

# True to Self

*Creator, I pray this brief writing about being Native American will be received with love and understanding and will not fall upon deaf ears. I pray hearts will be opened. I ask this in Creator's name. Amen.*

In 2011, while traveling to Yellowstone, I stopped at a gas station in Nebraska. I was told by the cashier that I couldn't use the restroom. I was perplexed as to why. So I questioned the cashier as to why couldn't I? She told me, "People like me couldn't use the restroom." It hit me like a ton of bricks. It is because I am a Native American. I used the restroom and we both glared at each other on my way out of the store. Now I know how blacks in the south felt during segregation.

Assimilation of the American Indian forever changed the indigenous peoples of this continent. The mindset of "making them white" escalated in the 1800's. Disease and manipulation of our lands had already set the stage for losing a way of life that had been in existence for thousands of years.

- The government 'divided' the tribes among the denominations.
- The American Indians had no immunity from common diseases of the Europeans.
- Traditional ceremonies and spiritual practices were banned.
- Treaties were signed that were far from honorable – and then broken regularly.

In the 1800's, the boarding schools were created to further the push of assimilation. They were either run by 'the church' or by military families. Harsh and unpardonable, they forced further loss of language, dress and spiritual practices. Children as young as four were taken to the schools and didn't leave until they were 18. Many of the schools were 'year round', so children didn't go home. As late as 1952, there are seven schools found to have sterilized girls at the age of 12.

The Hollywood portrayal of the American Indian as drunken savages in the movies has changed to some extent. At least now, Native Americans are the actors instead of people sprayed with colored paint and wearing matching braided wigs. Today, we still hear people say that 'Indians' lay around drunk and wait for a movie role. Such an offensive statement, but not seen as exaggeration.

Citizenship was 'awarded' in 1924 to the American Indian. Many states did not allow voter registration until the '60's. Code Talkers in two wars saved countless lives, using their languages that Japan and Germany could not break.

Native American became the politically correct term for the American Indian, to include the Alaskan native tribes. There are still 590+ federally recognized tribes and also state recognized tribes. The ONLY people in America to have a card with a number as an identification, we can say, we are not gone. There has been purposeful cultural and physical genocide. The world watches and Hitler wrote that he studied what was done to 'Indians' on the reservations. We are not ignorant. Even though statistics for every disease or diagnosis are the highest for Native Americans, we are here to stay. We are doctors, lawyers, teachers, congressional leaders, sports stars, military veterans and so much more.

-By Teryl Loftis, Cherokee



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