

## The Creation of American Indian Heritage Month

### A brief history

Source: U.S. Dept. of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs

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#### Dr. Arthur C. Parker

What started at the turn of the century as an effort to gain a day of recognition for the significant contributions the first Americans made to the establishment and growth of the U.S., has resulted in a whole month being designated for that purpose.

**Early Proponents:** One of the very proponents of an American Indian Day was Dr. Arthur C. Parker, a Seneca Indian, who was the director of the Museum of Arts and Science in Rochester, N.Y. He persuaded the Boy Scouts of America to set aside a day for the "First Americans" and for three years they adopted such a day. In 1915, the annual Congress of the American Indian Association meeting in Lawrence, Kans., formally approved a plan concerning American Indian Day. It directed its president, Rev. Sherman Coolidge, an Arapahoe, to call upon the country to observe such a day. Coolidge issued a proclamation on Sept. 28, 1915, which declared the second Saturday of each May as an American Indian Day and contained the first formal appeal for recognition of Indians as citizens.

The year before this proclamation was issued, Red Fox James, a Blackfoot Indian, rode horseback from state to state seeking approval for a day to honor Indians. On December 14, 1915, he presented the endorsements of 24 state governments at the White House. There is no record, however, of such a national day being proclaimed.

**State Celebrations:** The first American Indian Day in a state was declared on the second Saturday in May 1916 by the governor of N.Y. Several states celebrate the fourth Friday in September. In Illinois, for example, legislators enacted such a day in 1919. Presently, several states have designated Columbus Day as Native American Day, but it continues to be a day we observe without any recognition as a national legal holiday.

**Heritage Months:** In 1990 President George H. W. Bush approved a joint resolution designating November 1990 "National American Indian Heritage Month." Similar proclamations have been issued each year since 1994. The theme for 2005 is "Respecting Tradition, Embracing a Healthy Future" (From <http://www.ihs.gov/>)

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Some other sites that may be useful for your special observance activities.

\*\*\*Society for American Indian Government Employees (SAIGE) is a national

non-profit organization that serves the needs of American Indian (AI), and Alaska Native (AN), federal employees, promoting the recruitment, hiring, retention, development, and advancement of American Indians and Alaska Natives in the government workforce. SAIGE's 2006 conference will be held in Anchorage, AK <http://www.saige.org/>

\*\*\*The National Museum of the American Indian  
<http://www.nmai.si.edu/>

\*\*\*American Indian website - Phil Konstantin has a website with lots of links--especially to books on American Indians. We regularly send out Phil's newsletter when we receive it.  
<http://www.americanindian.net/>

\*\*\*\*The National Park Service has historical information in The National Register of Historic Places which promotes awareness of and appreciation for the history and culture of American Indians and Alaska Natives during National American Indian Heritage Month. This month is dedicated to recognizing the intertribal cultures, the events and lifeways, the designs and achievements of American Indians and Alaska Natives. As part of the observance, this site showcases historic properties listed in the National Register, National Register publications, and National Park units.  
<http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/feature/indian/>

\*\*\*Rod Enterprises, Inc has posters for special observances

\*\*\* The Diversity Store has posters for special observances. Their posters for American Indian Heritage have several different themes.  
<http://www.diversitystore.com/>

\*\*\*American West - This site has sections on General Native American Resources, Education, Leaders of the Past, Messages & Personal Home Pages, Native American Nations Homepages, Images, Organizations & Government Resources, Ghosts from the Past, Native Peoples' Web Ring, Native Languages, and Movies.  
<http://www.americanwest.com/pages/indians.htm>

\*\*\*\*For a listing of Federally recognized American Indian Tribes and a listing of Native entities within the state of Alaska (there are 227 of them!), go to  
<http://www.indiancircle.com/links.shtml>

\*\*\*\*Association of American Indian Affairs is an 80-year-old organization with offices in Maryland and South Dakota, with an active cultural preservation program. AAIA was an integral part of the advocacy effort that led to the

enactment of NAGPRA, has facilitated repatriation of almost 2,000 human remains to the Dakota people, plays a leading role in sacred sites preservation, and operates a small Dakota language program in South Dakota. AAIA's other programs focus on tribal sovereignty, sacred lands protection, youth, scholarships, and health.

<http://www.indian-affairs.org/>

\*\*\*Frontier Heritage Alliance --Our goal is to bring together a variety of organizations, government agencies, Indian tribes and cultural committees, educational institutions, businesses, and individuals working for the preservation, interpretation, and development of our shared heritage on the Northern Plains.

<http://www.frontierheritage.org/>

\*\*\*\*The American Indian Science & Engineering Society (AISES) is a national, nonprofit organization which nurtures building of community by bridging science and technology with traditional Native values. Through its educational programs, AISES provides opportunities for American Indians and Native Alaskans to pursue studies in science, engineering, and technology arenas. The trained professionals then become technologically informed leaders within the Indian community. AISES' ultimate goal is to be a catalyst for the advancement of American Indians and Native Alaskans as they seek to become self-reliant and self-determined members of society.

<http://www.aises.org/>

\*\*\*\*\*Activities to Celebrate Native American Heritage!

November is National American Indian Heritage Month. This week, Education World offers 12 lessons to help students learn about Native American history and cultures. Included: Activities that involve students in dramatizing folktales, learning new words, preparing traditional foods, and much more!

[http://www.education-world.com/a\\_special/native\\_americans.shtml](http://www.education-world.com/a_special/native_americans.shtml)