

PAULA LAVIGNE

They're people, not playthings

In elementary school, we did a lot of pointless things like raising gerbils and bean sculptures, but the highlight of my elementary school days was the annual field trip to Morrill Hall.

Our longest stop took us by the exhibit of Native Americans. We saw the men and women dressed in feathers and decorated with paints. The boys liked the big tepees. We all marveled at the fact that Indians used every part of the buffalo.

Our pseudo-guide told us about the traditions of the Sioux, Pawnee, Omaha and other tribes in and around Nebraska. They told us of the Native American's belief in the gods and the powers and unity of nature.

We understood Native American history was vital to our state. We understood the Indians were the first inhabitants of our lands.

Our guide left one question unanswered. Where did they go?

It was as if the Native Americans were modern dinosaurs who disappeared from our nation, save for the few remnants preserved on reservations dotted across the continent.

This question never really bothered me to the point of staying up nights. The elementary school field trips soon ended, and my interest in Native American affairs ceased.

That is, until two weeks ago, when I attended the Winter Council — a gathering of Native American leaders and members of tribes from all over America. My question was answered.

We killed them. We, as in European-American society, killed off the initial inhabitants of our great nation. We did this, ironically, in the name of freedom. And we haven't stopped.

America is so concerned about other nations being overrun by opposing forces. We protected Kuwait from Iraq when the native Kuwaitis were being threatened. It seems it's our duty to protect natives of other nations. At the same time, we hypocritically destroy our own native people.

I don't claim to be an expert on Native American affairs, but I know what our nation has done to Native



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Americans compares to what we've done to African Americans.

Native American children were taken from their homes and placed with "white" families in an attempt to assimilate future generations of Native Americans. Their land was bought out from under them, and they were rounded up like cattle and placed on reservations, outlined by the government. This same government will not allow the repatriation of their sacred remains so their spirits can be put to rest by proper burial.

We have robbed them of their culture, their religion, their rights and their future. Although they are somewhat sovereign, government limitations make it almost impossible for them to compete and succeed in society.

Their problems don't stop with the government, though.

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In general, Indians were peace-seeking pacifists. But westerners, even "Little House on the Prairie," made them out to be savage, scalping psychopaths. Granted, there were some tribes which sought revenge against the white man, but their vengeance was justified. Consider the following as an example.

You have this little island off the coast of Greenland. You raise children who raise their own children and so on. One day, boatloads of these purple people storm your little island and start building odd-shaped houses. They kill your only food source, polar

bears, just for fun and leave you eating plankton and whatever else grows on a glacier.

Granted, you'd be just a little irate. And, with the help of the Neanderthalic National Rifle Association, you take after those purple people with weapon in hand. It's called self-defense.

Apparently, American society doesn't realize this. Parents let their children play cowboys and Indians, and the Indians are portrayed as objects and mascots like the Washington Redskins.

What makes the Native American a second-class citizen in the views of the American government and society in general? In many cases, endangered animals have more rights.

Native Americans aren't dinosaurs and they aren't animals. We have to start taking them out of the storybooks and the old westerns and start putting them back into society. We need to give them their culture and the respect they deserve.

I think a poem by Linda Anfusio, a poet and artisan belonging to the Mohawk tribe, says it best. It should be read with a broadcaster's eager voice.

"Cowboys and Indians./ A realistic toy./ Complete with tomahawks and rifles./ Hours of fun for girls and boys!/ Nazis and Jews!/ A realistic toy./ Complete with gas ovens and Gestapo./ Hours of fun for girls and boys!/ Klansmen and niggers!/ A realistic toy./ Complete with burning crosses and nooses./ Hours of fun for girls and boys!"

Lavigne is a freshman news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

PAUL KOESTER

Species share some bad traits

From whence evolved the human species? Did we evolve from apes as scientists claim? Although Darwin conclusively proved life on this planet evolved as an adaptation to its environment, science has failed to provide the indisputable link between apes and humans. Although we share many attributes with apes, we are remarkably similar to several other creatures, too.

Perhaps we evolved from bacteria. Bacteria, like humans, breed at an exponential rate. Like us, they don't stop giving rise to offspring just because they see impending doom. When their populations surpass the carrying capacity of the environment, nature takes over.

Perhaps the human species started off as bacteria and evolved from other creatures such as cats, dogs, hyenas, chickens, ants and sheep.

Humans, like our feline friends, are full of pride and have an extreme fear of change. Ever see what happens to a cat when it is placed in a new environment? Like humans, most don't like it. Many refuse to adapt; many quit coming home or get very depressed. Humans, like cats, do what gives them the most short-term satisfaction.

People are also like dogs. A lot of humans seem to have a wall of fear and mistrust surrounding them. Many are insecure, starving for someone to recognize them or give them attention — to tell them they are OK. Many dogs, like humans, respond to life in a different manner. Ever notice how dogs are aggressive, wanting to bite or harm everybody but their few close friends? Humans often behave in this manner, especially when we have legal weapons that can destroy the lives of people in just a few seconds.

Humans seem to be closely related to hyenas as well. People have an inherent need to place someone, usually the wrong one, in a position of



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authority. At least hyenas place one in authority who can assure their survival. Hyenas, like humans, constantly struggle for power, and when the leader dies, there is chaos. Humans are also like hyenas in that they run in packs and kill their own.

On a more massive scale humans are like ants. Look at the huge wars that occur between different races of ants. Humans constantly mobilize and murder one another because they don't care to try to understand one another's cultural or racial differences.

Ever see chickens in a coop? Just like humans, there is a pecking order. Chickens will pick on one low on the totem pole until that bird is a bloody, featherless mess. As teen-agers, humans are downright cruel with name-calling and fighting, and as mature adults it is done with money, power and prison. Those deemed low on the totem pole by society's standards are kept there. They remain poor and powerless. Many kids who were ostracized and put down while growing up are now in prisons.

Most of all, people are similar to sheep. Few care to stand out in the crowd, for if they did, someone might think they were weird. I can see how this trait has become an important part of human behavior, because those who stand up against injustice are eliminated like Malcolm X and Martin Luther King. Those who keep their mouths shut are more likely to live

long enough to give rise to offspring. Too bad this trait isn't assuring a happy future for our children.

What a peculiar species we humans are, with all the biological processes of other creatures, yet with an unsurpassed ability to alter the environment with technology. Unfortunately, we still carry many negative traits of animals in a world totally detached from the environment in which we evolved.

Even if we're not killing people or running in packs, it is totally animalistic to behave as cats and sheep, resisting necessary change and going with the flow. Our personal comfort and security do not outweigh the predicament we are pawing off on our children.

Wouldn't it be great if we the people made changes that the old, white men and their corporate sponsors had to follow? We could become more like elephants and be active members in our communities, or like gorillas, strong when necessary but usually gentle, or like thousands of other creatures by making efficient, ecologically sound use of our resources.

The world we live in is a product of the policies we swallow, and environmental destruction, inadequate education, greed, intolerance and war leave a bad taste in my mouth.

Koester is a senior soil science major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

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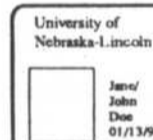
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