

The natives of new world



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Before the New World was discovered by Christopher Columbus, it was a land inhabited by tribes who have sun-kissed red skin. Even before America was recognized as the home of free white men, it was the American Indians who cultivated and tilled its land. The Native Americans - as most people refer them - have been essential in tracing the origins of the United States of America. Europe had been conquering colonies to increase empiric power and accumulate rich resources. The only discovered areas at that time were called the " Old World" which included Europe, Africa, and Asia (Robertson, Stewart 51).

A notable Italian sea-farer had been working on a new route to travel to Asia in a shorter time. Christopher Columbus thought of sailing west to be able to reach the east, an idea no one ever dared to consider. After many difficulties that he encountered in pursuing the voyage, Columbus landed on a fertile soil greeted by inhabitants which he recognized neither as Asians nor Africans. The natives were illustrated to have a complexion resembling the color of copper. Their physical attributes were further described as such:

Their black hair, long and uncurled, floated upon their shoulders, or was bound in tresses around their heads. They had no beards, and every part of their bodies was perfectly smooth...Their features singular, rather than disagreeable...though not tall, they were well-shaped and active. Their faces, and several parts of their body, were fantastically painted with glaring colors. (71) They were gathered in tribes and were not clothed at that time. The natives were practically astonished by the arrival of the white-skinned settlers.

The American Indians were believed to have migrated to the western hemisphere using the Bering land bridge. The land bridge connected a path from Siberia all the way to Alaska. Apparently, this bridge was used by the natives to follow the trend of the journey of animals during the ice age (Utter 7). By the time they reached the land, tribes settled and established their homes. Native American tribes were grouped according to blood-relations living in the same territory and spoke a common dialect (57). Each tribe has its own system of governing members for the purpose of survival and warfare.

Tribes have existed even before the Europeans set foot on their land. By the time Christopher Columbus reached the Americas, Native American tribes greeted him and his people, with anxiety and curiosity. After the discovery of the New World, colonizers started flocking to the new land. Migrants from Europe traveled to America to start a new life and to conquer the rich untouched soil. Due to this massive influx of migrants, it started inflicting effects that endangered the natives. Epidemic diseases brought by the foreigners caused deaths among the American Indians.

These diseases such as chickenpox and pneumonia did not prepare the natives to be immune from it (Thornton 28). This greatly reduced the number of Native American population during the time of colonization because of massive number of deaths. The era of conquest took the natives' land and grabbed what wealth they have. Aside from this, they never escaped the commerce of slavery, sexual exploits and discrimination. In later years, the natives were forced to study and learned how to live like the white people.

They were taught not to speak of their native language and to learn English and institutions were built for acculturation of the Caucasian culture (Nagel 115). These kinds of exploits and abuse prompted the natives to fight off the colonizers. They maybe outnumbered by the whites and their weapons were not a match against the pistols but they made sure they have defended themselves. These uprisings were known as the ' Indian Wars'. It became the label for the fight against the natives, to completely eradicate their culture and identity from the New World (Utter 169).

Before the acculturation happened, the lifestyle of the American Indians was as unique as their physical characteristics. Their spiritual life was governed by what they call ' The Great Spirit. ' The American Indians saw this spirit as the bearer of their good fortune. They give thanks to this supreme deity when they win battles, good harvest, and good health. On the contrary, they also have a spirit which was a counterpart of the Great one where bad luck was mostly associated (McIntosh 104). The natives hunted animals to be able to live and hunting not just became a necessity but also part of recreation.

Hunting became a sport among the natives. By the time the settlers came, horses were re-introduced to them. They domesticated this animal and became part of their everyday lives. From carrying belongings, to hunting games as well as waging wars, horses became a huge part of the Native American society (Fuss & Mellis 9). American Indians were described as lively people who enjoyed celebrations such as feasts. They prepared feasts for almost every major activity in their tribes. Feasts were accompanied with lively music, dancing, and prayers.

These are celebrated after a hunting trip, in marriage, after curing the sick, after birth, and in funerals (McIntosh 164). The natives always incorporated their spirituality in these celebrations and this made the mark of their identity and culture. They have long been discriminated in their land and colonizers have tried to erase their culture in the New World. However, as time went by, American Indians still fought for the right to have their very own place in the land they once called their own. They fought to have freedom when it comes to religion and practicing their culture.

The natives also strived to gain tribal sovereignty (Josephy, Nagel, Johnson 7). This fight for freedom took centuries for it to become part of a recognized set of laws. In 1975, the Self-Determination Act became one of the first laws that focused on giving the American Indians sovereignty within their own tribes (7). It can be said that this fight that the natives did, opened the doors for anti-discrimination movements. This inspired other minorities like the African Americans and other colored race to be treated equally as citizens.

These minorities wanted to be citizens that have the same rights and privileges with the Whites. The struggle of the American Indians can be seen as a starting point for America to be known as the land of the free. Through the course of history, they have suffered and were persecuted in their own land. Their struggle for freedom became the bearer for other minorities to gain confidence in fighting for their right as well. If not for this struggle, America won't recognize the essence of freedom with the absence of discrimination. America won't be able to take pride in the land that they claimed to be free.