BLACK+NATIVE: ALLIES, FAMILY AND SLAVEHOLDERS?

The complicated history of Black and Indigenous America





A VISUAL ESSAY WITH EVIDENCE

SPECIAL EDITION RIMBERIO @REALLYGREATSITE

THERE WAS NEVER ONE BLACK-NATIVE STORY



African-descended and Indigenous people encountered one another for centuries. Their relationships included family, intermarriage, refuge, trade, resistance, conflict, enslavement, and slave catching.

Different Native nations also had very different relationships with African-descended people.

BLACK + NATIVE FAMILIES WERE REAL



Black and Indigenous people formed families across colonial America, particularly where their communities lived and worked near one another.



Some people we now describe as “Black Indians” had both African and Indigenous ancestry. Others were African-descended people who became culturally or politically connected to Native communities.

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SOME NATIVE COMMUNITIES BECAME PLACES OF REFUGE





Some Africans escaping slavery fled into Native territories and communities. The relationships they formed ranged from refuge and alliance to incorporation into Native societies.

The Black Seminole experience gives us one of the strongest examples, but it also deserves nuance because Black-Seminole relationships changed across time and place.

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BUT SOME INDIGENOUS PEOPLE ALSO HUNTED FREEDOM SEEKERS



Colonial powers sometimes paid or encouraged Native allies to capture Black people who escaped slavery.

So while some freedom seekers found protection among Indigenous communities, others encountered Native slave catchers.

Same history. Very different experiences.

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AND YES, SOME INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OWNED BLACK SLAVES



By the nineteenth century, some citizens of the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Muscogee (Creek), and Seminole Nations held African-descended people in slavery.

But slavery did not operate identically across all five nations, and Native participation in slavery changed over time as these nations confronted U.S. expansion and pressure to adopt Euro-American institutions.

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BLACK-NATIVE HISTORY IS COMPLICATED



Black and Indigenous people married each other. Protected each other. Fought alongside each other. Enslaved each other. Hunted each other. Built communities together.

None of those facts erases the others.

The history becomes more interesting when we stop demanding that Black and Native people fit into a simple story of either solidarity or conflict.

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