

Reflective Essay

This research project was written for my final history seminar course, HIST 5400: *Indigenous Peoples and American History* with Professor Rosenthal, to examine Indigenous history as intertwined with American history and to assert that Indigenous peoples are not victims of colonization, but rather have found ways to adapt and thrive through avenues of resistance. This was a common theme throughout the entire course so it only felt natural to find a story that highlighted Indigenous resilience and self-determination, which I found through midwifery. I knew that I wanted to research Native American midwives at the start of the semester since I have written papers about the cultural significance of similar practitioners in colonial Mexico and colonial America. However, this time, I wanted to focus my historical research on the twenty-first century applications of midwifery which eventually led me to Mohawk midwife and activist, Katsi (pronounced Gudji) Cook.

I utilized the Adam Matthews Digital database of American Indian Histories and Cultures to search for primary sources that contained the word “midwife,” “midwifery,” and “midwives.” Of the few hits that I got, they all came from one newspaper publication called the *Akwesasne Notes*, and I would later learn that Cook was one of their writers. I focused heavily on the *Akwesasne Notes* because it was a newspaper made by—and for—Indigenous people and went into great detail about the social and political issues that were most important to their community. I was hoping to find a midwife organization to focus on as the centerpiece of my research but no such formal institutions existed, a lacuna that became one of the narrative plots of my paper. I broadened my search to include “babies” and “birth,” and was directed to a study conducted by Cook.

A quick Google search revealed that Katsi Cook is an incredibly outspoken women's health advocate, environmental activist, Native American rights activist, and most importantly for my research, a prominent midwife. I was able to access an interview with Cook through Smith College's Sophia Smith Voices of Feminism Oral History Project repository online and chose Katsi Cook's story to begin building a comprehensive view of Indigenous health and resistance from a midwife's perspective. This source also provided the clay pot metaphor that served as the narrative compass of my research, as well as the title of the paper. I leaned heavily on the PubMed database that I accessed through the Hannon Library Libguides to view a majority of the environmental study reports and Indigenous birthing statistics that helped me contextualize Cook's activism as a rebuilding effort. I was able to locate data produced by a wide range of public, private, and non-profit organizations, giving me ample sources to assess the evidence from multiple angles. Cook's personal anecdotes were paired alongside these scientific studies to give a voice to the people being negatively impacted by environmental damages.

The entirety of my research followed the relatively new historiographical trend of telling Indigenous history as intertwined with American history rather than parallel. My goal was to showcase acts of cultural restoration, resistance and self-determination. I was able to access both David Treuer's *The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee: Native America from 1890 to the Present* and a collection of stories from *Mothers of the Nations: Indigenous Mothering as Global Resistance, Reclaiming and Recovery* by D. Memee Lavell-Harvard and Kim Anderson on JSTOR through LMU's library databases. Both books, authored by Native American and First Nations people, allowed me to discuss the intersections of identity, motherhood, and health from an Indigenous perspective. It also allowed me to discuss the overarching influence that the Red Power Movement and the American Indian Movement had on Cook's work as an activist.

It was a unique experience to tell Cook's biographical story while still making a historical argument, but I feel that I was able to strike a mix that effectively conveyed how Indigenous people still carry out radical acts of living to this day. I am immensely grateful to Professor Rosenthal and the LMU Library for enabling me to conduct this research and encouraging me to further develop my own research and writing skills.