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Native American Festival Preserves American Roots in Pelham Bay Park



Bronxites gather in Pelham Bay Park to learn about Native American culture
(Jimin Kim Photography)

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by Kim Hardware and Gary Axelbank

October 3, 2019

Hundreds of people gathered for the Bronx Native American Festival on Sunday, Sept. 29 in Pelham Bay Park. The 25th year of the annual festival celebrated indigenous people of the Western Hemisphere through music, dance, storytelling, poetry and food.

The event was sponsored by the [New York City Parks & Recreation](#) and [The Friends of Pelham Bay Park](#). The festival's featured acts included [The SilverCloud Singers](#), drummers from several North American native groups, and [Cetiliztli Nauhcampa](#) – a dance troupe whose ancestry is tied to natives from several areas including Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean.

In addition to the traditional performances, there was more to do: The New York City Parks Mounted Unit, which patrols parks around the city on horseback, brought horses for visitors to pet. Several Native American entrepreneur vendors also sold art, clothing and jewelry.



Young indigenous people gather at Pelham Bay Park (Jimin Kim Photography)

The founder of the festival, Bobby Gonzalez, is a descendant of the Taino people (who are native to the Caribbean) and a lifelong Bronx resident. He started the festival a quarter-century ago to pass down ancient Native American traditions to future generations and to remind the community about the existence of numerous indigenous groups still living today.

"I'm a storyteller," he told *thisistheBronx*. "I'm a performance poet. I'm a lecturer. I go to colleges, do corporate functions, and go to museum school exhibits. My passion is to dispel commonly held stereotypes and misconceptions about native people throughout the Western Hemisphere."



Indigenous woman with child at Bronx Native American Festival ([Jimin Kim Photography](#))

According to a 2017 report by the United States Census Bureau, there are approximately 6.8 million Native Americans in the US. But that might not tell the whole story.

“It’s hard to put numbers on it because there are so many who come from Latin America,” Gonzalez said. “In the census forms people put down Mexican or Salvadorian, but many of them are [actually] indigenous. In fact, a number of these so-called Latin Americans can’t speak Spanish. They speak their indigenous language.”



Observers watch a traditional dance at The Bronx Native American Festival (Jimin Kim Photography)

Gonzalez says he appreciates it when Non-Native Americans take an interest in the Bronx Native American Festival. "We raise awareness of the culture of the native people who are still here and it's an opportunity for non-natives to interact one-on-one with Native Americans. It's clear they love it. They say, 'When's your next one, when's your next one?'"



Native Americans celebrate their culture in The Bronx (Jimin Kim Photography)

Gonzalez said this year he was voted the *New York City Indian of the Year*. It's the first time that someone from the Bronx has won the title. "It's an honor for me and for our beautiful borough," Gonzalez said.





25th Annual Bronx Native American Festival ([Jimin Kim Photography](#))

Gonzalez' next planned event will be at the Fordham University campus in The Bronx on Saturday, November 9th. The event is free admission and takes place from 11 A.M. to 4 P.M.

Follow Bobby Gonzalez on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

Check out [Jimin Kim's](#) fabulous [photos of the event](#).

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Jonas Bronck

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Hundreds gathered on Sunday, September 29, at Pelham Bay Park, New York City for the Bronx Native American Festival. For the past 25 years, the event has celebrated indigenous people of the Western Hemisphere through music, dance, storytelling, poetry and food.

According to a 2017 report by the United States Census Bureau, there are only approximately 6.8 million Native Americans including those of more than one race in the US, a country with a total population of about 330 million. One of the festival's main missions is preserving the culture of native groups and educating the community on the diversity of indigenous people.

 Bronx Native American Festival Gathers Hundreds

Bobby Gonzalez, a descendant of Tainos, a native people of the Caribbean, founded the festival. He was also the MC of this year's event. Gonzalez, a lifelong Bronx resident, is also a poet and motivational speaker. He started the festival to pass down ancient native traditions to the next generation and to remind the community about the existence of numerous indigenous groups still living today.

Featured acts included the Silvercloud Singers including drummers from several North American native groups and Cetiliztli Nauhcampa, a dance troupe whose ancestry is tied to natives from areas including Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean. The New York City Parks Mounted Unit, which patrols parks around the city on horseback, brought horses for visitors to pet. There were several indigenous entrepreneur vendors selling art, clothes and jewelry.

Reporting and photography for this event were provided by Jimin Kim.

About Jimin Kim

Jimin, a resident of Long Island, NY, is photographer / reporter with a deep interest in foreign affairs, national and local news.

He graduated from Stony Brook University, NY with a Bachelor's degree in Journalism in 2016.

For more information, please visit his website [here](#).

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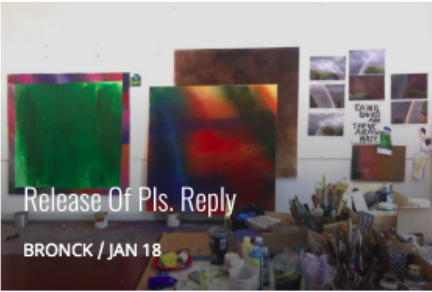
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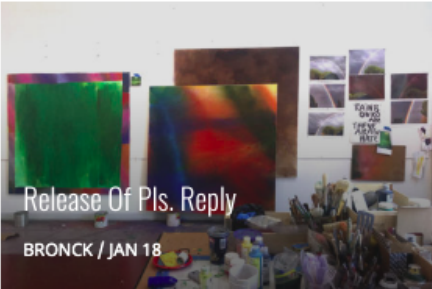




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