

## **38 Ways to Support—Not Appropriate From—Native People!**

*(Edited by the Mass. Center for Native American Awareness to reflect our knowledge & values.)*

1. When you plan your office meeting, please don't use the word "powwow." Conference rooms are not where powwows take place. Powwows are celebrations of our Indigenous cultures, which include dance (in regalia, not "costumes"), food, art, music, etc., and they take place in designated locations that can typically accommodate hundreds of people, not just a few dozen office staff. We invite you to come to a real powwow to learn, but don't touch anyone's regalia or take photos outside the circle without asking.
2. If somebody says, "My great grandmother was a Cherokee princess," understand that the word and hierarchy designation was not part of the Cherokee language or culture.
3. Wearing a headdress is cultural appropriation. Unless you are a Native who has earned each feather and the right to wear one, don't wear headdresses, just like we don't wear military medals and stripes unless we served and earned them.
4. The expression that "someone has gone off the reservation" comes from a time when Natives were forbidden from leaving the boundaries of a delineated area. It was also the first travel ban in the United States. Please don't use this phrase.
5. Change the narrative on "Indian givers." We aren't the ones who reneged on agreements.
6. The word "squaw" comes from the Algonquin word "shunksqaw," which means "woman." White men truncated it to describe what they desired in order to objectify Native women. It is an ethnic and sexual slur. Contemporary use of the term is considered offensive, derogatory and racist. So please don't use it.
7. Experiences vary among Native Americans, depending upon whether or not we grew up knowing our culture, on or off the reservation, or in foster care. Please do not speak for all indigenous people, especially if you have not done your research.
8. Too often when we bring up the Trail of Tears or Wounded Knee Massacre, for example, we're berated—"It's in the past. Move on, already!" Yet when it's a massacre of predominantly white people it's, "We will always remember," or, "We will never forget." Learn your history, do your research, and please do not tell us to "get over it."
9. Use your privilege and platform to speak out regularly against the oppression of Natives. Please speak out loudly against stereotypes, like Native mascots. They are the commodification and dehumanization of Native Americans and have been empirically proven to harm the mental health and stability of kids. Create and empower more allies to do the same.

For example, if you have a following or are in a position of authority, use it to illuminate issues in Indian country and hire more Natives!

10. The more children are exposed to the truth of a people, the less they will be affected by stereotypes. Help your children learn about Indigenous people through authentic activities.

11. Some companies profit off of indigenous culture and traditions. Instead of supporting those brands, like Urban Outfitters, support Native-owned businesses. You can purchase better quality Native clothing, jewelry, etc., while at the same time supporting actual creative Natives.

12. If you invite Native elders into your spaces, treat them with the respect that we do. Let them eat first, let them have your seat, and listen to them.

13. Even if you have an indigenous friend who says he or she doesn't have a problem with a racist slur, it doesn't make the racist slur any less of a racist slur. Simply remind your friend that their sentiments toward a slur does not change its definition.

14. Recognize that DNA does not equate to culture. Ancestry.com and 23andMe, for example, are in the business of biotechnology, not culture. Culture is the community. We are not defined by our blood quantum. Separate, sovereign tribal nations determine who is and isn't a part of their nation/tribe.

15. If you want to be an ally, please don't vote for politicians who support oppressive policies and agendas. Instead help elect and vote for Native candidates on the ballot. We need more representation at all levels of government—from local to state to national.

16. Speak out against Columbus Day. Our research shows that Columbus was a murderer and a rapist who set into motion one of the world's worst genocides. Stand up to friends and relatives when they use anti-Native slurs. Read up on how the Thanksgiving narrative, as you know, it is incorrect. Push for inclusion of Native American history in schools, especially the histories of local tribes/Nations.

17. Don't dress up as a Native American on Halloween. Don't allow schools to dress your kid up as a Native. Playing Native American is always racist. Traditional regalia is not a costume.

18. Know how many tribes and nations are in your state and what tribes and nations are local to your specific area. Learn about them. You're on their land. Tribes and nations still exist, even if not on their traditional land. Not every Native was born on (or is from) a reservation. 78% percent live off the reservation.

19. Read books by Indigenous writers like Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, Dina Gilio-Whitaker, Vine Deloria Jr., Louise Erdrich, and N. Scott Momaday. Fiction by non-Native authors is often not accurate.
20. The Bering Strait Theory justifies aggressive land theft. This theory suggests Natives crossed a land bridge, but the latest research continues to debunk this antiquated theory. The Bering Strait land bridge is only one way the first people came to this land.
21. Remind your friends/family that English is a foreign language. Lakota, Ojibwe, Diné, Cherokee, Choctaw, Osage, etc. are the languages of the land. English is from England.
22. You may refer to early Europeans as “pilgrims” and “settlers,” but they were invaders, colonizers, and terrorists to us. Your family hasn’t “always fought for this country,” like indigenous people have. Your family’s land is on land stolen from indigenous people.
23. Please do not dictate, talk over, or suppress actual Indigenous voices during an important dialogue on Native issues and topics. Be a good listener—put your ego aside. Do research. Attend events. Read. Learn. Then maybe you can understand and contribute to conversations. We are not your only or primary teacher. Educate yourself.
24. Understand that “Native American” is a very generalized term. Each and every tribe has their own customs and ways. Don't say “Native American culture.” There are hundreds of tribes, each with unique cultures, languages, foods, ceremonies, etc. Not all Native tribes and nations are the same.
25. If someone tries to charge you to participate in a “Native American ceremony,” don’t go! Also, call them out. There’s never an entry fee for “ceremony” (what we call “medicine”). Ever.
26. Learn about #MMIWG (murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls). Native women are 2.5 times more likely to be sexually assaulted than women of any other demographic.
27. Are you a student? A professor? When applicable, advocate for and/or add more Native content, voices, etc. to your syllabi.
28. Look up the Wounded Knee Massacre, Bear River Massacre, Sand Creek Massacre, etc. Headlines should not come at the expense of history. These are some of the worst massacres in the United States.
29. It’s worth remembering that reservations were first established as prison (concentration) camps, and Hitler was inspired by them.

30. Yes, we pay taxes. State and federal. Please don't assume we live tax-free. And, we pay for college, too!

31. There are Indigenous people in the U.S., Mexico, and Canada. Natives were not consulted, and did not approve, of the borders creating the three countries that make up this continent.

32. Treaty rights are not "special rights." They are agreements between one separate sovereign nation and another (and most have been broken).

33. Natives, per capita, serve in the U.S. military more than any other racial demographic. Just a fact allies should know.

34. We prefer our actual names (Wampanoag, Arawak, Diné, etc.) and the word "nation," as the U.S. had nation-to-nation treaties; not the words, "tribes," "tribe," and "tribalism." Incorrect language undermines the unique political, legal, and social status of tribes.

35. If your girlfriend or wife is Native, don't call her "Pocahontas." Pocahontas was a child and victim of rape and kidnapping. The name is not a complement and shouldn't be used as an insult either.

36. We do not get reparations from the U.S. government, and please do not assume that if you somehow get enrolled into a tribe, you'll get a monthly check from the feds. You won't.

37. We believe. We survived. Being a better ally is about getting to know who we are and who we are not. We are not mascots. We are not mere relics of the past. We are writers, doctors, business owners, classmates, and neighbors. We are still here. Please stop talking about us in past tense and saying things like, "Native Americans believed..."

38. The title of this list could also be, "38 Basic Ways to be a Decent Human." So, please just be a decent human being.

Adapted from Simon Moya-Smiths' list of **100 Ways to Support—Not Appropriate From—Native People**. He is a citizen of the Oglala Lakota Nation and Chicano writer and reporter.