

The life of Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indian and Indian Gaming

Daniel Park
University of Washington
American Indian Studies 230
Indian Gaming and Casinos

November 28, 2013

Summary:

The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, federally recognized tribe of Indians, is one of the biggest tribe of Indians in the United States. In their past history, they have gone through Trails of Tears moving from Mississippi to Oklahoma, to many difficulties fighting for their sovereignty. With many difficulties coming their way, the Choctaw tribe had started participating in Indian gaming, which helped them slowly grow economically. As the Choctaw tribe practiced more and more of their gaming, they were able to grow significantly

Background

Why is it that our culture is changing over time? Is it because we are accepting more of what is given to us from our society or is it because our culture has many flaws? The Mississippi band of Choctaw tribe are fighting hard to keep their culture alive and strong, but with many problems they face with the United States government, they are struggling to keep it alive. Through many trials, the Choctaw tribe members are staying communicated to keep each other accountable and to keep as much of their culture they can possibly keep. At the same time, as the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians are trying to keep their culture alive, they face many difficulties because it is hard to revive a dying culture without the economic help.

The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indian tribe have faced many issues with regulation and state policies to run gambling for their economic growth. Dealing with many attempts at being removed, which caused the Trail of Tears, the Choctaw tribe has learned to adapt to economy for the time. The Choctaw tribe, being federally recognized was able to go through many trials and came to a point where they were being helped by the state. The help all started with the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA) being passed and allowing Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians to operate gamings of many kinds. As time went on, not only were the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians able to operate gaming, they were given permission to develop their level of gaming into class III gaming which involved high-stakes. Being able to operate Class III gaming allowed more regulations and licensing to be applied to at casinos in Mississippi. With this much success, the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians were slowly able to get back on their feet and build a Silver Star casino in Pearl River Resort.

Have you ever wondered what it is like to have a casino in your neighborhood? The Pearl River Resort had opened the Silver Star casino in the tribal land of The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians in the year 1994 and many changes have been made. With so much money coming in from the players, some would wonder where the money would all go to, who get's it, and what would happen to the rest of the money that is not being used by anyone. The fact is that there really is not an amount of money that is not used by anyone. There are many different ways of how revenues are spent and the factors that are included in the development of casinos in a tribal territory. From the beginning of the tribal times to now, the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indian tribe has faced many difficulties trying to earn their sovereignty back from those who had taken it away from them. The fact was that it was very difficult to even get a portion of what they had lost back. Throughout the quarter, I have done many researches and background findings. Through all the research, I have concluded that in this final study of the American Indian Gaming for Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, this paper is going to focus on how the tribe had suffered and have conquered culturally by using content analysis of tribal and casino websites and social media online messages to stay culturally updated with each other, politically through the connection between tribe's casinos and state through policies, regulation, and licenses, and economically by seeing how the development of casinos like Silver Star casino has economically helped boost up the economy in positive outcome as well as having negative side effects to all the revenues coming in from the casino, to be where they are right now being federally recognized as one of the biggest tribe of Indians to first to be here. The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians are not back to their ancestral land, and probably never will get 100% of their

land back to how it once used to be, but through reformation the tribe has given themselves a chance to continue history in their modern days.

Findings

The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Tribe are known to be one of the biggest tribes known in the Southeast, ranging from 15,000 tribe members in the year 1650 to 21,500 members in 1764. As the years have passed by, the numbers of tribe members have declined back to about 15,000 by the year 1814. The tribe spoke Muskogean, which was very familiar to the Chickasaw tribe language. One special recognition that the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indian tribe have received is what is now called the Code talk. The Code talk started during the World War I when the United States used Choctaw Indians as a source of communication because other countries were not able to decipher the code used. This allowed the United States army and marines to communicate with each other without having to worry about the codes being figured out. This famous code talk has carried on to even World War II where the Navajo tribes have used their own code to help the United States during the war. When warfare started in the 18th century, the Choctaw tribe fought against the English Chickasaw, and Creeks in favor of their French allies. Even through all the warfare history in Choctaw tribe, they are mainly known for their agricultural goods and warfare was mainly used for defensive stance. In the 19th century, which is the time when the population of the Choctaw tribe had decreased by a large sum, the Choctaw tribe went through a hardship known as Trail of Tears. Secretary of War Lewis Cross was the supervisor for the removal of the Choctaws from Mississippi to where they are located now which is Southern Oklahoma. Each year

starting from 1831, their plan was to remove one third of the Choctaws from the land of Mississippi and many Choctaw tribe members have died through the process of moving from Mississippi to Oklahoma. Leaving their agricultural goods aside due to the lack of time given for them to pack and get ready to move to Oklahoma, Choctaw tribe were on a journey to a new beginning in Oklahoma. During that journey, devastating events have occurred due to the cold blizzard weather they were facing during their months and months of mobilization. With the lack of food they had, they ended up eating up all their herd of animals they were able to bring along throughout the movement. As a part of removing the Choctaw tribe, when they were moving from Mississippi to Oklahoma, they were forced to move using boats when there's water so that the tribe members have to decide on which animal they would have to kill and offer up.

In the year 2013, there stand a good 10,000 citizens of Choctaw spread throughout the nation. Even though the Choctaw are spread out in this country, majority of the tribe members reside in their originally Mississippi. In the year 1994, the Mississippi band of Choctaw Indians have gathered to build a casino named Pearl River Resort. Instead of going back to their agricultural goods, which was what they were known for, the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indian tribe went to Indian gaming like casinos. Ever since the opening of the casino in 1994, Silver Star casino in Pearl River Resort has been popular and has helped the Mississippi Choctaw tribe stay connected with their mutual community and culturally. It may not have been the way the Choctaw tribes have run their culture centuries ago, but this was a way for them to stay running economically, financially, and culturally. With majority of the employees of the casino being tribe members, and the casino being run by the tribe, they were able to financially

get support to keep their culture alive and going. Even through this was not the way for them to grow their culture ideally, it was a way for Choctaw tribe to gather with members of the same tribe. Both the Mississippi band of Choctaw Indians and Pearl River Resort are connected through Media. Even though they are not connected with each other strongly, they show that to some extent they are with each other. The tribe reminds social media users about all the events they have going on which are a part of their culture as well as events to get to know the tribe further and with more dept. Casino on the other hand is all about advertising their events to attract more people to them.

When the IGRA was first passed allowing Choctaw tribes to operate casinos, there were many different reasons. According to “An Exploratory Framework to Evaluate Casino Gaming” by Jason C. Irle, casino gaming was legalized “not only a result of the IGRA of 1988 but also of a need to generate governmental revenue” (Irle, 29). This was just a way for government to try to generate more revenue. When revenue first came in to the tribe, they were mainly used for purposes like expansions to attract more tourists to generate more revenue than they have before. The use of revenue from the gaming industry was established in solid form for the Choctaw Tribe. As IGRA required tribes to spend portion of casino gaming revenues towards education, they used revenues to establish scholarship programs that provide financial assistance to tribal members who were pursuing post-secondary education. As the level of education started increasing, the tribe then split it’s revenue to create higher wage job opportunities for those with higher skills and abilities to specialize in certain areas. The higher wage jobs were not only for people with good education, but it also persuaded other tribe members to strive for greater and higher educations than they are receiving. Tribe members striving for higher

education and specializing in specific field then lead to using more revenues towards technology advances. This advancement in technology allowed Silver Star Casino in Pearl River Resort to be one of the biggest resorts in the state of Mississippi employing thousands and thousands of tribe members providing them with funds to live. As Silver Star casino gathered more revenues, the casino kept increasing their land along with the amount of machines and tables there used to be.

As the casino got bigger, it required more licenses among the employees and more responsibilities for the casino. Having nearly 2,500 slot machines and more than 75 tables, it required all employees to have licenses in order to be part of the employee team at the casino. As the number of opportunity for gambling increased, Pearl River Resort was concerned about customers and posted addiction symptoms on the casino website so that when a person would come through about three or more of those symptoms, they are addicted and can even get guidance through the bank. Symptoms like “jeopardizing family, education, job or career, loss of control, and gambling to escape problems” were all on the list so that when customers were facing multiple symptoms, Mississippi gaming resorts can guide you to getting out of addiction. By having addiction help and guidance for the players, the casino gets more responsibility recognition. Casinos not only had requirements within the casinos with their employees but they also had to go through all the regulations given by the state.

Through all the regulations that the tribe had to go through with the state and federal, there was an issue of being sovereign in their own lands. In many ways possible, the government and state tried to attach their part of the strings to any regulations that has to do with casino gaming so that they will also be able to get some revenues out of casino

gaming but the Choctaw tribes thought otherwise. The tribes including many other tribes were against many ideas and regulations from the state because even before IGRA, the Indian reservations were up to the tribe government.

When you think of casinos, the first thing that usually comes to your mind is people who are spending money to earn more money, people who do not use their money wisely, or just people who are not responsible with money. And there is a negative aura around the casino area. But what we usually do not think about is what casinos do with the revenue made and how those revenues are being spent. The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indian Tribe has built Silver Star casino in the year 1994 and it has helped the economic boost of the tribe in many different ways. With more revenue coming in from the development of a bigger casino, the tribe is earning more money from the casino to keep their cultural events alive. The revenue not only goes towards the tribe culture, but it goes towards fire departments, police stations in the Gulf Coast. The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians emphasize a lot on housing; which include loans to their tribal members and tribal house rental programs to help members find places to live. Even though it is not free money for the members, the revenues coming out of the casino are helping tribal members find roofs to be under and places to sleep peacefully.

As casinos are being developed, they started diversifying assets to attract in more business and revenue from tourists. Casinos that have been developed are not only just casinos, but resort with golf courses for more diverse gaming and different ways to collect revenue. Having different assets is a great boost to the casino's revenue because many times, casinos go flat and stop increasing in their gaming revenues but having different assets helps casinos revenue go up even when the gaming tables are on a

plateau. For instance, players might want to be more outside in the cool theme park or even just enjoying a nice relaxing round of golf. In those kinds of situations, the assets are big help because it helps the players to really enjoy a variety of games. It also builds sustainable communities because it keeps tourists coming to visit the casino and might even get the chance to learn about the tribal culture, at the same time also keeping locals in town instead of going out to spend their money on games.

As good as developments are, there are also negative sides to casinos developing in the tribal lands. One of the main things that have come up is the value of tribal members land decreasing due to the amount of pollution that the casino will be creating with along with all the cars traveling causing traffic amount to increase. Not only that, but because of casinos, local stores and restaurants will become substitutes once casinos are open leaving local businesses without incomes for themselves. Instead of helping out the community, the casino and the local businesses are playing this cycle of the casino taking business and local businesses losing business forcing them to get financial help from casinos; which was in first place supposed to be their revenue. In order to try to keep players at a loss at gaming, they serve alcohol that is a smart business action, but when those intoxicated players step out of the casino it really becomes a different story. Drunk drivers lead to DUI accidents, which could really be a serious injury/death situation. Not only might gaming cause physical death, but a lot of the times it will cause moral decline and even family separation due to addictions. Gaming has a lot of influences on players and addiction is one of the worst influences. In our society, casinos are never understood as a positive thing. The way we understand casinos is just a place people go to have a good time and to do whatever they want; usually involving

irresponsibility. But the significance of this case study is really to show that casinos help tribes economically. With the revenues that are being distributed to the tribe members and society, casinos help tribal members be economically stable more than they would without casino's help. Casinos will help individuals grow, but as a society in general there are also some negative affects that come with developments of casinos who are higher rate of crimes and moral declines of players who are influenced by gaming.

Conclusion

Through many difficulties that the tribe has faced, the Mississippi band of Choctaw Indian tribe has worked hard to keep their culture going. The cultural significance of this study is that as time is passing by, everyone is really conforming to the society in order to, this this case, keep it's culture alive. Even though it really is not the ideal way of keeping their culture the Choctaw tribe are doing their best in whatever way possible to keep their tribe connected to their ancestral culture. I believe that even though the tribe and their social media is doing everything they can to reach out to people about their culture, more people would be drawn to the tribe if casinos could also make the effort to show some support for the tribes. In the future, scholars might study how tribal casinos change online messages to reflect more of the American Indian identity and its websites to even show support for the tribe that their casino came from. The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians have started from the bottom of the economy to building themselves up to building many casinos to generate revenue for the tribe. This was done in many steps that required state conflicts, licensing of many tribe members to be able to work inside the casino. As the casino got bigger, gaming was more secured with regulations and policies that were expected from the state, casino, and the players.

There were many regulations and policies that the Choctaw tribe had not agreed with because they thought it was really abusing their sovereign power and did not want to be apart of anything risky. But through the struggles of growing with the state, the economic growth of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians is also growing and now the state is now trying to offer the tribe with offers. Through many struggles that the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indian tribe has faced culturally, politically, and economically, they have been able to get back on track to try to revive their culture. Through this case of study, we have learned how the Indian gaming relates to the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians.

PAGE 11

APA Citation:

Mississippi band of Choctaw Indians. (2013). Retrieved from <http://www.choctaw.org/>

Geospatial Group. (2012). *MS Archaeology Trails*. Retrieved from <http://trails.mdah.ms.gov/default.aspx>

Pearl river resort. (2002). Retrieved from <http://www.pearlriverresort.com/>

Culberson, J. (2011, November). *Choctaws were hastened in starting "trail of tears"*. Retrieved from Culberson, J. (2011, November). Choctaws were hastened in starting "trail of tears". Retrieved from <http://www.ualr.edu/sequoyah/uploads/2011/11/CulChoc.htm>

Transparency Mississippi. (2013). *Mississippi gaming commission*. Retrieved from <http://www.msgamingcommission.com/>

MBCI. (2011). *Economic development history*. Retrieved from <http://www.choctaw.org/government/development/economicDevHistory.html>

Irle, J. (2011). *An exploratory framework to evaluate casino gaming legislation: A preliminary assessment*. Retrieved from <https://digital.library.txstate.edu/bitstream/handle/10877/3607/fulltext.pdf>