



National Indigenous Women's Resource Center

NIWRC's Statement on White House Use of "Pocahontas" Slur

Nov. 28th, 2017

The National Indigenous Women's Resource Center stands with the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI)¹ the Native American Journalists Association (NAJA)² and the condemnation that numerous other Native organizations have issued regarding the White House's use of "Pocahontas" in a derisive, dehumanizing, and disgraceful manner, especially during the month of November, National Native American Heritage Month. NIWRC calls upon sister and ally organizations to discourage President Trump's continued use of this name in a disrespectful way.

Although NIWRC is a non-partisan organization- committed to ending all forms of gender-based violence against American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, and Indigenous peoples, we view the President's disrespectful use of the name "Pocahontas" as especially significant in the context of violence against Native women. Pocahontas, of the Pamunkey Tribe in Virginia (which was just recently granted Federal Recognition status in 2016, after over 400 years of colonization), was kidnapped and subsequently raped by colonizers in her early teens. She was then brought to England, where she was shown off like a specimen to the English. At the age of 21, and before she could return to her People and her homelands, she died.

Pocahontas' story sadly resonates with the lived experience of many American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian and Indigenous women. The National Institute of Justice reported more than 4 in 5 American Indian and Alaska Native women (84.3%) have experienced violence in their lifetime, including: 56.1% who have experienced sexual violence, 55.5% who have experienced physical violence by an intimate partner, 48.4% who have experienced stalking and 66.4% who have experienced psychological aggression by an intimate partner. 97% of this violence is committed by non-Native perpetrators, who often act with impunity. Statistics such as these are perpetuated by the Indian princess and squaw stereotypes that damage and promote violence against Native women and their cultures.

¹ <http://www.ncai.org/news/articles/2017/11/27/national-congress-of-american-indians-ncai-president-jefferson-keel-issues-statement-on-the-white-house-ceremony-honoring-native-american-code-talkers>

² <http://www.naja.com/news/m.blog/509/naja-denounces-white-house-s-use-of-pocahontas-as-slur>

Pocahontas is not a Disney Movie.³ She is not a colonizer's fantasy of a Native Woman. She is not a costume. She is not a mascot or a caricature of the past. She is not a joke, nor should she be used in attacks against other women. Her name was Matoaka. She was the daughter of Chief Wahunsenaca and her mother, Pocahontas. She was a sister. She was a wife. She was a mother. She was, and continues to be, a beloved hero to her people. She continues to inspire our Native youth and our emerging leaders, including those of her own tribe. Like all Indigenous women, Pocahontas is sacred and is to be honored.

Just as Pocahontas is deserving of respect, so too are the many American Indian and Alaska Native veterans, who have fought proudly on behalf of the United States, including the Native women who have served or continue to serve our country. NIWRC honors the many Code Talkers who fought as warriors for their people and in various American wars. This should be a time of honoring warriors, not condemning others in the form of a joke and in the presence of our elders. The NIWRC thanks the many veterans in our own families, clans, and tribes who have bravely stood with the United States in service.

The use of the name "Pocahontas" in any manner other than by way of acknowledging her courage and offering a subsequent apology, by any sitting President, dehumanizes this relative who, as a child survivor of rape, experienced colonization and genocide at the birth of the United States of America. Nonetheless, as a non-partisan organization, we remain committed to working with both sides of the aisle and federal agencies of every administration in furthering both the sovereignty of our tribal nations and the safety and security of Indigenous women, as the two are undistinguishably tethered.

Sincerely,



Lucy Simpson
Executive Director Officer

³ <https://indiancountrymedianetwork.com/history/genealogy/true-story-pocahontas-historical-myths-versus-sad-reality/>>

About the National Indigenous Women's Resource Center

The National Indigenous Women's Resource Center, Inc. (NIWRC) is a nonprofit organization that is dedicated to restoring the sovereignty of Native nations and safeguarding Native women and their children. The NIWRC supports culturally grounded, grassroots advocacy and provides national leadership to ending gender-based violence in indigenous communities through the development of educational materials and programs, direct technical assistance and the development of local and national policy that builds the capacity of Indigenous communities and strengthens the exercise of tribal sovereignty. www.niwrc.org