Poverty on Sicangu Lakota Oyate, the Rosebud Reservation

Holland Professional Club
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Jim Piers

The Rosebud Reservation

12,000 residents

900,000 acres

40% poverty

33000 enrolled members

83% unemployed

23% no health ins

$40,585 median income

47.5 M 54 F life expectancy

82% high school 16.8% Bachelor education or higher

Sicangu Lakota Cultural Foundations

Lakota Virtues:

Wisdom (seeking truth, honoring elders)

Generosity (giving freely of time, energy and possessions to help community proper)

Fortitude (strength and perseverance)

Respect (treating all people, living things, Grand Mother Earth with high honor)

Courage (acting with bravery and discipline to protect family, community, principles)

Compassion (showing kindness, empathy and care for others, especially needy/suffering)

Humility (walking gently, recognize self as no higher or lower than any other living part of creation)

Prayer and Ceremony (speak and give thanks to the Great Spirit daily through prayer and ceremony)

Tiospaye (kinship remains a primary cultural value guiding governance and community development)

Sicangu Lakota Cultural Foundations

Lakota language is their identity (Lakota language carries their history, their worldview, their active presence and their future)

Land and Buffalo (The relationships between the Lakota, the buffalo and the land are both spiritual and practical. Buffalo and the land provide food, clothing, tools, and ceremonial items, and, even today, the buffalo and land remain a symbol of cultural identity and an ongoing pragmatic relationship)

Understanding these cultural foundations is essential for understanding both the historical disruptions associated with poverty and the modern efforts to overcome it. Culture is not separate from economic development; it is the framework through which the Sicangu Lakota approach community well-being.

It was hoped that a well- structured reservations system would:

expedite U.S. citizens land acquisition and Western Expansion;

centralize control of indigenous people and subdue tribal resistance;

reduce conflicts and wars among tribes and between tribes and U.S. Citizens;

encourage cultural assimilation of Indigenous Americans into Euro-American culture, beliefs, economic system and practices.

Building the reservation system involved several key U.S. government Acts and Treaties to shape the indigenous tribal environment and behavior

Acts and Treaties

- Removal Act of 1830
- Indian Trade and Intercourse Act of 1834 (Map 1)
- The Indian Appropriations Act of 1851 (Map 2)
- Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851 (Map 3)
- Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 (Map 4)
- Indian Appropriations Act of 1871
- Act of February 28, 1877 (Moneypenny Agreement)
- Sioux Act of 1889 (Rosebud),

Removal Act of 1830

The policy that initiated the North American reservation system was the **Removal Act of 1830**. The Act authorized President Andrew Jackson to negotiate for the removal and resettlement of some Eastern tribes. Though, it was hoped to be voluntary, ultimately, this act resulted in forcible removals and resettlements. This process was associated with what became known as the Trail of Tears during which 100,000 tribesmen were forced to march westward under U.S. military coercion in the 1830s and up to 25 percent of the Indians perished on the march, setting a very bad tone to a tribe and government conflict.

Indian Trade and Intercourse Act of 1834

In the late 1700's and early 1800's, the United States government feared that predatory private fur traders and new settlers were creating resentment among Indigenous tribes that could lead to war. This act established legal boundaries for "Indian Country" separated white American fur traders and settlers from Indigenous tribes. Unlike any of the previous acts, the 1834 Act empowered the federal government to use force to stop intertribal wars thus protecting the interests of fur trade companies. Again, ripe for potential conflicts. (Map1)



States and Territories of the United States of America **1834**

Maine 1820
Missouri 1821

Arnaksas 1836
Michigan 1837
florida 1845
Texas 1845
Iowa 1846
Wisconson 1848
Califorioa 1850

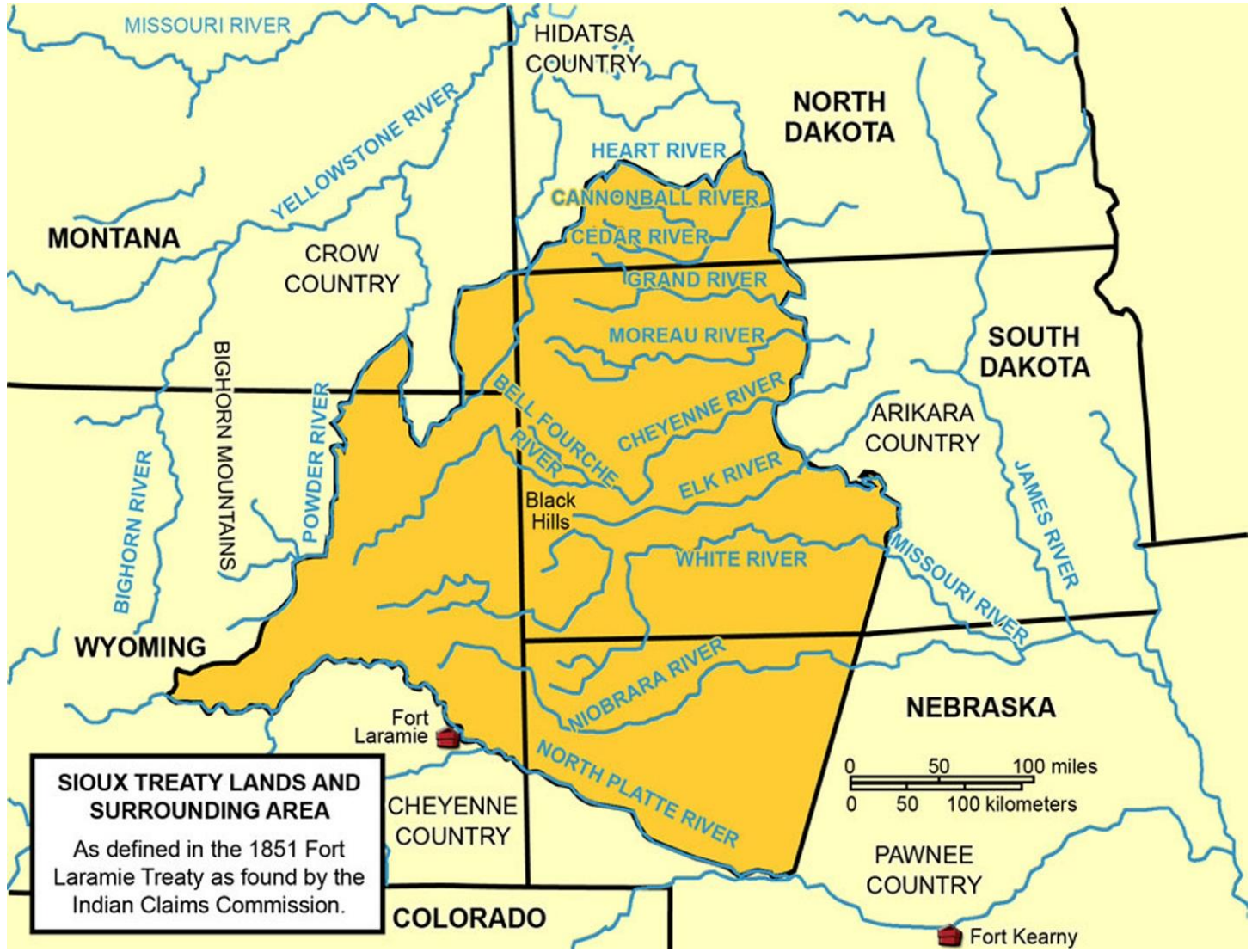
Kansas Nebraska Act of 1854

Minnesota 1858
Oregon 1859
Kansas 1861
W Virginia 1863
Nevada 1864
Nebrasks 1867
Colorado 1876
N Dakota 1889
S Dakota 1889
Montana 1889

A next governmental act in the process of reservation system building was the **1851 Indian Appropriations Act (February 1851)** which **allocated funds** to move Western tribes onto reservations where they would be protected from settlers, confined to specific land, stopped from their nomadic hunting lifestyles, forced to take up farming, and making them dependent on federal rations.

Later that year came the **Fort Laramie Treaty of September1851.** This act defined the tribal boundaries of Sioux Tribe land on the northern Great Plains. (See Map 1.) The Sioux tribes ***that signed*** the treaty agreed to allow travelers, railroad surveyors, and construction workers to enter tribal lands safely; allowed the government to establish forts and roads; defined Tribal Boundaries to reduce intertribal warfare and manage resources; selected Head Chiefs to deal with federal agents, enforced accountability and reparations for any wrongdoing of their people; and ceased fighting with other tribes.

The U. S. government agreed to protect Sioux tribes from U.S. citizens; and deliver annuities if the terms of the treaty were upheld.

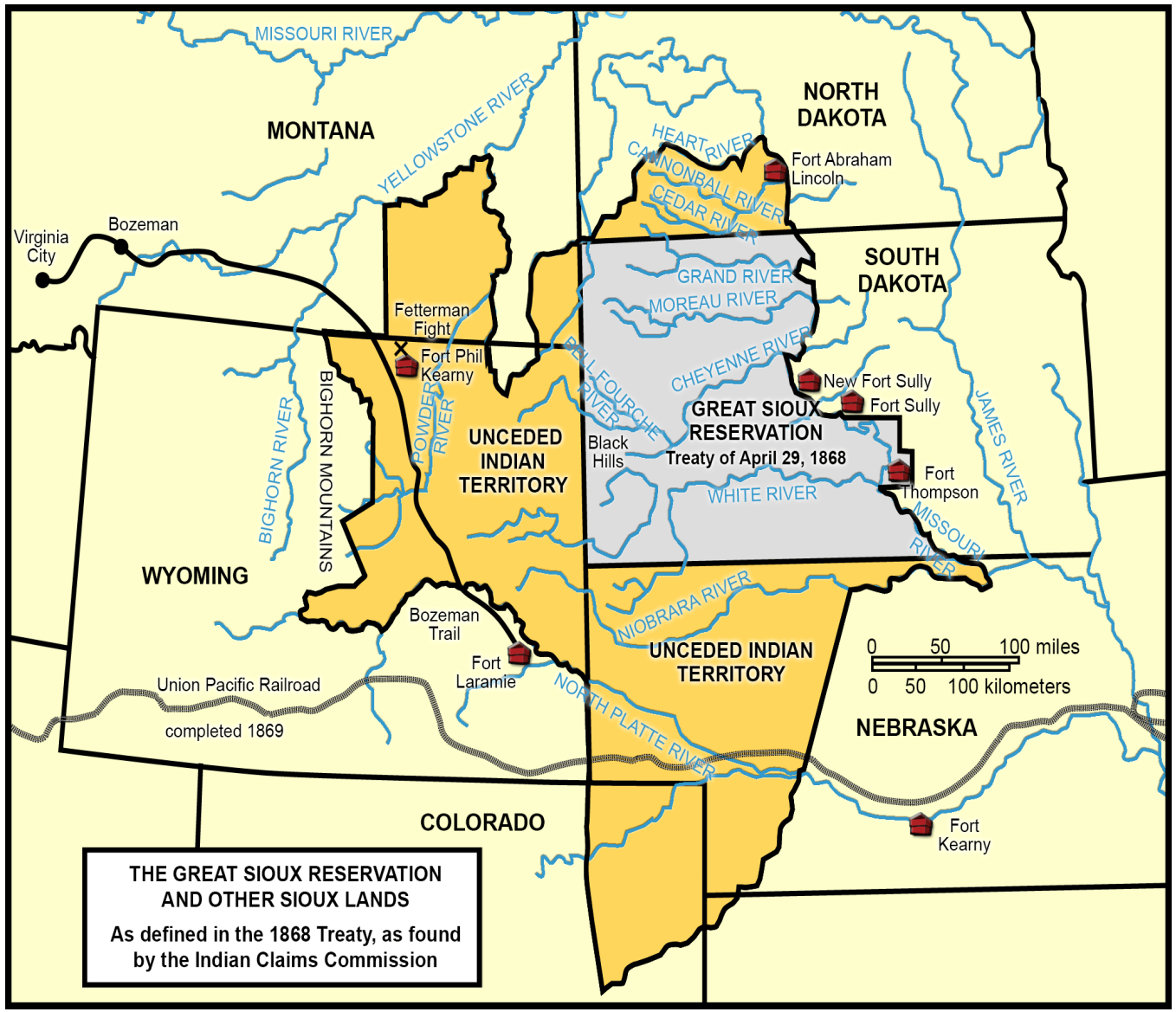

MISSOURI RIVER
HIDATSA COUNTRY
NORTH DAKOTA
YELLOWSTONE RIVER
HEART RIVER
CANNONBALL RIVER
CEDAR RIVER
MONTANA
CROW COUNTRY
GRAND RIVER
MOREAU RIVER
SOUTH DAKOTA
BIGHORN MOUNTAINS
POWDER RIVER
BELL FOURCHE RIVER
CHEYENNE RIVER
ARIKARA COUNTRY
BIGHORN RIVER
ELK RIVER
JAMES RIVER
Black Hills
WHITE RIVER
MISSOURI RIVER
WYOMING
NIOBRARA RIVER
NEBRASKA
Fort Laramie
NORTH PLATTE RIVER
0 50 100 miles
0 50 100 kilometers
SIOUX TREATY LANDS AND SURROUNDING AREA
As defined in the 1851 Fort Laramie Treaty as found by the Indian Claims Commission.
CHEYENNE COUNTRY
PAWNEE COUNTRY
COLORADO
Fort Kearny

In the **Treaty of Fort Laramie 1868,** the United States set aside exclusive use of the Black Hills by the Great Sioux Reservation. The tribe gave up thousands of acres of land where they could still hunt and fish.

Neither side fully complied with the Treaty of Fort Laramie 1868 terms, with the discovery of gold in the Black Hills, the United States sought to buy back the Black Hills. The Lakota rejected the offer, resulting in the Black Hills War (1876-1877), which included Custer's Last Stand at the Battle of Little Bighorn (June 25-26, 1876).

The **Indian Appropriations Act of 1871 ended treaty making.** This funding bill, declared that Indigenous people were no longer considered members of 'sovereign nations' and that the U.S. government could no longer establish treaties when Congress ceased to recognize the tribes as entities capable of making treaties.

Finally, in the **Act of February 28, 1877**, also known as the **Manypenny Agreement**, the U. S. government officially reclaimed the Black Hills area approximately 900,000 acres of Black Hills land from the Sioux Nation effectively nullifying previous treaties that had guaranteed Sioux ownership of the Black Hills. (Notice on the map below, that a large area of land in western South Dakota of the land is missing from Lakota reservations. In 1923, the Lakota Tribes sued the US. In 1980, **United States v. Sioux Nation of Indians, 448 U.S. 371 (1980),** the Supreme Court determined the land was unjustly taken and that the tribe is owed "just compensation" plus interest. The Lakota Nation has refused to accept payment and is still seeking the return of the land. As of 2026, the estimated amount of the payment would be well over 2 billion US dollars… but far less than its present-day actual value.


MISSOURI RIVER
MONTANA
YELLOWSTONE RIVER
NORTH DAKOTA
HEART RIVER
CANNONBALL RIVER
CEDAR RIVER
Fort Abraham Lincoln
Virginia City
Bozeman
SOUTH DAKOTA
GRAND RIVER
MOREAU RIVER
Fetterman Fight
Fort Phil Kearny
CHEYENNE RIVER
BELLFOURCHE RIVER
New Fort Sully
Fort Sully
GREAT SIOUX RESERVATION
Treaty of April 29, 1868
Black Hills
JAMES RIVER
BIGHORN RIVER
BIGHORN MOUNTAINS
POWDER RIVER
UNCEDED INDIAN TERRITORY
WHITE RIVER
Fort Thompson
MISSOURI RIVER
WYOMING
NIOBRARA RIVER
Bozeman Trail
Fort Laramie
UNCEDED INDIAN TERRITORY
0 50 100 miles
0 50 100 kilometers
Union Pacific Railroad
completed 1869
NORTH PLATTE RIVER
NEBRASKA
COLORADO
Fort Kearny
THE GREAT SIOUX RESERVATION AND OTHER SIOUX LANDS
As defined in the 1868 Treaty, as found by the Indian Claims Commission

In the **Sioux Act of 1889 (Rosebud),** the Rosebud Reservation was established. After the partition of the Great Sioux Reservation and, like other Lakota reservations, it has since been reduced in size.

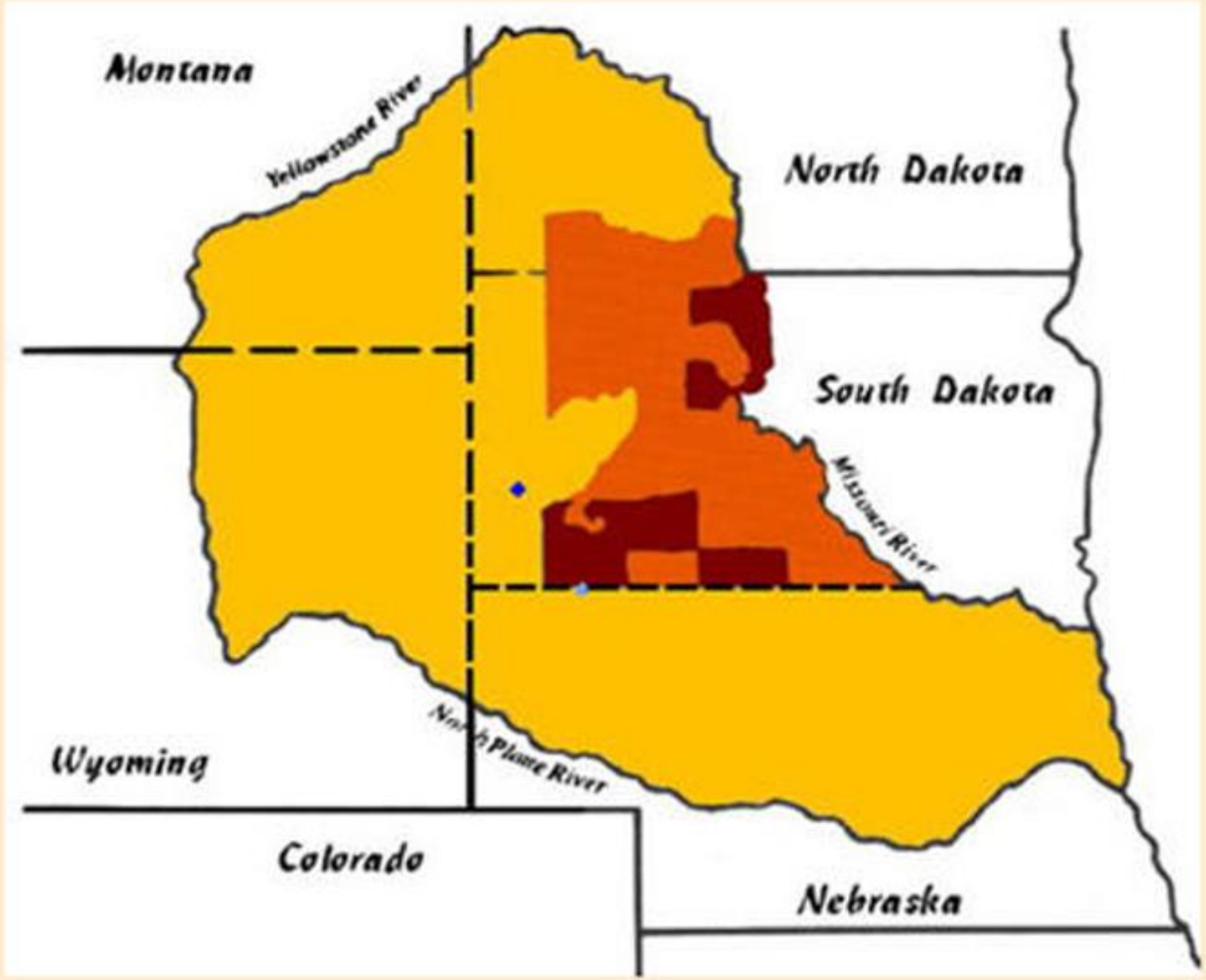
Note the space between the western South Dakota border and the beginning of the Sioux reservations

Map Legend:

Lakota Nation: Reserved by the 1868 Treaty for the unreserved use of the Lakota people

1876: Lakota reservation after the US stole the Black Hills

Lakota reservations after 100 years of court actions



Assimilation

Boarding Schools

The Carlisle Indian Industrial School and

Saint Francis Mission School

Land Allotment

Dawes Act of 1887

Urban Relocation

Indian Relocation Act of 1956

Federal Policies and Systematic Disinvestment

Historical Trauma affects Mental Health, Substance Use and Family Instability

Assimilation: A process where a minority group gradually adopts the ways values and language of a dominant society, often losing parts of their original cultural identity.

Boarding School: The Carlisle Indian Industrial School and Saint Francis Mission School . In 1879, the Carlisle Indian Industrial School opened. The motto **"Kill the Indian, save the man"** shaped federal policy (Estes, 2021). Carlisle became the model for more than 350 government and church-run institutions. Sicangu children were part of Carlisle's earliest cohorts.

Students were forcefully separated from their families, their hair was cut, they were denied traditional dress, language, and ceremony and punished for demonstration or practice of anything behavior that might Lakota. Families were often barred from visiting. Harsh discipline, systemic violence, hunger, and widespread disease were common. Federal policy mandated English-only instruction, Christian conversion, and vocational labor training intended to prepare Native children for subservient roles in a settler economy. Many children died.

Assimilation: General Allotment Act (Dawes Act of 1887)

The **General Allotment Act** was a federal law designed to dismantle communal landholding among indigenous tribes and replace it with individually owned allotments.

The Act marked a major shift in U.S. tribal policy away from treaties and reservations toward forced assimilation into Euro-American agricultural society.

The Act authorized the government to **subdivide reservation lands** into parcels distributed to individual tribe members. Allotments typically included **160 acres for heads of households**, **80 acres for unmarried adults**, and smaller parcels for children.

The Act also broke up large tribal landholding to enable ownership by non-tribal settlers. These allotments were held in trust for 25 years, during which they could not be sold. Those who accepted allotments were granted **U.S. citizenship**.

It was believed that communal landholding prevented Indigenous People from adopting “civilized” habits such as private property ownership, farming, and participation in the capitalist economy. Individual land ownership would encourage self-reliance and weaken tribal cohesion, an obstacle to assimilation. Tribe members needed to abandon traditional behaviors and adopt Euro-American agricultural practices to survive.

Implementation of the Act varied by tribe and often involved coercion, corruption, and inconsistent federal oversight. Tribal social structures weakened, and many tribal members struggled to adapt to farming, especially since allotted lands were often unsuitable for agriculture. Many Sioux were defrauded of their property, and reservation life deteriorated, marked by poverty, disease, and cultural disruption. it further marginalized the perception of reservation dwellers and set the stage for later reforms, including the **Indian Reorganization Act of 1934**, which ended allotments.

While Indigenous assimilation didn’t occur, by 1932 white settlers had acquired 92 million acres of reservation land due to allotment and subsequent sales to non-indigenous settlers.

. The ***Indian Reorganization Act of 1934*** imposed Western governance structures on tribes, often conflicting with traditional tribal consensus leadership systems. It also ended allotments, banned further government sale of tribal land but restored only a small fraction of the millions of acres of the tribal land lost during the allotment period. The “western governance” structure also assured heavy federal oversight and intrusion.

Indian Relocation Act of 1956

As the U.S. government was decreasing subsidies to tribes, the ***Indian Relocation Act of 1956*** encouraged tribe members to leave reservations for urban areas.

The Act promised that if: young adult tribal members would move to designated urban areas, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) would provide adult vocational training for those tribal members 18 to 35. The BIA would pay for moving expenses, temporary housing and job specific stipends, and provide job placements in designated cities.

The act did encourage tribal members to move to cities for jobs and increased the populations of “Urban Indians.” From the1950’s through the 60’s several tribal members nationally migrated to the cities and integrated with the urban population. But participants also reported culture shock, a loss of cultural connections, poverty, underemployment, homelessness, and termination of financial assistance.

Contemporary Socioeconomic Conditions on the Rosebud Reservation Associated with Poverty

Poverty and Income

The Rosebud Reservation faces some of the highest poverty rates in the United States. According to South Dakota News Watch (2024), nearly 40% of residents live below the federal poverty line, and per capita income is approximately $12,562. Poverty on Rosebud is not simply a matter of low income; it is a multidimensional issue involving housing insecurity, food access, health disparities, and limited educational opportunities. Many families rely on federal assistance programs, tribal services, and informal support networks to meet basic needs.

Employment and workforce participation

Unemployment on the Rosebud Reservation has historically reached over 80% in some communities. Although recent tribal initiatives have created new jobs, workforce participation remains low. According to the U.S. Economic Development Administration (2021), only about 45% of adults on Rosebud participate in the workforce.

Several factors contribute to low employment rates: **geographic isolation limits access to jobs and transportation, limited childcare makes it difficult for parents to work, health challenges reduce workforce participation, educational barriers** limit access to higher-paying jobs, and land fragmentation restricts business development.

Land Ownership Fragmentation

As noted earlier, land fragmentation remains one of the most significant barriers to development. **Because land parcels are often owned by dozens or even hundreds of heirs, securing land for housing or business development requires complex legal processes**. The U.S. Economic Development Administration (2021) identifies land fractionation as a major obstacle to economic growth on Rosebud.

Unemployment and Workforce Participation

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Contemporary Tribal Initiatives to Address Poverty and Revitalization

Sicangu Co



NAKE NULA WAUNŋ

I am prepared for anything, anywhere, at anytime



We are Siċaŋġu

We see a world
where we are healthy and whole
in body, mind, and spirit
connected to the earth and stars
and all our relations
We are living that world into being

THE 28,000 ACRE WOLAKȞOTA BUFFALO RANGE, HOME TO OVER A THOUSAND BUFFALO, IS THE LARGEST NATIVE-OWNED BISON HERD IN THE WORLD. WOLAKȞOTA SUPPORTS THE REGENERATION OF THE LAND, PEOPLE, AND ECONOMY OF THE SIĊAŋĠU LAKȞOTA OYATE.





Food access is a significant challenge on the Rosebud Reservation. The reservation has only three grocery stores, and many residents must travel long distances to purchase food. High transportation costs and limited availability of fresh produce contribute to food insecurity.

The Sicangu Food Sovereignty Initiative, launched in 2020, aims to address food insecurity by promoting local food production, farmers' markets, community gardens, and traditional food systems (Sicangu Co, 2022). This initiative integrates cultural values of land stewardship, community responsibility, and sustainability.

Traditional Food Systems

The initiative promotes traditional Lakota foods, including buffalo, chokecherries, timpsila (prairie turnips), and wild game. These foods carry cultural significance and support healthier diets. Integrating traditional foods into community programs strengthens cultural identity and promotes health.

Regenerative Agriculture

Regenerative agriculture practices restore soil health, increase biodiversity, and support sustainable food production. These practices align with Lakota values of land stewardship and ecological responsibility. They also create economic opportunities in agriculture, food processing, and land management.



- **Youth Empowerment and Cultural Education**

- Youth programs have become one of the most powerful sources of resilience on the Rosebud Reservation. These programs integrate cultural education, language revitalization, mentorship, and leadership development.

- **Lakota Language Immersion**

- Language immersion programs strengthen identity, improve academic outcomes, and connect youth with cultural teachings. Students learn Lakota language, history, ceremony, and values, creating a strong foundation for future leadership.





Health and Healthcare Access

Healthcare access on the Rosebud Reservation is limited due to underfunded federal programs, geographic isolation, and infrastructure challenges. The Indian Health Service (IHS) hospital on Rosebud faces chronic staffing shortages, outdated facilities, and limited resources. According to the Government Accountability Office (2022), IHS is funded at less than half the level required to meet basic healthcare needs.

Many residents must travel long distances for specialized medical services, creating additional barriers to care. Tribal programs have expanded mental health services, cultural healing programs, and community health initiatives, but significant gaps remain.



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Siċaŋġu Learning & Development aims to develop talent and strengthen the workforce by seeing and encountering each individual's intellectual, physical, psychological, social, and spiritual potential. We collaborate with tribal, public, and private organizations to offer personalized training and education on multiple topics.



Waȧkaŋyeja Ki Ṫokeyaȟčȋ is an immersive Lakota education that prioritizes the holistic well-being of Lakota students and the regeneration of the Lakota language and way of life.

By centering Laȟkota language, culture, and Indigenous identity, Waȧkaŋyeja Ki Ṫokeyaȟčȋ is reclaiming and rebuilding the foundation of the Siċaŋġu education system.