

Southern New Hampshire University

Native American Women and Their Defiance of Imposed Gender Roles

A Capstone Project Submitted to the College of Online and Continuing Education in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Master of Arts in History

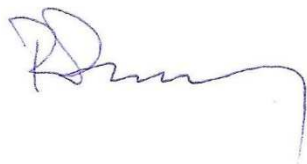
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## **Abstract**

Growing interest in Native American Studies has garnered new interest in the creation of the United States and the impact the various tribes had on historical events. Research pertaining to Native American women's history during colonization is slow, however, as time progresses momentum is growing. This thesis argues that Native women were not only victims of oppression but rather participants in their own history. The French and Indian War was the perfect opportunity to step out of gender roles and take back the power which colonization had stripped from them. While history has given Native American women an incorrect reputation, modern historians are sifting through old literature to seek the truth. By sifting through what little information there is on Native American during the French and Indian War, this thesis argues that despite the gender standards that were being imposed upon them, Native American women used War to their advantage.

## **Dedication**

To my mother, who always supports me.

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iv
Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: Pre-Contact.....	7
European Expectations.....	11
Case Study: Anacaona.....	15
Chapter Two: Initial Contact.....	18
Initial Perceptions of Native American Women.....	21
Religious Takeover.....	23
Case Study: Pocahontas.....	28
Chapter Three: Fur Trade.....	34
Case Study: Tacumwah.....	39
Case Study: Netnokwa.....	40
Case Study: Thanadelthur.....	42
Chapter Four: French and Indian War.....	46
Case Study: Mary Musgrove.....	50
Expectations of European Women.....	52
Native American Women’s Perspective.....	55
Conclusion.....	58
Bibliography.....	61

They came for our land, for what grew or could be grown on it, for the resources in it, and for our clean air and pure water. They stole these things from us, and in the taking they also stole our free ways and the best of our leaders, killed in battle or assassinated. And now, after all that, they've come for the very last of our possessions; now they want our pride, our history, our spiritual traditions. They want to rewrite and remake these things, to claim them for themselves. The lies and thefts just never end.

-Margo Thunderbird, 1988

## Introduction

Imperialism, or the process of expanding one's Empire through military force, always has two sides; beneficiaries and losers. In the history of the Americas, the beneficiaries were the settlers from Europe who took control of the land, while those who lost the battle with Imperialism were the Native nations. Try as they might, the Native nations were no match against the diseases and weapons the European brought over and while the history of the Americas propagated imperial glory, the true story is much more complicated. As Columbus sailed closer to the islands of the Caribbean, he set in motion a new history for North and South America that would never be reversible. The Native Americans that inhabited the Americas and the islands of the Caribbean would never experience the lives of their ancestors because Imperialism would not allow for tradition. Deemed as 'uncivilized' by the invading settlers, the Native peoples were the target of a physical and cultural extermination plan, while the Europeans saw themselves as the dominant race.

Columbus' 'discovery' of the Americas would forever change how the Native peoples lived. Unused to the diseases or the weapons, Native peoples were unprepared for the struggle for survival against the Europeans. Placing themselves as the dominant race, Europeans descended upon the New World like locusts and took whatever they wanted, but not without a fight. The Empires of Spain, England, France and Portugal claimed the various lands of the Americas and those that inhabited the New World were casualties of imperialism. Both Native men and women suffered under colonial rule, but lives changed the most for Native women. Traditional Native life allowed autonomy between men and women, and women were valued for their skills and knowledge that they brought to daily life. Native women were so respected that



they were given political power within the tribe which was very different than European society. Europeans had their own biases they brought over and as such, viewed Native American women in a sexual manner. "...male foreigners who visited their [Native] communities rarely encountered women on anything other than a superficial or sometimes sexual level."<sup>1</sup> By imposing their desires and expectations onto the Native culture, Native American women were the victims of rape and sexual assault, something they knew little about in their own culture. Despite the horrendous treatment Native women received, they continued to push back against the incoming colonizers.

Even though Native American culture and society was similarly advanced as European culture and society, the incoming colonizers had no desire to appreciate and absorb a new culture, but rather to bring 'civility' to the barbaric and god-less cultures. The French Jesuit priests arrived to the North America and Canada in droves with the sole intention of converting as many 'savages' as they could to Christianity. Jesuit priests focused on Native American women because they did not behave as women should; humble, quiet, and sexually repressed. By changing Native American women's traditional habits, Jesuit priests changed the traditional way of life for Native Americans. Prior to colonization, Native Americans society was community where men and women contributed and were appreciated; however, once the priests arrived, Native American society was changed to a community where women were seen as less than, and deserved no accolades for their contributions. Jesuit priests forced European gender roles onto Native American women and were so successful at their task, that by the 18<sup>th</sup> century, many tribes observed European gender stereotypes.

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<sup>1</sup> Theda Perdue. *Sifters*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, 4.

By the time the French and Indian War began, the differences in gender among native tribes had taken on a more European guise within various tribes across the country; however, this did not stop Native American women from trying to gain back their former high rank within the tribe. Through the booming fur trade business and jobs as interpreters, Native American women filled gaps left by their men, who were away fighting. While the French accepted the importance of women within the boundaries of the tribe, and even married Native American women so that they would be protected, British officers had more difficulty accepting Native women in prominent roles. In accounts left by British officers, many men did not appreciate Native American women stepping outside the prescribed gender roles. Yet, in order to create peace treaties amongst the tribes, officers knew that Native American women were the best way to go. For a while, when they needed the help, officers bit their tongues and accepted Native women in their male dominated realm because during war, rules are more easily bent. These women that filled a role that had been assigned to a man, were women of great respect within the tribe and traders. Not allowing themselves to be held down by gender stereotypes, Native American women pushed back against the European standards for what was a 'good' woman and earned the reverence they had lost. While women's roles might have been disregarded, there is clear evidence that Native American women held tightly to the memories of former respect and authority and thus, they did not accept the new societal structure that was being forced upon them; Native American women pushed back against the bonds of gender oppression whenever the opportunity arose.

Through the use of case studies, which appear at the end of each chapter, readers get a glimpse of how Native American women viewed themselves; powerful and worthy of respect. Each case study presents a Native woman and while they were all extraordinary women, they

were not exceptions to historical trends. Rather, large numbers of Native women married fur traders, acted as interpreters and/or participated in the fur trade business. The case studies present a summary of the life of a Native American woman who thought highly of herself and did what she had to do to survive. Native women saw themselves as strong, independent women with a vast knowledge and skills which were highly coveted by both Europeans and the tribes. Knowing that they held valuable skills, Native American women were determined to earn the respect of the Europeans and tribesmen alike and as a result, Native American women were included in the European histories.

Native American women have had an interesting relationship with historical literature. For centuries, Native American women have been left out of books, and the fur trade was deemed a male dominated occupation and there was no possibility that women could have been able to handle the rigors. For example, in Isaac Lippincott's book, *A Century and a Half of Fur Trade at St. Louis*, there is no mention of any Native American women participating in this trade. Written in 1916, scholars and historians cared little about women's history, and even less about the history of Native American women. Not until the late 1900's did historians start to question the authenticity of this claim and come to find out, Native American women had a larger role to play than originally thought. It was discovered that Native women skinned and processed the furs to be sold, and now more evidence has come to light that a good number of Native American women participated in one form or another, in the selling of fur. This information took so long to come to light because scant available information on Native American women is very difficult to find. Hidden within the journals, diaries, court cases and account books of European society, little snippets of Native American women can be found. The process of searching these

manuscripts is a grueling and time consuming task, which is why this history has taken so long to be unearthed.

In the available primary sources, which contain the majority of the information about Native American women, many of the journals, and diaries were not kind in their descriptions. When discussing Native American women, terms like “wild”, “lewd”, “uncivilized” and “wanton” were used to describe the behavior of Native women. European men were not used to encountering women who spoke their mind in trade and business and thus they were taken aback. There are a handful of primary sources that display a positive attitude towards Native American women in a man’s role which provide an account of what these women did and how they acted in the company of Europeans. Oral histories were a valuable form of history for Native American tribes and a few tribes have decided to write down their history, in particular the Powhatan tribe and their most famous ancestor, Pocahontas. While traditionally scholars have deemed oral histories as not a valid source of information, oral histories are valuable and should be used as much as possible. Oral histories provide a Native American perspective on events that transpired and affords a glimpse into what Native peoples valued and kept sacred. Whether using oral histories or journals there is no doubt that information on Native American women is limited, and any sources that can be used, should be used in order to better understand their history.

When discussing the creation of the Americas, the abbreviated version seems to always be: Europeans arrived, killed off the Native peoples through war or disease. Yet, the story is much deeper and richer than that. Native Americans did not simply disappear from the continent once the Europeans arrived, rather, Native Americans fought desperately to keep control of their lands. Native American women, while they were considered the weaker sex and their traditional roles were ripped from them, pushed back against colonialism. During the French and Indian

War, a time when North America was thrown into chaos, women gain rights that they would never have otherwise. *By using their linguistic skills as well as their savvy in the fur trade, Native American women adapted to the shift in government and during the French and Indian War, seized on the opportunity to gain back the power and authority they had lost because of gender stereotyping that took place during colonization.*

## Chapter One: Pre-Contact

Prior to the arrival of the Europeans, North and South America were vastly different places. While few Europeans had ever visited the continents, the giant forests, vast plains, humid swamps, and unbearable deserts held a secret; they were inhabited. For thousands of years, the Americas had been the homeland of hundreds of different Native American tribes and nations, all of whom created their own complex societies and cultures. Taking advantage of and learning how they cultivate the land allowed for the population of the Native Americans to increase. “...Recent estimates place the Native American population of the area that became the United States between 5 million and 7 million.”<sup>2</sup> By the time Christopher Columbus sailed across the Atlantic and came to land in the Americas, each tribe, nation, or pueblo had their own culture, society and even languages varied between them making the Americas an ever changing landscape, not the untouched land that Europeans had portrayed. When Europeans arrived to the Americas, they saw peoples living lives much different than their own, and unable to understand the differences, labeled them as ‘barbaric’ and ‘uncivilized’. However, what the Europeans did not know was that they had come across a group of people which had successfully survived in an environment that was full of dangers.

Before the first settlers ‘found’ North America, the evidence proves that the hundreds of Native Americans had successfully governed themselves for centuries across the continent in various tribes and nations. Native American nations established government systems, trading, harvesting and when enemies were made, they went to war. Similar to Europeans, in order to keep peace between rival tribes, or to form alliances with new tribes, Native American women

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<sup>2</sup> James Ciment. *Colonial America*. London: Routledge, 2016, 225.

would marry the Chief. In Europe, when a woman married a man, she was subject to his authority; however, in Native American tribes, this was not the case. In the Powhatan tribe of Virginia, in order to keep alliances, the paramount or head chief would marry young women from each tribe he was allied with. “The tradition was to infuse all the tribes with the blood from the primary leader and to provide relational ties and obligations through the chieftom to unite the tribes under one paramount leader...”<sup>3</sup> While Native American women agreed to marry the paramount leader, this did not limit her rights and in many tribes, such as the Iroquois and Mohawk, lineage was matrilineal and was traced through the mother side because there could be no guarantee of who the father was, but there was no question as to who the mother could be. Those tribes that were patrilineal did not impose the same set of standards and rules that Europeans did for their women. In Native American nations, a patrilineal society did not take away from women, rather women were important to the success of each community and marrying and having children by the paramount chief insured that peace would be kept between tribes.

In Native American society, tribes flourished because of the communal support given by each individual. In all tribes and nations one thing was common, all adults knew their proper place within the hierarchy and contributed to the well being of the community through various tasks. Both men and women helped look after the children to make sure they were safe and raised according to the laws that governed the tribe. If a mother or father was absent, a close relative, aunt, uncle brother or sister, would step in to take the place of the missing parent. When not keeping an eye on children, Native American men spent a great deal of time hunting game, fishing and trading as well as scouting for enemies or other tribal war parties. Women of the

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<sup>3</sup> Dr. Linwood “Little Bear” Custalow. *The True Story of Pocahontas*. 2007, 5.

Southwest United States took great pride in their pottery making, and were renowned for their exquisite work. In general, Native American women spent a great deal of time and pride planting and harvesting crops, tanning hides that the men brought back as well as making food for the survival of the tribe. These tasks were time consuming and required a large amount of skill to perform them properly and because of that, "...women often took great pride in their work and acquired significant respect within their communities as a result of it."<sup>4</sup> It was not just in the nations of the Northeast, all over North and South American women were respected for the knowledge and skills that they had. In some tribes, women held more rights than women in other tribes nevertheless the tasks they performed were so arduous and labor intensive, it demanded respect. "Some groups, such as the Iroquois, women not only prepared food, but were responsible for farming, fishing, and gathering wild plant products valued for medicinal as well as nutritional purposes; many Indian women also maintained the right to distribute any food, even that procured by men."<sup>5</sup> While respect for Native women was not attained in the same way through the many tribes, nonetheless women received respect from the men of the tribe, making them important figures in daily life.

In Europe, women were excluded from any political discussions because it was believed that politics was the realm of men. However, Native American tribes, the power wielded by Native American women was so great that in a large number of nations, women participated in political discussions that would effect the tribe. "In mourning for these dead, women demanded their their men raid other tribes to capture replacements for those who had been killed..."<sup>6</sup> In the

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<sup>4</sup> Molly Mullin. "Native American Women". Salem Press Encyclopedia (January 2016): *Research Starters*, EBSCOhost (accessed April 21, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Eric Jay Dolin. *Fur, Fortune, and Empire*. New York: Norton and Co., 2010 98.



Iroquois tribe, women sat in on the political discussions so that they as well as the men would be informed of the important issues that would effect them.<sup>7</sup> By being allowed to listen in, they could influence younger warriors to join in battle, or dissuade them from the fight altogether. In some cases, Native American women participated in the fighting, and killed those who were threatening their traditional lifestyle. “With a cue from their chief, the Indians attacked, wielding knives and war clubs they had hidden in their bundles of furs. McKay [the ship’s captain], the first to die, was clubbed in the head and tossed alive over the side into a canoe full of Indian women, who finished him off with their paddles.”<sup>8</sup> Native American women’s authority was so vast that they had political power and on occasion enough power to be included in the battle. With such authority, there can be no question as to why women pushed back against the imposing gender roles from the Europeans; the traditional equality was slowly slipping away.

Since tribal communities were so closely intertwined, the outcome of battle would effect not only the warriors, but Native women and children as well and as a result, most tribes allowed women the ability to speak their opinion on the matter, influencing the tribe as a whole. “In Cherokee council meetings, women tended to observe rather than actively contribute, voicing their opinions outside of the public forum.”<sup>9</sup> Native American women cherished the respect they received for their hard work and they treasured the traditional status of equality between men and women. Native American communities valued their women, as much as their men, for the skills

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<sup>7</sup> Gail Macleitch. *You Women Are of No Small Consequence*. In *The Practice of U.S. Women's History: Narratives, Intersections, and Dialogues*. 30-49. 2007: 30, Accessed April 20, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.snhu.edu/stable/j.ctt5hhxpx.6>.

<sup>8</sup>Eric Jay Dolin. *Fur, Fortune, and Empire*. New York: Norton and Co., 2010 202-203.

<sup>9</sup> Molly Mullin. "Native American women." Salem Press Encyclopedia Research Starters, EBSCOhost (accessed April 21, 2017).

which were used for the betterment of the community as a whole. While not all tribes were the same, for the most part women were appreciated and respected so much that their voices were heard in one form or another.

### **European Expectations**

As Christopher Columbus sailed across the Atlantic in search of India, he never expected to find a new land mass that Europeans had not already conquered; the Caribbean. Rather than admit his fault, he denied the reality which he faced; he had not found a short cut to India. In a letter to the King and Queen of Spain he wrote, "...I write you this letter, whereby you will learn how in thirty-three days' time I reached the Indies with the fleet which the most illustrious King and Queen, our Sovereigns, gave to me, where I found very many islands thickly peopled, of all which I took possession without resistance..."<sup>10</sup> Wishing to make a name for himself among the Spanish court, Columbus claimed the Caribbean islands without consideration for those Native peoples who had lived upon the islands for centuries, cultivating the land, and creating sophisticated cultures. These 'unspoiled' lands were ripe for the taking; full of fruit, animals and plant life, which would enhance the lives of those back home. Little else mattered in the eyes of Columbus and his desire to find the missing route to India and as a result, thousands perished under the flag of the King and Queen of Spain.

As he looked upon lands he had never seen before, Columbus saw the Caribbean islands as a fertile land ready to be raped and controlled and the spoils to be taken in the name of the King and Queen of Spain. "The lands are high, and there are many very lofty mountains with

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<sup>10</sup> Cristoforo Colombo. *Select Letters of Christopher Columbus*. London: Hakluyt Society, 1870, 1.

which the island of *Cetefrey* cannot be compared. They are all most beautiful, of a thousand different shapes, accessible, and covered with trees of a thousand kinds of such great height that they seemed to reach the skies. I am told the trees never lose their foliage...Some were in bloom, others bearing fruit...In the interior there are many mines of metal...”<sup>11</sup> Columbus saw what he wanted and expected to see; he viewed the land as virgin despite the communities living on the various islands of the Caribbean. Since the Columbus saw the islands as a way to make the Empire of Spain wealthy, he believed that it was his right and the will of God to subdue and conquer the islands for Spain. Columbus and the subsequent Spanish settlers assumed that the Native peoples, that inhabited the island, were primitive and therefore islands were not being used and cultivated to their full potential and as a result, decided to take over the land and use it ‘correctly’. “Espanola is a wonder. Its mountains and plains, and meadows, and fields, are so beautiful and rich for planting and sowing, and rearing cattle of all kinds, and for building towns and villages.”<sup>12</sup> Ignoring the villages the natives created, and the farming styles they had developed, the Spanish observed a world which had potential for growth, but only under the most civilized society. Columbus applied this same assumption to the native women he encountered as well. Since there was no obvious class system within the various tribes, he deemed that all women were equal. For native tribes this was not a problem, however, in European culture, class and status was based on various factors, including but not limited to clothing and jewelry. Thus, when Columbus and his men encountered women who “...go as naked as they were born...”, they assumed that these women were of little consequence. No amount of cultural sophistication on the part of the Natives could have convinced Columbus not

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<sup>11</sup>Cristoforo Columbo. *Select Letters of Christopher Columbus*. London: Hakluyt Society, 1870, 4-5.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

to conquer the islands of the Caribbean because his mind was firmly set on taking whatever land he found, whether that be India or not.

The Native tribespeople who lived on the various islands of the Caribbean were vastly different from Columbus and his men. The Native men and women dressed in little to nothing covering their bodies, and had weapons which were considered simple to the Spanish. Seeing such a vast difference between themselves and the Spanish, the Natives ran away from the intruders for fear of death. However, according to Columbus, the Natives quickly came to believe that the Spanish were much more than invaders. “They practice no kind of idolatry, but have a firm belief that all strength and power, and indeed all good things, are in heaven, and that I had descended from thence with these ships and sailors, and under this impression was I received after they had thrown aside their fears.”<sup>13</sup> Viewed as unsophisticated and therefore not a threat, Columbus had no qualms with taking over their land because the more ‘civilized’ people would be able to utilize it in a more efficient way. “Their only arms are reeds cut in the seeding time, to which they fasted small sharpened sticks, and even these they dare not use...they are, as I have described, incurably timid.”<sup>14</sup> Mistaking their kindness for weakness, Columbus took advantage of the situation and claimed the land for Spain. Columbus viewed the Native peoples as easily conquerable and with simple weapons, but his delusions were shattered once he realized that the Native peoples living on the isles would not hand over their homeland and the resources on it without a fight. “...when suddenly more than four hundred natives, armed with cross-bows and arrows, came down upon men, extending themselves along the face of the mountain; they then gave a shriek, then another, and another...they began to shoot their arrows and hurl their

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<sup>13</sup>Cristoforo Columbo. *Select Letters of Christopher Columbus*. London: Hakluyt Society, 1870, 8-9.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid, 7.

darts, as if they had been attacking a bull.”<sup>15</sup> The fierceness of the fighting surprised Columbus and his writings reveal that he did not understand or sympathize with the Native tribesmen. This lack of understanding and cultural suppression would not end with Columbus, but he did start it. Thus began the centuries long battle for control began, one which would change the lives of all the Native Americans living in both North and South America.

In South America, the Spanish were discovering new lands that had never been thought of before, and the rest of the European powers were watching with rapt attention. With the vast amounts of wealth that Columbus had gained from his adventures, Spain was being a wealthy Empire. The Portuguese Empire followed quickly behind Columbus and established an Empire on the West Coast of South America and as a result, obtained vast amounts of wealth. The French and English, almost a century behind the Spanish, placed themselves in North America, in hopes of finding even more treasure than their rivals. While there was little gold and precious gems, their wealth was made up in the fur trade and the felling of forests; two much needed commodities. What really drove the increase in exploration was the need and desire to be the Empire with the most land to its name; more land meant more power. In these lands, Empires saw a chance for change, and new beginnings.

With this “new” land, Europeans expected new opportunities to flourish, away from the difficult lives they had back in Europe. Pockmarked and scared from wars, plagues, famines and religious take overs, Europe was a prison that many were tired of and the New World was a chance for a new beginning. Plenty of land for farming, trees for lumbering and metals for forging tools; the New World was a viable Garden of Eden with endless possibilities. It was an

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid, 211.

opportunity to start over and create a better and more advanced culture than they had already, and take the mistakes of the past and remedy them. Those who were poor could make their fortunes in this untouched landscape and suffer no more under the oppressive hierarchy that had been set in Europe. Consequently, while they attempted to free themselves from the oppression, they created tyranny within the New world, it was simply a different culture that was suffering under the cruelty. The Americas became a blank canvas which the largest Empires, Britain, France, Spain and Portugal, imagined they could control and profit. The expectations of the New World that the Europeans had were just expectations because when they arrived, reality set in and it was vastly different than what they wanted.

### **Case Study: Anacaona**

By the time of Columbus' second voyage, a Papal bull by the Pope had split South America between Spain and Portugal.<sup>16</sup> As a result, the Americas had been split up, and both Empires sent shiploads of conquerors to discover the treasures yet to be revealed. As a result, the New World began to change and those effected were the various Native American nations across the continent. The Spanish were especially violent to those who stood up against them, and this can be seen on the island of Hispaniola where the last Tainó community struggled to survive against the European forces.

In the year 1493, in the kingdom of Xaraguá, on the island that Columbus had named Hispaniola, lived a Tainó Queen; Anacaona. She, as well as the rest of the Tainó community welcomed the Spanish onto their lands, and while she was the wife of a chief, the Spanish took

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<sup>16</sup>Cristoforo Columbo. *Select Letters of Christopher Columbus*. London: Hakluyt Society, 1870, lvii.

no notice of her importance because of her sex. While records differ as to how much influence she had, it seems that she "...rendered great service to the Spanish Crown and gave every assistance to the European settlers..."<sup>17</sup> At some point her husband died and she became the leader of her tribe. Anacaona led her tribe to resist the Spanish conquest in the form of a revolt. The exact reason for the revolt is unclear, however, the Spanish quickly squashed any defiance towards them and as a result, the Spanish governor put a death sentence on the entire Tiano nation. "The governor duped the unsuspecting leaders of this welcoming party into gathering in a building made of straw and then ordered his men to set fire to it and burn them alive. All the others were massacred, either run through by lances or put to the sword."<sup>18</sup> Before giving her a death sentence, Anacaona was asked if she would have liked to be a mistress of one of the Spanish men, and she refused and "...to show her honor, they hung her."<sup>19</sup> Any resistance on the part of the Native American tribes in the New World was met with fierce displays of aggression and control. Making examples out of various tribes was not unusual and it worked to subdue the remaining Native Americans. While the Spanish made an example out of Anacaona, she left her impressions of the Spanish upon history; she had no desire to be an object of sexual desire for the Spanish. Her decision to die alongside her people shows that she cared little for the incoming conquerors and refused to give into their demands and expectations of a woman.

When Europeans arrived in the New World, they expected the land and all that was linked with it, to give into their whims. When the land and those who lived upon it did not give

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<sup>17</sup> Bartolome Las Casas. *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1965, 39.

<sup>18</sup> Bartolome Las Casas. *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1965, 39.

<sup>19</sup> Samuel Wilson. *Hispaniola: Caribbean Chiefdoms in the Age of Columbus*. London: University of Alabama Press. 1990, 134.

into the wants and desire of the Europeans, they turned to deadly measures. Believing that the land was their gift from God and that 'he' had ordained it for them, the Europeans claimed the land for themselves because to do otherwise would go against the natural order. In claiming the land, they claimed all that lived on it, including the various Native American tribes that had lived on the lands for thousands of years. Women in these Native American tribes suffered in various ways under the assumptions that the Spanish conquerors brought over with them. Spanish men observed native women as naked, sexual beings and just like the land, they needed to be controlled and oppressed.



## Chapter Two: Initial Contact

The arrival of the Europeans disrupted thousands of years of traditional Native life and created a whole new society that was forced to struggle in a land that once was theirs. Not only did the Europeans bring over weapons that could kill people in mass, deadly diseases that the Native Americans had no immunity to, Europeans brought over their biases. At first glance, this might not seem like such a detrimental thing, however, their biases changed the course of Native American culture and society. Initial contact was especially jarring for Native American women who did not see the way they dressed as sexual, but rather they dressed in a way that was comfortable and appropriate for the climate in which they lived; it was Europeans who sexualized their bodies. Concerning themselves with the sexual freedoms of the Native American men and women as well as their lack of civilization and religion, Jesuit priests took it upon themselves to educate Native Americans on the 'one true God' and convert as many as they could. By tackling this challenge, it was the Jesuit's hope that the Native Americans might in turn learn to be just as civilized as they were. Native American women suffered the most at the hands of European men; women lost control of not only their bodies, but their personal freedom.

North America was not "discovered" by the Europeans until well into the 1500's. Europeans were convinced that there was a way to China, and continued to forge through rough and sometimes unforgiving terrain to be the first to claim such a prize; however, they quickly had to admit defeat. "Thus, by the end of 1525, the Spaniards knew that North America stood between Europe and Asia."<sup>20</sup> Despite not being able to find the pathway to Asia, the Spaniards

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<sup>20</sup> Lawrence Clayton and Edward Moore. *The De Soto Chronicles Vol 1 & 2*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995, 2.

hoped that North America would hold just as much wealth as South America. The Spaniards quickly realized that North America was a vastly different place. One of these first explorers to venture into North America was Hernando De Soto who traveled through what is now modern day Florida, Georgia, and Alabama. Rather than finding gold and jewels, as they had found in Mexico and Peru, the land they discovered was full of natural wealth, rich forests, lush vegetation, ample game and rivers. “There was no wealth as they understood the term... They could not visualize wealth as the result of the patient exploration of nature... The survivors returned ‘sans everything.’”<sup>21</sup> The Spanish did not recognize what the land could provide for them and so they left, disappointed in the months spent searching in vain. What the Spanish did notice, however, was that the Native Americans that inhabited North America were vastly different from the Native peoples in Mexico and Peru; they were more violent and resistant. De Soto and his men found that the Native Americans were not one to give into their wills and demands and the tribes fought back. “Imprisoned or chained or mutilated they might be, but these things did not tame them nor calm the fury roused in them by the white strangers. Sometimes they killed their captors.”<sup>22</sup> Native Americans in the Southern United States refused to be controlled as the Native tribes of South America were and as such, De Soto’s men dwindled in numbers and they were eager to get back to Mexico where land was much more peaceful. While they returned to Mexico with less men and with nothing to show for it, their impact on the Native Americans was great; disease and fighting set a precedence for future interactions.

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<sup>21</sup> Lawrence Clayton and Edward Moore. *The De Soto Chronicles Vol 1 & 2*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995, 29.

<sup>22</sup> Lawrence Clayton and Edward Moore. *The De Soto Chronicles Vol 1 & 2*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995, 30.

Many legends about the harsh land filled with fierce savages, fill the imaginations of the English, who began to settle North America roughly fifty years later. Henry Hudson, whose name had been given to the Hudson River, was an English explorer who ventured into New York State in search of the Northwest Passage. He took four voyages in four years and each trip was vastly different than the next; however, all were unsuccessful in finding a route to China. Hudson had heard about how dangerous the Native Americans could be, and was very wary of the Native Americans that he and his crew came in contact with. "We kept a good watch for fear of being betrayed by the people..."<sup>23</sup> While Europeans were fearful of the Native Americans, who they knew would fight back against attack, explorers captured Native peoples so that they could gain information about the lands they were traversing. Native Americans while feared, European explorers took them for their vast knowledge of the lands, with little care for the lives of those they captured. This lack of respect would be echoed for years as more Europeans ventured into the New World and became exposed to the fierce Native Americans of North America.

European explorers and conquerors arrived to both North and South America with the expectation of laboring very little. They had expected the new land to provide what they wanted and they in turn would become prosperous with minute effort. The New World proved more difficult to tame and European men, such as De Soto, found themselves working hard to survive in such harsh conditions, with little to no return. North America was vastly different from South America; with less treasure and fiercer Native tribes to contend with, survival was difficult and European expectations were shattered.

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<sup>23</sup> Ian Chadwick. "Henry Hudson's Third Voyage 1609: The New World." Henry Hudson's Third Voyage, 1609: The New World. 2007. Accessed May 05, 2017. [http://www.ianchadwick.com/ HUDSON/HUDSON\\_03.htm](http://www.ianchadwick.com/ HUDSON/HUDSON_03.htm).

## Initial Perceptions of Native American Women

One of the first things that Christopher Columbus noticed when he arrived to the Caribbean was how the islanders dressed. “They all, as I have said, go naked as they were born, except women of the island, who some of them wear a covering of cotton, which they bind around their hips, while others use grass and leaves of trees.”<sup>24</sup> This was very different from the European standard of dress in which both men and women were covered from head to foot, not exposing their most intimate body parts. Coming from the standards and cultures of Catholic countries, especially Latin ones, men were exposed to a new type of woman, one that dressed similar to their prostitutes and thus a complicated relationship formed. Surprised by their open sexuality, Columbus and other Europeans were taken aback by the Native women and their open display of their body. “Gonzalo Fernández de Ovideo, author of one of the earliest histories of America, looked upon the native inhabitants of the Antilles with disgust. Despite their occasional outward beauty, they seemed to him to be bestial in their habits, over-interested in sex and lacking in any recognizable social order.”<sup>25</sup> Despite their surprise, it did not take long for European men to interpret this open display of body parts as an invitation for sexual contact because that was what it meant back home. Unable to be themselves, Native American women were forced into categories that were not part of their culture, first by the Spanish, who imposed their own set of rules, and then by the English who built off of Spanish biases and assumptions. With no say in these decisions, Native American women became victims of Spanish imperialism in South America and then later victims of English imperialism in North America.

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<sup>24</sup> Cristoforo Columbo. *Select Letters of Christopher Columbus*. London: Hakluyt Society, 1870, 64.

<sup>25</sup> Anthony Pagden. *European Encounters with the World*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993, i.

In Native American society, seeing a female body part did not arouse a man; it was a natural part of a woman. “In Powhatan society, children went unclothed and women were frequently bare-breasted; therefore, seeing a woman’s breasts did not excite a warrior... The European men who came over, on the other hand, were all flustered with that which was natural from the Powhatan perspective.”<sup>26</sup> Native American tribes in the Americas as well as in the Caribbean dressed to accommodate the hot weather and thus, both men and women walked around naked; it was not considered sexual. Consequently, in Native American tribe’s sexual assault on a woman was not permitted. “Rape-theft of sex-only rarely occurred, and it was one of the few sexual acts forbidden by Indian cultures.”<sup>27</sup> If a man was found to have raped a woman, he would be shunned from the tribe, which was a death sentence because without the tribe, a person could not survive on their own without their kin. “Rape was not tolerated in Powhatan society. If a male was guilty of rape, her would have been driven from the Powhatan villages.”<sup>28</sup> Even European women who were taken captive were not raped by Native American men, despite tales of their sexual nature and inability to control themselves around white women. “In contrast, the Spanish settlers justified the rape of Indian women as a right of conquest and expected sexual service from female captives of war.”<sup>29</sup> European men mistook this display of breasts as an indication that Native women were lustful or sexual objects for them to conquer and readily took advantage of them.

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<sup>26</sup> Dr. Linwood “Little Bear” Custalow, 35.

<sup>27</sup> John D’Emillio. *Intimate Matters*. Chicago: Chicago Press, 1998, 9.

<sup>28</sup> Dr. Linwood “Little Bear” Custalow, 35.

<sup>29</sup> John D’Emillio, 9.

After the arrival of Europeans, Native American women found themselves faced with forced sexual aggression, something they had little knowledge of before the arrival of the Europeans. Since Native American communities cared for their women, they had to change their ways and constantly be on the look out for European men who were hunting for women. “The women and children needed protection from being raped by the English settlers...They wanted the prize either way.”<sup>30</sup> Try as they might, Native American nations were simply ill equipped to defend themselves against the guns and swords that the Europeans carried with them in those early years and women fell victim to sexual aggression of the European settlers. European assumptions regarding gender roles and sexuality changed how Native American tribes behaved and acted around their aggressors, changing how traditional roles were conducted on a day to day basis.

### **Religious Takeover**

As Europeans began to flood North America, they brought with them their own views on the appropriate roles of men and women and anything outside of that was considered scandalous or uncouth. One of the earliest groups to settle the Americas were Jesuit priests whose desire was to bring the ‘faithless heathens’ the knowledge of God and convert them to Christianity. However, when these priests arrived they found their jobs much harder than they first thought. Coming from Europe, where women were expected to obey their male counterparts, the priests assumed that Native women would behave in the same manner. “The Christian version of the true nature of men and women required, above all, the recognition that women, more than men,

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<sup>30</sup> Dr. Linwood “Little Bear” Custalow, 35-36.

were capable of bringing about misfortune and eternal damnation”<sup>31</sup> and therefore women must be controlled by those capable; men. The Jesuit priests were shocked by what they saw and quickly realized that Native American women were very different from the women back home in Europe. “The women have the chief authority amongst all the nations of the Huron language...though all is done in their name, and the chiefs are no more than their lieutenants...”<sup>32</sup> Native American women had already begun to feel the pressure of European standards and expectations push down upon them by the settlers who had already arrived, but many women refused to allow their traditional ways to be torn from them. Native women pushed back against the Jesuit priests with all their might; their freedom was too important.

Jesuit priests saw themselves as doing God’s work by converting Native Americans, whom they considered pagans, over to Christianity. Despite the fears of being killed in the process of trying to convert, Jesuit priests liked the idea of being martyred. “A number of them also expressed a desire to be martyred in the course of their stay...The Jesuits were convinced that no conversion could be won without suffering, torment and bloodshed...”<sup>33</sup> Whether they converted only ten Native American’s did not matter to the priests because they believed that God did not want the Native Americans to live any longer, and so martyrdom, bloodshed or numbers of converts made a difference. “They were convinced, moreover, that God himself wished the native peopled to die as a means of chastising, humbling and causing them to be more willing to accept Christianization.”<sup>34</sup> Yet, try as hard as they might, Jesuit priests found

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<sup>31</sup> Karen Anderson, *Chain Her by One Foot*. New York: Routledge, 2016, 98.

<sup>32</sup> Pierre de Charlevoix. “The Diversity of Native America: The Northeast.” Digital History. Accessed March 14, 2017. [http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp\\_textbook.cfm?smtID=3&psid=640](http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtID=3&psid=640).

<sup>33</sup> Karen Anderson, 13.

<sup>34</sup> Karen Anderson, 14.

resistance from the Native American women that they encountered and rather than being submissive, quiet and meek, the Jesuit priests found Native women the most difficult to convert because they were wild, ill mannered, vulgar and lecherous. “As women, they refused to conform to the behavior that the Jesuits knew God had ordained for their sex.”<sup>35</sup> This blatant push back against the priests maddened the ministers and led them to despise the women of the tribes and write negatively about them. Under the watchful eye of the French Jesuit persists, they took copious notes on Native American women and their habits and what they found was that, “The Indian women are more given to stealing, lying, quarrelling, back biting and slandering than the men.”<sup>36</sup> While Native women might have done all these things, there is a cultural barrier between the priest and the women. A Native woman might have been stating an opinion, something which was respected and encouraged in most tribes, and it could have been interpreted wrong. What these priests were seeing were women in the most natural state of being, and rather than learning why, they placed their own cultural assumptions on the situation and deemed Native women more aggressive. This negative description shows the frustration and misunderstanding that the priests held towards Native American women of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Jesuit priests came from a society which limited women’s rights, sexual, intellectual, and physical, and enforced submission on women while at the same time promoting male authority. Jesuit priests applied the same tactics in order to control the ‘savages’ who lived upon the land and encouraged both Native American men and women to adopt the European gender roles. “In every region in which Europeans and Indians came into contact, however, the Europeans,

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<sup>35</sup> Karen Anderson, 18.

<sup>36</sup> George Henry Loskiel. *History of the Mission*. London: 1794, 16.



applying the standards of the Christian tradition, judged the sexual lives of the native peoples as savage, in contrast to their own ‘civilized’ customs. Thus Spanish and French missionaries attempted to eradicate ‘devilish’ practices, such as polygamy and cross dressing, and condemned the ‘heathen friskiness’ of the natives.”<sup>37</sup> Yet in Christianity, it was believed that women were more susceptible and corruptible by the Devil and the only way to save them was to control their behavior; something Native American women did not want. Native American women did not want to submit to male authority because that would mean a loss of traditional rights and power within the tribe, authority that had been a staple of Native American society for thousands of years. “Independence appears to them to be the grand prerogative of Indians, considered either collectively or as individuals.”<sup>38</sup> Native American society had given women a place of respect and power based on their skills and intellect, and their culture allowed for intellectual and sexual freedom, and to change was unthinkable to those women who faced off against the clergy.

This intellectual and sexual freedom which had been engrained into Native American culture was deemed, by the Jesuit priests, not acceptable behavior for a woman. “As women, they refused to conform to the behavior that the Jesuits knew God had ordained for their sex. They would not submit themselves to the authority of their husbands and their fathers.”<sup>39</sup> By separating the men and women and targeting the gender roles and changing the importance of women’s roles, Jesuit priests were able to change how gender was perceived. Traditionally, Native American men recognized the importance of their women and both genders worked alongside one another in order to create a successfully community, yet things were starting to

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<sup>37</sup> John D’Emilio, 6.

<sup>38</sup>George Henry Loskiel, 17.

<sup>39</sup>Karen Anderson, 18.

change. By influencing the Native American men to accept European gender roles, through various means, a profound change took place in the relationship between Native American men and women. “Three men of influence among the Savages were placing some obstacles against the expansion of the Faith, by their polygamy, openly retaining to wives. A thunderbolt hurled from Heaven, I mean to say, an extraordinary punishment, has killed their bodies, and, perhaps, wretchedly destroyed their souls.”<sup>40</sup> By using the acts of nature to help in their cause, French Jesuit priests were able to influence and shake up how Native American men acted within their own tribe, and thus began to divide the two sexes. Slowly, Jesuit priests imparted their biases, stereotypes and expectations into traditional native life so that, “These people also remembered the outward order, observed in the Brethren’s meetings, and now of their own accord, persuaded the men to place themselves on one side, and the women on the other.”<sup>41</sup> By deliberately separating the men from the women, priests made the inequality known through a physical display. Jesuit priests were so successful at breaking down the traditional gender culture that Native Americans had for thousands of years, that by the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century many Native women had become submissive to male authority. “Women made fewer displays of shrewish bad temper, they no longer cursed the Jesuits as sorcerers, they no longer portrayed as doing just as they pleased, having sex with any man that attracted them.”<sup>42</sup> Such a dramatic change had occurred in Native American society that would be hard to reverse. By imposing gender biases upon the Native Americans, Jesuit priests were able to force their prejudices onto a group of people who traditionally cherished women’s skills, labor, and opinions as much as men’s.

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<sup>40</sup> Karen Anderson, 25.

<sup>41</sup> George Henry Loskiel, 22.

<sup>42</sup> Karen Anderson, 4.

Native American women saw a dramatic change in their independence, power and influence as compared to their mothers, and grandmothers. Forced into gender stereotypes where each sex had a specific role, Native American women found themselves being treated as second class citizens by the men in their own tribe. However, as submissive as they seemed, by the time the French and Indian War began, it became clear that this would be no quick war, Native American women found themselves in an entirely new realm. Despite the Christian teachings, women found themselves without their male counterparts because of the French and Indian War and so, in order to keep the tribe alive, women took on positions of power that had belonged to men. Therefore, all the efforts to place Native American women in their 'proper' place and erode the memory of traditional native life did not leave the memories of native women.

In a culture of oral history and traditions, no amount of European expectations could completely wipe out centuries of customs. One of the longest told oral histories is the story of Pocahontas; a young woman who grew up with traditional independence only to be ripped away from her family and culture and forced into a world of submission. Despite efforts to 'civilize' her, she kept an element of her culture close to her heart and never forgot her traditional ways. Pocahontas was one of many native women who suffered under European rule, yet just like native women who came after her, she pushed back against their efforts to control and take away her independence.

### **Case Study: Pocahontas**

John Smith was one of the first explorers and colonizer to land and settle in what is now Virginia. When looking upon the land, Smith saw the potential for vast fortunes to be made, and the Native Americans were not using the land correctly. "Heaven & earth agreed better to frame

a place for mans habitation; were it fully manured and inhabited by industrious people.”<sup>43</sup> While Smith and his men notoriously struggled to survive in the colony of Jamestown and regularly took goods from the Powhatan tribe, nonetheless felt that the Native Americans were not cultivating the land to its full potential, and therefore held no qualms with ridding the land of those he deemed inferior. His explorations and vehemence towards the Native Americans was not unusual for the period; Europeans saw themselves as superior despite their inability to live without help from Native peoples. “Seeking to establish their right to colonize by virtue of superior civilization, Englishmen saw or ignored what they wanted to in native societies.”<sup>44</sup> According to his own accounts, John Smith was able to create a relationship with the Powhatan tribe and form an alliance with them through the help of Pocahontas, the Powhatan chief’s daughter. The story of Pocahontas, as told by the Powhatan tribe, illuminates the struggles that she went through during the early years of colonization and her experience will foreshadow what Native women would have to endure in the following years. While the oral history has just as many flaws as John Smith’s account of the encounter, nonetheless it is important in clarifying the struggles Pocahontas and the Powhatan tribe encountered. The oral account of the encounter is very clear about the roles of women in the Powhatan tribe and how women were treated before and after the arrival of Smith and his men. The memory of women’s roles had been passed down through the generations, and their traditional roles were not forgotten despite the years of resistance and change.

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<sup>43</sup> Rebecca Kugal and Lucy Eldersveld Murphy. *Native Women’s History in Eastern North America Before 1900*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007, 31.

<sup>44</sup> Rebecca Kugal and Lucy Eldersveld Murphy. *Native Women’s History in Eastern North America Before 1900*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007 30.

When John Smith and his men arrived in Virginia, the Americas had become a place of wonder, mystery and new beginnings for the incoming settlers. To Europeans, Native Americans were considered "...a marvelously strange, wild and brutish people, without faith, without law, without religion and without civility."<sup>45</sup> Yet, it was not the Europeans who feared the Native Americans but rather Native Americans who feared the Europeans. In the Powhatan tribe of Virginia, they had learned of the rape of women by the Spanish and quickly learned that the English were no less aggressive and their women and children needed protection against their aggressors.<sup>46</sup> The British presence began to slowly change the Powhatan tribe and despite their efforts to keep traditional ways, one of their own became one of the first victims of the European system of oppression.

When discussing the roles which Native American women played during colonization, the most famous Native American woman that history recognizes is Pocahontas. While John Smith's memoir is valuable, it places Pocahontas in the role of savior and defiant daughter; a role that she did not play. "At this instant, Pocahontas, the King's dearest daughter, when no entreaty could prevail, got his head in her arms, and laid her own head upon his to save him from death."<sup>47</sup> Placing Pocahontas as his savior, John Smith created an adventure much more fantastic than what actually happened. The Powhatan Chief had no desire to kill Smith, but rather forge an alliance with him and as such, this situation most likely did not happen. However, the truth is not always as exciting nor does it place Smith, the invading Englishman, in the best light. Making sure that he was the hero, John Smith wrote a version of his encounters that suited the European

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<sup>45</sup> Robert Berkhofer. *The White Man's Indian*. New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing, 2011, 2.

<sup>46</sup>Dr. Linwood "Little Bear" Custalow, 35.

<sup>47</sup>John Smith. *A History of the Settlement of Virginia*. New York: Effingham Maynard, 1890, 29.

expectations of the new world and the Native Americans. As such, his writings perpetuated a stereotype that had been created as a form of justification for racial superiority, rape and destruction of an entire race of people. Pocahontas' story was published by John Smith nearly seven years after her death and in Europe it was assumed that Smith would flatter himself in his own writings yet history has taken his artistic license and reshaped it as truth. Despite the larger than life story the Smith wrote, the role Pocahontas actually played, peacekeeper, has been shrouded in the myth of colonial power.

The oral history of the Powhatan nation describes a young girl whose presence was used as a sign of peace by her father during encounters with John Smith and those who lived in the Virginian colony, Jamestown. However, while the Powhatan tribe meant peace, the Europeans meant to take over the land and as a result, took Pocahontas captive at around the age of sixteen. During her time in captivity, she was forced to assimilate to European standards of what was proper and decent for a woman. During captivity, it is said that she was the victim of rape, and conceived a child and successfully gave birth to a boy. As if suffering a rape and conceiving a child was not traumatic itself, Pocahontas was forced to learn Christian scripture and dress as a European woman, despite her best efforts to keep her traditional ways. "...they had difficulty in keeping her in English clothing. She would pull the English clothes off and the English would have to redress her."<sup>48</sup> Pocahontas fought against the gender roles that were imposed on her, but she lost the struggle, and during her time, married an Englishman. According to Smith's records, she was in love with the man, and according to the Powhatan oral history, she was forced to marry him. Either way, the marriage was just another way of forcing Pocahontas to assimilate to and once satisfied with their efforts, she was taken to England as a show pony.

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<sup>48</sup> Dr. Linwood "Little Bear" Custalow, 56.

For the English, Pocahontas was the Indian Princess who had assimilated to the ‘enlightened’ culture and if she could do it without a fight, then the rest of the ‘savages’ could be convinced as well. “The English colonists wanted to take Pocahontas to England to show her off to the King and Queen of England, as well as to the Church of England, to give the impression that relations were good between the colonists and the Powhatan tribes.”<sup>49</sup> By taking her to England, she was forced to submit to gender roles against her will for the pleasure of the British government. While she was used to show that the relationship between the Native Americans and the English was good, looks were deceiving. According to the oral history, by the time Pocahontas had figured out what she was being used for, it was too late; she could not undo what had been done. Demanding to return to her homeland, she and her English husband began their way back, but before they had left the Thames, she had died. Making sure to keep her story alive her sister and brother-in-law, who had traveled with her, made it back home to tell Pocahontas’ tale.

John Smith’s story of the defiant young woman who came to his rescue was vastly different from the more accurate account of Pocahontas’ history. The oral history left behind by the Powhatan people is more accurate to the history at the time; a Native American woman being used for European purposes. Despite her best efforts to keep her culture, Pocahontas was a young girl when she was taken captive, and had little ability to fight against such strong and imposing figures. While Pocahontas’ role was different than the women who followed her, her defiance in the face of impending change foretells the resistance Native American women.

Before the arrival of the Europeans, Native American women had no knowledge of gender submission. The ability to express themselves intellectually and sexually was as natural to

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 79.

native culture as snow in winter, and therefore when the English settlers began to arrive, tribes had to change their ways in order to protect their women. As Jesuit priests brought Christianity into the tribes, women rebelled against the desire for submission, and were the most difficult to convert. Native American women rebelled so much because they did not want to see their traditional roles being taken for granted, and their thoughts hushed; that was not how tribes worked. While Jesuit priests infiltrated tribal communities by targeting men and thus shaking up traditional life, native women kept their culture alive in their memory. As a result, when the French and Indian War broke out, Native American women were prepared because they had resisted against the European gender stereotypes which were being imposed upon them.



### Chapter Three: Fur Trade

By the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Native American women were experiencing a resurgence of power through the booming fur trade business. Europeans realized that while they might not value women in their own culture, in order to trade successfully with tribes, they had to have the help of Native Americans women. The relationship was beneficial to both parties; the French traders wanted fur, and the women wanted their lives to improve. As European gender roles took root in the various tribal societies, Native women began to look for ways to free themselves from their shackles and so they turned to the traders who were arriving by the boatful. The best way to gain greater access to the fur trade business was for Native American women to marry French fur traders. Native American woman could use their position as a way of gaining rank in both their tribe as well as in the colonial world which their husbands occupied.

The fur trade first started in the early years of colonization, when Native Americans sold their furs for European iron based tools which they did not have. It was not until wearing beaver hats became fashionable that the fur trade business picked up and companies began to establish themselves.<sup>50</sup> While the French were the first to begin trading, eventually the British got involved in the venture and competition was high between the two Empires, but the two Empires went about it in very different ways. “The French and English were distinguished as well by how they interacted with the Natives. The Hudson Bay Company established posts around the Bay and waited for the Indians, often middlemen, to come to them. The French, by contrast, moved

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<sup>50</sup> Ann M. Carlos and Frank D. Lewis 2001. *The Economic History of the Fur Trade: 1670 to 1870*. [Online]. [Accessed 22 April 2017]. Available from: <https://eh.net/encyclopedia/the-economic-history-of-the-fur-trade-1670-to-1870/>.

into the interior, directly trading with the Indians who harvested the furs.”<sup>51</sup> No matter how they did it, both Empires knew that their best chance was to trade with Native American women who had a knack for picking up languages and negotiating between the two groups.

Native American women in most nations and tribes did the majority of the labor that took place around the home while the men were warriors and hunters. Since Native American women were seen by Europeans as doing all the “hard” work, they deemed the Native American men as lazy. “What particularly galled [John] Smith and other White Virginians was the Indian man’s supposed carefree idleness, and enviable condition that lured many colonists into the wilderness.”<sup>52</sup> While Native men were perceived as lazy and not as hard working as the women, European men were envious of this lifestyle; thus, many European men found themselves taking up the task of fur trader. Men could have the relaxed lifestyle they wanted, and the Native women would do the bulk of the work to make the pelts, as was tradition. Native American women were responsible for the growth and distributions of crops and as such the European traders quickly learned that in order to survive, they had to trade with women. Native American women supplied traders with corn necessary for their existence and in turn, the fur traders, “...brought a wide variety of goods that were clearly aimed at women and children, such as kettles, combs, mirrors, hoes and fabrics...”<sup>53</sup> Native American women also had the skills and knowledge to harvest pelts and so these women began to be the primary point of trade with the Europeans. Just like on the East Coast, Native Americans in the Pacific North West learned how

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Rebecca Kugal and Lucy Eldersveld Murphy. *Native Women’s History in Eastern North America Before 1900*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007, 30.

<sup>53</sup> Michael, McDonnell. *Masters of Empire: Great Lakes Indians and the Making of America*. New York: 2015, 103.

to get the best price for the sea otters furs. “The Indians were savvy negotiators who quickly learned the value of their furs and how best to get the best deal, often by withholding furs until demands were met or playing one trader off against another.”<sup>54</sup> While the men did the hunting, they left the trading to the women because, “women could talk with the white men better than they could, and were willing to talk more.”<sup>55</sup> This rapport opened up a new world for Native American women and put them in a place of prestige. “Within the tribes, Indian women fostered trade with the Europeans...”<sup>56</sup> It was through their efforts that a successful symbiotic relationship could grow between the Native men that hunted the animals, the women who harvested them and the white men who would trade them. Despite the overall loss of power and rights that Native American women were experiencing, native women were able to amplify their role by providing furs, something Europeans desperately wanted. Native American women saw an opportunity which would serve them better, and they seized it with enthusiasm and gusto.

In order to secure a kinship between themselves and the traders, Native American women began to marry French fur traders which was easy because, “The adult males outnumbered the grown women in a proportion never less than two to one. This was because as a rule Frenchmen came to Canada single and formed alliances with Indian women.”<sup>57</sup> Since there was not a large supply of white women in the wilderness, native women filled the demand. By marrying French fur traders, Native American women began to take back the power and authority that had been

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<sup>54</sup> Eric Dolin. *Fur, Fortune, and Empire*. New York: Norton and Co., 2010, 156.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 156.

<sup>56</sup> Sylvia Van Kirk. *Many Tender Ties*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983, 75.

<sup>57</sup> Johnson, William. “The papers of Sir William Johnson, by Johnson, William, Sir, 1715-1774: Free Download& Streaming.” Internet Archive. 1921: 95, Accessed March 03, 2017. <https://archive.org/stream/papersofsirwilli12johnuoft#page/954/mode/2up/search/women>.

stripped from them a century before. By marrying Native women, fur traders were incorporated into the Native American society which strengthened the trading ties between the French and the Native Americans. "...the bond thus created helped to advance trade relations with a new tribe, placing the wife in the role of cultural liaison between the traders and her kin."<sup>58</sup> These white men even went so far as to assimilate into the Native culture by learning the language, dressing in the same style and most importantly, by marrying Native women. While larger fur trading companies discouraged "going native", these individual fur traders saw the importance of assimilating, and liked the freedom from European constraints.

Fur traders needed the safety and protection that Native American women could provide in such a harsh and unforgiving wilderness. Not liked by colonial officers or Jesuit priests, fur traders found themselves alone in the new world, and as a result, migrated closer to Native American tribes for support and survival. Marriage to a native woman would tie fur traders to an extended family which would allow them, "...to travel freely and conduct trade with an expansive number of natives who could provide the vital protection that the metropole could not."<sup>59</sup> When fur traders married into a tribe, the traders had somewhere to turn in case they needed protection not only from the elements, but from other tribes. "In the absence of the French post, not only were they [traders] more dependent on Indian women to feed and clothe them, but they needed the protection that Anishinaabe women could provide."<sup>60</sup> As a married

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<sup>58</sup> Sylvia Van Kirk, 4.

<sup>59</sup> Michael McDonnell, *Masters of Empire: Great Lakes Indians and the Making of America*. New York: 2015, 106.

<sup>60</sup> Michael, McDonnell. *Masters of Empire: Great Lakes Indians and the Making of America*. New York: 2015, 105.

couple, the French fur trader would move into his wife's community and set up lasting relationships with her kin.

While it might have seemed that the Native American women were puppets in the game of survival, Native women were not pawns of the French fur traders. While they met the demand of not enough women in the wilderness, Native American women began to realize that by marrying a fur trader, their status within the tribe improved. "A fur trader's presence enhanced the kinship network he joined, as well as his wife's 'authority and prestige among her people'."<sup>61</sup> Taking advantage of this authority, native women began to insert themselves in the fur trade business and became integral in all aspects of the fur trade. "Odawa women inserted themselves directly in the business of the fur trade. Thus they could oversee not only the supply side of the trade at Montreal or Trois-Rivieres but also the distribution of goods among their kin."<sup>62</sup> By being directly involved in the fur trade business, Native American women were once again allowed to walk through a world where both men and women held power and control.

Native American women were a valuable part of the fur trade business and since they were the ones who worked directly in trading, they became close with the fur trading men. As a result, French fur traders found themselves looking towards native women to fill the gap of eligible wives. In the Northeast and Canada, native women who married French fur traders found that they gained more influence and independence within the tribe; something that they had lost through the generations. Consequently, more and more native women began to expand and create fur trade businesses of their own.

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<sup>61</sup> Michael, McDonnell, 104.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 103.

### Case Study: Tacumwah

In the tribe of the Miami Indians, which was located in the Ohio Valley area, there was a Native American woman who pushed back against the imposed gender roles that the Europeans had brought over. Tacumwah was an elite Miami woman who stepped out of the gender stereotypes and filled the gap that was left open from the warfare. Married to a Frenchman and then divorced from him, she was one of a number of women who used her status as a woman in two worlds to establish a name for herself. As a result, Tacumwah gained a reputation that would intimidate European men.

Raised in a matrilineal society, the women of the Mahican tribe had more important roles within their tribal society than women in other tribes across the Americas. Tacumwah was raised to see the women of the tribe, "...playing pivotal roles in political decision-making, dictating the timing of wars and the taking of captives, and maintain control of their family's property."<sup>63</sup> It was in the Mahican society that Tacumwah gained the confidence to venture out into the male dominated world. Given skins from her family's huts, Tacumwah was able to successfully establish her own fur trade business which she used to create a comfortable life for her family. "...She also carried goods across the portage, collected tolls, conducted a lucrative business in skins and rum, and held considerable property in her own right."<sup>64</sup> A woman with so much business savvy intimidated European men and caused unrest among those she traded with. Using her new business to her advantage, Tacumwah gained a reputation from the British as a woman who could cause trouble. "...As the Woman is of the Pacanne Family of that Nation [Miami],

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<sup>63</sup> Marrero, Karen. *"She is Capable of Doing a Good Deal of Mischief": A Miami Woman's Threat to Empire in the Eighteenth-Century Ohio Valley*". *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* Volume 6, Number 3, Winter 2005.(Accessed April 22, 2017).

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

she is capable of doing a good deal of mischief, and the rest of the French Traders are under some apprehension she will, through the instigation of the Beaubien [a male companion].”<sup>65</sup> Yet despite the fears that European men had about Tacumwah’s growing business, it did not stop her from being a force to be reckoned with.

Tacumwah was not unique to history; many Native American women took advantage of the opportunities presented. She, like many other native women during this period, shook up the European standards of how woman were expected to behave. Tacumwah was not limited by her gender, rather, she used the skills her family taught her to create a successful business, one in which even the British took notice of. Just like Pocahontas and Anacaona, Tacmwhah did not want to be defined by her gender and pushed back against the prescribed roles that were limiting her.

### **Case Study: Netnokwa**

In the Great Lakes area of the United States, lived a fur trade captain of the Ottawa tribe who was very different from other captains; she was a woman. While little is known about her, what was most interesting about her was the power and respect she gained from her experience as a businesswoman. As the head of her family, she traveled with her husband and sons trapping and trading the furs all over the Great Lakes. At Forts, her presence demanded respect and she was treated with care during her encounters.

Netnokwa, led her husband and her sons around the region trapping and selling furs with other traders. She was a woman of great skills in not only her family life, but also in business and

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<sup>65</sup> Marrero, Karen. *"She is Capable of Doing a Good Deal of Mischief: A Miami Woman's Threat to Empire in the Eighteenth-Century Ohio Valley"*. *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* Volume 6, Number 3, Winter 2005.(Accessed April 22, 2017).

she commanded admiration for her knowledge. “All family property belonged to her; she made all major decisions for the family; and in crises she was able to call on spirit powers in order to affect weather and find game.”<sup>66</sup> During the course of her travels she obtained a young white prisoner; John Tanner who she treated as another son, raising him in the Native tradition. In John Tanner’s writings, which he wrote once he was an adult, he looked back on his adopted mother with the bias that most European men had and saw Native American women as not as capable as a white man. “Net-no-kwa, who, notwithstanding her sex, was then regarded as principal chief of the Ottawwaws... She was perfectly acquainted with the dispositions of those with whom she had to negotiate.”<sup>67</sup> While John Tanner, who Netnokwa took in as a replacement for a son she had lost, had little dealing with female fur traders he quickly learned that Netnokwa was much smarter than he first thought. Her family taught him how to hunt, trap and survive in the wilderness. While the information on Netnokwa is limited, her impact on John Tanner as a mother and savvy business woman lead him to write a great deal on his life with her.

Charged with the well being of her family, property and business, there was little time to worry about European standards of behavior; survival was more important. Netnokwa’s strong personality, and intelligent business acumen helped her resist the imposing European standards of ‘good behavior’ for women.

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<sup>66</sup> Grethen Baraille and Laurie Lisa. *Native American Women*. New York: 2001, 223.

<sup>67</sup> John Tanner and Edwin James. *A Narrative of the Captivity and Adventures of John Tanner*. London: 1830, 36.



### Case Study: Thanadelthur

Based in the colder climates, the French and British set up their own fur trade systems and alliances with Native Americans, each competing to collect the most furs and make the most money. Both governments knew that having a Native American woman working with them was the key to their economic success in North America. The Hudson Bay Company, a British company based in New York State, had a lucky break when a Native woman stumbled across their path in search of her home. Thanadelthur was a blessing to the Hudson Bay Company because she was able to speak both English and her native language and she gladly used her language skills to walk between two worlds. While she was not married to a trader nor did she have her own fur trade business, Thanadelthur's business was interpreter. Another means of stepping out from under the confines of European gender standards, the profession of interpreter was another form of freedom which Native women had not seen in many years.

Thanadelthur was a Chipewyan woman who became an interpreter for the Hudson Bay Company because of her ability to walk between the two worlds; European and Native American. As a "go-between", Thanadelthur demanded respect from both officers and Native tribes alike through her hard work and became a valued member of the Hudson Bay Company. The whole of the Hudson Bay Company was happy to have a Chipewyan woman because in order to gain peace between the Company and the Chipewyan tribe, Governor James Knight needed an interpreter and Thanadelthur filled the role with pride. Labeling her as 'Slave Woman' Knight keeps track of her and her work. "...the Slave Woman and Speaks these Indians Languages very Well and understands a pretty Deal of English..."<sup>68</sup> While Knight labeled

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<sup>68</sup> James Knight Journals, *Thanadelthur*. Hudson Bay Company Archives, Manitoba, Canada. (Accessed April 15, 2017).

Thanadelthur as a 'Slave woman', which speaks to his impression of her, she was anything but a slave. Thanadelthur saw an opportunity to gain power and influence over the Hudson Bay Company and she took it.

The ability to toggle between two cultures was so important that James Knight made sure that Thanadelthur was looked after while she was not under his direct care. In orders to the head of one of the peace missions, Knight wrote, "...2dly Item I order you to take care that none of the Indians Abuse or Missuse the Slave Woman that goes w<sup>th</sup> you or to take what She has from her that is to be given amongst her Country People..."<sup>69</sup> By making sure that Thanadelthur is cared for, Knight revealed how much he relied on her, and how important a mission such as this was to the survival of the Company.

Thanadelthur did not only do what she was told, but rather inserted herself into decisions that would be good for her and her people. Afraid of roaming English settlers, she refused to allow them to come near and told the head of the peace mission as much, and she was listened to. "...but Shee would not lett them come for fear of Mischief that they should do by Quarrelling..."<sup>70</sup> This display of power did not hinder the relationship between her and the mission leader, rather the men were in awe of Thanadelthur and the authority she wielded over her people. "Wm Stewart tells me he never See one of Such a Spirit in this Life She kept all the Indians in Awe as she went with... and when she came with her Country Men to them She made then all Stand in fear of her she Scolded at Some and pushing of others that they all stood in fear and forcd them to ye peace. Indeed she has a Divellish Spirit and I believe that if thare were but

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> James Knight Journals, *Thanadelthur*. Hudson Bay Company Archives, Manitoba, Canada. (Accessed April 15, 2017).

50 of her Country Men of the Same Carriage and Resolution they would drive all the Northern Indians in America out of there Country.”<sup>71</sup> Her ability to demand respect amongst her people surprised the Hudson Bay Company, but also garnered their respect. “...Presently Give her Opinion whether it would doo or not...” The high respect the Hudson Bay Company paid to Thanadelthur demonstrates that she was a valued asset; something not seen very often in the officers of the Americas.

After her death, only two years after joining with the Hudson Bay Company, Knight laments her passing after having watched her suffer an illness for seven long weeks and describes Thanadelthur’s desire to continue her work for the Hudson Bay Company. “...She had made Such Proposals to Me to bring the trade of that Country to Churchill River & had promised that she would never rest twill she had Completed it by going among all the National thereabouts & to Acquaint them what Commodity's wee deal for...”<sup>72</sup> James Knight’s appreciation of Thanadelthur and her ability to walk between two cultures shows in his final journal entry of her. “...wh<sup>ch</sup> has causd respect to her & Carry'd Allso a Great Sway among the Indians and that she know'd well Enough...”<sup>73</sup> Knight knew that he had lost an important and influential woman and it was through her determination that the Hudson Bay Company had gotten so far in their negotiations.

Thanadelthur’s story was very unique because of the little information that has been left about her, was written down by James Knight of the Hudson Bay Company. What was more unique was the Knight valued her talents and documented his thoughts on her in his journal.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> James Knight Journals, *Thanadelthur*. Hudson Bay Company Archives, Manitoba, Canada. (Accessed April 15, 2017).

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

Thanadelthur's ability to speak both English and her Native language placed her in a position of power and respect. Her sphere of influence is evident in her ability to approach Knight and make suggestions to him in such a way that he would listen. Even in sickness, Thanadelthur pushed past the gender roles and established herself as an imposing figure who deserved respect for her skills.

The fur trade opened up a new avenue for Native American women to pursue. With the influx of French fur traders, Native American women began to develop close relationships with them that a symbiotic relationship was created. French fur traders needed to survive in the harsh climates and native women wanted more authority within their tribe. Taking advantage of the opportunities a marriage to a French fur trader offered, Native American women found another way to gain back some of the power and authority which had been taken away from them. Native American women also became business women in their own right as well as interpreters who were 'go-betweens'. In any profession they took, Native American women found themselves upsetting European expectations of what was acceptable behavior for a woman. Not one to be thwarted by sexual oppression, Native American women continued to succeed in their occupation and earned the respect of both the Europeans as well as tribesmen alike. The opportunities that opened up during the French and Indian War were by no means the only way in which a native woman gained back their independence, however, it was a chance that could not be ignored.

## Chapter Four: French and Indian War

The French and Indian War was a catalyst for Native American women to reclaim lost rights, but the timing was pure luck. Had there been no war, there is not telling what Native American women would have done at this time, but perhaps they would have found a way to branch out into the fur trade and interpreter business on their own. However, it was because of the French and Indian War that the ratio of Native men to women were skewed because of men leaving for battle and never coming back. As such, in order to keep the tribe and themselves alive, Native American women had to take over the roles that men had held. “Miami women, who filled the power vacuum left by the deaths of so many men, found themselves possessing greater authority.”<sup>74</sup> It is at this point that Native American women push back against the imposing gender roles that were placed on them by the Europeans and win back the authority that had once been taken.

The French and Indian War, (1754-1763) also known as the Seven Years’ War, was fought between the French and the British. Both Empires were fighting for control of land rights in the Americas. The war was a complicated land battle for control over the Ohio River Valley which the French had expanded into, much to the chagrin of the British colonists. “France’s plan was to control trade in the Mississippi and Ohio valleys and, with the help of her Indian allies, confine the British to a narrow strip of land on the Atlantic coast.”<sup>75</sup> The French and British had been fighting off and on for years and the few years of peace between the two super powers

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<sup>74</sup> Karen, Marrero. *"She is Capable of Doing a Good Deal of Mischief: A Miami Woman's Threat to Empire in the Eighteenth-Century Ohio Valley"*. *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* Volume 6, Number 3, Winter 2005. (accessed April 22, 2017).

<sup>75</sup> Alfred A. Cave. *The French and Indian War*. Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2004, 6.

disintegrated as disputes over land rights increased. The ever increasing power struggle between the two governments meant that the borders changed on a regular basis, which meant that laws of the land were in flux most of the time.

The British Empire was struggling to gain the trust and friendship of the Native Americans because the British understood that a relationship with the Native tribes meant power over the French and their ever expanding empire. “The preserving and securing the friendship of these Indians is in the present situation of affairs an object of the greatest Importance it is from the steady adherence of these Indians to the British Interests that not only New York but all the other Northern Colonys have hitherto been secured from the fatal effects of the encroachments of a foreign power, and without their friendship and assistance all our efforts to check and disappoint the present view of this power may prove ineffectual.”<sup>76</sup> However, the British were finding it hard to keep friendships up with the Native Americans because, “...the Indians has lost faith in the English. The French had grasped the opportunity...were winning friendship of the Indians.”<sup>77</sup> It was the lack of a common union between the colonies, specifically regarding the outcome of Native Americans, that turned the Native American’s towards the French as allies. “The Indians doubted the sincerity of the English and their ability to act with vigor and unanimity against the French.”<sup>78</sup> Therefore, the Native Americans put their friendships in a government that was larger and one that was more likely to win; the outcome of the war was all the more important because it would decide the future and prominence of Native Americans within the colonies. Not wanting to be on the losing side and sick of the lack of union within the

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<sup>76</sup> Eugene Irving McCormac. *Colonial Opposition to Imperial Authority During the French and Indian War*. Great Britain: 1911, 15.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 15.

British colonies, the majority of the Native Americans sided with the French. It is within these years of war that Native American women pushed back against the imposing gender roles that the European colonists and priests had brought over.

Europeans continued to trade goods and wares with Native American tribes when they could because the survival of the colonies rested largely on the peaceful trade and alliances with the Native American tribes. It was in the desperate attempt to secure Iroquois allegiance that British officers began indulging Native customs more than they would normally have allowed. In a meeting with Iroquois warriors, Sir William Johnson was taken aback by the presence of Seneca women in the room and it was explained, “As women have a great influence on our young Warriors, I must desire that the women now present in particular may be acquainted with what news you many have.”<sup>79</sup> Surprised by their presence, but wishing to secure the Iroquois warriors onto the British side in the war, Johnson conceded to their traditional ways. “I am sensible your Women are of no small consequence...and I shall be always disposed to consult & inform them.”<sup>80</sup> In times of war, rules were bent so that communities could successfully thrive and this was no exception; the British stood to gain a lot from an alliance with Native Americans.

Johnson’s assurance was not long lasting and as it became clear that the British no longer needed the help of the Iroquois, he was less inclined to accommodate cultural gender norms. Rather, Johnson and other British officers believed that politics and military strategy was a mans domain and therefore he refused to include Native American women in the dialogue. The English misunderstood the cultural differences within tribal life, and played down the role of women within the fur trade because it was a man’s world. “To the English, Marie Madeleine [fur

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<sup>79</sup> Gail Macleitch. *You Women Are of No Small Consequence*. Rutgers: 2007, 30.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, 30.

trader] appeared an inconsequential 'squaw wife', and thus, they focused on Louis Chevalier [her husband].”<sup>81</sup> They turned to Chevalier to be the interpreter because he was a man, however, his authority within the tribe came from his marriage to his wife. It was the lack of understanding that placed a large majority of the Native Americans on the side of the French rather than the English. Since the British officers saw little value in Native American women, as compared to the French, they did not feel obligated in including native women in conversations about war.

As the battle raged on, Native American men went off to fight and did not return and Native American women found themselves replacing their male counterparts in trade and business more and more. Native American women acting independently of their men upset the British officers who encountered these women. This behavior made British officers nervous and uneasy because these women were intruding on their male dominated sphere and any change meant less power for the men. Those women were considered 'bad' because of this intrusion and those deemed 'good' did not intrude on their authority. "...I was regaled by the Princess if not in the neatest, at least in the most hospitable manner... These good folk were much chagrined that I could not stay until their soupe..."<sup>82</sup> By claiming that the way in which the Native American Princess treated Sir Hamilton was a "hospitable manner" he is imposing his biases on what is proper. By placing themselves as the 'civilized' and therefore superior culture, Europeans gave themselves authority to act and display dominance towards Native American women. By taking no time to understand the cultures they encountered, Europeans documented only one side of a culture which they knew nothing about. Despite the overwhelming change in gender roles and responsibilities that faced them, Native American women began to fight against the imposed

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<sup>81</sup> Susan Sleeper-Smith. *Indian Women and French Men*. University of Massachusetts: 2001, 57.

<sup>82</sup> Gail Macleitch. *You Women Are of No Small Consequence*. Rutgers: 2007, 135.



gender roles in order to liberate themselves from the binds that tried ever so desperately to hold them down.

With such a large number of Native American men away fighting in the Seven Years' War, those left behind were women, the elderly and children. After a century of living under the European standards of relations between Native men and women, Native women took over the tasks which men performed as a way to earn back their power within the tribe. With great pride and enthusiasm, the Native women who were left behind found themselves filling those societal roles which before the arrival of the Europeans, would have been theirs. By jumping so quickly to fill the open gaps within the tribe, there can be no question that Native American women did not like the gender roles which were forced upon them.

### **Case Study: Mary Musgrove**

As the British and the French struggled for control of North America, they fought to gain alliances with the various Native American tribes in North America. While the Empires battled for survival, so too did Native American women. In order to successfully survive in the unforgiving wilderness these women had to live in two different worlds. The ability to speak English as well as their Native tongue was a skill highly coveted by both governments who wished to create peace treaties with the Native Americans. While Europeans did not treat Native American women as equals for the work they did, nonetheless they were desperate for their help, and Native American women wanted the power that came with it. The ability to speak multiple languages and being able to be an interpreter gave Native women a status that they had not seen since before the arrival of the Jesuit priests.

Born already straddling two worlds, Mary Musgrove was half English-half Native American of the Creek Nation. As such, Mary could speak both English and Muskogee and this put her in a perfect place to become an interpreter and “go-between”. General James Oglethorpe, when he learned about Mary Musgrove’s talents for language decided to use her as a translator for the British government in creating a colony called Georgia. “. . .taking with him an interpreter, one Mary Musgrove, and Indian woman who had married a Carolina trader. This woman proved very useful on account of her influence with the Indians, and Oglethorpe afterward gave her £100 yearly for her services.”<sup>83</sup> Mary was an intelligent woman, who knew how special and rare her skills were. She made sure to keep her place of influence by inserting herself as the peace maker between the Creeks and colonists as Oglethorpe created a new colony. “She continued to be an important advisor to Oglethorpe and established a new trading post on the Altamaha River where she could observe the Spanish colonies which threatened war with the Georgia colony, and rally the Indians in the area to Oglethorpe’s side against the Spanish.”<sup>84</sup> Mary knew that her ability to speak two languages was a talent not found everywhere and she used her skills to her advantage and did business with other settlers as well as the Creek tribe.

With her skills, Mary made a name for herself and gained land rights, and the ability to fight her land claims in British court, which most women were not able to do. In one such court case where Mary was fighting for land rights, the British government labeled her as a trouble maker because of her ability to negotiate and her desire for, what she thought, was rightfully hers. Nonetheless, the British government understood that her position was one of influence, and any wrong word from her, could turn the tribes against them. “The commissioners. . . they

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<sup>83</sup> Harriet Cornelia Cooper. *James Oglethorpe*. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1904, 25.

<sup>84</sup> Gretchen Bataille and Laurie Lisa. *Native American Women*. New York: Routledge, 2001, 214.

thought she was a swindler- but also realized that alienating her could compromise the colony's security."<sup>85</sup> Rather than create more bloodshed between the Native Americans and the British settlers, the Georgia government came to a compromise, "...Mary was granted title to St. Catherine's and £2000 pounds in exchange for relinquishing the other lands."<sup>86</sup> Without her "go-between" status and her ability to speak two languages, Mary Musgrove would not have been as successful as she was at resisting the European gender roles that were being imposed on Native American women. While not all Native American women were as successful as Mary, her skill and business savvy speaks to the impervious nature of Native women and their desire for the respect and power that their ancestors once had.

### **Expectations of European Women**

European imperialism effected men and women of all races and classes in very different ways and while men were enjoying the spoils of their rule, women experienced something quite different. Native American women experience suppression, the likes of which they had never seen before and as a result, they pushed back. European women, on the other hand, were raised and expected to be subservient to their fathers and then later to their husbands. While European men perceived the New World as a place of reinvention, traditional expectations followed white women across the Atlantic. As white women realized that the New World was not a place of reinvention for them, they turned their anger on a group of women who had more mobility in society; Native American women. Once in the New World, European women were participants

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<sup>85</sup> "Mary Musgrove." Brooklyn Museum: Mary Musgrove. Accessed April 19, 2017. [https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/dinner\\_party/heritage\\_floor/mary\\_musgrove](https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/dinner_party/heritage_floor/mary_musgrove).

<sup>86</sup> "Mary Musgrove." Brooklyn Museum: Mary Musgrove. Accessed April 19, 2017. [https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/dinner\\_party/heritage\\_floor/mary\\_musgrove](https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/dinner_party/heritage_floor/mary_musgrove).

in the system of oppression against native women, yet, ironically, they did not receive any more rights than Native women.

For almost one hundred years, white women were discouraged from venturing into the wilderness; the conditions were too harsh and life would not accommodate womanly needs. The only women in the harsh wilderness were the native women, who were used to the drastic conditions. Once European women began to venture into less populated areas, they began to realize that their position in society was being threatened by Native American women. As a result, European women would propagate a system of oppression which was specifically targeted at their 'rivals'. Despite the inhospitable way in which white women treated native women, native women still held more authority and power in both worlds than white women did in their own. "...even the female Virginia Algonkians, 'were perhaps more powerful in their subordination than English women'."<sup>87</sup> There can be no doubt that the more freedom that native women experienced, left white European women feeling jealous because they were, in their minds, the 'superior' race.

After centuries of male domination, the expectations that men had for white women left little room to push back against the imposed gender roles. Barred from any form of political power, European women did not have the means to rebel against the social norms set in place for them. Gender stereotypes were so engrained into European society that colonial women had no ability to input their opinions in economic or militaristic matters what so ever and so they were forced to stay second class citizens. "For the majority of her life, her place was firmly fixed beneath her husband and above her children and servants."<sup>88</sup> Life for colonial women was not the

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<sup>87</sup> Heidi Hutner. *Colonial Women*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, 12.

<sup>88</sup> Carol Berkin. *First Generations*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1996, 26-27.

same as life for a Native American woman, yet white women were not passive actors in the New World. White women, while they had few rights in the colonies, they had an ability which Native women did not, white women became agents of prejudice towards Native women.

In a society which stigmatizes those who marry poorly and praises those who marry well, white women were in a sticky predicament. European society determined a women's 'lot' in life based on a successful a successful marriage, and competition lead to racist behavior. "While their public attitude toward native women might appear tolerant, the private opinions of the white wives indicated a good deal of racial prejudice."<sup>89</sup> White women knew that European men turned to Native women as wives, second wives or mistresses and so, a dislike for the Native American women grew. "In seeking to re-establish the domestic life of the mother country, the European woman zealously guarded her status as wife and mother."<sup>90</sup> While they held onto their traditional ideals about domestic family life, European women also knew that they could not control the actions of men and if a man wanted to have a second family, that was his birth right. What European women could control was their own actions and they could change how European society viewed Native women. Seeing themselves as more 'civil' and of higher status than Native American women, white women made sure to separate themselves and interact with them only when necessary. "She...has preserved during her whole residence here the same delicacy of feeling a good education gave her in Scotland.--Kind to the native women and children she yet maintains her original rank among them and seeks for society only in her own family."<sup>91</sup> A good

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 206.

<sup>90</sup> Sylvia Van Kirk. *Many Tender Ties*. Norman: Oklahoma Press, 2011, 35.

<sup>91</sup> Sylvia Van Kirk. *Many Tender Ties*. Norman: Oklahoma Press, 2011, 206.

portion of the anger and resentment rested with the “embarrassment” of having to acknowledge and deal with a husband's mixed blood offspring.

In this colonial period, being of “good rank” and having an upstanding reputation meant that a white woman would have the respect of whatever society she resided in. However, the slightest mishap or humiliation could impact a white woman immensely and tarnish her reputation, even if she was not the one who committed the act. White women felt their position's in society was being threatened because they were in competition with Native American women for position of ‘wife’. As a result, European propagated racist sentiments about Native American women and made it more difficult for native women to be accepted into a society in which they had once been fully accepted. This, however, did not stop Native American women from interacting with European men. Faced with greater challenges, native women accepted European women as another hurdle to jump over; they did not care about the European expectations.

### **Native American Women's Perspective**

The French and Indian War provided the catalyst for Native American women to walk between two worlds, and yet, it was not the only time that Native women rebelled against the constraints put upon them. Native American women in North America fought against the first explores, the French Jesuit priests and the various governments which were taking over their land, in order to keep their status. Through the few women mentioned in the case studies, there is clear evidence that Native American women knew that they were capable of much more than what the Europeans expected and wanted from a “savage” woman. The women in the case studies were just a handful of extraordinary Native American who were not the exception to the historical trend. A great many Native women in North America and Canada participated in the

fur trade, or had their own business or were “go-betweens”. While Native women did not leave a written record of their viewpoint on colonization and the destruction of their society, the evidence clearly indicates that they did not care about the European expectations for women. The first Native American woman, Anacaona, who was a Taino Queen, chose death rather than become a sexual object to the Spanish. Her attempt to rid the island of the Spanish, and her desire to die among her people show that she cared little for the Spanish government and would not be persuaded to submit to their desires and demands. Pocahontas, made infamous by Captain John Smith, vehemently refused to give up her traditional ways during her time in captivity and it was not until she was forced to marry an Englishman, did she ‘change her ways’. While she had little control over her life after her capture, once she realized that she was being used as a pawn for the English, she became furious and demanded to return home. There is no doubt that she wanted to rid herself of the English traditions and be free once more with her people, however, she never made it back. Netnokwa, the fur trade captain of her tribe, was renowned for her business acumen and as a result, respected. Her skills in business provides evidence that she had no qualms with stepping into a male dominated world and as a result, she became the head of the family. Netnokwa cared little for the standards that Europeans had in place, the survival of her family took precedent and her ability to trade fur allowed her to do this. Tacumwah, the savvy business woman who married a fur trader, was a woman who enjoyed her traditional freedoms. Raised in a matrilineal society, Tacumwah lived life according to what she wanted and felt no shame in creating a business where she would interact with Europeans. She felt so confident in her status, that she took her ex-husband to court in order to gain her business rights. For Thanadelthur, being the interpreter for Hudson Bay Company was a source of great pride. The great respect which she earned was not something that she wanted to lose, which was

evidenced in the letters James Knight left behind. Evidence shows that Thanadelthur knew how important her position was and there can be no doubt that she treasured it. Mary Musgrove was a head strong Native American woman who had walked two worlds her whole life; she knew the struggles of her people. Like many women before and after her, Mary Musgrove defied gender stereotypes and forced European men to take her seriously and as a result, they could not deny the influence she had among her people.

By the time the French and Indian War occurred, Native American women had few rights within tribal life; however, war allows for the bending of rules. As Native American men went off to fight, gaps were left and Native American women fulfilled those roles, as they would have a century prior. The French and Indian War provided the perfect catalyst for Native American women to gain the rights that had been slipping away from them. The War was not a blip in history where women found rights and then after, they fell back in step with the 'natural order', rather Native American women found various ways to rebel against the gender norms being imposed upon them. The French and Indian War provided a vacuum which had to be filled quickly, or the tribes would have suffered and Native American women stepped up to the challenge. Without the tragic loss of the Native men, women would not have been given a change to fill their roles and they would have been stuck in the imposed gender roles that had been pushed upon them. Native American women took advantage of the fur trade and pushed their way into the European world, despite the treatment they received from British officers and white women.



## Conclusion

Native American women's history is one fraught with gaps and holes. Lack of information about Native women during colonization leaves historians with only bits and pieces of their past actions. As a result, Native American women had been left out of the history of the United States because of the biases that were deep-rooted in the culture. While history has left out Native women, that does not mean that Native American women were bystanders as the world moved around them. Rather, Native women were active participants in the quick changing environment and quickly learned to adapt despite the overwhelming pressure to conform. Taking advantage of the French and Indian War, Native American women found a way to gain back the authority they had lost due to colonization.

With the arrival of Columbus, Native American women's lives changes drastically. Columbus brought with him culture oppression for both men and women, but Native women fell victim to the pitfalls of imperialism. Bring disease and weapons put Native tribes at a disadvantage, and they had very little ability to protect against both. As such, when they had the chance, Native tribes in the Caribbean fought desperately to keep their land, but to no end; their islands were overrun and their society destroyed. With each following trip to the islands, more and more explorers set out to discover 'new' and 'uncharted' lands in the name of the Empire and each time they came across a tribe, history would repeat itself. Death and destruction quickly followed the conquerors, leaving Native tribes with little to survive on.

Very quickly, Native American women were seen as sexual objects and they became the targets of sexual assault, something that they had little previous knowledge about. Losing their land, society and personal freedoms, Native American women struggled to survive under the yoke of incoming governments who cared little for their well being. With the pressure from

Jesuit priests, Native American women found themselves the victim of European gender stereotypes. With both men and women policing each others actions, Native American women were not allowed to act as they used to; voice anger, fight, spit, be political and be sexual. By getting Native Americans to monitor themselves, Jesuit doctrine was able to be passed down through the various tribes, ensuring the survival of European gender roles.

Prior to the war, one way to escape the European gender roles, which many Native American women practiced, was to marry a French fur trader. The intermarriage brought fur traders protection and a vast kin network, while at the same time, it gave native women a higher standing within the tribe. By the time the French and Indian War occurred, Native American women had few natural rights within tribal life; however, in war rules were bent. As a result, Native American women were given the chance to be authoritative once more in their tribes. When Native men went off to battle and the gaps they left had to be filled, native women filled those authoritative gaps, as their ancestors once did. Native women created their own fur trade business and were very successful, so much so, that many Europeans were put off by their presence. Native American women were more skillful than men in speaking English and had more patience for negotiations and were successful interpreters. Native American women learned quickly how to walk between two worlds, their traditional world and the European world, and how to interact successfully in both so that they, and their families could survive.

Native American women were fierce in their work which allowed them to gain a powerful reputation among those they traded with, or those they negotiated with. Without the French and Indian War, Native American women's roles might have been very different than what they were. The French and Indian War provided a greater opportunity for the gender boundaries to be weakened and allowed Native women to step into the masculine domain. Never

wanting to give into the European gender roles, Native American women rebelled when they could, and when they could not, they made sure to remember how life once was. As a result, when the War began, native women did not loose a beat, and they were able to successfully negotiate the male dominated world as if it was the norm. While native women ruffled some feathers, they found themselves with such authority and respect, which they had not seen since before colonization. The French and Indian War was a catalyst that allowed Native American women to push back even more than normal against the imposing gender roles that Europeans had placed on them, and earn back the respect which their gender had once been given.

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