

1492 – that is when we are told that Christopher Columbus (quote) discovered (unquote) these lands. It is amazing to think that crowds of people stood on the shore, some even helped tie off the boats, and still Columbus declared that he had discovered the place - and claimed that it belonged to the Europeans. The truth is that 1492 was the year that the indigenous people of these lands found Christopher Columbus lost at sea!

A lot has happened in these last five-hundred years – much of it has not been positive. Sadly, the occupation practices still continue today.

Consider that a recent report by a team of archaeologists, shows that human DNA was discovered in Oregon dating back 14,300 years – that is 138 centuries before Columbus; and in South Carolina, stone tools have been found and carbon dated to show human existence going back as many as fifty-thousand years.

So, let's be clear... Columbus didn't discover anything; he was actually late for the party!

These lands have long been inhabited by those that we now call American Indian's; long before the arrival of the Europeans.

Despite their long tenure as the first people on these lands, Native Americans are lagging behind in nearly every socio-economic category that is measured. It is a shame on these United States that the people who were first on American soil, are last in the American dream.

From the Trail of Tears – where more than 10,000 men, women and children died on the journey to relocation – to the deplorable conditions that exist right now, these more than 2.1 million people, many living on the more than 500 reservations, deserve better.

These are the statistics:

- Native-American babies are three times more likely to die from Sudden Infant Syndrome than a non-Indian baby.
- 38% of Native women will be victims of domestic violence – one in three will be raped!
- Native mothers are five times more likely to give birth to a child that is afflicted with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, - as many as 55% of the members of some tribes are afflicted with alcoholism – some victims as young as eight or nine - a direct link to the systemic despair and hopelessness that has become their life.
- American Indian girls are two-and-a-half times as likely to become pregnant before the age of eighteen.
- Indigenous youth suicide rates are three times the national average.
- 27% of American Indian families live below the poverty level – compared to the national average of 10%. In some nations, the Navajo for instance (the second largest tribe in the U.S.), roughly 50% are living in poverty, and some smaller reservations are worse.
- Nearly 50% of Indian students never finish high school

- Schools on Indian reservations are funded at less than half the level that Public Schools are – and Public Schools are severely underfunded.
- Only 17% of Indigenous High School graduates enroll in college – compared to a national average of 62%
- Indians earn only a little more than half as much as the average American – less per capita than whites, blacks, Asian-Americans and Hispanics.
- Natives are three times as likely to die of tuberculosis, and twice as likely to die of diabetes.

The original inhabitants of these lands have the highest rates of poverty, unemployment and disease of any ethnic group in America.

These conditions should not be accepted, and raising awareness to this disgrace is a first step in the right direction.

There are plenty of stories about Indians making big money from gambling casino's; however – this is the exception, not the norm.

Some – such as the Mashantucket Pequots of Connecticut, who own Foxwoods, the country's largest casino - have become wealthy; but the facts are that less than a quarter of America's 557 Indian tribes own casinos, and only 48 of those tribes earn more than \$10 million a year from them – but the additional crime, alcoholism, and problems that come along with operating a casino, mean that gambling is not an answer to the centuries of neglect, broken promises and oppression.

Remember the pledge – Liberty and Justice for all – those are supposed to be more than just words.

The ancestor's of the American Indian truly discovered these lands, and their children deserve to share in the prosperity of this nation.

American families are NOT the enemy

I ask this convention to stand up and support this proclamation, it declares that Native Americans deserve a chance at the American Dream. Native Americans deserve equality, and respect for their history and traditions.

If any group of people are left behind, then we all lose.

Thank You