**Myth #1—Native People aren’t around anymore. They belong to the past and exist only in history books and as artifacts in museums.**

**The truth:** 5 ½ million Native people are now living contemporary lives in the U.S. Although many live on 325 reservations, fully 71 percent are now city-dwellers.

DO... learn about Native people from authentic Native American sources showing them realistically as they were and are now.

**Myth #2—Native People all look the same.**

**The Truth:** Some are tall, some short. Some fair-skinned, some dark. (William Penn described the Lenape as like Europeans with a tan.) Some have high cheekbones, some do not. Hair and eye color vary greatly.

DO... be aware Native people are in many ways just like you. They look like you, dress like you, work and play like you, go on Facebook and tweet like you, etc. etc.

**Myth #3—Native People share the same culture.**

**The truth:** there were once 700 Native Nations in what became the U.S. Today there are 566 federally recognized tribes that evolved in dramatically different environments. All of them created separate languages, religions, histories, economic, political, and social systems, customs, and traditions based on the resources and limitations of their surroundings.

DO...realize there are many ways of identifying and addressing Native People. The U.S. Census now categorizes them as American Indians (AI), or as Alaska Natives (AN), or as multi-racial. They are also sometimes called Native Americans, Indians, indigenous or aboriginal peoples, First Nations, Indian Country.

DON’T...use a general term such as “‘Indians or “Native Americans” when referring to a specific Native tribe or Nation such as the Lenape. (You would not use the word “European” when talking about Germans.) Similarly, avoid generalizations such as “Indians lived in tipis” when such cultural practices were specific to certain cultures. (You would not say, “Europeans lived in castles.”)

DON’T...use generalizations implying Native People are without human faults. For example, the statement, “Native People never wasted anything” is impossible to reconcile with true human behavior. It is more proper to claim that Native People disliked waste or tried to discourage waste.

DO....keep in mind that Native American identity is not so much “racial” as “political.” Because they are indigenous people, Native Americans share the same relationship to the U.S. government, but they form distinct Nations spreading across North America. Some are federally (=legally) recognized by the U.S, Bureau of Indian Affairs, but others exist as self-identified tribes, bands, nations, and social groups.

**Myth #4—Native people are inferior and do not deserve the same rights as other Americans.**

**The truth:** From the time Europeans first arrived here, strongly negative stereotypes portraying all Native people as warlike, cruel, barbaric, fierce, primitive, stupid, lazy, etc. have permeated our popular culture. These unfair words and images have allowed us to rationalize marginalizing, dehumanizing, and demonizing The First People. They are propaganda created and promoted by those who seek to justify the U.S. government’s theft of 1.5 billion
acres of Native American land, the extermination of an estimated 1 to 4—OR MORE—million Native People, and past and present attempts to suppress and destroy Native cultures.

We can fight the hold stereotypes have on our attitudes and actions by recognizing the forms they take, then changing how we think and what we say and do. The following DO’s and DON'TS correct misinformation or behaviors that deliberately or unwittingly misrepresent, demean, or condescend to Native Americans...

Do not use terms such as squaw, brave or papoose. Woman, man, and baby are correct.

Avoid phrases such as acting like a bunch of wild Indians, Indian giver, going on the warpath, let’s have a powwow, sitting Indian style (cross legged), walking Indian file, paleface, redskin, etc.

Do not assume that a person of Native American heritage knows anything about what happened in the past or is an expert on his culture.

Do not refer to the European colonists as the “first settlers.” That phrase implies that Native Americans just roamed across the land. Native People lived in villages on this continent for thousands of years.

Avoid using the term prehistoric. In common usage this means “before the existence of European methods of recording events of the past.” The term pre-contact is more accurate and refers to the time before Europeans were present on this continent.

Avoid use of the word primitive. Native People and others of long ago were quite able to take care of themselves and had technology which we today would find difficult or even impossible to master.

Do not assume that the skills of Native adults in the past can be easily learned by children. This assumption makes Native life appear to be simple and childlike. It takes years for people to master adult-level skills.

If a story contains both Native People and Euro-Americans, do not use Indians to refer to the former and people to refer to the latter. Distinguish the characters by their nationalities.

Do not dress up animals in pictures as “Indians.”

Do not use Native People as objects to be counted or alphabetized.

Do not dress up as “Indians.” The Lenape in particular prefer to reserve the right of their traditional dress for themselves. Even among Native People, some items of dress must be earned before permission is given to wear them. An example of such a no-no: decorating preschoolers with war bonnets, face paint, and rubber tomahawks.

Do not attempt to re-enact Native ceremonies. That is considered sacrilegious.

Do not use images or words associated with Native People as mascots or as names for groups. By trading on and reinforcing stereotypes, such practices hurt feelings and even incite verbal or physical abuse. Native names and “Indian” mascots for sports teams of every kind on every level are amazingly common all over the US. One reportedly incomplete database includes over 42,000 of them. In recent years that racist tradition has created increasing controversy and sparked protests such as the one held at a 2014 Washington Redskins game.