



State Humanities Councils:

Supporting

Native Peoples

Since 1977

Attend an event near you or learn
about native communities in your
area at statehumanities.org

HUMANITIES MONTANA

The Big Read: *The Round House* by Louise Erdrich

Conby Skinner

American Indian. Alaska Native. Pacific Islander.

The history of native peoples is the history of America, and the lives of Indigenous populations are the lives of everyday Americans. For some, the word “Indian” might recall an earlier era, the American frontier, or the mythologized “Wild West,” but this narrative ignores the past two centuries of American history and the realities of native populations in America today. Those populations grew at almost double the rate of the total U.S. population during the last census, and they live nationwide, not just on reservations and native areas. Indeed, 78% of American Indians and Alaska Natives live outside of native areas, and the majority live in cities, like New York, Los Angeles, and Phoenix. The cultures of these native communities are an enduring part of American history, but their relationship with modern society is not always well understood or appreciated. That is why state humanities councils have spent decades working with American Indian, Alaska Native, and Pacific Islander communities to support cultural conservancy and awareness initiatives, forge stronger bonds between native and non-native populations, and bolster efforts to preserve heritage languages at risk of disappearing.

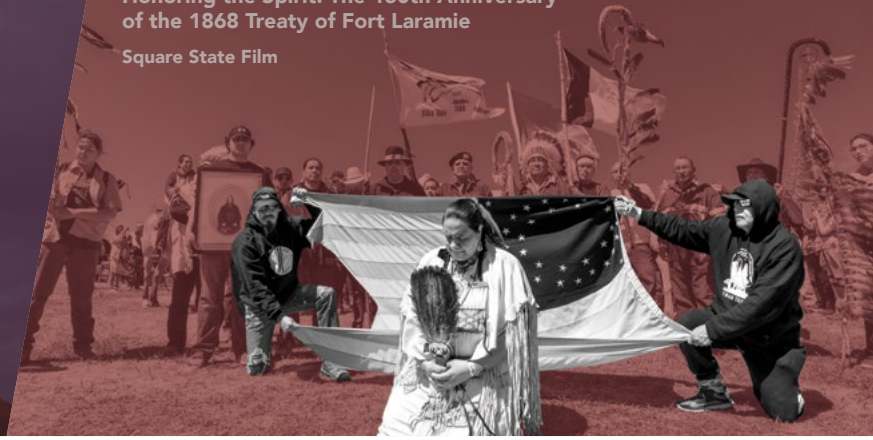
78% of American Indians and Alaska Natives live outside of native areas, and the majority live in cities, like New York, Los Angeles, and Phoenix.

Tribal nations have their own governments, rights, and languages. One event or program cannot adequately capture the experience of those sovereign nations, or their contribution to the cultural fabric of the country, and that is why state humanities councils have created and supported myriad efforts to increase understanding of the traditions, daily lives, and futures of Indigenous communities.



Case in Point

Wyoming Humanities' *Northern Arapaho Language Preservation Project* plays a critical role in fostering the retention and reintroduction of the Northern Arapaho language on the Wind River Reservation. Native languages are a cornerstone of American Indian cultures and identities, and the conduit through which Indigenous stories, histories, religions, and values are transmitted and thus survive.



Oklahoma Humanities, for instance, sponsors the annual *Symposium on the American Indian*, now in its 46th year, as well as diverse initiatives across the state like exhibits at the Seminole Nation Historical Society and the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, and academic conferences like those held by The Society of Early Americanists at the University of Tulsa. State councils have also made serious and ongoing commitments to support research and programming for their state's traditional communities, exemplified by **Humanities Washington's** recently created Center for Washington Cultural Traditions, an innovative new program designed to bring together Washington State's cultural communities for better understanding, respect, and appreciation of one another.

The state humanities councils have often served as a link between native peoples and the larger populace, in part by creating programming and sponsoring events that forge a stronger bond between those two communities. They create venues to share personal histories, stories, and traditional ways of living, like **Oregon Humanities' Confluence Story Gatherings**, a series of public forums that feature Indigenous perspectives on the Columbia River system, or events like *First Foods* at the Tamkaliks grounds, which invited the public to tour the Wallowa Land Trust, enjoy family-friendly activities, and learn about traditional diets of the local tribes.

Councils have also taken the lead in creating educational materials, like the textbook *A History of American Samoa*, created by the **Amerika Samoa Humanities Council**, which recorded local and oral histories and wove together legend, mythology, and biography into a dependable resource for native students and those curious about the lives and peoples of the island.



The state humanities councils have often served as a link between native peoples and the larger populace.

One hemisphere away, the **Alaska Humanities Forum** has pioneered two programs designed to help teachers better understand and serve their Alaska Native students. The *Educator Cross-Cultural Immersion* program focuses on urban teachers who are advised on communicating across cultural differences and taught to integrate native ways and ideas into the classroom, while the *Creating Cultural Competence* program offers new teachers in rural environments cultural orientation and the chance to join a culture immersion camp with local youths, elders, and regional stakeholders. Programs such as these highlight the vital role of native communities in our country and our history, and they remind us of the value and benefits of supporting American Indian, Alaska Native, and Pacific Islander communities today.