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### Prejudice Against Native Americans

These people began migrating thirty thousand years before Christopher Columbus "discovered" the Americas. Native Americans migrated from Asia, crossing a land bridge where the Bering Strait off the coast of Alaska is today. Over the centuries these people spread throughout the continents of North and South America. Since the arrival of the Europeans in 1492 the American Indian has been dehumanized, decivilized and redefined into terms that represent a dominate European view. The Spanish explorers under Columbus were the first to use the terms "Indian" to mean a Native American. These explorers were under the false impression that they had reached the West Indies. This term is still used today.

From the first interaction with the native peoples the Europeans initiated dominance and superiority. There are three distinctive reasons that the Europeans were able to dominate and later oppress the Native American culture such as; the Native American religious beliefs and practices, the lack of interaction between Native Americans and Europeans and the lack of organization of the Indian tribes. All of these aspects had a strong influence the Europeans to become dominate figures on the Native American land. These factors can still be attributed for the way that Native Americans are viewed in society today.

After the Revolutionary War the new United States government sought to gain land through treaties. The payment offered for the land was far from fair, however, and when Native Americans resisted the surrender of their homeland the US government simply used superior military power to evict them. The Europeans knew nothing of the new civilizations they encountered. Most Native American tribes viewed the lands they occupied to be no one man's property. They believed that they were allowed to occupy it by the grace of the "Great Spirit", in return the tribes took care of the land they used. Usually Native Americans harbored a great respect for the land they were allowed to use. When the European leaders attempted to purchase this land from the tribes the Native American leaders often thought they did not have the authority to sell the land. In their view the land wasn't theirs to sell. Often times, payment offered was refused because of this view. The Europeans, on the other hand, did not understand or care to understand the Native American way of life, culture or philosophy. Instead, they saw the land as a

great

business opportunity to be bought and sold. Sometimes payment was accepted because the American Indians did not fully understand the consequence or implications of the sale. It was difficult for the Indians to comprehend the ownership of land because in their view the land would always be available for everyone to use.

Europeans feared these new people with a seemingly savage way of life. The dances and other cultural traditions that Native Americans practiced were extremely abstract and foreign to the European settlers. These displays of savagery by the Native Americans sparked fear within many settlers mainly out of ignorance to their practices and cultural traditions. The Native American lifestyle was, in fact very organized and very practical.

Most American Indians have little or no interaction with the everyday lifestyles of the average American citizen. They have been residents of reservations for almost two centuries. Two hundred years of social oppression has to be overcome in order for the American Indian societies to become more accepted into our modern culture. The prejudice that American Indians endure rivals that of the African-Americans. In order for the Native American tribal nations to become equal in social standings there has to be reform and awareness of the prejudice.

Lack of organization is a strong contributing factor to why Native Americans are discriminated against. During the 1960's the African-American population united and fought for reform and equality. This has not yet fully occurred in the Native American social setting. Many of the tribes still feud with each other instead of trying to create social reform. This is especially apparent during the 1800's when Indian-White relations were especially full of tension. Crazy Horse, the great Oglala Sioux leader, expressed his concern for better relations between the American Indian tribes on his death bed (Nabokov 178). The European settlers had a problem understanding the differences between the tribes. Many times they could not comprehend that one tribe of Native Americans was separate and sometimes enemies with another tribe.

Another major factor that helped develop the discriminatory views against Native Americans was the American Indian religious practices. The European settlers during 1700's and the 1800's were mainly Christian fundamentalists. They viewed the practices of the Native Americans such as dances, sacrifices and other religious ordinances as against traditional Judeo-Christian ethics. The Europeans would recognize these dances as acts of evil. They did not take into consideration the Native American religious beliefs of harmony, unity and equality in all things.

The last significant cause in why the Native Americans are discriminated against are the terms used to describe their race. The term Native American refers to hundreds

of  
distinct societies- including; Aluets, Eskimos, Cherokee, Zuni, Sioux, Mohawk, Aztec  
and  
Incan- who first settled the western hemisphere. Indians in today's society are  
often  
looked down upon as not as productive or not as stable as other cultures. The high  
alcoholism rates and the third world living conditions found on reservations do not  
improve the terms used to describe the American Indian.