

National Native American Heritage
Month

November 2011

“Service, Honor, Respect:
Strengthening Our Cultures and
Communities”

National Native American Heritage Month



National Native American Heritage Month

“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



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The first "American Indian Day" was celebrated in May 1916 in New York after Red Fox James, a Blackfeet Indian, rode on horseback from state to state, gathering endorsements from 24 state governments to establish a day to honor American Indians.



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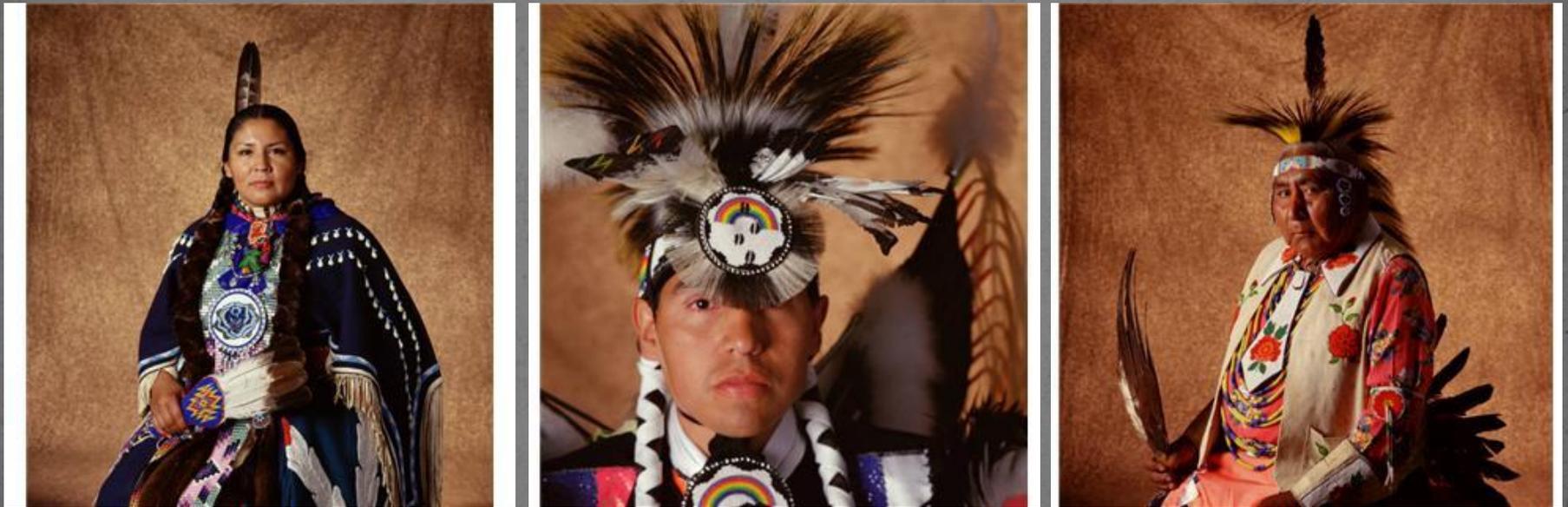
The month-long national recognition of Native Americans began in 1990 when President George H.W. Bush signed a joint congressional resolution designating November as National Native American Heritage Month.



Courtesy of the White House

National Native American Heritage Month

Since then, the title has expanded to celebrate the heritage, history, art, and traditions of American Indians and Alaska Natives.



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Currently, there are 565 federally-recognized American Indian and Alaska Native tribes, and more than 100 state-recognized tribes across the United States.



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The term "Native American" refers to any member of the indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere.



The term "Alaska Native" refers to Alaska's original inhabitants including Aleut, Eskimo, and Indian groups.

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The population data from the 2010 Census showed significant percentage growth of Native Americans and Alaska Natives.



The number of Americans identifying themselves as exclusively Native American or Alaska Native increased 18.4 percent in the past 10 years.

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Today, 5.2 million American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/AN) live in the United States—making up 1.7 percent of the total population.

The AI/AN population is young, with 31.6 percent under the age of 18, compared with 24 percent of the total population.



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The Native American people are strong in tradition and values.

They are a revered part of the American culture, yet many of their basic human needs go unmet.

President Barack Obama said in his 2010 Presidential Proclamation, *“Our debt to our First Americans is immense, as is our responsibility to ensure their fair, equal treatment and honor the commitments we made to their forebears.”*

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According to the National Indian Child Welfare Association, American Indian children have the third highest rate of victimization, at 11.6 per 1,000 children.

American Indian/Alaska Natives have the highest rate of poverty of any racial group in the nation. In 2009, the poverty rate of AI/AN peoples was 27.3 percent, almost twice the national poverty rate of 14.2 percent.

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Compared to other groups, AI/AN youth have more serious problems with mental health disorders; specifically, higher rates of anxiety, substance abuse, and depression.

In 2006, suicide was the leading cause of death for AI/AN males ages 10 to 14. For AI/AN young adults ages 15 to 24, one-fifth of them died by suicide in that same year.

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Alcohol-use disorders are more likely among American Indian youths than other racial groups. In 2007, 8.5 percent of all AI/AN youth were struggling with an alcohol-use disorder, compared to 5.8 percent of the general population.



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The AI/AN youth population is affected by gang involvement more than any other racial population. Fifteen percent of AI/AN youth are involved with gangs, compared to 8 percent of Latino, and 6 percent of African American youth.



Courtesy of the New York Times

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“Since the birth of America, American Indians and Alaska Natives have contributed immeasurably to our country and our heritage, distinguishing themselves as scholars, artists, entrepreneurs, and leaders in all aspects of our society. Native Americans have also served in the United States Armed Forces with honor and distinction, defending the security of our Nation with their lives.” —Barack Obama

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AP/Eric Gay

Courtesy of the Associated Press

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American Indians have participated with distinction in United States military actions for more than 200 years. Their courage, determination, and fighting spirit were recognized by American military leaders as early as the 18th century.



COURTESY BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS

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In World War I, 12,000 American Indians joined the ranks of the armed forces—even though it wasn't until 1924 that Congress granted American Indians U.S. citizenship. Their unique combat abilities and survival skills, which frustrated opponents for generations, became invaluable to the nation's combat success.



Courtesy of the Department of Defense

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During World War II, more than 44,000 American Indians—out of a total Native American population of less than 350,000—saw military service. Many of these troops and officers later transferred their fighting skills to the Korean Peninsula, where new recruits joined them in the fight against communist aggression.



Courtesy of the Department of Defense

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More than 42,000 American Indians—90 percent of them volunteers—fought in Vietnam.



Courtesy of the Department of Defense

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In May 2011, the Pentagon released the following statistics:

American Indian/Alaska Native military deaths in Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom from March 2003 through May 2011: 42

American Indian/Alaska Native military wounded in action in Iraq from March 2003 through May 2011: 336

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American Indian/Alaska Native military deaths in Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom, from October 2001 through May 2011: 19

American Indian/Alaska Native military wounded in action in Afghanistan from October 2001 through May 2011: 109



Courtesy of the U.S. Navy

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Historically, Native Americans have the highest record of service per capita when compared to all other racial groups.



There are nearly 190,00 Native American military veterans.

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“Over a hundred thousand Native men and women have served to protect this land and this country. Some who will never be named or honored. The commitment of American Indians and Alaska Natives to protecting our homeland is unquestionable.”



—Jefferson Keel
President of National
Congress of American Indians

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Management Institute
Patrick Air Force Base, Florida
October 2011

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