

Reservations

Natives have inhabited the land now known as the United States for 12,000 to 15,000 years, long before Europeans 'discovered' North America. These 'Native Americans' spread across the continent, developing different tribes, languages, and customs. Most hunted for food; some grew crops; and others fished, all dependent upon the land on which they lived. By the time European explorers found this 'New World,' the Native population had grown to around 10 million in what would become the United States. While the Spanish searched for riches and sought to convert Native peoples, France looked for wealth through trade. Meanwhile, the English focused primarily on territorial expansion, and with European diseases decimating Native populations, white settlers continued to push west. Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, wars, broken treaties, and disease forced

many Native peoples from their land. Supreme Court cases in the early 1800's provided the federal government with a legal precedent for the creation of reservations and the forced removal of Native tribes from the lands they had lived on for thousands of years.

The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church says, "The General Conference of The United Methodist Church affirms the sacredness of American Indian people, their languages, cultures, and gifts to the church and the world. We call upon the world, and the people of The United Methodist Church, to receive the gifts of Native Americans, including American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians, as people of God. We allow for the work of the Great Spirit/God among our communities and tribes without prejudice" (Resolution #3321). In addition, the Book of Acts in the New Testament says, "Then Peter began to speak to them: 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him'" (Acts 10:34-35).



Statistics:

- The 326 Native reservations in the United States constitute just 2-3% of the land in the U.S.
- The poverty rate for Native people in the U.S. (26.2%) is nearly twice the average rate (14%).
- There are 567 federally recognized tribes in the U.S.
- Only 22% of Natives live on reservations today; 72% live in urban or suburban areas.

Questions for Reflection:

1. What incorrect assumptions or prejudices do you hold about Native peoples?
2. Why do you think Native cultures are largely ignored in the U.S. today?
3. How might our history books be different if they took into account a Native perspective?
4. What can we learn from Native cultures?

Ways to Get Involved:

- Tree of Life Ministry: treeofliferelief.org
- Cherokee UMC/Mission: cherokeemission.wordpress.com
- Church & Society: umcjustice.org
- West Ohio Conference: westohioumc.org/native