

**CULTURAL
AWARENESS**

OBSERVANCE



**American Indian and Alaska Native
Heritage Month
Information Base**

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NOVEMBER

American Indian Heritage Month
People



Photo from deomi.org

In 1914, Red Fox James, a Blackfeet Indian, rode on horseback from state to state, seeking support for a day to honor American Indians. A year later, James presented the endorsements of 24 state governments to the White House. There is no record of a national day being proclaimed, despite his efforts.

<http://www.nativeamericanheritagemonth.gov/about/>

Sequoyah, a Cherokee who was born around 1776 in present-day Tennessee, was a silversmith who joined the U.S. military during the War of 1812. Observing how the White soldiers communicated via the written word, he invented a written alphabet for the Cherokee language, using 85 written symbols to represent syllables. He later became a statesman and diplomat for the Cherokee people.

<http://www.sequoyahmuseum.org/index.cfm/m/5>

Starting in World War I and again in World War II, the U.S. military employed a number of American Indian servicemen to use their tribal languages as a military code that could not be broken by the enemy. These “code talkers” came from many different tribes, including Chippewa, Choctaw, Creek, Crow, Comanche, Hopi, Navajo, Seminole, and Sioux. During World War II, the Navajos constituted the largest component within that elite group.

<http://www.bia.gov/FAQs/index.htm>

Maria Tallchief, an Osage Indian, became a successful ballerina and in 1981 founded the Chicago City Ballet with her sister Marjorie. Tallchief is considered America’s first major prima ballerina, and is the first Native American to hold the rank.

The New York Public Library, *American History Desk Reference*, pg.30

At the 1964 Olympics, Sioux Indian 1st Lt. Billy Mills set a world record for and won the gold medal in the 10k race event, and still remains the only American to win gold in the event. Following this accomplishment, Mills played a keystone part in the foundation of Running Strong for American Indian Youth – an organization dedicated to helping Native American youth lead healthy lifestyles and take pride in their heritage.

<http://indianyouth.org/billy-mills>

Ohiyesa, also known as Dr. Charles Alexander Eastman, was born in 1858 on a Santee Sioux reservation in Minnesota. He graduated from Dartmouth College, and then from medical school. After graduating, he worked as a doctor for the Indian Health Service on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, where he treated those injured in the U.S. Army attack on Lakota Chief Big Foot's band at Wounded Knee. In 1910, he helped to establish the Boy Scouts of America.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/1900/peopleevents/pandeAMEX38.html>

Nancy Ward was the daughter of a Delaware man and a Cherokee woman. When her husband, a Cherokee warrior, was killed in a battle she donned men's clothing and took over her husband's role in the fight. In recognition of her actions she was given a position on the Council of Chiefs, making her possibly the first Cherokee woman to wield such power. She was awarded the title of "*Beloved Woman*," which gave her the responsibility of deciding the fates of prisoners, and she spent the remainder of her years working for Indian-White peace.

The New York Public Library, *American History Desk Reference*, pg.30

In 2002, astronaut and Chickasaw Indian John Bennett Herrington became the first enrolled member of a Native American tribe to orbit the Earth. He carried a ceramic Hopi pot emblazoned with three corn motifs into space, 250 miles above the surface of the planet. Herrington also carried a decorated eagle feather given to him by an Elder of the American Indian Science and Engineering Society, which was floated in the International Space Station airlock.

<http://www.jsc.nasa.gov/Bios/htmlbios/herringt.html>

As Commissioner of Indian Affairs under President Franklin D. Roosevelt, John Collier crusaded to prevent the absorption of the Native American culture into mainstream American society, and questioned the wisdom of such decisions. During his time in office, Collier reformed Indian religious freedom, public relief and conservation programs, as well as protection and retention of tribal land.

<http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED167315>

Keith Harper, a member of the Cherokee Nation, became the first member of a federally recognized Indian tribe to serve at the U.S. Ambassador level when he was confirmed as United States Representative to the United Nations Human Rights Council in June 2014. In his career as an attorney, he has focused on issues involving injustice against Native peoples.

<http://www.ncai.org/news/articles/2014/06/03/ncai-congratulates-keith-harper-on-his-confirmation-to-serve-as-us-representative-to-the-un-human-rights-council>

On June 11, 2017, Dr. Gavin Clarkson assumed the duties and responsibilities of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for policy and Economic Development of Indian Affairs. Clarkson is a citizen of The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, and was recently named the nation's leading scholar in tribal finance by the *Financial Times*. Upon his appointment, Clarkson said he was “*excited to help tribal nations and tribal entrepreneurs create the conditions under which they can build, expand, and sustain their economies.*”

<https://www.bia.gov/index.htm>

Alyssa London, a Tlingit Native of Southeast Alaska, was crowned Miss Alaska USA in February 2017. With her platform, she hopes to bring awareness to Native Alaskan heritage.

<http://www.alyssalondon.com/anchor-age-native-news-miss-alaska-represents-tingit-culture-national-stage/>

Clarence Wolf Guts enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1942 at age 18. While in basic training, a general asked Wolf Guts if he spoke Sioux. Wolf Guts explained the three dialects to the general and said he spoke Lakota. Wolf Guts helped develop a phonetic alphabet based on the Lakota language which later was used to develop a Lakota code. His new job was transmitting coded messages from the general to his chief of staff in the field.

<http://www.southdakotamagazine.com/clarence-wolf-guts>

American Indian Heritage Month
Events



Photo from archives.gov

The slaughter of buffalo was a mainstay of culture as well as a primary means of survival for American Indians on the Great Plains. Buffalo hides were used to make clothing, tepees, furniture, moccasins, religious regalia, and drums. Hooves were used ceremonially to make implements, utensils, and glue. The bladder serves as a storage pouch. Meat was used for food and in ceremonies. Fat and marrow produced food, paint, and cosmetics. Fur was used ceremonially and to make rope. Buffalo dung provided fuel.

The New York Public Library, *American History Desk Reference*, pg.8

In 1890, the Miniconjous of the Lakota Sioux at Pine Ridge, South Dakota, led by Sitting Bull, planned to perform a religious ritual called the *Ghost Dance*. Two Federal Agents went to arrest Sitting Bull at his home in North Dakota, where he was shot and killed during the argument that followed. The Miniconjou people fled south, where they were captured and surrounded by Army troops in Wounded Knee, South Dakota. In the confusion a gun fired, and the troops began to fire upon the unarmed Indians. It is believed that as many as 300 men, women, and children were killed in the Wounded Knee Massacre.

The New York Public Library, *American History Desk Reference*, pg.11

Around 1804, the Poncas began to practice the ceremony that led to the pow-wow. They called it the Hethuska. They passed it to the Kaw, who gave it to the Osage. Then the Omaha incorporated the ceremony, which was passed to the Lakota (Sioux) tribe. It became popular in the late 1890s. During this time, the Omaha, or "Grass" dance as it was then called, spread quickly. The Grass dancers danced for the purpose of dancing itself, not religious ceremony.

<http://library.nau.edu/speccoll/exhibits/>

Photo from ndstudies.gov



On November 20, 2013, American Indian code talkers from 566 tribes were honored with Congressional Silver Medals, and leaders from the tribes' 33 nations received Congressional Gold Medals. These medals recognized the contributions of the code talkers during World War I and World War II, when they used their native languages to encode secret or

sensitive information so that the enemy could not decipher radio transmissions.

http://www.army.mil/article/115546/Congress_recognizes_American_Indian_code_talkers_for_wartime_service/

American Indians and Alaska Natives come from a multitude of different cultures with diverse languages, and for thousands of years used oral tradition to pass down familial and cultural information among generations of tribal members. As contact between Indians and non-Indians grew, so did the necessity of learning of new languages. Even into the 20th century, many American Indians and Alaska Natives were bi- or multi-lingual as a result of learning to speak their own language as well as English, French, Russian, or Spanish, or even another tribal language.

<http://www.bia.gov/FAQs/index.htm>

During World War I more than 8,000 American Indian soldiers, of whom 6,000 were volunteers, served. Their patriotism moved Congress to pass the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924. In World War II, 25,000 American Indian and Alaska Native men and women fought on all fronts in Europe and the South Pacific earning, collectively, at least 71 Air Medals, 51 Silver Stars, 47 Bronze Stars, 34 Distinguished Flying Crosses, and two Congressional Medals of Honor. Alaska Natives also served in the Alaska Territorial Guard.

<http://www.bia.gov/FAQs/index.html>

Historically, American Indians have the highest record of military service per capita when compared to other ethnic groups. The reasons are deeply rooted in traditional cultural values that drive them to serve their country. These include a proud warrior tradition, best exemplified by the following qualities said to be inherent to most, if not all, Native American societies: strength, honor, pride, devotion, and wisdom. These qualities closely correlate with military tradition.

<http://blog.nativepartnership.org/memorial-day-military-service-a-native-tradition/>

More than half of the U.S. states trace their names to Indian origins: Alabama, Alaska, ~~Arizona~~, ~~Arkansas~~, ~~Connecticut~~, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Wisconsin and Wyoming.

The New York Public Library, *American History Desk Reference*, pg.6

Parkas, a perennial fashion staple, were first worn by Indians and originally taken up by Whites as military garb. Ponchos—another common Indian clothing item—became popular during World War I as soldiers’ rain gear. Indian moccasins have been adopted as house slippers, and people living in snowy climates rely on Indian-originated snowshoes.

The New York Public Library, *American History Desk Reference*, pg.29

Many aspects of American Indian and Alaska Native culture have remained a staple in modern-day American life. The hammock, common in many different Indian cultures, found its way onto Navy and merchant-marine ships as a space-saving bed. Nowadays, they can be found in our own backyards!

The New York Public Library, *American History Desk Reference*, pg.29

In 2015, Cecilia Munoz, the Director of the White House Domestic Policy Council, announced the launch of the Generation Indigenous Native Youth Challenge. The challenge invited Native youth to become a part of the “Gen-I Challenge,” which called for kids to make a difference in their communities and document their efforts.

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2015/02/12/white-house-launches-generation-indigenous-native-youth-challenge>

American Indian Heritage Month
Milestones



Photo from army.mil

Sovereignty is the right of a nation or group of people to be self-governing and is the most fundamental concept that defines the relationship between the government of the United States and governments of American Indian tribes. American Indians and Alaska Natives are U.S. citizens and citizens of their tribes. They are subject to federal laws, but they are not always subject to state laws.

<http://www.civilrights.org/indigenous/tribal-sovereignty/>

In 1924, Congress passed the Indian Citizenship Act, also known as the Snyder Act, giving American Indians the right to vote. After a survey in 1938 found that eight states still prohibited Indians from voting, several cases were brought to the Supreme Court. Utah, Minnesota, and Arizona were the last states to allow the vote, and it wasn't until 1965 that all barriers to American Indians' suffrage were eliminated in the United States.

<http://www.memory.loc.gov/ammem/today/jun02.html>

Horses were native to North America but had disappeared by about 8000 B.C. and were unknown to the Indians when the Spanish arrived. By 1700, horses were roaming wild in the Southwest and they thrived on the grasslands of the plains. Indians quickly adopted the horse, which enabled them to hunt buffalo more efficiently.

The New York Public Library, *American History Desk Reference*, pg.5

Photo from archives.gov



In 1898, the Curtis Act dissolved Indian Territory tribal governments by abolishing tribal courts and subjecting all persons in the territory to federal law. Under this act, towns could be surveyed and incorporated, residents were permitted to vote, and the establishment of public schools was sanctioned.

<http://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=CU006>

In 1924, the passing of the Citizenship Act made all Indians citizens without impairing their status as tribal members. Nevertheless, few Indians were permitted to vote before the 1960s.

The New York Public Library, *American History Desk Reference*, pg.23

The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) was established in 1824, and it is the oldest bureau of the United States Department of the Interior. It serves about 1.9 million American Indians and Alaska Natives. The BIA is responsible for the administration and management of 55 million surface acres and 57 million acres of subsurface minerals estates held in trust by the United States for American Indians, Indian tribes, and Alaska Natives.

<http://www.bia.gov/WhoWeAre/index.htm>

As the first people to live on the land we all cherish, American Indians and Alaska Natives have profoundly shaped our country's character and our cultural heritage. Today, American Indians and Alaskan Natives are

leaders in every aspect of our society—from the boardroom to the battlefield, to the classroom.

<http://nativeamericanheritagemonth.gov/>

The purpose of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) is "*...to protect the best interest of Indian Children and to promote the stability and security of Indian tribes and families by the establishment of minimum Federal standards for the removal of Indian children and placement of such children in homes which will reflect the unique values of Indian culture...*" (25 U.S. C. 1902). ICWA provides guidance to States regarding the handling of child abuse and neglect and adoption cases involving Native children and sets minimum standards for the handling of these cases.

<https://www.bia.gov/WhoWeAre/BIA/OIS/HumanServices/IndianChildWelfareAct/index.htm>

The Helping Expedite and Advance Responsible Tribal Home Ownership Act of 2012 (the HEARTH Act) creates a voluntary, alternative land leasing process available to tribes by amending the Indian Long-Term Leasing Act of 1955, 25 U.S.C. Sec. 415. Under the Act, once their governing tribal leasing regulations have been submitted to, and approved by, the Secretary of the Interior, tribes are authorized to negotiate and enter into leases without further approvals by the Secretary.

<https://www.bia.gov/WhoWeAre/BIA/OTS/HEARTH/index.htm>

American Indian Heritage Month

Quotes



Photo from archives.gov

“Every year, our Nation pauses to reflect on the profound ways the First Americans have shaped our country's character and culture. The first stewards of our environment, early voices for the values that define our Nation, and models of government to our Founding Fathers—American Indians and Alaska Natives helped build the very fabric of America. Today, their spirit and many contributions continue to enrich our communities and strengthen our country.”

—President Barack Obama

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-pressoffice/2014/10/31/presidential-proclamation-national-native-american-heritage-month-2014-0>

“Prior to my election, Cherokee girls would have never thought that they might grow up and become chief.”

-Wilma Mankiller

<http://www.womenon20s.org/wilma-mankiller>

“If anything at all, perfection is finally attained not when there is no longer anything to add, but when there is no longer anything to take away.”

-Maria Tallchief

http://www.californiaindianeducation.org/famous_indians/maria_tallchief/

“[W]e all need to work together to invest deeply – and for the long-term – in these young people, both those who are living in their tribal communities... and those living in urban areas across this country. These kids have so much promise – and we need to ensure that they have every tool, every opportunity they need to fulfill that promise.”

-First Lady Michelle Obama

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/nativeamericans/generationindigenous>
