

"What is a Pow Wow?"

Source: <http://www.powwows.com>

Pow Wow time is the Native American people's way of meeting together, to join in dancing, singing, visiting, renewing old friendships and make new ones. This is a time to renew thought of the old ways and to preserve a rich heritage. There are several different stories of how the Pow Wow was started. Some believe that the war dance societies of the Ponca and other Southern Plains tribes were the origin of the Pow Wow. Another belief is that when the Native Americans were forced onto reservations the government also forced them to have dances for the public to come and see. Before each dance they were lead through the town in a parade, which is the beginning of the Grand Entry.

Pow Wow singers are very important figures in the Native American culture. Without them there would be no dancing. The songs are of many varieties, from religious to war to social. As various tribes gathered together, they would share their songs, often changing the songs so singers of different tribes could join. With these changes came the use of "vocables" to replace the words of the old songs. Thus, some songs today are sung in vocables with no words. Yet they still hold special meaning to those who know the song. Many songs are still sung in native tongue either newly composed or revivals of old songs. These songs are reminders to the Indian people of their old ways and rich heritage.

Dancers have always been a very important part of the life of the American Indian. Most dancers seen at Pow Wows today are social dances, which might have had different meanings in earlier days. Although dance styles and content have changed, their meaning and importance has not. The outfits worn by the dancers, like the styles of clothing today evolve over time, it is not a stagnant culture, but a vibrant and changing way of life.

Pow Wow are organized by committees that work for weeks before the event. At the Pow Wow, the MC runs the events. The MC works with the Arena Director to keep the Pow Wow organized and running smoothly. These two individuals along with the committee work hard to bring the people together to dance and fellowship together in the circle.

The Pow Wow begins by the Grand Entry. This is the entry of all the people entering the arena. This originally was a parade through the town the Pow Wow was in. Even today in some Pow Wows, these parades are still held. During the Grand Entry, everyone is asked to stand as the flags are brought into the arena. The flags carried generally include the US flag, tribal flags, POW flag, and eagle staffs of various tribes present. These are usually carried by veterans. Native Americans hold the United States flag in an honored position despite the horrible treatment received from this country. The flag has a dual meaning. First it is a way to remember all of the ancestors that fought against this country. It is also the symbol of the United States, which Native Americans are now a part. The flag here also reminds people of those people who have fought for this country. Following the veterans are other important guests of the Pow Wow including tribal chiefs, Princesses, elders, and Pow Wow organizers. Next in line are the men dancers. The men are followed by the women dancers. Once everyone is in the arena, the song ends and a song is sung to honor the flag and the veterans. After a prayer, the dancing resumes, usually with a few Round Dances. After the Round Dances, intertribal dancing songs are sung and everyone dances to the beat of the drum.



CONCLUSION

Do Native Americans have to choose between assimilating to the dominant White culture and maintaining their identity? In Figure 6.3, we revisit the continuum of intergroup relations as it relates to Native Americans. Recently there is evidence of pluralism, but aspirations to improve themselves economically usually drives them toward assimilation.

It is not easy to maintain one's tribal identity outside a reservation. One has to consciously seek out one's cultural heritage amid the pressure to assimilate. Even on a reservation, it is not easy to integrate being Native American with elements of contemporary society. The dominant society needs innovative approaches to facilitate pluralism.

The reservations are economically depressed, but they are also the home of the Native American people ideologically, if not always physically. Furthermore, the reservation's isolation means that the frustrations of reservation life and the violent outbursts against them do not alarm large numbers of Whites, as do disturbances in urban centers. Native Americans today, except in motion pictures, are out of sight and out of mind. The federal government, since the BIA was created in 1824, has had much greater control over Native Americans than over any other civilian group in the nation. For Native Americans, the federal government and White people are virtually synonymous. The typical White, however, tends to be more sympathetic, if not

paternalistic, toward Native Americans than toward African Americans.

Subordinate groups in the United States, including Native Americans, have made tremendous gains and will continue to do so in the years to come. But the rest of the population is not standing still. As Native American income rises, so, too, does White income. As Native American children stay in school longer, so, too, do White children. American Indian health care improves, but so, too, does White health care. Advances have been made, but the gap remains between the descendants of the first Americans and those of later arrivals. Low incomes, inadequate education, and poor health care spurred relations between Native Americans and Whites to take a dramatic turn

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why are sports team mascots such a burning issue for many Native Americans?
2. How have land rights been a continuing theme in White-Native American contact?
3. How much are Native Americans expected to shed their cultural heritage to become a part of contemporary society?
4. Do casinos and other gaming outlets represent a positive force for Native American tribes today?
5. What challenges are there to reservation residents receiving effective health care?

