

# Pocahontas and the role of women among the native people

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Pocahontas is one of, if not the most famous Native American Indian known today. She is so well known and admired by Americans today that we have stories and tales about her. In the book it is sad that, " Pocahontas...became famous to the London public as a beautiful (and adult) Indian Princess," (74). " Pocahontas and the Powhatan Dilemma" teaches us about many aspects of Native American life, and how the new settlers impacted the lives of the natives. We also learn about the role of women in the Native Indian tribes and how important they were to not only the tribes, but also to the new settlers. There is a line in the book that states, " And their own men, who likewise worked hard, who waged war and brought home meat and fish as often as they could, knew their women's worth. Both sexes knew that neither could survive a month without the other," (19). This quote further justifies the importance of women in Native American tribes. The women in these tribes were in charge of many duties within the tribes, they played major roles in power among the Native people, and they were the main communicators with the new English settlers. Women had specific jobs within the tribe, just as men had specific jobs. Once a woman was married it states that, " She worked for her own and her husband's welfare," (88). The women were usually in charge of the planting and farming of corns, beans, squash, and fruits, while the men usually went out and hunted. The women would also gather berries, greens, firewood, as well as many other things that were needed by the tribe. Since the men were usually hunting and constantly moving, babies were left at the villages to be nursed by their mothers. During the winter time they had duties weaving and taking care of the hinds. There is one duty women had to do as well that involved keeping

the fire lit. It states in the book that women had a, “ spiritual and practical duty to prevent it [the fire] from ever going out,” (12). Women were in charge of many aspects of Native life and survival. Compared to men, who seem to have only hunted and fished, women played a much larger role in the tribes and had many more responsibilities to take care of.

Women played a major role in “ power” among the Native people. Men were usually in power and were the chiefs of their tribes, but a woman could become a “ werowansqua”, where the women would be the “ chief” of the tribe. Power was also inherited not through the father, but the mother’s family line. The matrilineal aspect of power used by the Algonkian people has shown advantages compared to the common patrilineal method used today. The goes on to say why matrilineal heritage is better than patrilineal heritage by explaining, “ whole clans of brothers and sisters had an obvious shared interest in remaining united and maintaining their family’s power,” (15). Powhatan would take advantage of this matrilineal power by marrying many women who were of royal families. Then he would have a son with that woman who would become the ruler of that tribe due to the mother’s heritage. However, even though the power within the Algokian tribes was matrilineal, the women who were of that royal line were not free to choose their partners, unlike the other women within the tribe.

Women had been a lot more welcoming to the new settlers than the men were. In the book, when John Smith is taken to the Powhatan’s village, it says that “ women and children ran out to meet new arrivals,” (46). Women, typically, are more sympathetic and friendly than men are. This would lead to relying on the women and children to try and communicate with the new

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settlers and resolve conflicts. Pocahontas was one of the Native Indian women that the Powhatan had sent to visit the English settlers. Pocahontas was sent to secure the release of Paspahegh Indian prisoners, held by the English. John Smith explains why the Powhatan sent his daughter, Pocahontas, saying, “ He sent his daughter, a child of tenne yeares old, which not only for feature, countenance and proportion, much exceedeth any of the rest of his people, but for wit, and spirit, the only Nonpareil of his Country,”(69). The people of Jamestown, especially the men, would grow very fond of Pocahontas after her first visit. John Smith would go on to write about her, and she would later become a “ pop-star” back in England and would be seen as an “ Indian Princess”. Pocahontas would even help the English settlers as well, warning them of a plot Powhatan had of attacking them. So, Pocahontas played a huge role in protecting the English and had a great relationship with the settlers, especially John Smith. Pocahontas, as well as many other Native American women, would end up marrying an Englishman. This helped in the relationship between the natives and the settlers. Many of the Native women would also go back to England with their husbands and adapt to the English way of living. Relationships between the native women and the English settlers were very impactful, changing the culture of the Native Indians and the culture of England greatly.

Native women greatly impacted the life of the tribes, as well as the lives of the settlers. Pocahontas has played a huge role for Native American women, as well as all women around the world. The Native American women were strong, brave, and influential in tribes and settlements in America. The Native women played big roles in the development of America, for both the

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English and the Indians. Without these women, America, and the entire world, would be different.