

# AMERICA'S FIRST MORAL VIOLATION: A NATIVE AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE IN RESPONSE TO TODAY'S AMERICAN DIVISION

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For a nation that presents itself to the world as the shining example of an exceptional democracy based upon the foundation of freedom and equality, America has an unacceptable and shameful level of inequality, racism, bigotry and intolerance. Despite our progress toward achieving “a more perfect union”, perfection still eludes us. Perhaps the idea was always intended to be a work in progress. Nonetheless, it should be our priority to move closer towards this idea as expeditiously as possible with steadfast determination.

However, when reflecting on this past year, the unfortunate reality is that we live in a divided and polarized country which is evidenced by events such as Charlottesville and the resurgence of hate groups such as the KKK, the debate over the NFL anthem protests, the culture war to define America, the disrespect displayed by President Trump towards Native Americans, and the complicit response by so many elected officials, during the honoring of Navajo Code Talkers, and many other examples too numerous to list. Together, they serve as examples of the ignorance and insensitivity that exists within society; ignorance and insensitivity that is directly attributable for much of our current division. These long standing issues of racial, gender, social and economic inequality, racial profiling, extreme political partisanship, judicial injustice, dominant society privilege, and many other issues, reflect the deeply rooted negative beliefs and values that remain today despite our hopes and aspirations for a more just and civil society.

As reflected in our Declaration of Independence, “...all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.” However, our current state has sharpened the focus on the truth that these principled beliefs about freedom and equality within our democratic experiment are absent in far too many who call themselves citizens, much less patriots, of the United States.

The irony is that while our founders may have held these beliefs for themselves, they did not apply these beliefs to my Native American ancestors. This inequality of equality dispensation to all people, and the oppression of others’ freedoms and rights in order to pursue one’s own, is part of our nation’s origins. Despite the reflection of inspiring words reflected within our founding documents, our nation began with racism and inequality, and struggles with these first acts of moral violation by leaving them unresolved and unreconciled to this day. We are inextricably linked to our past and the root of today’s challenges are directly attributable to this past.

This is true despite great efforts to instill in all of us a revisionist historical understanding that is intended to conceal the truth. Our great nation has fallen woefully short of its moral and ethical responsibility to hold itself accountable for its past. This has prevented our nation from achieving truth and reconciliation with the many oppressed peoples who suffered and lost in the name of manifest destiny and American progress. To fulfill the aspirations of our Constitution, our nation can and must do better. The time has come to interrupt and dismantle this false narrative.

In the founding of America, acts of genocide were committed against my ancestors to allow others to pursue life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness in our native lands. Absent was a moral compass, but present was an arrogance and belief of divine superiority above all others. These proclaimed “discoverers” and “founders” used the Doctrine of Discovery as the justification for their immoral acts. Nothing, including a moral and ethical conscious, was allowed to impede their efforts to colonize, dominate, and lay claim to that which did not belong to them; nothing impeded

their efforts to kill and conquer a people who they viewed as less than human. We were viewed as nothing more than an interference and acceptable casualties in their quest for conquest and domination. These first actions by our nation have left an indelible stain on the character, integrity, and consciousness of this country.

Despite efforts by this country to assimilate, terminate, and marginalize us, Indian Country has persevered. While we have many reasons to be resentful, we have instead chosen truth, love, and reconciliation as the alternative path forward. While we are a forgotten people in our own lands, there is a tremendous opportunity for us as Native Americans to provide stewardship and leadership during these tumultuous times; rooted in our understanding, respect, and reverence for these lands and all its children. These are the lands of our creation story; the lands where the bones and spirits of our ancestors rest. We are connected and invested in these lands in a way that no other people can claim. As such, we are responsible and must hold ourselves accountable for their protection, care, and reverence.

Like so many others, I am troubled by the current state of our union. But unlike others, Native Americans are not surprised by the underlying racism, injustice, and inequality that has recently found itself prominent in the mainstream conversation and national dialogue. Many of today's challenges are not new, but nevertheless, we must all rededicate ourselves to moving forward with steadfast determination to find solutions to these deep rooted challenges; to come together; to make advancements toward a more perfect union. However, in order to best understand our present challenges, every citizen has a moral responsibility to better understand our nation's history, including those actions that do not fit nicely into the narrative of greatness and exceptionalism. In doing so, the negative societal flaws that still plague us today will be better understood.

In times such as these, we must all find our inner strength, our calling, and our purpose. We must not sit silently on the sidelines and turn a blind eye to the many ills that still plague our country. We must recognize that change only occurs when we accept personal accountability. Our actions today will ensure that our children's children will live in a world where all our relations and the planet is respected. In the end truth, justice, and righteousness will prevail as they stand firmly at the peak of the moral high ground.

The many natural disasters this past year that so negatively impacted the lives of many, regardless of one's race, creed, or color, serve as examples of how people can come together to support one another despite our individual differences. While the actions displayed by so many in response to these disasters did not solve our long-standing challenges as a society, they clearly demonstrate our potential as a people.

Some day we will demonstrate a greater accountability for our actions by telling our complete and truthful story of America; a truth no longer rooted in historical amnesia, but one that dismantles the institutionalized false narrative. In doing so, we will better exemplify exceptionalism as a nation to the rest of the world, but more importantly...to ourselves.

As we embark upon a new year, I pray that we will all choose to see ourselves as relatives who share a common humanity and a common interest in peace and prosperity. I pray that we will finally resolve our division and move our nation forward in greater solidarity. In doing so, we will achieve a future where all the Creator's children are treated with dignity, respect, and love; a future where the founding words and vision for our democratic experiment do not ring hollow.