

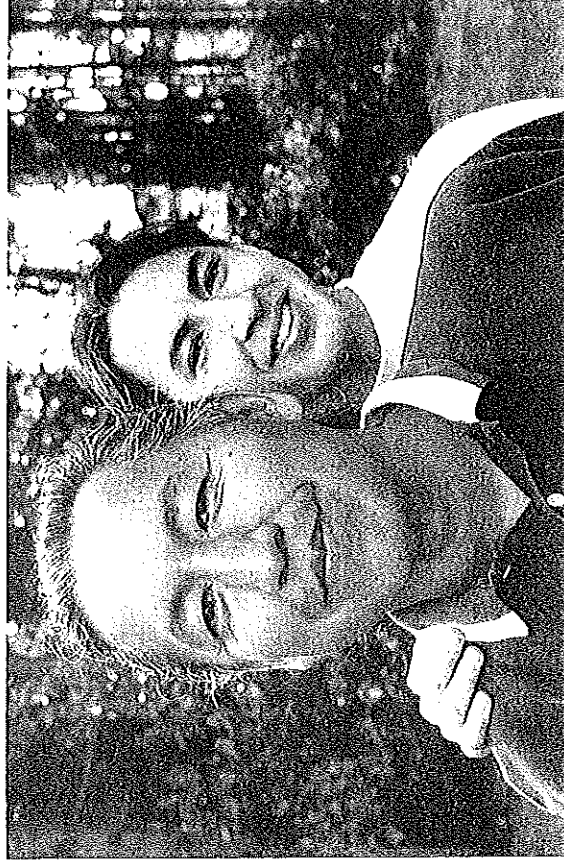
READING # 17

Coles, Roberta L.

“Native American Families.”

CHAPTER 10

NATIVE AMERICAN FAMILIES



Although their numbers have been increasing in recent decades, Native Americans are the smallest of the racial-ethnic groups discussed in this text. Their relatively small population of about 2.5 million represents less than one percent of the U.S. population. (Another 1.6 million Americans, however, reported being Native American and some other race.) This small number, combined with the variety of tribes (more than 300 different tribes and between 150 and 200 Native languages), makes research difficult, and it is virtually impossible to generalize about their traditional norms and values and changes in those over time. These conditions, along with the high rate of interracial marriage among Native Americans, render them almost invisible. Consequently, as you may have noticed throughout the text, less reliable data exist on Native Americans to facilitate rich descriptions or comparisons.

Although Native Americans are indigenous to the Americas in the sense that they resided in North and South America for centuries before the Europeans arrived, anthropological evidence indicates that they originally migrated to the Americas from Asia thousands of years ago when a land bridge joined what is now Asia and Alaska. Many migrated into South America, where they developed large and complex civilizations, known as the Mayan, Aztec, and Incan civilizations. Native American peoples still survive throughout Central and South America.

Other Native Americans settled in North America, where the pattern of settlement was more dispersed. Consequently, hundreds of tribes, each with their own languages, religions, governmental forms, means of livelihood, and family systems, developed. According to John (1998), virtually all the cross-cultural variations in family forms and mate selection (mentioned in Chapter 4), such as bride price, dowry, arranged marriage, social marriage, bride abduction, polygamy, patrilineality, matrilineality, and bilineality, could at one time be found among Native Americans. Assimilation and the decline in their population have reduced such variation. The number of indigenous languages alone has been reduced by half.

Since no census was taken until 1790, we have only estimates of how many American Indians existed at the time the first European settlers arrived in what would later become the United States. The estimates range anywhere from one million to 18 million (John, 1998). What is clear is that by 1890, only 250,000 indigenous people remained (Stuart, 1987). Exposure to new diseases (smallpox, measles, influenza, and diphtheria), forced labor, massacre, removal from their land, and destruction of their food sources had decimated their numbers (Gonzales, 1998).

Since World War II, the Native American population has experienced a dramatic increase. In 1950, they numbered about 377,000; so over the past 50 years the Native American population has experienced more than a six-fold increase. This explosion in the Native American population resulted from higher-than-average fertility rates and, more recently, to nonreservation American Indians declaring their ethnicity on census documents. Since 1960, the census has allowed individuals to self-identify, and with more racial tolerance and revival of interest in ethnicity, more Native Americans have claimed their identity. Others have argued as well that the increase in gambling revenues has provided an incentive to declare one's tribal affiliation. (In reality, however, only a small portion of the tribes who use gaming are actually profiting from it.) Tribal membership is usually determined by proof of blood quantum. The federal standard requires one fourth American Indian heritage to be legally considered Native American (Brokenleg & Middleton, 1993), but tribal governments may go as low as one sixteenth (Lamanna & Riedmann, 2003).

Table 10.1 lists the 10 largest American Indian tribes today. The top six account for about 40 percent of all Native Americans who listed one race only on the 2000 census; many tribes only have a few dozen members remaining. About three quarters of Native Americans live either in western or southern states (see Figure 10.1).

Table 10.1 Ten Largest American Indian Tribal Groups, 2000

Tribe	Population in Numbers (American Indian Alone)	Population in Numbers of Those Who Identified as American Indian and Some Other Race	
Cherokee	729,533		281,069
Navajo	298,197		269,202
Latin American Indian	180,940		104,354
Choctaw	158,774		87,349
Sioux	153,360		108,272
Chippewa	149,669		105,907
Apache	96,833		57,060
Blackfoot	85,750		27,104
Iroquois	80,822		45,212
Pueblo	74,085		59,533

SOURCE: Ogunwole (2002)

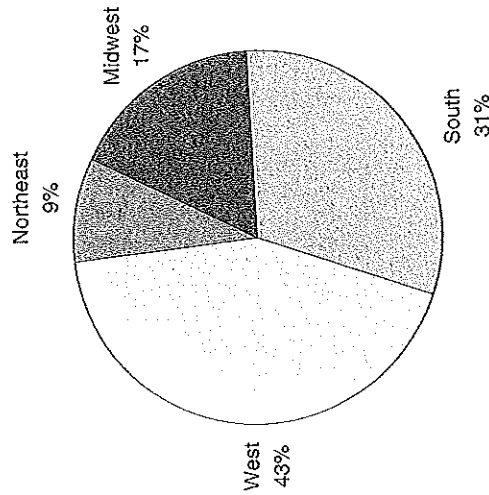


Figure 10.1 Regional Distribution of Native Americans, 2000

SOURCE: Ogunwole (2002.)

Looking Back in History

Like African Americans, Native Americans were involuntarily incorporated into the United States. Thus, they experienced more severe and longer-lasting discrimination than later-arriving racial minorities, the effects of which are still reflected in their current social status. Although it is estimated that about 5 to 10 percent of American Indians were enslaved, the Native American experience under European settlement was more one of war, genocide, and forced acculturation.

Prior to the American Revolution, official policy of the British government was to recognize each indigenous tribe as a sovereign nation. Colonists who wanted to obtain more land or trade agreements with Native Americans were supposed to negotiate treaties in public with a representative of the king present. This proclamation, however, was nearly impossible to enforce. The new White settlers' enormous appetite for land and resources far outweighed the royal army and American Indians. Nevertheless, more than 600 treaties were signed by the colonial government and leaders of various American Indian tribes (sometimes under compulsion). Although most of the treaties disadvantaged Native Americans by reducing their land holdings, and eventually most were broken, many treaties established some rights for the tribes, such as access to the natural resources or indefinite payments in return for the loss of land.

After the United States won independence from Britain, official policy changed from treaties to forced removal and/or assimilation. The United

States government no longer viewed American Indian nations as sovereign; rather, each Native American individual was considered a "ward of the state." The two most infamous policies that reflected these changes were the 1830 Indian Removal Act and the 1887 Dawes Act.

Removal and Reservations

In 1830, the Indian Removal Act initiated a process that eventually led to the creation of the reservation system. This act called for the expulsion of all Native Americans east of the Mississippi River to territory west of the river. Prior to passage of the act, the Cherokee nation had sued the State of Georgia, which had annexed Cherokee land for its growing cotton industry. The Georgia Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Cherokee, but President Andrew Jackson, newly reelected and supported by Congress, forged ahead on removal.

Five main tribes were targeted. These tribes—the Creek, Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Seminole—were referred to as the "civilized" tribes because they had made many adaptations to accommodate the European settlers. The Cherokee, in particular, had converted their economy to an agricultural one and modified their political system to include a written constitution, a code of laws, a legislature, and a judiciary. They created a written language and established churches, schools, sawmills, and newspapers. By most Western definitions, the Cherokee were prospering. Nevertheless they lived on land coveted by European settlers.

So starting in 1830 and continuing for nearly two decades, four of the five tribes made the tragic journey that later came to be called the "Trail of Tears." The Choctaw of Mississippi were first to be relocated. In the 6-month trip that took them to Oklahoma, 5,000 of their 20,000 members died from famine or disease. The Creek in Alabama were moved next; 2,000 of their 17,000 members died en route and another 3,500 died shortly after arrival. About 1,000 Chickasaw from Mississippi died as well. Following a lengthy battle in the legal system and Congress, the Cherokee were also removed. About 4,000 of their 13,000 members died (Parrillo, 2003). The Seminole in Florida was the only tribe to successfully (but only temporarily) fight off removal in a 7-year guerrilla war that killed 2,000 soldiers and cost the U. S. Army \$20 million (Joseph, 1991). Nevertheless, by 1858 only 3,000 Seminole remained in the Florida Everglades; like the others, most had been moved west of the Mississippi.

Although these were the main tribes moved in the Southeast, eventually the Delaware, Kickapoos, Miamis, Ottawas, Peorias, Potawatomis, Sacs, Foxes, Shawnees, and Wyandots were moved to so-called "Indian

territory." The only tribe to substantially remain in the Northeast was the Iroquois League. In all, about 100,000 Native Americans were moved west of the Mississippi River, where there were already a number of Indian nations, such as the Comanche, Osage, and Pawnee, who were not particularly enthused by the influx of refugees into their hunting territory. Although the U.S. government had promised that it would protect the refugees from other tribes and from the increasing influx of White settlers into the western half of the continent, help was inconsistent (McLemore, Romo, & Baker, 2001).

Following the removal period, the U.S. government moved to a policy of segregation and isolation, allotting poor quality (or at least what appeared at that time to be useless) land to tribes as reservations. For instance, the Pine Ridge Sioux reservation in South Dakota is located in the "Badlands," a name indicative of its soil quality. Most of today's more than 300 reservations were established between 1850 and 1880 with the help of an 1871 appropriations bill that ended federal recognition of the tribes as sovereign nations. Instead, that law designated Native Americans "wards of the state" and made the welfare of the indigenous tribes dependent on the government. Food rations and other supplies were issued (though they didn't always arrive), and most aspects of Indian life came under supervision of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA).

Let's take a moment to consider the impact of such relocation on a tribe's social organization. When European settlers first arrived, Native American tribes were scattered across North America. Depending on the climate and topography of their location, each tribe relied on a specific form of livelihood. For instance, those on the coasts relied on a specific form of livelihood. For instance, those on the coasts were often fishers. Others were nomadic tribes that hunted and gathered. The plains tribes relied heavily on buffalo and big-game hunting. Some were herders, and some farmers. When a tribe's way of life is defined primarily by one mode of livelihood, usually everyone's role in the tribe is defined by his or her relation to that process. For instance, in a fishing village, gender roles would be constructed around fishing and the processing of fish. Perhaps fathers taught their sons how to build boats and fishing instruments; mothers taught their daughters how to build traps and process various water animals for food or how to recognize edible plants in and along the waterways. The elders' years of experience instilled them with sought-after knowledge about when and where fish were more easily caught. People earned their status in the tribe according to their accomplishments in fishing. So what happens to these roles and statuses once the community is relocated to a setting where there are no bodies of water, no fishing? The skills of the adults must be abandoned and new ones learned. The wisdom of the elderly becomes worthless. The parents can no longer

teach their children useful skills. The new location often fails to support the tribe's social organization. Uprooting a people from a territory very likely entailed major transformations not only in the skills needed to provide for the sustenance of the tribe but also in their collective and individual identity and self-worth. As we shall see later, whereas some Native Americans made the adjustment, many did not.

As if the relocation were not enough, in 1887 the Dawes Act (sometimes called the General Allotment Act) was passed. This act had as its goal the breakup of the communal ownership of reservation land. Teddy Roosevelt described the law as "a great pulverizing engine, designed to break up the tribal mass" (quoted in Baldridge, 2001, p. 1518). Native Americans were allotted 80- to 160-acre parcels of land for agricultural purposes. Because many American Indians knew nothing about agriculture, and most had no money to purchase the necessary inputs, over time much of the land ended up owned or leased by White Americans. By the time this policy was repealed in the 1930s, Native American land holdings had been reduced from 138 million to 56 million acres (Parrillo, 2003). Through these combined land policies, Native Americans essentially lost control of their lives and livelihoods. Any esteem, meaning, and identity they reaped from self-government and provision was obliterated.

Assimilating Native Americans

Hand in hand with reducing Indian land holdings and decimating the population was a policy of assimilation. On the surface, juxtaposed to the horrors of genocide, assimilation appeared to be a fairly benevolent policy. In 1819, the U.S. Congress passed an act to supply education "for the purpose of providing against further decline and final extinction of the Indian tribes . . . to instruct them in the mode of agriculture suited to their situation and for teaching their children in reading, writing, and arithmetic" (Tyler, 1973, p. 45). Congress initially authorized \$1,000 for this so-called "civilization fund," but by 1842, \$214,000 in federal funds were directed to missionary organizations to maintain 37 schools, employing 85 teachers for nearly 1,300 students. These schools were usually day schools located near Indian communities (Lomawaima, 1994). In the late 1800s, President Ulysses Grant gave certain Indian reservations to churches with the mandate to strip them of their religious ceremonies (such as the Sun Dance and the Ghost Dance).

Few studies of these missionary schools exist. Clemmons's (2000) study of Protestant missionary schools in Minnesota before the Civil War found that many missionaries schooled Dakota children in missionary homes.

Dakota parents and children had more control over the curriculum and regulations than did most parents and students at the off-reservation boarding schools that later followed. Nevertheless, Clemmons concluded that European American society rarely accepted the graduates.

Eventually, the U.S. government became more directly involved in the school system. In 1879, the BIA authorized a former army officer to convert an abandoned military barracks in Pennsylvania into an off-reservation boarding school. Boarding school behavioral rules were generally modeled on a military format, and the curriculum was designed to replace Indian heritage with the vocational skills and culture of European American society, though, in fact, most of the schools prepared students for employment in Indian schools, not in mainstream society.

The schools' living conditions were designed to separate them from their tribal surroundings and expose them to White society. It was thought that if schools were too close to the reservation or Indian community, they would be less successful in assimilation. Therefore, boarding schools were opened farther away in Oregon, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Kansas, and Nebraska. In addition, many schools had a policy of "outing," in which Indian students would live with White families year-round or in the summers; sometimes outing continued for up to 3 years after graduation.

By 1899, 24 off-reservation schools held over 6,200 students. During the Great Depression, 29 percent of Indian children were in boarding schools; 15 percent were in off-reservation boarding schools (Lomawaima, 1994). Off-reservation boarding schools, in place until the 1970s, have been depicted as harsh, repressive institutions where abuse was common. Certainly, the intent of the BIA school system, on- or off-reservation, was to force Native Americans to assimilate to European culture, so children in these schools were usually not allowed to speak their language, practice their religion, or don their native dress. Contact with home was restricted, and letters to family were read by teachers. Punishment was solitary confinement in the "dark room."

Simon Ortiz (1993), an Acoma Indian from New Mexico, remembers in his childhood:

The language we all spoke was Acoma, and it was a struggle to maintain it against the outright threats of corporal punishment, ostracism, and the invocation that it would impede our progress towards Americanization. Children in [BIA day] school were punished and looked upon with disdain if they did not speak and learn English quickly and smoothly. (p. 30)

Nevertheless, according to some reports (Lomawaima, 1994), many Native American families sent their children to these schools by choice, hoping

that their children would be advantaged in society from the experience. Lomawaima concludes that

Boarding-school students had the resilience of children, and in many cases, they found happiness in their surroundings. Some people hated and endured their boarding-school years; others hated and did not endure; they ran away. Some count their years away at school among the happiest and most carefree of their lives. (p. xiv)

These happier accounts appear to be more the exception than the rule. In the early 1920s, the schools were investigated, and the findings were published in the 1924 Meriam Report, which criticized off-reservation schools for severe malnutrition, poor health care, overcrowding, unsanitary living conditions, restrictive discipline, low-quality teaching staff, and inordinate dependence on student labor. Specifically, it was found that the schools were feeding the children on 11 cents a day when the recognized standard was 35 cents. The number of boarding schools, especially off-reservation, dropped from 76 to 65 by 1933 (Lomawaima, 1994).

After World War II, as public awareness grew and families refused to send their children away, boarding schools increasingly served troubled students. A handful of boarding schools were still in operation in the 1990s, but most of those have been turned over to tribal control. The structure and curriculum of the schools now reflect more Indian history and culture, and only about 10 percent of Native American children attend these schools.

Increased Tribal Sovereignty

Since the early 1930s, particularly under pressure from the American Indian Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, the U.S. government has softened its approach to Native Americans. With some notable exceptions, most of the laws that have been passed in regard to Native Americans have restored tribal status and given American Indians more self-control over their activities. That is not to say the relationship has been fully resolved, but improvements have been made.

Some of the major laws increasing tribal control include the following:

- The 1975 Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act expanded Indian control over reservation programs and provided funding for more schools on or near reservations.
- The 1978 Education Amendments Act gave tribes substantial control over local education programs.

- The 1978 Indian Child Welfare Act gave tribal courts jurisdiction to place Native American children in Native American homes for adoption or foster care.
- The 1978 American Indian Religious Freedom Act protected the religious rights of Native Americans, including their use of peyote.

Native Americans are now dual citizens, both of the United States, since 1924, and of their tribes. Some carry passports from each. For the most part, tribes are regulated by federal, not state, law. As it turned out, some of the useless reservation land has been found to hold some of the richest resources, such as coal, oil, gas, uranium, and forests. Control over these and other resources, such as water and food, remains under continuous negotiation. Several tribes now run very successful industries. For instance, the Cherokee run a military parts industry, whereas the Choctaw run auto parts and greeting card businesses. Moreover, about 200 tribes now run gaming industries of one sort or another, generating about \$6 billion per year (still far short of the revenues generated by Las Vegas, Reno, and Atlantic City). Although some of this revenue is donated or turned over to state governments, much has become an important source of education, jobs, and social services for a few tribes (Holmstrom, 1994).

The State of American Indians and Their Families Today

As stated earlier, it is a risky enterprise to generalize about Native American families, but for the sake of facilitating some learning, I'm about to take that risk. Several researchers (Miller & Moore, 1979; Red Horse, 1988) have attempted to form a typology of Native American families ranging from traditional to acculturated, based on a number of criteria: language (whether they speak the tribal language or English), religious beliefs (tribal, pan-Indian, or Christian), family structure (extended or nuclear), health practices (traditional healing or Western), and attitude toward land (sacred or utilitarian). One of the main factors contributing to where Native American families fall on the continuum is their relationship to the reservation.

On or Off the Reservation

The United States contains more than 300 reservations. Currently, it is estimated that about 22 percent of American Indians live on reservations; another 15 percent or so live near reservations or in tribal areas (John,

1998), making Native Americans one of the most rural racial-ethnic groups in America.

As noted above, reservations originally were not residences of choice for Native Americans. By default, however, they now serve as the locus of Indian culture and tradition for those who want to maintain some semblance of their heritage. Therefore, American Indian families who reside full-time on reservations tend to be those who are tied to their particular tribe, as opposed to a pan-Indian identity. They tend to practice the religious traditions and rituals peculiar to their tribe or to the Native American Church, a 20th century pan-Indian religion combining Christian beliefs with traditional practices. Whereas off-reservation family experiences range widely from alienation to economic success, reservation families tend to have higher-than-average poverty, unemployment, domestic violence, fertility, and extended household rates (Baca Zinn & Eitzen, 2002; John, 1998). For many Native Americans, then, it sometimes seems that one has to choose between maintaining one's heritage or surviving financially. Some choose to do both by living and working off reservation but visiting family periodically on reservation.

Tribal Structure

Each tribe is united by a common language and governing structure. Though these structures vary, they frequently consist of several bands or clans, such as the seven clans of the Cherokee Nation, which are usually composed of extended kin with mutual economic interests. Each band or clan is often headed by a senior male who represents the clan at the tribal level. Traditionally, some of these representatives (chiefs) inherited their position by virtue of their ancestral line, whereas others were selected or elected by a council of elders based on their personal characteristics. A number of studies indicate that Native Americans define leadership skills differently from European Americans. Whereas most Americans would look for experience, education, and authority when choosing a leader, Native Americans are more likely to seek wisdom, bravery, humility, and intuition (Hoebel, 1978). In recent years more tribes have moved to leadership by selection or election.

The chief usually rules with a council of elders (usually male, but occasionally female, as in the Iroquois Nation) and with shamans or religious leaders, persons who are perceived as having special powers or understanding of the universe. Following the council of elders and religious leaders are the warriors and braves, usually young men and boys who have proven themselves capable of providing security for the tribe. Stereotypes usually

associate warriors with fighting, but security involved more than intertribal relations. Anna Lee Walters (1993, p. 46), a Pawnee, explains that in her tribe it was customary that warriors always bring food, preferably meat, when visiting friends or family. The food would then be prepared by the host and served to the warrior and the rest of the family. Nevertheless, Native American men do have a history of serving disproportionately in the U.S. armed services (as do many other racial minorities) and holding regular ceremonies honoring veterans. Some have suggested that this military commitment has served as a substitute for the loss of such opportunities within the tribe.

Cultural Values

Although Native American cultural values can be found on and off the reservation, they are more easily maintained and socialized in succeeding generations on the reservation where the context and structure support such values. Again, values vary by tribe and individual, but some observers have noted the following commonalities.

Cooperation, more than competition, is encouraged. In the two-part documentary *Winds of Change* (Cortez, Iverson, & Lucas, 1990), the filmmakers interview a young White man who coaches a Native American football team. He complains that it is difficult to get his Native American team to exhibit enough competitive spirit to continue to play hard against the other team; winning by one point is enough.

The collective is valued over the individual. Unlike most of America, where guests are expected to bring gifts to birthday and graduation parties, in a number of Native American tribes, the host gives gifts at his or her celebration. Personal achievements are viewed as the result of a family enterprise, and giving gifts is the individual's way of acknowledging all the people who helped along the way. As noted earlier when discussing U.S. laws regarding American Indian land, many tribes had no concept of private property. Land either couldn't be owned or was owned communally. Similarly, food obtained through fishing or hunting would be shared by the extended family, not just by those who caught it. Flannery (1995) describes the traditional Cree practice of winter hunting groups gathering in spring near a good fishing area. They would build a trap and all would share in the catch. If men hunted together, they would divide the caribou equitably regardless of who shot it.

Harmony between spirit, mind, and body is desired. As mentioned in the chapter on parent-child relationships, like many Asians, Native Americans try to avoid conflict and confrontation to maintain harmony both within oneself and among relationships. For instance, Flannery's (1995) study of

the Cree confirmed that Cree individuals tend to avoid direct criticism of, or intervention in, matters involving people outside the family. Writing of the Ojibwa, Shkilnyk (1985) also noted that when relational norms were transgressed, the Ojibwa seldom engaged in open expressions of anger or face-to-face confrontation; instead, they retaliated by covert means, namely by the use of sorcery and magic to punish those who violated social norms.

Current Family Trends

As with African American families, Native American families have been known for their reliance on extended family members as systems of support and for their fluid household boundaries. The use of other family and non-family members as co-parents is common and is sometimes reflected in tribal languages that refer to anyone who does parenting as "mother" or "father" even when they are not the biological parents. For instance, among the Hopi, the mother's sister is also called Mother and her children are called brother and sister. Among the Omaha, any female of the mother's clan is referred to as mother (Stanton, 1995).

Fluid household borders also accommodate cyclical migration between reservation and city. For instance, Lobo (2002) describes one American Indian household in the San Francisco area that had accommodated the comings and goings of at least 38 people during the course of one month. Yet, according to some recent estimates, the use of extended family households is declining among Native Americans (Yellowbird & Snipp, 1994).

Throughout the text I have pointed out that matrilineality is most commonly found in the United States among Native Americans, particularly among eastern tribes, such as the Creek, Choctaw, and Seminole, and among the southwestern Pueblo tribes, such as the Hopi, Acoma, Zuni, and Laguna. Nevertheless, most American Indian tribes are patriarchal and patrilineal. Traditionally, girls were married quite young (usually to older boys), and this may account for the current pattern of early marriage and childbirth.

The young age distribution among Native Americans (which results in fewer elderly living alone), combined with high rates of nonmarital childbearing, results in a higher percentage of family households (as opposed to nonfamily households) than that found among Black or White Americans (Refer to Table 5.1). In the past, among some tribes, the Micmac for instance (Guillemin, 1975), nonmarital births did not diminish a woman's marital prospects, but this pattern has declined, creating an increased proportion of female-headed households (now second to African Americans).

High rates of divorce also contribute to the increased proportion of single-parent households. Historically, divorce was easily obtained, particularly

by men, and less stigmatized among Native Americans, a practice that irked many Jesuit missionaries (Schwartz & Scott, 2003). For instance, according to Bates and Frarkin (2003), among the Navajo, people traditionally married and divorced four or five times, not expecting that marriage should last forever. What differs today is that the divorces are less likely followed by remarriage (John, 1998). Consequently, according to Lamanna and Reidman (2003), Native Americans have higher proportions of their population divorced than do other racial-ethnic groups.

As discussed in Chapter 7, Native American parenting styles were traditionally viewed as permissive and indulgent. Very little corporal punishment was used. Children were given quite a bit of latitude in making behavioral choices, and socialization was widely dispersed among clan members. The boarding school policy that separated generations of parents and children, however, contributed to a loss of parenting skills and traditions, and the generations of students who grew up in boarding schools frequently adopted the more authoritarian discipline methods of the schools. Today, Native Americans have higher rates of child abuse, foster care, and grandparent care than other groups (see Chapters 7 and 8). Since the 1978 Indian Child Welfare Act was passed, more than 80 percent of tribes adopted juvenile codes and courts to deal with child welfare issues and specifically to reduce the number of Indian children in foster care, particularly non-Indian foster care, but it has met with little success.

Like African Americans, Native Americans have made great strides in education, occupation, and income in recent decades. For instance, in 1940 only 2.2 percent of Native Americans held professional jobs (Gonzales, 1998); now nearly 20 percent do. Nevertheless, inequities in those areas linger, and severe social repercussions following relocation remain for a substantial minority. The rates of alcoholism, violence, and suicide reached frightening proportions in some Native communities in the last century. Though an extreme case, Anastasia M. Shkilnyk tells of the effects of such relocation in her 1985 book *A Poison Stronger than Love: The Destruction of an Ojibwa Community*. Shkilnyk describes the transformation of the traditional Ojibwa extended family system, which was guided by codes of respect and tolerance for each other, elaborate rituals of puberty and transition, strong taboos against incest, promiscuity, and marriage within bloodlines. Many of these traditions apparently were destroyed after relocation and were followed by an exponential increase in alcohol and drug use, which in turn gave rise to high rates of gang rape, child neglect, and self-destruction.

Although the majority of Native Americans are not alcoholics, the rate of alcoholism is higher among Native Americans than among any other racial group. Not traditionally part of the Native American way of life, alcohol was

introduced by European Americans to the indigenous population, frequently as a way of lubricating treaty negotiations. Today, Native Americans, like many American college students, are known for binge drinking, drinking until highly inebriated or unconscious (Shkilnyk, 1985). Some have speculated that because most reservations have laws prohibiting alcohol on the reservation, Native Americans are more likely to binge when and where they can get alcohol.

Consequently, health issues among Native Americans remain prominent. Diabetes is four times higher than the national average. In some communities, for instance the Pima in Arizona, more than 50 percent of the elderly have diabetes (Baldridge, 2001). Mortality from alcohol-related illnesses, accidents, and homicides is above average as well. Fetal alcohol syndrome is highest among Native American babies (Schwartz & Scott, 2003).

In particular, Native American teens have the highest drug and alcohol use rates of all racial-ethnic groups. Youth gang activity has increased exponentially on reservations (Youth Gangs, 1997), and adolescent suicide rates are four times higher than the national average for that age group. Some have suggested a cultural explanation for the high suicide pattern, because in some tribes death is approached as part of the natural circle of life (LaFromboise & Bigfoot, 1988). Poverty, substance abuse, and limited educational and economic opportunities, however, would be sufficient reason as well.

Some tribes have chosen to address these problems through economic development, with revenues and employment garnered from gaming, tourist, timber, and other industries, or with the development of tribal colleges, which now number about 30 (Conover, 1997; Serwer, 1993). Many attribute these problems, however, to the erosion of Native American culture and traditions. Consequently, in recent years, many tribes have instituted programs to overturn these trends through a revival of cultural practices, such as the sweat lodge or the Sioux Sun Dance, and renewal of spiritual values (Holmstrom, 1997). Although these tradition renewal efforts continue, the overwhelming trend is toward marital assimilation (see Chapter 13), which will make it difficult for Native Americans as a whole, let alone as particular tribes, to maintain unique cultural boundaries.

Resources

Books and Articles

Caduto, M. J., & Bruchac, J. (1992). *Native American animal stories*. Golden, CO: Fulcrum.

This is a children's book.

Crow Dog, M. (with Erdoes, R.). (1990). *Lakota woman*. New York: HarperCollins. This is an autobiographical account of a Lakota Sioux woman coming of age during the height of the American Indian Movement.

Lomavaina, K. T. (1994). *They called it prairie light: The story of Chillico Indian School*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

A researched account of the off-reservation boarding school system, this volume uses one school as a case study.

Marshall, J. M., III. (2002). *The Lakota way: Stories and lessons for living: Native American wisdom on ethics and character*. New York: Penguin.

These stories capture the values and beliefs of the Lakota people.

McCubbin, H., Thompson, E. A., Thompson, A. I., and Fromer, J. E. (Eds.). (1998). *Resiliency in Native American and immigrant families*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Part II of this collection of studies addresses cultural resiliency and its effects on Native American youth.

Riley, P. (Ed.). (1993). *Growing up Native American*. New York: Avon.

Patricia Riley collected essays from Native Americans of various tribes writing about their childhood.

Videos

Cotter, C., Iverson, D., & Lucas, P. (Producers). (1990). *Winds of change: A matter of promises* [Video recording]. Alexandria, VA: PBS Video. (Available from Wisconsin Public Television at <https://secure.uwex.edu/wpt/videos/>)

This 2-part, one-hour each, documentary explores Indian families on and off the reservation.

Native Americans: Celebrating traditions. (2001). (Available from Films Media Group, P.O. Box 2053, Princeton, NJ 08453-2053, or at <http://www.films.com>)

By presenting the experiences of Native Americans from a wide array of fields including artisans, performers, and teachers, this 30-minute video shows how many tribes are returning to the traditions and spirituality of their ancestors.

Obomsawin, A. (Producer). (1977). *Mother of many children*. Canada: National Film Board of Canada. (Available from Women Making Movies, 462 Broadway, Suite 500, New York, NY 10013, or at <http://www.wmm.com>)

This 58-minute film examines matrilineal Indian culture.

Sacred spirit: The Lakota Sioux, past and present. (1999). (Available from Films Media Group, P.O. Box 2053, Princeton, NJ 08453-2053, or at <http://www.films.com>)

This 51-minute video reviews the history and culture of the Oglala Sioux.

Teaching Indians to be White. (1993). (Available from Films Media Group, P.O. Box 2053, Princeton, NJ 08453-2053, or at <http://www.films.com>)

This 28-minute video looks at several tribal reactions to the different school systems developed for Native American children.

Websites

<http://www.cherokee.org>

The Cherokee Nation has its own web page. Many other Indian Nations have their own informational websites as well.

<http://www.indiancountry.com>

This is the on-line version of the pan-Indian newspaper *Indian Country Today*.

<http://www.indianeduresearch.net>

This website, affiliated with ERIC Digests, gives abstracts of research on Native Americans.

<http://www.native telecom.org>

This is a good collection of available media resources about Native Americans.

<http://www.native web.org>

This website contains information about indigenous people around the world.