

**COURSE: Foundations of Social Justice: Diversity, Power, and Oppression**

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# **EXPLORATION PAPER**

## **NATIVE AMERICAN INDIANS**

**“They came with a Bible and their religion, stole our land, crushed our spirit, and now they tell us we should be thankful to the Lord for being saved.”**

**Pontiac (1718-1769)**

### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The Native American Indians are an important part of the culture of the United States.

While this group have lived on this land for thousands of years, today their numbers are slowly diminishing. The Native American Indians were forced out of their homeland, prompting such legendary stories as the Trail of Tears. Eventually, the majority decided to adopt the European way of dress and even religion, with many Indians converting over to Christianity. Today, there are approximately 560 federally recognized Native American tribes within the United States and they want to ensure the Native American history and way of life is preserved, so that we never forget the important role they have played in the development of this nation (The history of Native American Indians).

### **CULTURAL COMPONENTS AND STRENGTHS IN THE COMMUNITY:**

The Native American groups all share the same values when it comes to family, elders in the community and ceremonies.

Families are considered to be multigenerational in their makeup. Native American family members focus on the need of the whole not on specific people. As a result of the multi-generational view of family, Native Americans are in a caregiver role for longer periods of time versus other cultures (Evans- Campbell et al., 2007).

Within the context of Native American families there lies a special group of people who are known as the elders of the community. Elders hold an esteemed position within a tribal community. Elders are to be respected based upon the wisdom and knowledge they possess. Elders in their community are the place traditional practicing Native Americans go for guidance. The elder may provide that leadership by their community service, spirituality, or example by their experiences (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2009). Without the connection to elders, many communities would lose their traditional practices and source of spirituality.

One last cultural component that will be discussed is the importance of ceremonies. Ceremonies are frequently very private and not accessible to those outside of the tribal culture

(Rybak & Decker-Fitts, 2009). Some ceremonies are common amongst many tribal cultures (pow-wows and storytelling) and some are created specifically for specific issues. Ceremonies are a vital part of building a connection between an individual's past, present and future as it relates to being part of a tribal community of identification with their community

### **PERSONAL EXPERIENCES OF INTERACTIONS**

In my role as a Child Protective Specialist, I was privileged to have met a Native American teenager from the Shinnecock nation while covering a case for a co-worker. I escorted him to be placed in kinship foster care with his aunt due to his grandmother passing away. He provided insight into his nation and informed me that his particular nation faced a little more ridicule even among other nations in the Native American communities. He explained that his descendants were of a mix race of black slaves and Native American Indians, hence the reason for his very dark color and wavy hair. He said he is referred to as a "Black Indian" by other Native American groups. I had no idea that this issue even existed. He was resilient in the sense that he was very educated and had a strong sense of self that he would not allow other's negative comments about him get in the way of how he felt and saw himself. He stated that he is Native American and will use all his Native American rights to make a life for himself and be able to give back to his Native American community. I was ecstatic for him that he showed resilience and had faith to overcome obstacles.

### **SOCIAL INJUSTICES**

To this day, many people who are not fully educated about the history of the United States' interactions with Native Americans, believe that there have only been abuses perpetrated against them in the past and that they no longer face these abuses. This is far from the truth. They face social, cultural and economic injustices still today as they did in the past. They are still in battles with the government that is still taking their lands despite agreements put in place that it is not to be touched. The following are just some more of the issues they face:

#### **Impoverishment and Unemployment**

Native Americans suffer from high rates of poverty and unemployment. According to U.S. Census Bureau Data, 27% of all Native Americans live in poverty. In the Blackfoot Reservation in Montana, the unemployment rate is 69% as of 2014. In 2012, the Sioux Reservations, in the North and South Dakota constituted three of the five poorest counties in the USA. Due to the high poverty rate among this group, many of them live in overcrowded and poor conditioned houses on Indian reservations. There are over 90,000 under-housed or homeless

Native Americans. The living conditions of some Native Americans have also been compared to those in third world countries. Presently, over a third of American Indians live on largely concentrated reservations with over 700,000 inhabitants. Mostly, the development of houses on reservations is attributed to underfunding by the federal government (Native American Issues Today).

### **Violence against Women**

Native American communities, but particularly Native women suffer from an epidemic of violence. They are physically abused, raped and stalked. These stories do not even make it to the headlines. On some reservations, Native American women are murdered at a rate, 10 times more than the nation's average. These violent crimes often occur from outside their community who are non-Native Americans (Native American Issues Today).

### **Less Educated**

The dropout rate for the group's students is twice the nation's average and is more than any other U.S. racial group. The Native Americans dropout rate is twice the nation's average and is more than any other U.S racial or ethnic group. This high dropout rate can be attributed to how they are treated in school or their academic needs not being met. For some Native Americans, their dropout can be linked to the structural deterioration and poor equipping of schools due to insufficient funding from the federal government (Native American Issues Today).

### **Unable to Exercise Voting Rights**

Native Americans do have the right to vote but they are unable to exercise that right because of the unavailability of polling units. Some of the natives' Reservations such as the Goshute Reservation in Utah and Duck Valley Reservation in Nevada do not have any polling unit near them. The polling units around are many miles away. Another issue that they face is that many Native Americans on reservations are unable to register to vote because the reservations on which they reside, don't use normal street addresses and their applications for voting cards are rejected which is so unfair. And what adds to this issue is that due to the high rates of illiteracy in some of the Native American communities they are unable to exercise this right. For example, the Yup'ik in Alaska, primarily speak and read their native language because public education was not available in their region until the 1980's (Native American Issues).

### **NATIVE AMERICAN POPULATION (2020):**

Before the European settlers explored America, Native American/Indigenous People had a population of nearly 10 million. Their numbers started to fall rapidly after due to the war and diseases that the Europeans brought with them. Thereafter, the pains did not stop there for them. They were robbed of their land and resources. They were forced out of the homes and onto reservations that lacked resources to rebuild their lives. The group faced centuries of discrimination and persecution.

Unbeknownst to many today, Native Americans/Indigenous People still face many threats from federal and state governments related to land-use and resource extraction. And among all the major racial groups, they have the highest poverty rate with one in four people living below the poverty line.

As per the U.S. Census Bureau, the current total population of Native Americans in the United States is 6.79 million. Alaska has the highest percentage of 13.77%. However, the Oklahoma has the highest number of Native Americans/Indigenous People which is 276,650

which is the highest in the United States (Native American Population 2020).

**BIBLICAL SCRIPTURES THAT APPLY TO FINDINGS:  
MICAHAH 2:1-3**

“Woe to those who scheme iniquity, who work out evil on their beds! When morning comes, they do it, for it is in the power of their hands. They covet fields and then seize them, and houses, and take them away. They rob a man and his house, a man and his inheritance.

Therefore thus says the Lord, “Behold, I am planning against this family a calamity from which you cannot remove your necks; And you will not walk haughtily, for it will be an evil time.”

My interpretation of this verse is of someone who lies awake at night and figures out ways to cheat the poor out of what they have. They go over how they plan to work their scheme and they go right out and put their evil plans into action. They can get away with this, because their plans are against the poor, who have no one to protect them. Not only does the entity covet (in verse 2 above), but they actually will take from a man by whatever force is necessary. They were forcing them to give up the land that was given to them for their heritage. This speaks to the government continuing to oppress the Native American Community. The Europeans took what was theirs in the past and the government continues to do the same today. God will not overlook this sin. They will feel the punishment for this sin. The "family" is speaking of the whole country. God will not stop the punishment (remove their necks). It is my hope that the Native Americans get the justice they deserve.

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