

Interpretive Troubleshooting: Native Women Women's Work Redefined



Mississippian woman funderweaving a strap.

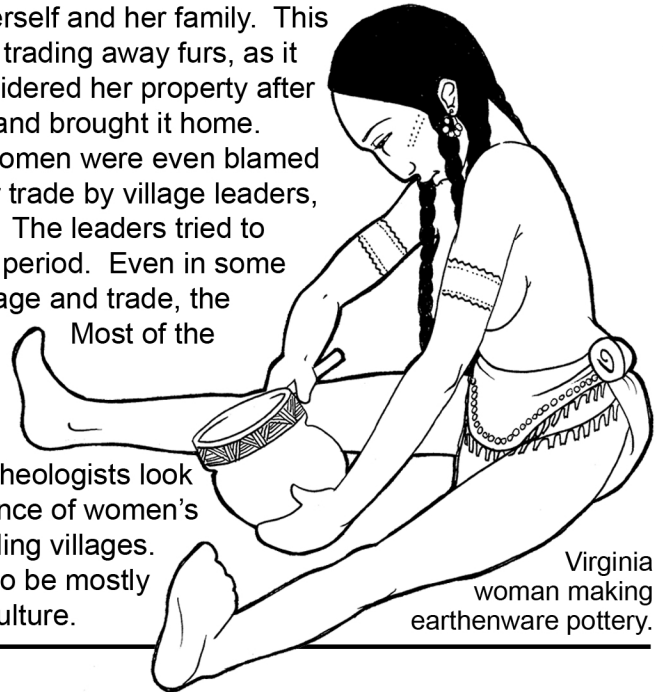
Our Perceptions:
Communication is commonly thought of as only the interest of men. Women are thought to never participate in the exchange of ideas and technology. We consider trade a man's prerogative.

More often than not, trade was also the business of women. For people like the Delaware, women aggressively traded for the needs and wants of herself and her family. This included trading away furs, as it was considered her property after her husband brought it home.

Delaware women were even blamed for the liquor trade by village leaders,

because in reality 'chiefs' had no real authority to stop them. The leaders tried to persuade them, but women had the rights to trade anything, period. Even in some Iroquoian societies where it was men's work to leave the village and trade, the women's voice in the exchangement was still predominant. Most of the items he traded for was for his wife's disposal. Essentially, he was the middleman for all the items she indicated she wanted. More than just trading items, we know women

communicated ideas far and wide. Archeologists look to pottery designs that indicate evidence of women's influence to their's and the surrounding villages. We believe women, not men, to also be mostly responsible for the spread of horticulture.



Virginia woman making earthenware pottery.

Our Perceptions:

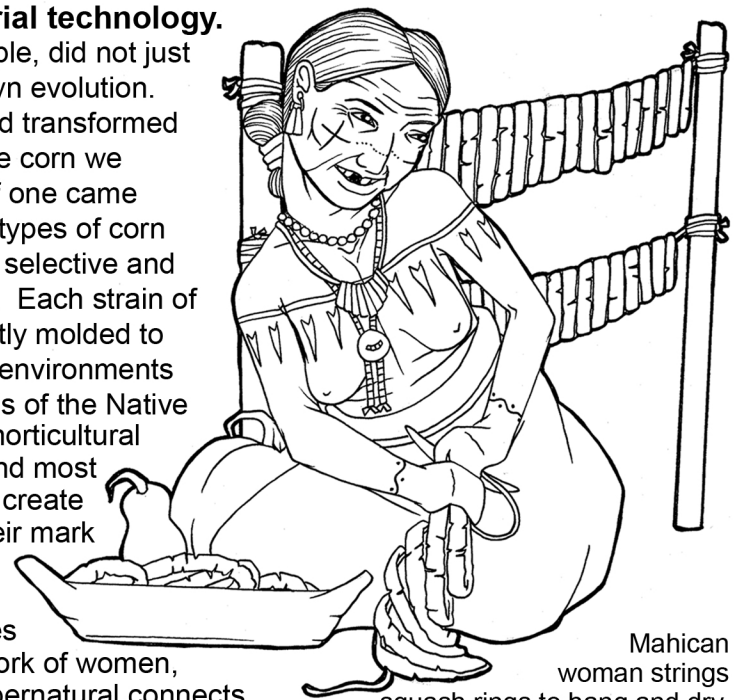
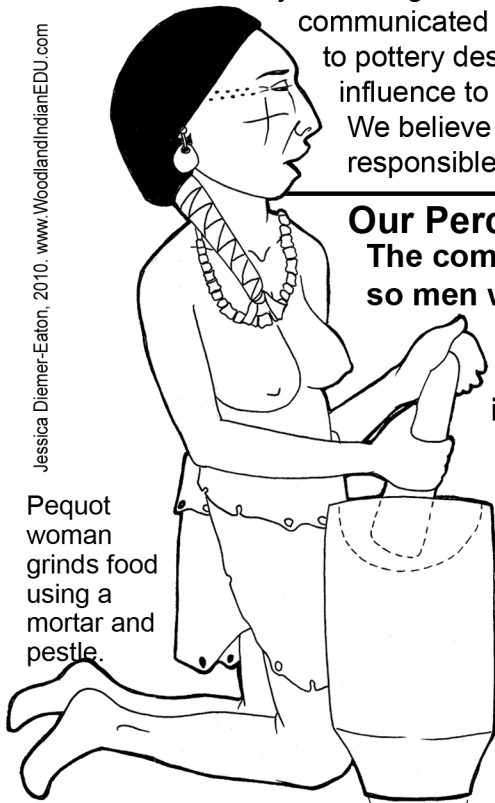
The common interpretation is essentially that women did menial tasks, so men were freed up to perform meaningful and 'intelligent' work that advanced technology. Men are thought of being solely responsible for the progress of any civilization, both in ideas and material technology.

Corn, for example, did not just appear of its own evolution. The Native hand transformed a 'grass' into the corn we know today. Of one came more. Several types of corn was created by selective and cross-breeding. Each strain of corn was expertly molded to grow in certain environments and fit the needs of the Native

People. It is generally believed that women were the horticultural "scientists" (referred to as "pioneer geneticists" (1) behind most advancements of corn as a crop. Not only did women create a crop now revered by the world over, they also left their mark in other ways. Petroglyph are usually assumed to be created by men because such work was important for communication and religious reasons. Many rock faces with such depictions have been reinterpreted as the work of women, who also had important ideas to communicate and supernatural connects.

(1) "Corn, Planting the Seeds of the Past for Our Future" by Sheryl Hartman

Pequot woman grinds food using a mortar and pestle.



Mahican woman strings squash rings to hang and dry.