

“We are the First Treaties Nations”: Reclaiming Eastern Identity through Powwows in the mid-Atlantic

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In recent years, Tribal Nations in the mid-Atlantic region of the U.S. have increasingly been incorporating Eastern styles of dance at contemporary powwows. Powwows, both as an intertribal social gathering and as a shared repertoire of song and dance, predominately came from Tribes on the Great Plains and Prairies. Tribal Nations on the East Coast later adopted powwow as expressions of Indigeneity in the 1970s. However, Algonquian Tribal Nations, along with other Siouan and Iroquoian Tribal Nations, have recently been reclaiming Eastern traditional regalias, dance practices, and languages through powwow performance and culture. Based on ten years of fieldwork on East Coast powwows as both a participant and observer, I show how mid-Atlantic Natives reclaim and affirm East Coast Native identities through the incorporation of Eastern dance styles at powwows. Given the small body of literature on powwows on the East Coast, this paper contributes towards ethnomusicological discourses on contemporary powwows and Eastern Native identities.