

This section contains background essays on Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, European Americans, Mexican Americans, Puerto Rican Americans, Angel Island, Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty. These essays have been developed from the main resource books in the Americans All® collection and have been created to meet both the language and social studies requirements of grade levels three and four. We encourage teachers to use these essays creatively as part of appropriate language arts, whole-language, reading and writing activities. Teachers need not confine their use to the activity suggestions that are included in this teacher's guide. Use them, when appropriate, to supplement textbook activities, particularly in social studies, and as a springboard for additional research or student assignments in other subject areas such as science or mathematics. These essays may also be used with related culturally sensitive literature selections to stimulate critical and creative thinking as students imagine characters in the context of history.

These essays are not designed as stand-alone pieces. They should not be expected to tell all there is to know about particular cultural and/or ethnic groups. They are an integral part of the entire Americans All® program and become a valuable resource to be used with the photographs and other teaching aids. For that reason we have not included photographs with them. Teachers may choose the photographs that adapt best to their individual teaching situations.

These factual essays can be readily translated and are written in a style similar to today's classroom textbooks. Because of the tremendous number of languages and dialects now spoken in our nation's public and private schools, we have left the translation opportunities to local resource specialists.

STUDENT BACKGROUND ESSAYS





Native Americans

When did people first live in America? No one knows exactly. Groups of people have lived on this continent for at least 30,000 years. Some say it has been much longer. Each group, or nation, of Native Americans had its own laws, language and way of life. Still, all of these first Americans lived close to nature. Some hunted bison, often called buffalo. Some fished for salmon. Some raised corn. When Columbus landed here in 1492, he met groups of these Native Americans. He thought he was in India, so he called them *Indios*, or Indians.

Giving and Taking

Other European explorers followed Columbus. Some Europeans came to make new homes for themselves in North America. The Native Americans welcomed these European **immigrants**—people who leave their home country to live in a new place. Native Americans shared their skills with the newcomers. They taught European immigrants how to build shelters. They taught them how to grow crops and to dry foods for winter. They shared their food—maple sugar, turkeys, corn, beans, squash and pumpkins—all new to the European immigrants. European immigrants shared what they had, too. They shared guns and metal tools. They shared sheep, goats and horses. Soon, Native Americans were raising these animals.

In 1776 Europeans living in America began a war to gain their freedom from England. That first winter was harsh. General George Washington and his troops were cold and hungry. Then came medicine, clothing and 300 bushels of corn. These supplies were a gift from Shenandoah, a chief of the Iroquois nation.

After winning their freedom, Europeans in America formed their own nation, called the United States. More and more, European Americans began moving west, building new towns for their people. They needed land. But Native Americans had lived on the land for thousands of years.

Treaties

European Americans kept on moving west. They took over cornfields, pastures, forests and hunting and fishing areas that had always been home to the Native Americans. Sometimes the United States government and the Native Americans signed **treaties**—agreements made between countries or groups of people. Most of the treaties were about land. European Americans broke many of these treaties and took more and more land. Native Americans fought with spears and arrows to keep their lands. European Americans fought with guns and forced the Native Americans to move from these lands. They forced them to move to **reservations**, small areas of land set aside for Native Americans by the United States government.

Then Congress passed a cruel law. The law forced thousands of Native Americans to leave their homes and move west. Among those who moved were Cherokees, Choctaws, Chickasaws, Creeks and Seminoles. They left their green fields and forests in the Southeast. The Cherokees had built excellent farms and towns in Georgia. They had to leave them. They traveled west on foot and on horseback. The trip was long—all the way to Oklahoma. As they traveled, many people got tired and hungry and sick. Many died. Today we remember their sad journey west as the “Trail of Tears.”

A Different Way of Life

As European Americans took the land, they also forced Native Americans to change their way of life. Once, millions of bison had roamed the plains. Native Americans hunted the bison to use for food, clothing, shelter, tools and heat. European Americans slaughtered the bison when they built railroads across the bison’s grazing lands. Soon, only a few bison were left.

Native American children had always learned ideas and skills from their parents and grandparents. Native American family members hunted wild animals together. They gathered nuts and berries. They planted and harvested crops. They cooked meals. Children listened, practiced and learned. Then European Americans opened their own schools to teach Native Americans the European way of reading, writing and arithmetic. Many Native American children had to leave their homes and move to these boarding schools. There they were given uniforms, new haircuts and European names.

Native Americans were the first people to live in America. Even so, they were not allowed to be American citizens until 1924. That was the year Congress passed a law making all Native Americans citizens of the United States. Today many Native Americans

still live on reservations. Many others live in large cities, such as Chicago and Los Angeles. Some live on farms and in small towns all over the United States. Over the years, Native Americans have had to fight for land and human rights. Today, they are a strong people who are proud to be the first Americans. We all can be proud of them, too, for their story begins the story of America.

Ideas to Think About

1. Who were the first Americans, and how did they live?
 2. What caused problems between European Americans and Native Americans?
 3. Why is the Native American story important for all of us?
 4. Put together a timeline showing the history of Native Americans. Make one inch equal to 10 years. How long will your timeline need to be if it shows when Native Americans first arrived in North America? What events should be on your timeline?
 5. Hundreds of states, cities, counties, rivers and lakes in America have Native American names. Which Native American nations lived in your area? How did they live in harmony with the land? Where are they now? Do you have any Native American ancestors?
 6. Pretend you are a Native American child. What would it be like to be sent far away from your family to a European American boarding school? To have your hair cut and your name changed? To attend classes taught in a language you did not know?
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Native Americans

The story of America began long before Columbus sailed here from Europe. In fact, many nations of Native Americans, each with its own laws, language and way of life, had been living on this continent thousands of years before Columbus arrived. These people were the first Americans. This is their story.

Native American Nations

Some scientists believe that the very first Americans came from Asia as many as 30,000 years ago, perhaps much earlier. They probably walked across a tiny land bridge that later became covered by the icy waters of the Bering Strait. Gradually, these people moved south through what is now Alaska, into Canada, the United States, Mexico and Central and South America.

Some of these first Americans made their homes soon after they arrived. Most moved on, fanning out across the land, establishing homes in different places. The Cherokee lived in what is now the eastern part of the United States. Then they moved on, making their new home in the southern Appalachians. The Sioux moved onto the Great Plains. The Apache **migrated** from western Canada to the Southwest of the United States.

Each Native American nation had its own government, language and way of life. Still, the various nations had much in common. These first Americans shared a belief in one all-powerful spirit, the creator of all things. They all lived close to nature, in tune with the seasons. They all relied on their own region's resources for food, tools, clothing and shelter.

Native American nations on the Plains hunted bison (often called buffalo). Woodland nations hunted turkeys and other small game. Those in the Northwest fished in salmon-rich rivers. Villages, or *pueblos*, of Native Americans in the Southwest raised corn.

Native Americans chipped tools from stones and carved them from bones. They learned that certain plants made good medicines. They preserved animal skins and used them for shelter, clothing and warmth in winter.

In 1492 Christopher Columbus landed off the coast of Central America. At that time, more than 300 different Native American nations—probably around 10 million people speaking 350 different languages—were living on this continent. Columbus thought he was in India, so when he met groups of these Native Americans, he called them *Indios*, or Indians. Life for these first Americans was about to change dramatically.

At First, Give and Take

Europeans who followed Columbus knew little about how to survive in America. These **immigrants**, or people who leave their home country to live in a new place, lacked the skills needed to provide for themselves. Native Americans tried to help, not hinder, these newcomers. They shared their foods, such as turkeys, maple sugar, corn, beans, squash, sunflowers and pumpkins. All these foods were new to the European immigrants. Native Americans helped them build shelters from the trees of the forest, and shared their medicines made from plants with immigrants who became ill.

Native Americans had many valuable skills that the newcomers soon adopted. European immigrant farmers tried Native American methods and seeds, and their crops grew well in American soil. Native Americans helped the European immigrants build canoes that were perfectly suited to America's rivers. They showed them how to dry foods to make them last during the winter. Also, some Native Americans showed European immigrants where and how to mine precious metals out of the ground.

Arthur Barlowe was one of those early European immigrants. He came to North Carolina in 1584. He wrote about how his people were treated by the Native Americans: "We were entertained with all love, and kindness."

How did the European immigrants treat the Native Americans? We know that European immigrants shared both goods and ideas with their new neighbors. The Native Americans welcomed the metal tools, cloth, guns and domestic animals from Europe. The Navajo in Arizona and New Mexico began to raise sheep and goats. Native Americans living on the Plains discovered that European horses made bison hunting far easier.

Later On, Problems

Despite such friendly exchanges, though, Native American and European cultures clashed. Native Americans began to die from diseases, such as smallpox, brought over by European immigrants. Native Americans had no **immunity**, or natural protection, from these foreign diseases. Some European immigrants would force Native Americans to help them with their building projects, or to mine precious minerals for them.

Like many people, immigrants from England, France, Spain and other European countries thought that their languages, traditions, religions and ideas were best. Most of them did not try to understand the Native

American cultures they encountered. European immigrants claimed that Native Americans were "savages" who should be "civilized" through learning European ways. For the next 200 years, European Americans pushed the Native Americans from their homelands.

A New Nation

European Americans wanted to set up their own government. In 1776 they began to fight the Revolution, the war that would free them from English rule. The troops were desperate during that first severe winter at Valley Forge. General George Washington and his soldiers were freezing and hungry. Then came a shipment of medicine, clothing and 300 bushels of corn. It was a gift from Shenandoah, chief of the Oneida tribe, a part of the Iroquois Nation. Generous Native Americans had helped rescue the man who would later become the first president of the United States.

By 1782 European Americans had won their freedom, and the 13 colonies were states in a new nation, the United States. Benjamin Franklin, a European American statesman who helped draft the new constitution, admired the government of the Iroquois Nation. Some researchers believe the democratic ideas of the Iroquois government strongly influenced Franklin's thinking.

Cultural Conflicts

From east to west, European Americans quickly spread out across America. They took over corn fields, pastures, forests and hunting and fishing areas that had been home to Native Americans for generations. Native Americans defended their homelands, often in fierce battles.

The new United States government recognized there were problems between European Americans and Native Americans. From 1778 to 1871, the United States government and Native Americans signed at least 380 **treaties**, or agreements made between

countries or groups of people. Usually, those treaties dealt with land rights and education.

Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce Nation told why his people signed these treaties with the new government: “We gave up some of our country to the white men, thinking that we could have peace. We were mistaken. The white man would not leave us alone.” The treaties benefited only the European Americans. They changed life forever for the Native Americans—and not for the better.

Under the treaties, land, or rights to water or minerals on the land, passed from Native Americans to the United States. A few Native American nations were allowed to stay in the areas where their ancestors had lived for centuries. Most were forced to move far from their homelands to **reservations**, or lands set aside for Native Americans by the United States government.

For centuries Native American nations enjoyed broad expanses of forest, farm and grazing land. On the reservations, the United States government assigned each family 160 acres of land. Often the soil was so dry that crops would not grow on the land.

Where was the water to come from? What were the people to eat? How could they earn a living? Once they moved onto the reservations, Native Americans had to depend on the United States government to provide the things they needed, such as food, water, shelter and health care.

Still worse problems were to come. In 1830 Congress passed a law called the Indian Removal Act. The new law forced the Cherokees, Choctaws, Chickasaws, Creeks and Seminoles to move from their lush green forests in the Southeast to the dry lands of Oklahoma. These people grew hungry, tired and sick as they crossed the country on foot and on horseback. The Cherokees alone lost almost one-fourth of their people as they made the terrible journey, known today as the “Trail of Tears.”

European Americans continued to press on across the country. They built railroads through

the Midwest, slaughtering herds of bison and destroying the bison’s grazing lands. For hundreds of years, Native American nations had relied on bison for food, clothing, shelter, tools and heat. By the late 1800s, European Americans had almost wiped out the bison. With them went Native American livelihoods and lifestyles that were centuries old.

In all, the United States took over nearly 1 billion acres of Native American homelands. The government paid far less than the land was worth. Millions of acres in the Great Plains, for example, brought only about 10 cents per acre. With every treaty, new waves of European Americans came to claim the soil that had been home to the Native Americans for longer than anyone could remember. And the government continued to force Native Americans off their homelands and onto reservations.

Conflicts over Education

Another conflict between European Americans and Native Americans was over education. For centuries Native American children had learned to hunt, build shelters and carry out the daily tasks of life by working alongside their parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles. Storytellers passed legends on from one generation to another by word of mouth. Native American children learned the rules, beliefs and ideas of their people by listening and doing.

European Americans had different ideas about religion and education. European American missionaries taught the Native Americans about Christianity. The government set up schools to teach European methods of reading, writing and arithmetic. Native American children were forced to leave their homes and move to these European American boarding schools. There they were required to have new haircuts, wear uniforms and use European names rather than their own. Classes were taught only in English, and discipline was harsh. In this way, Native Americans were

forced to give up their culture. The European Americans' goal was to replace Native American ways with their own.

Broken Promises

In 1824 the United States government set up the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to carry out its responsibilities to Native Americans. For the next 100 years, the needs and rights of Native Americans were often ignored or even trampled on. The United States government broke nearly every treaty it made with Native Americans.

Meanwhile, life on the reservations was bleak. Many Native Americans died of sickness and starvation. The government even forbade them to celebrate their own holidays. Native Americans saw their livelihoods destroyed. They saw their beliefs and ways of life come under strong attack.

For many years Native Americans were not even considered part of this country. Until the late 1890s, they were not counted in the United States census. They finally became American citizens in 1924, more than 50 years after African Americans were granted citizenship and thousands of years after the first Native Americans had set foot on this land.

Help has come with modern times, but problems continue for our nation's Native Americans. In the late 1950s, the government tried a new policy. Hoping to merge Native Americans with the rest of American society, the government took many people off the reservations and sent them to large cities, such as Denver, Los Angeles and Chicago. Some found work, but they also found life in a crowded city to be far different from life on a quiet reservation. About half of them returned to the only home they knew.

Strong People

Despite these many hardships, Native Americans have remained strong, surviving

great conflicts. In this century their population has grown to about the same as it was when Columbus landed. Today the United States is home to about 2 million Native Americans. The federal government recognizes about 300 Native American tribes and 200 native Alaskan villages.

Our government is also making efforts to repair the effects of broken treaties. The courts are still hearing cases concerning Native American homelands. Most of the people who now work for the BIA are Native Americans. Some tribes run their own schools and colleges. Native American tribes now form their own policies and take charge of services for their own people.

About half of our nation's Native Americans have left the reservations to live in cities. Others live in small towns and farms across America. Native Americans are proud of their ancestors—the first Americans. They are determined to preserve their rich traditions and pass them on to their children. Their hope is that all Americans will learn to appreciate and respect the beauty and strength of the Native American heritage.

Ideas to Think About

1. Who were the ancestors of today's Native Americans? Where did they come from, and how did they live?
2. What did the Native Americans give to the early European immigrants? What did they take from them?
3. How have United States government policies posed a threat to Native American livelihoods and cultures? What problems continue today?
4. Why do you think the United States government was so determined to replace Native American culture and tradition with European culture and tradition?
5. What can be done now to make up for the unfair and broken treaties?



Native Americans

How long have people lived in North America? No one knows exactly. Some Native American legends suggest that people have lived on this continent for countless generations, ever since human life began. Some scientists confirm that Native Americans were indeed the first humans to inhabit North America. They also say that humans first arrived here at least 30,000 years ago, perhaps much earlier.

Today these scientists believe it happened this way. Groups of people from Asia were the first to enter this continent. They probably walked across a narrow land bridge that is now covered by the icy waters of the Bering Strait. No doubt they were following herds of migrating animals. Those first Americans did not enter the continent in a single mass migration. Instead, they trickled across in small groups, probably for thousands of years.

Once they were living on this continent, most of these Native American groups kept moving. For example, the Anasazi made their homes in the southwest part of what is now the United States. Then they moved on. The Cherokee first established homes in the northern part of the United States. Later they migrated to the southern Appalachians. The Sioux moved to the Great Plains, forcing other Native American groups to move on.

Native American Life and Culture

By the late 1400s, both North and South America were widely populated. Columbus met groups of Native Americans when he landed off the coast of Central America. His belief that he had reached India led him to call these people *Indios*, or Indians.

Scientists believe that by 1492, North America was home to more than 300 separate Native American groups, or nations. Some were small **nomadic** bands, people who followed the animals and moved with the

changing seasons. Others had developed complex societies that supported themselves by farming. Some Native American nations had highly developed governments. Some traded goods with other nations.

Each nation was a separate society with its own culture, government, language and traditions. However, all Native Americans had certain religious beliefs in common. They shared a deep respect for nature. They felt a spiritual bond with every living and nonliving thing that the earth provided. Most of all, they believed in one all-powerful spirit that they referred to in various ways, such as the Great Spirit, He Who Made Everything and the Maker.

Native Americans lived in close harmony with nature, following the rhythms of the changing seasons. As we would expect, they made good use of the resources available to them. Those in the East and Southwest cultivated corn, beans and squash. They built shelters from the wood provided by the forests, where they also found nuts, berries and other foods. Native Americans on the West Coast enjoyed a great variety of foods, including fish, acorns and pinenuts. In the Northwest they fished in salmon-rich rivers, and on the Great Plains they hunted bison (often called buffalo).

Early Give and Take

At first, Native Americans welcomed the European immigrants who followed Columbus. They contributed to each other's lives in important ways. For example, Native Americans were eager to have certain European items they found useful. These included guns, blankets, cloth and metal tools. Native American nations of the Great Plains began to use horses, which were first brought to America by Spanish immigrants. Horses were especially useful in bison hunting. The Navajo in Arizona and New Mexico began to raise sheep and goats, also introduced by the European immigrants.

In return, Native Americans made lasting contributions to the lives of the early European immigrants. Products of Native American agriculture added flavor and nutrition to the immigrants' diet. Among these were corn, beans, sunflowers, squash, turkeys, pumpkins and maple sugar. Native Americans also introduced European immigrants to plants that were useful as medicines.

At various times throughout America's early history, Native American resources and ideas have benefited European immigrants. One incident happened soon after the Revolutionary War broke out. That first winter of 1776–77 was unusually severe. General George Washington and his troops at Valley Forge were cold and hungry. One day a shipment arrived, bringing medicine, clothing and 300 bushels of corn. The supplies were a generous gift from Chief Shenandoah of the Oneida tribe.

The Oneida were one of the six tribes that made up the Iroquois Nation. Some European Americans, including George Washington and Benjamin Franklin, admired the Iroquois government. Some researchers believe the democratic principles of the Iroquois government strongly influenced these statesmen as they worked to draft the United States Constitution.

Many of us today are also familiar with the names of certain Native American women. Some of these women aided the early European immigrants and explorers, earning a lasting place in history. One of these was Pocahontas, a Native American princess, who saved the life of Captain John Smith. Another was a young Shoshone woman named Sacajawea. She accompanied explorers Lewis and Clark and helped them communicate with the Native American groups they met.

Disease, Warfare and Lost Lives

Despite these positive exchanges, life would never be the same for Native Americans after the arrival of Columbus. Spanish, English, French and Dutch immigrants brought dramatic changes. From the beginning, conflict and misunderstanding marked the relationship between Native Americans and European immigrants.

Most of the European Americans regarded North America as an open wilderness waiting to be claimed and civilized. They saw the continent as practically

uninhabited. They saw the Native American population as consisting of small groups of savage peoples with inferior cultures. For years many European Americans would use ideas like these to justify their takeover of Native American homelands.

At the time Columbus arrived, close to 10 million Native Americans lived in North America. That number dropped sharply after the European immigrants came. The causes varied. Many Native Americans died of new diseases, such as smallpox, that they had caught from Europeans. Wars also broke out between Native Americans and European immigrants and among Native American nations.

By 1910 the Native American population in North America had dwindled to fewer than 400,000. Earlier, many European immigrants had viewed the Native Americans as savages. Now they were viewed as a vanishing race. However, Native Americans have endured and, in this century, their numbers have increased greatly. Today Native Americans are one of the fastest-growing groups in the country.

Broken Treaties and Lost Lands

European Americans had ideas about land that were very different from those of Native Americans. European Americans wanted land of their own. Many Native Americans saw the land as something to use, not something to own. These differing ideas added to misunderstandings between the two groups, and compounded the problems Native Americans had in dealing with the demands of European Americans.

During the 1800s wave upon wave of European immigrants landed on North American shores. The pressures of an expanding population forced the United States government to negotiate with Native Americans for their homelands. The government created more than 370 treaties with various Native American nations.

Under these treaties, European Americans gained huge tracts of land from Native Americans, who held onto some of their homelands along with water and mineral rights. In return, the government took on responsibilities for the Native Americans. These responsibilities included providing homes on **reservations** and providing education for Native American children.

In the European Americans' rush to get Native American lands, the treaties were repeatedly broken and more and more land was seized. Many Native Americans fought to resist the takeover, but they were generally unsuccessful. One reason was the military technology of the European Americans. Another was that Native Americans often disagreed among themselves about how to deal with European Americans. Little by little, Native Americans were forced off their homelands.

Later, the government found new ways to take Native American homelands. The Dawes Severalty Act of 1887 was the most harmful. It divided tribal lands among Native American families. Each family received 160 acres to farm. But most of these Native Americans were hunters and traders, not farmers. Besides, much of the land was so poor that it could not be farmed profitably. Lands not given to Native Americans were opened to European Americans. Many Native Americans sold their lands for very little money. Thus, over time, large pieces of Native American homelands ended up in European American hands.

Immigrants in Their Own Land

In 1838 Congress approved an especially cruel law, the Indian Removal Act. The new law forced Native Americans who lived in the eastern part of the country to move west to special lands reserved for them. Some groups, such as the Seminoles, fought to keep their homelands. The Cherokees, who had built excellent towns and farms in Georgia, took the matter to court.

Still, all Native American attempts to resist the harsh new law failed. The Cherokees of Georgia, the Choctaws and Chickasaws of Mississippi and the Creeks and Seminoles of Florida were forcibly removed from their homelands. The forced march of the Cherokees is well known. They traveled west on foot and on horseback, all the way from Georgia to Oklahoma. Almost 4,000—about one-fourth of the total number who had set out on the journey—died along the way. Today we remember their terrible journey as the “Trail of Tears.”

Other nations attempted to avoid moving to the reservations provided for them by the government. The Nez Perce, led by Chief Joseph, made an epic 1,300-mile trek toward Canada. They traveled through the mountains of Idaho, Wyoming and Montana. Along the

way, they were able to repel or evade the United States Army, which outnumbered them. Eventually, only a few miles from the Canadian border, they were captured. Finally, the Nez Perce were forced to move to reservations.

More recent laws have continued to make descendants of the first Americans “immigrants in their own land.” Legislation passed in the 1950s attempted to relocate Native Americans to big cities. From 1952 until the program ended in the mid-1960s, 200,000 Native Americans were moved from their homes on reservations to cities, such as Denver, Los Angeles and Chicago. Some found work, but most experienced poverty and neglect. Many were unable to adjust to urban life and the European Americans' world. Many returned to their reservations. Today about half of our nation's Native Americans live in urban areas. Others live in small towns and farms all across America.

Bureau of Indian Affairs

In 1824 the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) was charged with carrying out the United States government's responsibilities toward Native Americans. At the beginning the BIA took control of all aspects of Native American life. The European American BIA agents had complete power over Native Americans and their life on the reservations.

Early BIA policies were designed to destroy, not preserve, Native American cultures. BIA agents forbade Native Americans to observe their traditional ceremonies, replacing them with European American celebrations that had nothing to do with Native American life and traditions. They hoped to force Native Americans into merging with the European American population and culture.

Unfortunately, for many years the BIA did not provide adequate living conditions on the reservations. In the 1800s Native American life often included sickness, malnutrition and even starvation.

Finally, in 1924, the government granted citizenship to Native Americans. At first, their condition did not improve. Then the reforms began. The Indian Reorganization Act set the foundation for reform. By the 1970s the idea of a government-to-government relationship between Congress and Native American

nations went into effect. Since then, Native Americans have had a voice in forming policies that affect them. Today about 80 percent of the BIA's employees are Native Americans.

Native American Education

In traditional Native American cultures, the education of children was centered in the home. Boys and girls learned necessary skills and ideas through imitation and practice. Older relatives—mothers and fathers, aunts and uncles and older brothers and sisters—helped teach the young. From them children learned both moral lessons and life skills.

Early European Americans believed that their culture was superior to Native American culture. They saw it as their duty to introduce Native American children to the benefits of European culture.

As a result, many Native American children were taken from their homes and sent to European American boarding schools set up by the government. Harsh discipline was sometimes used to force these children to adapt to the European Americans' world. Many children ran away from these schools or dropped out before they completed their schooling.

The 1970s brought some improvements. Congress passed an Indian Education Act, which arranged for Native American parents and nations to become more involved in their children's schooling. Today Native Americans are working to improve the quality of education for their people. They have created the National Indian Education Association, which has established nearly 25 new community colleges in various states, each one being controlled by the members of a Native American nation.

Native Americans in War

The skill and courage of Native American warriors who fought against the European Americans' westward expansion is well known. Less known, however, is the fact that Native Americans also fought alongside European Americans. For example, Crow, Shoshone, Pawnee and Ute scouts and warriors helped United States troops during the Plains Indian Wars in the 1800s.

More recently, Native American soldiers have fought in World Wars I and II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War. Most of these Native Americans enlisted voluntarily. Many were exceptional soldiers who won honors for their distinguished service.

In these wars, Native American soldiers performed a service uniquely their own. Native American languages were, of course, totally unknown in Europe and Asia. During World War I, the Choctaw code-talkers communicated secret messages impossible for an enemy to decode. Later, in World War II, Navajos, Crows and Inuit (Eskimos) performed the same service.

Native Americans Today

Today Native Americans have a kind of dual citizenship. They are both members of their own tribe or nation and citizens of the United States. The United States government recognizes about 300 Native American tribes and 200 Alaska native villages.

Like other Americans, Native Americans seek to exercise the rights guaranteed them by the United States Constitution. They want to contribute to the betterment of America without having to give away any more land, water or other natural resources. They want to preserve their rights to govern themselves. Finally, Native Americans want to preserve their valued traditions and their distinct identity as the first Americans.

Ideas to Think About

1. When and how did the first Americans initially come to North America?
 2. How did the arrival of European immigrants change life forever for Native Americans?
 3. Why is it important for all of us to understand Native American history and culture?
 4. Write an essay about the health and religious practices and beliefs of Native Americans.
 5. Research and write an essay on several of the treaties established between the United States government and Native American nations.
 6. Prepare a graph that depicts historic population figures for Native Americans and projections for their population to 2005.
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