

THE MICCOSUKEE TRIBE OF INDIANS OF FLORIDA, THE IRON ARROW HONOR SOCIETY®

Joint Statement

Grounded in the principles of cultural exchange which drove the [initial founding](#) of the Iron Arrow Honor Society, as reinforced by the [1976 official charter](#) issued by the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida to Iron Arrow and most recently the [Memorandum of Understanding \(MOU\)](#) signed in 2018 by Iron Arrow and the Miccosukee to reaffirm our 94- year old bond and commitment to each other, we would like to announce the following corrective modifications and enhancements to Iron Arrow's use of the gifts given by the Miccosukee.

In the MOU, the Miccosukee and Iron Arrow agreed to implement an on-going authentication process which required Iron Arrow to periodically review all usage of symbols and customs in consultation with Miccosukee leadership to ensure authenticity and consent and fidelity to Miccosukee customs.

Over the past few weeks, as the country re-examines how symbols from Native American cultures are used by mainstream society, we have been working with each other on changes to practices of the Iron Arrow Honor Society. These are changes that are sympathetic to other Native American Tribes and their members or descendants as well as supportive of the gifts that the Miccosukee have bestowed on Iron Arrow. The Miccosukee understand that other nations do not have the same perspective on cultural exchange. Our two groups have made a pipeline into one another's world. Iron Arrow experiencing Miccosukee culture and sense of identity, and Miccosukee experiencing the wealth of knowledge and talent that the Iron Arrow membership has at its disposal.

Indigenous students and members of the university community have inquired as to the nature and background concerning some of the imagery and labels gifted by the Miccosukee to Iron Arrow. After conducting the most recent iteration of its authentication process and engaging in exhaustive discussion and analysis, effective immediately, use of the following symbols and cultures previously gifted and supported by the Miccosukee to Iron Arrow will be limited or completely discontinued:

- **Use of Ceremonial Drum:** The drum represented a symbol of the Green Corn Dance—a sacred Miccosukee/Seminole festival that marks the corn harvest and the gathering of the clans to celebrate their heritage through traditional practices. Out of respect for previously-raised concerns as balanced against the century-old tradition of using the drum for the auspicious occasion of the Iron Arrow tapping process, the use of the ceremonial drum will be limited to a few seconds prior to the tapping of a new member, and when the new tappee(s) is presented to the society.

- **Student Leadership Titles:** The titles used by the student leadership of the Society match those used by the Seminole at the time they assisted in Iron Arrow's creation in 1926. To ensure fidelity to modern conventions, Iron Arrow's Executive Board and Advisory Counsel will take all steps necessary to modify the names of their student leadership positions to match contemporary Miccosukee leadership titles. Specifically, the names Chief, Son-of-Chief, and Medicine Man, will be changed to Chair, Assistant Chair and Lawmaker, respectively.

- **Folding of Arms:** The folding of arms by Iron Arrow members during ceremonies was done in recognition of the solemn occasion. After review, Iron Arrow and the Miccosukee have mutually agreed that Iron Arrow will no longer engage in such activity. Going forward, members will cross their arms in front of them, clasping their hands – right over left – during solemn occasions.

The Miccosukee further state:

The Miccosukee are an unyielding tribe. We are unconquered. We were not moved west because we fought alongside the Seminole against tyranny and at one point dwindled down to just over 200 tribal members. We survived and began to thrive. Now that we are in a position of power, we do not want to be cruel or thoughtless through inaction.

We take this action because we recognize that our brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, and even two-spirit or multi-spirit natives are hurting. They are hurting because of generations of trauma, the theft of their land, the destruction of their cultures and languages, appropriation of their arts and imagery, and the marginalization of their identity. We take this action as a sovereign nation.

With this action we ask for your help in return. We ask that you respect the Tribe's sovereign right to engage in cultural exchange with Iron Arrow. We ask that you learn about Miccosukee's fight to survive and about how we got here. We ask you to support the symbols that remain as an homage to our ancestry, culture and art. Finally, we ask that you take the time to understand and learn about Miccosukee and the Iron Arrow Honor Society, and how crucial our relationship is to foster a better world for our children.

The Miccosukee and Iron Arrow believe their relationship to be the successful template as a novel model for cultural exchange, and thank the University of Miami for serving for nearly a century as a host for that model. One of the most powerful aspects of diversity and inclusion is the notion of cultural exchange where we evolve from mere tolerance of differences to actually celebrating and sharing those differences.

Curtis Osceola
Official Liaison,
Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida

Cachay Byrd
Chair,
Iron Arrow