

Vicksburg National Military Park

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

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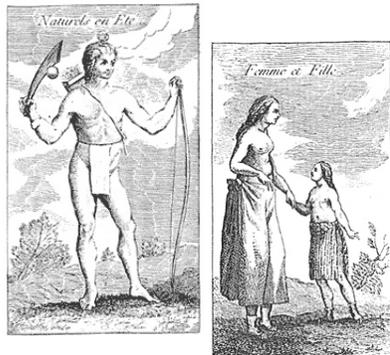
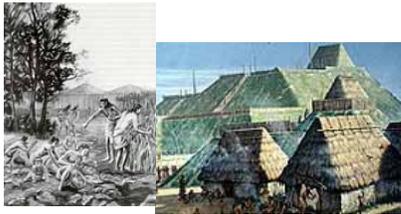


November - Native American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month



As the early inhabitants of the nation, the native peoples of North America have played a unique role in shaping the country's history and culture, making remarkable contributions to the national identity. What began at the turn of the 20th century as an effort to gain a day of recognition for the heritage of the first Americans, has resulted in the month of November being designated as National American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month. Throughout the month, the nation recognizes the intertribal cultures and strives to educate the public of the heritage, history, art, and traditions of proud native peoples.

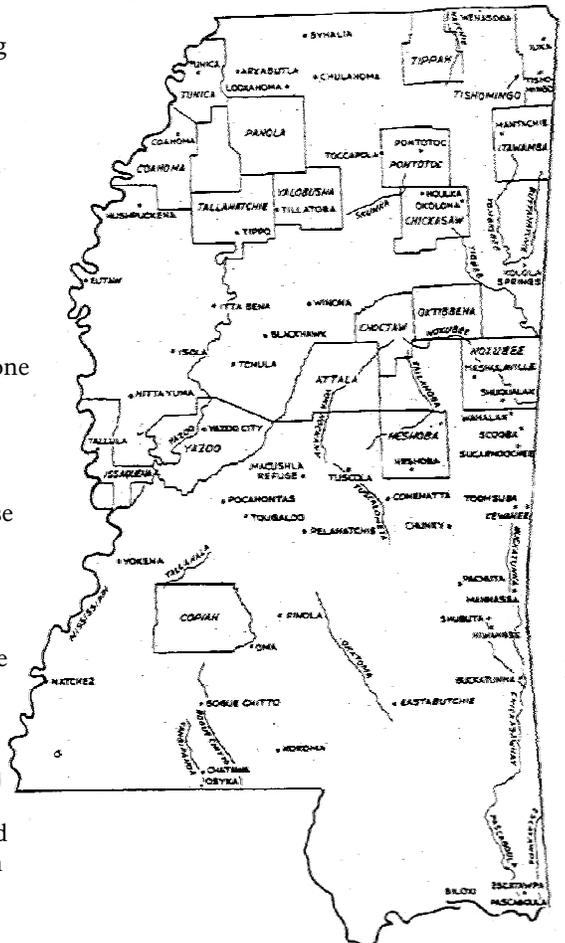
Early Inhabitants of the Mississippi Valley



Fort Rosalie

The history of Mississippi native peoples extends back centuries before the arrival of European settlers. Part of a widespread population living in the Mississippi Valley and adjacent areas in the Southeast, these ancestors of the state's historic tribes – Natchez, Creek, Choctaw – consisted of many communities and many languages, but shared a common way of life. They were skillful farmers, producing enough crops - supplemented by game, fish, and wild foodstuffs - to feed a dense population. As accomplished craftsmen, they built strong homes, devised ingenious tools and weapons, and crafted decorative pottery, all from the stone and wood materials at hand. Their way of life was complex, with a high degree of social and political organization.

The first documented contact with one of these tribes – the Natchez – occurred in March 1682 during the La Salle Expedition down the Mississippi River. Following this contact, French and English explorers, priests, and military personnel made numerous visits to the Natchez area. The French established Fort Rosalie in 1716, and over the next 13 years, the colony at Natchez grew. But disputes and misunderstandings between the French and Natchez Indians resulted in serious conflicts. The situation worsened as France and England struggled for control of North America, and in 1729, the Natchez Indians rebelled against the French, only to lose the war and be forced to abandon their homeland.



The Five Civilized Tribes



William McIntosh
Creek



Sequoyah
Cherokee



Chief Tishu Miku
Chickasaw



Apushimataha
Choctaw



Osceola
Seminole

Following their defeat by the French, many Natchez Indian refugees joined other tribes, including the Chickasaw, Creek, and Cherokee. These three tribes, along with the Choctaw and Seminole Indians of the Southeast, soon became known as the “Five Civilized Tribes,” for their adoption of many of the white man’s ways including advanced systems of government, education, and law enforcement. Following the Revolutionary War, the newly established United States government inaugurated a “*program to promote civilization among the friendly Indian tribes,*” in an attempt to shift them from a subsistence-based agricultural system to a plantation-based large-scale farming system. But this dramatic shift in the culture of the native peoples could not be accommodated without first altering the entire social, political, and religious structures of the traditional societies.

Although the U.S. government policy toward the Native Americans initially proved beneficial to those who held positions of power and land, several factors began to destabilize the structure of the Five Civilized Tribes, which would have devastating effects upon the Nations for the next

100 years. The first of these factors was the decisive split within the Nations themselves, dividing those who pursued the path of assimilation (“progressives”) and those who clung to traditional values (“conservatives”). Many full-blooded members of the Southeastern Nations rebelled against assimilation by reasserting the traditional methods of living. Treaties made between the Nations and the U.S. government in the 18th century saw Native American lands ceded to the government, and permanent rights to the tribes’ remaining territories established. But as settlers began to move westward, and valuable gold and mineral deposits were discovered on tribal lands, appeals were made by the white population to the Federal government for removal of the Indians. The tribes requested Federal protection from confiscation of their lands, but their appeals were rejected by President Andrew Jackson. Although state legislation outlawing tribal governments was declared unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court, Federal authorities, following Jackson’s policy of removal, ignored the decision.

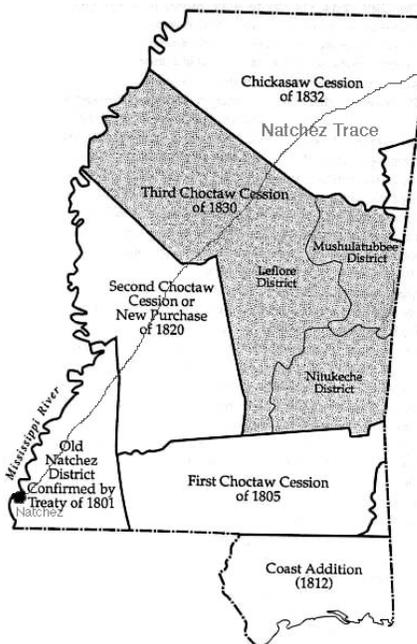
Choctaw Removal 1831-1833

The year 1831 saw the first removal of the Choctaws from Mississippi to what is now southern Oklahoma. Throughout the next 3 years, Choctaws from northern Mississippi were gathered at Memphis, Tennessee, and those from southern regions at Vicksburg, Mississippi. The Indians were allowed to gather their crops, assemble their personal property, and sell their houses and chattels, but ordered to leave all of their livestock in Mississippi, with the promise of new livestock furnished when they reached the “Choctaw Nation in the West.” By the end of October, 1831, encampments of Choctaws began to spring up all around the outskirts of Memphis and Vicksburg. The population of these encampments grew daily, a situation that created vast uneasiness with the residents of the two cities.

Bad planning and the elements worked against an orderly removal of the Choctaws. Heavy rains swelled the rivers, turning the river valleys into quagmires, and making the roads impassable. The decision to handle the removal by steamboat was immediately hampered by unavailability of boats and subsequent shortage of rations, used up while waiting for the transports. City residents found themselves facing food shortages, and battling profiteers for the available foodstuffs. When finally able to start the removal in mid-November, the 2000 Choctaws at Memphis were crammed aboard two steamboats, and dispatched up the Arkansas River toward their new homeland. But, after only 60 miles, the Army laid claim to the boats, unloading the Indians at Arkansas Post into the care of an Army detachment ill-prepared to

handle such an influx of refugees. Making matters worse, a blizzard followed the flooding. Most of the Choctaws were scantily clad, and the small military outpost could only offer 60 small army tents for shelter. Strict rationing was imposed, but within a few days most food was gone. After 8 bone-chilling days, 40 government wagons finally arrived from Little Rock, Arkansas, to begin relaying the Choctaws to Fort Smith, fortunately bringing food and blankets to the starving soldiers.

When the first wagons reached Little Rock, the famous term that would eventually become analogous with the removal of any Indian tribe was born, as a Choctaw chief was quoted as saying the removal to that point had been a “*trail of tears and death.*” The term was picked up by the Eastern press and widely published. The 3000 Choctaws who traveled the southern route from Vicksburg fared somewhat better. While waiting at Monroe, Louisiana, to be ferried to Ecore a’ Fabre, residents freely shared their supplies of foodstuffs, and woods provided some shelter from the winter storm. But the group was not totally immune from the privations and troubles suffered by their counterparts. Through either poor communications or lazy removal agents, Ecore a’ Fabre was not expecting 3000 Choctaws, resulting in too few rations, and only a dozen Army wagons to escort the Indians the remaining 150+ miles to the boundaries of their new territory. Any Choctaw able to stand was forced to walk, and the slow progress, along with the white man’s diseases, resulted in an excruciating 3-month journey over those last 150 miles.



The Dancing Rabbit Creek Treaty resulted in the removal of a large part of the Choctaw tribe from its traditional Southeastern homeland in present-day Mississippi, and served as a model for treaties of removal with the Chickasaw, Cherokee, Creek, and Seminole tribes. It extinguished all Choctaw title to land east of the Mississippi River owned by the Choctaw Nation, and led to the opening of a vast territory to American settlement.



Of the approximately 6000 Choctaws who began the first removal, slightly more than 4,000 remained alive by the time they reached their new homeland. Unfortunately, lessons were not learned from this near disaster, and in 1832, it was determined that all Choctaws were to be gathered at Vicksburg, excluding any use of the Memphis area, and necessitating transporting the Indians over much longer distances. Gathering began in mid-October, but during this process, an epidemic of cholera broke out in Vicksburg. Several hundred residents died from the disease, with the remainder of the population fleeing the

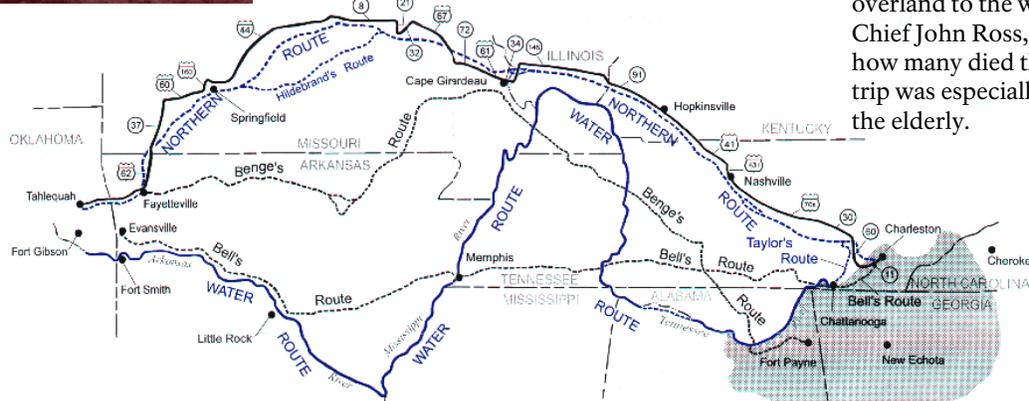
city in an effort to escape. This only served to spread the disease through the countryside, including infection of the Choctaws in route to Vicksburg. The Indians were hit harder than most, having no immunity to the white man's disease, and although no records exist of the number of Choctaws who died from cholera, the disease took a terrible toll on the tribe. By the end of the removal in 1832, approximately 3000 Choctaws had reached their new nation in the west, and following the last federally supervised removal in the fall of 1833, a total of some 7,500 to 8,000 Choctaws resided in the new western lands.

Trail of Tears – Cherokee Removal 1838 - 1839

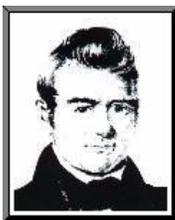


The Indian Removal Act had an even more brutal impact in 1838, when the Cherokees, having fought exile with a combination of passive resistance and national publicity for their plight, were finally forced from their homelands. The spring and summer saw more than 15,000 Cherokee removed by the U.S. Army from their lands in North Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, and Alabama, and forced to travel nearly 1,000 miles during an extremely harsh winter to Indian Territory in Oklahoma. An estimated 4,000 died of hunger, dysentery, exposure, and other causes during the trek. Members of the tribe called the forced evacuation, "nu na hi du na tlo hi lu i," or, "Trail Where They Cried."

Resistance among the Cherokees was high, and many had to be bound before being brought out of their homelands. A volunteer of the removal effort was later to remark on the cruelty imposed upon the Indians – "I fought through the civil war and have seen men shot to pieces and slaughtered by thousands, but the Cherokee removal was the cruelest work I ever knew." Missionary Daniel Buttrick said, "we are almost becoming familiar with death." A month later he was to say that the government might more mercifully have put to death everyone under a year or over sixty; rather it had chosen "a most expensive and painful way of exterminating these poor people." By November, 12 groups of 1,000 each were trudging 800 miles overland to the west. The last party, including Chief John Ross, went by water. No one knows how many died throughout the ordeal, but the trip was especially hard on infants, children, and the elderly.



Native Americans in the Civil War



Chief John Ross

After their arrival in Indian Territory, the Cherokee reorganized their government under their chief, John Ross, and became known as the Western Band, or Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma. With a culture and economy based on intensive agriculture, these Native Americans, along with the rest of the Five Civilized Tribes, had strong ties with the South. Among all the tribes, except the Seminoles, there was the presence of a large, politically important group of slave owners dependent upon plantation agriculture. This, along with the withdrawal of Federal troops from Indian Territory at the outbreak of the Civil War, opened the way for Southern agents, and an alliance with the Confederacy.

In the summer of 1862, treaties of alliance were signed by the Creeks, Choctaws, Chickasaws, Seminoles, Quapaws, Senecas, Caddos, Wichitas, Osages, and Shawnees. In October, Chief John Ross of the Cherokees abandoned his initial

position of neutrality, and also signed a treaty with the Confederacy. In these treaties, the Confederacy promised to assume former Federal obligations, to protect the tribes from invasion, and to invite Indian representation in the Confederate Congress. In turn, the tribes were to provide troops for their own defense. In compliance, tribal governments organized 3 Indian regiments: a Choctaw-Chickasaw regiment, a Creek-Seminole regiment, and a Cherokee regiment. The latter regiment, under Colonel John Drew, was composed primarily of supporters of Chief John Ross. Independently, Cherokee Colonel Stand Watie organized a second, anti-Ross regiment, bringing the total to four regiments comprising five thousand Indian troops. These forces were placed under the command of Colonel Douglas Cooper, a former Choctaw agent. Although smaller tribes were not initially asked to provide troops, by the end of the war men from all tribes would be involved, with over ten thousand Indian troops under arms.



Swearing in of Native American recruits.

"We Are All Americans" Ely S. Parker



Union Native American sharpshooters at Mary's Heights after the Second Battle of Fredericksburg.



Colonel Ely Parker

Statistics show that just under 3,600 Native Americans served in the Union Army, perhaps the best know of their number being Colonel Ely Parker, a member of the Seneca tribe. As an aide to General U.S. Grant, Parker was present at Appomattox Court House on April 9, 1865, drawing up the articles of surrender for General Robert E. Lee's signature. Although a trained attorney, Colonel Parker was once rejected for Union military service because of his race. When General Lee remarked to Parker, "*I am glad to see one real American here,*" the Colonel replied, "*We are all Americans.*"

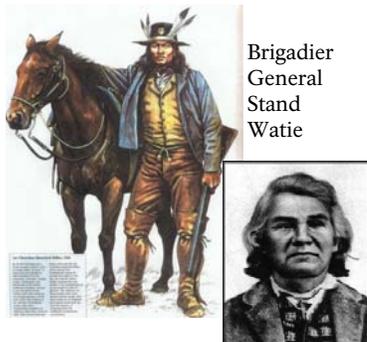
Ely Samuel Parker was born in 1828 in Genesee City, New York, a member of the Seneca tribe. Much of his life was spent straddling two cultures, acquiring knowledge of his grandfather's Iroquoian religion, while being educated at the local Baptist school. A trained attorney and self-taught engineer, Parker was

highly educated and spoke perfect English. Still, officers and enlisted men often referred to him as "the Indian," or "Grant's Indian." With Grant's support in 1863, he was commissioned as a staff officer for Brigadier General John E. Smith, and later joined Grant's staff as military secretary. Parker remained Grant's secretary following the war, and was appointed the first non-Caucasian commissioner of Indian Affairs by then-President Grant in 1869. Corrupt profiteers and overzealous religious leaders led to his political downfall, and though exonerated from accusations of fraud and numerous violations of law, Parker resigned in disgrace. His subsequent business career failed in the Panic of 1873, and he survived his final years on favors and handouts from former military colleagues. Upon his death in August 1895, Ely Parker was impoverished, leaving his widow with only a carbon copy of the document he had written at Appomattox.



General U.S. Grant's military staff. Colonel Ely Parker is seated on the far right.

General Stand Watie

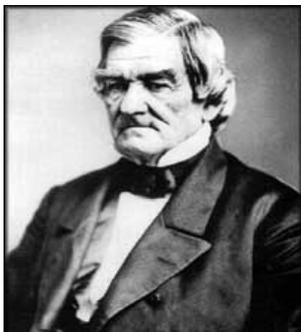


Brigadier General Stand Watie

Born in December 1806, in Georgia, Stand Watie was raised a Moravian by two Cherokee parents. Educated in white schools and western ways, Watie lived in financially well-off surroundings. He was a clerk of the Cherokee Supreme Court, and for more than 40 years a practicing attorney. A signer of the controversial 1835 treaty ceding the tribe's Georgia lands for Oklahoma holdings, Watie became leader of the minority faction of

the politically divided Cherokee Nation. Siding with the Confederacy, he earned legendary status as a genius in guerilla warfare, and became the highest-ranking Native American in the Southern Army. Organizer of the First Cherokee Mounted Rifles regiment, Watie was a brilliant field commander, and the last Confederate general to surrender his command, two months after Appomattox.

Chief John Ross



Chief John Ross

Privately tutored as a youth, John Ross was only 1/8 Cherokee, but played Native American games and kept his Indian ties. Growing up with the constant raids of whites and Indians, Ross witnessed much of the brutality on the early American frontier. He served as a Lieutenant in the Creek War, fighting with many famous Americans, including Sam Houston. Ross was invaluable to Moravian missionaries as translator and liaison between them and the tribal council, and was viewed as astute and very likable. He was the first and only elected Chief of the Cherokee Nation from the time it was formed in

1828, until his death in 1866. One of the richest men in Georgia before 1838, Ross was highly regarded for his role in leading the fight against removal, and when forced from the state, leading his people to their exile in Oklahoma. The forced "*Trail of Tears*" march took the life of the Chief's wife, Quatie, who died of pneumonia after giving her only blanket to a child during the harsh winter weather. Conflict and controversy were his constant companions throughout the rest of his life, keeping him active and busy till his death.

A War Within a War



Battle of Pea Ridge



Peace Commission and the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868.

The Confederate defeat at Pea Ridge, Arkansas, in March 1862, ended the threat of Southern invasion into Missouri, and opened the way for a Federal thrust into Indian Territory. Union officers had organized two Indian regiments from among the growing number of Creek, Seminole, and Cherokee refugees and deserters. In June 1862, the Indian Expedition, comprised of the two Union Indian regiments and several regiments of Kansas and Wisconsin volunteers, invaded the Cherokee Nation, capturing both the capital at Tahlequah, and the post at Fort Gibson. Chief John Ross declared his support for the Union, and most of Drew's regiment surrendered and joined the Union Army.

The Civil War in Indian Territory was in reality two wars – a war between pro-Northern and pro-Southern factions among the Five Civilized Tribes, and, even more intensely, a continuation of the conflict between those factions that had supported removal and those that had been opposed. It was this second element that made the war among the native peoples so destructive and bloody. As the war dragged on, Union forces penetrated deeper into Indian Territory. Confederate regiments, although poorly armed and short of supplies, and led by now-Brigadier General Stand Watie, responded with highly effective guerrilla raids into Northern-held areas. These raids included the burning of the Cherokee capital of Tahlequah, as well as the torching of the plantation home of Chief John

Ross. Many of Watie's men took vengeance on pro-Union families whenever they were encountered, just as the Federal troops wrought destruction on Southern sympathizers. As the war approached its end, anarchy prevailed throughout most of Indian Territory. When the Chickasaws and Caddos at last surrendered on July 14, 1865, the Civil War in Indian Territory ended, but not without an incredible cost to the tribal nations. Estimates show that over 6,000, and possibly 10,000, Native Americans died.

The vast majority of Indian families had been reduced to impoverished, homeless refugees. Yet, one more devastating blow was to come. Although as many members of the Five Civilized Tribes had served in the Union Army as had served in the Confederacy, the Federal government declared its treaties with the tribes to be void, forcing them to negotiate new treaties that ceded the western part of Indian Territory to the United States. By fighting along with the white man, Native Americans had hoped to gain favor with the prevailing government. In supporting the war effort, they saw their service as a means to end discrimination and relocation from ancestral lands to western territories. Instead, the Civil War proved to be the Indian's last effort to stop the wave of American expansion, with the U.S. government continuing its policies of pacification and removal of Native Americans, a concept later refined into the reservation idea.

Mixing the Old and the New



Choctaw Code Talkers, World War I



Comanche Code Talkers, Utah Beach, D-Day, World War II



Navajo Code Talkers, South Pacific, World War II

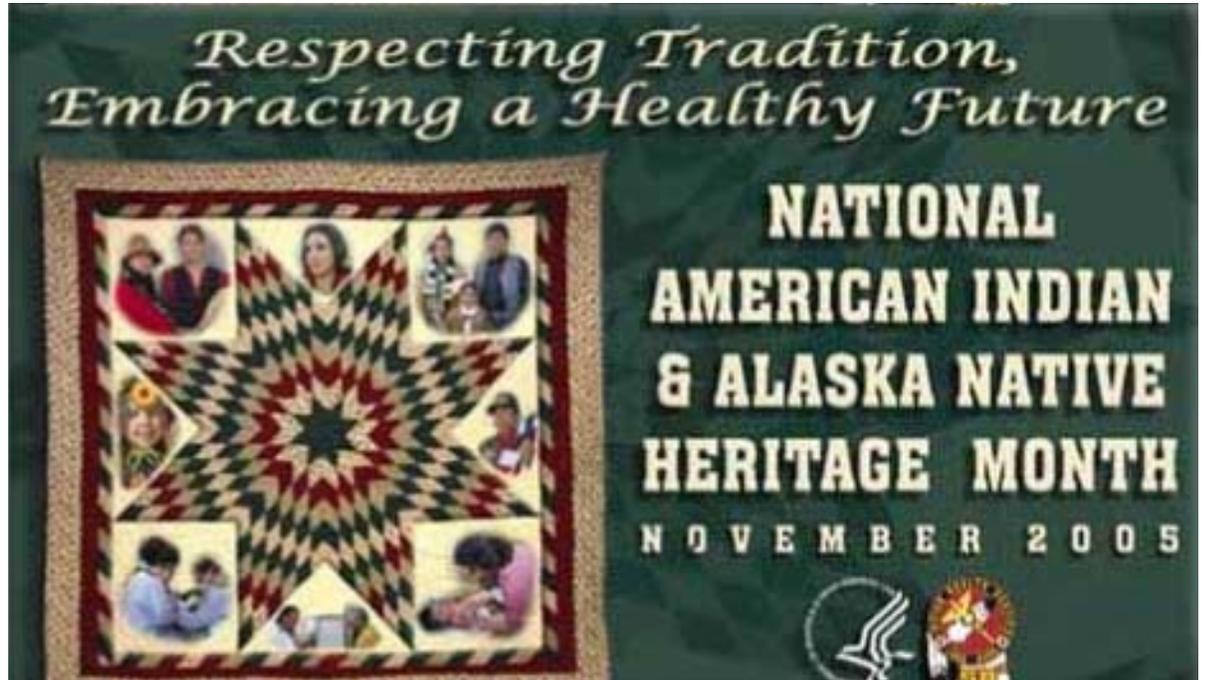
After the Civil War, the white presence in the West rose to new levels. Numerous financial crises and depressions hit the East after the boom of the war years, and many families chose to move onward in hopes of finding gold, or purchasing cheap land. The Native Americans fought to defend their sacred places, hunting grounds, and way of life, attacking railroad crews, hunters, prospectors, and settlers. Conflicting views on land ownership, as well as numerous cultural misunderstandings, led to bloodbath after bloodbath. The official Army policy was to provide necessities for the tribes during the winter, then face the reality of fighting the same people when the weather cleared, and the tribes wished to change hunting grounds. The policy ironically became known to the common soldier as, "feed 'em in winter, fight 'em in summer." Unofficially, attitudes, such as that of General Philip Sheridan's infamous statement, "The only good Indian I ever saw was dead," showed it was only a matter of time before the Native Americans saw their way of life almost totally taken from them. As the nation emerged into the 20th century, many non-productive attitudes towards Native Americans found voice, including the contention that the "Indian problem" would be resolved by their steady population decline to the point that they would vanish as an ethnic entity.

During the 20th century, however, Native Americans experienced a remarkable population recovery due to decreased mortality rates, and survived disastrous assimilation efforts. Instead of disappearing, they revitalized tribal governments, created modern economies, attained legal rights, and revived cultural traditions and ceremonies that had nearly died out. These resilient people were able to combine aspects of their traditional cultures with contemporary life without sacrificing the core of their identity. One of the greatest examples of this integration is the little-known heroic actions of the "Code Talkers" of World Wars I and II. Members of the Navajo, Choctaw, Comanche, and other tribes were recruited into the armed services when it was demonstrated that classified messages could be translated into these native languages, transmitted, received, and translated back into English quicker than messages coded, transmitted and decoded using conventional cryptographic facilities and techniques. Throughout their service, there is no indication that any message traffic of the Code Talkers - while undoubtedly intercepted - was ever deciphered.

Keeping the Traditions Alive

Most Native Americans in the United States today belong to Federally-recognized tribes, which number over 550. The tribes vary enormously in size, ranging from more than 100,000 in the Cherokee, Navajo, Sioux, and Chippewa tribes, to several California tribal bands with only 2 to 3 members. Though Native

Americans today still face many problems, their lives are better than any time since the arrival of the European settlers. Nevertheless, the general public still has limited understanding of the true nature and dynamics of Native American culture, a situation Native Americans are working hard to overcome.





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