

# AMERICANS

## Gallery Discussion Guide

- ▶ Use this guide to explore why Indians are in America's DNA.

# Why do Indian names and images surround us?

Images of Indians show up everywhere in American life. Just take a look around.

## How are images of Indians used to identify everyday products?

What do Indians have to do with baking powder, butter, football, or motorcycles? Not much, really. But an Indian name or image on a product brands it as strong, authentic, and “natural.”

- ▶ **Look at the objects and images in the Indians Everywhere gallery. How many different types of products can you find? Find one that is familiar or has meaning for you. Use the touchscreen table to learn more about it.**

**Discuss and compare with others in your group.**

Calumet Baking Powder can, ca. 2001; Gift of Lawrence Baca, 2015; NMAI 26/9922; NMAI Photo Services, Smithsonian Institution



Land O'Lakes Butter box, 2016; NMAI EP1094; NMAI Photo Services, Smithsonian Institution



Indian Chief motorcycle, 1948; Barber Vintage Motorsports Museum, Birmingham, Alabama

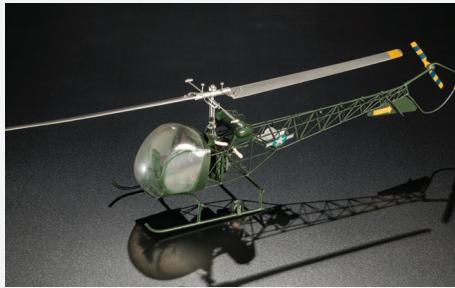
United States Naval Special Warfare Development Group (SEAL Team Six), Red Squadron shoulder insignia, 2016; NMAI EP1072; NMAI Photo Services, Smithsonian Institution



## Why does the military use Indian names and symbols?

- ▶ Find at least four more examples in the gallery. Talk about why you think the military uses Indian names and symbols.

Bell H-13 Sioux helicopter, 1/30-scale model; First flown 1961; Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum A19640018000; NMAI Photo Services, Smithsonian Institution



Tomahawk flight-test missile, 1976; Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum A19820119000

Hollow Horn Bear stamp, 1923; National Postal Museum, Smithsonian Institution



## How have the United States, individual states, and local governments used Indian imagery to represent America?

Indians have come to mean everything that is American. They appear as official symbols on seals, stamps, and medals.

- ▶ Find other official items that incorporate Native terms or symbols.



Daniel Morgan military medal, 1790; Augustin Dupré; Photography © New-York Historical Society



New York City seal, 1915; The City of New York Seal is used with permission of the City of New York

Indians are less than 1 percent of the U.S. population, but images of Indians appear everywhere you go in the United States.

- ▶ Talk about why Indians are so present but also so absent in American life.

To find out more about an image or object in the Indians Everywhere gallery, use the gallery's touchscreen table to key in the 4-digit number that appears on the wall next to it.

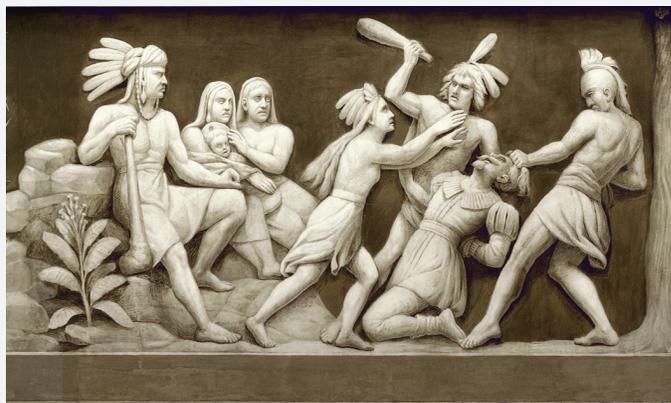
# Why does Pocahontas still captivate us?

No Indian has been as beloved, revered, and honored as Pocahontas. She played a central role in turning the failing Jamestown colony into an economic powerhouse. Why does she still captivate us?

## How is Pocahontas usually remembered?

When most people remember Pocahontas, they also remember John Smith.

- ▶ **Figure out what is happening in this scene. Discuss how and why you know this. Are you familiar with the famous “rescue” story?**



“Captain Smith and Pocahontas, 1607,” from *Frieze of American History*, 1877/78; Constantino Brumidi; Courtesy of the Architect of the Capitol

Smith was a famous explorer who traveled through Europe and Africa as well as to Virginia. His books about his adventures were best sellers. Modern scholars agree that Smith embellished his stories.

"Captain Smith and Pocahontas, 1607"  
(detail), from *Frieze of American History, 1877/78*; Constantino Brumidi; Courtesy of the Architect of the Capitol



## What does tobacco have to do with Pocahontas?

Pocahontas's husband, John Rolfe, secretly brought tobacco seeds from the Caribbean to Virginia. The seeds produced a strain of tobacco that sold well throughout Europe, making the Jamestown colony wealthy. Since then, tobacco has often been sold using images of Native people.



Postcard commemorating the Jamestown Exposition, 1907; Photo by Gavin Ashworth; Courtesy Sam Margolin



Degree of Pocahontas decorative plate, 1950–1970; NMAI EP1165; NMAI Photo Services, Smithsonian Institution

## Why have so many different Pocahontases existed since the 1600s?

For the past 400 years, Pocahontas has been depicted in many different ways.

Savior of John Smith? Probably not. Mother? She had a son named Thomas. Royalty? The British thought so, especially when she was introduced as the daughter of an emperor. Her father did control a powerful confederacy. Diplomat? She was the face of the New World—a face that suggested the Jamestown colony was safe.

- ▶ Examine the many images of Pocahontas in this gallery. Discuss their similarities and differences, and the purposes each image might serve.

Pocahontas and John Smith paper doll set, 1909; Courtesy of The Strong, Rochester, New York, USA



*Pocahontas, 1616*; Simon van de Passe; National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution



- ▶ Look for the one portrait created during her lifetime. Discuss how and why it is different from the others.

## What does it mean to remove a people?

In the early 1800s, Native people had large landholdings in the Southeast. The United States saw this as a hindrance to progress. The Indian Removal Act of 1830 was one of many ways the government tried to solve the “Indian problem.” The law suggested that Indians would *volunteer* to exchange their homelands for land in Indian Territory (now Oklahoma).

Andrew Jackson, 1845;  
Thomas Sully; National  
Gallery of Art, Washington



▶ **Read the statements below. How was removal justified? How was it resisted?**

*“And is it supposed that the wandering savage has a stronger attachment to his home than the settled, civilized Christian?”*

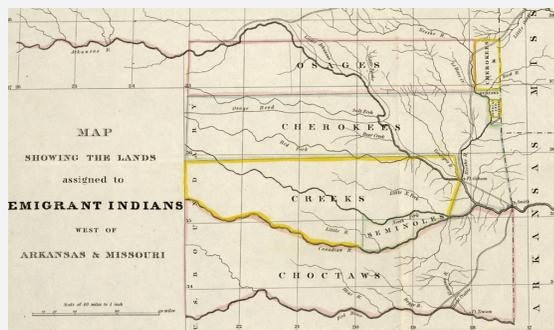
— President Andrew Jackson, 1830



John Ross, *A Cherokee Chief*,  
1843; John T. Bowen; Library  
of Congress Prints and  
Photographs Division

*“Sir, to these remarks we beg leave to observe, and to remind you, that the Cherokee are not foreigners, but original inhabitants of America, and that they now inhabit and stand on the soil of their own Territory. . . .”*

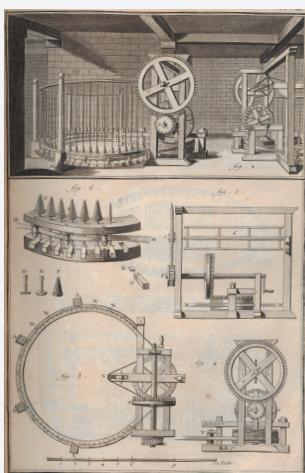
— John Ross, et al., to secretary of war  
John C. Calhoun, February 11, 1824



Map showing the lands assigned to emigrant Indians west of Arkansas and Missouri (detail), 1836; United States Topographical Bureau; Library of Congress Geography and Map Division



African American slaves loading cotton on the levee at New Orleans, 1850s; Artist unknown; North Wind Picture Archives/Alamy Stock Photo



Textile mill equipment, ca. 1765; Illustration from *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*; Courtesy of the ARTFL Encyclopédie Project, University of Chicago

## What is the difference between what the 1830 Indian Removal Act says and what it means?

- Find the wall that displays a reproduction of the Indian Removal Act. The back of the wall has a version of the act marked with callouts. Read the callouts and choose one to discuss. Think about...

*...why anyone would volunteer to leave their homeland.*

*...what would have happened if Native people had become extinct.*

*...the government's purpose in moving Native nations beyond the country's settled borders.*

## How did moving Native people beyond the boundaries of the United States shape the country?

Removing Indians opened the door for large cotton plantations supported by slave labor. Newly invented, the steamboat, cotton gin, and power loom fueled a boom economy nationwide.

- Examine the map of Indian Territory. What can you figure out from the map about the numbers of tribes assigned to live there?

So, what did it mean to remove American Indians? Removal turned the South into an economic engine at an enormous human cost.

- Talk about whether it solved the "Indian problem" or made it worse.

## Why is a headdress so recognizable?

After the Battle of Little Bighorn and the era of the Wild West shows, nothing symbolized American Indians more than the Plains-style feather headdress. And Indians symbolized America and American values. Soon the figure of a Plains Indian in a headdress appeared on everything from butter to sports teams. It still does.

Use the interactive tables to explore these questions.

### How did Americans learn of Custer's defeat?

On July 6, 1876, news of the Battle of Little Bighorn reached the army's headquarters in Washington, DC. The news spread rapidly across the country because of a new invention, the telegraph. Most Americans learned of the battle just days after the nation's centennial celebrations on July 4.

- ▶ **In the Little Bighorn gallery, find the interactive tables. Turn the wheels to see how newspapers of the day wrote about the army's loss at Little Bighorn.**
- ▶ **Choose five words to describe the event, and discuss their meaning.**

## How did Wild West shows shape ideas about the history of the American West?

After the Battle of Little Bighorn, Americans became even more interested in the West and Native people. Buffalo Bill's Wild West shows and other shows like them satisfied and stoked that interest by bringing together Indians, soldiers, and horses in exciting melodramas. The performances told a story of a West that had been "won." The line between entertainment and history was no longer clear.

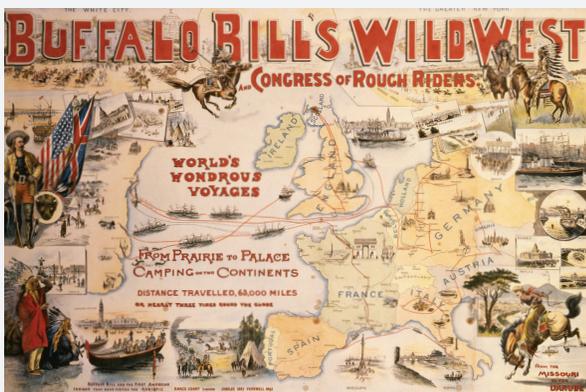
- ▶ **Study details in the images shown in the interactive tables. Discuss what you notice.**

Perspectives on historical events change over time. Enhanced narratives can make for a better story. The musical *Hamilton* is an example.

- ▶ **Think of other books, movies, or plays that retell a historical event. Discuss their accuracy.**



Sitting Bull (Hunkpapa Lakota) and William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody, 1885; Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division



"World's Wondrous Voyages" poster for Buffalo Bill's Wild West show, 1894; Buffalo Bill Center of the West, Cody, Wyoming, U.S.A.; Gift of The Coe Foundation, 1.69.16



"Attaque de la Diligence" poster for Buffalo Bill's Wild West show, 1905; Buffalo Bill Center of the West, Cody, Wyoming, U.S.A.; Buffalo Bill Museum Purchase, Mary Jester Allen Fund, 1.69.6022

## How did Wild West shows shape popular ideas about Indians?

After the Battle of Little Bighorn, the Indians who had defeated American soldiers were no longer hated enemies. Instead, they were celebrities starring in Wild West shows. As they traveled around the world, they became symbols of America itself.

- ▶ **Where have you noticed Plains headdresses in popular culture? Discuss how this phenomenon continues today.**

