

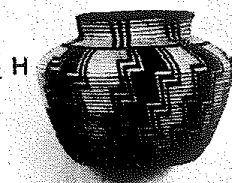
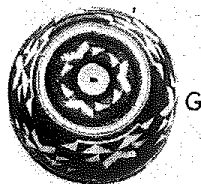
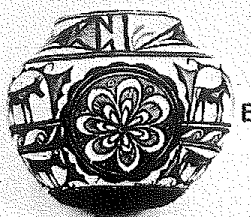
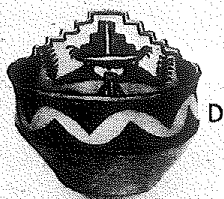
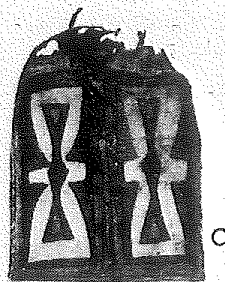
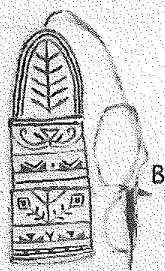
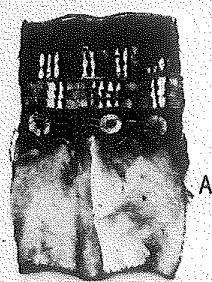
DENVER ART MUSEUM

1300 LOGAN STREET, DENVER, COLORADO

DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN ART

WILLENA D. CARTWRIGHT, CURATOR

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RED-DARK-LIGHT IN DESIGNS

LEAFLET 114

DECEMBER, 1951

1. INTRODUCTORY. This leaflet is concerned with the most important evidences of a combination of colors very widely distributed through the field of Indian art. The term "red-dark-light" is used rather than "red-black-white" because blue or brown are often substituted for black; and cream or pale yellow for white. "Red" is somewhat inaccurate because the shade ranges from dull orange-brown to almost scarlet, but the term is used because a satisfactory substitute is lacking.

Red-dark and red-light combinations are related to the triple combination, but dark-light is too common to be considered.

2. DISTRIBUTION. The color combination is—or once was—found in 3 distinct areas in the United States: 1, from the Rockies east to the Atlantic; 2, the Southwest; 3, the West Coast States. Practically all of Canada except the Eskimo-Pacific Coast areas should possibly be included with Area 1; and the Pacific Coastal regions of British Columbia and Southeast Alaska belong with Area 3. The interior of Alaska uses the combination, apparently in relation to Area 1.

AREA 1: THE ROCKIES TO THE ATLANTIC

3. GREAT LAKES TO ATLANTIC: QUILLWORK. From unknown beginnings up to about 1825 the most commonly recognized aspect of the color combination appeared in porcupine quill embroidery (A). Deer skin was decorated by areas of quillwork with the natural light color as a background for designs in brownish-black and red-orange. The designs are either simple blocky figures of animals, or of bird forms upright as though standing on their tails, with wings partially outstretched like arms (these last are the thunderbirds so common in Indian myths of Canada and the northern United States); or small geometric figures such as triangles, oblongs or squares, or combinations of straight lines or bands in alternating colors.

Work of this sort, now very rare, seems to have been done mainly by the Eastern Sicux (just west of the Great Lakes), tribes around the Great Lakes, the Iroquois, and the Delaware-Shawnee group. Its presence is always an indication of considerable antiquity. Quilled cradles of the Wyoming Arapaho and pipe stems from the central and northern Plains indicate that at one time the color combination spread to the Rockies.

4. GREAT LAKES TO ATLANTIC: PAINTING. Accounts of early travelers, and some specimens of the 1700's and early 1800's, indicate that in this area there was once a type of decorating skin articles with fine-line painted patterns in the red-dark-light combination. The style may have extended well west of the Great Lakes.

The style survived till about 1900 or slightly later among the Naskapi of Labrador. This tribe made clothing and many other kinds of equipment (B) from caribou skin and painted them with line designs. After the coming of White traders the original dark brown was replaced by a commercial blue paint. Reference 7 describes a Naskapi painted coat in detail.

5. CENTRAL AND NORTHERN PLAINS: PAINTING. In this region the painting of buffalo hide skin clothing and other objects with geometric designs lasted up till about 1880 (C). The style is obviously a western extension of that noted in paragraph 4 because of the many closely related patterns. A bag from the area, in a French collection, is dated 1724 and shows the styles and color

combinations fully developed. As among the Naskapi, blue has long been used for the dark color.

On the southern Plains painting on skin seems not to have been done to any extent, but this apparent condition may be due to lack of early specimens or records.

Robes collected in the 1700's in the central Mississippi Valley and now in Europe indicate the painting of skin in the 3 colors was done in that region. A few prints of the same period show something of the sort from the lower Mississippi Valley.

6. SOUTHEASTERN BASKETRY. In the southern states, from the Mississippi to the Atlantic, basketry was largely made of plaited split wild cane. This light colored glossy material takes dye well and red and dark brown were the standard colors (F). An enormous variety of elaborate geometric designs in the red-dark-light combination appear on baskets from many southern tribes. Even today at least 2 tribes, the Chitimacha of Louisiana and the Cherokee of North Carolina, make considerable basketry in this style.

7. DISCUSSION. Though the huge area east of the Rockies once held a large variety of tribes, differing in many details of their ways of living, certain major factors to some extent bound them together to something like a common heritage. In the forested sections the tribes were affected by a common environment, and the lack of natural barriers really difficult to cross allowed wide spreading of ideas and customs. In the North the tribes mostly spoke dialects of the basic Algonkian tongue. The Iroquois of New York and thereabouts came originally from the South, as did many of the Plains tribes. The northern Plains were also in considerable part peopled by tribes moving in from the East.

In view of these factors it is not surprising that the red-dark-light color combination was well nigh universal in the Plains-Eastern Woodland region. The evidence, such as it is, suggests that the color combination developed in the South and spread everywhere from there. But the existence of coloring materials pretty much everywhere makes this by no means certain.

AREA 2: THE SOUTHWEST

8. POTTERY. For 1000 years or more the red-dark-light color combination has been common in the Southwest on pottery of the Pueblo peoples, with either red and dark on light or dark and light on red as the main combinations. Many prehistoric wares show these combinations and today either or both are found—or were until recently—at San Ildefonso (D), Santo Domingo, Tsia, Santa Ana, Laguna, Acoma, Zuni (E) and among the Hopi.

9. BASKETRY. The color combination is not common on southwestern baskets and is confined almost entirely to occasional products of the Arizona Apache and the Yavapai. The Pima very rarely added red painted designs to their woven light and dark ones.

10. WEAVING. Red, white and blue, sometimes black, were the standard colors for Navaho weaving in its greatest days (mid-1800's) and to a considerable extent since then. But this art is so recent and so much affected by materials from the White man that it is not really indicative of native ideas. The much older and aboriginal weaving of the Pueblo groups does not favor the combination more than slightly.

11. DISCUSSION. The Southwest is almost entirely set apart from the Indians to the East. Its ancient links are south into Mexico and north. Because its

chief use of the red-dark-light color combination—almost to the exclusion of other appearances—is on pottery, and since there are indications of perhaps a partially common basis for Mexican and some Pueblo pottery it would seem that the feeling expressed in paragraph 7 about a southern origin for the custom may receive support in the Southwest. Certainly the southwestern use of the color combination did not come from the Plains or East.

AREA 3: PACIFIC AREA

12. BASKETRY. Basketry is the great art of this region and the red-dark-light combination is common everywhere in it, though in southwestern California the red is really a light brown which hardly justifies the term "red." But in both central and north California (G and H) and in Washington and southwest British Columbia the color combination is extensively used. Almost always there are red and dark combinations on a light background. The same is true of the Klikitat type baskets of interior Washington, but in coastal Washington and British Columbia the combination occurs in the form of red-dark-light designs on a brown background.

13. NORTHWEST COAST: PAINTING. Before modern commercial paints in many colors came into use the wood carvings, and paintings on flat wood surfaces, for which this region is celebrated used red, black or blue, and light colors almost exclusively, the red and dark shades being the most common by far.

14. NORTHWEST COAST & INTERIOR ALASKA. Porcupine quill embroidery and, later, beadwork were done with the red-dark-light combination with little exception.

15. DISCUSSION. The area from the Rockies west to the Pacific is as distinct a one as the Southwest, though the two once had some slight trade linkage. Area 1, discussed in the first paragraphs of this leaflet, is entirely out of the picture. Even more than the Southwest the Far West is an independent area, so that its use of the red-dark-light combination must apparently be thought of as a local development due to the presence of naturally colored basketry materials.

As was said earlier, the presence of the combination in the interior of Alaska might be the result of ancient basic connections with Area 1, but this possibility is little more than speculation.

Compiled by F. H. Douglas from examination of the great collections. The subject is not treated in the literature but the following references are pertinent:

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7. A Naskapi Painted Skin Shirt. Material Culture Note, Number 10, 1939.