

“The Coast of the Strait
was a place of overlapping
borders - natural, cultural,
and political...”

-Tiya Miles

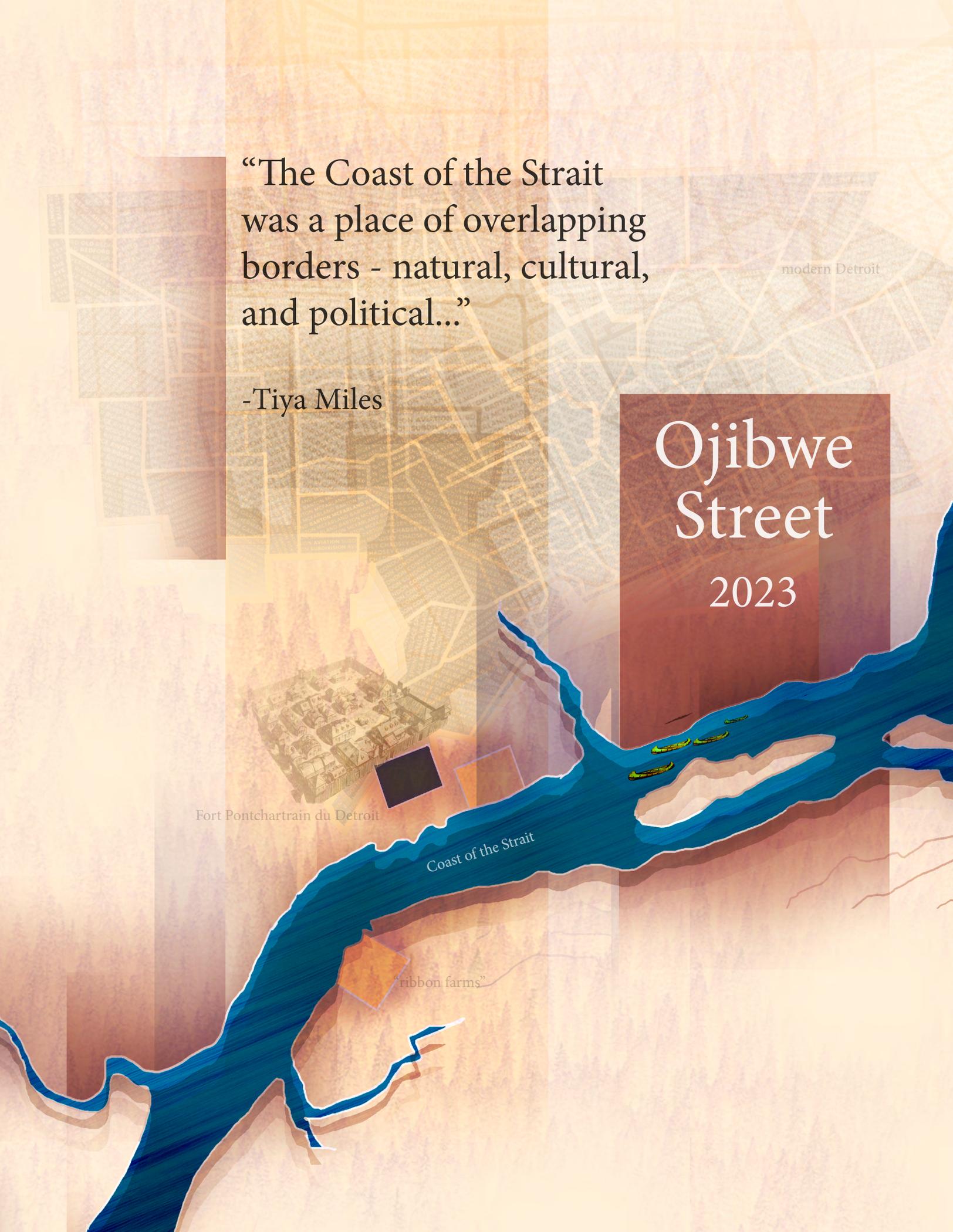
modern Detroit

Ojibwe Street 2023

Fort Pontchartrain du Detroit

Coast of the Strait

“ribbon farms”



Ojibwe Street Historical Marker

When Antoine de Mothe Cadillac established Fort Pontchartrain du Detroit in 1701, he would lay an important cornerstone in the history of this city's cultural mosaic. The former naming of this site, Cadillac Square, commemorates a historical and almost-literal footprint of Detroit's first European settler. In an attempt to deliver France the upper hand in its imperial conquest of "new worlds," Cadillac constructed his fort along a narrow strait of the present-day Detroit River. Here, he strategically crafted political and economic partnerships with local indigenous tribes, blocking the path of British expansion into the territory. Cadillac's fort marked the beginning of this city's history of colonial expansion; with the exploitation of its land, resources, and humans as a crucial narrative to "modern" Detroit's identity.

After establishing this fort with its agricultural, trading, and military infrastructure, Cadillac left Detroit to become Louisiana's governor in 1710. Before his departure; however, Cadillac asked over one-thousand people from the Fox, Kickapoo, and Mascouten tribes to move to Detroit and populate its economy as he left. This laid the groundwork for future cultural tensions and tribal warfare in Detroit, with a violent struggle beginning over primacy and access to the land's resources. This led to countless numbers of Fox and Mascouten people killed, and many of those who survived were captured and enslaved in Detroit for the remainder of their lives. Cadillac and the French government, whose actions were responsible for this period of tension and conflict, did little toward resolutions in Detroit after Cadillac's exit. The former name of this site, Cadillac Square, implies a story of heroism with little criticality. As a militant occupier of diverse lands, and a leader in pursuit of capitalist power and social order, Cadillac's role in history led to the enslavement and deaths of many lives.

The Ojibwe tribe is a group of indigenous peoples who reside in what is present-day Canada and the midwestern United States, as well as areas along the Great Plains. Upon Cadillac's arrival in Detroit, the Ojibwe were among various indigenous civilizations already existing in the region, with complex rituals of living with- and from the land's resources. Cadillac colonized this land from indigenous peoples, with little regard to their homes or wellbeing. Under the control of French settlers, the land from which these people lived began its transition into a commodity and platform for power struggles. Under both the French and British rules, countless numbers of Ojibwe people and other indigenous peoples were murdered in a series of imperial-related conflicts. Over 5,000 Indigenous lives were lost in the French and Indian War between 1754-1763, over 200 lives were lost during the Pontiac War from 1763-1766, and over 10,000 indigenous people were killed during the War of 1812. Even more suffering was caused by European colonizers during this period, as members of indigenous populations were captured and enslaved by European forces following the wars. The Ojibwe culture still lives on today in parts of North America, demonstrating a legacy of resistance and prosperity. The renaming of this site to commemorate the Ojibwe people serves as a critical reminder of Detroit's sometimes-forgotten histories. This act of naming acknowledges the city's origins without erasing stories of struggle, innovation, and the community of its people held in bondage. This marker and its accompanying poster speak to Detroit's history as a palimpsest of narratives, footprints, and grids; layered into the region's land and its water.