

Keeping a culture alive

Minorities emphasize their uniqueness in a world surrounded by whites

By Cindy Kimbrough

Clydia Nahwooksy tells of a Sioux holy man who looked to the future and saw a broken hoop.

The holy man knew it was foreshadowing the future—the people would be scattered across the nation, never to be the way they once were.

And they were scattered. More than half the population relocated to the cities in the 1950s to find employment.

Because it was difficult to keep the old ways alive in the city, moving away from a community-based culture, their children and grandchildren did not grow up with the traditions. Many Native Americans lost the pride they had in themselves.

But now American Indians are looking to “heal the hoop,” and renew the pride in themselves that was lost for a time.

One of the best ways to do this is through promoting their culture and learning their past, Nahwooksy said.

And Nahwooksy is not alone in her beliefs.

Several members of minority cultures in Lincoln said that promoting culture and folklore was important for minorities, although at times it may be difficult.

Representatives of American Indian, Hispanic and African American organizations in Lincoln said this cultural education is necessary for the people to better understand themselves and rebuild a sense of pride that was injured by the majority's culture.

Nahwooksy, a folklorist, said this is the major focus of the Lincoln Indian Center, where she works, “to help people to claim their intellect, their skills, their knowledge, their history and their importance in the creator's plan.”

And the center is aiming to help heal the hoop and promote American Indian history through a program entitled “Healing the Hoop.”

The “Healing the Hoop” symposium of fine arts, scheduled for October, is a very significant event for promoting American Indian culture because it will bring together a large number of Native Americans from a large range of tribes for mutual encouragement and support, she said.

She said “Healing the Hoop,” along with numerous other arts and crafts shows, theater presentations and Indian history seminars were meant to bring together Native Americans from the area and show them their culture in an educational way.

To bring more cultural education to Lincoln about the American Indian, the center is adding on a new Plains Indians culture center, as well, she said.

In addition to the shows and presentations, powwows, an American Indian tradition for many tribes, still take place, but more as social events, she said.

Nahwooksy said the powwow, which features dancing, arts and crafts, visiting and story telling, was now more of a tribal homecoming—a time to return to one's home and see old friends and family.

But, she said she was saddened that some Americans have turned the powwow into a commercial enterprise to bring money into the city.

The powwow in Denver was a prime example of what is happening across the nation, she said. It started with a small group that brought in Native Americans from the rural areas to support those in the cities. But now, it is a gigantic event, bringing in a great deal of money in tourist trade.

But Nahwooksy said, most other powwows still contain some traditional elements that are important to their culture, such as honoring, naming or other religious ceremonies.

“The powwow plays a significant part of the culture of many tribes,” she said.



Dave Badders/DN