

# American Indian Historical Experience with Research

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# Sources of Knowledge

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Ancient, traditional,  
contextual



Empirical, scientific,  
theoretical



# Knowledge Acquisition in Native Communities

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- ✦ Based on oral tradition and history
- ✦ Indigenous Ways of Knowing
  - ◆ Practical use of information
- ✦ The interconnectedness of all things
  - ◆ Keen observation of environment
  - ◆ Observation of individual and communal experience
  - ◆ Multiple perspectives and participation over time

# Native “research” Included

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- ✦ Tribal elders
- ✦ Bundle holders
- ✦ Pipe carriers
- ✦ Spiritual leaders
- ✦ Lodge makers
- ✦ Ceremonial chiefs
- ✦ Storytellers
- ✦ Oral historians
- ✦ Rites of passage
- ✦ Artisans and craftworkers
- ✦ Extended family systems
- ✦ Practitioners of tradition and custom

# A Clash of Cultures

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Europeans and Anglo-Americans often assumed Indians:

- were uncivilized pagans, heathen, and even savages.
- were a homogenous people.
- could be "civilized" using the same program for all.

# Colonization History

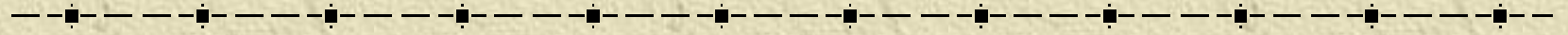
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✦ Between 389 and 650 Indian/US treaties from 1778 to 1871

✦ Federal policy eras:

- ◆ colonization, removal, containment, allotment, reorganization, termination/relocation, self-determination, and self-governance.

# Historical Experience of Native People and Research



- ✦ Scientific interests during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century
- ✦ The ongoing experiment
- ✦ Solving problems for Indians
- ✦ The accepted model for conducting research

# Native Americans as Subjects of Research

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## ✦ Grave robbing

- ✦ Estimates between 100,000 and 2 million deceased American Indians have been “dug up” for storage or display by government agencies, museums, universities, and tourist attractions.
- ✦ Dr. Samuel Morton, the father of American physical anthropology, collected large numbers of Indian crania in the 1840’s to prove Indians were racially inferior and doomed to extinction.



# Legislation affecting cultural preservation

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- ✦ Antiquities Act of 1906 (16 USC 431-433) protecting prehistoric Indian ruins and artifacts, sites and buildings seen as important to US identity and history
- ✦ **National Historic Preservation Act** (Public Law 89-665; 16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*) of October 1966
  - ✦ to preserve historical and archaeological sites in the US.

# Legislation, continued

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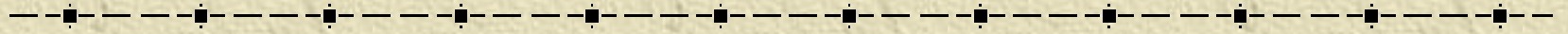
- ✦ NHPA requires federal agencies to evaluate the impact of federally funded or permitted projects through a process known as Section 106 Review

# More Legislation

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- National Environmental Policy Act 1969
- Moss-Bennett Act of 1974 (amendment of Reservoir Salvage Act of 1960)
- American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978 (PL 95-341)
- Archaeological Resource and Protection Act 1979 (PL 96-95)

# NAGRPA



## ✦ Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990

- ✦ object and sites should be documented if knowledge is to be preserved for future generations

# A typical scenario: A researcher trained in the western approach

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- ✦ enters/penetrates into a community
- ✦ observes and gathers data by “taking” notes, taking quotes, taking pictures, taking recordings, and taking samples
- ✦ leaves or essentially vanishes as quickly as he arrived
- ✦ completes analysis outside of the community, usually without community feedback or cross-validation amongst “subjects”
- ✦ shares findings of the study with the rest of the world, and
- ✦ receives recognition as “the authority” from the academic and non-Indian community or obtains grant funding.

# The Net Effect of Historical Research on Native People

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- ✦ Misappropriation and/or misrepresentation of culture and specific conditions in a community
- ✦ Inconclusive, and sometimes erroneous, assumptions about a people and their way of life
- ✦ Individuals and their communities are disenfranchised, even powerless, or exploited, whether intentional or not
- ✦ Communities can become marginalized and stereotyped
- ✦ Reality is distorted

# JFK's American Indian Proclamation of 1963

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“For a subject worked and re-worked so often in novels, motion pictures, and the media, American Indians are the least understood and most misunderstood of all citizens of the U.S.”

# Cultural Property Rights

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✦ Cultural property rights is a concept that a society, especially that of indigenous peoples, has the authority to control the use of traditional heritage



# Cultural Property Rights

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- ✦ These are rights held by a community rather than an individual
- ✦ The property to be protected has been handed down from one generation to the next

# Examples of cultural property

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✧ Names

✧ Traditional medicines

✧ Ceremonial healing  
practices

✧ Songs

✧ Histories

✧ Symbols

✧ artifacts

✧ Designs

✧ Arts

✧ Languages

✧ Sacred sites

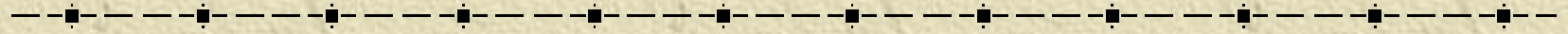
✧ Knowledge

✧ Ceremonies

✧ Customs

✧ Stories

# Some Caveats for Conducting Research in Native Communities



- ✦ Most researchers are considered “outsiders”
- ✦ The Indian “world” is much different than the mainstream
- ✦ There are stigmas associated with researchers and research
- ✦ Building and maintaining trust
- ✦ Integrity and Honesty

## Caveats, continued

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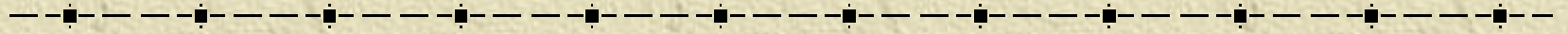
- ✦ Paternalism will not be tolerated
- ✦ Inclusion and involvement of “the people”
- ✦ Ownership of process and product
- ✦ Follow through (do what you say you’re going to do)
- ✦ Culturally appropriate, culturally-competent, culturally-sensitive, and tribally-specific
- ✦ Accountability and transparency

# Research in Indian communities

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- ✦ There are advantages as well as disadvantages in working with one's own culture. The knowledge that you already have can form a basis for defining a more in-depth problem or topic to document; where as, an outsider may need to take years to become familiar enough with the culture to define a meaningful topic. (Guyette, 1983, p. 126)

# Some Recommendations



# Research consideration

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- ✦ "Many tribes require approval of a research plan before the researcher is allowed within a community. Those who assist in a research project are often called 'participants' or 'consultants,' and may help formulate the research design" (p. xiv)

# The Role of TCUs

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- ✦ Train student researchers to address community issues and challenges
  - ✦ Include a protocol to create a balance of community interest in the research process
  - ✦ Make a deliberate attempt to incorporate key people from the community



# Learning from One Another

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- ✦ Form an Institutional/Tribal Review Board
- ✦ Seek a tribal resolution for each research project, if necessary (be familiar with the process)
- ✦ Ensure that any research is inclusive instead of exclusive
- ✦ Don't just take...give
- ✦ Invite outside researchers and provide cultural awareness and sensitivity training to them regularly

# New View for Tribes

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## ✦ Tool for Self-Determination

### ✦ Issues for research in Indian Country

- ◆ How will results be used?
- ◆ Will you see the results?
- ◆ What is the purpose of the research?

# Some final thoughts

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- ✦ Protecting cultural property through policy declarations is a worthy exercise of Native sovereignty (Harjo, 2002)
- ✦ Ideally, research about Indian people should be completed by Indian people for Indian people.
  - ✦ Otherwise, follow protocols, use ethical and rigorous practices, and partner with responsible, trusted individuals and entities.

## Use 3 P's

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### Pragmatism

- Avoid paternalism

### Protocols

- Importance of verbal and non-verbal behavior, following customs, open-mindedness

### Practice

- Be visible, be aware, ask for help



# Cultural Humility

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“Acknowledgement of one’s own barriers to true intercultural understanding. It is the difference between intellectually knowing another culture and being able to truly relate to it”.



Source: Wear, D. (2008). On outcomes and humility. *Academic Medicine*, 83(7): 625-626.