christian churches symbolize white society's imposition on indigenous people's culture. Forcing Native Americans to convert to Christianity was one way in which white settlers imposed their culture on indigenous people. In Mary's memoir, she describes the local mission school that she was forced to attend as "a curse for [her] family for generations," as her grandmother, mother, and sisters also all attended the school. Not only did they endure cruel treatment at the churches, but the forced assimilation and prolonged separation of children from their families prevented them from learning their people's cultural practices. As many traditional customs were lost, Native Americans—like Mary's mother and grandmother—were forced to adopt Christianity and other aspects of white society. Because of this, Christian churches came to represent the cultural erasure that Native American people have experienced for centuries. Mary captures this sentiment when describing the Catholic church at Wounded Knee, which she calls a "monument of an alien faith imposed upon the landscape" and, in turn, the people who inhabit that landscape.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Grove Press edition of *Lakota Woman* published in 2011.

Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ After my sister Sandra was born the doctors there performed a hysterectomy on my mother, in fact sterilizing her without her permission, which was common at the time, and up to just a few years ago, so that it is hardly worth mentioning. In the opinion of some people, the fewer Indians there are, the better. As Colonel Chivington said to his soldiers: "Kill 'em all, big and small, nits make lice!"

Related Characters: Mary Crow Dog (speaker), Mary's Mother, Sandra

Related Themes: ≠

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

Mary recounts some of her mother's child-birthing experiences. In this passage, Mary reveals that her mother is a victim of a forced sterilization. She stresses that her mother's experience isn't rare; rather, forced sterilizations are common among indigenous women. Mary then brings

up how some people believe that "the fewer Indians there are, the better," thereby addressing the genocide that the U.S. government and white society effected against Native Americans for hundreds of years. By discussing her mother's sterilization within the context of the genocide of indigenous people, Mary shows how forced hysterectomies were a way for this genocide to continue.

Because these forced sterilizations are performed to prevent indigenous people from population, they show how indigenous women are targeted by the government and white society for reproductive rights violations. White women do not experience the same widespread attack on their rights, as white America isn't trying to exterminate white people. The implication is that indigenous women experience a more complex form of oppression than white women because of their race and sex.

The Crow Dogs, the members of my husband's family, have no such problems of identity. They don't need the sun to tan them, they are full-bloods—the Sioux of the Sioux [...] They have no shortage of legends. Every Crow Dog seems to be a legend in himself, including the women. They became outcasts in their stronghold at Grass Mountain rather than being whitemanized. They could not be tamed, made to wear a necktie or go to a Christian church. All during the long years when practicing Indian beliefs was forbidden and could be punished with jail, they went right on having their ceremonies, their sweat baths and sacred dances.

Related Characters: Mary Crow Dog (speaker), Leonard Crow Dog

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 9-10

Explanation and Analysis

Mary discusses the Crow Dog family after revealing how she struggled with her biracial (Lakota and white) identity as a child. While she had to seek out ways to feel more Lakota—whether that be by tanning or by learning more about Lakota culture—her husband's family never had to. Mary implies that, because the Crow Dogs were only raised with Lakota culture, they don't question who they are or how to live—they stick to Lakota traditions. She praises them for their refusal to assimilate to white society, saying that "every Crow Dog seems to be a legend in himself."

Mary also suggests that it is thanks to the resistance of people like the Crow Dogs that Lakota traditions are preserved. Rather than convert to Christianity, a religion that white society imposes upon indigenous people, the Crow Dogs continue to practice their traditional religion, even during the periods when "practicing Indian beliefs was forbidden and could be punished with jail." So, not only does their refusal to comply with white society ensure the existence of many Lakota cultural practices, but, according to Mary, it also makes them feel more secure in their indigenous identity.

Chapter 2 Quotes

The whites destroyed the *tiyospaye*, not accidentally, but as a matter of policy. The close-knit clan, set in its old ways, was a stumbling block in the path of the missionary and government agent, its traditions and customs a barrier to what the white man called "progress" and "civilizations." And so the government tore the *tiyospaye* apart and forced the Sioux into the kind of relationship now called the "nuclear family"—forced upon each couple their individually owned allotment of land [...] So the great brainwashing began, those who did not like to have their brains washed being pushed farther and farther into the back country into isolation and starvation. The civilizers did a good job on us, especially among the half-bloods, using the stick-and-carrot method, until now there is neither the *tiyospaye* nor a white-style nuclear family left, just Indian kids without parents.

Related Characters: Mary Crow Dog (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 14

Explanation and Analysis

Mary is explaining how the government dismantled the *tiyospaye*—the extended family that, in traditional Lakota societies, lived and worked together. In the *tiyospaye*, children had many parental figures. Mary contrasts this supportive environment to the current reality for many indigenous families, which is "Indian kids [growing up] without parents." She shows how the tragic loss of the *tiyospaye* was not accidental, but deliberate. In order to better manipulate Native Americans into assimilating to white society and ceding their land to white settlers, the U.S. government divided tribal lands into small plots and assigned one couple to each plot. From there, it became easier to pressure individual families into selling their land,

thereby hastening white colonization of tribal lands.

Mary says that this divide-and-conquer method worked. It divided up the *tiyospaye* and the indigenous community as a whole, as those who resolved to maintain their land and cultural traditions became isolated from the rest of the tribe. The traditionalists suffered for their refusal to comply with the government (Mary suggests that the government starved them), but those who complied suffered as well. As Mary makes clear, the families that assimilated never achieved the "white-style nuclear family." Regardless as to whether a tribe or indigenous family complied, the U.S. government enacted policies that stripped away the rights of all Native Americans. In this way, Mary suggests that compliance with those in power doesn't mitigate oppression; rather, it only gives the oppressors more power.

❝ [Grandma Moore] thought she was helping me by not teaching me Indian ways. Her being a staunch Catholic also had something to do with it. The missionaries had always been repeating over and over again: "*You must kill the Indian in order to save the man*!" That was part of trying to escape the hard life. The missions, going to church, dressing and behaving like a *wasičun*—that for her was the key which would magically unlock the door leading to the good life, the white life with a white-painted cottage […] a shiny car in the garage, and an industrious, necktie-wearing husband who was not a wino. Examples abounded all around her that it was the wrong key to the wrong door, that it would not change the shape of my cheekbones, or the slant of my eyes, the color of my hair, or the feelings inside me.

Related Characters: Mary Crow Dog (speaker), Louise Flood

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 22-23

Explanation and Analysis

While describing her childhood, Mary depicts two ways that indigenous people are pressured into assimilating to white society. On one hand, the U.S. government forced Native Americans to attend missionary boarding schools that deliberately stripped the children of their cultures. On the other hand, there is a belief within indigenous communities that one's life would be better if one assimilated to white society. Mary's grandmother was one such person who believed that assimilation would make Native Americans' lives better. After hundreds of years of anti-indigenous governmental policies, many Native American people live in poverty. As a result, people like Mary's grandmother view assimilation as "the key which would magically unlock the door leading to the good life," a life without poverty or rampant alcoholism, two issues that affect many Native Americans.

While Mary understands her grandmother's reasoning, she ultimately disagrees with this resignation to assimilation. Mary calls assimilation "the wrong key to the wrong door" for two reasons. For one, even when Native Americans try to assimilate to white society, white people continue to discriminate against them. As Mary puts it, "behaving like a *wasičun*" doesn't "change the shape of [her] cheekbones," which is to say that assimilation doesn't change her race, which is what white people use to discriminate against her. Additionally, Mary says that assimilation "would not change […] the feelings inside [her]." Mary feels more connected to her Lakota heritage, and she longs to learn more about Lakota culture—living a "white life" wouldn't change her Lakota identity.

Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ One of the priests acted as the photographer, doing the enlarging and developing […] One day he invited Charlene into the darkroom. He was going to teach her developing. She was developed already. She was a big girl compared to him, taller too. Charlene was nicely built, not fat, just rounded. No sharp edges anywhere. All of a sudden she rushed out of the darkroom, yelling to me, "Let's get out of here! He's trying to feel me up. That priest is nasty." So there was this too to contend with—sexual harassment. We complained to the student body. The nuns said we just had a dirty mind.

Related Characters: Mary Crow Dog, Charlene Left Hand Bull (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 39-40

Explanation and Analysis

Mary is describing her experience as a student at a missionary boarding school, where indigenous students were forced to give up their cultures and assimilate to white society. In this passage, Mary reveals that some of the school staff sexually assaulted the students. Mary's friend, Charlene Left Hand Bull, was one such victim of sexual assault. The priest who assaulted her exploited his position

to grope her—he was supposed to be teaching her photograph development, but instead took advantage of his proximity to young, isolated women to assault one. His predatory behavior is representative of the pervasiveness of sexual assaults within missionary boarding schools. Mary goes on to show one way that this predatory behavior was allowed to continue: the other staff dismissed allegations, allowing sexual predators to prey upon the Native American children who were trapped within the schools.

Charlene's sexual assault is also representative of how Native American women experience sexual violence at disproportionate rates. As her case shows, institutions and justice systems do not take indigenous women's allegations seriously, especially when the charges are levied against white people in power. In turn, white people and people in power can more easily exploit their privilege to abuse indigenous women, whom justice systems generally do not treat with the same dignity or respect that they afford white people. This goes to show how Native American women are targeted because of both their race *and* their sex.

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ I haven't touched a drop of liquor for years, ever since I felt there was a purpose to my life, learned to accept myself for what I was. I have to thank the Indian movement for that, and Grandfather Peyote, and the pipe.

Related Characters: Mary Crow Dog (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 45

Explanation and Analysis

This passage comes from the chapter in which Mary portrays how alcoholism affects Native American communities. Mary drank heavily in her youth, but she explains here that she quit as soon as she "felt there was a purpose to [her] life." Earlier in the chapter, Mary illustrates how many Native Americans drink alcohol as a way to cope with the hopelessness and despair that poverty and racism cause. Mary says that she stopped drinking when she joined AIM and began to embrace her Lakota identity.

The fact that AIM gave Mary a sense of purpose reveals how activism is empowering. As a member of AIM, Mary fought against the oppression of white society and the inequalities that indigenous people faced, which was a different—and, Mary suggests, preferable—way to cope with the poverty and discrimination that indigenous people experience. Not only did AIM's fighting sometimes lead to meaningful change, but it also boosted the morale of its members. The other reason Mary quit drinking was that she felt less confused about her identity. The more Mary practiced Lakota cultural traditions, the more secure she felt in who she was. In this passage, Mary thanks *peyote* and the sacred pipe—both important components of Lakota religion—for helping her feel at peace with her identity and "accept [her]self for what [she] was."

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ A few years back the favorite sport of white state troopers and cops was to arrest young Indian girls on a drunk-and-disorderly, even if the girls were sober, take them to the drunk tanks in their jails, and there rape them [...] Indian girls accusing white cops are seldom taken seriously in South Dakota. "You know how they are," the courts are told, "they're always asking for it." Thus there were few complaints for rapes or, as a matter of fact, for forced sterilizations. Luckily this is changing as our women are less reluctant to bring these things into the open.

Related Characters: Mary Crow Dog (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 68

Explanation and Analysis

Mary addresses how indigenous women experience sexual violence at a disproportionate rate. In this passage, she describes how people—especially people in power—exploit the fact that justice systems and white society treat Native American women as inferior. Courts often dismiss any charges against white people that indigenous women bring forward, which only encourages the women to keep silent. Meanwhile, white people (especially people in power) exploit the fact that the justice system protects them by abusing indigenous women.

While Mary understands Native American women's reluctance to bring their cases forward, she nonetheless urges women to do so. As she reveals here, it is by taking action and continuously exposing the injustices of white society that change is achieved: as more women press charges against their white assailants, other women are emboldened to bring their cases forward as well. This is true for the forced sterilizations that Mary addresses earlier in her memoir—another crime that the U.S. government has committed against indigenous women.

Chapter 6 Quotes

In the beginning AIM was mainly confined to St. Paul and Minneapolis. The early AIM people were mostly ghetto Indians, often from tribes which had lost much of their language, traditions, and ceremonies. It was when they came to us on the Sioux reservations that they began to learn about the old ways. We had to learn from them, too. We Sioux had lived very isolated [...] AIM opened a window for us through which the wind of the 1960s and early '70s could blow, and it was no gentle breeze but a hurricane that whirled us around. It was after the traditional reservation Indians and the ghetto kids had gotten together that AIM became a force nationwide. It was flint striking flint, lighting a spark which grew into a flame at which we could warm ourselves after a long, long winter.

Related Characters: Mary Crow Dog (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 76

Explanation and Analysis

Mary recounts the beginnings of the American Indian Movement, which originally had a much narrower focus. Its initial goal reflected the identities of its founding members: to address the problems faced by the inner-city Native Americans of St. Paul and Minneapolis. The book suggests that part of the original founders' vision was to reconnect with their indigenous heritage. Because forced assimilation had caused them to lose "much of their language, traditions, and ceremonies," the founders decided to learn about the cultural traditions of tribes that had managed to retain them. The implication is that, while the first AIM activists wouldn't be able to reconnect as successfully with their specific tribes' cultures, learning about the culture of a nearby tribe would at least help them feel more secure in their identity as indigenous people.

So the founders met with the Lakota, who had maintained many aspects of their culture. Mary credits the Lakota people's relative isolation for their preserved culture, which speaks to the importance of resisting assimilation—had more Lakota complied with governmental demands, they could have lost more of their culture.

As the AIM founders met with the Lakota, AIM's vision expanded to address the inequalities that all indigenous people face. Mary implies that this was the right thing to do—as she puts it, "it was [only] after the traditional reservation Indians and the ghetto kids had gotten together that AIM became a force nationwide." In other words, the movement needed to become more inclusive of Native American experiences for it to become powerful enough to achieve the change that it eventually accomplished.

Mary makes it clear that it wasn't just the founding AIM members who benefitted from the cross-cultural exchange with the Lakota. Mary's reference to "the wind of the 1960s and early '70s" implies that the Lakota benefitted from being exposed to the attitude of revolution and rebellion that was gripping the U.S. during the 1960s and 1970s—it was during this time that several civil rights movements took place. Mary suggests that the isolated Lakota needed this exposure in order to become motivated to collectively fight for their rights.

In the end a compromise was reached. The government said they could not go on negotiating during Election Week, but they would appoint two high administration officials to seriously consider our twenty demands. Our expenses to get home would be paid. Nobody would be prosecuted. Of course, our twenty points were never gone into afterward. From the practical point of view, nothing had been achieved. As usual we had bickered among ourselves. But morally it had been a great victory. We had faced White America collectively, not as individual tribes. We had stood up to the government and gone through our baptism of fire.

Related Characters: Mary Crow Dog (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 91

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Mary describes the end of the Trail of Broken Treaties. One of the ways that the demonstration was successful was that it forced the government (and "White America" in general) to pay attention to the discontent and outrage of Native Americans, which speaks to the value of political activism and resistance; because the activists refused to comply with the government's demands to leave the Bureau of Indian Affairs building, the government was forced to address them. The protestors only had power so long as they resisted the government—as soon as they went home, their demands were dropped and ignored in Washington.

Mary admits that, "from the practical point of view, nothing had been achieved," but she adds that "morally it had been a great victory." The greatest success of the protest was that many tribes worked together to fight against the U.S. government, which had been oppressing them for hundreds

of years. The implication is that the value of resistance doesn't just lie in the change that it can achieve—activism is important because it can serve as an example for future generations. In this instance, the activists set the precedent of intertribal unity and resistance, with which they hoped to achieve more than what each individual tribe could accomplish on its own.

Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ The half-breeds, the *iyeskas*, I thought, never really cared for anybody but themselves, having learned that "wholesome selfishness" alone brought the blessings of civilization. The full-bloods have a heart [...] They are willing to share whatever happiness they have. They sit on their land which has a sacred meaning for them, even if it brings them no income. The *iyeskas* have no land because they sold theirs long ago. Whenever some white businessmen come to the res trying to make a deal to dig for coal or uranium, the *iyeskas* always say, "Let's do it. Let's get that money. Buy a new car and a color TV." The full-bloods say nothing. They just sit on their little patches of land and don't budge. It is because of them that there are still some Indians left.

Related Characters: Mary Crow Dog (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 93-94

Explanation and Analysis

Mary presents her view of the differences between "half-breeds," or Native Americans of part-white ancestry, and "full-bloods," or people who are fully indigenous. She describes "half-breeds" as having a "white" mentality; as she puts it, they have adopted the "wholesome selfishness" that white society espouses. Her sarcasm is clear when she says that this selfishness "alone brought the blessings of civilization." What she really means is that white society's selfishness aided in the destruction of traditional Native American lifestyles. Eager to make money for themselves, these "half-breeds" sell their land to "white businessmen" who want to strip it of its resources. In contrast to this greediness, Mary says that the "full-bloods" refuse to comply with U.S. capitalism—instead of looking to make money for themselves, they "sit on their land which has a sacred meaning for them, even if it brings them no income."

Mary makes it clear that the "full-bloods" are in the right. In fact, she believes that it is "because of them that there are still some Indians left." In this way, she suggests that the "half-breeds[']" greediness negatively impacts the entire indigenous community, as it hastens white colonization of tribal lands. On the other hand, the "full-bloods[']" refusal to comply with capitalism means that traditional Native American values are preserved, once again showing how resistance—and not submission—is the preferred way to respond to oppression.

❝ I have visited many tribes. They have different cultures and speak different languages. They may even have different rituals when partaking of this medicine. They may be jealous of each other [...] But once they meet inside the peyote tipi, all differences are forgotten. Then they are no longer Navajos, or Poncas, Apaches, or Sioux, but just Indians. They learn each others' songs and find out that they are really the same. Peyote is making many tribes into just one tribe. And it is the same with the Sun Dance which also serves to unite the different Indian nations.

Related Characters: Mary Crow Dog (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 101

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Mary explains how *peyote* ceremonies unify Native Americans of different tribes. Each tribe has its own culture, customs, and rituals, yet these "differences are forgotten," she claims, when they come together to partake of *peyote*, which is sacred to them all. The book suggests that jointly participating in the same religious ceremony reminds Native Americans of their shared indigenous identity. As Mary puts it, "once they meet inside the peyote tipi [...] they are no longer Navajos, or Poncas, Apaches, or Sioux, but just Indians." In this way, sharing religious ceremonies fosters intertribal unity and encourages the participants to see Native Americans as a unified community and not as separate tribes.

While this passage focuses on *peyote*, Mary does add that this spirit of unity is present in other ceremonies, like the Sun Dance. The Sun Dance is a ritual in which people make sacrifices for their community. Mary suggests that, as with *peyote*, the Sun Dance strengthens the indigenous community, as it inspires participants to work with each other rather than against.

Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ It is the government which made me into a militant. If you approach them hat in hand as a "responsible, respectable" apple, red outside, white inside, you get nowhere. If you approach them as a militant you get nowhere either, except giving them an excuse to waste you, but at least you don't feel so shitty.

Related Characters: Mary Crow Dog (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 113

Explanation and Analysis

Right before this passage, Mary states that she has never thought of herself as a militant. Rather, she blames the government for *making* her a militant—they didn't give her a choice but to become one. As Mary puts it, marginalized people often only have two options in responding to oppression: they can either peacefully ask for change, or they can rebel against the government and force change to happen. Mary says that the former option is useless, as the government can easily dismiss a person if they are "responsible, respectable." On the other hand, it is much more difficult to ignore someone who flagrantly rebels against the government—militants demand the government's attention.

In the passage, Mary admits that, oftentimes, nothing practical is accomplished either way. But she does maintain that, when one is a militant, one "do[es]n't feel so shitty." The implication is that complying with white "respectability" in the midst of being brutally oppressed is demeaning—Mary even conjures up an image of defeat when saying that one can "approach [the government] hat in hand." By adding that, when complying with the U.S. government, indigenous people are "red outside, white inside," she suggests that passivity is especially debasing because they people who comply are trying to be white. In this way, the book suggests that it is more empowering to express one's true feelings of rage by taking militant action than to try to act in a way that one's oppressor deems respectable.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ At one time a white volunteer nurse berated us for doing the slave work while the men got all the glory. We were betraying the cause of womankind, was the way she put it. We told her that her kind of women's lib was a white, middle-class thing, and that at this critical stage we had other priorities. Once our men had gotten their rights and their balls back, we might start arguing with them about who should do the dishes. But not before.

Related Characters: Mary Crow Dog (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 131

Explanation and Analysis

Mary is describing the activity at Wounded Knee during the 1973 occupation. During the occupation, everyone took on roles—from fighting to washing dishes—to make it possible for the group of activists to live and survive at Wounded Knee. Mary notes that one white woman scolded the Native American women for taking on the domestic work because it reinforced the expectation that women should only do menial work "while the men g[e]t all the glory." This woman's criticism of Native American shows her narrow-minded idea of feminism—she was projecting her own goals, which were dictated by her racial privilege. She could focus on dismantling sexist stereotypes because she already had other basic rights that the government protected due to her race.

On the other hand, indigenous women were still fighting for many of the basic civil rights that white women already had. For example, they were occupying Wounded Knee to protest the rampant violence and corruption in Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, problems that were not as widespread in white communities. As Mary puts it, indigenous women "had other [political] priorities." At this point, their allegiance lay with AIM. They wanted to first work with Native American men to fight for the civil rights of all indigenous people—only after that would they protest against Native American men's sexism.

❝ So there was a lot of sneaking through the perimeter, a lot of coming and going. Indians from Denver, New Mexico, and L.A. trickled in, a dozen or half-dozen at a time. A group of Iroquois from New York joined us for a while […] Among the groups walking in were some Northwest Coast people, Pullayups and Nisquallies, led by Sid Mills who had fought so long for native fishing rights in Washington State. These were among our toughest fighters.

Related Characters: Mary Crow Dog (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 134-135

Explanation and Analysis

Mary has just described how the government officials at Wounded Knee didn't keep a tight enough perimeter around the activists, particularly at nighttime. Because of this, new people were able to join the occupation and help sustain it. Mary illustrates how these newcomers came from all over the U.S., even though the Occupation of Wounded Knee was a protest against the violence and corruption in Pine Ridge, a Lakota reservation. Some of these activists were already famous for other acts of resistance; one such example is Sid Mills. The implication is that the U.S. government is the common enemy among indigenous people. Therefore, fighting with another tribe for their rights could perhaps lead to political change that would benefit all Native Americans.

The book also shows that the activists at the Occupation of Wounded Knee benefited from the aid of other tribes. On one hand, more people meant that the activists would have a better chance of lasting longer—they had more people to help out and, hopefully, more resources. On top of this, Mary commends Sid Mills and his people as "among [the activists'] toughest fighters," which shows that their additional talent was much appreciated. In sum, intertribal unity helped the occupation last as long as it did.

Chapter 10 Quotes

❝ Life was so hard for our people—starving, fenced in, without horses or weapons. The message brought them hope. And so they began to dance and sing, to bring back the buffalo, to bring back the old world of the Indians which *wasiču*n had destroyed, the world they had loved so much and for whose return they were praying.

Related Characters: Mary Crow Dog (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 149

Explanation and Analysis

Mary just explained how the Lakota learned of the Ghost Dance from Wovoka, a Paiute holy man. As Mary illustrates, the Lakota greatly appreciated the Ghost Dance, as its "message brought them hope" during an incredibly difficult time for them. The hope that the Lakota felt implies that this religious exchange between the Paiute and Lakota was a beneficial one.

When the Lakota learned of the Ghost Dance, they were struggling to hold onto their way of life. As Mary explains, they were "starving, fenced in, without horses or weapons." The Ghost Dance religion gave them comfort because it promised "to bring back the old world of the Indians which *wasiču*n had destroyed." Not only does the Lakota's renewed hope reveal the devastation that white society wreaked upon indigenous people, but it also speaks to the importance of embracing indigenous culture. The book suggests that the Lakota found comfort in part because the Ghost Dance was an indigenous ceremony, a ritual that made them feel more connected to their indigenous identity. Additionally, because the Lakota believed that the Ghost Dance would be a catalyst for change, participating in it gave them the satisfaction of resisting the government and white society.

❝ Leonard always thought that the dancers of 1890 had misunderstood Wovoka and his message. They should not have expected to bring the dead back to life, but to bring back their ancient beliefs by practicing Indian religion. For Leonard, dancing in a circle holding hands was bringing back the sacred hoop—to feel, holding on to the hand of your brother and sister, the rebirth of Indian unity, feel it with your flesh, through your skin. He also thought that reviving the Ghost Dance would be making a link to our past, to the grandfathers and grandmothers of long ago.

Related Characters: Mary Crow Dog (speaker), Leonard Crow Dog, Wovoka

Related Themes:

Page Number: 153

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Leonard has decided to revive the Ghost Dance at Wounded Knee. While he believed that the Lakota Ghost Dancers in 1890 had misinterpreted the religion, he believed that there was much to value about the Ghost Dance. For one, performing it would "bring back [Native Americans'] ancient beliefs by practicing Indian religion." By this, Leonard means that performing the Dance would expose modern-day participants to traditional Native American religious beliefs, since several of these beliefs are incorporated in the Dance. One such belief is the

importance of intertribal unity, which Leonard believed was paramount to the existence of indigenous people—they were more likely to achieve positive change if they worked together against the U.S. government. Additionally, by practicing the Dance, participants contributed to the preservation of Native American culture.

Leonard also believed that "reviving the Ghost Dance would be making a link to [indigenous peoples'] past." This statement suggests that participating in traditional ceremonies helped Native Americans feel more connected to their ancestors, which in turn helped them feel more in tune with their indigenous identity.

Chapter 11 Quotes

❝ I had been promised that I would not be arrested, but the moment I passed the roadblock I was hustled to the Pine Ridge jail. They did not book me, just took all my things away and were about to take my baby too. They told me I would have to wait, they could not put me in the tank before the Welfare came for my baby. Being poor, unwed, and a no-good rabble-rouser from the Knee made me an unfit mother. The child would have to be taken to a foster home.

Related Characters: Mary Crow Dog (speaker), Pedro

Related Themes:

Page Number: 165-166

Explanation and Analysis

After giving birth to Pedro, Mary left Wounded Knee under the impression that the government officials would not arrest her. But as soon as she exited the occupation site, officials arrested her and brought her to jail. This broken promise is just one of many that makes Native Americans wary of the U.S. government—they know that, even when they cooperate, the U.S. government will betray them and make their situation worse. This is true for Mary, whom officials informed that they would be taking her newborn baby from her. The cruelty of separating a mother from her newborn illustrates how the government officials had no regard for the humanity of indigenous women.

The threat of losing her baby was very real, as it was not uncommon for government officials to separate Native American children from their parents under the guise of giving them (the children) a more suitable home. This forced separation was another method by which the government destroyed indigenous cultures and hastened Native Americans' forced assimilation to white society—these Native American children were generally given to white foster families. In Mary's situation, they cited her political activism, marital status, and poverty for reasons that she wasn't a fit mother. None of these factors actually signified that she would be a bad mother—if anything, they illustrated the ways in which white society harmed Native American communities. For one, the very poverty that they claimed made Mary an unsuitable parent was brought about by anti-indigenous government policies.

The threat of losing her child reflects another way that indigenous women suffer at the hands of the U.S. government—their children and motherhood are at risk. White women generally aren't subjected to the same methods that forcibly separate their children from them, which illustrates how indigenous women are uniquely targeted because of their race and sex.

Chapter 12 Quotes

❝ Beside being tumbled headfirst into this kind of situation, still in my teens, with a brand-new baby and totally unprepared for the role I was to play, I still had another problem. I was a half-blood, not traditionally raised, trying to hold my own inside the full-blood Crow Dog clan which does not take kindly to outsiders. At first, I was not well received. It was pretty bad [...] [Henry Crow Dog] told me that, as far as he was concerned, Leonard was still married to his former wife, a woman, as he pointed out again and again, *who could talk Indian.*

Related Characters: Mary Crow Dog (speaker), Henry Crow Dog, Leonard Crow Dog

Related Themes:

Page Number: 176

Explanation and Analysis

Mary describes the challenges she encountered upon marrying Leonard Crow Dog. On one hand, she struggled under the weight of Leonard's expectations of her after she became his wife. In addition to caring for her own child, Leonard expected her to care for his other children, too. A new teen mother, Mary was not ready to care for so many children. On top of this, Leonard expected her to perform all the domestic work. Mary felt "totally unprepared for the role [she] was to play," and her frustration and exasperation speaks to the unfairness of Leonard's sexist demands of her and the gender roles he assumed she would adhere to.

At the same time, Leonard's family rejected her because of

her white education. Because Mary's grandmother and mother raised Mary to assimilate to white society, Mary wasn't fully educated in Lakota culture and traditions. Because of this, Leonard's family didn't view her as "Lakota enough," which illustrates another facet of the identity crisis that biracial and white-assimilated indigenous people experience—Native American traditionalists often reject them.

❝ The first Crow Dog was an outcast but also something of a hero. The Crow Dogs wrapped themselves in their pride as in a blanket. […] The first Crow Dog had shown them the way. As a chief he had the right to wear a war bonnet, but he never did. Instead he found somewhere an old, discarded white man's cloth cap with a visor and to the top of it he fastened an eagle feather […] He used to say: "This white man's cap that I am wearing means that I must live in the *wasičun*'s world, under his government. The eagle feather means that I, Crow Dog, do not let the *wasičun*'s world get the better of me, that I remain an Indian until the day I die." […] [T]hat old cap became in the people's mind a thing more splendid than any war bonnet.

Related Characters: Mary Crow Dog (speaker), The First Crow Dog

Related Themes:

Page Number: 183

Explanation and Analysis

Mary has just explained how the first Crow Dog became isolated from other Lakota because he killed Spotted Tail over their political differences: while Spotted Tail advocated for cooperation with the U.S. government, the first Crow Dog opted for continued resistance. The story about his hat illustrates his refusal to comply with white society. The "white man's cap" that he wore represented his acknowledgement that he was subjugated by the U.S. government, a system that would not easily disappear or leave him and his people in peace. But the feather that he attached to it symbolized how he would continue to resist white society and its influences—he would not assimilate culturally or politically. This cap, which embodied the first Crow Dog's defiance, was revered by his descendants, who thought of it as "more splendid than any war bonnet."

Mary makes it clear that the first Crow Dog's descendants carry on this legacy of defiance against white society. His activism set the precedent for their resistance. As Mary puts it, he "had shown them the way."

Chapter 13 Quotes

❝ Annie Mae still traveled a lot. Wherever Indians fought for their rights, Annie Mae was there. She helped the Menominee warriors take over a monastery. She told me that she was packing a gun. She said, "If any of my brothers are in a position where they're being shot at, or being killed, I go there to fight with them. I'd rather die than stand by and see them destroyed."

Related Characters: Mary Crow Dog, Annie Mae Aquash (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 192

Explanation and Analysis

Mary has just explained how Annie Mae Aquash was very aware that the U.S. government wanted to arrest or kill her, the implication being that the government saw her militant resistance against white society as a threat. But the possibility of death or imprisonment didn't stop Annie Mae from traveling the country to participate in demonstrations and protests for Native American civil rights. As Mary puts it, "wherever Indians fought for their rights, Annie Mae was there." Her willingness to die for the cause emphasizes how dearly she valued activism and suggests that she found resistance empowering and validating.

Annie Mae's activism also reveals her attitude toward indigenous unity. She was Micmac, and yet she fought for the rights of all Native Americans. As Mary mentions, she helped the Menominee activists in their struggle. She referred to other indigenous people as her "brothers" and expressed her intention to help them, no matter the cost. The book suggests that she saw all Native Americans as members of the same community whose fates were united. It appears she believed that, because they all suffered from similar issues and were oppressed by the same force (the U.S. government and white society), indigenous people should fight together.

Chapter 14 Quotes

❝ But always, always I felt, and was enraptured by, [Leonard's] tremendous power—raw power, spiritual Indian power coming from deep within him. It was raw because, never having been at school and being unable to read or write, there is no white-man intellectualism in him. At the same time, his thinking and ideas are often extremely sophisticated—unique, original, even frightening.

Related Characters: Mary Crow Dog (speaker), Leonard Crow Dog

Related Themes:

Page Number: 200-201

Explanation and Analysis

Immediately prior to this passage, Mary reveals that Leonard never went to school because his father, Henry Crow Dog, chased away the missionaries who tried to take Leonard to school. The community elders had already noticed Leonard's spiritual talents and had decided to train him within the community so that he would become a medicine man. Mary shows that their resistance paid off: Leonard became an extremely talented medicine man, one who was a leader for the many activists within AIM. Mary herself deeply respected his abilities, cultural knowledge, unique ideas, and "raw [...] spiritual Indian power."

Mary believes that Leonard is such an exceptional medicine man because he never went to a white school. As she puts it, "there is no white-man intellectualism in him." The implication is that his "unique, original" thinking and his ability to be so in touch with his Lakota spirituality would have been hampered had he ever gone to a white school, where he would have been pressured to assimilate. In this way, Mary suggests that assimilation inhibits a Native American's ability to be in tune with their indigenous identity. On top of this, assimilation would have prevented him from learning and preserving as many Lakota cultural and religious traditions as he did.

In May 1974, Old Henry and Leonard put on a Ghost Dance [...] It was supposed to be a ritual for Sioux only, but somehow, through the "moccasin telegraph" which always spreads news among Indians in a mysterious way, everybody seemed to know about it, and many native people from as far away as Alaska, Canada, Mexico, and Arizona suddenly appeared in order to participate.

Related Characters: Mary Crow Dog (speaker), Henry Crow Dog, Leonard Crow Dog

Related Themes:

Page Number: 212

Explanation and Analysis

Mary provides several anecdotes in which Native Americans from multiple tribes participated in religious ceremonies together. In this passage, the ceremony that takes place was intended for Lakota people only, but Native Americans from across the continent traveled to take part in it. The fact that the tribes traveled from afar shows their desire to join in the Ghost Dance. The implication is that participating in Native American religious ceremonies is so rewarding that it's worth traveling great distances, perhaps because it helps participants feel more secure in their indigenous heritage.

Throughout the memoir, Mary illustrates that many tribes have lost much of their cultures. As a result, Native Americans who want to learn more about their identity often have to turn to other tribes to learn pan-indigenous beliefs or even adopt the cultures of other tribes. Mary does not depict this cross-cultural exchange as a negative thing; in fact, her memoir suggests that it fosters intertribal unity and cooperation and also gives more Native Americans an opportunity to feel at peace with their indigenous identity.

Chapter 15 Quotes

[Leonard Crow Dog] could not understand why the government was after him. He did not consider himself a radical [...] He thought himself strictly a religious leader, a medicine man. But that was exactly why he was dangerous. The young city Indians talking about revolution and waving guns find no echo among the full-bloods in the back country. But they will listen to a medicine man, telling them in their own language: "Don't sell your land, don't sell Grandmother Earth to the strip-mining outfits and the uranium companies. Don't sell your water." This kind of advice is a threat to the system and gets you into the penitentiary.

Related Characters: Mary Crow Dog, Leonard Crow Dog (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 216

Explanation and Analysis

Mary explains that, after the Occupation of Wounded Knee, Leonard knew that the government wanted to imprison him. While Leonard saw himself as "strictly a religious leader, a medicine man," Mary understood why the government though of him as a dangerous radical. Because Leonard was a traditionalist, other traditionalists would listen to him, whereas they were less inclined to listen to the "young city Indians talking about revolution." The book suggests that the words of the militant youth did not move the

traditionalists because there was a cultural divide between the two. But the traditionalists would listen to a medicine man who preached resistance in a way that was culturally relevant to them. In this passage, Mary quotes Leonard urging the traditionalists not to sell their land, which has a sacred significance to them. This kind of resistance was a threat to the capitalist and colonialist system, as it encouraged Native Americans to keep their lands from white businesses that would exploit it for its resources.

Leonard's impact on the traditionalists speaks to the importance of having both traditionalists and radical city youth in the American Indian Movement. While the militant youth brought the spirit of political revolution, traditionalists like Leonard were able to get across to the older and more isolated Native Americans.

❝ With all that information pouring in upon Merhige, the judge began feeling twinges of conscience. He called us to his court in Richmond. A long trestle table in front of his bench was piled two feet high with petitions on behalf of Crow Dog. The judge pointed to this mass of papers, saying with a grin, "This is just the tip of the iceberg. We don't have enough space in this courtroom to bring them all out. We have letters here from Nigeria, Java, Greece, Japan, Sweden, Peru, and Austria. I just wonder how folks so far away can know more about this case than we do." Then he said in a low, matter-of-fact voice: "I resentence Crow Dog to time served. I order his instant release."

Related Characters: Mary Crow Dog, Judge Robert Merhige (speaker), Leonard Crow Dog

Related Themes:

Page Number: 239

Explanation and Analysis

Leonard was imprisoned for two years before he was finally released. From the moment Leonard was arrested, a multitude of civil rights and religious organizations rallied for him, and their rallying only got more intense as the years went on. They drummed up awareness of the injustice of Leonard's imprisonment, which eventually attracted international attention. As the sheer number of letters indicate, countless people from around the world wrote to show their support of Leonard.

Thanks to all the pressure from individuals and organizations alike, Judge Merhige eventually agreed to Leonard's release. The implication is that Leonard's legal victory was because of the activism of countless people who united to petition for Leonard's release. From the people who raised awareness, to the donors who paid for Leonard's legal team, his legal victory is evidence that the more people participate in the fight for equal rights, the more successful their fight will be. His release also illustrates how activism can lead to meaningful change—it was because so many people fought to free him that his time in prison came to an end.

Chapter 16 Quotes

❝ I pierced too, together with many other women [...] I did not feel any pain because I was in the power. I was looking into the clouds, into the sun. Brightness filled my mind [...] In the almost unbearable brightness, in the clouds, I saw people. I could see those who had died. I could see Pedro Bissonette [...] Buddy Lamont [...] I saw the face of my friend Annie Mae Aquash, smiling at me. I could hear the spirits speaking to me through the eagle-bone whistles [...] I felt nothing and, at the same time, everything. It was at that moment that I, a white-educated half-blood, became wholly Indian. I experienced a great rush of happiness.

Related Characters: Mary Crow Dog (speaker), Pedro Bissonette , Buddy Lamont , Annie Mae Aquash

Related Themes:

Page Number: 260

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Mary describes her participation in a Sun Dance. The Sun Dance is a religious ceremony traditional to the Lakota in which individuals make sacrifices for their community. While participating in the Sun Dance, Mary describes how she felt "in the power." While feeling the spiritual power, she couldn't feel pain, but she did see the faces of beloved indigenous friends who had died. The implication is that the ceremony helped connect her to them—she even says that she could "hear the spirits speaking to [her]" during the ceremony.

While participating in the Sun Dance and feeling "in the power," Mary suddenly felt that she, "a white-educated half-blood, became wholly Indian." In other words, it was by performing the Lakota ritual that she felt truly in tune with her Lakota heritage—she no longer felt torn between her mixed white-and-Lakota ancestry and upbringing. This moment of feeling "wholly Indian" brought on "a great rush of happiness," which speaks to Mary's joy and relief at finally feeling at peace with her identity. In sum, this passage

suggests that embracing one's indigenous culture is how

Native Americans can feel secure in their identity.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1: A WOMAN FROM HE-DOG

Mary introduces herself as Mary Brave Bird and says that, after she gave birth to her first child during a firefight that was part of the 1973 siege of Wounded Knee, she was given another name by her people: Ohitika Win, or Brave Woman. Being a Lakota woman, she notes, is not easy.

By mentioning that she gave birth during the Occupation of Wounded Knee, a political demonstration, she immediately establishes her dedication to activism—the implication is that advocating for civil rights is so important to her that she participated even while giving birth. Her giving birth while literally under fire is symbolic of the challenges that Native Americans—and Native American women in particular—experience; in this case, U.S. government officials fired upon Mary and the Native American protestors, even while Mary was going through labor.

As soon as Mary left Wounded Knee and before she had even healed after giving birth, "they" put her in jail and took her baby son from her. A few years later, government officials put guns to her head, threatening to kill her. It's hard, she notes again, to be a Native American woman.

Mary gives two examples of how government officials mistreated her. First, government officials imprisoned her even though she was still physically unhealed from giving birth. On top of this, they separated Mary from her newborn son, which illustrates a lack of empathy for both Mary's emotional state and her baby's health. Mary then implies that they were this cruel to her because she is a Native American woman. The second instance mentioned in this passage is that government officials used excessive force on her, which suggests their unconcern for Native Americans' lives.

Mary describes the deaths of two Native American women: her best friend Annie Mae Aquash and Delphine, her sister-in-law. The fierce and tough Annie Mae was murdered by a gunshot, but the police initially declared that she died from exposure to the cold. Delphine died after a drunken man beat her and left her outside in a blizzard.

The murders of both Annie Mae and Delphine are tragic examples of how Native American women are victims of physical violence at disproportionate rates. Additionally, another aspect of Annie Mae's murder is that the police lied about the nature of her death, which suggests that government officials killed her. Although Mary hasn't explained the situation surrounding Annie Mae's death, the implication that government officials killed her and then callously covered up her murder demonstrates a lack of respect for indigenous women's lives.

When Mary's sister Barbara went to a government hospital to give birth, the providers sterilized her while she was under anesthesia. Her baby died only two hours after birth. Once more, Mary notes that it's hard to be a Native American woman.

Forced sterilization is a medical procedure that makes a woman unable to reproduce. It's generally ordered by a government or organization without regard to the woman's own preference, and sometimes without her even knowing. Barbara is one of many Native American women whom doctors sterilized during the 20th century. This widespread effort to prevent Native Americans from having children was one way that the government carried out a genocide against Native American communities. Barbara's sterilization also speaks to how racism and sexism overlap in the oppression that Native American women experience. The book suggests that doctors targeted Barbara because of her race and gender—they exploited a moment of vulnerability when she was giving birth to sterilize her. Additionally, Barbara's baby's quick death implies negligence on the part of the doctors, which demonstrates their disregard for the life of a Native American child, as well as the emotional, mental, and physical health of the child's Lakota mother.

When Mary was still a young girl, she attended the St. Francis Boarding School, a Catholic school where the nuns brutally punished the young girls for inoffensive acts, like holding hands with a boy. When Mary was 15, she was raped.

The missionary boarding school that Mary attended was one of many boarding schools designed to separate Native American children from their families and culture and force them to assimilate to white society. In this passage, Mary briefly touches on the poor treatment she received while at the boarding school, specifically pointing out the sexism of the nuns, who sought to control the girls' behavior, especially in romantic contexts (like holding hands with a boy). This is especially abhorrent and hypocritical, since the nuns failed to protect her from being raped, even as they policed her behavior. Tragically, Mary's experience is not uncommon—Native American women suffer from a disproportionally high rate of sexual violence, particularly in comparison to white women.

In addition to big, dramatic traumas, Native Americans struggle every day to protect their cultures and languages from "an alien, more powerful culture."

Mary calls attention to how Native Americans must fight against the pressures of assimilation in order to maintain their culture.

On top of this, women in particular face additional hardships—Native American men expect women to perform sexual favors and then care for any resulting children. Mary believes that this sense of male superiority compensates for what Native American men have suffered at the hands of white society, which has stripped them of their livelihoods and disparaged their wisdom as "savage superstition."

Mary explains one way in which the loss of Native American culture affects Native American women. The implication is that, since white society has ostracized, mocked, and abused them, Native American men impose reductive sexist expectations on Native American women because they (the men) want to feel like they still have power, relevance, and control over another group.

Mary is a Lakota woman from the Sicangu, or Brule Tribe, in South Dakota. Her tribe is one of the seven tribes of the Lakota, or the Western Sioux. The Lakota have a legacy of being fierce warriors and "a horse people." But in the late 1800s, the U.S. government forced the Lakota onto reservations and took away many aspects of Lakota life. Nonetheless, they never fully gave up their traditional beliefs and pride.

Even though many U.S. government policies were aimed at destroying the Lakota people, the Lakota still resisted, which allowed them to maintain some of their cultural traditions. Mary emphasizes the tragedy of the attack on Lakota culture by contrasting the Lakota's legacy of being a fierce and proud nation to the 20th-century reality of a nation that has lost much of their land and culture.

The reservation that Mary grew up on was called He-Dog, after a chief. On the Native American side of her family, Mary is related to the Brave Birds and Fool Bulls, including Old Grandpa Fool Bull, who was the last maker of a kind of traditional flute. He lived 100 years and has memories of the Wounded Knee Massacre—he was camped by Wounded Knee when the massacre took place. Later, he saw the corpses of the Lakota men, women, and children who were murdered.

The fact that Old Grandpa Fool Bull was the last maker of a traditional kind of flute provides one specific consequence of the loss of Lakota cultural traditions: traditional knowledge and craftsmanship die with the older generation when younger generations are forced to assimilate to a different culture. After showing one casualty of the cultural genocide against the Lakota (the loss of the knowledge to make these traditional flutes), Mary then gives Old Grandpa Fool Bull's account of the Wounded Knee Massacre, in which U.S. soldiers murdered nearly 300 Lakota people. By putting these side-by-side, Mary draws attention to how the Lakota people and their culture have been under attack by the U.S. government and white society for hundreds of years.

Although Mary wishes that she could tell more stories of her relatives' bravery, she doesn't know much of her family's history before the year 1880. She does know that her people on the Rosebud Indian Reservation did not participate in many battles because their chief at the time, Spotted Tail, decided that fighting and resisting the *wasiču*ns, or "white people," was a doomed effort. Mary's family treated Christianity the same way, with many of them converting because they feared retribution—like reduced rations—for resisting white culture.

By recounting Spotted Tail's decision to stop resisting white society and the U.S. government, Mary illustrates how sometimes assimilation happens out of necessity. Spotted Tail saw that the U.S. government and white settlers outnumbered and out-resourced his people and so, to protect his people, he decided to cooperate. But Mary shows that the U.S. government did not reward him for his cooperation—they still forced his people onto a reservation where they restricted resources and coerced the Lakota to conform to white society by threatening punishments for those who resisted conversion to Christianity and other aspects of white culture. The implication is that, while Spotted Tail's reasons for cooperation were reasonable and understandable, assimilation only resulted in worse conditions for the Lakota.

When Mary's mother gave birth to her, her mother had to go to the Rosebud hospital because there was a pregnancy complication. That hospital wasn't properly equipped for any kind of surgery, so they drove Mary's mother to Pine Ridge to a different hospital. After Mary's mother gave birth to Sandra, Mary's sister, the doctors sterilized Mary's mother against her will, which was not uncommon—sterilization was another way to perpetuate the genocide of Native Americans.

The fact that Mary's mother needed to go to a distant hospital to give birth highlights the fact that reservations are often very under-resourced. In this case, the local hospital on Mary's reservation didn't have the equipment to handle a complicated pregnancy. The implication is that the U.S. government was not investing resources to keep the Lakota people alive and thriving. Mary then reminds the reader of another way that the U.S. government and white society threaten the existence of the Lakota people: forced sterilization. Like Barbara, Mary's mother underwent a forced sterilization. Mary has now identified two Native American women whom doctors sterilized against their will, which emphasizes the pervasiveness of this method of genocide against a people.

Mary is an *iyeska*, which means she is part Native American and part white. She often wishes that she could wash away all traces of whiteness in her body and remembers longing for the summer sun to tan her skin darker.

Mary makes it clear that she wants no part in assimilating to white society. In fact, her biracial identity causes her pain, as she sees her white ancestry as holding her back from being wholly Native American. By describing her childhood desire to remove physical traces of whiteness (such as by tanning), Mary communicates how she has always wished to be more connected to her Lakota identity.

The people of Mary's husband's family, the Crow Dogs, don't struggle with identity, as they are "full-blood[ed]" Lakota. The Crow Dogs isolated themselves as much as they could from white society, refusing to go to **church** or give up their religious ceremonies. Mary commends their courage.

Mary depicts her husband's non-assimilating, "full-blood[ed]" Lakota family as spared from the confusion that a biracial identity brings. She describes them as being more connected to their Lakota heritage, which they maintained by resisting white society and the U.S. government's efforts to force them to assimilate. Mary implies that their resistance—as opposed to Spotted Tail's cooperation—is the preferred way to react when confronting white society.

The first Crow Dog was a chief who got his name after a coyote and crow helped him while he was lying wounded after a battle. The white interpreter bungled the name, calling him Crow Dog instead of Crow Coyote. This first Crow Dog chief became famous after being a part of many historic incidents, from when he led the Ghost Dancers to when the Supreme Court freed him after deciding that the federal government had no jurisdiction on Native American reservations.

By mentioning several of the first Crow Dog's successes, Mary creates an association between resistance and achievement. In this case, the first Crow Dog was instrumental in a legal victory that established that the federal government couldn't make legal decisions on Native American reservations, which protected tribal sovereignty. He was also a leader of Ghost Dancers, participants in an important Native American religious movement, which highlights his resistance to Christianity. In contrast to Spotted Tail's cooperation and his people's assimilation to Christianity, Crow Dog resisted and became a historical figure who was instrumental in protecting Native Americans' legal rights and cultural traditions.

Native American land is also a legend in and of itself—it is central to Native American people's lives and cultures. The land is studded with historically and culturally important sites. But one cannot only reminisce about the great deeds of one's ancestors—one must "make [one's] own legends now. It isn't easy."

Mary stresses how important land is to Native American tribes. Not only does it sustain them, but it is filled with sites that are culturally relevant to tribes. The land's centrality to Native American life highlights the tragedy of white society's stealing indigenous peoples' land. Mary then says that "it isn't easy" to accomplish historically important deeds—perhaps because of how the U.S. government has stripped Native Americans of their land and forced them onto under-resourced reservations—but one must try to do so anyhow. Given that she has just described the first Crow Dog's resistance and accomplishments, it is likely that she is suggesting that, in order to "make [one's] own legends," one must carry on in Crow Dog's tradition of resistance, even if it "isn't easy."

CHAPTER 2: INVISIBLE FATHERS

Family relationships are very important to the Lakota. People often sacrifice all they have to help out relatives in need. Because of this, Mary is certain that "free enterprise has no future on the res."

Mary immediately establishes that generosity within the extended family is valued in Lakota culture. By saying that "free enterprise" (the economic system in which private businesses compete against each other) "has no future on the res," Mary is implying that the Lakota will never fully adopt white society's economic system in which individuals look out for themselves before aiding their relatives and neighbors.

In traditional Lakota society, the *tiyospaye*, or "extended family," is of paramount importance. When the *tiyospaye* was more prevalent, children typically grew up with multiple father and mother figures who taught them a variety of skills. Grandparents were revered, and they cared for the younger generation. White society and government deliberately dismantled the *tiyospaye*, which they saw as preventing the "civilization" of the Lakota.

Mary describes the tiyospaye *and how it was a mutually beneficial system that aided the whole tribe while contributing to tribal unity: children had multiple parental figures and learned many talents, the younger and older generations had a strong rapport, and the tribe maintained its cultural identity and traditions. Because the U.S. government wanted the Lakota to assimilate to white society, they enacted policies that deliberately destroyed the* tiyospaye *and the strong tribal unity that it fostered. The implication is that the government knew that it would be easier to defeat Lakota tribes if they were internally divided into smaller family units, making each one easier to manipulate.*

The white government forced the Lakota to live as nuclear families, each one with their own plot of land, which they hoped would "teach [the Lakota] the benefits of wholesome selfishness." Some of the Lakota, particularly those of mixed race, were more amenable to this form of cultural brainwashing. As a result, many Lakota lost the *tiyospaye*. But they also don't have the nuclear family—many Native American children simply grow up without their parents.

Mary explains one important reason behind the U.S. government's efforts to destroy the tiyospaye*—it became easier to take away the tribe's land when it was subdivided and given to smaller family units. Instead of the tribe working together to sustain each other and to protect a communal area of land, the land belonged to individual families, each of which would have to withstand the temptation to sell their land to the government or white settlers to get money to support their individual families. Mary says that Lakota of mixed race were particularly easy for the government to manipulate, which implies that these individuals' white ancestry and identity made them suggestible to the pressures of white society. Those who assimilated to the government's demands lost the* tiyospaye *while never quite achieving the white standard of the nuclear family, which is more evidence that assimilation does not mitigate oppression—it only aided the U.S. government in their attempts to subjugate the Lakota people.*

Mary never knew her biological father, a part-Native-American but mostly white man named Bill Moore. Claiming that he was tired of being around babies, Bill left Mary's mother shortly after she got pregnant with Mary. Neither Mary's mother nor Mary's grandfather (Bill's father) told Mary anything about Bill, except that he drank a lot. When Mary was about nine years old, her mother married an alcoholic who gave Mary and her siblings alcohol when she was only ten years old. Always uncomfortable when he was around, Mary avoided her mother's house.

For the most part, Mary grew up without a father. Her biological father left her mother because he didn't want to care for children, a fact that supports Mary's earlier statement that many men within the Native American community see child-rearing as a female role. Both Mary's biological father and her stepfather were heavy drinkers, which is reflective of how alcoholism is a significant issue on Native American reservations. In sum, Mary's relationship (or lack thereof) with her father figures illustrates how she grew up with neither a tiyospaye *nor a nuclear family.*

For several years, Mary did not get along with her mother. Since maturing, though, Mary realizes that her mother was in a tough position: she didn't have much of a choice when choosing a partner, as generally all Native American men psychologically suffer from the racist and under-resourced environment that they lived in. Because the schools are poor and the men have few job opportunities, most men spend their time drinking.

Mary explains that, now that she is more mature and knowledgeable, she understands that her mother did not have many viable options for a good partner. She further explains how many Native American men cope with despair by drinking, leading to widespread alcoholism. With the lack of job opportunities or ability to sustain themselves and their families, as well as the racism they encounter, Native American men face many obstacles that detract from their ability to become reliable partners and fathers, which in turn affects women and children.

Mary's mother was the sole financial provider in their household, which included Mary and her five siblings. Mary's mother worked as a nurse at the only hospital that would offer her a job, in Pierre, a city about a hundred miles away. Because she didn't have a car, Mary's mother had her children live with their grandparents. As a result, Mary didn't really know her mother until early adulthood.

Without a second parent with whom to raise her children, Mary's mother shouldered the burden of providing for her whole family. Mary's mother's story is reflective of the many Native American women who, without their children's fathers, struggle to raise children alone. The fact that Mary's mother only found work in a distant city illustrates how job opportunities are scarce on reservations. With Mary's mother's work taking her far from her children, the family unit is further disrupted so children have neither the tiyospaye *nor a nuclear family.*


Mary counts herself and her siblings lucky, as they got to live with their loving grandparents instead of in a foster home, which is where many Native American children are sent—social workers often separate Native American children from their families, citing that the houses and families aren't properly equipped or wealthy enough for children.

In addition to dismantling the tiyospaye, *another of the U.S. government's methods of forced assimilation is deliberately taking Native American children away from relatives under the guise of sending children to supposedly better environments. The irony is that the U.S. government's policies are what entrenched Native American communities in the poverty that they (the government) cite as unsuitable for children. Mary says that she and her siblings were lucky because, even if they were poor, they were at least with Lakota relatives who loved them, which she suggests is better than being with wealthy white strangers.*

Mary's grandmother was a woman named Louise Flood. When Louise was young, each household in the tribe had a ration card that they used to purchase supplies, although the people selling the supplies often cheated the Native Americans out of portions of their purchases. Sometimes the tribe was given gaunt cattle from glue factories that the men could "play buffalo hunter[]" with.

Mary tells Louise's story to illustrate the cruel conditions that the U.S. government forced upon the Lakota, regardless of whether they cooperated. The government controlled their resources and cheated the Lakota out of what little they had, and they made a mockery out of Lakota culture.

After her husband died, Mary's grandmother was left with her four children, two of whom died from tuberculosis. She never received any records about her boys' deaths—she only got the bodies to bury. Mary's grandmother then married Noble Moore, whose son from a previous marriage, Bill Moore, later married Mary's mother. Unlike his son, Noble Moore was a kind man who helped raise Mary and all her siblings. They lived together in a ramshackle house that had neither electricity nor plumbing.

The fact that the government did not provide Mary's grandmother with the records of her sons' deaths emphasizes the cruelty and callousness of the government toward Native American lives. The impoverished conditions that Mary, her siblings, and her grandparents lived in illustrate how the reservations designed by the U.S. government did not prioritize the well-being of the Lakota, including those, like Spotted Tail and his tribe, who cooperated—the government continued to oppress them regardless.

Even though Grandma Moore was a Catholic who wanted to raise her children to assimilate to white society "because she thought that was the only way for [them] to get ahead and lead a satisfying life," she maintained many Lakota traditions. She spoke the Lakota language, taught her grandchildren the properties of various herbs, and always generously fed visitors, even if the family had little food. Because the family was so poor, Grandma was resourceful, taking the children to rummage sales for clothes and finding inventive ways to make sweet treats for the children for Christmas, a holiday they couldn't afford to celebrate with a feast.

The loving and caring environment that Mary grew up in adds to Mary's argument that it is preferable for Native American children to remain with their relatives—even if they're poor—instead of being relocated to white foster homes. In addition to having their grandparents' love, growing up with Lakota relatives exposed Mary and her siblings to Lakota culture. Mary explains that, while her grandmother did pressure Mary and her siblings to assimilate, they learned aspects of Lakota culture that they would not have learned in a white family. Mary's grandmother's attitudes toward assimilation reflect another way that Native Americans are pressured to assimilate to white society: there is a belief within their own community that adjusting to white society is the only way to thrive in a colonized environment. Mary shows that she does not agree with this resigned attitude, as she expresses gratitude that she was raised with some Lakota traditions.

When Mary was a young girl, she encountered racism, although she didn't fully understand the significance of such incidents. For example, she was once denied purchasing an orange—the store owner said that she didn't have enough money to purchase it—and a white woman loudly complained that Mary had soiled the oranges with her "dirty hands."

Mary's encounter with racism illustrates how, from a young age, white people discriminated against her and made degrading remarks about her because of her race. Throughout her life, racism shapes the oppression that she experiences.

Grandma Moore often told Mary to never go into white people's homes. But one day, when Mary was young, a white girl whom she had befriended invited Mary into her house, adding that her mother wasn't home. Mary entered and was astonished at all the girl's toys. But their playing was interrupted when the girl's mother started banging on the door of the house, yelling that Mary had locked her out and threatening to whip her. After running home to Grandma Moore, Mary explained the situation. When the white woman came running to beat Mary, Grandma scared the woman off.

The white girl's deception and her white mother's mistreatment of Mary illustrate how, from a young age, Mary faces a different form of oppression than white women. While sexism affects all women, Native Americans also experience racism, which complicates the oppression that they are subjected to. This story highlights how Native American women also experience racism at the hands of white women.

Although Mary asked Grandma Moore many times to teach her how to speak the Lakota language, Grandma refused, saying that the best way for Mary to achieve success in the world was to assimilate to white society. Mary acknowledges that Grandma (who had attended mission schools) believed she was helping Mary, but assimilation would not change who Mary was, nor how she felt about her identity.

Mary's grandmother encouraged Mary to assimilate to white society, an attitude that reflects the pressure to assimilate that Native Americans experience within their communities. Surrounded by poverty and subjected to the mission schools' anti-indigenous teachings, Mary's grandmother believed that adapting to white society is the only way to escape to a more prosperous life. But Mary knew that assimilation would neither mitigate the racism she experienced—white society would always see her as a Native American and would discriminate against her because of it—nor would it alter the fact that Mary identifies as Lakota. Earlier, Mary described how her white ancestry only confused her—what she longs to do is learn more about her Lakota heritage.

Mary realized that if she wanted to learn about her identity, she would have to seek help from other elders. She went to her great-uncle Dick Fool Bull, who took her to her first peyote meeting, and her grandmother's niece, Elsie Flood. Elsie was a "turtle woman," which means that she was a resilient and independent person; turtles symbolize "strength, resolution, and long life." Elsie was also a medicine woman and a talented artist. Years later, Elsie's beaten body was found. The state never investigated her death. Mary still mourns the loss of the irreplaceable Elsie, with whom so much traditional wisdom died.

To learn more about her Lakota heritage, Mary seeks help from elders. The fact that Lakota cultural traditions are largely only known among elders illustrates how many Lakota traditions were dying with the older generation. Because the younger generations were forced to learn about and assimilate to white society, they did not learn the cultural traditions of their community. In this way, assimilation enacts a cultural genocide against Native American communities. Elsie Flood's death doesn't just demonstrate how cultural knowledge dies with elders whose communities have been forced to assimilate; it is also representative of the high rates of physical violence against Native American women, violence that the state rarely investigates. Whether the state didn't investigate Elsie's death because they had a hand in it (perhaps to prevent her from passing on her cultural knowledge to younger generations) is unknown, but it nonetheless shows how the state does not value Native American women's lives.

Although Mary and her siblings lived in poverty, they were not angry or envious because they were not exposed to the wealthy—their fellow community members lived in the same state of poverty. Mary liked her home, whose crowded atmosphere only made her feel more loved. Plus, she still had access to horses, for "No matter how poor [...] Sioux are, there are always a few ponies around." Throughout her childhood, Mary's loving grandparents cared for her, although they were unable to stop her from being taken away to boarding school.

Mary again emphasizes her gratitude for having grown up with her grandparents. Her family may have lived in poverty, but her exposure to Lakota culture was irreplaceable. Her regretful attitude that her grandparents hadn't been able to stop her from going to one of the missionary boarding schools that forced children to assimilate to white society demonstrates her deep resentment toward assimilation.

CHAPTER 3: CIVILIZE THEM WITH A STICK

Each Native American child suffers from mental shock when they arrive at one of the Native American boarding schools, even the newer ones where the teachers have better intentions (although still untrained in the culture and psychology of Native Americans). Mary even knows of children who attempted—and sometimes died by—suicide after arriving at the schools.

Mary immediately establishes that the missionary boarding schools are institutions that negatively affect Native American children. She points out that the teachers do not possess the adequate training to work with Native American children, even at the more modern institutions where teachers want to do good for the Native American community—Mary implies that teachers who work with Native American children should be educated in the culture of the tribe whose children they are working with. By mentioning that some teachers now have better intentions, Mary implies that the teachers who worked in the older missionary schools did not care for the well-being of the children they were working with. As a whole, Mary says these boarding schools—which were designed to assimilate Native American children to white society—are terrible for the children who attend them, as the forced assimilation and separation from their families are traumatic to the children, so much so that some children try to kill themselves.

The schools were originally founded by white people who thought that forced assimilation to white society was the better alternative to total extermination of Native Americans that many white settlers and officials advocated for. So, these white "do-gooders" kidnapped Native American children from their families, culture, and land, all of which were the children's original teachers.

The fact that the "do-gooders" believed that forced assimilation was beneficial to Native American tribes shows the racism of the white settlers, who believed that their society was superior to the societies of indigenous tribes. Native Americans already had their own rich cultures and lifestyles, and they had no need for the boarding schools that the "do-gooders" founded; as Mary says, the children already received an education, albeit an education that white settlers didn't recognize. Mary stresses that the kidnappings and forced assimilation were traumatic and devastating for Native American families and communities. So while the settlers believed they were helping Native Americans by "saving" them, their actions contributed to white society's cultural attack on Native American communities.

At these boarding schools, Native American children were isolated from their families for years, after which they returned to their homes dressed according to white fashions. But they quickly realized that forced assimilation didn't undo white people's racism; they still wouldn't hire or include those who assimilated. Their fellow Native Americans would often exclude them as well, and such ostracization encouraged alcoholism.

Mary explains how forced assimilation to white society led to a widespread identity crisis for the Native American children who attended the boarding schools. Having been taught the customs of white society, the now-grown children struggled to connect with the people of their tribe. Meanwhile, white people continued to discriminate against them because they weren't white, no matter how much they tried to assimilate. In this way, Mary demonstrates how assimilation does not mitigate oppression. In this case, it only made things worse for the Native Americans who attended the schools; as adults, they used alcohol to cope with their identity struggles, as they felt that they were unwanted by both white people and by the people of their tribe. As Mary has mentioned previously, alcoholism is a major issue on reservations, contributing to problems like domestic abuse and violence against women.


The school that Mary and her sisters attended was the same boarding school that her mother and Grandma Moore went to. All of them tried to run away at some point. Grandma tried running away after the nuns cruelly punished her for playing in **church** by imprisoning her in a dark cubby for a week. But her runaway attempt was thwarted: the nuns recaptured her, beat her, and imprisoned her again.

Mary elaborates on the terrible conditions in which the children lived while in the missionary boarding schools. The nuns abused Mary's grandmother, beating her and imprisoning her for insignificant offenses. Their abuse speaks to how the purpose of the schools was to force Native American children to assimilate to white culture, not to educate them—the staff of the boarding school were not concerned with providing an education so much as controlling the behavior of the children who attended. Mary, her sisters, her mother, and her grandmother all tried to escape the school, which illustrates how the schools were traumatic to the children within them.

Mary's experience at the boarding school was similar to her grandmother's: the nuns forced a strict routine on the children, punished them severely for any kind of misstep, and banned them from practicing their traditional religion. Mary resented being forced to follow the nuns' rigid schedules, which she credits to her Lakota culture—as an old medicine man put it, "Lakotas are not like dogs who can be trained."

Mary continues to describe the horrific conditions of the boarding schools, in which the nuns brutally punished the children and stripped them of their cultures. Additionally, the rigidness of the schools came to a shock to Lakota like Mary, who stresses that Lakota people generally resist taking arbitrary orders.

Mary and her older sister Barbara attended boarding school at the same time. Both of them received beatings from the nuns, who would hit their naked backsides with boards and leather straps. The nuns fed the children disgusting food, forced them to do endless chores, and didn't heat their rooms in the winter, all while the nuns dined on good food and stayed in comfortable quarters. Mary's terrible experience at the boarding school made her immediately distrustful of white people for years afterward.

Mary continues to detail the terrible conditions of the missionary schools. Nuns beat and humiliated the children and forced them to live in appalling conditions, all while they (the nuns) enjoyed comfortable lodging and good food. Again, Mary shows how the boarding school staff did not have good intentions; not only was the forced assimilation racist (it teaches that Native American cultures are inferior to white society), unethical, and traumatic for the children (and their communities, who lost their young generation), but the staff was cruel and abusive to the children. Mary's time at the boarding school was so horrific that she didn't trust white people for many years after. This may contribute to her skepticism toward white feminism; Mary was racially discriminated against by the nuns—who are all women—which shows another way in which white women have contributed to the oppression that Native American women face.

Around the year 1970, a hippie white woman stopped by the reservation and covertly talked to Mary and a few of the other girls about how Black people and Native Americans were fighting for their civil rights across the U.S. She suggested that they start an underground paper to talk about their experiences.

In this anecdote, Mary demonstrates how people of different communities can learn from each other when all fighting for equal rights. Mary and her classmates take inspiration from Black civil rights advocates, as well as Native American activists. The white woman's encouragement that they resist illustrates how the fight for civil rights is most successful when all people—regardless of race, gender, or beliefs—aid each other. The hippie woman was not Native American, but she supported the current movements of different racial groups who advocated for their civil rights.

Along with her close friends Charlene Left Hand Bull and Gina One Star, Mary started a newspaper called the *Red Panther*, in which they detailed the terrible conditions they lived in and the hypocrisy of the nuns and priests. But someone told the nuns about the paper, getting Mary and her friends into trouble. The nuns summoned the girls' parents to tell them about the incident. Mary's mother calmly said that "it's supposed to be a free country, free speech and all that," so the girls didn't really do anything wrong. The girls' punishment was reduced to extra chores.

An unidentified individual thwarted Mary and her friends' resistance paper by tattling on them. Although Mary doesn't identify the person who told on them, it's suggested that it was another student. Instead of standing in solidarity with their classmates, this student chose to cooperate with the missionary school staff, which hurt the newspaper writers' mission to expose the terrible conditions that affected them all. Mary's mother, however, argued that the nuns were being hypocritical if they silenced a newspaper while they taught the children about the principles of white America, in which the right to free speech is enshrined in the Constitution. The nuns still punished the girls, although their punishment was not too severe in comparison to the other punishments that they endured.

As time passed, Mary became more rebellious and tired of the nuns' colorism—they treated lighter-skinned girls better than the darker-skinned girls. Once, a nun singled out Mary for holding hands with a boy, saying that she was being too promiscuous. Mary responded by citing how, several years ago, many dead white newborns were found in the water lines of the missionaries. She added that the nun should criticize people like the newly transferred priest, who had molested a girl at a different school.

The fact that Mary only became more rebellious with time suggests that, eventually, resisting the nuns felt better than passively accepting their racism and abuse. Mary calls attention to how the nuns treated the students differently based on their skin tone, which shows how her school experiences were shaped by racism. Her teachers racially discriminated against her in a way that white girls—and even lighter-skinned Native American girls—were spared. While white girls also experience sexist attempts to control their sexuality, Mary says that she was especially targeted in this way because of the color of her skin. When a nun called her promiscuous for holding hands with a boy, Mary rebelliously points out the hypocrisy of the missionary staff; while the Catholic staff preaches sexual abstinence, Mary's accusation that the corpses of many white babies were found by the missionary school suggests that nuns killed their infants to maintain a veneer of chastity. Additionally, Mary points out a priest who sexually abused a girl in a different missionary school, which shows another way that Native American women's race affects the oppression they faced: they are more vulnerable to the abuses of authority figures, who believe they can prey upon the marginalized because they (the abusive authority figures) are protected by the institutions in power. In this case, the priest who abused a Native American girl was simply transferred to another school where, protected by the system of missionary schools, he could continue to molest young girls.


One day, a new priest was teaching English. During class, the priest commanded a shy student to repeat an answer over and over until he pronounced it correctly. Mary stood up and told the priest to stop mocking the boy. After class, the priest ordered Mary to stop taunting teachers. She punched him in the nose before wriggling free.

This anecdote illustrates the individual pain of one child who struggled to adjust to the missionary school, where the staff forced the children to speak English instead of their native languages. The priest who was teaching the class humiliated the boy instead of teaching him, which once again shows how the staff mistreated the Native American children in the schools. Mary took action, choosing resistance over passivity; even though she wasn't the one whom the priest mocked, she decided to stand up for the other student.

Mary ran to one of the nuns' offices and demanded her diploma, adding that she was quitting school—she was tired of being treated so terribly. The nun gave in and told Mary that she was free to go. Years later, Mary became friends with the same priest she punched; he became an advocate for many Native American causes.

Mary's act of resistance led to her release from school, which illustrates how taking action against oppression can bring about meaningful change. She adds that the priest whom she punched eventually became an activist for Native American civil rights. Mary doesn't specify whether it was her rebellion that persuaded him to re-examine his biases and actions, but it's possible that her outrage prompted him to reconsider his role as a teacher in a missionary school that traumatized Native American children. His later participation in the movement for Native American civil rights also demonstrates how the fight for equal rights is an inclusive one, and that anyone—regardless of race or religion—can participate.

CHAPTER 4: DRINKING AND FIGHTING

After quitting school, Mary spent a lot of time in various "reservation towns without hope." Poverty and alcoholism were severe problems in these towns, where a common family fight was whether to spend the little money they had on either food or alcohol, the latter of which was usually prioritized. With no one but one another to take out their frustration and depression on, drunken brawls are frequent.

Mary again addresses how the poverty and lack of opportunities on reservations drove many Native Americans to drink, which once again illustrates how government-constructed reservations hurt Native American communities. While Mary understands the hopelessness that leads many Native American residents to fight each other, she implies that this division does not help the community.

At age 12, Mary was drinking copious amounts of hard liquor. But she eventually quit, crediting the American Indian Movement and traditional Native American religion for giving her a sense of purpose. But while she doesn't drink now, she still has plenty of friends who do. All the same, she never judges them—she understands their feelings far too well.

Joining the American Indian Movement changed Mary's life so profoundly that she overcame her alcoholism, which shows how activism is empowering and boosts one's morale. Mary also says that embracing Lakota and (more generally) indigenous traditions also changed her life for the better and gave her a sense of purpose, which suggests that practicing cultural traditions helps Native Americans feel secure in their identity.

When Mary started drinking at age 10, it felt natural to her, as everyone around her was drinking. In fact, the first time that she got drunk was with relatives at a party. Throughout her drinking days, Mary's older sister Barbara did her best to look out for her, sometimes taking away Mary's cigarettes and alcohol. This led to fights between the two sisters, but Mary knows that Barb was always motivated by love.

Mary contrasts the ways that Barbara and some relatives reacted to her (Mary's) drinking as a young girl. Many of Mary's relatives actively encouraged her to drink, which speaks to both the pervasiveness of alcoholism in in Mary's family and social circle, as well as how her relatives appeared to passively accept that alcoholism would be Mary's fate. On the other hand, Barbara tried to stop Mary from drinking and smoking, even though it led to fights between the two sisters. In retrospect, Mary respects Barbara's efforts, as she knows that Barbara was only trying to protect Mary. Although Barbara didn't stop Mary from drinking as a teenager, it is clear that Mary now sees Barbara's actions—no matter how unwelcome they were to Mary at the time—as proof of her love. It's possible that Barbara's fighting to protect Mary helped solidify the girls' close relationship.

By the time Mary was 17, she no longer lived at home with her mother and stepfather, and she spent most of her time drinking and smoking weed. In retrospect, Mary counts herself lucky that she survived all the drunk driving that was such a central part of her life at the time, especially given that the cars were in such a dilapidated condition, often without working brakes or doors. She had lost many friends and relatives to drunk-driving accidents.

Drunk-driving has claimed the lives of many of Mary's friends and family, which demonstrates another way in which alcoholism—and the depression that comes with the poverty that prompts the drinking—takes a toll on Native American communities.

Drunken brawls are common on the reservation; Mary has participated in several. One day while at a bar in Rapid City—which many Sioux consider the most racist and anti-Native-American city in the U.S.—a white woman made a racist comment at Mary. In response, Mary broke a nearby ashtray and used the sharp edge to cut the woman's face.

This white woman's racist comment is just one of many racist incidents that Mary has experienced throughout her life. By telling this story, in which a white woman was racist, Mary illustrates how, although she confronts sexism as well, the racism that she experiences (sometimes from white women) creates obstacles that white women do not have. Mary's violent response shows how drinking made encounters like this one even more volatile.

A good number of the drunken fights that Mary has witnessed are motivated by anti-Native American racism. One such hate-fueled attack happened when Mary was visiting her friend Bonnie. While Bonnie was trying to make a phone call in a street-side phone booth, a drunken white man tried to squeeze into the booth, all the while yelling at Bonnie to get out and "use a tom-tom" instead. Bonnie tried to fight the man off, but he hit her with a beer bottle until she fell, her face dripping with blood.

In this anecdote, Bonnie is the victim of racism and physical violence. Given the man's racist comment that Bonnie should "use a tom-tom" instead of a phone, it is clear that the man targeted Bonnie because of her race. While white women are also victims of physical violence at the hands of men, Native American women suffer from physical attacks at a disproportionate rate. The man's assault of Bonnie is reflective of the racially motivated violence that Native American women suffer from.

A white woman rushed toward Bonnie, pushing Mary to the side and announcing that she was a nurse and could help her. Mary ordered the woman not to push her. When the white woman insisted that Mary get out of her way—adding that "those Indians are really something"—Mary pushed the woman against a car. When the police arrived, they arrested Mary and didn't attempt to find the drunken white man. Mary is so accustomed to violence and unwanted sexual advances that she, like so many other Native American women, often defensively attacks even when no harm is intended.

A white woman interrupted the scene to try to help Bonnie, but the woman's racist comment set Mary off. Mary defends her action of pushing the woman, pointing out that all the violence targeted toward Native American women forces them to live on edge; they especially cannot trust authority figures to protect them (in this case, the police officer let the white man go while arresting Mary). The implication is that white women do not understand how consistent, racially motivated violence affects Native American women's mental health and ability to trust others, including white women.

Now, Mary tries to avoid fighting, but sometimes it's impossible to avoid. One evening, while Mary was in Washington State with her husband Leonard, her son Pedro, her friend Annie Mae, and another Lakota leader, two white men approached Mary's group while they were packing up their car. The men started making racist comments and pulling on Leonard's braids. Speaking calmly, Leonard tried to deescalate the situation, but the men attacked him.

Mary gives another example of a racially motivated attack. In this story, Mary's Lakota husband tried to avoid a fight, but a group of white men attacked him anyway, which points to how, even when they try to avoid it, Native Americans often experience violence. In this case, being passive wasn't an option; the men attacked Leonard despite his attempts to pacify the men.

Several Native American friends saw the attack and joined in the fray, but more white men arrived, some armed with bats. Catching sight of nearby police officers, Mary approached them and demanded their help, but they refused and simply watched the scene until gunshots rang out. At this moment, they kindly told the white men to go home and started arresting the Native Americans.

This anecdote again shows how Native Americans cannot rely on government officials—like the police—to come to their aid in a violent situation. In this case, Mary and the Native Americans she and her husband were with had no option but to fight back in order to avoid getting seriously injured or killed.

Looking back at her teenage years, Mary notes that it seems like "just one endless, vicious cycle of drinking and fighting." Although she avoided becoming a life-long alcoholic, many of the Native Americans she knew were not so lucky. But while people say that there is an "Indian drinking problem," she counters that it's "a white problem." After all, it is white people who make liquor and sell it to Native Americans, and they're to blame for the grim social and economic conditions that prompt Native Americans to drink.

Alcohol and violence played a central role in Mary's teenage years, which she says were representative of those of many of her Native American friends and family. She then blames white society for making alcoholism such a pervasive problem in Native American communities. Not only do white people profit off the manufacturing and selling of alcohol to Native Americans, but the U.S. government stripped Native Americans of their culture and resources, shunting them into impoverished and hopeless conditions that breed alcoholism as a means of coping.

CHAPTER 5: AIMLESSNESS

The generational differences between Mary—and Mary's siblings—and her mother made life at home difficult. Mary's mother had strict Christian beliefs, and she was apprehensive of her friends' judgment. When Barbara got pregnant in high school, Mary's mother told Barbara that she was disowning her; later, when Sandra got pregnant, Mary's mother reacted in a similar way. All the same, Mary knew that her mother would always defend them, if need be.

Mary's mother's assimilation to white society caused tension in the family home. Mary's mother's anxiety about her friends' judgment suggests that pressures to assimilate fostered antagonism and competition between Native Americans, as those who assimilated to Christianity and white society judged those who didn't as inferior. Mary's mother's desire for her Christian friends to accept her led her to disparage her own daughters, whom she spurned for getting pregnant. This instance also highlights the sexism that Native American women face within their communities. By shaming them for their pregnancies, Mary's mother expressed the expectation that women shouldn't have sex before marriage and that those who do are unworthy of respect.

Eventually, tired of the generational rift between her and her mother, Mary left home and started traveling with a band of kids, drifting around the country and stealing food when they needed to. Drinking and drug usage was common among these groups: Mary liked smoking pot, and Barb took a lot of acid. Mary now sees that there was an "emptiness underneath all this frenzied wandering," as though she and the other travelers were waiting for a sign or message.

Unlike her mother, Mary refused to assimilate. To escape the pressure to assimilate, she found a group of like-minded youths to roam with. While Mary recognizes that their traveling was purposeless, she never seems to regret her decision to rebel against her mother's strict rules, which suggests that, for Mary, defying her mother's demands to assimilate and leaving the toxic home environment were the right choice.

To sustain themselves, the groups of roaming youth shoplifted—or "liberated" items—from stores. They didn't feel guilty about stealing; in fact, they saw it as a form of justice. After all, white store owners and white government officials had been stealing from the Native Americans for decades. For example, agents who were supposed to distribute government goods often stole them for themselves. Later, when trading posts were established, store owners would inflate prices because they had no competition—typically, there was only one store per area.

Mary and her friends viewed stealing from the stores as a way to get back at a society that has stolen so much from indigenous people. Seeing it as an act of resistance, the youth didn't feel guilty about stealing and, even now, Mary shows no regret, which suggests that she continues to view this behavior as part of her activism.

Another reason that Mary never felt guilty for shoplifting was that the store owners provoked it—white store owners would follow Native Americans around the store, watching their every move and expecting them to steal. Stealing started to feel like a challenge, and Mary got very good at it.

The shop owners' racism also prompted Mary and her friends to steal. Because white shop owners expected Mary and her Native American friends to steal, they reasoned that they might as well actually steal if shop owners were going to treat them like thieves anyway. Stealing also "punished" store owners for their racism, and getting back at these people felt better than passively accepting their racism.

Mary got caught only twice, but after getting caught the second time, she realized that shoplifting wasn't worth the risk of getting imprisoned. If she was going to get arrested, she wanted it to be for a more significant reason. Plus, she realized that there were more effective ways to fight for her and her people's rights.

Mary only stopped shoplifting when she realized that she could fight against racist white society in more effective ways—she still wanted to take action and advocate for her rights, but she knew that shoplifting wasn't going to create the meaningful change she wanted.

But, more often than not, Mary and her fellow travelers weren't arrested for what they did, but rather because they were Native Americans. One evening, while traveling, Mary's group got a flat tire. They pulled to the side of the road for the boys to fix it and, in the meantime, the girls made a fire. Suddenly, police arrived and arrested them all, saying that a farmer charged them for attempted arson and trespassing, among other similar, trumped-up charges. The police jailed the group of kids for two days before declaring them not guilty. Discriminatory arrests deeply affect a person—they make one want to commit the crimes they're charged with.

This anecdote emphasizes the racism of white society and law enforcement. Mary and her fellow travelers were simply trying to fix their car—they weren't causing any problems. Mary implies that the farmer called the police out of his racial bias against indigenous people—that he assumed the kids were causing trouble solely because they were Native American. Mary says that these racially motivated arrests took a mental toll on her and her fellow travelers. She argues that, when a person knows that they are going to get arrested no matter what they do, they become tempted to actually commit crimes. The implication is that committing the crime feels like an act of resistance against a society that is going to try to punish them no matter what they do. This anecdote also reveals the gender roles built into this traveling group: while the men fix the car, the women perform the domestic duties (building a fire).

Within the bands of travelers, having sex with multiple partners was common. In fact, many of the young men had an entitled attitude toward the women, simply expecting the women to have sex with them on request. Barb and Mary didn't appreciate this attitude—both of them wanted more commitment in their sexual relationships.

Mary reveals that there were gendered expectations within the groups of travelers regarding sex. Men felt entitled to women's bodies, as though women were simply objects. This attitude of expectation is in sharp contrast to the expectations of chastity and purity that Mary received during her upbringing from the missionary teachers and her mother. Though Mary doesn't explicitly say so, she implies that these two disparate demands on women's bodies and behavior pins women into an impossible position: they are shamed for having sex while they are pressured into appeasing men's sexual appetites. These expectations do not leave room for a woman's desires. For example, Barb and Mary didn't want to be used as sexual objects, but it's also apparent that they did want to have sex. But under these competing social pressures, their desires for committed relationships went unfulfilled.

Mary notes that while Lakota men speak eloquently about the important role of women within a tribe, many men do not treat women with respect. Women are expected to do a lot of domestic chores and craftwork. When young Lakota men claim that this is because men need to keep their hands and arms free to protect the women or go on hunts, Mary sarcastically retorts that they should "get [her] a buffalo" if they insist on being traditional.

Mary illustrates that, within Lakota culture, men expect women to bear the burden of all domestic duties. On top of this, many Lakota men simply do not respect women, as their sexual objectification of women demonstrates. Mary gets fed up with their lip-service about traditional gender expectations. Not only are gender roles reductive, but the men appear to expect women to maintain their traditional roles—doing domestic chores and craftwork—while they (the men) don't carry out their end of the bargain—providing food—especially because modern white society has exterminated the traditional way of life. In this anecdote, Mary sarcastically tells men to hunt for her if they expect her to do domestic work for them, knowing full well that the men cannot hunt the same way that Lakota men did prior to white settlement. The implication is that, in a changing world, gender expectations should change to adapt to the times.

In Lakota lore, there are important female figures and heroines, like Grandmother Earth and White Buffalo Woman, the woman who brought the Lakota the sacred pipe. Menstruating women are banned from rituals because they are considered to possess a powerful force that can make ceremonies ineffective. But in modern-day Lakota society, the traditional celebrations for a girl's first menstruation are gone—instead, menstruation is viewed with disgust.

Mary calls attention to how modern Lakota society doesn't reflect the same respect given to women that traditional Lakota beliefs espouse. The Lakota religion includes many important and revered female figures; additionally, it is believed that all women possess power when menstruating. But Mary argues that, while modern Lakota men claim respect for the female figures of Lakota lore, they do not respect modern Lakota women in the same way. This clarifies another reason for why Mary gets annoyed when men expect her to follow traditional gender roles—the men don't give her the same respect that traditional Lakota society attached to those traditional expectations for women.

A man raped Mary when she was about 15 years old. The violent incident traumatized Mary, who felt so ashamed about the incident that she didn't tell anyone what had happened.

Mary reveals that she is a victim of sexual violence. While sexual violence is a threat to all women, Native American women in particular suffer from sexual violence at a disproportionate rate.

Tragically, it's not uncommon for Native American women to be raped. White officers often arrested Native American women on sham charges in order to rape them in jail or in their cars. Any legal complaints raised by Native American women are often dismissed by judges, which only encourages women to stay silent about the sexual abuses they suffered. Mary notes that this is changing, as more Native American women are courageously stepping forward to fight against the rapes and forced sterilizations that they endure.

Not only do many Native American women suffer from the trauma of rape and sexual violence, but law enforcement—the people who ostensibly exist to protect others—target Native American women. This racially motivated sexual violence is a widespread problem in the Native American community; it also destroys any trust between Native American women and the U.S. justice system. The implication is that, while sexual violence is a problem for all women, Native American women suffer in particular. Not only do perpetrators target them because of their race, but the justice system doesn't give Native American women's cases the same amount of attention that they give to white women's cases. On a more hopeful note, Mary says that, thanks to the activism of many Native American women, more people are becoming aware of the sexual abuses and reproductive violations that white society and the U.S. government commit against Native American women.

In the groups Mary traveled with, the men typically wanted to have commitment- and responsibility-free sex with women. Once, she played a joke on a Native American man who climbed into her sleeping bag without waiting for her to give him permission. Mary was eight months pregnant at the time but didn't say a thing—she stayed silent as her groped her breast and slid his hand down her body. As soon as his hand touched her swollen belly, he stopped, shocked and confused. She exclaimed that she was starting to go into labor; he leapt out of her sleeping bag in a hurry.

In this anecdote, Mary exposes the entitlement of some Native American men, as well as their fear of commitment. A man non-consensually climbed into Mary's sleeping bag and groped her. He only left when he found out that she is pregnant, which is representative of the many men who leave their female sexual partners when they become pregnant. As Mary has discussed, this entitlement and non-committal attitude among men is what leaves so many Native American women with the burden of raising children alone.

On the whole, Mary respects Native American men for their dedication and bravery in the fight for Native American rights and in protecting Native American women from "outsiders," even though they could be cruel to women at the same time.

But Mary makes it clear that she does respect Native American men for all that they do in the fight for indigenous civil rights. She also notes that they are quick to protect women from non-indigenous men, which she appreciates, although it's clear that she wishes that they'd personally be more respectful of women. Mary's joint respect and frustration with Native American men exposes how Native American women's gender and race complicate their fight for civil rights; they want to stand by their fellow Native American men to advocate for indigenous rights and for women's rights, even though they experience discrimination from both Native American men and from white women.

For instance, Native American men are protective of Native American women when white men sexually harass them. Once, while staying in Pierre, South Dakota for the trial of some AIM (American Indian Movement) members, some white men sexually harassed Barb while she was walking to a motel parking lot. She ran back into the motel she was staying at, where she found Tom Poor Bear, an Oglala boy who was also staying at the motel. He walked out to the parking lot with her and ordered the white men to apologize. They refused, one of them saying, "I don't apologize to her kind ever."

This anecdote illustrates how white men harass Native American women because of their race and gender. In this instance, a group of white men picked Barb to sexually harass because she is Native American—it's clear that they viewed Native American women as inferior to white women given the man's comment that he didn't "apologize to her kind ever." It's likely that these white men were aware that the U.S. justice system would protect them if a Native American woman tried to press charges, as the government does not treat Native American women as equal to white people, including white women.

Tom Poor Bear started fighting the white man, and the white man's friends started beating up Tom Poor Bear. But, with a sizeable group of Native American men at the motel, Tom Poor Bear had reinforcements, as several other AIM supporters rushed out of the motel to help him, as soon as they realized what was happening. They beat up the white men until the latter either fled or collapsed.

The AIM activists jumped to Barbara's defense, which shows how many Native American men are protective of Native American women when white people harass them. Their action also shows that they prioritized fighting over passivity—they preferred to brawl rather than let the white men walk away without consequences for their racism and misogyny.

Shortly afterward, several squad cars pulled into the parking lot of the motel and, using a loudspeaker, they ordered the Native Americans within the motel to exit, as they were being charged with assault and battery. Aware that their lives were on the line—the police have a reputation for carelessly firing at Native Americans—one of the AIM members phoned one of the trial's lawyers who was staying in another room in the motel. The lawyer then called the sheriff and eventually persuaded him to drop the charges.

Again, the U.S. government sided with the white men, as officials tried to arrest the Native American men instead of the white men who harassed Barbara. This incident reveals how Native American women have many reasons to distrust the U.S. government and not bring their cases forward: historically, the government often protects white perpetrators and punishes Native Americans for retaliating to the abuses of others.

In retrospect, Mary isn't sure whether her days of traveling left a positive or negative effect on her life. Nonetheless, they gave her a broader idea of "what being an Indian within a white world meant." And when she joined AIM, the aimlessness that plagued her disappeared.

Mary doesn't appear to regret her roaming days, as they gave her a broader understanding of the racism—and misogyny—of white society. Joining AIM, an organized civil rights movement, allowed her to apply her small acts of resistance to a political environment.

CHAPTER 6: WE AIM NOT TO PLEASE

The American Indian Movement (AIM) was a powerful force, captivating many peoples' interest. Mary's first encounter with AIM was at a powwow in 1971. It was at this event that Mary first saw Leonard Crow Dog, who caught her attention with his long hair—most men on the reservations had shorter hair at this time.

Leonard's long hair establishes that there was a cultural revival aspect to the American Indian Movement. Men's shorter hair was evidence of white society's influence and the forced assimilation that took place—missionaries cut short the hair of the Native American children when they arrived at mission boarding schools.

The speeches made at the event resonated with Mary. One man spoke about the genocide and cultural destruction that white society committed—and continues to commit—against Native American peoples. Leonard Crow Dog said that white society has not listened to or sympathized with the words of Native Americans for hundreds of years, so they must "speak with [their] bodies" instead.

The first speaker addressed the genocide of the Native American peoples and cultures and, by discussing both tragedies together in one speech, illustrated how both are cruel and destructive acts. In other words, he made it clear that forcing people to give up their culture and lifestyle is devastating to a group of people. Leonard Crow Dog's speech was a call for resistance. He said that, because white people have not listened to or cooperated with Native Americans, indigenous people must now take action (instead of simply speaking) in order to make change, even if that means violent confrontation.

AIM originated in Minnesota in 1968, when its primarily Ojibway leaders focused on improving the conditions for Native Americans living in the slums of Minneapolis and St. Paul. Seeking to reconnect with traditional Native American culture and religious ceremonies, the AIM leaders established connections with the Lakota people, whose isolation helped preserve many traditions. Mary believes that AIM needed both reservation-based and city-based Native Americans to become the force it was.

The shift in AIM's mission—from focusing only on the plights of urban Native Americans in the Twin Cities to addressing the problems faced by all Native Americans and reviving Native American cultures—shows a decision to be more inclusive of Native American experiences. Simply put, AIM wanted to serve all Native American people, not just the Ojibway of Minneapolis and St. Paul. Part of this decision to have a more inclusive mission was the goal to revive Native American cultures. Mary notes that it was this decision that brought AIM leaders to the Lakota, which helped the movement broaden its scope and become a stronger force. She says that it was thanks to the Lakota's isolation that they retained more cultural traditions than other tribes, which speaks to the importance of resistance to assimilation. The implication is that the Lakota's distance from white society is what allowed them to preserve more of their traditional lifestyle.

Mary credits Black civil rights leaders for some of AIM's rhetoric. While Native Americans and Black people share the status of being systematically discriminated against and economically subjected by white society, there were differences as well. As Mary puts it, many Black activists argued for the same rights that white people had, whereas "we Indians want *out*!"

Mary suggests that AIM benefited from the Black civil rights movement, not least because AIM activists based some of their arguments on those of Black civil rights activists. In this way, she shows how the fight for equal rights is an inclusive one: while AIM activists and Black civil rights leaders fought for different things, they were all fighting for equality and could benefit from each other's work.

Mary states that she, along with many other AIM members, hated white people because they were so accustomed to enduring racist hostility and brutality from them. Yet as she met more supporters of AIM, she realized that there were white people dedicated to AIM's causes.

Although Mary and other AIM activists were initially suspicious of all white people, they eventually realized that there were white people who actively aided them in their fight for Native American civil rights. The implication is that activism is an inclusive activity—anyone can join—and that as activism grows more inclusive, the cause as a whole benefits.

Romantic relationships abounded between AIM members. The marriages were conducted by medicine men; some lasted a few days, others several years. Mary entered into one such marriage, which lasted until she got pregnant. AIM did not support the use of birth control, as they wanted to increase the Native American population. Not everyone agreed. When Barb went to a government hospital to have her baby, the doctors performed a hysterectomy on her, without her permission. Her baby passed away only two hours after birth.

Mary doesn't explain why her marriage ended, but one thing is clear: her partner left Mary to care for their child on her own. As Mary has previously explained, single-parenting is not uncommon for Native American women, who are often left to shoulder the heavy responsibility of raising children on their own. Mary adds that AIM was against the use of birth control, as they believed that having more Native American children was an important way to fight against the genocide of indigenous people. One of the ways this genocide was perpetuated was through forced sterilizations, such as Barbara's. These forced sterilizations performed on Native American women illustrate how racism and sexism overlap to form the oppression that Native American women face. In this instance, Barbara's reproductive rights were violated because she is Native American, and the doctors exploited her labor and childbirth to sterilize her.

Throughout her pregnancy, Mary traveled with AIM, which older generations of Native Americans joined as well. While the middle-aged adults were considered a "lost generation" who were too concerned with assimilation, the older generation generally supported AIM. They had a lot of cultural knowledge and wisdom that they passed on to the young generation of AIM members, who started participating in ceremonies like the Sun Dance. Mary is proud that many of the practiced traditions among the AIM were adopted from Lakota culture.

AIM united young Native Americans with tribal elders as the young sought to learn more about the cultural traditions that the older generation maintained. In this way, Mary shows how intergenerational unity was vital for the continuation of cultural knowledge. At the same time, she illustrates how the assimilation of the middle-aged adults to white culture affected the whole community. By assimilating, the middle-aged generation contributed to the loss of cultural knowledge, with wisdom and traditions dying with the older generation. Mary adds that the Lakota were instrumental in the Native American cultural revival that AIM espoused. Because the Lakota had maintained more traditions than other tribes, non-Lakota AIM activists adopted traditions and ceremonies from Lakota culture in order to reconnect with their indigenous heritage. The fact that many Native Americans had to turn to a different tribe to learn more about Native American cultural practices highlights how assimilation and cultural genocide led to the extinction of some tribes' unique traditions.


Wherever the AIM members went, the white people of the area—particularly in the Dakotas—were terrified. Gun stores sold out whenever the AIM members arrived in a town, and the white locals started carrying their guns publicly. Mary reflects on the absurdity that it was they, the AIM members, that were feared. After all, Native Americans are—and have always been—the victims. Perhaps the local white people hated AIM because they felt guilty for all that they had done to Native Americans, from stealing their land and exploiting them for cheap labor to stereotyping them and profiting from the tourism.

This passage captures the racism of white society, as white people feared AIM activists simply because they were Native American. Mary believes that the white people's fear was because of the guilt they carried regarding their crimes against Native Americans—white people knew that Native Americans had many reasons to retaliate and rebel and, now that there was a resistance movement, they feared what Native Americans might do.

Of course, the AIM members weren't perfect, and there were some AIM members—or people who claimed to be members—who committed acts that Mary isn't proud of. But even with its shortcomings, Mary staunchly believes that AIM was a positive and necessary force: it not only set political and cultural goals for Native Americans, but it also lifted their spirits and helped them feel seen and heard.

Mary admits that there were problems within AIM, but overall she believes it was a beneficial movement. It set a precedent of political resistance and cultural appreciation for younger generations; plus, advocating for their rights and celebrating their cultural identity felt empowering to Native American peoples.

One event that Mary will always remember was the Sun Dance in 1972. It took place at Rosebud, her reservation. The ceremony—which was comprised of flesh offerings, sun-gazing, prayers, and whistles—felt "like a rebirth, like some of the prophesies of the Ghost Dancers coming true." Although many of the participating men came from tribes that did not traditionally practice this ceremony, Mary believes that it was their way to feel connected to their Native American heritage.

The Ghost Dancers believed that the Ghost Dance (a religious movement that began in the late 1800s) would end colonization and usher in a time of peace and prosperity for Native Americans. At the Sun Dance of 1972, Mary saw Native Americans of various tribes uniting to embrace and celebrate their indigenous identity. Mary implies that she took this unity and cultural celebration as an auspicious sign for the Native American civil rights movement and cultural revival. She also says that this cross-cultural exchange helped individual Native Americans feel more in tune with their indigenous identity, even if the Sun Dance (a Lakota ceremony) isn't a traditional ritual in their tribe.

In addition to the ritual, this Sun Dance was an occasion for AIM leaders and members to discuss recent and occurring events. Shortly before the Sun Dance, several Native Americans had been murdered across the country, with perpetrators receiving meager punishments or, in some cases, no punishment at all. Sensing that "it was open season on Indians again," AIM leaders planned the Trail of Broken Treaties.

The ceremony also served as a way for AIM leaders to discuss future acts of resistance. In this way, these intertribal cultural exchanges fostered unity between members of different tribes. In this instance, the conversations at the Sun Dance led to AIM leaders planning the Trail of Broken Treaties to protest white society's violence against Native Americans.

Mary interjects to add that she is proud that this momentous protest was planned at Rosebud, with Bob Burnette, a tribal chairman from Rosebud, playing an integral role in the planning. However, she fears that "the feeling of pride in one's particular tribe is standing in the way of Indian unity."

Mary is proud of her Lakota heritage and how Lakota leaders like Bob Burnette were instrumental in the fight for Native American civil rights. But she also acknowledges that too much pride in one's own tribe can threaten intertribal unity, which she clearly supports. Here, she advocates for pan-indigenous pride over pride in one's individual tribe, with the implication being that the tribes can accomplish more together than each individual tribe could accomplish on their own in the fight against racism and white society's oppression of indigenous peoples.

Part of the significance of the Trail of Broken Treaties was this unity across Native American tribes, as caravans—each with their own spiritual leader—from many tribes made the journey from their homelands to Washington, D.C. Mary's caravan started at Wounded Knee to symbolically bring the spirits of the murdered Lakota with them on their journey.

One of the most important aspects of the Trail of Broken Treaties was that it embodied intertribal unity. Each tribe that participated had its own caravan and spiritual leader, but all the tribes converged together in Washington, D.C., symbolizing how the tribes, though they were individual and unique nations, were united in standing against the U.S. government and the racism and inequality that oppresses all Native American peoples.

When the protesters arrived in Washington, D.C., they discovered that the various church groups who had promised the protesters food and accommodation had now rescinded their offers, thanks to government pressure. At first, Mary's group tried to sleep in an abandoned **church**, only to discover that it was infested with rats and cockroaches. Suddenly, someone suggested that the group go to the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) building.

The various church groups who rescinded their help presented a setback in the protest. Their help would have aided the Native American activists and would have been an example of how people and organizations of various races and beliefs can work together to advocate for equal rights. Yet, in the end, the church groups succumbed to the government's expectations and abandoned the protestors. By complying with the government, not only did they risk hurting the Trail of Broken Treaties' success, but they also likely damaged their relationships with the Native American organizations to whom they had originally promised aid.


There was an outpouring of support for this idea. The great wave of protesters hurried from the **church** and poured into the BIA building. Once there, each tribal group selected a room or floor of the building, where they made themselves comfortable and discussed proposals. Every now and then, the various leaders convened in the building's main hall to discuss. Throughout the building, roles were distributed, with people given duties such as cooking, looking after children, or being part of the medical team.

This passage captures how the different tribes—and the individuals within each tribe—collaborated to make the occupation of the BIA building successful. The leaders worked together to plan their next political move while individuals took on roles—such as domestic or medical duties—to make it possible for the group of protestors to live and sustain themselves in the BIA building for the duration of the occupation.

Originally, the protestors' plan was to be peaceful. The discussions had centered around inviting lawmakers for a feast and song-and-dance performances. Yet they quickly realized that President Nixon had ordered lawmakers to ignore the protesters. As the mood turned sour, Mary—along with many other AIM members—began to realize that they would have to stir up some trouble in order to get the attention they needed.

The protestors determined that peaceful collaboration with the U.S. government was not an option, as the lawmakers refused to meet with the protestors or hear their demands. The implication is that it is impossible to prompt a ruling body to give up its power while acting within the bounds of what that society considers to be respectable—oppressors can easily ignore activists when they are peaceful and undisruptive. In this instance, AIM activists decided that, in order to get the government's attention, they would have to take extreme action.

The protestors wrote up 20 demands, all of which were rejected by the few lawmakers who contacted them. Eventually, armed police surrounded the building and demanded that the protestors leave—"or else." In response, the protestors barricaded themselves in the building, making makeshift weapons for themselves.

The protestors decided on their extreme action. By refusing to leave the BIA building, the activists forced the government to pay attention to them and their demands.

Each morning the protestors were ordered to leave the building by 6 p.m. Each evening, the protestors remained, ready to fight. Various groups and individual arrived to show their support, from officials to hippies. One of Mary's favorite moments from the occupation was when Martha Grass, a middle-aged Cherokee woman, spoke to Rogers Morton, the Secretary of the Interior. She furiously spoke out against the problems that she—a Native American woman—faced every day.

As the activists got more attention—from the government as well as various organizations and individuals throughout the country—more people began to show their support. The implication is that the protestors' continued resistance generated attention, which in turn helped their case, as more people joined in by putting added pressure on the government to concede to the activists' demands. Meanwhile, the fact that Martha Grass's speech resonated so much with Mary suggests that the unique experiences of Native American women do not receive as much attention as the experiences of other groups, such as Native American men or white women.

When Election Week arrived, the federal government agreed to have two high-level officials read and deliberate the protestors' 20 demands. They promised to pay for the protestors' trips home and agreed to not prosecute anyone. After the protestors left, the 20 demands were dropped. Yet while "nothing had been achieved" on a legal level, Mary still considers the occupation to have been a victory, as Native Americans "had faced White America collectively, not as individual tribes."

The protestors' resistance disrupted the government so much that they (the government) had no choice but to establish some kind of agreement with the activists; simply put, it was the activists' continued rebellion that gave them power. In the end, the government agreed to at least look over the demands and not prosecute any of the protestors. But as soon as the protestors left, the government no longer felt the pressure to agree to their demands, so they dropped the protestors' requests. Again, Mary shows that activism—and not passivity—is the only way to achieve success in the fight against oppression. But while the activists did not secure their political demands, Mary still sees the Trail of Broken Treaties as a great success, as the protestors set the precedent of intertribal unity and resistance against white society and the U.S. government.

CHAPTER 7: CRYING FOR A DREAM

Mary stresses that AIM was a spiritual movement, with traditional Native American beliefs playing a central role. Because their religions had been banned and threatened by forced conversions, holding onto traditional beliefs was a way for Native Americans to protect their identity and culture.

Mary argues that practicing and celebrating one's indigenous culture is a political act of resistance, as it ensures the survival of cultures that white society has tried to eliminate. She also says that it is only through participating in cultural traditions that Native Americans can connect with their indigenous identity.

While active in AIM, Mary, along with many Native Americans, turned back to Native American traditions. She adds that "Jesus would have been all right," only white society had twisted his teachings to serve them. Native American religions, however, "had not been coopted" by white people, which added to their appeal.

Again, Mary argues that practicing Native American religious traditions helps Native Americans feel more connected to their identity as indigenous people. Turning away from Christianity, a religion that white society has imposed upon Native Americans, is a way to resist the cultural genocide against Native American religions. Mary even adds that the teachings of Jesus weren't the problem so much as the fact that white society used Christianity as a weapon to wipe out Native American ways of life.

To learn more about spiritual traditions, Mary sought out "full-bloods," as she considered her "half-breed" relatives as corrupted by the selfishness of white society—she says that "half-breeds" are the kind of people willing to sell their land to white people for a profit. While Mary's Catholic mother regretted Mary's desire to drop the Christian faith, Mary went to her Grandpa Dick Fool Bull, an old man who practiced traditional Lakota rituals. He was the one who took Mary to her first peyote meeting.

Mary associates "full-blood" Native Americans with the maintenance of indigenous traditions, while "half-breeds" (people who are of mixed race ancestry) try to assimilate to white society. Mary makes it clear that this assimilation harms the Native American community as a whole; not only does it disrupt the maintenance of cultural traditions, but it also aids white society in colonizing Native American land. In this instance, individuals seeking to make a profit collaborated with white people to get money by selling their land. But by selling their land, the U.S. government and white society only gained more power and resources, which they then leveraged against all Native American people. Mary maintains that "full-bloods" are instrumental in maintaining indigenous cultures, as they refuse to assimilate to white society. In Mary's life, her mother assimilated to white society and Christianity, while Mary's older relative Grandpa Dick Fool Bull refused to assimilate; it is from him that she learned about Lakota traditions.

At her first peyote meeting, Mary took a lot of the medicine. Upon taking peyote, she felt in the power—hearing the voices of dead relatives and sensing messages from the staff, drum, and feathers. With the herb, she united with the earth, as that is where the herb comes from. To Mary, "peyote was people, was alive, was a remembrance of things long forgotten."

While participating in her first peyote meeting, Mary felt connected to her ancestors and to her ancestral lands. The implication is that Mary feels in tune with her Lakota identity by practicing Lakota religious traditions. Even though she didn't grow up with those traditions, they help her remember "things long forgotten."

Two weeks later, Mary had a dream that she believes the peyote and its spiritual power caused. She dreamed of white soldiers attacking a Native American camp, killing and raping the Native Americans. Mary then saw an old woman, who was singing an ancient song while carrying a heavy pack. The white soldiers attacked and killed her. After the dream, Mary felt depressed for weeks. Over and over, she wondered why her people suffered so much, but she never found an answer.

The peyote meeting that Mary attended had a strong effect on her. A few weeks after taking peyote, she had a dream that she believes came from the peyote. This dream depicted the oppression that Native Americans experience at the hands of white society. The implication is that the peyote strengthened her awareness of the suffering that Native Americans have endured since colonization.

Mary believes that she only fully understood the meaning and significance of peyote after she married Leonard Crow Dog. Leonard is a peyote priest, as well as a Sun Dancer, a yuwipi, and a Lakota medicine man. While some people criticize him for practicing so many different beliefs and ceremonies, he believes that all traditional Native American religions are "part of the same creative force." The Great Spirit, *Wakan Tanka*, takes many forms.

Leonard Crow Dog's spirituality reflects his desire for intertribal unity. He is a leader of many different Native American religious ceremonies—not just traditionally Lakota ceremonies. His belief that all Native American religious enrich an indigenous person's spiritual experience and cultural identity corresponds with his belief that intertribal unity strengthens the fight for Native Americans' civil rights. In both cases, individuals benefit from the support of many. For a person who wants to feel more spiritually connected to their indigenous culture, Leonard believes that practicing diverse Native American rituals will help a person achieve their goal. For the activists who advocate for Native Americans' rights, they will benefit from the help of all tribes, not just their individual tribes.

Mary asserts that visions are of paramount importance in all indigenous religions, from North America to the Arctic Circle. Visions are obtained in a variety of ceremonies, from fasting and staring at the sun during a Sun Dance to using mushrooms or herbs.

Mary also adds that indigenous religions share similarities, such as the importance of visions. The implication is that all indigenous vision-seeking ceremonies can be helpful for an indigenous person—regardless of their tribe—who is searching to connect with their cultural identity in a spiritual way.

Peyote is once such herb that Native Americans use for spiritual purposes. Peyote doesn't grow north of the Rio Grande, so many believe that the tribes on the Plains first got peyote from Mexico. What is known is that, when the Kiowa and Comanche people established the Native American Church in the 1870s, peyote was used to pray. Mary inserts that the plains tribes first received peyote at the most critical time, as they were suffering from disease and starvation at the hands of white government and settlers.

In providing the history of peyote, Mary illustrates how intertribal cultural exchanges are beneficial to Native Americans. In this instance, the plains tribes adopted the use of peyote as a spiritual herb from other tribes. Mary stresses that the herb was a great spiritual help to the Native American plains tribes.

While it is legal for Native Americans to buy and use peyote for their religious ceremonies, many people exploit the Native American Church's use of peyote by selling the herb at heavily inflated prices.

The inflation of peyote prices is another way that Native American cultures are threatened. In this case, people sell the spiritual herb at ridiculously high prices, making it difficult for Native Americans to obtain it.

Mary sees peyote as a great unifier among the Native Americans. Although each tribe has different rituals when using the medicine, she feels that these differences melt away as soon as they begin the ceremonies.

In this passage, Mary argues that intertribal cultural exchanges—like participating in various tribes' peyote ceremonies—fosters intertribal unity and helps her feel connected to her Native American identity. She acknowledges that each tribe has unique ceremonies regarding the herb, but, in participating in a Native American religious ceremony together, the various attending Native Americans can feel connected to each other as a community of people who share similar experiences and beliefs as indigenous peoples.

The songs of peyote meetings incorporate the voices of the items used: the pebbles in the rattle, the magpie and scissortail birds whose feathers make up the fan, and the water bird for the water drum. Although women were originally banned from singing or praying with the staff (the staff is a masculine item), women now sing during the ceremonies. To Mary, Leonard is the most exceptional peyote singer, as he knows hundreds of different songs that he has collected from various tribes—he has even made up his own.

Mary illustrates that peyote rituals are ceremonies that evolve over time. For one, women now sing during peyote ceremonies, even though they were not traditionally permitted to sing. This change also shows how gender roles are being challenged within the Native American community. Second, the songs within a peyote meeting can change. Mary writes about how Leonard adopts and incorporates songs from different tribes to use in the ceremonies he puts on. The implication is that Leonard sees spiritual value in the songs of other tribes; although these songs might not be songs that the Lakota traditionally used in peyote meetings, he finds that they are useful for him and his participants, regardless of their tribe. He also invents his own songs, which means that he is adding something completely new to the rituals.

Government agents and missionaries persecuted the first followers of the Native American Church because they complicated white society's efforts to "whitemaniz[e]" the Native Americans. Leonard Crow Dog's father, Henry, was one of the victims of this religious persecution. After white priests discovered that Henry was hosting a peyote ceremony, government officials drove Henry from his home in the middle of a blizzard, which resulted in the death of his two-year-old son. But persecution didn't cause Henry and other Native American Church followers to turn away from their religion. In fact, it did quite the opposite—they held on even tighter.

Henry Crow Dog resisted the government's efforts to erase the Native American Church. It is thanks to the resistance of people like Henry Crow Dog that the beliefs of the Native American Church were perpetuated and carried on to the next generation.

After marrying Leonard, Mary made several trips with him to purchase or harvest peyote from the south. During these trips, Mary and Leonard often stayed with southern tribes, such as the Pueblos. Mary thanks these cross-cultural exchanges for broadening her perspective and even undoing some prejudices she had against southern tribes, whom she had thought of as too peaceful. When staying with Pueblo families, she appreciated how they adapted to the changing society and federal government, all while practicing their traditional farming and craftsmanship.

Mary explains how visiting other tribes, such as the Pueblos, was an educational experience for her. In learning about the lifestyles and cultures of different tribes, she began to appreciate the various ways in which each tribe adapted to white society and colonization. She realized that her prejudices were unjust—while she had thought that Pueblos should be more rebellious, she learned that, by adapting economically, the Pueblo people achieved some amount of success in protecting their culture against white society. The implication is that this cross-cultural exchange with the Pueblo people taught Mary a different way to resist assimilation.

Mary was also interested in how, in Pueblo families, women had a significant role: they owned their houses, and their children typically took their mother's last name. Mary also recognizes that, unlike the Lakota people, the Pueblo people had not been forced onto contained reservations. All the same, the Pueblo people also have to advocate for their land rights and protect it from developers.

Mary also appreciates how women have more influential roles in Pueblo families than in Lakota society. In this way, Mary suggests that the Lakota people could learn from the Pueblos to make their society more equal for women. She adds that, while there are differences between Pueblo and Lakota societies, both nations suffer from colonization, as white society tries to take away their land. The implication is that, while the Pueblos have managed to adapt to white society, their cooperation doesn't protect them from being targeted by white people wanting to take their land.

While it is now legal for members of the Native American Church to harvest peyote, it was not always this way. One significant court case happened when a sheriff tried to arrest everyone participating in a peyote meeting. When the case went to trial, Leonard—who had been at the meeting—argued that the sheriff had no jurisdiction on the reservation, as only tribal police can make arrests. He even argued that the sheriff didn't commit any crimes in taking peyote, as he was doing so as part of a religious ceremony that is open for all to participate. The Native American Church won the court case.

By going to court and actively arguing for the Native American Church, Leonard won a court case that protected Native Americans' legal authority on their reservations. His victory is evidence that fighting for one's cause is preferable to passively accepting one's situation. Had he not argued in court for the Native American Church's right to use peyote, the U.S. government might have punished the Native Americans who participated in the peyote meeting. As part of his argument, Leonard stresses that the Native American Church is inclusive: all people can participate. His insistence on the inclusive nature of the Native American Church reflects his firm belief in the value of unity and inclusion—the fight for equal rights has more success when all people (regardless of race or beliefs) join together.

Recently, Mary and Leonard have harvested peyote, rather than purchasing it from a dealer. Not only do they avoid the inflated prices that way, but harvesting adds more meaning to the collection of the medicine. This is true despite—or perhaps because of—the scratches that one gets when trying to collect peyote, which is a cactus. Generally, they are sure to only harvest the tops of the plant, leaving the root so that it will continue to grow.

Mary finds that harvesting the peyote herself is more meaningful than buying it. The implication is that the traditional method of gathering peyote helps her feel more connected to the herb and the spiritual experience that comes with using it—it feels more authentic to her.

After one harvest, Mary and her companions were driving their car—which was filled with peyote—from Mexico to Texas when someone exclaimed that they needed to get rid of all the visible peyote, lest they get arrested at the border. Instead of throwing it out of the car, Mary and another woman ate all the extra peyote, getting exceedingly high in a way that one doesn't during a proper ceremony. Later, Mary discovered that she and her companion ate all that peyote for nothing—Leonard had all the proper paperwork to get them across the border.

Mary's story suggests that the religious rituals are necessary for peyote to have its spiritual influence. When she ate it outside of a ceremony, she got high instead of feeling the spiritual power that the ceremonies inspire. In this way, Mary shows how peyote can be used recreationally or spiritually, and that the ceremonies are necessary to experience peyote in the traditionally spiritual way.

CHAPTER 8: CANKPE OPI WAKPALA

Mary doesn't consider herself a revolutionary—all she wants is for her people to be able to live their lives in peace, away from government interference. It is the government that prompts people to militancy, as government officials never accept the demands of people who politely ask. Even if one doesn't accomplish much with militancy either, at least it makes them feel better. The Occupation of Wounded Knee was an example of this—it wasn't intended to cause militancy.

Mary argues that the government creates revolutionaries when it refuses to respect the requests that people politely ask for. The implication is that, because the government refuses to concede power to those who peacefully request it, they force people to take extreme action to achieve their political goals. While Mary concedes that sometimes militant activism doesn't accomplish the desired political change, either, she says that, at the very least, it makes a person feel empowered.

Mary interjects to explain the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, as it played a major role in the Occupation of Wounded Knee. This Reorganization Act was the federal government's attempt to force a democratic government on each Native American nation. Although Mary believes that it was meant to help Native Americans, it actually did more harm than good.

Mary argues that the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 was another method of forced assimilation to white society that the U.S. government implemented on Native American tribes. Although she believes that the officials who created the Act had good intentions—they believed that Native Americans would benefit from having a democratic government modeled after the U.S.'s government—it actually had more negative effects than positive ones, making it additional evidence of how forced assimilation is devastating to the societies that undergo it. The Act also reflects the racism of the U.S. government, who assumed that indigenous nations had inferior forms of government because their systems of governance were different from white America's.

For one, the Act undid the traditional forms of government that each tribe already operated by. Additionally, the Native American politicians who installed themselves in these governments were generally more loyal to the federal government than to their own people. Tribes began to divide themselves between those who were friendly to the new government and those who refused to accept it. On top of this, the tribal governments had very little power—it was the white superintendent who was really in control.

Mary details the problems with the Act. First, like with other methods of forced assimilation, the Act stripped tribes of their traditional forms of government, systems that the tribes knew, trusted, and relied on. Forcing a new form of government upon Native Americans meant that each tribe had to undergo the pain of altering the way they operated; not only were cultural traditions lost, but the Act risked internal disaster for each tribe, as white America's form of democracy was not an automatic improvement for tribes, each of whom had their own systems of governance that already worked. The Act also divided tribal members, as some people decided to cooperate with the U.S. government and assimilate to white America's democracy, while others refused to adapt. The internal tribal division only helped the U.S. government assume more control over each tribe, as they now had less resistance from those who cooperated with the Act. Those who assumed political positions within the new governments developed a vested interest in making the Act work—the power and support they received from the U.S. government often encouraged these politicians to serve the U.S. government before the people of their tribes. The U.S. also benefited from having people cooperate because the white superintendent was actually the person who held the most power in these new tribal governments, so cooperating with the Act meant handing power directly to white U.S. officials. The implication is that division between Native Americans—with individuals agreeing to cooperate with the U.S. government for their own benefit—typically harms indigenous communities while benefitting white America.

Dicky Wilson, the tribal president of Pine Ridge (an Oglala Lakota reservation that borders Rosebud Indian Reservation), was a particularly corrupt tribal president. He abused funds, banned free speech, practiced nepotism, and rigged elections. He even had a group of militants—known as "the goons"—that committed violence against those who opposed him. Eventually, the Lakota traditionalists who opposed Wilson's regime founded the Oglala Sioux Civil Rights Organization (OSCRO). It was led by Pedro Bissonette, a man who became one of Mary's friends.

Dicky Wilson is an example of one Native American man who exploited the new form of government to accumulate power for himself, much to the detriment of the people he was supposed to serve. Mary details several of the ways he abused his power while acting as tribal president. Eventually, a group of Oglala traditionalists decided to fight back against Wilson and his regime, which Mary suggests was the right thing to do, once again showing a preference for resistance over passivity.

Around this same time, AIM members gathered in nearby Rapid City to protest the discrimination and police brutality against Native Americans. It was during this protest that Dennis Banks, one of the AIM leaders, announced that a white man had stabbed a Lakota man named Wesley Bad Heart Bull to death. The trial would take place in Custer. Just the name of the city was provocation enough: Custer was not only named after the man who waged war against the Lakota for years, but it was also built on a sacred site.

In this passage, AIM members took action to try to mitigate the oppression that they face. Mary illustrates how their activism serves as an outlet for their collective rage—they are moved to protest when they discover that the murder trial will take place in a city that represents the anti-indigenous racism and hostility of white society. The implication is that actively protesting the discrimination that they face makes the AIM activists feel more empowered.

Several hundred AIM activists drove to Custer that February of 1973. When they arrived at the courthouse, the district attorney announced that the man who killed Wesley Bad Heart Bull was charged with second-degree manslaughter, a meager charge that felt like an insult to the gathered protestors.

Second-degree manslaughter is a much lighter charge than murder. Therefore, the manslaughter charge indicated that the death of Wesley Bad Heart Bull wasn't deliberate, which cheapens the weight of the tragedy while setting a precedent that the murders of Native Americans are not taken as seriously as the murders of white people. The reduced charge infuriated the protestors and validated their activism as they saw that the U.S. justice system would not give Native Americans justice if left to its own devices. To make the system change, they would have to fight for it.

As the AIM protestors tried to enter the courthouse, the police beat the protestors—including Sarah Bad Heart Bull, the mother of the murdered man. While some of the older activists tried to calmly reason with the government officials, the police continued to attack them with clubs. In response, the AIM activists started rioting, breaking store windows and setting fire to the courthouse and Chamber of Commerce. The fighting lasted for hours and resulted in the arrests of many Native Americans, including Sarah Bad Heart Bull, whose son's murderer was later acquitted.

The courthouse incident illustrates how those in power easily squash peaceful demands for change. Here, the activists who tried to politely discuss with officials received brutal beatings in return. In this case, the protestors' rioting didn't change anything, either—Wesley Bad Heart's Bull's murderer was eventually acquitted—but Mary doesn't express any regret for AIM's actions, which suggests that she is nonetheless glad that she and the other AIM activists expressed their anger and discontent with the system, as opposed to quietly accepting it. Meanwhile, Sarah Bad Heart Bull's arrest shows the racism and double standard of the U.S. justice system, in which a grieving indigenous mother is imprisoned while her son's murderer walks free.

When Mary and the other AIM activists who weren't arrested returned to Rapid City, they received calls from OSCRO. OSCRO needed help: Wilson's goons were attacking and killing many of his Lakota opposers. So, Mary and her fellow activists drove to Pine Ridge, where Wilson and his goons were backed by U.S. marshals and other armed law enforcement.

Even though the AIM activists didn't really achieve anything by rioting in Custer, they were not deterred from future action—as soon as OSCRO informed them that they (OSCRO) needed AIM's help, the AIM activists made their way to Pine Ridge to stand by the OSCRO activists. AIM's ready willingness to continue fighting against the oppression that Native Americans face—even after an experience that proved that activism may not succeed in changing anything—shows that activism has a moral component. Resistance seems to empower people, regardless of outcome, so even in the face of failure, the AIM activists continued to fight for their cause. Additionally, AIM's coming to OSCRO's support is an example of unity between different indigenous social justice groups. Even though their exact missions were different, it is likely that both groups had a better chance of advancing indigenous civil rights if they worked together.

The AIM activists drove to a community hall outside of Pine Ridge where OSCRO members often met. There, people from AIM and OSCRO mingled with Lakota chiefs and medicine men, all deliberating how to take a stand against Wilson and the government agents who supported him.

By working together, AIM and OSCRO ensured that they would have each other's support as they protested U.S. governmental abuses against Native Americans. Although the scopes of their missions were different—for example, OSCRO focused specifically on the plight of Pine Ridge Native Americans, while AIM espoused the issues that all Native Americans faced—they were both fighting to change the anti-indigenous racism and inequalities within the U.S. government.

Mary interjects to say that, when she joined the caravan to go to the community hall, she didn't realize that she would be part of a historic act—she simply joined along because that was her lifestyle at the time. But as she listened to the elders discuss what to do, it dawned on her that she was living in a historic moment—this realization thrilled her.

Mary's lifestyle was one of resistance and activism, even though she knew that her actions wouldn't necessarily ensure lasting change. The implication is that fighting against oppression felt empowering and motivated her regardless of results. But, in this moment, Mary felt a premonition that she was part of something historic—she believed that significant change would come from the protest they were planning.

At this point, the AIM and OSCRO leaders were realizing that they couldn't storm Pine Ridge—it was too well-defended by Wilson and the armed law enforcement. Suddenly, one of the older women (Mary can't remember if it was Ellen Moves Camp, Gladys Bissonette, or another woman activist) suggested that they make their stand at Wounded Knee. She added that the men could keep talking—they, the women, wouldn't hesitate to occupy it.

Mary makes it clear that it was a woman who recommended that AIM and OSCRO occupy Wounded Knee while the men couldn't decide on what to do. She gives women the credit for thinking of the site for the historic protest and for prompting the men to action. Yet the fact that Mary can't quite remember who first aired the idea suggests that this woman didn't receive the attention and credit that she deserved—her role in the occupation was forgotten as male activists took the lead. The implication is that, while many male leaders get attention for their role in civil rights movements, female leaders are frequently overlooked.

Wounded Knee, known as Cankpe Opi in the Lakota language, is a significant site for Native Americans, particularly the Lakota, as it is there that Custer's Seventh Cavalry massacred hundreds of Lakota men, women, and children. The massacre is part of Mary's family history, both on Leonard's side and her own: they each had relatives who were nearby the site during the massacre.

Similar to the protest in Custer, the decision to occupy Wounded Knee reveals the emotional nature of activism. Wounded Knee is the site of historic trauma for the Lakota people: the Wounded Knee Massacre took place there in 1890. The implication is that protesting at Wounded Knee would be a way to express some of the rage and grief that the Lakota have carried since the massacre.

Before the AIM and OSCRO activists drove to Wounded Knee, Leonard and Wallace Black Elk (another medicine man) prayed for them with their pipe. Then the caravan started out to Wounded Knee, where they arrived on February 27, 1973. Upon arrival, the crowd of protestors stood silently, each in their own thoughts yet also united, feeling the presence of those who had been murdered. At this moment, as she considered the historical significance of the stand that they were about to make, Mary inwardly decided that she would have her baby at Wounded Knee—she was eight months pregnant at the time.

Mary continues to stress the emotional impact of occupying Wounded Knee—while there, the activists felt the presence of those who had died. The weight of the tragedy that took place there appears to have strengthened the resolve of the activists; although they could not change the horrors that happened in the past, protesting the U.S. government's treatment of the Lakota people would perhaps be a way to express and unleash the fury and grief that they (the activists) felt. Mary's private decision to commit to the occupation despite being eight months pregnant illustrates her dedication to the cause—it is clear that participating in the occupation makes her feel empowered.

The activists jumped into action. They dug trenches, made bunkers, and counted their weapons. They had only 26 guns, which they knew was a meagre amount compared to what they'd face from the opposing side. As Mary puts it, the activists' "message to the government was: 'Come and discuss our demands or kill us!'"

The activists' commitment to the occupation—even though they knew that they were risking death—shows that resisting has a moral value in addition to its political value. In other words, not only can resistance bring about political change, but the act also strengthens resistors' resolve and commitment to one another, no matter what its political results turn out to be.

CHAPTER 9: THE SIEGE

The three main buildings that the activists used during the 71-day-long occupation of Wounded Knee were the Sacred Heart Church, the museum, and the Gildersleeve Trading Post. The trading post was the most important, as it had food and other supplies. Mary adds that the Lakota people had always resented the trading post, as it exploited their tragedy by making the site of the massacre a tourist hot spot.

The insensitivity of making Wounded Knee a tourist spot highlights the callousness of white society toward Native Americans. Not only was it white people who murdered the Lakota at Wounded Knee, but the white population later exploited the tragedy to make money. The resentment that Mary and the other Lakota feel appears to have strengthened their resolve during the occupation, as they take all the supplies within the trading post to support their efforts.

People each assumed different roles. Someone made an inventory of groceries, and another was appointed head of security. Leonard Crow Dog was the spiritual leader. By the afternoon of the day of their arrival, they could see the approaching cars of the FBI and U.S. marshals.

Mary shows how the activists worked together to sustain the occupation. People assumed various roles to make it possible for the group to survive and for the occupation to last as long as possible. The implication is that the success of the protest depended on everyone working together.

Mary interjects to say that not every day of the Wounded Knee Occupation was done doing heroic deeds. In fact, much of it was spent completing the tasks and routines of everyday life, from doing dishes to getting married.

Mary continues to show how people took up various roles and duties to ensure that life achieved some sense of normality during the occupation. By cooperating together, the activists built a community at Wounded Knee.

At one point, a white volunteer nurse scolded the Native American women for "betraying the cause of womankind" by agreeing to do all the domestic chores, like cooking, washing dishes, preparing the men's sleeping quarters, and sewing. They responded by saying that "her kind of women's lib was a white, middle-class thing." Until the Native American men had their civil and political rights, they (the women) wouldn't "argu[e] with them about who should do the dishes."

The white woman's criticism of Native American women reveals the narrow-minded version of feminism that the white woman supported. Not taking into account how Native American women were still fighting for the civil and political rights that all Native Americans were deprived of, the white woman projected her goals and more privileged experience onto the Native American women. As a white person, she wasn't subjected to racism. She already had many civil rights protected by the government because of her race. The Native American women, however, were still fighting for many rights that white women already had. By not addressing the issues that Native American women—and other women of color—faced, the white woman (and the white women's liberation movement in general) wasn't being inclusive of the needs and experiences of the Native American women with whom she worked. For the Native American women, their allegiance and priorities lay with AIM, not with white women; they wanted to first work with Native American men ensure that all indigenous people (both men and women) had their civil rights before they would protest against Native American men's sexism.

Mary adds that both men and women put in a lot of work. For example, Bob Free, an engineer, organized a crew of men who did a lot of manual labor, from constructing latrines to making bunkers. Meanwhile, some women carried pistols and participated in the exchange of fire between activists and U.S. government officials.

Mary goes on to show how the white woman wasn't even correct in her assumption that the roles were strictly divided by gender. While Native American women did generally complete more domestic and manual labor than Native American men, Mary says that this wasn't always the case. Some men, like Bob Free and his crew, did a lot of manual labor while some Native American women took on more military roles (which were typically performed by men).

After a few days, the exchanges of fire started happening daily. A one-day ceasefire was arranged to let the women and children leave, but many women—Mary included—refused to go. Even at eight months pregnant, Mary continued to do her share of chores. During this period, she and Pedro Bissonette became good friends, with him always making sure that she had enough food.

The fact that Mary refused to leave the occupation—even while pregnant—demonstrates her dedication to AIM and OSCRO's mission at Wounded Knee. She wanted to continue to participate and do her part in making sure that the activists' occupation was as successful as possible. Additionally, by staying at Wounded Knee while pregnant, Mary challenged expectations of what women can and cannot do while pregnant; she demonstrated that pregnancy doesn't necessarily preclude women from emotionally and physically taxing endeavors like ongoing political protests. The many other women who joined Mary in refusing to leave Wounded Knee also exemplify how women take intense interest in their political environments. They, like Mary, are just as dedicated as the men are in terms of fighting for Native American civil rights.

Even though the federal officers were far better equipped than the AIM and OSCRO activists, they were generally unable to really tighten the perimeter, as they avoided getting lost in the land surrounding Wounded Knee. So, throughout the siege, groups of Native Americans from all across the continent snuck through the perimeter to join the activists.

The arrival and support of Native Americans from various tribes shows that intertribal unity aided in perpetuating the occupation. Although these Native Americans weren't all Lakota or from Pine Ridge, they knew that protesting the U.S. government's abuse and mistreatment of the Pine Ridge Lakota could perhaps lead to change that would affect them and their rights, too.

Mary interjects to add that there were many light-hearted moments during the siege, such as when several of the activists made a big scene while burying empty film canisters. The federal agents were alarmed, thinking that they were planting mines. For a moment, the federal officers scattered from the area, and the activists "scored another coup."

The more humorous moments of the occupation demonstrate how the protest lifted the spirits of the participating activists. While the primary goal of the occupation was to protest the mistreatment of Native Americans at the hands of the U.S. government, it was also a way for activists to know that they were doing their part in fighting back against a power that oppressed them.

After a few days, the government tightened its grip on Wounded Knee, bringing in a sniper helicopter and a special kill-and-destroy team. On the other hand, the Native American activists had old weapons and only a meagre amount of ammo.

There was a stark difference in resources between the U.S. government officials and the Native American activists. While the activists had only a few guns and a little ammunition, the U.S. government brought in a wave of specialty war weapons. This show of power accentuated the differences in wealth and resources that each side possessed; the U.S. government had funds to spend on technologically advanced war weapons while indigenous communities fought for more resources to be invested in their communities. But the government's weapons didn't cow the activists. They clearly believed in the importance of their protest (of the U.S.'s abuse of indigenous peoples, specifically in Pine Ridge) and so continued to hold out.

Mary interrupts her narrative to insert a Cheyenne saying: "A nation is not lost as long as the hearts of its women are not on the ground." During the siege, many women stepped up to fight, such as when one woman took over her husband's bunker after he was wounded in crossfire.

Mary takes a moment to stress the women's important role in the occupation. Dedicated to fighting for the civil rights of their people, women not only helped the siege operate but also participated in the exchanges of fire.

It was during the siege that Mary had a chance to meet Annie Mae Aquash, a Micmac woman who became one of Mary's dearest friends. They met when Annie Mae confronted a group of Native American women who weren't doing their fair share of chores; Mary liked Annie Mae's attitude, and from that moment on, the two women became friends.

Annie Mae was Micmac, not Lakota, yet she still participated in the Occupation of Wounded Knee, whose original purpose was to protest the abuses of Wilson's regime against the Oglala Lakota who lived in Pine Ridge, the reservation that he presided over. Annie Mae's participation is another example of intertribal unity; she joined in AIM and OSCRO's protest to fight against the U.S. government's mistreatment of all indigenous people. Mary shows that Annie Mae's sense of solidarity and collaboration was strong—she even scolded people who weren't doing their part in ensuring that the occupation could continue.

On March 12, 1973, the activists at Wounded Knee declared the area to be a sovereign territory of the Oglala Nation. Anyone, no matter what race, could join. Mary adds that this was a reference to how, in 1868, the Lakota had been recognized as an independent nation in the Treaty of Fort Laramie. Shortly thereafter, however, the U.S. government revoked the treaty.

The U.S. government's going back on the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie is another example of how the Native Americans' attempts to cooperate with the U.S. government were futile, as the U.S. government only broke the Treaty and exploited the Treaty to force indigenous tribes to "agree" to terms that were not adequately explained. The implication is that trying to cooperate with an oppressing power is useless, as the oppressor will only exploit one's compromises and continue to exert its power. Meanwhile, the activists demonstrated their inclusivity by announcing that anyone could join them in holding Wounded Knee, which highlights how all people—regardless of race or gender or beliefs—can join in the fight for equal rights.


Every now and then, the leaders of both sides—the activists and the government officials—met to try to negotiate an agreement. Each time, the government officials insisted that the activists had to surrender their weapons before the officials would consider the activists' demands. The activists refused, saying that they would only surrender their weapons when the officials would hear out the activists' demands.

The activists had countless historic examples that showed that giving into the government's demands only results in the government getting what they want. The activists had leverage in their negotiations only so long as they continued to resist—if they maintained the occupation, the government would eventually be pressured to give in to their demands.

Switching back to the narrative of the siege, Mary reminisces on the two airdrops that happened during the siege. Food supplies started running low rather early on, so the airdrops were greatly appreciated. The first one was carried out by a part-Mohawk man who flew with a Vietnam veteran to drop off food for the activists. On the day of the second airdrop, one of the activists, a man named Frank Clearwater, was killed.

Again, the activists received outside support which allowed them to continue holding the occupation. Neither of the people who executed the first airdrop of food were Lakota (in other words, Wilson's tyrannical and violent regime didn't affect them), but they clearly believed in the activists' mission of resistance against a government that abused its power.

Frank Clearwater was one of two men who were killed during the siege of Wounded Knee. Mary adds that both of the men were activists—the government officials had no casualties, and only one man was badly injured, while many of the activists were wounded.

Mary reveals that two of the activists died for their ideals. Having far more resources and protective equipment, the U.S. government did not sustain any deaths. While the activists knew that victory against the powerful force of the U.S. military was not possible, they fought anyway, to hopefully ensure some political change, as well as to express their discontent and set a precedent of resistance for future generations.

Frank Clearwater, a Cherokee man, arrived the day before the airdrop with his pregnant Apache wife, Morning Star. He was killed by a bullet that flew through the wall of the **church**, where he was resting. The activists immediately radioed to the government officials that one of their men had gotten badly wounded and needed immediate medical assistance. The government officials agreed to cease fire, only to start shooting as soon as the nurses—who were waving a white flag—tried to move Clearwater. It wasn't until later that evening when the activists managed to carry Clearwater down the hill to a federal helicopter. Clearwater died a few days later; his wife was arrested and jailed overnight.

Once again, the U.S. government reveals itself to be untrustworthy. In this instance, the activists received confirmation from the government officials that they would be able to get aid for a dying man, yet the officials broke their promise and fired at the nurses, preventing them from getting to Clearwater and giving him the medical attention he needed. The government officials' blocking medical aid from Clearwater illustrates their disregard of Native American lives. On top of this, the government jailed Clearwater's grieving, pregnant widow, which further emphasizes the cruelty of the U.S. government. Clearwater's death is another example of why Native Americans historically cannot trust the U.S. government to uphold its promises in negotiations.

The other man who died during the siege was Buddy Lamont, an Oglala marine veteran. He was shot and killed instantly in crossfire. As in Clearwater's situation, the government officials didn't stop firing to allow medics to reach him. When relatives tried to leave Wounded Knee with Buddy's body, they were arrested. He was buried at Wounded Knee.

Again, the U.S. government reveals its cruelty and callousness toward Native American lives. Government officials continued to shoot at Buddy even though he was already down, instead of getting him medical attention after he first fell (they presumably wouldn't have known that he had been killed instantly). As in Clearwater's situation, Buddy's grieving family was jailed, once again showing the government's lack of concern for the humanity of Native Americans.

CHAPTER 10: THE GHOSTS RETURN

Just as the Ghost Dance religion was a central part of the Wounded Knee Massacre, so were several Native American religious rituals at the heart of the siege of Wounded Knee. Leonard Crow Dog was the primary spiritual leader during the siege, where he performed ceremonies along with healing the wounded and participating in negotiations. Before their first negotiation with government officials, Leonard set up an altar and prayed, saying that "this land [they're] defending" was their "holy place."

The prominence of religious rituals—and the existence of a spiritual leader—during the Occupation of Wounded Knee illustrates how reviving indigenous cultural traditions was central to AIM's mission. Leonard even emphasizes how the occupation itself was a cultural act: the activists were fighting for their ancestral lands. In this way, the occupation also united the Native American activists, as they were always aware that their fight was an echo of all their ancestors' battles against colonization.

In addition to the occasional peyote or yuwipi ceremonies, the sweat lodges were operating daily. After one evening sweat, federal officers started firing on Leonard and the other men as they exited the lodge. It was a close call, but luckily no one was killed.

This incident not only shows the U.S. government's callousness toward Native American lives (the activists they fired at were vulnerable and not fighting, yet the officials shot at them anyway), but also their lack of respect regarding indigenous religions and cultures. The government's disregard of the sweat, which is a religious ceremony, is representative of their racist disdain of Native American cultural traditions in general, which white society tried to suppress for several hundred years.

Leonard was also the primary doctor at Wounded Knee during the siege. He used various herbs and animal parts to heal the wounded. The white doctors who volunteered during the siege deferred to Leonard, evening learning how to use natural medicines and to pray prior to operating on a wounded person. But Mary believes that Leonard's most memorable contribution is that he revived the Ghost Dance.

Leonard was instrumental in the cultural revival of AIM. He incorporated traditional healing methods during the Occupation of Wounded Knee, in which he was a doctor as well as the spiritual leader. By teaching the volunteering white doctors how to use natural medicines and which prayers to pray, Leonard demonstrates his inclusivity—it appears that he was open to sharing his traditional wisdom and religious customs to anyone who was a willing and open-minded learner, regardless of their race or beliefs.

Mary interrupts the story's narrative to tell the history behind the Ghost Dance, which begins with Leonard's great-grandfather, the first Crow Dog. The elder Crow Dog received the instructions for the Ghost Dance from a man named Short Bull, who had been taught by Wovoka, a Paiute holy man. The holy man gave them a new dance that Short Bull interpreted to be the means by which they would bring a new world—one that would undo the evils brought by the white settlers. Word of the Ghost Dance spread quickly, and many tribes embraced it, as its "message brought them hope."

The Ghost Dance is a religion that many Native American tribes incorporated into their religious beliefs. As Mary explains here, the Lakota learned of the Ghost Dance from a Paiute holy man. Mary suggests that this cross-cultural exchange between tribes was beneficial and enriching—the Lakota found hope in the Ghost Dance, as it promised an end to white society's colonization, which devastated their tribes and threatened their cultures and livelihoods. It's clear that the Native American tribes who adopted the Ghost Dance were searching for a way to revive their traditional way of life.

During the Ghost Dance ceremony, dancers wore **upside-down American flags**, "symbolic of the *wasiču*ns' world of fences, telegraph poles, and factories which would also be turned upside down, as well as a sign of despair." The dancers would dance for hours at a time, with some dancers "dying," or falling into a trance, during which they walked among the stars and spoke to their ancestors.

Undoing the evils of colonization was central to the Ghost Dance religion and was symbolized by the inverted American flags that the dancers wore. The upside-down American flag is a symbol of distress, so, by wearing it, the dancers showed that they and their people were suffering. In this passage, Mary adds that the American flags were also symbolic of the world that white people have created, a world in which land is divided, colonized, and polluted. But she says that this world "would also be turned upside down," which reflects the mission of the Ghost Dance: to undo the systems of white society and usher in a time of peace and prosperity for Native Americans.

This new dance frightened the white government agents, who feared that it was a sign that the Lakota people would rebel against the government. Mary adds that she believes it was the officials' guilty consciences that spurred them to misinterpret this peaceful dance and order that the religion be exterminated.

Mary believes that the government agents misinterpreted the dance as a sign of impending rebellion because they knew that their mistreatment and abuse of Native Americans would prompt retaliation. So, the agents reacted by trying to stamp out the religion, which is yet another example of the U.S. government waging war on indigenous cultures.

In the winter, white soldiers started driving the Lakota dancers into the hills of the Badlands, where the dancers began to starve. The first Crow Dog was one of the chiefs who, along with his people, were driven into the hills. Realizing that continued resistance would mean certain death, he surrendered to the white soldiers, thereby saving his people. Other chiefs were not as fortunate—most notably, Big Foot and his people were massacred at Wounded Knee, after he had surrendered.

The U.S. government persecuted adherents of the Ghost Dance religion to try to exterminate it. The first Crow Dog, one of Leonard's ancestors, resisted until he and his people faced certain death. Although he did eventually relent to save his people, his resistance illustrates how dearly he held the religion—being able to practice his beliefs was clearly of paramount importance to him. As Mary previously mentioned, the Crow Dog tribe has a reputation for refusing to assimilate. In this passage, it appears that the first Crow Dog established this precedent of defiance so, even if he was eventually forced to surrender to the government officials, he set an example of resistance for future generations. This passage also illustrates how, even when the dancers surrendered to the U.S. government, their cooperation was only met with more oppression. Most notably, the U.S. soldiers massacred Big Foot and his people after his surrender.


Mary jumps back to Leonard's role in reviving the Ghost Dance. He believed that the Lakota dancers of the late 1800s had misunderstood Wovoka's message. The purpose of the dance, Leonard believed, wasn't to bring back the dead, but to revive their traditional wisdom and beliefs by means of a Native American ceremony. The dance also stressed the importance of unity among different tribes.

Leonard believed that the primary value of bringing back the Ghost Dance was that, by putting on and participating in the ceremony, the dancers were bringing back Native American cultural traditions. In hosting the Ghost Dance, Leonard and the dancers were contributing to the preservation of these Native American religious beliefs. Additionally, the dance encouraged unity between tribes, which Leonard routinely preached. By having indigenous people of various tribes participate together in the religious ceremony, Leonard hoped to foster intertribal cooperation.


The night before the first Ghost Dance at the siege of Wounded Knee, Leonard gave a speech to the activists. Having learned the songs and rituals from his father and grandfather, Leonard explained to the activists that they would dance without stopping. Whenever someone got "into the power, the spiritual power," they would let that person fall into a trance. And above all, they would unite in the dance, no matter one's race or tribe. As he put it, they were "not goin' to have this white man's attitude." The Ghost Dance ceremony that Leonard initiated lasted for four days.

The fact that Leonard learned the Ghost Dance rituals from his father and grandfather shows how the Crow Dog family resisted assimilation and preserved their cultural traditions; because they (the Crow Dogs) embraced their Lakota identity and passed on their culture to their descendants, Leonard grew up knowing the religion of his ancestors. During the Occupation of Wounded Knee, Leonard taught indigenous people of multiple tribes—as well as non-Native American people—the Ghost Dance ceremony. He was adamant that all people should be allowed to participate, which reveals how he believed in the value of intertribal and interracial unity. He indicates that excluding people based on tribe or race was one of the problems with white society, whose discrimination led to the oppression of people of color.

Mary interjects to recount the words of Black Elk, an Oglala man who wrote about the Wounded Knee Massacre. In his book, he said that Wounded Knee wasn't just the massacre site for people, but for a dream as well. He wrote that "the nation's hoop is broken and scattered." When the activists joined together at the Wounded Knee siege to revive the Ghost Dance, they demonstrated that the dream is not dead—they "mended the nation's hoop."

While Mary doesn't specify what dream died at the Wounded Knee Massacre, she implies that it was the message that the Ghost Dance promised: that the evils of white society's colonization would end, and a new age—one of peace and prosperity for all Native Americans—would begin. Black Elk also writes that "the nation's hoop [was] broken and scattered" after the Wounded Knee Massacre, which suggests that another aspect of the dream was intertribal unity, which the Ghost Dance promoted. Mary then says that the activists at Wounded Knee revived this dream of intertribal solidarity, as indigenous people of multiple tribes joined together to perform the ceremony.

CHAPTER 11: BIRTH GIVING

At the beginning of April, Leonard Crow Dog left Wounded Knee to go to Washington, D.C., where he hoped (in vain, it turned out) to have better luck in his negotiations with government officials. Mary was aghast that he would be leaving—she knew she'd be having her baby soon, and she had expected Leonard to be around. Looking back, Mary recognizes that her attitude was "belly-centered."

Mary interjects her narration of the activists' activities at Wounded Knee to remind the reader that, throughout the occupation, she was pregnant. Her participation in the occupation despite her late-term pregnancy illustrates her dedication to the political mission of the occupation. As she approached the end of her pregnancy, Mary's focus switched to the fact that she was going to give birth, which shows that, as a soon-to-be mother, she had a lot on her mind: she had to prepare for motherhood and child-rearing while also fighting for Native American civil rights. These multiple priorities—personal and civil—speak to the humanity of activists like Mary, all of whom had private lives in addition to their political missions. As a woman and a mother-to-be, Mary's concerns are also linked to her gender—she was preparing for a child while fighting for a more equitable world. The overlapping factors of her gender and race speak to how Mary's life experience is complicated by the oppression that she faces as a Native American woman: she has the burdens that women and Native Americans bear in a world that prioritizes white people and men.

Mary was determined to have her baby at Wounded Knee. Not only did she not trust white doctors—she could never forget how white doctors had sterilized her older sister, Barbara—but she also wanted to follow Native American traditions.

Mary chose to have her baby at Wounded Knee for two reasons: one, she knew that, as a Native American woman, she was a target for forced sterilization; and two, she wanted to incorporate Native American traditions in her birth-giving. Mary's fear of forced sterilization reflects the very real threat of reproductive violations that Native American women face. Because of white society's racism, Native American women are targeted for forced sterilizations in a way that white women are not, as Native Americans (and not white people) were victims of a racially motivated genocide that put women's reproductive rights at risk. In addition to this, Mary wanted to have a more traditional birth, which reflects her desire to embrace her Lakota and Native American identity.

For better or for worse, there were some traditions that Mary knew she wouldn't be able to follow through on. For example, she had no desire to give birth while squatting and gripping an upright stick, as the ancient traditions suggested. But she regretted the fact that her baby would not receive turtle or lizard amulets—amulets that are supposed to ensure longevity for the baby—particularly as the woman who could do this, her aunt Elsie Flood, was dead. But Mary still wanted to incorporate Lakota traditions where she could, like burning sweetgrass, praying Lakota prayers, and having the aid of Native American women.

In this passage, Mary explains the limitations on her plans for incorporating indigenous American birthing traditions. On one hand, there are several traditions she didn't wish to follow, which reflects how some traditions are dropped over time because of personal choice (for example, Mary suggests that she wanted some more modern comforts). But primarily, the reason why Mary could not incorporate some traditions was because these traditions' existences were threatened. For example, Mary could not acquire the turtle and lizard amulets for her baby because the one woman Mary knew who could perform this tradition—Elsie Flood— had died. Elsie Flood's death is significant because it symbolizes the extinction of the cultural knowledge she possessed. Because the U.S. government forced so many Native Americans to assimilate to white society, many cultural traditions were lost. Around the time of her labor, Mary mourned the loss of these traditions, as she wished she could have incorporated them. She nonetheless resolved to incorporate as many traditions as she could, which reflects how she sought to embrace Lakota and Native American cultural traditions to connect with her indigenous identity.

Cheryl Petite, another woman at Wounded Knee, was also in the last stage of pregnancy. She went into labor just a few days before Mary did, and while Cheryl also wanted to have her baby at Wounded Knee, she and her husband decided to go to a hospital as her labor dragged on. After Cheryl left, many of the activists approached Mary to urge her to hold onto her hope of giving birth at Wounded Knee.

The activists' desire to have a baby born during the occupation suggests that they valued the symbolism of having the next generation of Lakota born at a site where white soldiers perpetuated the U.S. government's genocide of the Lakota people. In the face of the racism and persecution that white society leveraged against indigenous people, Mary's giving birth during the Occupation of Wounded Knee symbolized how Native Americans were still resisting and fighting against a government that oppressed them.

A few days later, Mary's water broke, and that morning, she heard the ghostly wails of the murdered women and children who were buried in the nearby ravine. The next day, Mary went into labor, during which she was in so much pain that she didn't pay attention to the incessant gunfire outside the trailer she was in.

Mary was keenly aware of the act of resistance she was performing by giving birth at Wounded Knee: on the site where the U.S. government massacred nearly 300 Lakota, she would bring into the world a Lakota child, the newest member of a nation of people that the U.S. government had waged war against.

During the excruciating labor, Mary found herself feeling alone, wishing for her mother, sisters, and a father for herself and the baby. Yet she was comforted by the fact that she had many devoted friends staying by her side. Annie Mae Aquash and Josette Wawasik acted as midwives, and Pedro Bissonette checked in on her throughout the birth.

Mary's loneliness speaks to the challenges that indigenous women—and political activists—experience. Mary's choice to fight for the rights of Lakota and Native Americans means that she sometimes had to compromise some aspects of her personal life, such as living in proximity to family. In this moment, because Mary chose to protest with other AIM activists at Wounded Knee, she had to give up being near her mother and sisters during the time of her birth. In addition to this, Mary is one of many Native American women who was left with the burden of raising a child on her own. As Mary previously explained, Native American men leaving their partners and children was not uncommon, as there was a gendered expectation that women should take on the responsibility of raising the children. Yet despite this loneliness, Mary took comfort in knowing that she had many Native American women—and men, like Pedro Bissonette—remaining by her side. Their solidarity aided Mary in knowing that she wasn't truly alone.


When Mary at last gave birth, Josette Wawasik held up the baby to the window of the trailer to the cheers of the activists outside. As the Native Americans at Wounded Knee celebrated, Mary had the sense that she had done something very important for her people. She named her son Pedro, after her dear friend, Pedro Bissonette.

The activists at Wounded Knee celebrated the birth, as it symbolized the continuation of the Lakota people—and Native Americans as a community—despite the attacks that they endured on their culture and people.

A few days after Mary gave birth, Leonard returned to Wounded Knee. He gave Pedro a Native American name and held a peyote meeting, which Mary participated in. It was around this time that some California supporters sent Mary a sacred pipe for Pedro.

As she had hoped for, Mary was able to incorporate Lakota and Native American cultural traditions into her son's infancy. By raising Pedro in a community of Native Americans, Mary ensures that the Lakota culture—and indigenous American culture—live on.

Shortly afterward, Buddy Lamont was shot and killed. Buddy's relatives wanted Mary's help with the funeral process, so she agreed to leave Wounded Knee with them. When she left the siege, she and Pedro only had the clothes they wore, a blanket for Pedro, a few diapers, and Pedro's new sacred pipe.

Mary was very poor when she gave birth to Pedro. As she has previously explained, poverty was a major problem in indigenous communities across the U.S., as they did not receive ample governmental resources. Mary's poverty is representative of the systemic poverty that affects Native American communities, and it highlights another way that Mary's identity as a Lakota woman affects the problems she faces; while poverty also affects white women, Native American women experience poverty and single parenthood at higher rates than white women.

Although the government officials had promised not to arrest Mary, the arrested her anyway and took away Pedro, saying that she was an unfit mother, and that Pedro would be sent to a foster home. Luckily, Cheyenne, Buddy Lamont's sister, persuaded them to let her care for the baby until Mary was released from jail. Mary is still grateful for Cheyenne's help, especially since Cheyenne was grieving her brother's death.

Once again, the U.S. government officials break a promise—this one to Mary—illustrating why Native Americans felt that they could not trust the government to uphold promises when they (Native Americans) cooperated with them (the U.S. government). The government officials judged Mary to be an unfit mother based on the little they knew about her: her poverty, her race, and her participation in the Occupation of Wounded Knee. None of these things actually made her an unfit mother; rather, it reveals the government officials' racism and aim to separate indigenous children from their families, after which they would place the children with white foster families, ensuring the children would be raised apart from their indigenous culture. As Mary noted earlier in her memoir, forcibly separating indigenous children from their families was not uncommon, and this form of government-sponsored kidnapping was another systemic issue that Native American women faced. Luckily for Mary, Cheyenne—in an example of female and indigenous solidarity—helped Mary by looking after Pedro for the duration of Mary's imprisonment.

The officers held Mary in jail for 24 hours, during which they didn't let her talk to a lawyer or call anyone. Unable to nurse, Mary's breasts swelled up and ached painfully. At last, the officers released her, apparently because they worried about the bad press they would get by imprisoning a nursing mother and keeping her from her child.

Mary's post-birth imprisonment speaks to the racism and sexism that indigenous women like Mary experience. Dismissive of the emotional and physical pain that Mary experienced as a new mother who could not nurse, the officers only let her go to protect their own image. The implication is that Mary was targeted because of her race and gender: the government officials do not treat indigenous women with the same amount of dignity and respect that they afford white women.

When they let Mary out of jail to nurse Pedro, Mary's mother was waiting for her. At first, Mary's mother ranted at Mary, shouting that she should have never spent time with AIM members. But she suddenly switched topics and raged about the cruelty of the officers who had so horribly mistreated her daughter and grandson. Mary calmly responded that she was now a mother, and that her mother was now a grandmother. Mary interjects to say that, since that moment, she and her mother have been able to understand each other better.

Mary began to understand her mother's thinking and behavior as soon as she became a mother. Although Mary doesn't explicitly explain what she came to understand about her mother, the implication is that their shared identity as mothers—and, specifically, Lakota mothers—means that they would have similar experiences and, even though they may have different reactions, they at least understand the unique problems and situations that Lakota mothers experience.

But Mary was not free to go. The officers sent her to another jail in Rapid City, where they questioned her for several hours. When Mary didn't give them the answers they were after, they finally let her go. Alone with Pedro, she hitchhiked over a hundred miles to get back home. At one point, one of Wilson's goons picked her up and tried to rape her. She escaped by leaping from the car with her baby and hiding in some bushes until he gave up. After this terrifying ordeal, she met a kind Native American man who drove her home without issue.

Mary's horrifying hitch-hiking experience captures the threat of sexual violence that Native American women face. Research shows that Native American women suffer disproportionately from sexual assault.

The siege of Wounded Knee officially ended when Leonard signed an agreement with the federal officers. Many of the activists were upset with his decision, as they assumed that the government would simply break this agreement as they had broken so many others. This is indeed what came to pass, when the federal officers were suspicious of the surprisingly small number of firearms that the AIM activists turned in.

The activists were upset with Leonard because they assumed—correctly, it turns out—that the government would drop the activists' political demands as soon as the activists stopped protesting. This incident is another example of how resistance—and not passivity or cooperation—can be the most effective way to achieve political change.

After the siege, government officials bulldozed all that was left on Wounded Knee. Mary suspects that they wanted to remove every trace that a group of Native Americans once defied the government on that hill. But she knows that the memory will live on among Native American people, who will pass down the knowledge of the event to the next generation. Lastly, Mary considers that it is perhaps only right that Wounded Knee now looks the way it did before white settlers arrived.

Mary suggests that the government removed all trace of the occupation to deter future generations from following in their ancestors' footsteps in resisting the U.S. government. But Mary knows that Native Americans will remember this act of defiance, and that it will inspire younger generations for years to come, thus showing how activism is valuable not only in that it can achieve political change, but also in that it can inspire others.

CHAPTER 12: SIOUX AND ELEPHANTS NEVER FORGET

Although Mary wasn't romantically interested in Leonard Crow Dog around the time of the siege, she married him shortly afterward. It wasn't the fact that he was a medicine man that deterred her—there are no Lakota society rules against medicine men marrying—but rather the fact that she regarded him as an esteemed leader.

Mary implies that she couldn't imagine Leonard as a romantic partner because of his high position as the spiritual leader of AIM—she respected him so much that she couldn't imagine him as a romantic partner. Her esteem for him speaks to his importance in her life—and the lives of the AIM activists—as the person who helped Native Americans connect with indigenous American culture.

Mary suspects that Leonard had been interested in her for quite some time. Leonard made his first sexual advance at the Rosebud Fair that took place after the Wounded Knee siege. He drove her to a party, kissing her on the way. But Mary wasn't interested in him—she wanted to leave. While at the party, Leonard grabbed her arm and took her from the house to a deserted pasture. She went home with him. Afterward, she still didn't consider him a potential partner, even though Leonard's mother informed Mary that he had told her his plan to marry Mary.

In Mary's account, Leonard comes off as very presumptuous and even abusive. Mary makes it clear that she wasn't interested in him, yet he forced her to go with him to a pasture where it is suggested that they had sex. Given Mary's resistance to going with him, it's not clear whether she consented to having sex with him. Without taking Mary's opinions or feelings into consideration, Leonard simply assumes that Mary will marry him. His entitlement speaks to the sexism that Native American women encountered—many men simply treated women as sexual objects they could possess.

For a while afterward, Leonard continued to try to persuade Mary to marry him. She gave in after a ceremony that Leonard performed, when he cornered her and demanded that she marry him. She refused for a while but, when her ride home left without her, she ended up staying with Leonard that night—and, it turned out, for life.

Again, Leonard's actions reveal his entitled attitude toward women. Mary is very clear that she did not want to marry him, but Leonard coerced her into agreeing. His presumptuous and—it is suggested—abusive behavior reflects the sexism that Native American women faced, including in their own communities.

Mary interrupts her narrative to describe the Crow Dogs' family home, which was on a beautiful stretch of land. The home wasn't just for the nuclear family, but for the whole *tiyospaye*. In addition to relatives, they often hosted friends and strangers who needed a place to stay.

Mary has already described the Crow Dogs as a Lakota tribe that resisted assimilation and continued to live a more traditional Lakota lifestyle. In this passage, she shows that the Crow Dogs still lived with the whole tiyospaye*; evidently, their generational refusal to assimilate to white society paid off, in that they were able to keep alive Lakota cultural traditions.*

Jumping back to the narrative, Mary discusses how she was not at all ready to become a wife. In her role, not only was she expected to be a mother to Leonard's three children from a previous marriage, but she was also expected to do all the housework at the Crow Dogs' home. Leonard constantly had guests over—relatives, other activists, community members, and sometimes even strangers in need of help—and Mary was always expected to cook and clean for these groups of people, most of whom were men who refused to help with the chores.

Upon marrying Leonard, Mary struggled under the weight of all the work that he expected her to do. Because of her gender, Leonard expected her to carry out all domestic duties without his assistance, including caring for the children of his previous marriage. Her frustration speaks to the unfairness of his demands and the gender roles by which he operated.

Another stressor in this already difficult situation was that Leonard's family was not welcoming to Mary. They criticized her because she was a "half-blood" Lakota woman who had not been raised in a traditional Lakota manner. One particular sore point for Leonard's family was that Mary couldn't speak the Lakota language.

The Crow Dogs' cold reception of Mary shows another problem that assimilated Native Americans face: more traditional Native Americans sometimes reject them. Because Mary's mother and grandmother raised Mary without many Lakota cultural traditions—such as the language and religion—Leonard's family wasn't welcoming to her. They didn't consider her Lakota enough.

In turn, Mary's family didn't accept Leonard, whom they thought was undoing Mary's Christian and "white" upbringing. But the more that Mary's and Leonard's families criticized their marriage, the stronger their bond became.

The tension between Mary's and Leonard's families illustrates how assimilation to white society divides Native Americans. Mary's family and Leonard's family both represent a group: those who assimilated and those who retained a traditional lifestyle. In this passage, Mary shows that each group was prejudiced against the other. For children like Mary who were forced to assimilate to white society yet wanted to live a more traditional Lakota lifestyle, this situation could be alienating, as neither her family nor her husband's family was accepting of her.

Mary interrupts the narrative to give the Crow Dog family history. The founder of the clan (the first Crow Dog) was a man named Kangi-Shunka. A warrior, a medicine man, and a chief, Kangi-Shunka is an important figure in Lakota history. Even though Kangi-Shunka lived about a hundred years before Mary married Leonard, his actions still affect the culture and lifestyle of his people. As Mary puts it, "Sioux and elephants never forget."

Mary has previously touched on how the first Crow Dog, Kangi-Shunka, was a man of resistance, as he refused to culturally assimilate to white society or cooperate with the U.S. government. Here, Mary makes it clear that the first Crow Dog set a behavioral and ideological precedent for his people and their descendants, which speaks to how a person's acts of resistance can inspire future generations.

Mary then tells the story of how Kangi-Shunka got his name, which means Crow Dog. It comes from an attack that he and his people endured one morning while they were on a hunt. At dawn, white settlers and some Crow warriors attacked Kangi-Shunka and his people. After giving his horse to one of his wounded warriors, Kangi-Shunka was badly wounded by two arrows. He told his men to save themselves. They did so, leaving him behind in the snow.

This passage depicts two different tribes fighting against each other, with the Crow warriors aiding white soldiers in their attack against Kangi-Shunka and his people. Presumably, the Crow had something to gain by fighting with the U.S. government, but history shows that, in the end, their cooperation didn't stop the U.S. government from stripping all indigenous tribes of their rights. The implication is that division between indigenous tribes—particularly when tribes would help the U.S. government in fighting other indigenous nations—only ended up hurting the Native American community as a whole, as the U.S. government sought to assume power over all tribes.

Kangi-Shunka was dying in the snow when two coyotes approached him. They kept him warm and gave him medicine to heal his wounds. When he was well enough to walk, the coyotes were joined by a crow, and the three animals led Kangi-Shunka to his people's camp. He was named after these animals, Crow Coyote. The person who translated the name mistranslated it to English, calling him Crow Dog instead of Crow Coyote.

This anecdote encourages unity between different beings: without the help of the coyotes and the crow, Kangi-Shunka likely would have died.

The most famous story about the first Crow Dog is his murder of Spotted Tail, a chief of the Brule tribe. Although the first Crow Dog and Spotted Tail had been friends in their youth, they parted ways when Spotted Tail started cooperating with the white settlers and government—he believed it was useless to resist them. The first Crow Dog disagreed vehemently, and the two men and their clans became rivals.

Spotted Tail and the first Crow Dog represent the two options that marginalized people are often limited to: one can either assimilate to the oppressor's system and accept that fate, or one can fight back. Spotted Tail chose the former while the first Crow Dog espoused the latter. Mary's admiration for Crow Dog's legacy and how his descendants have retained their Lakota culture suggests that, while Spotted Tail's assimilation is understandable (she makes it clear that he didn't feel like he had much choice), Crow Dog's resistance is preferable.

On August 4, 1881, the first Crow Dog and Spotted Tail got into a gun fight. Spotted Tail had initiated the fight, but Crow Dog won it, killing Spotted Tail. After the fight, Crow Dog participated in a sweat to purify himself.

The rivalry and Spotted Tail's murder show how internal division harms indigenous communities. In this instance, the first Crow Dog's and Spotted Tail's differing political stances on how to deal with the threat of colonization resulted in the death of a tribal leader and Crow Dog's guilt and potential legal punishment.

A judge in nearby Deadwood sentenced the first Crow Dog to death for the murder and gave him one month to prepare for his hanging. During that month, Crow Dog prepared a death song, gave away all his belongings, and had an outfit made for him. As Mary explains, he was willing and ready to die for killing Spotted Tail. But when Crow Dog arrived in Deadwood for his execution, his lawyer cheerfully informed him that the Supreme Court ruled that the U.S. government has no jurisdiction on reservations. Legend has it that Crow Dog was vaguely annoyed that he had prepared for nothing.

The legal victory speaks to the importance of taking action to change a situation. Although the book suggests that it was Crow Dog's lawyer—and not Crow Dog himself, as he was prepared to die—who argued against Crow Dog's execution, the legal battle resulted in a victory for indigenous people, whose tribes retained legal sovereignty on reservations.

But the first Crow Dog did suffer a punishment among his people: he was sentenced to living apart from his tribe, meaning he had to eat, drink, and smoke alone. Crow Dog gave the Spotted Tail family money and resources, but while this payment helped establish peace between the tribes, the Crow Dog people suffered a "blood guilt" and ostracization that was declared to endure four generations.

Crow Dog's punishment among the Lakota show how the Lakota already had their own systems of justice within their communities prior to white settlers' arrival. In other words, white society's legal system was just another form of forced assimilation for indigenous people.

Mary returns to her narrative, in which she describes her attempts to adjust to life with the Crow Dogs. She emphasizes how difficult it was to break through the cultural divide between her and the traditional and isolated Crow Dogs. Over-stressed from all the work she was doing for Leonard's family, she had a mental break-down and got very physically sick.

Mary makes it clear that she greatly struggled at the beginning of her marriage. Not only was she rejected by the more traditional Crow Dog family, but she also suffered from all the work that was expected of her, as Leonard's family believed in strict gender roles in which women had to complete all the domestic and child-rearing duties.

With the help of another man, Estes Stuart, Leonard held a peyote meeting for Mary. During the meeting, Estes declared that Mary was suffering from a "love sickness." At the time, this diagnosis upset Mary—she thought Estes was making fun of her. But later Estes explained that he meant that she was feeling broken down because she didn't feel loved or appreciated for all she was doing for Leonard and his family. Leonard's family began to comfort her, Henry Crow Dog even calling her daughter. After taking peyote and having a vision that depicted her former self passing away, Mary felt reassured.

The diagnosis of Mary's love sickness suggests that Mary felt underappreciated because Leonard and his family expected her to perform an enormous amount of work simply because she was a woman. Not only does it appear that she didn't like the work asked of her, but she also struggled with the thanklessness of her chores—Leonard's family acted as though men were entitled to avoid domestic work because they expected women to do it. While it doesn't appear that Mary's chores were lessened, Leonard's family did start making an effort to welcome her and show their appreciation. After the ceremony, Mary felt comforted, which shows how participating in indigenous religious ceremonies helps her feel more in tune with her identity. In this case, the ceremony also prompted the Lakota who were excluding her to become more welcoming, which is another way in which the ceremony helped Mary's sense of identity—her husband's family stopped ostracizing her for her non-traditional upbringing.

CHAPTER 13: TWO CUT-OFF HANDS

Mary describes her beloved friend Annie Mae as a kind-hearted woman and a force to be reckoned with. Annie Mae was diligent, hard-working, and eager to help—both around the home and in the community as an AIM activist and a director for various Native American youth and anti-alcohol organizations. Annie Mae was a wonderful friend, and she "did not deserve to die."

Mary describes Annie Mae as a woman who embodied indigenous solidarity—she was someone who offered her time and talent to a variety of organizations that served Native American communities. It is clear that Mary loved and admired her friend for her incessant activism and efforts to improve the social and economic problems that Native Americans struggled with.

Mary provides Annie Mae's backstory. A Micmac woman, Annie Mae's experience living on a reserve in Canada was very similar to Mary's childhood. As Mary puts it, the poverty, harassment from law enforcement, and tumultuous family life are common for many Native American women.

Mary draws parallels between her and Annie Mae's life experiences to show how Native American women face unique problems because of the combination of racism and misogyny. Like Mary, Annie Mae struggled with poverty, a difficult family environment, and predatory law enforcement.

Annie Mae left her reserve at the age of 17. She went to Boston, where she married a Micmac man named Jake Maloney. Jake abused Annie Mae, and Annie Mae eventually divorced him, won custody of their children, and left him. Shortly afterward, Annie Mae joined AIM to fight for Native American rights.

Annie Mae was also a victim of domestic abuse, a problem that Native American women suffer at a disproportionately high rate, particularly in comparison to white women.

Around 1972, Annie Mae fell in love with another Native American man named Nogeeshik Aquash. They were both dedicated to the AIM cause and often worked together. Like Mary, they were both at the siege of Wounded Knee, where they got married. Unfortunately, Nogeeshik was mentally and physically abusive to Annie Mae. After splitting up and getting back to together several times, she left him for good after he broke the sacred pipe that they were married with.

Annie Mae was abused in her second marriage as well. The domestic abuse that she suffered throughout her life speaks to how Native American women experience domestic abuse at disproportionately high rates.

After leaving Nogeeshik, Annie Mae moved onto Mary and Leonard's land, where she built a tipi and lived simply. She was always generous with her possessions, often casually adding that the government would kill her soon, anyway. As she told Mary, "I've fought too hard [...] They won't let Indians like me live."

Annie Mae's decision to live simply in a tipi reflects a desire to live more traditionally, even though the traditions she was adhering to were Lakota, and not necessarily Micmac (traditionally, Micmac people lived in wigwams). All the same, given her wish to live in a tipi, it appears that she valued the opportunity to embrace the culture of another indigenous tribe. It is also clear that political activism was extremely important to Annie Mae—the fact that she was willing to die for her political beliefs suggests that she found activism validating and empowering.

At this time, many Native American civil rights activists were brutally murdered, with the government rarely investigating these deaths. On Pine Ridge, where tribal chairman Wilson "had established a regime of terror," the homicidal violence reached such a level that it is estimated that about 250 people were murdered between 1973 and 1975. The reservation had a population of just 8,000 people at the time. Among the many activists who were mysteriously murdered was Pedro Bissonette, whom the police shot for supposedly "resisting arrest."

Pine Ridge suffered from internal political division. Mary has described Wilson as an extremely corrupt tribal chairman who exploited his position for power and money. The violence that he and his supporters wreaked on Pine Ridge was devastating, as homicide violence increased to shocking rates. The implication is that division within the tribe—in this case, one man and his supporters working with the U.S. government for their own benefit—hurts the entire tribal community.

Mary emphasizes how no one felt safe at this time. In addition to Wilson's murderous goons, the FBI infiltrated AIM with spies and informers, which only added to the paranoia. Leaders began suspecting one another; Annie Mae became one of the people whom certain AIM leaders began to suspect. One night, Annie Mae cried to Mary, begging her to protect her truthful legacy after her death.

The FBI also caused division within AIM—they planted spies and informers within the movement, causing people to suspect each other. Mary shows the individual impact that this division caused by depicting Annie Mae's distress when people began to accuse her of being an FBI informer.

The situation worsened after a violent confrontation between Native American activists and FBI agents that resulted in the deaths of one Native American and two FBI agents. Annie Mae's close friend Leonard Peltier was a wanted man after this incident, even though the evidence against him was flimsy. Shortly thereafter they started looking for Annie Mae.

Mary reveals one of the double-standards within the U.S. justice system: while the government didn't examine many of the suspicious deaths that took place on Pine Ridge, they deeply investigated the deaths of the two FBI agents. This passage also sheds light on the dangers of being an activist—by being important members of AIM, Leonard Peltier and Annie Mae attracted the FBI's attention.

In 1975, about 180 government agents stormed the Crow Dogs' property to arrest Annie Mae, who was staying with Mary and Leonard Crow Dog at the time. Once they arrested Annie Mae, they questioned her about Peltier and other matters, all the while telling her that she would die—sooner or later—if she didn't cooperate. When she refused to answer their questions, the agents let her go. She briefly returned to Mary and Leonard's, where she told Mary that the agents were watching her, hoping that she'd lead them to Peltier. The next time Mary saw her was in South Dakota, where she (Annie Mae) went to support Mary and Leonard during his trial.

Again, Mary illustrates how Annie Mae was risking her life for her political beliefs and activism. In this instance, government agents threatened her to try to get her to reveal another AIM member's whereabouts. Even knowing that government agents were following her, Mary suggests that Annie Mae never stopped fighting for AIM, which again shows her dedication to the cause and indicates that she found political resistance and activism rewarding in their own right—even in the face of danger.

In November 1975, Annie Mae vanished. In early March 1976, her body—which bore signs of rape—was found on Pine Ridge Reservation. The FBI cut off her hands for lab identification, even though they could have taken fingerprints at the crime scene. After identification, the FBI announced that she had died of exposure, even though there were no drugs or alcohol in her system to suggest that she passed out. Suspicious of this report, Annie Mae's friends and family exhumed the body and performed another autopsy. During this autopsy, they discovered a bullet in her skull, suggesting that she had been killed execution style.

Annie Mae's rape, suspicious death, and mutilation are reflective of the sexual and physical violence that plagues Native American women. Mary suggests that it was U.S. government officials who killed Annie Mae, presumably because of her political activism. In addition to the potential murder, Annie Mae's rape and mutilation (FBI agents needlessly cut off her hands) show how the officials did not respect Annie Mae, living or dead. The implication is that Annie Mae's race and gender made her a target for sexual violence and degradation.

Shifting to the present, Mary mourns the loss of her dear friend Annie Mae, who had sacrificed herself for the AIM cause.

Mary again recalls Annie Mae's dedication to AIM and Native American civil rights, honoring her for her kindness, selflessness, and activism. Mary's appreciation for Annie Mae's work supports the idea that activism is inspiring and preferable to compliance or passivity.

CHAPTER 14: CANTE ISHTA—THE EYE OF THE HEART

Medicine men say that the meaning behind Native American religions is to see and interpret the world through "the eye in one's heart." After marrying Leonard, Mary learned how to do just this. Even though she would occasionally fight with Leonard, Mary always respected his "raw power, spiritual Indian power coming from deep within." She adds that, as he had never gone to school—Henry Crow Dog chased the school officers away when they tried to take Leonard—his thinking was largely untouched by white society's way of thinking.

Regardless of their fights, Mary deeply respects Leonard for his religious power and wisdom and for his role as a spiritual leader—for AIM and for her. Mary's respect for him reveals how important it is to her to learn more about Lakota and indigenous religious traditions. She credits his "raw [...] spiritual Indian power" to his never having attended a white school, which suggests that, had Leonard attended a white school, the forced assimilation would have mitigated his spirituality and original thinking. In this way, Mary depicts assimilation to white society as a negative force, one that destroys indigenous cultures and traditions. Mary also shows how Henry Crow Dog's resistance to the school officers—who tried to take Leonard to school—allowed Leonard to grow up with fewer white-society influences, which in turn made it possible for him to be such an important spiritual leader.

At first, Mary's new role as a medicine man's wife intimidated her, especially as she was unsure whether women participated in ceremonies. To reassure her, Leonard told Mary about how he was trained by an exceptional medicine woman named Bessie Good Road.

Mary's insecurities regarding her role appear to come from her uncertainty about the role of women in indigenous religious ceremonies. Her doubt could be because, in her experience, women are not offered the same amount of respect or freedom as men. But Leonard reassured her that, within indigenous religious ceremonies, women can indeed have important positions. He cited Bessie Good Road as an example—he actually took direction from her, and not the other way around. The implication is that, in some indigenous religious ceremonies, women are treated with more respect and equality than they receive in the modern settings that Mary has illustrated, from the groups of youths she roamed with (in which men acted entitled to women's bodies) to the doctors who violated Barbara's and Mary's mother's reproductive rights by sterilizing them.

Leonard taught Mary how to listen to the world around her and find meaning in the sounds of plants, animals, and all natural things. He taught her the necessity of finding harmony and balance between one's self and one's environment.

Mary reveals that Leonard's firm belief in the importance of coexistence and unity come from his religious beliefs. In this way, Mary shows how traditional Lakota beliefs are central to Leonard's political activism and identity.

Mary goes on to say that she had to learn about sweat baths, which is a ceremonial purification that takes place before other ceremonies. It takes place in a lodge made of willow sticks; in the center of the lodge is a pit, into which hot rocks are placed. The rocks are heated in a fire that is outside the lodge and then passed into the lodge. Once the rocks are in the lodge and the entrance flap is closed, the leader pours cold water onto the rocks, which causes the steam. During a sweat, the participants are naked and often separated by gender (although that is not always the case for every tribe). Everyone has the opportunity to pray during the ceremony.

Mary hints that she had a lot to learn—for example, she had to learn about the ceremony that precedes all other ceremonies: the sweat bath. Because her mother and grandmother wanted Mary to assimilate to white society, they did not teach her traditional Lakota religious ceremonies. Her detailed description of the sweat ceremonies speaks to her dedication to learning more about her Lakota heritage. In describing the sweat ceremony, Mary shows how, while some tribes do separate the participants by gender, everyone still has the opportunity to take part in the ceremony by praying. This suggests that, while there are specific gender roles in Lakota culture, there are some aspects of equality between men and women in Lakota religion.

Sweat ceremonies can get extremely hot. The first time Mary participated in a sweat, the heat was so intense that she felt unable to breathe. But after a moment, she felt the soothing force of the heat. After the sweat, she felt her skin and mind were open and that her body was "drunk with the spirit."

Mary describes how the sweat ceremony helped her feel more connected to her Lakota identity. Not only did she find the ceremony calming, but she also felt as though her mind was more open to "the spirit" afterwards. In other words, the ceremony helped her get in touch with Lakota spirituality.

Mary goes on to tell several comedic stories about various sweat ceremonies that she or Leonard has been a part of. Once, when visiting L.A., Mary participated in a local sweat in the desert. During the ceremony, the leaders put so many rocks in that she quickly realized that "these people don't sweat to purify themselves. They sweat to suffer." Another time, Leonard hosted a sweat for some Native Americans on the east coast. The participants were so shocked by the heat that they raced out of the lodge at the beginning of the ceremony. Leonard laughed it off, saying that "they just don't understand Indian ways. They have to be taught."

In the first anecdote, Mary shows how, while multiple tribes use the sweat ceremony for religious purposes, they perform it differently. For example, in L.A., Mary thought that the ceremony took on a more masochistic meaning than one of purification. During the east coast sweat that Leonard performed, it appears that the participants were not accustomed to sweats, potentially because their tribes did not traditionally perform sweat ceremonies or because their tribes had been forced to assimilate to white society and lost their religious traditions. Either way, the book suggests that they had sought out Leonard to perform a sweat ceremony, likely with the goal of feeling reconnected with their indigenous culture. But the anecdote shows that learning how to embrace indigenous religious traditions takes time—as Leonard said, the participants in the east coast sweat "have to be taught" before they will truly appreciate the ceremony.

Leonard also leads yuwipi ceremonies. During a *yuwipi* ceremony, a medicine man acts as a moderator between spirits and living people. During the ceremony, people are able to pose questions to the spirits, who answer through the leader of the ceremony. Mary had never been to a *yuwipi* ceremony prior to meeting Leonard—she was scared before her first one, and she describes her behavior as "reacting like a white woman."

Mary admits that she also didn't always react well to traditional Lakota ceremonies. She even says that she was "reacting like a white woman," which calls to mind how she had been raised to assimilate to white society, so that, as an adult, Lakota ceremonies felt foreign, or even frightening. The book hints that she finds this behavior regrettable, suggesting that she wishes that white society had not forced so many Lakota like herself to abandon their culture.

Mary describes the various parts that go into a yuwipi ceremony. A dog-meat feast is traditional. Women make 405 tobacco bundles by using colored cloth and tobacco. A room is prepared for the ceremony by installing blankets over windows and removing any item that reflects light. After covering the floor with sage, the tobacco ties are placed in a square, into which only the *yuwipi* man can step. At the top of the square is a large can of earth into which a sacred staff is placed. A buffalo skull serves as an altar, against which rests the sacred pipe. Three rattles are used to communicate the voices of the spirits.

Again, Mary's detailed description of a Lakota ceremony—this time, the yuwipi *ceremony—reveals her dedication to learning more about her Lakota heritage.*

The yuwipi man is then bound in a blanket and placed face-down onto the floor. The lamps are extinguished, plunging the participants into total darkness. Singers and drummers begin to perform *yuwipi* songs. Mary then describes her first *yuwipi* meeting, during which she could hear the spirits' voices as the rattles flew through the air and sparks of light flashed through the air. When the lamp was relit, Leonard was already unbound. He then relayed the messages of the spirits, after which the feast took place.

Mary describes the yuwipi *ceremony as a ritual in which people can communicate with the dead. This sought-after connection reflects a desire for unity, one in which people can communicate with the spirit world to better understand something happening in the world of the living.*

Mary interjects to add that white missionaries have always dismissed yuwipi ceremonies as "hocus-pocus." Once, during the mid-20th century, government agents tried to "expose" a medicine man by the name of Horn Chips as a charlatan by having him perform the ceremony in front of them. To their chagrin, the mysterious sparks and flying rattles took place nonetheless, which encouraged many of the watching Lakota to return to their Lakota religion.

Mary describes a failed attempt of white missionaries trying to coerce Lakota into assimilating to Christianity. The attempt backfired, as the missionaries only gave Horn Chips a chance to prove to many people that yuwipi ceremonies are real encounters with spirits. The fact that many Lakota reconverted to their traditional religion upon seeing the ceremony suggests that they felt more at peace when embracing their cultural traditions.

In May 1974, Leonard and his father hosted another Ghost Dance, his second Ghost Dance after the siege of Wounded Knee. Although originally intended to be for Lakota only, many indigenous people from across the continent arrived to participate in the ceremony. Additionally, several government agents also tried to secretly observe the ceremony before the participating dancers forced them away, even arresting two meddling FBI agents. Despite these disturbances, the dance was successful—a shockingly large number of eagles (which are sacred birds to the Lakota) flew over the dancers.

The fact that many non-Lakota indigenous people participated shows how strongly they wanted to learn about and participate in indigenous customs. Even if the ceremony wasn't one that their tribe would have traditionally performed, Mary suggests that participating was a way to engage with their indigenous identity. At this same event, government agents tried to spy on the dancers, which shows the governmental animosity toward indigenous cultures and religions.

Mary interrupts her story to add that the Crow Dogs still feel weighted by the first Crow Dog chief's killing of Spotted Tail, even though the event happened about a hundred years ago. At last, in 1989, the Crow Dog and Spotted Tail families had a ceremony to officially recognize the end to their feud.

This anecdote speaks to how connected the Crow Dogs are to their heritage—they still carry the guilt of their ancestor. Mary has already described how the Crow Dog clan carries on the first Crow Dog's spirit of resistance by isolating themselves from white society and maintaining traditional Lakota customs—their decision to have a ceremony to recognize the end to their feud with the clan of Spotted Tail only emphasizes how they deliberately recognize their ancestry.

CHAPTER 15: THE EAGLE CAGED

After the siege of Wounded Knee, Leonard knew that government agents would find a reason to imprison him. He had been sentenced to prison for 13 years because of his role in the Wounded Knee Occupation, but he was able to get out on probation. While he didn't understand why the government officials wanted so badly to imprison him—he saw himself as a religious leader, not a revolutionary—Mary knew then and knows now that, because the militant youth of AIM would listen to a medicine man, Leonard was a threat to the system. For example, when Leonard instructed the youth to never sell their lands—no matter what company offered to purchase it—the youth listened.

The book suggests that the government saw Leonard as a revolutionary because he was encouraging the younger generations of the indigenous community to resist complying with the government or white society—he not only helped lead a cultural revival for indigenous cultures, but he also urged people to not sell their land, which companies wanted for its natural resources. Because of his refusal to comply with white society—even if he attributed his stance to his religious beliefs and not to political beliefs—he was a threat to the capitalist and colonialist system.

Shortly after the Ghost Dance of 1974, the government seized their opportunity. On September 2, 1975, two drunk men named Beck and McClosky crashed their car in Leonard's yard. Their rowdy shouts—they were bragging about how they had attacked one of Leonard's young nephews—woke up several of the relatives who were staying on the Crow Dogs' property. The drunk men and the relatives started fighting, during which someone broke McClosky's jaw.

At this point in the narration, the book implies that the government exploited the Beck and McClosky event to arrest Leonard, as they saw him as a revolutionary who preached resistance against capitalism.

Beck and McClosky pressed charges against Leonard, and, just a few days later, a team of nearly 185 agents and officers stormed the Crow Dogs' property to arrest Leonard. These officers acted with excessive violence, throwing young Pedro against a wall and putting guns to Mary's head as they ransacked the house.

Beck and McClosky's pressing charges in an incident that they instigated suggests that the government may have pressured them into it, so that they (the government) would have cause to arrest Leonard, whom they saw as a revolutionary. The officials were needlessly violent with Mary, Leonard, Pedro, and the rest of the family on the grounds, which indicates the racism of the acting officers—the implication is that they did not act calmly or respectfully because the Crow Dogs are Native American.

The agents took Leonard in for questioning, during which they repeatedly asked him where a man named Peltier was hiding, a question that had no connection to what he was being arrested for, which was McClosky's broken jaw (even though it had been one of Leonard's relatives, and not Leonard, who had broken the man's jaw). It was only years later that Mary and Leonard found out that the FBI had staged the Beck-McClosky incident with the goal of arresting Leonard.

Mary at last reveals that the Beck-McClosky incident was fabricated by the government, likely for two reasons: one, the book suggests that U.S. officials had long been looking for an opportunity to arrest Leonard Crow Dog to prevent him from encouraging young people to resist U.S. capitalism; and two, officials believed that, as the spiritual leader of AIM, he had connections to Leonard Peltier, whom they were trying to arrest.

Mary interrupts her narrative to explain why the FBI had decided to frame Leonard. The reason is tied to a shoot-out between AIM activists and FBI agents that took place in 1975. The gunfight resulted in the death of one Native American and two FBI agents. The FBI relentlessly searched for the killer of the two agents.

In contrast to the FBI's negligence regarding the many homicides occurring in Pine Ridge, the FBI diligently searched for the killer of the two FBI agents. This double-standard in the U.S. justice system is one of the many inequities that AIM activists fought against. Yet, as Leonard's situation proves, resisting the government had dangerous consequences—because of his activism, the government saw Leonard as a threat and sought to imprison him.

The FBI eventually decided to charge a radical AIM leader named Leonard Peltier for the deaths of the two FBI agents. They threatened several "witnesses" into testifying, and so established their "case." Supposedly, someone gave the FBI a false tip that Peltier was staying with Leonard Crow Dog. So, the government agents staged the Beck-McClosky incident to have a reason to investigate the Crow Dog property and arrest Leonard Crow Dog.

Mary makes it clear that she believes the charges against Leonard Peltier were fabricated, suggesting that the government targeted him because he, too, was an AIM revolutionary that they possibly wanted to eliminate. Like Leonard Crow Dog, Leonard Peltier's resistance made him a government target. Mary illustrates that both of the arrests of Leonard Peltier and Leonard Crow Dog were unjust.

Mary describes Leonard Crow Dog's trials as a complete "farce." The Native Americans often won cases when tried outside of South Dakota and had an unbiased jury, which is why, Mary suspects, the government set the trial in South Dakota, a notoriously anti-Native American state. Sure enough, Leonard was found guilty and sentenced to 23 years.

The injustice regarding Leonard Crow Dog's case continued with the setting of the trial. Mary believes that the government deliberately placed Leonard's trial in South Dakota because a Lakota man would be unlikely to receive a fair trial there.

Mary was broken-hearted and at a complete loss when Leonard was imprisoned. Leonard had been so important for his community—from healing others to leading ceremonies—that Mary knew she could never fill the void he left behind.

Mary's love and respect for Leonard are very clear in this passage. She not only misses him as her husband, but also as the religious leader of AIM. Leonard's uniquely extensive knowledge of Lakota—and other indigenous cultures'—religion and cultural traditions made him an invaluable resource in a world where Lakota and indigenous cultures were threatened by forced assimilation, genocide, and white society. Mary also expresses how many people valued his role as a spiritual leader, which speaks to how many indigenous people relied on him when trying to reconnect to their indigenous heritage, regardless of whether they were Lakota.

From the moment that Leonard went to jail, the friends and activists of AIM rallied and raised money to set him free. Over the two-year struggle to free Leonard, Mary learned about the corruption of the justice system. Money, she says, is more important than guilt or innocence; if one has enough money to spend on good lawyers, one's chances at winning are infinitely better. With the help of fundraising and donations, Leonard was able to get a good team of lawyers and organizers. Among them were Bill Kunstler, Sandy Rosen, and Richard and Jean Erdoes.

Mary shows that freeing Leonard was a team effort. Many friends, family members, and donors joined together to raise the awareness and money necessary to give Leonard a good chance at winning his case. The implication is that, without the unified efforts of various people, Leonard may not have won.

Leonard was mistreated horribly in prison. Before describing the treatment he faced, Mary interjects to say that imprisonment is excruciatingly difficult for a man as connected with nature as Leonard is. When he arrived in prison, they confined Leonard to an isolation cell, where he became disoriented. In an effort to keep his sanity, Leonard sang, even making up his own peyote songs.

Mary has already noted how indigenous peoples' land is sacred to them. For Leonard, being separated from the land of his people was painful, as the land was religiously important to him. To maintain his sanity, Leonard continued to practice his religion, which illustrates that engaging with his Lakota and indigenous identity was grounding for him and good for his mental health.

The prison guards (Mary calls them "hacks") did their best to humiliate Leonard Crow Dog. They sexually harassed him, tried to cut his braids, and taunted him, telling him to become a bird "if [he was] such a big-shot medicine man."

The prison guards targeted Leonard because of his race—they mocked his religion and threatened to violate his beliefs by cutting off his hair. The implication is that they would not have used these forms of harassment with a white man. Their harassment stands as yet another example of white society's animosity toward indigenous cultures.

At one point, Leonard asked the warden for permission to obtain his pipe. He argued that since Jewish prisoners had a right to the Talmud, and Catholic priests could keep their Bibles, he—and all members of the Native American Religion—should be able to have access to his pipe. After a legal struggle (in which the Native American Religion was recognized), the warden granted Leonard the right to his pipe, although he refused to allow him access to tobacco. When it became clear that the warden would not relent on this point, Leonard gave him back his pipe, saying that, without the tobacco, his pipe was useless.

In this anecdote, Leonard's resistance and persistence results in a partial victory. By pressing his case, he (and his lawyers) succeeded in gaining recognition of the Native American Religion and winning the right to the pipe for all adherents of the Native American Religion. This victory illustrates that activism and resistance can lead to meaningful change. Even though it wasn't a true victory for Leonard—he was still denied access to his tobacco—his persistence nevertheless resulted in legal recognition of the Native American Religion. Leonard's activism also indicates how central his religion is to his identity.


Several psychiatrists visited Leonard, but almost all of them were useless. One gave up after Leonard explained that the only irritation he suffered from was the many broken promises of the U.S. government. Another one tried to put Leonard on Valium. There was, however, one psychiatrist who helped Leonard. After recognizing that Leonard didn't need psychiatric help, he wrote favorable reports for him and supported Leonard in his attempt to regain freedom.

The fact that Leonard found that the psychiatrists were unhelpful emphasizes that Leonard was mentally very healthy and did not need a psychiatrist—he was a sane man who was falsely imprisoned. The one psychiatrist that Leonard found useful was one who—recognizing Leonard's mental health—began to work with Leonard to ensure his release, thus joining in the fight for justice.

Leonard suffered only two mental breakdowns during his time in prison. The first happened when another man in prison told Leonard (whom he called "Chief") that he was going to get lobotomized, like the uncooperative man in the book *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Leonard panicked—he knew too well that, should the prison officials want to lobotomize him, he would have no power to stop them. Leonard called Mary and Richard and Jean Erdoes to inform them. Mary, Richard, and Jean spent the night trying to talk to lawyers to stop the lobotomy, only for them to discover that the man had been playing a cruel joke on Leonard.

This anecdote reveals the racism and power imbalance within U.S. prisons. In this instance, another man in prison gives him the racist epithet of "Chief" and scares him with the very possible threat of a lobotomy, a surgery once used as a treatment for mental disorders that actually often left patients in a vegetative state. Leonard is aware that the prison officials had him in their power—they could do what they wished with him while he was in prison. The injustice of this situation terrified Leonard, particularly as he knew that his resistance had already made him a government target. Luckily, thanks to the collective work of Mary, Richard, and Jean, Leonard discovered that the lobotomy rumor had been a lie.

Leonard's second breakdown took place after his home, the old Crow Dog home, burned to the ground under suspicious circumstances. The fire consumed all the cultural relics and sacred items in the house. Leonard was heartbroken and yearned to be reunited with his people and his land.

The book suggests that it was the loss of cultural artifacts that so distressed Leonard. His distress speaks to how important Lakota cultural traditions are to him—their loss is devastating to him.

Leonard's imprisonment took a toll on Mary as well. She missed him, and it was difficult to see him frequently—the officials in charge moved him a couple times, usually far from where Mary was living, which made visiting an expensive inconvenience. But as various civil and religious rights groups began advocating for Leonard and rallying for his freedom, Mary made many friends and acquaintances with other political leaders, artists, and attorneys.

The book suggests that the government officials deliberately moved Leonard so that Mary could not visit him. This callousness indicates that they did not respect the grief of an indigenous woman and wife. Mary does reveal that she didn't always feel alone, as she developed a support network of other activists who took an interest in Leonard's case. This diverse group of organizations and individuals helped Mary in fighting for Leonard's release, which illustrates how the fight for equal rights is an inclusive one—everyone, regardless of religion or race, can participate and make a difference.

Leonard credits his spiritual power with helping him endure his imprisonment. Even when in isolation, he felt the presence of spirits and communicated with the Great Spirit.

Again, the book stresses how much Leonard valued his religion. It was by practicing his religion that he maintained a stable mental state, which speaks to the importance of remaining connected to one's cultural identity.

Generally, the other inmates greatly respected and appreciated Leonard. He made friends with inmates of all races, and he especially bonded with those who were imprisoned for life. He felt a great deal of empathy for them—he understood that living life eternally isolated from loved ones and the world outside was a type of living death.

Leonard's friendships with the other inmates reveal his sense of inclusivity. He was kind and welcoming to people regardless of race, and he recognized the humanity of the life-long inmates, whom he befriended rather than ostracized. His empathy towards them shows his concern for the human rights of all people—he didn't see them as inferior beings because of their sentence.

In the spring of 1976, Leonard was released for three months pending appeal. Along with several friends, Mary picked up Leonard. Although the prison guards added petty requests to delay Leonard's release by a few hours, Mary was able to at last greet Leonard outside the prison. That evening they had a big feast with friends, but Leonard wasn't able to relax that night. As he told Mary, "mentally [he was] still in prison."

In contrast to the many supporters who played a role in getting Leonard out of prison, there were prison guards who used their energy to keep him in prison for as long as possible. The implication is that everyone has the choice to either join in the fight for justice or use their influence to perpetuate inequalities. In the case of the prison guards, they pettily delayed Leonard's release, presumably so that they could feel powerful over someone else. The actions only resulted in pain and stress for Leonard and his friends and family.

Leonard and Mary at last returned to Rosebud, only for them to receive a notice that Leonard's appeal had been denied, so he had to return to prison. To echo history, Leonard gave himself up in Deadwood at the same courthouse that his great-grandfather, the first Crow Dog, had surrendered himself.

Leonard followed his ancestor's footsteps when he turned himself in. This decision reflects the first Crow Dog's legacy and cultural impact on his descendants. Mary has already shown how the Crow Dog clan adheres to the precedent of resistance and traditionalism that the first Crow Dog set. In this instance, it was the first Crow Dog's compliance with U.S. law that Leonard reenacted. While this compliance appears to go against the first Crow Dog's typical resistance, it reveals how Crow Dog conceded when he felt he had no other option. Additionally, Leonard would still be fighting his case, so his decision to give himself up at the courthouse also indicates his resolution to keep fighting the legal battle to have official release from his crimes, which would force the U.S. government to officially recognize their fault in falsely accusing a Native American man. Leonard's decision to follow the first Crow Dog's footsteps also suggests that he (Leonard) took comfort in echoing the historic actions of his ancestors.


So, Mary and Leonard's team of lawyers appealed once again. They appealed to the case's judge, a Judge Robert Merhige, whom they despised for having sentenced Leonard to prison time in the farcical assault-and-battery charges. But the international outpouring of support for Leonard began to change his mind. Judge Merhige received thousands of letters from people all over the world—Richard Erdoes even met with Merhige's bishop and successfully persuaded him to write the judge a letter in support of Leonard's release. So, at last, the judge ordered Crow Dog's immediate release.

The book suggests that it was the collective international support for Leonard that persuaded the judge to change his mind. The implication is that it was thanks to countless people around the world that Leonard was released: from the people who fundraised and raised awareness to those who wrote pro-Leonard letters to the judge, it was because of the combined efforts of many organizations and individuals that Leonard was at last released, as was just. The legal victory also shows how activism and resistance sometimes does lead to meaningful change. Had Leonard and his supporters (including Mary) not fought back, it's likely that Leonard would not have been released.


Unfortunately, all the additional paperwork delayed Leonard's release for another three months. When Leonard at last returned home, a huge crowd of medicine men, tribal members, tribal leaders, and even missionary priests gathered to welcome him. They also honored Mary, whom they gave the name *Ohitika Win*, or Brave Woman.

Just as many people worked together to secure Leonard's release from prison, so did many people unite to welcome him home. Even missionary priests gathered to welcome Leonard, which shows how, regardless of one's religious beliefs, one can always join the fight for equal rights, even if the person whose rights are threatened is an adherent of a different religion. It is significant that these missionary priests advocated for Leonard, particularly given the Catholic Church's history of wrongs against indigenous people. Although Mary doesn't give many details about these priests, it's possible that these particular priests recognized the evils inflicted by their institution and therefore invested their energy in fighting to undo the inequalities that their Church had a direct hand in creating.

Mary pauses the narrative to add that a film was made about Leonard's imprisonment and legal battles. In it, Bill Kunstler makes a speech in which he argues that many white people and U.S. government officials persecute Native Americans and "hate them because their claims are totally justified—and [they] know it." Mary adds that while she recognizes that it was a good speech, she was too exhausted at the time for any more speeches. All she craved was her private life with Leonard and their children.

Bill Kunstler's speech argues that white people know that Native Americans are justified in their resistance against the U.S. government and white society—after all, white America is to blame for the impoverished conditions and the cultural genocide that indigenous Americans suffer from. The implication of Kunstler's speech is that white peoples' persecution of Native Americans is driven by feelings of guilt—white society knows that their actions are wrong, so they persecute the people who fight against them and force them to confront their history of oppressing indigenous people. While Mary recognizes the value of Kunstler's speech, she makes the reader see the humanity of the situation—while Leonard's legal battle was an inspiring and historic act, it was also exhausting and, in the end, she just wanted a simple, happy life for her, her husband, and their family.

CHAPTER 16: HO UWAY TINKTE—MY VOICE YOU SHALL HEAR

Adjusting to life after Leonard's imprisonment and legal battles came as a shock. Leonard's children, who had stayed with relatives, were older and emotionally distant from both Mary and Leonard. The Crow Dog property had become even more run-down in their absence. Mary, who had spent much of the last two years living with wealthier friends and supporters, had to get used to living without running water again.

The book reveals some of the interpersonal costs of Leonard's imprisonment and court case. For one, all the time apart caused the children became emotionally distant from their parents, which echoes how the U.S. government deliberately separated indigenous children from their parents to break up the process of passing cultural traditions from one generation to the next. Mary notes that she personally had to get used to living in impoverished conditions again, as she spent time living in wealthier and more resourced environments while traveling for Leonard's case. The stark difference between her living conditions highlights the economic inequalities in the U.S.: Mary depicts how many white people live with amenities like running water that some Native American communities live without.

Leonard's imprisonment and legal battles had changed both him and Mary, and, upon being reunited, they had to get accustomed to the new people they had each become. For example, Mary's time with New York feminists influenced the way she viewed male-female relationships. She was no longer willing to meekly follow what men demanded of her, and she was more critical of Lakota men and their "macho" sense of masculinity. She especially became more critical of domestic violence, which happened far too often to Lakota women.

Leonard's imprisonment also meant that he and Mary had spent a long time apart, during which they each had very different experiences. The emotional distance that resulted shows how the government's unjust imprisonment had long-lasting impacts on Leonard's life and the lives of his loved ones—forced separation of family members threatens relationships. The implication is that Leonard's imprisonment was another way in which the government harmed a Native American community. But Mary makes it clear that not all the changes were bad; for example, her time with feminists emboldened her to advocate for her rights as a woman. Her refusal to blindly accept the "macho" masculinity of Lakota men suggests that she was tired of the gender roles that many Lakota espoused. She notes that her time with feminists especially made her critical of domestic violence, which suggests that—given the high rates of domestic violence among indigenous women—it had become normalized for Mary. After her travels, however, Mary was no longer willing to accept this widespread violence against indigenous women as "normal."

At the same time, however, Mary viewed feminism as primarily a movement that supported "white, upper-middle-class" women. At times, her feminist New York friends patronized her for her beliefs, like her anti-abortion stance—she saw it as her duty to procreate to offset the genocide that white Americans had enacted against Native Americans.

But while Mary found some parts of her friends' feminism to be useful (such as how domestic violence against women should not be normalized), she generally saw the movement as something that only addressed the issues that white women faced. The memoir has illustrated how indigenous women experience a more complicated form of oppression than white women because they (indigenous women) experience racism in addition to sexism, and the effects of racism create systemic problems for indigenous women that white women are spared. For example, because of the historic genocide against indigenous people—which was perpetuated by forced sterilizations on the part of the U.S. government—Mary is against abortion, which the white feminist movement of the 1970s advocated for. Mary says that her white friends patronized her for her anti-abortion stance, which reveals these white feminists' narrow perspective of what feminism should encompass; instead of espousing issues that affect women of color (such as forced sterilizations and ethnic cleansing), they only addressed problems that white women faced and belittled the women of color who disagreed with them.

Leonard also struggled to adapt to life after imprisonment. His trials had made him famous, so he was the recipient of many letters and requests from people of all races who contacted him for spiritual aid, money, ceremonies, and more. He was especially receptive to the requests he received from inmates and did his best to help them.

Leonard's decision to fight against an unjust system made him an inspiration among other inmates; therefore, not only did Leonard's legal battle result in meaningful change (he got released), but it also set a precedent of resistance against the injustices of prison. Leonard's receptiveness to the requests for help that he received reveals his dedication to advocate for others' rights, especially inmates' rights. This passage depicts him as a man of empathy whose desire to help others was racially inclusive.

It was during this time that Mary noticed that Leonard was more understanding of Mary's difficulties, both as a woman and as she tried to fit into his lifestyle. He dropped many of his "old Sioux macho habits," and the two fought much less than before. He also made an effort to reassure Mary of the important role women play in Lakota religion.

The book illustrates that people can change their beliefs or political attitudes. In this instance, Leonard became more sympathetic regarding the forms of oppression that women—in particular, indigenous women—face, and he changed his behavior (by dropping his "macho" attitudes) to be a better ally for Mary and other women.

Mary interrupts the narrative to relay the story of First Woman, a story that Leonard told her about the importance of women in Lakota culture. Unlike in Christianity, where Adam came first, the Lakota believe that First Woman was the first human, and First Man came from First Woman's menstrual blood. First Woman was given the tools and knowledge for survival. As Leonard told Mary, "she was four-dimensional—all the Creation rolled into one human."

The book suggests that Leonard told Mary of the important roles that women play in Lakota culture because he wanted to show Mary that he valued and respected her womanhood. In this passage, Leonard showed how Lakota traditions value women for their integral role in producing and sustaining life for humans. According to the story, First Woman preceded First Man and comprised "all the Creation," which suggests that, in traditional Lakota society, women held an extremely important role and were respected for being life-givers.

A woman was also the person who gave the Lakota people the *ptehincala-huhu-chanupa*, or the "sacred pipe." This woman was White Buffalo Woman, and the pipe that she gave the Lakota people still exists. Leonard has even prayed with it a few special times.

White Buffalo Woman is another important female figure in Lakota lore. Leonard told this story to again reassure Mary that women play an important role in Lakota religion.

According to Lakota legend, women were also behind the discovery of peyote. Mary retells the story, in which a woman and her granddaughter heard the plant calling to them while they were lost. Upon eating the plant, the women were able to find their way home, whereupon they shared the knowledge of peyote's power.

Mary tells another Lakota tale to emphasize the important role of women in Lakota religious beliefs. But, throughout the memoir, Mary has called attention to how, in modern society, Lakota women are not afforded the same amount of respect as men in their communities. The implication is that the respect that the Lakota had once held for women dwindled after the arrival of colonizers, who forced assimilation and poverty upon the Lakota people.

While Leonard firmly believes that women are important to Native American religious ceremonies, he is staunchly opposed to various Native American feminists' groups decision to hold ceremonies that exclude men. For example, he was furious when Women of All the Red Nations (a Native American feminist society) hosted a woman-only Sun Dance. He believes that "our religion was all-inclusive;" the only people excluded from ceremonies are menstruating women, because their periods are too powerful and override the power of any ritual.

This passage reveals that, while Leonard did make strides in recognizing the specific problems that indigenous women face, he was not ready for them to create their own spaces that exclude men. His thinking was largely influenced by his desire for inclusivity and unity—he believes all people should be able to participate in Native American religious ceremonies (Mary doesn't specify a specific tribe's religion, so it appears that she is referring to Native American religions as a group of religious beliefs that share many commonalities, particularly their identity as indigenous religions threatened by white society). But while Leonard said that everyone can participate in these ceremonies, he actually made an exception that affects women: only people who menstruate risk being excluded. Leonard accepts this as tradition, but the book suggests that not all indigenous women wanted to accept that exclusivity. Lastly, the fact that a Native American feminist society formed shows how the mainstream, white-centered feminist movement did not include the issues that indigenous women face so, in response, Native American women formed their own feminist movement.

After his imprisonment, Leonard embarked on a vision quest (also called "Crying for a Dream"), a ritual he often does when starting a new phase of his life. Mary interjects to describe a vision quest. During a typical vision quest, one crawls into an underground pit and stays there—in complete darkness—and fasts for several days and nights. While in the pit, one loses one's senses: one cannot see, feel, taste, or hear anything. Mary adds that some vision seekers don't use a pit but will find other ways to isolate themselves.

Leonard's decision to embark on a vision quest reflects how traditional Lakota rituals help Leonard feel confident in his life choices and in who he is.

While living with Leonard and his family, Mary began to appreciate how "every part of daily life had a religious meaning." From the weather to animal calls, many day-to-day occurrences "had spiritual significance." The more time she spent with Leonard and his family, the more she began to develop "a split personality": she felt like both a traditional Lakota woman and still a roaming "half-breed girl."

Mary expresses how the process of embracing her Lakota identity could be confusing. Because there was "spiritual significance" to every moment of life, Mary had a lot to learn, which likely only accentuated how separated she felt from her Lakota heritage. But the more she learned, the more she appreciated Lakota traditions, which suggests that she felt more in tune with her identity the more she embraced Lakota culture. All the same, Mary acknowledges that she felt like she had "a split personality," which means that she was still torn between her different identities: her identity as an indigenous woman raised to assimilate to white society, and her identity as a Lakota woman yearning to live a more traditional lifestyle.

An important step in Mary's spiritual journey was participating in the Sun Dance, a ceremony in which participants pierce their flesh to help a loved one. For decades, white missionaries banned the Lakota people from participating in the Sun Dance, as they saw it as "barbarous" and an obstacle to "civilizing" the Lakota. Nonetheless, the Lakota continued to secretly perform the Sun Dance, which means that the details of the ceremony have been preserved.

The Sun Dance was yet another indigenous ceremony that white missionaries tried to eliminate in their effort to force Native Americans to assimilate to Christianity. It was thanks to the Lakota who refused to comply to the missionaries' bans that the Sun Dance was preserved, which speaks to the value of resistance against oppression: their resistance mitigated the effects of forced assimilation.

The Sun Dance is now legal, but it is also often commercialized in a way that cheapens the sacred ceremony. So, in 1971, Leonard and several other medicine men decided to hold the ceremony at Wounded Knee, away from the "circus atmosphere" of the commercialized Pine Ridge Sun Dance. But police interrupted the ceremony to arrest and fine the dancers—all because this Sun Dance drew people away from the Pine Ridge money-making one.

The commercialization of the Sun Dance at Pine Ridge shows another way that colonization wreaked havoc on indigenous communities. Additionally, the book suggests that there were some Lakota who joined in the commercialized Sun Dance, the implication being that some Lakota exploited the sanctity of the ceremony to make money for themselves. This led to a group of traditionalists (which included Leonard) hosting their own ceremony, one that better followed traditions and respected the sanctity of the ceremony, which suggests that maintaining a more traditional atmosphere to the Sun Dance is imperative for the ceremony to retain its spiritual weight and impact on its participants.

But Leonard and the dancers did not give up. They decided to move the ceremony to the Crow Dogs' private land, but there was one problem: they needed to somehow transport the sacred tree that stands in the middle of the Sun Dance circle. The tree is cut each year and then transported to the circle without letting it touch the ground. Unfortunately, the Crow Dogs' land was many miles away from Wounded Knee.

Leonard's hesitancy to move the ceremony because of the sacred tree reflects how much he values retaining Lakota traditions.

At that moment, a truck full of hippies pulled up and, when they heard the dancers' dilemma, they offered to transport the tree on their truck. Leonard disagreed—the tree is traditionally carried on foot—but another medicine man, Bill Eagle Feathers, took them up on the offer. He was sure that the Great Spirit and the Sacred Tree would understand. When they arrived at the Crow Dogs' land, they proceeded with the Dance.

Leonard's initial refusal to move the tree via the truck again shows his determination to adhere to Lakota traditions, which he clearly values dearly. On the other hand, Bill Eagle Feathers' decision to use the vehicle to move the tree represents how one can adapt to a new situation without giving up one's traditions or the meanings behind them. Additionally, the hippies' offer is an example of individuals extending aid to a community that could use assistance to achieve its goals.

Mary then describes the forms of self-inflicted pain that take place during the ceremony, which have only gotten more intense under the influence of Leonard and several other medicine men. Participants make flesh offerings for loved ones who are suffering. They then pierce themselves in the chest with a skewer that is attached to the top of the sacred pole with a rawhide thong. The dancers must tear themselves free from the pole, thus ripping out the piercing. Participants can also embed buffalo skulls in their backs, which they must then drag behind them for a distance.

The self-inflicted pain that is part of the Sun Dance represents a sacrifice for one's community, which indicates that a sense of unity is central to the ceremony. In this way, the book suggests that participating in the ceremony helps foster a sense of unity with one's community, which would both strengthen the community (as people feel more attached to it and the people within it) and one's own cultural identity. Perhaps achieving this reinforced sense of her Lakota identity is why participating in the Sun Dance was such an important step in Mary's journey to embracing and understanding her Lakota heritage.

Mary then describes her Sun Dance experiences. She says that she doesn't feel pain from the piercing; rather, as she stares at the sun and hears the eagle-bone whistles, she is in the power. In the sun she sees the faces of her loved ones who have died while the spirits communicate through the whistles. It was her first Sun Dance, she maintains, that made her "wholly Indian."

Mary makes it clear that it was by participating in the Sun Dance—a traditional Lakota religious ceremony—that she truly felt in tune and secure in her Lakota identity. The implication is that the way for Native Americans to feel at peace with their identity is by embracing their indigenous culture and spirituality.

EPILOGUE

Mary jumps to the present day. She and Leonard are still together and have had three children together. Although she once took the kids and left Leonard—the stress of taking care of so many children and guests became too much for her—she and Leonard were able to make up and are living together in Rosebud. Mary is also close to her mother, as she is now able to better understand her mother's struggles in raising children.

Once again, Mary reveals that the gendered expectations that fell on her shoulders—raising multiple children, cooking and cleaning for guests—became too much for her. She left Leonard in a moment of frustration, which suggests that she again did not feel that he was supporting or appreciating her enough. Her burn-out illustrates how the gender roles (in this case, domestic duties and child-rearing) foisted upon Native American women can be exhausting. Mary's motherhood has made her more sympathetic of her mother, as she understands the pressure and stress that uniquely shapes Native American women's lives.

Mary also discusses the lives of several AIM leaders, from Dennis Banks, who became a professor before starting a limousine service, to Russel Means, who is still a political leader. Many AIM members died, some from homicide and others from natural causes. The struggle for civil rights is taxing, she says, and had a physical effect on many of its fighters.

Although Mary doesn't express regret—hers or the activists'—for the activism that led to the deaths or burn-out of many activists, she recognizes that fighting for change is mentally and physically draining. Nonetheless, her lack of regret implies that although the battle for equal rights is difficult, it is worthwhile.

As for Leonard, he is still a highly revered person in the Native American community and beyond. He has helped the Navajos and Hopis in legal battle regarding their forced relocation from Big Mountain. He visits Native American inmates throughout the United States to perform religious ceremonies. As Mary puts it, "wherever Native Americans struggle for their rights, Leonard is there."

Leonard continues to be an advocate of intertribal unity. He joins other tribes, such as the Navajos and Hopis, in their legal fights against the U.S. government when it encroaches on the tribes' rights. He provides spiritual guidance to Native American inmates of various tribes, which again demonstrates his strong desire to uplift all Native Americans, regardless of their tribe or their struggles. Leonard's incessant activism—and the change he accomplishes—have made him a highly respected man, which demonstrates the importance of taking action and resisting oppression. Leonard's activism led to meaningful change, generated awareness of the problems Native Americans face, and set a precedent for his admirers to follow.

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