

National American Indian Heritage Month 2015



**GROWING NATIVE
LEADERS: ENHANCING
OUR SEVEN
GENERATIONS**

National American Indian Heritage Month

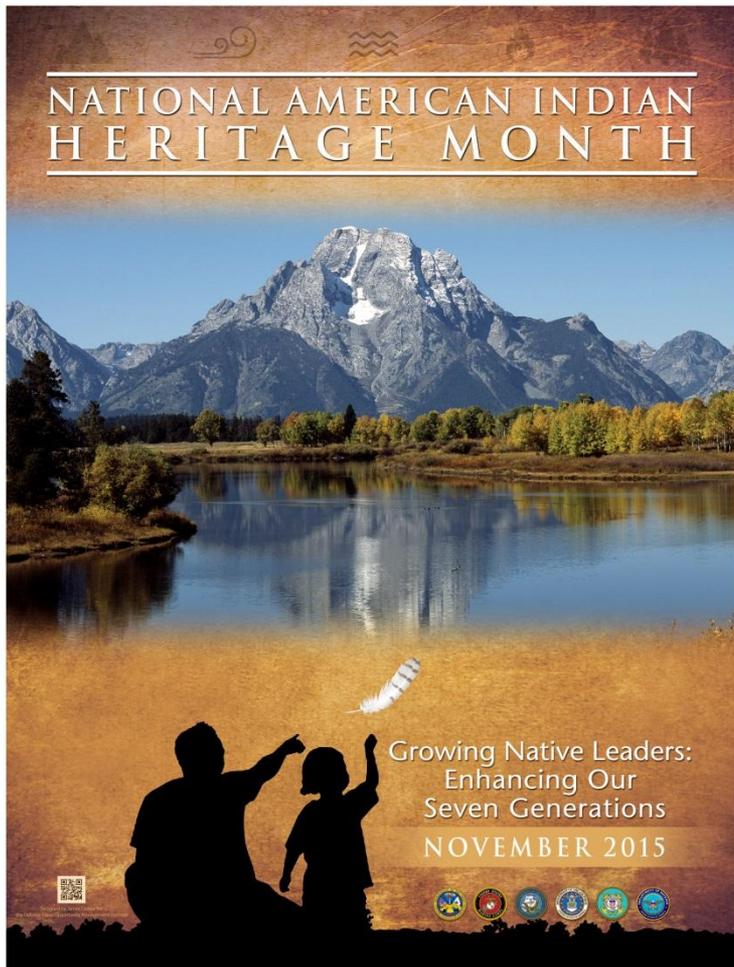
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National American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month celebrates and recognizes the accomplishments of the original inhabitants, explorers, and settlers of the United States.



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The Society of American Indian Government Employees has chosen this year's theme, *Growing Native Leaders: Enhancing Our Seven Generations*.

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“In Iroquois society, leaders are encouraged to remember seven generations in the past and consider seven generations in the future when making decisions that affect the people.”

—Wilma Mankiller

First Female Chief of the Cherokee Nation

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This presentation reviews the historical milestones that led to the establishment of National American Indian Heritage Month, covers various aspects of American Indian and Alaska Native life, and honors the contributions of our Native Service Members.

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At the turn of the century, efforts began to implement a day of recognition for American Indians' contributions to America.



One of the early proponents of an American Indian Day was Dr. Arthur C. Parker, a Seneca Indian.

In the early 1900s, he persuaded the Boy Scouts of America to set aside a day to honor the first Americans.

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In 1914, Red Fox James, a Blackfeet Indian, rode on horseback from state to state, seeking support for the designation of 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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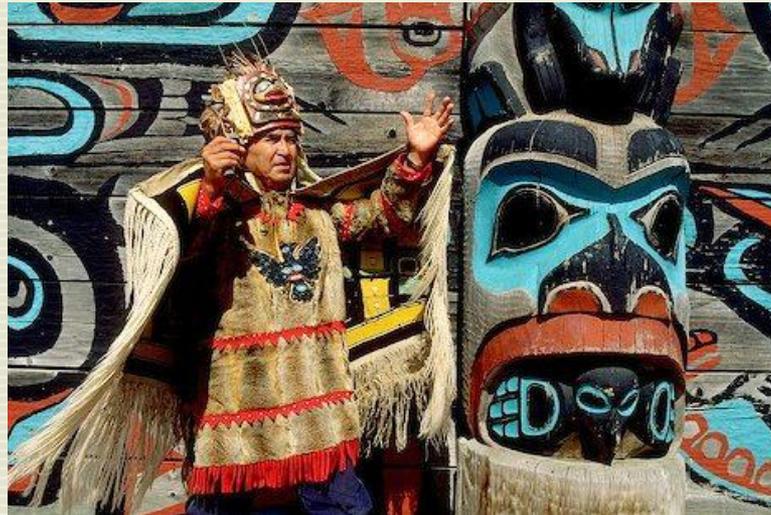
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Currently, there are 566 federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native tribes and more than 100 state-recognized tribes across the United States.

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Native Alaskan tribes belonging 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 defining 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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The nation's population of American Indians and Alaska Natives, including those of more than one race, was 5.2 million in 2013, making up about two percent of the total population.

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

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

According to the Department of Defense (DoD), there were 152,897 American Indian veterans as of March 2013.

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



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American Indians have participated with distinction in United States military actions for more than 200 years.



COURTESY BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS

Their courage, determination, and fighting spirit was recognized by American military leaders as early as the 18th century.

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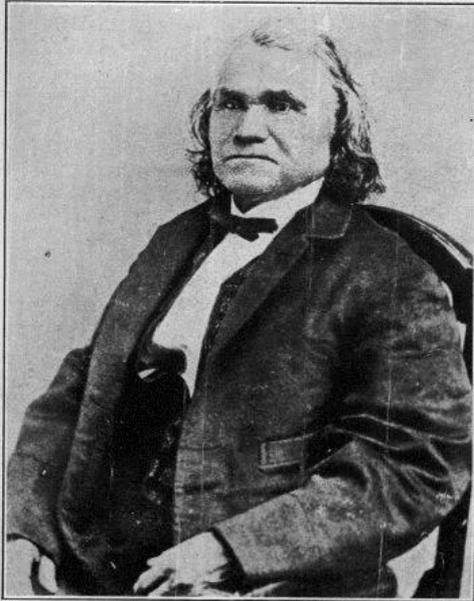
During the Civil War, American Indians served on both sides of the conflict.

Ely Parker was a Union Civil War General who wrote the terms of surrender between the United States and the Confederate States of America. Parker was one of two American Indians to reach the rank of Brigadier General during the Civil War.



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Stand Watie -

The second American Indian General was Stand Watie, a leader of the Cherokee Nation and Confederate Indian cavalry commander—the last Confederate General to surrender his troops.

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In World War I, roughly 12,000 American Indians joined the ranks of the armed forces—their patriotism moved Congress to pass the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924.



Their unique combat abilities and survival skills, which frustrated opponents for generations, became invaluable to the nation's combat success.

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Approximately 600 Oklahoma Indians, mostly Choctaw and Cherokee, were assigned to the 142nd Infantry of the 36th Texas-Oklahoma National Guard Division.



The 142nd saw action in France and its soldiers were widely recognized for their contributions in battle. Four men from this unit were awarded the Croix de Guerre, while many others received the Church War Cross for gallantry.

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During World War II, more than 44,000 American Indians—out of a total American Indian population of less than 350,000—served with distinction between 1941 and 1945 in both European and Pacific theaters of war.



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Collectively, American Indians service members earned at least 71 Air Medals, 51 Silver Stars, 47 Bronze Stars, 34 Distinguished Flying Crosses, and two Congressional Medals of Honor.

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Alaska State Library - Historical Collections

Alaska Natives were a significant presence on the Alaska Combat Intelligence Detachment. This outfit was the first ashore on each island occupied by Allied forces in the Aleutian Campaign.

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Alaska Natives also served in the Alaska Territorial Guard (ATG). The ATG was a military reserve force component of the U.S. Army. Organized in 1942, 6,368 volunteers—who served without pay—were enrolled from 107 communities throughout Alaska.



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Battle-experienced American Indian troops from World War II were joined by newly-recruited American Indians to fight Communist aggression during the Korean conflict.



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During the Vietnam Conflict, more than 42,000 American Indians—90 percent of them volunteers—fought in Vietnam.



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The contributions of American Indians in United States military combat continued in the 1980s and 1990s as they saw duty in Grenada, Panama, Somalia, and the Persian Gulf.

It is recognized that, historically, American Indians have the highest record of service per capita when compared to other ethnic groups.

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The reasons behind this disproportionate contribution are complex and deeply rooted in traditional American Indian culture. In many respects, American Indians are no different from others who volunteer for military service.

They do, however, have distinctive cultural values that drive them to serve their country. One such value is their proud warrior tradition.

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This characteristic has been clearly demonstrated by the deeds of American Indians in combat.



The warrior tradition is best exemplified by the following qualities said to be inherent to most, if not all American Indian societies: strength, honor, pride, devotion and wisdom.

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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

Lieutenant Governor of the Chickasaw Nation
Retired U.S. Army officer

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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, ensuring they consider the next generations when making decisions that affect the people.



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A new generation of American Indians and Alaska Natives has assumed this charge from their elders, and they continue to improve living conditions and opportunities for a better future.



Sources

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