

Some thoughts for the celebration of American Indian Heritage month

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I been told by many non-native people that they have the same problems as American Indians.

White people can be poor and be on welfare. White people can be uneducated. White people come from a large family and may not have the opportunities that other white people have. Some white people are under-privileged. Some experience hunger and homelessness. They, as white people, have had to fight for where they have accomplished and for what they have made of themselves today, the same as Native Americans.

They are correct to some degree. American Indians come from poor backgrounds. Some have lived on reservations, had poor school districts, experienced hunger, and they often have low incomes. Yes, many have been or are still on welfare. The difference comes when Native Americans become successful -- when they become educated and reach what some consider upper middle class, and become doctors, lawyers, CEOs, own their own companies, etc.

When these individuals walk into a store or restaurant, or place of business, they don't wear a tag that says "I am successful." This is where "white privilege" comes into play. Native Americans cannot change the color of their skin—they are still American Indians no matter their level of success or economic status. Yet, society at large still sees them as "different," and they will be watched (they might steal something after all). They will still be seen as the stereotypes that have followed them throughout history.

I, myself, have been told, I am "TOO Indian!" How can I be "too Indian?" But that remark did make me question why was I born an American Indian and not "White." Why did the Creator make me this way? I think that remark was one that will always remain with me, and in some ways, will always hurt.

Some white people feel a sense of guilt for things that happened in the past. Some don't feel that they have to feel guilty about anything because they didn't do anything, it's all in the past and "Indians" need to "get over it."

Some don't see the systemic racism and discriminatory attitudes all around us, because it doesn't affect them! Some feel they have to "support" people of color by electing them into political offices. Some white people will say, "I have friends who are not white like me." Some have ancestors who were native, but that was their ancestors, not them! Some think they have to march in protest about racism, to the point of over-compensating.

What people should be concerned with is knowing what happened in the past, learn from it, and be concerned with how they treat people in the present and future. And remember, people who are a different ethnicity are not "projects."

Some might ask, exactly what has been done to American Indians? Some statistics might help.

## **U.S. Statistics on Native Americans**

1. 2,430,000,000 acres of land stolen from Native Americans.
2. Estimates of the genocide of Native Americans range from 95,000,000 to 114,000,000 slaughtered. Each life is priceless. (Don't all lives matter?)
3. \$48,355,153,052,264 of resources (gold, silver, platinum, iron, copper, palladium, coal, lumber, oil, natural gasses, and 24 other resources) have been stolen from Native Americans (estimate based on pillage of U.S. territories from 1492 to present and **adjusted for inflation** averaging \$92.8 billion dollars per year.)
4. The average cost of an acre of land in the United States is \$3,160. Native Americans have been given (forced to live) and paid for 125 million acres of land. 2,215,000,000 acres of land still have not been paid for. The cost per acre multiplied by the land stolen equals \$6,999,400,000,000 (\$6.9 trillion.)
5. The sites of millions of Native American resting grounds have been excavated, and still to this day are being unearthed.
6. The EPA set the price for human life at \$9.1 million dollars. The mean number from the Native American genocide is 104,500,000 people. According to the EPA, the total cost of life lost from the American genocide of Native Americans is \$950,950,000,000,000 (\$950 trillion dollars)
7. The U.S. collected \$526 billion dollars in property taxes from stolen land in 2017. The total amount of taxes collected in the United States for properties and adjusted for inflation is \$63,002,197,877,244.60 (\$63 trillion dollars)

### **Total Damages: \$1,069,306,750,929,509.60 USD (1 quadrillion dollars)**

*This amount of money doesn't exist, but it's to illustrate what reparations would cost the government the Native American people.*

### **This doesn't include:**

1. The lives that would have been (it is projected there won't be 10 million Native Americans living in total until 2060.)
2. The damages for damaging burial sites, artifacts, and cultural sites.
3. The mental health issues that stem from children being taken from their families and put into conversion/boarding schools, or family members being murdered or beaten just for being Native American.
4. The oppression of Native American people and the effects it had on its people including stigma, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, unemployment, suicide, disease, rape, violence and lose of cultural traditions, teachings, and language.

### **Native Americans Today:**

1. Native Americans own 272,000 businesses in the U.S.

2. Native Americans employ 96,000 people in Oklahoma, 41,000 in Minnesota, and 27,000 people in Washington.
3. There about 5.2 million people who have above 12.5% indigenous blood.
4. 26.8% live in poverty (compared to the national average of 4.6%)
5. A Native American is 1.7 times more likely to commit suicide than any other race.
6. A Native American youth is 2.5 times more likely to commit suicide than other races.
7. Native Americans are 3.2 times more likely to develop diabetes because of the extreme poverty rate they live in.
8. Home lives are stressful because of poverty, and from the abuse, violence, and judgment from other races.
9. Native American children were still taken from their homes to force them to speak English and forget their heritage as soon as the 1970s.
10. A Native American is 2 times more likely to be raped than any other race.
11. Native American Women are 3.5 times more likely to be human trafficked in the United States than any other race. Possible reasons are because of bad home lives and luring girls off of the reservation. Another possible reason is that police enforcement is small on reservations, and state and federal officers take Native American calls less seriously than others.
12. The Bureau of Indian Affairs enforces a little over 1% of the entire nation with only 0.17% of the entire nation's police force. Citizens off the reservation will see 1 law enforcement officer for every 291 people. On the reservation, that number is 1 in 768. These officers are usually responsible for maintaining order at Native American casinos, which skyrockets the density of officers to people.
13. Only 17% of Native Americans attend post-secondary institutes because of the lack of education funding. Often young Native American's can't afford to attend school or may drop out because of sexual assault, targeting, and and the need to take care of other family members. The national average is 60%.

The lives of Native Americans have been devastated and destroyed by American settlers, the American government, and its people, which had led to an almost complete downfall of an entire race.

Why is it critical and essential to have a cultural foundation and awareness in order for people to have a sense of identity, connectedness and belonging? Because we need to break the gravitational pull of grief, loss, depression and other traumas.

Our American Indian ancestral blood and knowledge – better known as our cultural and generational resilience – have sustained us amid numerous dilemmas and traumas for thousands of years. Resilience is the process of adapting in the face of adversity, trauma and tragedy.

Generational resilience is the implicit, passive knowledge of our ancestors that provides additional intelligence and stores it in our DNA to help us overcome trauma and tragedy. Generational resilience is the determination, creativity, courage, persistence and perseverance necessary to our tribal survival. These attributes must be recognized to be among the most important resources for surviving trauma and various dilemmas.

Ancestral knowledge uses nature, traditions and past survival awareness to learn and to teach the ancient skills that allow us to perpetuate our traditions through the intertwining generational resilience and self-reliance. Generational resilience and knowledge is our genetic inheritance, our consciousness of the past.

Indigenous people have lived for millennia in accordance with the principles encapsulated in the life the Creator gave us. Not only have we survived radical changes in environmental conditions, diet, family dynamics and cultural degradation, but we thrive and perpetuate, and have some of the richest and longest-living cultures on Turtle Island (North America). Indigenous wisdom and ancestral knowledge culminate in generational resilience, enabling us to share our culture and traditions with generations to come.

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