

PEACE AND JUSTICE



open wide our hearts

the enduring call to love *a pastoral letter against racism*

Article – 5

The following excerpt was taken from: https://www.usccb.org/resources/open-wide-our-hearts_0.pdf

As Christians, we are called to listen and know the stories of our brothers and sisters. We must create opportunities to hear, with open hearts, the tragic stories that are deeply imprinted on the lives of our brothers and sisters, if we are to be moved with empathy to promote justice. Many groups, such as the Irish, Italians, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Poles, Jews, Chinese, and Japanese, can attest to having been the target of racial and ethnic prejudice in this country. It is also true that many groups are still experiencing prejudice, including rising anti-Semitism, the discrimination many Hispanics face today, and anti-Muslim sentiment. Especially instructive at this moment, however, are the historical and contemporary experiences of Native and African Americans. *The Native American Experience*.

Before Europeans arrived, this land already had many diverse peoples upon it, with varying customs, languages, and beliefs. As explorers, and then pioneers, arrived, relations with 11 Native Americans also varied but were mostly to the detriment of Native peoples. Native Americans experienced deep wounds in the age of colonization and expansion, wounds that largely remain unhealed and strongly impact the generations to this day—a fact that St. John Paul II recognized when he met with Native peoples in 1987: “The early encounter between your traditional cultures and the European way of life was an event of such significance and change that it profoundly influences your collective life even today. That encounter was a harsh and painful reality for your peoples. The cultural oppression, the injustices, the disruption of your life and of your traditional societies must be acknowledged.”¹⁶

Many European settlers were blind to the dignity of indigenous peoples. Colonial and later U.S. policies toward Native American communities were often violent, paternalistic, and were directed toward the theft of their land. Native Americans were killed, imprisoned, sold into slavery, and raped. These policies decimated entire communities and brought about tragic death. The results were massive, forced relocations of people, such as the forced removal of the Cherokee people from the Southeast to the Western territories along the “Trail of Tears,” and of the Navajo in the “Long Walk.” Thousands of men, women, and children died during those forced removals. The forced relocation of peoples occurred again and again due the idea that if the indigenous peoples “interfered with progress they should be pushed aside.”¹⁷In many boarding schools and orphanages, the objective was to “Americanize” Native children by forcing¹² them to abandon all facets of their culture, including the irnative languages. In the words of the superintendent of one school, the goal was to “kill the Indian, and save the man.”

In Christ,
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