



EVERYTHING YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT INDIAN TRIBES

1. Who is American Indian?

There are millions of people with Indian ancestry, but that does not make them American Indians in the eyes of the federal government. The federal government considers some on American Indian if he or she belongs to a federally recognized tribe. Individual tribes have the exclusive right to determine their own membership. Tribal governments formally list their members, who must meet specific criteria for enrollment. Some tribes require a person trace half of his or her lineage to the tribe, while others only require proof of descent.

2. Where did American Indians come from originally?

Many anthropologists believe that Indians traveled about 35,000 years ago across a land bridge spanning the Bering Strait from Asia to North American. Most tribes have their own creation story. Many believe that Native people originated on this continent.

3. Why are Native people referred to as Indians?

Indigenous people in the United State were first referred to as Indians because Columbus believed he had reached East Indies when he touched the shores of North America. Today, many people prefer to call themselves American Indians to avoid stereotypes associated with “Indian.”

4. Which is correct: American Indian or Native American?

Either term is generally acceptable, although individuals may have a preference. Native American was first used in the United States for American Indians and Alaska Native.

5. How many American Indians and Alaska Natives are there?

There are 2.3 million, according to U.S. Census estimates for 1997. They represent only roughly one percent of the population. (This number is expected to increase after the Census 2000 is complete.) Before Europeans arrived in North American, Native Americans may have numbered as many as 10 million. By the time colonists began keeping records, the population was substantially less, ravaged by war, famine, forced labor, and disease. Also, there are many different tribal populations in Canada as well as the United States.

6. Are Native Hawaiians considered American Indians?

No, Native Hawaiians trace their lineage and language to Polynesians, including Tahitians, Maoris, and Samoans. Starting in 2000, the federal government will recognize Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders as a distinct group. Native Hawaiians often unite with Native Americans over issues of self-governance and self-determination.

7. What is a tribe?

Originally, tribes were a society of people bound by blood ties, family relations, and common language. They also had their own

religion and political system. When members of different tribes were forced to live together on reservations, some new tribal groupings were formed.

8. How many tribes are there?

In 1998, there were 554 federally recognized tribes in the United States, according to the Bureau of Indian Affairs. This includes 226 villages in Alaska.

9. Ok, there are a lot of different tribes. But aren't American Indians pretty much the same as a group?

Indian tribes are all different, just as for example, the Irish and Italian. Individual tribes have their own culture, language, and tradition. Many groups may be strangers to one another. Some were once enemies.

10. Which is the largest tribe?

With a 1990 population of 208,132, Cherokees are the largest U.S. tribe. Most live in Oklahoma, though more than 5,000 Cherokees live on their reservation in North Carolina.

11. Are Indian tribes and Indian nations the same?

Yes. The federally recognized tribes are considered self-governing – or sovereign nations – by Congress. The federal government deals with tribes as political entities, not as person of a particular race.

12. Can any tribe be federally recognized?

A rigorous application process determines federal recognition. Many nations were recognized by treaty making in the 18th and 19th centuries, though several groups are petitioning for recognition today. In, 1998,

there were 14 tribes under active consideration for recognition.

13. What powers do the tribes hold?

They have nationhood status, enjoying the power of government, except those expressly taken away by Congress or overruled by the Supreme Court. The United States recognized the tribes' right to form their own government, determine membership, administer justice, raise taxes, establish business, and exclude people from reservations.

14. What is tribal council?

The tribe's governing body is usually referred to as the tribal council, and is elected by the adult members of the tribe. Heading the council is one elected chairperson, president, chief, or governor who is the recognized leader. The council performs the legislative aspects of tribal government.

15. Are reservations and tribal governments the same?

No. Tribal governments existed long before reservations were established. However, governing authority on reservations is the tribal council. In cases where different tribes share a reservation, they often separate governments, as the Shoshone and Arapaho do in Wyoming.

16. What is a reservation?

Indian reservations are areas of land reserved by the federal government as permanent tribal homelands. Today, there are 314 reservations.

17. Why is it called a reservation?

The term originates from the federal government's act of reserving land for federal purposes. In the United States, there are two kinds of reservations: Indian and military.

18. Do all American Indians live on reservations?

No. More than 50 percent live away from reservations, according to Census reports.

19. How much land do American Indians hold?

About 56 million acres in reservations and trust land. The Navajo Reservation is the largest, numbering 16 million acres and occupying parts of Arizona, Utah, and New Mexico. Many smaller reservations are less than 1000 acres.

20. What is trust land?

Land held by the United States for the use and benefit of American Indian tribes. Virtually all trust land is located in or near reservations. Tribes also have the ability to purchase land and to petition the federal government to hold it in trust, protecting the land from encroachment and seizure.

21. What is Indian Country?

Indian Country is a legal term used in Title 18 of the U.S. Code. It broadly defines federal and tribal jurisdiction in crimes affecting Indian on reservations. But it also has popular usage, describing reservations and areas with American Indian populations.

22. What is tribal sovereignty?

Just like states, tribes have attributes of sovereignty - to govern their own territory and internal affairs. The status of tribes as self-governing nations is affirmed and upheld by treaties, case law and the Constitution. Legal scholars explain that tribes are inherently sovereign, meaning they do not trace their existence to the United States.

23 What is the government-to-government relationship?

It is a federal (and sometimes state) policy expressing how the United States interact

with tribes. It requires the United States to assess federal actions affecting Indian tribes and to consult with tribes about those actions.

24. How are Tribes exercising their status as sovereign nations?

In New Mexico, for example, the Isleta Pueblo tribe is requiring the city of Albuquerque to abide by its water claim standards, which are stricter and costlier than state requirements. In the Pacific Northwest, tribes partner with state and federal governments to co-manage fisheries and protect salmon stock.

25. What is sovereign immunity?

It is the ability of a government to define the terms on which they can be sued. Tribes have invoked sovereign immunity in suits that challenge their authority to regulate land use. There have been recent efforts in Congress to regulate sovereign immunity.

26. What are treaties?

From 1777 to 1871, U.S. relations with the Indian nations were negotiated through legally binding agreements called treaties. These treaties, or agreements, between tribal governments and the United States transferred and created property rights as well as service obligations.

27. What agreements did the treaties contain?

The treaties often promised the Indian protection, good, services, self-governing rights and tribal homeland in exchange for their cooperation and vast acres of land.

28. What does the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) do?

The Bureau is the principal federal agency working with tribes. Its job is to provide services and/or funds for services to benefit tribal members. Unlike the 1800s, when the Bureau was in the War Department, the

Bureau's stated goal is to help tribes with self-determination. Almost 100 percent of its employees are tribal members.

29. How does someone qualify for BIA services?

Persons must belong to a federally recognized tribe.

30. Do Native Americans serve in the Armed Forces?

Native Americans have fought in all American wars since the Revolution, and one out of four Indian men is a U.S. military veteran. Their patriotism in World War I led Congress to pass the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924. In World War II, Navajo Marines used their language as a code to transmit messages: it was the only code the enemy failed to break.

31. Who regulates Indian Casinos?

The National Indian Gaming Commission, established by Congress, oversees bingo operations, casinos and certain other types of gambling on tribal land. It sets rules for licensing, reviews yearly audits, and approves ordinances that tribes develop to run gaming operations. The U.S. departments of Treasury, Justice, and Interior have authority over aspects of Indian gaming. Indian nations, as well as their own gaming commissions, tribal police forces, and court systems.

32. What is the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act?

The federal law requires states to enter into compacts with tribal governments that plan to engage in casino gambling, including slot machines and blackjack. Gaming must be conducted on tribal land, and the states' control is limited to the terms of the compacts. Compacts are approved by the Secretary of the Interior.

33. Is Indian gaming a major player in the gambling industry?

Indian gaming is growing at a rapid pace, but represents only 8 percent of the revenue market share, according to the National Indian Gaming Association.

34. Do all tribes have casino gambling?

No. Roughly one-third of the 554 tribes have gaming operations, and may be limited to bingo.

35. What is a tribal school?

Since early 1800s, the Bureau of Indian Affairs assumed responsibility for the education of children on reservations through Indian schools. In 1978, the federal government began turning over school control to the tribes, while still providing funding. Today, the Bureau funds or operates 187 schools with 50,000 students.

36. How many American Indian students attend public schools off the reservations?

About 480,000 American Indian children attend public schools off reservations. Some states with large populations of Indian schoolchildren provide funds for Indian language and cultural education.

37. Do American Indians speak their own language?

The vast majority of Indian speak English as their main language, though some know their Native language as well. When Europeans first arrived some 350 Indian languages were spoken.

38. How many Indian languages are still spoken?

The precise number is unknown. It is estimated that about 200 languages are spoken.

39. Which are the most common languages?

There is no standard American Indian language, but a number are spoken regularly by the larger tribes, such as Navajo (spoken by 80,000) and Ojibwe (spoken by 40,000).

40. Is there an American Indian religion?

Many Native Americans believe in the Great Spirit that reveals itself through nature and influences all life. Indigenous religions also are filled with lesser spirits that inhabit the everyday world. In the 19th century, Native Americans lost many of their religious customs as colonists forced them to convert to Christianity, sent children to mission schools, and banned some of their ceremonies.

41. How does tobacco figure in American Indian religion?

Tobacco has been regarded as a most sacred plant, used in American Indian religion, medicine, and diplomacy. Smoking at gatherings was a symbol of hospitality. Sharing a pipe sealed treaties, and sprinkling leaves ensured a good harvest. Ritualistic use of tobacco continues today.

42. Did Native Americans learn about tobacco from white settlers?

On the contrary, Native peoples introduced tobacco and the pipe to white explorers. Native Americans had been smoking tobacco for a thousand years or more by the time Columbus returned to Spain with some leaves, and its use spread across Europe.

43. What is a peace pipe?

When various tribes dominated North America, carrying a pipe was evidence of peaceful intent, a passport universally honored.

44. Why is the eagle feather significant to American Indians?

Certain symbols including the eagle feather, seem to be universal in their importance to Indian tribes. The eagle is revered for its strength, size, and intelligence. Its feathers are used in religious ceremonies.

45. How do American Indians obtain feathers of a protected bird like the eagle?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service administers a program that makes the feathers available to Indian religious practitioners. The feathers are from eagles that die naturally or by accident.

46. Why do Native American object to the use of Indian symbols, like feathers and face paint, in U.S. sports?

Many Native Americans believe that the use of Indian symbols by sports teams and fans trivializes their way of life. For example, some Native Americans take offense when fans paint their faces at football and baseball games. In traditional Native cultures, face-painting is reserved for sacred ceremonies that include weddings and funerals.

47. What is a pow-wow?

Pow-wow comes from the Narragansett word for Shaman. It is a celebration and social gathering honoring sacred Indian traditions through dancing, drumming, singing and gathering of people. Pow-wows may be held to honor an individual or a special occasion. Most commonly, a pow-wow is a social event.

48. Are Non-Natives welcome at pow-wows?

There are ceremonial pow-wows that are closed to non-members, but everyone is welcome at publicized pow-wow, or a tribe's annual pow-wow.

49. What is a sweat lodge?

Sweat lodges are used by some Native Americans to induce sweating for spiritual

or medicinal purposes. Sweat lodges are heated by fire or by pouring water over hot stones. A sweat ceremony is very sacred to Native peoples.

50. How can a person trace his or her Indian Ancestry?

The first step is basic genealogical research to obtain specific information on ancestor's names, birth dates, marriages and deaths, and places where they lived. The next step is to find out if these ancestors are on any official tribal rolls. After determining tribal heritage, should contact individual tribes to learn about membership. Tribes have the final determination on who qualifies.

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