

## PEOPLE AND SOCIETY



For millennia before European arrival, Two Spirit people played special roles in many cultures of Turtle Island and were known to have gifts from the Creator. In some communities they were healers or mediators that were able to move between identities and worlds, and acted as caretakers for parentless Native children. In these special roles, they enjoyed their people's blessings; but inconceivable stigma arrived with settler invasion. J. Miko Thomas, whose drag name is Landa Lakes, is a writer, performer and activist as well as one of the founders of the Bay American Indian Two-Spirit Pow Wow (BAAITS), an annual gathering that celebrates Two Spirit people and their Tribal relatives in Turtle Island.

"We started the Two-Spirit Pow Wow with this vision to be inclusive and welcoming. I grew up in Oklahoma. Sometimes when we went to the largest powwow, called Red Earth, when you're on that gender variance scale, you don't really feel as included or as wanted. So one of the things we wanted to do with the Two-Spirit Pow Wow was make a space that would be completely welcoming of all people. And that's what we did. We want it to be a Two-Spirit Pow Wow, but we wanted the whole community to come out. And that's really what they did from the very start. When we had our very first one at the LGBT center, we expected like maybe about 150 to 200 people; 500 people showed up! And ever since, it's just grown and grown. It's been amazing to watch. Scholars look into histories of Native Americans and say, "These are welcoming places." But sometimes that's not the reality for many Tribes, because Christianity has really moved in. Some people will say, "We've never had Two Spirits! Then you go into anthropology to find that, yes, there are records of Two Spirit people. Sometimes you have to back to the really old legends they don't even tell anymore, because some Tribes prefer these more Disneyfied sort of stories of their own traditions, specifically with the Southeastern Tribes. One of the characters they have in there is called Long Nails. And Long Nails is sometimes by different Tribes just called Berdache, which was like the code word many anthropologists use to describe Two Spirit people.

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Dr. Desi Small Rodriguez is a Cheyenne Chicana with dual PhDs. She teaches at UCLA and runs the Data Warriors Lab, an Indigenous social science platform. "I'm a demographer and a social researcher, and my work is in part population studies. So blood quantum to me is the most disgusting and devastating effect of colonization that our people continue to perpetuate among each other. It only serves to laterally oppress one another; we've internalized the white man's poison - 'full-blood, half-blood' - and we use it against each other, against our babies. We see some sort of legitimacy in being more than one-fourth or more than one-half. There's some sick sense of claim, that people are owed more because they're more Cheyenne or people are supposed to be respected more. That entitlement mentality is really enhanced by the exclusionary powers of blood quantum. And I just, I want nothing to do with it. I identify as a Cheyenne woman, but I'm biracial; my father's Mexican. I'm just enough blood to be enrolled in my Tribe. As Cheyenne people, we're all mixed. That's a strength to me. It shows we've survived; we've been able to adapt; we've had to come together and intermarry but we're still here."

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# INVESTIGATION

**How does cultural value reflect in how caretaking is accomplished in a culture?**

Citation: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jan/03/original-caretakers-indigenous-groups-team-up-with-conservationists-to-protect-swaths-of-us>  
Citation: <https://www.ihs.gov/mspi/bppinuse/cultural/>

**What counts as being part of a culture or having an ethnic heritage?**

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# EXPLORATION

**#1: Listen to All My Relations Podcast, Indigiqueer, 4/3/2019**

<https://www.allmyrelationspodcast.com/podcast/episode/47547617/ep-6-indigiqueer>

**How does intersectionality relate to identity?**

Citation: <https://www.intersectionaljustice.org/what-is-intersectionality>

**#2: Listen to All My Relations Podcast, Beyond Blood Quantum, 10/8/2019**

<https://www.allmyrelationspodcast.com/podcast/episode/49fcb76f/ep-10-beyond-blood-quantum>

**Do people have the right to claim being be part of a culture if they have no connection other than through a blood line?**

**#3: Read Your DNA is not your Culture:**

<https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2018/09/your-dna-is-not-your-culture/571150/>

And responses: <https://www.theatlantic.com/letters/archive/2018/10/letters-does-your-ancestry-determine-your-culture/572305/>

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