

Pocahontas/A #MeToo?

Caroline LaPorte, senior native affairs policy adviser for the National Indigenous Women's Resource Center based in Washington, D.C states:

[Pocahontas] is basically our first well-documented human trafficking victim in the U.S. What Pocahontas experienced was no love story. She was raped and kidnapped. We've romanticized her story — and it's just not true. Her story is a story of colonization.

LaPorte is a descendent of the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians.

Amber Crotty, elected delegate for the Navajo Nation Council writes:

The intentional disregard of the historical trauma of Pocahontas as a sexual assault survivor directly resulting from colonization is disturbing. Every day we're dealing with severe violence against native women, I will not allow the president (Trump) of this country (United States) to continue to disregard Pocahontas and what her legacy is. She's not a character. She's a native woman who suffered, and her story is our story.

Oral histories from self-identified descendants of Pocahontas and tribal peoples of Virginia tell a dire, not a love, story of Pocahontas.

According to Mattaponi oral history, Pocahontas' mother, also named Pocahontas, died birthing her. Her father Wahunsenaca, Paramount Chief of the Powhatan Chiefdom, had other wives from the other villages and Matoaka (Pocahontas' birth name) had many loving brothers and sisters and many tribe women to care for her.

Little Matoaka was about age ten when John Smith and English colonists arrived in Tsenacomoca in the spring of 1607, Smith was about twenty-seven. They were never married nor involved. Within her tribe, Pocahontas was married at age fourteen in 1609 and lived with her Native American spouse Kocoum and their child in his village.

In 1613, she was kidnapped by Captain John Argall, taken to Jamestown and held captive. She was never again allowed to see her child, or father, and her husband was killed. She was dressed in English clothes, which reportedly she tore off, was forced to convert to Christianity and was baptized as Rebecca. She was told her father did not rescue her because he did not love her.

According to Mattaponi historian Dr. Linwood Custalow, she suffered depression, became fearful and withdrawn and was allowed a visit by her sister Mattachanna. She confided to Mattachanna she had been raped.

John Rolfe, accompanied by his wife who died shortly after their arrival, came to North America in 1610 with about 150 other settlers seeking good fortune. They were part of a new charter to set up business ventures organized by the Virginia Company of London. They were under a (1616) deadline to become profitable. Rolfe began his venture by experimenting with growing and curing tobacco. His first several years of several attempts had not produced profitable results.

He wanted to use the tobacco curing techniques of the Powhatan. He knew they produced a superior tobacco but this was a sacred practice to be preserved within the tribe. He could only obtain tribal status through marriage. On April 5, 1614, Rolfe married the captive Indian Princess Pocahontas. They had a son, who according to Mattaponi oral history, was born prior to their marriage.

Rolfe was given the sacred tobacco curing techniques. His tobacco product was a sensation in England and proved profitable for him. The Powhatan tribal lands were now highly sought after to farm tobacco and the tribe suffered great losses of life and land. The settlers' need for farmland intensified, as did the need for additional settlers to farm.

The Virginia Company immediately noticed the propaganda value of using Pocahontas as an example of Anglo-Indian peace and friendship to attract new settlers and new financial investments in their company. They sponsored a trip to England for the Rolfs and a small entourage of American Indians, including her sister Mattachanna, where they were welcomed enthusiastically and had a formal audience with King James I.



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Pocahontas (or the Lady Rebecca, as she was presented) was seen as a shining example of a Native American who had been “civilized” and successfully adapted to English ways. She would spend her next few years as a political pawn, paraded around the English court in a public/publicity effort to promote partnerships with American natives and attract future investors/settlers.

Pocahontas never returned to her native homeland. While onboard ship preparing to return home from England, after a dinner with Rolfe and Argall, Pocahontas suddenly vomited and died. Her sister Mattachanna, confirmed she was in previous good health and asserted she must have been poisoned.

Reportedly Pocahontas was buried in Gravesend, England, at Saint George's Church, March 21, 1617. Virginia tribes have requested Pocahontas' remains be returned for repatriation, albeit officials in England say their exact whereabouts are not known.

Books about adventures in the new Americas to encourage colonization became popular. Some included references to Pocahontas. It was in this market in 1624, that John Smith published his *Generall Historie of Virginia, New England & the Summer Isles* in which he first penned his personal involvement with Pocahontas, seven years after her death.

Kevin Glover (Pawnee) Director of the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in Washington, DC, writes:

Pocahontas was a real person, but her story has largely become fiction. We're living in a time when what most people know about Indians is incomplete or entirely false. Even "well known" events in Native American history like the story of Pocahontas are largely misunderstood. And while she played an important role in our shared American story, the tales of her involvement with English settlers have long been shaped to serve more political purposes.

Sources:

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