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Missing Murdered Indigenous Women

Gabby Petito shocked the world when she went missing while traveling across the country with her boyfriend. She broke national news as everyone was deeply invested in knowing what had happened to her. The whole world stopped and wanted to know every detail leading up to her murder. My cousin sister who hails from the Navajo Nation was also another statistic added to the records of murdered women in the United States. Shockingly, being an Indigenous woman, her story didn't show up on every news station the way Gabby's story was broadcasted. Indigenous women go missing every day and are being murdered ten times more than any other race in the United States, as a matter of fact "There's a rate of violence against Native women that's happening, and it doesn't seem to be highlighted." (Qtd. in Hay). It is a great epidemic in rural and urban areas. Nobody seems to care about the way Native Americans are treated or how they are the largest percentage being murdered in our country. What will it take for Indigenous women to get the same coverage, the same sympathy, the same attention from the world the way they pay attention to white women? You don't need to have an Indigenous background or even come from an Indigenous tribe to care about the unfair, cruel treatment Native Americans receive. Native American women across reservations from the Navajo Nation to as far as First Nations struggle with injustice; they are unnoticed in our society and that is very unsettling. The way we see women of an Indigenous background needs to

change, and we need to understand that they deserve the same recognition and equality as any other race in the United States.

Native American and Alaskan Native women are the targets in not only rural areas on native lands, but they are also the targets in urban areas across the world. Their perpetrators are more likely to be non- native men. Some women are homeless, are victims of sex trafficking, are just getting out of foster care, or are without family to turn to but to rely on the street life. It is known that a great portion of Native American women grow up in violence and are traumatized in their earlier years of their lives that affects them later into adulthood. Native American and Alaskan Native women are 1.7 times more likely to experience violence, 2 times more likely to be raped, and suffer with a 3 times higher murder rate than white women.

- 84.3% more than 4 out of 5 women experience violence.
- 55.5% have been physically abused by their partners.
- 40% of sex trafficking are Native American or Alaskan Native women.
- 56.1% Indigenous women experience sexual violence.
- 48.8% of Indigenous women have been stalked in their lifetime.
- Murder is the third leading cause of death for Indigenous women.

According to these statistics you can begin to understand the trauma that is casted upon Indigenous women. They experience violence not only from strangers, but it can also stem from anywhere, from their own families or even from their partners. (Bartley and Pueblo).

The National Crime Information Center has reported 5,712 cases of missing American Indian and Alaskan Native women and girls as of 2016. While the number of cases may be disturbing, “In 2020 alone, there were 5,295 reports of missing American Indian and Alaskan Native women and girls, according to the National Crime Information Center. And this crisis

hasn't gotten better in recent years" (Bonn). The United States Department of Justice has only reported 117 of these cases. The amount of missing Native American and Alaskan Native women has skyrocketed. It has become tragic within the Indigenous communities across the nation and has affected many families in hopes of justice being served.

Why haven't you heard about these cases you may ask? Not only do Native Americans and Alaskan Native women get swept under the rug, but they also do not get the media coverage as do white women or any other demographic gone missing. The lack of media coverage is the main reason why nobody knows they are missing. Eighteen percent of Indigenous women get the coverage but why not all? In 2018 my cousin sister Amanda Webster was a part of that eighteen percent; her attacker Jesse James was a white male who was released from jail two days prior to her murder due to mental health conditions. He pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 35 years in prison, we as her family believe that will never be enough. Why didn't they serve him the death penalty? Someone with a history of mental illness should be held accountable for their actions. They don't deserve a get out of jail free card for taking the lives of innocent Indigenous women. We can live with that outcome in hopes he doesn't get released, but it still isn't fair, and it doesn't amount to the pain and suffering our community feels about the loss of Amanda. We will never get her back.

The lack of government from tribal, state, and federal law enforcement is also another reason why our Native American and Alaskan Native women become underreported, missing, and murdered as they fight over jurisdictions going back and forth as to who should investigate these cases. These cases are lost or have been forfeited by these agencies making it easy for men of all demographics to step onto tribal lands and target Indigenous women knowing about the lack of jurisdictions and law enforcement. It all had to change at some point in time; "For nearly

half a century, tribal nations have lacked the authority to prosecute people who are not members of a tribe.” (Brewer). Most crimes committed on reservations are at the hands of non-native individuals who know that they can get away with not being prosecuted due to tribal jurisdictions. Deb Haaland, U.S Interior Secretary was the first Native American woman to be elected to Congress. Deb has shed light on the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women movement. She has also stood by the Savanna’s Act that was signed into law October 2020. Savanna LaFontaine-Greywind was from the Spirit Lake Nation of North Dakota, she was murdered while eight months pregnant in August of 2017. Savanna’s Act was enacted to improve the response to Missing Murdered Indigenous People. It is also in place to implement that the tribal, state, federal and local law enforcement agencies handle their cases with momentous severity. Deb Haaland’s goal is to assist law enforcement in the cases of Missing Murdered and Indigenous Women. She is the voice of Native Americans and Alaskan Natives across the country, her power in office is the change the Indigenous community has hoped for, the equality Indigenous communities prayed for.

May 5th is the known National Day of Awareness for Missing Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) in the United States and in Canada. The red hand symbol across the face of Native American Women represents the silence Native Americans endure. It represents the silence in their media coverage. It represents the silence in being unheard. It represents the silence of law enforcement who refuse to investigate these cases. It represents “No More Stolen Sisters.” The color red is believed to be a color their ancestors and spirits not at rest can see. It is a color that has a connection to the physical and spiritual worlds. Many tribes across the nation wear turquoise jewelry as a representation for protection, and prosperity to fight off evil spirits that may come about. I hope you will take a stand for Native Americans and Alaskan Natives on

this day, and for the future years to come by wearing the color red to forever represent the Missing Murdered Indigenous Women movement. #MMIW #NoMoreStolenSisters



3 "Missing Murdered Indigenous Women."



2 "Missing Murdered Indigenous Women."



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