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Our America

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Our America Summary

In this Our America class, I was able to learn about the US through the perspective of immigrants and people who had their land taken from them by the US. I had a bit of general knowledge about the African view on it as my Mother had taught me a bit of it when I was homeschooled and I even read a book based on a true story called Stealing Freedom about a girl who disguised herself as a boy on the underground railroad to escape to freedom. However, the other viewpoints I wasn't familiar with before attending this class such as the viewpoint of Native Americans, Asians, and the Spanish, definitely added to my view of the US. I wouldn't say a whole lot has changed in my mindset towards race in America besides being made aware of the injustices that occurred to races besides Africans, but I will remember it in the future when interacting with others. The first viewpoint I will start with will be through the lens of the Africans. One thing I did not know about the enslaved Africans in the US was how they used Christianity as propaganda to push a narrative onto the slaves that they were supposed to be subservient to them. I was familiar with this a bit after seeing this in a few black history movies with my family, but I don't think I was aware of the slave Bible which was a Bible with parts taken out to fit a certain narrative such as Moses freeing the slaves in Exodus. The Bible was twisted to suit the narrative of the slave owners and this has led to some people still having a negative view of slavery even to this day. This as well as the African burial ground exhibit I was

able to see at a Museum in Manhattan helped add to my knowledge of what it was like to be a slave in those times. I especially liked the interactive exhibits such as the barrel on a lever that anyone could push to give the visitor a minute taste of what it was like for African slaves to work from sunup to sundown with little to no breaks except to sleep or relieve themselves. A part of me is glad that the slaves who suffered in those times and had to be buried in such a haphazard way were able to have their stories told centuries after their suffering. Giving them a voice through their remains made me feel like a bit of justice was served in having it brought to light. Africans or African Americans after being freed were oppressed using Jim Crow Laws which were used as a legal way to still dehumanize the black people. Things like making them use a separate water fountain and making black people sit in the back of the bus were all things part of the Jim Crow laws but thankfully, this led to the Civil Rights Movement which was many protests and demonstrations led by Civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King for black people to not be discriminated against and receive the same rights guaranteed to white people. Martin Luther King preached against the segregation that still happened in the US. To paraphrase a quote of his, he stated that the most segregated time of day in the US is 11 AM on Sunday. What this means is that most if not all churches catered to a specific ethnic group and this continues to this day. MLK wanted both races or rather, all races to come together in love to defeat the hatred plaguing our society, and in a way, he achieved his goal but religion is still for the most part a tool of segregation, or rather, there is segregation that goes on in religion today.

The next ethnic group I learned about was the Spanish. My view of the Spanish was not necessarily a good or bad one though I would have to say it leaned somewhat toward the bad. My mother worked with Spanish people and told us about how they spoke about her in Spanish right in front of her face then quieted down after she responded in Spanish to let them know she

knew what they were saying. Aside from this, I don't think I have any negative views of Spanish people. The exercise we had in class invited us to tell each other assumptions about the label we got such as what we thought of someone if they were Conservative or Democrat or what we thought of an Ex-convict or a single mother. From there, I was able to confront biases I had about people that weren't necessarily based on race but rather, about how they carried themselves such as women who had Only fans accounts which is a site where they post pictures of themselves in provocative poses or otherwise for money from subscribers. I learned that as a Christian, even if I don't agree with what people choose to do, that doesn't mean I should be looking down on them or thinking less of them because of it. Let me go back to the ethnic group I was originally speaking about. I didn't visit a museum but through a PBS documentary, I was able to get a glimpse into the history of the Spanish people and how the US treated them. One person in the documentary that stuck out to me was Juan Seguin who was part of a revolution in the then-Spanish territories against the current Spanish president. I really liked the fact that the Spanish people as well as the people from US colonies had banded together to fight against Santa Anna as it reminded me a lot of how the US rebelled against British rule. Even though the famous Alamo mission at which they holed up fell, Juan Seguin upon returning did not give in to despair but instead rallied any surviving men he could find to join the Mexican governor of Texas and they joined the battlefield with the cry, "Remember the Alamo!". I really respect Juan Seguin, but I was saddened by what happened to him and his countrymen after the war when the Americans came in and started squatting on their land after the US claimed it. A group called the Bear Revolt came to Mr. Seguin's estate and put him in prison leaving Juan to wonder what became of his property. When he was released, he found that the US had claimed the previously Mexican territories of California and Texas as US territories. What followed was people from the

Bear Revolt as well as other Americans started squatting on his and his neighbor's property and when he appealed to the new courts of law of the US, they didn't do squat to help him. They were forsaken by the US court and were forced to sell their lands to pay off the legal fees they accrued to defend the land they had. The new neighbors they had that moved into their land due to the Spanish having unclear land deeds made things even harder for them and after moving in, they cordoned off the land they took with barbed wire and kept moving it out further and further to expand their property. The Spanish fought back by rebelling by cutting the barbed wire of their new unwanted American neighbors, setting fire to their barns, and releasing their cattle. They put white blankets over their faces and rode in groups by night. They called themselves the white caps or Los Gorras Blancas. This forced the US court to listen to their pleas and the new residents who moved into the Spanish territory were forced to stop encroaching on the property of Spanish people through the extension of their barbed wire fences, but the damage was already done.

For my next Ethnic group, I will be speaking about the Native Americans or Indigenous peoples. The Native Americans had their land systematically taken as they were pushed further and further away as the US encroached upon their land under the guise of the doctrine of discovery which said just because someone is inhabiting an area does not make them the owner. The someone, in this case, would be anyone not American. The doctrine of discovery is a very self-serving document that shouldn't have any place in the US but unfortunately, it has still been in use in as recent as the 2000s. The whole of Manhattan was all land originally belonging to Native Americans, but it was bought from them for what would be less than pennies compared to the price properties are sold for today. The Native Americans were dehumanized in that they were portrayed as noble savages to the populace. One thing I knew about the Native Americans

before this class was how the US stole their land with things called whisky treaties. Whisky treaties were meetings where they met with the tribal chiefs to discuss the purchase of their land. The US got the chiefs drunk and then coaxed them into signing extremely unfavorable treaties thus the term, whisky treaties. The US assimilated the Native Americans into their culture, and they contributed greatly to their victories with one tribe being MVP of World War 2 due to the code they used to transmit messages to allies which was really just their own language. The adversaries of the US were unable to crack the code as it was a wholly unfamiliar language to them. I read of the strong sense of nationalism the Native American tribes had in the US and how hard they worked to make a home for themselves in the country they were now a part of but they also suffered mentally from the wars they were put in. One account I read in the Museum of the Native American Indian was from an Indian soldier describing how he felt being sent to fight other ethnic groups and how it felt like he was repeating what the US did to him or something along those lines. I do not recall exactly what he said but I do know that there were many Native American soldiers who suffered from the wars they were put to fight.

The last ethnic group I will talk about is Asians. When we had the exercise in class that I mentioned earlier and we talked about stereotypes attributed to certain people and I would have to admit that I still had presuppositions about Asian people myself. I wouldn't say they were all bad as most of them held Asian people in a certain sort of respect due to my attending High School with a number of Korean exchange students. I felt I could understand them coming to America and working hard to make a new life for themselves and their family but then I learned about a term called Model Minority. The term Model Minority was a divisive term describing an immigrant coming to the country and using the laws of the country they were in to better themselves and become successful. This on its own might not be a bad thing but it was used as a

weapon to pit Asian people against black people such as in the 1992 Los Angeles riots. The riots were an attempt to make the voices of black people heard as leading up to it there were a number of cases of black people dying at the hands of Police Officers. Civil Officials had the police guard the rich white neighborhoods but this just drove the rioters to vent their frustration against smaller neighborhoods such as small Asian communities. This led to the legend of the rooftop Koreans as they are referred to in some circles. The Korean shop owners defended their shops with firearms since law enforcement was nowhere to be seen. I'm not saying they weren't justified in defending their shops, but this is simply an example of one ethnicity being pitted against the other as is common even today. I still respect Asian people and other ethnic groups who have come to the US to make a better life for themselves and want their children to do the same, but I need to make sure my idea of them isn't influenced by other people's ideas of them but rather, from my own experiences with them

To conclude, from this class, I was able to understand the lens through which other ethnic groups viewed America and learn about the things they had to experience in coming to this country as well as how the US treated the original owners of the land which we now live on. I was made to see them through their lens instead of through the lens of the Master Narrative which is a way of teaching history and a way of thinking prevalent in culture that paints other ethnic groups in a certain light as opposed to others. When it comes to how the US used divisive tactics and terms such as model minority to drive a wedge between US citizens, I feel it is still going on today except the target now is to divide white people from black people again but by painting white people as villains. Racial reconciliation as I have learned from this class is the understanding of the history between races in the US and healing over time but when it comes to the news nowadays, this isn't the goal of the media. I saw a post on Twitter comparing two articles. One

article explicitly stated the race of the victim and suspect and headline as it was a case of a white elderly person shooting a young black man who mistakenly went to his house while the other article didn't have any mention of race but in the article, it was a case of a black male opening fire on a white family due to an altercation. I've seen this before in the news but this is just the most recent example that was brought to my attention. I wholeheartedly support racial reconciliation among all races but I hope that we as US citizens can recognize what mainstream media is attempting to do to divide us into categories of black or white or straight and gay in order to cause conflict. I will leave a link to the two articles I mentioned below. Please compare them for yourself.

First case

<https://www.cnn.com/2023/04/18/us/kansas-city-ralph-yarl-shooting-tuesday/index.html>

Second case

<https://www.cnn.com/2023/04/20/us/neighbor-child-shooting-basketball-singletary/index.html>