

Ethnic minorities in oregon



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According to the United States Census Bureau, “ American Indian and Alaska Native alone consists of 1. 8% of Oregon’s population, when white alone stands for 88% of Oregon’s population”. Not only is race and ethnicity a physical attribute of a person, but it is also different ways of seeing and understanding the world. Recently I had the privilege to interview my uncle, and his Native American past to get a better insight on his experiences with discrimination and rejection. Discrimination comes in many different forms, but overall it is when one excludes one from social participation based on their ethnic and cultural background. Our society has made tremendous progress when dealing with racial discrimination, but injustice still remains today.

To provide you with a little background, Ray Castro grew up in Ashland Oregon where he lived in a shack with his mother until he was 15. They had no running water, no electricity, and no bathroom, “ It was literally a storage shed on a couple of acres,” he proclaims. Their house was located on ten acres and was four miles off of any major road. He spent every night sleeping on the floor with a blanket and a sweatshirt as a pillow. Privacy was not an option, “ if you had to crap you dig a hole”. When they needed to shower they would take one from a bucket that they had heated water previously on the gas stove. His high school diploma was the only education he received. At 15 his grandparents, which he calls nana and tata, took him under their wing and was kind enough to let them into their home with open arms. I asked if his father was ever in the picture he thought long and hard on the topic and with little effort he says that “ he was a dead beat, I wouldn’t give him the satisfaction of even talking about him in this

interview”. I respected his wishes and moved on to my next topic. At this point I felt like I was drilling him with questions that he was clearly not impressed with. When he reached high school his grandparents kept him busy with sports therefore he would stop getting into trouble. He wrestled throughout his entire high school career and worked sense he was in 7th grade. As you could imagine because of his living situations he grew up on government assistance as well as all medical insurance was provided by the Indian Clinic.

Moving on to his later years in life, at the age of 19 Ray packed up his small bag that he had and was fortunate to move to California where he could work for the city of Roseville and city of Folsom California for about 7 years then was promoted to work at High Desert State Prison, which is a maximum security prison. After Desert, he was promoted to sergeant at Folsom State Prison with nothing but a high school diploma, but because he had so much experience and was dedicated to his job he has constantly pushed through the struggles to make it as far as he can in life. He now has been department of corrections at Folsom state prison for 15 years now.

To spice up this exciting conversation I stopped drilling him with one-word questions. I asked him about his cultural background and with excitement in his voice he replied with “ I’m Native American even says so on my birth certificate!” from the sound of his voice you could tell there was pride and honor behind his words. Knowing that he was Native American before the interview I did some research therefore I can figure out the questions that were important and satisfied my paper, because I showed interest in what he is most proud of he opened up. He told me he is apart of Blackfoot, which <https://assignbuster.com/ethnic-minorities-in-oregon/>

derived from the black-dyed moccasins that were worn by tribal members during the time of early contact with non-Indians, hints where they get their name. I stated, “ From my research I know that the Blackfoot Indians consist of four different tribes, each tribe having their own tribal leader: The Blackfoot/ siksika, blood/kainai, Pikuni/Peigan, and the North Peigan Pikuni, which one were you apart of?” with impression in the tone of his voice he says, “ wow I’m impressed, you’ve done your research, and to answer your question none, I was apart of Blackfoot and San Juan where I banded mission Indians.” During his time of membership with the Blackfoot tribe the roles that previously existed were mainly distinguished. Because they are losing population within their tribe their roles begin to decrease, but he did keep in touch with the Blackfoot culture by dancing in pow wows and continues to play the drums in performances, they have Indian superstitions, the house is decorated all in Indian items, and they continue to have celebrations at other cities of family members filled with cultural foods like fry bread.

Keep in mind that Ray is 6 foot 4 inches weighting 300 pounds of solid muscle. As I sat there and stared at him I asked, “ Have you personally ever been discriminated against because of your culture?” He laughed and asked if I was kidding. “ I was born in a town where at the time the people of the town did not like Indians so they would always help white people before me in stores.” Which I find ridiculous! There’s one thing to discriminate against a culture, but a young kid is absurd. “ During his childhood do you feel that your cultural background affected your thoughts, values, viewpoints, work life, and social experiences?” He claims that he wouldn’t change his childhood for the world. Even with the hardship and the buckets of water he

had to shower in his cultural background taught him to view no one has evil, and honesty is the basis of leading an honorable life, that all people deserve respect whatever their age or rank. He asked me to close my eyes, and to think about this- “ have you ever been in the mall and think, I could very well be the only person of my race (American Indian) out of a thousand people in this mall. That’s a crazy thought, but very possible. This thought crosses my mind everyday, every time I step into a large population of people.” This amazes me because I have never had to experience this. Never once have these feeling crosses my mind. I have in situations where I haven’t felt included but that’s more than a feeling of one not being included, it’s a feeling of hatred. In this day in age I do believe that racism still does exist but the media blows it out of proportion. This is probably because this is one of our main communication sources. He is a firm believer that media enhances the small problems we have. It’s all-negative, the first thing you hear about is murder, rape, death, then negative views on our government.

Many people call Native Americans Red Skins, which is suppose to be an insulting name toward their culture. Ray believes that Its just “ some non-natives pushing the name change because they think it offends us, but it really doesn’t offend us which is the funny part”. I do believe that people constantly try and punish Native Americans due to the overzealous campaign that try to punish all Indians for the alleged offense of a few tribes. He informed me what offends natives is people who feel sorry for us; natives are strong prideful and patriotic people. More American Indian men have volunteered to fight in World War One, World War Two, and the Korean war than all other races combined. They are very prideful people who strive to

come together to create a better union. In the minds of Native Americans they think that if ethnic people are claiming racism makes them unemployed or a criminal, its just an excuse to not work hard and they are weak minded people, no matter the race. They work hard and don't want ones pity. They work for what they got and they truly believe that what they have is what they have worked hard for.

Throughout this paper I realized that racism is still a big part of our culture today, and I truly believe that it's always going to be a problem. As awful as that sounds, we can't accept the fact that there are other types of hair color, skin color and beliefs. We will never all be the same, but we need to accept that and stop the discrimination. I learned so much from this opportunity and am so glad that I got the chance to learn more about Ray and what is most important to him.