

*Kent County Cultural Insight Council  
Cultural Awareness Book Club Presents:*

*BURY MY HEART AT  
WOUNDED KNEE*

***Ethnic Enlightenment***

**NATIVE AMERICANS**

**Countries or Regions of Origin:** Great Lakes region of the United States and Canada

**Languages Spoken:**  
Anishinabemowin, a Central Algonkian language with different dialects and variations by tribe; English



**Geography and Politics:** The Ojibway, Odawa, and Potawatomi belong to a traditional alliance known as the “People of the Three Fires.” These bands lived around the Great Lakes region at the time of initial exploration and settlement by non-native Europeans. In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the American government signed a series of treaties with the Odawa and Ojibway, granting them land reservations and other rights, and opening their territories to non-native American settlers. Many of the Potawatomi of Michigan were forcibly relocated to the Great Plains, but others managed to remain or return. Today there are 12 federally recognized tribes within Michigan, all originating from the Odawa, Ojibway, and Potawatomi nations. Across the United States, there are more than 500 federally recognized tribes.

**Leaving and Arriving:** While the majority of Native Americans in West Michigan today are members of or trace their lineage to the indigenous nations of this region, there are also Native Americans representing many other tribal backgrounds who have moved to the region.

**Settlement in West Michigan:** West Michigan’s Potawatomi people live mostly in the southwest portion of the state, from Grand Rapids south to the Indiana border, with concentrations in the Niles – Dowagiac, and Hastings – Gun Lake areas. Bands of Odawa and Ojibway were traditionally located in the river valleys north of the Grand River and surrounding the Grand Traverse and Little Traverse Bays. Today many also live in West Michigan’s urban centers.

**Population Size:** In the 2000 census 6,302 people claimed Native American descent in Kent County, followed by 2,897 in Muskegon County and 2,789 in Kalamazoo County. 32,321 people claimed Native American descent throughout the 28 counties of western Michigan.