

CPCS Pays Honor to National Native American Heritage Month 2023

This year, the theme for National Native American Heritage Month is “Celebrating Tribal Sovereignty and Identity.” According to the United States Department of the Interior’s Bureau of Indian Affairs:

“Tribal sovereignty ensures that any decisions about Tribes with regard to their property and citizens are made with their participation and consent. The federal trust responsibility is a legal obligation under which the United States ‘has charged itself with moral obligations of the highest responsibility and trust’ toward Indian tribes.”

This obligation, one that has been ignored too often in our history, is perhaps in a better place and moment to honorably serve native people than ever before. Today, the Bureau of Indian Affairs is led by Secretary Deb Haaland, the first Native American to serve as a cabinet secretary. She is a member of the Pueblo of Laguna and is a self-described 35th-generation New Mexican. Under her leadership, the Department of the Interior has been focused on acknowledging “the impact that relocation, forced assimilation, and lack of critical funding has on Indigenous communities across the country. (They) are committed to elevating those issues while empowering Tribal governments and Indigenous peoples.”

This year, one essential symbol of the struggle, insult, and hope toward the future can be found in the PBS documentary series by Ken Burns, called “The American Buffalo.” This two-part film depicts the 10,000-year history that native people had with the buffalo - a relationship of respect and honor, in which they regarded the buffalo essentially as a family member.

The Indian’s economic dependence on the buffalo had a very important part in developing the interactive and cooperative economic relationships. The buffalo is a giving animal. It gave its life so Indians could live. The buffalo’s generosity provided Indians with food and shelter. Indian people modeled the buffalo’s generosity, and it became fundamental to the economy of the American Indian. Like the buffalo, the American Indian people are generous. ([The meaning of the buffalo](#))

The film also takes on the decimation of this vital resource for survival, by those who sought to build the railway system, eliminate native people, or wastefully find sport in the killing of these defenseless creatures. It looks to the future and what people are doing to bring the buffalo back from near extinction.

While we do not practice law in a tribal context, what we can learn about the contribution, struggle, and achievement of native people is essential to the humanity and empathy that define our public defense work. The story of the buffalo is one of tribal sovereignty and identity and the denial thereof, powerfully and painfully depicted in the Burns documentary. Please take time this month to view this important film, linked [here](#), or join in one or more of the activities across Massachusetts that are taking place in honor of the Native American community, and are attached with this note.

The American Buffalo

<https://www.pbs.org/kenburns/the-american-buffalo/>

NOVEMBER 2023

National Native American Heritage Month Celebrations

Boston

- November 7, 2023 – Documentary Club: Pure Grit (2021) (Mattapan Library) – ([Learn More Here](#))
- November 8, 2023 – Special Collections Sampler: National Native American Heritage Month (Copley Library) ([Learn More Here](#))
- November 15, 2023 – Stolen Relations: Centuries of Native Enslavement in the Americas (Copley Library) ([Learn More Here](#))
- November 16, 2023 – Cranberries: New England's Bounty ([Learn More Here](#))
- November 18, 2023 – Wampanoag Food-ways are fun-ways (Roxbury Library) ([Learn More Here](#))
- November 18, 2023 – Native American Bead (Granby Library) ([Learn More Here](#))
- November 24, 2023 – Celebrate with Wampanoag Nation Singers & Dancers ([Learn More Here](#))
- November 30, 2023 – Book Club – The Night Watchman by Louise Erdrich (Hyde Park Library) ([Learn More Here](#))

Cambridge

- November 15, 2023 – Caring for Navajo Culture: In Museums and Beyond ([Learn More Here](#))

Fall River

- November 9, 2023 – Native American Drum Circle with Brother Granite Stone ([Learn More Here](#))

Mashpee

- November 18, 2023 – 14th Annual Native American Thanksgiving Celebration ([Learn More Here](#))

Newburyport

- November 16, 2023 – Honoring Native American Heritage Month ([Learn More Here](#))

Salem

- November 8, 2023 – North Indian Classical Music Concert ([Learn More Here](#))