

A New World Through the Eyes of the Liberally Educated

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Throughout my life, I thought I had a pretty good idea about other cultures, specifically ones that played a major role in American history. It was the same story over and over again in history classes: Europeans colonized America and conquered the Native Americans; slavery divided the nation until the Civil War when it was abolished by the Emancipation Proclamation; America is the melting pot where all nations can come together and live out their dreams, giving it the diversity it has today. The story was so familiar after so many years that there seemed to be no questioning the content; it had to be the whole and true story of history. It wasn't until I was nearly halfway done with college when I realized that my previous schooling had taught me very little about the world and other cultures in it, and when I learned that history is always written by the victor of the story, the most successful society.

The class that truly opened my eyes to what a liberal education really means was an anthropology course focused on Native Americans throughout history as well as their present day political influence and social structure. I learned about their way of life, how immensely different it is from my own, despite seeming to live in the same world as I do, but also about how they lived before the severe impacts of the European arrival in North America centuries ago. Their values and rituals were foreign to me; I had neither heard of them before, nor seen them performed, and that which I had witnessed, like a Powwow, I didn't understand the significance of. Their dedication to their culture was also shocking for me to learn about, as they would go through any kind of peril or discrimination to be able to keep their language and traditions. I learned of the truth behind the many, mostly negative, stereotypes of Native Americans, why they have persisted through the ages, and how they represent only a fraction of all the tribes in

America. Throughout the semester, the course entirely changed my outlook on Native American cultures, and other cultures in general, as well as my own. I only possessed a very basic understanding of this topic before taking the class, making me realize just how much was left out of the standard education at my previous schools. After reflecting with other students in the class, I discovered that other schools were no different from mine, despite the presence of legislation requiring this topic to be taught in primary and secondary schools. While I learned a lot in the course, I began to develop a few inquiries relating to my own life.

The most startling question that came to me during the course was why had I never learned any of this before? The content struck me as something that everyone should learn about, as it is relevant in many parts of the country where citizens can regularly interact with Native Americans on or off reservations. I found it important as well because these topics have a significant part in modern day politics with governments working with tribes over issues like natural resource use and the recent mining controversy in northern Wisconsin. However, from guest appearances in class, it seemed that even those holding political power knew very little about important issues relating to Native Americans, like treaty rights, but were still voting on major decisions that would affect the tribes despite being uneducated in the area. A simple education could easily remedy this problem, but as long as the legislation remains unenforced, the government and tribes are constantly engaged in unnecessary controversy with ever-growing animosity for one another.

As the class covered more topics, I began to form a few conclusions that had never occurred to me before. Most prominently, no society is without its flaws, certainly

not my own, but that always leaves room for improvement. While taking this anthropology class, I really realized the importance of accepting other cultures without thinking they should change to be more similar to my own, nor considering them inferior simply because their ideals and traditions are different from mine, as has been the most apparent trend throughout history. I developed a willingness to admit that my own society is not superior to those around it, as is best exemplified by one of William Cronan's qualities of a liberally educated person: "They practice humility, tolerance, and self-criticism."

After studying the disputes between Native Americans and the U.S. government through the past centuries and up to the present, it drove home the idea that nothing can really be accomplished as long as such deep discriminating divides among people exist. Individualism is strongly emphasized in the younger generations today to create diversity and encourage them to become leaders. However, this country has continually been plagued by division through political ties, racial lines, sexuality, gender, and countless other differences in opinions. While it is important for everyone to know his or her differences to show uniqueness, I believe it is just as important to recognize the similarities between all people, and accept differences without judgment. In order for any kind of action or change to occur in the world, cultural boundaries need to be put aside and have people work together, otherwise they will be locked in eternal disagreement.

After everything I learned through my anthropology course and all the ideas that completely changed my view on the world, I finally feel that I understand the importance behind gaining a liberal education. This is a course that doesn't openly seem to pertain

to my specific area of study, but it teaches important lessons pertinent for a successful education and future life. Without this type of course, as part of the system of classes required for a liberal education, most people will not develop the ten characteristics explained by Cronan that define a liberally educated person. In order to live in a progressive world where people work together to solve ever-increasing problems, these qualities are imperative. We are still all human sharing one earth, and when we work together, anything is possible.