

Identity is learned. It's a seeing thing, it's a knowing thing.  
Everything that is passed down is identity because that's all we've  
got!

Roldena Sanipass

Micmac

The pan-Indian movement changed how people perceived  
Wabanaki culture. By adopting from other Native American  
cultures in performances, the Wabanaki produced a more  
marketable image that was familiar to the tourists.

James Eric Francis, Sr.

Penobscot

Tribal Historian, Penobscot Indian Nation

## Identity

The ability of a nation to determine who its citizens are is one of its sovereign rights. The United States requires American Indian governments to create a system of tribal membership based on criteria established individually by each tribe. These requirements vary from proof of direct descent to having  $\frac{3}{4}$  or  $\frac{1}{2}$  blood quantum from that tribe. Tribes can change their enrollment regulations based on a vote of the membership or tribal council.

### Nationally:

In exchange for land or resources, treaty agreements often commit the federal government to provide annuities to tribal members in perpetuity, requiring enrollment lists. Court rulings and acts of Congress further require identification of Native people to protect tribes from theft, but also to limit the amount of services provided.

Native identity goes beyond blood quantum and tribal enrollment. There is a long legacy of cultural knowledge, experience and shared history that link tribal communities and members. The United States government has made many attempts to stop Native people from continuing those things that make them unique – sovereignty, language, religion, and lifeways, including child rearing. Direct and indirect attacks on sovereignty and identity have forced Native people to adapt, become assimilated in the social and economic culture that surrounds them, while struggling to maintain their cultural identity.

### Maine:

In Maine, Wabanaki people and tribal governments have created economic and social opportunity by adapting traditions to meet the market demand of tourists, simultaneously

maintaining traditions while adapting enough to stay viable. The evolution of ash and sweetgrass fancy baskets is an important example of an enduring tradition that has evolved into an important business for many people, thanks in large part to the Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance. New enterprises have also been created, and business opportunities that go beyond tradition are able to support cultural values and priorities.

Shared experiences, history, and place maintain the bond developed among the Wabanaki tribes. This bond helps to strengthen the core of Wabanaki identity and those cultural values that are unique to Maine.

### *Identity Newspaper Headlines:*

#### **When is an American Indian really an Indian? Nation's tribes face conflict of self-definition**

By David Foster, Associated Press  
*Bangor Daily News*

January 27, 1997 David Foster

Many tribes are easing membership requirements just to survive, prompting worries that tribal traditions will fade along with blood levels. But even as bloodlines thin, being Indian has never been so popular. The number of people identifying themselves as American Indian has nearly tripled since 1970, rising from 827,000 to more than 2.2 million, census figures show.

#### **Dream weavers: Maine Indian basket event in Orono an 'Important business opportunity'**

By Jessica Bloch  
*Bangor Daily News*  
December 11, 2008

The (annual winter basket sale) is an important event for both the public and about 40 other artisan basket makers who work in the tradition of the Wabanaki tribes of Maine.

'I would say about 90 percent of our artisans live on one of the Maine Indian reservation communities. This is a very important business opportunity for them to get some sales and also to make some other connections with the museums.' Said Theresa Secord, executive director of the Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance.

#### **Sacred fire renews Wabanaki tradition: More than 40 tribes attend conference**

By Aimee Dolloff  
*Bangor Daily News*  
June 23, 2008

Runners escorting embers from a 'Sacred Fire' that has been burning for fourteen years arrived Saturday on Indian Island for the annual Wabanaki Confederacy Conference. 'The conference is a traditional meeting of the Wabanaki tribes that goes way back,' Penobscot Nation Chief Kirk Francis said.

#### **Sacred Passage: Passamaquoddy salute elders with traditional canoe run**

By Diana Graettinger  
*Bangor Daily News*  
August 11, 2007

Each stroke of their paddles as they skimmed along the St. Croix River was a reminder that for thousands of years the Passamaquoddy people have been making the annual pilgrimage from Indian Township to Sipayik – Pleasant Point.

***To go with tribal ID card:***

Native people in the United States are the only group in the world who have to use blood quantity to identify themselves as Native. This is not the traditional way to identify a Native person. It was brought about by the state and federal government.

Donald Soctomah

Passamaquoddy

Historic Preservation Officer, Tribal Representative to the State Legislature

***Identity Wabanaki Quotes:***

We have people in our village who may not have blood quantum but are integral members of the tribal community.

Richard Phillips-Doyle

Passamaquoddy

Sakom/Chief, Passamaquoddy Indians

The Micmac don't use blood quantum to identify members, but you do need to have Micmac heritage. The quantum requirement is a Bureau of Indian Affairs construct designed to phase out Native people. If someone has been raised in a culture and knows it internally, then they can be a member of the tribe.

Richard Dyer

Micmac

Housing Director, Aroostook Band of Micmac Indians

Indian Health Services is one of the agencies that provides hundreds of services to non-enrolled citizens of our community who are descendents, as well as to members of other federally recognized tribes. We're trying to get away from enrollment as the only way people are defined as Penobscot. We want to highlight and enhance all those things that are part of our values and that make us culturally unique, and bring those people to the table that have ties here and respect their heritage and make them part of the process.

Kirk Francis

Penobscot

Chief, Penobscot Indian Nation

In my generation it wasn't good to be an Indian in Houlton, and we would try to hide it. So, at the time of the Settlement Act in 1980 we didn't have a tribal government or much cultural cohesiveness. We were separated and isolated from each other; we weren't united. It's gotten better now. I feel like our community members are very proud of who we are, and that's important.

Brenda Commander

Maliseet  
Chief, Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians

Half our population is very traditional, and half attend churches. We have a three-day celebration each November and a bear feast in the fall and spring that a lot of people attend. Last year we had a group of college students here for two weeks who learned sunrise ceremony, how to smudge, and they built a longhouse in the traditional way. I'd like to see that furthered, but we're a poor tribe and we're barely keeping the doors open right now.

Victoria Higgins  
Micmac  
Chief, Aroostook Band of Micmacs

There's now a drumming group for boys that teaches them Micmac values. They must be drug and alcohol free to participate. This way they get to see the other side of the culture too, not just be a spectator.

John Dennis  
Micmac  
Cultural Director, Aroostook Band of Micmacs

In the past, Native people were made to feel bad about being Indian, but now we're teaching kids to be proud of who they are.

Donald Soctomah  
Passamaquoddy  
Historic Preservation Officer, Tribal Representative to the State Legislature

Every part of our culture is interconnected and if we lose one little bit we will lose a little something of the whole, but we are most at risk of losing our language.

Donald Soctomah  
Passamaquoddy  
Historic Preservation Officer, Tribal Representative to the State Legislature

There's pressure from film and media about what it means to be a 'real' Indian in today's world. People expect you to speak your language, drum or dance, make baskets, or fit other pop culture stereotypes. But I think now people carry forward what they can. Whether it be language, drumming, basket making, hunting or other activities. I don't think even in days gone by that ONE person was an expert at ALL activities. There were hunters, there were basket makers, etc. People pass on and carry forward what they can. There is no shame in that.

Brian Reynolds  
Maliseet  
Tribal Administrator, Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians

We're proud of our basketmakers, but mostly it's the older generations that are weaving, not so much the younger. They should be taught, but there's not enough money to get

people interested or keep people employed. I have eight kids, the youngest was the only one who learned.

Roberta Silliboy

Maliseet

As soon as we got the Settlement money, people came out of the woodwork claiming to be Micmac- some were, some were not. Before federal recognition, it was a battle just trying to exist. There were 382 members at the time of federal recognition, which rose to over thirteen hundred. After that, we brought in Harald Prins, an anthropologist, to determine who should and should not be listed on the rolls. That brought tribal enrollment down to about seven hundred.

Richard Silliboy

Micmac

I've dedicated my entire life to our culture and that's not just making a basket. There are core values that are at risk, which are based on experience and knowledge. These are changing, becoming watered down- not for everyone, but I can see it, and my generation can see it. The things my parents went through and suffered, I didn't have to; my parents made things better for me. I do that for my kids too, but what are we losing? What's changed is our lifestyle, but are our values going with it?

Barry Dana

Penobscot

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## **Stereotyping**

A stereotype is a learned form of classifying and labeling individuals based on inaccurate information or on assumptions, rather than factual knowledge. Many people are familiar with negative stereotypes about American Indians, including the drunken Indian, being violent or war-like, receiving government handouts, or being lazy and living on "Indian time." There are positive stereotypes about Native people as well, which can be just as dangerous- assuming all Native people are environmentalists, spiritual, or know how to track animals or shoot a bow and arrow ignores individual and tribal differences and assumes that all people are alike. Both positive and negative stereotypes can lead to prejudice and discrimination.

American Indian imagery is deeply ingrained in our society and many people may not even realize how prevalent it can be, or that something is a stereotype. To make things more complicated, not everyone agrees on what constitutes a stereotype. Some stereotypes receive so much attention that most people are aware of the issue. For example, the controversy surrounding school and professional sports mascots receives a lot of media coverage. But not everyone agrees that the use of Indian images in sports promotes stereotypes- including Native people. The word "squaw" is another example -

some people feel it's a derogatory term used against Native women, other people think it simply means "woman."

"I was once asked, 'What do we call Native American Indian women if we can't use squaw?' I responded, 'How about Native American Indian Women, or...Women.'"

Rhonda Frey

Penobscot/Passamaquoddy

Regardless of an individual image, product, or label, the sheer volume of American Indian imagery used to market products leads to the question: Would this ever be acceptable with images from another race of people? What is it about American Indians or native values that resonates with the general public and makes us want to buy products with native imagery? And, who decides if something is a stereotype or not? **One argument often made by non-Native people about mascots or "playing Indian" in clubs, social organizations, or performances is that this honors Native people. A rule of thumb to consider - if it has to be explained that something honors Native people, it probably isn't.**