

NATIONAL NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

NOVEMBER 1ST - 30TH

Native American Heritage Month is celebrated to honor the remarkable original inhabitants of our nation. This month is also referred to as the American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month. The United States is home to more than eight million Native Americans, representing 574 tribes with 167 spoken languages. This month honors the rich and diverse cultures, histories, and contributions of Native Americans. It is an opportunity to acknowledge their resilience, wisdom, and unique traditions, while also fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation for the challenges they have faced throughout history.

To commemorate Native American Heritage Month join the DMAVA Office of DEIB in immersing in the exploration of their contributions, traditions, and historical events presented below.

Navajo Code Talkers



Pfc. Preston Toledo and Pfc. Frank Toledo, Navajo cousins in a Marine artillery regiment in the South Pacific, relay orders over a field radio in their native tongue.

In World War II, the U.S. Marine Corps harnessed the Navajo language to create an unbreakable code. In May 1942, 29 Navajo men were recruited to develop a specialized encrypted language for military operations. This code's impregnability stemmed from the fact that, like many Native American languages, Navajo is primarily oral, emphasizing the cultural significance of spoken language in preserving heritage.

The Navajo Code talkers demonstrated remarkable efficiency, translating, transmitting, and re-translating a test message in just two and a half minutes, a task that could take hours without the code. Their pivotal role in the U.S. victory at Iwo Jima is underscored by six Navajo Code Talkers operating simultaneously during the invasion, successfully transmitting over 800 messages without error. In this extraordinary chapter of history, the Navajo language played a critical role in military success, showcasing the potency of indigenous languages in unexpected arenas.

View the Navajo Code Talkers dictionary, [here](#).



President Bush with the surviving four Navajo Code Talkers in 2001

Land Acknowledgement



A map of the NJ Native American tribal territory, Mercer County was occupied by the Lenni Lenape tribe.

Land acknowledgement is a traditional custom within Native American culture. It holds profound significance as it recognizes the historical connection between indigenous communities and the land they inhabit. For Native Americans and Indigenous Peoples, the earth is not merely a resource, but a sacred entity intertwined with their identity, spirituality, and traditions. Embracing land acknowledgement is a crucial step for all individuals, as it fosters awareness and respect for the complex history and ongoing struggles faced by indigenous peoples.

The Lenape Tribe, having inhabited New Jersey, New York, and Delaware for tens of thousands of years before European arrival, held a deep connection to the land. The historical records of Mercer County highlight the former Lenape village in Trenton NJ as the first known Native American settlement on the east coast near the Atlantic Ocean. To honor the Lenape Tribe's historical ties to the land:

"we express our gratitude, acknowledging the Native Peoples on whose ancestral homelands we gather. We also recognize the diverse and vibrant Native communities that call this place home today."
—NMAI Land Acknowledgment

To explore additional Indigenous territories, treaties, and languages, click [here](#) to access a Digital Native Land Map.

The Peace Treaty of 1621



*Ousamequin, Chief of Wampanoag signs a peace treaty with Governor John Carver (1576 - 1629).
Credit: MPI/GETTY Images*

In March 1621, representatives of the Wampanoag Confederacy, the Indigenous people of what is now southeastern Massachusetts, negotiated a pivotal treaty with struggling English settlers who had recently arrived on the Mayflower. This crucial agreement aimed to address the dire needs of both parties, as the Wampanoag tribe faced vulnerability due to sickness, plagues, and violence brought on by earlier English settlers. This left them in danger of being overpowered by surrounding indigenous tribes and losing their land. Simultaneously, the English settlers were grappling with the challenges of survival, lacking skills for hunting, farming, and navigating the unfamiliar terrain. Thus, the proposed treaty emerged as a solution to help both groups sustain themselves amidst trials. Upheld for the next half-century, this historic accord marked the first official agreement between the two groups—a rare instance of cooperation under the guidance of their leader, Ousamequin (Massasoit). The Wampanoags played a crucial role in sharing vital skills that ensured the survival of the developing colony.

To express their gratitude, Governor William Bradford and the settlers invited the Wampanoags for a celebratory feast in November 1621, now recognized as the first Thanksgiving. While commemorating this significant historical event, it is imperative to acknowledge that, for many Native Americans and Indigenous peoples, Thanksgiving carries the weight of a painful history, symbolizing cultural destruction, legacy impact, and a profound shift in their way of life, including the erasure of their sacred heritage.

This Thanksgiving as families gather with cherished loved ones and friends, let empathy guide your awareness, recognizing the diversity of experiences during this season.

Explore more information about the inaugural Thanksgiving [here](#).