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The invisible lawyer? New study looks at challenges of Native American attorneys

by Marilyn Cavicchia

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Invisible.
Excluded.
Marginalized.

What's more, it's not uncommon for these negative feelings and experiences to occur even in groups focused on diversity and inclusion in the profession.

That's a common scenario for Native American lawyers, according to a first-of-its-kind study released this spring by the National Native American Bar Association. From a total of about 2,640 lawyers in the United States who identify as American Indian, Alaska Native, and/or Hawaiian Native, more than 500 responded to a detailed survey, and more than 50 participated in one-on-one telephone interviews.

A full 40.65 percent of respondents to the survey portion of "The Pursuit of Inclusion: An In-Depth Exploration of the Experiences and Perspectives of Native American Attorneys in the Legal Profession" reported experiencing demeaning comments or other types of harassment based on their race, ethnicity, and/or tribal affiliation. Also, 33.63 percent reported experiencing discrimination based on those factors.

According to Mary L. Smith, president of NNABA when the study was conducted and released, the findings are relevant to all bar associations, regardless of location and the number of known Native American lawyers who practice there.

"I think people would be surprised that even in areas that are not traditionally thought of as high Native American populations, there are probably more Native Americans than expected," says Smith, general counsel at the Illinois Department of Insurance and a member of the Cherokee Nation. In fact, she notes, about 80 percent of the Native American population lives in urban areas.

Assistance with pipeline, career resources

Even bar associations in areas commonly known to have large Native American populations have some work to do, Smith believes—and some are embarking on those efforts now. For example, she said, in South Dakota, nearly 10 percent of the population is Native American, but over the last three years, only seven of 206 incoming 1L's at the University of South Dakota have been Native

Americans.

The State Bar of South Dakota "has not always made an effort to be inclusive of Native Americans," Smith says, but new President Eric Schulte and President-Elect Stephanie Pochop are working to change this and have identified the law school pipeline for Native Americans as an area where the bar might be able to help.

Smith encourages other bar associations to start or get involved with pipeline efforts, too. Though many prospective law students of any racial/ethnic background have been scared off by the well-publicized changes in the economy and profession, Smith believes these factors "have not significantly affected potential Native American law students."

This may be because Native Americans attend law school for very different reasons from that of the general population. Whereas the Law School Survey of Student Engagement usually indicates that having a challenging and rewarding career and achieving financial security are two primary motivations, Smith notes, respondents to the NNABA survey "were more likely to report that they wanted to give back to their tribe, fight for justice for Native Americans, and work for the betterment of Indian people."

More than other groups, Smith adds, "Native American attorneys report that their decision to attend law school was strongly influenced by family, friends, mentors, and lawyers."

And once a Native American lawyer is in practice, bar associations of any type may be a good source of connections, information, and referrals for employment opportunities, as 35 percent of respondents said they found these critical career resources through "business/professional networks."

While it's important not to pigeonhole Native American lawyers and believe they necessarily practice Indian law—an experience reported by many of the respondents—it's also true that more than 60 percent of the respondents do practice in that area.

"It then follows that to help attract Native American members, a bar association might create an Indian law committee or section," Smith says. "At a minimum, a bar association should develop some Indian law programming or a Native American mentoring program."

Exclusion even within diversity programs

In what the study report calls "one of the more sensitive issues raised in the surveys and interviews," respondents reported that their "feeling of exclusion persisted even when Native American attorneys were working with racial/ethnic minority attorneys, groups and/or groups in and out of their organizations that focused on diversity and inclusion in the profession."

Exclusion of Native Americans that respondents experienced in these contexts included: not being seen as an important part of diversity and inclusion efforts, in part because of a lack of

understanding about Native American histories, experiences, and ongoing challenges; not being seen as a group that requires deliberate focus because of their relatively small numbers; discrimination not being taken as seriously because it seems different from the discrimination experienced by other racial/ethnic minority groups; offenses being ignored because the small numbers make them seem like isolated instances; and being ignored because it feels "natural" to do so, after centuries of this being the case.

Women fight the 'double whammy'

One diversity and inclusion concept that emerged very strongly in this study is *intersectionality*. This term describes the fact that one person may identify with two or more different aspects of diversity, such as race or ethnicity; gender; sexual orientation or gender expression; or disability status.

In particular, women reported more exclusion and denial of opportunity than men in a number of different areas, including: lack of access to informal or formal networking opportunities; being denied advancement or promotion opportunities; being denied appropriate compensation; lack of access to information that affected their ability to perform effectively; lack of access to resources that similarly affected their performance; and the perception that they were less committed because they were mothers. Some female respondents also noted gender bias within their tribe and its politics, policy, and leadership.

Smith says this "double whammy" of race and gender is often even worse for younger female lawyers who are Native, as they are also perceived to be less professional and competent because of their age. Awareness and support within the workplace itself are critically important, Smith notes, but there's an opportunity for bar associations to "help women navigate the often unwritten rules to success" and to provide "training in business development and rainmaking [that] can also help to empower women to greater longevity and success."

Support from other specialty bars

In addition to state and local bar associations, Smith hopes other specialty bar associations will take note of the study and look for ways to help. Many already do realize that the Native American population is lagging behind other minority groups in some ways, she says, "because of their small numbers and their virtual invisibility." As a result, she adds, other specialty bars "have the backs" of Native American lawyers rather than leaving NNABA and its chapters to work alone.

For example, Smith notes, there is currently only one Native American—Hon. Diane Humetewa in Arizona—among the approximately 900 federal judges. A couple of years ago at the Coalition of Bar Associations of Color Advocacy Day, it was not NNABA representatives who pressed the Senate Judiciary Committee on the need for more Native American judicial nominees but Peter Reyes, now a judge and then president of the Hispanic National Bar Association.

"In some respects," Smith says, "the message was more powerful coming from the HNBA. Frankly,

diverse attorneys are stronger advocating and working together to be more inclusive of all groups."

What else should bar associations do?

Besides making sure to include Native Americans within their diversity umbrella, specifically reaching out to such lawyers in their area, and establishing Indian law sections, Smith believes bar associations can also help Native American communities and Native American lawyers via pro bono and one of their most important and successful functions: education.

"Bar associations play an important role in educating the legal profession and the public," she says, "and programs can be developed that educate non-Native lawyers and nonlawyers about Indian law and some of the legal challenges facing Native Americans today."

Smith also urges bar associations of every type to prioritize diversity in leadership, including at the officer level—and to make sure Native American lawyers aren't overlooked in this respect, either. "It takes conscious effort to recruit and mentor diverse candidates," Smith says, "and this is true of all bars, regardless of their size."

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Traditional indigenous beliefs are a powerful tool for understanding the pandemic

By Rachel HartiganPhotographs by Josué Rivas

"What are we going to do?" Jillene Joseph asked the board of the Native Wellness Institute. It wasn't a rhetorical question.

It was mid-March, and the board was holding an emergency meeting as schools and businesses began shutting down due to the novel coronavirus. The Oregon-based institute addresses trauma in indigenous communities, usually through in-person trainings that are rooted in ancestral teachings and traditions. Joseph, the executive director, knew she had to find a new way to help community members who were adjusting to stay-at-home orders.

Native Americans are especially vulnerable to COVID-19 due to underlying health issues such as diabetes and heart disease, as well as crowded multigenerational homes. On reservations, where roughly half of Native Americans live, not everyone has indoor plumbing or electricity, making it difficult to follow the guidelines to wash hands regularly in hot water. As a result, Navajo Nation, the largest reservation in the United States, has an infection rate nearly as high as that of New York and New Jersey. As of May 11 there have been 102 confirmed deaths.

"An already traumatized people are being retraumatized," says Joseph, a member of the Gros Ventre or Aaniiih people who are from Fort Belknap, Montana. Managing the pandemic's psychological and spiritual toll has become her focus.

As a community health practitioner, Joseph sees traditional cultural beliefs and practices as powerful tools for helping indigenous people understand this pandemic. She is not alone. With an emphasis on community, resilience, and a holistic relationship with nature, spiritual leaders from different tribes express guarded optimism that people of all backgrounds will learn from the lessons coronavirus has to teach.

'Blood memory'

For indigenous people, history plays an unavoidable role in interpreting the pandemic. One elder from Michigan called Joseph to talk about how difficult it's been for her to care for herself and her family. After some reflection, the woman realized why: She was weighed down by thoughts of the smallpox epidemic that had killed so many Native Americans. She felt she needed to forgive the U.S. government for intentionally giving her people the illness.

While documentary evidence that Europeans or Americans purposely spread smallpox is scarce, there's little doubt that colonizers brought infectious diseases that killed an estimated 90 percent—some 20 million people or more—of the indigenous population in the Americas. "Even though we may not have been alive in the time of the smallpox epidemic, that's in our blood memory," says Joseph, "just as historical resiliency is also in our blood memory."

Those deeply rooted experiences can lead to acceptance, especially among elders. "They have been through so much and experienced so much that there's no need to fear or even panic," says Tiokasin Ghosthorse, the Stoneridge, New York-based host of First Voices Radio and a member of the Cheyenne River Lakota Nation from South Dakota. "It's almost like this [pandemic] is familiar."

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Nature "has been listening to us not listening to her," says Tiokasin Ghosthorse, from his home in Stoneridge, New York. The radio host and member of the Cheyenne River Lakota Nation believes the coronavirus is a wake-up call.

Photograph by Josué Rivas, National Geographic

As such, indigenous communities aren't dwelling on the pandemic's backstory. "Indigenous peoples don't always need to go and explain what happened, why it happened," says the Reverend David Wilson, a Methodist minister in Oklahoma City and member of the Choctaw Nation. "We just know it's there."

"We're taught not to think of nature as separate," explains Ghosthorse, and that includes COVID-19. "The coronavirus is a being," he says. "And we have to respect that being in an 'awe state' and a 'wonder state' because it has come to us as a medicine" to treat spiritual ills.

Reconnecting with culture

At a time when people around the world are sheltering in place, maintaining meaningful connections is vital. Native American leaders are finding creative ways to reach out. In an effort to bring positivity, calm, and reassurance to indigenous people, Joseph and her colleagues tapped into the community of Native American storytellers, musicians, healers, and even comedians to create the Native Wellness Power Hour.

Since it launched on March 21, thousands have clicked into the institute's Facebook page to listen to prayer songs, lectures on navigating healing associated with PTSD, especially related to the ongoing epidemic of missing and murdered indigenous women, or just to dance along with others tuning in from around the country.

In Oklahoma, Native American Methodists sent videos of themselves singing tribal hymns to the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference, which incorporated them into virtual church services. "We work hard to keep people connected to our culture and our language," says Wilson, who is the conference's superintendent. "Most of the people who have texted me or called me say, man, we love that—especially the hymns."

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Stay-at-home orders have been particularly difficult, says Reverend David Wilson, a member of the Choctaw Nation and a Methodist minister in Oklahoma City. Church members are "missing that connection in our community of powwows, church services, and ceremonies."

Photograph by Josué Rivas, National Geographic

Lessons for the future

While this pandemic is presenting an opportunity to find meaningful ways to connect, it's also a wake-up call with important lessons for the future. "If we don't learn from now," warns Mindahi Bastida Muñoz, general coordinator of the Otomi-Toltec Regional Council in Mexico, "then another thing, more powerful, is going to come."

Bastida, who is also the director of the Original Caretakers program at the Center for Earth Ethics in New York City, says the world is out of balance and that anthropocentrism—our human-centric outlook—is the cause. "We think that we are the ones who can decide everything," he says, "but we are killing ourselves."

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It doesn't matter where the coronavirus came from, says Mindahi Bastida Muñoz, a member of the Otomi and Tolteca people in Mexico who is sheltering with friends in Granville

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"Mother Earth is saying, 'please listen,'" adds Joyce Bryant, known as Grandmother Sasa, the Abenaki founder of a healing center in New Hampshire. "We have to care about others. You know, the grass, the trees, the plants, the air, the water—all are extensions of ourselves. And they teach us."

"Living in harmony with Mother Earth is a lot of work," says Bastida, but it can be done by reviving the indigenous idea that humans serve as caregivers of nature. He's working with spiritual leaders across the world to return to the old ways—producing food by hand, finding medicine in plants, animals, and minerals, and performing rituals and ceremonies that send prayers to Mother Earth.

Perhaps the biggest lesson that indigenous spiritual leaders hope people will take from the pandemic is that it's a time to be still, to reflect, and to listen to elders. Both Joseph and Wilson likened this period of stay-at-home orders to a long winter, when people would traditionally stay inside and listen to stories. According to Joseph, it's like Earth is saying "not today, humans, you need some more reflection."

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Joyce Bryant, known as Grandmother Sasa in her community, takes a moment to meditate at her home in West Ossippee, New Hampshire. "Our elders have known for a long time that

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Related: Inside Deb Haaland's historic bid to become one of the first Native congresswomen For centuries, Native communities have fought disenfranchisement and marginalization. Now, Haaland will join another Native woman in U.S. Congress after a groundbreaking election.

400 years on, the Pilgrims get a reality check

By Bill Newcott

The good people of Plymouth, Massachusetts, had big plans for 2020, the 400th anniversary of the Pilgrims' arrival in New England. The town's nonprofit living history museum—known since its 1947 founding as Plimoth Plantation—had spent considerable time and some expense rebranding itself Plimoth Patuxet Museums, to more accurately represent the link between the Pilgrims and the Native American tribe whose village they occupied. More than $11 million had been invested in restoring *Mayflower II*, the reproduction ship that has floated in Plymouth Harbor since 1957. Tens of thousands of spectators were expected for the renovated ship's triumphant return from dry dock, including a rendezvous with Boston's 223-year-old *U.S.S. Constitution*, and an escort of Native Americans paddling dugout canoes.

Millions were expected to attend the biggest summer-long party Plymouth had ever seen. Then, last spring, COVID-19 came and ate all the birthday cake.

Then again, the story of the Pilgrims' early years in Massachusetts and their relationship with the Indigenous people they met there has always been fraught with unexpected twists. The Europeans found their foothold in the ruins of a village emptied by the ravages of plague. Barely surviving their first winter, they feared being overrun by the Native Americans they saw peering at them from the forest—only to find in them an unlikely military and trade partner. And through it all, in every direction, the land was stained by treachery, bloodshed, and betrayal.

For the hundreds of thousands of annual visitors to the Plimoth Patuxent Museums, those hard truths can be difficult to square with the traditional grade-school narrative many of us grew up with—of benevolent Pilgrims and amiable Indians seated around a big Thanksgiving picnic table. But the real story is, if a bit more complicated, no less human. New discoveries have revealed not only the extent of conflict between the two cultures, but also the surprising levels of social intimacy they shared.

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A crowd of onlookers turned out on August 10 to see the *Mayflower II* return to Plymouth Harbor after three years of restoration at Connecticut's Mystic Seaport. But it was a far cry from the hundreds of thousands of visitors the town was expecting before COVID-19 kept them away.

Photograph by Scott Eisen, Getty

Stormy beginnings

Despite their haloed image, the Pilgrims were a decidedly motley crew. Staunch Protestant Puritans, they had been forced into exile in the Netherlands around 1607 for resisting King James's Church of England. But the strait-laced refugees were doubly unhappy in the Netherlands, which then as now was a fairly freewheeling party scene. Luckily, King James was anxious to populate the new North American colonies, so he let the Pilgrims sail there to practice their renegade religion undisturbed. The voyage would be financed by investors, and in return

the Pilgrims would send furs and other goods back to England for sale.

After a few false starts, the *Mayflower* set sail from Plymouth, England, on September 6, 1620. For 65 miserable days the huddled passengers endured storms, sickness, and even the births of two children, a pair of boys named Oceanus Hopkins and Peregrine White. Weather forced them north of their intended destination along the Hudson River, then part of the British colony of Virginia. Finally, on November 9, land was sighted: the tip of Cape Cod.

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The *Mayflower* set sail from Plymouth, England, on September 6, 1620. "We loosed from Plymouth having been kindly entertained and courteously used by divers friends there dwelling," wrote Pilgrim leader Edward Winslow.

Photograph by Hulton Archive, Getty

But before anyone could set foot in the New World, Pilgrim leader John Carver had a bit of last-minute paperwork. Unlike Virginia, the land that spread before the Pilgrims had, as far as Carver knew, no formal charter from King James, and thus no effective law. He became alarmed when some of the non-Puritans among them gleefully began to anticipate becoming a law unto themselves.

Quickly, the Pilgrim leadership drafted a rudimentary constitution to "combine our selves together into a civil body politick"—which would, through democratic process, enact "just and equal laws...for the general good of the Colony."

"This is almost certainly *not* the room where the Mayflower Compact was signed," says Richard Pickering, chief historian for Plimoth Patuxet Museums. We are standing in a relatively large cabin at the back end of *Mayflower II*. Countless paintings depict finely dressed Pilgrim fathers gathered in just such a cabin and seated, Last Supper-like, around a large table, wielding feathery quills as they sign their document of self-government.

"First of all," Pickering explains, "these were crew quarters, and the crew didn't really even *like* the Pilgrims. All 102 of them were crammed onto the deck below this."

In reality, the signing was probably more of an informal affair, Pickering says. "The document was carried from person to person: 'Here—sign this!' There was also a bit of coercion involved. You weren't getting off the boat until you signed."

Coerced or not, the Mayflower Compact stands as a landmark document in North American history. Although Native American tribes had organized into governments for centuries, the Pilgrims' compact was the New World's first written constitution of self-government by Europeans.

A tale of two rocks

Cape Cod curls like a flexed arm, its angry fist railing against the assault of New England winters. At its apex stands Provincetown's 110-year-old Pilgrim Memorial, a 250-foot tower commemorating the Pilgrim's first landing nearby. Incongruously based on the 14th-century Torre del Mangia in Siena, Italy, the monument looks as if its creators had somehow confused Thanksgiving with Columbus Day. Atop its 116 steps and ramps, the New World of the Pilgrims comes into focus.

To the east, Atlantic surf pounds Cape Cod National Seashore. Down the coast lies First Encounter Beach, site of the first face-off between the newly-arrived Pilgrims and the Wampanoag. That initial meeting ended in a brief, ineffectual volley of arrows and gunshots. It was the beginning of a complicated relationship that began in conflict, grew into a shaky political alliance, and finally devolved into open hostilities and centuries of mistrust. Even today, the two sides are, in a sense, trying to work out their troubled shared history.

Some 32 miles west, outlined against the low afternoon sun, lies the Pilgrims' ultimate destination: the protected natural harbor of Plymouth Bay. The Pilgrims wrote about their adventures in exquisite detail, yet never once did they mention Plymouth Rock, traditional site of their second landing a few weeks after their arrival. Not until 1741 did the elderly son of a Pilgrim bestow that honor on the modest boulder that now sits under a granite canopy on Plymouth's waterfront.

So breathless was the schoolhouse lore of Plymouth Rock that, as a young boy on a New England vacation with my family, I fully expected to see a monolith the size of Gibraltar—only to discover a hunk of stone that resembled a big, gray beanbag chair. Never a very large rock, the thing is today about one-third its original size, the rest having been chipped away by souvenir seekers.

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The Roman Doric portico that shelters the traditional Plymouth Rock was already 30 years old when these 1950s visitors made the pilgrimage. Built to celebrate the 300th anniversary of *Ma*

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From Plymouth Rock I climb a steep concrete stairway up Cole's Hill, a bluff overlooking Plymouth Bay. Most years the hill rings with the laughter of tourists snapping selfies, but in truth there are few spots more mournful than this, a place long associated with death and despair.

Ascending this hill, the first Pilgrim expedition discovered a literal ghost town: a Native village, empty for three years or so. Many of its huts were still populated by skeletal corpses of Patuxet who had been wiped out by a hemorrhagic disease—probably smallpox brought by earlier European traders.

Still, the grotesque site sat on an easily defensible hillside beside a rushing stream. Despite its clearly awful history, the Pilgrims settled there, praising God for his provision.

But praise soon turned to mourning. At the lip of Cole's Hill stands a marble sarcophagus containing a mass of commingled bones—assumed to be those of the 52 Pilgrim men, women, and children who died of disease and exposure that first savage winter. They'd been hastily buried on this site in the dead of winter, only to have their remains exposed following heavy rains in the late 1800s.

The melancholy spirit of Cole's Hill deepens just a few feet away with a more modest monument, a plaque attached to a rock commemorating a "National Day of Mourning." Each Thanksgiving, representatives of many Native American tribes gather here to remember, in the words of the plaque, "the genocide of millions of their people, the theft of their lands, and the relentless assault on their culture." (*Today, traditional indigenous beliefs are a powerful tool for understanding COVID-19.*)

The sadness of this place is palpable.

Sole survivor

After those initial burials on Cole's Hill, the Pilgrims established a new cemetery higher in the hills, just beyond the wooden palisade they built around their settlement. Burial Hill remains a quiet, tree-shrouded retreat, a relatively easy climb from the waterfront. From its summit, through the trees and headstones, the sweeping view of Plymouth Bay and its barrier sand bars affirms why this made such a likely spot for defense from attack by sea.

The surrounding woods, however, were another story.

Turning south atop Burial Hill, I look toward another hill just across the narrow and fast-moving Town Brook. For months in early 1621, Pilgrims stood where I'm standing and gazed across the creek, watching nervously as the concerned faces of Wampanoag tribe members stared back at them.

Then, on March 16, a Native American strode boldly through the gate of Plimoth, raised his hand, and greeted them in English. His name was Samoset, and he'd learned the foreigners' language from traders. He returned with another Native American named Tisquantum, more commonly known as Squanto. This man not only spoke perfect English, but years earlier he'd been kidnapped and taken to Europe as a slave.

Squanto had gained his freedom and returned to North America as a guide, only to learn that his misfortune had probably saved his life: He was, it turned out, a member of the Patuxet tribe, which in his absence had been wiped out by plague. Now, the Patuxet's sole survivor stood in the Pilgrims' new settlement—built on the ruins of his dead family's home. (*Related: Native American imagery abounds, but the people are often forgotten.*)

With Squanto serving as translator, the Pilgrims negotiated a peace treaty with Massasoit, leader of the Wampanoag—a loose confederation of several area tribes, including the now-extinct Patuxet. Most significantly, the two parties agreed to provide mutual defense—a bond that benefited both Massasoit, who was facing resistance from rivals, and the Pilgrims, who would have been helpless in the face of any concerted attack.

It was that treaty, in fact, that led to the fabled first Thanksgiving. As the Pilgrims celebrated their first harvest in November 1621, they fired their muskets into the air. Legend has it that Massasoit, fearing his allies were under attack, rushed to the scene with a group of warriors. Relieved to discover all was well, the story goes, the group stayed for dinner. More likely, Plimoth historian Pickering says, Massoit and his men, who were accustomed to hearing gunshots from military drills, dropped by on a diplomatic mission, bringing along five deer as a gift.

> What Is Thanksgiving? What does the Thanksgiving holiday celebrate? Learn about the first encounter between the Pilgrims and Native Americans in 1621, their surprising relationship, and the reason a United States president created a holiday in honor of it.

'This isn't Disneyland'

As fall foliage erupts in yellows and reds, the Plimoth Patuxet Museum's parking lot should be jammed with cars from every state east of the Mississippi. Instead, a hundred or so vehicles, virtually all with Massachusetts plates, bunch near the entrance. The limited numbers are no surprise. Just to visit here from my home in Delaware I first had to fill out an online Massachusetts State Visitor's Form and bring documentation of a recent negative COVID-19 test.

I'm greeted near the visitors center by Darius Coombs, a Wampanoag tribe member and a museum staffer for more than 30 years. As I zip up my windbreaker against the fall chill, Coombs seems entirely comfortable in his traditional dress: moose hide moccasins and deerskin leggings, breechcloth and mantle. Around his shoulders is draped a beaver pelt coat, worn with the fur facing in to capture and preserve body heat. Over his arm hangs the skin of a black wolf.

Coombs leads me to a clearing with a pinwheel-shaped pattern staked out on the ground—the outline of what the Wampanoag call a snail house, first built in these parts some 12,000 years ago. COVID willing, it will be built in time for next season's visitors.

The museum's reconstructed circa-1620 Wampanoag village, a scattering of bark-covered houses called *wetu*, sits on the shore of the Eel River. By the water, a tribe member scrapes a *mishoon,* a dugout canoe, from a tree trunk. Nearby, a massive 46-foot mishoon—carved from a seven-ton tree—lies nearly completed.

Like Coombs, all the skin-wearing workers here are Wampanoag. "You can't wear skins if you're not Wampanoag," he says. "When we go hunting for these animals, we do a ceremony for them. You're taking the animal's life, so it becomes part of what we are. This is important to us. This isn't Disneyland."

I can't help but notice that Coombs's accent often carries echoes of his Boston childhood ("*...paht* of what we *ah*"). When I suggest his speech would never pass muster in a Hollywood movie about Native Americans, he smiles at the memory of a documentary crew that recently asked his help making a film about Wampanoag children at the time of the Pilgrims.

He agreed, with one condition: "I told them they'd also have to show our children today—wearing jeans and sneakers and riding their bikes. I don't want kids to think our children only existed in the past. They are here now, and they're just like any other kids."

A startling discovery

I am walking up The Street, as the one and only avenue in early Plimoth Colony was known. The unpaved, eroded course is flanked by rustic timber houses with thatched roofs. Behind many of them are small gardens, tended by men and women in period dress, diligently digging, hoeing, or pruning.

The original Street lies somewhere below the busy pavement of modern-day Plymouth's Leyden Street. This replica runs up a similar hillside three miles south of the original, through the middle of the reconstructed Plimoth Plantation.

Behind one house I spot a red-bearded man in a bright yellow smock, hard at work.

"I'm hoeing dung," he cheerfully declares with a smile and a lilting British accent.

He tells me he is Edward Winslow, a signatory of the Mayflower Compact, three-time governor of the colony, and author of a seminal Pilgrim account, *Good Newes From New England.*

"We use this dung to fertilize our little garden beds," he says. "But in the fields, for the corn, we use fish, as the Indians showed us. I would not wish to have enough animals to create enough dung to cover our corn fields!"

He chats animatedly about encouraging news from Jamestown and the death of King James. I can tell he could go on all afternoon, but I've been told I'm free to ask the museum's historical interpreters to break character and talk about their real selves—a radical departure from the museum's strict stay-in-character rules. Checking to make sure no other visitors are within earshot, I ask Edward Winslow to re-enter the 21st century.

The twinkle in his eyes remains, but the voice abruptly shifts from 17th-century English to modern-day suburban Bostonian.

View Images

Originally launched from a British shipyard in 1957—a gift to America in gratitude for its sacrifices during World War II—*Mayflower II* returns to Plymouth Harbor August 10. A gala celebration in Boston Harbor had to be scrapped due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Photograph by Scott Eisen, Getty

"I'm from Plymouth," says Joshua Bernard, who started here in 2012 while working his way through the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. "I went to UMass for linguistics, then polished it by doing research while working here."

Bernard explains he's sprinkling his archaic language with a Worcestershire accent. "I had a woman from England go into a full regional dialect with me," he says. "That was a personal win."

Too soon, it's time to let Joshua Bernard return to Edward Winslow. "A pleasure," says the 400-year-old Pilgrim. He turns back to his dung pile.

As I exit through the broad opening in the replica palisade, I notice a loaf-shaped, bark-covered Wampanoag *wetu* house about 20 yards away. New archaeological research suggests the house might belong much closer. (*A newfound survivor camp may explain fate of the famed Lost Colony of Roanoke.*)

Digging at the foot of Burial Hill in 2019, a University of Massachusetts team discovered a line of dark soil that is almost certainly the remains of the colony's original palisade—the first actual remnant of Plimoth ever found. But the most exciting find was hard against the outside of that wall: the remains of what appears to be a Wampanoag tool-making site.

"Literally, these two cultures were living a few feet away from each other," says Jade Luiz, curator of collections at Plimoth Patuxet Museums, where an entire gallery is given to a history of the Wampanoag and their interactions with the Europeans. "That rewrites a lot of what we thought we knew about them."

Baptized in blood

The Wampanoag showed the Pilgrims how to farm New England's thin soil and also traded furs the Pilgrims desperately needed in order to pay their creditors back in London. Beyond that, theirs was a relationship baptized in blood. As part of their mutual defense agreement, the two groups fought side by side against Massasoit's enemies. Pilgrim leaders even lured two men from a rival tribe to a supposed private dinner—and promptly stabbed them both to death.

"Life was brutal," says historian David Silverman, a professor of history at George Washington University and author of *This Land is Their Land*. "If you walked into either the Plymouth colony or a Wampanoag village during the 1600s, the first thing you'd see at the entrance would be severed body parts and decapitated heads."

He does not envy the stewards of Plimoth Patuxet Museums as they try to balance family-friendly experiences with cold-hearted history.

"Good history," he says, "upsets everyone."

The Pilgrim-Wampanoag alliance lasted about 50 years. After the death of Massasoit in 1662, his son Metacom, also known as King Phillip, began to push back against European encroachment. In the course of King Philip's War, from 1675 to 1678, Native Americans raided more than half the European settlements from Connecticut to Maine. The colonists responded by forming an armed militia, the first in colonial history.

In the end, the Europeans prevailed. The systematic conquest of America's Indigenous peoples had begun in earnest.

But is it wrong to memorialize that one bright moment when people of two very different worlds found a way to coexist? Not in the opinion of scholars like John Turner, professor of religious studies at George Mason University and author of *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*.

"When you think about it, 50 years of peace is a pretty long time," says Turner. "Even though the alliance between the Pilgrims and the Wampanoag was one of necessity and not of friendship, it's nevertheless worth celebrating."

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CORONAVIRUS / 2020 ELECTION

Native American Voters In Arizona Showed Up In Force For Biden As COVID-19 Ravaged Tribal Nations

"This is us saying: COVID-19 is a monster that has come into our communities and devastated our people, but we're still going to show up," one citizen of the Navajo Nation told BuzzFeed News.

Clarissa-Jan Lim
BuzzFeed News Reporter

Posted on November 13, 2020, at 2:43 p.m. ET

Native Americans go to vote by horseback at the Navajo County early voting location.
Talia Mayden / HUMAN

This has been a catastrophic year for the Navajo Nation. The coronavirus pandemic has spread like wildfire through the sprawling reservation, infecting thousands and killing hundreds. Still, Diné, the Navajo people, voted in huge numbers this election, and largely in favor of Joe Biden, helping turn Arizona, a longtime deep red state, blue.

For Allie Young, a 30-year-old activist and citizen of the Navajo Nation, it's been emotional to watch her community vote in force despite these challenges.

"I feel the only word that comes to mind is *proud*," she told BuzzFeed News. "Thinking about the pandemic and how we've been impacted because of the decisions from our elected officials — it feels like we put our foot down and we're saying, 'We're gonna be involved in these conversations; we're going to make sure that we

Young, who cofounded Protect the Sacred, a Navajo youth advocacy group, had worked hard to get out the vote in her community. In the weeks leading up to Election Day, she organized several "Ride to the Polls" events to encourage her fellow Diné to go to polling stations on horseback and vote. She was heartened to see dozens of riders join her voting campaign; she was even more appreciative that they were participating in an election that would determine the future of the country in the midst of a pandemic that has ravaged not just her family — her uncle had COVID-19, and several extended family members have died from the virus — but also her people.

"This is us saying: COVID-19 is a monster that has come into our communities and devastated our people — but we're still going to show up, and it's not going to get the best of us," she said.

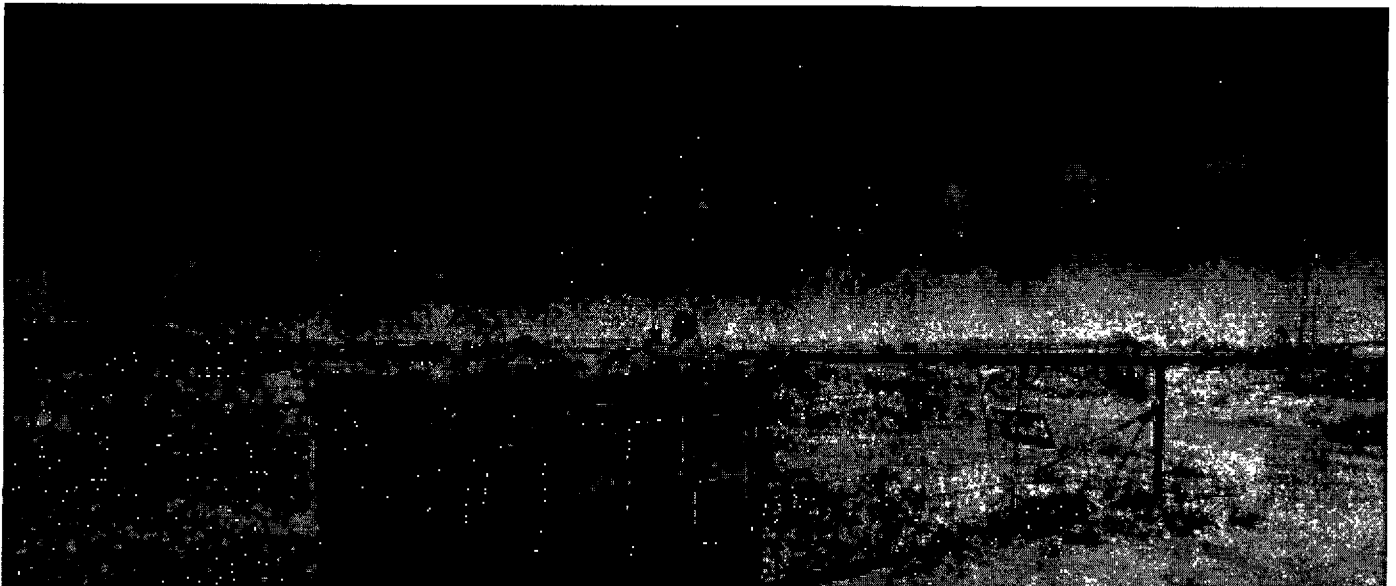
Across Arizona, there have been nearly 270,000 COVID-19 cases and more than 6,200 deaths to date. And Navajo Nation, the biggest Native American reservation in the US, which spans three states — although the majority of its land sits within Arizona's borders — has seen more than 12,000 COVID-19 cases and 596 deaths.

Despite the tribal government imposing some of the country's strictest safety precautions, the Navajo Nation had a higher infection rate per capita than any state in the US in May, including New York, which at the time was the epicenter of the pandemic. Doctors Without Borders, an international organization that sends medical aid to parts of the world stricken by war, famine, and natural disasters, even dispatched a team to the Navajo Nation to help with the crisis.

Now, six months later, the reservation is entering its second wave of the pandemic. Navajo health officials are preparing for "uncontrolled community spread" of the virus, Navajo President Jonathan Nez and the Navajo Health Department's Jill Jim told local news outlet KOAT on election week.

Indian Country as a whole has been hit especially hard by the virus. Served by a chronically underfunded Indian Health Service, a federal agency within the Department of Health and Human Services, tribal governments had to fight to obtain sorely needed COVID-19 funding relief that the Trump administration delayed distributing.

In July, six tribal nations had higher case rates per capita than any US state, according to the UCLA American Indian Studies Center. The virus is especially deadly among older people, a factor that has been particularly destructive considering the role of Native elders as protectors of their cultural knowledge and traditions.



A Biden campaign sign is seen near a spraypainted "VOTE!" sign in Arizona.
Talia Mayden / HUMAN

Many Native American reservations occupy vast, rural swaths of land, and residents often lack access to basic resources like clean water, internet, or reliable transportation. One in three Native Americans live in poverty, and voter turnout among Indigenous voters has historically been lower than that of other racial or ethnic groups, partly due to the burden of casting a ballot.

"If you're Native [on a reservation], you gotta drive 40 miles, and hopefully the ballot will be there, and hopefully it will reach the secretary of state on time," said O.J. Semans, an enrolled member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe in South Dakota and the cofounder of the Native voter advocacy group Four Directions.

People of color across the country have long been disenfranchised at the ballot box, but those issues are "magnified in Indian Country because of the distance, the poverty, the transportation, the roads," he told BuzzFeed News.

Considering the long-standing barriers that Native American voters have faced at the polls, and the added safety fears due to the pandemic, seeing them turn out, especially in Arizona, is nothing short of remarkable, Semans said.

"I'm really happy with the turnout based upon the inconveniences that Natives had to face in order to participate," he said.

Even before Election Day, Arizona was inching toward a milestone: By Oct. 30, the last day of early voting in the state, election officials had received 2.3 million ballots. When Decision Desk HQ called Arizona on Wednesday night, more than 3.3 million votes had been processed — a record number for the state, according to the Arizona secretary of state's election data. The turnout numbers in Arizona were reflected across the country; both Biden and Trump have received more popular votes than any other candidate in history; the president-elect is about 5 million votes ahead of the current president, and his lead is expected to widen as more are tallied.

Allie Young takes a selfie just before casting her ballot at the Navajo County early voting-location.
Talia Mayden / HUMAN

The number of votes processed so far in the three counties where the Navajo Nation is located altogether show that Biden has won by a larger margin than Hillary Clinton did in 2016: He holds a commanding majority of the vote in Apache (more than half of the county is Navajo Nation) and Coconino counties, though Navajo County, where there is a big Mormon population, went to Trump. (The Hopi tribe is also in Apache and Navajo counties.)

It's not just the Navajo Nation, either. Native Americans are spread out in reservations across Arizona, as well as in metropolitan areas, and the results show that they have overwhelmingly voted for Biden.

According to an ABC15 map of the election results by precinct, tribal communities have made up a formidable base of support for Biden in the state. A majority of the blue spots on the map, besides metropolitan areas like Phoenix and Tucson, are where tribal nations are located: Navajo Nation and the Hopi in the northeast, White Mountain Apache and San Carlos Apache tribes in the east, the Pascua Yaqui Tribe outside Tucson, Tohono O'odham Nation (whose sacred burial ground the Trump administration desecrated and blew up to make way for the president's border wall) to the south, Yuma County's Cocopah Indian Tribe and Fort Yuma Quechan Indian Tribe in the southwest, the Hualapai Tribe in the northwest, and the Colorado River Indian Tribes in the west.

With a lot of talk about Native voting in Arizona. I thought I would share 2 maps. The left is a map showcasing all 22 tribes in the state. The right an updated 2020 voting results maps by precinct. This give you an idea of how Indigenous communities voted in the 2020 election.

Shondiin Silversmith' @DiinSilversmith

With a lot of talk about Native voting in Arizona. I thought I would share 2 maps. The left is a map showcasing all 22 tribes in the state. The right an updated 2020 voting results maps by precinct. This give you an idea of how Indigenous communities voted in the 2020 election.

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mail ballots there (though not enough to beat Biden) than he has in other states.

“We have a lot of urban Indians in Maricopa County,” Semans said, pointing to the Indian Health Service office in Phoenix, which oversees programs in Arizona, Nevada, and Utah.

The Native vote, including in the Navajo Nation, is not a monolith; even the Navajo government leaders openly supported different candidates — its president, Jonathan Nez, endorsed Biden, and its vice president, Myron Lizer, endorsed Trump at the Republican National Convention. But Semans said Indian Country tends to lean left despite Democratic candidates historically having ignored and failed Native American voters to their detriment.

“I can tell you that for being the most left out by the Democratic Party, there has been no race more loyal to the Democratic Party,” Semans said. “Throughout Indian Country, they’ve always been Democratic strongholds but completely ignored.”

A lot has been made of Arizona flipping blue in this election. A crucial battleground state, Arizona has long remained just out of reach for Democratic presidential candidates vying for its 11 electoral votes. President Bill Clinton was the last Democratic candidate who won the state during his reelection bid in 1996. "The Grand Canyon State" has since been a reliable stronghold for Republican presidential candidates, including Trump, who beat Hillary Clinton by a 3.5% margin in 2016.

But the state has seen a significant demographic shift in the past few decades, and the population in its cities and surrounding suburban areas has ballooned. Arizona’s Latino population has more than doubled, according to Pew’s numbers; in recent years, grassroots Latino groups, spurred by an opposition to Trump, have built a massive organizing effort to turn out the vote for Biden this year.

Latino voters have been widely and deservedly credited for flipping Arizona blue. But Native American voters in Arizona, which has 22 tribes and the country’s third-highest population of Indigenous people, have also been acknowledged for their role in handing Biden the state.

Young, who is planning a victory horseback ride next week in honor of Biden winning Arizona, said she has never seen Native American voters recognized more by the media and the public than in the past week since the election ended.

“The way that people are thanking Native people [and] the Navajo Nation, which for me is more personal and hits close. It is my home,” she said about voters who lifted Biden to victory in Arizona. “It is emotional for me and my people. We’re always invisible in this country, in our own homelands. So it feels really nice to be acknowledged right now.”

She also wants people to change their notions of who Arizonans are and what they look like — and understand that it’s not just a state where conservative white people go to retire.

“Arizona is filled with so many diverse communities,” she said. “People think Arizona is filled with retired, white conservatives. We’re gonna prove them wrong. We‘re gonna reclaim how we show up to the polls, and we’re gonna reclaim Arizona — because Arizona has Indigenous DNA.” ●

A donkey is guided behind a group of Native Americans on horseback on their way to vote.
Talia Mayden / HUMAN

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