

## The First “Americans”

The land that we call the United States had people living on it for thousands of years before Europeans arrived. The Vikings, Spanish explorers, Pilgrims, and colonists all had interactions with the indigenous peoples who were members of many different tribes who had their own languages and customs. (Indigenous is a term for people who already lived in a place new to other people.) As Europeans explored the land, they met even more indigenous peoples who lived on the land in different ways.

The notion that America was ‘discovered’ is incorrect. To discover something means that no one knew about it. The indigenous people who lived here knew it existed but for Europeans it was new information. Most of the United States history is told from the European point of view.

### The Land of the Free - But Not for All

Most of the tribes in New England fought on the side of the American Revolutionary Army. Here is a quote from a chief offering help: Stockbridge Sachem (Chief) Solomon Unhaunawwaunnett said, “If we are conquered our Lands go with yours, but if we are victorious, we hope you will offer us our just Rights.”

However, the American Indians were excluded from the freedoms and rights won during the Revolutionary war. Even in the Declaration of Independence they are referred to as “merciless Indian savages” and are NOT included as part of the most famous sentence “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

More reading

[The Declaration of Independence — Except for 'Indian Savages'](#)

Throughout the history of this country, as the non-Native population increased, American Indians were removed from their lands and placed on reservations and in cities far away. Also, children were taken from their parents and put in boarding schools where their hair was cut and they had to wear different clothes. All Native Americans were kept from enjoying and participating in the freedoms that white Americans had. In the 1880s, the Religious Crimes Code meant they were not even allowed to practice their religion. July 4th observances became a rare chance to honor the traditions of their culture and ancestors while celebrating America’s freedoms. To this day, July is a time that many American Indians gather on reservations or in the homelands of their tribes to spend time with family, practice their religion, and continue cultural traditions, including holding powwows.

### What is a Powwow?

The term “powwow” is actually a North Eastern Woodland word belonging to the Narragansett Language and the closest English translation is “meeting.” The modern day powwow evolved from the Grass Dance Societies that formed in the early 19th Century. Many ceremonies and customs were outlawed during the reservation period. The Grass Dance being more social was one of the only events allowed. As so many Tribes were pushed together it was soon clear and necessary to transfer the traditions of the Grass Dance between Tribes. Over time the phrase “Powwow” as a term for meeting or

gathering became very popular and has been used widely to describe the cultural event since the mid-20th Century.

Watch an example of a traditional Grass Dance

<https://youtu.be/5w824Viiuos>

Source

[History of the Powwow | Origin & Background | Native American -](#)



## How do Native Americans Celebrate July 4th?

Today, there are over 570 different tribes in the United States. Of course, not all Native Americans travel to powwows or recognize July 4th in the same way. Here, Native people from different tribes share how they celebrate:

**Tulsa, Oklahoma:** I am headed to Quapaw Powwow, arguably the longest running annual powwow—145 years. Our family and tribal nation have always played host to friends and visitors from all over the world.

**Laguna, New Mexico:** As much turmoil the United States government has given our people in the past and present, my father has instilled in my family a sense of loyalty, liberty, and responsibility for our country. He is a Vietnam Veteran and could easily have forsaken this country due to the treatment he and other Vietnam veterans received upon their return. Instead, he chose to defend a country and the land of Indigenous Americans. He then raised his children and grandchildren to respect the country. So we will spend the day probably watching a parade in the morning and then have a BBQ with friends and family. We will honor and remember the veterans on this day.



**Akwasne Mohawk territory, Haudenosaunee territory:** We don't celebrate the independence of our colonizer, especially considering that George Washington ordered the Sullivan–Clinton Campaign of burnings, displacement, and murder against the Haudenosaunee villages during their war for Independence. This while so many of our people were helping the Americans at Valley Forge, while decisive battles were won due to Iroquois allies.

**Arizona and the Diné (Navajo) Nation:** Greet and end the day by thanking Creator for another blessed day. We don't celebrate but use the day for family activities.

**Oklahoma City:** Do as our people always have: Help feed and care for those who need it!

Read more about how the First Americans celebrate July 4th:

[Do American Indians celebrate the 4th of July?](#)