

African Native American (Royal's Native American Heritage)

Royal Homecoming 2015

Presented by: Community of Royal, Inc.
Collaborator: Young Performing Artists (YPAs), Inc.

Etta: Hello my name is Etta Johnson Huff, a lifelong resident of Royal, a Community Of Royal, Inc. Board of Director, a Board Appointed Volunteer with Young Performing Artists (YPAs), Inc. and Trustee with Ebenezer AME Church, Royal.

We give honor and thanks to God for all Royal Church Pastors, especially to Pastor Henry Goldsmith, First Lady Goldsmith and Lady Hannah here at New Life Center Ministries for continuing to host our Community's Annual Homecoming Service and granted us time to share some of Royal's history and heritage.

Etta: Speaking of history, the late Great Dr. Maya Angelou stated "History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be un-lived, but if faced with courage, it need not be lived again."

Speaking of heritage, the Bible in Exodus 6: 8 states that "And I will bring you in unto the land, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it you for an heritage: I am the Lord."

This year we are sharing some of our African Native American history & heritage.

Did you know, that there were freed Africans in Florida alongside the Indians? Remember, last year we shared that it was a group of freed Africans that settled here in Royal before 1840, this group of freed Africans named this community Royalsville then in 1865, it was named Picketsville and it was quietly renamed Royal by 1891.

There is a long rich history of interrelations between African Americans and Native American Indians. Today, we are sharing two sides of this history: the freed Africans who lived among and with the Native American Indians but did not mix blood (commonly known as Black Seminoles) and the history of the Africans who lived among and with the Indians but did mix blood (recently known as African Native Americans).

I am interviewing: Dr. Rosalyn Howard a retired Associate Professor as the Director of North Indian Studies Program at UCF and a Black Seminole. And, Whitany Lewis, a UCF graduate and an African Native American whose Great Great Grandmother was full Cherokee.

Welcome and let's start with Dr. Howard who will share a conversation that took place in Florida in 1835 with a young African woman who became a Black Seminole:

Etta: What is your name?

Dr. Howard: The name that my slave master gave me is Pheobe. But the name given to me by my family in Africa is Diatou. It means intelligent and spiritual one.

Etta: Where was your home in Africa?

Dr. Howard: My home was in Senegambia, a place they call the Rice Coast of Africa. But I was captured by slavers who took me to Goree Island, where hundreds of us were packed like animals into ships. After two horrible months, we landed in Charleston, SC where we were sold to white people in the slave market.

Etta: So how did you get from SC to Florida?

Dr. Howard: I heard about the freedom offer made by the King of Spain to all Africans who were slaves in the American colonies.

Etta: The freedom offer?

Dr. Howard: Yes, he said that if I escaped I could get my freedom in the land called Florida. I only had to become a Catholic and help the Spaniards to fight against the Americans that wanted to take over their land. So, me and my husband and our baby, we escaped one night. They came after us with dogs that we could hear barking, closing in on us. But we managed to make it across the border into Florida.

Etta: How did you become associated with the Seminoles instead of the Spaniards when you came into Florida?

Dr. Howard: When we got here, some Seminoles befriended us right away, so we went with them instead of the Spaniards. They allowed us to worship God in the way that we were used to, and I didn't have to become a Catholic. Back in Africa, I was a Muslim. Now, because we Africans are friends of the Seminoles and help them to fight against the Americans, outsiders call us the Black Seminoles.

Etta: What has your life been like since you came to Florida?

Dr. Howard: Life has been very hard sometimes, especially with the patty rollers (slave catchers) always trying to kill us or catch us and take us back to massa. But even with all that, life is much better here than it was on the plantation. We have our own separate towns and our own African leaders in our towns and we live there as free people! The only thing we must do for the Seminoles is to provide them with a portion of our harvest. You know the Seminoles came from further north – in Georgia and Alabama- and don't know how to grow crops in this kind of climate. We know how to grow crops in this climate because it is very similar to the one where many of us came from in Africa.

Etta: Thank you, Dr. Howard for sharing how some Africans did not mix blood with the Indians and became commonly known as the Black Seminoles. Is it true that one of the largest Black Seminole tribes was once located in Lake County which was a part of Sumter County before separating?

Dr. Howard: Yes, it was led by Chief Micanopy.

Etta: Now, Ms. Lewis your story is that you are African Native American mix?

Whitany Lewis: Yes. According to my family, my great grandfather, Mitchell Devon Steele's Mom, my great great grandmother, was full Cherokee.

Etta: Since you are mixed Native blood, do you think your roots began the same way that Dr. Howard explained how the Africans who did not mix with Native blood?

Whitany Lewis: Yes, because my great great grandfather was an African whose family was captured by slavers and brought to this country. Although, I'm not certain if his family was sold into slavery because I've learned that not all captured Africans were sold into slavery. Similar to the freed ones who were once African Kings & Queens and who lived in the Long Hammock (more commonly known as the Nichols area) of our beloved Community Of Royal.

Etta: How do you think your African great great grandfather met your Cherokee great great grandmother?

Whitany Lewis: It is well known that as the African slaves began to escape they would establish interrelations with the Native Americans; live with them, marry them, etc. The Africans, along with other Indian tribes such as the Creeks, Cherokees, etc., would help the Seminoles fight to hold onto Florida (their land). Some would not mix as the Black Seminoles and some would mix as my great, great grandfather.

Etta: In conclusion, our history contains pure Africans who did not mix blood with Native Americans and pure Africans who did mix blood with Native Americans. This is another nugget that makes our beloved Community Of Royal-UNIQUE. If you're a Royal native it is a highly likely that your family history has a connector to the Africans who did not mix blood with Native Americans (known as the Black Seminoles) or Africans who did mix blood with Native Americans (known as African Native Americans).

Etta: Thank you, Dr. Howard and Ms. Lewis for sharing information that shines light on African American's and Royal's Native American Heritage. And certainly, we thank God for continuing to bless our families, our homes, our churches and our community. Let us all say Thank you, Jesus! Now, we ask Cliff Hughes, Chairman of Community Of Royal, Inc. to come forth.

Cliff:

Etta: : *Now, we turn the service back into the hands of our Worship Leader.* Thank you.