

## Make Amends, Grateful America [MAGA]

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>1</sup>

So the question of making amends involves our sense of community, the others with whom we are in a relationship. If, as many in the Trumpian MAGA group do, you 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 our national history has inflicted on Native Americans, African Americans, and women in general, and thus not feel any need to make amends. “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. But if, as 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 we are decent human beings, what can we do to make amends?

We can start with apologies. Asking forgiveness for past wrongs—even wrongs we personally may not have committed—is an important first step in making amends. But we need to be careful not to use apologies merely as a form of virtue-signaling. As Cheryl Lightfoot has pointed out<sup>2</sup>, we need to distinguish between meaningful apologies, which go

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<sup>1</sup> “A personal experience of guilt,” *The Psychologist* (The British Psychological Society), 5 January, 2026. Web.

<sup>2</sup> 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,

beyond mere words to acknowledge past wrongs and commit to future policy change, and “non-apologies”, which lack any true accountability.

For examples of true, positive, apologies we can look to Canada. 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; these apologies included \$45 million for the Nunavik Inuit and \$4.5 million for the Dundas Harbour Relocation Society. 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 older brother, who is now a Canadian citizen, pointed out to me, some of the Canadian apologies are only window dressing. In Canada, public meetings are required to begin with a statement that the land on which the meeting is 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 Massachusetts 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.”]

Public apologies in the United States to Native Americans, African Americans, and to women in general, has been a somewhat spotty affair.

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 closed in 1974, led to the return of Blue Lake to the Taos Pueblo and to the establishment of 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.

In 1975, Congress passed the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act, which was signed into law by 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 1987, the U.S. 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 following the passage of the Indian Removal Act of 1830. [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.

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, with \$1.4 billion being allocated to be paid to the plaintiffs and \$2 billion being 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.

A "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 substantial monetary compensation package, the Biden apology was something of a “non-apology” in that it 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 build 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>

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<sup>3</sup> Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report Vol. II, p. 78

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, 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.

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

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 76–77.

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

"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.

Not surprisingly, under the current Trump administration, the acknowledgements of wrongs suffered by Native Americans, African Americans, and women in general have been curtailed.

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 the 1890 Wounded Knee massacre where some 300 Lakota men, women, and children were slaughtered. 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. 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 the construction of the infamous "Alligator Alcatraz" immigration detention center in the Everglades.

In 2020, the U.S. 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 authorize 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.

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. The “Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History” Executive Order 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> 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.



“The Scourged Back,” 1863.

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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.



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.

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.”

So here we are, and what can we do?

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-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 did in March 2025, when it did not renew the contract of Major General Cedric T. Wins, its first Black superintendent who the 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>7</sup>

Here’s something else we might do: add some history to a national monument—to the mural that Emanuel Leutze painted in 1862 on the wall of the west stairway in the House of Representatives of the United States Capitol. Leutze’s mural fits into the “virgin soil” myth, the erroneous idea that the White American pioneers simply marched into an unoccupied land as they fulfilled their “manifest destiny” to occupy all of the North American continent. The central composition of Leutze’s 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. Given, however, 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?

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<sup>7</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.*





Emanuel Leutze, *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way*, 1862, House of Representatives, United States Capitol, Washington, DC.

Resisting implies communal efforts, joining with other decent people to decry the wrongs you perceive. Organize, join marches, carry signs, write letters to your congressmen and congresswomen demanding 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 ask them to build the American Women's History Museum and to try to pass the Equal Rights Amendment again. And vote the Trumpian bastards out of office.

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.