

Spring 2017

Tracing Native American Feminism Through Myth and Poetry

Cassidy Webber

University of North Georgia, cassidy.webber@hotmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.northgeorgia.edu/honors_theses



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Webber, Cassidy, "Tracing Native American Feminism Through Myth and Poetry" (2017). *Honors Theses*. 15.
https://digitalcommons.northgeorgia.edu/honors_theses/15

This Honors Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Honors Program at Nighthawks Open Institutional Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of Nighthawks Open Institutional Repository.

Tracing Native American Feminism Through Myth and Poetry

A Thesis Submitted to
The Faculty of the University of North Georgia
In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Art in English Writing and Publication
With Honors

Cassidy Webber
Spring 2017

Accepted by the Honors Faculty
of the University of North Georgia
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the title of
Honors Program Graduate

Thesis Committee:



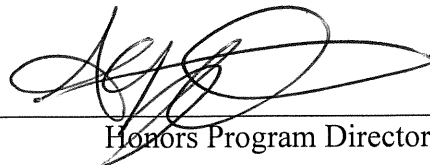
Thesis Chair



Committee Member



Committee Member



Honors Program Director

Prior to contact, the Native American tribe hierarchy looked much different to how history immortalizes it. Since most history was written from a Euro-centric point of view, the nuances of European society, including the idea of a patriarchal society, are assimilated into the varying tribal histories. This, in turn, provides a skewed perception of what Native American society truly looked like. In 1702, Francis Louis Michel, a visiting Swiss nobleman to the colonies, reported:

A Frenchman and I were astonished at the baskets and that two of them could speak English. One of them looked at us and said in poor English whether we thought that if they had been taught like we, they could not learn a thing just as well as we. I asked him where he had learned to speak English. He answered, they were not so stupid, because they had to come every year, they could hear us speak and learnt it that way. It is certain that good talents are found among them. (“Becoming American: The British Colonies” 2)

In this example, Michel only finds the Native Americans useful and valid when they exhibit European qualities, such as learning English, and this mentality has permeated recorded history, particularly the history of Native Americans. The current history portrays Native societies as inherently patriarchal and placing women in a subservient class, but further anthropological study reveals that Native American society differed from what the first colonists believed.

Feminism in Native American communities has been embedded in the culture; however, as white women began their movement in the early 1900s their Native counterparts have been missing from the narrative. Third wave feminism introduced the concept of intersectionality, the idea that “women’s suppression can only be fully understood in a context of the marginalization of other groups and genders – feminism is part of larger consciousness of oppression” (Rampton). With this new

idea, however, the concept of white feminism has become more apparent, as the problems facing women of color, including Native women, are ignored. This idea is problematic because the problems of white women do not translate to women color

In her book, *The Sacred Hoop*, Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo), poet and activist, quotes Stan Steiner's novel *The New Indians*, which asserts the idea that:

The footnote of history was curiously supplied
when Susan B. Anthony began her 'Votes for Women'
movement two and a half centuries later. Unknowingly
the feminists chose to hold their founding convention of
latter-day suffragettes in the town of Seneca [Falls],
New York. The site was just a stone's throw from the
old council house where the Iroquois women had
plotted their feminist rebellion (Allen 213).

These new American feminists had not only neglected to include their Native counterparts but did not include anything about Native American women's culture. This mentality has become the core of the American feminist movement and has carried over into even the most recent waves of feminism. While the third and fourth waves claim intersectionality as a core component of the movement, the execution of the component has been poor and centered around white women speaking for Native women. Similarly, the execution of the inclusion completely ignores the appropriation of Native American culture, only deeming it worthy if white America can profit from it.

In Hopi poet Wendy Rose's piece, "For the White Poets Who Would be Indian," she takes these misunderstandings and asserts that they have created a seemingly disingenuous attitude toward Native Americans. She uses images of cultural

appropriation that suggest an almost romanticized perception of Americans have of the American Indians: “With your words/you paint your faces./chew your doeskin,/touch the breast to tree/as if sharing a mother were all it takes,/could bring/instant and primal/knowledge” (22). These lines also touch on the race-mixing and how merely having Native American DNA does not inherently allow a person to exaggerate and disrespect the culture.

While Rose’s poem challenges a much broader issue, it touches on the long-term effects of the bias of colonial history that Allen mentions. Because colonists focused on manipulating the gender norms in Native society, however, powerful and influential female tribal leaders are not even mentioned. Leaders like Cockacoeske (Pamunkey), Anacaona (Taíno), and Nonhelema (Shawnee) have all but vanished from history; their legacies of military service, peace, and negotiation with them. Similarly, the women are termed as “useful” because they prepare food and bear children but are still remembered as subservient wives with no political, spiritual, or social power; however, these assertions are just incorrect. Tribal women tilled the fields, dress the game, prepared the skins, made clothes, reared the children, and were held in high respect spiritually. Most of these women were anything but subservient.

This power structure makes the discussion of unbiased Native American history unpalatable to a white audience due to the violence and pain these people endured. To such an extent that Laurie Grobman, Assistant Professor of English at Pennsylvania State University, explains how even teaching at this “crossroads” of culture is difficult, purely because the texts are unfamiliar (Grobman 88). She uses Silko’s *Storyteller* as a prime example of these crossroads, where the roads of “multicultural, feminist, Native American, and Native American feminist critical circles” meet pedagogy (Grobman 89). Teaching these authors creates a conversation

for students of all backgrounds to learn and appreciate Native American culture and their struggle.

Similarly, it generates a kind of understanding where students and teachers alike are exposed to the intricacies of Native society because the students are forced to engage with the work through that culture's societal standards, not the typical Eurocentric ideals. Allen emphasizes in her book *The Sacred Hoop* that the root oppression is loss of memory and how the mischaracterization of Native women as “squaws, traitors, or at best, vanished denizens of long-lost wilderness” does the entire feminist movement a disservice (Allen 214).

When considering these opinions, it is important to note that, even within Native American feminism, there exists a spectrum which offers a wide variety of different definitions of what it means to be a feminist in Native culture and how to appropriately support them. In her book, *Indigenous American Women*, author and Choctaw scholar, Devan Abbott Mihesuah states that, “With the exception of works of fiction, the vast majority of these [Native] works are written by white authors who analyze the subject using Eurocentric standards of interpretation,” thus eliminating the Native voice (5). This idea is not suggesting, however, that supporters of Native women's rights are to not speak about Native feminism but take care that the Native voice stays alive within the different works. Similarly, it is the job of the supporters to understand the origins of this ideology in its fullest capacity. Looking at Native American myths from numerous tribes, feminism was not a radical concept simply because it was so ingrained in the culture. It was colonization and the loss of unbiased Native American history that made the two mutually exclusive. There are, however, a number of cultural elements, like mythology, that can provide insight into early roles and perceptions of Native women.

The mythology of different tribes is comprised of essential and empowered female heroes and deities. These goddesses and heroes were central figures and often contributed to the inherent respect Native women get within their communities. Cherokee women believe they come from Selu, or Corn Mother, and the Tewa Pueblos' first mothers were known as Blue Corn Woman and White Corn Maiden. In the Penobscot tale "Corn Mother," a beautiful woman came out of the ground said to have been born of the "wonderful earth plant, and of the dew, and of warmth" (Erdoes and Ortiz 12). This woman became the First Mother, and she gave life to the people. They lived solely by hunting, and as people increase, game decreased causing the people to suffer from starvation.

First Mother decided the only way to prevent her children from suffering is to sacrifice herself. Her husband begrudgingly agreed, and she told him to drag her body around the Earth until only her bones remained and to then bury the bones. Then, the husband was instructed to "wait seven moons and then come back," where her flesh would strengthen and nurture him and their children forever (13). She also instructed them not to eat all of it but return some back to the Earth. Upon his return, the husband saw that the First Mother's flesh had grown into corn, and following her instructions, the people planted the kernels back in ground, and this is how the Penobscot tribe learn how to grow a corn, a vital source of food for their people.

The Shawnees' creator is known to them as "our grandmother." The Iroquois came into the world on the back of Grandmother Turtle, and a similar "grandmother" motif can be found in the Cheyenne myth, "The Old Woman of the Spring. An old woman gave instructions to two boys who she called her "grandchildren" (27). She fed them from never-ending pots of buffalo meat and corn and explained that all the animals of the west, all the corn of the north would be theirs if they followed her

instructions. She taught them how to plant corn and bring the buffalo back to their tribe. She also told them to give the pots to the people in their village starting with males, youngest to oldest, except for an orphan boy and females, oldest to youngest, except for an orphan girl. When everyone else was through, the orphan boy and girl could finish off the rest. The next day the Cheyenne were surrounded by buffalo but found their corn stalks were all stolen. This is said to symbolize how the Cheyenne abandoned planting for buffalo hunting. And the list can go on and on.

Even in more patriarchal tribes like the Brule Sioux, women maintain an important role in their society, due particularly to an important figure of their mythology, the White Buffalo Woman. Before the Sioux met this woman, they did not know how to live. The scouts never brought any game back to camp until they saw this mysterious woman walking toward them. She told them to prepare for her arrival with a “24-pole medicine tent” (48). White Buffalo Woman taught the Sioux how to live and thrive. She taught them how to heal, pray, hunt, and sustain themselves. This myth establishes women in a prominent role, which in turn garners respect.

Most tribes were matriarchal with very few exceptions, and women were often at the center of religious rites and political discussions. For example, Cherokee women owned the homes and land which were inherited by their daughters. In the Apache tribes, there were duties specific to men and women, but they were taught to both boys and girls. Tribes, like the Hopi, believed in female superiority because of the link between their female tribe members and Mother Earth. Similarly, the Iroquois and Haudenosaunee assumed different roles for males and females, but they overlapped significantly. The Great Law of Dekanawida provided equal rights between the sexes. While the chief was always male, he was elected by women.

While these realities have been lost in popular American history, Native poets and authors have striven to rewrite it in their own words.

Much of this rich, matrilineal history is lost in time, but Native American writers, like Leslie Marmon Silko (Pueblo Laguna), have taken these empowering stories and given them new life. She alludes to this social norm of gender equality in her poetry collection, *Storyteller*. This collection is comprised of poems and short stories that document the childhood stories of the Laguna people that she heard from her aunt, referred to as Aunt Alice.

In an untitled poem, Silko tells the story of Kochininako, a female Laguna hunter who went to find game to feed her family. In her commentary, Silko asserts, “You know there have been Laguna women/who were good hunters/who could hunt as well as any of the men,” which further substantiates the idea of gender equity in most tribes (Silko 79). At the end of her hunt, Kochininako came across Estrucuyu, a great big animal. He ended up eating all her game and weapons, so knowing he would ask for more, she went into a cave where his head would not fit and proceeded to call the Twin Brothers (also known as the Hero brothers), Ma’see’wi and Ou’yu’ye’wi. These brothers help remove her from the situations, but Silko makes sure that given the circumstance, Kochininako could have accomplished the same thing. This idea can be seen in Silko’s commentary in the poem, “Ma’see’wi’ and Ou’yu’ye’wi’ carry bows and arrows/and they each carry a flint knife/a “hadti”/like the one Kockininako carried for hunting” (Silko 82). In this way, Silko emphasizes the empowerment of the women in the Laguna Pueblo tribe, further highlighting the existence of feminism before European contact.

Additionally, in the Laguna Pueblo tradition, there is a figure called Yellow Woman. She is wild, refuses to marry, and highly sexual. Leslie Marmon Silko often

draws from this figure and inserts her into many of her stories but in very ambiguous ways. Yellow Woman is often looked at as the spirit for womanhood, and while she is a central figure in Laguna Pueblo mythology, she can often take on a less visible role as a force that influences and benefits different women within the Laguna Pueblo community.

In her short story "Yellow Woman," Silko uses the legend of Yellow Woman and the spirit of the North to frame the story of this young Laguna woman who wakes up with a stranger in the mountains who keeps calling her Yellow Woman (Silko "Yellow Woman" 1). Throughout the story, it is never clear whether the narrator is actually Yellow Woman, but that is the point that Silko is trying to make. Yellow Woman straddles two worlds or two states of existence, and the narrator finds herself caught between her everyday life and the mythic history of her people, even the fact that Silko never truly names her "Yellow Woman" suggests ambiguity. The narrator is Native woman living in a modern world, yet she continues to get pulled toward her Laguna history. Similarly, Silva, the Navajo cattle rustler, has a similar dilemma where he has his own real-time identity but can easily be connected with the mountain spirit or ka'tsina Whirlwind Man. The whole story, however, progresses this way, and by the end of the piece, the reader sees her as Yellow Woman and her real-time identity.

The most powerful element of this story, however, is the empowerment that the narrator receives through the sexuality of Yellow Woman. She follows Silva even though she is married and has a child. In her essay, *Yellow Woman and the Beauty of the Spirit*, Silko writes:

Kochininako, Yellow Woman, represents all women in the old stories. Her deeds span the spectrum of human

behavior and are mostly heroic... Yellow Woman is my favorite because she dares to cross traditional boundaries of ordinary behavior during times of crisis to save the Pueblo; her power lies in her courage and in her uninhibited sexuality, which the old-time Pueblo stories celebrate again and again because fertility was so highly valued.

Additionally, these abductions and seductions are often used to transfer knowledge in Native American myth, and Silko uses Yellow Woman's sexuality to empower her.

In another one of her poems, Silko further illustrates female empowerment in an untitled poem in her *Storyteller* collection where she discusses the power of Mother Corn (Naut'ts'ity'i) and the ignorance of the Twin Brothers. The Twin Brothers, Ma'see'wi and Ou'yu'ye'wi get involved in Ck'o'yo magic (Silko 105). They gave this magical, and ultimately, fruitless power all their attention and neglected the Mother Corn's alter. They felt that they could sustain themselves, and this hubris anger Naut'ts'ity'i. So, she took all the plants, grass, and baby animals. She took the rain clouds and everything necessary to sustain themselves. People began to starve and the ground dried up.

The people realized the error of their ways by placing their focus in the Ck'o'yo magic. They see a fat hummingbird, well fed, who led them to the place to which their mother retreated and offered a gift to her. After four days, the jar began buzzing and Mother Corn started to replenish the Earth as they kept offering her gifts. In this story, the power of female deities permeates not just the society but the Earth itself. The feminine power is directly connected with the ground, the animals, and the

grass, making the female role in Laguna societies essential to the longevity of the tribe.

Similarly, in her poem, “Truganinny,” Wendy Rose reveals a truly horrific side of colonization that is often overlooked, drawing inspiration from the writings Paul Coe, an indigenous Australian activist. She subtly incorporates feminism in Truganinny’s speech as well as her request. Coe tells a story of Truganinny, the last of the Tasmanians, who had seen the stuffed and mounted body of her husband and never wanted to have her body disrespected in that way. The poem is Rose’s interpretation of her request to have her body buried in the Outback where they could never find her.

The most notable element of the poem is the use of second-person point of view. It places responsibility on the reader from the first line, “You will need/to come closer/for little is left/of this tongue/and what I am saying/is important” (Rose 54). Additionally, the short, quick lines and stanzas create a sense of urgency in the poem. While there is a sense of desperation in this line, she is also demanding of your attention and appears very empowered because she sees the importance of her words. Similarly, Rose includes a ton a female imagery while also emphasizes her importance and power, “I whose nipples/wept white mist/and saw so many/dead daughters/their breathing stopped/their eyes gone gray” (54). This line also creates a somber tone as she mentions of not only the adults in her tribes but also the children.

Truganinny demands respect in death and that idea, especially during a time of such catastrophic change, “Please/take my body/to the source of night/to the great black desert/where Dreaming was born./Put me under the bulk of a mountain/or in the distant sea./Put me where they will not find me” (55). While incorporating naturalism, a common theme in many indigenous peoples’ religion, the strength and desperation

make Truganinny a powerful feminist figure. She knows her worth. These elements of myth and social structure are part of the Native American culture prior to contact. In the 1500s, however, Europeans made contact with these people, and seeds of imperialism were sown. Overtime, European culture began to invade, and the current Native social norms began to disappear, and the embedded feminism also faded.

Colonialization had a devastating and lasting effect on the American Indians on a personal and cultural level. English, French, and Spanish explorers brought new diseases, including smallpox, influenza, measles, and even chicken pox. Their resources quickly ran dry as bison and other mammals were over-hunted to nearly extinction. They were forced to leave their tribal lands and migrate, and in an attempt to assimilate Native peoples into the new “Euro-American” culture, colonists prevented them from performing their religious dances and rituals.

As previously mentioned, most tribes were egalitarian concerning gender. In most cases, women had equal political and spiritual power. The colonists, however, never truly understood Native culture. “Many non-Natives misunderstood tribal kinship systems, gender roles, and tribal spiritual and social values” (Mihsuah 45). As the colonists recorded the observations, they included their biases and misunderstandings, and that is the record of history that persists. Their observations also reflected “...perhaps, their desire to manipulate reality to accommodate their expectation that Native women were held in lesser regard in their tribal societies because women were subservient in to men in European societies” (45). These religious influences and intermarriage between the colonists and the Natives, the status of women was diminished significantly. After the balance of respect was shattered, women’s status in society declined drastically. Men became the head of the household, meaning the women moved in with them after marriage. This change led

to the women losing her entire family's support and contact. Should divorce occur, the women lost all her assets. Native women had no security in tribal life, and their importance economically, socially, and spiritually lessened. This change was detrimental to these women and Native American culture as a whole because of the tribes' tie to the land, and because most tribes were matrilineal, women inherited the land which establishes a particularly intimate cultural connection.

In her poem "What Distinguishes Sunset in Seattle from Sunset in Chicago,"



A map created from the landmarks mentioned in Wendy Rose's "What Distinguishes Sunset in Seattle from Sunset in Chicago".

Rose illustrates this geographical tie as a flight from Seattle to Chicago. "Loot-Wit" (Mt. St. Helens), "Baker," "Hood," and "Mazama" are all volcanos around Seattle,

and then "Shasta," "Lassen," "Tamalpais," and "Diablo" are all mountains or volcanos that span the length of California (Rose 75). If one maps the points, this airplane proves to take a particularly interesting route, crossing all these mountains as well as the original Hopi territory, which used to span over Arizona, Nevada, Utah, and parts of California. Similarly, there seems to be an exchange between the speaker and a child who is incredibly curious about the speaker. With phrases like "I feel her/and the jet plane/shakes her/visible again," it seems as if the speaker identifies with the child.

The child then asks many questions about the speaker's heritage, "Listen to her/wanting to know/if our tongues drip lava/if our flesh empties itself.../if we have a

fire inside/as she does” (75). After passing the southern California mountains, the speaker seems to reminisce about old stories, “Old friends blinking in new sun/we take sharp ashes and rub dark the east./We have become distant naked silhouettes/of spirits picking nettles” (76). She then says that “we have become one who are careful,” which suggests a major shift from the identity that she introduces first, a colorful and dynamic people with a rich oral history, to a population with a distorted history and a new identity. This shift can be seen in not only the landmarks gradually rooting themselves into the Earth from volcano to mountain to city to lake to fault line but also in the geography from Seattle to Chicago. As the plane gets closer to Chicago, the landscape flattens, and the same could be said about the Native American culture, their oral history, and women’s place in Native American society as it continues to get distorted by European influence.

This poem suggests not only the passing on of oral history from the speaker to the child but also the effects of colonization. There is a shift in tone suggesting that the speaker was telling these stories of heroes and traditional Native American myth, but when she reached contemporary time, she had to explain how that culture has subsided. This idea can be seen in Richard Erodes and Alfonso’s collection of Native American myths, *American Indian Myths and Legends*. The stories were collected post-colonization and straight from leaders in the different tribes. While the stories are pulled directly from tribe culture, the influence of the white man is evident and even specifically mentioned, like in the legend of “Coyote and Wasichu” from the Brule Sioux (Erodes and Alfonso 342). In the poem, Rose alludes to dilution of the stories when she states that her people have become “careful” (76). Similarly, the passing of this knowledge to another female suggests that this little girl will carry the history as

the speaker has and she will sustain the culture. Particularly for the Hopi, placing that much power in a little girl is a common occurrence as it is embedded into the culture.

After decades of silence and oppression, Native women are speaking loudly for everyone to hear. Some are finding it in writing and others are calling for their government's attention to preserve their culture. Author Devan Abbott Mihesuah asserts in *Indigenous American Women: Decolonization, Empowerment, Activism* that "there is no such thing as the culturally and racially monolithic Native women" (7). This is to say that even Native feminist scholars disagree. There is no one voice among Native women that totalizes Native women's thought, "rather, there exists a spectrum of multi-heritage women in between 'traditional' and 'progressive,' possessing a multitude of opinions about what it means to be a Native female" (6). So, no one opinion is a universal truth for the entirety of Native women. This concept is perfectly illustrated in how Silko and Rose approach their feminist native works. While Silko pulls influence from her tribe's myths and legends to further a contemporary Native feminist dialogue, Rose is inspired by the horrors Native people across the world have experienced. There are, however, consistencies that can be found in contemporary poetry and even the news that help illustrate what Native women truly need.

Wendy Rose articulates the struggles of Native peoples vividly in her poetry collection *Bone Dance*. While the struggle is evident, she also takes great pride in her cultural identity. Not only does she focus on her tribe's struggles but includes indigenous peoples from all around the world, like the Aborigines in Australia and the Inuits and Eskimos in Alaska and Canada. She establishes the Native identity as not exclusively "American" but connects Native peoples internationally.

Race mixing resulted in many people of Native origin and their children from participating in rites and rituals, and poet Wendy Rose is one of them. Rose, however, is proud of her “half-breed” identity, and this is a problem many indigenous people struggle with today. In an interview with Laura Coltelli, she comments on this identity saying, “I’ve always thought in terms of being a half-breed because that is the way both sides of the family treated me” (Rose). Her mother is Scots-Irish and Miwok and her father is full-blooded Hopi. Her mother’s side rejected her and her situation completely, and while her father’s side was more sympathetic, she lacked the matrilineal connection to be considered part of the tribe. Through her poetry, however, Rose connects these pieces of her identity including her views on feminism.

In the same interview, Rose states, “There are a lot of Indian women, myself included, who consider ourselves to be feminist, but we’re not feminist like non-Indian women are. We come from a different base; we have a different history. If I’m on the Hopi reservation I am not a feminist; if I’m in Fresno, California, I’m a feminist” (Rose). Because of this cultural difference, one must read Rose’s poetry knowing her feminist views are embedded in the lines, even if does not seem overt. Similarly, it allows her to focus on what she believes is the most important element in her poetry: reclaiming her native heritage and fighting for visibility and recognition for not only her tribe but native peoples all around the world.

For example, in her poem, “I Expected my Skin and my Blood to Ripen,” Rose discusses the mistreatment of Native peoples and the metaphorical as well as physical removal of identity. She draws inspiration from Kenneth Canfield’s 1977 Plains Indian Art Catalog where, after the Wounded Knee Massacre and after a blizzard, the colonists took to field and stole the moccasins, leggings, and other items off the deceased bodies of the Native Americans, symbolically and literally stealing

their culture and using it for profit. Similarly, the fact that the speaker in the poem is one of the dead bodies of the Native Americans incorporates an element of naturalism that is common in Native religion. The first five lines, “I expected my skin and my blood/to ripen, not be ripped from my bones;/like fallen fruit I am peeled, tasted,/discarded. My seeds open/and have no future” use a metaphor for death and the afterlife. The natural process of decaying after death and being able to give back to the Earth was an important concept in most Native religions, and with the ability to do that taken away, his or her cycle is incomplete.

There is a tone of futility, particularly at the end of the poem where the last six lines read, “if I could, would’ve turned her into a bush/or a rock if there’d been magic enough/to work such changes. Not enough magic/to stop the bullets, not enough magic/to stop the scientists, not enough magic/ to stop the money” (Rose 19). This passage could also allude to the commercialization of Native culture, which affects nearly every single Native culture across the globe. Her use of “I” and other first-person pronouns suggests that these injustices are felt for generations not just those Natives who died that day.

Poetry, however, is not the only way that Native women are finding their voice. In 2016, news cameras were focus on the Oglala tribe in the Dakotas as a huge pipeline threatened to cross their reservation and create a pollution risk for the tribe’s only water supply. It also has the potential to destroy historical sites that are sacred to the Sioux, and some sites have even already been damaged by construction. But a closer look at this issue, it reveals an entire power structure that threatens not only the water supply for the Oglala tribe but the reproductive rights for their women.

The pipeline itself poses “tangible economic, environmental, and reproductive health consequences,” according Erin Longbottom, writer for the National Women’s

Law Center. Because of Native Americans' history of being displaced and exploited for decades, many tribes have not recovered economically and societally, particularly the women. Native American women have the second largest wage gap of any racial group, and the chemicals found in oil obtained from fracking have been linked to cancer, premature birth, and high-risk pregnancies as well as fighting for their own body autonomy and reproductive rights (Longbottom 3).

What is truly amazing, however, is how these women, from 13-years-old to the tribe elders, have banded together to fight the misogynist and racist structure that has been towering over them since first contact. Similarly, the Dakota Access Pipeline provides the platform for Native women to voice their needs and be heard and exercise intersectionality that this fourth wave of feminism is becoming known for. In this case, however, these women are speaking for themselves for the first time in a long history of oppression without the intrusion of white feminism.

Comprehensively, the idea that Native American feminism as a new concept is just incorrect. A closer look at their history and their culture reveals centuries of gender equality and female empowerment. We discover that Colonialism took those social structures and undermined them, instituting their statutes and stripping the Native peoples of their identity and removing that strength and power that Native women once had. In this sense of cultural and physical displacement, these women have found themselves through poetry and their own culture's myths, and today, they face issues that most white women, and subsequently white feminism, do not realize. In attempt to understand the plight of these women, white feminism washes out the issues giving them a new face but no real answers. They assert that these women are oppressed by the same patriarchy as them, which is true, but it is not through unrealistic beauty standards or even the wage gap. The battle that Native women fight

is one for sovereignty and visibility from a social structure that took those things from them. With the recent events surrounding these people, their platform has been created and they are speaking out. And it is time for white feminism to just listen.

Works Cited

- Allen, Paula Gunn. *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*. Boston: Beacon, 1994. Print.
- Erdoes, Richard, and Alfonso Ortiz, eds. *American Indian Myths and Legends*. New York: Pantheon, 1984. Print.
- "European Americans and Native Americans View Each Other, 1700-1775." *Becoming American: The British Atlantic Colonies, 1690-1763*. National Humanities Center Resource Toolbox, n.d. Web. 19 Apr. 2017.
- Grobman, Laurie. "(Re)Interpreting 'Storyteller' in the Classroom: Teaching at the Crossroads." *College Literature* 27.3 (2000): 88-110. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 19 Apr. 2017.
- Longbottom, Erin. "Why the Dakota Access Pipeline Is a Feminist Priority." Blog post. *National Women's Law Center: Expanding the Possibilities*. National Women's Law Center, 15 Sept. 2016. Web. 19 Apr. 2017.
- Mihesuah, Devon Abbott. *Indigenous American Women: Decolonization, Empowerment, Activism*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska, 2003. Print.
- Rampton, Martha. "Four Waves of Feminism." *Pacific University*. Pacific University, Oregon, 25 Oct. 2015. Web. 19 Apr. 2017.
- "Restoring Native American Families." *Indian Country Diaries*. Public Broadcasting Service, n.d. Web. 19 Apr. 2017.
- Rose, Wendy. *Bone Dance: New and Selected Poems, 1965-1993*. Tucson: U of Arizona, 1994. Print.
- Rose, Wendy. "Laura Coltelli Interview with Wendy Rose." Interview by Laura Coltelli. *Modern American Poetry*. Modern American Poetry, n.d. Web. 19 Apr. 2017.

Silko, Leslie Marmon. *Storyteller*. New York: Penguin, 2012. Print.

Silko, Leslie Marmon. "Yellow Woman." 1974. Rpt. in *Nothing But the Truth: An Anthology of Native American Literature*. Edited by John L. Purdy and James Ruppert. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001. 367-74. Web. 19 Apr. 2017.