Erasure of African culture is an injustice to young minds

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How many countries in Africa can you name right now? How many European countries can you name? Schools in America have been perpetuating the miseducation of African history for years. For example, it’s common for maps to show Africa and Greenland to be near the same size, despite Africa being bigger than China, India, most of Europe, and the U.S. (save for Alaska and Hawaii) combined.

Often, the first introduction children in school have to Africa is the Transatlantic slave trade. This is a disservice to young minds. Africa wasn’t just the place where slaves came from. It was the continent from which human life emerged, giving birth to some of the earliest civilizations ever recorded. The land has always held valuable natural resources such as diamonds, gold and oil and thus, has always been exploited for it.

In 1798, after Napoleon invaded Egypt, he was so enamored with the ancient kingdom that he brought in scholars to document his findings. Images of Egypt spread to Europe, and over the next century, rich Europeans came in hordes to help themselves to these treasures. There were even “mummy parties” where they unwrapped the mummy’s remains as a party game.

The stereotype of Africans as savages in the wild bush paints a picture of the continent in a negative light, and was a deliberate ploy set in motion hundreds of years ago to dehumanize people of African descent. If they were so savage and so beneath you, then why come so far to their land with advancements equal to and even superior to your own? Egyptian culture heavily influenced what later became modern mathematics, medicine, art, beauty, paper, writing, the list goes on.

What is so infuriating about the erasure of African greatness is that they were just fine without Western influence. They had their own systems in place, and they might not have been perfect, but they belonged to the people. They had no chance to evolve with the times because they were wiped away. Western influence has caused the fall of so many ways of life. Out of ignorance and malice, people try to diverge the conversation about slavery with the age-old argument that Africans sold each other into slavery, without addressing the context of the situation.

No one addresses how the white colonizers fueled wars and prayed on leaders when they were most vulnerable. Before being introduced to guns, spears and arrows were used in battle and the conflicts were relatively brief. Guns elongated warfare and multiplied fatalities. They were also often given on loan. The Europeans convinced African leaders to surrender their prisoners of war to them as payment for these weapons. These deals were often broken by the Europeans, and several people were tricked into slavery.

There are still empty spaces left from the African diaspora. If I could tell you about the country I’m from, I would. But that heritage was stolen from me and the vast majority of people of African descent. How could culture and language be carried down when it was beaten out of our ancestors or died with them?

Black people are so beautiful and powerful that we have adapted and created our own collective culture to fill that void. Our greatness has never ceased, as we continue to influence the mainstream: fashion, slang and music all link back to what we started. Kylie Jenner was out here with cornrows! Even in South Louisiana, all the best food can be traced back to slaves. Gumbo is the Angolan word for okra.

For my readers, I challenge you all to go against the grain and take what you’ve learned in indoctrinated schools with a grain of salt. The only people who can write history are the survivors. Sit down and ask yourself how exactly some of these “third-world” countries came to be. Remember, knowledge is power.