

# Protecting Our Women Presented by Marlin Mousseau

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National Indigenous Women's Resource Center

June 25, 1876  
Battle of Little Bighorn

The defeat of Custer and his 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry on this day, was not about a show of strength, but rather a traditional Native American value and belief of protecting our women as well as young women of our nations. Custer was notorious for the rape and killing of our women as well as anyone who stood in his way.

# Sitting Bull's words to his warriors

“A bird, when it is on its nest, spreads its wings to cover the nest and eggs and protect them. It cannot use its wings for defense, but it can cackle and try to drive away the enemy. We are here to protect our wives and children, and we must not let the soldiers get them. Make a brave fight!” (pg. 259 of The Last Stand by Nathaniel Philbrick)

## The Last Stand pg. 278

The Cheyenne had recognized what Custer was up to in his final push to the north. Just as he'd done at the Washita, he was trying to secure female captives. He laughed and said "when we get to the village I'm going to find the Sioux girl with the most elk teeth on her dress and take her along with me"

## The Last Stand continued

In the story of the White Buffalo Calf Woman, the Lakota told of the young man whose lustful thoughts unleashed a dark and enveloping cloud that reduced him to a skeleton. Custer had also succumbed to the perils for ruinous temptations.

# The 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry

The 4 behaviors we found most appalling about them: 1-they drank every day, 2-they cussed a lot, and we couldn't understand how they could take the name of their god in vain, 3-they gambled every day and 4- they had no respect for our women.

# The Power of Native Women

- The Beliefs of Native Cultures
- Redefining our Beliefs as Men

# Egalitarian

Definition: Characterized by a belief in the equality of all people, one who adheres to egalitarian beliefs.

Traditionally, Native American women were never subordinate to men, or vice versa for that matter. What Native societies have always been about is achieving balance in all things, including gender relationships.



# Egalitarian

“Where are your women?” The speaker is Attakullakulla, a Cherokee renowned for his shrewd and effective diplomacy. He has come to negotiate a treaty with the Whites. Among his delegation are women. The absence of women amongst the Whites, makes him suspicious of their intents.

# A Narrative of the Captivity and Removes of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson

**Indian captive Mary Rowlandson**  
**said of her experience:** *“I have been  
in the midst of roaring Lions, Savage  
Bears, that feared neither god, nor man,  
nor the Devil...and yet not one of them  
ever offered the least abuse of unchastity  
to me in word or action.”*

## Thoms stated:

“Among the Algonquian people of the Great Lakes the relatives of Unmarried women defended their right to Regulate their own sexual activity on the Grounds that women were the masters of their own bodies. What was once denounced as wanton by early European observers is now praised as sexually liberated.”

\*Dr. A. C. Ross, Keeper of the Female Medicine Bundle: Biography of Wihopa

## Ephraim Webster quote

“The Indians have no altercations, and in ten years I have not heard any angry expressions nor seen any degree of passion(rage). They treat their women with respect, even tenderness. They use no ardent spirits and they settle their differences amicably (conflict resolution).

# M. St. Pierre and T. Long Soldier Walking in the Sacred Manner

Orville Mesteth, a Lakota elder: “About 1910, when the Catholics were trying especially hard to discourage the people from believing in the old ways, this woman became fed up. She was disappointed in the people for giving up their faith, living in doubt. In the middle of winter, with the thick snow on the ground, she called a large group of people together and said “I’m going to show you something!” She walked into a thicket of plum bushes and snapped a branch off one of those bushes. She held that branch out and sang. Plums sprang out of that branch. She said, “come out and eat, they’re real!” But people had already become so affected (by the influence of the missionaries) that they were frightened and would not eat the plums even though others said they were good and sweet. They had learned to fear their own religion from the Catholic missionaries.

## What kind of beliefs must have been in place?

- “All living things deserve respect because they too have a spirit like mine”.
- She is the representative of children and those spirits yet to come.
- Women are equal human beings not objects of sex.
- Women, children, elders, and those who cannot defend themselves will be protected by protectors.
- No hitting, name calling, belittling, devaluing, dehumanizing, and no sexually objectifying.

# What beliefs were in place?

- Native men had a respectful code of conduct towards all women and each other.
- Violence is not acceptable behavior.
- Native men are fearless in the protection of our families, tribes and homelands, yet polite, kind and courteous within them.
- “If you respect someone, you don’t mistreat them.”

# What Happened to Us (Native Americans)

- Rape and Colonization
- Forced Removal
- Boarding School
- Outlawing Native Religion
- Forces Sterilization



The rate of violent crime victimization among American Indian females (86 per 1,000) was 2 ½ times the rate for all females. The victimization rate among American Indian females was much higher than that found among African American females (46 per 1,000 age 12 or older), about 2 ½ times higher than that among white females (34), and 5 times higher than that among Asian females (17).

## Why Are Native Women More Victimized?

Douglas A. Brownridge, a researcher at the University of Manitoba wrote, “Male Partner Violence Against Women in Canada: An Empirical Analysis” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, Vol. 18, No. 1, Jan. 2003. Basically he compared the rates of DV in the aboriginal and non-aboriginal populations and “controlled” for all the factors that people usually associate with domestic violence (joblessness, poverty, alcohol). Even controlling for those factors, aboriginal women still suffered a higher rate of violence. It’s fascinating stuff.

The conclusion was that  
colonization, boarding schools, and  
Government Policies towards Indians  
was an experience other peoples  
didn't have to endure and was the  
cause of DV/SA

# Government Policy

“Indian Ceremonial Crimes Bill” of 1861 outlawed our lifeways including: religion, language and reinforced the removal of Indian children from their families to assimilate them.

# Indian People Speak Out on Sexual Violence

Europe's hatred for women was most fully manifest in the witch hunts. As many as nine million people were killed during the witch hunts; over 90 percent of them women. It was not possible for these violent, women-hating societies, transplanted to the Americans, to exist side-by-side with egalitarian Native societies.

When I was in the boat I captured a beautiful Carib woman... I conceived desire to take pleasure... I took a rope and trashed her well, for which she raised such unheard screams that you would not have believed your ears. Finally we came to an agreement in such a manner that I can tell you that she seemed to have been brought up in a school of harlots.

In the Indian boarding schools of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, founded by the US government to prevent Indian women from passing on their language and culture to their children, physical and sexual abuse was rampant. Irene Mack Pyawasit recalls her days as a boarding school resident from the Menominee Reservation.

The government employees that they put into the schools had families but still there were an awful lot of Indian girls turning up pregnant. Because the employees were having a lot of fun, and they would force a girl into a situation, and the girl wouldn't always be believed. Then, because she came up pregnant, she would be sent home in disgrace. Some boy would be blamed for it, never the government employee. He was always scott-free. And no matter what the girl said, she was never believed.

Two of the best looking of the squaws were laying in such position, and from the appearance of the genital organs and their wounds, that can be no doubt that they were first ravished and then shot dead. Nearly all of the dead were mutilated.



One woman, big with child, rushed into the church, clasping the altar and crying for mercy for herself and her unborn baby. She was followed, and fell pierced with a dozen lances. The child was torn alive from the yet palpitating body of its mother, first plunged into the holy water to be baptized, and immediately its brains were bashed out against the wall.

I heard one man say that he had cut a woman's private parts out, and had them for exhibition of stick...I heard of numerous instances in which men had cut out the private parts of females, and stretched them over their saddle-bows and some of them over hats.

David Stannard points out that control over women's reproductive abilities and destruction of women and children are essential in destroying a people. If the women of a nation are not disproportionate number of the population will not be severely affected. He says that Native women and children were targeted for wholesale killing in order to destroy the Indian nations.

This is why colonizers such as Andrew Jackson recommended that troops systematically kill Indian women and children after massacres in order to complete extermination. Similarly, Methodist minister Colonial John Chivington's policy was to "kill and scalp all little and big" because "nits make lice". Says Stannard, "No population can survive if its women and children are destroyed...This slaughter of innocents (is not) anything but intentional in design."

- American Horse said of the massacre at Wounded Knee:

The fact of the killing of the women, and more especially the killing of the young boys and girls who are to go on to make up the future and strength of the Indian people is the saddest part of the whole affair and we feel it very sorely

The disrespect of women's bodily integrity is also manifest in the sterilization abuse of the 1970s. In 1972, an Indian woman entered the office of Dr. Connie Uri, a Cherokee/Choctaw doctor, and asked to have a womb implant. Dr. Uri discovered that the woman had been given a hysterectomy for sterilization purposes and had been told that the surgery was irreversible.

Dr. Uri began to investigate Indian Health Services sterilization policies. Her work prompted Senator James Abourezk to request a study on IHS sterilization policies. The General Accounting Office released a study in November 1976, indicating that Native women were being sterilized without informed consent. These investigations led Dr. Uri to estimate 25% of all Native women of childbearing age had been sterilized without their informed consent, with sterilization rates as high as 80% on some reservations.

# Douglas Brownridge Research

The research concluded in order to eliminate DV/SA we must reclaim and internalize our original value system

# NATIVE LIFEWAYS

- VALUES

- Respect
- Humility
- Great Thought
- Generosity
- Compassion
- Bravery
- Love
- Wisdom

- CEREMONIES

- Naming
- Rites of Passage
- Purification
- Knowledge Seeking
- Healing & Thank You
- Prayer Dances
- Sacred Games
- Funerals



# Wopila

Thank you and please let  
us know if you have any  
questions!

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