

# SANTA YNEZ VALLEY NEWS

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## **Is 'Indian country' a country divided?**

I recently returned from a family vacation where we spent a few days at Gettysburg. It was both fascinating and shocking to be reminded of the horror and death of the Civil War. Gettysburg, a three-day battle, was the scene of 51,000 casualties and deaths. We had a guide explain the three-day battle and we all listened, dumbstruck, as he described thousands of men charging into battle, some told that they must give the Union Army 15 minutes by giving their lives. This war was a battle to ensure that the United States remain one nation. It was about protecting freedom for all. It was about treating all people equally. A few days later, after honoring the tomb of the Unknown Soldier, I tried to express to my children the profound feelings I had for the millions of men and women who had given their lives for my freedom, and our country, and the men and women who continue to lose their lives protecting our freedoms.

I returned to our home in the beautiful Santa Ynez Valley to read the July 6 edition of the Valley News. In it was a commentary entitled: "Economic development in Indian country." The article discussed "financing and development opportunities in Indian country," "competitive advantages for tribal government economic development," "public policy recommendations for Indian country," "building a nation," and "tribal nations." Indian country. These words and types of commentaries from the Santa Ynez Chumash and other Indian tribes across the nation are not new. However, they were especially sad for me to read after viewing thousands and thousands of headstones in the cemeteries of Gettysburg and Arlington. Indian country are words that Indian tribes all over the United States are using in an attempt to reclaim aboriginal lands that were lost generations ago to conquering people from Mexico, Spain and other European countries. Indian country and Indian reservations now make up over 560 separate, independent governments with their own separate, individual constitutions. To some, this might look like just restitution, but it is never justifiable to promote inequality because of past persecution and our country has made continued progress and fought wars to secure that we remain one nation, one people. What are we? Are we the United States of America and Indian country? Are we one nation under God, and Indian country? Are we the United States, or are we a country divided? Remembering Lincoln's Gettysburg address: "It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us, that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion, that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the Earth."

Kathy Cleary lives in Los Olivos.