

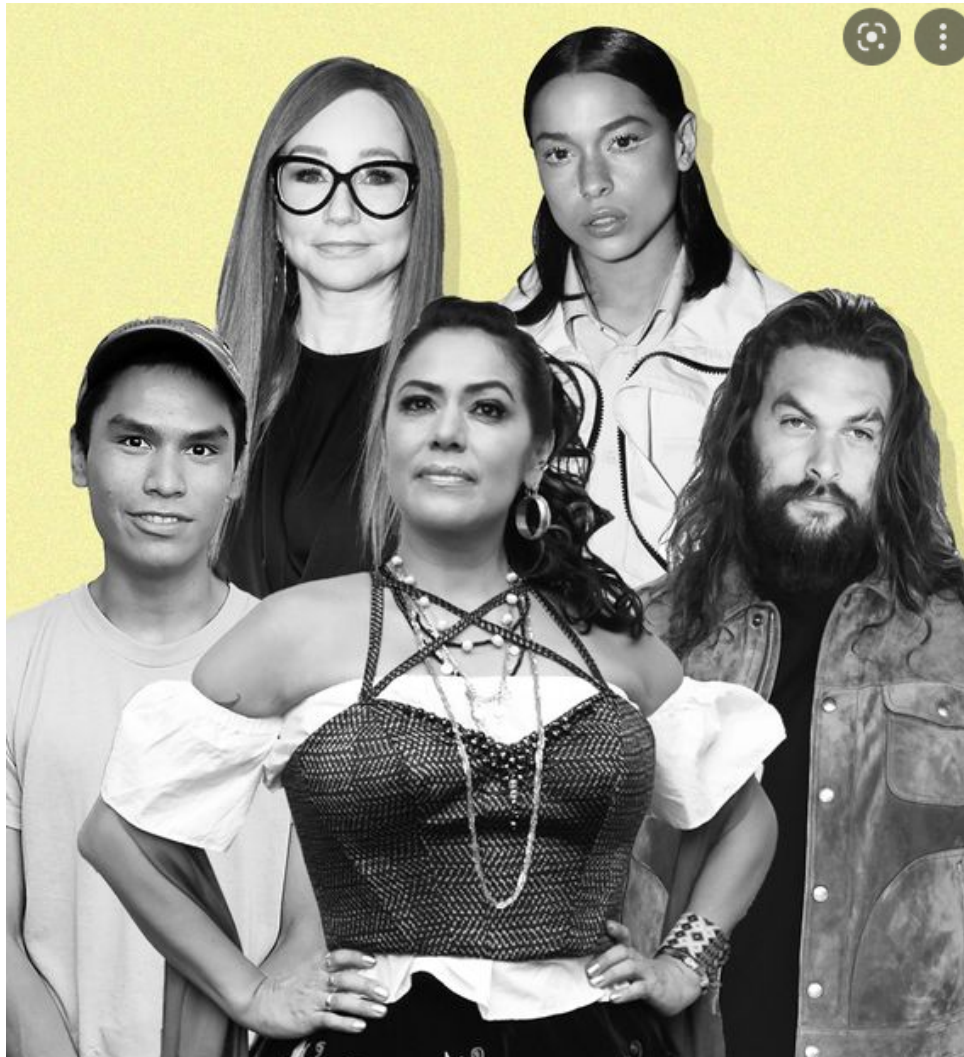
## Resource 5: Common Misconceptions about Native Americans

### Statement 1: Native Americans live in tipis

*Misconception:* even when you search Google for images of Native American homes you will be directed to traditional shelters such as tipis and longhouses. Today, while some American Indians own tipis, they live in a range of homes that are similar to ones that other Americans live in.

### Statement 2: American Indians all have red skin and long black hair.

*Misconception:* Native American's skins are not red, and they sport a wide range of hair styles - some more traditional, others more modern. Traditionally, American Indians have viewed hair as a symbol of spiritual health and strength, hence the disposition to have longer hair.



Source [here](#).

**Statement 3:** American Indians all belong to the same tribe.

*Misconception:* There are 574 different American Indians tribes that are officially recognized by the United States government - all with different cultures.



Source [here](#).

**Statement 4:** American Indians want to be called Native Americans.

*Misconception:* The Native Knowledge 360 website hosted by the National Museum of the American Indian posts the following:

**“What is the correct terminology: American Indian, Indian, Native American, Indigenous, or Native?”**

All of these terms are acceptable. The consensus, however, is that whenever possible, Native people prefer to be called by their specific tribal name. In the United States, Native American has been widely used but is falling out of favor with some groups, and the terms American Indian or Indigenous American are preferred by many Native people. Native peoples often have individual preferences on how they would like to be addressed. When talking about Native groups or people, use the terminology the members of the community use to describe themselves collectively.”

**Statement 5:** American Indians are all dead.

*Misconception:* The manner in which the story of American Indians has been taught includes what has been described as a “terminal narrative.” This narrative suggests that there has been excessive attention to the histories of Indigenous people that focus on their removal, “cultural death, or disappearance” with little if any attention to recent American Indian history and experiences. It is as if they no longer exist. (Dunbar-Ortiz, 39-41)

The 2010 Census showed that the U.S. population on April 1, 2010, was 308.7 million. Out of the total U.S. population, 2.9 million people, or 0.9 percent, reported American Indian or Alaska Native alone. In addition, 2.3 million people or another 0.7 percent, reported American Indian or Alaska Native in combination with one or more other races. Together, these two groups totaled 5.2 million people. Thus, 1.7 percent of all people in the United States identified as American Indian or Alaska Native, either alone or in combination with one or more other races.

Today, most American Indians live in western parts of the United States, including Alaska.

**Statement 6:** Native Americans sold Manhattan for \$24 worth of trinkets

“According to a letter to Dutch officials, the settlers offered representatives of local Lenape groups 60 guilders, about \$24, in trade goods for their homeland, Manahatta. The best insight we have into what the Lenape received comes from a later 17th-century deed for the Dutch purchase of Staten Island, also for 60 guilders, which lists goods "to be brought from Holland and delivered" to the Indians, including shirts, socks, cloth, muskets, bars of lead, powder, kettles, axes, awls, adzes and knives.

But it is unlikely that the Lenape saw the original transaction as a sale. Although land could be designated for the exclusive use of prominent native individuals and families, the idea of selling land in perpetuity, to be regarded as property, was alien to native societies. Historians who try now to reconstruct early transactions between Europeans and Native Americans differ over whether the Lenape considered it an agreement for the Dutch to use, but not own, Manahatta (the majority view), or whether even as early as 1626, Indians had engaged in enough trade to understand European economic ideas. Source [here](#)

**Statement 7:** American Indians' government pays for things that Native Americans need.

*Misconception:* Some American Indians receive government aid just like other Americans but just like other Americans, American Indians earn their living and pay taxes.

**Statement 8:** Native Americans have gotten rich off of casinos.

*Misconception:* “The idea that money just flows freely into Indian people’s hands is pure fantasy.” According to one website, less than half of federally recognized tribes have casinos (474 gaming facilities in 28 states) and there are strict regulations on how gaming money can be used. Moreover, the unemployment rate for American Indians is double that for other Americans and up to 75% of the jobs created by casinos go to people who are not American Indians.



Source [here](#).

**Statement 9:** Native Americans have/wear headdresses.

*Misconception:* “**War bonnets** (also called **warbonnets** or **headdresses**) are feathered headgear traditionally worn by male leaders of the American Plains Indians Nations who have earned a place of great respect in their tribe. Originally they were sometimes worn into battle, but they are now primarily used for ceremonial occasions. In the Native American and First Nations communities that traditionally have these items of regalia, they are seen as items of great spiritual and political importance, only to be worn by those who have earned the right and honour through formal recognition by their people.”

Source [here](#).

For many Native Americans, it is offensive and disrespectful for anyone who has not earned the honor to wear a headdress.



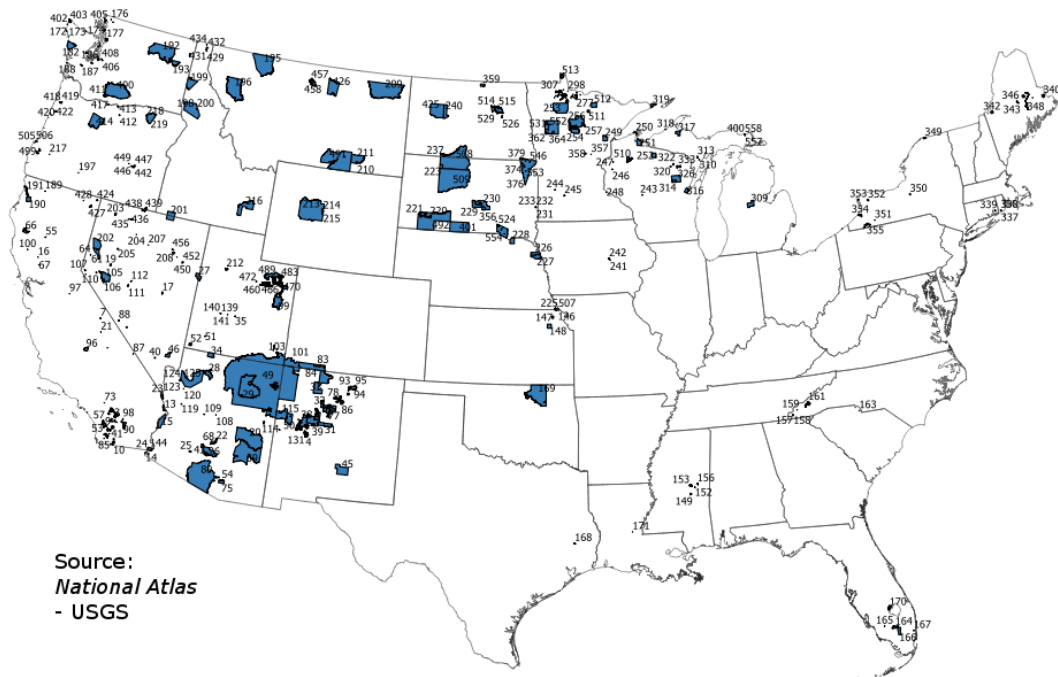
Source [here](#).

**Statement 10:** Native Americans live on reservations.

*Misconception:* only 25-30% of Native Americans in the United States live on reservations.

However, it should be noted that conditions on some of the reservations have been compared to those in Third World countries. “The scarcity of jobs and lack of economic opportunity mean that, depending on the reservation, four to eight out of ten adults on reservations are unemployed. Many households are overcrowded and earn only social security, disability, or veteran’s income. The overall percentage of American Indians living below the federal poverty line is 28.2%” (2008, American Indians Census Facts). The disparity for American Indians on the reservations is even greater, reaching 38% to 63% in our service area (2006, National Center for Education Statistics, and other sources).” Source [here](#)

### Native American Reservations in the Continental United States



Source:  
*National Atlas*  
- USGS

Source [here](#).

#### Other Sources:

- [Here](#)
- [Here](#)