Smithsonian

AMERICANS

The Smithsonian exhibit is coming to Michigan in 2026!
Apply by November 13, 2025, to bring it to your community.

About the Exhibit:

Based on a major exhibition at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, DC, the Museum on Main Street exhibit, *Americans*, explores how deeply intertwined Native Americans are in the culture of the United States. Michigan Humanities is coordinating the exhibit's tour throughout Michigan, happening September 2026 through June 2027.

Native Americans are less than 1 percent of the population, yet images of them are everywhere. From imagery on commercial products and professional and high school sports mascots, to classic Westerns and episodes of Seinfeld and South Park, we are surrounded by Native American imagery. Indigenous names are everywhere too, from state, city, and street names to the Tomahawk missile.

How is it that Native Americans can be so present and so absent in American life? Pervasive, powerful, at times demeaning, the images, names, and stories reveal the deep connection between Americans and Native Americans. Native Americans have been embedded in unexpected ways in the history, pop culture, and identity of the United States. The exhibition highlights the ways in which they have been part of the nation's identity since before the country began and offers a new way of understanding a few familiar events:

- Thanksgiving was a modern invention.
- Pocahontas was a key figure in the country's founding.
- The Trail of Tears was a vast national project that reshaped the entire country.
- Little Bighorn was the moment when, after killing 200 American soldiers, Native Americans became the country's unofficial mascots.

Americans surrounds visitors with images and objects from popular culture and delves into these historical events. The exhibition invites visitors to explore this complicated history and to share local stories about Native American history and culture and identity.

Host Sites Receive:

- The exhibit rent-free for 6 weeks.
- Free exhibit shipping.
- Resources, educational, and promotional materials.
- Program planning assistance from Michigan Humanities and Smithsonian staff.
- Access to a statewide network of experts for consultation, presentations, and programming.

MIHumanities

How to Become a Host Site:
Michigan Humanities invites museums, libraries, nature centers, and other nonprofit cultural organizations to apply. Visit www.michiganhumanities.org for more information.

Eligible Applicants Must:
- Be located in a community with a population below 20,000.
- Identify a staff member to serve as project director for the exhibit and related programs.
- Provide a minimum of 800 square feet of climate-controlled, secure exhibit space.
- Exhibit spaces must have strong internet connectivity.
- Have a minimum of 100 square feet of storage space for crates.
- Work within guidelines to install and de-install the exhibit in the time frames provided.
- Track attendance, maintain budget records, submit assessment forms, and submit final program reports.
- Have convenient hours that are free and open to the public.
- Have two staff members attend a virtual training in April 2026 AND an installation workshop at the first host site, September 9–10, 2026.

Applicants Are Encouraged To:
- Collaborate with community partners to develop robust programs that support the exhibit which can include an opening event, multiple programs throughout the duration of the exhibit, and complimentary local exhibit.
- Conduct a public relations or marketing campaign to ensure widespread community participation.

What's Included:
- Stand-alone exhibit kiosks and panels
- Photographs, text panels, and objects
- Audio and video clips
- Hands-on activities
- Exhibition support materials

Available Dates:
- September 12-October 24, 2026
- October 31-December 12, 2026
- December 19, 2026-January 30, 2027
- February 6-March 20, 2027
- March 27-May 8, 2027
- May 15-June 26, 2027

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Questions?
Contact James Nelson, Director of Grants
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