

INDIAN COUNTRY TERMS 101



573 Federally recognized Indian Nations are published in the Federal Register

Includes Tribes, Nations, Bands, Pueblos, communities, and Native Villages

63 Tribes are State-Recognized

Within 11 states: Alabama, Connecticut, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, South Carolina, Vermont and Virginia

CURRENT TRIBES PETITIONING FOR FEDERAL RECOGNITION (As of 1/08/2021)

- Amah Mutsun Band of Ohlone/Costanoan Indians
- Fernandeno Tatviam Band of Mission Indians
- Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians
- Muscogee Nation of Florida
- Piro/Manso/Tiwa Indian Tribe of the Pueblo of San Juan de Guadalupe
- Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation
- Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina

*More Tribes are in the process of petitioning; updates can be found at <https://www.bia.gov/as-ia/ofa>

BROAD TERMS

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDERS

When capitalized, Aboriginal is used to describe the Indigenous peoples of Mainland Australia. Torres Strait Islander refers to the Indigenous people of 274 Islands north of Australia in the Torres Strait. - commonground.org.au

AMERICAN INDIAN AND ALASKA NATIVE PEOPLES (AIAN OR AI/AN)

American Indian is used to identify the Indigenous peoples of the contiguous United States. Alaska Natives are the Indigenous peoples of Alaska.

FIRST NATIONS

The Indigenous peoples of Canada.

INDIAN

Used by Natives to refer to themselves and other natives. The only time it is appropriate for non-Natives to use "Indian" is when it is in an organization's name or in the name of a federally recognized tribe.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

People who are part of a larger collective identity, shaped by a common history both of long ancestral traditions on the land, and of a long and similarly troubled relations with European settlement and various forms of government authority.

NATIVE AMERICAN

A term that is meant to refer to Indigenous peoples of North, Central, and South America but is commonly used to talk about American Indians and Alaska Natives, excluding other Indigenous peoples of the Americas. – Nativephilanthropy.org

NATIVE HAWAIIAN

The Indigenous people of Hawai'i

TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY

Since 1975, the federal policy of self-determination acknowledges that federally recognized Tribes possess inherent rights of self-government with authority to construct membership criteria and administer federal programs and services for their members.

SPECIFIC TERMS

INDIAN COUNTRY

The term “Indian Country” is used to refer to Native spaces and places within the US, and it is inclusive of the hundreds of tribal nations that occupy these spaces. The term is used with positive sentiment within Native communities is wherever American Indian spirit, pride, and community are found. It is also used in law and the US Code as an official term pertaining to federal law relating to American Indian land and people. – NCAI

NATION

Indigenous peoples conscious of their unity that seek or possess a government of their own in a particular territory. Tribal Nations are recognized as sovereign and have a unique political status and relationship with the US.

RANCHERIA

Are made up of one or more Tribes and are a designated land that Tribes reside and maintain their communities on. Rancherias are only found in California and are dated from a time in the late 19th and early 20th centuries when federal agents came out to California to identify homeless Indians and subsequently purchased small parcels of land for them. – Indian Country Today

RESERVATION

An area of land managed by a Tribe under the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs. Some Tribes have more than one reservation, some share reservations, while others have none, often due to a lack of federal recognition. Because of past land allotments (for example, under the Dawes Act of 1887) some reservations are fragmented, with pieces of tribal, individual, and privately held land, some of it owned by non-Indians. – Pam Halverson, Lower Sioux Indian Community 2010

TRIBE

A group of people united by ties of common descent from a common ancestor, community of customs and traditions, adherence to the same leaders. A Tribe is also a local division of an Aboriginal people. – Indian Country Today

VILLAGE

A “Native Village” is any Tribe, Band, Clan, group, Village, community, or association in Alaska listed in sections 1610 and 1615 of Title 43–Public Lands, or if they meet the requirements on the 1970 census enumeration date, composing of twenty-five or more Natives. - Alaska Native Claims Settlement

SUGGESTED READINGS

An Indigenous Peoples History of the United States¹
Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz

Decolonization is not a Metaphor²
Eve Tuck & K. Wayne Yang

SUGGESTED PODCASTS

All My Relations³
Matika Wilbur (Swinomish and Tulalip) & Adrienne Keene
(Cherokee Nation)

¹Dunbar-Ortiz, R. (2015). An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States. Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press.

²Tuck, E., & Yang, K. (2012). Decolonization is not a metaphor. Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society, 1(1), 1-40.

³Wilbur, M. & Keene, A. (Hosts). All My Relations [Audio podcast]. Retrieved from <https://www.allmyrelationspodcast.com>

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