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American Indian Mortality in the Late Nineteenth Century: The Impact of Federal

Assimilation Policies on a Vulnerable Population J. David Hacker, Michael R. Haines NBER Working Paper No. 12572 Issued in October 2006 NBER Program(s): DAE An NBER digest for this paper is available. Abstract Under the urging of late nineteenth-century humanitarian reformers, U.S. policy toward American Indians shifted from removal and relocation efforts to state-sponsored attempts to "civilize" Indians through allotment of tribal lands, citizenship, and forced education. There is little consensus, however, whether and to what extent federal assimilation efforts played a role in the stabilization and recovery of the American Indian population in the twentieth century. In this paper, we rely on a new IPUMS sample of the 1900 census of American Indians and census-based estimation methods to investigate the impact of federal assimilation policies on childhood mortality. We use children ever born and children surviving data included in the censuses to estimate childhood mortality and [responses to] several questions unique to the Indian enumeration [including tribal affiliation, degree of "white blood", type of dwelling, ability to speak English, and whether a citizen by allotment] to construct multivariate models of child mortality. The results suggest that mortality among American Indians in the late nineteenth century was very high - approximately 62% [standardize as % or percent throughout] higher than that for the white population. The impact of assimilation policies was mixed. Increased ability to speak English was associated with lower child mortality, while allotment of land in severalty was associated with higher mortality. The combined effect was a very modest four percent [as above] decline in mortality. As of 1900, the government campaign to assimilate Indians had yet to result in a significant decline in Indian mortality while incurring substantial economic and cultural costs.

<http://www.nber.org/papers/w10299>

The Best of Times, the Worst of Times: Health and Nutrition in Pre-Columbian America

Richard H. Steckel NBER Working Paper No. 10299 Issued in February 2004 NBER Program(s): DAE Abstract Lack of evidence has been the major obstacle to understanding trends and differences in human welfare over the millennia. This paper explains and applies methods that are obscure to most academics and essentially unknown to the general public. A millennial perspective is best obtained from skeletal remains, which depict not only childhood health conditions but also processes of degeneration that accompany aging and strenuous physical effort. Compiled into an index of health, data from 23 localities as part of a large collaborative project on the Western Hemisphere reveal diverse health conditions for the pre-Columbian population. For reasons not yet understood populations moved over time into less healthy ecological environments. The analysis has implications for understanding environmental determinants of health, the pattern of European conquest, pre-contact population size, investigating human adaptation to climate change, and discovering prime movers of very long-term economic growth.

<http://www.nber.org/papers/w9519>

What Can Be Learned from Skeletons that Might Interest Economists, Historians and Other Social Scientists?

Richard H. Steckel NBER Working Paper No. 9519* Issued in March 2003 NBER Program(s): DAE Abstract Economists and other scholars have long sought to measure and analyze long-term trends and differences in social performance. Average stature supplements and lengthens data series on traditional measures of life expectancy and real GDP per capita. This paper presents a methodology for using skeletal remains to greatly extend the chronological and cultural reach of anthropometric measures. Bones are widely available for study and unlike stature, they portray health over the life cycle, depicting both childhood and processes of aging and degeneration. The paper briefly explains seven skeletal measures widely used in physical anthropology and discusses procedures for summarizing community health in the form of an index. Results are based on a sample of over 12,000 individuals who lived at 65 localities in the Western Hemisphere over the past several millennia. Results challenge conceptions of the pre-Columbian disease environment, and the methods can be used to test models of very long-term economic growth and to study important aspects of human welfare during climate change. *Published: Steckel, Richard H. "What Can Be Learned From Skeletons That Might Interest Economists, Historians, And Other Social Scientists?," American Economic Review, 2003, v93(2,May),213-220.