

# ECHOES ON EASELS TREATIES



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*State Names*, Jaune Quick-To-See Smith, 2000  
Smithsonian American Art Museum

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The first treaty created by the United States with a tribal nation was the Treaty of Fort Pitt, signed in 1778. This treaty was signed between the United States and the Lenape. This was in the midst of the American Revolution and was a treaty that made a commitment of alliance, peace, and also the possibility of the Lenape becoming a state or nation once the war was over. The promises in the treaty never came to fruition.

Treaties are legal documents that are made between sovereign entities. They are binding legal documents that can cover a range of scopes, including ending wars, protecting human rights, and cession of lands. Regardless of the date a treaty was created, there is no expiration date on them. A treaty created in 1778 would still be valid today. So when the United States made that first treaty with the Lenape, it was significant in that it recognized the sovereignty of tribal nations.

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The United States has made anywhere from 370–400 treaties with tribal nations. The majority of these were made from 1778 to 1871. And most of these treaties that were made dealt with land cessions and the removal of tribal nations. After that, Congress passed a law that stated it would no longer make treaties with tribal governments. All matters related to changes within Indian Country or land cessions would be done through Congress. However, the treaties that had already been created would always still be in effect. Meaning they are still legally enforceable.

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## GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What was the first treaty signed with a Native nation in the United States?
- What kinds of things do treaties cover?
- Are there lasting effects today?

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## RESOURCES



[Click here to watch What Supreme Court's McGirt ruling means for Oklahoma's Native tribes](#)

- [Oklahoma State University Libraries – Tribal Treaties Database](#)
- [National Archives: American Indian Treaties](#)
- [Native Governance Center: Understanding Treaties](#)
- [Native Knowledge 360 – Northern Plains Treaties: Is a Treaty Intended to be Forever?](#)