

LOCKE LORD DIVERSITY AWARENESS

November 2016: National American Indian Heritage Month

After nearly a century of advocacy, National American Indian Heritage Month was first recognized through joint resolution by Congress in 1990. Now recognized annually, November is a time to recognize the native peoples of America who have been an integral part of the American character and to learn more about their history, achievements and heritage history. Here are a few examples of how Native Americans contribute to the legal community:



Billy Michael Burrage is a former U.S. District Judge for the Eastern, Northern and Western Districts of Oklahoma, and a member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. He was one of the first Native Americans to be appointed as a federal judge, nominated by President Bill Clinton in 1994, until his resignation in 2001. He became the Chief U.S. District Judge for the Eastern District of Oklahoma in 1996. During his legal career, Judge Burrage has been committed to the Native American community. As a member of the Choctaw Nation, Judge Burrage acted as a tribal counsel for three years. His dedication to the community also carried into his private practice, where he represented those affected by gambling issues on reservations.



Diane J. Humetewa serves as a federal judge for the U.S. District Court of Arizona, and is a member of the Hopi Tribe located in northeastern Arizona. On May 14, 2014, Judge Humetewa was confirmed as a federal judge making her the first Native American woman federal judge in U.S. history and the third Native American to ever hold such a position. Prior to becoming a federal judge, Judge Humetewa served as the U.S. Attorney for the District of Arizona from December 2007 to August 2009. She was the first Native American female to be presidentially appointed to that position, where she presided over one of the largest U.S. Attorney Offices with one of the highest caseloads in the nation. Judge Humetewa is considered a national expert on Native American legal issues and has instructed law enforcement and prosecutors. Judge Humetewa served as counsel to the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, as a judge pro tem on the Hopi Tribal Appellate Court, and as an ad hoc member of the Native American Subcommittee of the U.S. Sentencing Commission.



Stacy L. Leeds is the Dean of the University of Arkansas Law School and is a citizen of the Cherokee Nation. Leeds is the first Native American woman to serve as dean of a law school and was the first woman to serve on the Cherokee Nation Supreme Court. She has served as a judge for seven tribal courts, as a director of the Tribal Law and Government Center at Kansas Law School, a director of the Northern Plains Indian Law Center at the University of North Dakota School of Law and a commissioner of the Secretarial Commission on Indian Trust Administration and Reform.



Frank Howell Seay was a federal judge on the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Oklahoma. Judge Seay was nominated by President Jimmy Carter in 1979 and served as Chief Judge from 1980 to 1996. He assumed senior status on Sept. 25, 2003. Judge Seay's dedication to improving his community is evident by his service as President for the Seminole County Bar Association and as a member of the Oklahoma Uniform Criminal Jury Instruction Commission. In 2002, Judge Seay became a member of the U.S. Judicial Conference, becoming the first Native American to serve on the Conference.

Frank Howell Seay did not learn of his heritage until he was in his 50s and already on the bench. His paternal grandfather was a full-blooded Native American. As a federal judge, he was recognized for reversing the rulings that led to the unjust convictions of two men in Pontotoc County, Oklahoma. The John Grisham book, *The Innocent Man: Murder and Injustice in a Small Town*, depicts the story.



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