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English 300
12/8/22

The Accepted Colonization

The works that we have explored throughout this course place a heavy emphasis on colonization and abuse, whether that be physical, mental, or emotional. Such issues are hardly exclusive to the Caribbean. As these texts took me through Caribbean history, I could not shake a sense of familiarity in regard to the United States. It forced me to look inward at my lineage's past and reevaluate what I have been taught about American history. Ultimately, I am sure everyone has identified the biases in the information they are taught throughout schooling, particularly favoring the United States. The erasure of true Native American history for example would have one believing that they happily let the colonists take over their land and that they were the grandest of friends. However, this course helps to spark further investigation into our stories, not just the ones that were repeated throughout grade school. This was particularly impactful for me, given that my ancestry can be traced back to the Pilgrims who traveled to the "New World" on the Mayflower. The specific individual who I am a descendant of escapes me entirely, however this was a fact that was repeated to me by family members numerous times throughout childhood and allowed for small instances of special treatment. As I have aged though, I am forced to ponder just how prideful I should be over such a fact, if at all?

The Pilgrims/colonists are portrayed in a positive light, while the Natives are often vilified or completely misshapen. To understand why we simply need to turn to one of the major themes of this course: race. The Pilgrims are made up of entirely white families and people, who have become a beacon of nationalism over time. They are pictured as the founders of this grand country, and Columbus as the "discoverer" of the new world, despite, well... people already

living there. Their race brings on a false hierarchy to where they immediately believed they were better than the Natives, and that prejudice continues to live on in this country because of that. William Bradford, who wrote the most complete account of the Pilgrims' journey, even described them as "savage and brutish men" before he had encountered them (Williams). The Pilgrims' actions have become glorified, while those of the Natives are ignored. Pilgrim labor is constantly discussed, except there is alarmingly little acknowledgement of how the Natives managed to thrive without any such technological advancements. Even Native American writings are ignored. Lisa Brooks has explained that the Natives made great use of writing, but James Fenimore Cooper popularized "the illusion of Native Americans as illiterate people" (Simon). As a result, she says that even today "people are often surprised at how much material is out there," because these longstanding myths have people fooled. Overall, it is the colonizer who controls history, and as one might expect, they have portrayed themselves as humble, hard-working people who miraculously befriended the "savages" of the west.

The storybook alliances we often hear about between the groups are a product of this control. The Pilgrim alliance with the Wampanoag people was very short-lived for example, as war soon erupted as the colonists grew greedy for land, and the Native population was "decimated" upon pushback (ABC News). Just as it corrupts many colonizers throughout this course's texts, whiteness grants a sense of superiority among the Pilgrims, as they feel entitled to land that is not their own. Such entitlement is what fueled the mass displacement of Native Americans, and this continues to impact them significantly centuries later. Of course, these are not the things we are taught (or at least in depth), resulting in this group of people being glamorized and heavily commercialized.

The topics of this class clearly align with the behavior of the Pilgrims, and while I am sure many understand that they are not as perfect as they might be traditionally portrayed, identifying the similarities with people/groups such as the colonists in *The Fourth Century* was an interesting experience. Because in their case, without already being told for years how glorious they are, you immediately think to yourself that they are *awful*. And then the realization hits me that they are hardly far off from our very own Pilgrims. I was raised in Plymouth myself, the supposed “landing spot,” and throughout the town are replicas of their settlement, a reproduction of the original Mayflower, and multiple museums dedicated to their achievements, but very little attributed to the Natives. This extremely nationalistic approach is unsurprising, but it begs the question of how the perception of the original Native Americans might have changed if they were white themselves? Surely, they would be seen more positively, and the preconceived notions the Pilgrims had about them would have been significantly less harsh. Would William Bradford have described them as he had? I feel like we all know the answer.

Instead of “savages” they would most certainly be great innovators or survivors for managing to build up their lives in this foreign land. It is such questions that this course evokes, as the wide variance in treatment among races is evident throughout our texts, whether that be the Chinese Chen Pan or the African Fela. And clearly, a similar gap presents itself here. Bradford’s early description exemplifies this assumption of inferiority that we often see within slave texts such as *Daughters of the Stone*. It is there where African women such as Fela are expected to “know their place” and submit to the desires of the white man who proclaims himself as superior, or where rebellious male slaves are beaten into submission if they dare to disobey. The parallels are unsettling to say the least.

Clearly these individuals are complicated people at best, but with the willingness that this course's texts criticize colonizers, it creates the question of why that is not the case with our country's own colonists? While there is an "effort" to explain the shortcomings of these figures, it falls noticeably short. Typically, the negatives only arise through high school history courses, after the education system has already spent the entirety of at least elementary school teaching children that the Pilgrims are national heroes. What continues to make these stories tick is this approach, an approach that still results in support for grossly racist, exploitative, and horrible people such as Christopher Columbus. Once again, we are taught about his incredible discovery, while associating him with the grandeur of a day off school. Attempts to roll back the already established beliefs later in schooling clearly do not suffice, or else there would no longer be a debate over if it should still be called Columbus Day, or people in costumes at Plimoth Patuxet acting as Pilgrims for all the children on school field trips to interact with. We are raised to worship colonizers; white individuals who made a habit of stealing land from the less fortunate.

The Native Americans are not only forced to pay the price of the Pilgrims' actions but must also endure the effects of the resultantly biased education system. Their settlements eradicated, their people forced out of their homes, and their land still controlled by others, they are left with little and largely without sympathy. While awareness over these issues has increased over the years, simple Land Acknowledgements will not bring back what they have lost. Overall, to answer my introductory question I would say no, that my ancestry is not something to be overly proud about. While an interesting fact, the Pilgrims are not a group I would willingly laud over, as it is hard to deem them any better than most colonizers in this course's texts. The only significant difference is we have been taught about them through their words, instead of the words of the colonized/enslaved that make up the writing in this course.

Works Cited

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