Our pride sits on stolen land. We must fix harm done.

Your Turn

Annabeth Preston
Guest columnist

I’m 11 years old, but I know enough to know that while we in our lifetime didn’t take over, invade and dishonor promises and land deals we made with any Native American group, it’s still our duty to fix it. That 'our' means the United States of America. Our ancestors bear responsibility, so it is our 'privilege' to fix it as best we can. Maybe then we will be seen as a light to the world as we once were.

My parents tell me that our nation is up over our heads in debt, but righting our wrongs is the rightful thing to do. Consider even just one National Monument, Mount Rushmore. You see it and see pride for your home country. Imagine you had a friend who was part of the Sioux Native American tribe; she looks at the same monument and feels hurt and distaste.

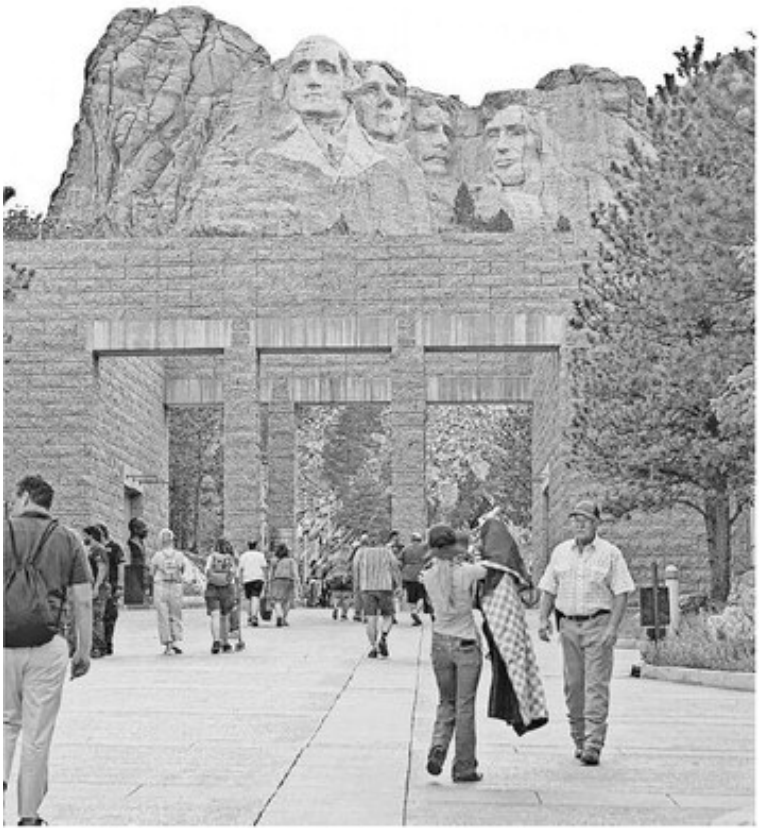
Why? Because the Sioux’s precious religious rock was stolen, defaced – literally – and 'fixed' (and by that I mean Americanized – just one more place to sell merchandise). Their ancestors held religious ceremonies there. We stole a sacred rock and then carved faces into it.

We are the intruders. Imagine if we were placed on set-aside reserves so Native groups could practice their culture and religion as they please. Maybe it’s time to finally acknowledge that we did something wrong – after coming from Europe and removing Native Americans from their land in places like upstate New York and then forgetting about them, with no shame.

America has its great points – freedom of religion, fresh water and food, plus freedom in general. But we also have our flaws, like any country. School shootings, and violence in general. Discrimination toward people of color and persons with disabilities.

What I’m trying to say is: We caused harm. And it is our 'privilege' to fix it. I really hope I’m alive to see the day when we, as a country, realize that we can still turn this around, not by trying to erase it and pretend it never happened, but making actual repair by showing Native Americans we’re sorry, we care and that they are not invisible. I really hope I can be part of this peaceful revolution.

Annabeth Preston is a student who lives in Greece.



Visitors walk around the Mount Rushmore National Memorial on July 3 in Keystone, South Dakota. USA TODAY Network via Reuters Connect

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