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**Tribal Government Gaming in the United States: Changing Cultural Currencies**

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Abstract:

Since the 1987 US Supreme Court decision in Cabazon acknowledged the right of American Indian Nations to pursue gambling as a means of economic development, over 200 tribal governments have established some sort of gambling operation on their reservation lands. What distinguishes tribal government gaming from other U.S. gambling industries is that many Indian Nations are directly investing gaming revenues into cultural production and preservation. In addition to these cultural projects, Indian Nations are beginning to invest in media messages about their history and identity through education, public relations and political activism.

This address will examine the ways American Indian Nations are investing gaming revenues in order to revitalize their communities culturally, economically and politically. For example, some American Indian Nations are using their revenues for innovative projects such as museums and language recovery programs, establishing new traditions to carry forward and preserving time-honored cultural institutions. Others have diversified their investments and developed other successful businesses, countering the public perception that gaming is successful for tribal governments only because of outside managers. This address will also examine the relationship between these community projects and the ongoing process of expanding the legal and political engagement of American Indian communities at all levels of government.

This address will also examine the ways that an anthropological approach to the study of tribal governmental gaming can re-direct the gaming debate by bringing a critical engagement with such integral concerns as social change, cultural production, group identification/identity, tradition and modernity, political economy and nationalism. By linking community revitalization with an increase in the imagining of political possibility and opportunity for Indian Nations, this address will go beyond a discussion of profits and gains and consider the more profound question of how tribal government gaming has provided an opportunity for American Indian communities to define their cultural, economic and political future for themselves.