

Everything you always wanted to know about Indian Tribes.

in Congress to regulate sovereign immunity.

26. What are treaties?

From 1777 to 1871, U.S. relations with 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 Indians protection, goods, 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, have 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 the 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 Indians 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 a 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 re-

ligious practitioners. The feathers are from eagles that die naturally or by accident.

46. Why do Native Americans 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 the 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 a 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, individuals should contact individual tribes to learn about membership. Tribes have the final determination on who qualifies.

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