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### The Effects of American Nescience on Indigenous Issues Today

The American people spent the founding of this country violently rending land from Indigenous Americans and creating racist, oppressive policies. Then, they spent the period immediately following the “utter military triumph on the continent” (Dunbar-Ortiz 2014, pp.161), attempting to appropriate native cultures to assuage guilt over this violence. This appropriation, called “Going Native” (Huhndorf, 2001) still happens today, despite popular belief to the contrary. The lack of awareness of this history, including historical progression of policies regulating Indian affairs, allows Americans to continue their daily lives without consideration of the residual effects of said history. Garnering awareness of these policies and history will allow Americans to acknowledge and tend to modern indigenous issues.

The general population of the United States is unconscious of early and current government policies regarding indigenous people. This unawareness colors Americans’ perspective of indigenous people today. Prior to this class, I was completely unaware of the codification of racism against indigenous people, or the theft of indigenous lands through unjust legislation and policies. These oppressive American practices can be exemplified by a Supreme Court case ruling on January 3, 1903, entitled *Lone Wolf v. Hitchcock*. In this decision, the court ruled that the US Congress has “plenary authority” over the property of Indians, and that Congress is “not subject to be controlled by the judicial department of the government” (Prucha 2000, pp. 201). Essentially, Congress overruled the checks-and-balances system set up by the Constitution, which exists to stop this very type of ruling. This represents a historical

institutionalization of racism and oppression. The indigenous people attempted to participate in the colonizing power's systems of governance, as they were told to, to fight back--and they should have won. This Supreme Court ruling was unconstitutional. Though a lawyer may argue that at the time of this ruling, all indigenous people were not technically citizens of the United States, and thus not protected by the Constitution (however that does not exempt Congress from Constitutional regulations on their legislative powers). Indigenous Americans were only considered citizens at this point if they had been allotted land and stayed on that land past the trust period expiration date and thus won a "patent" or title to that land, as is iterated in the General Allotment Act of 1887 (Prucha 2000, pp.170-173) and reiterated in the Curtis Act of 1898 (Prucha 2000, pp. 195-196). This is just one example of many in which the US government circumvented indigenous rights via unjust, unconstitutional, and somewhat illegal legislative 'power', and represents the internalization of racist oppression.

Most Americans are probably unaware of these laws. I certainly was unconscious of this politicized oppression until taking this class--as a third year university student--and I have heard others in this class confer a similar lack of knowledge. If college-educated Americans aren't aware of the institutionalized oppression of indigenous people then the American public--usually generalized to have an 8th grade education/comprehension level--must be atrociously unaware of this issue. This unconscious neglect of an issue affecting indigenous people today, who are now our fellow American citizens, causes the general public to view history through a constructed lense. The origin myth of America portrays a quaint, relatively non-violent colonization of a land inhabited by uncivilized 'savages', and this is how most Americans (recall, with a general 8th grade level of education) see our history (Dunbar-Ortiz 2014, pp. 102-107). They do not see the

horrific violence used against indigenous people to steal their land. Americans do not see the oppression literally written into our laws, and thus they do not see a problem. If more Americans became aware of the truth behind our foundations, and acknowledged the issues with our government's historical and modern interactions with indigenous people, they may be more willing to aide in the remediation of current indigenous issues.

### Works Cited

1. Dunbar-Ortiz, Roxanne. *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*. Revisioning American History. 2014.
2. Huhndorf, Shari M. *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imagination*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001..
3. Prucha, Francis Paul, ed. *Documents of United States Indian Policy*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000. Accessed October 12, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central.