

EXPLORING INDIGENOUS AMERICAN INDIANS

INDIGENOUS AMERICANS OF THE
SOUTHEAST

by Donna B. McKinney



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AT A GLANCE

- Indigenous Americans have lived in the Southeastern United States for thousands of years. Over time, they formed many distinct nations.
- Indigenous American nations in the Southeast include the Chickasaw, Choctaw, Muscogee (Creek), Cherokee, and Seminole nations.
- When Europeans arrived in North America, they murdered and enslaved many Indigenous Americans. Other Indigenous people died from diseases brought by the Europeans.
- In the 1600s, Europeans started settling on Indigenous land. In the 1800s, the US government forced many Indigenous Americans to leave their homelands to give the land to settlers.

SOUTHEASTERN INDIGENOUS NATIONS

The Southeastern United States is the homeland of more than twenty Indigenous American nations. These nations include the Chickasaw, Choctaw, Muscogee (Creek), Cherokee, and Seminole. Their homelands cover Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Louisiana. Some nations also lived in parts of eastern Texas and Arkansas.

Some Indigenous traditions are thousands of years old.





About 25 percent of Indigenous Americans live on reservations.

Indigenous Americans are US citizens. Many are also citizens of Indigenous nations. Some Indigenous nations have reservations. Many reservations run their own schools. They have businesses. Some Indigenous Americans live

on reservations. But most Indigenous people in the Southeast live outside of reservations.

Many Southeastern Indigenous nations are recognized by the US government. The Chickasaw, Choctaw, Muscogee, Cherokee, and Seminole are independent nations. These nations have their own governments. They have their own laws.

SOUTHEASTERN NATIONS TODAY

There are three recognized Cherokee groups in the United States. The Cherokee Nation is the largest. It is based in Oklahoma. The United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians is also based in Oklahoma. The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians is based in North Carolina.

More than 15,000 people are part of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. Most of the nation's members live in western North Carolina. Tribal citizenship is granted at age 18. Members must show that some of their ancestors were Cherokee. They must be at least one-sixteenth Cherokee by blood to get citizenship.

The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians owns land near the Great Smoky Mountains. It is called the Qualla Boundary. The land spreads across five counties in North Carolina.

The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians has its own government. The nation is led by a principal chief and a vice chief. The government also includes a tribal council. The council is made up of twelve members.

They are elected by the members of the nation. The tribal council makes laws. It also governs the nation.

Schools on the reservation teach children the Cherokee language. The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians also manages two casinos in North Carolina. These casinos provide jobs for tribe members. The casinos also make money for the nation.

First People in the Americas

Scientists believe people have lived in North America for at least 23,000 years. They traveled from Asia to Alaska. They then spread across North America. Many settled in the Southeastern United States. But different nations have different stories about where they came from.

GLOSSARY

alliance

a relationship where groups of people work together toward a common goal

ancestors

people in a person's family who lived long ago

assimilate

to adopt another culture's ways and traditions

discrimination

unfair treatment of people based on traits such as race, gender, or age

domestic violence

when a person mentally, emotionally, or physically hurts their spouse or partner

legacy

the memory or spirit of a person

reservations

areas of land held by Indigenous nations through treaties with the US government

settlers

people who move to a new area

SOURCE NOTES

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