

Slide 1-2:

I would first like to ask, what names come to mind when you think of significant Native American Women? Ok great, thank you. Usually, when discussing Native American history, Pocahontas and Sacagawea are the only women that are considered important, and worth discussing. In light of Native American Heritage month, I would like to introduce you to some other, very impactful Native American Women, the first being Wilma Mankiller.

Slides 3-8

*The following slides detail other important native American figures. We encourage you to do your own research and write your own biography for these individuals... Or choose new individuals!*

Slides 10-11:

In today's society, Native American women are an oppressed group of people, experiencing things many other underrepresented and disenfranchised groups such as wage gaps, higher incarceration rates infringement of rights, and overall social mistreatment. Today I want to focus on the wage gap.

On top of the preexisting wage gap, NAW experience it to a higher degree, earning ~30% less than the white woman. This gap can start as early as age 15, and it only grows from there.

It also applies to people holding the same position (ex. NAW that are nurses experience an 11% gap in pay compared to nurses that are white men)

Education doesn't eliminate the gap either; a 2019 study showed that NAW w/ bachelor's and master's degrees earn at least 41% less than white men with the same degrees.

This specific issue matters because ~58% of NA mothers are breadwinners for their families. With a wage gap of this magnitude in effect, it denies them not only the right to basic necessities like groceries or rent, but their families as well.

Slide 13-15

The Native American Women are perceived to have a different today then back then.

A few different roles that the Native American women had, are farming, taking care of the children, cooking, cleaning, and doing the laundry.

Roles of Native American Women

- Native women were obliged to prepare land, to mow, to plant, and do everything when the men were only entitled to hunt, fish, and go to war against their enemies.

- Sometimes the native American women were known as “slaves” to the men.

Native American women mostly did the mens work according to the European society

- Native women managed the “internal operations of the community.” mostly owned the family’s housing, and goods, prepared the land and farmed, along with taking care of the children
- Native Women held important political, social, and economic power
- Their activities were central to the community’s welfare

Native American women ultimately had more power than men. In most tribes they had more political power than the men

What were women’s roles in the Apache tribe?

- Men were responsible for hunting, warfare, and ceremony. The women were responsible for childcare and the preparation of food and clothing.

Rare for the Apache women to become warriors, they had to learn how to ride and hunt to protect the villages when needed.

What were women’s roles in Cherokee Nation?

Cherokee women oversaw farming, property, and family.

Men made political decision for the tribe

Women made social decisions for the clans

Chiefs were men, and landowners were women

Both genders took part in storytelling, artwork, music and traditional medicine

What were women’s roles in the Chinook tribe?

- Chinook men were fishermen and hunters, carved canoes, and went to war to protect their families
- Chinook women gathered plants, herbs and clams and did most of the child care and cooking

Slide 16-20

Another topic under discussion is native American women and public health. Namely, we will discuss the past and present of reproductive justice for native Americans, or more specifically,

past public health stigmas and myths, as well as current inequities in the reproductive health sphere for native American women.

In order to discuss the disparities for women, however, we need to understand the health inequities and disparities impacting native Americans as a whole. The American Board Association, after pursuing a sociology study on how native Americans represent a crisis in health equity, found that native Americans continue to die at higher rates than other Americans in many categories of preventable illness, including chronic liver disease, diabetes, and lower respiratory disease. The IHS, the Indian Health Service Agency within the US health and human services department, is responsible for treaty responsibilities to provide health care for more than 560 recognized tribes. Congress, however, constantly underfunds the agency, limiting the services offered; it gives no matched benefits to programs like Medicaid. Moreover, the scale of the crisis has expanded, given population increases and insufficient funding.

Now, to narrow in on native American women in public health, let's discuss the past — namely, tribal traditions in the reproductive justice sphere. For tribes in the Pacific Northwest, salmon runs and fishing seasons held unique ceremonies. For example, they threw salmon bones in the water to ensure the cycle of abundance would continue. However, taboos and stigmas in the culture limited women's contact with salmon and water during menstruation, aka when their blood was believed to have the power to offend the salmon & jeopardize the run.

In more recent news to highlight such traditions, a movie titled “Long Line of Ladies” was produced in early November to emphasize the coming-of-age ceremony in the Karuk tradition, a tribe in Northern California. The director, a native American herself, centers the movie around The “Chuk” or Flower Dance; it is a once-dormant ceremony that “takes place after young women in the community have their first period. If you'll see on the cover of the film, the girl's eyes are covered with a feather blind. Made typically by a girl's father, the girl will wear for a day or several days to contemplate her actions and thoughts. Taking off the blind marks entering the new phase of life: being a woman. The ceremony was held for generations without interruption until the violence and destruction brought on by the Gold Rush, where Native American girls and women were victims of sexual violence.” However, a group of Karuk people revived the tradition in the early 1990s “to once again honor their girls as they transition into womanhood.

This point on sexual violence brings us to our next point: how disparities have remained pervasive in such health spheres. Native Americans experience health disparities in many forms. Historical trauma and cycles of oppression that include stolen land, genocide, poverty, environmental contamination of lands, and more have impacted many generations. Research by the organization Forward Together emphasizes such inequities in reproductive healthcare; the study was conducted in 2020 in New Mexico for two main reasons. One, because of the unprecedented attacks on reproductive rights. And two, because in 2019, amidst the New Mexico State Senate's debate on an abortion ban, legislators often spoke for Native communities, claiming that Native Americans are against abortion due to cultural and religious beliefs. These stereotypes were false; native American voices were omitted, ignored, and spoken for.

The research showed that 1 in 5 Native Americans in New Mexico had experienced stillbirth or miscarriage, which is higher than the national average. Such statistics, including the ones on the board, emphasize the lack of native American voices in such decisions as well as the lack of research focusing on the experiences of pregnant Native people interfacing with maternal healthcare provisions. Far too often, healthcare interventions are based on healthcare providers' experiences and not on community members' experiences, as emphasized through disparities amongst native tribes.

Even more alarming is that nearly 2 out of 5 survey respondents had experienced domestic violence, and over 1 out of 5 said they had experienced sexual assault or sexual violence in their life. In fact, some national reports have shown that Native Americans are twice as likely to experience sexual assault compared to all other races. Such inequities continue to be exacerbated by lack of attention, lack of research, and lack of funding.

Although not typically highlighted on the front page of the media, Indigenous communities have always been part of the reproductive justice movement. Indigenous women were part of committees that formed decades ago challenging forced sterilizations, and in the 1980s, along with other racial and ethnic groups, started reproductive justice organizations. For example, people like the Lakota Grandmas banded together to serve their tribal communities by tackling various other health issues, including tuberculosis, mental health, and alcoholism. Many Native Americans, according to the research conducted by Forward Together, believe in the

reproductive justice values of self-determination and body sovereignty, respect in healthcare decision-making, and reproductive healthcare access for all people. There is truly a crisis in health equity when you look at how disproportionately native American women are impacted by disease and access to health care. Their actions must be supported by legislative action.