

THE STRENGTHS & CHALLENGES OF NATIVE AMERICAN FAMILIES: CHARTING OUR COURSE AS WE NAVIGATE TWO WORLDS

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Introduction & Overview of Content



- Who I am & how I come to this topic (Lakota, social worker, educator, Beaver Clan, traditional, urban community member, Mom)
- Overview of presentation
 - Native Americans (demographics, family structures)
 - Impact of colonial policies on families
 - Resilience
 - Moving forward

Overview of Native Americans

- Almost 7 million people, around 2% of the US population
- Young & growing population
- More than 300 reservations but most people live off-territory
- More than 570 tribes, different cultures, languages, social structures, different experiences with identity...
- Social & health disparities balanced by resilience





Understanding Sovereignty

- Treaties & government-to-government relationships
- Federal & state recognition
- Enrollment, citizenship & identity



Collectivist Values & the Importance of Families

- Centrality of the group & home territories
 - Source of identity (genealogy, clan structures, who are your relatives?)
 - Shaping influence on priorities (Seven Generations)
 - All My Relations (human & beyond human, past, present & future)
 - Respect
 - Responsibility



Native American Family Structures



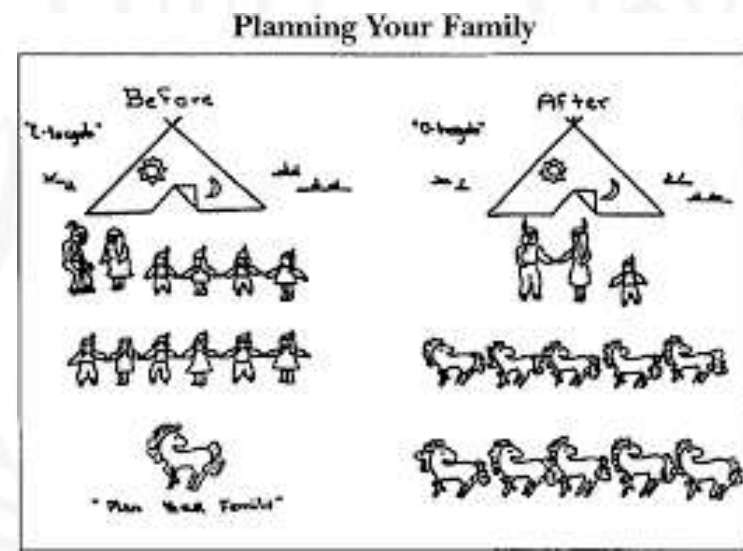
- Multigenerational & extended networks
- Balance & distinct roles based on age & gender
- Matrilineal or patrilineal
- All are sacred & have their place in Creation
 - Elders, women, children, Two Spirits
- Adoption & nonbiological relatives
- Clan structures & relationships across clans (marriage, funerals)





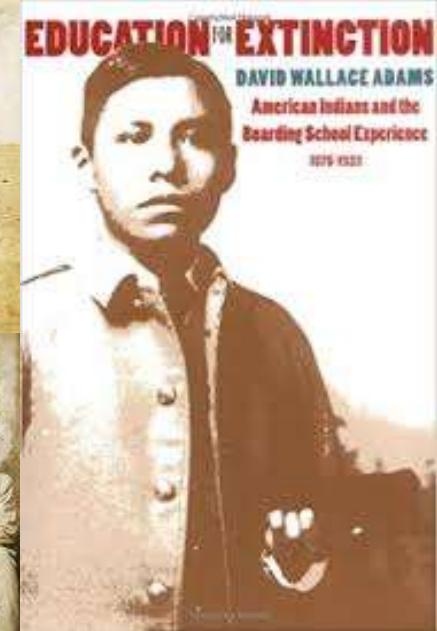
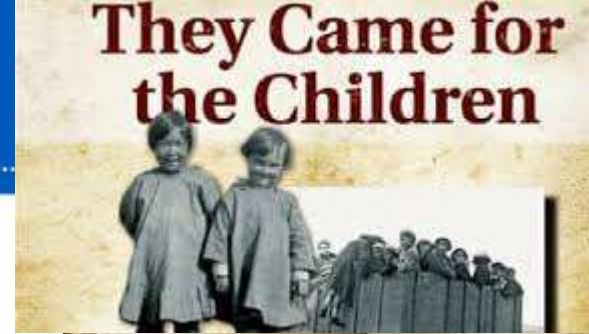
Colonial Attacks on Families

- A nation is not conquered until the hearts of its women are on the ground
- Colonial powers deliberately undermined Indigenous women leaders
- The Dawes Act: allotment to male-headed nuclear families
- Involuntary & coerced sterilization
- Undermining women & children threatens nations



Colonial Attacks on Families

- Residential schools (separation from families, communities, cultures; gender socialization)
- Child welfare system (family separation continues; Indian Adoption Project, disproportionate removal)



ADOPTIONS OF INDIAN CHILDREN INCREASE

One little, two little, three little Indians--and 206 more--are brightening the homes and lives of 172 American families, mostly non-Indians, who have taken the Indian waifs as their own.



Impact of Undermining Families

- Intergenerational trauma
- Loss of culture, language, spiritual traditions, coping mechanisms
- Internalized colonization, shame & grief
- Legacies of violence & substance misuse
- Missing & Murdered Indigenous Women





Indigenous Families Retain Strengths

- Spiritual & cultural traditions were maintained by some
- Language & cultural reclamation
- Collectivism remains despite attacks & fractures
- Example: Seneca Clan Mothers continue although the Seneca Nation of Indians abolished their Chief structure
- Adoptees find their way back & claim relatives





Recognizing & Supporting Strengths

- The Healthy Living in Two Worlds program



Recognizing & Supporting Strengths

- The Indian Child Welfare Act
 - Tribal jurisdiction
 - Affirming family beyond a nuclear model
 - Cultural continuity as the best interest of the child
 - The promise of ICWA must be fully realized
 - training, funding, counteracting misinformation





Charting our Path Forward

- Resources for families should be where the people are (urban & reservation-based)
- Support ICWA
- Rising to challenges in the pandemic (social distance pow wow, on-line webinars, using messages & communication methods that fit our needs)
- Aspirations for new visions of sovereignty
 - Building/rebuilding respectful systems (child welfare, health, etc.) & true partnerships where we support each other





Conclusion

- Challenges bring opportunities
- Deficits are balanced by resilience
- Partnerships are needed in our shared world
- We must chart our course forward to ensure the wellbeing of generations yet to come



Questions & Discussion

- Pilamaya! Thank You!

