

Why I am torn by the casino debate

By Nicole Allard (Nicky LaMarco)

I believe Native Americans, especially those on reservations, should be able to start any business they deem necessary anywhere they feel necessary. I feel that the Natives here in Maine, and all over the country, deserve a break. They deserve a break from poverty levels that are higher than any other ethnic group. They deserve a break from having to live on reservations that seem to have been deliberately placed on isolated lands. They deserve a break from a federal government that tries to control everything they do and forces them to live on poor land when, in truth, all of America's soil belongs to them.

Yet, I also feel uncomfortable about a casino being built in my area. I was born and raised in North Berwick, Maine. I decided to stay here, because of the peaceful atmosphere of Maine. I love Maine, just like every other person who enjoys this land. I like not hearing gunshots, police cars racing by, and screams from victims of who knows what, every day. I have two young daughters, and a fiancée. We want to live in peace and without fear. We want to be able to travel southern Maine without horrendous traffic, and crime-ridden streets.

My fiancée was born and raised in Boston. The stories I hear from him about his childhood in a big city are not stories I wish to hear my children telling years from now.

People move here to escape the violent life that cities permit. People vacation here to temporarily flee their hectic, stress filled lives. Maine is known as a state that cares about its land, people, and natural beauty. It is not known for casinos, cheap lounge acts, or people throwing away money they need to pay bills or buy food.

I wonder if we are ever going to compensate the Native People of Maine properly for all society has taken from them; the land our houses are built on, the water we drink, the rivers we enjoy. This is the real question that never seems to get answered. When are we going to start addressing the real issues that separate our two peoples: Greed, racial and economic segregation, and ignorance.

So, I am torn on the casino debate. I am torn, because I am Native American and I have seen and heard the discrimination against our people. It continues to this day and I'm not sure if it will ever stop. I have learned who my ancestors were and where I come from. I have visited my relatives on their reservation. I have seen their struggles and frustrations. I have read about my ancestors and I can feel the immensity of their pain. I must say that if I have an opportunity to vote on the casino proposal I will vote no. My family comes first; their safety is everything to me. But, I cannot bury my concern for my fellow Native People. What else can they do, I wonder? What other options do they have to create a profit to improve their lives beyond mere subsistence?

I have agonized over these questions these past months. I have asked myself why my people would want to build something that would go against all of their beliefs; if they have lost touch with their ways of life, if they have finally conformed to the government vision of making them

docile American consumers. When I went with my family to the reservation where some of my Native relatives live I expected to see some of my heritage. I expected to learn something tangible about where I come from but I was disappointed. I saw nothing of our ancient traditions or the teachings of my ancestors.

All I see today of Native Americans is artificially replicated in movies and I wonder why people think of Native Americans only as part of the past instead of part of the future?

Our numbers have actually increased over the past century? We are still here and we will not be forced out of modern society. We will not be hushed or shoved aside. So we continue to look for solutions to our predicament and that is why a casino has so much appeal even though it cuts down more trees, covers more land and brings more cars that contributes to the slow destruction of our earth. The same earth that once provided Native American People with everything they could ever want.

The casino question is one of the most difficult questions a Native American will have to answer and that is why reaching my answer has left me torn between my love of my people and my love of my family.

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