



BE A MYTH BUSTER



Popular culture has created and reinforced many myths about Native communities and Native people that creatives should be mindful of when creating content that includes or centers Native peoples. There is a significant opportunity through your work to clear up the common misconceptions that too often shape Americans' views of what it means to be Native.



MYTH 1

All Native peoples receive free government benefits just for being Native.

The most persistent and toxic negative narrative is the myth that many Native Americans receive government benefits just for being Native, do not pay taxes, or go to college for free. This false narrative has been found to increase feelings of “unfairness” and undermines relationships between Native peoples and other communities of color. This misunderstanding is held by many Americans across the country - even among elected officials and policymakers. Contrary to stereotypes, Native peoples are required to and pay federal taxes like other Americans.

MYTH 2

All Native peoples/tribes are rich from tribal gaming.

This myth showcases the dual false narratives that often exist in representation of Native communities. Native peoples are often shown living in poverty accepting government benefits while also being portrayed as flush with casino money. In reality, only 39.3% of Native tribes have casinos and only 12% of those tribes generate more than 68% of their revenue from gaming. Only 8.9% of the total Native population profits from gaming,¹ and these benefits help support tribal government services, economic, and community development.

MYTH 3

Most if not all Native peoples live on reservations.

While most Native peoples remain connected to their sovereign tribal communities, approximately 75% of Natives live in urban and suburban areas.²

MYTH 4

All Native peoples are alcoholics and are destitute.

One of the most common depictions of Native peoples is as lazy alcoholics or Native communities rife with poverty and generally reliant on the US government for handouts. While research has

shown Native peoples report similar heavy or binge drinking rates to white Americans, Native peoples report abstaining from alcohol at higher rates overall.

MYTH 5

All Native American cultures are the same.

Most Americans hold the belief that all Native Americans are a monolithic population, wear headdresses, live in tipis, and possess horsemanship skills because Native representation onscreen has often only encompassed the Westerns genre or period pieces. Predominantly, these storylines represented Native men and cultural elements of tribes from the *Great Plains*. This of course is inaccurate and does not come close to representing the diversity present within Indian Country. In 2021, there were 574 federally recognized sovereign nations, and 63 state recognized tribes, each possessing their own unique language, culture, and traditions. Consultation with an individual from that exact community or tribe is the only way you can fully know the proper history and culture of each tribe.

MYTH 6

All Native people look the same.

There is an abundance of diversity within Indian Country and across Indigenous communities. Often, because of how Native peoples have been portrayed in popular culture, perceptions of Native representation have been seen as narrow. Representation in popular culture has normalized the existence and inclusion of white mixed identities but has excluded others. There is no one way to look Native American, in fact there are many Indigenous peoples who are multiracial or biracial, including those with Latinx and Black identities. While certain communities may share visual commonalities, it is important to remember that there are members of those communities who might not possess those traits. It's important to be inclusive when depicting the Native community.

¹*Indian Gaming Facts*. National Indian Gaming Association. (2019, September). <http://www.northforkrancheria.com/files/Indian%20Gaming%20Facts%202021.pdf>

²*The American Indian and Alaska Native Population: 2010 Census Briefs*. U.S. Census Bureau. (2010). <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2012/dec/c2010br-10.pdf>