

Native American Stereotypes and Realities

1. Indians are all alike.

1. In American alone, there are approximately 2.1 million Indians, belonging to 511 culturally distinct federally recognized tribes or an additional 200 or so unrecognized tribes. They live in a variety of environments, either on 286 US reservations, or off reservation in rural areas or cities.

2. Indians were conquered because they were inferior.

2. Indians were conquered because of their lack of immunity to European diseases.

3. In Indians had united, they could have prevented the European invasion.

3. Tribes were too different culturally and lived too far apart to fight together as a cohesive unit.

4. Indians had no civilization until Europeans brought it to them.

4. Indians were civilized. Their cultures were different from those of Europeans.

5. Indians arrived in this hemisphere via the Siberian Land Bridge.

5. Indians believe that they were created in this hemisphere.

6. Indians were warlike and treacherous.

6. Indians fought to defend their lands, sovereignty and way of life from invaders.

7. Indians had nothing to contribute to Europeans or to the growth of America.

7. The contributions of American Indians have changed and enriched the world.

8. Indians did not value or empower women.

8. Indian women often wielded considerable power within their tribes.

9. Indians have no religion.

9. Indians are deeply religious. Each tribe has its own religion.

10. Indians welcome outsiders to study and participate in their religious ceremonies.

10. Indians often practice their religions secretly and want outsiders to respect their desire for privacy.

11. Indians are a vanished race.

11. There are 2.1 million United States Indians today.

12. Indians are confined to reservations, live in tipis, wear braids, and ride horses.

12. There is nothing that confines Indians to reservations. Few wear braids and ride horses. Fewer still own tipis.

13. Indians have no reason to be unpatriotic.

13. Most American patriotism is the celebration of Euro-American history and interest. Euro-Americans' behavior and policies towards Indians have been brutal throughout American history.

14. Indians get a free ride from the government.

14. The benefits Indians receive from the government derive from treaty agreements, which purport to compensate them for the surrender of some or all of their invaluable lands.

15. Indians' affairs are managed for them by the B.I.A.

15. Each tribe has its own governmental structure possessing a variety of self-governing powers.

16. Indians are not capable of completing school.

16. Hundreds of Indians graduate from universities every year.

17. Indians cannot vote or hold office.

17. Indians represent a powerful voting bloc in elections; numerous Indians hold tribal, state and national offices.

18. Indians have a tendency toward alcoholism.

18. Indians are no more predisposed to alcoholism than members of any other ethnic group.

19. “My grandmother was an Indian.”

19. Thousands of Americans “wannabe” Indians, but they are not.

20. Indians are all full bloods.

20. The majority of Indians are of mixed heritage.

21. All Indians have an “Indian name.”

21. Most Indians have only a Euro-American name; a minority of Indians also have “Indian names”.

22. Indians know the histories, languages, and cultural aspects of their own tribe and all other tribes.

22. Few Indians know all cultural aspects of their own tribe, much less those of other tribes.

23. Indians are stoic and have no sense of humor.

23. Indians are as endowed with as rich a sense of humor as anyone else.

24. Indians like having their picture taken.

24. Indians find photographers intrusive.

Adapted from and for a more in-depth discussion of these stereotypes and realities, refer to:
American Indians: Stereotypes and Realities by Devon Mihesuah, 1996, Clarity Press