

National Indigenous Peoples Day June 21

Written by Elder Donna Augustine, Thunderbird Turtle Woman

It was not that long ago that our people could not display our culture. Now as the Indigenous Peoples of this land we are publicly displaying our culture and who we are as a people.

I am a Mi'kmaq woman who has seen many changes in the past 45 years. Before that time there were no Powwows in this area. There were no sweat lodges, no ceremonies, because of the effects of colonization and assimilation. Today, every Indigenous community in the Atlantic region celebrates its culture and spirituality, to coincide with the rest of our native brothers and sisters across the land. The Powwows have returned, the sweat lodges have returned, and the Sacred Fire burns brightly again as many ceremonies are revived.

All across the land on June 21st the First Nations, Inuit and Metis people are celebrated. It is a day of honoring the heritage and cultures of the first people of this land and acknowledging all of their valuable contributions.

In the United States, this day is celebrated as World Peace and Prayer Day; a result of a vision by a Lakota spiritual leader from Green Grass, South Dakota, Chief Arvol Looking Horse. He is the 19th generation keeper of the original Sacred Pipe that was brought by the spirit of Buffalo Calf Woman. Many people are not aware that in the early nineties he brought this vision to Canada and shared it with Elijah Harper (National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations). They brought this forward and in 1996 it was proclaimed by then Governor General of Canada, Romeo Leblanc, to become an annual day of celebration. It was originally called Aboriginal Day.

The other reason this day was chosen is that it marks the equinox: the transition from spring to summer. Indigenous peoples believe that ceremonies and prayers are very strong during the change of every season.

So, on Indigenous Peoples Day each year, June 21, 2020, celebrations will begin with opening prayers as it leads into the day of celebrating our various cultures. The people usually put on their finest regalia, and dance to the drum, but this year because of the coronavirus, many will be doing virtual celebrations or smaller versions of a Powwow. I invite you all to pray and celebrate with us on Indigenous Peoples Day (World Peace and Prayer Day) as we give thanks for our culture, our families, communities, and our Nations.

Find more information here:

<https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100013248/1534872397533>

<https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/campaigns/indigenous-peoples-day.html>

Did you know that June is 'Indigenous Peoples' month in Canada? Here are some things you can do to celebrate and learn more:

<https://www.cbc.ca/documentaries/10-docs-on-indigenous-life-in-canada-1.5606739>

<https://www.cbc.ca/kidscbc2/the-feed/5-cool-facts-about-the-indigenous-origins-of-lacrosse>