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The U.S. Census Data on American Indians: 1990 v. 2000 *Report Compiles Economic and Social Indicators on a Decade of Striking Change*

Cambridge, MA. – Identified for decades as the poorest group in the United States, American Indians living on reservations made substantial gains, both economically and socially, during the final decade of the 20th Century. A new report released by The Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development at the Kennedy School of Government compiles the data from the 1990 and 2000 U.S. Censuses for 15 key socioeconomic indicators. The data on measures ranging from income and poverty to unemployment, education, and housing conditions indicate that, although substantial gaps remain between America's Native population and the rest of U.S. society, rapid economic and social development is taking place among gaming and non-gaming tribes alike.

American Indians on Reservations: A Databook of Socioeconomic Change Between the 1990 and 2000 Censuses assembles the publicly-available U.S. Census data for 1990 and 2000 on the socioeconomic status of single-race American Indian individuals living in Indian land areas that did and did not have gaming operations before January 1, 2000. Gaming and non-gaming reservations are compared to each other and to the U.S. as a whole. Also released in conjunction with the report is an annotated bibliography of existing research into the economic and social consequences of Indian and other gaming. The bibliography provides a guide to more than 130 studies, giving researchers brief synopses of research methods, topic coverage, data sources, and reported findings.

The databook and bibliography were produced with partial funding from the National Indian Gaming Association (NIGA), a membership organization whose voting members are American Indian tribal governments. Additional support was provided by the Christian A. Johnson Endeavor Foundation (CAJEF). Consistent with Kennedy School and Harvard University policies, neither NIGA nor CAJEF exercised any editorial control over the content of the Census report or over the contents of the annotated bibliography.

The Census report reflects a mosaic of the tremendous changes experienced by individual Indians living on reservations during a time of increasing political self-determination by Indian tribes and the unprecedented expansion in gaming activities under the federal Indian Gaming Regulatory Act of 1988. Key trends seen in the U.S. Census data include:

- Having started the 1990s with incomes lagging far behind those for the general U.S. population, American Indians in Indian Country experienced substantial growth in income per capita. Even with this Indian population rising by more than 20% between 1990 and 2000, real (inflation-adjusted) per capita Indian income rose by about one-third. For both gaming and non-gaming tribes, the overall rate of income growth substantially outstripped the 11% increase in real per capita income for the U.S. as a whole.

- From 1990 to 2000, Indian family poverty rates dropped by seven percentage points or more in non-gaming areas, and by about ten percentage points in gaming areas. For the U.S. as a whole, family poverty dropped eight-tenths of a percentage point.
- Indian unemployment rates dropped by about two-and-a-half percentage points in non-gaming areas and by more than five percentage points in gaming areas. U.S. unemployment dropped by half a percentage point.
- Housing overcrowding in Indian Country decreased during the decade, particularly in Indian areas without gaming. The percentage of American Indians living in homes with plumbing increased markedly in both gaming and non-gaming areas.
- The proportion of adult Indians on reservations with less than a 9th grade education declined substantially. In Indian areas with gaming, this put adult Indians at about par with U.S. levels. The proportion of Indian adults with college degrees rose substantially, though not enough to keep pace with the very substantial gains in overall U.S. college attainment.

“Reflecting the interest shown by the press, the public, and policymakers, this report provides the Census data in a form that compares tribes with gaming operations to tribes without gaming operations, and both are benchmarked against the data for the U.S. as a whole,” states report co-author Joseph Kalt, co-director of The Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development and Kennedy School professor. By posting the entire dataset on the Harvard Project’s website, Kalt adds, “We are encouraging others to examine and use the data. We hope to promote serious research about the whys and wherefores of economic development and social change in Indian America.”

Report co-author Jonathan Taylor, a research fellow at The Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, says, “The Census data show solid socioeconomic improvement in the lives of Indians living on reservations with *and without* gaming. What’s more, these gains came despite the fact that federal Indian funding levels have been losing ground against non-Indian domestic spending. Considering that reservation incomes *fell* by eight percent in the 1980s, the strides tribes have made in the 1990s are quite remarkable.” Taylor continues, “Despite these positive changes, average income in Indian Country is less than half the overall U.S. average. American Indians still have a long way to go to address the accumulation of long-enduring socioeconomic deficits.”

Commenting on the interests of the National Indian Gaming Association in funding the work undertaken by the Harvard Project, professor Kalt notes, “There is so much confusion, partial information, and supposition surrounding the gaming operations of tribal governments, it seemed important to pull together the basic Census data and the available research so that future public discussion, press coverage, and policymaking could begin from a common base. These reports do not solve any disputes or answer any problems, but at least they will give everyone a chance to communicate from a foundation of firm knowledge.”

The report, its underlying data, and the annotated bibliography can be accessed on the Harvard Project’s website, www.ksg.harvard.edu/hpaied.

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