# Reclaiming Native Truth

A PROJECT TO DISPEL AMERICA'S MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTIONS

Presented by:

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#### Reclaiming Native Truth

Reclaiming Native Truth is an unprecedented national project to transform the way society, institutions, popular culture and Americans perceive Native Americans that can lead to equity, inclusion, accurate representation, policy change and social justice.

#### **GOAL:**

Research public opinion and inform narrative and cultural strategies that will shift public perceptions and win hearts and minds to catalyze transformative change.



Reclaiming Native
Truth will set the
stage for the next
phase and long-term
to result in:

- Improved accuracy of portrayals in the media and entertainment
- New narratives in pop culture and media that can lead to greater cultural shifts
- Greater inclusion in government decision-making
- Increased support for key issues and policies important to Indian Country
- Inclusion of accurate history in K-12 educational curricula
- Increased social and philanthropic investment in Native communities, innovation and Native-led solutions
- Increased self-esteem, hope and opportunities for Native youth to realize their full potential

#### OUR RESEARCH INCLUDED A COMBINATION OF LITERATURE REVIEWS, SOCIAL LISTENING, FOCUS GROUPS, ONLINE FOCUS GROUPS, NATIONAL SURVEYS, AND IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS AS DETAILED BELOW.

2	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
28	focus groups completed in 11 states and nationally online (see map on previous page)
45	in-depth interviews completed among elites including members of Congress; former political appointees; judges; foundation officials; and civil rights, business and entertainment leaders
3,401	college students from 12 colleges/universities participated in a national study examining perceptions of Native Peoples and issues related to Native Peoples
13,306	respondents to nationally representative surveys on key issues and perceptions regarding Native Peoples
240,380	Facebook and Twitter posts on cultural appropriation and Native Peoples analyzed
4.9 million	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

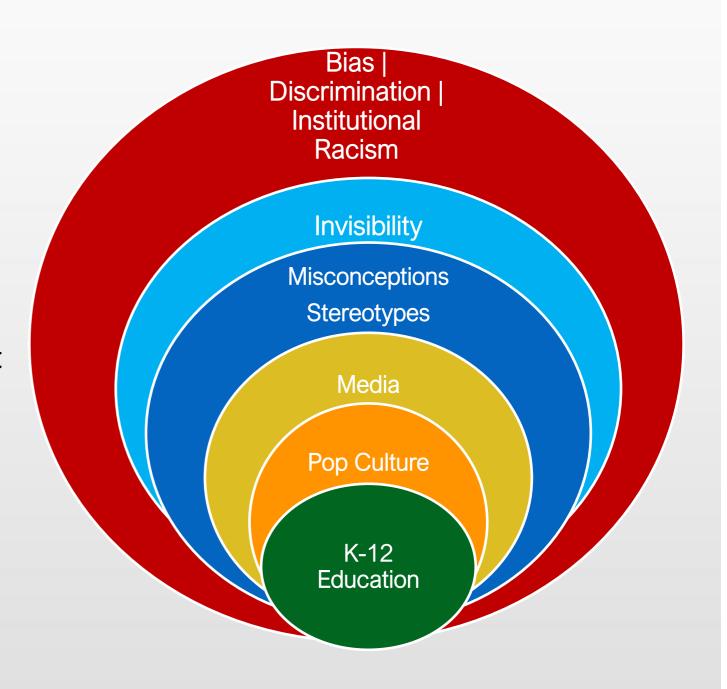
#### **Significant Research Findings**

- **Invisibility** may represent the biggest obstacle Native peoples face when it comes to changing public perceptions
- Majority of respondents admit they do not know any Native Americans.
- Many believe population is declining because they do not see or hear much in media
- People fall back on toxic narratives, myths and misconceptions perpetuated in schools, pop culture & media:
  - 1. Government benefits and Indian Gaming
  - 2. Harmful stereotypes in Hollywood, sports, pop culture;
  - 3. Negative coverage in media: poverty, alcoholism and crime
- Only 34% of Americans believe that Natives face discrimination
- Respondents in rural areas/close to reservations had less respect for tribal sovereignty and rights than their counterparts they were not in close proximity.



#### **Significant Research Findings**

- 1) K-12 education 2) Pop Culture 3)
   Media perpetuating invisibility and false narratives
- Creates very serious biases among diverse demographics and institutions, including the Courts, Congress, philanthropy and other sectors.
- Invisibility found to be equally if not more damaging to misconceptions and stereotypes
- Invisibility strong indicator for continued bias, lack of support for social justice



#### Political and Judicial Research

Wilson Pipestem & Mary Kathryn Nagle, Pipestem Law

- Judicial Elites
- Executive Elites
- Legislative Elites
- Moving Forward



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# Significant Research Findings: Political & Judicial Research

- Federal judges and their law clerks are particularly ignorant about tribal sovereignty & Federal Indian Law
- Judges' perceptions of tribes and Native issues are often formed by limited experiences in the form of criminal cases and are informed by the same toxic narratives and issues of invisibility of other respondents surveyed.
- "Tribes often call themselves 'nations' to puff themselves up."
- "Native communities are dysfunctional."
- "Indigenous means primitive."
- Indian law cases were perceived to be "nonsensical" and "irrational"
- Congresspersons and administrative officials agree that invisibility, stereotypes and narrative set by others affect policy.
- Tribes are seen as having moral authority, expertise and influence on natural resources and the environment.
- Tribes are perceived to be an "afterthought" on issues such as taxes, housing, education and health care
- Tribes perceived to have very little influence on criminal justice





#### The Judiciary: The Law Clerks

- All of the American Indian Law Clerks reported ignorant statements made by federal Judges or their law clerks:
- \* "You are not dark enough to be Native."
- \* "You are not Native if you did not grow up on a reservation."
- ❖ On Baby Veronica, "How can the tribe take jurisdiction over a child who has such a tiny fraction of Cherokee blood?"
- \* "Are tribal members allowed to vote in state elections?"

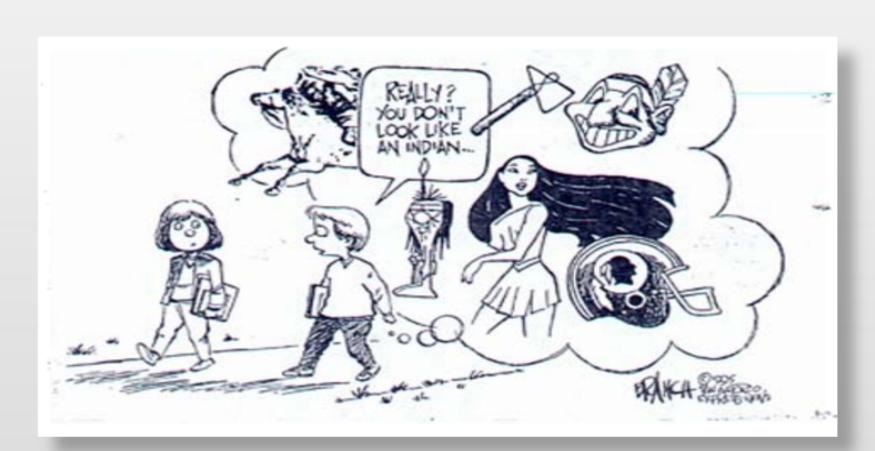
#### Stereotypes in the Executive: White Noise

- All interviewees agreed that perception and invisibility is a major problem
- ❖ One interviewee pointed to Standing Rock as an example of the role the media plays in shaping the public's perception of Indians.
- Stereotypes are rarely communicated directly, but "like white noise, it's always there."

Indians are not as smart

Tribes are all the same

Noble Savages Lazy alcoholics



#### The Legislature: Partisanship in Indian Affairs

- ❖ Interviewees said most members of Congress have little knowledge of Native issues
- ❖ A significant number do not have Tribes in their districts, and they see Indians as "somebody else's problem"
- ❖ A few influential members of Congress have great influence on Indian policy, and other members rely on them and vote as they vote, unless there is another partisan issue.
- ❖ Federal spending on programs that support Tribes is often a partisan issue

#### **Significant Research Findings**

#### **Standing Rock**

- Majority of participants across the country had basic knowledge of Standing Rock and were supportive of the tribe's fight "to protect its land and water"
- Created a major disruption in dominant narratives and opened new space for interest in, support for Native American issues.
- Powerful intersection of new narrative messaging based on values that intersected with grassroots organizing, tribal sovereignty, social media and pop culture
- Many lessons learned that can inform future narrative and social change work



Global impressions worldwide

the height of DAPL

opposition (Jan 20-

27, 2017)

Army Corps **15,000** 

Calls made to the

White House +

Engagement of: 5.1M

Reach of: **56.7M** 

12M
people engaged
online
every month

**590,000**petition signatures
+ EIS comments

submitted

7,000 people moved to the camp in 2016

# **Changing the narrative**

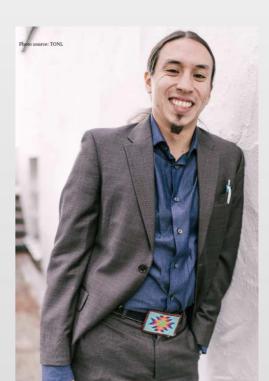


#### **Opportunity: Narrative Change**

- Indian Country has a huge opportunity to shift public perceptions and start to disrupt and change the negative narratives and invisibility
- Two-years of intensive RNT research and strategy development has mapped a pathway forward.
- In April 2018, RNT conducted a nationally representative survey of 2,000 U.S. adults to study whether various groups, given "new narrative" messaging strategies, would shift their opinions on Native specific issues such as pop culture representation, the Indian Child Welfare Act, and tribal sovereignty.



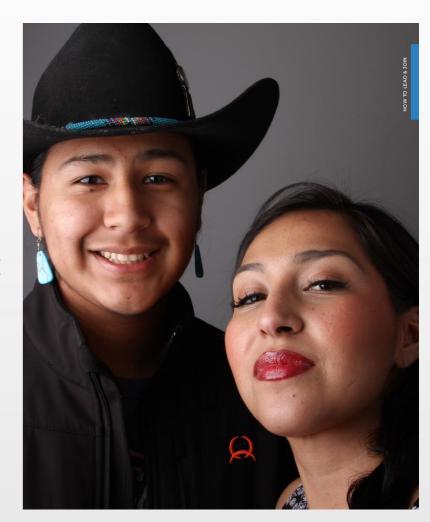






#### **Significant Research Findings**

- GOOD NEWS! When diverse groups of Americans are exposed to the "new Native narrative" they are moved to change perceptions, be more supportive and are open to learning more:
- 78% of Americans are interested in learning more about Native cultures and that strong majorities support Native positions on most issues;
- 72% believe it is necessary that to make significant changes to K-12 curriculum on Native history & culture
- 64% Even among conservatives, support increasing resources to reduce poverty and improve health care and education.



#### The new narrative moves people.

# The Four Themes That Make the Narrative Strong

The research done by *Reclaiming Native Truth* revealed four key themes that need to be part of the new narrative because, used together, they move hearts and minds:



Native values of family, connection to the land, and respect for culture and tradition are understood and highly respected by non-Native Americans. Linking to these values creates a connection and builds understanding. Illustrating how these values are present today helps prevent a slip into historic, romanticized ideas of Native cultures.



Research shows that most non-Native people do not fully understand the true histories of Native Americans and nations, are open to learning, and feel frustrated when they realize that what they were taught in school was false or incomplete. Weaving in facts — not too many, but a few to get the conversation started — about Native Americans' histories makes people more receptive to hearing more and more willing to act on many issues of importance to Native Americans.



History must be directly linked to contemporary life. This shows two things: 1) that Native Americans' cultures and contributions are vital parts of modern life, and 2) that injustices continue today. Because many non-Native Americans don't know (or don't realize they know) any Native Americans, highlighting Native peoples' involvement in every aspect of modern life helps people to move past the systemic erasure and stereotypes and to see what is true today.

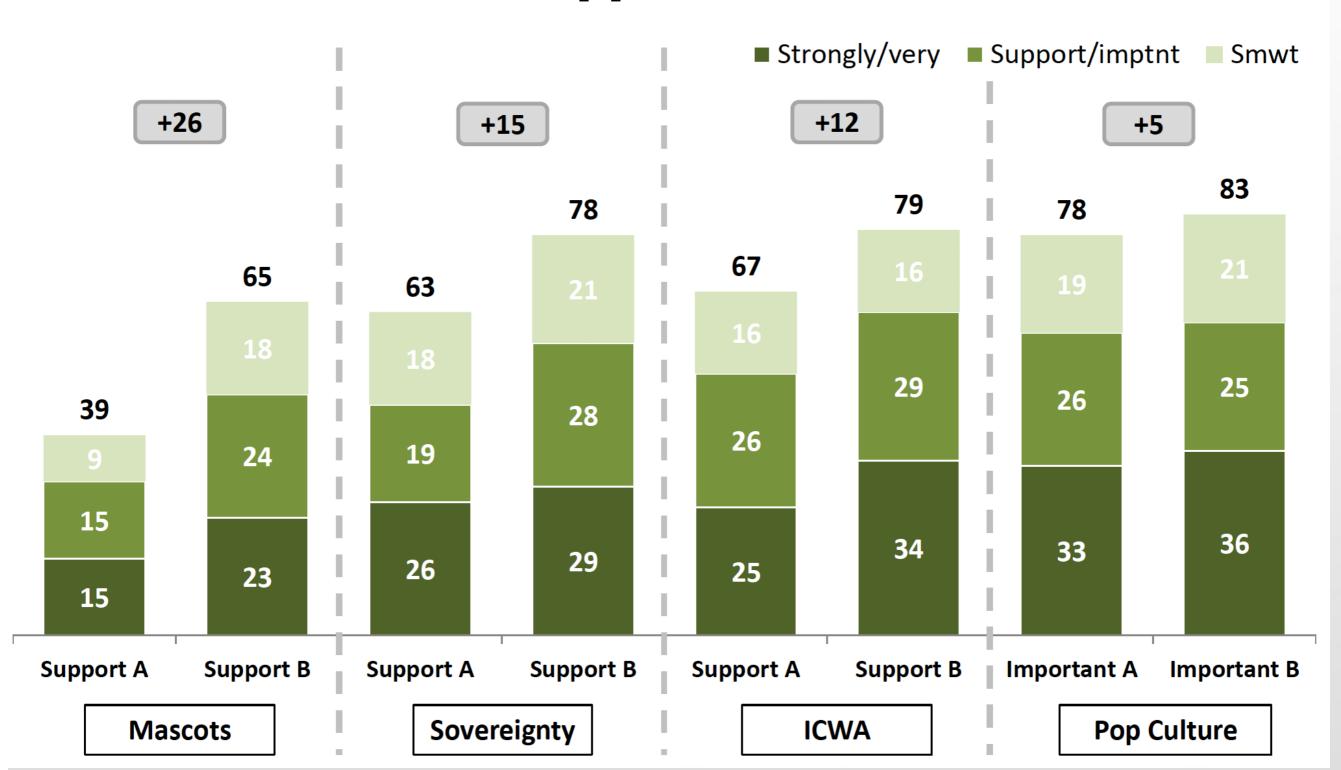


The other essential piece of the narrative is a strong call to action or request for people to do something. It will vary depending on the audience and the issue, but it should be clear, specific and inviting. See the issue-specific narratives on page 16–19 for some examples.

#### Reclaiming Native Truth

- The history of Native Americans is one of great strength and revitalization.
- It is a story built around values that have shaped Native cultures and U.S. society: respect for family and elders; shared responsibility to care for the land; and an obligation to do right by the next generation.
- It is a story of resilience through great pain and injustice, from broken treaties and loss of land and language in the past to
  - derogatory sports mascots and biased history taught in schools today. Across more than 600 sovereign Native nations<sup>2</sup> and in every profession and segment of society, Native Americans carry the cultural knowledge and wisdom that sustains Native nations and helps build a stronger future for all.
  - Let's find our commonalities, celebrate our differences and creatively work together for our shared future and the futures of the next generations.

### Narratives increase support across the board





## Perception of discrimination against Native Americans increases after more information

(SPLIT B) How much discrimination would you say Native Americans face in the United States today?

■ Great deal	■ A lot	Moderate
	+22	83
61	ı	28
27		28
19		27
15		27
Untreated		Treated

	% Great deal/ a lot/moderate	
Total	+22	
Non-college men	+29	
Lib/mod Rep	+28	
Af-Am men	+28	
Hispanic women	+28	
Cons Rep	+26	
White men	+26	

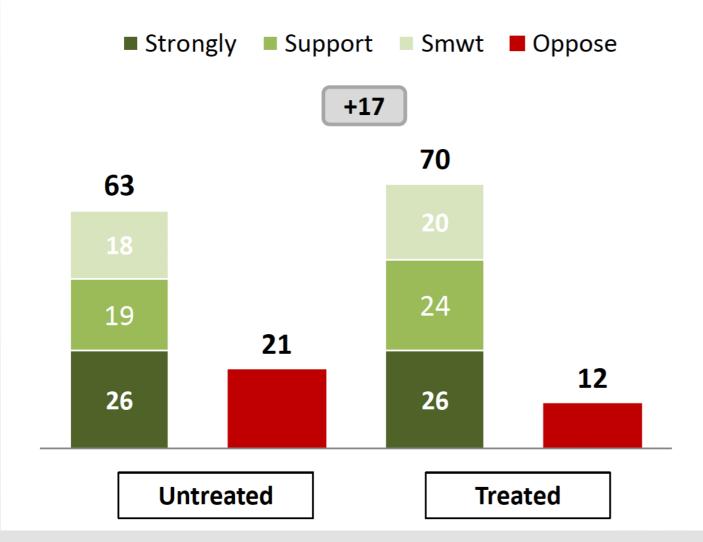
# SOVEREIGNTY

#### **Example Two: The Need to Uphold Treaties and Sovereignty**

- Honor and integrity are important values we all look for in other people. They're important values for countries, too. When a country makes an agreement or signs a treaty, you expect them to live up to it.
- And yet, our own country has broken more than 500 treaties with Native nations that were here long before the United States was founded.
  - Today, there are more than 600 sovereign Native nations within the borders of the United States. Their residents are citizens of both their own Native nations and the United States, and they pay federal taxes like all Americans. Yet, federal and state governments, corporations and individuals continue to violate these treaties and challenge the sovereignty of these independent nations to set their own laws and do what is right for their own citizens.
- It is only fair to honor the treaties with Native nations and to respect their sovereignty.

# Support for sovereignty increases among older, conservative, college graduates who hear narrative

(SPLIT B) Do you support or oppose giving Native tribes full legal authority on their own lands, including the ability to make their own laws that may conflict with state or local laws, without interference from the federal or state government?



	Net Difference	
Total	+17	
Seniors	+40	
Older college grads	+39	
Conservative women	+37	
Older Hispanic	+36	
Older men	+28	
Older white	+28	

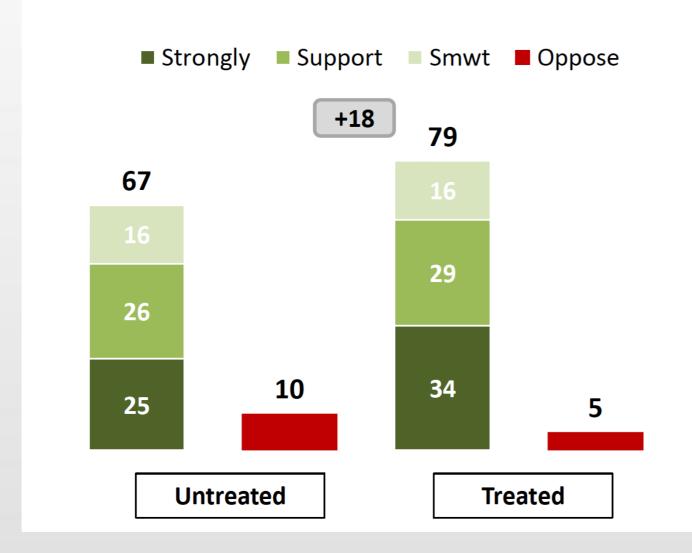
# **ICWA**

## Example One: The Importance of Upholding the Indian Child Welfare Act

- All children deserve to be raised by loving families in supportive communities, surrounded by the culture and heritage they know best.
- In Native cultures, family is defined very broadly. Everyone plays an active role in raising a child and is ready to help in times of crisis.
  - But when the U.S. child welfare system was created, it was biased against raising a child in this way as a community. As a result, the U.S. government removed Native children from their families not because of abuse or neglect, but because of this communal way of being. The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) was passed in 1978 to prevent Native American children from being unjustly taken away and adopted outside their culture.
- Today, however, ICWA is not consistently respected.
- We need to uphold and improve the law to make sure we are doing what is best for Native children.

# Support for ICWA jumps among moderates, older white respondents who hear narrative

(SPLIT B) Do you support or oppose the Indian Child Welfare Act, which keeps Native American children with their own extended family or with another Native American family?



	Net difference	
Total	+18	
Lib/mod Republican	+38	
Seniors	+30	
Moderate men	+25	
White older	+24	
Mod/cons Democrat	+24	
White	+18	

## **Audience segments**

Allies	Moveable	Tougher
People of color, especially Hispanics	Asian Americans	Whites in Indian Country
Democrats	Young, non-college graduates	Seniors
Liberals	Liberal/moderate Republicans	Older, non-college men
Northeast	Mountain states	Conservatives
Know a Native American	Deep South	Conservative Republicans
Native American ancestry	Young men	
Young, college educated	Dads	
Young women	Young African American	

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#### **Key findings: New Narrative**

- 78% Most Americans are generally open to hearing this narrative. A
  78 percent majority in this survey say they are interested in
  learning more about Native American cultures. Strong majorities
  support Native American positions on most issues—mascots
  excepted—without hearing the narratives.
- 81% The public reacts strongly to our narrative.
- 88% Nearly nine in ten voters find it credible



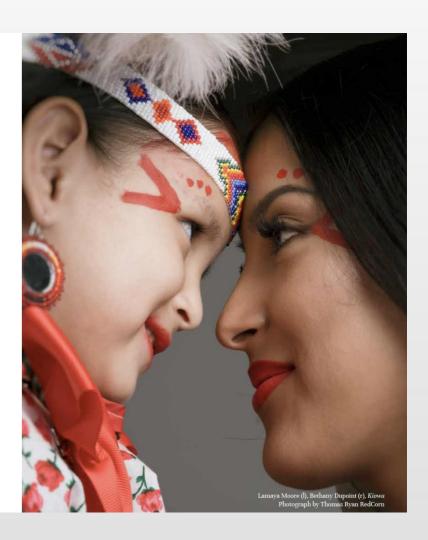




# **Opportunities & Next Steps**







#### **CALL TO ACTION**

 Download research, message guides, narrative change strategy and share widely: <u>illuminatives.org/reclaiming-native-truth/</u>

#### **Next Steps**

- 1. IllumiNative formed to help advance and be a backbone organizing entity for phase 2
- 2. National coalition of tribes, Native organizations, youth and allies committed to work together on a national narrative change campaign
- 3. Translate data into actionable formats, tools and strategies to impact change in pop culture, media, K-12 education, policy and philanthropy
- 4. Training & building capacity new narrative strategies:
  Native speakers bureau, tribes, organizations, grassroots,
  youth and coordinated rapid response communications
  capacity
- 5. Develop & launch multi-media and multi-prong national campaign with a focus on pop culture, media, K-12 education, policy and philanthropy
- 6. Need to resource movement and build collaboration









- Mission to advance narrative change in pop culture, media, K-12 education, philanthropy and policy about, by and for Native peoples.
- Illuminate the vibrancy, resilience and transformative potential of Native traditional knowledge, contemporary voices, experiences, storytelling, innovation and Native-led solutions to break through the invisibility, erasure and toxic narratives that impact Native peoples

www.illuminatives.org

## The Time is Now.



#### **Thank You!**

For more information:
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