



## Reparations, Reconciliation, Truth & Healing with & for Native American Communities

### THE FACTS

In September, 2020 as the United States and the world was focused on surviving the global COVID pandemic, the U.S. Supreme Court in a 5-4 vote, affirmed that the Muscogee Creek Nation in Oklahoma should have sovereign jurisdiction over all Native Americans living within its borders. Before this ruling, the state of Oklahoma could, and often did, enter tribal land and arrest and prosecute Native Americans living within Muscogee Creek borders. This ruling stripped the authority and power of the state, and in doing so advanced the cause of reparations for Native Americans by giving America's first peoples control of what happened within their nation's borders.

For Native Americans, the issue of reparations is both regionally nuanced and historically flawed. Following WWII, the federally empowered Indian Claims Commission was charged with overseeing payments to any federally recognized tribe for land that had been seized by the United States. But research done by the New York Times (2019) found that,

*"The results were disappointing for Native Americans. The commission paid out about \$1.3 billion, the equivalent of less than \$1,000 for each Native American in the United States at the time the commission dissolved in 1978."*

The catch was that this monetary award, and a subsequent \$952M of Alaskan land given in exchange for Indigenous people giving up their Aboriginal rights to the rest of the state, were held in trusts controlled by the federal government. Again, undermining the sovereignty of Indigenous people on their own land.

*"I don't think there is a one-size-fits-all policy of reparations for Indian tribes in the U.S.," Matthew Fletcher, a foundation professor of law at Michigan State University, said in 2022. "There are 574 federally recognized tribes. They are all unique and individual."*

He noted that the case for Native American reparations must include discussions of land, sovereignty, restoration of language and culture, accurate education about Indigenous peoples in the Americas, and natural resource protections -- and all must be co-created or led by Native people.

### THE BUSINESS CASE

The case for reparations for Indigenous people is anchored in first acknowledging the truth about the atrocities committed against Native peoples and the multi-generational effects of these atrocities on Native people and land.

While financial reparations are important, the reconciliation of America's dark history and the dismantling of systems that continue to harm Native Americans is equally critical for sustainable, ethnically relevant and responsive action.

### PROMISING PRACTICES

1. A 2023 **Minneapolis Federal Reserve** study documents how character-based lending criteria predicted loan delinquency better than traditional credit scores at 11 Native CDFIs. These organizations provide essential access to capital to Native Americans, who have the highest proportion of unbanked households at 16.3%.
2. In 2021, nuns representing the **Sisters of the Order of St. Benedict** issued a letter apologizing for their role in the forced relocation of children and cultural erasure perpetuated by Native boarding schools operated by the Benedictines on the White Earth and Red Lake reservations in Northern Minnesota.
3. The **Decolonizing Wealth Project** has invested almost \$2 million in their #Case4Reparations program to support Indigenous and Black communities in the fight for reparations to build the case for local, regional and national policies that will inform the way wealth is redistributed by institutions and governments.



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