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150 Years of False Peace

A statement from the K'é Infoshop Collective

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150 years ago today (*Ed. Note: originally published June 1, 2018*) the so-called United States allowed Diné prisoners of war to leave the Bosque Redondo concentration camp. The treaty is idealized through the lens of American exceptionalism as a symbol of “strength” or “sovereignty”, however if we examine the language of the treaty we will discover the effects of its consequences.

First we acknowledge not signing the treaty meant we would have been removed even further from the land we love. We would not be comforted by the presence of our Dzixl Nataanii/ mountain leaders. We would be corralled to lands that didn't know our songs, ceremonies, or names. We are not advocating for a romanticized “fight to the last man” battle with an enemy who still has access to nearly unlimited resources of death.

In the historical context, the signing of the treaty was not between two equal sovereigns coming to a fair or mutually beneficial agreement, as most would like to believe treaties are (they aren't). The treaty is a list of demands coercing Diné people to deny our original laws of matrilineal kinship, to accept settler morals of land ownership/slavery, and to build a toxic dependency on settler paternalism which they call “democracy”. These settler ideals then had to be translated from English into Spanish for the few Diné men who could speak Spanish. Oral history tells us the signers only understood that writing “X” meant our people could leave.

And so began an era of outright violence towards Native people being slowly replaced by the insidious violence of language and laws in the structures of settler colonialism.

Article 10 of the treaty states “No future treaty for the cession of any portion or part ... shall be of any validity ...unless agreed to ... by at least three-fourths of all the adult male Indians ...”. One may interpret this as a measure to protect the rights and privileges within the treaty, however it directly marks when we began to exclude Diné womxn from gaining political power. The treaty almost only references Diné “him” and “his” with a Diné “her” mentioned once. Patriarchy is a structure of violence that enforces the false belief of a gender-binary system, where the “male” is positioned over the “female”. The treaty symbolically removed Native processes of consensus that included all six genders of the Diné and the matrilineal strength of Diné society.

Article 9 lists specific tasks to carry out the United States’ settler colonialism project: “They will not ... oppose the construction of railroads, wagon roads, mail stations, or other works of utility or necessity which may be ordered or permitted by the laws of the United States.” Much like the violent imposition of democracy upon Native people, so will the infrastructures of capitalism be built across Native lands where the only form of recourse is “payment of damages”. The settler desire to expand westward in order to gain capital to build and maintain empire left a literal trail of destruction not only upon the land, but upon Native womxn. Infrastructure projects included man-camps where Native womxn were murdered, trafficked, and abused in ways not too different from the resource extraction man-camps of today. Most of these early man-camps still exist in what we now know as “bordertowns”. Capitalism is not just a theory of economics; it

is a map of extreme violence continuously drawn and updated by colonialism and imperialism.

Through immense suffering of the Diné, the United States legitimized the theft of land and rivers through its system of governance and laws. This system is not broken, it efficiently governs the murder and exploitation of Native lives and land.

The treaty promised peace to Diné people. We are not at peace. Bordertown settlements along the railways continue to bleed out Native rebellion through white supremacy and economic exploitation. The United States says treaties are the supreme law of the land yet allow states created after 1868 to be the primary beneficiaries of rivers that have flowed through our creation stories, denying us the ability to create a future with water. Colonialism isn't finished, it's in every pipeline, every water settlement, every police bullet that kills a Brown, Black, or Native person. The treaty is a symbol of great duress and false promises.

The treaty is not to be celebrated. Our ancestors warned us of this very moment, powerful songs and ceremonies were performed to guide us onward. We must finish their songs and ceremonies by not simply enduring the monsters of colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy, but to totally crush them. Let us organize with all good relatives of the Earth to create a future based on kinship and reciprocity.

This isn't a call to pre-contact, this is a demand for a future free from the monsters that harm us all by slaying them.

In Kinship and Solidarity,
– K'é Infoshop Collective