

*“Native Pride and Spirit:
Yesterday, Today and Forever”*

NATIONAL AMERICAN
INDIAN HERITAGE
MONTH

2014

Theme provided by: *Society of American Indian Government Employees*

National American Indian Heritage Month

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The Department of Defense (DoD) celebrates observances annually in support of Joint Congressional Resolutions, Presidential Proclamations, and achievements of groups that comprise the society of the United States.



National American Indian Heritage Month

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Presentations are designed to increase total force awareness by highlighting the contributions that different cultures and ethnicities have made in our great nation's rich history and its defense.



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The American Indian cultures are known for their rich oral tradition used to share their history, customs, rituals, and legends through vivid narratives.

Each time a story was told, it breathed life into their culture, cultivated their verbal language, gave meaning to the tribe's history, and also taught life lessons about leadership and honor.



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This presentation reviews the historical milestones that led to the establishment of National American Indian Heritage Month.

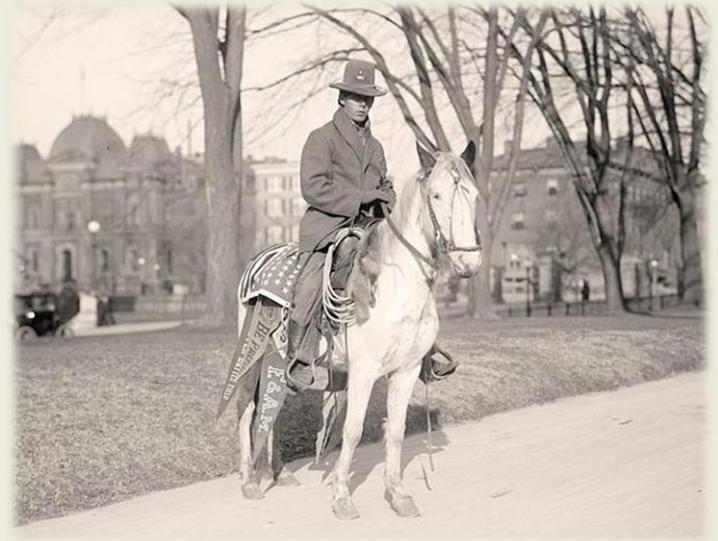
It also describes various aspects of American Indian and Alaska Native life, including population, tribes, and national sovereignty.

Finally, it honors three individuals— Sadie Neakok, Wilma Mankiller, and Michael Thornton—by telling their stories.

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In 1914, Red Fox James, a Blackfeet Indian, rode on horseback from state to state, seeking support for a day to honor American Indians.



A year later, James presented the endorsements of 24 state governments to the White House. There is no record of a national day being proclaimed, despite his efforts.

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In 1915, the Congress of the American Indian Association approved a formal plan to celebrate American Indian Day.

Reverend Sherman Coolidge, an Arapaho tribal member, asked the country to formally set aside a day of recognition.

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In 1924, Congress enacted the Indian Citizenship Act, but it took no action to establish a national American Indian Day.



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It wasn't until 1986 that Congress passed a proclamation authorizing American Indian Week.



In 1990, the month of November was designated as National American Indian Heritage Month. The title has since expanded to celebrate Alaska Natives.

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National American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month is celebrated to recognize native cultures and educate the public about the heritage, history, art, and traditions of American Indians and Alaska Natives.



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Did you know American Indians have the highest population per capita of any ethnic group serving in the military?



American Indians have participated with distinction in U.S. 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.

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The nation's population of American Indians and Alaska Natives, including those of more than one race, was 5.2 million, making up about two percent of the total population in 2012.

By the year 2060, the population of American Indians and Alaska Natives is expected to be 11.2 million.

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American Indian and Alaska Native employees represent one percent of the DoD federal workforce.



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Today, 22,248 American Indians serve in the Armed Forces, making up 1.7 percent of the military population.

Additionally, according to the DoD, there were 156,515 American Indian veterans as of March 2012.

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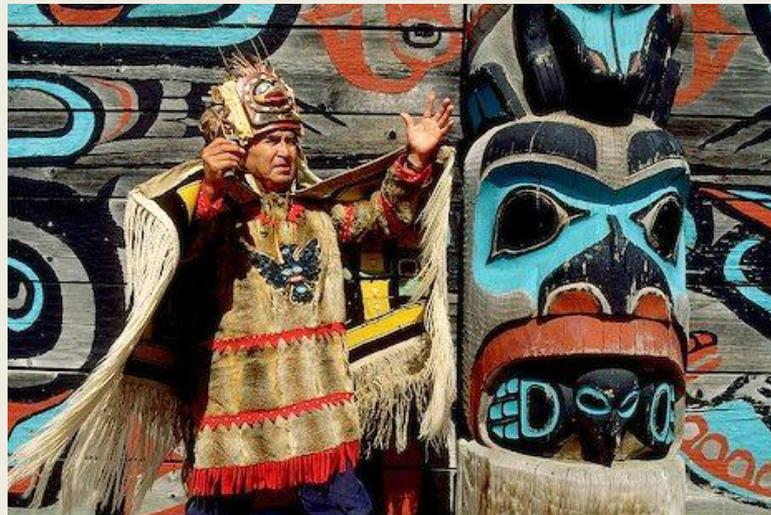
Currently, there are 566 federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native tribes and more than 100 state-recognized tribes across the United States.



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Native Alaskan tribes belong to five geographic areas, are organized under 13 Alaska Native Regional Corporations, speak 11 different languages and 22 different dialects. They also have 11 distinct cultures.



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Federally recognized tribes retain certain inherent rights of self government (i.e., tribal sovereignty) and are entitled to receive certain federal benefits, services, and protections because of their relationship with the United States.

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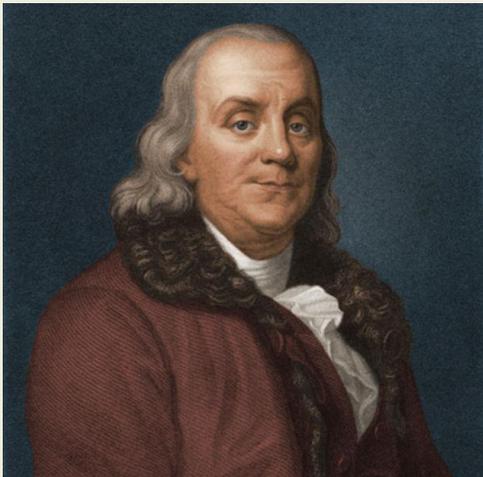
Sovereignty is the right of a nation or group of people to be self-governing and is the most fundamental concept that defines the relationship between the government of the United States and governments of American Indian tribes.

American Indians and Alaska Natives are U.S. citizens and citizens of their tribes. They are subject to federal laws, but they are not always subject to state laws.

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Did you know that the Iroquois League of Nations government was a model for the development of the U.S. government?



Benjamin Franklin said that the idea of a federal government, in which certain powers are given to a central government and all other powers are reserved for the states, was adapted from the system of government used by the Iroquois League of Nations.

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

Today, American Indians are leaders in every aspect of our society—from the classroom, to the boardroom, to the battlefield. Here are the stories of three such individuals.

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Sadie Neakok

Educator, community activist, and magistrate

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Sadie Neakok walked a challenging path as Alaska's first Native woman magistrate in 1960.

In 1959, when Alaska became a state, there were many changes in the legal system. On one side were the demands of White law in a state just emerging from federal jurisdictions; on the other were the needs of an Alaskan Native community living at the very edge of American civilization.

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One well-known episode involved village-wide civil disobedience over federal game regulations restricting the season for hunting waterfowl, which was a primary food source for the community.

When an Alaskan Native hunter was arrested for violating the law, Neakok quietly organized the rest of the village to protest, overwhelming the game warden. Her efforts pressured the state to change the regulation.

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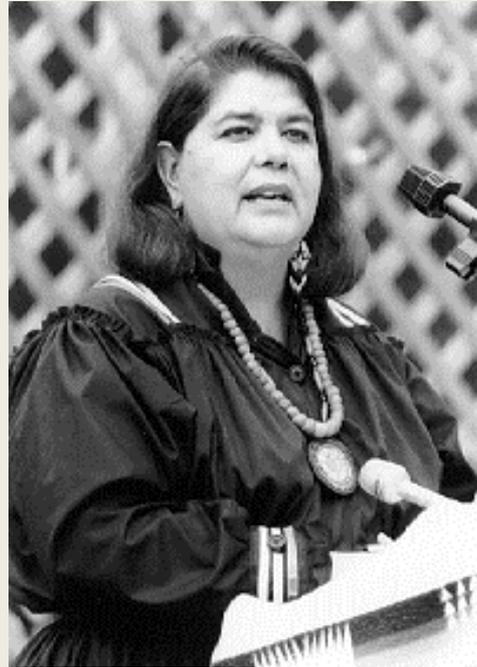
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She worked constantly to reconcile demands that often clashed. Neakok was instrumental not only in introducing and implementing the American legal system among the Inupiat people but also in helping the community learn how to benefit from the system.

She served as Alaska's northernmost magistrate for 17 years.

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Wilma Mankiller

*American Indian community activist, tribal
chief, and tribal legislator*

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Wilma Mankiller was the first woman elected principal chief of the Cherokee Nation.

She worked to improve the lives of American Indians by helping them receive better education and health care, and she urged them to preserve and take pride in their traditions.

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Mankiller overcame many hardships to become a guiding power for the Cherokee people of Oklahoma, and she became a symbol of achievement for women everywhere.

Throughout her life, Mankiller worked to improve the lives and status of her fellow American Indians.

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Although she declined to seek another term as principal chief in 1995 for health reasons, she remained in the public eye, writing and giving lectures across the country.

She stressed that American Indians could influence policymakers and enact change through the power of collective suffrage. She also championed for an end to the increasing problem of violence against women.

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Mankiller was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame in New York City in 1994 and was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1998.



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After learning of Mankiller's passing in 2010, President Barack Obama issued a statement about the legendary Cherokee chief:

“As the Cherokee Nation's first female chief, she transformed the nation-to-nation relationship between the Cherokee Nation and the federal government, and served as an inspiration to women in Indian Country and across America.”

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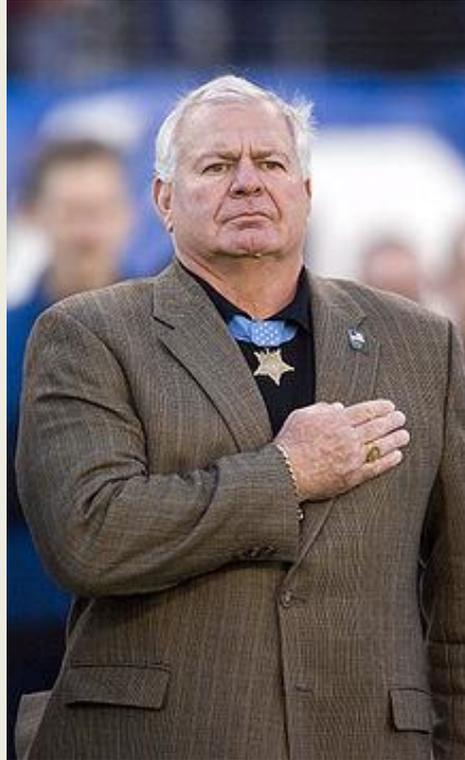


*“One of the things my
parents taught me, and I’ll
always be grateful for the
gift, is to not ever let
anybody else define me.”*

— Wilma Mankiller

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Michael E. Thornton
Lieutenant, USN, Retired

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Michael Thornton enlisted in the Navy in 1967 after graduating from high school. Upon completion of Basic Underwater Demolition training, he was assigned to SEAL Team ONE and served several tours in Vietnam and Thailand.

In the spring of 1972, Petty Officer Thornton was assigned to a mission under the command of LT Thomas Norris.

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On his last tour to Vietnam, at the age of 23, Thornton saved the life of his senior officer on an intelligence gathering and prisoner capture operation.

The small team of two Navy SEALs and three South Vietnamese commandos were discovered by a larger North Vietnamese Army force, and a fierce firefight ensued. Norris finally ordered his outnumbered team to retreat to the sea.

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Norris, who had earned the Medal of Honor just months earlier, was shot in the face. A South Vietnamese commando told Thornton that Norris was dead.

Thornton refused to leave without his lieutenant, upholding the pledge that no SEAL would ever be left behind by a brother. Although the wound was grievous and Norris was unconscious, he was still alive.

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Thornton carried his lieutenant into the water and inflated his lifejacket, swam with him until they were out of the range of fire, and continued to swim for two hours until they were rescued.

Thornton was awarded the Medal of Honor in 1973. He was the first person in more than a century to receive that honor for saving the life of another Medal of Honor recipient.

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“I feel honored, but I’m not a hero, this medal belongs to every man and woman who died serving their country. I feel honored to represent them.” —Michael E. Thornton

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Since the arrival of European settlers in America, American Indians and Alaska Natives have fought to preserve their culture and heritage for future generations.



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A new generation of dedicated individuals have assumed this charge from their elders, and they continue to improve living conditions and opportunities for a better future.



Sources

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Patrick Air Force Base, Florida
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Dawn W. Smith

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