

From Blue Corn Mush to Frybread: An Indigenous-Centered Approach to Nutrition

Presented by

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Objectives

By the end of this webinar, participants will be able to:

- Describe the demographics, characteristics and food history of American Indian/Alaska Native communities
- Demonstrate an awareness of social and structural determinants of health of American Indian/Alaska Native communities
- Adapt counseling skills to include consideration of culture, lifestyle, food preferences, and availability of food in
Indigenous communities



Ya'át'ééh

I'm Denee!

I help American Indian and Indigenous communities understand our relationship with food and teach practical skills for building a healthier life while staying true to our heritage.

I am the owner and founder of Tumbleweed Nutrition LLC, founded in 2021 to help tribal organizations deliver evidence-based care.



Disclaimer

- I can only speak from my own perspective of my lived experiences as a Navajo woman and dietitian.
- I am consultant for Bidii Baby Foods LLC



My roles



REGISTERED DIETITIAN

I have worked in indigenous communities as a clinical dietitian, diabetes educator and group facilitator for more than 10 years. I love when I see the light bulb flicker on in the minds of my patients and community when I discuss nutrition with them. I am, at my core, an educator and love developing new and engaging ways to teach nutrition.



COMMUNITY MEMBER

I was born and raised on the Navajo Nation in Northeastern Arizona. I was raised in a single-wide trailer and went to hang out with my grandma and extended family on the weekends. I am the Charcoal Streaked Division of the Red Running into the Water Clan and I am born for the Coyote People Pass Clan. I currently live in Farmington, NM, 30 mins east of Navajo.



GARDENER

I have been growing my own food for at least a decade to help me access fruits and vegetables not available in my local grocery stores. I recognize the power of building on our local food systems to increase access to healthy and traditional foods, because that's how we will make a change in our communities.

American Indian demographics



AI/AN Background

POPULATION

There are 3.7 million people who identify as AI/AN alone, and additional 700,000+ reported in combination with another race

DIVERSITY

There are 547 federally recognized U.S. tribes and can be divided into 9 general regions

LANGUAGE

In the U.S. & Alaska, there are 381 distinct non-English languages, 169 of these are Indigenous languages

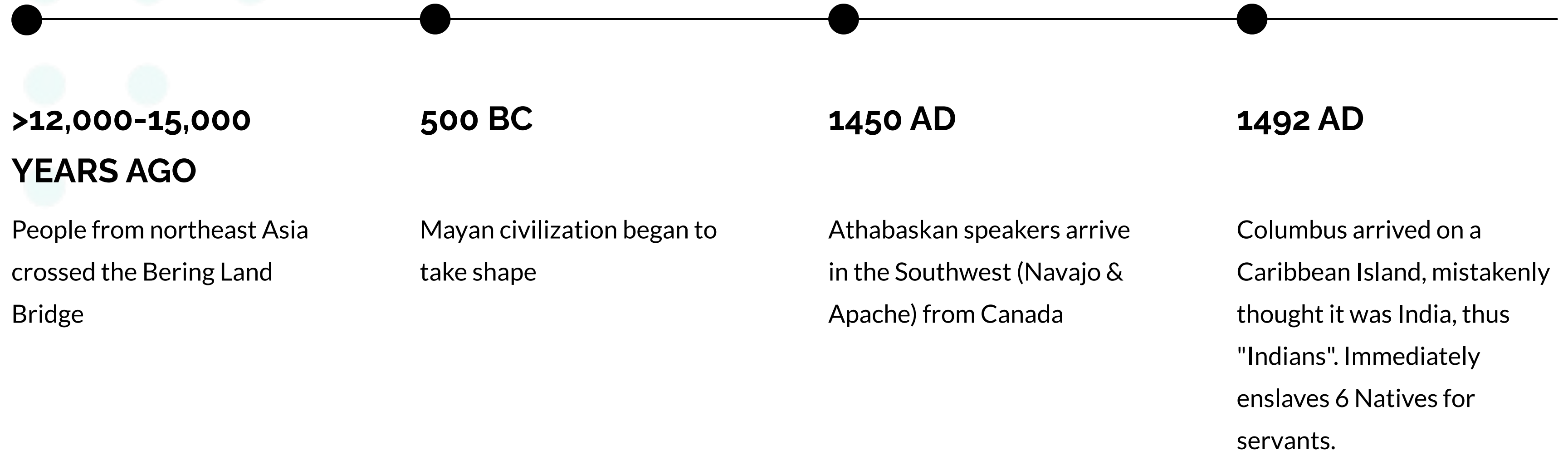
FOOD

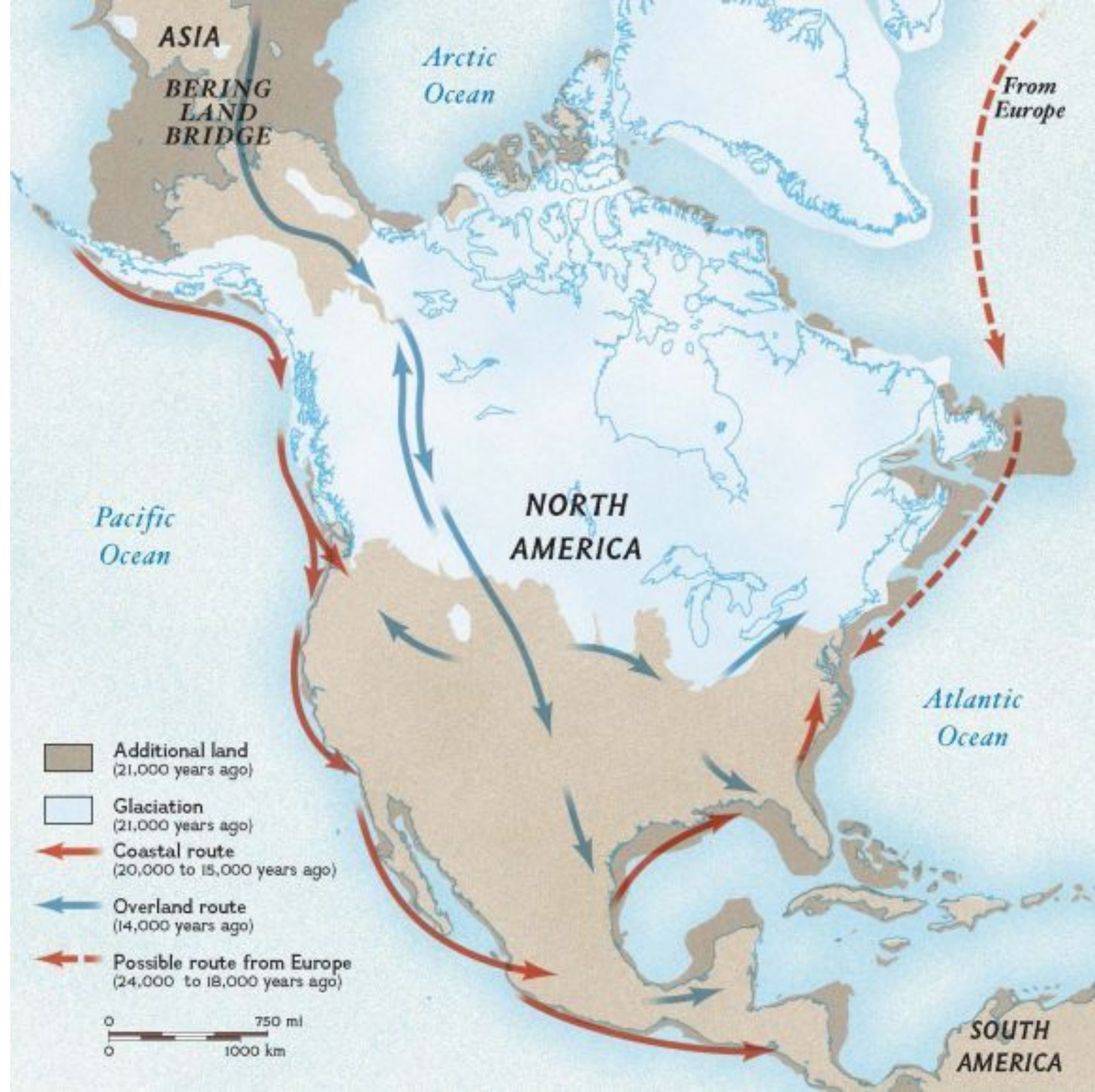
Historically, a mix of hunter-gatherers and agriculturalists, influenced by environment

(Christensen, L., 2022; U.S Census Bureau, 2011)



Timeline





Source: National Geographic Society

Timeline

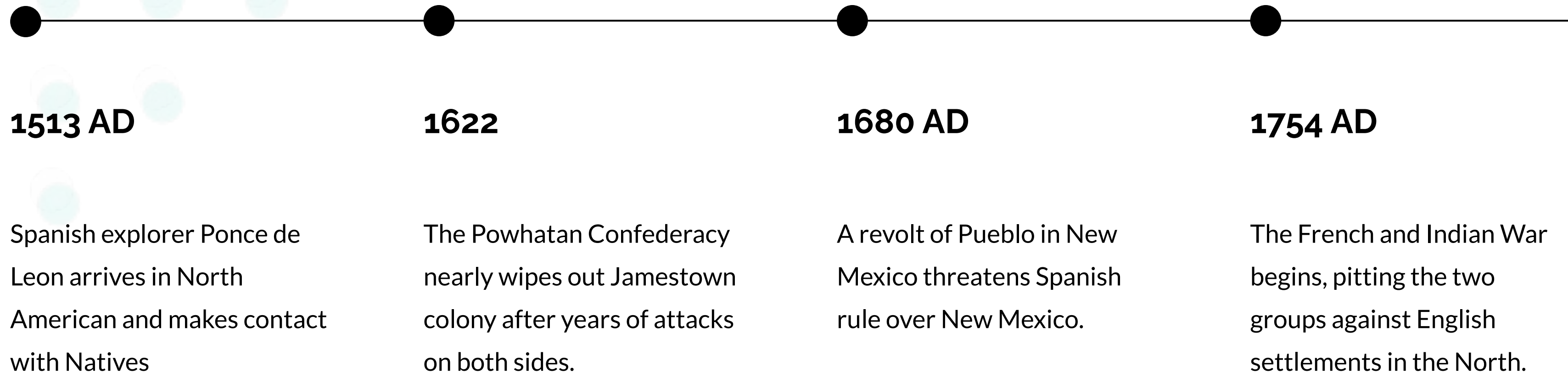
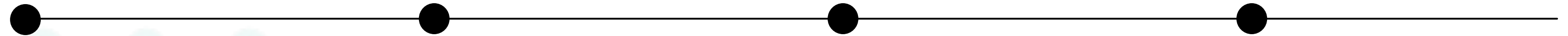




Fig. 1. Map of USA depicting the location of major Native American tribes. Asians first entered North America by crossing from Siberia into Alaska using the Bering land bridge, but soon spread throughout the Americas. This map shows some of the larger and better known tribes of the USA.

Source: Park, Hongu, Daily III (2016)

Timeline



1830 AD

President Andrew Jackson signs the Indian Removal Act, which gives plots of land west of the Mississippi River to Native American tribes in exchange for land that is taken from them.

1851 AD

Congress passes the Indian Appropriations Act, creating the Indian reservation system. Native Americans aren't allowed to leave their reservations without permission.

1868 AD

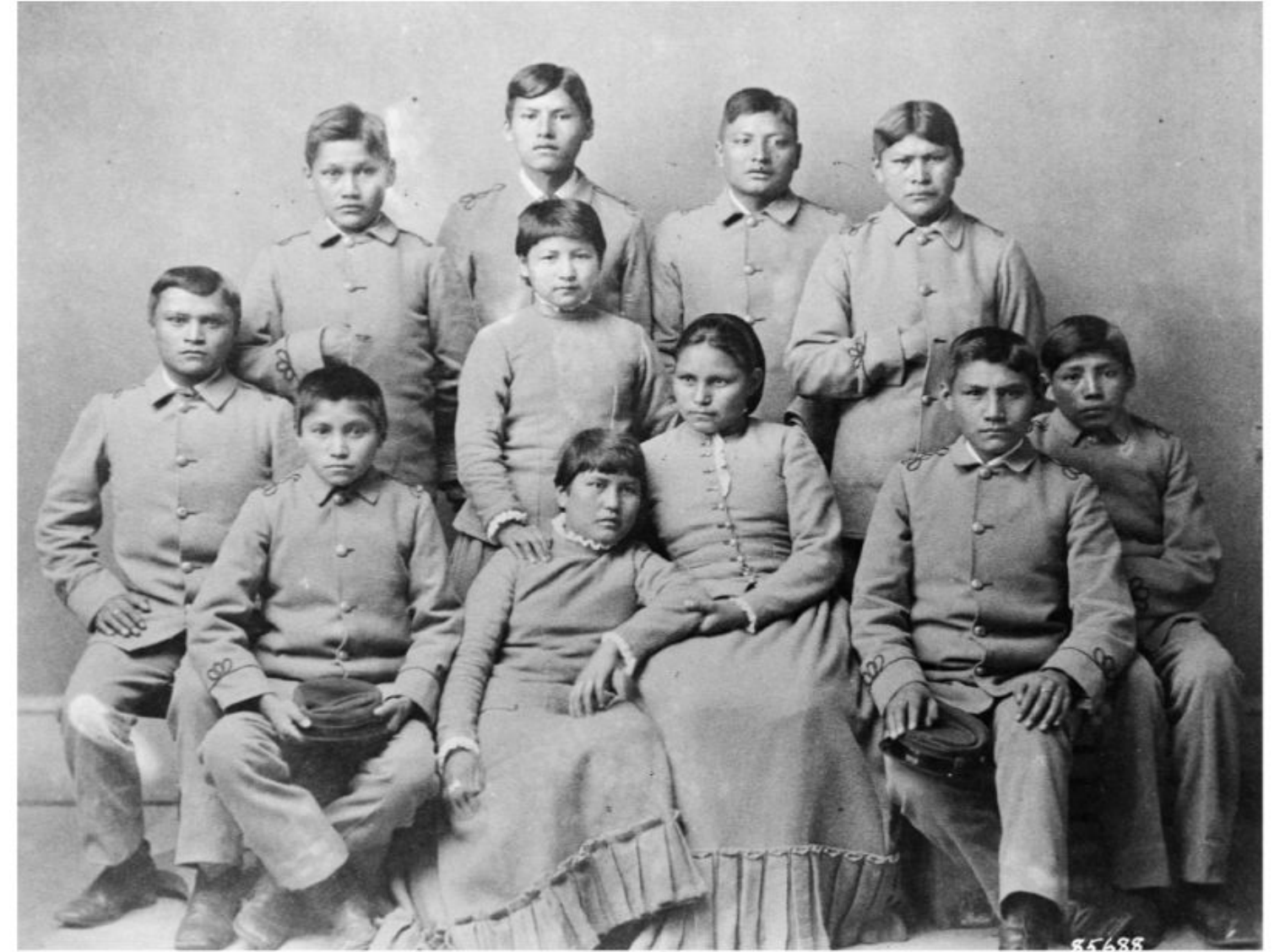
Treaty of 1868 is signed - The Navajo (Diné) Nation agreed to cease war against the United States, allow U.S. officials to live within their lands and permit the construction of railroads through their lands.

1879 AD

Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania started, kicking off the boarding school era to "kill the Indian, save the man" through assimilation. Children forcibly removed from families.

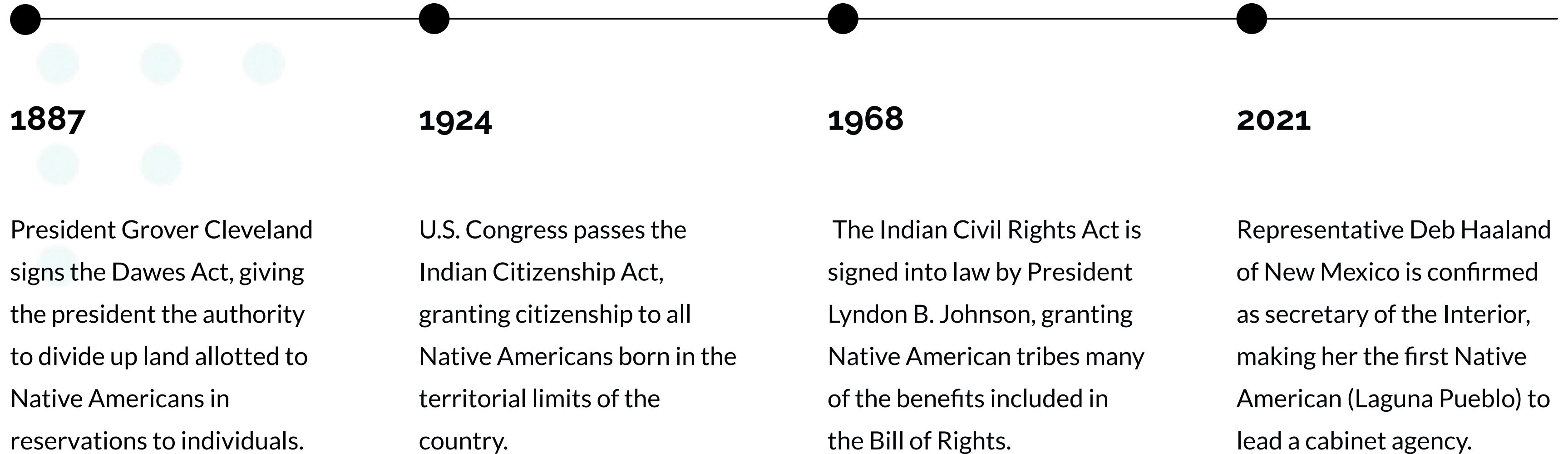


Children from the Chiricahua Apache tribe upon arrival to the school.
The National Archives



The children were given new Anglo-American names, clothes, and haircuts, and told they must abandon their way of life because it was inferior to white people's.
The National Archives

Timeline



American Indian/Alaska Native

determinants of health

Social

- High rate of poverty
- Lack of running water
- Lack of basic utilities
- Inadequate access to healthy food
- Inadequate access to healthcare providers
- Lack of access to broadband for telehealth and virtual education

Structural

- First contact
- Removal Act of 1830
- The Dawes Act of 1887
- "Scorched Earth Policy"
- Failed treaty obligations
- Federal oversight for healthcare
- Boarding school era
- Natural resource extraction

Terminology

American Indian

Recognizes political status in treaties and state/federal government documents. We are countries within the U.S. The most "politically correct". Rejected by some.

Native American

Doesn't carry as much political weight as "American Indian", but still acceptable. This term is a preference. Rejected by some.

Tribal Name

Recognizes the variety of tribes and the term is a preference. Can be in tribal language or the English version. English versions are rejected by some. I.e. Diné vs. Navajo

Terminology

Indigenous

Casual term and is becoming more popular among younger people. Rejected by some.

Indian

Casual term and is used more often among older people. Rejected by some.

Native

Casual term and is used among both younger and older generations. Rejected by some.

Each term is a preference and it is ok to ask the person's preferences once you know they identify as American Indian.

Source: Wilkins, D. (2002). American Indian Politics and the American Political System (4th ed.). Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.



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WHAT IS YOUR PREFERENCE?

American Indian

Native American

Tribal Name

More options on next slide....

Poll results ⓘ

American Indian (3 votes)

5%

Native American (22 votes)

37%

Tribal Name (34 votes)

58%



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WHAT IS YOUR PREFERENCE?

Indigenous

Indian

Native

Poll results ⓘ

Indigenous (41 votes)

63%

Indian (0 votes)

0%

Native (24 votes)

37%

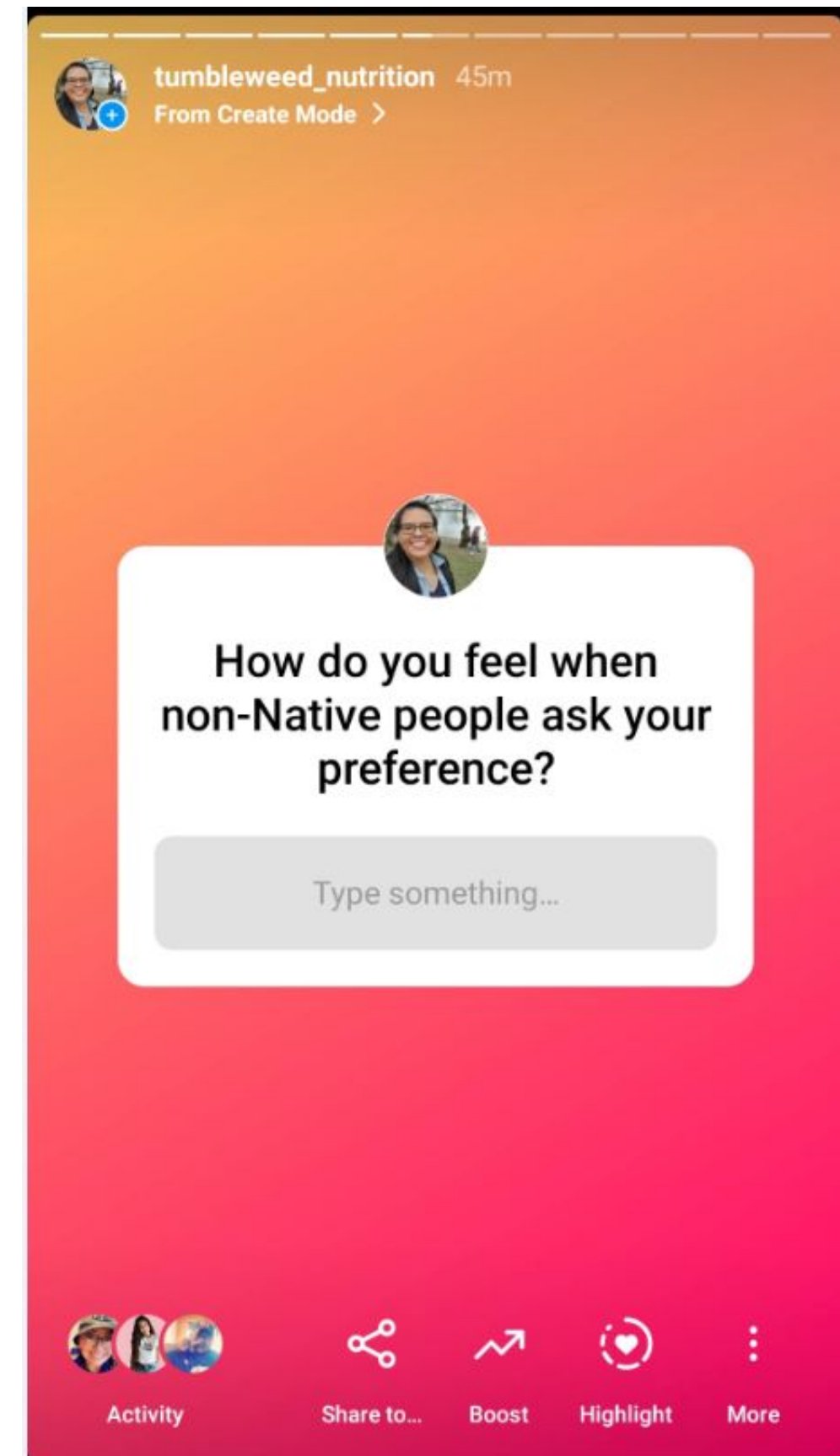
"I appreciate it if asked"

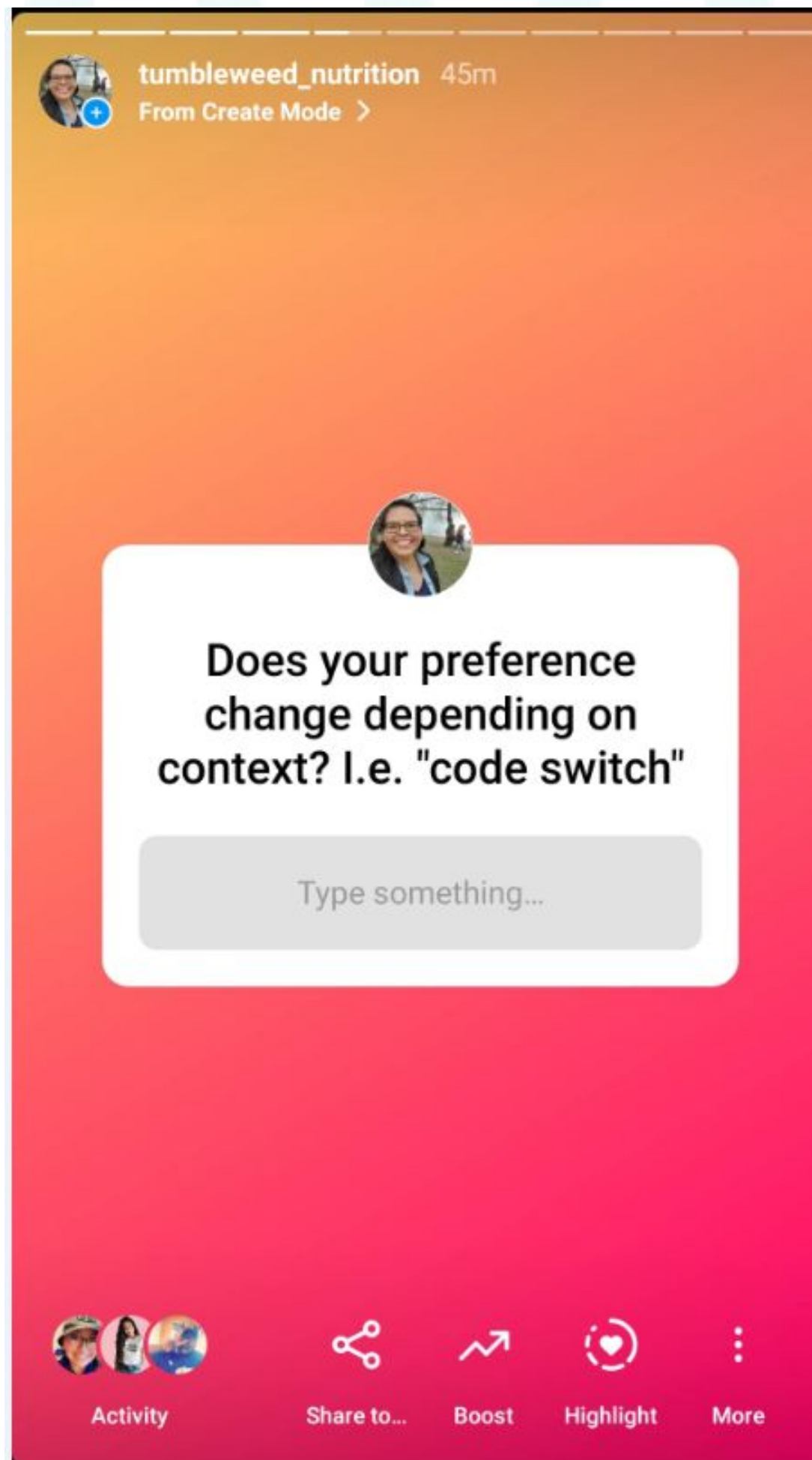
"As long as there is no confusion"

"Glad they are respectful enough to ask than assume"

"I'm just happy they ask at all. Opportunity for me to give what I prefer to be recognized as."

"Seen"





"Yes. Depends on the audience"

"No"

"Native and Indigenous are synonymous"

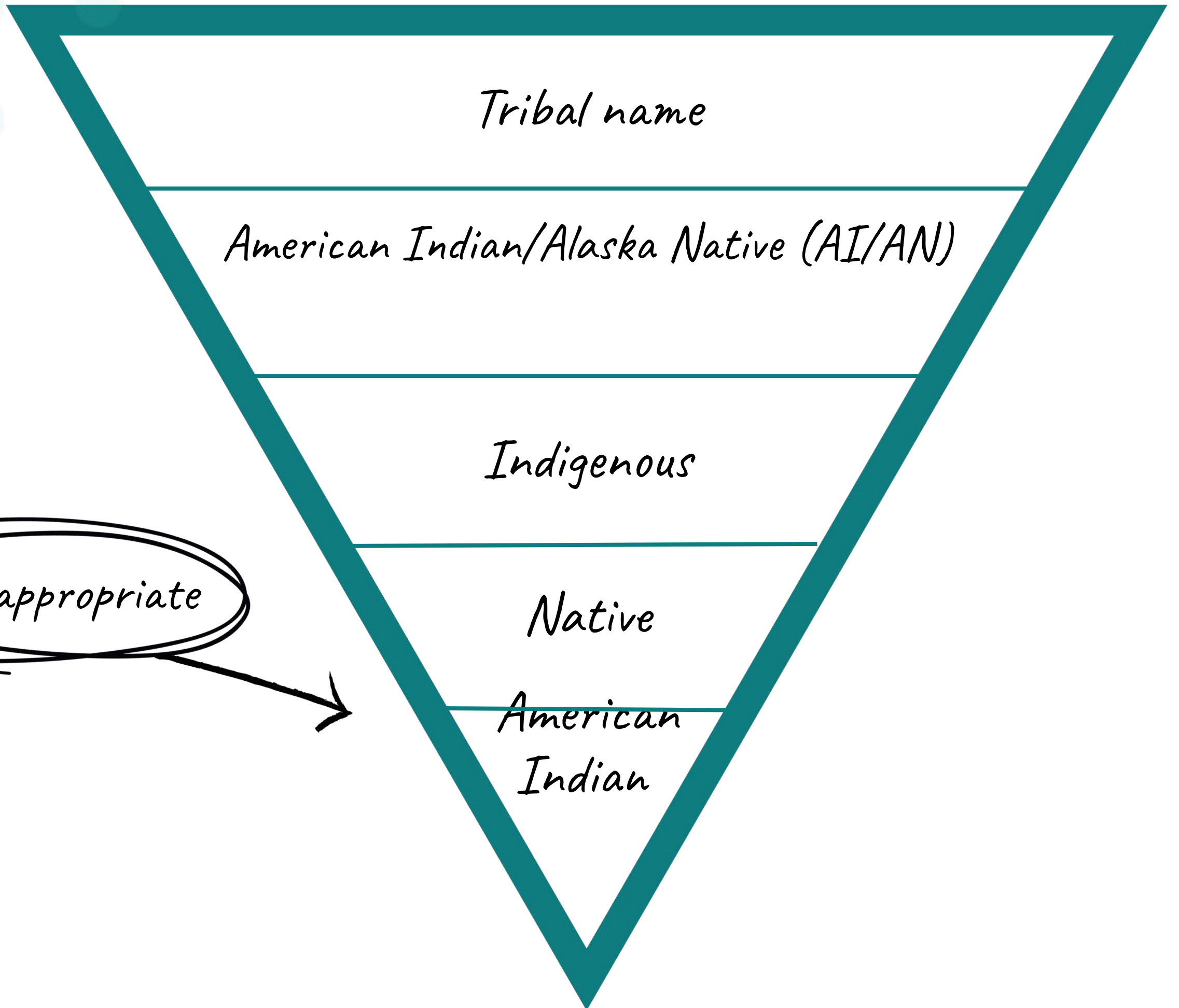
"Depending on who I'm talking with"

"Depends on who I'm conversating with. To close family and friends I say native. To strangers indigenous"

"Somewhat change, as in terms of a group of different tribes"

"For academic writing and social media, I use Indigenous & include geographic area"

Most appropriate



Least appropriate



**My educated
opinion of when to
use different terms
as an outsider**

Diné/Navajo Demographics

POPULATION

400,000 registered members, largest American Indian nation by membership and land; 50% live on the "rez"

LAND BASE

Reservation is located within 4 sacred mountain/original homeland, 16 million acres, size of West Virginia

FOOD ACCESS

14 grocery stores in the entire nation


UTILITIES

30% of families living on the reservation do not have access to indoor plumbing and/or electricity



American Indian Food



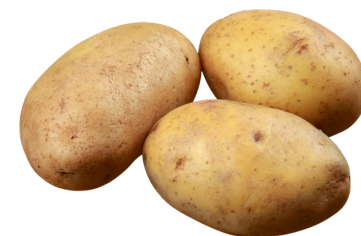


“The American Indian's greatest contribution to our civilization is, in the eyes of many experts, the patient cultivation from their original wild state of the food plants which are now more than half of our agricultural wealth”

-Samuel Beck

Food historian

Indigenous foods

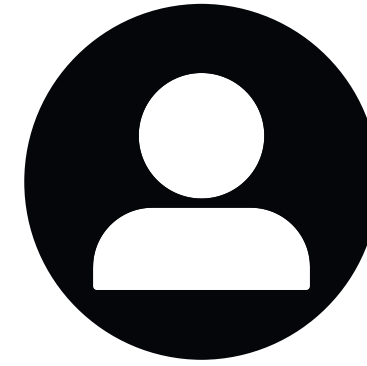


60% of the current world food supply have Indigenous American roots

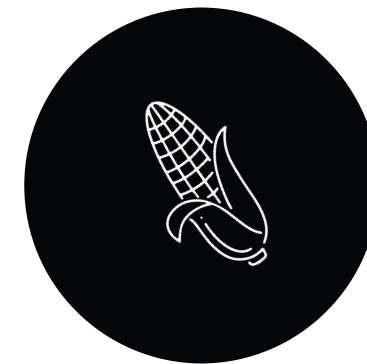
THE INDIGENOUS CONNECTION TO FOOD



Source: Denée Bex



Before colonization, Indigenous people were successful stewards and managers of the land.



Food & plants are considered sacred beings



Certain plants and food are part of spiritual ceremonies and creation stories



Developed thousands strains of plants, grains, fruits & vegetables

Food Regions

A mix of agricultural and hunter/gatherers, depending on regions

Eastern

Corn, beans, squash, maple
syrup, cranberries, nut milks,
nut-based dishes, clam, fish
(More agricultural)

Western

Salmon, other fish, seafood,
acorns, mushrooms, berries,
deer, duck, rabbit (less
agricultural)

Southeastern

Corn, squash, pumpkin,
blackberries, deer, rabbits,
squirrels, opossums, raccoons,
fish

Southwestern

Corn, beans, squash, pinon
nuts, deer, turkey, wild root
vegetables, sheep (Spanish
introduction)

Great Plains

Bison, cranberries, berries,
potatoes, squash, rabbit,
pheasant, wild rice, wapato
(edible rhizomes)

Alaska Native

Acorn, moose, seal, berries, fish,
eggs, walrus, hare, ptarmigan

Many Indigenous dishes serve as a basis for current regional foods

First-Contact Foods and Changes

In the 15th century, European settlers brought sheep, goats, cattle, pigs, horses, peaches, apricots, plums, cherries, melons, watermelon, apples, grapes, and wheat. Spanish sheep changed the lifeways of the Navajo (Diné).



Europeans adopted foods indigenous to the Americas such as the tomato, potato, and chile.

Government-Issued Foods

The Federal Indian Removal Act of 1830 forcefully removed more than 100,000 American Indians to Oklahoma Territory.



The federal government discouraged AI/AN from continuing their traditional hunting and gathering traditions and provided food rations known as commodity foods – lard, flour, coffee, sugar, and canned meat – to Native communities.

Blue corn mush



Nutrition Facts	
servings per container	
Serving size	(273.39g)
Amount per serving	
Calories	130
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 2g	2%
Saturated Fat 0g	0%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 10mg	0%
Total Carbohydrate 27g	10%
Dietary Fiber 3g	11%
Total Sugars 0g	
Includes 0g Added Sugars	0%
Protein 3g	
Vitamin D 0mcg	0%
Calcium 9mg	0%
Iron 1mg	4%
Potassium 140mg	2%
* The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.	

Per ~8 oz serving

Where does frybread belong?



Nutrition Facts	
servings per container	
Serving size	(170.1g)
Amount per serving	
Calories	560
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 21g	27%
Saturated Fat 8g	39%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 10mg	4%
Sodium 560mg	24%
Total Carbohydrate 82g	30%
Dietary Fiber 0g	0%
Total Sugars 3g	
Includes 0g Added Sugars	0%
Protein 11g	
Vitamin D 0mcg	0%
Calcium 97mg	8%
Iron 7mg	40%
Potassium 130mg	2%
* The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.	

Per ~6 oz serving

Counseling



What challenges do dietitians face when working in Indigenous communities?

1

LITERACY

Low reading and health literacy make it harder for our community to understand

2

FOOD INSECURITY

When our people are just trying to feed their families, it's hard to focus on quality

3

LIMITED RESOURCES

If people aren't meeting their basic needs, it's hard to self-actualize

4

RURAL

People live far away from grocery stores and hospitals

5

MENTAL HEALTH

People have many life obligations and competing priorities

Nutrition is important, but what's most important is the person

What solutions can dietitians bring to the table?

1

LITERACY

Create handouts with lots of pictures and make it 6th-grade reading level

2

FOOD INSECURITY

Support Indigenous farmers and offer classes which teach basic cooking skills, highlight budget-foods

3

LIMITED RESOURCES

Offer non-judgmental acceptance of their situation and ask for permission to educate

4

RURAL

Offer accessible classes, aid with transportation, budget-friendly recipes

5

MENTAL HEALTH

Work with mental health professional and ask for permission to refer

Nutrition is important, but what's most important is the person

Counseling skills to cultivate

Stay curious

Ask about people's favorite food memories or ask about foods you don't know about.

Eat local food

Try out local Native-prepared foods so you have context and background.

Be humble

We are community-based and take time to build trust, especially with medical facilities.

Recognize diet varies

People eat a range of foods which include "traditional" food and "regular" food, don't assume all Natives have the same diet.

Learn local food names

Natives appreciate it when we take the time to learn about the community.

Trauma-informed care

All tribes have experienced trauma and are still grappling with effects, come with radical acceptance.

Applying nutrition guidelines

MY NATIVE PLATE



Fruit

Water

**Grain/
Starch**

Vegetables

Protein

Use your plate as a guide to help you eat in a healthy way!

1. Fill half of your plate with vegetables.
2. Fill the other half of your plate with a grain/starch and a protein.
3. Add a side of fruit.

Pictured here:

- Mixed berries
- Cooked spinach
- Baked squash with peppers and herbs
- Steamed wild rice
- Baked deer meat with sage
- Water

Take a picture with your cell phone. Look at the picture later as a reminder!

Remember:

-  Stay active
-  Drink water
-  Use a 9-inch plate

Notes:

Produced by:
Indian Health Service, Division of
Diabetes Treatment and Prevention.
07/2018

Applying nutrition guidelines

More Ideas for MY NATIVE PLATE

Plate 1: Fruit / Dairy (Yogurt with strawberries), Grain/Starch (Tortilla), Vegetables (Salsa), Protein (Scrambled eggs with zucchini).
Pictured here: Yogurt with strawberries, salsa, scrambled eggs with zucchini, tortilla, coffee

Plate 2: Fruit (Apple), Grain/Starch (Bun), Vegetables (Carrots, celery, lettuce, tomato, onion, pickle), Protein (Beef patty).
Pictured here: Apple, carrots, celery, lettuce, tomato, onion, pickle, beef patty, bun, unsweetened tea

Plate 3: Fruit (Peaches), Grain/Starch (Cornbread), Vegetables (Salad), Protein (Beef and vegetable stew).
Pictured here: Peaches, salad, beef and vegetable stew, cornbread, water

Ways to Add Variety to Meals and Snacks

Vegetables and Fruits	Proteins	Grains and Starches
Tips <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stock up on fresh, frozen, and canned vegetables and fruits.• Keep fruits and vegetables on hand for snacking.• Plan some meals around a vegetable main dish, such as a stir fry, stew, or soup.• Enjoy fruit as a dessert. Examples <p>Vegetables: Wild greens, tomatoes, carrots, leafy greens, zucchini, avocados, broccoli, green beans, cucumbers, onions, peppers, okra</p> <p>Fruits: Berries, melons, apricots, peaches, citrus fruits, bananas, apples, pears</p>	Tips <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Choose fish, beans, lentils, eggs, and nuts more often to cut down on meat.• Instead of a beef patty for your burger, try a veggie, black bean, turkey, soy, or bison patty.• Grill, stew, or bake meat instead of deep frying.• If milk upsets your stomach, try yogurt, lactose free milk, or soy milk. Examples <p>Animal proteins: Fish, wild game, bison, poultry, mutton, beef, pork, eggs</p> <p>Plant proteins: Beans, lentils, nuts, nut butters, seeds, tofu, soy products</p> <p>Dairy proteins: Milk, lactose free milk, yogurt, cheese, cottage cheese</p>	Tips <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Choose whole grain foods, such as whole wheat breads, corn tortillas, oatmeal, and wild or brown rice.• Try whole wheat flour instead of white flour.• Add wild or brown rice to main dishes, such as a stir fry, stew, or soup.• Bake or roast potatoes instead of deep frying. Examples <p>Grains: Pastas, breads, crackers, rice, oats, quinoa, barley, cereals, tortillas, flour, cornmeal</p> <p>Starchy vegetables: Potatoes, corn, green peas, winter squash</p>

Produced by the IHS Division of Diabetes Treatment and Prevention
For more information and materials, visit www.ihs.gov/diabetes
07/2018

Food Sovereignty

What is it?

“Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations.”

– Declaration of Nyéléni, the first global forum on food sovereignty,
Mali, 2007

Food Sovereignty

Why does it matter?

- Cultural preservation
- Health & well-being
- Economic empowerment
- Environmental sustainability
- Self-determination



Indigneous food today



Indigenous food today



Increasing Native Representation in Dietetics

1 **INCREASE NUMBERS**

Actively recruit and mentor Native people; Provide scholarships, accessible/paid/federal loan eligible internships

2 **IMPLICIT BIAS**

Examine our implicit biases and stereotypes that may impact our interactions with patients or community.

3 **CULTURAL HUMILITY**

Support training and coursework that includes cultural and diverse perspectives on nutrition.

4 **POLICY & PROGRAMS**

Advocate for changes that increase access to healthy food in underserved communities and address social determinants of health.

5 **PUBLIC AWARENESS**

Educate the public about the importance of diversity in food choices can increase demand for diverse food options and reduce stigma about cultural foods.

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