

Native American Healing Initiative

Trail of Hope: Remembering, Recognizing, Renewing

Delivered by Ron Holloway of the Lenape peoples to representatives of the Collegiate Church of New York on 27 November 2009 at Bowling Green, Manhattan, New York

Over 400 years ago, European explorers came to the shores of this land and declared that they were here to colonize, to subjugate, and to convert the indigenous population. They set up their homesteads, businesses and churches right on this very spot.

This new world was “discovered” and, as the rulers of Europe had already agreed, it was to be divided into sections, the results of which were devastating. Some scholars estimate that there were close to 28 million natives living on this continent at the time.

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Today, there are less than 1 million full blood indigenous natives. Obviously, something devastating happened to these original inhabitants.

What happened is that the native populations were suppressed by a political and religious will of which they could never begin to conceive. Two different ideologies clashed, the results of which were devastating, and to this day the effects can still be seen and felt.

There are still some who view American Indians as second-class citizens in our own lands. This is not surprising, considering our peoples were not even granted U.S. citizenship until 1924. Further, it was not until the 1970's that Indians were legally allowed to practice their own religion.

American Indians were so far removed from the collective conscious of this country, it took acts of Congress to obtain even these basic “rights” that most of us take for granted.

No one ever apologized, no one voluntarily returned what was taken from us, or even offered restitution. Instead, as the country expanded, every treaty was systematically broken, and the Indians were relegated to reservations to be removed from the public eye.

That is what makes today so very special. Today, the descendants of the original explorers who landed here have come to the descendants of those who have always been here, and openly apologized for their responsibility in policies that so decimated our peoples. They have extended their hands in friendship to chart a new course of race relations, to usher in a new era of healing and reconciliation that can only have beneficial results for the whole of humanity.

For when humans come to understand their commonality: that all are equal under the eyes of our creator; that neither skin color, race, nor even religion are a reason to elevate one man above another; then healing and harmony can go forth.

A 19th-century author wrote: “Certainly, there are many evils and bad passions, and much hate and contempt and unkindness everywhere in the world. We cannot refuse to see the evil that is in life. But all is not evil. We still see good in the world. There is good amidst the evil. The hand of mercy leads wealth to the hovels of poverty and sorrow. Truth and simplicity live amid many wiles and sophistries. There are good hearts underneath gay robes and tattered garments also. And there is no beauty like a firm faith in God, whatever your religious belief, as well as a faith in our fellows, and ourselves.”

It is to this faith in our own deity, in our fellows, and in ourselves that we celebrate today. On behalf of all Lenape that live, and have lived in Lenapphoking, and my ancestors, I wholeheartedly accept this apology, and offer of reconciliation. I extend my hand in brotherly affection for all to see.