

**Testimony for Oregon HB 2625, Regarding Missing and
Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls**

My name is *Ga-lo Nutley Skildigado*. My settler name is Joshua Vann. I am an enrolled member of the Cherokee Nation of Eastern Oklahoma and I am doing 10 years in the Oregon correctional system for an accidental manslaughter DUI. I follow traditional ceremony and have a background in public health research in the CDC.

My words are being read because women ceded their time. I honor them.

In 1953, Congress adopted House Concurrent Resolution 108, terminating recognition of the racial identities of many of this country's indigenous population. Oregon, conceived by Settlers and social engineers to be a "white state" suffered the highest concentration of terminated nations. Denial of identity for over sixty indigenous groups in Oregon is only one link in the chain binding Indian people to the disparities to which white institutions choose to subject our communities. You are gathered today in an institution constructed from land originally stewarded by the Molalla, Tualatin-Calapooya, various bands of Chinook, and other nations. The budgets you allocate, natural resources you barter, and influence you exert to guide the operation of this state is the result of theft, rape and murder against these nations. The legitimacy of the government you represent is underpinned by this truth. It is the first stone in your foundation.

Indigenous women experience the highest per capita rate of rape in the US. An overwhelming amount of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls' cases are found to be linked to rape or some other form of sexual assault. Rape is the defining act of colonization. State and federal racial demographic accounting methods are inadequate, but as they improve, trends have clarified. On July 29, 2010, former President Barack Obama referenced a National Violence Against Women Survey from the year 2000, finding that 34.1% of native women will be raped in their lifetimes. Later that year, the CDC found through its National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey that 49% of indigenous women reported a history of sexual violence. However, self-reporting is consistently under-reporting in the aggregate. Indigenous people have learned to mistrust the governments that have betrayed them and exacerbated their disparities. Reporting such a personally traumatic and dehumanizing event positions victims to vulnerabilities historically exploited by state and federal institutions. In national crime surveys it is understood that less than half of all crimes are reported in any way.

Also, in 2010, the Urban Indian Health Institute, a Native American community organization, conducted a survey in Seattle which found that 94% of American Indian/Alaska Native women had been raped or coerced into sex at least once in their lives. The report was a bittersweet vindication that our experiences were real and our voices should be trusted beyond government under reporting.

Most importantly, this shows that it takes earned trust to serve truth.

Doctor Ronet Bachman, a national expert on interpreting national crime victimization survey data and a university statistician has identified salient trends about the raping of Indian women across this country. These trends conclude that during their rapes: 90% of indigenous women were beaten, compared to 71% of white victims; 25% of indigenous women report their perpetrators used a weapon, compared to 9% of white women. These unique characteristics illustrate that Indian women's rapes are especially brutal in comparison to other populations. National reporting also shows that the vast majority of rapes in the US are INTRA racial (within the same racial groups). The only exception to this rule is American Indian/Alaska Native women, who are predominately victims of INTER-racial rape. A 1999 Bureau of Justice statistical report concluded 9:10 AI/AN victims of rape had white or black assailants. Another report measured that 70% of assailants were white. This preponderance of white men raping Indian women across the United States is an example of coloniality. Colonialities reflect recurring patterns of power that have become established over time as a result of colonization. Rape is a 527-year-old tradition for the culture your office is born of.

The policies practiced for counting population demographics are complementary colonialities to rape and the effort to disempower and deny Indian identity. To clarify, the Coalition of Communities of Color Report entitled, "The Native American Community of Multnomah County: an unsettling profile" explains "...official census bureau counts can be tallied for people who either marked one (race) box or people who multiply identify with more than one race. Figures for people who mark/choose only one racial identifier are reported under "alone" statistics, while people who choose more than one identifier are reported under "alone or in combination" figures." The report goes on to explain that standard practice among policy making bodies is to use alone figures when determining the official size of communities when identified by race. I am half white and half American Indian. I have lived as an Indian man, lived in Indian communities, worked in Indian communities, and am enrolled as a tribal nation citizen. I will never be counted as an Indian by the government under current practices. Year 2009 inter-censal data for Multnomah County shows 10,486 AI/AN people as native alone, and 21,533 as AI/AN alone or in combination with one or more other races. This meant that over half of our community became statistically invisible, like me, in 2009. The practice of interracial rape carried out against Indian women complemented by current government demographic accounting practices present a future in which no Indian is recognized as such, our disparities and resulting deaths will sink back into obscurity. It is also salient that the way the government counts racial populations rewards racially pure respondents with identities by granting them statistical weight and punishes mixed race people by devoting us of any. We are statistical non-humans in your decisions.

According to the US Department of Justice when measured by race, Indian people are victims of crime the most with 1:2 of us a victim of violent crime, at a rate 250% higher than whites. In Oregon, our poverty is triple that of whites. Our incomes are typically half that of whites. Our unemployment is about 70% higher than whites. More than 20% of AI/AN people experience hunger on a monthly basis. Although our criminality has dropped consistently for 24 years, we are incarcerated just as much as before this decline. Our youth are charged by police three times more than their numbers warrant. Our youth

also suffer the highest suicide rates in the country. Oregon is a state in which it is markedly worse to be Indian when compared to surrounding states and nationally aggregated data. Understand that these are under counts. Add to these measured outcomes that rape is almost a certainty for our grandmothers, mothers, aunties, sisters, girlfriends, wives, friends, nieces, daughters and granddaughters. Sara Deere, a native American law professor, Macarthur Fellow, and author of "The Beginning and End of Rape: confronting sexual violence in Native America" observed, "it is impossible to have a true self-determining nation when its members have been denied self-determination over their own bodies." This is not a matter of indigenous people making poor personal choices. This is a matter of extant genocidal behaviors and attitudes.

As an Indian man, nearly every woman I have ever loved has been the victim of rape or sexual assault. My little sister will go to college next year. She will be alone in a massive institution controlled by white bodies that enforces harsher penalties against plagiarism than it does against campus rape. I fear for her because as a young Indian woman in America her life is demonstrably valued less than any other life.

I am serving 10 years in the Oregon Department of Corrections for an accidental killing of a man named Dale McConaughey in a drunk driving accident. Before my accidents, three major events took place. The CDC funded grant I worked on completed, leaving me unemployed. My engagement to my fiancée ended, leaving me alone. And I learned about the widespread sexual abuses carried out against almost every Indian woman in my spiritual community. This came to light because of the near-death of a girl from sex abuse related injuries. I must claim I made poor personal choices as a result of alcohol abuse and grief. I was ill-equipped to cope with the historical immensity of the spiritual group trauma, which was agonizing, even from the periphery. I feel that I should have somehow sensed and stopped what was happening to the girls and women being sexually abused all around me. I carry shame for not being able to protect those I love. I did not do it, but I am complicit in it as you are. We can change this by taking today's first step.

My words are being read by my mother Rebecca Whetstine, a survivor of multiple rapes and sexual abuse. I honor her.

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Transcribed by Rebecca Whetstine, Project WIT (Whatever It Takes!)

