

# Native American: Drum Song

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The history of the Native American is a sad one. As the European settlement of North America spread across the land from east to west, the people Columbus named "Indians" were displaced, killed, conquered, shoved aside and forced to abandon their culture.

Those who refused efforts to remake the many tribes into the image of Western European culture's ideal suffered for their tenacity. Although some languages disappeared, efforts to save language began just in time for others.

Cultural history was in danger of disappearing when some recognized the importance of saving knowledge of the traditional ways: of food gathering, artistry, tool making, basketry, regalia and music. Tribal elders taught skills to those who had been encouraged by missionaries and the educational system to turn their backs on all things native.

Nothing can change the history of what has already passed, but a movement is spreading throughout the United States and Canada to restore the pride of Native American culture including the spirituality and respect for the land.

The drums are telling the story. It's okay to be Indian. Native American. Indigenous.

The spiritual life of the Native American recognized the concept of one creator God with reverence and respect for the ways of nature as an integral part of a concept that man was placed on earth to love, respect and take care of the land — to take only what was necessary to sustain life and allow nature to do its work.

"We call the moon grandmother, the sun grandfather," says Vernon Kennedy, a leader in a group that calls itself "All Nations" who is spreading the word that worship

can and should include Native American music, instruments and regalia in spiritual life.

"God is the creator of all things," he says. "All things, hides, wood, sage, come from the creator."

Some have likened God's work through the indigenous people in centuries before European settlement as like God's work through Abraham's people, the Israelites.

European missionaries introduced Christianity. Although many enforced the idea that the Indian should be made over in the likeness of what the Burns Paiute people refer to as "the English-speaking people," today there are those who are stoutly proclaiming that one can be Christian and Indian.

Not all Native Americans accept that idea. The history of the Indian's treatment in the past four centuries has been a history of suppression, of insisting that the Indian adopt new ways and turn away from the old.

Indian children were forbidden to speak the language, forbidden to learn the dances, the songs, the instruments.

Today it is hard for some to accept that Native American songs of worship in a native tongue ac-

companied by the drumbeat of the circle of drummers is acceptable — even desirable Christian activity.

All Nations, a group made up of Paiute, Sioux, Navajo, Cherokee, Apache, Lakota and others who have been accepted to the circle, travel from reservation to reservation holding services of worship and praise with a circle of drums and singing of hymns in English and native languages.

Last spring a morning of drumming and song took place at the Burns Paiute Reservation at Burns. This year All Nations plans to come again.

"It's come as you are. It is okay to wear regalia, beadwork, moccasins," Kennedy says.

It's okay to sing a song in praise of the creator learned from a grandmother who learned those words and that song from a grandmother.

It is okay to fill the air with the aroma of burning white sage.

It is okay to use the expressions of rattle and dance to glorify God.

It is okay to accept Jesus Christ as savior.

It is okay to become one with the heartbeat of the drum.



Photo by PAULINE BRAYMEN

**Circle of the drum**