

# **How Did The Native American Elders View The Changes Their Children Experienced While At European/American**

## **How Did The Native American Elders View The Changes Their Children Experienced While At European/American Contact?**

The arrival of Europeans and later American settlers dramatically transformed the lives of Native American communities. Among the most profound impacts were the cultural, social, spiritual, and economic changes experienced by Native American children. Elders, as custodians of tradition, history, and cultural identity, observed these transformations with a mixture of concern, grief, resilience, and sometimes hope. They viewed their children's experiences through a lens shaped by centuries of cultural continuity disrupted by colonization, forced assimilation, and ongoing marginalization. To understand their perspectives, it is essential to explore how elders perceived these changes, the emotional and cultural implications involved, and the ways in which they responded to and tried to preserve their heritage amidst rapid transformation.

## **Initial Reactions to Contact and Early Changes**

### **Shock and Disbelief**

Native American elders often describe their initial reactions to European contact as one of shock and disbelief. Many had witnessed firsthand the arrival of explorers, traders, and missionaries—events that seemed to herald a new era. Elders recognized that their children's worlds were about to change dramatically, and this often caused feelings of anxiety and foreboding.

### **Recognition of Disruption**

Elders saw early on that the newcomers brought new diseases, technologies, and ideas that would alter traditional ways of life. They observed that their children's exposure to European goods and customs began to erode indigenous practices, language, and spiritual beliefs. The elders understood that these changes would challenge the fabric of their cultural identity.

# **Perceptions of Cultural Erosion and Loss**

## **Concern for the Preservation of Language**

Language is a cornerstone of cultural identity, and elders perceived the language loss among their children as a critical threat. The imposition of European languages through schooling and religious instruction led to bilingualism, often with the indigenous tongue gradually fading away. Elders lamented this loss, seeing it as a loss of history, tradition, and worldview.

## **Spiritual Disconnection**

Many elders viewed the spiritual upheavals with deep concern. Christianity, introduced by missionaries, often conflicted with traditional spiritual practices. Elders observed that their children's participation in Christian rituals and abandonment of indigenous ceremonies indicated a spiritual disconnection from their ancestral beliefs.

## **Altered Social Structures**

European influence disrupted traditional social structures, kinship systems, and community roles. Elders noticed that their children's interactions and societal responsibilities were shifting, often leading to a breakdown in communal cohesion. This change was viewed as weakening the social fabric that sustained their culture.

## **Emotional and Cultural Responses of Elders**

### **Grief and Mourning for Cultural Loss**

Elders often expressed profound grief over the loss of cultural practices, languages, and identities. They mourned the decline of traditional ways of life, viewing it as a form of cultural death that threatened their community's survival.

### **Resilience and Adaptation**

Despite these losses, elders also demonstrated resilience. Many sought to adapt by preserving core aspects of their culture through storytelling, ceremonies, and teaching their children about their heritage. They believed that by maintaining cultural knowledge, they could resist complete assimilation.

## **Educational and Cultural Preservation Efforts**

Elders took active roles in passing down oral histories, songs, dances, and spiritual

practices. They often founded or participated in cultural revitalization movements, aiming to reconnect their children and future generations with their roots.

## **Perspectives on Assimilation Policies and Education**

### **Critical Views on Boarding Schools**

One of the most traumatic changes experienced by Native American children was forced attendance at boarding schools, which aimed to eradicate indigenous languages and customs. Elders viewed these institutions with deep suspicion and criticism, seeing them as tools of cultural genocide. They believed that these schools stripped children of their identity and caused lasting trauma.

### **Concerns About Loss of Autonomy**

Elders perceived that assimilation policies undermined their authority as community leaders and cultural custodians. The subversion of indigenous education and socialization processes was seen as an attack on their sovereignty and way of life.

### **Mixed Feelings on Cultural Resilience**

While elders recognized the destructive intent of assimilation policies, some also acknowledged that their children's resilience and adaptation efforts could serve as a source of hope. They saw some children navigating new realities while still holding onto core cultural values.

## **Long-Term Views and the Legacy of Change**

### **Hope for Cultural Revival**

Many elders expressed hope that their culture could be revived and reclaimed despite the upheavals. They believed that through language revitalization, storytelling, and cultural ceremonies, future generations could reconnect with their heritage.

### **Concerns About Future Generations**

Elders worried that the ongoing influence of Western culture and modernity might lead to further erosion. They emphasized the importance of deliberate efforts to teach their children about their history, spirituality, and traditional practices.

## **Reflections on Identity and Resilience**

Ultimately, elders viewed their children's experiences as a complex mix of loss and resilience. They recognized that while colonization had inflicted deep wounds, their community's strength lay in their enduring cultural identity and the efforts to preserve it for future generations.

## **The Role of Elders in Cultural Preservation and Education**

### **Custodians of Tradition**

Elders saw themselves as the primary custodians of their culture. They believed that it was their responsibility to pass on traditional knowledge, stories, and practices to their children and grandchildren.

### **Teaching Through Storytelling**

Storytelling was a vital tool for elders to transmit history, moral lessons, and spiritual beliefs. They believed that oral tradition was the most authentic way to keep their culture alive in the face of external pressures.

### **Community and Ceremony**

Elders emphasized the importance of participating in cultural ceremonies and community gatherings as a means of strengthening cultural identity and resilience.

## **Conclusion: Elders' Perspectives as a Reflection of Cultural Endurance**

Native American elders viewed the rapid and often traumatic changes experienced by their children with a mixture of sorrow, concern, and resilience. They recognized that colonization, forced assimilation, and modernization posed significant threats to their cultural integrity, yet they remained committed to preserving and revitalizing their traditions. Their perspectives underscore the importance of intergenerational transmission, cultural resilience, and the ongoing struggle to maintain indigenous identities in a changing world. Despite the profound disruptions, elders' efforts to teach, share, and uphold their heritage serve as a testament to the enduring spirit of Native American communities and their unwavering belief in the importance of cultural continuity for future generations.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **How did Native American elders perceive the cultural shifts experienced by their children due to European contact?**

Many elders viewed the cultural changes with concern, fearing the loss of traditional values, language, and spiritual practices as their children adopted European customs and beliefs.

### **What were the elders' feelings about the impact of European education systems on their children?**

Elders often believed that European-style education aimed to assimilate Native children, leading to feelings of loss, frustration, and a sense that their traditional knowledge was being marginalized or suppressed.

### **Did Native American elders see the technological advancements introduced by Europeans as beneficial or harmful to their children?**

While some elders recognized practical benefits, many viewed these advancements as disruptive to traditional ways of life, fearing they would lead to dependence on foreign technology and weaken cultural identity.

### **How did elders interpret the changes in language use among their children during European contact?**

Elders often saw the decline of their native languages as a tragic loss, believing it eroded their cultural heritage and spiritual connection to their ancestors.

### **What was the elders' perspective on the social and behavioral changes in their children caused by European influence?**

Many elders observed that their children adopted new social norms and behaviors that conflicted with traditional values, causing concern about the erosion of community cohesion and moral principles.

### **How did Native American elders respond to the adaptation of their children to European economic systems?**

Elders were often wary of their children engaging in European-style economies, fearing it would lead to materialism and a departure from subsistence practices rooted in their

ancestral ways.

## **Additional Resources**

How Did The Native American Elders View The Changes Their Children Experienced While At European/American

The history of Native American communities is marked by profound upheaval and transformation, particularly as their children encountered European and American influences through colonization, forced assimilation, and cultural suppression. For generations, elders within these communities have observed and interpreted these changes through a lens shaped by deep cultural roots, spiritual beliefs, and a profound sense of loss and resilience. Understanding how Native American elders viewed these shifts provides critical insight into the complex relationship between indigenous identity and external pressures. This article explores their perspectives, the cultural implications of these changes, and the enduring legacy of elders' observations.

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### **The Indigenous Worldview and the Role of Elders**

Before delving into their perceptions of change, it is vital to grasp the centrality of elders in Native American societies. Elders are traditionally considered the custodians of culture, history, wisdom, and spiritual teachings. They serve as the link between past and future, guiding younger generations through oral traditions, ceremonies, and cultural practices.

In indigenous worldviews, community cohesion and harmony with nature are paramount. Elders often see themselves as protectors of these values, and their views on change are deeply intertwined with spiritual beliefs and a holistic understanding of life. When external influences threaten these spiritual and cultural frameworks, elders tend to interpret such shifts as both challenges and opportunities—though not without a sense of sorrow for what is lost.

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### **The Initial Contact and Early Encounters**

#### **Perspectives on the First European Arrivals**

Elders' reactions to the initial contact with Europeans in the 15th and 16th centuries were complex. While some viewed explorers and settlers with suspicion or wariness, others saw potential alliances or trade opportunities. However, over time, elders recognized that the arrival of Europeans marked the beginning of profound upheaval.

Key perceptions included:

- Cultural Intrusion: Elders observed the introduction of new customs, languages, and religious practices that often clashed with indigenous beliefs.
- Disruption of Social Structures: The imposition of European governance and legal systems undermined traditional leadership and kinship roles.

- Loss of Land and Resources: Elders saw the dispossession of their territories as a spiritual and physical loss, disrupting their connection with the land.

While initial encounters were sometimes viewed with curiosity, elders soon understood that these interactions would usher in lasting change, often detrimental to their communities.

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## The Impact of Forced Assimilation Policies

### Boarding Schools and Cultural Suppression

One of the most profound changes witnessed by elders in the 19th and early 20th centuries was the forced removal of indigenous children to boarding schools, often under government or church auspices. These institutions aimed to eradicate indigenous languages, spiritual practices, and cultural identities.

Elders' perspectives on these policies include:

- Grief and Anguish: Elders frequently describe feelings of heartbreak seeing their children stripped of their languages and traditions.
- Loss of Cultural Transmission: The disconnection of children from their communities hindered the passing down of oral histories, ceremonies, and spiritual teachings.
- Resilience and Resistance: Despite these efforts, elders often highlight stories of children secretly practicing traditions or preserving knowledge internally.

Many elders view these policies as a form of cultural genocide, one that inflicted deep psychological wounds but also fostered resilience and a desire to reclaim their heritage.

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## The Cultural and Spiritual Consequences

### Erosion of Traditional Values

The influence of European/American culture led to significant shifts in indigenous worldview among children, as elders observed:

- Adoption of Western Customs: Children increasingly embraced European dress, education, and religious practices, sometimes abandoning indigenous ways.
- Loss of Language: Language is central to cultural identity; elders often lament the decline of their native tongues among younger generations.
- Altered Worldview: The spiritual connection with nature and ancestral spirits was sometimes replaced or overshadowed by Christian beliefs or secular worldviews.

Elders' reflections often emphasize:

- A sense of spiritual dislocation.
- The importance of reviving language and ceremonies.
- The need to reestablish indigenous identity amidst ongoing change.

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## The Role of Education and Media in Shaping Perceptions

### Schools, Literature, and Media

As the 20th century progressed, education systems, media, and governmental policies continued to influence Native children's perceptions of themselves and their culture.

Elders observed:

- Assimilation through Education: Schools promoted Euro-American history and values, often marginalizing indigenous perspectives.
- Media Influence: Television, movies, and literature frequently portrayed stereotypes, affecting how children saw themselves and their communities.
- Internalized Oppression: Some children grew up feeling ashamed of their heritage due to systemic discrimination.

Despite these challenges, many elders see the rise of indigenous activism and cultural revival as a positive response, reclaiming narratives and fostering pride among youth.

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## The Resilience and Revival of Indigenous Identity

### Elders' Perspectives on Cultural Revival

While elders have historically viewed change with a mixture of sorrow and resilience, many also see a powerful resurgence of indigenous pride and cultural preservation as a response to centuries of transformation.

Examples include:

- Language Revitalization Programs: Elders often serve as language teachers, emphasizing the importance of passing on linguistic heritage.
- Ceremonial Rebirth: Re-establishing traditional ceremonies and spiritual practices has become a vital act of cultural resilience.
- Educational Initiatives: Elders support culturally grounded education that integrates traditional knowledge with modern curricula.

Elders often express hope that future generations will honor their ancestors' sacrifices and restore the cultural vitality that was threatened by previous changes.

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## Challenges and Continuing Concerns

### Modern-Day Perspectives

Despite progress, elders remain vigilant about ongoing issues:



- Cultural Appropriation: Commercialization and misrepresentation of indigenous cultures continue to concern elders.
- Loss of Land and Sovereignty: Political struggles over land rights and self-determination remain central.
- Intergenerational Gaps: Bridging the gap between elders and youth is crucial for cultural continuity.

Elders emphasize the importance of education, community involvement, and spiritual practice in maintaining their identity and guiding their children through ongoing societal changes.

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### Conclusion: A Legacy of Hope and Resilience

The views of Native American elders on the changes their children experienced while at European and American hands are multifaceted. They encompass profound grief over cultural losses, recognition of resilience, and a deep commitment to cultural revival. These elders serve as living repositories of history and wisdom, reminding future generations of the importance of preserving their heritage amidst ever-changing circumstances.

While the impacts of colonization and assimilation have left indelible marks, the strength of indigenous communities continues to shine through in efforts to reclaim language, spirituality, and cultural practices. Elders' perspectives underscore a narrative not solely defined by trauma but also by resilience, hope, and the enduring power of indigenous identity.

As Native American communities continue to navigate the legacy of these historical changes, the voices of elders remain vital—reminding us all of the importance of respecting and honoring indigenous histories and cultures.

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