

American Indian" redirects here. For other indigenous peoples, see Indigenous peoples of the Americas and other geographic regions. For Americans from South Asia, see Indian American.

Native Americans within the boundaries of the present-day United States (including indigenous peoples of Alaska and Hawaii) are composed of numerous, distinct tribes and ethnic groups, many of which survive as intact political communities. The terms used to refer to Native Americans have been controversial. According to a 1995 U.S. Census Bureau set of home interviews, most of the respondents with an expressed preference refer to themselves as "American Indians" or simply "Indians"; this term has been adopted by major newspapers and some academic groups, but does not traditionally include Native Hawaiians or certain Alaskan Natives, such as Aleut, Yup'ik, or Inuit peoples.

Since the end of the 15th century, the migration of Europeans to the Americas has led to centuries of conflict and adjustment between Old and New World societies. Many Native Americans lived as hunter-gatherer societies and told their histories by oral traditions; Europeans therefore created almost all of the surviving historical record concerning the conflict.[2]

The indigenous cultures were quite different from those of the proto-industrial and mostly Christian immigrants. Many[citation needed] native cultures were matrilineal and occupied hunting grounds and agricultural lands for use of the entire community. Europeans at that time had patriarchal cultures and had developed concepts of individual property rights with respect to land that were extremely different. The differences in cultures between the established Native Americans and immigrant Europeans, as well as shifting alliances among different nations of each culture through the centuries, caused extensive political tension, ethnic violence, and social disruption. Native Americans suffered high fatalities from contact with Eurasian diseases to which they had not acquired immunity. Smallpox epidemics are thought to have caused the greatest loss of life for indigenous populations, although estimates of the pre-Columbian population of what today constitutes the U.S. vary significantly, from 1 million to 18 million.[3][4]

After the colonies revolted against Great Britain and established the United States of America, President George Washington and Henry Knox conceived of the idea of "civilizing" Native Americans in preparation for assimilation as U.S. citizens.[5][6][7][8][9] Assimilation (whether voluntary, as with the Choctaw,[10][11] or forced) became a consistent policy through American administrations. During the 19th century, the ideology of manifest destiny became integral to the American nationalist movement. Expansion of European-American populations to the west after the American Revolution resulted in increasing pressure on Native American lands, warfare between the groups, and rising tensions. In 1830, the U.S. Congress passed the Indian Removal Act, authorizing the government to relocate Native Americans from their homelands within established states to lands west of the Mississippi River, accommodating European-American expansion.

As American expansion reached into the West, settler and miner migrants came into increasing conflict with the Great Basin, Great Plains, and other Western tribes. These were complex nomadic cultures based on (introduced) horse culture and seasonal bison hunting. They carried out resistance against American incursion in the decades after the completion of the Civil War and the Transcontinental

Railroad in a series of Indian Wars, which were frequent up until the 1890s but continued into the 20th century. Over time, the United States forced a series of treaties and land cessions by the tribes and established reservations for them in many western states. U.S. agents encouraged Native Americans to adopt European-style farming and similar pursuits, but European-American agricultural technology of the time was inadequate for often dry reservation lands. In 1924, Native Americans who were not already U.S. citizens were granted citizenship by Congress.

Contemporary Native Americans have a unique relationship with the United States because they may be members of nations, tribes, or bands with sovereignty and treaty rights. Cultural activism since the late 1960s has increased political participation and led to an expansion of efforts to teach and preserve indigenous languages for younger generations and to establish a greater cultural infrastructure: Native Americans have founded independent newspapers and online media, recently including FNX, the first Native American television channel;^[12] established Native American studies programs, tribal schools and universities, and museums and language programs; and have increasingly been published as authors.