

Navigating Circumstances From Subaltern

An American Indian Perspective

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You will definitely get into that university because you are Navajo,” “Must be nice you do not have to work as hard to get into a university,” “You have it easy because you are Navajo,” “I heard you receive money from Indian casinos, must be nice to have that,” “the government is giving you handouts,” “was and is the constant replies I receive as a Navajo American Indian navigating her way through academia.



However, the reality of my journey is an echo of what other American Indians and Indigenous youth must endure when etching to create a seat within academia. I grew up in Southern Orange County, California, miles away from the reservation in New Mexico, essentially, I am an indigenous outsider. My mother, on the other hand, spent her early youth on the reservation and the silence between her and her memories remains loud for me to know that much was endured for her survival. What was not lost between my mother and I, is that I am and will always be a proud Dine or the well-known term, Navajo. My mother’s and father’s sacrifices were to provide me with the best opportunity that public school education in the state of California could offer, which is the Southern Orange County school district.

I committed myself to take as many advanced placements (AP) classes as possible because I was told this would be beneficial when applying to universities. I did what I was told to do to become the best candidate for my dream universities. I took nighttime community college courses, prep for the SAT and ACT, became a youth sports instructor, and worked at a donut shop, even committing myself to work before I had to go to class. My high school teachers praised my work ethic. I was told by friends and family members, "you will definitely get into that university because you are Navajo." It did not dawn on me that everyone looked to my ethnicity as the defining factor for why I would be accepted into universities and truthfully it did not dawn on me that universities looked to my ethnicity as hindrance; for every rejection letter read along the lines I would not fit in culturally. What did that mean? As an 18-year-old I could not fathom this conundrum.

I am here to tell American Indians and Indigenous youth that it is not too much to be you. Although it is tireless to pick oneself up from stereotypical comments about what it means to be indigenous and to make leaps and bounds against systemic hurdles; it is within the midst of adversity that fuels one's journey. For American Indians and Indigenous youth that have faced denial after denial and were left with no community to hear you out, do not give up on your academic aspirations. Having faced denial from universities, I began my road of academia at community college, for I felt it was a fall from grace. By chance, a letter from the University of New Mexico offered me the opportunity to complete my bachelor's degree. It was to my mother's surprise that she would be making her journey back to New Mexico and leaving me there to continue with my education. Now, my time completing my Master program has come to the full realization that the perspective of indigenous ingenuity on the international forum is left in the subaltern. I dedicate my journey of denial, heartbreak, and resilience to all American Indians and Indigenous, young, and old, and most of all to my mother for I know the land calls us home. ●