

V'Santi Tobey

Major: Theatre Dance and Art Studio double major

Class of 2022

Tribal Affiliation: Mashpee Wampanoag, Taino Indian

V'Santi Tobey is a second-year attending the University of California, Davis (UC Davis). She is an involved member of the African American Association, Theatre and Dance programs, and a student assistant to the Native American Academic Student Success Center (Native Nest). She started very rocky but has made an enormous comeback in her second year at UC Davis. During V'Santi's first year at Davis, she was academically dismissed for her Spring quarter because of poor grades. In retrospect, V'Santi reflects and thinks that she thought of her first year as an escape rather than a place to get an education. She treated it in such a manner because she believes in high school; she "was just always on at school." She worked very hard in high school to make it to college and now that she had completed her goal she thought she could finally sit back. However, once she realized the industriousness of the academic aspect V'Santi states, "I couldn't get myself together in time enough for [the University] to say, 'Yeah, you can stay.'" Being dismissed had a tremendous impact on V'Santi's mentality as she describes her experience as a mixture of, "...this idea of not being good enough, or not doing enough, or just basically being insufficient as a person." While having such emotions, she had to start getting help from every resource and fighting to be back on campus for her second year. She was able to complete such a huge task thanks to her parents, friends, and campus resources such as the African American Association, and Native Nest.

Upon the return of her second year, V'Santi came back with a driving force fierceness and desire to succeed after realizing, "It might seem like a really scary idea not to be good at something, or to not reach your goals right away, but failing is what helps you learn." With that mindset, V'Santi was able to get her Grade Point Average (GPA) up into good academic standing once again at the end of her Fall quarter. However, her following Winter quarter in comparison was truly revolutionary as V'Santi starred in a UC Davis student production, "Peter and the StarCatcher" all while attending regular classes, on top of starting her new job as a student assistant at the Native Nest. V'Santi recalls the past quarter as one of her proudest achievements as she received A's in all of her courses while handling all of her responsibilities. Stating, "I went from leaving on academic probation (to) this past quarter getting straight A's in all of my classes." Reflecting on her progress as a student V' Santi states;

"This time last year and seeing me then and how upset I was and how much I had let myself go. Seeing all the heavy conversations I had just to make myself feel worth- just to get rid of that imposter syndrome and seeing myself now as prospering, getting opportunities left and right... I am so happy. I feel so much better than I did last year."

Nevertheless, V'Santi claims being a first-generation, ethnic minority student as her proudest accomplishment declaring that "Being a minority in such a large academic system (is) a big deal to defy the odds in statistics." She believes the fact that she is a person of color and has the chance to attend classes at UC Davis and succeed is a considerable accomplishment. While being a first-gen student and being tested by all that she'd been through in her first year, V'Santi was able to come back better and stronger in her second year, which is all due to the community she found that stuck with her during such a difficult time. She praises the people who helped get

back on campus, saying, "It's everyone. Everyone has made me persevere." V'Santi now works at the Native Nest and believes that it is like working with family because of the amount of academic and emotional support she has received from everyone there. Now V'Santi is once again receiving the help she needs as her tribe goes through a devastating time of being disestablished by the Trump Administration during this disastrous pandemic of COVID-19.

V'Santi is a member of the Mashpee Wampanoag tribe; currently the tribe's reservation is being taken out of trust or disestablished by the Trump Administration (Marcelo, 2020b). This came as a shock to the tribe when they heard the news from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), as the tribe had applied for aid for COVID-19 the very same week. However, the tribe has been under fire for some time, since about 2015, The U.S. Department of Interior has been reconsidering its decision to place about "300 acres into trust for the tribe." (Fonseca, 2018). According to The Harvard Crimson, "While in trust, land cannot be taken away from a tribe or sold to a non-Native without the approval of the federal government." This means the Mashpee Wampanoag people will have a say in what happens to the land and resources, but if taken out of trust, the government would have the property title and will take all of that away.

A reservation hasn't been taken out of trust since the Termination Era from the 1940s to the 1960s, having this tribe be taken out of trust in 2020 is taking a massive step in the wrong direction. This makes many of the Mashpee Wampanoag people scared because of the main reason V'Santi voiced, "We won't have a reservation or any lands for our people to go to." This will also have a significant impact on the people working for tribal affairs because the land being taken out of trust will also disestablish the tribal police and court. As well as delay any construction or housing projects for months, as the tribe would have to get permits and the

correct paperwork for the construction to continue. The most significant blow would be the amount of taxes the tribal members living on the reservation would have to pay back because they will once again be "subject to state and local taxes." (Fonseca 2018). How will people be able to repay such debts during one of the country's biggest economic crises in the middle of a pandemic?

This all came because The Mashpee Wampanoag people lost a case on February 28, 2020, for wanting to build a casino on their reservations famous Cape Cod vacation spot where residents did not want the casino. According to Sungreis, "... the U.S. Court of Appeals for the First Circuit ruled in favor of a group of nearby residents who oppose the casino, holding that the Bureau of Indian Affairs did not have the authority to designate land to the tribe in 2015." Although this was what was believed to have started the spark for the tribe's disestablishment, it can also be believed that President Trump was pulling the strings from behind. On the report of Marcelo President Trump had asked Republicans to reject legislation "that would protect its reservation, regardless of what the courts decide." With President "Trump calling it a 'special-interest casino Bill.'" (Marcelo, 2020a) A month after the court's ruling during the start of COVID- 19 the already struggling tribe is faced with a lost "reservation status by order of the U.S. Secretary of the Interior." (Sungreis, 2020). Due to the legal interpretation of the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934.

The Mashpee Wampanoag tribe is at a loss for bringing attention to their injustice due to the Virus. As V'Santi states, "We can't really get out of our homes and protest. We can't do anything except for signing a petition." Many tribal members are outraged, frustrated, and scared with the U.S. government as nothing is being done to undo the disestablishment.

You can help the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe by signing the petition to show you stand with them at <https://sign.moveon.org/petitions/stand-with-the-mashpee>

About the Author

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