

Justice for Native American women

By [Debra Bendis](#)

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If you haven't realized the urgent need for an expanded Violence Against Women Act, read today's [New York Times](#), where novelist Louise Erdrich restates the theme that runs through her powerful novel *The Round House* ([reviewed in a previous post](#)): Native American women are being battered and raped by non-native men, and they have no legal support for pursuing justice—because non-natives are immune from prosecution by tribal courts.

Statistics suggest that in some cases sexual predators have even traveled to reservations for the purpose of preying on native American women. They know that they won't be prosecuted.

The Senate recently passed a VAWA reauthorization bill with several new provisions, including an end to this impunity for non-natives who commit crimes on reservations. House Republicans have drafted language for a compromise between the old version of VAWA and the Senate's expansion. But now they are indicating that they can't pass their version and [will vote on—and likely pass—the Senate version tomorrow instead](#).

That's good news for Native American women, who experience rape at rates even higher than the general population.

Erdrich adds that, according to a Cheyenne proverb, a nation is not conquered until the hearts of its women are on the ground. If the hearts of so many Native American women are "on the ground," what does that say about our country?