

Presidential candidate set to reevaluate country's foundations

Written by By Cody Begaye Sun Correspondent
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The platform of Mark Charles 2020

As the 2020 presidential election ramps up, independent candidates are tossing their hats into the ring. One of those is Mark Charles.

Charles identifies himself as a dual citizen of the United States and the Navajo Nation who is running as a candidate with one major goal in mind.

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"I want to build a nation where 'We the People' means all the people," Charles told the *Sun* Aug. 12. "To make that happen, we have to address the foundations of our country."

BACKGROUND

Charles was born in Gallup and attended Rehoboth Christian School, where he graduated in 1989 before moving to study at the University of California, Los Angeles, where he earned a degree in history.

Afterward, Charles moved back to Gallup in the late '90s and then onto the Navajo Nation in the early 2000s.

"[My family] was given an opportunity to live in a one-room hogan out on a sheep camp located on a dirt road about six miles off of the nearest paved road," Charles said. "We lived there for about three years before we moved to Fort Defiance, [Ariz.]"

During this time, Charles began to study and investigate a document from the 15th century called the Doctrine of Discovery.

"[This doctrine] was the Church in Europe basically saying to the European nations, whatever land you find that is not ruled by Christian Rulers, those people are less than human and the lands are yours for the taking," he said.

This doctrine is what led to enslaving of African tribes and the removal of Native Americans from their lands in the centuries to come, making it a "systemically racist doctrine," Charles said.

PRESIDENTIAL PLATFORM

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The opening line of “We the People” from the Constitution of the United States is a key point to his campaign because Charles said its context has to be understood as well.

“When it was written, ‘We the People’ didn’t mean everyone, it just meant the white men who could vote,” Charles said.

He also referred to the Declaration of Independence, and how it states just a few lines after “all men are created equal” that the Indigenous peoples on the land were “merciless Indian Savages” and their land was up for taking.

“The problem is we [as a country] never decided, collectively, we want to be a country where ‘We the People’ includes everybody,” Charles said. “We have to change things like our Declaration of Independence and our Constitution to get there.”

This history of documents and rulings leaving out Indigenous people or making it so the conditions of those documents can be abused continues today, Charles continued. He cited a recent example being the ruling of *McGirt v. The State of Oklahoma*.

“The court ruled all of eastern Oklahoma was reservation land. That’s how it was framed,” Charles said. “Because the court designated it [that way] doesn’t make it non-reservation land. The court ruled in favor of the Creek Nation for judicial purposes.”

However, Charles noted there was a big condition to this ruling, which shows how deep the problem of systemic racism goes.

“Throughout the entire ruling, it was referenced or repeated at least four times that the Supreme Court stated, ‘Any time Congress can muster the will, they have every right to disestablish reservation land and to break treaties with Indian nations,’” Charles said. “The court basically ruled Congress can break treaties whenever they want.

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"So while the Creek Nation won the lawsuit, this was the first time the Supreme Court has ruled and said they have the right to break treaties and do so with no accountability," Charles added.

ABOLITION OF SLAVERY

"As far as I know, I'm the only candidate I've seen right now who's running, who in my platform, states I want to abolish slavery," Charles said.

He explained that this is because slavery is still technically legal because of the Constitution. Specifically, the 13th Amendment, which abolished it, states "neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as punishment of a crime."

"This amendment keeps slavery legal in prisons," Charles said. "We have the highest incarceration rate of any country in the world. This is why slavery is still legal in prison[s]. Our criminal justice system is where we've protected it.

He spoke about how men of color, including Native men, are being killed at disproportionate numbers by police officers.

"We need to start this reform by abolishing slavery and not allowing it to be legal in the criminal justice system. We have to address the system at its roots," he said.

The death of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police at the end of May and the protests that followed his death demonstrated how people of diverse backgrounds across the country feel about this issue.

EXAMINE THE ROOTS

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While the roots of the country are key areas for Charles' campaign, he also wants to address issues specific to his Indigenous roots. One such area is missing and murdered Native women and girls.

"Native women and girls are the ethnic group with the highest reported missing count in this country," Charles said. "And nothing happens after they are reported missing. It's usually the family who goes out and looks for them [instead of the police]."

Charles recalled how he attended a presidential forum in 2019 with other Democratic nominees where this subject was brought up. The candidates answered the question with their own plans, but Charles expressed skepticism about those plans.

"[The candidates] said they would do something about it, but it's telling when you see the Constitution and Declaration of Independence downplay the problem by making Natives and women feel less important or less valued," he said.

This is why both of those documents must be addressed, according to Charles. He has since revised versions of both the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, which remove the racist, sexist, and white supremacist language throughout the documents.

"This is where I'm trying to reframe so much of what we talk about as a country, and what we think the problems are and what the solutions are," he said.

This ultimately ties back to Charles' vision of creating a country where "We the People" will truly mean everyone.

"If you want to build community, you have to build a common memory," Charles said. "We as a country don't have one. I want to build it."

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For more information on Mark Charles and his presidential bid, visit <https://www.markcharles2020.com/> .

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