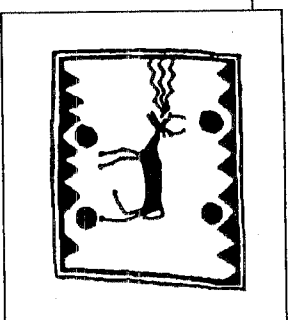
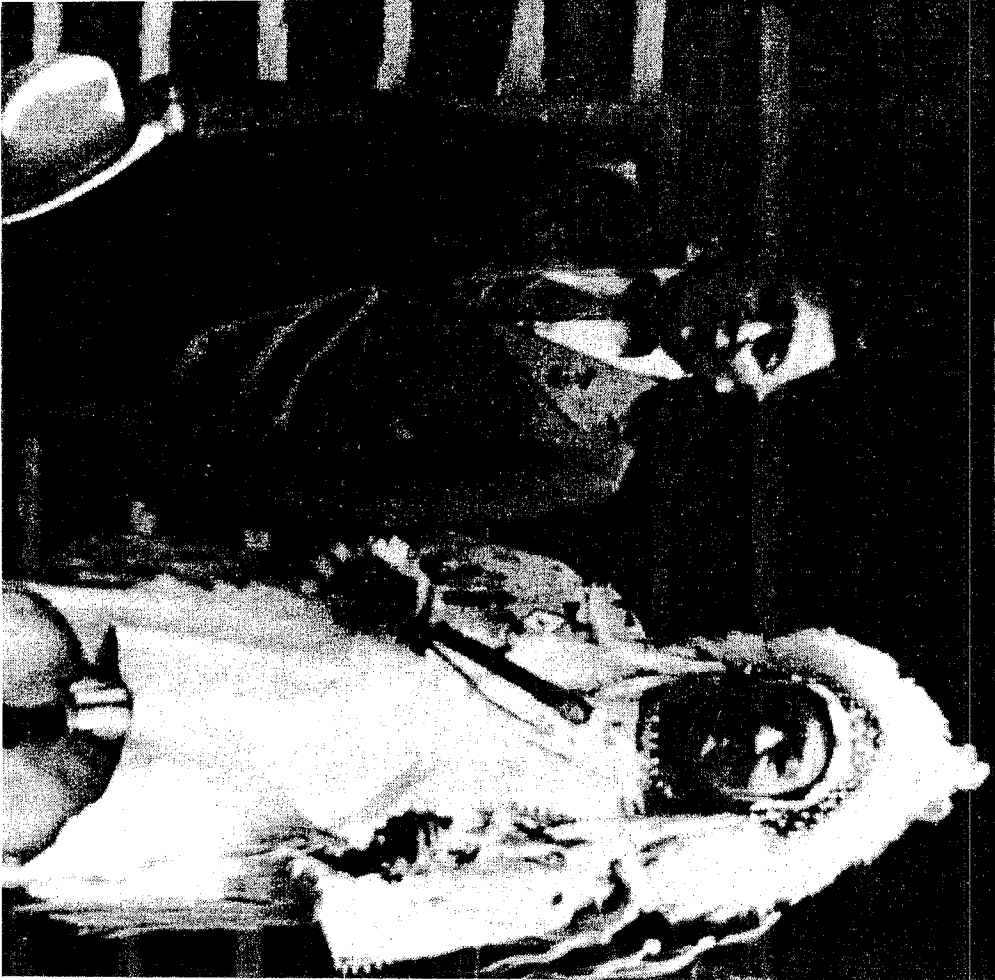


Walter Fleming, "Native Americans in the Twenty-First Century," in *Visions of an Enduring People*, ed. Walter Fleming and John Watts (Kendall/Hunt, Dubuque, 2000)



# Contemporary Issues



## Native Americans in the Twenty-first Century

*Walter C. Fleming*

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*In this chapter, Fleming points out that the stereotype of the "vanishing Indian" is erroneous. Native Americans are, in fact, a growing population, but one which has endured many outside influences and exists in a much different world than might have been imagined 500 years ago.*

### INTRODUCTION

One of the most persistent stereotypes about American Indians<sup>1</sup> is the image of the "vanishing Red Man." Since the be-

ginning of contact with Europeans, American Indians have been thought to be on the verge of extinction. Yet, despite exposure to disease, extensive warfare and forced assimilation, American Indians have survived. Not only have they survived, they are flourishing. That has not always been the case, however.

### AMERICAN INDIANS IN THE PAST

Just how many Native Americans lived in the Americas when Columbus achieved land-fall in 1492 is not known. Estimates of the number of Native people living in what is now the United States in 1492 range from 1,153,000<sup>2</sup> to 12,250,000.<sup>3</sup> The Bureau of Census did not begin to collect statistics regarding Native Americans until 1880, therefore any estimate of populations prior to that time is speculation.<sup>4</sup>

It is true, however, that at one point in American Indian history, the population dramatically plunged, in large part the result of contracting European diseases, such as smallpox, cholera, measles and whooping cough—diseases to which Native peoples in the Americas had no natural immunities.

Over the last 100 years, however, the American Indian population has grown from less than one-quarter million in 1920 to nearly 2.5 million in 2000 (see Figure 17.1).<sup>5</sup>

### CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN INDIAN POPULATIONS

Counting Indians has been a long tradition in the United States but never an exact science. To complicate the process further, for the first time in history, the Census 2000 offered Americans the chance to identify themselves as belonging to more than one race (Figure 17.2). The overwhelming majority of Americans (98 percent), however, reported only one race.

But nearly seven million (2.4 percent) reported belonging to more than one racial category. The results affect dramatically the overall American Indian and Alaska Native population in the country. By single-race alone, there are about 2.5 million American Indians and Alaska Natives in the country (Table 17.1). Including respondents who identified themselves as American Indian and another race, the number jumps to 4.1 million. Due to the difference, comparing the Census 2000 directly with the Census 1990 is not straightforward. Based only on single-race respondents, however, the American Indian population increased 26 percent over the past decade, from 1,959,234 to 2,475,956.

The 1990 census estimated that there were almost 2 million American Indians in the United States.<sup>6</sup> If we compare this to the 2000 census results, and only use the “American Indian Alone” population, this population increased by 516,722, or 26 percent, between 1990 and 2000. If

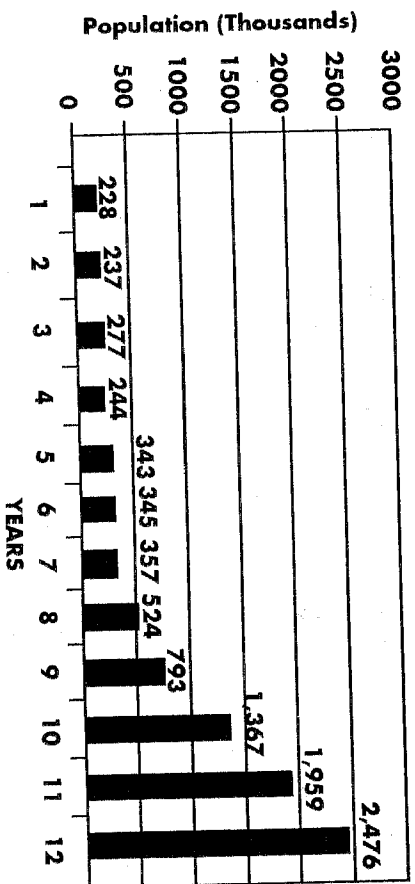


Figure 17.1.

Reproduction of the Question on Race from Census 2000

6. **What is this person's race? Mark  one or more races to indicate what this person considers himself/herself to be.**

White

Black, African Am., or Negro

American Indian or Alaska Native—Print name of enrolled or principal tribe. ↓

Asian Indian  Japanese  Native Hawaiian

Chinese  Korean  Guamanian or Chamorro

Filipino  Vietnamese  Samoan

Other Asian—Print Race. ↓  Other Pacific Islander—Print race. ↓

Some other race—Print race. ↓

Figure 17.2. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Questionnaire.

the American Indian alone or combination with other racial categories is used, the outcome is an increase of 2.2 million, or 110 percent. In contrast, the total U.S. population growth for the same time period is 13 percent. By either measure, however, the American Indian is one of the fastest growing minority groups in the United States.

Because of this new method of recording race, it is difficult to say exactly how many American Indians there really are in the United States. For example, in 1990, someone whose great-great-grandmother was Cherokee had only two options. He or she could identify as “White” or as “American Indian.” Likely as not, that person would more naturally

TABLE 17.1 American Indian and Alaska Native Population: 2000

Category	Number
American Indian & Alaska Native Alone	2,475,956
American Indian & Alaska Native in Combination w/ one or more other races	1,643,345
American Indian & Alaska Native; White	1,082,683
American Indian & Alaska Native; Black or African American	182,683
American Indian & Alaska Native; White; Black or African American	112,207
American Indian & Alaska Native; Some other race	93,842
American Indian & Alaska Native	172,119
American Indian & Alaska Native Alone or in Combination w/ one or more other races	4,119,301

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 1.

claim "White." In 2000, that same person could claim both "American Indian & Alaska Native" AND "White." Similarly, for the 1990 Census, a Kickapoo whose great-great-grandfather was Irish would likely claim "American Indian & Alaska Native" and not "White." In all probability, in 2000, that person would continue to claim "American Indian" only. So, can we conclude that the Native population doubled in the ten years since the 1990 Census? Certainly, that would not be a logical conclusion because those people who might have made claim to more than one racial category did not have that option. It is therefore difficult to guess how many in 1990 might have made that choice. The only consistent number is those who, in 2000, identified themselves as "American Indian & Alaska Native Alone." In this

chapter, unless noted otherwise, the population estimates and percentages used are for American Indian and Alaska Native alone.

According to the 2000 census, of all respondents who reported American Indian and Alaska Native, 43 percent resided in the West; 31 percent lived in the South; 17 percent lived in the Midwest; and 9 percent lived in the Northeast. The West also was the region that had the highest proportion of American Indians and Alaska Natives as part of its total population: 1.9 percent (Figure 17.3).

That one-half of all Native Americans live in the West is perhaps not that surprising, as these states were the last to be settled by non-Indians. The following table (Table 17.2) defines the 15 states with the greatest American Indian, Eskimo and Aleut populations.

**TABLE 17.2** States with Greatest American Indian, Eskimo and Aleut Alone Population—2000

State	American Indians, Eskimos and Aleuts Alone Population
California	333,346
Oklahoma	273,230
Arizona	255,879
New Mexico	173,483
Texas	118,362
North Carolina	99,551
Alaska	98,043
Washington	93,301
New York	82,461
South Dakota	62,283
Michigan	58,479
Montana	56,068
Minnesota	54,967
Wisconsin	47,228
North Dakota	31,329

United States. By comparison, 80 percent of the U.S. population was White, 12 percent was Black, while "Other" represented 4 percent and Asian or Pacific Islanders made up 3 percent.

In many states, the Native population is significant, representing the largest minority population in that state. In no state, however, is the Native American population a majority, but in Alaska nearly 16 percent of the population are Alaska Natives (Table 17.3).

One persisting stereotype about Native Americans is that they all live on reservations. While at one time the reservations were home to most American Indians, that is no longer the case. In 2000, only one in five Native Americans lived on a reservation (Table 17.4).

One should not conclude from such statistics, however, that the reservation system is dead or dying. While most American Indians do not live on their home reservations (that is, the reservation where they are enrolled), many live nearby and maintain contact with frequent visits for feast days, ceremonies, pow wows or like celebrations. Indian people often refer to "home" as the reservation where they

**Percent Distribution for the American Indian & Alaska Native Population by Region: 2000**

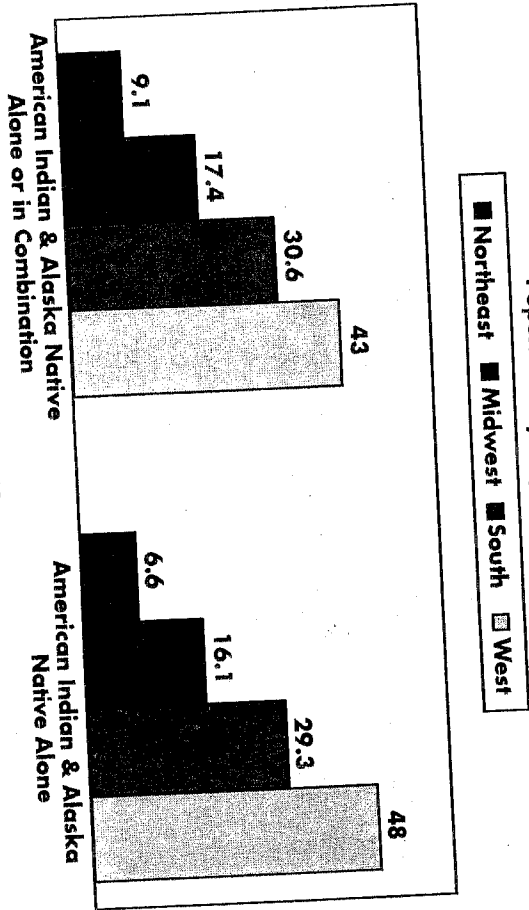


Figure 17.3. Percent Distribution by Region: 2000

**TABLE 17.3** States with Greatest American Indian Populations by Percentage

State	Total Population	American Indian, Eskimo and Aleut	Percent of Total
Alaska	626,932	98,043	15.6
New Mexico	1,819,046	173,483	9.5
South Dakota	754,844	62,283	8.3
Oklahoma	3,450,654	274,230	7.9
Montana	902,195	56,068	6.2
Arizona	5,130,632	255,879	5.0
North Dakota	642,200	31,329	4.9

**TABLE 17.4** U.S. Indian Population Living On Reservation or Other Trust Lands

Residency	Population	Percent of Total-2000
Living On	538,300	21.7
Living Off	1,937,656	78.3
<b>Totals</b>	<b>2,475,956</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: U.S. Census, Public Information Office, "American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month: November 2003." Excerpts for Features (20 October 2004): n. pag. Online. Internet: Available [http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/facts\\_for\\_features/001492.html](http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/facts_for_features/001492.html)

are enrolled even after living elsewhere for years.

In the West, a far greater number of Native Americans live on a reservation. In Montana, for example, the majority of the state's American Indian population lives on the seven reservations in that state (Tables 17.4 and 17.5). It is unknown exactly how many live on a Montana reservation as the population is quite mobile. A fair number of Montana

Indians live near reservations, and maintain an intimate contact there.

The Cherokee is the largest tribal group in the United States, as it was in 1990. Nearly 300,000 individuals identified themselves as Cherokees. Almost as many people claimed Navajo tribal affiliation.<sup>7</sup> A significant number (over 100,000) identified affiliation with Latin American tribal groups.

As previously discussed, the 2000 Census is the first such enumeration that permitted individuals to select more than one racial category. One of the outcomes is that 1.6 million Americans listed "American Indian and Alaska Native" as a second (or third) racial identifier (or, perhaps, listed "White" or "African-American" as a second category after "American Indian"). Whatever the case, a significant number of people elected to make that second choice. The tribe of choice was Cherokee, as over 700,000 individuals claimed Cherokee ancestry (see Figure 17.4). Sig-

nificantly, nearly 500,000 Americans professed to possess at least some Cherokee blood.

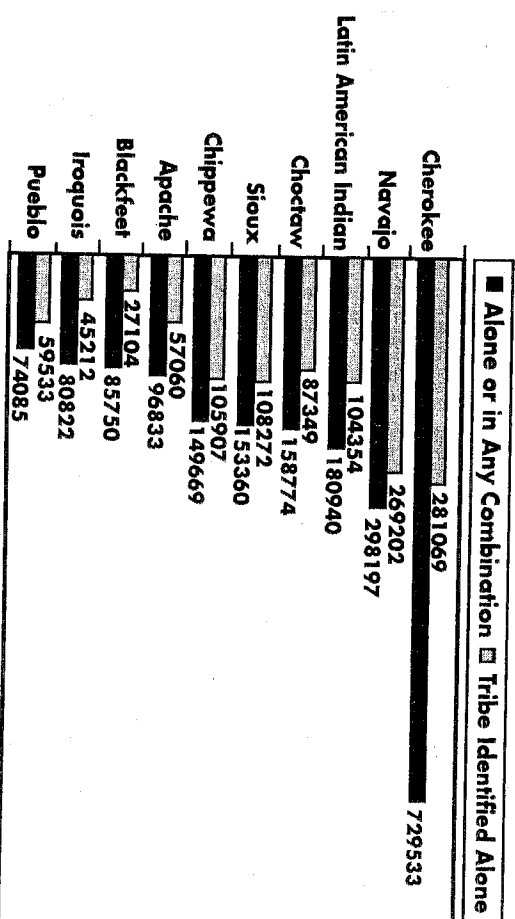
One question that the statistics cannot answer is if anyone who self-identified as an American Indian did, in fact, have Native ancestry. One of the persistent stereotypes in the Native community is the Cherokee Princess, someone who claims Cherokee ancestry, tracing their lineage back to some supposed Cherokee king. Every Native person has met some blonde, blue-eyed, seemingly non-Indian person who professed to be "part Indian." There are blond, blue-eyed Indians but some are certainly making claims that are dodgy at best. Their motivation for wanting to be Indian varies from innocent to notorious. One can un-

derstand wanting to know more about one's heritage, but there are others who claim Native ancestry with the sole aim of exploitation. They profess to be the keepers of ancient religious knowledge or practices that they will "share" for a monetary donation, while others charge large sums of money to conduct pseudo-religious ceremonies.

### AMERICAN INDIANS IN THE FUTURE

American Indian, Eskimo and Aleut people have endured and survived for tens of thousands of years in the Americas. Perhaps more importantly, they will continue to survive, and thrive, as is evidenced by estimates from the Bureau of the Census.

#### Ten Largest American Indian Tribal Groupings: 2000



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 1.

**TABLE 17.5** Montana Tribes: On and Off Reservation

	Total Enrollment	Living On Reservation	Living Off Reservation
Blackfeet	15,560	9,125	6,435
Crow	10,333	7,153	3,180
Flathead	7,800	4,244*	3,556
Fort Belknap	7,303	5,771	1,532
Fort Peck	11,248	6,812	4,436
Northern Cheyenne	8,036	4,029	4,007
Rocky Boy's	5,008	3,442	1,566
Little Shell	+4,000**		

\*In addition, 7,095 American Indians from other tribes reside on the Flathead Reservation.

\*\*The Little Shell Tribe is currently seeking federal recognition and has no reservation. Source: Bureau of Indian Affairs Calculation of Unemployment Rates for Montana Indian Reservations, 2001 Local Estimate of Indian Service Population and Labor Market Information (<http://dli.state.mt.us/resources/indianlabormarket.asp>) and Northwest Area Foundation, <http://www.indicators.nwaf.org>.

Figure 17.4 Ten Largest Tribes

White Americans may nearly be a minority in the United States by the year 2050. The U. S. Bureau of the Census estimates that non-Hispanic whites will comprise 50 percent of the U. S. population in 2050 (see Table 17.6).<sup>8</sup>

American Indian population estimates for the year 2050 show little apparent growth, at least as measured by percentage of American Indians in the general population. However, the Census Bureau projects that the Native American population will double from 2.1 million people in 1995 to 4.3 million in 2050. Thus, the question is not if Native American people will survive into the middle of the next century; that much is certain.

The more important question to be asked is what of Native American culture will survive? Obviously, since 1492, much knowledge has been lost and, with each passing generation, still more is being lost. As the tribal elders pass on, they take with them experiences and wisdom that cannot be replaced or retrieved.

**TABLE 17.6** Percent of the United States Population by Race

RACE	2000	2050
Asian	3.8	8.0
Hispanic	12.6	24.4
Black	12.7	14.6
White	69.4	50.1
<b>American Indian</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>0.9</b>

(Totals will not equal 100% due to additional Race categories in respective reporting data)

Sources: U. S. Bureau of the Census, Census 2000 and "Census Bureau Projects Tripling of Hispanic and Asian Populations in 50 years; Non-Hispanic Whites May Drop To Half of Total Population," March 18, 2004 Bulletin, U.S. Bureau of the Census.

Native people speak often about cultural continuity. Elders lecture the young about the importance of keeping their tribal traditions. These elders are well aware of what has been lost. Many tribes in the United States have already lost their native languages, ceremonies and traditions. Others try to resurrect lost culture or borrow culture from other regions and tribes.

There will be Native people in the middle of the next century. What is yet unknown is what will remain of their now vital and active cultures—those values, customs and traditions which make Native Americans distinct and unique people in the United States. It may well be that those 4 million American Indians will be Indian in name only—a check on a Census box.

This has long been an issue with American Indian people. Even in the middle of the last century, Native elders were concerned about what was to be Indian survival in the next century. In a speech to Governor Stevens of Washington Territory in 1854, Seattle (Seattle), the great Dwanish chief observed:

*... It matters little where we pass the remnant of our days. They will not be many. A few more moons; a few more winters and not one of the descendants of the mighty hosts that once moved over this broad land or lived in happy homes, protected by the Great Spirit, will remain to mourn over the graves of a people once more powerful and hopeful than yours. But why should I mourn at the untimely fate of my people? Tribe follows tribe, and nation follows nation, like the waves of the sea. It*

*is the order of nature, and regret is useless. Your time of decay may be distant, but it will surely come, for even the White Man whose God walked and talked with him as friend with friend, cannot be exempt from the common destiny. We may be brothers after all. We will see . . .*

Seattle might be surprised that his eloquent and sorrowful prediction for the destruction of Native people has not come to pass. Much of Native culture has changed, and his way of life has perhaps passed. But much of that culture has endured. Native people are experiencing a

resurrection of pride in their culture and history and a rejuvenation of spirituality is occurring.

Seattle ended that 1854 speech by observing, "Death did I say? There is no death. Only a change of worlds." American Indians have experienced that change of worlds, it did not occur only after their demise. Seattle might not recognize some aspects of Indian America in the 21st Century; however, his visions of a vanishing race are also "visions of an enduring people."

## REFERENCES

1. The terms American Indian, "Native American" and "Native" are used herein synonymously. As the reader will note, the U. S. Bureau of the Census, a major source for the data contained in this chapter, makes distinctions between American Indians, Eskimos and Aleuts.
2. James Mooney, "The Aboriginal Population of America North of Mexico." *Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections* (1928) 80: 1-26.
3. Henry F. Dobyns. "Estimating Aboriginal American Populations: An Appraisal of Techniques with a New Hemispheric Estimate." *Current Anthropology*. 7 (1966): 415. While estimates vary considerably, many scholars are willing to accept a figure somewhere between four million to eight million Native people in what is now the United States prior to colonization. Alvin M. Josephy, Jr. in *America in 1492*. (Vintage 1991, p. 6), splits the difference and calls it six million.
4. The first census to count Indians as a separate race was the one taken in 1860, however, this census, like the one to follow in 1870, only counted those Indians living in the general population. In 1880, an attempt was made to count "non taxed" Indians, meaning those living on a reservation. *Guide to Records in the National Archives of the United States Relating to American Indians*, compiled by Edward E. Hill and published by the National Archives and Records Services: Government Printing Office, 1981, p. 385.
5. With the exception of the 2000 population estimate, these figures are from the Bureau of the Census reports; "American Indian and Alaska Native Areas: 1990 (1990 CPH-L-73)" and "A 1990 Census Profile of the American Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut Population," both available from the U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Washington, D.C. With the exception of the 2000 Census estimation, this table does not include Alaska Natives, Eskimos or Aleuts. Except where noted, the 2000 figures used in this chapter can be found at "*American Indian and Alaska Native (ALAN) Data and Links*," <http://factfinder.census.gov/home/aiand/index.html>.
6. It should be noted that the 1980 and 1990 Census counts are based upon self identification. That is, the individual simply checked the appropriate box where asked for "Race." No doubt, some individuals declared themselves to be American Indian on the Census forms when, in fact, they were not.
7. Some will argue that the Cherokee is the largest tribe, based on the number of people who claim affiliation, however, the Navajo numbers reflect the number enrolled.
8. "Population Projections of the United States by Age, Sex, Race and Hispanic Origin: 1993-2050." U. S. Bureau of the Census, Report P25, #1104, September 1993. In 1993, the non-Hispanic white population represented 76 percent of the U.S. population. The Census Bureau estimates that this percentage will decrease to 68 percent in the year 2010.