

**"WE ARE AS MUCH ALIVE AS WE KEEP THE EARTH ALIVE."**

— CHIEF DAN GEORGE (1899-1981)

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## AMERICAN INDIAN — An Overview

**Inception:** Paleo-Indians entered, and subsequently inhabited, the American continents during the final glacial episodes of the late Pleistocene period. The traditional theory has been that migration occurred via the Bering Strait land bridge between eastern Siberia and present-day Alaska perhaps as early as 85,000 years ago, when sea levels were significantly lower. Stone tools are the primary evidence of the earliest human activity in the Americas. The Burnham site near Freedom, Oklahoma produced evidence of human habitation in the form of tools dating back to 35,000 years. The Topper site in South Carolina's Savannah River Valley features stone tools, and charcoal from as early as 50,000 years ago. The Boqueirão da Pedra Furada remains place human habitation on the eastern side of Brazil about 60,000 years ago. Other scientific evidence links indigenous Americans to eastern Siberian populations by linguistic dialects, the distribution of blood types, and in genetic composition as reflected by molecular data, such as DNA.

**Adherents:** 100 Thousand [EBI Estimate]

**Primary Value Proposition:** Beliefs and practices form an integral and seamless part of our very being

### The Word of (about and/or attributed to) God:

- Airsekui is the great spirit invoked at times of great danger. — Huron
- Thus was the earth created, when it was formed by the Heart of Heaven, the Heart of Earth, as they are called who first made it fruitful, when the sky was in suspense, and the earth was submerged in the water." — Mayan (from the Popol Vuh)
- Anpao is the spirit of the dawn. — Dakota
- Awonawilona was the divine Shehe from Whose being flowed forth the mists of increasing and the streams of growing. — Zuni
- Finisher is the Great Spirit who created the universe and everything in it. — Shawnee
- Ha Wen Neyu is the great spirit. — Iroquois
- Heammawihio is the great spirit. — Cheyenne
- Maheo was the all-spirit who existed before existence and created the primordial ocean and birds to fly over it from his thoughts alone, and later created the land and all the animals and plants — Cheyenne
- Na'pi (dawn-light-color-man) is the supreme chief. The flat, circular earth in fact is his home, the floor of his lodge, and the over-arching sky is its covering. — Blackfoot
- Tirawa created the world in the shape of a bowl floating in space. He gave the stars the task of supporting the world and protecting it. He ordered the Moon and Sun to mate and produce a son and he ordered the Evening and Morning stars to mate and produce a daughter, these became the parents of the human race. — Pawnee
- Tonacatecuhtl, Lord of Our Sustenance, is the being at the "center" of existence, a place around which everything revolves but where everything is still and at rest. — Aztec
- Wakonda is the Great Spirit who keeps the balance in the universe. — Sioux

**Core Beliefs:** Followers of Aboriginal religions, such as the many types of Native American Spirituality, do not regard their spiritual beliefs and practices as a "religion." Their beliefs and practices form an integral and seamless part of their very being. Religious traditions of aboriginal peoples around the world tend to be heavily influenced by their methods of acquiring food, whether by hunting wild animals or by agriculture. American Indian spirituality is no exception. Their rituals and belief show a blending of interest in promoting and preserving their hunting and horticulture.

The traditional Inuit (Eskimo) culture is similar to those found in other circumpolar regions: Northern Russia and the Northern Scandinavian countries. Life has been precarious; there are the double challenges of the cold, and the continual threat of starvation. Their religious practices are grounded in the belief that anua (souls) exist in all people and animals.

Native religions in the Eastern Subarctic, Eastern Woodlands, Plains and Southwest Cultures share some similarities. A common concept is that of a dual divinity. The first is a Creator who is responsible for the creation of the world and is recognized in religious ritual and prayers. There is also a mythical individual, a hero or trickster, who teaches culture, proper behavior and provides sustenance to the tribe. There are spirits that control the weather, spirits which interact with humans, and others who inhabit the underworld.

The Creator and the spirits may be perceived as a single spiritual force, as in the unity called Wakan-Tanka by the Lakota and Dakota. Many tribes have unique concepts of the world and its place in the universe. Some tribes understand the universe as being composed of multiple layers with the natural world as a middle segment. These layers are thought to be linked by the World Tree, which has its roots in the underground, has a trunk passing through the natural world, and has its top in the sky world.