



## Behind the paint and feathers: celebrating Native American Heritage Month

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My name is Steph Small. I'm the founder and director of Black Taxi out of the Taxi Toronto office. My pronouns are she, her. Where I'm currently working occupies the ancestral land of Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe tribes. I'm acknowledging this land to honour the past, present and future contributions of Indigenous people. I'm speaking as a non-Indigenous person, as a settler. And I thank you for welcoming me into this space to learn and reflect.

So today, our Spirit ERG has brought to us an illustrious guest. Now if you don't know Notorious Cree, I have to seriously wonder how that is. Notorious Cree is a traditional hoop dance artist famously known on Instagram. He's just surpassed a million followers. On TikTok, he has three million followers. And I know this because I follow him on both. I've learned so much. I've been entertained. I've laughed. I've cried.

It's been a ride. And I'm so excited for y'all to see everything he's going to bring to us today. He's going to take us on a deep dive into native and Indigenous sacred items, dances, celebrations, and customs. So, without further ado, you don't want to hear from me. That's not why you're here. I am completely honored to introduce Notorious Cree.

Hello. Thank you. [NON-ENGLISH]. James Jones. [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] Tallcree First Nations [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. Hi, everybody. I'm really honoured and happy to be here today to be presenting and speaking a little bit about myself as well about my culture. I'm from Tallcree First Nations. I am Cree, [NON-ENGLISH]. And I'm currently living in Treaty 6 territory, which is Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

But that's not where I'm originally from. Like I said, I grew up in the northern area of Alberta. My community is about maybe five, five and 1/2 hours north of Edmonton. And it's a very, very small community. Life is quite a bit more simple up there. When I grew up, I was doing a lot of hunting. I was doing a lot of medicine gathering, doing a lot of land-based things as a young person.

I want to start off with introducing my little friend here. This is a cedar style traditional flute. And it's something that a lot of different nations use throughout our communities. And people use them for different reasons. And there's different teachings and stories between different nations.

And that's the one thing too about us, as Indigenous peoples here in this territory, is that there's a lot of different nations. There's a lot of different communities. And we don't all speak the same language. We don't all have the same traditions. We don't all dance to-- dance the same, or speak the same, or-- we have many, many diverse nations with a lot of different languages, different beliefs, different teachings.

So that's one thing that's good to remember, especially with it being National Indigenous History Month, is that there's lots of different nations, different natives

across the territory. And there's also a lot of mixed natives as well. There's-- we have Afro natives, Latin natives, Asian natives. So, there's also a lot of mixed natives as well. So, it's good to keep those things in mind, especially as we're just in the dead of Native American History Month.

So yeah, with that, I'm going to sing-- well, I'm going to play you guys a bit of a song. So, what I was told is that this is used for many different things. Some people use it for their own spirituality. Some people use it for healing. Some people use the flute for storytelling.

But one of the things it was commonly used for, especially pre-contact, was courtship. So, from the southern communities, there was a lot of people who were flute players, who would gift songs to people who they were interested in or maybe wanted to make them their partner. You would gift them songs.

Or sometimes, you would gift people certain things in hopes to catch their attention. Because our communities were very small. And often, people in the communities had a lot of suitors. So yeah, you would try to do certain things to stand out. We didn't have Facebook, or Instagram, or Snapchat, or any of those things they have today. They had to actually put in work back in the day.

You couldn't just poke someone on Facebook or try to send a cute selfie, like this, on Instagram or something. So yeah, often people would gift other people things in order, like I said, to maybe try to win their heart over. So, I'm going to sing guys a song. Don't worry, it's not a love song. So, you won't fall in love. It's just a regular song.

[LAUGHTER]

So, I'm just going to sing this-- I'm going to play this for you here. Let me just back up just a little bit.

[PLAYING THE FLUTE]

So, what I'm going to do now is I'm going to get into the dance portion of this event. And I'm going to share with you a very special dance to me. This dance was shown to me by one of my friends from down south from Big Pine, California. His name is Sage Romero. And he was my hoop mentor. And he's the one who taught me just about the hoops and the meaning behind it. He's Taos-Pueblo.

[PERFORMING HOOP DANCE]