

## NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH



Included in this document are several biographies of Native American heroes of the LGBT community. There is also a timeline of LGBT Native American history in the United States.

# Native American Heroes of LGBT Community

### PURPOSE

To learn from the diverse stories of extraordinary Native American people who have made significant contributions to American life and culture.

### ACTIVITY

Read the portraits of each hero and examine the details of the story.

There are 9 heroes chosen for each heritage/awareness/history month. Have the students read the portraits of each hero and examine the details of the story. Then generate discussion about the heroes. Some potential themes to explore, and relevant discussion questions, include:

### DIVERSITY

- Why do you think it's important to celebrate National Native American Heritage Month?
- Does the list of heroes reflect the diversity of the community/population being celebrated during the month?
- Are there similarities between the heroes? What themes, qualities or traits do you notice?

### HEROIC QUALITIES

- Why do you think each individual is selected as a hero?
- What makes a person a hero?
- Do any of the heroes surprise you? Why or why not?

### RACE/ETHNICITY

- How do you think the hero's ethnicity or race impact their story?
- How might being a LGBT/Two-Spirit person who is also Native American change their understanding of their identity?

### INSPIRATION

- There are two quotes included with the heroes. What do you think each of these are saying?
- How do the quotes relate to the hero's story? Their LGBT/Two-Spirit, Native American or professional identity?

### INTERSECTIONALITY

- What do you think it would feel/look/sound like to identify with a culture that has created space for people to identify as Two-Spirit?
- What can our GSA learn from the Native American/Two-Spirit community?
- What lessons can we incorporate into our own GSA to make our GSA even more inclusive of various identities?

## Native American Heroes of LGBT Community

Susan Allen



Susan Allen is one of the first openly lesbian Native Americans to be elected to the state legislature. She grew up on Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota, where her father was a member, though her family moved around frequently as her father was an evangelical priest. Susan received a BA in Economics from Augsburg College, earned her law degree from the University of New Mexico Law School and an LL.M from William Mitchell College of Law. In 1997, she began working as an attorney, with a focus on tribal and tax law and in 2004 was made partner. As a member of the Minnesota Democratic Farmer Labor Party, she ran for a vacant seat in the Minnesota House of Representatives. She was elected in 2011 and re-elected the following year. She is Lakota, Dakota, and Anishinabe and currently a member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, where her mother was born and raised. Susan was strongly influenced by the American Indian Movement and has been a strong advocate for reducing discrimination and gaps in equality for Native people.

Cheyenne Jackson



Cheyenne Jackson is an openly gay actor and entertainer known for his performances on Broadway and on various television shows. Born in Idaho, his father was Native American and an evangelical Christian, which caused a disruption in their relationship when he came out at 19. He worked as an ad executive while doing regional theater to earn his Equity card. He moved to New York and began as an understudy on Broadway, before being cast in the off-Broadway production of *Altar Boyz*. In 2005, he got his break on Broadway as Chad in *All Shook Up*, which was followed by the lead role of Sonny in *Xanadu*. Cheyenne has also had numerous film roles, including playing hero Mark Bingham in *United 93*, *Hysteria*, and the soon to be released biopic *Liberace*, and television guest spots on *Glee*, *30 Rock*, and *Ugly Betty*. Cheyenne is a talented singer, who has had two shows at Carnegie Hall, including his one man show, *Cocktail Hour: Music of the Mad Men Era*. Cheyenne is an active supporter of LGBT rights, an international ambassador for amfAR, and a national spokesperson for the Hetrick-Martin Institute. He was named one of Out's People of the Year and won a Theatre World Award for Outstanding Broadway Debut.

Beth Brant



Beth Brant is a literary critic, writer, theorist, and activist. Born to Scottish-Irish and Mohawk parents, Beth grew up on the border area of Ontario and Michigan. Her writing career began at the age of 40, when while driving with her partner she noticed a bald eagle who gave her the message that she was to be a writer. She went home to start writing and was published for the first time later that year. Since then, she has produced several books of poems, narratives, and essays, as well as anthologies of Native writing. Her works delve into issues of nationality, sexuality, class, and experiences of oppression and include *Mohawk Trail*, *Food and Spirits*, and *Writing as Witness: Essay and Talk*. She has also been a lecturer for creative writing at the University of British Columbia and the University of Toronto. Beth has won several awards, including the Creative Writing Award from the Michigan Council for the Arts, a grant from the Ontario Arts Council, a National Endowment for the Arts, and the Canada Council Award in creative writing.

## Chrystos



Chrystos, who identifies as Two-spirit, and is a poet, artist, and activist, with Menominee ancestry. She was born and raised in San Francisco and her writing and identity have been shaped by her urban experience. She began working as a home caretaker and was engaged in activism, fighting against injustices and for land and treaty rights for the Native community. Chrystos began publishing in anthologies and in 1988, released *Not Vanishing*, a book of poetry that seeks to dispel stereotypes of Native people and to illustrate issues of class, gender, and colonialism that have impacted the Native American community. Throughout her writing career she has continued to advocate for and empower Native Americans to reconnect to their heritage and culture. She won the Audre Lorde International Poetry Competition in 1994, and the following year, the Sappho Award of Distinction from the Astraea National Lesbian Action Foundation.

**“ I don’t think any one person, whether artist or not, has been given permission by anyone to put the responsibility of the way things are on anyone else.”**

— Robert Rauschenberg

## Felipe Rose



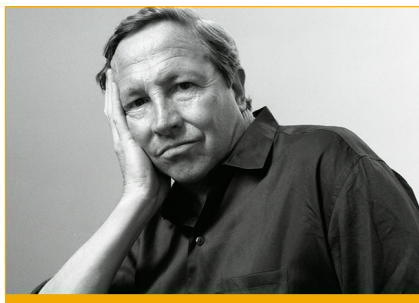
Felipe Rose is a musician, activist, and performer, most famous for being an original member of the *Village People*. Born and raised in Brooklyn, he lived with his Puerto Rican mother and Lakota Sioux father. He has been called a “shadow walker,” a Native term for people walking in two worlds. He began dancing at a young age and was awarded a scholarship with the Ballet de Puerto Rico at the age of 16, where he went on to dance at the Lincoln Center to rave reviews. Felipe’s paternal aunt suggested that he embrace his Native heritage, which had a strong influence on his dress and dance. The exploration of his culture led him to be identified and recruited for what would later become the *Village People*. While the other members were being auditioned, Felipe went to Paris to choreograph a native dance number at the Crazy Horse Saloon. The *Village People* had several hits, most notably *Macho Man* and *Y.M.C.A.* and a few movies, including *Can’t Stop the Music*. Felipe stayed with the band for 30 years, worked in theatre, and developed a solo career, and for the latter was nominated for three Native American Music Awards. Felipe has raised millions of dollars for various Native American, music, and AIDS charities, and has started his own recording company, the Tomahawk Group.

## Jack Jackson, Jr.



Jack Jackson, Jr. is an attorney and registered Democrat serving on the Arizona Senate. Born in the Navajo Nation, Jack received his J.D. from Syracuse University in 1989. Upon graduation he moved to D.C. where he spent twelve years advocating for tribal nations and organizations, and served as Deputy Director for the Navajo Nation, Legislative Analyst at the National Indian Education Association, and as Director of Governmental Affairs for the National Congress of American Indians. In 2002, Jack returned to Arizona where he won a seat in the state House of Representatives. After his first term, the governor appointed him as Executive Director of the Arizona Commission of Indian Affairs. Five years later, Jack was elected to the Arizona Senate. Jack currently serves on the boards of the Navajo Gaming Enterprise, Phoenix Body Positive, Arizonans for Cultural Development, and the National Native American AIDS Prevention Center and was appointed by Presidents Clinton and Obama to the President’s Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS. Presently, Jack works for Blue Stone Strategy Group, a Native-owned consulting firm which advocates for strengthening sovereignty and fostering self-efficacy among tribal businesses. Jackson and his husband became married in Del Mar, CA, before the passing of Prop 8.

## Robert Rauschenberg



Robert Rauschenberg was an artist and painter of Cherokee, German, and Anglo-Saxon descent. Born in Texas, Robert went into the military where he discovered his artistic talents. He began studying in Paris, but soon moved to North Carolina to attend Black Mountain College. Robert left for New York where he studied at the Art Students League. He had his first solo show in 1951 at the Betty Parsons Gallery. In 1984, he began his Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange at the United Nations, through which he visited ten countries in seven years. He created and left a piece of art in each location, influenced by its local culture, in order to increase world peace and understanding. The Robert Rauschenberg Foundation was founded in 1990 to promote world peace and awareness about the environment and humanitarian issues. Robert also founded Change, Inc. to provide grants to visual artists. Robert won a Grammy Award for best album package for his design of a Talking Heads album in 1983 and the National Medal of Arts in 1993. The Guggenheim Museum had a retrospective of his work in 1998.

## Max Wolf Valerio



Max Wolf Valerio, a transgender male Blackfoot American Indian / Latino, is a Sephardic Jewish poet and is also known for his careers in performing and writing. Max's work has been recognized by poets such as Adrienne Rich and Allen Ginsberg, and has appeared in acclaimed collections such as *This Bridge Called My Back*. He is influenced by diverse spiritualities, from Afro-Caribbean to American Indian philosophies and has an ongoing interest in feminism. Max's book, *The Testosterone Files: My Hormonal and Social Transformation from Female to Male* has been instrumental in informing readers about one person's FTM transitioning process. The book highlights Valerio's honesty regarding gender, identity, and self perception, which comprise the core of this personal and absorbing narrative. Max has also appeared in several documentaries, including *Gendernauts*.

## Paula Gunn Allen



Paula Gunn Allen was a poet, professor, literary critic, and activist of Laguna, Sioux, Scottish, and Lebanese descent. Born and raised in New Mexico, Paula attended the University of Oregon for her BA and MFA, and received her PhD from the University of New Mexico. She wrote 17 books of stories, poems, essays and novels, including *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*, which were often influenced by cultural traditions and stories and her own struggles being of mixed race. Paula was one of the foremost scholars of Native American literature and had a deep interest in Native American spirituality and tradition. Paula has received numerous awards for her work including: an American Book Award, the Native American Prize for Literature, the Susan Koppelman Award, the Lannan Foundation Fellowship, and a Lifetime Achievement Award by the Native Writers' Circle of the Americas. She also received a Pulitzer Prize nomination for *Pocahontas: Medicine Woman, Spy, Entrepreneur, Diplomat*.

**“ I reflect the great diversity of our district, as a Native American woman and a member of the LGBT community, and hope to bring this important voice to the state capital to offer more balanced, representative contributions and input.”**

– Susan Allen

