

WHERE WE BELONG | BY MADELINE SAYET

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WHERE WE BELONG

BY MADELINE SAYET

February 15 to March 10 at The Folger Shakespeare Library

INDIGENOUS HISTORY AND LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION IN DC

This special installation highlights the history of local Indigenous tribes, Algonquian and Powhatan vocabulary, and how you can support language reclamation efforts.

Created in consultation with Dr. Buck Woodard (College of William & Mary)



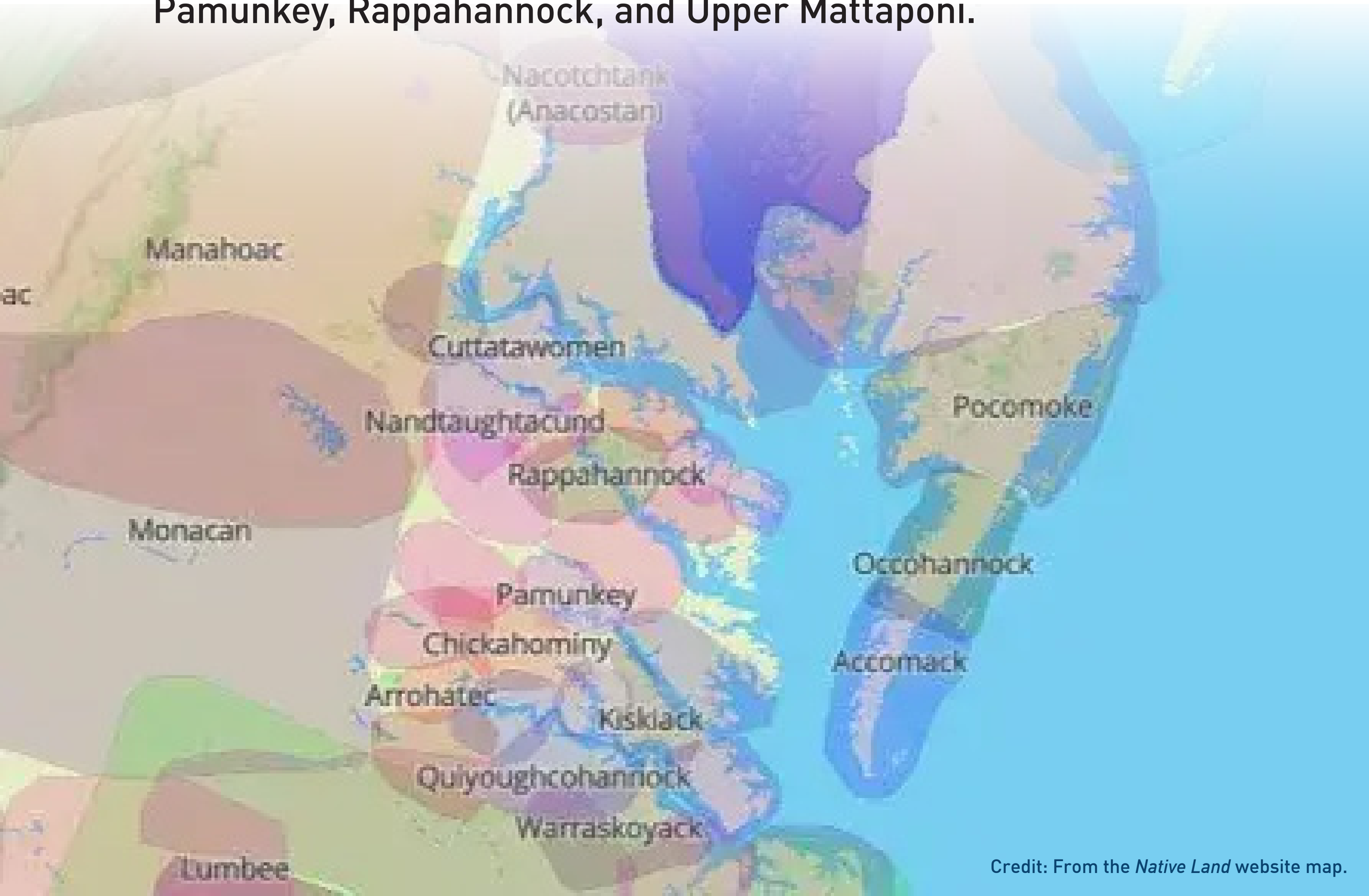
Credit: Madeline Sayet in *WHERE WE BELONG*. Photo by John Burkland (Zanni Productions)

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HISTORY

Indigenous people have lived in the area now known as Washington, D.C. for thousands of years. **The District, eastern Maryland, and Northern Virginia (DMV) are the original homelands of Algonquian speakers, including the powerful Pamunkey, Patawomeck, and Piscataway chiefdoms.**

Farther west and to the north were Iroquoian- and Siouan-speaking peoples, including the Susquehannock, Saponi, and Tutelo. Today, descendants of these Native peoples remain in the southern Mid-Atlantic. The state of Maryland formally recognizes three tribes, the Piscataway, Piscataway-Conoy, and Accohannock. The Commonwealth of Virginia has four state-recognized tribes: the Cheroenhaka Nottoway, Mattaponi, Nottoway, and Patawomeck. In addition to these communities, The United States government federally acknowledges the Chickahominy, Eastern Chickahominy, Monacan, Nansemond, Pamunkey, Rappahannock, and Upper Mattaponi.





By the end of the 16th century, these and various other tribes thrived in the region, creating a robust trading economy and stewardship of the land and its resources. There were roughly 40 named groups in the DMV area with the Piscataway and Pamunkey being two of the largest. **The Piscataway capital, Moyaone, was located in what is now present-day Accokeek, Maryland.** As Dr. Elizabeth Rule explains, “The Piscataway, an Algonkian people, migrated to this western Chesapeake territory after splitting from the Lenni Lenape and Nanticoke further north. **Governed by a tayac, or chief, the Piscataway confederacy included multiple subtribes, allying Anacostan, Portobac, Nanjemoy, and potentially more, all centered around Moyaone.** The Anacostan, also known as Nacotchtank or Nacotchanke, established their primary village in present-day Southeast DC near Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling, along the eastern shore of the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers.”¹

The Pamunkey Chiefdom, also known by the name of their great chief Powhatan, was centered in what is now Virginia on the James and York rivers adjacent to the Chesapeake Bay. Today, their reservation lands are on the Pamunkey River in King William County, Virginia.

The arrival of the Europeans in the 1500s and their subsequent colonization of the area introduced diseases that, in combination with seizures of land and violence, resulted in the decimation of the Indigenous population in the area. By the late 1600s, only 10% of the original communities remained, in part pushed out due to King Charles's deeding of their land to Lord Baltimore in 1632. Many Natives left the region to merge with other tribes, particularly in Pennsylvania, Michigan, the Carolinas, and Canada.² The centuries of oppression and loss resulted in an incalculable loss of life and community. By the early 1800s, only 25 piscataway individuals remained near their reservation lands.

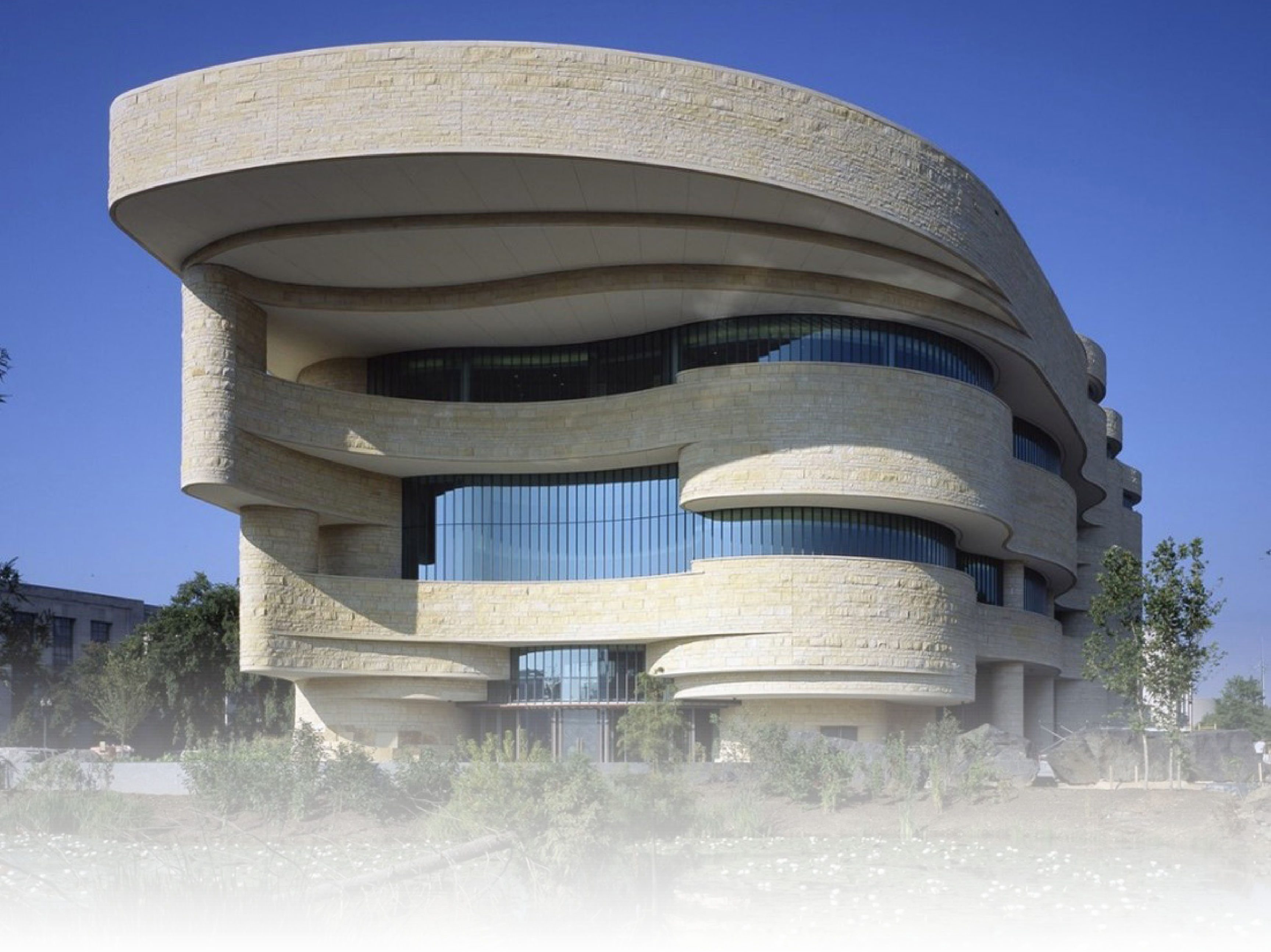
²Rule, Elizabeth. *Indigenous DC: Native Peoples and the Nation's Capital*. Georgetown University Press, 2023. 3.



The 1960s and 70s saw the rise of the Pan-Indian movement, which focused on cultural and political revitalization. In the DMV region, “community leaders Billy Tayac, Turkey Tayac, and Avery Wind Rider chartered the Piscataway Conoy Indians, Incorporated, in 1974 as a tribal service organization that welcomed Piscataway descendants, Indigenous peoples affiliated with other tribes, and non-Native allies into its ranks.”³ **This movement eventually led to the protection of the sacred site of Moyaone**, the gathering of historical documents regarding oral and written traditions of area tribes, and the state of Maryland officially recognizing both the Piscataway Indian Nation and Piscataway Conoy Tribes. **In 2016, The Pamunkey tribe gained federal recognition and currently has over 400 tribal members.** As of 2021 data, 0.36% of DC residents identify as American Indian/Alaskan Native and 0.07% identify as Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander.⁴

In addition to the tribes that call Washington, D.C. and the surrounding region home, the city has also served as a major meeting place for tribes to gather and to petition the federal government. Tribal representatives have traveled to D.C. to advocate for their people for centuries and in the 20th and 21st centuries have participated in major acts of activism such as the occupation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs to advocate for tribal sovereignty, The Cowboy and Indian Alliance's Reject and Protect action to stop the Keystone XL Pipeline, the Oceti Sakowin Youth and Allies Relay Run to Washington to protest the Dakota Access Pipeline, the Native Nations Rise March, and the Change the Name campaign to petition Washington's football team name, among many more.





The District remains a key meeting place for advocacy, activism, and learning. **In 2004, The National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) opened in Washington, D.C. as a result of the National Museum of the American Indian Act, which in addition to creating the museum, requires that any objects and human remains be considered for repatriation to tribes.** The primary location of the museum is on the National Mall, with secondary locations at The George Gustav Heye Center in New York and The Cultural Resources Center in Maryland. In 2009, The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) opened the Embassy of Tribal Nations in Washington D.C. to serve as a central meeting place for political advocacy for the organization.

LANGUAGE

The influence of Indigenous nations has deeply shaped Washington D.C., as the names of many streets, parks, and bodies of water come from the Virginia Algonquian language:

- **POTOMAC:** “an Algonquian word whose meaning relayed the river’s significance as a trading hub.”⁵
- **CHESAPEAKE:** “**Chesepiooc,**” an Algonquian word for village at a big river.
- **ANACOSTIA:** “**Anaquashetanik,**” an Algonquian word meaning “town of traders” which was written as Nacotchtank by Europeans and then anglicized over time into Anacostia.

ALGONQUIAN

The Algonquian family is named for the Algonquin language, used by groups of Native peoples Indigenous to the lands around the St. Lawrence River. Algonquian is divided into Eastern, Central, and Plains language groups. These languages are characterized by a strong focus on verbs and complex syllable stress.

FOR EXAMPLE, NIBÌ (WATER) WOULD HAVE THE STRESS NIBÌ, WITH THE EMPHASIS LANDING ON THE Ì.

Cree, Ojibwe, and Shawnee are part of the Central Algonquian branch and encompass a number of subgroup languages and dialects. Some Central Algonquian speakers refer to themselves as **Omàmiwinini or Anicinàpe**. Virginia Algonquian is part of the Eastern Algonquian subgroup and is related to other Eastern Algonquian languages like Abenaki, Lenape, and Massachusett.

POWHATAN (VIRGINIA ALGONQUIAN)

Powhatan, or Virginia Algonquian, is connected to the chiefdoms and tribes in what is now eastern Virginia and North Carolina. While the mechanics of the language are the same, there are dialectical variations – mostly in vocabulary – between dialects formerly spoken in the Albemarle-Pamlico sounds region (Carolina) and those of the Chesapeake Bay (Virginia).

Though the language became dormant in the late 18th century, there are currently efforts to revitalize it using similar languages in the Eastern Algonquian subgroup.

VO CABULARY

ENGLISH WORD ALGONQUIAN WORD

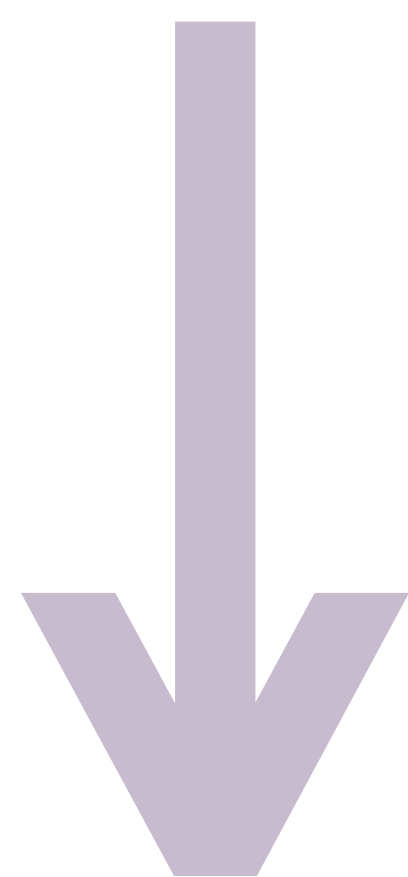
One	Pejig
Two	Nij
Three	Niswi
Four	New
Five	Nànan
Man	Ininì
Woman	Ikwe
Dog	Animosh
Sun	Kìzis
Moon	Tibik-kìzis
Water	Nibi
White	Wàbà
Yellow	Ozàwà
Red	Miskwà
Black	Makadewà
Eat	Mìdjin
See	Wàbi
Hear	Nòndam
Sing	Nigamo
Leave	Màdjà or Nagadàn

VOCABULARY

ENGLISH WORD POWHATAN WORD

One	Nekut
Two	Nin [^] s
Three	Nuh [^] s
Four	Yew
Five	Parensk
Man	Nimatew
Woman	Uskwe
Dog	Atumohs
Sun	Ke [^] soh [^] s
Moon	Sakimaw
Water	Sukwuhan
House	Yihakan
Canoe	Akwinten
White	Wapeyuw
Yellow	Wusawak
Red	Muskwa
Black	Mahkateweyuw
Eat it	Mi ^v ci [^] s
I see it	Nunamen
I hear it	Nunontamun

**TIME TO PUT YOUR
NEW KNOWLEDGE
TO THE TEST!
USING THE HANDOUT
AND MARKERS
BELOW, FIND THE
ALGONQUIAN AND
POWHATAN WORDS IN
THE SEARCH.**



LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION & RECLAMATION

The Pan-Indian movement in the second half of the 20th century led to major efforts to reclaim, document, and revitalize Indigenous languages. **Over 300 Indigenous languages were spoken in the United States and Canada before the arrival of the Europeans and since their arrival 115 languages have disappeared in the United States alone and in addition a number of languages are “sleeping,” or *dormant*, meaning they have written documentation but are not spoken.**⁶ Language is a vital part of every community’s past, present, and future which is why the United Nations includes the right to language and to revitalization of languages in Article 13 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People:

“INDIGENOUS PEOPLES HAVE THE RIGHT TO REVITALIZE, USE, DEVELOP AND TRANSMIT TO FUTURE GENERATIONS THEIR HISTORIES, LANGUAGES, ORAL TRADITIONS, PHILOSOPHIES, WRITING SYSTEMS AND LITERATURES, AND TO DESIGNATE AND RETAIN THEIR OWN NAMES FOR COMMUNITIES, PLACES AND PERSONS.”

⁶Woodward, Kyle. “Indigenous language revival: The Wôpanâak Language Reclamation Project as a case study in Indigenous identity, representation, and place-based knowledge.” *James Madison Undergraduate Research Journal*, 5(1), 71-80, 2018. 72.

A major hurdle to revitalizing and reclaiming languages lies in education and access to education. The educational systems in the United States and Canada have done irreparable damage through their running of Indian Boarding Schools in the 19th and 20th centuries. **Government officials regularly abducted Indigenous children and sent them to Christian schools, where they were abused physically and verbally when they tried to speak their Native languages.** By 1925, over 60,000 children were in these institutions in the United States and many never returned home. This cruel policy resulted in a major loss of life, language, and culture for dozens of tribes.



Elders, activists, and scholars have been leading a renewed push for revitalization and education for several Native languages over the past few decades, including Wôpanâk (Wampanoag) and Myaamia (Miami). Fishman's eight stages of language loss model provides a useful tool for revitalization efforts:

- **STAGE 8:** Only a few elders speak the language
- **STAGE 7:** Only adults beyond childbearing age speak the language
- **STAGE 6:** Some intergenerational use of language
- **STAGE 5:** Language is still very much alive and used in community
- **STAGE 4:** Language is required in elementary schools
- **STAGE 3:** Language is used in places of business and by employees in less specialized work areas
- **STAGE 2:** Language is used by local government and the mass media in the minority community
- **STAGE 1:** Some language use by higher levels of government and in higher education

Methods of revitalization include immersive schooling, speaking the language at home, musicmaking, workshops, nests, community classes, and mentorship, among others. These methods will shift depending on where a language lies on the scale and what the needs of each community might be and may result in large scale projects, such as the The Wôpanâk Language Reclamation Project.

**LEARN MORE
ABOUT LOCAL TRIBAL
HISTORY, LANGUAGE
RECLAMATION
EFFORTS, THE
LEGACY OF INDIAN
BOARDING SCHOOLS,
AND MORE
WITH THE RESOURCE
GUIDE BELOW.**



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