

Guiding Our Destiny  
with  
Heritage and Traditions

NATIONAL AMERICAN  
INDIAN HERITAGE  
MONTH 2013

# National American Indian Heritage Month

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“This month, we celebrate and honor the many ways American Indians and Alaska Natives have enriched our Nation, and we renew our commitment to respecting each tribe's identity while ensuring equal opportunity to pursue the American dream.”  
—President Barack Obama

# National American Indian Heritage Month

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



Portrait of a Native American named Big Head, ca. 1905  
Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress

# National American Indian Heritage Month

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Photo courtesy of  
the Library of  
Congress

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 backing for a day to honor American Indians.

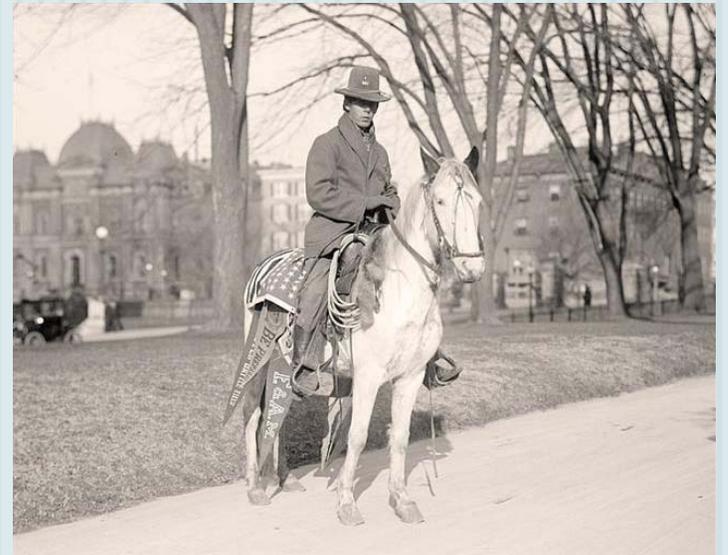


Photo credit: Harris & Ewing

In 1915, James presented the endorsements of 24 state governments to the White House. However, there is no record of a national day being proclaimed, despite his efforts.

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Photo courtesy of the  
Library of Congress

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.

This photograph shows President Calvin Coolidge with four Osage Indians after signing the bill granting Indians full citizenship.



Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress

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It wasn't until 1986 that Congress passed—and President Ronald Reagan signed—a proclamation authorizing American Indian Week.



In 1990, President George H. W. Bush designated November as National American Indian Heritage Month.

# National American Indian Heritage Month

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Photos courtesy of the  
Library of Congress

After 100 years of efforts to establish it, 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 the American Indian and Alaska Native people.

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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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The following individuals have dedicated their efforts to honoring and preserving their rich traditions, as well as improving living conditions for their people.

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Joe Medicine Crow

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Joe Medicine Crow was born October 27, 1913 on the Crow Indian reservation in Montana. Raised by his elders in the tribe's warrior tradition, Medicine Crow was taught to master his fears, ride bareback, track game, and withstand extreme cold. He was also schooled in the stories of those who had previously distinguished themselves in battle.



Photo courtesy of the  
Library of Congress

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Medicine Crow was the first member of his tribe to go to college, and he was attending graduate school in California when America entered World War II.

He joined the Army and became a scout in the 103rd Infantry Division. He drew on the teachings of his grandfathers, which he credits for giving him the strength to be a warrior.

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Before heading into battle, he would paint red stripes on his arms, and he carried a sacred eagle feather from a Sun Dance medicine man to shield him from harm.

During his time in service, he completed the tasks required of a Crow war chief.

Medicine Crow was the last Crow Indian to become a war chief.

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Since returning from war, he has served as the Crow tribal historian for more than 50 years. He has written extensively about Indian history and culture.

He has also gathered numerous oral histories from older generations, preserving a large section of Crow history and stories that otherwise would have been lost forever.

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In 2009, he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, America's highest civilian honor.

Photo courtesy of  
the White House

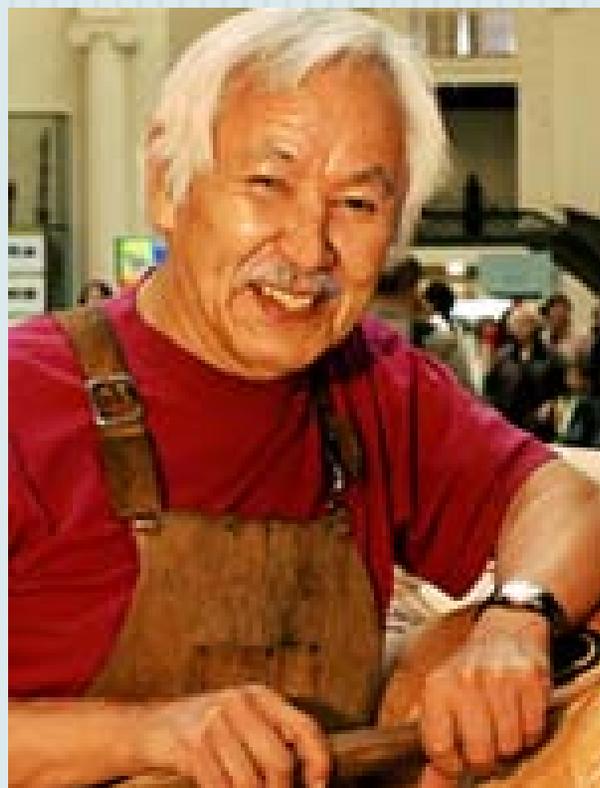
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“As a warrior and living legend, history flows through Dr. Joseph Medicine Crow. For his valiant service in World War II, he was awarded the status of Crow War Chief, and his renowned studies of the first Americans and contributions to cultural and historical preservation have been critical to our understanding of America's history. Joe Medicine Crow is a symbol of strength and survival, and the United States honors him for his dedication to this country and to all Native Americans.” —President Barack Obama

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Nathan Jackson

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Nathan Jackson is among the most famous living Tlingit artists. He was born in Alaska to the Sockeye Clan on the Raven side of the Chilkoot. He learned tribal ways from his clan uncle and grandfather.

Art is a vital part of the Tlingit social system. The design motifs of Tlingit art are from clan crests such as the raven, eagle, killer whale, and beaver, and they reflect traditional stories.

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A traditional artist must know the meanings of these symbols and stories, and a totem carver must know the protocol involved in commissioning, carving, and raising a totem pole.



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After completing his military service in 1959, Jackson started creating miniature totem poles and discovered that he had a talent for carving and painting.

He attended the Institute of American Indian Arts to further hone his skills. He learned to use the adze, an ancient edging tool dating back to the stone age.

His work has included large totem poles, wood panel clan crests, masks, canoes, and carved doors.

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Jackson has created more than 50 totem poles. His artwork is on display in every major museum—as well as many public and private buildings in Alaska.

His work can also be found in museums and private collections throughout North America, Europe, and Japan.

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He has taught Tlingit art apprentices through the Alaska State Arts Council's Master Artist and Apprenticeship program and offered workshops and demonstrations throughout Alaska and the Northwest.

In recognition of his work, the University of Alaska, Southeast, awarded him an honorary doctorate of humanities.

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Molly Hootch

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In 1975, Molly Hootch, a 16-year-old Alaska Native, was one of 27 plaintiffs in a class action lawsuit against the state of Alaska. The suit was filed on behalf of all Alaska Native children in villages without high schools.

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The plaintiffs stated that not providing local high schools in rural villages violated the constitution of Alaska, which contained a clause obligating the state to establish and maintain a system of public schools.

They argued it was not beneficial for students to be away from their home, family, and culture for nine months out of the year.

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Additionally, they asserted that by not providing local high schools to Alaska Native children, the state was perpetuating a pattern and practice of racial discrimination—a direct violation of the U.S. Constitution, federal discrimination laws, and the Alaska constitution.

Records were examined and confirmed the pattern: 95 percent of children coming from the villages without high schools were indeed Alaska Natives.

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Students who finished 8th grade had to attend state-provided boarding schools hundreds of miles away from their homes in order to earn a high school diploma.

Alaska Native children were placed in social situations that did not fit their beliefs, customs, and values. This had an adverse effect on the students, and there were many reports of abuse and neglect.



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Eventually, a settlement that constituted the largest settlement in the history of American education litigation was agreed upon.

Hootch's name has become synonymous with equality in education for the State of Alaska. Many of these schools became known as Molly Hootch schools, in honor of the first name on the plaintiff list.

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Contemporary American Indians and Alaska Natives continue to fight to improve living conditions, increase educational and employment opportunities, and preserve their people's heritage and culture.



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Each year, the White House honors Native American youth leaders as Champions of Change. These young people are advocates in their tribes and communities, working to improve the lives of those around them.

They are examples of the generation that will build a stronger future and address the challenges facing American Indians and Alaska Natives.

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Lorna Her Many Horses is dedicated to honoring American Indian soldiers and veterans. American Indians serve this country at a higher per capita rate than any other racial group. She worked with elders to translate the Star Spangled Banner into Lakota and Dakota, believing that our soldiers and veterans deserve to be honored in their own language.



Photo courtesy of the White House

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With the help of others, she has recorded and produced CDs in her own community. These have been provided to hundreds of Native American veterans and soldiers, as well as more than 50 schools and youth organizations.

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Photo courtesy of  
the White House

Teresa Baldwin has been impacted by suicide and wanted to take action to reduce its rate in her home state of Alaska. She was appointed to the Statewide Suicide Prevention council. She started her own organization, sharing her story about how suicide affected her life and teaching others about recognizing the signs of suicide.

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She has worked with 12 schools on suicide prevention programs, and she is hoping to reach out to more.

Baldwin feels that her work is part of her life goal to help lower the rates of suicide, not only Alaska, but in all of America.

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Photo courtesy of  
the White House

Morgan Fawcett Tlingit was diagnosed with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) when he was 15 years old.

When he was diagnosed, he developed a desire to help educate Native youth and others across the country about FASD.

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Tlingit has organized FASD awareness concerts and benefits, and he speaks about FASD at school assemblies, colleges, hospitals, and churches.

He has also created a Native flute program, which has donated over 650 flutes to at-risk youth and challenged individuals. Tlingit hopes to show others that people born with a disability can succeed with help from friends, family, and the community.

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Photo courtesy of  
the White House

Emmet Yepa from the Jemez Pueblo tribe in New Mexico is an environmental advocate in his tribe. He wants to find solutions to help educate his people and future generations about the importance of recycling.

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Yepa helped form the Walatowa Green Stars Recycling Group, whose mission is to keep their ancestral lands beautiful through recycling. His goal is for his tribe to eventually have its own recycling center.

The Green Stars group educates students about the importance of recycling and provides recycling bins within their pueblos. They have been recognized with numerous awards and have spoken at various environmental preservation conferences.

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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.



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



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“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 of the Chippewa Tribe

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