



BLERDTEK

CULTURE CROSSINGS: BLACK GAMERS MAKE A HOMEBASE IN ANIMAL CROSSING: NEW HORIZONS

When a manufacturer finally gets representation right.

BY STARRENE RHETT ROCQUE | FEBRUARY 22, 2021



Reading Time: 4 minutes

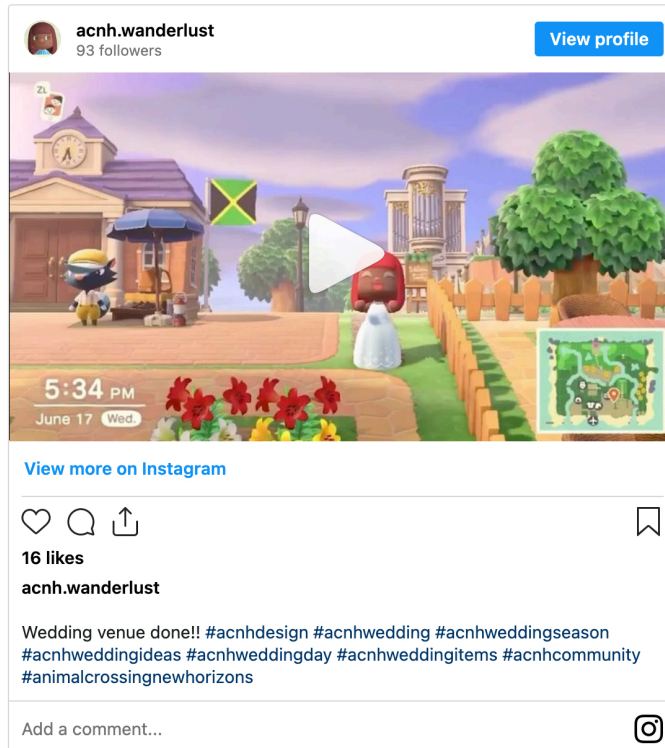
Daniel Stokes is a Brooklyn-based human resources professional who—when he has time—enjoys playing *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*, a life simulation game where players create and run their own islands. Stokes began playing last March when the game was first released, just as the chaos in the world began to reach a fever pitch. He didn't think much about how the game spawned a sub-genre of Black users applying cultural idiosyncrasies until prompted to reveal his island's name to co-workers.

"Some of my [non-Black] co-workers asked what my island's name was," Stokes tells AURN, "I said, 'Thotlandia,' and they were like, 'What?'" But another Black co-worker actually got it. She was like, 'OMG, that's where Porsha is from!'" That would be Porsha Williams from *The Real Housewives of Atlanta*. In an episode of the popular reality show, Williams referred to herself as a *native of Thotlandia*. The root of the word stems from T.H.O.T., a derogatory acronym commonly used in Black web vernacular in a variety of ways, whether playfully or in a manner of offense. Porsha and Stokes used it playfully.

That's just a snippet of how people—especially Black people—have been expressing themselves in the game *Animal Crossing: New Horizons* over the past year.

Animal Crossing made its debut in 2001 on Nintendo Gamecube. Centered around creating a town that features a human character living among anthropomorphic animals, it has developed a cult following. The game has seen multiple iterations over the years, such as *Animal Crossing: City Folk*, *Animal Crossing: New Leaf*, *Animal Crossing: Wild World*, etc., with the most recent version, *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*, being released last year for Nintendo Switch, just after lockdown began.

The game allows players to build their own islands from scratch while fellowshipping with other players along the way if they choose to. People can visit each other's islands where up to eight players at a time can party, have events, and pick up or exchange items that will help them improve their island's life and aesthetics.



"It has definitely been like an escape," says [TechMe0ut](#), a North Carolina-based Youtuber and content creator, "because you're on an island. So, that alone is nice, and then in being on this island, you have as much control as the game allows with you naming it, designing it, controlling who is invited, who lives on the island, and who gets kicked off of the island. It's about letting your imagination run wild and creating something, and making it look beautiful, and then showing it off and inviting people to see what you created."

For Black players in particular, the element of community became even more important amid isolation due to the pandemic, as the coronavirus killed Black people at higher rates than their white counterpart. Then, there was the rampant police brutality, government drama, and Black Lives Matter protests in full force. Last summer, players expressed themselves throughout the game in various ways as a response to what was going on in the world. Some people customized clothing and furniture to sport the Black Power Fist or to display phrases such as "Black Lives Matter." They created African print designs, LGBTQ+ flags, and even [flags that represented their ancestry](#).

"I fell in love with [the game] immediately," explains Schnelle Acevedo, a Brooklyn-based mom and content creator who purchased it at the start of lockdown last March. "I joined all the groups. There's one called [Animal Crossing for Black Folk!](#) and it's pretty hysterical. They just take everything and blackify it somehow—and it's the best."



Not found

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[Animal Crossing: New](#)

Animal Crossing: New Horizons.

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Think of Black Animal Crossing as a subgenre. It's similar to #BlackTwitter or #DemDeads, (used by Black fans of *The Walking Dead*) or #DemThrones (used by Black fans of *Game of Thrones*). The *Animal Crossing: New Horizons for Black Folk!* group, which launched last March, boasts over 6,000 followers. There's also #AfroCrossing which is used on twitter. The latter isn't related to the Facebook group, but it started similarly as a way for Black *Animal Crossing* fans to find each other.

So why are Black people gravitating toward each other in this universe?

It's as simple as the mission statement for Animal Crossing New Horizons for Black Folk!, to be a safe space where Black people can show love to each other, especially during a time when finding some semblance of normalcy and safety is clutch.

"I think we just have our own jokes that are really funny at our core," says Acevedo. "There was one thread inside the group where we related characters of villages to our uncles or that kid in the corner in school that was always doing weird stuff."

Tali, an adult education director based in Olympia, Washington, who is also in the aforementioned Facebook group, can relate to the camaraderie and ingenuity of Black genius applied to fandom. "I had a Juneteenth event on my island and a Met Gala where a bunch of us made outfits, showed up, and showed out," they explained to AURN. "You can only have a certain amount of people on your island at any given time, so we would all coordinate different islands that everyone can go to, and we just hung out being loud, happy and Black, talking sh-t, roasting each other's outfits and talking sh-t about each other's hometowns. We managed to carve out our own space and make it our own thing."

Last fall, Nintendo added a few more options for Black hairstyles. Whereas the game's initial release only came with two, it now includes afro puffs, two standard afro options, cornrows, a fade, and two loc options. "I remember seeing the trailer for it when it came out," says Tali, "and I was like, 'Holy sh-t! There's Black hairstyles! Look at those twists and that fade—and it's a nice fade. I remember thinking, finally somebody's getting [it]—and then when the update came out a couple months ago for the new ones, where you got the afro with the part, and then the really nice afro, and then the puffs, I genuinely cried."

Next up for *Animal Crossing: New Horizons* fans is Festivale, which is based on various carnival celebrations held in the Caribbean and in Brazil. In the game, players will get new items and new dance moves, which were released Feb 1, as well as a visit from Pavé on February 15th, the date of the big event. Pavé is a peacock and "professional dancer" who will lead the festivities. It's not yet known how the party will play out, but enthusiastic players are already busy making plans and creating custom carnival designs. Since there won't be any carnivals happening this year, this is the next best thing.

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