COLORADO RIVER INDIAN TRIBES (CRIT)

The Colorado River Indian Reservation stretches along the river border of California and Arizona. The river runs like a spine through the entire length of the reservation of some 278,000 acres—home to 2,400 members of four distinct tribes, the Mohave, Chemehuevi, Hopi, and Navajo. An 1865 act of Congress originally created the reservation for just the Mohave and Chemehuevi. In 1945, the Bureau of Indian Affairs relocated some Hopi and Navajo to the reservation from their homes in northeastern Arizona.

The largest of the four nations on the reservation is the Mohave; their name comes from the term *aha-makave* meaning “beside the water”. The Chemehuevi, whose name comes from a Mohave term dealing with fish, call themselves the *Nu Wu* or “people”. They are closely related to the Southern Paiute people of Nevada (ENAT, 95-98). Their traditional homelands stretched along the Colorado River between Nevada and Yuma, Arizona.

The Hopi are from northern Arizona, where their reservation is totally surrounded by that of the Navajo. The Hopi were village dwellers with homes built atop mesas for defense. Hopi and Navajo have now lived on the Colorado River Reservation for some 50 years. Their skills in farming under arid conditions have helped them and the reservation thrive.

Today the four tribes maintain and observe their traditional ways and unique religious and cultural identities but function as one political unit. The Colorado River Indian Tribes (CRIT) adopted a flag on 4 January.
1979 from a design by tribal member Margie McCabe. The design contest called for a flag that would uphold the tribal traditions and indicate the uniqueness of the four nations living and working together as one. January 4th of each year is now CRIT Flag Day (The Colorado Indian Tribes Museum, undated pamphlet), a celebration and appreciation of the unity of the four peoples.

The flag has three horizontal stripes. The top stripe is light blue upon which is an orange sun, whose rays represent the endless rising and setting of the sun on the land and water of the reservation. The central stripe is tan or light brown, symbolizing the earth from which the tribe reaps its food and builds its dwellings. The bottom stripe is dark blue with two white wavy lines, representing the Colorado River, which gives life to the earth and people of the reservation. Centered on the tan stripe and extending to the sun are four feathers, one for each tribe. The feathers are white, tipped with black. Below them appears the acronym “CRIT” in black. ☈