

## Make Amends, Grateful America [MAGA]

Recently I wrote, in a piece I called “History is Curious”:

Taking control of the historical narrative seems to be alive and well in 21<sup>st</sup>-century America led by the pathological narcissist Donald Trump. Rather than acknowledging his privileged background and expressing sympathy or empathy for the exploitation of Native Americans, African Americans, women, and others that, in large part, created the conditions of his privilege, Trump, and other similarly minded misogynist, racist Americans, would prefer to erase the historical record of that exploitation by removing any reference to it from our history books and historical museums. “We shouldn’t have to feel guilty for the bad things our ancestors did,” the White MAGA crowd chants. Bullshit!, of course you should if you personally have benefitted from their actions, however much you abhor what they did. “Slavery wasn’t so bad, and many slaves were treated well.” Again, bullshit!!!! Statues of Confederate heroes, erected in the south during the Jim Crow era and removed a decade ago amid public outcry, are now being re-erected. And echoes of the old “Manifest Destiny” can be heard in the mouths of White Christian nationalists when confronted with the facts of the genocide of Native Americans.

So what about me? As a White male with an Ivy-League Ph.D., I sit close to the top of the privileged tree. I was born into a middle-class family with a university professor as a father and with a full-time mother who dedicated her life to raising four children. As a child I played “cowboys and Indians” and on TV I watched “The Lone Ranger” with his sidekick the Indian Tonto. I attended good public schools and managed to get into a top-notch college and grad school. In my first year at college I inherited some money from my maternal grandparents, enough to pay for the rest of my college. My maternal grandparents had grown up as poor cotton-pickers in central Texas, but through hard work and perseverance they became comfortable owners of a hardware store and a sizable sheep ranch, and they were happy to help support the family of their only child, my mother. So, yes, my grandparents earned their money honestly, but, as Whites, they certainly had an advantage in their segregated Texan town over their Black neighbors—the children of former slaves who were forced to live in “N-word-town”, attend poorly funded segregated schools, and were not allowed to drink from the “Whites Only” water fountain at the courthouse or to swim in the public swimming pool.

While recognizing the privileged background I was blessed with, I have to admit that I've not really done anything to make amends for it. Yes, after decades of pursuing a career as an academic archaeologist and spending a considerable amount of time digging in the Mediterranean, I resigned from my university position and took up teaching at the high-school and community-college levels. I did write a US History textbook that encouraged students to identify with, and feel good about, those ancestors who stood up to oppose the Native American genocide, slavery, and our patriarchal heritage.

And I have written many letters to my congressmen (and women), many letters to the editors of newspapers (a few of which were published), and I have felt compelled to write polemical rants like this. Pretty pathetic, I know, but what else can one do?

My next older brother, who is now a Canadian citizen, tells me that Canada has made some strides in making amends for the wrongs afflicted upon its Indigenous peoples. In 2008, as part of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, the government of Canada issued a formal apology to the former students of Indian residential schools, their families, and communities, for the policy of forced assimilation and the harm it caused; as part of that agreement, the government provided a \$1.9 billion compensation package for victims of the Residential School policy. Further apologies were issued in 2017 to the former students of Residential Schools in Newfoundland and in Labrador, and after the discovery of unmarked graves at several Residential School sites in 2021, another formal apology was issued. In 2019, and again in 2024, the government of Canada issued apologies to the Inuit people for the forced relocation, mistreatment, and dog slayings they had endured. In 2021, the Canadian parliament passed an Implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, requiring the government to ensure that federal laws and policies are consistent with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which had been adopted in 2017. In practice, this means that First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people are consulted in governmental matters that might affect their rights.

But, as my brother pointed out to me, this is mostly window dressing.<sup>1</sup> In Canada, public meetings are required to begin with a statement that the land on which the meeting is

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<sup>1</sup> There is now a substantial literature on Indigenous reconciliation studies. Cf., e.g., Cheryl Lightfoot, "Settler-State Apologies to Indigenous Peoples: A Normative Framework and Comparative Assessment," *Native American and Indigenous Studies*, 2015, vol. 2(1), pp. 15–39, in which Lightfoot sets out the framework to distinguish between meaningful apologies, which go beyond mere words to acknowledge past wrongs and commit to future policy change, and "non-apologies", which lack any true accountability.

being held once belonged to this or that Indigenous people. “So big deal,” my brother says, “it’s like saying ‘we took this land from you and there’s no f\*cking way we’re giving it back.’” [And I agree with him. The last time I visited the Boston Museum of Fine Arts several years ago, I was taken aback by a sign at the entrance which stated that the museum had been built on land originally belonging to the Neponset people. “Big deal, you put us a sign” I thought. “At the very least, you would think that they would give all Algonquian people free entrances to this outrageously priced museum.”]

Official U.S. governmental acts to make amends for its history of violence against Indigenous peoples has been just limited as the Canadian attempts.

The image most people in the United States have of the genocide of Native Americans is of the U.S. cavalry charging into Indian villages, taking scalps and slaughtering everyone in their path.



THE SEVENTH U.S. CAVALRY CHARGING INTO BLACK KETTLE'S VILLAGE AT DAYLIGHT, NOVEMBER 27, 1868.—[SEE PAGE 811.]

*Harper's Weekly*, v. 12, 1868 Dec. 19, p. 804.

While such massacres certainly did occur in the so-called American Indian Wars, from the Pequot War, King Philip’s War, and the French and Indian War during Colonial times, to the Tecumseh War, the Seminole Wars, Red Cloud’s War, the Great Sioux War, the Comanche-Mexico Wars, the Cayuse and Yakama Wars, the Coeur d’Alene War, the Fraser Canyon War, the Nez Perce War, the Bannock War, the Sheepeater Indian War, the Navaho Wars and the Apache Wars, the Bald Hills War, the Owens Valley Indian War, the Bear River Massacre, the Snake War, the Colorado War, the Sand Creek Massacre, the Dakota War, and

the Black Hills War (including the Battle of the Little Bighorn and the Wounded Knee Massacre) during the westward expansion of the United States, it could be argued that the real decimation of Indigenous peoples in the North American continent was due to the smallpox and other Old World diseases they contracted before European colonists advanced to their lands; it is estimated that some 20 million Indigenous people, or 95% of the population, died from these diseases—more like a nonaginta-quinquemation than a decimation.

Scholars argue over the extent to which Old World diseases ravaged Native American communities, but it is clear that the genocide of Native Americans was a result of not only those disease but also the intentional violence inflicted on those communities that had survived the pandemics. So, for those of us of European ancestry, we need not feel guilty for the diseases our ancestors unintentionally brought to the continent, although we should try to make amends for the killings our ancestors inflicted on the Indigenous peoples.

The myth that North America was unpopulated “virgin soil” began when the Pilgrims established their Plymouth Plantation in 1620 on the site of the Pawtuxet village, whose Wampanoag residents had cleared the land and planted fields before they suffered, between 1616 and 1619, from the pandemic of Old World diseases introduced by earlier European contact, with the survivors moving away from their costal communities.

In the first lesson in my U.S. History textbook I ask students to examine this “virgin soil” myth.<sup>2</sup>

### **Lesson 1**

The first primary documents are three maps from the early colonial period in Virginia.

#### **Questions:**

What are the main differences between the two maps based on John Smith’s 1606 description and the map of the same area published in 1667?

How can you explain these differences?

#### **Pedagogy**

National History Standards, Era 1 (Beginning to 1620): Standard 2: How early European exploration and colonization resulted in cultural and ecological interactions among previously unconnected peoples.

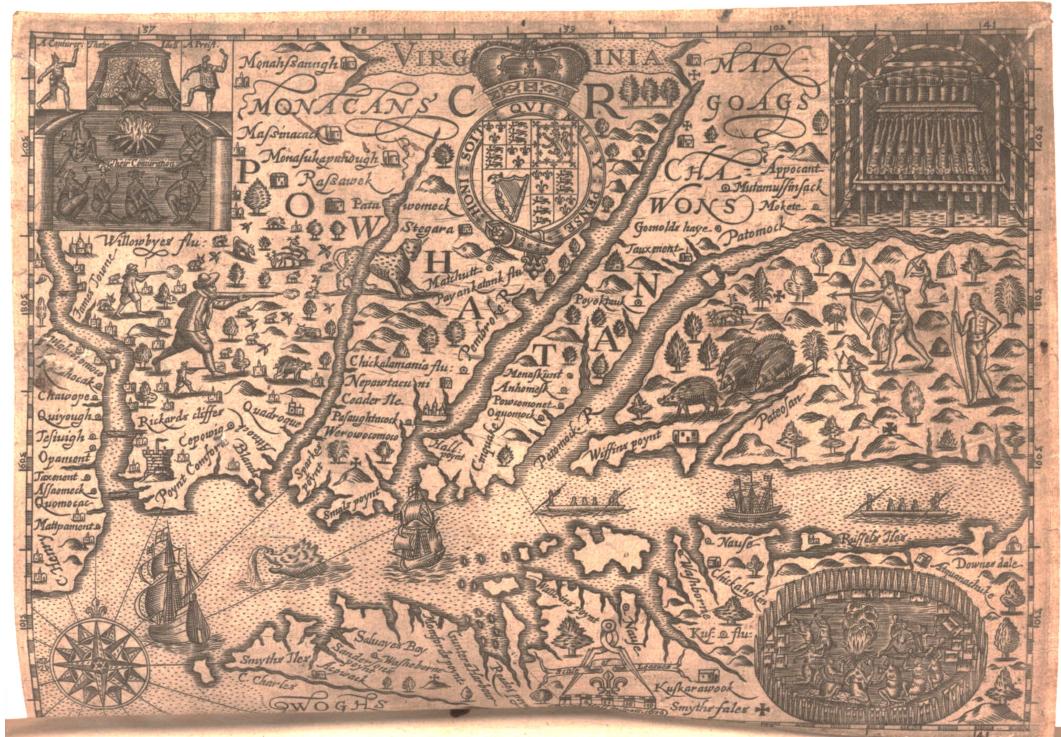
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<sup>2</sup> *Key Moments in American History*, 2017, pp. 115–118. My lessons, scaffolded by historical narratives, consist of sets of primary documents and questions, an effective pedagogical technique as it forces students to develop critical thinking skills, leads to engaged in-class discussions, and helps students retain information better than if I merely stated in class “the virgin soil thesis is a myth.” Other lessons in my book, which is available for free on my website, cover, among other issues, slavery and women’s rights.

Be sure to zoom in on the details of each map.



Primary Document 1a: "Virginia / discovered and discribed by Captayn John Smith, 1606; graven by William Hole." Published 1624. Library of Congress call number G3880 1624 .S541 Vault. <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g3880.ct000377>



Primary Document 1b. Mercator's Atlas. Containing his cosmographicaall description of the fabricke and figure of the world. London : Printed by T. Cotes, for Michael Sparke, 1635. From John Lukas, U.S. History Sourcebook Advanced, cK-12 textbook.



Primary Document 1c: "A mapp of Virginia discovered to ye hills, and in it's latt. from 35 deg. & 1/2 neer Florida to 41 deg. bounds of New England / Domina Virginia Farrer collegit; John Goddard sculp." Published ca. 1667. Library of Congress call number G3880 1667 .F3 Vault. <http://www.loc.gov/resource/g3880.ct000903/>

**[Answer:** While there are no definitive answers to the questions posed in this lesson, I would hope that students would have noticed that in the first, 1606, map, the Native American represented is depicted in a noble form while in the second, 1635, map, the landscape is full of exotic creatures and the colonists are apparently firing guns at the Native Americans, who return fire with bows and arrows. In the third, 1667, map, all traces of Native Americans—including the place names that had appeared in the two earlier maps—are now gone, although the exotic animals remain.]

The ‘virgin soil’ idea was tangentially related to “Manifest Destiny”—a term first coined by John O’Sullivan in an editorial supporting the admission of Texas to the Union in 1845 (“Annexation,” *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 17, no.1 (July-August, 1845). pp. 5–10):

.... Texas is now ours. .... Her star and her stripe may already be said to have taken their place in the glorious blazon of our common nationality; and the sweep of our eagle's wing already includes within its circuit the wide extent of her fair and fertile land.

.... other nations have undertaken to intrude themselves into [the question of the reception of Texas into the Union] between us and the proper parties to the case, in a spirit of hostile interference against us, for the avowed object of thwarting our policy and hampering our power, limiting our greatness and checking the fulfillment of our **manifest destiny** to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions. ....

.... The Anglo-Saxon foot is already on its borders. Already the advance guard of the irresistible army of Anglo-Saxon emigration has begun to pour down upon it, armed with the plough and the rifle, and marking its trail with schools and colleges, courts and representative halls, mills and meeting-houses. A population will soon be in actual occupation of California, over which it will be idle for Mexico to dream of dominion. They will necessarily become independent.... And they will have a right to independence--to self-government--to the possession of the homes conquered from the wilderness by their own labors and dangers, sufferings and sacrifices—a better and a truer right than the artificial tide of sovereignty in Mexico, a thousand miles distant, inheriting from Spain a title good only against those who have none better. ....



O'Sullivan's "wilderness" was depicted in the *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way* mural that Emanuel Leutze painted in 1862 on the wall of the west stairway of the House of Representatives in the United States Capitol. The central composition of the mural depicts a group of pioneers and their train of wagons reaching a peak and pointing to the sunset in an apparently empty west; below the main scene is a depiction of the San Francisco Bay, also deserted.

Another visual depiction of Manifest Destiny is John Gast's *American Progress*, a popular chromolithograph based on the oil-on-canvas painting Gast made in 1872. Here, a flying Lady Liberty, holding a Bible and a coil of telegraph wire, leads a group of pioneers heading out from the New York City harbor (on the far right), with a Conestoga wagon, a

stagecoach, and a train heading west, and a herd of buffaloes and a group of Native Americans peacefully retreating towards the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific coast.



The initial U.S. policy towards Native American tribes was one of removal and resettlement. The Indian Removal Act of 1830 authorized President Andrew Jackson to negotiate for the removal and resettlement of the Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Seminole—the so-called “Five Civilized Tribes”—from Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Florida. The Cherokee appealed to the Supreme Court and in an 1831 ruling, *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, the Marshall Court ruled that Georgia could not impose its laws on the Cherokee because the Cherokee were a sovereign nation with whom only the federal government could negotiate. In a subsequent 1832 case, *Worcester v. Georgia*, the Supreme Court upheld the notion of tribal sovereignty, ruling that the state of Georgia could not prevent missionaries sympathetic to the Cherokee cause from going into Cherokee lands. After these rulings, Andrew Jackson infamously stated “John Marshall has made his decision, now let him enforce it,” and the President did nothing to prevent the state of Georgia from imposing its will on the Cherokee.

Not everyone in the United States, of course, supported these removal policies. During the debate in Congress over the Indian Removal Act of 1830, Representative Edward Everett of Massachusetts predicted:

They are to go in families, the old and the young, wives and children, the feeble, the sick. And how are they to go? Not in luxurious carriages; they are poor. Not in stagecoaches; they go to a region where there are none. Not even in wagons, nor on horseback, for they are to go in the least expensive manner possible. They are to go on foot: nay, they are to be driven by contract. The price has been reduced, and is still further to be reduced, and it is to be reduced, by sending them by contract. It is to be screwed down to the least farthing, to eight dollars per head. A community of civilized people, of all ages, sexes and conditions of bodily health, are to be dragged hundreds of miles, over mountains, rivers, and deserts, where there are no roads, no bridges, no habitations, and this is to be done for eight dollars a head; and done by contract. The question is to be, what is the least for which you will take so many hundred families, averaging so many infirm old men, so many little children, so many lame, feeble and sick? What will you contract for? The imagination sickens at the thought of what will happen to a company of these emigrants, which may prove less strong, less able to pursue the journey than was anticipated. Will the contractor stop for the old man to rest, for the sick to get well; for the fainting women and children to revive? He will not; he cannot afford to. And this process is to be extended to every family, in a population of seventy-five thousand souls. This is what we call the removal of the Indians!

In December 25, 1829, Catherine Beecher (the daughter of Lyman Beecher and sister to Harriet Beecher Stowe) published a "Circular Addressed to the Benevolent Ladies of the U. States", calling on women to send petitions to Congress protesting the Indian Removal Act. In the circular, Beecher wrote: "It has become almost a certainty that these people are to have their lands torn from them, and to be driven into western wilds and to final annihilation, unless the feelings of a humane and Christian nation shall be aroused to prevent the unhallowed sacrifice."

And, just as has sadly become apparent in the case of the police murder of George Floyd and the ICE murders of Renee Good and Alex Petti in Minneapolis, it is important to bear witness to governmental atrocities. While of course there were no cell phones to record the sufferings these Native American groups endured in the forced removal known as the Trail of Tears, where some ten thousand Indigenous souls perished between 1831 and 1839, we do have some eye-witness accounts of the tragedy. The French diplomat, political philosopher, and historian Alexis de Tocqueville, who began publishing his *Democracy in America* in 1835, had been in Memphis, Tennessee in the winter of 1831 when he saw the Choctaw passing through the city on what one of their leaders was later to describe as a "trail of tears and death." De Tocqueville records in Book 1, Chapter XVIII, section 6:

..... there arrived a numerous band of Choctaws. .... These savages had left their country and were endeavoring to gain the right bank of the Mississippi, where they hoped to find an asylum that had been promised them by the American government. It was then the middle of winter, and the cold was unusually severe; the snow had frozen hard upon the ground, and the river was drifting huge masses of ice. The Indians had their families with them, and they brought in their train the wounded and the sick, with children newly born and old men upon the verge of death. They possessed neither tents nor wagons, but only their arms and some provisions. I saw them embark to pass the mighty river, and never will that solemn spectacle fade from my remembrance. No cry, no sob, was heard among the assembled crowd; all were silent. Their calamities were of ancient date, and they knew them to be irremediable. The Indians had all stepped into the bark that was to carry them across, but their dogs remained upon the bank. As soon as these animals perceived that their masters were finally leaving the shore, they set up a dismal howl and, plunging all together into the icy waters of the Mississippi, swam after the boat.

Thus the beginning of the Trail of Tears. As an old man in 1890, John G. Burnett, who had been in the military during the Cherokee removal in 1838 – 1839, wrote down his remembrance of the end of the Trail:

I saw the helpless Cherokees arrested and dragged from their homes, and driven at the bayonet point into the stockades. And in the chill of a drizzling rain on an October morning I saw them loaded like cattle or sheep into six hundred and forty-five wagons and started toward the west. .... On the morning of November the 17th we encountered a terrific sleet and snow storm with freezing temperatures and from that day until we reached the end of the fateful journey on March the 26th 1839, the sufferings of the Cherokees were awful. The trail of the exiles was a trail of death. They had to sleep in the wagons and on the ground without fire. And I have known as many as twenty-two of them to die in one night of pneumonia due to ill treatment, cold and exposure ....

From the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the policy of the U.S. government towards Native Americans was one of allotment and assimilation. The Dawes Act of 1887 broke up communal tribal lands into allotments to be owned by individual families; while the aim of this policy was to encourage Native Americans to become farmers and to assimilate into mainstream society, the result of the policy was the loss of over 90 million acres of Native land, devastating tribal economies and cultures as "surplus" land was sold to non-Natives.

After a century and a half of the U.S. government making treaties with Native American tribes and largely ignoring those treaties, in 1934 the New Deal administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt passed the Indian Reorganization Act, which ended the allotments of tribal land to individual families, banned further sale of Native American land, and returned some lands to the tribes. In 1946, in recognition of the service Native Americans had provided to the government during WWII, the U.S. Congress passed the Indian Claims Act of 1946, which established the Indian Claims Commission (ICC) to oversee claims against the United States by any Native American tribe or other identifiable group of Indigenous

people living in the United States; by the time that the ICC was disbanded in 1978 it had awarded \$818,172,606.64 in judgements on 546 cases.

Roosevelt's pro-Indian policy did not last long as in 1940 the state of Kansas passed an act that gave the State, and not Federal, courts jurisdiction over tribal lands. This opened the gates to two decades of an Indian termination policy, in which more than one hundred Native America tribes were denied official recognition. In 1953, following an investigation of the poor conditions of tribal lands administered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Congress passed a Resolution that defined the goal of the assimilation of Native Americans:

Whereas it is the policy of Congress, as rapidly as possible, to make the Indians within the territorial limits of the United States subject to the same laws and entitled to the same privileges and responsibilities as are applicable to other citizens of the United States, to end their status as wards of the United States, and to grant them all of the rights and prerogatives pertaining to American citizenship . . . .

Following the example of the Civil Rights protests and sit-ins of the 1960's, Native American groups began to protest this policy of assimilation.

Beginning in 1963, tribals groups in the Pacific Northwest began a series of "fish-ins" to assert their traditional right to collect fish in the Puget Sound, a tradition upon which the tribes economically depended and a right guaranteed by treaty. These fish-ins attracted national attention and support from celebrities such as Marlon Brando and Dick Gregory, and led to the game-changing 1974 Boldt Decision, in which the U.S. District Court judge George Hugh Boldt ruled that no court decision or act of Congress had annulled what the treaties preserved for the Native tribes; the Boldt Decision was upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1979 and has been used as a precedent for handling other similar treaties.

In November, 1969, a group of Native Americans began a 19-month-long occupation of Alcatraz Island and its prison complex, arguing that under the terms of the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie between the U.S. and the Lakota Sioux tribe all retired, abandoned, or out-of-use federal land was to be returned to the Indigenous peoples who once occupied it. Given that the Alcatraz penitentiary had been closed in 1963 and the island handed over to the City of San Francisco, the United Council of the Bay Area Indian community petitioned for it to be used as a Lakota cultural center. At the height of the occupation there were more than 400 protestors, who had come to call themselves the Indians of All Tribes (IAT). Among these was the daughter of Jim Thorpe, who helped convince the celebrities Jane Fonda, Anthony Quinn, Marlon Brando, Jonathan Winters, Buffy Sainte-Marie and Dick Gregory to visit the island and show their support, thus helping to bring national and

international attention to the occupation. In the end, however, the occupation did not obtain its goal. After months of internal discord among the Native Americans groups and after months of suffering from lack of water and electricity, the remaining 15 protestors were removed by government forces in June, 1971, and in 1972 the Alcatraz Island became part of the National Park Service's Golden Gate National Recreation Area. Visitors to Alcatraz today can see the Nation Park Service exhibit *Welcome to Indian Land: Resistance, Resilience and Activism* that documents the 1969 occupation.

Galvanized by the Alcatraz occupation, in 1972 the newly formed American Indian Movement (AIM) led by Russell Means and Dennis Banks organized the Trail of Broken Treaties, a cross-country caravan of Native Americans from the West Coast to Washington, DC that, by the time that it arrived in the nation's capital, some two hundred tribes were represented. President Richard Nixon refused to meet with the caravan and ignored the Twenty Point Paper that outlined the Native American's demand for the recognition of their sovereignty and the restoration and enforcement of Indigenous rights as guaranteed by treaties. Most public attention to the Trail of Broken Treaties was negative, focusing on its occupation and vandalism of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

The following year, in 1973, AIM and Ogala Lakota activists mounted a 71-day protest at Wounded Knee, highlighting the 1890 massacre of some 300 Lakota men, women, and children by the US 7th Cavalry Regiment. This protest resulted in two deaths but continued the national awareness of Native Americans' struggle to obtain their rights.

Over the past half century, Native Americans have witnessed both progress and setbacks in their struggle to obtain those rights.

In 1968, President Lyndon Johnson, who was sympathetic to the concerns of Native Americans, delivered an address to Congress, a "Special Message to the Congress on the Problems of the American Indian," in which he talked about "the forgotten American" and advocated for Indigenous self-determination and an end to termination policies, shifting focus to partnership and self-help programs for Indigenous communities. Johnson helped to establish the National Council on Indian Opportunity, a Federal commission that, before it was shuttered in 1974, led to the return of Blue Lake to the Taos Pueblo and led negotiations for the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, which gave Alaska Natives 44 million acres of land and nearly \$1 billion, establishing 12 regional and over 200 village corporations to manage these assets.

As we have seen, President Richard Nixon was not particularly sympathetic to the concerns of Native Americans, but his Vice-President, Spiro Agnew, was, and in 1975 Congress passed the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act, which was signed into law by Nixon's successor, President Gerald Ford. This Act authorized the government to enter into contracts and make grants directly to recognized Native American tribes, thus giving these tribes a greater degree of autonomy and self-determination; a drawback of the Act, however, was that it did not allow tribes to reallocate government funds across different programs to meet shifting needs in their communities.

In 1974 a meeting was held, under the auspices of AIM, on the land of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe in South Dakota at which the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC) was formed, an organization of Indigenous peoples from North, Central, and South America. In 1977, the United Nations recognized the IITC as an official NGO on its UN Economic and Social Council, the second Indigenous NGO to be so recognized.

The successes in moving away from an official governmental policy of assimilating Native Americans led to a backlash, and in 1978 the House of Representatives introduced a Native Americans Equal Opportunity Act, which directed the President: "(1) to abrogate all treaties entered into between the United States and any Indian tribe; (2) to convey to individual adult members of such tribe or to a tribal corporation any real property held in trust for such tribe and any funds deposited to its credit in the United States Treasury; (3) to abrogate all hunting and fishing rights; and (4) to subject all members of such tribe to Federal, State, and local laws." In response to this pending legislation, Dennis Banks organized the Longest Walk, a five-month long pilgrimage of Native American activists from Alcatraz Island to Washington, D.C. The primary goal of the Longest Walk was met when Native Americans Equal Opportunity Act was not passed in Congress.

In recent decades there has been a number of positive developments in the status of Native Americans in the country.

In 1987, the US National Park Service established a Trail of Tears National Historic Trail across Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Missouri, Arkansas, and Oklahoma, with several trail-side commemorative markers documenting the forced removal of the Cherokee people in 1838–1839. [There is, however, no equivalent Trail of Tears National Historic Trail commemorating the sufferings of the force removal of the Creek, Seminole, Chickasaw, and Choctaw tribes in the years before the removal of the Cherokee.]

Also in 1987, the Supreme Court determined that states cannot regulate Native American gaming enterprises, resulting in the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act of 1988, which provided the framework that governs Indian casinos—casinos that in many cases have become an important source of revenue for Indian tribes.

In 1990, Congress passed the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) which called for museums and ethnographic collections to identify Native American human remains, funerary objects, objects of cultural patrimony, and sacred objects that had been removed from Federal or tribal lands and to return them to federally recognized Indian Tribes and Native Hawaiian organizations. Over the course of the past decade, the National Parks Service has provided \$15,842,000 in grants to dozens of museums and tribes to support the return of Native American human remains and cultural artifacts. One of the most notable cases of these NAGPRA repatriations is Harvard University’s Peabody Museum, which, under its scientific racist founder Louis Agassiz, had amassed a huge collection of the bones and cultural artifacts of Indigenous peoples; in 2021 the Director of the Peabody Museum, Jane Pickering, offered an apology:

The Peabody . . . . . apologizes without equivocation for not confronting our historic collecting practices and stewardship of all of these human remains and for our failure as an institution to face the ethical and moral issues that undergirded the practices that brought them to our Museum. In 1990, when NAGPRA was passed, our Museum should have issued a formal apology. Today, we take the occasion of this current discovery and this wide-ranging institutional apology, to make a specific and formal apology for the practices that led to the Peabody’s large collection of Native American human remains and funerary objects.

And there have been other official apologies to the Indigenous peoples of the United States.

In 1993, on the occasion of the centenary of the overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom in a rebellion led by American and European residents supported by U.S. military forces, President Bill Clinton signed the “Apology Resolution” passed by Congress. This Resolution “acknowledges that the overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawaii occurred with the active participation of agents and citizens of the United States and further acknowledges that the Native Hawaiian people never directly relinquished to the United States their claims to their inherent sovereignty as a people over their national lands, either through the Kingdom of Hawaii or through a plebiscite or referendum.” Given, however, that this “Apology” contained no provisions for reparations to Native Hawaiians, it would seem to constitute a “non-apology” under Cheryl Lightfoot’s framework. Indeed, in the 2009 *Hawaii v. Office of*

*Hawaiian Affairs* case, the Supreme Court unanimously ruled that the “Apology Resolution” had no legally binding effects and therefore did not create any new rights for Native Hawaiians to raise legal claims.

A more positive judicial case was *Cobell v. Salazar*. The case, originally brought in 1996 by Elouise Cobell (Yellow Bird Woman) of the Blackfeet Confederacy and other Native American representatives, claimed that the U.S. Department of the Interior and the Department of the Treasury had mismanaged funds held in trust for Native Americans. The case was settled for \$3.4 billion in 2009. \$1.4 billion was allocated to be paid to the plaintiffs and \$2 billion allocated to repurchase allocated land interests from those distributed under the Dawes Act of 1887 and to return it to reservations and communal tribal ownership.

Another “non-apology”: “A joint resolution to acknowledge a long history of official depredations and ill-conceived policies by the Federal Government regarding Indian tribes and offer an apology to all Native Peoples on behalf of the United States”—was issued by Congress and signed by President Barack Obama without ceremony or comment in 2009 “on behalf of the people of the United States to all Native peoples for the many instances of violence, maltreatment, and neglect inflicted on Native peoples by citizens of the United States.” As Cheryl Lightfoot noted (*op. cit*, p. 27):

So, the government recognized its own wrongs but accepted responsibility only on behalf of the people, not the government, of the United States. The apology also included a disclaimer that nothing in the apology authorizes or supports any legal claim against the United States, so the erasure of governmental responsibility was legally, rhetorically, and financially complete.

In 2024, President Joe Biden issued an apology for the American Indian Residential Schools. “I’m heading to do something that should have been done a long time ago, to make a formal apology to the Indian nations for the way we treated their children for so many years,” Biden said. Unlike the Canadian apologies for its Residential Schools policies, which included a \$1.9 billion compensation package, the Biden apology was something of a “non-apology” in that, while a report from the Department of the Interior’s Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative called for the return of lands that once housed the boarding schools and for the construction of a national memorial to honor the children who were separated from their families and forced to attend schools that sought to wipe out their culture, identity and language. the Biden’ apology didn’t offer any restitution or reparations. As one of his last acts in office in December 2024, President Biden did open the Carlisle

Federal Indian Boarding School National Monument in Carlisle, Pennsylvania; and there is a pending class-action lawsuit filed by the Washoe Tribe and the Wichita and Affiliated Tribes seeking the return of the \$23.3 billion the U.S. government took from Native tribes to built and fund the Indian Boarding Schools.

The Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative did lead to the Road to Healing project, announced in 2022 by the Secretary of the Department of the Interior Deb Haaland (herself a Native American and member of the Laguna Pueblo tribe). The Road to Healing project was a listening tour to gather an oral history of survivors about their experiences in the Federal Indian boarding school system. Secretary Haaland and other Department of the Interior officials visited ten states and met with hundreds of survivors and their descendants. In southern California, Secretary Haaland declared:

I believe we are born with an obligation. We're not just people here on this earth taking up space, we have an obligation to honor the legacy of our ancestors, so they didn't starve in vain, so they didn't die in vain, so they weren't ripped away from their mother's arms in vain. It's our obligation to help people, to honor our earth, and protect our environment for future generations. We know that things don't die when we die. We're not here to use up as much as we can and then who cares about our children and grandchildren. That's not who we are as people.<sup>3</sup>

The Catholic Church has also issued apologies. In 2022, Pope Francis officially apologized on behalf of the Holy Roman Catholic Church for its participation in Canada's Indian residential school policies:

I ask forgiveness, in particular, for the ways in which many members of the Church and of religious communities cooperated, not least through their indifference, in projects of cultural destruction and forced assimilation promoted by the governments of that time, which culminated in the system of residential schools . . . . What our Christian faith tells us is that this was a disastrous error, incompatible with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is painful to think of how the firm soil of values, language and culture that made up the authentic identity of your peoples was eroded, and that you have continued to pay the price of this. In the face of this deplorable evil, the Church kneels before God and implores his forgiveness for the sins of her children. . . . . I myself wish to reaffirm this, with shame and unambiguously. I humbly beg forgiveness for the evil committed by so many Christians against the indigenous peoples.<sup>4</sup>

And in the following year, 2023, Pope Francis officially renounced the Doctrine of Discovery, repudiating the Papal Bulls that had authorized Catholic countries in Europe to conquer non-Christians and seize their territories. To date, there has been no apologies from the Vatican for the Indian boarding school policies in the United States, but on June 14,

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<sup>3</sup> [Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report Vol. II](#), p. 78

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 76–77.

2024, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops approved a motion “Keeping Christ’s Sacred Promise: A Pastoral Framework for Indigenous Ministry”:

The Indian boarding school system itself left a legacy of community and individual trauma that broke down family and support systems among Indigenous communities. These multigenerational traumas continue to have an impact today, one that is perpetuated by racism and neglect of all kinds.... . Many Indigenous people feel unaccepted by and unwelcomed in society and even the Church. Further, Indigenous peoples still suffer disrespect and neglect within the larger U.S. society.<sup>5</sup>

Another important event in the attempt to make amends to Native Americans was the creation of the National Museum of the American Indian, which opened in 2004 in Washington D.C. This Museum also has a branch in the George Gustav Heye Center in New York City, whose Museum of the American Indian originally opened in 1922.

Not surprisingly, under the current Trump administration, the rights of Native Americans have been under attack.

In 2021, Senator Elizabeth Warren and others sponsored a Remove the Stain bill to revoke the Medals of Honor that had been awarded to the 7th Cavalry soldiers who had fought at Wounded Knee. This bill failed because it was determined that the awarding of Medals of Honor belongs to the Executive, and not the Congressional, branch of government. In 2025, Senator Warren and others again attempted to pass a revised Remove the Stain bill, but in September, 2025, Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth announced that the awarded Medals of Honor would not be revoked, calling the recipients "brave soldiers" and saying: "We're making it clear, without hesitation, that the soldiers who fought in the Battle of Wounded Knee in 1890 will keep their medals, and we're making it clear that they deserve those medals." Hegseth also added that "their place in our nation's history is no longer up for debate." It should go without saying that Hegseth's declaration that the Wounded Knee massacre is not up for debate doesn't make it so!

The nonpartisan Brookings Institution has estimated that Trump administration's proposed freeze on federal grants would cut \$24.5 billion in funding to Native communities for health, law enforcement, education, and key social services. In addition, Native tribes are set to lose millions of dollars in grants to address climate change that the Trump administration has cancelled. President Trump's proposed FY 2026 budget announced in May, 2025, contains nearly \$1 billion in cuts to the funding of tribal programs—particularly egregious given that the funding of these programs has remained level for a decade, thus not

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 77.

keeping up with inflation; in January, 2026, however, a bipartisan bill was introduced in Congress to reject these cuts to the funding of Native American tribes. At the end of December, 2025, Trump vetoed the bipartisan Congressional Miccosukee Reserved Area Amendments Act, a flooding mitigation measure that would have expanded the Miccosukee Reserved Area in Florida to include part of the Everglades National Park known as Osceola Camp; in explaining his veto Trump accused the Miccosukee Tribe of seeking “to obstruct reasonable immigration policies that the American people decisively voted for when I was elected”—a reference to the Miccosukee Tribe’s suing to stop to the construction of the infamous “Alligator Alcatraz” immigration detention center in the Everglades.

On March 27, 2025, Trump issued his Executive Order 14253, “Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History”, which has led the National Parks Service to remove numerous historical panels that mention the Native American genocide, such as an exhibit at the Grand Canyon visitor center which said settlers “exploited land for mining and grazing” and that federal officials “pushed tribes off their land” to create the park. [We will see, below, other examples this Executive Order attempts to erase history.]

And then there is the on-going issue of Native mascots in non-Native schools and in professional sports teams. Native American activists had been advocating since the 1950’s for replacing these mascots with non-offensive ones, and in 2001 the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights released a statement calling for the end of Native mascots at non-Native schools. Many—but not all— non-Native schools have changed their Native mascots and in 2020 the Washington D.C. National Football League team changed its name from the Redskins to the Commanders. In the following year, the NFL Cleveland Indians became the Guardians and, in Canada, the Edmonton Eskimos became the Edmonton Elks. Other teams, such as the NFL Kansas City Chiefs (which plays in Arrowhead Stadium), have resisted changing their names, although the Kansas City team has forbidden fans to come to games wearing headdresses or face-paint; the Chiefs fans, however, still use the offensive “tomahawk chop” cheer, as do the fans of the Florida State University Seminoles and the baseball team the Atlanta Braves. In July, 2025, Trump threatened to hold up the construction of a new stadium for the Washington Commanders unless they changed their name back to the offensive Redskins, and Trump indicated that he wanted the new stadium to be named after himself. And, at the end of January, 2026, Trump’s Department of Education cited two New York State public schools for civil rights violations under Title VI for changing their Native mascots, even though the schools did so following a New York

State law; one wonders how removing a Native mascot that many psychological studies have shown is harmful to Native American students constitutes a *civil rights* violation!

And—*irony of ironies*—dozens of Native Americans have been racially profiled and questioned and detained by Trump’s Gestapo-esque ICE goons, including the well-known Indigenous actress Elaine Miles, who said that the ICE agents who questioned her in Seattle, Washington, said that her ID from the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation in Oregon was probably fake and that “anyone can make that.” [One wonders where the Immigration and Customs Enforcement might deport detained Native Americans. To Siberia in Russia, from whence their ancestors originally came some twenty thousand years ago?]

Okay, okay, I can hear you asking, “So, are you saying that the only thing the United States needs to make amends for is its history of mistreatment of Native Americans?” No, of course not, although it is imperative that we resist the Trump Administration’s attempt to defund Native American tribes and to wipe out all traces of the genocide of Native Americans from our national monuments. Here’s something else we might do: add some history of that genocide to a national monument—to Emanuel Leutze’s 1862 mural *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way* in the United States Capitol (see p. 7 above). Given that Leutze had already altered his original design of this mural he made in his smaller, oil-on-canvas, 1861 study by adding a Black child, presumably a freed slave, to the 1862 mural in the Capitol, might we not advocate for the addition of some Native American encampments in that otherwise unpeopled landscape the White pioneers are pointing to in the west?

Yes, there is still more work to do in making amends to Native Americans but it is, however, just as important to make amends for America’s “original sin” of slavery and for its apartheid Jim Crow era and the on-going racism in the country, as well as for the systemic sexism that the women of the country have endured.

For the abuses that African Americans have suffered in our nation’s history I need not go into as much detail as I have for the Native American genocide as the general outline of this story is familiar to most people in the United States, from the arrival of the first African slaves in Jamestown, VA, in 1619, to the Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation, to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights movement. What I might stress is that we should confront the myth that African American slaves passively accepted their status,

pointing to the long trail of resistance, from the Stono Rebellion of 1739, the Prosser Rebellion of 1800, the Chatham Slave Revolt of 1805, the Andry's Rebellion of 1811, the Denmark Vesey Revolt of 1822, the Nat Turner's Rebellion of 1831, and to the slave revolt on the schooner the *Amistad* in 1839 and the mutiny on the slave ship *Creole* in 1841, not to mention the daily acts of individual resistance by slaves, from breaking tools, working slowly, feigning illness, and stealing—acts that led White slave owners to think that their African slaves were lazy and stupid. And, of course, there were the many attempts at self-emancipation by running away, only a few of which ever successfully reached the Underground Railroad.

And we should make sure that our history books are full of those White abolitionists who fought against the institution of slavery, heroes and heroines that all of our children can be proud of: Theodore Dwight Weld, Lyman Beecher, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Henry Ward Beecher, Charles Stuart, William Lloyd Garrison, Henry Brewster Stanton, Thomas M'Clintock, Benjamin Lundy, Charles Sumner, and Thaddeus Stevens.

And every student should know about Angelina Grimké, Lucretia Mott, Lucy Stone, and Arthur Tappan, White abolitionists who also supported the right of women to have their voices heard in public political discourse. And while we're at it, we should also teach our children about the close collaborations between Blacks and Jews in the Civil Rights movement, the “Grand Alliance” between the NAACP and the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith and the American Jewish Congress. Students should know about Jack Greenberg, the Jewish lawyer who, as the Director-Counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, won the landmark 1954 Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* that ended racial segregation in public schools. And students should know about Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, who marched beside Martin Luther King and John Lewis on the third Selma to Montgomery march in 1965. Students should learn about the courage of Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner, two Jewish members of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) who, together with the African American James Chaney, were murdered by the Ku Klux Klan in Mississippi during the 1964 Freedom Summer. [I might add to this list Jonathan Daniels, a White Episcopal seminarian from Keene, NH (where my wife's parents grew up and where I lived for many years) who, in 1965, answered the call of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to help register Black voters in Selma, Alabama, and who died when he threw himself in front of the Black activist Ruby Sales, taking the full blast of a shotgun fired by a racist special deputy.]

And, along these lines, I would hope that our students are taught about the struggles that women in the United States went through—and are still going through!—to obtain equal rights and status as the men in the country. And in discussing the first wave of feminism in the United States, beginning with the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention organized by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott and attended by Fredrick Douglass and three hundred others, we should not shy away from the tensions between abolitionists and suffragettes, with Fredrick Douglass and others arguing that it was more important to advocate for Black [male] suffrage (the XV Amendment was passed in 1870) than, as Stanton and others wanted, to advocate for suffrage for women (they had to wait until 1920 for the XIX Amendment to become law); we might, however, shy away from the racist language that Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony used in arguing that educated White women deserved the vote more than uneducated Black men. In examining the intersection of the struggles to obtain rights for African Americans and for women we would be remiss not to mention Ida. B. Wells, the Black journalist, suffragette, and anti-lynching crusader who, in 2025, was honored by having her image minted on one of the coins in the American Women Quarters Program. We might also note that Wells' seminal publications *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases* (1892) and *A Red Record* (1895), which argued that lynchings were more about economic competition between Blacks and Whites than supposed sexual assaults by Black men of White women, brought international attention to the lynchings of Blacks in the United States; Ida B. Wells is commemorated at the National Memorial for Peace and Justice (aka the National Lynching Memorial) which opened in 2018 in downtown Montgomery, Alabama.

In our imagined, historically inclusive, textbook, we would be sure that our students learned about the successes (and failures) that women had in pushing back against the post-WWII rollback of gains that (both Black and White) women had made when they were an integral part of the workforce during the war, pushing back against the Ozzie-and-Harriet, Leave-It-To-Beaver image of women as trad-wives in the house, comforting their children and doing housework while immaculately dressed and in high heels. We would point to the work of Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem and to the Equal Pay Act of 1963, and to the Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (which banned sex discrimination in employment); we would point to the creation of the National Organization of Women (NOW) in 1966, to the 1970 Title X Family Planning Program, to the 1971 Supreme Court case *Reed v. Reed* (which was the first case to use the Equal Protection Clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment to strike

down a law that discriminated against women, in this case that men should be preferred to women as executors of estates), to the Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (which outlawed sex discrimination in public schools and public colleges), to the 1974 Equal Credit Opportunity Act (which criminalized sex discrimination by creditors against credit applicants), to the 1974 Fair Housing Act (which banned sex discrimination in housing), and to the 1974 Women's Educational Equity Act. We would also point to the 1973 Supreme Court *Roe v. Wade* case which legalized abortion, a case now, sadly, overturned by a Supreme Court dominated by justices appointed by Trump. Likewise, we would note that the Equal Rights Amendment, which stated "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex", failed to be adopted by three quarters of states before the 1982 deadline. But we would also point to more successful recent legislation, such as the Violence Against Women Act of 1994 (an act signed by President Bill Clinton which provided \$1.6 billion toward investigation and the prosecution of violent crimes against women, imposed automatic and mandatory restitution on those convicted, and allowed civil redress when prosecutors chose not to prosecute cases), the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009 (which President Barack Obama signed and which overturned a Supreme Court decision to restore worker protections against pay discrimination by resetting the 180-day statute of limitations with each discriminatory paycheck), and the National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality established by President Joe Biden in 2021. And, of course, we would discuss the #MeToo movement that flourished after allegations of sexual harassment and rape emerged in 2017 against the now disgraced Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein; we would point to the #MeToo bills Ending Forced Arbitration of Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Act (which allows employees to bring sexual harassment or assault claims to court rather than being forced into confidential arbitration) and the Speak Out Act (which prohibits the use of pre-dispute non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) and non-disparagement clauses that allowed employers to silence victims before a dispute arises), both of which were signed into law by President Biden in 2022.

“Okay,” I hear you saying, “Besides imaginary textbooks, what can be done in the *real* world to make amends for the sad history of exploitation and discrimination that African American men and women, and women in general, have endured in the United States?”

Well, to start with, let's look at what attempts to make amends have already been made.

In 2003, an act of Congress established the National Museum of African American History and Culture, which opened in 2016 in Washington D.C. as the nineteenth museum of the Smithsonian Institution. And, as we have already seen, a National Lynching Museum was opened in Montgomery, AL, in 2018. And, again as noted, the United States Mint ran, from 2022 to 2025, the American Women Quarters Program, which minted the portraits of five different women each year, selected for "contributions to the United States in a wide spectrum of accomplishments and fields, including but not limited to suffrage, civil rights, abolition, government, humanities, science, space, and arts." These honorees included Maya Angelou, Sally Ride, Wilma Mankiller, Adelina Otero-Warren, Anna May Wong, Bessie Coleman, Jovita Idar, Edith Kanaka'ole, Eleanor Roosevelt, Maria Tallchief, Pauli Murray, Patsy Takemoto Mink, Mary Edwards Walker, Celia Cruz, Zitkala-Ša, Ida B. Wells, Juliette Gordon Low, Vera Rubin, Stacey Milbern, and Althea Gibson.

On the other hand, in 2020 Congress began planning for the Smithsonian American Women's History Museum, and in February, 2025, the Smithsonian American Women's History Museum Act was proposed in Congress that would authorized the transfer of Federal land on the National Mall to the Smithsonian Institution, but in spite of the fact that the land transfer bill itself would not cost any money and that \$70 million has already been raised in private donations to help with the construction of the American Women's History Museum, and in spite of the fact that the bill has strong bipartisan support and that President Trump said at a history month event in March, 2025 "We have a great site. ... It's gonna be a big, beautiful museum. We're working on that, and we're gonna back it 100%," to date the House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., has refused to bring the legislation up for a vote in the House of Representatives. It is thus unclear if, or when, the American Women's History Museum might ever open.



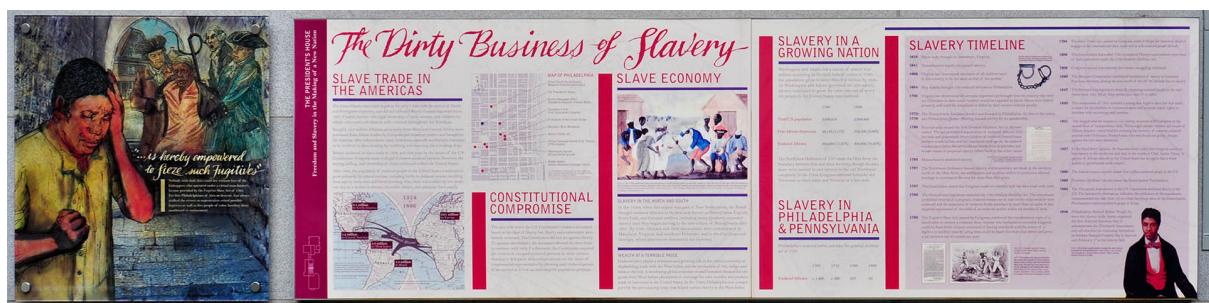
"The Scourged Back," 1863.

We might add that Trump's March 2025 Executive Order, "Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History" called for changes to the Smithsonian Institution and singled out the National Museum of African American History and Culture and the National Portrait Gallery for "divisive narratives that distort our shared history."<sup>6</sup> We have already seen that the "Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History" order has resulted in the National Park Service removing references to the genocide of Native Americans. In addition, the National Park Service has removed from our National Parks all mention of climate change and of the detention of Japanese Americans during World War II (in spite of the fact that the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, signed by President Ronald Reagan, provided reparations of \$20,000 to over 82,000 survivors of the "grave injustice" of that incarceration). In September, 2025, the National Park Service removed a disturbing 1863 photograph entitled "The Scourged Back" that had been displayed at Fort Pulaski National Monument in Georgia.

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<sup>6</sup> For more, see Charlotte Higgins, "Assault on the Smithsonian," *The Guardian Weekly*, 16 Jan., 2026, pp. 34–39, including Trump's attempt to fire the African American director of the National Portrait Gallery even though the President lacks the authority to do so.

And, more recently, in January, 2026, the National Park Service removed a series of panels and videos that were part of a “Freedom and Slavery in the Making of a New Nation” exhibition mounted in 2010 at the President’s House in the Independence National Historical park in Philadelphia, PA, an exhibit that explored the lives of the slaves George Washington brought to Philadelphia when the city was the capital of the new United States and Washington was its first President; two of Washington’s slaves, the cook Hercules and the house servant Oney Judge escaped to freedom while they were living in Philadelphia. The National Park Service’s desecration of the President’s House in Philadelphia, located only a few meters away from the Liberty Bell, of course elicited public outcry. The City of Philadelphia has sued the Federal government, and the Democratic Governor of Pennsylvania, Josh Shapiro, said “Trump will take any opportunity to rewrite and whitewash our history. But he picked the wrong city – and he sure as hell picked the wrong Commonwealth. We learn from our history in Pennsylvania, even when it’s painful.”



Panels from the “Freedom and Slavery in the Making of a New Nation” exhibit at the President’s House in the Independence National Historical park, Philadelphia, PA

And, of course, there have been official governmental apologies for the institution of slavery. In 2007, the General Assembly of Virginia passed a resolution acknowledging "with profound regret the involuntary servitude of Africans and the exploitation of Native Americans, and call for reconciliation among all Virginians." Similar apologies have also been issued by Alabama, California, Florida, Maryland, New Jersey, and North Carolina. In 2008 the Congressional House of Representatives passed a resolution acknowledging the "injustice, cruelty, brutality and inhumanity of slavery and Jim Crow", adding that "the vestiges of Jim Crow continue to this day." The following year, in 2009, the Senate passed a similar resolution noting the "fundamental injustice, cruelty, brutality, and inhumanity of slavery." But these official apologies would count, in Lightfoot's framework, as "non-apologies" in that they offer no restitutions. The U.S. Senate 2009 resolution explicitly stated that it could not be used for restitution claims. The California law, signed by Governor Gavin Newsom in 2024, called for the creation of a plaque memorializing the apology in a public and conspicuous location in the State Capitol, but it did not include any of the over 100 recommendations from a state reparations task force. [ "Great, a plaque! A lot of good that'll do me!" we can image African Americans in California saying.]

The question of reparations to African Americans for the history of slavery and Jim-Crow-era racial discrimination that their ancestors suffered is a thorny one. Unlike the case with Native Americans, the U.S. government had no formal treaties with enslaved African Americans, and, indeed, slavery had been legal in parts of the United States before 1865 and racial discrimination legal before the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In addition to the question of how to identify the African American descendants of ancestors who were harmed by slavery and racial discrimination, the coffers of states and the Federal government have already been depleted by tax-giveaways to billionaires and it is unclear how any cash retributions to African Americans could be funded, especially in light of the fact that the majority of U.S. citizens oppose such retributions. Still, Reparations Task Forces have been established in many states, counties, and cities, including Boston, Detroit, Philadelphia, and San Francisco.

"So," I can hear my imaginary interlocutor asking, "Is the only thing we can do is to write to our Congressional representatives to ask for the repeal of Trump's shameful attacks on the public historical documentation of the genocide of Native Americans and of the horrors of slavery, and to ask them to build the American Women's History Museum and to try to pass the Equal Rights Amendment again?"

Well, that would be a good step to take, but there is much more that needs to be done in making amends to the marginalized groups that have been harmed in our nation's history.

And that brings up the topic of individual vs. communal action.

In 2025, the psychologist Chris Moore published a book, *The Power of Guilt: Why We Feel It and Its Surprising Power to Heal*, the thesis of which is that guilt, as an emotional reaction to having done something wrong—as opposed to a civil determination of a crime, can be a positive (though unpleasant) emotion that motivates one to repair a broken relationship. As Moore says:

.... The experience of guilt is fundamentally tied to the ways in which we interact with other people. In the simplest terms, guilt arises when a person perceives that their relationship with another person has been damaged in some way. Most guilt follows from doing something that harms the other person in the relationship. But, sometimes guilt can arise even when we did nothing to cause harm.<sup>7</sup>

So the question of making amends involves our sense of community, the others with whom we are in a relationship. If you, as many in the Trumpian MAGA group do, identify yourself as one of a community of White males who deserve to be privileged, then you would not feel guilt over the harms that history has inflicted on Native Americans, African Americans, and women in general, and thus not feel any need to make amends. If, as, hopefully, a decent human being, you identify yourself as part of the community of the citizens of the United States, or—even better—of everyone residing in the country, or—even better still—as part of the community of all the humans who live on our planet, then you will feel guilt over the harms that have been inflicted on other members of your community, even though you personally may not have had a direct hand in inflicting those harms.

Assuming that you are a decent human being, what, as an individual, can you do to make amends?

First of all, you can educate yourself. Be aware of our history of colonialism, genocide, and discrimination, and learn about the efforts to combat the effects of that history —of AIM, of the BlackLivesMatter and the #MeToo movements. Read up on Critical Race Theory, which stresses that race is a social, not a biological, concept and which examines how systemic racism continues to exist in the country.

And become an advocate, Call for the end of tax giveaways to billionaires and advocate for cash reparations to African Americans for the history of slavery and Jim- Crow-

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<sup>7</sup> “A personal experience of guilt.” *The Psychologist* (The British Psychological Society), 5 January, 2026. Web.

era racial discrimination . Support Wages for Housework and advocate for free daycare and the continuation of the Child Tax Credit.

And resist! Resist Trump's efforts to whitewash our national history. Resist Trump's attacks on academic freedom in our colleges and universities. If you are a college graduate, advocate for your alma mater to stop legacy admissions, and that it not voluntarily submit to Trump's attacks on social diversity and critical thinking, as the Virginia Military Institute (the alma mater of Jonathan Daniels) did in March 2025, when it did not renew the contract of Major General Cedric T. Wins, its first Black superintendent who opposed the historically racist "Lost Cause" culture of the institution, or as Texas A&M University did in January 2026 when the university ended its women's and gender studies program.<sup>8</sup>

Resisting, of course, implies communal efforts. Effective resistance means joining with other decent people to decry the wrongs you perceive. Organize, join marches, carry signs, write those letters, and vote the Trumpian bastards out of office.

But making amends can also call for individual sacrifice. And this brings up the issues of Affirmative Action and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). [I tried a few years ago to start a Facebook meme "DEI is Latin for 'of God'", but it, as I'm sure will happen with this attempt to create an alternative MAGA movement, did not catch on.] On paper, calling for college admissions or employment hirings to favor Blacks, other minorities, or women if "all things being equal" sounds like a good way to make amends for past discriminations. But, "all things being equal" rarely are (even SAT scores). Your deserving son or daughter might not get in to their preferred college. At work, an incompetent person may be hired or get an undeserved promotion before you just to fulfill some DEI quota. But, we can only hope that competent students will get the education they need and incompetent workers will eventually get their comeuppances.

And, finally, the question of making real amends that include reparations brings up the issue of economic inequality. The United States has by far the highest level of economic inequality of all developed nations and, as we have noted, the tax giveaways to the millionaires and billionaires under the Trump Administration is only making the situation worse. As a recent *Forbes* magazine report noted: "The richest 1% of households in the United States have accumulated almost 1,000 times more wealth than the poorest 20% over

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<sup>8</sup> For how museums in the U.S. are also voluntarily submitting to Trump's attempt to erase "woke" culture from our institutions, cf. Higgins, *op. cit.*

the last three and a half decades, and economic inequality is getting worse at a rapid pace.”<sup>9</sup> And most of the people we want to make amends to belong to that lowest 20%. And, as AI and robotics are increasingly taking away entry-level jobs, we should try to make sure that these technological innovations do not simply make the richest among us even richer. We should support the Fully Automated Luxury Communism movement.

I guess that, in the end, all we can hope for is that, as Abraham Lincoln said in his first Inaugural address, the “better angels of our nature” will prevail.

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<sup>9</sup> Josie Cox, “[Income Inequality Is Surging In The U.S., New Oxfam Report Shows](#),” *Forbes*, 3 Nov., 2025.

In 2011, I tried to start a movement, [The 40X Rule](#), which would require private companies to adopt the same pay scale range as in the Federal Government, where the salary of the highest paid worker (the President) is only forty times that of the lowest paid, Grade 1 step 1, government worker; that effort fell on deaf ears, if it fell on any ears at all!