

The Possibilities of the Heritage of the Black Seminoles: The Current Situations of Local Community and Their Culture in Red Bays, Bahamas

ブラック・セミノールの文化遺産の可能性—バハマ・レッドベイにおける地域コミュニティとその文化の現状に注目して

氏名 Dana De'Shan Newton

英文氏名 ニュート デーナ ディーシャーン

1. Introduction

(1) Research Background

This chapter establishes the context for the study by highlighting the unique history and cultural significance of the Black Seminoles, a group formed from the alliance between escaped enslaved Africans and the Seminole Native American Tribe in the Southeastern United States during the 1800's. Facing recapture into slavery, many Black Seminoles sought refuge in The Bahamas. This move was fueled by The Bahamas still being a British Colony and Britain and all of its colonies had abolished slavery.

The Bahamas is an archipelago, where tourism is the number one industry. The Black Seminoles are one of the most unique ethnic and underrepresented groups in The Bahamas. While currently the exact number of Black Seminoles is not available, as of 2010 there were about 280 residents living in the Red Bays settlement (village) (The Bahamas Department of Statistics) The research focuses on Red Bays because it was the only known place that the Black Seminoles settled in The Bahamas.

Also, Red Bays bears a specific cultural heritage, history, and traditions that are not represented in any other parts in The Bahamas, and therefore any generalizations to all settlements across the Bahamas are not suitable.

(1) Research Aim and Methods

This research aims to clarify how the local community of the Black Seminoles and their culture have been preserved and the modern challenges the community faces. Along with possibilities for further preservation efforts which can lead to global recognition. To do this, the research uses a qualitative approach, it combines archival research, field visits, interviews with locals and experts, and surveys of educators to explore their cultural identity, historical journey, and socio-economic challenges.

2. The Roots and Development of a Unique Heritage

This chapter starts with tracing the origins of the Black Seminoles as the children of escape enslaved Africans and the Seminole Native American tribe. It points out the mutual beneficial nature of their collaboration and unique culture. In the 1820's the Black Seminoles migrated to The Bahamas and settled on a remoted settlement (Town or village) named Red

Bays, Andros, a name given to the settlement to reflect the '*Red Indians*', a name that the locals from other parts of the island called them (Rosalyn Howard, 1999). The migration pattern itself is unique, as most Bahamians of African descent, up until this point arrived either through the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade as enslaved individuals or as enslaved person brought by White slave owners ([Craton, 1986). The settlement provided the seclusion needed to preserved their cultural practices such as basket weaving, woodcarving, oral storytelling, and fishing and farming practices, which continue to define the community's identity. Despite their historical and cultural contributions, the legacy of the Black Seminoles remains largely underrepresented in Bahamian national narratives.

3. Cultural Preservation Efforts on Red Bays

This chapter explored the multifaceted heritage of the Black Seminoles, encompassing both tangible and intangible aspects, such as basket weaving, wood carving, oral traditions and bush medicine (Turner, 2024). This chapter underscores the significance of safeguarding both forms of heritage to preserve cultural identity. It notes the community's endeavors in this regard, which include the sale of traditional crafts and the art of oral storytelling. Community events—like the Snapper Fisherman Tournament and the Back to Angola Festival—play a crucial role in these preservation efforts. However, despite the limited governmental support, the chapter recognizes several noteworthy initiatives: the renaming of the local school, the raising of a monument, promotion via a local TV show and road paving. Additionally, a Sustainable Development Master Plan was introduced, which sought to establish a Cultural Heritage Village; yet, this plan was not fully realized.

4. Educational Perspectives on Heritage

This chapter looks at the role of education in preserving the cultural heritage of the Black Seminoles in Red Bays. Education is key to cultural preservation, respect for diversity and connecting students to their heritage. The B. A. Newton Primary School in Red Bays is the main institution where the history and traditions of the Black Seminoles are taught alongside the national curriculum. There is some cultural representation in nearby schools. A survey of teachers in The Bahamas (excluding Andros Island) found that most are somewhat familiar with the history of the Black Seminoles through

teaching about the islands in Social Studies classes but lacked resources and training to teach the topic effectively. The chapter notes the current curriculum repeats the same topics that have been taught in the country for the last 30-40 years (Ministry of Education, Commonwealth of The Bahamas, 1997). It does not cover the diverse heritage of the nation including the history of the Black Seminoles. To fix these issues, the chapter suggests the need for curriculum updates, the development of multimedia resources, teacher training on Black Seminole Heritage and possible field trips to Red Bays.

5. Modern Challenges of Red Bays

This chapter speaks about the complex interrelationship of economic, infrastructure, and demographic difficulties of the Black Seminole community. Economic decline and out-migration due to limited job opportunities and a shift away from traditional crafts (Ziel, 2011). Infrastructure is underdeveloped with poorly maintained facilities in general, all contributing further to stagnation in the community. The population has become smaller, being predominantly female, and in the last five years, there have been no babies born (Curtis, 2023). All in all, economic hardship and poor infrastructure inhibit the development of Red Bays and threaten its culture.

6. Possibilities for Cultural Preservation

This chapter discusses the Possibilities for Cultural Preservation and explains how cultural heritage preservation of Black Seminoles in Red Bays can become a sustainable culture, have economic development, empower the community, and be internationally recognized using examples from the internship with UNESCO in Thailand that the author took. It notes that Bahamian heritage laws that currently exist only cover tangible heritage and not intangible (The Commonwealth of The Bahamas Government, 1998). The chapter proposes the integration of Red Bays in the National Heritage List through UNESCO's concept of Outstanding Universal Value, which highlights the unique traditions and historical importance of the community. Lastly, the chapter proposes changes that must be made in order to protect the intangible heritage and proposes a development plan for turning Red Bays into a cultural village, which includes an eco-museum, ecolodge, and heritage trails. In the long term, it might be a path to restore Red Bays through

cultural pride, sustained income from tourism and heritage crafts, and international recognition of the community.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

When summarizing the findings, this chapter reemphasizes the importance of the Black Seminoles' heritage and their challenges but, at the same time, indicating their potential in terms of cultural preservation. It also clearly outlines the present educational system and legal framework shortfalls, with a call for a holistic approach to cultural preservation and community development. The study calls for the integration of Black Seminoles' history in the national curriculum, and updating the nation's heritage laws in intangible cultural heritage. Lastly, key conclusions for the research are that the Black Seminoles' cultural heritage is in jeopardy and underrepresented in national narratives, while the community shows resilience and adaptability. Some recommendations for the community are policy and educational changes, sustainable development improvements and national and international recognitions.

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Abstract: This research examines the origins, cultural practices, and present challenges of the Black Seminoles on Andros Island in the Red Bays Settlement using the historical perspective and cultural heritage. The unique practices of, basket making, woodcarving, and storytelling are influenced by African and Native American people. Some key findings are preservation activities ongoing within the community but little governmental support and a very low level of public awareness outside the settlement. The community still faces significant challenges such as economic and infrastructural and demographic. However, these heritage preservation elements present openings for cultural sustainability and economic development through tourism. The study finally brings forth the recommendation of making Red Bays a Cultural Village with an eco-museum, eco-lodge, and heritage trails, while integrating Black Seminole contributions into Bahamian education and heritage policies.