

Deculturizing Native Americans

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Abstract

This paper describes the history of Native Americans in the world of education and how this relates to now.

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Throughout my whole life and education, I have never seen the other side of history; it has forever been teachings of the “good side” and references to the only side that you should be proud of. Our focus is not really brought upon different cultural backgrounds due to the authors who wrote out our history; their mentality is that the white man is always right. This is a very conflicting idea because it makes a lot of us wonder and question about our cultural history. Once the other side of the story about Christopher Columbus was brought to my attention, to me, history changed drastically. Many Native American students seem to have close to no knowledge of their cultural backgrounds because of the way our education system is laid out. Instead, they see their culture exposed through a mascot and brought to everyone as a closed society who lost all and gained more with our white customs, which we are told about by our white educational system.

To the Europeans, Native Americans were viewed as the problem inhibiting progress and the creation of their ideal democracy. In the Europeans’ eyes, they were seen as savages with a lack of knowledge. They did their best to strip them of their cultural ways and to convert them to the European culture and religion. By doing this, they created many laws that minimized their participation in the political world and limited the way they exercised their “rights”. For example, the Naturalization Act was an act that denied citizenship to Native Americans because they simply were not “white”. They also used education as their main resource to teach young Natives the social norms of being an American. These norms included being Christian, having manners, farming and much more. This also contributed to only having white teachers in the classroom, whose main priority was to teach the young how to speak proper English and to teach them the “American” way of doing things. Public Schools became a big part of their world since

many of them were not able to afford boarding schools stated Tozer. They saw schooling as a way to get rid of the “Indianness” that they had in them. They also built a lot of Christian churches to promote Christianity; this means that eventually the Native Americans gave into the white religion. Slowly, the Europeans were accomplishing what they wanted.

The biggest concern to the Europeans was making the Native Americans “civil” and inferior to them. Spring stated that they were held in reservations in order for them to learn skills such as agriculture and basic English. The boarding schools would snatch away their children at an early age, so they would not learn any customs from their families. Even if they were not attending boarding schools, all schools were still required to teach English. They were supposed to learn American history. That way, they were more informed about the federal government which would help to build a sense of community towards white people. Many people also supported early education as a way for children to learn about being patriotic. Tozer’s and Spring’s articles both describe how the past has a lot to do with how education is now. They both described the ways in which Native Americans were oppressed and the ways in which they did not have the right to express themselves. Students with diverse cultural background feel similarly today.

In other words, both of the readings are trying to explain how education is a big part of our lives. To me, these articles showed how the Europeans tried to get rid of a culture completely. Therefore, our education system is problematic. Europeans used education to decolorize a race, and some of these issues are still the same today. For example, once you hit the fifth grade, you are not able to take bilingual classes anymore just as they made it required to teach English to these Native children. After learning more about how our education system works, I noticed that the people in control of it have been predominantly white. Jefferson brought up the idea of having grammar school and high school. This problem does not only affect Native Americans,

but it also affects every other minority group. To add more to this point, many of us can not relate to our history for the reason that we are only being taught the American way. This brings about a conflict from knowing more about our background history.

Culture is a big part of our world that is basically a way we tend to use to describe ourselves, and for them to just take that away from us and to just teach us a whole different culture is very wrong. To me, this highlights a crucial injustice that the Europeans have caused. They have taken part in so many genocides and have brought down so many minorities just, so they could be superior. This has a lot to do with education because we are teaching children that these people are inferior to people of European descent. This can later lead to children being misled by not being exposed to unwritten history. When children are misled about their culture, they will grow up not knowing about their own culture, which can be embarrassing. Growing up with a different culture is like having someone else's identity.

In Tozer's chapter, he stated that "Standardized testing mandates have viated efforts of teachers of American children to incorporate American languages cultural practices and intellectual traditions". He is trying to state that minorities are more likely to drop out for the reason that most of us come from bilingual families, and we have a whole different cultural practice then the ones from here. This goes back to trying to changing the Native American culture to the European culture; it is something hard to adapt to. I personally think that it's the right of the person to decide if they want to change their culture or not.

All of these ideas connect to the Europeans creating boarding schools and schools that were only allowed to speak English. This makes it harder for students, especially Native Americans, to connect their schooling with their culture. I think there should be more ways in which students can connect their cultural lives with their education. That way, they are able to relate more to it

and better comprehend it. For example, if the child is more fluent in Spanish than in English, they should be able to take the test in Spanish. They may get a better score than the kid that took it in English. This all relates back to not repeating history and to not taking away someone's cultural identity to create this "ideal" world.

References

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