

THE HISTORY OF NATIONAL NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

The origin of this observance as National Native American Heritage Month started out as a day of recognition for indigenous culture including native Alaskans, in the United States. The bill was first introduced by Senator Daniel Inouye of Hawaii and Congressional Delegate Eni Faloemavaega of American Samoa.

The first observance was in the state of New York starting it out as “American Indian Day” in 1916 to acknowledge the many accomplishments and achievements of Native people. Several other states followed suit in later years. The California Assembly introduced legislation creating Native American Day as an Official Holiday in 1989; South Dakota’s state legislator passed a bill in 1990 as a “Year of Reconciliation” between the American Indian and White citizens. Governor George S. Mickelson of South Dakota designated Columbus Day as the state’s American Indian Day making it a state-sanctioned holiday.

Many efforts were taking place to bring this into fruition. During the National Bicentennial Commemoration in 1976, S.J. res. 209 authorized President Gerald Ford to proclaim October 10-16, 1976 as “Native American Awareness week.” Later in 1986 Congress passed S.J. res.390 for the president to designate November 23-30, 1986 as “American Indian Week.” The practice continued for years declaring one week in the fall as “Native American Indian Heritage week.”

Congress passed a joint resolution proclaiming November as National American Indian Heritage Month (also, Native American Indian Month, as American Indian and Alaskan Native Heritage Month). This month was designated through House Joint Resolution 577 (Pub. L. 101-343) in 1990 as “National American Indian Heritage Month” by George H. W. Bush issuing Proclamation 6230 on November 14, 1990.

Native American Heritage Day is a civil holiday celebrated the day after Thanksgiving.

BLACK CATHOLIC LAY CONGRESS

The Black Catholic Lay Congress also known as the National Black Catholic Congress, is convening July 20 - 23, 2023 in National Harbor, Maryland.

This organization's roots originated from the Black Catholic Lay Congress from 1889-1894, meeting every five years. The purpose of the meeting was to address their attitudes toward and understand what it means to be Catholic, Black, and proud of their Catholicism. They also organized to speak against racism and racist teachings of the Catholic Church. All of this was deliberately undertaken in the context of being grateful for being Catholic in its entirety. The church's mission is to be involved with social justice issues. The American church did not get involved until much later.

Discussions on the past including African history in the church also mentioned struggles of Black saints such as Augustine, Monica, Cyril of Alexandria, Perpetua, Felicity, and Saint Benedict the Moor. They were doing what every other national cultural group such as the Irish, Hungarian, and Polish had been doing throughout history: establishing their ethnicity and rooting themselves in the early church.

The Congress showed their identity as Catholic. The church was concerned about Black spirituality and rights of the individuals. Spirituality did not come into fruition for Black Catholics by the church until later even though it was scripturally based. Black spirituality included very strong notions of prayer and charity as it was with St. Benedict the Moor and St. Martin de Porres and working in the communities of religious men and women.