

American Indians and the Mass Media

Edited by Meta G. Carstarphen and John P. Sanchez

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There is no ethnic group subjected to more stereotyping, myths, and distortions than the indigenous people of this hemisphere. Europeans built their nation states on the dehumanization of indigenous people through the use of deceptive, simplistic, or just plain wrong, images. Virtually nothing taught about Native people in western schools is untainted; nor is contemporary reporting about aboriginal issues free from the bias of reporters assigned to cover stories and events for which they have little or no formal training.

Most media consign Natives to the distant horizons of their concerns, citing them only in social events such as powwows, or as opponents to environmental development who share a near superhuman connection with the natural world. In recent years, however, this perception of Natives as earth caretakers has been eclipsed by a rival image: the rise of a casino gambling culture has, according to its critics, exposed Natives as little more than opportunists willing to make any compromise to enrich themselves and carry on the tradition of substance abuse and associated violence. In the public's perception, the casino culture overwhelms everything else in Native life, and most non-Native journalists are far too apathetic to see it otherwise.

Government policy is largely influenced by the media, hence the

direct relation between raw and racist stories that have come to characterize U.S. news about Natives and the federal and state policies directed at indigenous people. Fortunately, Native writers and political leaders have created their own means of communicating news using contemporary technologies. In *American Indians and the Mass Media*, editors Meta Carstarphen and John P. Sanchez reveal the stories of the intrepid Natives who have, with various levels of success, entered this profession.

The book's contributors include some of the most respected Native journalists—Paul DeMain, Mark Trahant, Patty Leow, Selene Phillips, and Juan Hernandez—as well as academics from universities ranging from Syracuse to Washington. Their essays mix historical analysis, contemporary viewpoints, mediated images, and distinctly Native perspectives; their subjects include mascots, pejorative terms like “squaw,” the use of Native images in the marketplace, and the relation of law and the media. The volume's fifteen chapters conclude with suggestions for discussion and notes for further research, as well as an ample index and bibliography. However, the book would have been greatly enhanced by a guide to current Native print, online, and broadcast news outlets.

Two other additions would have fittingly rounded out this volume.

First, a chapter on the exceptional success of Canada's Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN), the only indigenous broadcast network in the hemisphere, would have supplemented the other stories by showing that Native people can, and do, operate a complex cable television unit with exceptional competence. Second, the editors could have included a chapter on how Native media shaped the international indigenous rights movement. *Akwesasne Notes*, created by the highly conservative Mohawk Nation Council in 1968 and expanded over the years to become the most important breeding ground for Native journalists was, for a generation, the primary advocate for aboriginal peoples. Traditional Native government sponsorship of a news journal that both the U.S. and Canadian officials labeled subversive and radical is a fantastic story and would make a logical addition to future editions.

American Indians and the Mass Media is an important book that summarizes what we have long known—the non-Native media must apply the same levels of credibility and professionalism to aboriginal stories as they do to any other. By providing the public with a summation of outside media portrayals of indigenous peoples, the editors have added to this ongoing discourse. The book should be required reading for all journalists and is essential for students of this discipline.

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