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A System of Continued Erasure and Mistreatment

America is seen as a melting pot where we have many cultures to appreciate and share yet the country has failed to acknowledge past and ongoing injustices that affect Native Americans. History books have taught students about assimilation and how it can be seen as integrating someone to a culture or society. For example, how White Americans wanted Native Americans to assimilate into American society to “aid” them in becoming “Americanized.” However, education centers have not taught about Native resistance against complying to an administration that took away their land and culture. The forced assimilation taken place in America is evinced in the imprisoning of Hopi leaders that created rippling effects in today’s age such as manufacturing Native Americans mascots and the case of overturning of ICWA reminding America to not allow a repetition of the past.

In the 19th century, the government created laws that would try to bring Indigenous people into American society, and it came with resistance from Native Americans. Many laws were passed to assimilate Native Americans, as it would advance their goal of conforming Natives to a society White Americans deemed was more “civilianized.” The government would press for Native American children to attend White schools that would bring them into American Society (*Hopi Leaders*). This led Native Americans divided as they either had to adopt White American ways or stand against conformity. The Hopi tribe felt the pressure of assimilating to the society because if they did not send their children to boarding school, consequently, the federal government would send “soldiers to round up children and send them to Keams Canyon” in 1895 (*Hopi Leaders*). Nevertheless, Hopi parents rejected sending their children away causing the U.S.

government to involve the military in arresting 19 Hopi Leaders. The leaders would be transferred to Alcatraz Prison known for its horrible conditions such as having an unhygienic environment and tasking prisoners in tedious labor. While being imprisoned some of them passed away and after a year the surviving ones were freed from imprisonment holding a false promise that their children would not have to be forced to attend school (Blakemore). Unfortunately, Native children were still forced to go to White schools and the imprisonment of 19 Hopi Leaders has faded from memory in many minds.

The nineteen Hopi leaders' arrest was a reminder of how White Americans viewed people of color, seeing them as "inferior" and threatening the society. As a result of that mindset, White Americans found it necessary to Americanize Natives, opening the doors to injustices that remains till this day such as commercializing people of color into mascots or costumes. At my old middle school, our name was the "warriors", and the mascot was a Native American Chief which would be printed on gym shirts and school jackets. At the time, many of us didn't realize why it was a problem for a teacher to dress us as a Native American but when we educated ourselves on the issue of Native American Mascots, we found out how racist mascots adversely affects Native Americans and how it is not "honoring" them. My friends and I recognized that what our school did was an injustice towards Native Americans, and we started informing other students about how using Indigenous people as mascots was racist and offensive. Since the belief of racial difference still exists where people of color are seen as lesser than a white man it created the abuse towards Native Americans that allows racist mascots to continue and thrive because many people excuse the mascots as they view it as a sign of appreciation instead of appropriation. If Native American mascots are kept it brings more ignorance and disrespects someone's culture, as a result, we would be continuing the mistakes of the past instead of learning from them.

The U.S. Government would not only make Native children attend American school it would strip them from their culture and family until in 1978 the Indian Child Welfare Act was passed. The ICWA protects Native Children from being separated from their tribe because the state courts must work effectively on keeping “Native families together” (Lopez). The act can be overturned by a current supreme court case called *Brackeen v. Haaland* as they are deciding if the ICWA is unconstitutional. Acknowledging the history of forcibly conforming Native Americans to western ways will actively aid people in admitting the events and change our attitudes for the future since we would be using everyone’s voices to give marginalized groups a platform. We can overcome our history by remembering historical events like the 19 Hopi leaders, writing the true story of Native American people in history books instead of forgetting it, and using our history to assist us in better decision making in politics that could help keep acts that protect Native American children. We will not be able to overcome our history if we fail to admit our past wrongdoings.

American history has shown many times the forceful cultural assimilation of Native Americans. One historical case being the incarceration of Hopi people who wanted to keep their children instead of sending them away to lose their cultural and familial ties. The event produced an ongoing battle of Native Americans not wanting to be kept as mascots but insisting to be seen as people who exist. In addition, Native children separated from their families resulted in the passage of the ICWA where it is currently being debated on even though it supports holding Native families together. By continuing to preserve important events and supporting people it allows a hope of a future where people aren’t forgotten or disregarded instead, they are memorialized and valued. Just one person sharing valuable historical events can create change for all.

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