



**National American Indian  
Heritage Month  
Resource Base**

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## Table of Contents

Milestones .....	4
People.....	19
Events.....	28
Quotes .....	35

## Instructions

Choose the items you'd like to include on your document from the Resource Base. You may use all or part of the content for each topic or sub-topic. Copy and paste desired items into the blank templates located on DEOMI's Special Observances tab, under Observance Products. You can also paste facts and images into emails and other social media. Be creative and share your ideas!

### Note:

This observance's title has varied over time.

In 1990 President George H. W. Bush approved a joint resolution designating **November 1990 National American Indian Heritage Month**. Similar proclamations, under variants on the name (including "Native American Heritage Month" and "National American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month") have been issued each year since 1994.

DEOMI continues the observance title as established in the founding law.

The terms American Indian and Native American are considered synonymous, and both are used throughout this document. Neither is incorrect and their use is determinate upon the user's preferred term.

## National American Indian Heritage Month

### Milestones

#### Milestones in American Indian and Alaska Native History Early Events: Explorers and Jamestown

Long before Christopher Columbus set foot on what would come to be known as the Americas, the expansive territory was inhabited by indigenous people. Throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, as more explorers sought to colonize their land, these people responded in various stages, from cooperation to indignation to revolt.

After siding with the French in numerous battles during the French and Indian War and eventually being forcibly removed from their homes under Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Act, Native American populations were diminished in size and territory by the end of the 19th century.

Below are some of the events that shaped Native Americans' tumultuous history following the arrival of foreign settlers.

**1492: Christopher Columbus** landed on a Caribbean Island after three months of traveling. Believing at first that he had reached the East Indies, he described the natives he meets as "Indians." On his first day, he ordered six natives to be seized as servants.

**April 1513:** Spanish explorer **Juan Ponce de Leon** landed on continental North America in Florida and made contact with Native Americans.

**February 1521: Ponce de Leon** departed on another voyage to Florida from San Juan to start a colony. Months after landing, Ponce de Leon was attacked by local natives and fatally wounded.

**May 1539:** Spanish explorer and conquistador **Hernando de Soto** landed in Florida to conquer the region. He explored the South under the guidance of local Indian who had been captured along the way.

**October 1540: De Soto** and the Spaniards planned to rendezvous with ships in Alabama, but were attacked. Hundreds of Native Americans were killed in the ensuing battle.

**1607: Pocahontas'** brother kidnapped **Captain John Smith** from the Jamestown colony. Smith later wrote that after being threatened by Chief Powhatan, he was saved by Pocahontas.

**1613: Pocahontas** was captured by **Captain Samuel Argall** in the first Anglo-Powhatan War. While captive, she learned to speak English, converted to Christianity, and was given the name "Rebecca."

**1622:** The **Powhatan Confederacy** nearly wiped out the Jamestown colony.

[Native American History Timeline - HISTORY](#)

## Milestones in American Indian and Alaska Native History

### Early Events: Wars and Treaties

**1680:** A revolt of **Pueblo Indians** threatened Spanish rule over New Mexico.

**1754:** The **French and Indian War** began, pitting the two groups against English settlements in the North.

**May 15, 1756:** The **Seven Years' War** between the British and the French began, with Indian alliances aiding the French.

**May 7, 1763:** **Ottawa Chief Pontiac** led Indian forces into battle against the British in Detroit. The British retaliated by attacking Pontiac's warriors in Detroit on July 31, in what is known as the Battle of Bloody Run. Pontiac and company successfully fended off the attackers, but both sides suffered losses.

**1785:** The **Treaty of Hopewell** was signed in Georgia, protecting **Cherokee Indians** in the United States and sectioning off their land. The Treaty of Hopewell marked a new era of relations between the United States and Native American nations. During Andrew Pickens' 20-year career as the commissioner of Indian affairs, "Skyagunsta" or the "Border Wizard Owl," as Pickens was respectfully called by the Cherokee, successfully negotiated a series of treaties on his Hopewell Plantation in 1785 and 1786.

Three hundred yards northwest of the Hopewell property on November 28, 1785, U.S. Treaty Commissioners met with 918 Cherokees and signed the first treaty between the United States of America and the Cherokee Nation. Similar treaties were signed at Hopewell with the Choctaws and Chickasaws on January 3 and 10 in 1786.

These treaties ended years of participation in the Revolutionary War for the Native Americans who had befriended the British and provided for prisoner exchanges, boundaries, trade, peace, and perpetual friendship.

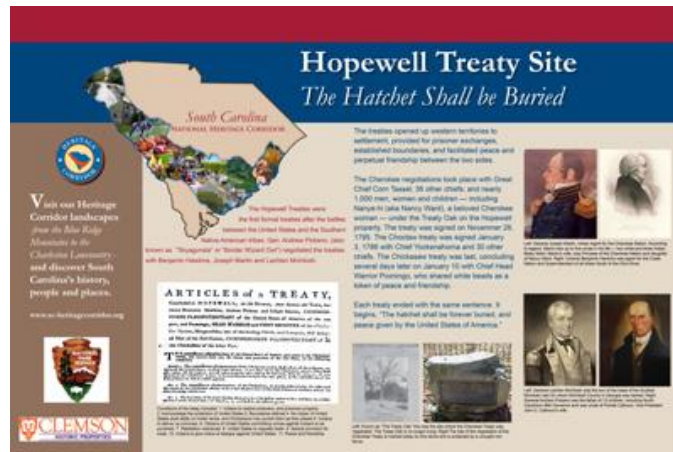


Figure 1 Photo of the Hopewell treaty site and commissioners. All treaties ended with the same words: "The hatchet shall be forever buried, and peace given by the United States of America." Photo credit: Clemson Historic Properties <https://www.clemson.edu/about/history/properties/documents/4.pdf>

[Native American History Timeline - HISTORY](https://www.clemson.edu/about/history/properties/documents/4.pdf)  
4.pdf (clemson.edu)

## Milestones in American Indian and Alaska Native History

### Early Events: Sacagawea and the Lewis & Clark Expedition

**1788/89: Sacagawea** was born, the daughter of a Shoshone chief. Much of Sacagawea's life is unknown. Around the age of 12, Sacagawea was captured by Hidatsa Indians, an enemy of the Shoshones. She was then sold to the French-Canadian trapper Toussaint Charbonneau, who made her one of his wives. She was a Shoshone interpreter best known for serving as a member of the Lewis and Clark expedition into the American West — and for being the only woman on the famous excursion.

**1791:** The **Treaty of Holston** was signed, in which the Cherokee gave up all their land outside of the borders previously established.

**August 20, 1794:** The **Battle of Fallen Timbers**, the last major battle over Northwest territory between Americans Indians and the United States following the Revolutionary War, began and resulted in U.S. victory.

**November 2, 1804:** Sacagawea met explorers **Meriwether Lewis and William Clark** during their exploration of the territory of the Louisiana Purchase. The explorers realized her value as a translator, although she was 6 months pregnant at the time.

**April 7, 1805:** Sacagawea, and husband Toussaint Charbonneau, joined **Lewis and Clark** on their voyage. In February 1805, Sacagawea gave birth to a son named Jean Baptiste Charbonneau. Despite traveling with a newborn child during the trek, Sacagawea proved helpful in many ways. She was skilled at finding edible plants. When a boat capsized, she was able to save some of its cargo, including important documents and supplies. She also served as a symbol of peace — a group traveling with a woman and a child were treated with less suspicion than a group of men alone.

Sacagawea also made a miraculous discovery of her own during the trip west. When the corps encountered a group of Shoshone Indians, she soon realized that its leader was her brother Cameahwait. Thanks to Sacagawea, the expedition was able to buy horses from the Shoshone to cross the Rocky Mountains. Despite this joyous family reunion, she remained with the explorers for the trip west, tragically dying after the journey was completed, at age 25, at Fort Manuel, in what is now Kenel, South Dakota, around 1812.



Figure 2 Photo of statue of Sacagawea holding her baby located at the Sacajawea Center, Salmon, Idaho. Photo credit: [The True Sacajawea of the Shosone tribe \(native-net.org\)](http://The True Sacajawea of the Shosone tribe (native-net.org))

[Sacagawea - Facts, Death & Husband - Biography](#)  
[Native American History Timeline - HISTORY](#)

## Milestones in American Indian and Alaska Native History

### Early Events: War of 1812 and the Battle of Horseshoe Bend

**November 1811:** U.S. forces attacked War **Chief Tecumseh** and his younger brother Lalawethika. Their community at the juncture of the Tippecanoe and Wabash rivers was destroyed.

**June 18, 1812:** President **James Madison** signed a declaration of war against Britain, beginning the war between U.S. forces and the British, French, and American Indians over independence and territory expansion.

**March 27, 1814:** **Andrew Jackson**, along with U.S. forces and Native American allies, attacked the Creek Indians who opposed American expansion and encroachment of their territory in the **Battle of Horseshoe Bend**. On the peninsula formed by the Tallapoosa River, in what is now Alabama, stood 1,000 Creek warriors. These men, along with 350 women and children, had arrived over the previous six months in search of refuge. Many had been part of a series of costly battles during the past year. Surrounding the Creek were forces led by future President Andrew Jackson, then a major general of the Tennessee Militia. The core of his force was 2,600 American soldiers, most of whom hoped that a victory would open Native land to European American settlement. Yet this fight was not simply European American versus American Indian: on Jackson's side were 600 "friendly" Indians.

What followed is best described as a slaughter. American soldiers and their Creek and Cherokee allies killed as many of the opposing Creek warriors as possible. They set fire to a heap of timber the peninsula's defenders were hidden behind; when they emerged, they were immediately shot down. The bloodshed continued until dark; the next morning another 16 Creek, found hidden under the banks, were killed. In the end, 557 Creek warriors died on the battlefield, and an estimated 250 to 300 more drowned or were shot trying to cross the river. Only 49 Tennessee militia men died that day, and another 154 were wounded. The Creeks ceded more than 20 million acres of land after their loss.



Figure 3 Map depicting Creek Country 1777-1814. Photo credit courtesy of the Alabama Archeological Society. Map by James McKinley.

[The Battle of Horseshoe Bend: Collision of Cultures \(Teaching with Historic Places\) \(U.S. National Park Service\) \(nps.gov\)](#)  
[Native American History Timeline - HISTORY](#)

## Milestones in American Indian and Alaska Native History

### Early Events: Trail of Tears

**May 28, 1830:** President **Andrew Jackson** signed the Indian Removal Act, which gave plots of land west of the Mississippi River to Native American tribes in exchange for land that was taken from them.

**1836:** The last of the **Creek Indians** left their land for Oklahoma as part of the Indian removal process. Of the 15,000 Creeks who made the journey to Oklahoma, more than 3,500 did not survive.

**1838:** When only 2,000 **Cherokees** left their land in Georgia to cross the Mississippi River, President Martin Van Buren enlisted General Winfield Scott and 7,000 troops to speed up the process by holding the Cherokee at gunpoint and marching them 1,200 miles. More than 5,000 Cherokee died throughout the journey. The series of relocations of Native American tribes, and their hardships and deaths during the journey, has become known as the **Trail of Tears**.



*Figure 4 Map showing routes of the Trail of Tears. Photo credit: public domain.*

**1851:** Congress passed the **Indian Appropriations Act**, creating the Indian reservation system. Native Americans weren't allowed to leave their reservations without permission.

**October 1860:** A group of Apache Indians attacked and kidnapped a White American, resulting in the U.S. military falsely accusing the Indian leader of the Chiricahua Apache tribe, **Cochise**. Cochise and the Apache increased raids on White Americans for a decade afterwards.

**November 29, 1864:** 650 Colorado volunteer forces attacked Cheyenne and Arapaho encampments along Sand Creek, killing and mutilating more than 150 American Indians during what would become known as the **Sand Creek Massacre**. (Continues on next page.)

[Trail of tears map NPS - PICRYL - Public Domain Media Search Engine Public Domain Search](#)

[Native American History Timeline - HISTORY](#)



## Milestones in American Indian and Alaska Native History The Sand Creek Massacre

**November 29, 1864: Sand Creek Massacre**, also called the Chivington Massacre, was a controversial surprise attack upon a camp of Cheyenne and Arapaho people in southeastern Colorado Territory by a force of about 675 U.S. troops, mostly Colorado volunteers, under **Col. John M. Chivington**.

The camp contained approximately 750 Cheyenne and Arapaho. Following the eruption of hostilities between the army and Indians, Black Kettle, White Antelope, and some 30 other Cheyenne and Arapaho chiefs and headmen had brought their people, as “Friendly Indians of the Plains,” to the site along the Sand Creek near Fort Lyon in accordance with instructions issued by Colorado Territorial Gov. John Evans to report to their nearest Indian agent.

Although they were armed, the Cheyenne and Arapaho were under a white flag of truce when they were attacked by the army. During the attack, Indians took shelter in the high banks along Sand Creek. As they fled, many were killed and wounded by artillery fire. Survivors of the attack fled to the north, hoping to reach a larger band of Cheyenne.

More than 230 Native Americans were massacred, including 150 women, children, and elderly. Thirteen Cheyenne chiefs and one Arapaho chief were killed. Chivington was at first acclaimed for his “victory,” but he was subsequently discredited when it became clear that he had perpetrated a massacre. The incident was a chief cause of the Arapaho-Cheyenne war that followed and had far-reaching influence in the Plains Wars of the next decade.

Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site was opened in 2007 to preserve and protect the cultural landscape of the massacre, enhance public understanding, and prevent similar incidents in the future.



*Figure 5 Ellen and Arthur Brady at home on the Northern Cheyenne reservation in Montana. Their daughter Mary stands in the doorway. Ellen and Arthur were in the Cheyenne camp during the Sand Creek Massacre. Photo credit: National Park Service. Thomas Marquis photo.*

[Native American History Timeline - HISTORY](#)

[Sand Creek Massacre - Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site \(U.S. National Park Service\) \(nps.gov\)](#)

[Sand Creek Massacre | Definition, Casualties, & Facts | Britannica](#)

## Milestones in American Indian and Alaska Native History

### The Battle of the Little Bighorn

**April 29, 1868:** The U.S. Government and the **Sioux Nation** signed the Treaty of Fort Laramie. In this treaty, the United States recognized the Black Hills of Dakota as the Great Sioux Reservation, the exclusive territory of the Sioux (Dakota, Lakota, and Nakota) and Arapaho people. But after gold was discovered in the Black Hills, miners and settlers began moving onto the land en masse. Native resistance to the treaty's violation culminated in the **Battle of the Little Bighorn** on **June 25, 1876**.

**The Battle of the Little Bighorn** was fought near the Little Bighorn River in Montana Territory and pitted federal troops led by **Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer** (1839-76) against a band of Lakota Sioux and Cheyenne warriors. Tensions had been rising since the discovery of gold on Native American lands. When a number of tribes missed a federal deadline to move to reservations, the U.S. Army, including Custer and his 7th Cavalry, was dispatched to confront them. Custer was unaware of the number of Indians fighting under the command of Sitting Bull (c.1831-90) at Little Bighorn, and his forces were outnumbered and quickly overwhelmed in what became known as Custer's Last Stand.

**Sitting Bull** and **Crazy Horse** (c.1840-77), leaders of the Sioux on the Great Plains, strongly resisted the mid-19th-century efforts of the U.S. government to confine their people to Indian reservations. In 1875, after gold was discovered in South Dakota's Black Hills, the U.S. Army ignored previous treaty agreements and invaded the region. This betrayal led many Sioux and Cheyenne tribesmen to leave their reservations and join Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse in Montana. By the late spring of 1876, more than 10,000 Indians had gathered in a camp along the Little Bighorn River—which they called the Greasy Grass—in defiance of a U.S. War Department order to return to their reservations or risk being attacked.

In mid-June, three columns of U.S. soldiers lined up against the camp and prepared to march. A force of 1,200 Native Americans turned back the first column on June 17. Five days later, General Alfred Terry ordered George Custer's 7th Cavalry to scout ahead for enemy forces. On the morning of June 25, Custer, a West Point graduate, drew near the Indian camp. He split his command into three elements and pressed ahead rather than wait for reinforcements.

At mid-day on June 25, Custer's 600 men entered the Little Bighorn Valley. Among the Indians word quickly spread of the impending attack. The older Sitting Bull rallied the warriors and saw to the safety of the women and children, while Crazy Horse set off with a large force to meet the attackers head on. Despite Custer's desperate attempts to regroup his men, they were quickly overwhelmed. Custer and some 200 men in his battalion were attacked by as many as 3,000 Native Americans; within an hour, Custer and all the soldiers in his immediate command were dead.

**The Battle of the Little Bighorn marked the most decisive Native American victory and the worst U.S. Army defeat in the long Plains Indian War.** The demise of Custer and his men outraged many white Americans and confirmed their image of the Indians as wild and bloodthirsty. Meanwhile, the U.S. government increased its efforts to subdue the tribes. Within five years, almost all the Sioux and Cheyenne would be confined to reservations.

[Battle of the Little Bighorn - Location, Cause & Significance - HISTORY](#)

[Native American History Timeline - HISTORY](#)

## Milestones in American Indian and Alaska Native History

### Boarding Schools: Intended to Eradicate Indigenous Culture

**October 6, 1879:** The **Carlisle Indian Industrial School** opened to students in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, the country’s first off-reservation boarding school.

Native American Boarding Schools first began operating in 1860 when the Bureau of Indian Affairs established the first on-reservation boarding school on the Yakima Indian Reservation in Washington. Native American Boarding Schools (also known as Indian Boarding Schools) were established by the U.S. government as an effort to assimilate Indigenous youth into mainstream American culture through education. This era was part of the United States’ overall attempt to kill, annihilate, or assimilate Indigenous peoples and eradicate Indigenous culture.

The Carlisle Indian School was founded by **Richard Henry Pratt**. He modeled the boarding school on an education program he designed while overseeing Fort Marion Prison in St. Augustine, Florida. He developed the program after experimenting with Native American assimilation education on imprisoned and captive Indigenous peoples.

Pratt served as the Headmaster of the Carlisle Indian School for 25 years and was famously known for his highly influential philosophy, which he described in a speech in 1892. He stated, “A great general has said that the only good Indian is a dead one. In a sense, I agree with the sentiment, but only in this: that all the Indian there is in the race should be dead. Kill the Indian in him, and save the man.”



Figure 6 Laundry class at Carlisle Indian School, circa 1901. Photo credit <https://www.theindigenousfoundation.org/articles/us-residential-schools>

**Attendance at the boarding schools was made mandatory by the U.S. Government regardless of whether or not Indigenous families gave their consent.** Upon arrival, Native children were given Anglo-American names, bathed in kerosene, given military-style clothing in exchange for their traditional clothing, and boys had their hair shaved off, while girls had their hair cut into short bob styles. (Continues on next page.)

[The U.S. history of Native American Boarding Schools — The Indigenous Foundation](#)

[Native American History Timeline - HISTORY](#)

## Milestones in American Indian and Alaska Native History

### Boarding Schools: Exploitation of Native Children (cont.)

The Native American assimilation era first began in 1819, when the U.S. Congress passed The Civilization Fund Act. The act encouraged American education to be provided to Indigenous societies and enforced the “civilization process.”

The passing of this act eventually led to the creation of the federally funded Native American Boarding Schools and initiated the beginning of the **Indian Boarding School era**, which lasted from **1860 until 1978**. Approximately 357 boarding schools operated across 30 states during this era, both on- and off-reservations, and housed over 60,000 native children. A third of these boarding schools were operated by Christian missionaries as well as members of the federal government. These boarding schools housed several thousand children.



Figure 7 Students at The Carlisle Indian Industrial School (1879-1918). Photo credit: <https://www.theindigenousfoundation.org/articles/us-residential-schools>

Education primarily focused on trades to make Native students marketable in American society. Male students were taught to perform manual labor such as blacksmithing, shoemaking, and farming and other trades. Female students were taught to cook, clean, sew, do laundry, and care for farm animals. Standard academic subjects like reading, writing, math, history, and art were also taught; however, these subjects emphasized American beliefs and values. Students were taught the importance of private property and material wealth; they were forced to convert to Christianity and celebrate American holidays such as Columbus Day.

Richard Henry Scott eventually implemented a “Placing Out System” that placed Native students into American communities for a certain amount of time, varying from a Summer to a full year. **These programs tended to exploit students and used them for domestic and physical labor.** (Continues on next page.)

[The U.S. history of Native American Boarding Schools — The Indigenous Foundation](#)

## Milestones in American Indian and Alaska Native History

### Boarding Schools: Abuse and Death of Native Children (cont.)

Native students were not allowed to speak in their Native languages. They were only allowed to speak English regardless of their fluency and faced punishment if they didn't. The discipline at these boarding schools was severe. Punishments varied and included privilege restrictions, diet restrictions, corporal punishment, and confinement. Additionally, Native students were neglected and faced many forms of abuse including physical, sexual, cultural, and spiritual. They were beaten and coerced into performing heavy labor. Their daily regimen consisted of several hours of marching, and, later, adopted recreational time consisted of watching disturbing movies such as Westerns about Cowboys and Indians.

Since they were used as forms of punishment, food and medical attention were scarce. This led to boarding schools being susceptible to infections and diseases like tuberculosis and the flu. **Due to these harsh, abusive conditions, Native students often became ill and died at these boarding schools.** Parents were rarely informed of their children's deaths; some parents would learn of their child's death only after they were buried in school cemeteries. Some students were buried in unmarked graves. Those that survived these inhumane conditions were scarred from the traumatic experiences for the remainder of their lives.

Although a majority of Native children were forced to attend these boarding schools, some parents chose to send their children because those were the only schools available. Other families, and even entire villages, refused to enroll their children in the boarding schools, coordinated mass withdrawals, and encouraged their children to run away from the schools. Indian agents – individuals hired to interact with Indigenous communities on behalf of the U.S. Government – would retaliate by withholding rations and supplies to Indigenous communities. These agents were responsible for seizing children from their families and their homes until boarding schools were filled.

While the Native American Boarding School era has ended, the U.S. government still operates a few off-reservation boarding schools. As of 2020, 7 boarding schools continue to be federally funded, 3 of which are controlled by Indigenous community leaders. In 1934, the Indian Reorganization Act was passed to decrease U.S. federal control of Native affairs and allow for Native self-determination and self-governance. An example of this transition can be seen with the Santa Fe Indian School, which was established in 1890 and originally implemented the Carlisle model. By the 1920s, the school began transitioning after Indigenous leaders fought to gain control over the school. It is currently managed by Indigenous leaders, and the focus has switched to traditional arts, sovereignty, Native cultures, and community.

The tragedies Native children faced during this era have impacted the lives of not only the children but also their families and communities. Many Native students who survived the boarding school era went on to suffer from mental health and other related issues such as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, a lack of cultural identity, and others. These traumatic experiences have been passed down from generation to generation and continue to impact Indigenous communities today.

[The U.S. history of Native American Boarding Schools — The Indigenous Foundation](#)

(Video) Unspoken: America's Native American Boarding Schools ([PBS Utah](#))

## Milestones in American Indian and Alaska Native History Broken Promises and the Wounded Knee Massacre

**February 8, 1887:** President **Grover Cleveland** signed the Dawes Act, which allowed the president to make land allotted to Native Americans in reservations available to individuals.

**December 29, 1890:** U.S. Armed Forces surround Ghost Dancers led by **Chief Big Foot** near Wounded Knee Creek in South Dakota, leading to the **Wounded Knee Massacre** of 300 Lakota men, women, and children by U.S. Army troops.

In the years leading up to the massacre, the Indigenous **Lakota Sioux** had suffered a generation of broken treaties and shattered dreams. White settlers poured into the Dakota Territory following the 1874 discovery of gold in the Black Hills, seizing millions of acres of land and nearly annihilating the native buffalo population.

Throughout 1890, the Lakota endured droughts and epidemics of measles, whooping cough, and influenza. According to Lakota historian Donovan Sprague, a descendant of survivors and victims of the Wounded Knee Massacre, “The Lakota were very distraught at that time. They lost massive amounts of land under the Dawes Allotment Act of 1887, and many of them were dealing with the recent surrender to the reservation system, which forbade the **Sun Dance**, their most important religious ceremony, and required permission to leave.”

At the time, the **Ghost Dance** religious movement had gained popularity among the Lakota. They believed that participants in a ritual circular dance would usher in a utopian future that would bring back all they had lost—their land, their buffalo herds, and their dead ancestors.

Wearing white muslin shirts that they believed would protect against danger and even repel bullets, nearly one-third of the Lakota had joined the movement by the winter of 1890. As the Ghost Dance movement spread, frightened White settlers feared an armed uprising. “Indians are dancing in the snow and are wild and crazy,” federal agent Daniel F. Royer telegraphed U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs headquarters from South Dakota’s Pine Ridge Reservation in November 1890. “We need protection, and we need it now.”

“I suppose the authorities did think they were crazy—but they weren’t,” a Lakota at Pine Ridge later recalled. “They were only terribly unhappy.”

The federal government banned Ghost Dance ceremonies and mobilized the largest military deployment since the Civil War. General Nelson Miles arrived on the prairie with part of the 7th Cavalry, which had been annihilated at the Battle of the Little Bighorn 14 years earlier, and ordered the arrest of tribal leaders suspected of promoting the Ghost Dance movement.

When Indian police attempted to take **Chief Sitting Bull** into custody on the Standing Rock Reservation on December 15, 1890, the noted **Sioux leader was killed** in the ensuing melee. With a military warrant out for his arrest, Sitting Bull’s half-brother, **Chief Spotted Elk** (sometimes referred to as Chief Big Foot), fled Standing Rock with a band of Lakota for the Pine Ridge Reservation more than 200 miles away on the opposite side of the state.

(Continues on next page.)

[What Happened at the Wounded Knee Massacre? - HISTORY](#)

[Native American History Timeline - HISTORY](#)

## Milestones in American Indian and Alaska Native History

### The Wounded Knee Massacre (cont.)

On December 28, the U.S. cavalry caught up with **Spotted Elk (Chief Big Foot)** and his group of mostly elders, women, and children near the banks of **Wounded Knee Creek**, which winds through South Dakota. The American forces arrested Spotted Elk—who was too ill with pneumonia to sit up, let alone walk—and positioned their Hotchkiss guns on a rise overlooking the Lakota camp.

The following morning, American soldiers mounted their horses and surrounded the Lakota. A medicine man started to perform the ghost dance and implored the heavens to scatter the soldiers like the dust he threw into the air.

The cavalry, however, went tipi to tipi seizing axes, rifles, and other weapons. As a soldier attempted to wrestle a weapon out of the hands of a Lakota, a gunshot rang out. It was not clear which side shot first, but within seconds the American soldiers launched a hailstorm of bullets from rifles, revolvers, and the rapid-fire Hotchkiss guns that tore through the Lakota.

Spotted Elk was shot where he lay on the ground. Boys who only moments before were playing leapfrog were mowed down. Through the dust and smoke, women and children dove for cover in a ravine. “Remember Custer!” one cavalryman cried out as soldiers executed the defenseless women and children at point-blank range.

When the shooting stopped hours later, bodies were strewn in the gulch. At least 150 Lakota (historians such as Sprague put the number at 300) were killed along with 25 American soldiers struck down by friendly fire. Two-thirds of the victims were women and children.

The dead were carried to the nearby Episcopal church and laid in two rows underneath festive wreaths and other Christmas decorations. Days later a burial party arrived, dug a pit and dumped the frozen bodies in a mass grave. “To add insult to injury, some of the survivors were taken to Fort Sheridan in Illinois to be imprisoned for being at Wounded Knee,” Sprague says, until **William “Buffalo Bill” Cody** took custody of them for inclusion in his **Wild West Show**.

General Miles called the carnage “**the most abominable criminal military blunder and a horrible massacre of women and children;**” still, shockingly, the U.S. Army awarded the Medal of Honor to 20 members of the 7th Cavalry who participated in the bloodbath.

“When I look back now from this high hill of my old age,” survivor **Black Elk** recalled in 1931, “I can still see the butchered women and children lying heaped and scattered all along the crooked gulch as plain as when I saw them with eyes still young. And I can see that something else died there in the bloody mud and was buried in the blizzard. A people’s dream died there.”

It was not the last time blood flowed next to Wounded Knee Creek. In February 1973, activists with the **American Indian Movement** seized and occupied the site for 71 days to protest the U.S. government’s mistreatment of Native Americans. The standoff resulted in the deaths of two Native Americans.

[What Happened at the Wounded Knee Massacre? - HISTORY](#)

## Milestones in American Indian and Alaska Native History Firsts in Service to the U.S.

**January 29, 1907: Charles Curtis** became the first **Native American U.S. Senator**. Curtis was 1/8th American Indian and a descendent of Kaw Chief White Plume and Osage Chief Pawhuska. Following the death of his mother, three-year-old Curtis went to live with his maternal grandmother on the Kaw Indian Reservation. The reservation was near Council Grove, Kansas, an important stop on the Santa Fe Trail.

In 1868 a group of neighboring Cheyenne and a small number of Kiowa and Arapaho warriors raided the reservation. The battle ended quickly but was the beginning of a period of great change for Curtis. As the U.S. government prepared to remove the Kaw from their reservation to what's now Oklahoma, young Curtis moved to Topeka, Kansas, to live with his paternal grandmother. There he became integrated into the White world.

In Topeka, Charles grew up to study law. At 21, he was admitted to the bar, soon rising to county attorney. In 1892 he gained national prominence with his election to the U.S. House of Representatives. In 1907 he moved to the U.S. Senate, becoming the first Republican whip with American Indian ancestry in 1915.

In 1928 the Republican party chose **Curtis to run as Herbert Hoover's vice president**, and he became **the first Native American to hold that office**. The U.S. elected the duo for one term, from 1929 to 1933. Shortly after their election the economy crashed, and the Great Depression began. Like many of the administration's relief policies, the duo's bid for reelection failed. Curtis retired from public office. Upon his death in 1936, his body was returned to his home in Kansas along the Santa Fe Trail.



Figure 8 Charles Curtis, 1860-1936, bust portrait. Photo credit: Library of Congress.

**September 1918:** Choctaw soldiers used their native language to transmit secret messages for U.S. troops during World War I's Meuse-Argonne Offensive on the Western Front. The Choctaw Telephone Squad provided Allied forces a critical edge over the Germans.

[Charles Curtis: The First American Indian to be Vice President of the United States \(U.S. National Park Service\) \(nps.gov\)](#)

[Native American History Timeline - HISTORY](#)



## Milestones in American Indian and Alaska Native History The Struggle for Progress

**June 2, 1924:** U.S. Congress passed the **Indian Citizenship Act**, granting citizenship to all Native Americans born in the territorial limits of the country. Previously, citizenship had been limited, depending on what percentage Native American ancestry a person had, whether they were veterans, or, if they were women, whether they were married to a U.S. citizen.

**May 1942:** Members of the **Navajo Nation** developed a code to transmit messages and radio messages for the U.S. armed forces during World War II. Eventually hundreds of code talkers from multiple Native American tribes served in the U.S. Marines during the war.

**April 11, 1968:** The **Indian Civil Rights Act** was signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson, granting Native American tribes many of the benefits included in the Bill of Rights.

**July 1968:** The **American Indian Movement (AIM)** was founded in Minneapolis in response to police brutality and racial profiling. AIM grew rapidly in the 1970s to become the driving force behind the Indigenous civil rights movement.

**November 20, 1969:** A group of San Francisco Bay-area Native Americans, calling themselves "**Indians of All Tribes,**" journeyed to Alcatraz Island, declaring their intention to use the island for an Indian school, cultural center, and museum. Referencing Europeans' colonization of North America, they claimed Alcatraz is theirs "by right of discovery." In 1971, armed federal marshals removed the last of its Indian residents.

**August 29, 1970:** A group of Native Americans, led by San Francisco-based **United Native Americans**, ascended 3,000 feet to the top of Mount Rushmore and set up camp to protest the broken Treaty of Fort Laramie. On **June 6, 1971**, they returned and were arrested.

**November 26, 1970:** On Thanksgiving Day, AIM members seized a replica of the Mayflower in Boston Harbor, declaring the holiday a **National Day of Mourning**.

**October 1972:** Hundreds of American Indians drove in caravans, beginning at the West Coast, to the offices of the **Department of the Interior** in Washington, D.C. in a movement called the **Trail of Broken Treaties**. During the occupation, AIM released the Twenty Points, a list of demands that included the re-recognition of Native tribes, abolition of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and federal protections for Indigenous cultures and religions.

**February 27, 1973:** The **Wounded Knee Occupation** began as 200 Oglala Lakota (also referred to as Oglala Sioux) and AIM members seized and occupied the town of Wounded Knee, South Dakota, on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. The occupation lasted for 71 days; two Sioux men were shot to death by federal agents and several more were wounded.

**January 4, 1975:** Congress passed the **Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975**, which reversed the termination policy of previous decades when American Indian tribes were disbanded, their land sold, and "relocations" forced Indians off reservations. The 1975 act provided recognition and funds to Indian tribes.

**July 15, 1978:** A transcontinental trek for **Native American justice**, called the "**Longest Walk,**" set off from Alcatraz Island, California. By the time marchers reached Washington, D.C. they numbered 30,000.

[Native American History Timeline - HISTORY](#)

## Milestones in American Indian and Alaska Native History The Struggle for Progress

**August 11, 1978:** The **American Indian Religious Freedom Act** was passed, granting Native Americans the right to use certain lands and controlled substances for religious ceremonies.

**October 11, 1980:** President **Jimmy Carter** signed the **Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act**. The act granted Indian tribes, including the Passamaquoddy, Maliseet, and Penobscot, \$81.5 million for land taken from them more than 150 years ago.

**November 16, 1990:** President **George H.W. Bush** signed the **Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act**, or NAGPRA into law. The act required federal agencies and museums that receive federal funds to repatriate Native American cultural items to their respective peoples.

**October, 1991:** The **National Coalition of Racism in Sports and Media (NCRSM)** is established by leaders at the National Congress of American Indians to organize against the use of Indian names, logos, symbols and mascots in sports.

**July 13, 2020:** The **Washington National Football League** franchise dropped its name, the “Redskins,” as well as its Indian head logo, in response to decades of criticism that they are offensive to Native Americans. The team was renamed the **Commanders**.

**March 15, 2021:** **Representative Deb Haaland** of New Mexico, a member of the Pueblo of Laguna, is confirmed as secretary of the Interior, making her the **first American Indian to lead a cabinet agency**. “Growing up in my mother’s Pueblo household made me fierce,” Haaland Tweeted after her confirmation. “I’ll be fierce for all of us, our planet, and all of our protected land.”



*Figure 9 Deb Haaland official head shot. Photo credit: U.S. Department of the Interior.*

**July 23, 2021:** In response to criticism, **Cleveland's Major League Baseball** team changed their name to the **Guardians**, dropping their previous name, the Indians.

[Native American History Timeline - HISTORY](#)

[Secretary Deb Haaland | U.S. Department of the Interior \(doi.gov\)](#)

## National American Indian Heritage Month

### People

#### Notable American Indians of Today

The Indigenous community is expansive, with 574 federally-recognized tribes in the United States, 630 in Canada, and more than 17 million Indigenous citizens in Mexico. There have been great Indigenous storytellers, activists, and performers for as long as the various tribes have existed, but as with so many people of color, it has been an uphill battle to be appreciated on the national and international level. Today, many Native Americans and Indigenous people are finally being properly recognized for the vital work that they're doing.

Even as Native writers like **Scott Momoday** earned the Pulitzer Prize and **Winona LaDuke** made history as a vice presidential nominee, Indigenous people still had to combat stereotypes, a dearth of resources, and smaller platforms than many of their White contemporaries.

In the world of American politics, **Sharice Davids** and **Deb Haaland** are breaking down centuries-old boundaries as the first American Indian women to serve in congress. **Jason Momoa** helped to diversify the superhero movie genre as *Aquaman*, and has established himself as a bona fide A-lister in the process. Novelist **Tommy Orange** made waves with his first book, *There There*, a *New York Times* Best Seller that consciously combatted stereotypes about American Indian literature.

“I feel like, for Native writers, there’s a kind of burden to catch the general reader up with what really happened, because history has got it so wrong and still continues to,” Orange stated, and the sentiment is one that likely rings true for Indigenous people in all disciplines. “It feels like you want to get everybody on the same page as where your voice is coming from, and your experience.”



Figure 10 Kiowa writer and visual artist N. Scott Momaday receiving the National Medal of Arts from U.S. President George W. Bush in 2007. Photo credit: public domain.

[16 Famous Native Americans Today \(oprahdaily.com\)](https://www.oprahdaily.com/16-Famous-Native-Americans-Today/)

## Notable American Indians of Today

### Jason Momoa: Pawnee and Native Hawaiian

**Joseph Jason Namakaeha Momoa** was born on August 1, 1979, in Honolulu, Hawaii. He is the son of Coni (Lemke), a photographer, and Joseph Momoa, a painter. His father is of Native Hawaiian and Samoan descent, and his mother, who is from Iowa, is of German, Irish, and Native American ancestry.

Jason was raised in Norwalk, Iowa, by his mother. After high school, he moved to Hawaii, where he landed a lead role, beating out of thousands of hopefuls in the TV series *Baywatch* (1989) (known as *Baywatch Hawaii* in its 10th season). When the show ended, he spent the next couple of years traveling around the world.

In 2001, he moved to Los Angeles, where he continued to pursue an acting career. In 2004, after the short-lived TV series *North Shore* (2004), he was cast as the popular character "Ronon Dex" in the TV series *Stargate: Atlantis* (2004), which achieved a cult-like following. In 2010, he appeared in the Emmy-nominated HBO series *Game of Thrones* (2011), playing the Dothraki king, Khal Drogo. To illustrate to the producers that he was Khal Drogo, he performed the Haka, a traditional war dance of the Maori of New Zealand. The audition was with the same casting director who was casting the titular role in the reboot of *Conan the Barbarian* (2011).

Four weeks after being cast as the popular Robert E. Howard character, Momoa began shooting in Bulgaria. His approach, like that of the filmmakers, was to pull from the eight decades of comics and stories as well as the Frank Frazetta images rather than the hugely popular 1982 movie.

Momoa has talked at length about his background. He has a shark teeth tattoo on his forearm, which honors his family spirit, and he joined protestors trying to protect Mauna Kea, Hawaii's tallest mountain. He's also Pawnee by way of his grandmother, and has spoken about wanting to tell more Indigenous stories on screen.

"There's little to nothing but that doesn't stop me from wanting to bring justice to a lot of stories and a lot of things people don't know about," he told Rotten Tomatoes. "It's what I find interesting, the disenfranchised and people that don't get to tell their story."

Jason lives with his wife, actress Lisa Bonet, with whom he has two children, Lola and Nakoia-Wolf.



Figure 11 Jason Momoa. Photo credit: [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0597388/bio?ref\\_=nm\\_ov\\_bio\\_sm](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0597388/bio?ref_=nm_ov_bio_sm)

[Jason Momoa - Biography - IMDb](#)  
[16 Famous Native Americans Today \(oprahdaily.com\)](#)

## Notable American Indians of Today Irena Bedard: Cree, Iñupiaq, and Yup'ik

**Irene Bedard** (born July 22, 1967) is an Alaska Native actress enrolled in the Native Village of Koyuk who has played many American Indian characters in a variety of television shows and films. She is best known for her voice role as the title character in the Disney animated film *Pocahontas*, and the cult-classic *Smoke Signals* as Suzy Song. She is known for bringing a powerful emotional presence to her characters.

Bedard was born in Anchorage, Alaska, raised primarily in Alaska, but also spent a few years as a child in Washington state. Her father was Bruce Bedard, and mother was Carol Bedard, and she is the oldest of four siblings. She is Inupiaq and Yup'ik on her mother's side, and Cree on her father's side. She graduated from Anchorage's Dimond High School in 1985, and then earned a Musical Theatre degree from The University of the Arts in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Bedard's son Quinn Wilson was born in 2003.

Her first role was as Mary Crow Dog in the television production, *Lakota Woman: Siege at Wounded Knee*, which depicted the 1970s standoff between police and Native Americans, many of the Pine Ridge Reservation, at Wounded Knee, South Dakota. She received a Golden Globe nomination for the role.

Besides the first Disney *Pocahontas* movie, she also voiced direct-to-video sequel *Pocahontas II: Journey to a New World*. Bedard was the physical model for the character. She appeared in a different take of the Pocahontas story in Terence Malick's 2005 film *The New World*, as Pocahontas's mother, Nonoma Winanuske Matatiske. In 2005, she was cast in the television mini-series *Into the West*, portraying the half-Lakota, half-White adult Margaret "Light Shines" Wheeler. In 2011, Bedard portrayed the Messenger in the Academy Award-nominated film, *Tree of Life*. In 2018, Bedard reprised her voiced role of Pocahontas for Disney's *Ralph Breaks the Internet*.



Figure 12 Irene Bedard. Photo credit: <https://www.themoviedb.org/person/65529-irene-bedard/images/profiles>

Actress Irene Bedard has been a fixture in Hollywood for more than two decades, and her creative work includes singing and performing in theatre and spoken word, as well as producing television and movies, speaking, and teaching. She fosters a passion in many creative disciplines, and is a great lover, and adopter, of animals. Bedard was chosen in 1995 as one of *People* magazine's "50 Most Beautiful People." She's served on the American Indian Enterprise and Business Council to the United Nations, and is involved in frequent activist work around the environmental and Indigenous issues.

[Irene Bedard - Biography - IMDb](#)  
[16 Famous Native Americans Today \(oprahdaily.com\)](#)

## Notable American Indians of Today Joy Harjo: Creek and Muscogee

The first Native American poet laureate in U.S. history, **Joy Harjo** has won acclaim for collections like *In Mad Love and War* and *Secrets from the Center of the World*. Harjo has a diverse background, and she's been an enrolled member of the Muscogee tribe since age 19. She's been writing since 1973, and her work confronts and dismantles long-held stereotypes around Indigenous people.

"A lot of images [of Native Americans] are based on fairy tales or Wild West shows. We are human beings, not just people who have been created for people's fantasy worlds. There's not just one Native American," she told Time. "We're diverse by community, by land, by language, by culture."

Harjo is an internationally renowned performer and writer of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation. She served three terms as the 23rd Poet Laureate of the United States from 2019-2022.

The author of nine books of poetry, including the highly acclaimed *An American Sunrise*, several plays and children's books, and two memoirs, *Crazy Brave* and *Poet Warrior*, her many honors include the Ruth Lily Prize for Lifetime Achievement from the Poetry Foundation, the Academy of American Poets Wallace Stevens Award, two NEA fellowships, and a Guggenheim Fellowship.

As a musician and performer, Harjo has produced seven award-winning music albums including her newest, *I Pray for My Enemies*. She is Executive Editor of the anthology *When the Light of the World was Subdued, Our Songs Came Through — A Norton Anthology of Native Nations Poetry* and the editor of *Living Nations, Living Words: An Anthology of First Peoples Poetry*, the companion anthology to her signature Poet Laureate project. She is a chancellor of the Academy of American Poets, Board of Directors Chair of the Native Arts & Cultures Foundation, and is the first Artist-in-Residence for Tulsa's Bob Dylan Center. She lives in Tulsa, Oklahoma.



Figure 13 Portrait of Joy Harjo. Photo credit: Matika Wilbur <https://www.joyharjo.com/>

[16 Famous Native Americans Today \(oprahdaily.com\)](https://www.oprahdaily.com)

[Joy Harjo Official Site - Joy Harjo](https://www.joyharjo.com)

## Notable American Indians of Today Sharice Davids: Ho-Chunk Nation

**Congressperson Sharice Davids** has already made plenty of history in her political career. She's one of the first two Native American women to be elected to congress (alongside Deb Haaland), and is also the first LGBTQ person to be elected in Kansas.

Davids is part of the Ho-Chunk Nation, which originated in Wisconsin, and she regularly works on projects to help the Indigenous population, including boosting economic growth and community development.

Representative Davids was raised by a single mother, who served in the Army for 20 years. After graduating from Leavenworth High School, she worked her way through Johnson County Community College and the University of Missouri-Kansas City before earning a law degree from Cornell Law School. As a first-generation college student who worked the entire time she was in college, Rep. Davids understands the importance of quality public schools and affordable higher education. That foundation allowed her to go on to a successful career, focused on economic and community development, which included time as a White House Fellow under President Barack Obama.



Figure 14 Photo of Representative Sharice Davids. Photo credit: <https://davids.house.gov/about>

When she was sworn into the 116th Congress, Rep. Davids became one of the first two Native American women to serve in Congress. Rep. Davids has centered her work in office on putting Kansans first, fighting to limit the influence of special interests, and making health care more affordable and accessible to everyone. She is a resident of Roeland Park.

On a national level, she's worked to protect and expand access to healthcare, strengthen voter protections, and to provide more resources to small business owners.

[About | Representative Sharice Davids \(house.gov\)](https://davids.house.gov/about)

[16 Famous Native Americans Today \(oprahdaily.com\)](https://www.oprahdaily.com/16-famous-native-americans-today/)

## Notable American Indians of Today

### Louise Erdrich: Chippewa

One of the most prolific and acclaimed Native American authors, **Louise Erdrich** has received two National Book Critics Circle Awards for *Love Medicine* and *LaRose*, as well as the PEN/Saul Bellow Award for Achievement in American Fiction. In addition to her novels, Erdrich has also written children's fiction, poetry, and several non-fiction collections.

Erdrich's grandfather was chairman of the Turtle Mountain Band of the Chippewa in North Dakota, and the writer is a member of that same tribe today. Her book, *The Night Watchman*, tells the story of her grandfather resisting an attempt by Congress to terminate recognition of the Turtle Mountain Band. (For details, see Termination policy on page 33.)

Erdrich was born in Little Falls, Minnesota in 1954. As the daughter of a Chippewa mother and a German-American father, Erdrich explores Native-American themes in her works, with major characters representing both sides of her heritage. In an award-winning series of related novels and short stories, Erdrich has visited and re-visited the North Dakota lands where her ancestors met and mingled, representing Chippewa experience in the Anglo-American literary tradition. In addition to her numerous award-winning novels and short story collections, Erdrich has published three critically acclaimed collections of poetry, *Jacklight* (1984), *Baptism of Desire* (1989) and *Original Fire: New and Selected Poems* (2003).

Erdrich grew up in North Dakota, where her parents taught at a school run by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Erdrich attended Dartmouth College, part of the first class of women admitted to the college; her freshman year also coincided with the establishment of the Native-American studies department. The author's future husband and collaborator, anthropologist Michael Dorris, was hired to chair the department. In his class, Erdrich began the exploration of her own ancestry that would eventually inspire her poems, short stories and novels. Erdrich also became an editor for the *Circle*, a Boston Indian Council newspaper. In 1978, the author enrolled in an M.A. program at Johns Hopkins University, where she wrote poems and stories incorporating her heritage, many of which would later become part of her books.

After receiving her master's degree, Erdrich returned to Dartmouth as a writer-in-residence. Dorris attended a reading of Erdrich's poetry there and was impressed. The two began collaborating on short stories, including one titled "The World's Greatest Fisherman." When this story won five thousand dollars in the Nelson Algren fiction competition, Erdrich and Dorris decided to expand it into a novel—*Love Medicine* (1984), which went on to win the National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction. At the time, Dorris had returned from New Zealand and their literary relationship led to a romantic one; they were married in 1981.

Undoubtedly, though, it is as a novelist that Erdrich is best known. Over the course of a dozen award-winning and best-selling novels, Erdrich has carved out an important place for herself and her work in contemporary American fiction.

[Louise Erdrich | Poetry Foundation](#)

[16 Famous Native Americans Today \(oprahdaily.com\)](#)





Figure 15 Photo of Louise Erdich. Photo credit: <https://www.coursehero.com/study-guides/elpaso-englishcomp2-1/louise-erdrich/>

### Notable American Indians of Today Tommy Orange: Cheyenne and Arapaho

**Tommy Orange's** debut novel *There There* tells the story of several Indigenous Americans living in Oakland and their experience with urban life. The book was a sensation, making the *New York Times* Best Seller list, earning a prize for best first book from the National Book Circle Awards, and a shortlist spot for the Andrew Carnegie Medals, among other honors. In the novel, he sought to challenge antiquated ideas around being a Native American.

A brilliant new writer at the start of a major career, Orange talks about his craft, the writing process, and Native American history and culture, often with meticulously researched visual presentations. In his 2017 opinion piece in the *Los Angeles Times*, “Thanksgiving is a tradition. It’s also a lie,” he confronted the violent past of the American holiday, asking readers to challenge their traditions.

Tommy Orange is a 2014 MacDowell Fellow and a 2016 Writing by Writers Fellow, as well as a recent graduate from the MFA program at the Institute of American Indian Arts. He is an enrolled member of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma, and was born and raised in Oakland, California. He now lives in Angels Camp, California, with his wife and son.



Figure 16 Photo of Tommy Orange seated at a book reading. Photo credit: [https://www.secondsale.com/?msclkid=b99c4142823f14a604c8228be3fe8bf7&utm\\_source=bing&utm\\_medium=cpc&utm\\_campaign=SS%20-%20General%20Search%20Terms&utm\\_term=bargain%20books&utm\\_content=Cheap%20](https://www.secondsale.com/?msclkid=b99c4142823f14a604c8228be3fe8bf7&utm_source=bing&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=SS%20-%20General%20Search%20Terms&utm_term=bargain%20books&utm_content=Cheap%20)

[16 Famous Native Americans Today \(oprahdaily.com\)](https://www.oprah.com/16-Famous-Native-Americans-Today)

[Tommy Orange: Literary Author, Speaker - Penguin Random House Speakers Bureau \(prhspeakers.com\)](https://prhspeakers.com)

## Notable American Indians of Today

### N. Bird Runningwater: Cheyenne and Mescalero Apache

**N. Bird Runningwater** was reared on the Mescalero Apache Reservation in New Mexico. He has worked to build an Indigenous film and television presence for 25 years, championing Indigenous storytellers and creating global representation of Indigenous peoples. Since 2001, Runningwater has guided the Sundance Institute's investment in Native American and Indigenous filmmakers while building a global Indigenous film community. He has nurtured a new generation of Indigenous filmmakers.

Based in Los Angeles, California, Runningwater serves as the Director of Sundance Institute's Native American and Indigenous Program overseeing the Native Filmmakers Lab, the Native Producers Fellowship, the Sundance Film Festival's Native Forum, and the Full Circle Initiative, and he was recently appointed to co-lead the Institute's Outreach and Inclusion work across all programs. Highly sought after for his expertise and knowledge, Runningwater has led workshops and been featured on panels at the Sundance Film Festival and at the MessageSticks Festival held at the Sydney Opera House in Australia.

Runningwater has also established filmmaker Labs in New Zealand and Australia, and *Time Magazine's* 2019 *Optimist Issue*, listed him among "12 Leaders Who Are Shaping the Next Generation of Artists." In 2019 he was invited to join the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences. A recipient of the Woodrow Wilson Foundation's National Fellowship in Public Policy and International Affairs, Runningwater is an alumnus of Americans for Indian Opportunity's Ambassadors Program and the Kellogg Fellows Program.

Before joining the Sundance Institute, Runningwater served as executive director of the Fund of the Four Directions, the private philanthropy organization of a Rockefeller family member. He served as program associate in the Ford Foundation's Media, Arts, and Culture Program, where he built and managed domestic and global funding initiatives. Runningwater also serves as a patron to the imagineNative Indigenous Film Festival in Toronto.



Figure 17 Photo of N. Bird Runningwater at the podium at the Sundance Film Festival in 2018. Photo credit: Twitter.com

Currently based in Los Angeles, he is a graduate of the University of Oklahoma with degrees in Journalism and Native American Studies, and he received his Master of Public Affairs degree from the University of Texas at Austin's Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs.

[N. Bird Runningwater - Biography - IMDb](#)

[BIRD RUNNINGWATER](#)

[Bird Runningwater | Hixson-Lied College of Fine and Performing Arts | Nebraska \(unl.edu\)](#)

## Notable American Indians of Today

### Micki Free: Comanche and Cherokee

On November 21, 2022, the Native American Music Award Hall of Fame honored **Micki Free**, a Grammy Award winner and multiple Native American Music Award winner in the categories of Male Artist and Pop Rock artist.

Micki Free was born May 20, 1955 in West Texas and moved to Germany soon afterward. He claims Irish, Comanche, and Cherokee descent. His stepfather, a U.S. Army sergeant, was stationed in Germany, and Free was introduced to rock 'n' roll there as a child, when one of his five sisters received tickets to a Jimi Hendrix concert and took him along to the show. Later his family moved to Illinois, where Free formed a rock band called Smokehouse. When he was 17, he was discovered by Gene Simmons of KISS, during a concert at which Smokehouse was the opening act for KISS, Ted Nugent, and REO Speedwagon.

After Simmons' encouragement, Free joined Shalamar in 1984, contributing to the group's mega platinum hit songs like "Dancing in The Sheets" from the movie soundtrack *Footloose*. Free also won a Grammy for "Don't Get Stopped in Beverly Hills" from the *Beverly Hills Cop* soundtrack in 1985. While with Shalamar, Free was nominated for a Grammy three times.



Figure 18 Photo of Micki Free with guitar. Photo credit: <https://www.nativeamericanmusicawards.com/hall-of-fame>

After Shalamar, Free and Jean Beauvoir (of The Plasmatics) founded an Adult-oriented rock (AOR) band, Crown of Thorns. Free later founded (and still tours with) The Micki Free Electric Blues Experience, with Jon Brant (formerly of Cheap Trick) on bass, and Curly Smith (formerly of Boston) on drums. Micki Free has recorded with Billy Gibbons of ZZ Top and the release *Micki Free Live in Hyde Park* featured Bill Wyman, formerly of The Rolling Stones. In 2002, Free was cast to play Tonto in a new production of *The Lone Ranger*.

Free was invited to appear as part of an all-star cast of Native American musicians, known as Native Rocks, at the American Indian Inaugural Ball in Arlington, Virginia, on the occasion of president Barack Obama's inauguration. Free's latest album, *Turquoise Blue*, features members of The Santana Band, Steve Stevens of Billy Idol, and Gary Clark, Jr. Free also has a son, Talon Free and a wife, Britt Free, and a daughter with former wife actress Teri Copley.

[HALL OF FAME \(nativeamericanmusicawards.com\)](https://www.nativeamericanmusicawards.com)

[Micki Free Biography, Age, Height, Wife, Net Worth, Family \(celebsagewiki.com\)](https://celebsagewiki.com)

[Micki Free - Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Micki_Free)

## National American Indian Heritage Month

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### Events

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#### **Notable Events in Native American History** **Pontiac’s Rebellion**

**Pontiac’s Rebellion** (1763-1765) was an armed conflict between the British Empire and Algonquian, Iroquoian, Muskogean, and Siouan-speaking Native Americans following the Seven Years’ War. Also known as “Pontiac’s War” or “Pontiac’s Uprising,” the violence represented an unprecedented pan-Indian resistance to European colonization in North America, in which Indigenous nations – Ottawa, Delaware, Potawatomie, Shawnee, Mingo (Seneca), Wyandot, Ojibwe, Huron, Choctaw, Piankashaw, Kickapoo, Tunica, Peoria, and Mascouten – challenged the British Empire.

In May 1763, Native Americans in the Great Lakes and Ohio River Valley went on the offensive and overran Britain’s westernmost fortifications, from Fort Edward Augustus in present-day Wisconsin to Fort Presque Isle in western Pennsylvania. From the beginning, Indigenous strategy revolved around besieging the western forts, cutting off all communications and reinforcements, and subduing the surrounding settler communities. The offensive was largely successful, and by the end of June 1763, only three forts remained – Niagara, Detroit, and Pitt. British responses proved sluggish, since they believed Indigenous peoples incapable of concerted action.

The following year, the empire launched expeditions to relieve pressure on the surviving garrisons, but British forces scored only minor victories. The war ended in early 1765 when French aid failed to materialize for Native Americans and with promises by imperial British administrators to recognize Indigenous sovereignty.

The legacies of “Pontiac’s Rebellion” were many. The conflict enabled Native Americans to compel the British to reevaluate its “Indian Affairs” and give in to Native demands for fear of a prolonged war. The violence also produced unforeseen consequences. American settlers bore the brunt of the violence; scholars estimate that over five hundred civilians lost their lives. The resulting trauma incited indiscriminate attacks against Native populations during and after the conflict, including the infamous Paxton Boys massacre of the Conestoga (Susquehannock) Indians.

In addition, what emerged in the colonies was a culture of “Indian-hating” – or the “anti-Indian sublime” – in which Europeans of different religions, ethnicities, and political affiliations rallied together, despite their dissimilarities, against a Native “Other.” And when the British Empire took measures to defend Native sovereignty, like enforcing the Proclamation Line of 1763, the colonists vented their frustrations upon the empire, all of which contributed to the revolutionary storm brewing in the American colonies between 1763 and 1775.

[Pontiac's Rebellion · George Washington's Mount Vernon](#)

## Notable Events in Native American History

### Indian Citizenship Act, June 2, 1924

This law, **the Indian Citizenship Act**, granted U.S. citizenship to Native Americans living in the United States and removed the ambiguity of the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution regarding who was considered to be a citizen. With Congress' passage of the Indian Citizenship Act, the government of the United States conferred citizenship on all Native Americans born within the territorial limits of the country.

Before the Civil War, citizenship was often limited to Native Americans of one-half or less Indian blood. In the Reconstruction period, progressive Republicans in Congress sought to accelerate the granting of citizenship to friendly tribes, though state support for these measures was often limited. In 1888, most Native American women married to U.S. citizens were conferred with citizenship, and in 1919 Native American veterans of World War I were offered citizenship. In 1924, the Indian Citizenship Act, an all-inclusive act, was passed by Congress. The privileges of citizenship, however, were largely governed by state law, and the right to vote, and until 1957, some states barred Native Americans from voting.



Figure 19 Salish man named Paul Challae and small child in Montana. Photo credit: <https://digitalcollections.lib.washington.edu/digital/collection/loc/id/734>

In addition to the extension of voting rights to Native Americans, the Secretary of the Interior commissioned the Institute for Government Research to assess the impact of the Dawes Act (1887), which had resulted in the loss of two-thirds of the 138 million acres that Native Americans had held prior to that Act. Completed in 1928, the Meriam Report described how government policy oppressed Native Americans and destroyed their culture and society.

The poverty and exploitation resulting from the paternalistic Dawes Act spurred passage of the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act. This legislation promoted Native-American autonomy by prohibiting allotment of tribal lands, returning some surplus land, and urging tribes to engage in active self-government. Rather than imposing the legislation on Native Americans, individual tribes were allowed to accept or reject the Indian Reorganization Act.

From 1934 to 1953, the U.S. government invested in the development of infrastructure, health care, and education, and the quality of life on Indian lands improved. With aid from federal courts and the government, over two million acres of land were returned to the tribes.

[Congress enacts the Indian Citizenship Act - HISTORY](#)

[Today in History - June 2 | Library of Congress \(loc.gov\)](#)

## Notable Events in Native American History Indian Reorganization Act (Indian New Deal), June 18, 1934

**The Indian Reorganization Act**, also called Wheeler–Howard Act, (June 18, 1934), was a measure enacted by the U.S. Congress, aimed at decreasing federal control of American Indian affairs and increasing Indian self-government and responsibility. In gratitude for the Indians’ services to the country in World War I, Congress in 1924 authorized the Meriam survey on the state of life on the reservations. The shocking conditions under the regimen established by the Dawes General Allotment Act (1887), as detailed in the Meriam report of 1928, spurred demands for reform.



Figure 20 A 1911 ad offering "allotted Indian land" for sale. Photo credit: United States Department of the Interior.

Many of the Meriam report’s recommendations for reform were incorporated in the Indian Reorganization Act. The act curtailed the allotment of tribal communal lands to individuals and provided for the return of surplus lands to the tribes rather than to homesteaders. It also encouraged written constitutions and charters giving Indians the power to manage their internal affairs. Finally, funds were authorized for the establishment of a revolving credit program for tribal land purchases, educational assistance, and tribal organization.

About 160 tribes or villages adopted written constitutions under the act’s provisions. With the funds for purchase of land, millions of additional acres were added to the reservations. Improved staffs and services were provided in health and education, with more than half of all Indian children in public school by 1950. The act also awakened a wider interest among Indigenous people in civic affairs, including the right to vote (granted in 1924).

The Reorganization Act remains the basis of federal legislation concerning Indian affairs. The act’s basic aims were reinforced in the 1960s and 1970s by the further transfer of administrative responsibility for reservation services to the Indians themselves, who continued to depend on the federal government to finance those services. Legal challenges to the act have been mounted by some state governments. Notably, in 1995 South Dakota sued over a section of the act under which the Department of the Interior took land in trust for Indian tribes. The case rose to the U.S. Supreme Court but was remanded to a lower court. Subsequent challenges to this part of the act also failed, as have a number of other challenges to the constitutionality of the act.

[Indian Reorganization Act | History & Outcome | Britannica](#)

## Notable Events in Native American History

### Jim Thorpe (1888-1953) Olympic Medals Restored 2022

In 1950, **Jim Thorpe**, one of the most accomplished all-around athletes in history, was selected by American sportswriters and broadcasters as the greatest American athlete and the greatest gridiron football player of the first half of the 20th century.

Predominantly of American Indian (Sauk and Fox) descent, Thorpe attended Haskell Indian School in Lawrence, Kansas, and Carlisle (Pennsylvania) Indian Industrial School. While playing football for Carlisle under coach Pop Warner, he was chosen as halfback on Walter Camp's All-America teams in 1911 and 1912. He was a marvel of speed, power, kicking, and all-around ability.

In 1912, Thorpe won the decathlon and the pentathlon by wide margins at the Olympic Games in Stockholm, but in 1913 an investigation by the Amateur Athletic Union showed that he had played semiprofessional baseball in 1909 and 1910, which should have disqualified him from Olympic competition. He was subsequently deprived of his gold medals.

From 1913 through 1919, Thorpe was an outfielder for the New York, Cincinnati (Ohio), and Boston baseball teams in the National League. He was more successful as one of the early stars of American professional football from 1919 through 1926. He spent two seasons (1922–23) with the Oorang Indians, whose owner attracted crowds by having Thorpe and his teammates dress up and perform “Indian” tricks before games and at halftime. In 1920–21 he served as the first president of the American Professional Football Association (later the National Football League [NFL]).



Figure 21 Jim Thorpe, c. 1910–20s. Photo credit: Harris & Ewing, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

He also excelled in basketball, boxing, lacrosse, swimming, and hockey. In his later years, as he was celebrated in magazine and newspaper articles as one of the greatest athletes of all time, alcoholism and inability to adjust to employment outside sports reduced Thorpe to near poverty. The 1951 film biography of his life, titled *Jim Thorpe—All American*, transformed his story into uplifting melodrama, with the fallen hero rescued by his old coach Pop Warner.

In 1954, after his death, the communities of Mauch Chunk and East Mauch Chunk, Pennsylvania, merged to form the borough of Jim Thorpe. From 1955, the Jim Thorpe Trophy was awarded annually to the most valuable player in the NFL. In 1973 the Amateur Athletic Union restored his amateur status, but the International Olympic Committee did not recognize his amateur status until 1982. Thorpe was subsequently restored as a “cowinner” of the decathlon and pentathlon of the 1912 Olympic Games (along with the second-place finishers in those events). **His Olympic gold medals were returned to his family in 1983. Thorpe was reinstated as the sole winner of the two events in 2022.**

[Jim Thorpe | Biography, Olympics, & Facts | Britannica](#)

## Notable Events in Native American History National American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month

What started at the turn of the century as an effort to gain a day of recognition for the significant contributions the first Americans made to the establishment and growth of the U.S. has resulted in a whole month being designated for that purpose.

One of the very early proponents of an American Indian Day was **Dr. Arthur C. Parker**, a Seneca Indian, who was the director of the Museum of Arts and Science in Rochester, New York. He persuaded the Boy Scouts of America to set aside a day for the “First Americans” and for three years they adopted such a day. In **1915**, the annual Congress of the American Indian Association meeting in Lawrence, Kansas, formally approved a plan concerning American Indian Day. It directed its president, **Rev. Sherman Coolidge**, an Arapahoe, to call upon the country to observe such a day. Coolidge issued a proclamation on Sept. 28, 1915, which declared the second **Saturday of each May** as an American Indian Day and contained the first formal appeal for recognition of Indians as citizens.

The year before this proclamation was issued, **Red Fox James**, a Blackfoot Indian, rode horseback from state to state seeking approval for a day to honor Indians. On December 14, 1915, he presented the endorsements of 24 state governments at the White House. There is no record, however, of such a national day being proclaimed.

The first American Indian Day in a state was declared on the second Saturday in May 1916 by the governor of New York. Several states celebrated the fourth Friday in September. In Illinois, for example, legislators enacted such a day in 1919. Presently, several states have designated Columbus Day as Native American Day, but it continues to be a day we observe without any recognition as a national legal holiday.

In 1990 President George H. W. Bush approved a joint resolution designating **November 1990 National American Indian Heritage Month**. Similar proclamations, under variants on the name (including “Native American Heritage Month” and “National American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month”) have been issued each year since 1994.



*Figure 22 Photo of Angelic La Moose dressed in traditional clothing as a young girl on the Flathead Reservation in Montana. Photo credit: <https://docsteach.org/activities/teacher/analyzing-a-photograph-of-a-young-american-indian>*

[National Native American Heritage Month](#)



## Notable Events in Native American History

### The Termination of The Menominee

Historically, U.S. policy toward Native people has been based in greed and deceit. One of the lesser known but brutally destructive actions began in the 1940s and continued into the 1960s, a policy called **Termination** was put into effect. In the 1930s, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs had been a man named John Collier, who had given tribes the right to keep their own culture. When he left office in 1945, those that hadn't agreed with him took the opportunity to reverse everything he'd done.

The Termination policy was touted as an emancipation process that would free tribes from the control of the government. What the policies were really doing was taking away the power for tribal governments to run themselves. Reservations were to be broken up and no longer receive any kind of government protection. In turn, groups that had previously been run by their own, generations-old system of governance would now be answering to the same rules and institutions that European Americans did.

The process was a long one, and it required legislation to be drawn up for each individual tribe. One of the first was Wisconsin's Menominee Tribe. In 1954, they were officially terminated, and Congress declared that they would no longer be recognized as a tribe. Several extensions were granted, but eventually, in 1961, the tribe was terminated.

The fallout was fast. Programs that had been supported by the federal government before, like schools and hospitals, didn't have a funding base. The small population couldn't afford to support things like utility services on its own, and **termination, bizarrely, meant the removal of government funding that small towns all over the country rely on to survive.** Hospitals and clinics closed; courts were shut down; police departments dissolved; utility services were shut down, and suddenly, the people needed to pay for hunting and fishing licenses for the land that had sustained them for thousands of years.

Termination was repealed in 1973, largely due to its disastrous results with the Menominee, but the damage was already done. The tribe had been living in the same area for more than 10,000 years and were so closely tied to the land that they took their name from the Menominee River, where their origins were set. Before termination, they were one of the wealthiest tribes in the country, completely self-sufficient with their own government, law enforcement, and schools. Fifty years later, the Menominee reincorporated as a tribe, but they're still picking up the pieces.



Figure 23 The Menominee Village/Tribal Hall in Keshena, Wisconsin. Photo credit: Royalbroil/Wikimedia Commons

[10 Atrocities Committed Against Native Americans In Recent History - Listverse](#)

## Notable Events in Native American History The Indian Child Welfare Act Of 1978

Until the 1970s, Native American children were taken from their families on a huge scale. From 1969 to 1974, 25–34 percent of all Native American children were removed from their homes on a temporary or permanent basis and passed into the system of federal schooling, foster care, or adoption.

Part of the problem was the idea of federally instituted boarding schools (see page 11 of this document for more on this topic); another problem was that laws didn't recognize tribal traditions for raising children. Tribes were communal in nature, so extended family or even neighbors often cared for children. In a system that was biased in favor of families made up of only parents and children, this type of childrearing was seen as a problem. In states like North Dakota, about 99 percent of children removed from families were because of cases of communal childcare, which were deemed neglect cases.

These horrific removal practices continued until Congress was finally moved to act. **The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) of 1978** is a federal law that governs the removal and out-of-home placement of American Indian children. The law was enacted after the Federal Government recognized that American Indian children were being removed from their homes and communities at a much higher rate than non-Native children. The law established Federal standards for the removal and placement of Native children as well as for termination of parental rights to protect the best interests of Native American children and keep them connected to their families and Tribes.

ICWA was enacted after Native American children were systematically removed—often without evidence of abuse or neglect that would be considered grounds for removal—and placed with non-Native families, with the intent to deprive them of their Native family or culture. The law delineates the roles of State and Tribal governments in child welfare cases involving children who are members of or eligible for membership in Federally recognized Tribes. For example, it clarifies that Tribes have sovereignty and exclusive jurisdiction over their members who reside on Tribal land and establishes a process for transferring cases to Tribal court in other cases. The law is one of the key components in protecting the rights and culture of American Indian and Alaska Native children and families.



*Figure 24 Nez Perce boy, Colville Indian Reservation, Washington, ca. 1903. Photo credit: University of Washington Libraries*

[Indian Child Welfare Act \(ICWA\) - Child Welfare Information Gateway](#)  
[10 Atrocities Committed Against Native Americans In Recent History - Listverse](#)

## National American Indian Heritage Month

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### Quotes

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#### Native American Quotes

"Humankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are bound together. All things connect."

**Chief Seattle, Duwamish**

"I do not think the measure of a civilization is how tall its buildings of concrete are, but rather how well its people have learned to relate to their environment and fellow man."

**Sun Bear, Chippewa**

"If you talk to the animals, they will talk with you and you will know each other. If you do not talk to them, you will not know them and what you do not know, you will fear. What one fears, one destroys."

**Chief Dan George, Tsleil-Waututh Nation**

"We must protect the forests for our children, grandchildren, and children yet to be born. We must protect the forests for those who can't speak for themselves such as the birds, animals, fish and trees."

**Qwatsinas (Hereditary Chief Edward Moody), Nuxalk Nation**

"I have seen that in any great undertaking it is not enough for a man to depend simply upon himself."

**Lone Man (Isna-la-wica), Teton Sioux**

"I have heard you intend to settle us on a reservation near the mountains. I don't want to settle. I love to roam over the prairies. There I feel free and happy, but when we settle down, we grow pale and die."

**Chief Satanta, Kiowa**

[Native American \(xavier.edu\)](http://xavier.edu)

## Native American Quotes

"The Great Spirit is in all things. He is in the air we breathe. The Great Spirit is our Father, but the Earth is our Mother. She nourishes us.....That which we put into the ground she returns to us."

### **Big Thunder Wabanaki, Algonquin**

"Honor the sacred. Honor the Earth, our Mother. Honor the Elders. Honor all with whom we share the Earth: four-leggeds, two-leggeds, winged ones, Swimmers, crawlers, plant and rock people. Walk in balance and beauty."

### **Native American Elder**

"Friend do it this way—that is, whatever you do in life, do the very best you can with both your heart and minds. And if you do it that way, the Power of the Universe will come to your assistance, if your heart and mind are in Unity. When one sits in the Hoop of The People, one must be responsible because All of Creation is related. And the Hurt of one is the hurt of all. And the honor of one is the honor of all. And whatever we do affects everything in the universe. If you do it that way—that is, if you truly join your heart and mind as One—whatever you ask for, that the Way it's Going to be."

### **Lakota Instructions for Living passed down from White Buffalo Calf Woman**

“When a White army battles Indians and wins, it is called a great victory, but if they lose, it is called a massacre.”

### **Chiksika, Shawnee**

"Hold on to what is good, Even if it's a handful of earth. Hold on to what you believe, Even if it's a tree that stands by itself. Hold on to what you must do, Even if it's a long way from here. Hold on to your life, Even if it's easier to let go. Hold on to my hand, Even if someday I'll be gone away from you."

### **Crowfoot, Blackfoot warrior and orator**

"It is better to have less thunder in the mouth and more lightning in the hand."

### **Apache Tribe**

"We will be known forever by the tracks we leave."

### **Dakota Tribe**

[Native American \(xavier.edu\)](http://xavier.edu)