

Issue Brief: Native American/Public Opinion

Key Words

Native Americans, public viewpoints, American Indians, politics, group opinions

Description

Through comparing and contrast in the issues of federal funding, education, health cares, and gambling industry, this issue brief will discuss the major public issues that American Indians are concerned about as well as how they are viewed through the lens of the American society.

Key Points

- It is difficult to summarize every tribe's standpoint due to their diversity and various cultures.
- The Native Americans tend to be unjustly considered as a single culture by the non-Native populations
- There exists a dichotomy in the preconceptions about American Indians that discount the diversity among various tribes; in other words, they tend to be considered either as national enemies or noble savages.
- This unawareness of the real picture of Native American community prevents the general public and the government from perceiving or resolving social issues.

Issue Brief

The American Indian population includes less than one percent of the United States population. Although they include only a small number of the total population, their interests and characteristics vary among 540 tribes nationwide. However, throughout history, the non-Indian populations have considered Native Americans as one unified group with a single culture. This preconception to group all the tribes together and discount their diversity still persists today. As a result, this indifferent attitude prevents the government to accurately perceive and resolve issues that exist in the Native American communities, thereby causing serious discrepancies between Native Americans' and non-Indians' standpoints for various social issues.

From the 16th century, American Indians have been depicted through the dichotomy of either as national enemies or noble savages. Since the colonization era, the White settlers have treated them as a disparate race whose culture could only measured through rather than coexist with their own. One of the most prevalent misconceptions, whose vestiges are found from the imagery of Native American's gold, regards their casino industry. Most of the non-Indian population believes that Indians are accumulating an unprecedented wealth that could sustain the tribes as separate nations from the federal government. However, although it is true that Native Americans are recognized as "domestic dependent nations,"¹ most tribes in fact rely on federal funding for health, education, and other necessities. With the exception of the tribes that run casino industry and find revenues separate from federal funding, Native American population lives below

¹CQ Researcher, p. 255

poverty level in need of financial assistance from the federal government. In fact, because of lower-than-national-average income, American Indians suffer from unhealthy lifestyle and high mortality rate and therefore have more health issues than the national average.



However, characterizing all American Indians as possessing abundant natural resources and gold from the colonization era, p the general population fails to recognize the tribes' needs for government assistance for various salient issues, such as health care and education. Although most American Indians raise their voice to urge the federal government for a better health care system, the federal government believes that the accusations against them are inaccurate, and has been cutting the budgets and cancelling Indian Health Service's urban programs. In 2003, Indian Health Service appropriation amounted to \$2,533 per capita, compared to \$3,803 per capita for federal prisoners. On the other hand, this prevalent financial poverty among Native Americans simultaneously formed the idea of a "vanishing race" that no longer has any significant role in the American society. It has been reported that a number of general population believes that American Indians will naturally disappear as the result of financial difficulties and their restrained lifestyles imposed by the government.

Besides the existing prejudice against the tribes, public media seems to play a significant role in confirming people's pre-notion of Native American population. When discussed in media, Native Americans often conveyed negative connotations related to drugs, poverty, and ignorance, thereby only corroborating the general population's stereotypes. Even though recently there have been more active movements to shed light on who Native Americans really are, as *Native Americans in the News* discussed, while the idea of an "Indian" is ubiquitous, the reality of Native Americans is invisible.



General References

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