

A FLOURISHING CULTURE: AFRICAN-NATIVE LIFEWAYS



FOR MORE THAN FIVE CENTURIES, EXTRAORDINARILY RICH CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS, WITH ROOTS BOTH IN THE AMERICAS AND IN AFRICA, HAVE DEVELOPED AND CONTINUE TO FLOURISH AMONG PEOPLE OF AFRICAN-NATIVE AMERICAN DESCENT. Out of their struggles and triumphs, they have created cultural innovations by combining the traditions of two continents.

Whether it is food, language, writing, music, dance, storytelling, or visual arts, the cultural expressions that emerge from the intermingled Native and African American cultures have had a vast social impact. Edmonia Lewis (ca. 1845–1911), an Ojibwe-African, was the first African-Native American woman to gain international acclaim as a sculptor; pioneering rock musician Jimi Hendrix (ca. 1942–1970) was proud of his Cherokee grandmother; and Pamyua, a “tribal funk” hip-hop group, creates a highly contemporary sound by combining musical traditions from the band members’ dual Inuit-African heritages.

America Meredith (Cherokee), *Edmonia Lewis: Wildfire*, 2007. Courtesy America Meredith. Background: Jimi Hendrix, The Royal Albert Hall, London, February 18, 1965. Photo by Graham F. Page. Courtesy Experience Music Project and Science Fiction Museum and Hall of Fame.

Research for *IndiVisible* involved many scholars working with tribal communities across North and South America. Site work was conducted in Massachusetts with the Mashpee Wampanoag community, in Los Angeles with the Creek and Garifuna communities, with the Cherokee Nation in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, and at the Tutelo Homecoming Festival in Ithaca, New York, which welcomed the Cayuga, Tutelo, and Saponi Indian Nations.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

- Brooks, James F., ed. *Confounding the Color Line: The Indian-Black Experience in North America*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2002.
- Minges, Patrick. *Black Indian Slave Narratives*. Winston-Salem, N.C.: John F. Blair, Publisher, 2004.
- Tayac, Gabrielle, ed. *IndiVisible: African-Native American Lives in the Americas*. National Museum of the American Indian, Washington, D.C., 2009.

IndiVisible: African-Native American Lives in the Americas was developed, produced, and circulated by the National Museum of the American Indian, the National Museum of African American History and Culture, and the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service. The exhibition was curated by Gabrielle Tayac (Piscataway) and a team including Angela Gonzales (Hopi), Robert Collins (African and Choctaw descent), Judy Kertész, Penny Gamble-Williams (Chappaquiddick Wampanoag), and Thunder Williams (Afro-Carib).

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The exhibition is on view at the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C., from November 10, 2009, through May 2010. For public programs and national tour schedule, please visit www.AmericanIndian.si.edu.

National Museum of the American Indian
4th Street and Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20013

PHONE: 202-633-1000
HOURS: 10 a.m.–5:30 p.m. daily,
closed December 25
ADMISSION: free
The museum is fully accessible.

The Mitsitam Native Foods Café on the First Level is open from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., with a full menu served between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. The museum has two stores, the Chesapeake Store on the First Level and the Roanoke Store on the Second Level.

To become an NMAI member, call 1-800-242-NMAI (6624) or click on Membership and Giving on our website: www.AmericanIndian.si.edu.

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The book *IndiVisible: African-Native American Lives in the Americas* is available at Smithsonian stores, by phone at 1-800-331-3761, or online at www.AmericanIndian.si.edu/bookshop.
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"There still exists a largely invisible story of America—how African and Native peoples came together across space and time to create shared histories, communities, and ways of life. Through centuries of struggle, slavery, and dispossession, then by self-determination and freedom, African American and Native American peoples have become, more often than publicly recognized, indivisible."

—GABRIELLE TAYAC (PISCATAWAY)

INDIVISIBLE: AFRICAN-NATIVE AMERICAN LIVES IN THE AMERICAS

A place of belonging. A true sense of home.

All people share this desire. For those of dual African American and Native American heritage, this powerful sense of home has been difficult to find. Because they have not fit into society's established racial categories, they've been denied a true sense of belonging.

Despite this challenge, the life experiences of African-Native American peoples have become a vital part of our American identity. Faced with centuries of government policies and laws that systematically oppressed and excluded them, they came together to find creative and effective ways to fight back. They established new blended communities that drew strength from sharing traditions and philosophies. And, for more than 500 years, with their music, dance, craft, and food, African-Native Americans developed deeply rich cultural expressions that made an indelible mark on American life.

A HISTORY OF RACE AND POLICY



THROUGHOUT THE HISTORY OF THE AMERICAS, SINCE THE TIME OF CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS, RACIALLY MOTIVATED LAWS HAVE BEEN FORCED UPON NATIVE, AFRICAN, AND MIXED-HERITAGE PEOPLES. The earliest such law, Papal Bull *Inter Caetera* issued by Pope Alexander VI in 1493, declared Native and African peoples inferior to white Western Christians and authorized Spain to colonize the Americas and convert Native peoples into religious subjects of the crown. As Europeans arrived in greater numbers in the early 16th century, they encroached on Native peoples' ancestral lands, and some enslaved both Native Americans and Africans. In the 17th and 18th centuries, most European settlers commonly differentiated people by race in order to discriminate against and enslave them.

In the 19th century, scientists established a faulty hierarchy of races, with Western European Christians at the top and sub-Saharan Africans at the bottom. People of mixed races, particularly those with African ancestry, were said to have the least desirable traits. The idea of "hypodescent," meaning one drop of African blood erases any other ethnic ancestry, was accepted into race laws. Because racism generally abrogated treaty rights extended to people of African ancestry, these laws threatened to dissolve some Indian reservations where people of mixed African and Native heritage lived.

In 1935, the federal government enacted blood-quantum legislation, or Indian blood laws, which regulated tribal membership. African-Native Americans in the Southeast were especially affected by these policies.

Amelia "Kitty" Cloud and John Taylor, 1907. Courtesy Center of Southwest Studies, Fort Lewis College. Background: Mrs. Benson, a widely regarded healer, in a garden, 1900. Fort Gibson, Oklahoma, N27287. Photo by Frank C. Churchill. © Smithsonian Institution.

CREATIVE RESISTANCE: FIGHTING FOR CHANGE



THE HELL'S GATE SLAVE REBELLION IN 18TH-CENTURY NEW YORK. THE 1815 SEMINOLE WAR. THE OUSTING OF THE KU KLUX KLAN IN THE 1950s BY THE LUMBEE PEOPLE OF NORTH CAROLINA. African American, African-Native, and Native American peoples have united to fight against their oppressors for hundreds of years. When these groups aligned, their combined force triggered real concern among pre-colonial, colonial, and later, American government leaders.

The Native American and the African American rights movements in the 20th century worked toward the same goals: freedom, dignity, and respect. Native Americans had limited participation in the 1960s civil rights movement. They aligned themselves more closely with the strong message of nationalism in the Black Power movement, which echoed their own focus on protecting treaty rights.

More recently, the success of Indian gaming and casino revenues have empowered tribes that were torn apart in the colonial period. The Mashantucket Pequot in Connecticut, for example, with their long history of African American and white genealogical lines, have become a regional economic and political force, and have regained some of their ancestral territory.

BLENDING COMMUNITIES, BINDING LIVES



THE STORIES OF NATIVE AND AFRICAN PEOPLES IN THE AMERICAS HAVE LONG BEEN CLOSELY INTERTWINED. From pre-colonial times, they intermarried, established communities, and shared their lives and rich traditions. These blended tribes worked to preserve their land, and rebelled against displacement.

The Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Creek Nations were four of the "Five Civilized Tribes," a name given to them by white settlers because they adopted many Western customs, including slavery. When these tribes were forcibly removed to the American West in the 1830s, their slaves—often of African and Native ancestry—came with them. Following the Civil War, these former slaves became members of the tribes.

Despite the litany of racial policies that tried to dictate which people belonged to a particular community, African-Native Americans have long identified members using their own methods. Within some Native tribes, extended family, clan, and kinship networks can regulate tribal membership, regardless of blood quantum or other ethnic ancestry. Native adoption ceremonies historically brought in outsiders who often intermarried with tribal members, and their offspring were fully incorporated into the community.

Maurice Fox (Mashpee Wampanoag), 2008. Photo by Kevin Cartwright. NMAI. Courtesy Fox family. Background: Radmilla Cody, Miss Navajo Nation, and her grandmother, 2006. © 2009 John Ranning.