

The Reading Red Report 2007

**A content analysis of general-
audience newspapers in circulation
areas with high percentages of
Native Americans**

A NewsWatch Project Report

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Introduction

In 2002 and 2003 the Native American Journalists Association conducted the first Reading Red Reports to examine mainstream news coverage of Native Americans and our communities. This third report continues in that vein of uncovering newsgathering practices that portray Native Americans unfairly, stereotypically, nor not at all. A goal for this report is to examine what, if anything has changed in the last five years, given that the newspaper industry continues to change so quickly.

The 2002 Reading Red Report analyzed 1,133 articles appearing from 1999–2001 from nine of United States largest circulation newspapers: The Chicago Sun–Times, Houston Chronicle, Los Angeles Times, New York Daily News, The New York Times, USA Today, The Wall Street Journal and The Washington Post. “The best stories simply reflected good–quality and fair–minded reporting; writing and editing applied to Native America. They treated Native Americans as people rather than historical figures. They explained to readers the unique status of the federally recognized tribal nations as sovereign governments within the United States. They acknowledged the depth and diversity of Native American communities.” Most stories, however, did not fall under the best stories category. Stories predominated from three areas: mascot team names (11%), casino gaming by tribes (13%) and “on the res” (20%) datelined stories.

The Reading Red Report 2003 called on the United States news media to cease publishing and broadcasting sports teams' Indian mascot names and images. It highlighted the six newspapers that had policies against using the mascot names when reporting on teams that used mascots instead using the name of the school.

Both reports captured particular issues and points in time when specific Native American issues were in the national eye. The 2007 Reading Red Report takes a different approach to examine if newspapers in circulation areas with high percentages of Native Americans fairly and accurately cover Indian Country. We are interested if there is a difference in coverage if large numbers of Native people live in the circulation areas of newspapers.

Method

Using the Lexis/Nexis news database, a content analysis was conducted to examine the coverage of Native Americans in newspapers. In past Reading Red Reports NAJA examined the leading newspapers in the United States. In this report, newspapers with circulation areas that have the highest percentages of Native Americans, according to 2000 census data, were examined (Table 1).

Table 1: Cities with high percents of Native Americans

City	Percent of Native Americans in Population
Anchorage, AK	7.3%
Tulsa, OK	4.7%
Oklahoma City, OK	3.5%
Albuquerque, NM	3.9%
Tucson, AZ	2.3%
Los Angeles, CA	.8%
San Antonio, TX	.8%
San Diego, CA	.6%
New York, NY	.5%

Sample

This content analysis examines coverage of Native Americans in ten newspapers (eight dailies and two weeklies) from January 1, 2005 – December 31, 2006, accounting for 1,867 articles. Using Lexis–Nexis research software, all stories pertaining to Native Americans in the following newspapers were collected:

1. The Albuquerque Journal
2. Anchorage Daily News
3. Arizona Capitol Times (Tucson)
4. The Journal Record (Oklahoma City)

5. Los Angeles Times
6. The New York Times
7. Phoenix New Times
8. San Antonio Express News
9. San Diego Union Tribune
10. The Tulsa World

After accounting for duplicates and for articles that did not pertain to Native Americans, 125 articles were discarded from the data and 1,741 articles were analyzed.

The following terms were used in the Lexis–Nexis search: American Indian, Native American and tribe. All news stories containing the search terms were coded, including articles with only brief mentions of Native Americans such as in statistical information. Letters to the editors and obituaries were also included in the sample.

Three main coders made judgments at both the story level and source level for analysis. First, coders were asked to judge what the story was about and whether it portrayed Native Americans positively, negatively, or neutrally. Second, coders were asked to ascertain if Native sources were used in the stories. Coders were also asked to look for specific stereotypical terms that often occur in stories about Native Americans such as “circle the wagons,” “smoke the peace pipe,” and “On the Warpath.” Finally, based on the 2002 findings of “curious” articles, headlines, story topics, etc. coders were asked to identify anything they found odd about the story. Specifically, “were there any odd sentences, or anything unique or curious that you found in the article? For

this report, those items are classified as Objectionable and considered in the discussion section.

Coding

Three undergraduate journalism students at San Francisco State University performed the majority of coding of data for this dissertation. Additionally, students in the spring 2007 Cultural Diversity and U.S. Journalism course in the Department of Journalism at San Francisco State University coded articles in order to produce presentations on their findings (see student presentations in the online presentation). These articles were all double-checked by the three main coders who were trained extensively and periodically checked for accuracy. The three main coders were paid for their work as researchers for the Center for Integration and Improvement of Journalism through funds provided by the Native American Journalists Association. Coders underwent approximately two hours of instruction and regularly checked in with the lead investigator. Consistency during the course of coding is essential for ascertaining the reliability of the data. As such, a continual check was conducted to identify instances of coder fatigue at its onset and to make any necessary modifications.

Variables

Coders were provided a codebook with 19 variables, of which 16 are pertinent to this report:

1. Which paper the story came from
2. Section of the paper did the story appeared

3. Page number the story appear on
4. Word length of story
5. Dateline
6. Headline
7. Topic of story
8. Tone – positive, negative or neutral portrayal of Native Americans
9. If Native American sources quoted in the story
10. Number of Native American sources quoted in the story
11. If non–Native American sources quoted in the story
12. Number of non–Native American sources quoted in the story
13. Whether term “war path” appeared in the story
14. Whether term “circle the wagons” appeared in the story
15. Whether the term “smoke the peace pipe” appeared in the story
16. Curious topics, headlines, etc.

Results

Newspapers varied widely in the number of stories printed about Native Americans (Table 2). The Albuquerque Journal published the most, followed closely by the San Diego Union Tribune. The Phoenix New Times and The Arizona Capitol Times published the fewest, however these papers are both weeklies. The Anchorage Daily News has the highest percentage of Native Americans in its population; however, it only printed slightly more articles than either of the weeklies. In retrospect, the Anchorage Daily News should have included additional search terms such as Alaska Native, Inuit, and aboriginal. However, due to the large amount of data that was collected, we can make some general statements on that particular paper based on preliminary results.

Table 2: Articles sampled and Native Population

Newspaper	Number of Articles	Percent of Articles	Percent of Natives in Population
The Albuquerque Journal	326	18.7%	3.9%
San Diego Union Tribune	323	18.6%	.6%
The Tulsa World	298	17.1%	4.7%
The New York Times	274	15.7%	.5%
San Antonio Express News	204	11.7%	.8%
Los Angeles Times	184	10.6%	.8%
The Journal Record (Oklahoma City)	63	3.6%	3.5%
Anchorage Daily News	28	1.6%	7.3%
Phoenix New Times	24	1.4%	2.3%
Arizona Capitol Times (Tucson)	17	1.0%	2.3%

Pages and Sections

The majority of the stories appeared in the News section of the paper (23.9%) followed by the Metro section (11.3%) even though the majority of the articles found were under the topic of Arts/Entertainment. Articles in those sections accounted for 10.7% of the stories from all newspapers.

Almost 33% of the stories about Native Americans appeared on the first page of any given section (of the 1,573 stories with identifiable sections). The Main or News sections, generally the first section of a newspaper, had 174 stories (11%) on the first page. For Arts/Entertainment sections, 42 stories appeared on the first page.

Story Length

The average length of the stories was 795 words. The shortest story contained only 61 words and the longest 6,535 words.

After coding for general article variables such as date, headline, article length, etc., coders were asked to ascertain the main topic of the article and its tone (e.g., positive, negative, neutral).

Topics

The three most common topics were Arts/Entertainment 334 articles (19.2%), Education 143 articles (8.2%) and Casinos/Gaming 123 articles (7.1%) (Table 3). Together these topics accounted for 600 articles, or a little more than one-third of the total number of articles examined. Table 4 provides a snapshot of article topics by individual newspaper.

Table 3: Common Topics

Topic	Number	Percentage
Arts/Entertainment	334	19.2%
Education	143	8.2%
Casinos/Gaming	123	7.1%
Economics/Business	113	6.5%
History	112	6.4%
General Politics	97	5.6%

Table 4: Topic by Newspaper

Newspaper	Arts/ Entertainment	Casinos	Education	Economics/ Business	History
The Albuquerque Journal	107	4	42	27	9
San Diego Union Tribune	41	12	26	20	20
The Tulsa World	38	15	36	25	28
The New York Times	64	7	12	6	17
San Antonio Express News	41	3	7	7	26
Los Angeles Times	19	13	14	13	8
The Journal Record (Oklahoma City)	3	8	1	14	2
Anchorage Daily News	8	0	4	1	1
Phoenix New Times	13	0	0	0	1
Arizona Capitol Times (Tucson)	0	1	1	0	0

In comparison to the 2002 report which found the top three topics were “on the res” stories (20%); casinos (13%) and mascots (11%), the 2007 report found casinos only accounting for slightly more (7.1%), mascots for only 2.6% – the 11th most common topic -- and “on the res” for only .2% of the stories or only four stories. However, 73 (4.2%) of the stories had datelines from reservations.

Tone

The tone is based on the entire article – it captures the overall tone for Native Americans and Native American subjects in the article based on the entire piece. The default 'tone' for articles is neutral, and an article has to be *very clearly* positive or negative in order to be coded as such. The tone of the articles was overwhelmingly either neutral 75.5% (1,314) or positive 19.0% (331). Only 5.6% (96) of the articles were of a negative tone towards Native Americans. Examining the top three categories for tone, we again found that the majority of the stories were either neutral or positive (Table 5).

Table 5: Article Tone

Topic	Positive	Negative	Neutral
Arts/Entertainment	105	7	229
Education	27	7	110
History	28	6	86
Total	160	20	425

Six topics had more negative stories than positive ones, however the majority of the articles were still neutral. Those categories with negative stories were: Alcohol, Crime, Social Problems, Tobacco, Tribal Politics, and Jack Abramoff Lobbyist Scandal (Table 6).

Table 6: Topics with Negative Tones

Topic	Positive	Negative	Neutral
Alcohol	1	4	2
Crime	4	9	46
Social Problems	4	8	32
Tobacco	0	4	26
Tribal Politics	2	3	38
Lobbyist Scandal	0	5	17
Total	11	33	161

Sources

This report is also interested whether Native Americans sources are sought out for stories about Native Americans. A total of 4,684 sources appeared in the 1,741 stories; 3,448 (73.6%) were non-Native and 1,236 (26.4%) were Native (Table 7). The majority of the articles, 1,110, contained no Native sources (63.8%). Of the 634 stories that contained Native sources, the majority (18.6%) contained only one (Table 6). Eighteen stories used six or more Native American sources. Most stories (70%) relied on non-Native sources for information about Native American topics.

Table 7: Use of Native American Sources

Number of Sources per Story	Frequency	Percent
0	1110	63.8%
1	323	18.6%
2	161	9.2%
3	79	4.5%
4	34	2.0%
5	16	.9%
6+	18	1.0%

Stereotypical Terms

Clichés such as “on the warpath” “smoke the peace pipe,” and “circle the wagons” often appear in political and sports stories that have nothing to do with Native Americans. In the stories coded for this sample, we were concerned only with stories about Native Americans, but we were still interested in whether the terms would occur.

Two instances of the term warpath occurred in the sample. One occurrence was a quote from an Ojibway Indian in a story in the Anchorage Daily News who was most likely attempting to be funny: “They Bobbittized my pole...and that would get any guy on the warpath.” The story was about a city in California that cut a totem pole that he has design in half.

The second story was a New York Times movie review of the “Into the West” TNT series “The first scalping of a frontiersman is the work of a grizzly bear, not of an Indian brave on the warpath.”

The term “peace pipe” occurred once in a New York Times story and was used literally, “Some of the same leaders who have been advocates of the casino formed a circle yesterday...whose districts include the reservation, and shared a peace pipe with them.”

The phrase “circling the wagons” also appeared only once in a New York Times story about a fire destroying a mosque “A ‘circling of the wagons’ was a

natural reaction to the suspicion that the Muslim religion raises among many people in the United States...”

In the next section of the Reading Red Report, individual newspapers are examined to explore the differences between them.

Findings By Newspaper

In this section, major results for each individual newspaper are provided. At the beginning of each individual section, the number of articles examined is noted as well as the mission statement, market area and circulation. This report is interested in the mission especially if it specifically mentions Native Americans or the importance of diversity in its product.

Kudos

It is important to focus on some of the best stories that came out of the sample. Like the 2002 Reading Red Report: "The best stories simply reflected good-quality and fair-minded reporting; writing and editing applied to Native America. They treated Native Americans as people rather than historical figures. They explained to readers the unique status of the federally recognized tribal nations as sovereign governments within the United States. They acknowledged the depth and diversity of Native American communities." Examples of exceptional stories that exemplify the type of reporting that should be done more often in Indian country appear in a kudos section of each evaluation. None of the stories in the kudos sections representing the best are arts/entertainment stories, mascot, or casino stories. These are common, easy topics for reporters to cover, and also discussed in the 2002 report. They are not travel stories, not holiday, nor food stories. They are the important, rarely told stories of Native America in all of its complexity.

Findings by Newspaper

The Albuquerque Journal (Albuquerque Publishing Company)

Number of Articles: 326

Mission/Market:

The Albuquerque Journal proudly serves as the newspaper of record for the state, with five separate morning editions, including The Journal, Journal Santa Fe, Rio Rancho Journal, West Side Journal and Journal North. Each edition provides expanded reach statewide and delivers the news coverage New Mexican's have come to depend on. From investigative reporting and provocative opinions to revealing features and grass-roots community news, the Journal has been serving New Mexico since 1880.

New Mexico has a relatively long history of occupation by Native American populations. New Mexico has the highest percentage of people of Hispanic ancestry of any state, some recent immigrants and others descendants of Spanish colonists. The state also has a large U.S. Amerindian population. As a result, the demographics and culture of the state are unique for their strong Spanish, Mexican, and Native American cultural influences.

Weekday Combined Statewide Readership 294,877; Sunday Statewide Readership 417,093

Topic

The majority of the stories published in the Albuquerque Journal were about Arts/Entertainment (32.8%). Education accounted for the second largest category (12.9%) and Economics/Business was the third largest (8.3%).

Section

The State/regional section of the Albuquerque Journal contained the most articles about Native Americans (24.8%) followed by "Other" sections (17.8%) – sections that were difficult to categorize -- and Arts/Entertainment (16.3%).

Tone

The majority of the stories portrayed Native Americans in a neutral light (67.5%). Almost one-third of the stories were positive towards Natives (31.3%). Only four stories were perceived as negative towards Natives (1.2%). Those stories were in the categories of Alcohol, Art, Education, and Social Problems.

Sources

There were 781 sources cited in the Albuquerque Journal of which more than half (65.4%) or 511 were non-Native. Native Americans accounted for 34.6% or 270 sources.

Most of the 270 Native American sources appeared in stories about Arts/Entertainment 120 sources (44.4%); Education, 27 sources (10.0%); and Health, 22 sources (8.1%).

The 511 non-Native American sources appeared in stories about: Arts/Entertainment, 129 sources (25.2%); Education, 75 sources (14.7%); and Economics/Business, 37 sources (7.2%).

Kudos

🕒 “Ailing Health Care.” This story examines the growing problem of health care for Indians as they increasingly live in cities and not on reservations.

🕒 “Pushing A.P.” Only about six percent of Native Americans participate in advanced placement programs.

🕒 “American Indian Dentists Rare.” Only 105 of the 150,000 dentists practicing in the United States are members of federally recognized Indian tribes.

- ⌚ “N.M. is Fourth in Freezing Deaths.” Describes the annual rates of hypothermia- related deaths in the United States. American Indians are 30 times more likely to die of hypothermia than any other New Mexico resident.
- ⌚ “Bush Budget Would End Aid.” Describes a line item in Bush’s proposed 2007 federal budget that would eliminate all federal funding for urban health care clinics that mostly serve Indians.
- ⌚ “Mission of Pride.” Two Native educators working to teach kids about their identity through the context of history.

San Diego Union Tribune (Copley Newspapers)

Number of Articles: 323

Mission/Market: Our mission is to be the leader in providing news, information and marketing services indispensable to customers in our diverse region. We will ensure our future by continuously improving our products and services, enhancing our financial strength and upholding the highest standards of journalistic quality.

Together, The San Diego Union–Tribune and SignOnSanDiego.com reach 1,451,611 San Diego County adults.

Topic

The majority of the stories published in the San Diego Union Tribune were about Casinos/Gaming (22.3%). Arts/Entertainment (12.7%) was the second largest followed by Education (8.0%).

Section

The Local section of the San Diego Union Tribune contained the most articles about Native Americans (33.4%) followed by News (21.1%) and State/Regional (20.4%).

Tone

The majority of the stories portrayed Native Americans in a neutral light (81.4%). Positive towards Natives accounted for 12.7%. Nineteen stories were perceived as negative towards Natives (5.9%). Negative stories were in the categories of Casinos/Gambling (5 stories); the Environment (5 stories); Economic Business (2 stories); Tribal Politics (2 stories); General Politics (2 stories); Education (1 story); Sacred Objects/Religion (1 story); and Travel/Tourism (1 story).

Sources

There were 1012 sources cited in the San Diego Union Tribune of which almost three-quarters (72.3%) or 732 were non-Native. Native Americans accounted for 27.7% or 280 of all sources.

Most of the 280 Native American sources appeared in stories about Casinos/Gaming (35.3%), 99 sources; Tribal Politics (8.9%), 25 sources; and Identity (7.9%), 22 sources.

The 732 non-Native American sources appeared in stories about: Casinos/Gaming (26.6%), 195 sources; Education (10.0%), 73 sources; and Environment (9.8%), 72 sources.

Kudos

🕒 “Connecting with the Culture.” Native Threads, an American Indian clothing company, challenges the stereotypes of romantic Indian designs by creating modern ones.

🕒 “Wind Farm Taking Shape.” Campo Indian reservation erects the first large-scale commercial wind farm on Indian lands with the largest capacity wind turbines in the United States.

🕒 “Myth Information.” The study of geomythology which draws on Native and other lore to understand the Earths geological history.

🕒 “Indians Establish Own Court System.” Intertribal Court of Southern California handles legal matters on the reservations in San Diego County. The story also provides a historical context to the importance of the system.

🕒 “Triple Fence Along Border Would Split Indian Nation.” The Secure Fence Act of 2006 calls for a fence that would force the Tohono O’odham Nation to divide.

The Tulsa World (World Publishing Company)

Number of Articles: 298

Mission/Market: Tulsaworld.com is another way to get the latest and most accurate news and information about Tulsa and northeastern Oklahoma from the almost 200 journalists working in the Tulsa newsroom. The website is updated throughout the day with breaking news stories and online exclusive content, while also providing all the day's local stories from the newspaper and an archive free to everyone.

In March 2006 the circulation was 138,262 Daily and 189,789 Sunday.

Topic

The majority of the stories published in the Tulsa World were about Arts/Entertainment (12.7%). Education (12.1%) was the second largest category followed by History (9.4%).

Section

The News section of the Tulsa World contained the most articles about Native Americans (52%) followed by Local (15.1%) and Arts/Entertainment (10.7%).

Tone

The majority of the stories portrayed Native Americans in a neutral light (68.1%). Positive towards Natives accounted for 28.2%. Eleven stories were perceived as negative towards Natives (3.7%). Negative stories were in the categories of Casinos/Gambling (2 stories); History (2 stories); Arts/Entertainment (2 stories); Crime (1 story); Economics/Business (1 story), Tobacco (1 story); Women's Issues (1 story); and Identity (1 story).

Sources

There were 688 sources cited in the Tulsa World of which over half (61.0%) or 420 were non-Native. Native Americans accounted for 38.9% or 268 of all sources.

Most of the 268 Native American sources appeared in stories about Tribal Politics (15.3%), 41 sources; Arts/Entertainment (13.1%), 35 sources; Economics/Business (9.7%), 26 sources.

The 420 non-Native American sources appeared in stories about: Education (16.9%), 71 sources; History (9.8%), 41 sources; and Arts/Entertainment (9.8%), 41 sources.

Kudos

In addition to the stories note below, The Tulsa World covered many aspects of Indian Country in Oklahoma and beyond. Nations and tribes within Oklahoma and outside were written about extensively.

🕒 “Quapaw Tribe Cleans Up Twice.” Indian landowners sell the chat from a Superfund Site, which is then used to pave roads and bridges.

🕒 “Surprise Blips on Local Radar.” Tribes are having a large positive impact on the economy of Oklahoma.

🕒 “State’s Tribes Devote Resources to Preserving Their Languages.” This is a statewide look at Oklahoma language revitalization programs.

The New York Times (The New York Times Company)

Number of Articles: 274

Mission/Market: The New York Times Company is committed to diversity in its most inclusive sense. Read about our Diversity and how we fulfill our commitment. Our diversity notwithstanding, our workforce shares a common commitment that unites our people and businesses together and sets us apart from our competitors. We call our beliefs our Core Purpose and Core Values. (Our core purpose is to enhance society by creating, collecting and distributing high quality news information and entertainment).

In 2006, the paper reported a circulation of roughly 1,086,798 copies on weekdays and 1,623,697 copies on Sundays.

Topic

The majority of the stories published in the New York Times were Arts/Entertainment stories (23.4%), General Politics (7.3%) and History (6.2%).

Section

The News and Arts/Entertainment sections of the New York Times contained the most articles about Native Americans – both with 25.5% followed by “Other” (difficult to categorize) sections (13.1%).

Tone

The majority of the stories portrayed Native Americans in a neutral light (74.1%). Positive stories towards Natives accounted for 13.9%. Thirty-three stories were perceived as negative towards Natives (12.0%). Social problems accounted for six of those stories, Education for four, Entertainment, Alcohol and the Jack Abramoff lobbying scandal for three each. The rest of the stories were scattered throughout other categories.

Sources

There were 840 sources cited in the New York Times of which more than three-quarters (77.6%) or 652 were non-Native. Native Americans accounted for 22.4% or 188 of all sources.

Most of the 188 Native American sources appeared in stories about Social Problems (13.3%), 25 sources; Arts/Entertainment (11.7%), 22 sources; and Identity Issues (7.4%), 14 sources.

The 652 non-Native American sources appeared mainly in stories about: Arts/Entertainment (9.5%), 62 sources; General Politics (7.2%), 47 sources; and History (6.9%), 45 sources.

Kudos

- 🕒 “A Spirit of Belonging.” A rare story on gay and lesbian Indians.
- 🕒 “The Newest Indians.” An in-depth look at issues of Native identity.
- 🕒 “Closing of Mine on Tribal Lands Fuels Dispute.” A mine shut down for environmental reasons threatens the Hopi and Navajo economy, but the tribes also realize the dangers of the mine.
- 🕒 “As Tribal Leaders, Women Still Fight Old Views.” Using Cecelia fire Thunder of the Oglala Sioux tribe as the lead example, the article focuses on the changing roles of women in Native politics.
- 🕒 “In Shadow of 70’s Racism, Recent Violence Stirs Rage.” Three decades after three Navajos were murdered in New Mexico, violence is still being inflicted on Native Americans.

- 🕒 “Commerce and Religion Collide on Mountainside.” Treated wastewater turned into snow for an Arizona resort interferes with tribes’ religious practices.
- 🕒 “The Founding Sachems.” How American Indian culture, especially that of the Iroquois influenced the constitution and American democracy.

San Antonio Express News (Hearst Corporation)

Number of Articles: 204

Mission/Market: Mission/Market: It is our mission to be the most trusted, respected and accurate source of news and information in the community that we serve.

As just one of many information sources today, we must work hard to maintain our credibility. Integrity is key. We must tell the truth and maintain high journalistic standards.

The circulation is 238,149 Daily; 342,709 Sunday.

Topic

The majority of the stories published in the San Antonio Express News were Arts/Entertainment (20.1%), History (12.7) and Crime (7.4%).

Section

The Metro section of the San Antonio Express News contained the most articles about Native Americans (39.7%). This was followed by the Lifestyle (15.2%) section and “Other” sections (8.8%).

Tone

The majority of the stories portrayed Native Americans in a neutral light (79.9%). Positive towards Natives accounted for 12.7%. Fifteen stories were perceived as negative towards Natives (7.4%). Crime stories accounted for five of those stories, History for two, Mascots for two and the Jack Abramoff lobbying scandal for two. The remaining stories were scattered throughout other categories.

Sources

There were 461 sources cited in the San Antonio Express News of which 419 (90.9%) were non-Native. Native Americans accounted for 42 (9.1%) of all sources.

Most of the 42 Native American sources appeared in stories about History (16.7%), 7 sources; and Reservation Life (14.3%), 6 sources. Arts/Entertainment and the Jack Abramoff Lobbyist Scandal tied for third in this area with four sources or about 9.5% each of the total sources.

The 419 non-Native American sources appeared mainly in stories about: Arts/Entertainment (13.8%), 58 sources, Crime (7.9%), 33 sources. History and General Politics each had 32 sources (7.6%).

Kudos

🕒 “Keeping Close to Ancestors and Tradition.” A pow wow story delves into American Indian history of San Antonio’s missions.

🕒 “Tribes on the Border.” The formation of a border summit by tribes to protest the increasing use by the United States government of their lands for national security purposes.

Los Angeles Times (Tribune Company)

Number of Articles: 184

Mission/Market: The Los Angeles Times is the only newspaper in the West with the resources and commitment to cover important stories wherever they happen. We strive to be the definitive news source for Californians, an essential part of the national news dialogue, and the voice of Los Angeles around the world.

As of May 2006, the Los Angeles Times reported its total average paid circulation of 1,172,005 on Sundays and weekdays 775,766

Topic

The majority of the stories published in the Los Angeles Times were General Politics (11.4%), Arts/Entertainment (10.3) and Education (7.6%).

Section

The Metro section of the Los Angeles Times contained the most articles about Native Americans (35.3%). This was followed by the Main (26.6%) section and “Other” sections (12.0%)

Tone

The majority of the stories portrayed Native Americans in a neutral light (86.4%). Positive towards Natives accounted for 11.4%. Four stories were perceived as negative towards Natives (2.2%). The topics of Casinos, Crime, Tribal Politics and General Politics each contained a negative story.

Sources

There were 568 sources cited in the Los Angeles Times of 478 (84.2%) were non-Native. Native Americans accounted for 90 (15.8%) of all sources.

Most of the 90 Native American sources appeared in stories about Casinos/Gaming (20.0%), 18 sources; Government Damage to Native American Land (18.9), 17 sources; and Economics/Business (14.4%), 13 sources.

The 478 non-Native American sources appeared in stories about General Politics (15.7%), 75 sources; Education (12.3%), 59 sources; and Casinos/Gaming (9.6%), 46 sources.

Kudos

- ⌚ “Blighted Homeland.” A series of in-depth articles about how the Navajo land Superfund Site may never be decontaminated.
- ⌚ “Tribes Place Bets Outside the Casino.” Indian tribes are reaching beyond their U.S. borders to take advantage of globalization.
- ⌚ “The Horizon Recedes Again on Indians’ Vast Royalty Claims.” The suit against the federal government’s mismanagement of the billions of dollars of Native Americans’ held in trust.

- ⌚ “A Matter of Jurisdiction, Justice.” A stabbing case that challenged tribal sovereignty issues.
- ⌚ “A Sousa Band of Indians.” The Fort Mojave tribe continues to their own music, even if with non-Native instruments.

The Journal Record (Oklahoma City)

Number of Articles: 63

Mission/Market: To be Oklahoma’s foremost influential and trusted information service. Our commitment is to serve our audiences with quality products and timely, accurate information that helps them gain success. – Daily general business and legal newspaper focuses on Oklahoma City business trends with in-depth stories about the business community.

Circulation figures were not available.

Topic

Stories on tobacco accounted for 36.5% of the articles in the Journal Record. This topic was followed by Economics/Business (22.2%) and Casinos/Gaming (12.7%) stories.

Section

All of the stories in the Journal Record appeared in either the News (96.8%) or Op/Ed (1.6%) sections.

Tone

The majority of the stories portrayed Native Americans in a neutral light (76.2%). Positive towards Natives accounted for 17.5%. Four stories were

perceived as negative towards Natives (6.3%). Of the three negative stories, two were tobacco stories and one was a health story.

Sources

There were 118 sources cited in the Journal Record of which 40 (34%) were Native. Non-native sources accounted for almost twice as much with 78 (66%) sources.

Most of the 40 Native American sources appeared in stories about Economics/Business and Tobacco with ten sources each (25.0%); Casinos/Gaming followed with seven sources (17.5%).

The 78 non-Native American sources appeared in stories about: Tobacco (50.0%), 39 sources; Economics/Business (15.4%), 12 sources; with Casinos/Gaming and Health following with eight sources each (10.3%).

Kudos

🕒 “Osage Nation Renews Call for Arbitration in Cigarette Tax Case.”

Provides an in-depth look at the cigarette tax and the sovereignty of Indian nations in Oklahoma.

Anchorage Daily News (The McClatchy Company)

Mission/Market: *Our mission statement is to be the best newspaper in Alaska and to enhance the lives of Alaskans.*

The circulation is 77,000 Daily; 89,423 Sunday making it the largest newspaper in Alaska.

Number of Articles: 28

Topic

The majority of the stories published in the Anchorage Daily News were about Arts/Entertainment (28.6%). Education accounted for the second largest category (14.3%) and Social Problems and Employment both accounted for 10.7% of the stories (three stories each).

Section

The Lifestyle section of the Anchorage Daily News contained the most articles about Native Americans (46.4%) followed by the Main and Alaska sections, both (7%).

Tone

The majority of the stories portrayed Native Americans in a neutral light (85.7%). Positive stories accounted for (14.3%). The Anchorage Daily News printed no negative stories about Native Americans.

Sources

There were 90 sources cited in the Anchorage Daily News of which 30 (33%) were Native and 60 (67%) were non-Native sources.

Most of the 30 Native American sources appeared in stories about Arts/Entertainment, 17 sources (56.7%) with Employment (16.7%), five sources; and Identity (13.3%), four sources.

The largest category for non-Native sources were Education stories (20.0% of non-Native sources), 12 sources. Employment followed (18.3%) with 11 sources; and Arts/Entertainment (15.0%), nine sources.

Kudos

- 🕒 “Road to Dissent: Frank Peratrovich.” An interview with an Alaska Native elder that reveals history through storytelling.
- 🕒 “Native Leader Says Culture Aids Suicides.” A difficult story on how Native culture can influence copy-cat suicides.

Phoenix New Times (Village Voice Media)

Mission/Market: Since its founding in 1970, Phoenix New Times has kept the Valley of the Sun's feet to the fire. Over the years, the paper has attracted hundreds of thousands of loyal readers who consider the paper an unparalleled source of information and insight, from politics and business to music and the arts.

Circulation: 111,408 – Weekly (every Thursday)

Number of Articles: 24

Topic

More than half of the stories published in the Phoenix New Times were about Arts/Entertainment (54.1%). Social Problems accounted for the second largest topic category (25.0%). No other category contained more than one story.

Section

The Arts/Entertainment section of the Phoenix New Times contained the most articles about Native Americans (37.5%) followed by the News and Op/Ed sections, both (29.2%).

Tone

The majority of the stories portrayed Native Americans neutrally (70.8%). Positive stories accounted for (12.5%). The Phoenix New Times was one of the two newspapers with more negative than positive portrayals (16.7%)

Sources

There were 69 sources cited in the Phoenix New Times of which 49 (71.0%) were non-Native and 20 (29.0%) were Native.

Fourteen (70.0%) of the Native sources appeared under the topic of Social Problems, three (15.0%) in Environment, two (10.0%) in Arts/Entertainment, and one (5.0%) in NAGPRA (Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act).

The largest category for non-Native sources was in Social Problems (46.2%), followed by Arts/Entertainment (23%).

Kudos

🕒 “The Crying Game.” A look at reservation through the eyes of a transgender teen.

🕒 “Wisdom of the Ancestors.” How Hopi leader Vernon Masayesva stopped Peabody Cole from stealing water.

Arizona Capitol Times (Tucson) - Dolan Media Company

Mission/Market: The Arizona Capitol Times is an award winning weekly newspaper that covers Arizona government, politics and legislative news for business, industry and politically savvy citizens throughout the state. Our team covers the Legislature with in-depth reporting on what's going on behind the scenes and on the frontline. Our coverage includes focus sections that give readers a close look at issues affecting Arizona public policy, associations, senior citizens, arts organizations and charitable

giving. Our writers are award-winning observers who chronicle the day-to-day actions of our state policy-makers.

The Arizona Times is a weekly paper and the readership is about 1,950.

Number of Articles: 17

Topic

The General Politics category contained the most articles about Native Americans in the Arizona Capitol Times (35.3%). Health (11.8%) and Environment (11.8%) followed. No other category contained more than one story.

Section

The News section of the Arizona Capitol Times contained all but one of the 17 articles. One story did not have a section associated with it.

Tone

The majority of the stories portrayed Native Americans neutrally (82.4%). Positive stories accounted for (5.9%). The Arizona Capitol Times was one of two newspapers with more negative than positive portrayals (11.8%)

Sources

There were 62 sources cited in the Arizona Capitol Times of which there were 54 (87.1%) non-Native sources and eight (12.9%) Native sources.

Most of the 8 Native American sources appeared in stories about the Environment, 4 sources (50.0%).

The largest categories for non-Native sources were in General Politics (38.9%), 21 sources, Environment (26.0%), 14 sources, and Social Problems (13.0%), 7 sources.

Kudos

- ⌚ “Arizona’s American Indian Tribes Have Problems with Non-Indians Dumping Trash on Their Lands.” Costs to the 8,000 member Salt River-Pima-Maricopa Tribe is high.
- ⌚ “Arizona Tribes’ Bills of Interest for 2006.” An examination of legislation affecting Arizona’s 22 Indian tribes for the coming year.

Discussion

The 2007 Reading Red Report analyzed 1,741 articles from ten mainstream newspapers with high percents of Native Americans in their circulation areas to examine the type of coverage Native Americans receive.

The best stories came from the more local newspapers such as the Tulsa World, San Antonio Express News and Albuquerque Journal. Local Native Americans were profiled as everyday people doing positive and negative deeds or provided interactions between Natives and others. For example, The Tulsa World profiled playwright Bret Jones, a Muscogee-Creek and assistant professor. The Albuquerque Journal ran an article about the infamous cartoons lampooning the Prophet Muhammad that appeared in a Danish newspaper and noted that “There are an estimated 200 Muslims living in the Gallup area, many of them Palestinians who are involved in the American Indian jewelry business.

Objectionable Headlines and Stories

Objectionable headlines and stories also appeared in these newspapers though. These often appear as clichés and stereotypes where reporters still miss the nuances of Native American culture and life whether local or national papers.

A sports column in the San Antonio Express News mocks the very serious issue of the use of Indian mascots. The writer went so far as to use stereotypical language "...big chiefs in Indianapolis" and mocked Chief Sitting Bull.

Two instances of the term "chanting" appeared when the correct term is singing. The San Antonio Express news profiled a Cherokee death row inmate in the common "Indian as mystical creature theme": With thunder banging overhead, the state of Texas executed Richard Hinojosa...while the inmate changed a Native American prayer, invoked heaven...Hinojosa began chanting, over and over, 'Hey-Yah, Yahweh, Hey-Yah' with the slow rhythm of a Native American drumbeat." The New York Times also committed the "mystical creature with chanting" theme: "...During a news conference that opened with the chanting of ancient American Indian prayers." If the reporter had asked about the opening, she would have learned that the chanting was either a prayer in a Native language or a song. What otherwise could have been an important story on the unusually high rate of substance abuse by Native Americans becomes overshadowed by the lack of understanding.

Yet another inaccuracy in the New York Times appeared in a story about a woman's fight to save a plot of land, the lead is "On a hidden bend of the Hackensack River, a mysterious disappearing cemetery faces west, toward the happy hunting grounds, the American Indian heaven.

Even in the Tulsa World, which had many stories reflecting the diversity of Oklahoma's Native cultures, an "elderly American Indian...appeared out of nowhere" in a gardening story.

The "Indians don't exist anymore" theme showed up in a Nebraska-road-trip travel feature in the Los Angeles Times. In the middle of the story an out-of-place section "Inhabitants past" of four paragraphs was devoted to food and lodging in Ft. Robinson intermixed with the history of the Indians at the Fort.

Another anti-mascot Tulsa World sports editorial took a patronizing tone in a look the Washington Redskins while at the same time ignoring history. The sentence "...Native Americans may have slept on their rights" references that the use of the term Redskins should have been challenged in 1937. America was a very different place for people of color in 1937 - in some places like Virginia, Native children weren't allowed to go to school past the eighth grade. How could they even have known they could challenge it?

A third mascot story was the landing place for one of the few objectionable headlines found in the sample. But they did show up. The New York Times used "A Dispute of Great Spirit Rages On" for a story on the

American Indian–head logo used at the University of North Dakota (Fighting Sioux).

Headline writers may think they are being clever when they use the term reservation, but often it is used incorrectly and has no relationship to the story. Three instances of this occurred in this sample. The Tulsa World reported on Mato Nanji, the lead singer of the band Indigenous. The headline “Without reservation” had nothing to do with the story. A Phoenix New Times story on the Native American Basketball Invitational ran with the headline “Without Reservations.” “No Reservations” was the headline for what otherwise was an excellent book review of David Treuer’s *Native American Fiction: A User’s Manual*.

The Tulsa World also ran two headlines with common Native American cliché imagery. The first headline “War paint” was used in a story about artist Talmadge Davis who includes military themes in his works. A more appropriate headline would have been something like “Art history” or “Art of war.” “Spirit walkers” focused on the new collection at the Gilcrease Museum. Nothing about spirit walkers appears in the story, so the title of the collection “Enduring spirit” might have made for a more accurate headline.

Comparisons Between Newspapers

General Conclusions

As Native Americans gain political power, newspapers seem to be taking them more seriously. The 2007 report found many fewer objectionable headlines and stories than the 2002 report. However, this may be because the newspapers examined for this analysis have higher populations of Native Americans and so may be understanding of cultural norms, or may be have learned from past mistakes.

Native Americans still account for less than one percent of mainstream newspaper staffs. The number is closer to one-half of one percent, or only 332 Native reporters, editors, and photographers. In 2001 the American Society of Newspaper Editors counted only 249. Perhaps the newspapers in this sample had high percentages of Native staff members in addition to their high Native circulation areas.

Much progress still needs to be made in covering the nuances of Native American cultures in newspapers and in television. We hope this report is used as a guide to help the reporters we depend on to tell our stories. We close with tips for covering Indian Country.

Some Quick Tips for Covering Indian Country



Get past the casino and alcohol stories.



Get to know the Native community, become a familiar face.



Subscribe to at least one national Native newspaper.



Develop a source list that includes tribal college presidents, professors and community elders.



Make Native issues a regular news beat.



Consider your reporting role important to Native communities.



Find out the political and legal status of the Indian nation before starting the interview.



Ceremonies and cultural objects are rarely photographed. Talk to the person in charge for proper protocols.



One Native person doesn't speak for all community members.



Native people belong to sovereign nations, meaning they have their own distinct governments (laws, political structure, law enforcement procedures, etc.).



Tribal politics permeate many reservations, but it shouldn't prevent an accurate story from being told.

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Founded at San Francisco State University in 1990 by Betty Medsger, the **Center for Integration and Improvement of Journalism** believes that accurate and responsible journalism reflects the changing demographics of the society it serves. We develop programs and conduct research aimed at recruiting, retaining and revitalizing journalists and journalism educators. We seek to make journalism more inclusive from the classroom to the newsroom.

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