

**NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH**


# MARCH FOR OUR LIVES

**Topic At A Glance**

November is Native American Heritage Month. It celebrates the traditions, languages, and stories of Native Americans including Alaska Natives, Hawaiian Natives, and other Native communities. Not only is culture celebrated, but during this time, Native communities mourn for their lost ones. It is a time to acknowledge Native genocide, history, and embrace their land. Each year, the Department of Interior announces a theme for the month. This year, 2023, the theme is "Celebrating Tribal Sovereignty and Identity". To celebrate, honor, and observe the month, you can visit museums, support businesses, and uplift voices from Native communities. November should not be the only time to acknowledge the existence of Native people. Every single month, every single day, native voices should be uplifted, true history should be taught, and their issues should be advocated for.

**Topic's History**

Native American Heritage Month is a time dedicated to honoring and celebrating the rich history, diverse cultures, and contributions of Native American peoples. The origins of this commemorative month can be traced back to efforts aimed at recognizing and raising awareness about the significant roles played by Native Americans in shaping the nation's history.

- American Indian Day:
  - The first "American Indian Day" was declared by the State of New York in 1916. Other states followed suit, setting aside specific days to acknowledge and celebrate Native American heritage
- Expansion to a Month:
  - The idea of a month-long recognition gained traction in the 1980s. Lobbying efforts by various groups, including the National Congress of American Indians and the American Indian Policy Review Commission, contributed to the establishment of a week-long observance.
- November Designation:
  - President George H.W. Bush approved a joint resolution designating November 1990 as "National American Indian Heritage Month" on August 3, 1990. This marked the first official proclamation of Native American Heritage Month.
- Annual Proclamations:
  - Subsequent presidents continued the tradition by annually proclaiming November as Native American Heritage Month. These proclamations highlight the historical and contemporary contributions of Native Americans to the United States.

**Current News**

Recently in November, the Supreme Court heard the case for upholding the law banning people guilty of domestic violence from bearing dangerous weapons like guns. This case has been pushed all the way to the highest court because of the large conservative backing despite all the negatives it brings upon an already fragmented American society. This case stems from the 2019 case *United States vs Rahimi* where the defendant, Zackey Rahimi, was banned from owning a firearm due to his past history of domestic violence and dangerous misuse of his gun. To list the numerous aggressions he committed: he assaulted his girlfriend in a parking lot, and after realizing that a bystander saw the assault, he fired a gun at the witness and threatened to shoot his girlfriend if she told anyone. He was sentenced in a court order that suspended his license, but he continued to violate it by shooting his firearm in public whenever he felt agitated or things didn't go his way. When he was arrested again he pleaded his case by stating the government was violating his constitutional right to own a gun. Rightfully, the Supreme Court looks poised to strike down this case and uphold the ban on guns for domestic abusers. We should never allow guns to easily fall into the hands of dangerous people we know are violent and rash. This case is an important reminder that there really are people out there who think defending others' Second Amendment rights is more important than keeping the common folk in their communities safe. We, as a community, have to speak out against cases like these where our safety is being encroached so severely.

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**Topic's Relation to Gun Control**

Native Americans have faced countless instances of oppression and violence crossing over centuries. For this month's topic, the relationship it has with gun violence is a very unjust one. Since Colonial America, Native Americans have been forced to assimilate, relocate their tribes, and do many other discriminatory tasks. Often these tasks are violently forced upon these tribes via weaponry. Today, Native American culture is more celebrated and not violently suppressed. Many Native tribes have been paid restitution for the countless lives and traditions that were lost. This obviously can not repay the indescribable treatment that Native American people have had to endure for centuries. So please celebrate the traditions, languages, and stories of Native American, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, and affiliated Island communities and ensure their rich histories and contributions continue to thrive with each passing generation.

**Jason Pero's Story**

In 2017, Jason Pero, a 14-year-old from the Bad River Indian Reservation was shot and killed by a police officer. The story being told is that 911 got a call that there was a knife-wielding man. This call was actually made by Jason himself, Jason gave the police his exact description according to the Cable News Network. After the police Deputy came out he said that "Pero approached him with a large butter knife and refused numerous times to drop the weapon". It was said that Pero lunged at the deputy while he was trying to retreat. After this instance, Deputy, Mr. Djenovich, struck him twice with a bullet. Jason Pero's mom said, "I know that lunging could also mean taking a step. It's all on what words they want to include in their report," Gauthier said. "It's almost like they are trying to make my 14-year-old boy look like a man, and he did not. He had a baby face and a boy's voice." It is so sad how poorly Deputy Mr. Djenovich handled this situation as Jason was just a 14 years old boy.

According to the Cable News Network, there was also a discovery that Jason was despondent a few days before his death but that just proves that the police officer should have handled this better. Jason was just a 14-year-old boy with a large butter knife. There is no justification for the officer's action. Jason deserves justice. March for Our Lives Iowa offers our sincere condolences to Jason Pero's family.



**Resources: CNN & Teen Vogue**

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