Native Americans: Stereotype vs. Reality

Who are Native Americans? What stereotypes distort non-Native peoples’ perceptions of Native people? Some of these books describe the reality; others analyze the stereotypes. Your library (school, college, or public) may have some of these books. A reference librarian in a public or college library may be able to obtain these books for you through the interlibrary loan program. Many of these books are in print, and can be purchased from the publishers or through bookstores.

The Stereotypes


Deloria, Philip J. 1998. *Playing Indian*. New Haven: Yale University Press. Explores the dominant culture's fantasies about Native people and the co-optation of Native symbols, culture, etc., from colonial days to the present.

Dilworth, Leah. 1996. *Imagining Indians in the Southwest: Persistent Visions of a Primitive Past*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press. The author examines the creation and enduring potency of the early 20th Century myth of the primitive Indians and discusses the ways in which Native people have resisted cultural colonialism.

prepared to accompany an exhibit designed to examine the false symbols of "Indianness" that help to perpetuate harmful stereotypes.


Mihesuah, Devon A. 1996. *American Indians: Stereotypes & Realities*. Atlanta: Clarity Press. This useful resource dispels many misconceptions and negative stereotypes; also includes a list of do's and don'ts for teaching about Indian history and culture. The author is Choctaw.


**The Reality**


Chapman, Serle. Two books: *Of Earth & Elders: Visions & Voices from Native America (Volume One, 1998)* and *We, the People: Of Earth & Elders (Volume Two, 2001).* Missoula, MT: Bear Print @ Mountain Press Publishing Company (PO Box 2399, Missoula, MT 59806). A unique look at contemporary Native Americans. Works to counteract stereotypes.


Roche, Judith, & Meg McHutchison, editors. 1998. *First Fish, First People: Salmon Tales of the North Pacific Rim.* Seattle: University of Washington Press / Vancouver: UBC Press. Presents the voices of contemporary Native writers and storytellers of the Northwest Coast, where salmon looms large in traditional life and beliefs.


Encyclopedias and Reference Books

**American Indian Studies: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Contemporary Issues**, Dane Morrison, ed. New York: Peter Land Publishing, Inc., 1997. This collection of essays is meant to introduce issues that American Indians face while promoting the importance of having Native American studies in higher education. Serving the general interests and questions that people have about Indians, this book covers a broad range of topics. Chapter six, “Images and Icons,” focuses on stereotypes in T.V., film, and sports.

**Native America In the Twentieth Century: An Encyclopedia**, Mary B. Davis, ed. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1994. This useful encyclopedia briefly discusses stereotypes of Native Americans from many different perspectives. The different viewpoints come from the Civil Rights Movement, museum exhibits, role of anthropologists, media, photographs, and sports.

**Native American Issues: A Reference Handbook**, William M. Thompson. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 1996. This reference book contains information on such topics as sovereignty in relation to contemporary issues of land rights, water rights, hunting and fishing rights, sacred sites, and religious practices. In addition, a chronology, biographical sketches, court cases, a directory of organizations, and selected print and non-print resources are included. One section in the introduction discusses stereotyping.


**Teaching American Indian Students**, Jon Reyhner, ed. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992. The book discusses the importance of culturally relevant teaching and multicultural education as it relates to Indian students. Recommendations for teaching Indian children’s literature and social studies are provided along with other resources like journals, curriculum materials, and a list of audio-visual distributors.

Books

collection of editorials published by the Times covers four decades of public opinion and commentary on what was thought to be “the Indian problem.” The underlying moods of Manifest Destiny and American conquest are expressed throughout chapters titled: “The Status of the Indian” and “The Chiefs” and “Corruption.”

**American Indian Stereotypes in the World of Children: A Reader and Bibliography**, Arlene Hirshfelder, Paulette Fairbanks Molin, Yvonne Wakim. Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1999. This text emphasizes the diverse history that Indians have experienced and acknowledges that stereotypes of American Indians have confined the conception of what people think about American Indians, especially American Indian children. Topics discussed vary from: mascots, Pocahontas, tipis, and certain national holidays. In addition, a 50-page bibliography about the stereotyping of American Indians is included for further research.

**American Indians in World War I: At War and at Home**, Thomas A. Britten. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997. This book is useful for research on American Indians in World War I. A couple of chapters relating to stereotypes include the segregating of troops and terms like “Doughboys,” “instinctive” soldiers, or “blood-thirsty warriors” used to describe American Indians.

**American Indians: Stereotypes and Realities**, Devon A. Mihesuah. Atlanta: Clarity Press, Inc., 1996. Created as a tool to promote discussion and clarification, this book confronts the various stereotypes about American Indians that are commonplace in today’s society and academia. With an easy to understand format, Mihesuah presents the stereotype and confronts it with the “Reality.” Also, at the end of each section, recommended readings are shared for further research for each particular stereotype.

**Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imagination**, Shari M. Huhndorf. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001. Organized thematically and chronologically, this book discusses the phenomenon of going native by “forming ‘tribes,’ participating in ‘traditional Indian’ rituals, and emulating Indian practices in other ways” and how this process has affected Indian and non-Indian relationships throughout history. Huhndorf references other works in her examples of how “going native” regenerates the ideas and justifications of European-American hegemony.

**Indian Images in Commerce**, Gregory A. Reinhardt. Weston, CONN: Pictures of Records, Inc., 2000. This collection of slides was used as a material-culture essay about how conventional images of Indians have been used commercially throughout the world. The slides illustrate how non-Indians have exploited Indian images to sell or advertise products by depicting Indians in various contexts, re-enforcing stereotypes that have and continue to denigrate Indians. Themes used in describing Indian images range from “The Respectable Indian” to “The Enigmatic Indian.”

episodes from a number of popular T.V. science fiction shows. Interviews with Native American individuals and focus groups discuss how negative stereotypes impact religious beliefs, culture, traditions and sacred objects. Some T.V. series analyzed include: Star Trek, Quantum Leap, and The Adventures of Superman.


**Native Americans in the Saturday Evening Post**, Peter G. Beidler and Marion F. Egge. Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2000. This resource is very useful for those researching the perceptions of American Indians through the eyes of popular American culture as it was published in the *Saturday Evening Post*. Types of materials include: editorials, feature columns, photographs, poetry, short stories and serial fiction, cartoons, and general nonfiction articles. This collection is a less time consuming alternative to reviewing many rolls of microfilm.

**Plains Earthlodges: Ethnographic and Archaeological Perspectives**, Donna C. Roper and Elizabeth P. Pauls, eds. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2005. This text focuses on Plains earthlodges from ethnographic and archaeological perspectives. One chapter titled, “Confounding Stereotypes: Building an Earthlodge for Fun and Edification”, discusses the different obstacles faced in re-building a Hidatsa “village” for an event in Minnesota called Farmfest ’76. This project was intended to acknowledge the contributions of American Indians to American agriculture.

**Playing Indian**, Philip J. Deloria. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001. This book examines the ways in which imagining Indians has been used to shape national American identity. Some examples studied are the Boston Tea Party, Campfire Girls, Boy Scouts, and Grateful Dead concerts. Deloria explores these identities throughout American history and how each era has appropriated and deprived Indians of their identity for the sake of constructing an American one.

**Selling the Indian: Commercializing & Appropriating American Indian Cultures**, Carter Jones Meyer and Diana Royer, eds. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2001. This book of essays discusses the commercialization of American Indian cultures by non-Indians in the twentieth century and implications of cultural imperialism through this process. Issues of economic need, cultural integrity and self-determination are integrated with the discussion of marketing the Indian. Stereotypes mentioned include the “casino Indian,” the “environmentalist Indian,” the “Indian Princess,” and the “wise Indian elder.”
Shadows of the Indian: Stereotypes in American Culture, Raymond William Stedman. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982. Stedman discusses the different images of Indians that white America has imagined from past to present. Along with a contemporary take on images of Indians, Stedman discusses how white America’s images of Indians never accounted for the modernity factor that contemporary American Indians experience today.

Stereotypes, Distortions and Omissions in U.S. History Textbooks: A Content Analysis Instrument for Detecting Racism and Sexism, Supplemental Information on Asian American, Black, Chicano, Native American, Puerto Rican, and Women's History. New York: Council on Interracial Books for Children, Racism and Sexism Resource Center for Educators, 1977. This book serves as a guide on how to analyze the content in U.S. history textbooks as they pertain to Asian American, Black, Chicano, Native American, Puerto Rican, and women populations. Quotes written in textbooks about each group are commented on, analyzed, and referenced for future readings. A checklist at the end of each section enables the reader to grade the content and accuracy of books written by a certain population.

The Insistence of the Indian: Race and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century American Culture, Susan Scheckel. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998. This book examines what the “Indian Problem” was and how it relates to national identity. American Indians are analyzed within the context of American nationalism, American citizenry, and American identity from a historical perspective. Pocahontas and Indians as the subjects of American history are some topics covered in this six-chapter book.

The Invented Indian: Cultural Fictions and Government Policies, James A. Clifton, ed. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1994. This compilation of essays was written by scholars with the intentions of reconstructing the current understandings of Indians from past to present, countering the “cultural fictions” that have become Indian policy. A variety of topics include: Pocahontas, Squanto, the Iroquois League, Primitivists and Plastic Medicine Men, and Authenticity. A total of seventeen essays.


Theses and Dissertations
“The Attitudes of Selected Educational Groups in Arizona Toward Indians,”
Timothy Francis Shaunessy.

A dissertation presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy, Arizona State University, December 1976. The different
educational groups selected for this paper are administration faculty members,
school board presidents and superintendents in Arizona.

**Journal Articles**

“Smoke or Signals?: American Popular Culture and the Challenge to Hegemonic
Images of American Indians in Native American Film,” John Mihelich, *Wicazo Sa
Review* 16:2 (2001) 129-137. This article explores how popular culture has been
incorporated in shaping perceptions about American Indians. The whole issue of this
journal is about film and video making it very useful in researching stereotypes
discussing different movies like *Smoke Signals, Thunderheart, Powwow Highway,
Lakota Woman* and television documentaries.

“The Need for Textbook Reform: An American Indian Example”, James P.
analysis of the form and content of literature, oral and written, in a South Carolina
high school. Four stereotypic categories are explored: noble savages, savage savages,
generic Indians, and living fossils. Useful references are listed.

**Videos**

“In whose honor?” [videorecording]: written and produced by Jay Rosenstein.
Champaign, IL: Jay Rosenstein, 1996.

Discussion of Chief Illiniwek as the University of Illinois mascot, and the effect the
mascot has on Native American peoples. Graduate student Charlene Teters shares
the impact of the Chief on her family. Interviewees include members of the Board of
Regents, students, alumni, current and former "Chiefs," and members of the
community.

Images of Indians Series [videorecording]: a co-production of KCTS-9 in
cooperation with the United Indian of All Tribes Foundation; directed by Phil Lucas
and Robert Hagoplan. Lincoln, NE: Distributed by Native American Native

The five-part series analyzes how Indian stereotypes are portrayed in movies and
examines how the Hollywood images of Indians affect Indians’ own self-image.
Each 30-minute movie covers a different identity that Hollywood has
misappropriated toward Indians through historical inaccuracies, romanticized story
lines, misrepresentations of Indian religions and values.
Part 1: The Great Movie Massacre

Part 2: How Hollywood Wins the West

Part 3: Warpaint and Wigs

Part 4: Heathen Injuns and the Hollywood Gospel

Part 5: The Movie Reel Indians

Ephemera

Included are small manuscripts, informational brochures, museum publications, photographs (including slides), radio transcripts, articles, and poetry. To find ephemera related to sovereignty, search the American Indian Index and the Arizona and Southwestern Index, which are accessed from the University Libraries home page under “Find: Specialized Collections” or click on the link from the Labriola website: http://www.asu.edu/lib/archives/labriola.htm. Examples of subjects are: stereotypes and/or American Indians, mascots.

Rethinking Columbus: Teaching About the 500th Anniversary of Columbus’s Arrival in America. Rethinking Schools, 1991. The whole issue of this magazine discusses Christopher Columbus’ “discovery” of this country and how stereotypes and historical inaccuracies have been carried on through the institution of education. Issues relating to elementary and secondary schools issues, contemporary issues, and terminology in the classroom are just a few topics covered.

Online Resources

Caution: Before using the information from any web pages in your paper, be certain that your source is legitimate and accurate.

Retire the Chief website exists to give a voice, create dialogue, and to advocate a change in policy that would extinguish the use of Chief Illiniwik at the University of Chicago. This website also provides updates, news, pro/con opinions about the use of Indians as mascots.

www.retirethechief.org/Essays/stereotype0503.html

This website provides a detailed bibliography titled, “Native Americans: Stereotypes vs. Reality.” The list is a good starting point for those who wish to do research on stereotypes. An easy link is provided that allows the user to email the list to themselves. The Smithsonian Institute provides the list.

www.si.edu/resource/faq/nmai/naster.htm
This site administered by the American Museum of Natural History provides a lengthy list of resources available on-line, in print and film. Charlene Teters’ exhibit on mascot stereotypes is also accessible with public commentary from people of all ages.

http://www.amnh.org/education/resources/programs/teters/index.html

The Media Awareness Network has created “Common Portrayals of Aboriginal People” in their “Media Issues” section discussing representations of Indians. Romanticism, historical inaccuracies, stereotyping by omission, and simplistic characteristics are a few misrepresentations discussed. Links to more relevant articles are easily accessible.

http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/issues/stereotyping/aboriginal_people/aboriginal_portrayals.cfm

The University of Minnesota has created a library resources guide of representations of American Indians in American film and culture. Large compilations of resources available in their library and on-line are provided. This site has tons of resources and databases that are definitely useful to any researcher.

http://www.lib.umn.edu/libdata/toc23877

The Tulsa City-County Library has an American Indian Resource Center on-line. This site is most useful for educators who evaluate materials like picture books and posters before presenting it to their students. A list of do’s and don’ts when teaching Indian children is given.

http://www.tulsalibrary.org/airc/do.htm