

# MUSEUM on Main Street

## *Americans* Description and Themes

### Exhibition Description

Based on a major exhibition at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, DC, *Americans* explores how deeply intertwined American Indians are in the culture of the United States.

American Indians are less than 1 percent of the population, yet images of Indians are everywhere. From imagery on commercial products and professional and high school sports mascots, to classic Westerns and episodes of *Seinfeld* and *South Park*, we are surrounded by American Indian imagery. Indian names are everywhere too, from state, city, and street names to the Tomahawk missile.

How is it that Indians can be so present and so absent in American life? Pervasive, powerful, at times demeaning, the images, names, and stories reveal the deep connection between Americans and American Indians. Indians have been embedded in unexpected ways in the history, pop culture, and identity of the United States.

The exhibition highlights the ways in which American Indians have been part of the nation's identity since before the country began and offers a new way of understanding a few familiar events:

- Thanksgiving was a modern invention.
- Pocahontas was a key figure in the country's founding.
- The Trail of Tears was a vast national project that reshaped the entire country.
- Little Bighorn was the moment when, after killing 200 American soldiers, Indians became the country's unofficial mascots.

*Americans* surrounds visitors with images and objects from popular culture and delves into these historical events. The exhibition invites visitors to explore this complicated history and to share local stories about Native American history and culture and identity.