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Ethnic Mosaic Religious Group

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In the current world, most countries have settled for religious freedom for their citizens. The United States is the country where many non-Americans expect to find much religious freedom considering their participation to encourage acceptance and fairness. However, the reality is that indigenous people, who were the first Americans, do not have the rights that they desire. They were denied the right to exercise their traditional religions that were referred as earth based. Most of the people who have full rights to practice their form of religion have to observe European religious ethics. In spite of the many freedoms in the U.S. Constitution, the Natives have experienced much religious persecution. Long ago, indigenous people accepted the conqueror's mentality of the settlers, which threatened the spiritual and physical survival of the natives, and it continues affecting their life even today.

Traditional religion of American Indians follows the principle of nature conservation and fair association. Therefore, the natives respect their nature by protecting their homelands, regions, and communities. Their activities aim at ensuring a healthy world where every living thing, water, and air is well-nurtured to mature and be in harmonious co-existence with each other.¹ Eventually, such kind of relationship forms a strong foundation for sustainability and a fair, ordered balance in the world.

Native teachings contradicted the European understanding of life structure. It is likely that if whites had used the natives' attitude towards life, the current severe environmental and human crisis could be eradicated or easy to solve. Unfortunately, the American government does not support understanding the nature conservation from a sacred point of view. American Indians

¹ Paula Hartz, *Native American Religions* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2009).

have struggled for about 500 years to overcome the trauma of elimination and assimilation of their culture. They still struggle to overcome the genocidal effects of religious intolerance and governmental interference. The historical harassment of native religious practices by the U.S. government aimed at converting American Indians from their traditional religions to Christianity. Though the natives live in their homelands today, they live under siege, because they cannot practice their religion as freely as many other communities do.²



Ghost Dance

In the late 1800s, American Indians lost their ancestral lands to the settlers and explorers who built homes and used the land for the exploitation of natural resources. The settlers coordinated groups of whites to kidnap Indian children to take them to Christian boarding schools. Any native religion leader who resisted the rule against their religion faced a harsh punishment. The U.S. government purposed to exterminate native religions. Ghost dance was a major religious practice that the colonists rejected. As the natives were practicing the dance

² Gregory E. Smoak, *Ghost Dances and Identity Prophetic Religion and American Indian Ethnogenesis in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

around Wounded Knee, armies were sent to attack them. They attacked all the tribes that practiced the dance, and the attack left more than 300 worshippers dead. The government further declared other religious ceremonies unlawful, and anybody found practicing them suffered arrest, imprisonment, and starvation.

The cold treatment is the evidence of a violent clash between the nations greed for their interests over the indigenous people, which sets the foundation for consequent abrogation of the fundamental rights of American Indians to carry out their traditional religious practices. Unfortunately, there is an awful hypocrisy in the Constitution regarding the protection, which it offers to religions. Other religions similar to Christianity have received positive status in American society, whereas native religions have not. In 1924, American Indians became the U.S. citizens, but their search for freedom of tribal religions failed. Even today, their traditional religious practices are unaccepted, which poses a significant threat to religious liberty of all Americans.

Native Americans also value their sacred sites, but, unfortunately, most of the sites are located on the governmental lands. Currently, much cultivation is happening in the Indian ancestral lands, including the site where the U.S. Calvary engaged natives in the 1890s. The urge to have the religious cultures back and safeguard the cultural sites has led to the creation of some groups like the Apache Survival Coalition, among others. However, the harsh opposition of the rich and powerful timber lobbyist and miners remains the major challenge for American Indians.

References

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