

2/20/2019

To whom it may concern:

My experience in Native American History class at PCC was like a 180 degree turnaround from my required high school U.S. History class 25 years ago which only offered a very limited and one-sided version. This was the information I wish was taught during that time instead of the white washed, sugar coated version of history here in the United States which is designed to encourage, enforce and maintain the patriarchal colonial imperialist ideologies, mentalities and positions of power and control. I like to imagine the possibility of how much more evolved humanity could be in our society today if this class replaced that U.S. history class 25 years ago, minus my concerns.

I was reminded of these concerns out of a discussion that was taking place in my Intro to Indigenous Studies class at PSU with Professor Carma Corcoran, member of the Chippewa-Cree nation. During this discussion, I shared my experience of Jon Shaw's class from PCC which then validated my concerns I had at the time. Although I was grateful for the information taught to me at PCC, as a Native woman with small daughters, I had concerns over how the term "squaw" was taught as not being derogatory but was a native word describing a young native girl and concerns over the repetitious ways John Shaw had pointed out that there were "bad people on both sides" especially after talking about certain battles that took place. For instance, the violent conflict that took place after another treaty violation and starvation of Natives that led to Abraham Lincoln ordering the execution of over 30 Native American men who were involved in the conflict (instead of over 300) to be publicly hanged. Because of the violent actions that took place on both sides – John Shaw would be sure to mention "there was bad on both sides". I could not believe these two sides were being compared. For me there is no comparison.

As a Native American woman, member of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, I considered hearing the words "bad on both sides" throughout John Shaw's class as being completely dismissive to the cruel, unfair, normalized, legalized mistreatment and genocide of the Native American people. The education system historically has been abusive for Native Americans and all people of color. It a vulnerable place for us to trust we are safe and being taught accurately and responsibly with consideration for our historical and present conditions. Sensitive and serious topics like Native American History should be given the utmost care and consideration with the ways the content is taught and who it is being taught by.

I equate this experience similar to having a male police officer teaching a class on the history of violence against women and the issue of police brutality. Before I continue let me share a sad and shocking statistic: 40% of police officer families experience intimate partner abuse (domestic violence) compared to 10 % for non-police officer families. By emphasizing there's "bad" people on both sides of the issue when mentioning times women have defended

themselves against their abusers/oppressor or times when women are criminalized/demonized for causing injury or death to their abusers/oppressors completely takes the focus away from the real issue – patriarchal male privilege. It is dismissive and perpetuates the issue by not allowing real accountability to take place. This prevents men from learning the true definition of “bad” behavior and how it shouldn’t be tolerated or accepted, as well as prevents opportunity for male introspect on the ways they participate and perpetuate this bad behavior.

Those sides cannot be compared at all, one side is the abuser/oppressor/benefactor – the privileged, dominant group. The other is resisting, forced into a state of desperation for survival and protection as a result of the others actions. Using the words “bad on both sides” against victims of genocide, against the abused/oppressed is not acceptable.

At the end of the term I can’t remember if I mentioned in the survey anything about my concerns during John Shaw’s class or not. Honestly I am usually emotionally done by that time and zip right through the survey for a variety of reasons. I believe teacher surveys are required to receive your grades? I do recall having the feeling of concern that my comments could impact him in a negative way and God forbid my words impact someone in a negative way even though I have been emotionally affected in a negative way. In the end I just was not emotionally ready to express those concerns. Just as writing this letter is emotionally draining, it also takes a lot time and is not an easy process to get through.

Sincerely,

Marnie Griffin