

Chapter 1

The Rich, Troubled Past of the American Indian

In This Chapter

- ▶ Getting a new perception of the American Indian
 - ▶ Checking out their ancient beginnings
 - ▶ Sorting through struggles and successes
 - ▶ Looking toward a bright future
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All Americans need to know the undeniably wonderful, oftentimes troublesome, commonly awe-inspiring, sometimes regrettable history of our country. Economic miracle and global influence? Great. Slavery and the near-extinction of the Native American peoples? Not so great.

The “American identity” is multifaceted and has been forged in a cauldron of countless influences, one of the most important being the fact that the Indians were here first. Why is that important? For the same reason that many states have passed resolutions apologizing for slavery. The Indians were here when European explorers arrived and claimed the land as their own, using authority they believed was given to them by God himself.

That’s pretty powerful validation, when you think about it, and it helps explain how European settlers had zero qualms about taking what they wanted and eliminating Native peoples at will. They were doing God’s work.

The Price of Greatness

Knowing and understanding the genesis of what many believe is the greatest country in the history of civilization is important because it puts this achievement known as the United States in perspective. It illustrates that greatness often comes with a price, and that price is commonly the exploitation or elimination of others.

But don't get me wrong: This is not a diatribe against the great American success story. It is simply a reminder that one of the signs of a truly evolved society is its willingness to admit the travails of its past, which America consistently does with dignity and grace.

The history of the American Indian is the story of ancient civilizations, ancient cultures, glorious rites and rituals, and evolved societies that were fully developed and functional when they first met the European explorers and settlers.

In *Native American History For Dummies*, you look at who Indians were, what happened to them, and who they are now. You can find out more about:

- ✓ Their homes
- ✓ Their hunting, trapping, fishing, and other survival practices
- ✓ Their rites of passage
- ✓ Their battles, both with Anglos and each other
- ✓ Their creation myths
- ✓ Their cultural practices

You will hear from great warriors and leaders, and hopefully gain that aforementioned perspective on how the creation of America impacted an entire race of people.

In the Beginning . . .

The first part of this book discusses the many theories put forth to explain how the Native peoples who were here when the first Europeans arrived got here.

Some say by land, some say by sea, but the bottom line and the undeniable historical and scientific fact is that there were certainly hundreds of thousands, and more likely millions of indigenous people already inhabiting the North American landmass when it was “discovered.”

The theories

A few theories as to how this huge population came into being in North America are looked at, including:

- ✓ The migration across the Bering Sea theory via the Beringia land bridge
- ✓ The arrival along the western coast by boat

- ✓ The theory that the Chinese may have been here first
- ✓ A similar theory that the Celts may have stopped by earlier

Why should you care about how the people we now know as Indians, Inuits, and Aleuts got here in the first place? Why is this important?

Because their history is *your* history, and it is critically important that science pinpoints the genetic ancestry of as many of the earth's populations as possible. Such information has consistently been used to pinpoint important genetic and medical facts that have been used in the battle against disease and ethnic-specific medical problems.

Plus, it can't be denied that even though Santayana's reminder about those who don't know their history are bound to repeat it is now something of a cliché, there is a huge amount of truth in it, and the reason history is studied is to not make the same mistakes over and over and over again.

The stages and waves

While studying Native American history, it is also of value to identify and discuss the different stages of cultural development and the geographical migration waves of Indian tribes and ethnic groups.

You will look at:

- ✓ Clovis and Folsom cultures
- ✓ Na-Dene culture
- ✓ The Inuits and the Aleuts

You also journey through the development stages that have come to be known as:

- ✓ Archaic
- ✓ Plano
- ✓ Pueblo

And don't forget the K-Man

The discovery of the Kennewick Man was a huge step forward in . . . well, in making scientists and tribal peoples even more confused about the Paleoindian Period and who lived where, and when.

The K-Man was not supposed to be where they found him. Or it could actually be the other way around: The K-Man was not who scientists expected to find where they found him.

Controversy has raged ever since the remains of the indigenous male known as Kennewick Man was discovered in 1996. As many as five tribes initially claimed ownership of the remains of someone they believed was their ancestor, and it took a court ruling rejecting their claims for kinship to get them to drop their suits.

So who owns the Ancient One?

Right now, we do. Yeah, that’s right. I’m talking to you. The American people own the remains of Kennewick Man. Well, more accurately, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, a federal agency, owns the remains because they were found on land controlled by the Corps. (See Chapter 2 for more on Kennewick Man.)

The Tribes of Then and Now

The tribal migration patterns resulted in Indian settlements all across North America, from the northwest forests and western shores, to the plains, the southeast and southwest, and the northern woodlands.

Some tribes were enormous; many were very small. An overwhelming number of tribes are now extinct.

The Five Civilized Tribes were the tribes that had the largest populations, inhabited the most land, and had the most influence, both among other tribes and with the white man. The Five Civilized Tribes are the tribes the Anglos negotiated with, and did business with.

They consisted of:

- ✓ The Cherokee
- ✓ The Choctaw
- ✓ The Seminole
- ✓ The Chickasaw
- ✓ The Creek

Other important tribes included the Navajo, the Lakotas, Nakotas, and Santee, the Chippewa, the Pueblo, the Apache, the Iroquois, and the Arctic tribes.

Native American History For Dummies provides concise “biographies” of these varied tribes, with emphasis on how and where they lived, what they were known for, and what their status is today.

Unexpected Visitors

Once the Europeans arrived, the Indian tribes had to deal with them.

Whether they liked it or not. Whether they wanted to or not.

Columbus was first to come in contact with tribal peoples, specifically the Arawaks on the Bahamas, and later Haiti, and that intercourse didn't go all that well for the Natives. Columbus put them to work as slaves, sent many back to Spain as slaves, and, as the historical record unequivocally shows, treated them . . . well, let's just say it was as though the Golden Rule didn't exist for the Italian explorer and his men.

Spanish and French explorers soon followed Columbus. After all, the so-called "New World" was like a bottomless treasure chest of natural resources, fur-bearing wildlife, game, fish, and other riches that were absolutely irresistible to Europeans.

Soon to follow were such explorers as:

- ✓ John Cabot
- ✓ Amerigo Vespucci
- ✓ Ponce de Leon
- ✓ Hernando Cortez
- ✓ Jacques Cartier
- ✓ Hernando De Soto
- ✓ Francisco Vasquez de Coronado
- ✓ Marquette and Jolliet
- ✓ La Salle

A Plethora of Persistent Personalities

Tribes always were, and still are, the foundation and cornerstone of Native American life and culture. (See Chapter 17 for more on the familial and organizational structures of American Indian societies.)

Indians identify themselves by their tribe. "I'm Choctaw. I'm Navajo. I'm Cree." Tribal identity is as important to American Indians as national ethnicity is to European-descended people of America: "I'm Italian American. I'm African American. I'm Polish American."

Yet it is commonly the fascinating *people* of the tribes, specific tribes’ memorable individuals, that are spoken of most often these days. Native American leaders and warriors have permeated white culture. Their names have truly become household names:

- ✓ Geronimo
- ✓ Cochise
- ✓ Sitting Bull
- ✓ Crazy Horse
- ✓ Pocahontas
- ✓ Tecumseh
- ✓ Chief Seattle
- ✓ Sacagawea

From the 16th century through today, Indian tribes have produced great leaders who have often been visionaries working diligently to maintain the aforementioned tribal identity and not allow their pasts to fade away into the annals of time.

Their aspirations have not always been fulfilled, and many iconic American Indian leaders have watched sadly as their tribes were dispersed, or their land was taken, or their past was forgotten.

Things are somewhat better these days.

Native American culture is thriving and many tribes have Web sites and historical foundations and museums working to educate people — both tribal and Anglo — about Indian history and the roles tribes have played before, during, and currently in the history of America.

The U.S. government, through the Bureau of Indian Affairs, strives to support Native American community efforts, and laws have been passed to protect rights that have been commonly trampled on in the past.

The Smithsonian Institute’s Museum of the American Indian also works diligently to chronicle Indian history and culture.

War Stories

The history of Indians in America has been violent.

But not always.

Treaties were signed and peace did exist for great lengths of time between tribes and the white, as well as between rival tribes.

But warfare was one of the main causes for the devastating population losses tribes suffered through in the 16th through 19th centuries. Interestingly, both the whites and the Indians had advantages and disadvantages. Whites had superior firepower, but Indians were incredibly skilled at surreptitious movement and attacking from concealment.

Some of the more important battles — meaning influential and impacting both the Indians and the Europeans (see Chapter 11 for more on our violent past) — in chronological order, covered in this volume include:

- ✓ King Philip's War
- ✓ The French and Indian Wars
- ✓ Pontiac's Rebellion

Also, Indians fought — on both sides — in the major wars as well:

- ✓ The American Revolution
- ✓ The War of 1812
- ✓ The Civil War

Many battles with Indians have now become an iconic part of our history and their names have morphed into having more meaning than simply identifying where the conflict took place.

Movies are made, books are written, and even people who have limited knowledge of history have heard of “Little Big Horn” and “Wounded Knee.”

Dysfunction Junction

Relations between the United States government and American Indians have been troubled from the start. That's an undeniable historical fact. This reality resonates throughout the Native American community today, and permeates the Indian culture and zeitgeist.

The U.S. was formed at the expense of the indigenous peoples, yet great effort has been consistently made to remedy the wrongs and repair the damage.

Treaties were broken; tribes were “relocated”; children were taken from their parents and placed in government schools. Reservations were offered as a trade-off for land grabs, yet they were often inferior in all ways.

Sovereignty works

There’s still a lot of catching up to do, but Indian self-determination is, as Harvard professor Joseph P. Kalt, author of a 2005 Harvard American Indian Project survey, says, “the best policy in 100 or 200 years for solid progress in taking the tribes out of poverty.”

“Self-rule,” Kalt wrote, “brings decision making home, and local decision makers are held more accountable to local needs, conditions and cultures than outsiders.”

The seven ways

Over the centuries of U.S.-Indian relations, the United States has implemented seven specific approaches to “dealing with” the Indians.

They were/are:

- ✓ Treaties (1608–1830)
- ✓ Removal (1830–1850)
- ✓ Reservations (1850–1871)
- ✓ Assimilation (1871–1928)
- ✓ Reorganization (1928–1942)
- ✓ Termination (1943–1968)
- ✓ Self-determination (1968–present)

Currently, self-determination is the official policy of the United States government. Indian tribal nations are sovereign entities, and the U.S. deals with them like individual countries. They make their own laws, impose and collect their own taxes, and yet are still an important part of America.

Stepping up

The U.S. has not shirked from remedying wrong. In the last 35 or so years, many acts, bills, and programs have been passed and launched to benefit the Native American community, including:

- ✓ The Indian Self Determination and Education Assistance Act (1975)
- ✓ The Indian Health Care Improvement Act (1978)
- ✓ The American Indian Religious Freedom Act (1978)

- ✓ The Indian Child Welfare Act (1978)
- ✓ The Native American Graves and Repatriation Act (1990)

Daily Life

The history of any ethnic group is also told by how it lived and continues to live on a day-to-day basis.

A group's living arrangements, its eating habits, the clothes it wears, the games its children play, its religious beliefs, its parenting practices, its art and music . . . all these elements combine to paint a rich and textured portrait of a people.

Regarding sustenance, Native Americans relied for food on

- ✓ Hunting
- ✓ Trapping
- ✓ Fishing
- ✓ Crops

Trading also played a huge role in the daily lives of many Indian tribes. The Indian's talent for trapping and skinning fur-bearing animals created an economic dynamo to satisfy the European demand for North American animal furs.

Natives also made their own clothing from deer and buffalo hides, which included footwear in the form of boots, moccasins, and snowshoes.

All parts of the animals were used, plus Indians made use of the other bounties of the natural world including:

- ✓ Shells
- ✓ Stones
- ✓ Bark
- ✓ Feathers

Home Is Where the Hearth Is

Native American tribes were markedly different in how and where they lived. It often comes as a surprise to people that Indians employed many more types of homes and domiciles than just the tipi.

Some of these included

- ✓ Plankhouses
- ✓ Longhouses
- ✓ Hogans
- ✓ Chickees
- ✓ Tipis
- ✓ Wigwams
- ✓ Lean-tos
- ✓ Igloos
- ✓ Earth homes

Prey tell

The white man introduced the Indian to the rifle and that enormously changed the way Native peoples hunted.

Prior to the use of firearms, Indians used bows and arrows for distance hunting, knives for close-up killing, and traps for prey that they couldn't spend time stalking. They would set the traps and return days later, usually to find an animal snared.

All aboard

Traveling on foot was de rigueur for tribal peoples, although they were also very adept at figuring out labor- and time-saving other ways of traveling. Waterways were especially useful for covering long distances in a short period of time, and some of the vehicles they used included:

- ✓ Dugout and bark canoes — water
- ✓ Kayaks and umiaks — water
- ✓ Balsa boats — water
- ✓ Bull boats — water
- ✓ Snowshoes — snow
- ✓ Plank boats — water
- ✓ Travois — land
- ✓ Sleds and toboggans — snow

Family First

An important facet of Native American societies is the family, which forms the core unit of the tribe. In Chapter 17 the family structure of American Indians is discussed, including the difference between patriarchal and matriarchal family types.

A woman's work

The role of women in Native American culture was an enormous surprise to the Europeans, who were quite literally shocked at the authority women wielded in both the family and the tribe.

Tribal women in the 16th through 19th centuries were enormously important in terms of tribal solidarity and the continuing maintenance of a sense of community, and their duties included:

- ✓ Keeping the household supplied with whatever it needed
- ✓ Constructing the home
- ✓ Cooking for the family
- ✓ Monitoring and restocking the water supplies
- ✓ Having almost total responsibility for and oversight of the family's children
- ✓ Maintaining the vegetable garden
- ✓ Tanning the hides, if the tribe was in the fur business

The kids are alright

In the pre-reservations era for Native Americans, children were somewhat indulged, yet also expected to contribute to the welfare of the tribe, and achieve certain ritualistic milestones in order to officially move into adulthood.

Puberty and first menses were epic transitions into adulthood for tribal children, and for males this commonly required some type of fasting, isolation, or physical endurance tests (or all of the above) for “graduation” into the world of tribal adults.

Language Lab

There were almost as many Native American languages as there were tribes prior to contact with the Europeans explorers and settlers.

There was very little written down, and tribes both communicated and passed down tribal traditions and legends through the use of sign language, the spoken word, and pictographic symbols.

Language groups

The Native American language families included these groups:

- ✓ Algie (Algonquin)
- ✓ Iroquoian
- ✓ Muskogean
- ✓ Siouan
- ✓ Athabaskan
- ✓ Uto-Aztecan
- ✓ Salishan

Today, there are approximately 175 Native American languages, yet a staggering 90 percent of them are what is known as “moribund.” This means they are not being used enough, or passed down enough to younger generations, to survive much longer.

More than words . . .

Indians did, in fact, use smoke signals to communicate among tribes.

They also used pictures when communications needed to be recorded on paper or bark. The Native American pictographic symbols and drawings illustrate the validity of the old adage about a picture being worth a thousand words. A simple line drawing could easily recount a history, give instructions, chronicle the change of a season, and provide at a glance detailed information that would take lots of words (even if, perhaps, not a thousand), to write or speak.

Words as weapons

Language is a tool that can be used to educate, communicate, and do damage.

The historical record is awash with racist essays and diatribes against Native Americans by white writers, and today there exists Indian literature that not only counters such stereotypical hogwash, but paints a rich and multifaceted portrait of Indians.

If you want to know what real Indians are like, then it is critical that you read literature by real Indians, like:

- ✓ Louise Erdrich
- ✓ Leanne Howe
- ✓ Susan Power
- ✓ Wendy Roses

Pray Tell

Native American spirituality is a topic that can, and has, filled many, many books.

And as with Indian languages, there are almost as many tribal belief systems and creation myths as there are/were tribes.

Although it has become something of a cliché to describe Native American religious beliefs as “nature based,” it is true that the natural world informed and validated tribal beliefs in a nature spirit (commonly called Wakan Tanka) that was, in one sense, the manifestation of God and the spirit of life in the world.

Animal spirits

Animals play a large role in Indian spirituality and have their own spirits as well as having participated in the creation of the universe.

Animals and birds that appear in Indian creation myths include

- | | |
|------------|------------------|
| ✓ Beavers | ✓ Ducks |
| ✓ Buzzards | ✓ Eagles |
| ✓ Coyotes | ✓ Foxes |
| ✓ Crows | ✓ Geese |
| ✓ Deer | ✓ Hummingbirds |
| ✓ Dogs | ✓ Mountain lions |

- ✓ Parrots
- ✓ Serpents
- ✓ Tarantulas

- ✓ Turtles
- ✓ Water beetles
- ✓ Wolves

Water

Many Indians believe that all life comes from the water. Many creation myths are very specific: Before there was *anything*, there was water. Some creation myths state that all of reality was beneath the water at the beginning of time. This sacred belief has been validated by science, which uncovered the secrets of how life sprang from the sea and moved onto dry land.

Indians also have creation myths revolving around:

- ✓ A first man and a first woman
- ✓ The wind
- ✓ The underworld

See Chapter 19 for details on these and other tribal deities.

Rituals

Native American spirituality commonly employs rites, ceremonies, and rituals to focus the percipient's spirit and enhance the experience.

These include

- ✓ Chanting
- ✓ Dancing
- ✓ Meditation
- ✓ Prayer
- ✓ Singing

A church where drugs are legal?

The Native American Church is the only religious establishment in the United States in which members that can legally use the drug peyote in their religious ceremonies.

- ✓ Sweat lodges
- ✓ Vision quests

Some of the “tools” used for these rituals include

- ✓ Drums
- ✓ Foods
- ✓ Musical instruments, especially flutes
- ✓ Peyote
- ✓ Prayer beads
- ✓ Rattles
- ✓ Sacred garments
- ✓ Stone and wood fetishes

Christian Indians

Many Native Americans today are practicing Christians who strive to incorporate traditional Indian beliefs and practices into Christian dogma and rituals.

Some crossover practices include

- ✓ Using “holy water” and crosses in ceremonies
- ✓ Saying Christian prayers during tribal ceremonies, like sweats
- ✓ Calling peyote a “sacrament,” a common Christian term
- ✓ Incorporating sacred Indian pipes into Masses and other Christian ceremonies
- ✓ Christian ministers and Catholic priests participating in sacred Sun Dances

The Indian Population Decline . . . and Hope for the Future

It is estimated that nine out of ten Native Americans died in the period between initial European contact and the end of the 19th century.

The causes for this enormous number of deaths were

- ✓ Exposure to diseases for which they did not have immunity
- ✓ Violent conflict with Anglos
- ✓ Violent internecine conflicts among tribes
- ✓ Starvation and death from illness from forced relocation

See Chapter 20 for details on the staggering population loss experienced by Indians in North America during the period of European exploration and settlement.

Native American Identity Today

Today, tribes must be federally identified as an official tribal nation in order to avail members of government programs, as well as establish and implement sovereignty regarding laws and official policies.

Not every tribe that requests federal recognition gets it.

And not every person who wishes to claim membership in a particular tribal nation is granted “citizenship.” There are “blood quantum” requirements that effectively determine whether or not someone is officially Cree, or Cherokee, or Navajo, and so forth.

Don't all tribes own casinos?

There is a pervasive misconception in America today that all tribes own casinos and all tribes are getting rich from owning casinos. Would that this were true, eh?

The truth is somewhat different.

Of the over 560 federally recognized tribal nations, only around 200 or so own and operate casinos. There are currently around 360 Indian casinos in the United States, and the overwhelming majority of them are nowhere near as successful as the ones we read about in the papers all the time, like the Mashantucket Pequot and Foxwoods casinos in northeastern Connecticut.

It's been estimated that of the 360 casinos, around 10 percent of them — maybe 30, 35 establishments — generate three-quarters of all the tribal casino revenue in the country. Obviously this means that the 90 percent of the remaining casinos share a very small piece of the gaming pie.

Problems and solutions

The American Indian in today's U.S. has problems, although the progress being made in education, income, health, life expectancy, and entrepreneurship is encouraging and ongoing.

Education

Educational levels are improving steadily. In 2000, almost 71 percent of all Native Americans had earned a high school degree.

This was around 15 points below the national U.S. average, but this was a marked improvement over this same statistic in 1990.

Alcoholism

The trend in Native American communities is toward reversing the devastation alcoholism has wreaked upon their people. Alcohol abuse is a huge problem among American Indians, yet as they say, knowing you have a problem is the first step toward correcting it.

And today, there are programs and a new attitude about alcohol that bodes well for the future and for Native American children who currently abuse alcohol at ten times the average national rate among other children.

Offshore banking

Some Indians are in the international banking business these days and they're making serious money at it, too.

The Blackfeet Tribe of Montana, for example, led the way in 1999 with the formation of their groundbreaking endeavor, the Glacier International Depository.

Mineral rights

Many tribal nations now look to the mineral rights on the lands they own as a source of income to the tune of \$245 million in the U.S. in the year 2000.

What minerals are Indians selling for profit? Here's a breakdown:

- ✓ **Gas:** 45 percent
- ✓ **Coal:** 27 percent
- ✓ **Oil:** 22 percent
- ✓ **Other:** 6 percent

Tribes are also into wind farms, biodiesel, hydroelectric plants, and biomass (logging and mill residue).

A Bright Future

Native Americans have suffered in the past, and it has taken decades to begin the process of turning around the headlong rush into poverty, lack of education, and dependence on the government.

Today, a new generation of Native Americans are PhDs, doctors, lawyers, accountants, computer designers, and every other profession in America. College is now considered very important for young Indians (although for many, it is still an unattainable dream) and the number of Native American self-owned businesses climbs annually.

In *Native American History For Dummies*, you'll find out about not only the rich and troubled past of the American Indian, but also about the opportunities and achievements taking place today, and the ones that will assuredly take place in the future.