



Mitchell Museum *of the* **American Indian**

3001 Central Street
Evanston, IL 60201
tel 847-475-1030
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www.mitchellmuseum.org

"Cultural Identities: Mixed Blood" on view
NOW to August 2014

EVANSTON, Ill., October 8, 2013 — The vast and complex topic of American Indian identity — how it's expressed through language, art, religion, and cultural practices and how it's affected by US federal and tribal laws — is the focus of a new exhibit that opened last week at the Mitchell Museum of the American Indian in Evanston.

The exhibit introduces many of the internal and external forces that impact tribal membership and cultural identity that shape the experience of American Indian peoples.

Exhibit graphics use quotations gleaned from a Mitchell Museum survey of sixty members of the American Indian community. Survey participants shared their sentiments, experiences, and perceptions as mixed ancestry or mixed culture American Indians in the U.S. and Canada.

The exhibit includes video clips of American Indians discussing identity issues and a video about misappropriation of culture, produced by Vincent Schilling, a correspondent for Indian Country Today Media Network.

A section examining Native identity from the era before European contact and on into the 1800s will look at the dynamics of inter-tribal marriages and how clans and bands have differentiated themselves. Objects on view include Hopi deerskin wedding boots, Inuit carvings, and copper jewelry pieces.

The exhibit also explains how Indian-owned slaves, intertribal adoptions, and adoptions of Indian children by non-Natives have complicated the identity picture.

The exhibit explains developments such as the forced assimilation of American Indians through Indian boarding schools and missionary schools, which stripped them of their languages, religions, and traditional cultures. The exhibit introduces the Indian Adoption Project of 1958 to 1967 which placed hundreds of American Indian children from western states with white families in the East and Midwest. Even today, adopted Indian children from that program continue to search for their lost Native past.

Concepts of Indian identity were shaped by the federal government's blood quantum laws, established to determine who was eligible for financial and other benefits under treaties. A



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version of this system for certifying a person's degree of "Indian-ness" is still in use today. A display of U.S.-tribal peace medals, an 1886 government food-ration card issued to an Indian family, and photos of Indian boarding schools illustrate the topics.

A section on religious identity discusses the impact of assimilation and religious oppression over the centuries, and the relationship between those following traditional spiritual practices and those practicing Christianity. Visitors will see an 1837 missionary book about the life of Jesus, written in the Ottawa language; a Northwest Coast spirit box; and a Cochiti nativity scene.

The exhibit explores how American Indian arts and crafts continue in the 20th century as expressions of American Indian identity. Items on display include a Navajo necklace made from U.S. silver dollars, a beaded pair of gym shoes, and a Navajo-beaded Chicago Bulls hat.

Another topic discussed is the high level of American Indian participation in the US military in every US war and the prevalent use of the American flag and bald eagle images on their personal items. Objects on display include a GI Joe Code Talker doll and an early 20th-century elk hide dance apron displaying a bald eagle between two American flags.

The commercializing, trivializing, and stereotyping of American Indian identity can be seen in a display of objects that include a Montana Frank Wild West Show poster, a bottle of "Indian Spirit" bath and floor soap, and a toy set of "real Indian" war paints — made in Japan.

Visitors are invited to share their thoughts on their own identities and examples of misuse of American Indian symbolism. Handouts allow visitors to fill in their family histories and see how blood quantum requirements would redefine their own cultural identity and ancestry.

Admission to the exhibit and September 28 curator tour is included with Mitchell Museum admission, which is \$5 for adults and \$3 for seniors, students, teachers (with valid school ID), and children. Admission is free for Mitchell Museum members and tribal members. Admission is free to everyone on the first Friday of every month.

The museum is open Tuesday–Wednesday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Thursday 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., Friday–Saturday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Sunday noon to 4 p.m. The museum is closed on Mondays and some major holidays.



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The independent, nonprofit Mitchell Museum is at 3001 Central St., Evanston. For information, phone (847) 475-1030 or email visitor.services@mitchellmuseum.org. Website: <http://www.mitchellmuseum.org>.



Items featured: Catlinite Pipe C. 1890 Lakota or Dakota, Pipe Stem c. 1890 Lakota or Dakota, Pipe Bag with Beaded Horseman c. 1890 Lakota or Dakota. During the treaty period, tribes were divided as to whether to ally with stronger US troops, evade or battle them. American motifs in Plains objects can either be an expression of US allegiance or a method of honoring the enemy.