

Giani Rodrigues

Mayflower Essay Contest

Question: As a native student, what does your tribal history mean to you?

6/10/2020

My tribal history has a profound impact on who I am. My family is from Fogo, an island of the West African archipelago called Cape Verde. Although I was not born there, I learned a lot about my family's motherland after visiting Fogo in 2015 to honor my late great grandmother. With this experience, I was able to visualize and experience my heritage and genuinely understand the meaning of my tribal history. My tribal history is exemplified by perseverance, solidarity, and cultural traditions, all of which define who I am today.

The elders in my family were raised in rural areas of the Cape Verdean islands. To provide for the family, my grandparents and great grandparents farmed for their crops, raised their livestock, and bargained-for resources they could not afford otherwise. They adapted to challenges such as droughts, poor crop growth, and the death of livestock due to rabid predators. To survive, my family needed to navigate the precarious climate and treacherous terrain of the Cape Verdean islands. For many, it may seem like Cape Verde was a very unfavorable place to live. But for my family, it was everyday life, and tenacity and ambition were required to survive. The perseverance from my elders has moved swiftly through the generations. Both sets of my grandparents decided to move to America for a better life in the early 1980s. They ensured that I understood the hardship that they went through to enable an experience full of opportunity for my entire family. For this reason, I am a more resilient person and embrace the challenges that life places ahead of me.

From our elders, my family learned to embrace solidarity and unity. Most families in America are small, averaging out at about three people per family. My family, on the other hand, is unique in the aspect of size. I am thankful to have met my aforementioned great grandmother and to have all sets of my grandparents still alive and well. Collectively, I have a total of fifteen aunts and uncles, and many other cousins who maintain a healthy relationship. I have a stable connection with all of my cousins, so I look forward to the holidays and birthdays to get together and enjoy each other's presence.

Furthermore, everyone in my family is proud of our Cape Verdean heritage, and we show it. I love how my family demonstrates unity by celebrating major Cape Verdean holidays with great food, loud music, and lots of dancing. Although social injustice and inequality exist in our society, my support system is a constant reminder to embrace my tribal history. I wouldn't want to be from any other ethnic group. When I'm older, I want to be able to say, "my family fought for this", or "my family suffered through that, but we made it together through solidarity." We're proud to be Cape Verdean American, and we support each other no matter what.

Lastly, being Cape Verdean is strongly exemplified through our cultural traditions. An example of a cultural tradition is making Cape Verdean "couscous," a fresh codfish salad or a dessert called "pudin", or the Cape Verdean staple, cachupa. Many in my family often share these meals, and a simple meal offering can often turn into a significant family event. Furthermore, many traditions can be celebrated for religious reasons, but for us, it's about Cape

Verdean pride. The music and the food from the islands are something that I cherish as I can live vicariously through the singers. All of the songs paint a picture of my Cape Verdean heritage and remind me of the hard journey my elders went through to ensure a better life for the family. Another tradition is embracing familial ties and relationships with friends, colleagues, and even neighbors. Whenever my family or any Cape Verdean family throws a small gathering or cookout, it always turns into a festive event, where all of our friends, neighbors, and associates come over for a good time.

In summary, my tribal history is a constant reminder of perseverance, solidarity, and cultural traditions. It's always fun being a Cape Verdean, especially with my family, from holidays to standard days. My elders experienced hardships to provide a fulfilling life for the family, but we've learned to embrace the struggle and support one another through strong bonds and cultural traditions. It may be a difficult time to be a Cape Verdean, but I wouldn't trade it for the world. My tribal history explains to you who I am.