Reclaiming Native Truth

A PROJECT TO DISPEL AMERICA’S MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTIONS

FIRST NATIONS DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

ECHO HAWK CONSULTING
Welcome

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Overview of Reclaiming Native Truth

Native Americans and tribes face discrimination and bias at every level of society, institutionally, and within government. They are held back from reaching their full potential by the negative stereotypes, damaging misperceptions, and lack of awareness that prevail within the media, entertainment industry, popular culture, and among thought leaders.

First Nations Development Institute is co-leading with Echo Hawk Consulting *Reclaiming Native Truth: A Project to Dispel America’s Myths and Misconceptions*, a groundbreaking project made possible by a $2.5 million grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. This initiative built upon previous research efforts in order to create a long-term, Native-led movement that will positively transform the popular image of and narrative about Native Americans.
What is Narrative Change?

Narratives = create individual’s perception of Native Americans and their interpretation of facts

Narratives often shaped by media, popular culture, education curricula, etc.

Individuals draw on these limited narratives to make sense of “other” groups and themselves
What’s Wrong with the Dominant Narrative?

- Existing negative narratives set and controlled by non-Natives.
- Overwhelmingly tends to use **deficit-framing**
  - Native American community framed as deficits or burdens to society
  - Research shows deficit frames are harmful psychologically

“Native Americans have the highest poverty rate.”

Native American communities suffer from obesity, diabetes, and suicide.
Asset vs Deficit Framing

Asset
A community starts out with value but has fallen short of its potential.

Deficit
Focuses on shortcomings. Requires needing to first prove a community is essentially human and has added value to society.
Narrative Change Work Seeks to:

Reframe and change stories in dominant culture to create more political possibilities for social movements

Use strong asset-based narratives to challenge dominant ideas

Shift the hearts and minds on issues that shape the current reality for Native Americans
Long-term Goals of the Project

Improve the portrayal of Native Americans in the news and media

Create respectful inclusion and accuracy of Native American history and culture in educational curricula

Promote greater inclusion of Native Americans in development of public policy

Achieve equity within philanthropy that promotes investment in Native communities

Lead to supporting solutions that strengthen Native American communities
Shifting the Narrative: Step 1 - Research

First Step - **Research**: Understand what the current public perceptions of Native Americans are and the dominant narratives that pervade American society.

Questions:

**What are the perceptions??**

**How perceptions differ by different segments of the population??**

**What types of narratives/messages can we begin to create to shift the narrative??**
Our research included a combination of literature reviews, social listening, focus groups, online focus groups, national surveys, and in-depth interviews as detailed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Comprehensive literature reviews conducted on existing public opinion research on Native Peoples and on the strengths and limitations of narrative frameworks to transform negative stereotypes by challenging implicit bias and misperceptions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Focus groups completed in 11 states and nationally online (see map on previous page).</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Message testing discussion groups: Six in-person groups with Native Peoples representing 21 different tribes, two each in Oklahoma, Phoenix and Minneapolis; and four online groups with non-Natives with diverse participants.</td>
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<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>In-depth interviews completed among elites including members of Congress; former political appointees; judges; foundation officials; and civil rights, business and entertainment leaders.</td>
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<tr>
<td>13,306</td>
<td>Respondents to nationally representative surveys on key issues and perceptions regarding Native Peoples.</td>
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<tr>
<td>240,380</td>
<td>Facebook and Twitter posts on cultural appropriation and Native Peoples analyzed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9 million</td>
<td>Social media posts analyzed from Twitter, Facebook, 300 million blogs, and other social media platforms to uncover the dominant narratives around Native Americans and how the conversations differ across channels, demographics and influencers.</td>
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Research Findings

Finding 1:
Romanticized past, invisible present

Contemporary Native Americans are, for the most part, invisible in the US.
Research Findings

Finding 2: Deficit frame has deep roots

Limited personal experience and pervasive negative narrative set by others cement stereotypes
Research Findings

Finding 3: Tension - Unity and Distinction

Americans value the “melting pot” and blend tribes into a homogenous culture.
Research Findings

Finding 4: Sovereignty grossly misunderstood

The origin, details, and rights are not clear, even for people charged with upholding it.

“My Judge does not know what ‘tribal sovereignty’ means in real life, today” – Native Law Clerk

“They are not sovereign nations. They rely too much on us and our government to call themselves sovereign.”
- Focus Group Participant
Research Findings

Finding 5: Proximity shapes perception

People who live near or work in Indian Country, especially in areas of great poverty, hold prejudice.
Research Findings

Finding 6: Contradictory stereotypes exist

People comfortably accept and maintain conflicting narratives about Native Americans
Research Findings

Finding 7: Paths for change

Across research, people ask for more accurate education about Native Americans

After being informed of accurate history, people across groups believe more should be done to help Native communities

Native American values are deeply respected
How do we change the dominant narrative?

- **Research** (2017)
- **Share with Stakeholders** (Get Feedback) (2018)
- **Analysis** (2017-2018)
- **Strategy to Deploy New Narrative**
- **Identify New Narrative**
- **Work with Communications Firm** (Nov. 2017)
How do we change the dominant narrative?

- **Research** 2017
- **Share with Stakeholders (Get Feedback)** 2018
- **Analysis** 2017-2018
- **Strategy to Deploy New Narrative**
- **Identify New Narrative**
- **Work with Communications Firm** Nov. 2017
Successfu"Successful Stakeholder Convening l Stakeholder Convening

- Over 135 attended
- Awareness increased
- Research presented
- Stakeholder Input
- Tribal leadership engaged
... is flexible and sets context but does not define Native peoples.

...helps removes stereotypes and sets the table for people to define themselves.

...offers a unifying framework in which many strategies fit and many voices are able to tell their stories.
...resonates with both Native and non-Native people.

...when used consistently-written, visual, in public art, in pop culture, in how history is taught--begins to replace the current dominant, deficit-based and false narratives, primarily set by others.
How do we Write a New Narrative?

- Native voices
  - Should be Native-authored and Native-led

- Authentic
  - Stories should reflect authentic voices, resonate with people

- Working group
  - Narrative Change Retreat
Narrative Change Retreat

In February 2018, the *Reclaiming Native Truth* project opened up a creative space and brought together 18 renowned Native artists, storytellers, and playwrights together to explore the development of starting-point narrative themes for the development of our new meta-narrative.
The power of stories

The Noble & Ignoble Savage

Athletic and brave

Violent and malevolent
NARRATIVES AND SYMBOLS

Detroit Lions
Bobcats
Wildcats
NARRATIVES AND SYMBOLS

- Soccer moms
- Millennials
- Yuppies
Narratives and Symbols

- Redskins
- Braves
- Seminoles
The power of stories

The Noble & Ignoble Savage

Athletic and brave

Violent and malevolent
In the Narrative Change Retreat, these artists and innovators took a metaphorical blank canvas and created and envisioned several starting-point stories or narratives:

1. **History doesn’t define us, it informs us. (We are human)**
2. **Invisibility isn’t a superpower after all. (We are here today)**
3. **Supreme Law of the Land. (Use the familiar to teach about Native Peoples and history)**
4. **We were here first. (We lead, we listen, we teach)**
Creating a New Narrative Strategy

We are human

We lead, we listen, we teach

Use the familiar to teach about Native Peoples and history

We are here today

Native Values make America better

People want to learn more, are supportive

New Narrative
Finding 7: Paths for change

Across research, people ask for more accurate education about Native Americans

After being informed of accurate history, people across groups believe more should be done to help Native communities

Native American values are deeply respected
We are here – we are humans – we are individual in our identity but we are like you. We are not exotic or historic people.

Native people are not just relics or mascots but they are still vibrant communities today.
Creating a **New Narrative Strategy**

- **We are human**
- **We lead, we listen, we teach**
- **Use the familiar to teach about Native Peoples and history**
- **Native Values make America better**
- **People want to learn more, are supportive**
- **We are here today**
How do we Write a New Narrative?

Counter the Negative Frame:
Positive values in Native communities: Pro-family, care for the environment, respect for elders

Indians are Historical Relics
We are here today, our history is a story of resilience and revitalization and strength.

What Indians?
Visibility: We are here, nearly 600 Native nations and in every state, city and community.
New Narrative

The starting point stories led to the development of a 3-part narrative model where **Values, History, and Visibility** provide the foundation for our narrative change work.

### Values
- Family
- Environment

### History
- Resilience
- Revitalization

### Visibility
- Over 600 Native nations
- In every profession

**New Narrative**

A PROJECT TO DISPEL AMERICA’S MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTIONS
New Narrative

Values
Native values anchor Native cultures and have defined American society.

History
Our history is our strength and strength is our history.

Visibility
There’s more to Native Peoples than you know about.
Situation: Testifying in state legislature for policy change for teaching accurate information about Native American history in all public school districts.

Problem:
- Curriculum perpetuates stereotypes & does not tell full story.
- Implies that Natives do not exist anymore.

History:
- There is a proud history of resiliency and revitalization that should be reflected.

Values:
- Education must reflect positive, current Native culture and values.
- Native values are important part of US history.

Visibility:
- Half million Native students in school today.
- Native leaders’ contributions part of rich, relevant curriculum for all.

Solution & Call to action:
- Adopt curriculum that is:
  - Historically accurate
  - Culturally-embedded
  - Place-based
  - Contemporary
Situation: Writing a grant proposal for **funding for youth programs to promote physical fitness.**

- **Opportunity**
  - Native youth: one of the fastest growing population groups.
  - Youth are the future leaders of our communities.

- **History**
  - There is a proud history of resilience in our communities.
  - Proud history of being active and self-reliant

- **Values**
  - We value our children and our families, and want to find ways to support them.

- **Visibility**
  - Half million Native students in school today.
  - Native families are in every community, every state.

- **Solution & Call to action**
  - Need to make sure that Native youth are growing up healthy, supported, self-reliant
Chat or Questions:

• What strengths do you find in this new narrative approach?
• What resonates with you?
• Would you use this narrative - adapted to carry messages about your specific issues - in your work?
**NARRATIVE THEME (VALUES)**

Native values anchor Native cultures and have defined American society.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>For use by and for Native Peoples</th>
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We live our values through multi-generational relationships based on respect, reciprocity, interdependence and responsibility. We listen to, learn from, teach and serve our families, the land, the water, Native Nations and all our circles of friends, allies and communities of interest. *We offer thousands of years of accumulated knowledge and share our strengths and struggles, in order to build a stronger and more resilient future for all.*

Our world needs more of the values and traditional knowledge that anchor Native Peoples’ cultures: deep respect for family and elders; shared responsibility to care for the land; and knowledge that our actions affect future generations. These values keep American Indian Nations and cultures strong, and are helping to build a stronger and more resilient future for all.
**Narrative Theme 2 (History)**

**Our history is our strength and strength is our history.**

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We honor our ancestors before us who shape our identity, connect us to place, and power our future. Our shared story is our strength, a living and evolving history of wisdom, resistance, resilience and cultural revitalization as Native Nations and Indigenous Peoples. Our story is embodied in our arts, sciences, philosophies, literature, foods, political structures, justice systems, cultures and all the other gifts we have brought to the U.S and many other nations. We demonstrate this strength despite experiencing the theft and near loss of our lands and languages, having our children wrenched from our homes and Nations, and being forced into others' assimilation models and experiments. As Native Peoples, we have survived genocide, and we remain strong, despite our continued mourning for the far too many who did not survive, and despite countless broken promises and forced removals.

Continued evidence of these injustices is visible in deceptions and distortions taught in schools as history, misunderstanding and mockery of tribal sovereignty, and disrespect for our humanity and cultures in the sports and advertising worlds' demeaning stereotypes and appropriations. In our resiliency, we see our character as Native Peoples.

The history of American Indian Peoples in this country is one of great strength—a living and evolving story of resistance, resilience and cultural revitalization visible in nearly 600 Native Nations and in all Indigenous Peoples. Native Peoples’ arts, sciences, literature, foods, political structures, judicial systems, cultures and philosophies are foundational to our country’s strength and power. This story also is a painful history of wrongdoing and loss: languages driven underground or to extinction, children stolen from their homes and punished for not assimilating, whole Native Nations forced to move from their homelands, and thousands of treaty promises broken by Congress and by our justice system. Injustices persist in countless laws created to oppress, inaccurate histories taught in schools, and demeaning and false personifications of American Indian Peoples in sports and advertising stereotypes and cultural appropriations.
### Narrative Theme 3 – (Visibility)
**There’s More to Native Peoples Than You Know About.**

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*Indigenous Peoples thrive today in nearly 600 Nations and Tribes, in rich and diverse cultures, and are one of the fastest growing populations in urban areas.* Yet, too often, our communities remain invisible to most Americans. The truth is that we are resilient, strong and vibrant contributors to our families, Native Nations, community circles and U.S. society. We have always taken the torn pieces of our history and stitched them together with bright threads, rebuilding beauty, restoring culture and breaking down barriers. We build on 500 years of resiliency to grow stronger each day. Our youth are carrying forward the next generation of our work, life, and cultures. In our actions, the world sees we have historical longevity and an endless future.

Keeping traditions and sacred knowledge alive, Native Peoples bring rich history and cultural wisdom into every profession and segment of society—as teachers, doctors, lawyers, artists, writers, scientists, politicians and more. *Nearly 600 individual Native Nations and Tribes and their nearly five million citizens are rejuvenating language and culture, advancing laws and justice, and continuing to carry knowledge and strength.* Youth are leading the way, walking in two worlds. In movements like Standing Rock, we see Native Peoples leading and building on thousands of years of accumulated knowledge to address some of our country’s most important current issues.
A Narrative Change Strategy Guided by Research & our Stakeholders

- Stakeholder Convening
- Final Advisory Committee Meeting
- Other stakeholder input
- All managed and mediated by Metro Group

Final report by Metropolitan Group based on input of teams
Values
Native values anchor Native cultures and have defined American society.

History
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Visibility
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