Native People Are Taking Center Stage. Finally.

We asked a group of Native people about their heritage, the country and the future.

By Amanda Gorman

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Welcome to The Edit. Each week in our newsletter, you’ll hear from college students and recent graduates about issues going on in their lives. Sign up here to get it in your inbox.

It’s hard to fathom that it took until 2018 for the first Native American women to be elected to Congress. As Native American Heritage Month draws to a close, we asked Native change-makers, artists, and visionaries from a wide, diverse range of nations to reflect on what heritage means to them.

Danielle Robinson
Name: Congresswoman-elect Sharice Davids, Ho-Chunk Nation

City/State: Shawnee, Kan.

What does Native American heritage mean to you in this day and age?

I am honored to be a part of this time in history when so many new voices are finally being included in our national discussion. It will be a special privilege to serve our country alongside Congresswoman-elect Deb Haaland, whom I will join as the first Native women sworn in to Congress. I am inspired by the incredible work she has done for her community and am grateful for her friendship and support.

Name: Keolu Fox, Ph.D., Kānaka ʻŌiwi (Kingdom of Hawaii)

What does your Native heritage mean to you?

Native Hawaiians are not “Native American” in the way Navajo, Paiute or Lakota are (we are from an island Kingdom in the middle of the Pacific Ocean). However, we do find solidarity with our Native American brothers and sisters through our shared history of exploitation and illegal seizure of land, resources and attempted erasure of our culture and identity.

How do you continue to celebrate and remember your history?
I celebrate Native Hawaiian history and culture every day through the music I listen to, the food I eat, and the way I communicate with others, in ‘Ōlelo and English. I try to spread “aloha” everywhere I go. That’s my kuleana, or responsibility, as a Hawaiian.

I also celebrate indigenous history through the projects I champion as a genome scientist. We are underrepresented in both population-based genomic studies, and as primary investigators in academia. In addition to publishing papers and winning grants, I am far more interested in understanding how our work will become actionable. If participating communities are not seeing tangible benefits — such as access to medicine, developments to infrastructure, or capacity building — then research focusing on genetics in our communities could potentially continue a legacy of colonial exploitation. Technological independence, self-governance, and democratization of tools should always be the long-term goal of ethical partnerships in genomic research.

Name: Kayla Briêt, Prairie Band Potawatomi

City/State: Cypress, Calif.

Tell us a little about yourself.

I’m an artist exploring themes of identity in multiple mediums of storytelling: film, music and virtual reality.
What do you think is important for non-Native Americans to know this Native American Heritage Month?

In a time where Native culture is often romanticized, this month is really about remembering our ancestors and the hardships they endured for us to be here today.

But it’s not only about the past. Even today, many tribal citizens face voting barriers. Each year, there is a growing list of thousands of missing and murdered indigenous women. To move forward in creating an environment of tolerance for our future generations, we must first learn to acknowledge and understand the past.

Name: Nataanii Means

Who are you?

First, I’m an original person from this land, born and raised on the Navajo Nation, enrolled in the Oglala Lakota Nation. I’m a hip-hop artist and advocate for the health of the earth and our future generations.

What does Native American heritage mean to you?

That title doesn’t clarify who I am, it’s a government term given to us in the late 1960s to categorize all indigenous people, Alaska natives and at the time, even native Hawaiians. To be an original person whose blood and clans go back thousands of years before colonialism means a lot.
There’s no better sense of belonging than knowing your traditions, ceremony and songs. Our ancestors fought and died for us to be here, for our ways to continue. I remember that every single day.

**What do you think is important for non-Native Americans to know this Native American Heritage Month?**

I think it’s important for everyone to know that we are still facing genocide. Our youth have the highest rate of suicide of any ethnic group in the U.S. The government is still stealing land and allowing foreign companies to extract the earth around our sacred sites. We are still fighting pipelines and raising awareness about missing and murdered indigenous women. The sex trafficking that is happening in our communities is at an all-time high.

**Name:** Congresswoman-elect Deb Haaland, Pueblo of Laguna

**City/State:** Albuquerque

**What does Native American history mean to you?**

This month is a time to honor the legacy of our ancestors, but every day we should stop to think about our country’s beginning, and that the U.S. would not exist if not for a great deal of sacrifice, blood and tears by Indian Tribes across the country.
How do you continue to celebrate your history?

In spite of our agonizing history, Native American people find much to celebrate. The songs, dances, culture and traditions surrounding planting and harvests, the prayers that are sent upward for healing and peace, and the welcoming of children into our families, are all reasons for us to keep moving forward with optimism.

During this month, I choose to honor my ancestors by thinking, each day, about the sacrifices they made so that I could be here, and I will continue to work to protect what they left here for me.
Name: Elonna LaFromboise

Tell us about who you are and the people you come from.
Native People Are Taking Center Stage. Finally. - The New York Times

My tribes are Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate, Tonawanda Seneca, Absentee Shawnee and Sac & Fox. I’m eighteen years old and I live in Edmond, Oklahoma. I am a senior in high school and I like dogs, food and sleep. I also really love listening, writing and learning about music.

**What does Native American heritage mean to you?**

I continue to celebrate and remember my history by being involved in my traditional ceremonies. I try to learn as much as I can so our traditions aren’t lost. It’s especially important for my generation to pick up our teachings so we can continue to pass them on to the next generation.

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**What We’re Reading**

Liberal Parents, Radical Children The generation gap returns.

Music Festivals Are Gaining Popularity in Asia. Just Not With Officials. Conservative governments have been canceling Western-inspired events, which they see as threats to public safety, political stability or social and religious values.

4 Ways to Stay Motivated When You’re in a Rut Beat that post-Thanksgiving daze.

2018 Holiday Gift Guide Practical or luxe, quirky or classic, these gifts will send just the right message to the people you are oh-so grateful for this year.

Capturing the Complexities of the Modern South, in Photographs A new exhibition challenges the perceived identity of the American South, at a time when the definition of regionalism itself is in flux.

This Is the Way the Paper Crumples In a ball of paper, scientists discover a landscape of surprising mathematical order.

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**Let’s Figure It Out**

Clara sent us a problem to figure out this week:

> I graduated college this last July and moved out to Calif. in September in hopes of finding a job. This was a big move because I actually grew up and got my degree in Spain, but I figured the busier job market in the U.S. would make it a quick and easy process. Needless to say two and a half months in and the job thing is taking a little longer than expected, how do I avoid getting discouraged? And, how do you build a life for yourself when it feels like you're in limbo?

Alexandra March, newsletter editor for NYT Opinion, weighed in on this one:

I job hunted for more than six months my senior year at the University of Connecticut before landing an interview for a job that was even in the realm of what I actually wanted to do with my life.

Because writing endless job applications was dragging me down, I decided to leave my computer and my apartment. I asked friends of friends in my field of interest to short coffee appointments, I went on informational interviews, I asked people to tell me about their lives and their career paths. I walked away from all of these encounters with valuable information — whether it was about how to improve my resume or a job lead that wasn't posted publicly yet.

An even brighter silver lining? If you can demonstrate your intelligence and skills in these meetings, the people you meet with may be in a position one day to hire or recommend you. You’ll get through this! And other people can help.

Navigating college and the years afterward can be tough, but we’re here to help! Maybe you’re wondering how to choose a major, or the best time to study abroad. Perhaps you’re out of school and figuring out how to budget. Send us an email at theedit@nytimes.com with the subject line, “Figure It Out.” We’ll do our best to answer a new question each week.

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