

LONG LINE



of
LADIES



THIS IS L, PRESENTS IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE PAD PROJECT IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE KARUK DANCE FAMILY, JUNK DRAWER FILM "LONG LINE OF LADIES"
MUSIC BY FORREST GOODLUCK AND JUAN KLEBAN EDITOR SAM DAVIS PRODUCTION DESIGNER MELISSA BERTON PRODUCED BY PIMM TRIPP-ALLEN DANA KURTH
PRODUCED BY GARRETT SCHIEFF RAYKA ZEHTABCHI SAM DAVIS DIRECTED BY RAYKA ZEHTABCHI AND SHAANDIIN TOME

COMMUNITY
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ODYSSEY
IMPACT

REFLECTIONS ON LONG LINE OF LADIES

BY EVA MARIE CARNEY/OJINDISKWE

Founder + Executive Director, *The Kwek Society*



In the opening minutes of *Long Line of Ladies*, Eva/Ahty's mother AND father are shown helping her prepare to dance in her Flower Dance Ceremony. Later, Eva's father recounts how Eva's older sister called him while he was working on a construction site with many other men to let him know she had just gotten her first period. He tells Eva that when he got off the phone, he told his co-workers, "Hey, you guys, I gotta go. My daughter is having her period, and I've got to make sure everything's okay." He also tells Eva that, the next day, one of the men said, "That was really cool that your daughter would call you. They don't talk about it, especially amongst the men." Eva's father observes: "Here we do a whole ceremony."

These scenes illustrate how Indigenous communities' tradition-grounded responses to periods reflect unique ways of knowing and doing. Viewing periods as a time for teaching and for honoring girls as they transition into womanhood is not part of our "contemporary" culture. Instead of keeping a first period quiet, as is typical in most families, a community response is set in motion. Here, the girl's family plans an *Inuk* or Flower Dance Ceremony that includes her community. Instead of hoping that she will figure out on her own or from a book what having a period means, the menstruator's community – men and women – is shown rallying around her to provide instruction on becoming a woman and entering adulthood; that instruction is integral to the ceremony.

I, like Eva in the film, am Indigenous – I am *Neshnabé*, enrolled with the Citizen Potawatomi Nation. But unlike Eva, I was not raised near relatives who could share our traditional puberty, or "moon time," teachings. Traditionally, Potawatomi people refer to their periods as "moon time" or "moon." Most Potawatomi relatives of ours do not know those traditional teachings for many reasons, including

forced removals from our ancestral homelands around the Great Lakes. Only in my adult years did I learn about our rite-of-passage teachings, Berry Fast Teachings.

Learning about our Berry Fast Teachings is connected with my work as founder and executive director of The Kwek Society. This nonprofit organization seeks to end period poverty in Indigenous communities by supplying period care items at no charge. (Kwe'k means "women" in *Bodwéwadmimwen*, the Potawatomi language.) I started The Kwek Society in 2018 by sending pads, tampons, liners, and underwear to Indigenous students living on reservations in the Southwest after I learned that some students were missing school during their moon times because they couldn't afford period care. Soon, we expanded to support Indigenous students and their peers attending schools across the United States and Canada. With design help from some Potawatomi elders, we introduced our "moon time bags" – colorful cotton bags sewn by our supporters who stuff each bag with 2-period pads and 3 liners – to schools and communities. You can see some examples [here](#).

We consider our moon time bags to be practical gifts of celebration. We ask school counselors and others through whom we work to share our moon time bags with younger students on the cusp of their periods and with new menstruators. In each moon time bag, we include a message of celebration -- a brightly colored card printed with the opening lines of the poem *Remember*, written by the acclaimed Indigenous poet and the 23rd United States Poet Laureate, Joy Harjo: “*Remember the sky that you were born under, know each of the star’s stories. Remember the moon. Know who she is.*” With our moon time bags, we send our best intentions so that the recipients feel celebrated and cared for by the community who sew and stuff the bags. Our goal is to flip the contemporary script about starting one’s period. We celebrate periods, highlight dignity, and reject the too-common feelings of shame and embarrassment.

More recently, to underscore the power and beauty of menstruation, we began sharing information about traditional coming-of-age ceremonies with the communities we support and the public through our newsletters and teachings about periods shared with us by Indigenous women across North America. The commonalities in these teachings, which you can find on The Kwek Society’s website [here](#), are that having a period is empowering and that one’s first moon time marks a rite of passage to be celebrated with family and community.

Watching *Long Line of Ladies* made me even more committed to expanding The Kwek Society’s distribution of moon time bags and their celebration message and sharing uplifting traditional teachings about periods.

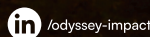
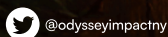
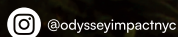
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 Did you find it surprising that Eva/Ahty’s mother AND father, as well as community elders, were active participants in the preparations for her Flower Dance Ceremony? How does that fit with your experiences when you reached puberty? What might be the benefits of having the community involved?
- 2 Period poverty is not an Indigenous-specific problem, it is a poverty problem. What do you think are the reasons more Indigenous students are at risk for period poverty than their non-Indigenous peers?
- 3 What actions can you take in your own school, workplace, or broader community to destigmatize periods? To expand your thinking about the possibilities, I recommend [this online article](#), published in August 2023.

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COMMUNITY DISCUSSION GUIDE

THANK YOU *for* SCREENING THE FILM *and*
BEING *a PART of the* IMPACT CAMPAIGN!



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