

Native American Giving and Sharing

The Native American tradition of giving and sharing was a communal practice and expectation. Historically, the Native Americans demonstrated good character by helping European settlers survive the harsh winters with gifts of food, extracting medicines from plants, and teaching them planting techniques. Assisting European settlers was an act of kindness. The Native American life set a high priority on the idea of sharing and doing things for the good of the community. Material goods were not considered a status of wealth, but as an opportunity to give back to the community. Sharing was a way of life.

The Tlingit Indians of Alaska shared their possessions at potlatches. When an important clan member died, his possessions were given away to guests who helped arrange services during the clan member's time of passing. This tradition is still practiced at Tlingit potlatches. This tradition of giving is seen as an investment for the future. In time the possession will be returned to the community for another to use. The goal of the Tlingits was not to compare or gather possessions, but to receive and distribute them to others.

Native Americans looked beyond the present day and were aware of the community's future needs. Careful planning of funds and the education of their children helped their traditions to continue. The Native American traditions of giving were maintained by investing and reinvesting in funds in order to benefit future generations. Also ensuring the future traditions for gift giving and sharing were the ideas of caring for the children within the community. It was a shared responsibility in the Native American community to raise the children. As part of their education, the values of giving and sharing were transmitted to each child in the Native American community. Many Native American groups believed raising the children, planting crops, and irrigating plantings was everybody's work. In the Cherokee culture, the community would assemble for help projects. The actions of the Native Americans preserved the philanthropic ideas of their forebears and projected their traditions of giving to the future.

