American Indian Skateboarding and Suicide Prevention

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American Indian Skateboarding and Suicide Prevention

Abstract
The purpose of this project is to contribute to a growing movement that is empowering American Indian youth across the nation’s many reservations; skateboarding. Emerging in communities as more than a hobby, sport, or past-time, skateboarding has revitalized the youth living on Native American reservations like Pine Ridge in South Dakota, which is home to the poorest counties in the United States, as well as some of the worst living conditions in the Western Hemisphere. The trend has impacted and lowered the suicide rates among the youth of these areas, which in Pine Ridge has been as high as 150% of the national average.

This project consists of designs for skateboards that remember a heritage of hardship and loss, and in embracing an ongoing, honest dialogue, the history of lies, betrayal, and violence that caused it. The Northern Plains design concerns Lakota history, and is a donation for Wounded Knee Skateboards, one of the more visible forces working with the youth and communities of Pine Ridge. The other boards offer ideas of how the progress at Pine Ridge can be expanded and shared with youth on reservations across the country, with ideas for the Southeast, Southwest, and Northwest Coast culture areas.

Faculty mentor: Sean Daley

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AMERICAN INDIAN SKATEBOARDING AND SUICIDE PREVENTION

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SOUTHEAST

The Indian Removal Act of 1830, which decreed the mass relocation infamously dubbed “the Trail of Tears”, displaced entire nations to areas west of the Mississippi River and was directly responsible for the death and suffering of thousands.

Roman numerals “MDCCCXXX” signify the year of the act and represent the styling of peace medals (as seen in the center of the board) that had been given to the leadership of many of these same peoples before forced relocation by the Jackson administration. The figures forming the “trail” are based on Cherokee textile work.
NORTHERN PLAINS

Primarily directed at Lakota, the eagle feather, serving as a symbol of strength and proud remembrance, is formed by the grievous past between Lakota nations and the U.S. Government.

Broken treaties and particularly infamous “battles” make up the vanes of the feather. The mantra along the side is meant to acknowledge the ongoing structural violence endured by those living on reservations today, a hundred years after the most famous violations against American Indians.
SOUTHWEST

Nuclear testing and uranium mining having plagued the Navajo, and many other peoples of the American Southwest, for more than 65 years. Cancer rates have skyrocketed amidst multi-generational developmental problems in children. The Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA) of 1990 has paid out more than $1 billion dollars in damage claims, with many claims still being denied. This has become a black spot on the history of relations between the U.S. and southwestern communities, and represents yet another example of ongoing abuse.
NORTHWEST COAST

Inspired primarily by Haida totems and line forms, the board makes what is commonly known as a “shame pole” that references the ongoing and enduring environmental damage of the region due to oil spills and industrial callousness.

The owl, bear, frog, and beaver, all proud members of the natural community, are surrounded by their brethren that have been smothered and lost to the blackness of mindless industry.