

WHO WE ARE

# THE NATIVE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

Stuart A. Kallen



# CONTENTS

<b>Native Americans: By the Numbers</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>6</b>
Unique Cultures, Diverse People	
<b>Chapter One</b>	<b>10</b>
Early Life in America	
<b>Chapter Two</b>	<b>20</b>
Rebuilding Communities	
<b>Chapter Three</b>	<b>29</b>
Reclaiming Identity	
<b>Chapter Four</b>	<b>38</b>
Striving for Rights	
<b>Chapter Five</b>	<b>48</b>
Confronting Challenges	
<b>Source Notes</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>For Further Research</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Index</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Picture Credits</b>	<b>64</b>

# NATIVE AMERICANS: BY THE NUMBERS

## Total Population

- 3.7 million identify as Native American or Alaska Native alone
- 5.9 million identify as Native American or Alaska Native in combination with another ethnic group



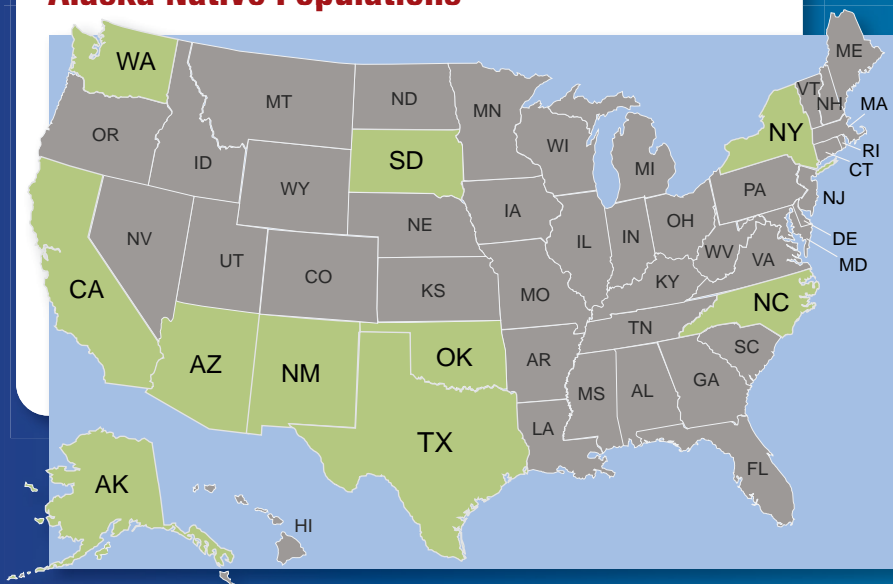
## Youth Population

- 1.6 million Native American and Alaska Native young people under the age of 18

## Number of Federally Recognized Tribes

- 574

## Ten States with Largest American Indian/Alaska Native Populations



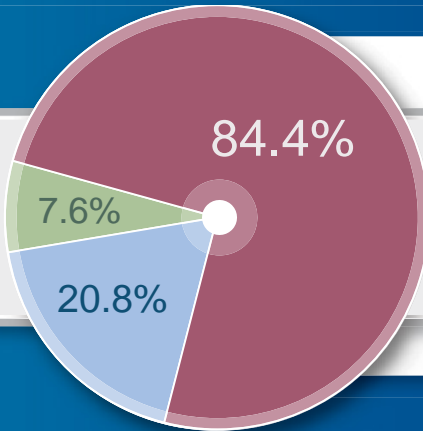
## Largest Native American Tribe

- Navajo (Diné) Nation: population 399,494



## Largest Reservation

- Navajo (Diné) Nation: 24,425 sq mi

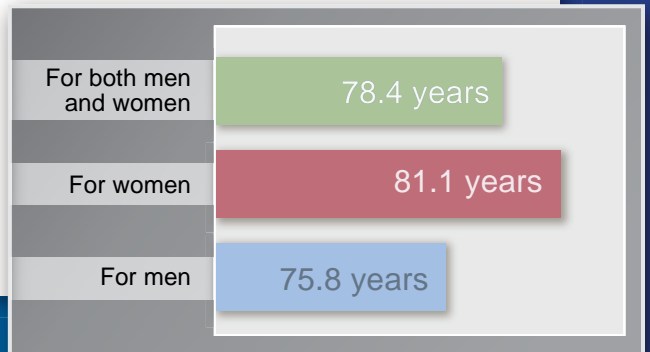


## Education

- High school diploma
- Bachelor's degree
- Graduate or professional degree



## Life Expectancy



# CHAPTER ONE

## Early Life in America

American schoolchildren have long been taught about a period called the age of discovery. This era from the fifteenth through eighteenth centuries was a time when the English, French, Spanish, and other European explorers sailed to North America and built settlements. Some old history books make it sound as if the explorers had discovered a vacant land. In 1987 a widely used high school textbook called *American History: A Survey* reinforced this idea: “For thousands of centuries . . . in which human races were evolving, forming communities, and building the beginnings of national civilizations in Africa, Asia, and Europe—the continents we know as the Americas stood empty of mankind and its works.” The book goes on to state that Europeans created “a civilization where none existed.”<sup>4</sup>

Despite the notion that North America was an untouched wilderness, anthropologists estimate that before the fifteenth century around 10 million indigenous people lived in what is now the United States. They spoke over three hundred languages, according to the Indigenous Language Institute. While early European colonists called the land the New World, it was an ancient expanse of earth that had been shaped by Native Americans for more than ten thousand years. Around two thousand years ago, the Hohokam people of Arizona built a series of dams and more than 500 miles (805 km) of canals to provide water to approximately fifty thousand people. On the West Coast the Mono, Karuk, and Yurok people burned the underbrush that surrounded ancient sequoia and redwood trees to attract game animals and prevent large, destructive wildfires. And almost everywhere freshwater flowed, Native

Americans lined river banks with basket traps to catch fish. Ancient archaeological records show that tribes traded seeds, food, animal skins, precious stones, and other goods with one another through a system of interconnected trails that linked thousands of villages across the continent.

## **Nations of the Northeast**

Before the arrival of Europeans, Native Americans did not have guns, horses, livestock, metal tools, or vehicles with wheels. However, their hunting, fishing, and agricultural skills allowed them to enjoy an exceptionally varied diet in a fertile land that teemed with plants and animals. This helped Native American communities thrive in almost every part of North America.

Indigenous people had many different governing systems, cultural traditions, languages, and spiritual practices. However, there were some similarities. Most Native American groups were made up of extended families, or clans. Clans held a special place in Native American life as explained by Jake Aguonia and other tribal elders of the Anishinaabe people of the Great Lakes region: “Your clan is with you from the day you are born. It is said that your clan walks with you and looks after you. Your clan takes care of you so that you don’t have to go through life without help and protection.”<sup>5</sup>

Some of the clans—though related—lived far apart, went by different names, and spoke different dialects of the same language. The Haudenosaunee Confederacy is an example of distant but related clans. The confederacy, also known as the Six Nations of the Iroquois, originally included the Mohawk, Oneida, Tuscarora, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca peoples. They spoke different Iroquoian dialects. They occupied thousands of villages spanning hunting grounds and farmland in present-day New York and Pennsylvania and around the eastern Great Lakes region all the way up into parts of southern Canada.

*Haudenosaunee* translates as “People of the Longhouse.” Longhouses were large shelters constructed from layers of birch bark over wooden poles. They could be up to 250 feet (76 m) long

# Native American Cultural Regions



This map shows the major Native American cultural regions in North America as they were when the Europeans first arrived. It also names some of the tribes living in each region.

and 25 feet (7.6 m) wide. Twenty or more families might share a longhouse. The Haudenosaunee cultivated corn, beans, and squash—crops they referred to as the Three Sisters. Early French explorers noted that 6 square miles (15.5 sq. km) of cornfields surrounded each Haudenosaunee village.

Native Americans who lived in present-day New England were part of the Wampanoag tribal confederation, which included the Patuxet, Mashpee, and Nantucket peoples. These clans spoke dialects of the Algonquian language, which was also spoken by nations as varied as the Delaware Lenapé, the Ojibwa in the upper Midwest, and the Blackfoot of the Great Plains. As with many other Native Americans throughout the continent, corn provided a nutritional staple that allowed the Wampanoag to thrive. English explorer John Smith expressed his amazement at the bountiful landscape shaped by the Patuxet in present-day Massachusetts. In his 1616 book *A Description of New England*, Smith wrote that the land is “so planted with Gardens and Corne fields, and so well inhabited with a goodly, strong and well proportioned people . . . [that] I would rather live here than any where.”<sup>6</sup>

## **Great Plains and Western Nations**

In the central part of North America, vast prairies covered the land between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains. An estimated 50 million bison (often called buffalo) occupied these grasslands. Bison provided food, clothing, and shelter to dozens of Native American nations, including the Ojibwa, Lakota, Pawnee, Kiowa, and Cheyenne.

People of the Great Plains considered the bison as both a sacred animal and a provider of all necessities. The meat was roasted, dried, or made into soup. Bison hides were fashioned into clothing, drums, and other items. Large hides were sewn together to create cone-shaped shelters called tepees.

In the Pacific Northwest more than one hundred Native American nations prospered along the coast from California to Alaska. This cool, rainy region was home to communities including the Tlingit in the north and the Salish, Pomo, and Yurok further south. The coastal regions teemed with seals, walruses, whales, oysters, lobsters, and other seafood. Salmon and other fish were abundant in pristine mountain rivers that flowed cold and clear from the Sierra Nevada range. Historian Roxanne Dunbar-



Ortiz describes the people of the Pacific Northwest: “Great seafaring and fishing peoples flourished, linked by culture, common ceremonies, and extensive trade. These were wealthy peoples living in a comparative paradise of natural resources, including the sacred salmon. . . . They crafted gigantic wooden totems, masks, and lodges carved from giant sequoias and redwoods.”<sup>7</sup>

“Great seafaring and fishing peoples flourished [in the Pacific Northwest]. . . . These were wealthy peoples living in a comparative paradise of natural resources, including the sacred salmon.”<sup>7</sup>

—Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, historian

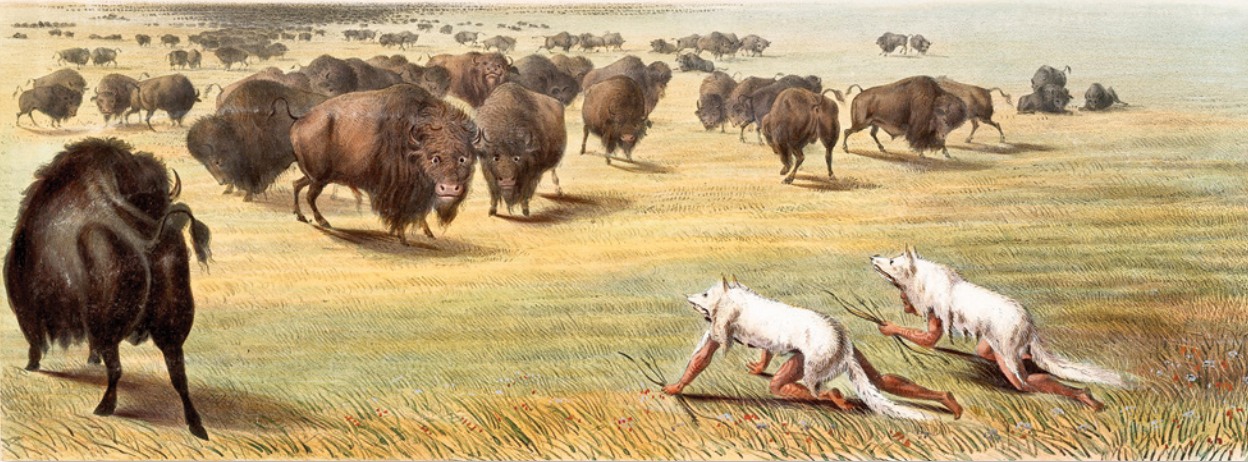
Indigenous people who lived between the Sierra Nevada and the Rocky Mountains did not have a paradise of natural resources. This region, known as the Great Basin, features an arid climate, brackish water, and high deserts that sizzle in the summer and freeze in the winter. But the Shoshone, Paiute, Ute, and Bannock, among others, understood the harsh rhythms of their environment. They fished and hunted rabbits, antelope, and waterfowl. In the summer they gathered pine nuts, roots, and tubers to store for cooking during the cold winter months.

## **The Southwestern Clans**

In the rugged lands of the Southwest, the Navajo, Pueblo, Apache, and other indigenous peoples adapted to a dry landscape marked with mesas, canyons, mountains, and deserts. The Apache were nomadic people. Some clans followed migrating herds of bison while others set up temporary villages and planted crops. The Pueblo people built permanent adobe homes called pueblos. They cultivated corn, squash, and other crops and hunted small mammals like gophers and rabbits.

For more than eight thousand years, Native American women of the Southwest practiced the arts of basket weaving and pottery making. Baskets decorated with geometric patterns, flower themes, and animal images were used as backpacks, hats, and

*Native Americans are depicted wearing wolf skins as they hunt bison (also known as buffalo). Before Europeans arrived with horses in the seventeenth century, nomadic communities hunted buffalo on foot, with bow and arrows.*



utensils. Pottery bowls, jars, vases, and decorative items were emblazoned with intricately painted designs.

Blue-green turquoise stones were laboriously mined and painstakingly transformed into beads, bracelets, earrings, and necklaces with tools made from tortoise shells and elk horns. Turquoise served many functions. In addition to jewelry, the stone was infused with magical significance and was central to spiritual and healing rituals.

## **Spirits and Art**

To the people of the Southwest—and to Native American clans throughout the continent—spirituality was central to daily life. While the religious practices of the clans were numerous, intricate, and different in each community, most held a central belief that the natural surroundings were permeated with spirits. All plants, animals, rocks, bodies of water, and weather phenomena were said to be governed by mystical life forces. These spirits could be helpful or harmful, depending on how they were treated. Native American spiritual practices revolved around praying to spirits, pondering their motives, and making offerings to appease them.

People of many nations, from the Ojibwa to the Haudenosaunee, also believed in a supreme being called the Great Spirit. This being was an ever-present active force without form who

## The Haudenosaunee Confederacy

For centuries the five Iroquois-speaking clans in upstate New York were fierce rivals embroiled in constant conflict. According to Iroquois oral tradition, a wandering elder named Deganawida met up with Hiawatha, an Onondaga man, to unite the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca clans in the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. Anthropologists believe that this happened sometime around 1450. Deganawida and Hiawatha traveled to each of the five nations and presented the Great Law of Peace, which is the oral constitution of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. The Great Law of Peace laid out about 115 decrees to unite the clans in symbolic kinship so they could live together in peace.

Leaders of the confederacy were selected by the most respected women in each clan. They elected fifty life-appointed sachems, or peace leaders, who represented the clans in a Grand Council. The council met whenever it needed to rule on disputes, represent the confederacy to outsiders, and coordinate group actions.

Framers of the US Constitution, including Benjamin Franklin and James Madison, studied the democratic ideals of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. Some historians have suggested that the decrees of the Great Law of Peace were incorporated into the US Constitution, written in 1787.

oversaw all life on earth. In the mid-nineteenth century, anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan befriended several Seneca leaders. Morgan explained his understanding of the Great Spirit in his 1851 book *The League of the Ho-dé-no-sau-nee or Iroquois*: “The Iroquois regarded the Great Spirit as the God of the Indian alone. . . . To him they rendered constant thanks and homage for the change of the seasons, the fruits of the earth, the perseverance of their lives.”<sup>8</sup>

In the wild lands of the subarctic the Yupik people of Alaska referred to their spirituality as the “Way of Life.” This was based on the belief that animals could understand human speech and should be afforded the utmost respect. While obtaining food in a land of deep snow and frigid temperatures could be extremely challenging, hunters did not curse the animals no matter how great their hunger. Instead, they prayed to animal spirits and offered honor and devotion. After a successful hunt the Way of Life dictated that the animal be thanked for giving the gift of its life.

# SOURCE NOTES

## Introduction: Unique Cultures, Diverse People

1. Kevin Gover, "Five Myths About American Indians," *Washington Post*, November 22, 2017. [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com).
2. Robert Martin, "To Lead Is to Serve," Tribal College, February 20, 2022. <https://tribalcollegejournal.org>.
3. Quoted in Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, "Yes, Native Americans Were the Victims of Genocide," History News Network, May 12, 2016. <https://historynewsnetwork.org>.

## Chapter One: Early Life in America

4. Quoted in Charles C. Mann, *1491*. New York: Vintage, 2006, p. 14.
5. Quoted in "Native Teachings Are About a Way of Life," Anishnawbe Mushkiki, 2022. <https://mushkiki.com/our-programs/clans>.
6. Quoted in Charles C. Mann, "1491," *The Atlantic*, March 2002. [www.theatlantic.com](http://www.theatlantic.com).
7. Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *The Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*. Boston: Beacon, 2015, p. 25.
8. Lewis Henry Morgan, *The League of the Ho-dé-no-sau-nee or Iroquois*. New York: Citadel, 1993, p. 155.
9. Thomas Morton, "Thomas Morton: Manners and Customs of the Indians (of New England), 1637," Fordham University, January 20, 2021. <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu>.
10. Black Elk et al., *Black Elk Speaks*. New York: SUNY Press, 2008, p. 218.

## Chapter Two: Rebuilding Communities

11. Quoted in Len Greenwood, "Trail of Tears from Mississippi Walked by Our Ancestors," School of Choctaw Language, 2017. <https://choctawschool.com>.
12. Alexis de Tocqueville, "Democracy in America," Pearson, 2022. <https://wps.pearsoncustom.com>.
13. Martin Van Buren, "State of the Union Address: Martin Van Buren (December 3, 1838)," Infoplease, 2022. [www.infoplease.com](http://www.infoplease.com).
14. Cherokee Nation, "History," 2022. [www.cherokee.org](http://www.cherokee.org).
15. Chuck Hoskin Jr., "Check Out Our Sound Stage," Cherokee Nation Film Office, 2021. <https://cherokee.film>.

# FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

## Books

Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *The Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*. Boston: Beacon, 2015.

Kathy Eckles Hooker, *Voices of Navajo Mothers and Daughters: Portraits of Beauty*. Flagstaff, AZ: Soulstice, 2022.

Robin Wall Kimmerer and Monique Gray Smith, *Braiding Sweetgrass for Young Adults: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*. Minneapolis: Zest, 2022.

Antoine Mountain, *Child of Morning Star: Embers of an Ancient Dawn*. Baltimore: Uproot, 2022.

Anton Treuer, *The Language Warrior's Manifesto: How to Keep Our Languages Alive No Matter the Odds*. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 2020.

## Internet Sources

Kevin Gover, "Five Myths About American Indians," *Washington Post*, November 22, 2017. [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com).

Nicola Jones, "How Native Tribes Are Taking the Lead on Planning for Climate Change," *Yale Environment 360*, February 11, 2020. <https://e360.yale.edu>.

Thomas Morton, "Thomas Morton: Manners and Customs of the Indians (of New England), 1637," Fordham University, January 20, 2021. <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu>.

Max Nesterak, "Uprooted: The 1950s Plan to Erase Indian Country," *APM Reports*, November 1, 2019. [www.apmreports.org](http://www.apmreports.org).

Dan Ninham, "Anton Treuer: Keeping the Ojibwe Language Alive," *Indian Country Today*, February 14, 2022. <https://indiancountrytoday.com>.

Shandlin Vandervere, "Life on a Native American Reservation," *Medium*, May 8, 2020. <https://medium.com>.

## Websites

### Center for American Indian Health

<https://caih.jhu.edu>

This organization founded in 1991 runs public health interventions for Native Americans based on traditional culture and spirituality. Programs in-

# INDEX

*Note: Boldface page numbers indicate illustrations.*

- age of discovery, 10  
Aguonia, Jake, 11  
Alcantara, Pedro, 29  
Alcatraz Island occupation (1969–1971), 42–44  
Algonquian language, 13  
Allard, LaDonna Brave Bull, 46  
*American History: A Survey* (textbook), 10  
American Indian Movement (AIM), 42, 45  
American Indian Religious Freedom Act (1978), 37, 44  
Apache Nation, 14  
arts, 8, 35  
    of Southwestern clans, 14–15
- Banai, Eddie Benton, 42  
Banks, Dennis, 42  
Bannock Nation, 14  
beavers, **55**, 55–56  
Bellecourt, Clyde, 42  
Biden, Joe, 7, 27–28  
Black Elk (Oglala Lakota elder), 19  
Blackfoot people, 13  
Black Power movement, 41  
boarding schools, 30–33  
    historical trauma from, 48  
    investigation into, 32  
    Native American children in, **31**  
Bosque Redondo (reservation), 24–25  
Brave Heart, Maria Yellow Horse, 48, 49  
Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), 32
- Campbell, Ben Nighthorse, 38, **39**  
Carmichael, Stokely, 41  
Carter, Jimmy, 37  
Cayuga people, 11, 16  
Center for American Indian Health (CAIH), 52, 60–61  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 49  
Charger, Jasilyn, 7–8, 47  
Charles-Newton, Eugenia, 54  
Chavers, Dean, 45  
Cherokee Nation Businesses (CNB), 23–24  
Cherokee Nation Film Office, 24  
*Cherokee Phoenix* (newspaper), 20  
Cherokee (Tsalagi) Nation, 7  
    develops written language, 20  
    forced relocation of, 21–22  
    rebuilding of, 22–23  
Cheyenne Nation, 13, 17, 19  
Chickasaw Nation, 20, 21  
Child Welfare Act (1978), 32–33  
Choctaw Nation, 20, 21  
    forced relocation of, **25**  
clans, 11  
climate change, 54–56  
Constitution, US, 16  
Cooley, Nikki, 54  
Creek Nation, 20, 21  
cultural regions, **12**  
Culture Forward program, 52  
Curtis Act (1898), 23
- Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) protests, **46**, 46–47  
Day, Charlotte, 41, 42  
Day, Clyde, 41  
Day, Dorene, 42  
Deganawida (Iroquois elder), 16  
Department of Interior, US, 32  
Department of Justice, US, 50  
*A Description of New England* (Smith), 13  
Diné Nation. *See* Navajo Nation  
domestic violence, 48, 50–51, 54  
Dunbar-Ortiz, Roxanne, 13–14, 31–32  
environmental justice activism, 45–47
- Farrell, Cynthia, 53  
Five Civilized Tribes (Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole), 20  
Franklin, Benjamin, 16
- gaming operations, 9, 23  
Garcia, Anthony, 42–43  
Gathering of Nations (Albuquerque), 37  
Gibson, Jeffrey, 35  
Goldtooth, Dallas, 46  
Goldtooth, Tom, 45–46  
Gover, Kevin, 6  
*The Grandfathers Speak* (Hitakonanu'laxk), 18  
Grass Dance Society, 35  
Great Law of Peace, 16  
Great Spirit, 15–16
- Haaland, Deb, 7, 32, 52  
Harjo, Sterlin, 7  
Haudenosaunee Confederacy (Six Nations of the Iroquois), 11–12, 16, 26  
Hill, Carrie, 35  
historical trauma, 48–49  
    ongoing effects of, 51  
Hitakonanu'laxk (Lenapé chief), 18  
Hohokam people, 10  
Hopi people, 9  
Hoskin, Chuck, Jr., 24
- Indian country, 7  
Indian Country Today (website), 61  
Indian Education Act (1972), 44  
Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (1988), 23  
Indian Relocation Act (1956), 40–41  
Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (1975), 44