

By Jungwon Kim

STAFF WRITER

A grassy slope in the Bronx was transformed into a ceremonial ground during a powwow at Orchard Beach yesterday.

It was the first time Caribbean natives gathered with Native North Americans in New York City, organizers said.

"I feel very proud because I'm bringing the heritage in the city limits," said J.E. Parilla, a Bronx prison guard who is known in this circle as Chief Council Pony Hair.

Parilla's Bronx-based Native American Correctional Indian Society put on the Orchard Beach event in conjunction with Presencia Taina, a Bronx cultural organization for one group of indigenous people from the Caribbean.

Chief Pony Hair, a Taino-Cheyenne, said the purpose of holding a powwow at an urban location is to get others "to take notice of what a beautiful culture we are."

Although yesterday's gathering of some 200 people was primarily social, powwows are also forums for issues like the struggle to save ancestral burial grounds of the Matinecock Nation at Fort Totten, said drummer Lonnie Moonfire of Rego Park. A Cherokee activist named DayStarr, from Flushing, took the opportunity to pass out a Native American newsletter she puts together monthly.

At the start of the event, an upstate woman

known as Nancy Eagle Spirit Woman thanked "the Creator" and the four directions before turning to greet the Tainos, Cherokees, Apaches, Seminoles and Quechuas who were present.

Eagle Spirit Woman stood in the center of the circle and prayed aloud for indigenous people to learn "a vision of equality."

She advised the crowd to do so "by maintaining and preserving ancient languages" and "listening to our cherished and beloved elders who hold the rhythm of the world."

Standing with her 6-year-old son and 13-year-old daughter, Gladys Angorena of Jamaica said softly, "That basically says everything."

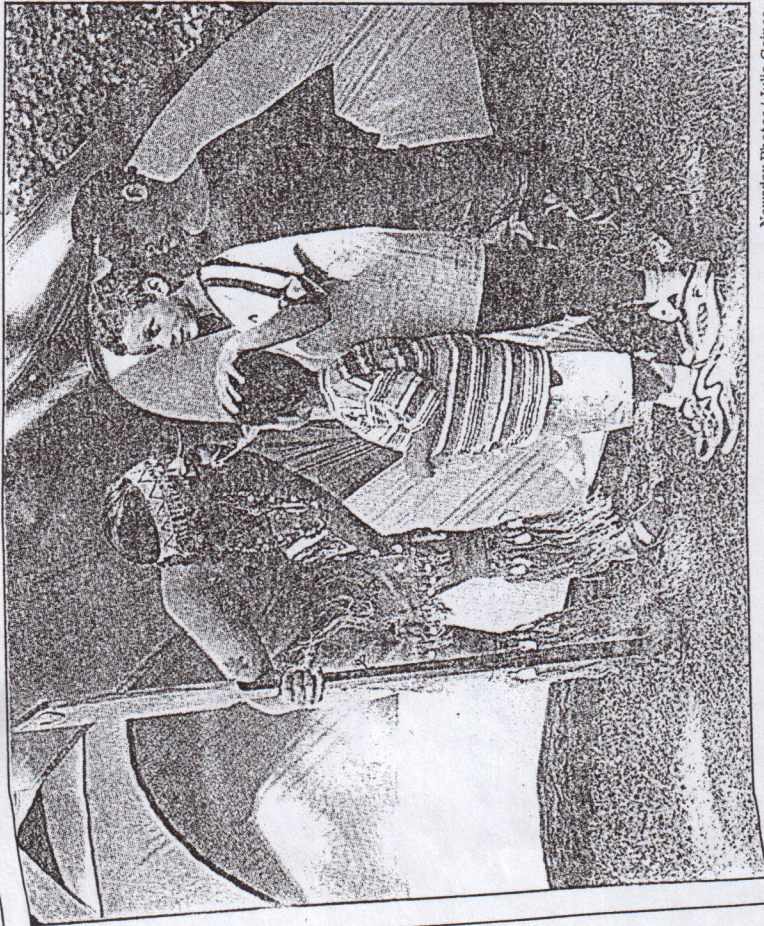
It was Angorena's first powwow. City dwellers like her are just the people organizers were hoping to reach when they dug into their own pockets for \$1,500 to hold the powwow in the city.

For Angorena, the event marked a very personal transition. After her father died three months ago, the Cuban native began to study her Taino heritage with her children, visiting the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution in Battery Park to learn about ancient symbols and dress.

As the heavy thump of the drum gave way to polyrhythmic Caribbean beats, Angorena said, "To know I'm part of this, that this is where I come from, it's something to be proud of."



Kateri Summer, top, and Shianne get their sister Imami ready for the powwow.



Newsday Photos / Julia Gaines

Holding a war instrument called a macana, Iuaonbo or "White Wolf" of the Taino Arawac tribe talks with, from left, Laurence Toridio and his brother Claudio, both of Brooklyn, and Michael Coredno of New Haven.

People Power

Powwow puts heritage in focus