



## Washington State University Miss Indian World

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### Miss Indian World Speaks at WSU

by Faith Price

After Taylor Thomas was crowned Miss Indian World at the 2014 Gathering of Nations Powwow, the Shoshone-Bannock college student was in tears.

"They thought I was crying because I was excited, but I was crying because I was scared," Thomas told the crowd gathered to listen to her speak November 14 on the WSU campus. The thought of representing her family, her culture, and all Native people weighed heavily on her young shoulders.

Since being crowned, however, Thomas has proven she is up for the challenge. Those present at her speech at WSU were impressed with her poise, presence, and public speaking abilities.

"It was inspiring and I think it was what we all needed to hear so we can continue on to be strong indigenous women," said political science major Cherrise Reyes.

Reyes is a member of the Native American Women's Association that hosted Thomas's visit to WSU. Miss Indian World's presence was a way to expose the WSU community to another aspect of Native American culture, said Reyes.

"People always hear about Miss America or Miss Universe," said Reyes, "but not Miss Indian World."

Thomas may be singlehandedly changing that. After winning the crown, Thomas, a junior majoring in political science at Idaho State University, had to take a year off of school to fulfill her duties as Miss Indian World, and make room on her plate for all the opportunities coming her way. Thus far in her reign, she has traveled to multiple powwows, conferences, ceremonies and speaking engagements across the United States and Canada.

Thomas told the audience she has enjoyed learning about the diversity of other tribes in her travels. She spoke of being honored to sit in the "princess seat" of a Tulalip canoe, of the healing that took place at the Fort Bidwell Boarding School Conference, and her excitement in being able to attend the Federation of Saskatoon Indian Nations Elections.

This wide breadth of experiences has provided her with plenty of opportunity for growth. In her tribe's creation story, Thomas said, every being and plant was given a purpose when placed on the earth.

"Everywhere I travel, this makes more and more sense to me," said Thomas, explaining that she is learning every day. "Sometimes I can really feel myself changing."

Thomas's message to the college students attending her presentation at WSU was to pursue your own life's aspirations. Her message



**Miss Indian World, Taylor Thomas, visits with students at a reception in the Native American Student Center after her presentation.**



***Students "rocked their mocs" with Miss Indian World, as part of WSU Native American Heritage month activities.***

resounded with Reyes, who found Miss Indian World to be simultaneously a role model and highly relatable.

"She's only 22 and she's doing all this traveling!" said Reyes, noting, however, "Even when she took off her regalia and her sash, and we all had dinner, she's a regular woman. She's down to earth."

Thomas seems to be following her own advice and using her reign to make a difference with those she meets.

"We are capable of changing and influencing our communities as leaders," said Thomas. "Follow your dreams and become the inspiration you seek in the world."

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