

Celebrating Native American Heritage Day

Who best represents resilience in this nation? Is it the Europeans who fought for freedom and rights despite the challenges they had to face? Or perhaps, is it the Native Americans, who continue to fight for their rights, land and heritage?

On Friday, November 27, Native American Heritage Day was celebrated for the twelfth year since it was signed into law by President Barack Obama on October 8, 2008. This day was established to recognize and honor the first people of this nation and celebrate the importance of their past, present and future, according to Native Hope.

This day is not only a celebration of Native Americans, but also a day people must recognize and learn more about. Xavier High School Principal Ms. Angela Olson, who volunteered at Mission Grade School on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation after college, had a few observations regarding the problems Native Americans, no matter how young or old, still face in this country.

"...my fourth graders once asked me why the start of each chapter in their social studies book talked about the 'old Indians' (as in when Indians first arrived to various parts of the United States) but they never talked about 'real-life' (meaning how they saw themselves in 21st century)," Olson said.

Some other issues that affect Native Americans today include shorter life expectancy due to underfunded healthcare programs, lower graduation rates due to governmental neglect and lack of vital resources due to land conflict. Despite these deep-rooted problems, Native Americans continue to fight for themselves, addressing the issues listed above. For example, this summer, Muscogee (Creek) Nation, a Native American tribe in Oklahoma, celebrated the pivotal *McGirt v. Oklahoma* case, which declared that original Native American land in eastern Oklahoma was, in fact, theirs, according to *The New York Times*.

In addition, citizens of America have started to slowly grow in awareness of Native Americans and their struggles, translating this into action this year.

"Our curriculum has recently been updated to include more respect for the culture and accomplishments of Native Americans. As always, in social studies, we seek to simply teach the truth with very little bias (although there will always be some)," Mr. Matthew Farrell, a social studies teacher at Xavier, said.

These steps are more than important for the youth of the community, with the role of education at all social levels and, in particular, of young generations remaining one of the best ways

to stop the proliferation of racist and discriminatory discourses, and to foster intercultural exchanges, according to UNESCO.

However, Xavier High School, Cedar Rapids and the United States have to continue to speak up against the oppression of modern-day Native Americans and continue to educate the community about indigenous groups in this area.

The day after Thanksgiving, when families are still telling old tales of the settlers' treacherous journey to America, is rather a day to remember the strength of the Native Americans and work to grow in awareness. Consider taking a virtual tour of Effigy Mounds National Monument,

Ella Tallett
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