A Book Review of *Rez Life* by David Treuer

David Treuer, author of the non-fiction book *Rez Life*, grew up in Minnesota as a member of the Ojibwe Indian tribe. The Ojibwe tribe is the largest tribe in North America, with reservations across Michigan, Montana, Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. Treuer recognizes tribes that spread across the United States. By telling his story he is able to grasp the reader’s attention, for it not only tells the history of Native American tribes, but also the potential future they have. David Treuer states eloquently: “To understand American Indians is to understand America. This is the story of the paradoxically least and most American place in the twenty-first century.”

Treuer’s book delves into the heart of Native American reservation history and present life. He tells the stories that have never been told; the stories that focus on the trials and tribulations that reservation life entails. The interactions that were had with the government are explained in great detail, and Treuer does an excellent job of hitting on other aspects of reservation/government tension. He looks at natural conservation and the detrimental occurrences that were happening to fish populations on reservations to show the hostility between parties.

Through this self-report of the reservation life in America, the reader doesn’t merely get a historical view of the Native American and government interactions, for the book also looks at the discrimination judgment put on Native Americans in present day society. As Treuer states
from the very beginning, there are many stereotypes made about Indian reservations and life. One major stereotype made in America is that Native Americans dislike reservations; Treuer debunks many of these stereotypes while emphasizing the important relationships between Native Americans and Anglo-Americans.

Treuer’s book is captivating and easy to dive into. With any interest in Native American history and current affairs, one will be contained by Treuer’s stories. As Treuer states: “… from the first Thanksgiving to the Boston Tea Party up through Crazy Horse, the Battle of Little Bighorn, and Custer’s Last Stand,” Native Americans are as American as it gets, and yet people in current day society still claim their displacement in this country. Native Americans have somehow affected every American individual and Treuer makes sure this is displayed through his book; Treuer states these facts simply, with the telling of his home reservation. With a personal connection to reservation life, Truer is able to capture the deeper roots of “rez” life.

David Treuer, through the creation of this memoir, has created a collection of incidences, stories, and situations that can show the inspiring life of living on a reservation. His memoir has great strength with the reminiscing on his life; no accounts are from a textbook or an encyclopedia. Treuer has gathered his information from personal experiences, and this fact alone creates a book that is greatly moving and inspiring in immeasurable ways.

David Treuer, through Rez Life, has reached a topic that many merely tiptoe around. The current discrimination and issues surrounding Native American relationships with Anglo-Americans are prominent, and Treuer does not shy away from this fact. The truth that comes out in this book brings great information to the study of American history and culture, no matter the views of the reader.