

“TO LIVE AND THRIVE” IN MASSACHUSETTS

Native American Perspectives on Wealth

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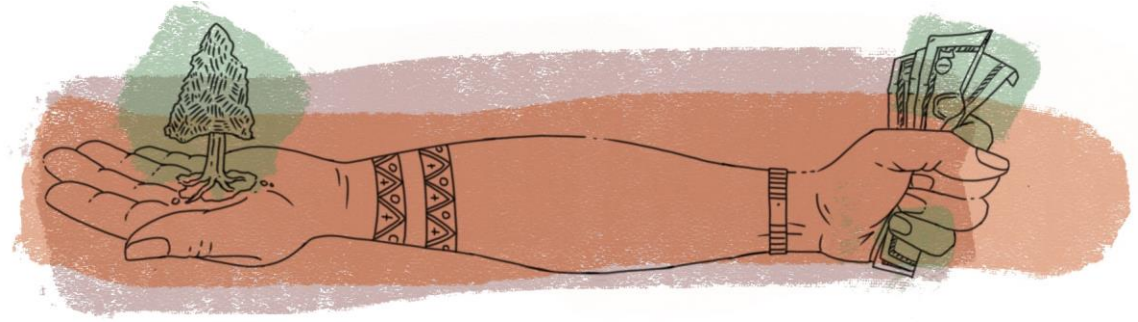
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Introduction



Mission of INENAS

Minimal information available related to Native residents of the Commonwealth due to data constraints

Role of this report is to center Native voices and experiences on the topic of Native Wealth





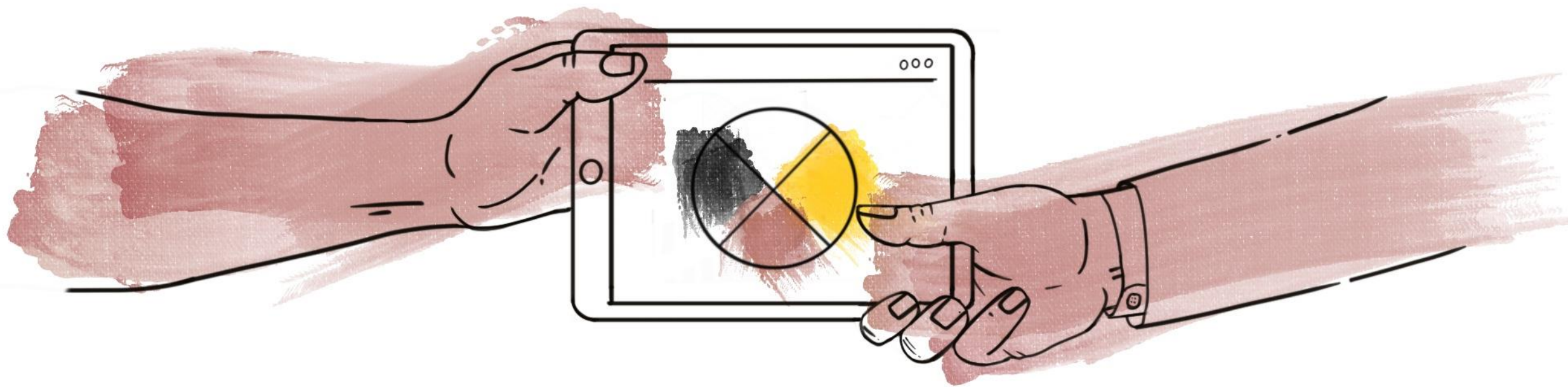
Historical Context



Historical Context of Study

- Protected status of Native towns/districts before Allotment Act (no taxes on Native lands by local towns)
- Impact of MA Allotment and Enfranchisement Act (loss of protections for Native lands led to land loss and homes on these lands)
- Massachusetts Commission on Indian Affairs established
- Failure to establish Indian Housing Authority by Commonwealth





Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative Analysis

- No quantitative estimate of Native People's wealth exist in Massachusetts
- Socioeconomic characteristics suggest that wealth accumulation is difficult because compared to the total population, Native Peoples have
 - Lower median household income
 - Lower levels homeownership
 - Limited business ownership



Qualitative Study



Qualitative Study: Focus Groups

- Five 90-minute focus groups
- 18 Participants:
 - From 5 regional Tribes, plus one group of “ex-pats”
 - Aged 20s to 70s
 - 10 women, 7 men, and one Two-spirit person
- We asked about:
 - Defining wealth
 - Historical factors and present-day barriers affecting wealth
 - Experiences of wealth and what building wealth looks like
 - What is need to build and maintain wealth

Focus Group Findings

- Native definitions of wealth are more inclusive and values-driven
- Land is central to Native wealth
- Education is key
- Structural change is needed



Defining Wealth from a Native Perspective

- Native definitions of wealth are more inclusive and values-driven:
 - Wealth as a community asset: collective resources, shared traditions, and mutual support
 - Comfort and stability over accumulating material wealth
 - Culture and community as forms of wealth

*Financial security, or having a high income, or owning a lot of property are things that we bring from our perspective as living in the dominant culture, and the **idea of cultural wealth and the idea of having enough, and everyone having enough, is something that we bring from the Native culture.** And those two things are sometimes diametrically opposed.*

– Focus group participant

The Centrality of Land to Native Wealth

- Land is central to Native Wealth:
 - Core to cultural, spiritual, and community wealth
 - State and federal policies ruptured connections to land

*When you can't steward lands, and you can't be on lands that are connected and that can sustain us in a traditional way – whether it be for our traditions and food or whether it be in our practices, spiritually or just communally – how do you reconcile that within yourself? **How do you heal that relationship with the land, with yourself, if you don't have those opportunities?***

– Focus group participant

Stolen Land

- The effects of colonialism, racism, and policies such as the Allotment Act of 1869 and the Dawes Act of 1887, persist today

*I want everybody to look at what was taken from us in terms of the land, our territory, our homelands. We can't build our communities and our families when things have been taken from us. We can't pass on. **We don't have generational wealth like others do, because we're already behind that eight ball, because things are being taken from us.***

– Focus group participant

Repairing Historical and Ongoing Harms

- Structural change is needed:
 - State policy changes, such as expanded access to housing programs and property tax exemptions
 - Repairing historical harms: solutions need to come from within Native communities

*There's just such a long historical trauma and stain on our collective consciousness, even over the hundreds of years.... **We do need to deal with the reality of what has been done to Native people before we can really, really create true opportunities for Indigenous people to have long term wealth.***

– Focus group participant

Conclusion



Native residents have important stories to tell
Qualitative approaches provide opportunity to
center Native voices on topic of wealth and can
do so for other topics



Contact us

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