Centered in Minnesota on the Leech Lake Reservation, David Treuer’s work of non-fiction, “Rez Life: An Indian’s Journey through Reservation Life,” describes his experiences as a member of the Ojibwe tribe. Having been educated in mainstream America, Treuer brings a fresh look on reservation life, weaving Indian reservation history throughout the plotline. Treuer clearly states in his introduction that he feels he owes his life to his family and set outs to write a book to honor them and to reflect the debt he owes. He believes that to understand American Indians is to understand America as a whole: “This is the story of the paradoxically least and most American place in the twenty-first century. Welcome to the Rez” (Treuer 20).

The book traces the exploitation of Native Americans marking their historical relationship between the United States government and the Native American population. Treuer’s book mainly falls under the interdisciplinary area of history. Although his research of the nation’s Indian reservation history is thorough, it seems to be randomly intertwined into the personal stories of a variety of tribes. He assumes that the reader misunderstands contemporary issues of sovereignty, treaty rights and natural-resource conservation of Native Americans. His personal story about his relationship with his grandfather and relatives on the reservation, which I found to be the most interesting part of the book, seems to get lost with the numerous dates of treaties, court cases, and other Indian stories that he describes. The book, however, as a whole presents an original look on reservation life coming from a “white” Native American.
Elements of this book overlapped with course material from "The American West," a previous class I took at Connecticut College. Important Native Americans, treaties, as well as court cases were discussed by Treuer, which had stuck with me from that class. The dramatic experiences of boarding schools that the U.S. government used to break the bonds between Native American parents and children was presented with individual stories from children’s experiences, which made them more authentic. Treuer presents the famous case *Worcester v. Georgia* as stemming from a $147 tax bill on a trailer at Squaw Lake, as a few people who fought and won eventually gave reservations the rights to own casinos. He shows how casinos, tribal government, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs have transformed the landscape of Native American life. At some points in the book, the socio-economic status of the Indians seems inconsistent. Treuer talks about the harsh conditions, while also saying many made it big from casinos on the reservations or from government funding, giving a disjointed feeling of what life is actually like through reservation in the nation.

Treuer presents a cynical view of the mistreatment of Native Americans that I agree is valid. His view on the “Americanization” of Native Americans, aimed at creating a uniform public body of values and lifestyles, is that of a a dark time for Indians. Treuer's book is not an uplifting story about Native Americans, but rather the truth about their struggle with colonization through research and report. Treuer’s personal stories in *Rez Life* document the harsh views that Native Americans feel towards America as “schools and blood quantum and all that stuff turned us into the worst kinds of Americans” (Treuer 299).

Ultimately by writing this book, David Treuer shows the important of language and culture through his dedication to teaching Ojibwe language. He feels that if the language dies, culture will go with it, as well as something personal - a degree of understanding and a sense of
He achieves his goal by showing how endangered Native American cultures are not only important to Indians. If we lose cultures, we lose American plurality and “the lovely discomfort that true difference brings.”

I would recommend this book to students who would like a more personal view into the lives of Native Americans. Coming out of "The American West" class, “Rez Life” shows a deeper understanding of the major events in Native American history. The history in the book is rich and plentiful, and helps the reader understand the struggle that has forced Native Americans onto reservations as they continue to fight to keep their culture alive.