

Chapter 2

Indigenous Religions of North America

Indigenous Religions of North America

- Very diverse and still largely unknown and violently stereotyped
- Not relics of the past, or vanishing—the most common trope-- but present and dynamic
- Over 700 nations recognized faith followings today in the United States alone

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This photo from 1910 shows several Cheyenne people gathered in preparation for a Sun Dance ceremony.





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Teachings of Native American Religions

- Most teachings in sacred narratives, or myths
- Few religions have creed or statement of belief

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Navajo *hogans* are built to represent the Navajo lands and the cosmos.



Teachings of Mythic Narratives

- Creation Narratives
- Creators and Sacred Power
- Human Origins and Human Ancestors

The Teachings of Mythic Narratives

- Life Lessons
- The Importance of Balance: Humanity and the Natural World
- Sacred Places and Sacred Spaces
- Sacred Language and Sacred Time

The *tipi* is a typical structure of the tribes of the Great Plains that has religious significance. Each *tipi* is an image of the universe. The perimeter of the *tipi* is the edge of the universe, and the lit fire in the center represents the center of all existence.



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The History of Native American Religions

- Diverse individual histories
- Shared of violence and colonial colonization
- Common challenges in the modern colonial period

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In Chichicastengo, Guatemala, Mayan men take part in a religious ceremony where saints are taken to the streets by members of religious brotherhoods.



Changes in the Modern World

- Changes in the Modern World:
 - Conquest, Colonization, and Christianity
 - Resistance Movements
 - Native Religions and non-Native practitioners

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A photograph of Wovoka
(seated).



Native Religions as a Way of Life

- Healing
 - Example: Mabel McKay, Pomo healer
- Rites of Passage
 - Example: Navajo Kinaalda
 - Example: Vision Quests

Native Religions as a Way of Life

- Rites of Renewal
 - Example: Yurok Jump Dance
- Rites of Purification
 - Example: Sweat Lodge Ceremonies

In North American religions from Mexico to Alaska, sweat lodge ceremonies ritually purify and cleanse the body. In these ceremonies, participants build an enclosed structure that is filled with heated stones.



Women and Gender in Native Religions

- Rites of Passage marking womanhood
 - Example: Kinaalda for Navajo young women
- Two-Spirit People

Native Religions and non-Native Practitioners

- Interest in Native Religions
- Reaction to this interest

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Mt. Shasta, in northern California, is regarded as sacred by many tribes in the region.



What Is Ultimate Reality?

- Myths contain sacred knowledge about ultimate reality and the nature of the world.
- The world is believed to have been created by creator deities.
- The entire world, and the many elements within it—including human beings—may be believed to be infused by the spiritual essence of a Supreme Being, or Great Spirit.

How Should We Live in This World?

- Myths provide the foundations for the way people should live their lives.
- Humans are one part of the general order of existence and live in a reciprocal relationship with the land, plants, and other animals.
- Myths teach that it is the responsibility of humans to maintain balance, order, and right relationships with other elements of creation.

What Is Our Ultimate Purpose?

- Some religions focus on humanity's role in maintaining balance with the natural world.
- Maintaining this balance can improve the human condition, and upsetting the balance can have terrible consequences.
- Many Native American religions conceive of life and death to be cyclical in nature.
- In some religions, the deceased transitions to the land of the dead, which may resemble this life.

Standing rock



Comparative Studies of force

