Celebrating Native American Heritage Month

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Sacagawea

Sacagawea was an important member of the Lewis and Clark expedition. The National American Woman Suffrage Association of the early twentieth century adopted her as a symbol of women's worth and independence, erecting several statues and plaques in her memory, and doing much to spread the story of her accomplishments. In 1977, she was inducted into the National Cowgirl Hall of Fame in Fort Worth, Texas. In 2001, she was given the title of Honorary Sergeant, Regular Army, by then-president Bill Clinton.
Pocahontas

Pocahontas was captured and held for ransom by the Colonists during hostilities in 1613. During her captivity, she was encouraged to convert to Christianity and was baptized under the name Rebecca. She married tobacco planter John Rolfe in April 1614 at age 17, and she bore their son Thomas Rolfe in January 1615. In 1616, the Rolfes travelled to London where Pocahontas was presented to English society as an example of the "civilized savage" in hopes of stimulating investment in the Jamestown settlement. She became something of a celebrity, was elegantly fêted, and attended a masque at Whitehall Palace. In 1617, the Rolfes set sail for Virginia, but Pocahontas died at Gravesend of unknown causes, aged 20 or 21. She was buried in St George's Church, Gravesend in England, but her grave's exact location is unknown, as the church has been rebuilt. Numerous places, landmarks, and products in the United States have been named after Pocahontas. Her story has been romanticized over the years, with some aspects discovered to likely be fictional. Many of the stories told about her by John Smith have been contested by her documented descendants. She is a subject of art, literature, and film, and many famous people have claimed to be among her descendants through her son, including members of the First Families of Virginia, First Lady Edith Wilson, American Western actor Glenn Strange, Las Vegas performer Wayne Newton, and astronomer Percival Lowell.
Arguably the most powerful and perhaps famous of all Native American chiefs, Sitting Bull was born in 1831 in what is now called South Dakota. The son of an esteemed Sioux warrior named Returns-Again, Sitting Bull looked up to his father and desired to follow in his footsteps, but didn’t show a particular talent for warfare. As a result, he was called "Slow" for his apparent lack of skills. Sitting Bull joined his first war party at 14 and soon gained a reputation for bravery in battle. In 1868, the Sioux accepted peace with the U.S. government, but when gold was discovered in the Black Hills in the mid-1870s, a rush of white prospectors invaded Sioux lands. Sitting Bull responded but could only win battles, not the war. He was arrested and killed in 1890.
Geronimo

Geronimo was an Apache leader and medicine man best known for his fearlessness in resisting anyone—Mexican or American—who attempted to remove his people from their tribal lands. He repeatedly evaded capture and life on a reservation, and during his final escape, a full quarter of the U.S. standing army pursued him and his followers. When Geronimo was captured on September 4, 1886, he was the last Native American leader to formally surrender to the U.S. military. He spent the last 20 years of his life as a prisoner of war.
Elizabeth Marie “Betty” Tallchief

Tallchief was considered America's first major prima ballerina, and was the first Native American to hold the rank. She remained closely tied to her Osage history until her death, speaking out against stereotypes and misconceptions about Native Americans on many occasions. Tallchief was involved with America for Indian Opportunity and was a director of the Indian Council Fire Achievement Award. She and her sister Marjorie are counted as two of a group of five Native American ballet dancers from Oklahoma born in the 1920s. However, she wished to be judged on the merits of her dance alone. "Above all, I wanted to be appreciated as a prima ballerina who happened to be a Native American, never as someone who was an American Indian ballerina," she wrote.
Patty Ferguson-Bohnee has substantial experience in Indian law, election law and policy matters, voting rights, and status clarification of tribes. She is a clinical professor of law, the faculty director of the Indian Legal Program and the director of the Indian Legal Clinic at ASU. Professor Ferguson has testified before the United States Senate Committee on Indian Affairs and the Louisiana State Legislature regarding tribal recognition, and has successfully assisted four Louisiana tribes in obtaining state recognition.
N. Scott Momaday

Navarre Scott Momaday is a Kiowa novelist, short story writer, essayist, and poet. His novel House Made of Dawn was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1969, and is considered the first major work of the Native American Renaissance. His follow-up work The Way to Rainy Mountain blended folklore with memoir. Momaday received the National Medal of Arts in 2007 for his work's celebration and preservation of indigenous oral and art tradition. He holds twenty honorary degrees from colleges and universities, and is a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.
Joy Harjo

Librarian of Congress Carla Hayden appointed Joy Harjo the Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry in June, 2019. Harjo is the first Native American poet to serve in the position – she is an enrolled member of the Muscogee Creek Nation, and she is the author of nine books of poetry. She is also the nation's first Poet Laureate from Oklahoma. Hayden says that Harjo's poems tell “an American story of tradition and loss, reckoning and myth-making. Her work powerfully connects us to the earth and the spiritual world with direct, inventive lyricism that helps us reimagine who we are.”
Arlinda Locklear

Arlinda Locklear is an American lawyer of Native American origin from the Lumbee tribe. Locklear was the first Native American woman to argue a case before the U.S. Supreme Court and is noted as an expert in Native American law and tribal recognition litigation. She represented the Lumbee tribe in its quest for federal recognition from 1987 until 2010.
Zitkala-Sa

Zitkála-Šá also known as Gertrude Simmons Bonnin, her missionary-given and later married name, was a Yankton Dakota Sioux writer, editor, translator, musician, educator, and political activist. She wrote several works chronicling her struggles with cultural identity and the pull between the majority culture she was educated within and her Dakota Sioux culture into which she was born and raised. Her later books were among the first works to bring traditional Native American stories to a widespread white English-speaking readership, and she has been noted as one of the most influential Native American activists of the 20th century.
Heather Kendall-Miller

Alaska Native (Athabascan), is a senior staff attorney with the Native American Rights Fund in Anchorage. Kendall-Miller is a graduate of Harvard Law School and has dedicated her career to public service. She was a law clerk at the Alaska Supreme Court and then served as a Skadden Fellow, where she worked as a staff attorney for the Alaska Legal Services Corporation representing indigent clients in court and in administrative hearings. During the second year of her fellowship, she worked for the Native American Rights Fund, where she continues her groundbreaking work. With more than 25 years practicing in federal and state courts, Kendall-Miller has established foundational legal principles protecting Native American subsistence, tribal sovereignty and human rights.