



The
Brinton
Museum

AMERICAN INDIANS: ART, LIFE AND CULTURE



“We Have Always Lived Here”

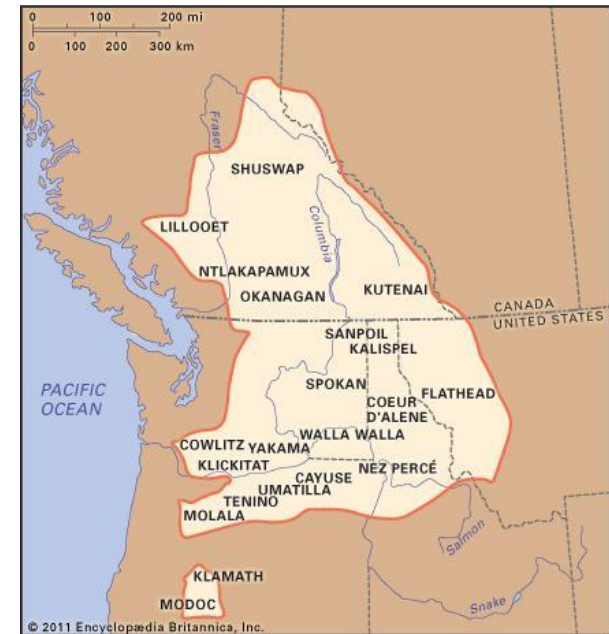
Thousands of years before Christopher Columbus landed in the Caribbean Islands in search of a land called India, Native peoples were inhabiting what is today America. Today, as in the past, Native Americans proudly declare ‘we have always lived here.’ Over the centuries these peoples developed into diverse groups that inhabited specific areas such as the Southeast, the Northwest Coast, the Southwest, the Plains, the Plateau area, and more. We call these peoples American Indians. The Plains is a geographic area that encompasses a region of land from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains, and from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico. The Plateau area extends from the lands between the Rockies and the California Sierra Nevada mountains to the southwest and included parts of Washington, Oregon, Montana, Idaho and California.



The United States is represented by 7 regions:
Northeast, Southeast, Plains, Plateau, Great Basin, Southwest and California



Plains Tribes



Plateau Tribes

The Brinton Museum's American Indians collection of art includes artifacts made by Crow, Northern Cheyenne, Lakota, Kiowa and Apache as well as Blackfeet and Nez Perce Indians. These Indian tribes lived very differently from how we live today. They were a spiritual people who believed the earth, wildlife, trees, plants, rocks, wind and sky possessed sacred powers. All creation was filled with supernatural life often called 'The Spirit World'. Before the arrival of horses, the Plains Indians hunted buffalo on foot with spears, bows and arrows. When the Spanish introduced horses to the continent in the 17th century, Plains Indians became more nomadic and were able to follow the movements of the buffalo over great distances.

What did the buffalo mean to the American Indians?



The Wary Bull, etching by Joel Ostlind, Collection The Brinton Museum

The buffalo blessed the Indian peoples in many ways. The buffalo or bison provided meat for food, hides for covering tipis and making clothes, bones for tools, and horns for dishes and spoons. Buffalo hair was used to make ropes and halters. Every part of the buffalo was used for a purpose. Buffalo hair and horns used as adornment, for example, symbolized bravery and generosity. The buffalo was thought of as 'the ever generous one', and a noble animal. The general term in the Crow or Apsáalooke language for bison is [bishée](#) which some people translate as 'my robe'. The Lakota term for a buffalo bull is [tatanka](#).



A Lakota Woman's Dress for Important Occasions, Collection The Brinton Museum

The bead colors in this beautiful Lakota Woman's Dress that would have been worn for important occasions are representative of blue for a lake, the designs are reflections of clouds and the narrow white band is the shore. The symbolism of the beadwork is known only to the woman who did the beading. The U-shaped design in the center represents a turtle. The Lakota believed that turtles had the power to protect a woman's health.¹ The turtle is considered very sacred in the lives of the Lakotas and Cheyennes. Made of tanned elk hide, beadwork and ribbon this woman's dress is dated around 1910. The Lakota word for dress is

[Cheskasansan ksupi](#)

¹ "Identity By Design: tradition, change, and celebration in native women's dresses", edited by Emil Her Many

Horses, National Museum of the American Indian Smithsonian Institution, 2007



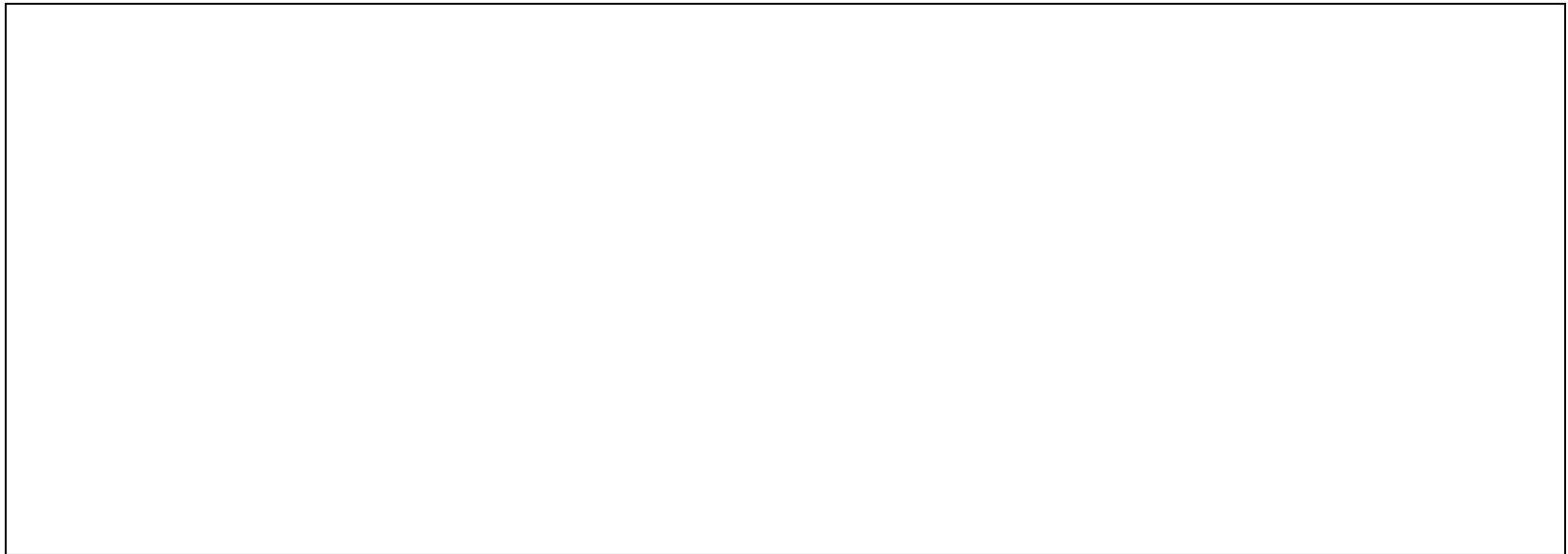
Crow Indian Cradle Board, Goelet and Edith Gallatin Collection, The Brinton Museum

Crow beadwork is considered among the finest of the American Indian peoples. The various colors of the beads represent different elements. This superb beaded cradle board shown here has many beautiful colors. The Crow word for cradle in the Apsáalooke language is [baakáatiche](#), meaning 'good child'. Cradle boards were used to keep a baby safe, secure and close to its mother. A cradle board could be fastened to a mother's back, propped against a rock while she was working, or even strapped to a saddle. They were beautifully decorated to represent the joy and love that surrounds the birth of a child. The cradle board shown here is dated 1880 and is made of various materials that include tanned buffalo hide, deer hide, wool and glass beads.

In American Indian cultures, specific colors are often associated with various things that are considered sacred or that might have spiritual meaning. In Crow beadwork, for example, the color pink represents the first glow of the morning sun. Other colors and their meanings are listed here:

Pink	is the first glow of morning sun
Blue	is the sky
Green	is the earth
Yellow	is the east, most sacred of directions, where the sun rises
White	is considered a sacred color and is often used as a border or outline in a design
Red	is considered a symbol of life

Imagine that you are asked to create a drawing or design that represents an emotion or belief that is sacred to you. What colors would you choose? What would you draw? Explain the meaning of your drawing.





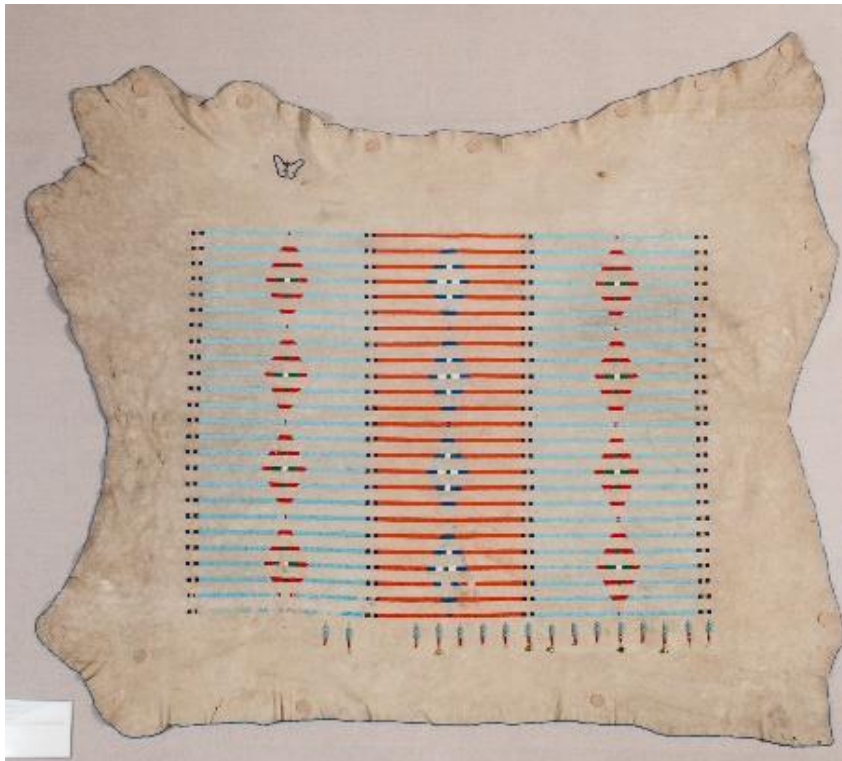
Crow Gun Capturer's Shirt, Goelet and Edith Gallatin Collection, The Brinton Museum

This Crow Gun Capturer's Shirt is an excellent example of beautifully decorated American Indian clothing. The color red is a symbol of life force and is often seen in a capturer's or warrior's shirt. This particular shirt is made of tanned hide, glass beads, porcupine quills, and ermine casings or skins and is dated between 1890 and 1900. The Crow would have called this item **balei'ttaashtee** meaning 'his shirt'.

An Indian warrior needed to accomplish four deeds to earn the right to wear such a shirt. These four deeds are listed here:

- Touching an enemy known as counting coup, up to four warriors could count coup on the same enemy but the honor diminished with each successive coup
- The taking of a gun or bow in hand-to-hand combat without killing the enemy
- Taking a horse from an enemy camp, the horse had to be cut loose to be considered captured otherwise the animal was 'free' and there would be no challenge to the capture
- The leader of a successful war party, this also counted toward the steps of becoming a chief

Have you ever been cold? Wrapping up in a blanket or a robe is a good way to get warm and cozy. That is exactly what the women and girls of the Crow tribe did. They would wrap up in a beautiful robe made of deer or elk skin, decorated with colorful beads like the Crow bridal blanket shown here. The beaded stripes on this robe are symbols representing the flow of power in the Universe—to the north, south, east and west; above and below. The butterfly, with its beauty and delicate movements, symbolizes femininity, speed and flight. Blue, red and yellow evoke the colors of the sky and the summer landscape, reflecting the beauty of the lands given to them by the Creator. The Crow or Apsáalooke term for a woman's or girl's robe is [bishbaalopuuchiukuua](#) which means 'blanket beaded in stripes'. If you could make a beaded robe, what designs and colors might you use and can you explain why?



Crow Woman's Robe, Goelet and Edith Gallatin Collection, The Brinton Museum

The introduction of the horse to the Americas dramatically changed the life and culture of the American Indians. The horse allowed for tribes to be nomadic and follow the movement of the buffalo. Horses were used for hunting and as war ponies as well as pack animals. The Cheyenne bridle shown below dates between 1870 and 1900 and is made of porcupine quills, glass beads, dye and leather. The bit or mouthpiece is made of forged iron. How might this be different or similar to bridles used today? Are modern bridles decorated? What might you see on a typical Western horse bridle?



Cheyenne Bridle, Goelet and Edith Gallatin Collection, The Brinton Museum

The Plains Indians were considered to be excellent horsemen! Men and horses shared sacred power. In preparation for battle, both men and their horses were painted with the same colors and symbols that the Holy Man who painted them had himself received in a dream or vision. A sacred medicine of antelope horn tied to a horse's neck gave the animal speed and 'swiftness of foot' to outrun the enemy and protect the horse from stepping in prairie dog holes. Eagle feathers tied in the horse's tail and mane gave the animal great protective powers. The eagle flies closest to the creator's presence in the heavens. American Indians are deeply spiritual people and often associate particular objects, animals, or spirits with 'powerful medicine'.

The Cheyenne word for bridle is: [H'oxahtsen'aeto'hamestotse](#)



Horse Healer's Coat of Corner of the Mouth

Baleiittaashtaawaaxpeexaapiwaaxpee

Goelet and Edith Gallatin Collection, The Brinton Museum

This magnificent **Horse Healer's Coat** that once belonged to Corner of the Mouth of the Crow Nation is made of buffalo hide, cloth, fur, metal buttons, glass button and sacred red ochre. It is dated ca 1875.

There is a horse track painted in sacred red on the right sleeve of this coat that indicates its use by a horse doctor, a healer and blesser of horses. The most spiritually powerful horse doctors were both healers of sick horses and blessers of horses for battle endowing the horse with protective power and uniting him with his owner in overcoming his enemies.

Summarize in a few words below the importance of the Horse Healer to the Crow people. Why was this spiritually powerful person very important in the tribe?

A warbonnet is another sacred artifact that possesses spiritual powers. The impressive Crow warbonnet shown here was given to Knows His Coups by his Spirit Guardian. It is dated around 1865 and made of antelope hide and horns, red stroud, prairie chicken and magpie feathers, glass beads, brass bells, ribbon and paint. Only the Spirit Guardian who gave this warbonnet to Knows His Coups, Knows His Coups himself, and those to whom he chose to reveal these secrets know the spiritual meaning of this warbonnet, if he shared them with anyone. The Crow or Apsáalooke term for a warbonnet is [ikkúhpawaaxpee](#) which means 'sacred hat'.



(detail)

Crow Warbonnet, Goelet and Edith Gallatin Collection, The Brinton Museum

The trailer is red trade cloth or stroud, red being the most sacred of colors, the life color.



Lakota Possible Bag, Goelet and Edith Gallatin Collection, The Brinton Museum

This beautifully beaded Lakota Possible Bag, or **wizipan**, as it is called in the Lakota language, is dated ca 1885 and made of hide, colorful glass beads and hair. Lakota women are distinguished by the power and beauty of their bold designs as mirrored in this exquisite example of a reservation-era artifact. The Lakota attribute the holy woman, Double Woman, for giving the first designs to the People. The possible bag shown here is made of the soft style and would have been used to store clothing.

Explain how **color** and **composition** are used as strong **design** elements in this artifact? (Example: the geometric shapes and symmetry of pattern create a balanced composition.) Which color do you believe is the more bold, and describe why that color appeals to you.

“Bradford Brinton’s Tipi”, etching by the American artist Joel Ostlind, Collection The Brinton Museum



Bradford Brinton who owned the Quarter Circle A Ranch from 1923 until his death in 1936, owned a tipi that had two colorful images of bees painted on the tipi's exterior, one at each side of the entryway. It has been suggested that the two bees perhaps represent Bradford Brinton's initials, BB. The American artist Joel Ostlind made an original print of Brinton's impressive tipi, preserving this artifact in art.

American Indians preserved their history through oral tradition and the spoken word and also in colorful images painted on walls of rocks or on buffalo robes. Images were also painted or inscribed on tipis, tipi covers and lining as well. Historically, women were in charge of the tipi and anything to do with it. However, it was the men who often decorated the exterior with symbolic images. Beginning in the late 1800s, Indian artists of the Plains Nations also began to record their history through pictures and drawings on the lined pages of ledger books. Storekeepers and merchants as well as military officers recorded the amounts and usage of various provisions such as coffee, flour and sugar, colored cloth, knives, guns and ammunition in ledger books containing sheets of lined paper. These used ledgers were available to the Plains Indians through traders, settlers, military officers, missionaries and U.S. government agents.¹ Ledger books were also commonly captured in battle. Ledger drawings are an important visual record of Plains Indians history.

¹Native Peoples Magazine NATIVE, online article, September/October 2011, *Ledger Art: Looking Between The Lines*, by Gussie Fauntleroy

Can you list two examples of picture books that tell a story?

Draw an image on the ledger sheet that tells a story about an event or experience that you know.

This could be about a sports event where your team won a match. It could be about a fishing or hunting experience, or attending a rodeo. It could tell about a family celebration such as a wedding. It can be something as simple as stargazing or hiking in the mountains. It is a story told or illustrated in art through visual shorthand, symbols and colors.

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My visit to The Brinton Museum:

List three of your favorite pieces in the American Indian exhibit and explain why you chose these items:

- 1
- 2
- 3

Describe what these items were used for:

Can you name objects in today's world that correspond to your three favorite artifacts? (Example, a beaded possible bag might have a similar use today as a tote bag or storage box.)



Lakota Woman's Ceremonial Dress



Lakota Possible Bag



Plains Indians Warbonnets



Cover: Kiowa Girl's Dress; Crow Warbonnet; *The Indian Soldier*, attributed to Frederic Remington

The Brinton Museum

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Forrest E. Mars, Jr. Building