HOW ARE LENAPE PEOPLE BRINGING THEIR LANGUAGE AND CULTURE BACK?

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

A new exhibition in New York is telling the story of the Lenape, the Indigenous people whose homeland included Manhattan. During the 19th century, the United States forced many Indigenous children into boarding schools. They were separated from their families, given new names and punished for speaking their own languages. The aim was to make them abandon their cultures. One object in the exhibition is a 150-year-old hymnal written partly in Munsee, a Lenape language. Missionaries originally used it to teach Christian songs, but Lenape people are now using it to recover old words and grammar. The exhibition also includes clothing, music, paintings and modern protest art. The Lenape were badly affected by disease, violence and forced removal, but their story did not end. Today, communities in the United States and Canada are working to protect their language, land and traditions.

WHY IS THIS INTERESTING?

This story shows that colonialism did not only take land. It also attacked languages, names and traditions. It is surprising that a book once used to erase Lenape culture is now helping to rebuild it. The exhibition also challenges the idea that Indigenous peoples belong only to the past. Lenape communities are still active and are shaping their own future.

THINK LIKE A HISTORIAN

“Why was keeping the Lenape language so important?”

Source: The Guardian

https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2026/sep/30/native-american-lenape-art-exhibit