

Native Americans: Minority Group, Major Contributions

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Introduction

This paper will discuss Native American cultural contributions to modern American society. This paper will explore the breadth of Native American diversity within the United States. This paper will review how early Native American societies allowed for the formation of The United States. This paper will discuss cultural contributions of Native American tribes to modern American art forms.

Native American Diversity

Native American cultural contributions are sprinkled throughout the United States. Though Native American tribes were eventually forced into concentrated reservations, they originally inhabited the vast majority of the United States and Canada (Carapella, 2014). It logically follows that such geographic dispersion led the Native Americans to develop an array of cultural practices. These not only included art, but agricultural practices that allowed for the vast array of foods that now constitute 60% of the world's food supply (National Resources Conservation Service). Many of these practices allowed for the very creation of the United States as it is today.

Formation of the United States

Native Americans share historic connections with non-native peoples of the United States. These connections have been well intended on the part of the Native Americans, yet fraught with angst and sorrow. Native Americans have held a long-standing relationship with the development of American society. Benjamin Franklin's idea for a central government with individual state rights was influenced by the Constitution of the Iroquois Nations. The Great Biding Law stated, "The Mohawk Lords are the foundation of the Great Peace and it shall,

therefore, be against the Great Binding Law to pass measures in the Confederate Council after the Mohawk Lords have protested against them” (section 6). This is clearly translatable to our federally overseen states, though Native American influence was ignored for centuries. In relatively recent years, however, the Iroquois have been hailed as “The Forgotten Founders” (Payne, 1996, pp. 605).

The Congressional Medal of Honor was awarded to Pawnee member of the Indian Scouts unit in 1869. Code talkers speaking the Choctaw language were utilized in World War I, shortly after the Iroquois Confederacy declared war on Germany in 1917. [This occurred before Native Americans were first allowed to apply citizenship, in 1919.] Pima, Ira Hayes, was even at the raising of the flag at Iwo Jima. It’s concerning to wonder where the United States would be today, had Navajo code talkers not been there to take part in *every* assault conducted by the United States Marines during World War II (Molnar, 1997, para. 2). In short, “from the time of European arrival on this continent, the indigenous people have taken sides and taken up arms in conflicts” (Lemay, 2012).

Other visible, yet overlooked, evidence that Native American history is ingrained in American life include town names, such as Powhatan, Virginia; Cheyenne, Wyoming; Seattle, Washington; and Mi-Wuk village, California.

Contributions

Native American art forms include pottery, jewelry, totem poles, carvings, baskets, beadwork, art, and architecture. Southwestern pottery features both unique forms (double-spouted wedding vase) and techniques (Pueblo “black on black” firing) (Native Languages of the Americas [NLOA], “Pottery,” 2015). Totem poles can be found standing throughout the Pacific Northwest, into Canada, and in Southern Alaska. Though it cannot be proven that they stood

before the arrival of Europeans, anthropologists believe that the majestic poles seen standing today (such as those created by Athabaskan tribes in Alaska) were assisted by the acquisition of European cutting tools (NLOA, “Poles,” 2015). This represents positive cross-cultural connection between Europeans and Native Americans.

Modern architecture also reflects Native American tradition. Throughout the southwestern United States, pueblos are commonplace. On some reservations, or in areas densely inhabited by Native Americans, architecture reflects traditional ideas. This is done in order to create or enhance tribal pride. It is achieved simply by ornamentation or more intensely by paraphrasing historically significant Native buildings, such as earth lodges or brush shelters (Herselle Krinsky, 2011, para. 3). There are rules for where traditional Native structures are to be built, and for which purposes (such as for direct benefit by people of the tribe). Since the turn of the 21st century, the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development has become more sensitive to the need for affordable housing that represents traditional Native American life (Herselle Krinsky, 2011, para. 5).

One striking contemporary contribution of Native Americans to modern American cultural norms is the cessation of the celebration of Columbus Day, in favor of Indigenous Peoples’ Day. This came about because people such as Native American mapmaker, Aaron Carapella, protested in order to honor their ancestors and bring the truth of their contributions to light (Lo Wang, 2014, para. 12).

Discussion

Native Americans have held an undeniable place in American history. However, in order for Native American voices to be heard, ethnohistorians must fight their own internal disciplinary battle of synchronicity versus a diachronic view of culture (Hoxey, 2014, pp. 138). It

is only through the cooperation of academics and Native peoples that Native American contributions can be recognized, understood, and appreciated. One way this can occur is through modern renditions of Native American art.

Conclusion

This paper discussed Native American cultural contributions to modern American society. This paper explored the breadth of Native American diversity within the United States. This paper reviewed how early Native American societies allowed for the formation of The United States. This paper discussed cultural contributions of Native American tribes to modern American art forms.

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