

Native American Heritage Month

Native American women have made significant impacts on the United States in a wide variety of fields. These women are only some of those who have helped shape our country.



Sarah Winnemucca

Sarah Winnemucca gave hundreds of speeches throughout her life to gain political support for the Paiutes. By the time she was 14 she could speak five languages. When whites insisted Native Americans move to a reservation, Winnemucca went to DC in 1880 to speak out. Promises were made by the government, but not kept. Winnemucca spoke before Congress, to army officers, and anyone else who would listen. In fact she made 300 speeches along the East Coast.



Susan La Flesche Picotte

Susan La Flesche Picotte was the first Native American woman to earn a medical degree in the United States. Picotte attended the Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania to earn her medical degree, finishing in 1889. She returned to the Omaha reservation to practice medicine, and overhauled the healthcare system. Picotte worked tirelessly to educate her patients on the importance of cleanliness. Picotte also lobbied in DC against alcohol, which she believed was destroying Native American communities.



Elizabeth Wanamaker Peratrovich

Elizabeth Wanamaker Peratrovich worked to end racial discrimination. After attending college, Peratrovich returned to Alaska, and was shocked by the blatant discrimination towards Native Alaskans. Signs that hung in store and business windows read "No Dogs, No Natives." In February 1945, Peratrovich attended the Territorial Senate and spoke in support of a bill that would prohibit racial discrimination. Her speech was met with thunderous applause and the Senate then passed the Alaska Civil Rights Act.



Minnie Spotted Wolf

Minnie Spotted Wolf was the first Native American woman in the Marines. She joined the United States Marine Corps Women's Reserve in July 1943 and served for four years. Wolf served as a heavy equipment operator and driver for visiting general officers. Wolf grew up on a ranch near Heart Butte, Montana and worked as a ranch hand. This physical work helped prepare her for boot camp, which Wolf said was "hard, but not too hard." After serving, Wolf returned to Montana and taught elementary school for 29 years.



Wilma Mankiller

Wilma Mankiller was the first woman to be elected Chief of the Cherokee Nation's tribal government. She greatly increased the nation's membership, opened three rural health centers, and expanded the Head Start program. In 1981, she founded the Community Development Department of the Cherokee nation and became the first female Deputy Chief in 1983. When the Principal Chief was appointed Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, Mankiller became Principal Chief. She was then elected to the position in 1987.