A FLOURISHING CULTURE: AFRICAN-NATIVE LIFESTYLES

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 INVENTED CULTURAL INNOVATIONS BY COMBINING THE TRADITIONS OF TWO CONTINENTS.

Whether it is food, language, 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 African-American woman, 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.

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 Chumash and Eastern Chumash communities, with the Cheyenne Nation in Cheyenne, Oklahoma, and at the Tobaco Homecoming Festival in Iowa, New York, which welcomed the Cayuga, Tztotol, and Sauk and Fox Indian Nations.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY


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 Kerter, Penny Gamble-Williams (Chappaquiddick Wampanoag), and Thunder Williams (Afro-Carib).

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Smithsonian Institution

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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, remediated Native and African peoples inferior to white Western Christians and authorized 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 and African 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.

THE HELLS GATE SLAVE REBELLION IN 18TH-CENTURY NEW YORK. THE OUSTING OF THE KU KLUX KLAN IN THE 1950s HAVE LONG BEEN CLOSELY INTERTWINED. The Hell’s Gate Slave Rebellion in 1815 Seminole War. The ousting of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1950s have long been closely intertwined. 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 advance their faith, and resisted against displacement.

The Cherokee, Chickasaw, Creek, 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 Native and African ancestry—came with them. Following the Civil War, these former slaves became members of the tribes. Despite the literary of racial policies that tried to dictate which people belonged to a particular community, African-Native American people 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.

CREATIVE RESISTANCE: FIGHTING FOR CHANGE

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, the 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 oppression and exclusion, they came together to find creative and effective ways to fight back. They established new blended communities that drew strength from sharing cultural expressions that made an indelible mark on American life. Throughout the 19th century, scientists established a faulty hierarchy of races, with Western European Christians at the top and sub-Saharan Africans at the bottom. As Europeans arrived in greater numbers in the early 16th century, government leaders authorized 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 and African 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.

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