



**Wilma Mankiller is an author, activist, and former principal chief of the Cherokee Nation. She co-chaired the conference between tribal leaders and cabinet members which led to an Office of Indian Justice. Her awards include the Presidential Medal of Freedom.**

Her roots are planted deep in the rural community of Mankiller Flats in Adair County, Oklahoma, where she has spent most of her life. She was born at Hastings Indian Hospital in Tahlequah, and grew up with few amenities. At age 10, her family moved to San Francisco as part of the Bureau of Indian Affairs Relocation Program where she lived for two decades before returning to Oklahoma.

Wilma was the founding director of the Cherokee Nation Community Development Department, which received several national awards for innovative use of self-help in housing and water projects in low-income Cherokee communities. Then in 1983, she was elected the first female deputy chief of the Cherokee Nation, and president of the tribal council. In 1987, she was elected to serve as the first female principal chief of the Cherokee Nation, and was overwhelmingly re-elected in 1991. She chose not to seek re-election in 1995.

During Wilma's tenure she met with Presidents Reagan, Bush and Clinton to present critical tribal issues, and she and Navajo Nation President Peterson Zah co-chaired a national conference between tribal leaders and cabinet members which helped facilitate the establishment of an Office of Indian Justice within the U.S. Department of Justice. Wilma's tenure was also marked by a great deal of new development, including several new free-standing health clinics, an \$11 million Job Corps Center, and greatly expanded services for children and youth. She led the team that developed the core businesses which comprise Cherokee Nation Enterprises.

She has received many awards, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom. She has published several works, including, *Every Day is a Good Day*, Fulcrum Publishing 2004, *Mankiller: A Chief and Her People*, co-authored, St. Martin's Press 1993, *A Reader's Companion to the History of Women in the U.S.*, co-edited, Houghton-Mifflin 1998. She has also contributed to other publications, including an essay for *Native Universe*, the inaugural publication of the National Museum of the American Indian. Wilma Mankiller lives on the Mankiller family allotment in the Cherokee Nation with her husband, Charlie Soap.

She currently serves on the board of trustees of the Ford Foundation and the Freedom Forum's Newseum, a \$400 million museum of the news being constructed on Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C. to promote the First Amendment. She provides technical support to rural Cherokee development projects, serves as a leadership coach for Native American non-profit leaders, including the leadership of the Institute of American Indian Arts presents lectures on the challenges facing Native Americans and women in the 21st century.

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