

# **THE HISTORY OF THE NATIVE AMERICAN PEOPLE**

**By Paul Rogers, 2004**

**1.**

**The first people to inhabit the North American migrated from Asia about 10,000 years ago during an Ice Age. At that time the sea between Siberia and Alaska was frozen. Bands of people trekked across the glaciers hunting certain animals. Over thousands of years, these native peoples inhabited every part of North, Central and South America.**

**2.**

**The social structure of the native people was based upon tribalism. A chief governed most tribes. The first-born son inherited the position of the chief, usually. This type of tribe or society is called a patriarchy. In some cases the chief was a woman, and this type of society was called a matriarchy.**

**The concept of private, individual ownership of land did not exist. All land was owned in common. Probably the idea of owning the earth did not exist in their languages.**

**3.**

**Christopher Columbus landed in North America in 1492, from Spain. He thought he had landed in India, and therefore called the native peoples “Indians”.**

**A mapmaker named Amerigo Vespucci followed Columbus. The “New Land” was then named after him.**

**4.**

**One of the first successful colonies of Europeans was established in 1620. A group of people from England immigrated due to religious persecution in England. This group called themselves Pilgrims. The Pilgrims were Theocratic which means that only members of their church could run for office and own property.**

**The Pilgrims landed on the peninsula of Cape Cod, which is part of Massachusetts. They named the first city Plymouth, after Plymouth, England.**

**5.**

**The Pilgrims landed in the fall of 1620. The native people at the time welcomed the new immigrants. During the winter the native people shared food with the Pilgrims and showed them how to grow certain crops, such as corn.**

**In the fall of 1621, the native people and the Pilgrims shared in a large feast of friendship, which we call Thanksgiving today.**

**6.**

**The first native people who helped the Pilgrims were the Abenaki. An Abenaki by the name of Samoset befriended the Pilgrims. Samoset brought his friend, Squanto who had learned English from other settlers.**

**Squanto was an invaluable friend to the Pilgrims. He taught them how to tap syrup from the Maple tree; how to distinguish poisonous plants from medicinal plants; how to plant corn; and how to hunt.**

**7.**

**The Pilgrims also became friends with the Wampanoag. The Wampanoag chief was Massasoit; and the state of Massachusetts is named after him. The Wampanoag and the Pilgrims lived in friendship.**

**But the friendship did not last long. The Europeans also brought with them the concept of private property of land. The Pilgrims made contracts with the native people to buy their land**

at a cheap and unfair price. The Pilgrims wanted more and more land.

8.

The Pilgrims cut down trees to clear the land, and drove away many game animals. So, the native peoples began to starve.

Greed sparked violence, and soon the Europeans were at war with their hosts.

One of the weapons was “biological warfare”. Smallpox and other diseases spread among the native people by means of “gifts” of blankets that the Pilgrims had used to cover dying patients.

8.

One Pilgrim, Roger Williams, disagreed with the policies and attitudes of the leaders. Roger Williams believed that the Pilgrims and other European settlers should live in harmony with the native peoples. He believed also that the native people should receive fair payment for land. Roger Williams learned the native people’s languages and set up fair trade relations with them.

Roger Williams also disagreed with Theocracy, which he considered religious intolerance. It was this religious intolerance that formed the basis of regarding native peoples as “Heathens” and “Savages.”

9.

Roger Williams broke from the Pilgrims and moved to the state now called Rhode Island. Here he set up a government based upon his principles of equality and fairness.

However, the actions of the other colonists continued to enflame wars with the native people. And soon even Roger Williams’ attempts at peace were defeated.

10.

The cruelty toward the native people continued in these forms until the War for Independence in 1776.

**After the colonists won their war for independence, they set up a special Bureau of Indian Affairs to engage in the settlement of treaties with native people.**

**By law it was recognized that native people were sovereign nations and therefore were to be treated in the same way as France, England, Spain or any other country in Europe.**

**11.**

**During the next 100 years over almost 600 treaties with the native peoples all over the United States were established. And the government of the United States broke almost each and every one of these treaties.**

**All of the treaties dealt with the purchase and use of land. The main motive force for these false treaties was the constant westward expansion and the desire of new settlers to become “homesteaders.”**

**Because of this treachery, the native people say: “White Man speaks with forked tongue.”**

**12.**

**When the treaty with the Cherokee Nation of Georgia was broken, the Cherokee’s sued in the US Supreme Court. The Cherokees won their lawsuit. However, President Andrew Jackson ignored the Supreme Court’s decision and forced the Cherokees off of their land.**

**In 1838, the Cherokees were literally driven like cattle to their new “home” in the West. Hundreds of Cherokee people died during this “Trail of Tears.”**

**13.**

**During the 19<sup>th</sup> century the US government conducted dozens of Indian Wars.**

**Heroic native people such as the Nez Perce Chief Joseph, and the Apache Chiefs Cochise and Geronimo tried in vain to lead their tribes against the American occupiers.**

**One famous battle which the native people won was called the battle of Little Big Horn, in Wyoming.**

**In 1876, General Custer and his men were thoroughly defeated. Chief Sitting Bull of the Sioux Nation led the native people in this battle.**

**14.**

**Other means were also used to decimate the native peoples.**

**American settlers needlessly butchered the buffalo on the Plains of Wyoming. By killing off the buffalo, the native people in the plains would not be able to eat. Mass starvation followed.**

**Cultural and religious brutality was practiced in several ways. Native children were forced to go to Christian schools, and forbidden to speak their language. And many native spiritual practices were outlawed. The Ghost Dance was brutally suppressed at Wounded Knee in North Dakota. Nearly the US army killed 500 native.**

**15.**

**By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the vast majority of native people had been relocated to “Indian Reservations.” Here they were subjected to conditions of extreme poverty. Diseases and alcoholism spread. The native children were forced to go to schools run by the government or a Christian church.**

**It was only in 1924 that the native people were legally granted US citizenship.**

**16.**

**The condition of the native people has improved over the years. Poverty is not as severe as it was many years ago. Educational opportunities are available. But these improvements were won because of the work done by many native organizations which have worked for the rights of their people.**

**Today many tribes are able to run casinos on the reservations, which bring in funding to assist the tribes in the areas of**

**education for the children, medical care, and various social services.**

**References:**

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