

Universal Basic Income as Indigenous Reparations: Connecting Economic Sovereignty and Land Justice



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BACKGROUND

- For centuries, the United States government enacted policies of systematic land theft against Indigenous nations.
- This violent dispossession ripped away the foundational economic resources of these communities.
- As a direct consequence, Indigenous peoples face persistent poverty and diminished self-determination today.
- While the demand for land back remains important, this study explores UBI as an additional possibility of repair.

THE MEANING OF LAND

- Glen Coulthard, “**grounded normativity**”: “Indigenous land-connected practices and longstanding experiential knowledge that inform and structure our ethical engagements with the world and our relationships with human and nonhuman others over time” (Coulthard 13)
- The return of land is essential, so UBI should be complementary, not a replacement
- Most former attempts to provide reparations by the U.S. have been weak, and usually benefit the U.S. more than the Native communities

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Unconditional cash transfers may help address the economic legacy of Indigenous dispossession, but they must be Indigenous-led and complemented by land justice efforts



The **Montana Water Rights Protection Act** passed in 2020 made it possible for the **CKST Bison Range** to be **returned to the Kootenai Tribes** in 2022 (Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, 2022).



The case of the **Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians** and their casino dividends displays that a **guaranteed fixed income** can lead to reduced poverty, greater mental health, and an enhanced education (Costello et al., 2010).

METHODS

Collected:

- Historical records of land dispossession.
- Indigenous philosophies on economy, ethics, & community.
- Analyses of UBI models & similar cash transfers.

Tested With:

- **Comparative Lens:** Aligning UBI principles with Indigenous values & historical context.
- **Case Study (Cherokee):** Examining real-world impacts of unconditional cash transfers
- **Sovereignty Check:** Assessing UBI's potential to empower vs. perpetuate dependency.

FINDINGS

- **Potential:** Unconditional cash could boost economic stability and individual agency.
- **Alignment:** Some UBI aspects mirror Indigenous concepts of shared well-being.
- **Limitation:** UBI *cannot* replace the fundamental need for land back and self-determination.
- **Caution:** State-led UBI risks repeating paternalistic patterns without Indigenous control.
- **Core Finding:** UBI offers a *potential economic* tool for repair, but must be Indigenous-led and complement land justice efforts

REFERENCES

