Native Americans in Modern Society

Native American culture and identity represent a unique combination of historical, economic, political, religious and diverse cultural influences. Impressions and interpretation of the land and the traditions shaped American culture brining unique beliefs and aspirations followed and shared by millions of Americans. This survival of a close link between religion and ethnic identity helps to understand the way Americans tend to think and act. Globalization and integration processes have forced many Native Americans to assimilate and become a part of the American society. According to statistical results, "the Native Americans population is growing. According to the 2000 census data, there are 2.5 million Native Americans in the United States, up from 1.9 million in 1990" (Morton 2002, p.37). In spite of great benefits and advantages, assimilation into American culture brings Native Americans grievances and disillusions. Thesis Assimilation and new social changes have brought Native Americans such problems as alcoholism and infectious diseases, false social images in media have resulted in lack of social support and negative stereotyping which cause great suffering and psychological burden to native population.

Low class location prevents many Native Americans to obtain social respect and opportunities available for white and black majority. For instance, it is difficult for Native American families to give good education for their children. From the early age, their children are excluded from society. It means that they visit pre-school courses and sections for low class families; they go to low prestigious schools (The United States Commission on Civil Rights 2001). They receive poor primary education because of social position of their parents. In ten years, they become workers or service labor unable to obtain high paid job and step over to a higher social class.

Lack of education and low social position leads Native Americans to such problems as sexually transmitted diseases and alcoholism. The lack of HIV/AIDS education, prevention, and quality care on reservations has encouraged many Natives to migrate from reservations to urban areas. Native population is similar to that of society at large, with men representing 82.6 percent of the cases and men who have sex with men constituting the largest segment of Native American AIDS cases, 5%. The second largest exposure category for Native male adult/adolescents is men who have sex with men and inject drugs, 17%. Since males account for the largest portion of AIDS cases for Native American, and men and women who have sex with men make up the main exposure category, it is critical that we focus our attention on this population to stop the further spread of HIV/AIDS in tribal communities. Lack of understanding and discriminatory treatment of two-spirit men creates an environment where HIV/AIDS can spread unimpeded. Knowledge of gender and sexual variance in Native societies is limited, but what is known is that some tribal communities had more than male and female genders and participated in a variety of sexual orientations (Weaver 1999). Those tribal members who engaged in third and fourth genders and sexual diversification were known by several names, such as winkte (Lakota), nГЎdleeh (Navajo), kwidГi (Tewa), tainna wa'ippe (Shoshone), dubuds (Paiute).

Generally speaking, the aboriginal harmony ethos consisted of a complex social code whereby individual freedom was checked by the extended family and clan. Respect for, and cooperation with, nature was imperative for existence, according to this ethos. Accordingly, animals and plants were thanked for providing sustenance to the group. Elements of the harmony ethos have survived to the present and are represented in tribal traditionalism. At the Civil Rights Commission hearings, many of the Navajos stated that alcoholism was the major problem affecting their people and that it was fueled by the non-Indian, off-reservation business community, which deliberately took advantage of this social ill for its profit. There

was a call for closing all local Indian bars. Another environment of marginal Indians where there is a high concentration of substance abuse is the urban Indian ghettos, created by the federal policies of termination and relocation in the 1950s. “Factors that seem to be related to alcohol abuse in this population include cultural dislocation (the feeling of not fitting into either traditional Native American culture or the general U.S. culture), the lack of clear sanctions or punishments for alcohol abuse, and strong peer pressure and support for alcohol abuse” (Thomason 2000, p.243).

Indian gambling enterprises became major employers of Indians and nonIndians in states like Connecticut and parts of Wisconsin and Minnesota. Gambling revenues paid for roads, water systems, health care, and education for some tribes. Indian gambling was not without problems. State governments sought to limit the operations. Disputes arose in some small tribes over who was and was not a member and thus entitled to casino profits. Some tribes were cheated out of gambling profits by the outside casino operators they employed. Rivalries between pro- and antigambling factions led to bloodshed in a few cases. Nevertheless, gambling remained a significant and growing engine of economic development (Calloway 1995).

The most disturbing facts concern wrong social images of Native Americans depicted by the media. While much attention goes to larger groups such as African Americans and Hispanics or Latinos, increasingly Native Americans' views are heard on treatment of their people in the news media. Generally their criticisms echo those of the larger groups, but in addition, Native Americans criticize the use of imagery. They say journalists failed to understand Native American cultures, history, and treaty rights and misrepresented them when reporting conflicts such as those over fishing. They criticize mainstream reporting on the rise of Native American casinos for not describing adequately the tribal sovereignty that

make them possible. Finally, mainstream coverage is cited for too often depicting Native American people and communities as historical artifacts or museum pieces who has no contemporary existence. Journalism educators pay attention to preparing their students to work in a multicultural world. Again, though more notice is given to the larger African American and Latino or Hispanic groups, Native American concerns also surfaced. These generally are aimed to remind viewers of the complex cultural and legal issues surrounding news about Native Americans, and to explore the nature of stereotyping in the media.

As in the 1990s, the variety of Indian images in the press increased. But, perhaps in keeping with the hard-nosed "me" orientation of the 1990s and public cynicism of the 1990s, there were fewer romantic images. Stories depicting Native Americans as exotic people from the past or degraded Indians who were beset by poverty and social problems persisted, though modified to fit the times. Although Native Americans were not routinely identified as "braves", "squaws", and the like in the mainstream press, stereotypical language continued to crop up. It seemed to appear more often in stories in which Indians were peripheral to the action than in stories specifically about their concerns. The story selection also reinforced imagery. Despite attempts to broaden the definition of what was considered news, stories of conflict, the unusual, and the bizarre still rated prominent placement. When these values were applied to stories about Native Americans, a numerically small group with little political or economic power, mundane but significant stories about their communities were less likely to see print.

Native American resist strongly and their protests are also raised on the emotional and symbolic issue of the use of Indian representations for sports teams. Critics contend such logos and mascots are racist and demeaning to Native Americans. "Indians are people, not mascots," wrote Lakota editor and publisher Tim Giago. He quoted activist Charlene Teters

as saying, "Mascots disgrace Indian people. . . . When a static symbol is used to represent a group of people, it gives off a one-dimensional image and devalues the living individuals." Another activist said the mascot issue "represents the core of institutional racism. As long as we tolerate these types of images, attitudes towards jobs, social welfare, progress, and important issues will continue to be dealt with at a surface level." Stanford University and Dartmouth College did away with their Indian mascots in the 1970s, and numerous other colleges and high schools did so later. Others, including the University of Illinois, professional football teams such as the Washington Redskins and Kansas City Chiefs, baseball teams such as the Atlanta Braves and Cleveland Indians, and hockey teams such as the Chicago Blackhawks, clung stubbornly to what they saw as tradition or profitable marketability (Calloway 1995).

The clash of cultures showed how journalistic practices can lead to flawed images and coverage. Reporters from many states descended on the sprawling, isolated reservation to cover the story. Some were Native Americans, but not necessarily Navajos. All were under deadline pressure. They could not observe the Navajos' traditional four days of deep mourning and still get their stories. Also, journalism required facts, in this case, names. Journalists felt compelled to intrude on privacy and tradition to get their stories. The damaging generalizations were certainly not new in the coverage of Native Americans. Nor was it the first time journalists had run roughshod over traditional practices. The significant aspect was that Navajo leaders spoke out and condemned the media and that their views were reported in the mainstream press (Hatfield 2000).

Their views also found their way into some mainstream publications, where they could resonate among journalists and the public alike. Whether it was due to the vigilance of Native Americans or the greater economic power of a few tribes or journalism's attention to

multicultural issues or expanding definitions of news or some combination of these, the images of Native Americans in the 1990s press multiplied. Stereotyping did not end, as the examples cited illustrate, but it was mitigated by a variety of other portrayals. Indians have been patronized, romanticized, stereotyped, and ignored by most of mainstream America. The twentieth-century press has been complicit in this, seldom by design but certainly through the exercise of its own conventions and values. To be sure, journalism has reflected the images and stereotypes prevalent in the popular culture. But it has done more. The very conventions and practices of journalism have worked to reinforce that popular--and often inaccurate--imagery. Stereotyping does not depend only on the use of crude language or factual inaccuracies. It also comes from the choice of stories to report, the ways stories are organized and written, the phrases used in headlines (Minerd 2000).

By the late twentieth century, stories of Native Americans were finding prominent places in mainstream news publications. The images those articles presented in the news seemed more varied than in the past. While the old, stereotypical images were easily found in the press, new ones were also there. Significantly, Native American journalists and others talked back to the media, taking news organizations to task for flawed coverage. Given all this attention to accurate portrayals of diverse communities, was the press more sensitive to images of Native Americans embodied in its stories? Did journalistic practices that sought to broaden definitions of news and ways of telling it affect the portrayals of Native Americans? "So, since many Native Americans are outraged about the symbolization of Native Americans in sports and advertising, and since society would not tolerate equivalent symbols of other minorities, it is clear that Native Americans are discriminated against--regardless of how others may feel about the matter--and that their civil rights are violated by such racial discrimination" (Hatfield 2000, p.43).

It is incredible but the image of Native Americans in these stories was one of a symbol, a metaphor, a mascot--one that had nothing to do with real people or even real history. Such trivialization perhaps made the use of stereotypical language seem permissible. The stories were not dealing with real Native Americans; they and their views had disappeared from the coverage. Though some later stories quoted Native Americans, when the Illiniwek controversy entered the political realm, Indians were shut out. If contemporary Native Americans were relegated to minor roles in the 1999 controversy, they were more prominent a few years later when two professional sports teams with Indian names played in Minneapolis, which has a large Native American population (Native American Spirit Survives 2004). Native Americans were portrayed as leaders of the effort to eliminate offensive sports mascots in 1991 when the Atlanta Braves played the Minnesota Twins in the World Series and in 1992 when the Washington Redskins played in the Super Bowl in Minneapolis. In both events, Native Americans were generally portrayed in the mainstream press as legitimate protesters whose views were to be treated seriously (Native American Spirit 2004).

The facts show that lack of government support and intervention campaigns are the main causes of the problems mentioned above. On the one hand, the US government does not help Native Americans to assimilate; on the other hand false media images worsen the problem depriving many people to enter American society. Clearly articulated goals against alcohol and HIV/AIDS will help to identify the true purpose of the intervention, facilitate public understanding and debate around legitimate health purposes, and reveal prejudice, stereotypical attitudes, or irrational fear and exploration of more intrusive measures are permissible where clearly necessary. Social agencies should launch campaigns against the drinking and should educate Native Americans about the adverse effects of drinking and diseases on their health. “There are likely to be a variety of cultural, psychological and

biological factors that distinguish Alaska Natives from the majority population with respect to alcohol use and the development of alcohol problems, it is also appears that there are many similarities" (Hesselbrock *et al* 2000, p.150).

The main reason is that if the provision of service or benefits programs does not adequately protect public health, more restrictive policies may be warranted. The "disconnect" is rooted in official schizophrenia--at least when it comes to federal policy toward Native Americans" (Mckelvey 2004, p.28). Governments sometimes feel public pressure to respond to an urgent public health concern with restrictive or punitive measures. For example, public opinion may blame Native Americans, drug users, homosexuals, sex workers, or other disenfranchised populations for the health threat. A searching examination of a range of less restrictive alternatives can uncover policies that not only defend the rights of the individual, but also are more worthwhile for the population as a whole. "Native Americans who have a strong Native Americans identity and are greatly involved in their traditional culture may respond better to a treatment program that takes their culture into account, although there is no empirical data to suggest that this will result in improved outcomes" (Thomason 2000, p.243).

The second important measures are that public opinion should call for civil commitment offering alcohol addicts incentives and services. Stress, portraying a self image and cultural pressure are found to be the indisputable causes of cultural decay. In terms of the crisis of identity is an interpretation of the self that establishes what and where the man is in both social and psychological terms. When one has identity one is situated; that is, cast in the shape of a social object by the acknowledgement of his participation or membership in social relations. Gender identities exist only in societies, which define and organize them. The search for identity includes the question of what is the proper relationship of the individual to

society as a whole. It is important these steps and decisions must be made in an emergency, precluding deliberative reasoning and assessment of scientific evidence. Knowledge of the self is discovered through an understanding of the whole congeries of social and communal bonds which determine a male, and this in turn depends on an appreciation of the 'narrative' of social life: personal identity is just that identity presupposed by the unity of character which the unity of narrative requires.

The true images of Native Americans are gathered in a gallery which shows that "Interesting Native Americans doing wonderful and amazing things in society" (Modern Native American Profiles 2006). These photos dhow that Native Americans do not differ from other nations: African-Americans or Latinos who positively portrayed by the media. To some extent, false social images of Native Americans show discrimination and racism against ethical minorities, if the roots of color are found partly in widespread acceptance of the one drop rule. In other words, that objective value structure is to be found in given social forms that provide shared meanings, phenomena that are entirely absent from the artificial world created by males. From this perspective, media can never be neutral between competing ways of life but must preserve the form of life in which individuals are embedded. The males is not prior to social arrangements but constituted by them. This approach clearly undermines that purported universalism which characterizes much of normative mode, and would seem to limit social criticism to an exploration of the meanings of forms of life. "Many people in Indian Country desire the trappings of middle-class American life--cars, televisions, stereos, jobs, money--but do not want to lose their Indianness or sense of belonging to place" (Minerd 2000, p.10).

Unlike whiteness, which is rooted in the belief that whites are racially pure and that being white is genetically determined, Native Americans make no assumption that they are

not ethically pure. Native Americans and whites in the United States offer strikingly different explanations for behavior. Whites come by this belief honestly enough, for their culture has taught them that blacks are an inferior, degraded people, strong, stupid, and oversexed. Most black people, not all, really believe that behavior is determined by choice, and that the choices made are moral ones. Native Americans come by this belief honestly enough for their culture has taught them that some whites behave morally and others do not. Native Americans distinguish among whites who are racist, those who are antiracist, and those who claim that racism is no longer a force in American society. Native Americans draw these distinctions for the same reason as their ancestors; they do not have the luxury of pretending all whites are the same.

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