

Native American Cultural Philosophy

Cultural Views, Land Values and Cross Cultural Comparisons

Indian Cultures

Few Material Things

Grace of giving are virtues to be admired. Members of tribes are often suspicious of individuals who collect many material possessions. Some tribes even hold ceremonies and during celebrations give away most of their possessions to others as "gifts of love" or "gifts of honor." Mono spiritual leaders say "you cannot take your material possessions with you to the spirit world."

Walking in Balance with Mother Earth

\...JEarth and all her creatures dwelling upon it are here to be respected and enjoyed. If man accepts this world as it is and lives with it as she/he should, there will be balance, harmony and an abundance of food to sustain good health. Mono fanlilies grew up using kerosene lamps, spring and creek water.

Time is Relevant

Time is a very relative thing. Clocks are not watched. One does things as they need to be done. Often the family gets up as the sun raises and retires soon after the sun sets. "Indian Time" means when everyone gets there. A community meeting can be set for 1:00 p.m. and people will come as near that time as they wish. There will be always -../be time in which things can be done.

Euro-American Cultures

Many Material Things

Wealth is measured in terms of material accumulations. Many such possessions often constitute "status symbols" and are considered highly desirable. The accumulation of possessions is directly related to the happiness of an individual both now and in the future. This concept is what moved Europeans across America, in search of wealth, land, gold and prestige.

Age of Convenience

The Bible is often quoted and interpreted that, "God gave man dominion over all creatures and earth." Control and mastery of the elements are the constant motivations for scientific research. Artificial lakes are made, natural waters are controlled, electricity is generated and controlled. Such accomplishments are looked upon with great pride.

The Importance of Time

Time is of great inlportance. When a person says he will be somewhere at 10:00 a.m., she/he must be there -at 10:00 a.m. Otherwise, she/he is felt to be a person who "steals" another's time. The premium placed on time results in "rushes" - "rush-hour traffic," "last minute rush." It is felt among this culture to be a virtue to use "time" to its fullest extent. One who is prompt is respected.

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Indifference to Saving

Traditionally, Indians have not sought to acquire savings accounts, life insurance policies and the like. This attitude results from the past, when nature's bounty provided one's needs. Not all food could be saved, although what meat, fruit, or fish that could be preserved by salt curing or drying was saved. Most other needs such as food, clothing, shelter and land were provided by nature in abundance and little need existed to consider saving for the future. When a hunter brought meat to the village, it was divided up by elders or an uncle and dispersed to the chief, elderly and family members first before it went to his family. One of the elders or uncle would pull a section of the kill for the hunter's family. In the Indian society sharing was and still is the way of life.

Value of Age

Indian people value age. they believe that wisdom comes with age and experience. Tribal elders are treated with great respect. It is not considered necessary to conceal white hair or other signs of age. To be an elder is highly esteemed. The oldest elder always leads the line at dinner, as in elders first. In the Mono Tribe the eldest holds the final voice. Yet there is little generation gap as all generations are afforded respect.

Euro-American Cultures

Emphasis on Saving

In the Euro-American society strong emphasis is placed on saving. Investing, accounting and thrift is taught in the educational system and is a strong concept in the dominant society's communal way of life. This culture teaches one to forego present use of time and money for greater satisfactions to come, called "delayed gratification." America was built on the concept of "Goods and Services." This philosophical concept is what still drives the economic structure of the country. Classes, such as upper class, middle class and lower class are symbolic status levels of this society. Sharing and generosity come with strings attached such as loans, grants and investments. Food is preserved in containers, in warehouses, grown on land privately or corporately owned.

Emphasis on Youthfulness

The Indian view of aging is at odds with the emphasis on youthfulness and physical beauty evident in the dominant culture. Conflict results when Indians are influenced by non Indian attitudes toward youthfulness. The assumption is that as one grows older, one's productivity and usefulness diminishes. Whole towns have sprung up in America advertising youthful living or that are designed for "senior citizens."

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Respect for Nature

Native Americans dislike the word "management," because nature cannot be regulated. Indians did not survive off the land, they lived on the land. They formed a cooperative way of life to function in balance with nature. If sickness occurs or food is lacking, the Indian believes that the necessary balance or harmony has somehow been destroyed. Nature is full of spirits and hence spiritual. Per this spiritual outlook Native Americans view disasters as Creator's way of cleansing the land. Fires cleanse not destroy. Afterward, new grasses grow, more land is available for the animals to feed from, less brush and tree canopy recharges the ground water which creates a healthy forest and or land. Because of their understanding of nature most Indians today do not believe in progress at the expense of all else.

Importance of Cultural Pluralism

Native Americans resist assimilation and instead emphasize the importance of their culture. Indians desire to retain as much of their cultural heritage as possible. They leave the reservation and their home land to find city jobs and educational opportunities, not to stop being Indian. Indians avoid educators with reformist attitudes who strive to propel them into the mainstream.

Euro-American Cultures

Man Controls Nature

Projected on a large screen at a governmental meeting the adage said, "If no one is in the forest and no one is utilizing the forest, what value does the forest hold?" The Indians took care of the forest for hundreds if not thousands of years while the current government has been in control for only one hundred years and the forest is a mess. Prior to the Euro-American arriving in California the first explorers described the land as a "garden of eden." The Indian respect for nature is in opposition to the value others place on the importance of controlling and asserting mastery over nature, hence the "management of the land." Although the general public, including the school system, is becoming more conscious of ecology, the continuing emphasis on man's attempts to control nature runs contrary to what Indian youth are taught by their people.

Total Assimilation without Culture

The Indian is an outcast amongst their people and is lost within their assimilated society. Because the "classes" of this society have criteria to live by and be judged by. An Indian cannot buy back their culture and thus confusion over values is a constant. Terminologies such as "Walking in Two Worlds," "Red Apple" precede the assimilated one.