

Stigmatized, Stereotyped

FALL HOLIDAYS HAVE A DIFFERENT MEANING FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

In 1990 President George H.W. Bush approved a joint resolution designating November 1990 “National American Indian Heritage Month.” The irony is that this falls around the same time as Columbus Day, marking the “discovery of America” and beginning of colonization. Genocide, degradation, disease, theft, rape, displacement, starvation, all followed colonization for Indigenous peoples, and the exploitation of Indigenous cultures continues to this day all over the world.

It follows Halloween, which always seems to resurrect the uncomfortable cultural appropriation. I can never go a year without seeing someone dressed up “like an Indian.” As if some fake feathers in your hair and paint on your face makes a person even close to defining the rich culture, history, legacy and struggle we have as Native people. It is a blatant mockery of our ethnicity, for those that may be unaware.

And for the grand finale ... Thanksgiving. The day to stuff your face with turkey, and wake up early to catch those Black Friday bargains. Truth be told, we live in a commercialized society where all peoples culture, ethnicities, gender and identities are up for blatant objectification. Unfortunately, only during this stigmatized time of year, do Indigenous people arise in the psyche of American culture.

Is it OK for a stereotypical image of Native people to be perpetuated whether it be mascots, advertisements, movies, costumes, etc.? And if I want to protect the dignity of my community by preventing a stereotypical image of my demographic from being perpetuated throughout our town, am I somehow “just overreacting?” Due to our culture that has become so well adjusted to injustice, it is very difficult for us as Native people to defend our identities with dignity. Especially during a time of year that has so many stigmas attached to it.

Is it possible to have an honest dialogue about the genocidal history that this country was founded upon? Our ancestors were among the first victims of this terrorist attack we know as colonization. This hateful language and ideology has degraded our precious African-American brothers and sisters throughout history, and that same ideology is terrorizing our fellow Indigenous brothers and sisters south of this “American” border. It runs rampant, waging the longest and least talked about war in U.S. history on innocent civilians of the Middle East. Yet, when we want to have an honest dialogue about colonist ideologies and how white privilege has been systematically put into place throughout this world, country and history, it is somehow offensive, and the New Jim Crow isn’t?

The Native community, just as so many other stigmatized communities, has suffered many losses over the last century at the hands of this oppressor, and we are still here today. We are the survivors of the attempt of the U.S. government to exterminate an entire culture. *I cannot speak for every indigenous person*, but some may share this sentiment when I say, our ancestors did not suffer to be later remembered as characters and as a culture to be made a mockery of. This is supposed to be a time when we honor and remember our Indigenous peoples with dignity and respect, especially those that have passed on. I am Klamath, Wasco, Chinook, Molalla, Paiute, Warm Springs, Yakama, Pit River, Modoc, all tribes of Oregon, Washington and California, and I have been a resident of Eugene for 18 years.

Being a Native woman, I am 2.5 times more likely to experience a sexual assault than women in other ethnic groups and was born into an ethnic group with the highest poverty rate in the nation at 39 percent. I live in a world where I can be harmed, just for being who I am. Though I am very proud to be a strong survivor and part of the tradition, this is why it is often referred to as “the struggle,” because we are still subject to harm to this day. Our families have called this land home for thousands of years and would like to continue to live here for thousands more with peace, dignity, honor and respect. Happy Native Heritage month! Kwathla, thank you. ■

Kayla Godowa-Tufti is a member of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs of Oregon.

been in a warm house being pampered, not lying under a tree in the cold and the rain with your eyes crusted shut, covered in feces and urine and so dehydrated you felt more like a piece of leather than a cat.

I hoped there was something that could be done for you and took you to the vet. It was too late to save you. Your eyes were so infected they had turned to liquid and were draining. The infection so bad, it had probably spread to your brain. I would have done anything to save you but even heroics couldn’t help you.

We gave you the only gift we could; we ended your suffering Nov. 8 and made sure during your last moments on earth you knew you were loved. Somebody cared about you. Somebody cried for you. Rest in peace sweet kitty.

What happened to this cat is totally preventable. Spay/neuter, vaccinate (we have great resources like the city of Eugene Spay/Neuter Clinic and Willamette Animal Guild). Do not abandon. Very few domestic cats can make it on their own. Think long and hard before you get a pet; they are a lifetime commitment and are expensive to care for. Don’t turn away when an animal needs help. If you can’t help, tell someone who can. We can make a difference.

*Lyllian Breitenstein
Springfield*

THE 12 R’S

Has anyone else besides me noticed the following alphabetical anomaly of the letter “R” as it relates to the Republicans and their huge election loss? Here goes: Republicans, Romney, Ryan, Rove, Rush, racists, rednecks, rich, robber barons, religious conservatives, right-wing Tea Bagger and, of course, idiotic comments about rape. I thought about taking the “w” out of wrong, but we all know that “W” was wrong, so we should leave that one alone.

*Jay Schwartz
Eugene*

WALL STREET THIEVES

Regarding your Slant comment Nov. 1, a suggestion to Barack Obama to “send Timothy Geithner and his buddies back to Wall Street”: You hit the nail on the head. If you would like confirmation — in spades — read *Bailout: An Inside Account of How Washington Abandoned Main Street While Rescuing Wall Street* by Neil Barofsky, the former special inspector general in charge of oversight of TARP. Barofsky exposes the whole bloody mess. And shows clearly, “if you are who you hire,” then Washington, D.C., is full of complete morons. Geithner and his gang of Wall Street thieves have raped and plundered this entire nation — legally.

There are more criminals, per capita, in the securities industry than anywhere in the entire world. These people have no consciences, no morals, no ethics, etc. And our government still protects them. Barofsky’s comments about AIG are especially interesting.

*Frank Skipton
Springfield*

DRUG TESTING COSTS

This letter responds to Kim Myers, and her call to administer drug tests to all welfare and financial aid recipients (Letters, 11/01).

First, are you aware that drug testing welfare recipients in Florida actually *increased* the budget for Florida’s welfare program? It costs more money to ensure that welfare recipients remain “drug free” than just giving welfare to whoever qualifies.

Second, your argument “After all, it is government money!” implies that we should drug-test everyone who receives public aid or wages. Do you also suggest drug-testing residents of the East Coast who are receiving aid from FEMA? Or all elected officials? Or all instructors at state universities?

Third, federal financial aid comes with a 2.0 GPA requirement. You are arguing this is not enough because some can “party” and be adequate students simultaneously. How extensive is this problem? What percentage of financial aid recipients at LCC, state and private universities — both undergraduate and graduate — use drugs and party? Will this law be enforced with equal aggression at Harvard as it is at LCC? This proposal isn’t about being fiscally conservative. It’s about excluding a certain demographic from attending college. A cheaper, easier, more effective and fair change would be to raise GPA requirements.

*Tim Haley
Eugene*

WHAT WORKS

Losing is no fun. I can attest to that. Winning is better. And we who supported President Obama won “big time,” to quote former vice-president Dick Cheney. It will be a while before the entire significance of this win rolls out. But some of the obvious ones are: Threatening women with anti-health-care laws doesn’t work, attempting to return to the bad old days of voter suppression à la Jim Crow doesn’t work, and hiding under a gauze of empty platitudes doesn’t work either. What does work is sticking by the middle class, supporting our children in all of their educational needs, helping those who need it obtain health insurance and getting us the hell out of foreign wars and not starting any new ones.

Winning is better. What the president, Senate and Congress do with this mandate is what will really make the improvements in our lives that we all want and, definitely, voted for.

*Gerry Merritt
Eugene*

DIS-ORDERLY CONDUCT

When I went to college if you were caught with a girl in your dorm room you were expelled, even if it was your own mother. This “hippie” is not use to “having conservative values” but I wager if the UO bounced a few citation-ed party rowdies the problem would magically disappear; behind the closed doors where it belongs.

*Vince Lovin
Eugene*

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