

CELEBRATING INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Hello, and happy Indigenous People's Day! I am Dr. Caitlin Jacobs, one of the categorical general surgery interns. I am biracial – my mother is first generation Chinese-American, and my father is Native American. We hail from the Lumbee tribe of North Carolina, headquartered in Pembroke, NC. My tribe descends from a conglomerate of tribes including Tuscarora, Cheraw, and Hatteras. Back in the 1400's, a small settlement now known as the Lost Colony of Roanoke was absorbed into my tribe. We remained fairly settled in the Virginia/North Carolina region for many years, and went largely undisturbed as we occupied otherwise undesired "swampland." In efforts to make nice with the surrounding locals, and integrate our newest European members, we adopted Elizabethan English early on, and language along with many of our customs became lost. Many people who escaped slavery came to join us, and in this way, we became a triracial tribe. With the dawn of the Jim Crow era, segregation layered on already prevalent poverty brought a newfound need for activism amongst us. The Lumbees are a bit infamous for winning a high profile KKK showdown around this time. While poverty and opportunity access are still huge issues in my tribe, our resilience as Indigenous people carries us forward, ever striving for our relatives.



A brief history of Indigenous People's Day:

"Columbus Day" was declared a U.S. federal holiday in 1934 as a part of an ongoing effort to combat discrimination against Italian immigrants by celebrating a well-known Italian-Catholic figure. Many Italian Americans disagree with the renaming of the holiday to Indigenous People's Day. It is important to emphasize that this naming isn't to detract from one minority group in favor of another - it's simply to stop celebrating a colonist and rapist, who never set foot in what is now the United States. Northwestern University began recognizing this holiday in 2016, the federal government in 2021.

Why this is important:

- Chicago is home to the 3rd largest urban population of Native Americans
- Northwestern sees thousands of Native patients. In a recent review of the Northwestern Medicine electronic medical record, there are 3,200 patients ages 18-45 living within Cook County who identify as Native.
- Native patients have high prevalence of many diseases, **present with later stage disease** and **receive surgical guideline non-concordant care** at higher rates compared to White patients
- The history of Native people and medical racism runs deep and is ongoing. For example, in the height of pandemic the Seattle IHS was **sent body bags instead of PPE**
- **There are less than 300 Native medical students nation-wide each year.** Many Native students take >4 years to graduate due to financial barriers
- About 0.3% of the physician workforce is Indigenous

Recent and upcoming days of importance in the Native community:

- September 30th: National Day for Truth and Reconciliation of Indigenous People
- October 10th: Indigenous People's Day
- November: Native American Heritage Month
- Thanksgiving is generally a day of mourning. The narrative of a peacetime meal was largely fabricated as a tool of Manifest Destiny in efforts to systematically displace Natives from their land. The true "first thanksgiving" was a temporary alliance brokered between Wampanoag and pilgrims that ended in imprisonment, enslavement, rape, massacre, and the decimation of Native peoples. Since this first feast, Native peoples have faced constant revocation of their rights and been stripped of our culture and language. We can begin healing by acknowledging this holiday's origins and honor the land and its caretakers instead.

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Highly recommended resources and items to explore:

- Indian Health Service (IHS)
- **The forced sterilization of Native women in the 1970s**: an estimated 25-50% of all reproductive aged Native women
- **Northwestern's Center for Native American and Indigenous Research (CNAIR)**
- **American Indian Health Service of Chicago**: an urban IHS clinic, one of only 33 nationwide
- **American Indian Center of Chicago**
- **Association of American Indian Physicians** – There is no association of Native surgeons
- The Field Museum has an excellent rotating exhibit hall curated by local Indigenous artists and historians. It lies in stark contrast to the outdated collection of totem poles and Alaskan Native artifacts that are poorly described at the end of the Ancient Americas hall
- **Northwestern's Land Acknowledgement**, and a tool to see whose land you are on now
- Podcasts: **All My Relations**, **Unreserved**, **Indigenae**, **Indigenous Health MeDTalk**
- Books: *The Inconvenient Indian* (Thomas King), *The Great Vanishing Act* (Kathleen Ratteree, Norbert Hill), *There There* (Tommy Orange), *Ohpikiihaakan-Ohpimh / Raised Somewhere Else* (Colleen Cardinal), *This is Paradise: Stories* (Kristiana Kahakauwila)
- TV: **Reservation Dogs**, **Rutherford Falls**
- Shopping: Eighth Generation, Urban Native Era, B. Yellowtail, Ginew, or consult [this list](#)



Bison Burger with fry bread at the American Indian Center of Chicago Pow Wow, the largest annual gathering in Chicago

Terms to use and terms to avoid:

- Native or Native American or Indigenous are most preferred, First Nations is used in Canada
- American Indian/Alaska Native is used by the federal government (therefore in research) and is something you may hear used frequently or exclusively, especially by older generations
- Avoid saying Indian – it can be confusing and inaccurate
- “NDN” is a reclamation of the word “Indian” forced upon us. You will also see “Indian Country” used as a vestige of this history
- Use “pow wow” only in context of Native cultural gatherings
- Use “pathway” rather than “pipeline” in reference to recruitment programs. In the Midwest especially, the word pipeline has a highly negative context
- Tribe and Nations are sometimes used interchangeably, many **Midwest tribes** also have bands
- Eskimo, spirit animal, squaw, Injun, and redskin are all **highly offensive terms**
- Asking anyone’s **blood quantum** is generally a signal that you don’t know what it is and why it’s **not a part of Native identity**. Lacking tribal enrollment does not mean someone is not Indigenous, particularly in the context of some tribes specifically excluding Black Indigenous people from enrolling



Representatives from the Northwestern Center for Native American and Indigenous Research