

DEAR AMERICA

BY KITCKI A. CARROLL

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Last night, I watched the NFL AFC Championship game and had to listen and watch 70,000 Kansas City Chiefs fans chanting their “tomahawk chop”. Over the weekend, I became aware of the Nathan Phillips viral video, an Umo^{ho} citizen, and the controversy surrounding the events that unfolded in your Capitol that afternoon. Finally, last week, President Trump once again invoked the name Pocahontas in an inflammatory and derogatory manner as part of his ongoing feud with Senator Elizabeth Warren; only this time, he chose to make reference to Wounded Knee, a massacre where your soldiers brutally massacred hundreds of Lakota and were subsequently awarded Medals of Honor. These are examples only from this past week, but they are a reflection of the experience and persistent challenges we face as indigenous peoples in the land of the free.

These are examples of the persistent and deep seeded ignorance and disrespect towards indigenous peoples that you have allowed to exist. During the weekend when you pause to pay homage to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. for advancing race relations, equality, and justice, these despicable and shameful events serve as a stark reminder of the challenges that indigenous peoples continue to face within our own lands; lands that you now claim as your own. It serves as a reminder of how woefully short you have been in ensuring that the indigenous peoples of these lands are afforded the dignity, respect, and honor that we rightfully deserve.

Despite these realities and challenges, we have persevered as a people despite the greatest of odds and we must continue to rise above it all as modern day warriors. We choose to stand strong with courage, conviction, and righteousness in order to ultimately achieve the justice we deserve. Conversely, the examples from this past week stand in representation of all that is wrong today. It would be easy to scapegoat the individuals from the events that transpired over the last week, parents, school systems, but the truth of the matter is that these examples are a consequence of your unwillingness to be truthful about your own existence. These incidents stand in representation of your own failures and I refuse to allow you to brush them off as isolated incidents or to externalize the blame.

For far too long, you have conveniently allowed yourself to justify and rationalize your abhorrent actions perpetrated against indigenous peoples as a necessary means to an end. You have used laws of your own making and created religious doctrine, such as the Doctrine of Discovery which viewed indigenous peoples as sub-human non-Christian heathens, to validate your immoral, inhumane, and unethical behaviors to clear your conscious of any accountability. In our own lands, you denied us the same rights that you were seeking for yourself. You have intentionally suppressed the truth and advanced an incomplete story of your deeds and asked

your citizens to follow blindly without question, without challenge, as a reflection of their patriotic duty.

You are quick to point out the misdeeds and shortcomings of others, but excuse away your own and fail to hold yourself accountable. You debate immigration policy, but conveniently fail to recognize that your entire foundation is based on an illegal presence in lands that did not belong to you and which you were not invited. You have allowed for the normalization, social acceptance, and tolerance of the stereotyping, caricaturizing, and romanticizing of indigenous people. You have become the wealthiest and most powerful nation the world has ever known, as a consequence of the lands and natural resources that you took against our will, but you fail to live up to the promises you made that resulted from you asserting your will. You saw us only as an impediment to your aspirations that were rooted in greed, not as equals, as intended by the Creator. You have perpetuated a belief that we are of only historical relevance and value. You have allowed us to be invisible in our own lands.

America...enough...no more. Your consistent failure to be honest with your past and failure to fulfill trust and treaty promises and obligations is an indelible stain on your character, integrity, and honor and challenges your claim of global exceptionalism. The time is long overdue for you to be honest with the atrocities of your origin in order for you to best emulate the principles you profess to stand for. Citizens of America, the time has come for you to hold America accountable to demand nothing less than truth, justice, and righteousness towards indigenous peoples as a direct beneficiary of her actions.

America, you must be better, you are better. Unfortunately, there exists much divisiveness today. If nothing else, while the media debates the merits of these stories from the past week, there is presently an opportunity to ensure that our indigenous concerns are not marginalized. Will you use this moment as an opportunity to correct the systemic problems that resulted in these events, or will you impugn yourself of responsibility and allow them to exist only as momentary relevance, consequence, and concern? America, it is time to live by the principles, morals, and values you profess to embrace and exemplify; it starts with your relationship with this land's indigenous peoples. As you pause today to honor Dr. King, recall his teachings, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."