Colonization is Misogynistic: The Sterilization of Native American Women in the Twentieth Century

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The violence against Native Americans began with Native and European contact and has persisted into contemporary society, establishing a never-ending cycle of cultural and political dominance. As Europeans arrived in the Americas with the intent of colonizing and taking its natural resources, violence was unavoidable because Native Americans had an established matriarchal society vastly different from the European's patriarchal system. Violence, especially against women, was used to assert dominance over the Indigenous people across the Americas. Examining the continuing trend of violence makes clear that the sterilization of Native American women from the 1960s to the 1970s was not an isolated occurrence in American history. Historians have identified several important women's roles, first within the Native societal systems, and how native women were central to establishing balance in tribes. Secondly, scholars address the European need to use women as tools to assert their dominance, resorting to violence to obtain control over the tribe and their men. Third, scholars discuss male authority in native society, displacing women in accordance with patriarchy. Finally, the forced sterilization of Native women in the twentieth century exemplifies the cycle of violence against Native tribes, targeting their women.

Matriarchal Societies

In the pre-contact period, many Native American cultures were matriarchal, in which women held significant power and position in the tribe and were politically and socially influential. As Juliana Burr's *Peace Came in the Form of A Woman: Indians and Spaniards in the Texas Borderlands* demonstrates how "Caddo men and women of both elite and nonelite status had their

parts to play" within their society.[1] Additionally, scholar Nancy Shoemaker's *Negotiators of Change* reinforces this concept by noting, "Women and men had complementary roles of equal importance, power, and prestige."[2] Both of these scholars look at this balanced system of gendered roles but centralize the concept of what ultimately makes native societies matriarchal. Barr discusses the Native familial households, in which women held control. Since households "functioned as the basic social and economic unit of production," women were regarded as the "heads of clans" among the Caddo.[3] Shoemaker focuses on the Iroquois, in which women weren't necessarily allowed to hold political positions; they did however, possess a significant amount of political authority.[4] "Iroquois women did control certain decisions" because of their "ability to control economic resources" from their agricultural responsibilities allowing them to take high political and societal positions such as the Caddo women.[5] Within both Barr and Shoemaker, "women's reproductivity was often metaphorically identified with food, nurturing, and life itself," within native origin stories, women are the creators of life and thus are valued for the contributions they made to society at large.[6]

As Europeans arrived, their patriarchal belief devalued the Native women's position in their interactions. However, it is vital to address that rather than the Europeans' sudden colonization of the Natives, there was a period in which the Natives continued to rule over their land, were feared by Europeans, and even in Tejas were regarded as "conquerors."[7] This

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[1] Juliana Barr, *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman: Indians and Spaniards in the Texas Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 28

[2] Nancy Shoemaker, *Negotiators of Change: Historical Perspectives on Native American Women*. (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis, 1995), 5.

[3] Barr, *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman,* 29.

[4] Shoemaker, *Negotiators of Change*, 8.

[5] Shoemaker, *Negotiators of Change*, 8.

[6] Shoemaker, *Negotiators of Change*, 8.

[7] Barr, *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman,* 3.

contradicts traditional Eurocentric belief, as the arrival of Spaniards and Frenchmen in "Eighteenth-century Texas, instead, offers a story of Indian *dominance*."[8] With this in perspective, we can now look at how Europeans had to "accommodate to native systems" to achieve economic trade and alliances, as well as the role of Native women in that process.[9] When the French and Spaniards came to Tejas, there was this misunderstanding of women's value in diplomacy because of how different these social structures were. For the Caddoan people, men were allowed to have outside alliances with the Europeans, giving the illusion that Caddoan men had the political control to decide diplomacy. However, political movements within the tribes were left for the women to decide, and if a Caddo man wanted to assimilate "strangers into their community," it was required for women to take part in that decision.[10] As Shoemaker reiterated this division in authority by the Iroquois, "men had more of a visible public role," but it didn't necessarily indicate they were more powerful.[11] As a matriarchy, Natives followed a matrilineal and kin-based society. Marriage was used as a tool of commitment, and "women represented the key element to solidify relationships with the Caddoan peoples."[12] If Europeans wished to live among the tribe permanently, they had to establish ties with the Caddoan people, primarily through marriage, which "linked peoples as well as families together in networks of interaction and reciprocity."[13] Scholar Fay A. Yarbrough, in "Women, Labor, and Power in the Nineteenth-Century Choctaw Nation," breaks down how marriage tied Europeans into native society. It was because they were "matrilocal: husbands joined their wives' households upon marriage."[14] In this instance, women were used and held within the

[8] Barr, *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman,* 7.
[9] Barr, *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman,* 15.
[10] Barr, *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman,* 79.
[11] Shoemaker, *Negotiators of Change,* 5.
[12] Barr, *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman,* 70.
[13] Barr, *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman,* 71.
[14] Fay Yarbrough, "Women, Labor, and Power in the Nineteenth-Century Choctaw Nation" In *Gender and Sexuality in Indigenous North America, 1400-1850* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2011), 125.

diplomatic importance of trust and family ties. The Caddo particularly valued the French as tradesmen among the Europeans because the French had learned the "everyday rhythms of Caddo reciprocity as well as the balance of power and honor between Caddo men and women."[15] As for the Spanish, they exemplify how "Just as women had been crucial figures in first establishing peaceful contact . . . women were also key to those contacts collapsing into hostility."[16] For not respecting the Caddos' beliefs and maintaining women's respect, the Spanish would be banned from economic and political diplomacy, putting them at a disadvantage compared to the French.

European Imposition

As historians established the women's critical role in Native society and their authority in decision-making, there is a transition from contact and building alliances to Europeans imposing their patriarchal and religious beliefs on the Natives. It is essential to remember that natives valued a "gender labor division" in which both men and women had their respective roles that maintained "balance and order."[17] According to Jennifer Di Paolo in her article "Violence against Native American Women in the United States," unlike the patriarchal systems in place in Europe, native "women held a complimentary role to men instead of a secondary one."[18] Europeans unknowingly disrupted this balance; they would eventually discover that they could use "Gender-based violence and the exclusion of women" as a critical tool to dismantling native society.[19] Limiting native women's gendered responsibilities, which were crucial to preserving balance within the native

[15] Barr, *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman,* 76

[16] Barr, *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman,* 61

[17] Barr, *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman,* 103.

[18] Jennifer Di Paolo, "Violence Against Native American Women in the United States" *Politikon (Bucureşti)* 20 (2013): 174–87, 175

[19] Di Paolo, "Violence Against Native American Women in the United States."175.

community, and then going further by abolishing Indigenous traditional laws that "kept Native women safe" led to the endangerment of native women.[20]

Since its beginning, colonization had undermined matriarchal societies by excluding women from negotiations and hindering the channels of female power. Once Europeans and Natives established alliances, Europeans imposed their systems on the Natives to civilize and "progress [Natives] to Europe's elevated position" of superiority.[21] According to Burr, the Spaniards would try to impose their Catholic patriarchal system on the Caddo people who often visited their missions.[22] However, as Burr reveals, it was not a full success, as the Caddo people retained their traditional systems of gendered labor divisions.[23] This was not the case for all native tribes, as Shoemaker discusses the continuous struggle for Native Americans to "find new ways of making a living, and that struggle had a gender dimension" due to colonialism.[24] Native men and women had to adapt and reinvent their traditional roles in society, especially when involved in economic activities and European trade.[25] Lucy Eldersveld Murphy reinforces this issue of trade in her article "Autonomy and Economic Roles of Indian Women of the Fox-Wisconsin River Region, 1763 - 1832." The Sauk women made large contributions to the market productions until the "white U.S. settler men seized the resources and forcibly took over the Indian women's role as lead miners and farmers."[26] Prior to the seizing of women's resources, in adapting to the European market, the Sauk were contracted to provide lead to the American government, used to build guns.

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[20] Di Paolo, "Violence Against Native American Women in the United States." 176.

[21] Theda Perdue, "Women, Men and American Indian Policy: The Cherokee Response to 'Civilization'" In Nancy Shoemaker, *Negotiators of Change : Historical Perspectives on Native American Women* (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis, 1995), 91.

[22] Barr, *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman,* 152.

[23] Barr, *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman,* 143.

[24] Shoemaker, *Negotiators of Change*, 16.

[25] Shoemaker, *Negotiators of Change*, 16.

[26] Lucy Eldersveld Murphy, "Autonomy and the Economic Roles of Indian Women of the Fox-Wisconsin Riverway Region, 1763-1832" In Nancy Shoemaker, *Negotiators of Change: Historical Perspectives on Native American Women* (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis, 1995), 74.

Women were miners since it was regarded as agricultural farming and were the most negatively impacted by the encroachment of white greed within the mines. Out of jealousy and capitalistic greed, white farmers resorted to violence against female miners. In one instance, a white man "stamped on [a miner's] head, killing her," and the incident was ignored by local white authorities.[27] Violent incidents such as these occurred as a result of native women's persistent role and adaptation to maintain their traditional responsibilities as heads of the household.

Despite the patriarchal system not working for the Caddo people and slightly for the Sauk tribe, it was the Apache women who faced more danger from the Spanish. The Apache and Spaniards were "combatants far longer than allies" due to the Spanish alliance with the Apache's enemy, the Caddo.[28] Barr addresses how the Apache women and children were faced with Spanish imprisonment if captured in a raid, exploited as the "only vulnerability" of the Apache men. "The Apache women and children who served as human trophies of war" reflecting this dehumanization of the Apache people, as the Spaniards sought to dominate over Apache men by exploiting women and children.[29] The Caddo and Apache people's traditional native systems were imposed on, mostly through unsuccessful attempts on the Spanish missionaries' part; however, they did inflict harm to Native society by purposely undermining women's labor contribution to the tribe.

For other tribes, such as the Iroquois, the English had imposed more than just labor restrictions on native women, as they used three tools of conquest: gendered hierarchy, sexual violence, and relocation or "clearing of the land."[30] The gendered hierarchy was a strategy to transform native culture into becoming civilized; Europeans maintained it through their "refusal"

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[27] Murphy, "Autonomy and the Economic Roles of Indian Women of the Fox-Wisconsin Riverway Region, 1763-1832," 86.

[28] Barr, *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman,* 159.

[29] Barr, *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman,* 170.

[30] Di Paolo, "Violence Against Native American Women in the United States," 176.

to "negotiate with Native women," thus undermining women's position of authority and failing to recognize their political and economic contributions.[31] As for sexual violence, scholar Eleanor Ned-Sunnyboy, in "Special Issues Facing Alaska Native Women Survivors of Violence," illustrates how sexual violence was a foreign idea pre-colonial; violence of any kind toward women was a rare occurrence but taken extremely seriously, even resorting to shunning the perpetrator.[32] However, with European efforts to dominate native tribes, "sexual assault was a tool of war," used to assert fear over Native tribes.[33] Lastly, the clearing of the land refers to the "removal and relocation" of whole communities. The removal was intended to allow for the land to be occupied by American settlers, but it also caused the "loss of customary land, the lifestyles had built on that land, economic downturn and disparity."[34] These three tools of denomination imposed on the Iroquois, much like the religious Spanish imposition against the Caddo, were forced onto the native tribes to convert and civilize Native tribes according to European standards.

Decentering Native Women

As the United States of America was established, Indigenous Tribes were continuously denied sovereignty, only promised superficial treaties based on the whims of white judicial court systems and Presidents who wanted land over alliances.[35] As Native tribes have previously adapted or resisted colonial systems to maintain their matriarchal society, assimilation to retain their sovereignty will eventually become a priority. Assimilation would require tribes to "accommodate certain aspects of American culture," such as adhering to patriarchal and Christian-valued Federal

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[31] Di Paolo, "Violence Against Native American Women in the United States,"176.

[32] Eleanor Ned-Sunnyboy, "Special Issues Facing Alaska Native Women Survivors of Violence" In *Sharing Out Stories of Survival: Native Women Surviving Violence* (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2008), 75.

[33] Di Paolo, "Violence Against Native American Women in the United States," 176.

[34] Di Paolo, "Violence Against Native American Women in the United States," 177.

[35] Perdue, "Women, Men and American Indian Policy: The Cherokee Response to 'Civilization,'" 90.

policies.[36] As Jacqueline Agtuga in "Beloved Women: Life Givers, Caretakers, Teachers of Future Generations" states, "The root of violence against Native women is not found in any single code, act, or policy, but is revealed in the layers of governmental law and policies known as Federal Indian Law," that have pushed women out of their traditional respective roles into one of inferiority.[37] Brenda Hill, in her article "The Role of Advocates in the Tribal Legal System: Context Is Everything," introduces two tactics of oppression that followed European policies: femicide and the unnatural belief system. Femicide was where colonizers targeted women because they "understood on some level that to destroy Native culture, Native women must be destroyed."[38] The system of colonial oppression had forced tribes into following an "unnatural belief system that ignores and devalues women," a misogynistic attempt at denying "women [their] sovereignty."[39]

Eventually, the unnatural belief system would be "internalized in most Native communities and takes the form of hierarchy," which is "built and maintained by violence."[40] Since the system itself is inherently misogynistic and oppressive toward women, there is an "increased level of violence" within the Indigenous culture.[41] The violence is a "product of internalized oppression" in which the "oppressor doesn't have to exert any more pressure because the oppressed now do it to each other and themselves."[42] The Choctaw Nation's Constitution of 1838, exemplifies this self-oppression in its exclusion of women from political participation. It did not include women in the "electorate or permit them to serve as representatives," even removing women's control over their

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[36] Perdue, "Women, Men and American Indian Policy: The Cherokee Response to 'Civilization'," 90.

[37] Jacqueline Agtugu, "Beloved Women: Life Givers, Caretakers, Teachers of Future Generations" In *Sharing Out Stories of Survival: Native Women Surviving Violence* (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2008), 4.

[38] Brenda Hill, "The Role of Advocates in the Tribal Legal System: Context Is Everything" In *Sharing Our Stories of Survival: Native Women Surviving Violence* (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2008), 194.

[39] Hill, "The Role of Advocates in the Tribal Legal System," 194.

[40] Hill, "The Role of Advocates in the Tribal Legal System," 195.

[41] Hill, "The Role of Advocates in the Tribal Legal System," 195.

[42] Hill, "The Role of Advocates in the Tribal Legal System," 195.

reproduction.[43] Choctaw legislation was decentering women from their traditional roles, by shifting the "importance of tracing kinship matrilineally" toward following it through the father's lineage. This was critical to women's autonomy, and property inheritance would soon follow.[44] Native societies were reflecting patriarchal society to assimilate into Anglo-American society properly, which meant that men gained a "greater authority."[45] Agtuga addresses that the "alteration of the legal relationship of Native women to the land [was a] . . . dimension in the erosion of the status and identity of Native Women."[46] Women's position as "caretakers and cultivators" was not only threatened through the decentralization of women from their access to land but also by removing women from their roles as "mothers."[47]

The Federal Indian Policies, as previously mentioned, generated the "Boarding School Era, the Adoption Era, and the Forced Sterilization Era," which highlight the most impactful governmental policies "upon the lives of Native women."[48] The Boarding School Era occurred from the 1880s to the 1950s, and as Elenor Ned-Sunnyboy states in "Special Issues Facing Alaska Native Women Survivors of Violence, it had "led to a breakdown of traditional cultural values and beliefs."[49] Agtuga addresses it as a "cultural genocide," as it was a purposeful attempt at severing the relationship between a child and their parents.[50] Di Paolo refers to the children as those who "lost their spirituality," and would be "unable to become adequate parents in terms of passing down their culture, language, spirituality, or lifestyle to their children."[51] Following the Boarding

[43] Yarbrough, "Women, Labor, and Power in the Nineteenth-Century Choctaw Nation," 129 -130.
[44] Yarbrough, "Women, Labor, and Power in the Nineteenth-Century Choctaw Nation," 131.
[45] Yarbrough, "Women, Labor, and Power in the Nineteenth-Century Choctaw Nation," 131.
[46] Agtugu, "Beloved Women," 17.
[47] Agtugu, "Beloved Women," 15 and 8.
[48] Agtugu, "Beloved Women," 17.
[49] Sunnyboy, "Special Issues Facing Alaska Native Women Survivors of Violence," 73.
[50] Agtugu, "Beloved Women," 18.
[51] Di Paolo, "Violence Against Native American Women in the United States," 177.

School Era was the Adoption Era from the 1950's to the 1970s, "removing the children of Native women in order to further the federal policy of assimilation."[52] Within these conditions, Di Paolo addresses that the "role of the Mother in Native society had been forever changed," only intensifying during the Forced Sterilization Era.[53]

Forced Sterilization

The Colonial Era had allowed native women to become targets, as they were valued members of the tribes. It has historically been observed that women are the most impacted in the native population. The persistent pattern of violence, fueled by federal financing and racial motivation, the forced sterilization of Native American women during the 1960s to the 1970s. Deer discusses the "depth of the erosion of the physical safety and respect for Native women caused by this genocidal practice is societal and integrational."[54] In "The Enemy is the Knife: Native Americans, Medical Genocide, and the Prohibition of Nonconsensual Sterilizations" by Sophia Shepard, she discusses how not only Native Americans but all women of color were subjugated to forced sterilization between 1969 and 1979 for governmental and white gain. This perpetuates the ongoing cycle of violence that Native tribes have been forced to withstand. Native women are being exploited, and the larger white society has disregarded their well-being.

In the 1960s, there was an increase in concern regarding the expanding U.S. population, resulting in numerous States advocating for the sterilization of poor women. The federal government would create and fund several programs in response to this fear to "study population growth and devise plans to reduce it."[55] Some of these programs included the Office of Economic Opportunity, the Commission on Population Growth, and the American Future; however, the

[52] Agtugu, "Beloved Women," 17.
[53] Di Paolo, "Violence Against Native American Women in the United States," 178.
[54] Agtugu, "Beloved Women," 18.
[55] Shepherd, "The Enemy is The Knife," 95.

"perpetrator of thousands of unconsented sterilizations was the federal government's Indian Health Service (IHS)."[56] In 1965, the "federal IHS facilities began family planning programs that included sterilization" but offered doctors little reimbursement for sterilization.[57] It wasn't until Congress passed the Family Planning Services and Population Research Act of 1970 that the government began to cover ninety percent of the cost of sterilization performed through IHS. Compared to the small subsidies received for giving birth control, doctors could earn up to $720 by performing sterilization. This would increase the "number of federally-funded sterilizations increased by more than five times during the next decade."[58]

The IHS hospitals were a federal government program established in 1955 that solely served Native Americans due to past treaties tracing back to 1832 that required the U.S. to provide medical care for Native American Tribes. As a federally funded program and the sole medical provider, it allowed them to target Native American women, having "sterilized twenty-five percent of all Native women of childbearing age in the United States."[59] There were seven ways in which the IHS doctors coerced Native women and forcefully sterilized them without their consent. First, many women were sterilized without their knowledge or even a full understanding of what the operation was. Second, many others were falsely told that it was reversible and could be undone when they were ready to have children. Third, others were told they were going for a completely different procedure, such as an appendectomy, and were operated on under pretense. Fourth, many reported that they agreed to the procedure either under "sedation or experiencing labor pains," and they weren't in the right frame of mind to understand what they agreed to.[60] Fifth, others were

[56] Shepherd, "The Enemy is The Knife," 89.
[57] Shepherd, "The Enemy is The Knife," 96.
[58] Shepherd, "The Enemy is The Knife," 96.
[59] Shepherd, "The Enemy is The Knife," 92.
[60] Shepherd, "The Enemy is The Knife," 92.

minors and therefore "unable to legally consent."[61] Sixth, many were coerced and threatened by doctors, being told that it was in their best interest as they could "lose custody of their children."[62] Lastly, English, for some, was not their first language, and interpreters were "rarely engaged to ensure that the women understood what the doctor said to them."[63] "IHS doctors and nurses who performed the procedures and by the IHS personnel that approved and funded the procedures" fully understood the situation in which they were placing these Native American women, forcing sterilization upon the unknowing and unwilling.[64] Deer refers to this nonconsensual act as "domestic terrorism" in which the colonial system has removed Native women from "the right to control their own bodies."[65]

Shepard introduces a critical figure in bringing IHS sterilization to the attention of the public, Dr. Connie Redbird Uri, a physician of Choctaw and Cherokee descent. Dr. Uri was visited by a patient in 1972, hoping to reverse a hysterectomy that a doctor at the IHS had performed. The patient was initially told that it was a reversible procedure, which was the sole reason she had allowed the procedure to occur; however, Dr. Uri informed her that a hysterectomy is a permanent procedure. Dr. Uri, at first, believed this was an isolated occurrence; however, as she reached out to other Native American women, she discovered that this was not the case. Rather, she stumbled upon other stories and experiences of Native women coming forth that they were sterilized without their knowledge or full consent. Dr. Uri would trace these stories back to the IHS hospital in Claremore, Oklahoma, where, upon further research, they had sterilized "one of every four women" who came in to give birth. "According to Dr. Uri, Claremore doctors were running a

[61] Shepherd, "The Enemy is The Knife." 92.
[62] Shepherd, "The Enemy is The Knife," 92.
[63] Shepherd, "The Enemy is The Knife," 92.
[64] Shepherd, "The Enemy is The Knife," 93.
[65] Hill, "The Role of Advocates in the Tribal Legal System," 194-195.

'sterilization factory.'"[66] As she reported her findings to a Native American newspaper, *Akwesasne Notes*, in 1974, other tribes would also investigate their local IHS facilities, and they found in some tribes, it was a higher percentage. The Northern Cheyenne Tribe had "one-third of [their] tribe's women of childbearing age were sterilized during a three-year period," and another study shows that it could even be more than half of their women who were sterilized.[67]

As Dr. Uri discovered "the secret program of government sterilizations," she began to understand that Native American women faced powerful barriers, and so she would become the first "Native American woman to obtain both medical and law degrees," giving the fight for reproduction anatomy her undivided attention.[68] She and other Native activists had to overcome the federal government, the physicians, the physicians' board, the IHS, and the little support from white feminists and Native American men in ending the injustice of non-consensual sterilization. Since the IHS facilities were federally funded, it allowed physicians and the physicians' board to take full reins within the hospitals themselves. Surveys by doctors confirmed that women on welfare and/or who had a lot of children were twice as likely to be sterilized than women who did not receive any public assistance as they claimed it was "helping both society and the women themselves."[69] "Women of color were especially targeted for sterilization," as there was a racial stereotype that women of color were more fertile than white women.[70] This resulted in "policymakers assert[ing] that sterilization efforts should be focused on women of color" who were economically in a lower standing in comparison to white women, as well as perceived to be much more fertile.[71] This racial perspective on colored women greatly increased the likeliness of

[66] Shepherd, "The Enemy is The Knife," 91.
[67] Shepherd, "The Enemy is The Knife," 91.
[68] Shepherd, "The Enemy is The Knife," 90 and 100.
[69] Shepherd, "The Enemy is The Knife" 96.
[70] Shepherd, "The Enemy is The Knife" 96.
[71] Shepherd, "The Enemy is The Knife," 97.

them being sterilized, and a study done in 1970 determined that "even after controlling for education and age, Black women were approximately twice as likely to be sterilized as white women," proving that it was beyond a women's economic standing or educational advances, and rather it was about their skin color.[72]

As for the physicians' board, there was no regulated standard for a patient to be able to qualify for sterilization, only a recommended "age-parity standard, which provided that the only women who should be sterilized were those who were older and had many children," by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.[73] However, this standard was only a guideline for hospitals to follow; some did, while many others sterilized young women of childbearing age and even women who had few children. "In addition, private licensing groups created incentives that further encouraged doctors to perform sterilizations."[74] As residents were required to undertake a certain number of surgeries to complete their residencies, poor and colored women were an easy target to achieve this. Since the Indian Health Service (IHS) facilities were solely established to serve Native Americans, providing free healthcare, by 1970, "'virtually all Indian births took place in IHS facilities.'"[75] It was due to this that the IHS doctors were in a "powerful position to increase sterilization" since IHS facilities were the only medical facilities available to them.[76] Native American women had no other opportunity to turn for a second opinion, and they feared rejecting the doctor's recommendation might lead to lower-quality care. This fear was justified, as the IHS in Clamore planned to shut down after the continuing complaints received from the Tribal Nations after Dr. Uni published her research findings in 1974. Lastly, Native

[72] Shepherd, "The Enemy is The Knife," 97.
[73] Shepherd, "The Enemy is The Knife," 97.
[74] Shepherd, "The Enemy is The Knife," 97.
[75] Shepherd, "The Enemy is The Knife," 98.
[76] Shepherd, "The Enemy is The Knife," 98.

American activists who opposed sterilization "received little support from other groups that might normally have been allies."[77] The white feminist groups in the 1960s and 1970s experienced a different issue, where they could not have contraceptives or sterilization made available to them. And so they did not support the Native women due to the idea that opposing the "overuse of sterilization was in direct conflict with their primary goals of improving women's access to contraceptives."[78] This in itself speaks volumes about the exact underlying issue: race. Minority women were susceptible to non-consenting sterilization due to the lack of any other option, while white feminists had a multitude of resources available; it goes to show that the government wanted white women to continue giving birth to white children. As for the Native men, they faced "broad issues such as tribal sovereignty and the forced assimilation of Native Americans" and were very politically involved.[79] Supporting Native women activists on the issue of forced sterilization was simply not a priority to white female and native male activists.

Dr. Uri would publicly advocate and pressure the government to investigate their IHS facilities; in 1976, she "convinced Senator James Abourezk of South Dakota to request an investigation by the federal government's General Accounting Office (GAO)."[80] GAO investigated only four of the twelve facilities from 1973 - 1976, finding that "3,406 Native women had been sterilized, 3,001 of whom had been of childbearing age," which means that six percent of the Native American women in that area were sterilized in just four years.[81] In the fifteen years of IHS sterilizing the Native American population at a constant rate, realistically, 22.5 percent were sterilized. "Moreover, the GAO found that many of the sterilizations violated the law and

[77] Shepherd, "The Enemy is The Knife," 99.
[78] Shepherd, "The Enemy is The Knife," 99.
[79] Shepherd, "The Enemy is The Knife," 99.
[80] Shepherd, "The Enemy is The Knife," 100.
[81] Shepherd, "The Enemy is The Knife," 100.

government regulations."[82] As GOA reviewed all the consent forms, the majority were performed illegally because "it neither described the sterilization procedure nor explained what the women were told before signing the form," and it did not inform women of their welfare rights if they choose not to be sterilized.[83] With the GOA investigation confirming Dr. Uri's research, she would go on to broaden her activism to the Tribal Nations, where more Native women joined her fight. Some would organize grassroots movements; the most important was the Women of All Red Nations (WARN), founded in 1974 by "several female members of the American Indian Movement who wanted a group focused exclusively on women's issues."[84] Despite the investigation held by GOA, the federal government was not making any immediate incentive to change sterilization regulations, so Native American activists would eventually join other women of color who also faced "sterilization abuse in their communities."[85] The federal effort to reduce poverty and the stereotype that women of color were more fertile than white females resulted in the nonconsensual sterilization of many Black and Latina women. In 1975, organized groups representing different populations of women of color officially joined together under the National Women's Health Network (NWHN), composed of Black women, Mexican-American women, Puerto Rican Women, and Native American women.[86] Through the united efforts of the NHWN and other grassroots organizations, "Congress held hearings about sterilization abuse in 1978."[87] In the hearing, lawmakers acknowledged the illegality of these sterilizations, done without the consent of the patients due to all of the coercive methods pressured by doctors. Following the hearing, the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) passed new

[82] Shepherd, "The Enemy is The Knife," 100.
[83] Shepherd, "The Enemy is The Knife," 101.
[84] Shepherd, "The Enemy is The Knife," 102.
[85] Shepherd, "The Enemy is The Knife," 103.
[86] Shepherd, "The Enemy is The Knife," 103.
[87] Shepherd, "The Enemy is The Knife," 103.

guidelines to prevent nonconsensual sterilizations, mandating that each consent form for the sterilization procedure must explain the alternative birth control methods, that federal benefits will not be withdrawn if they choose to refuse the procedure and include the signature of the patient's interpreter. Other guidelines stated that women under intense pain or medication could not provide consent, the consent waiting period was raised from 3 days to 30 days, and lastly, it eliminated federal funding for "hysterectomies done for sterilization purposes, removing a significant financial incentive of physicians to perform the procedures."[88] The guidelines went into full effect in February 1979, and although a victory for Native American women and other women of color, "they were not supported by many feminist organizations who feared that the extended waiting period intruded on reproductive choice."[89]

Although nonconsensual sterilization declined after the 1979 HEW guidelines were put into effect, the damage had already been done, "the federally-sponsored sterilization of Native women between 1965 and 1979 had long-lasting impacts on the Native American population."[90] Several investigations, aside from GAO, indicate that as much as twenty-five percent of Native American women were sterilized, and other studies show it could be a higher percentage. "Many of the sterilized women suffered psychologically and experienced higher rates of addiction and divorce," and it especially affected their tribal traditions on the female anatomy.[91] Reproduction is critical for tribal survival, and for Native women, it is passed down to each generation, and they are taught from a young age that their "reproductive power" is sacred to them.[92] Each tribe was affected differently, but an overall majority of women in politically influential positions suffered

[88] Shepherd, "The Enemy is The Knife," 104.
[89] Shepherd, "The Enemy is The Knife," 104.
[90] Shepherd, "The Enemy is The Knife," 105.
[91] Shepherd, "The Enemy is The Knife," 105.
[92] Shepherd, "The Enemy is The Knife," 105.

a loss of "power in tribal councils whose representation was based on population and by losing federal services based on population."[93] Some tribes that depended on IHS were seen as inferior to other tribes, who saw their dependency as a "direct affront to a tribe's sovereignty and ability to protect its members."[94] Some tribes, such as the Kaw, would be devastated due to the sterilization of their female members, and it threatened the continuation of their lineage since many tribes had few purebloods. As Dr. Uri explains, "We are not like other minorities. We have no gene pool in Africa or Asia. When we are gone, that's it."[95] This forced sterilization of Native American women is only a continuing legacy of the unfair treatment of Native Americans for the past 500 years. As Deer also addresses that "Colonization failed in its attempt to completely annihilate Indian culture and spirituality, but it was successful [in] causing long-term damage."[96]

The nonconsensual sterilization of Native Americans in the United States was not an isolated occurrence, as Jennifer Leason, in her article "Forced and Coerced Sterilization of Indigenous Women: Strengths to Build Upon," discusses the sterilization of Indigenous women in Canadian native tribes and the long-standing effects that impact their community. Leason is a member of the Pine Creek First Nation Indian Band, and she talks about how traditionally, within her tribe and other Canadian tribes, "Indigenous women commanded the highest respect in their communities" due to their reproductive anatomy.[97] Women were viewed and treated as powerful and sacred beings, as they "birth the whole world," but because "racism, sexism, and colonialism have disrupted respect for Indigenous peoples and women," their human right to anatomy was

[93] Shepherd, "The Enemy is The Knife," 105.
[94] Shepherd, "The Enemy is The Knife," 105.
[95] Shepherd, "The Enemy is The Knife," 105.
[96] Rose L. Clark and Carrie L. Johnson, "Overview of Sexual Violence Perpetrated by Purporting Indian Medicine Man," In *Sharing Out Stories of Survival: Native Women Surviving Violence* (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2008), 219.
[97] Jennifer Leason, "Forced and Coerced Sterilization of Indigenous Women: Strengths to Build Upon" *Canadian Family Physician* 67, no. 7 (2021): 525.

stripped away from them.[98] Much like the United States eugenics laws and the *Buck v. Bell* Supreme Court ruling, Canada also passed similar policies in Alberta from 1928 to 1972 and in British Columbia from 1933 to 1973: the Sexual Sterilization Acts, which forcefully sterilized any women leaving a mental institution before they were discharged. Leason documents more than 1200 sterilizations from 1966 - 1976 that occurred in Indian Hospitals across Canada, of which 50 are men. On January 28 and 29, 2020, Leason was a speaker at the National Collaborating Center for Indigenous Health in Ottawa, Ontario, where there was a gathering centered on "Culturally Informed Choice and Consent in Indigenous Women's Health Services."[99] As she gave her speech, she addressed the "resiliency of Indigenous women and culture" and shared her own experience of how she was raised and taught to view herself and other women as "gifted with the seeds of creation."[100] She was instilled with the foundation and "power to be grounded and connected to a matriarchal tradition and an inherent Indigenous wisdom and knowledge," these lessons she learned from her elders, and it is through these lessons that you strengthen bonds and communities.[101] As a contemporary activist, Leason raises awareness of sterilization even though these federal programs have ended. It demonstrates the fear these Indigenous tribes hold their lineage, much like tribes in the United States continuously face the problems of political and racial incentives to eradicate native peoples.

Conclusion

Historians have characterized Europeans' patriarchal and colonial systems as an illusion of superiority over Native Americans. As Juliana Barr has displayed, this was not the case upon initial contact, as Natives were feared warriors who ruled over their lands in Tejas. The Spanish and

[98] Leason, "Forced and Coerced Sterilization of Indigenous Women," 525.
[99] Leason, "Forced and Coerced Sterilization of Indigenous Women," 525.
[100] Leason, "Forced and Coerced Sterilization of Indigenous Women," 525-526.
[101] Leason, "Forced and Coerced Sterilization of Indigenous Women," 526.

French conformed to native matrilineal society to build relationships for economic gains, specifically through marriage. Women's roles within native tribes regarded them as central figures, pillars that maintained a balance, and main contributors to their communities. Eventually, Europeans would target women, viewing the Native Americans' matriarchal society as vulnerable to attack. Native women would be targeted as tools to assert dominance over Native men. The ongoing cycle of violence against Native peoples has had a mental, emotional, and cultural impact on Native women, from initial encounters to the formation of alliances, the foundation of the United States government, and into contemporary society. Women are recognized as nurturers and life-givers, yet continual European participation in political policies and economic imposition has jeopardized their lives as well as the survival of tribes. The decentralization of women allowed for an influx of lost culture and spirituality of the traditional way of Native society, which has shifted into a reflection of the oppressors' patriarchal system. As tribes were advocating for their right to sovereignty, women were undergoing an unknowing battle over their rights to reproduction. Upon the realization of the non-consensual sterilization of Native American women, many tribes were left to struggle and on the brink of extinction. Since colonial contact, the imposition of European patriarchal oppression has used women as signifiers of domination over Native tribes. Today, the misogynistic colonial system is the foundation on which our nation has built itself; our country of diverse immigrants has allowed its citizens to overlook the ones who are indigenous to these lands.