



Images from the 2022 Gather of Nations, Albuquerque

Gathering of Nations Pow Wow

Celebrated April 27-29

~Written by Lea Ann Turner

Growing up in New Mexico, many of my classmates and school staff were part of the Apache, Navajo, and various Pueblo tribes of Native Americans. One of the traditions in my elementary school was the annual Pow Wow celebrated every April. I remember it as a fun feast of colors, sounds, and culture. It was a beautiful introduction to a heritage different from my own.

As an adult, these memories are rich, and I appreciate that tribal members let me dance and drum with them as part of learning about their culture. As we celebrate diverse cultures, equity, and inclusion, I found myself wanting to know more about the history and purpose of Pow Wow celebrations.



What is a Pow Wow?

I asked GPT, “What is a Native American Pow Wow?” and it synthesized many of the thoughts and ideas I found in my research across the various tribes.

According to Chap GPT,

“A Native American Pow Wow is a cultural gathering that is held by indigenous people of North America, in the United States and Canada. It is a celebration of indigenous traditions, culture, and spirituality, and it typically involves singing, drumming, dancing, and feasting.

The word "Pow Wow" comes from the Algonquian language and originally referred to a healing ceremony. Over time, the term has come to refer to a larger cultural event that brings together people from various Native American tribes.

At a Pow Wow, dancers and drummers from various tribes come together to perform in traditional regalia. Each dance has its own unique style and meaning, and dancers may compete for prizes. The drummers provide the rhythm and songs for the dancers, and their music is considered the heartbeat of the Pow Wow.

In addition to the dancing and drumming, Pow Wows often feature arts and crafts vendors, food booths, and other activities that celebrate Native American culture. Pow Wows are important events for many Native

American communities, and they are often open to the public so that others can learn about and appreciate their traditions.”

The History of the Pow Wow

Ohio University Professor, Jamie K. Oxendine of the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina, provides some more historical insight into the history of the Pow Wow.

“The modern-day Pow Wow evolved from the Grass Dance Societies that formed in the early 19th Century. The Grass Dance Societies were an opportunity for the warriors to re-enact deeds for all the members of the Tribe to witness.

The removal period increased the growth of the reservations, and this soon gave rise to the modern powwow. This transition for Native Americans often put tribes at odds with other tribes they did not know and many tribes that were bitter enemies found themselves very close neighbors. A compromise and compilation of traditions had to take place in order for the people to survive.

Many ceremonies and customs were outlawed during the reservation period. The Grass Dance being more social was one of the only events allowed. As so many Tribes were pushed together it was soon clear and necessary to transfer the traditions of the Grass Dance between tribes. “Inter-Tribalism” began to emerge with the sharing of songs, dances, clothing, food and art.

Gift giving and generosity became integral aspects of these early festivities, and they are still with us today. Over time the phrase “Pow Wow” as a term for meeting or gathering became very popular and has been used widely to describe the cultural event since the mid-20th Century.”

The Gathering of Nations

The largest Pow Wow in North America is the Gathering of Nations held in Albuquerque, New Mexico, the fourth weekend of April every year. Over 3,000 singers and dancers from 565 tribes from across the United States and Canada participate and attendance during the 3-day event exceeds 70,000.

Flint Carney, a long-time friend and member of the Kiowa tribe, said, “The greatest thing about the Gathering of Nations is the respect that is shown to all Native people of the world. This is the way of Pow Wow life and teachings, which are provided and handed down from the elders to the younger generations. The Gathering of Nations experience does not end when you leave and head for home, but rather continues in your heart and mind, remains with you down the road to the next event, powwow or your family gathering(s).”

To learn more, visit the [Gathering of Nations website](#).

Sources

(ChatGPT, personal communication, April 6, 2023)

Oxendine, J. K. (2023, March 27). *History of the Powwow* | Origin & Background | Native American.

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