

# SOVEREIGNTY

## An Inherent Right to Self-Determination



*“When the legal concept of sovereignty was first challenged in the Supreme Court by the state of Georgia in the 1820s, Chief Justice Marshall took pains to examine this legal apparatus and to explain how it functions... “Sovereignty, explained Marshall, exists as a pre-condition among self-governing entities and acts as a legal shield protecting all rights and privileges reserved and implied by nationhood. In fact, treaties were a granting of rights from the tribes, to the federal government.”*

*–Paul VanDevelder; 1999@ Seattle Times*

*“...Indian tribes must act like Indians. That’s the only justification for preserving internal sovereignty... So if we’re going to have internal sovereignty, we’re going to have to bring back the majority of social traditions... if we don’t bring those traditions back, then the problems those traditions solved are going to continue to grow. Then we’ll have to get funding to set up programs to deal with those issues...When you set up programs, you are exercising your internal sovereignty, but the funding sources determines how the program is going to operate and then the funding source defines internal sovereignty.”*

*–Vine Deloria- American Indian Research and Policy Institute*

### TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY:

#### ***ALL TRIBAL NATIONS HAVE AN INHERENT RIGHT TO:***

- 1) A land-base: possession and control is unquestioned and honored by other nations. To exist without fear, but with freedom.
- 2) Self-governance: the ability and authority to make decisions regarding all matters concerning the Tribe without the approval or agreement of others. This includes the ways and methods of decision-making, social, political and other areas of life.
- 3) An economic base and resources: the control, use and development of resources, businesses or industries the Tribe chooses. This includes resources that support the Tribal life way, including the practice of spiritual ways.
- 4) A distinct language and historical and cultural identity: Each Tribe defines and describes its history, including the impact of colonization and racism, tribal culture, worldview and traditions.



*Colonization and violence against Native people means that power and control over Native people’s life way and land have been stolen.*

*As Native people, we have the right and responsibility to advocate for ourselves and our relatives in supporting our right to power and control over our tribal life way and land - tribal sovereignty.*

### NATIVE WOMEN’S SOVEREIGNTY:

#### ***ALL NATIVE WOMEN HAVE AN INHERENT RIGHT TO:***

- 1) Their body and path in life: the possession and control is unquestioned and honored by others. To exist without fear, but with freedom.
- 2) Self-governance: the ability and authority to make decisions regarding all matters concerning themselves, without others’ approval or agreement. This includes the ways and methods of decision-making in social, political and other areas of life.
- 3) An economic base and resources: the control, use and development of resources, businesses or industries that Native women choose. This includes resources that support individual Native women’s chosen life ways, including the practice of spiritual ways.
- 4) A distinct identity, history and culture: Each Native woman defines and describes her history, including the impact of colonization, racism and sexism, tribal women’s culture, worldview and traditions.



*Violence against women, and victimization in general, means that power and control over an individual’s life and body have been stolen.*

*As relatives of women who have been victimized, it is our right and responsibility to be advocates supporting every woman’s right to power and control over her body and life - personal sovereignty.*

“It was to the advantage of white men to mislead white women, and themselves, into believing that their treatment of women was superior to the treatment by the men of the group which they considered savage. Had white women discovered that all women were not mistreated, they might have been intolerant of their men’s abusiveness.”

–Paula Gunn-Allen, Laguna, Sioux and Lebanese, poet, novelist and scholar

Sitting Bull to Alice Fletcher, anthropologist 1881, Ft. Randall: “You are a woman. You have come to me as a friend. Pity my women. We men owe what we have to them. They have worked for us...but in the new life their work is taken away. For my men I see a future; for my women I see nothing. Pity them; help them if you can.” He took a ring from his finger and gave it to Alice Fletcher to remind her of his request.”

–Joan Mark; *A Stranger in her Native Land: Alice Fletcher and the American Indians*

“While the white man was calling the Indian woman a drudge, old man He Dog, at 92 told me: “It is well to be good to women in the strength of our manhood, because we must sit under their hands at both ends of our lives.”

–Mari Sandoz from *Oglala Women* by Marla Powers

“Where are your women?” The speaker is Attakullakulla, a Cherokee chief renowned for his shrewd and effective diplomacy. He has come to negotiate a treaty with the whites. Among his delegation are women “as famous in war, as powerful in the council.” Their presence also has ceremonial significance: it is meant to show honor to the other delegation... Implicit in their chief’s question, “Where are your women?” the Cherokee hear, “Where is your balance? What is your intent?” They see the balance is absent and are wary of the white man’s motives. They intuit the power of destruction.”

–From the work of Andi Smith; Marilou Awiakta, Cherokee

“...Methodist minister Colonel 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 by design.”

–David Stannard, *The American Holocaust*

“The celebration of the Battle of Little Big Horn - Victory Day - is not about celebrating Native men’s “warrior image.” Custer had targeted women and children to demoralize Native men and destroy Native people. The Battle of Little Big Horn was about the defense of Native women and children, who are the life and future of the people.”

–Marlin Mousseau, Oglala Lakota, Descendant of Crazy Horse and survivors of Wounded Knee

Photos courtesy of Indian Country Today

*“A nation is not defeated until the hearts of its women are on the ground. Then it is done, no matter how brave its warriors or how strong its weapons.”*

*–Cheyenne proverb*



# Sovereign Women Strengthen Sovereign Nations



National Indigenous Women's Resource Center

P.O. Box 99 • Lame Deer, MT 59043

406-477-3896 • 1-855-649-7299 Toll Free • www.niwrc.org



Originally prepared and written by Sacred Circle National Resource Center to End Violence Against Native Women.

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