



POW WOW



The term *Pow Wow*, or *Pau Wau*, is believed to have its roots in the Algonquian language that originated in the Nagaransett territory, or Massachusetts area, and describes a community social gathering consisting of many dancers, drummers, and singers [1, 2]. Writings from German immigrant folk healers were known to observe *Pau Wau* and referred to their native counterpart as Pow Wow; doctors that referred to a collective of native people [2].

Traditionally, the dances that were commonly held at ceremonies were more spiritual and sacred. Dances were held for ceremonies of name-giving, to honor the dead, honor the living, and to pray for good fortune [1].



The regalia worn in dances were all hand-made from natural resources. The rustling sound, or jingles, were made from animal dew claws and the rattling sounds were made from gourds filled with small stones.



Eagle feathers continue to be used as part of the regalia, for their headdresses and for ceremonies and prayers. Traditionally, the dancers dressed as the animals of their spiritual guides with an intent to bring their spirit animal to the dance [1].

Prior to gathering for the dance, a pipe ceremony would be held to bless the food, the children, and for the long life of their people. A memorial feast would follow to honor for their ancestors [1].



Although many tribes continue with some of the traditional practices around Pow Wow, the modern-day dances are largely a gathering for communities of all cultures to attend a great social event that brings artisans with gift items, and food vendors for all to enjoy [1,2]. The regalia and dance styles are thought to have its origins in the Pawnee *Iruska* dance translating to '*the fire in me*'. Crow Feather was the man who received the vision of *Iruska* and set the standard for the regalia. Men were directed to create a headpiece 'roach' and a bustle 'feather belt' using porcupine quills, deer hair, and a crow feather belt [2].



Traditional garments, regalia, were made from buckskin, ornamented with intricately detailed beading using glass beads, porcupine quills, and organic dyes. Plaiting, braiding, wrapping and types of stitching with decorative styles were characteristic features of each tribe that were embedded into each garment [3].

“All regalia were treated with great respect as all are honored once it is donned” [2].



The traditional forms of dance and music of Pow Wow has evolved since pre-colonial times where they were often a part of sacred ceremonies [4]. As people of the Northern and Southern Plains faced great upheaval and placed on reservations, they became more inter-tribal with many exchanges of dances and songs. Emerging from this exchange was the Drum Religion that fostered peace and friendship, and the Grass Dance, a form of warrior dance. Both practices were adopted by the Plains tribes, which “emphasized the value of generosity and gift-exchange” [5]. Adaptations of intertribal songs from the *wacipi* of the Lakota and the *niimiwin* of the Anishinaabe are thought to have developed the modern templates of song and dance for Pow Wow [4].

The modern Pow Wow is an important inter-tribal event that engages and teaches the youth with their heritage and traditions and can be traditional or competitive in nature [2,3,4]. Pow Wow's include the honoring of dances and drumming as competitions with prizes to be won to entice the youth to become more engaged into their cultural activities with an interest to maintain their culture [2,3]. The celebration is also held to honor royalty, military, and a time for making and renewing friendships [2,3].



All Pow Wows begin with a Grand Entry and greeting with color guards to carry the flags of the country(s), province (state), the local tribes' flags, and an Indian Eagle Feather Staff [2].

The Grand Entry is led by an elder and accompanied with an opening song sung by a host drum. Followed are all the dancers in regalia that form into a large circle. Men begin to form the circle and enter the centre as women gather and surround the circle with their later arrival.

Drummers and singers are invited to participate in the Pow Wow. "The drums are treated as honored beings and gifted with tobacco and sage with drummers adhering to proper protocols" [2]. Both drummers and singers adhere to a beat their tribe considers a good tempo for dancing [6].



An emcee keeps the Pow Wow organized by announcing events entered in the competition. The emcee may also call for certain dances and songs, identify dance style and song and preside over all activities [2]. A drumming contest is often included.



Categories for competition during the Pow Wow include: Tiny Tots for those aged six and under.



Women's and Men's Golden Age:



Juniors:



Teens:



Women's and Men's:



Dances include men's and women's Northern Traditional Dance, the Plains men's Southern Straight Dance, and women's Southern Cloth Dance. Fancy dances include women's Jingle Dance, the Butterfly Dance, and men's Grass Dance. Some dances commemorate animals of nature, such as the Chicken Dance of the Northern Plains, the Crow Hop (Montana), and Rabbit Dance (Sioux). The Warrior Dances include the Sneak-Up Dance (Plains) and the Smoke Dance (Haudenosaunee). The Hoop Dance (Anishinaabe) incorporates up to 30 hoops in story-telling fashion [7].

At the completion of the celebration of Pow Wow, championship announcements are made followed by the folding of the flags.



“The best dancers know the songs and the drum rhythm. They seek to stay in time with the beat, stopping and starting dance steps through the changes from drummers and singers” [1].

The significance of the modern Pow Wow is reflective of the resistance against assimilation and government policies against the First Nations people. Tribes refused to abandon their cultural traditions including dancing and drumming of Pow Wow celebrations [4].

Thousands of singers, dancers and their families are known to travel the Pow Wow trail across the North American continent to share and celebrate native American culture [5].



“Eagle feathers are tied with our spirituality, our social life and culture. We have used them for centuries for decorations. Only Indians can possess eagle feathers, as it is recognizably used for our ceremonies and our prayers” [1].

References

1. Long Standing Bear Chief (Gray, Harold, E.) (1992). Ni-Kso-Ko-Wa: Blackfoot Spirituality, Traditions, Values and Beliefs. Spirit Talk Press: Browning, Montana, U.S.A.
2. Kelly, D.F. (2012). Ancient traditions, modern constructions: Innovation, continuity, and spirituality on the Pow Wow trail. *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, 11 (33): 107-136 ISSN: 1583-0039.
3. Zimmer, V.S. (1991). Native American Pow Wow: Through the perspective of women's dress. Master's Thesis. (Pg. 3, 4, 9, 10) Department of Home Economics. University of Wyoming ProQuest Dissertations Publishing: Laramie Wyoming, U.S.A.
4. Simpson, M.J. & Filice, M. (2016). The history of Pow Wows. Retrieved online February, 2024 from: <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/history-of-powwows>.
5. Sacred Springs Pow Wow. (2020). The history of Pow Wow. Retrieved online February, 2024 from: [History of Powwows \(sspowwow.com\)](https://www.sspowwow.com/history-of-powwows).
6. Browner, T. (2000). Making and singing Pow-wow songs: Text, form, and the significance of culture-based analysis. *Ethnomusicology*, 44(2): 214-233.
7. Simpson, M.J. & Filice, M. (2016). Pow Wow Dances. Retrieved online February, 2024 from: <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/history-of-powwows>.