
Finding a Riverview: Anti-Racist Education, Decolonization, and the Development of a District-Wide Wabanaki Studies Curriculum

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In my experience, my fellow white New Englanders know very little about the Indigenous peoples, histories, or cultures of this area. In what is now called Maine, there is profound ignorance about Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, Mi'kmaq, and Maliseet/ Wolastaqiyik cultures and communities.

When we encounter our ignorance, we often express surprise or perhaps embarrassment, but we rarely consider our ignorance a matter of public health. So when Lisa Sockabasin, Director of Programs and External Affairs at Wabanaki Public Health, said during an early meeting between Portland Schools officials and tribal leaders, that Wabanaki Studies was a matter of public health, I thought about it for weeks afterwards. As I contemplated her words, it became clear that decolonizing is not a social justice add-on, or a trendy way to demonstrate wokeness, or an additional box on the cultural proficiency checklist.

It is a matter of life and death.

Like most white people, I've been trained to think that my ignorance is accidental, or at least benign, but it's neither. Also, it isn't as simple as not knowing. As Charles Mills points out, white ignorance cannot be explained as white not-knowing because it is ultimately about errors and biases in thinking, which cannot be overcome just by learning new information.¹ The kind of place-ignorance I share with most of my fellow white New Englanders is not just a byproduct of settler colonialism.

It is the *work* of settler colonialism.

This place-ignorance, so common among non-Native people and white people in particular, is part of the structure of settler colonialism. It's no accident that we're ignorant and it's no accident that we remain that way.

The failure of the state of Maine to implement Wabanaki Studies is a structural failure rooted in settler colonialism—a failure in no small part responsible for the ongoing public health crisis that Lisa Sockabasin identified.

Passamaquoddy nurse practitioner and consultant for the Portland Publics School, Bridgid Neptune, describes it this way:

Our tribal community, like others, is mourning preventable deaths of young people and deaths of our Elders who carry our language and culture. As I mourn recent losses and as each day passes, this work becomes more and more important for us. Without a doubt, I know that Wabanaki Studies, done right, will change the outcomes my family and Native community face.

The gravity of structural inequity was reinforced for me when I stood below the Dundee Dam on

¹ Charles Mills, "White Ignorance," *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007), 11-38.

the Presumpscot River last summer. The dam towered one hundred feet above—a great behemoth of concrete and steel. Water poured down in a long, controlled line from the pond the dam had created above.

Though it looks like part of the river on maps, to call this area a river is inaccurate. The river has been buried in a pool of near stagnant water. The dam has pushed the water far outside its banks, which causes a continual swirl of silt and debris. Even if they could make it up that far, fish would not be able to lay eggs in the aquatic dead zone created by the dam. The flowing water that fish have journeyed from the sea to find for thousands of years is now gone.

Chief Polin, an Indigenous leader from the Presumpscot River watershed, is the first recorded water protector of the Presumpscot River. In 1739, he traveled over one hundred miles on foot to Boston to tell Governor Belcher of the destruction wrought by the dams that had been built to support the extraction of mast pines for British ships. These same ships transported barrels of dried cod harvested by the ton from the Gulf of Maine to feed enslaved Africans in the southern colonies.²

At this time, Colonel Thomas Westbrook, military leader and the King's Mast Agent, was building a massive dam across the river. In his request that fish passage be included in the dam, Chief Polin referred to the Presumpscot as the "river to which I belong."³ He explained that the loss of a critical food source would devastate his people.

Belcher requested that Westbrook add fish passage, but the request was ignored. In order to

protect the ecosystem to which they had belonged since time immemorial, the people of the Presumpscot river attacked dams, mills, and upriver logging settlements for the next seventeen years.⁴

I'd recently learned this history and thought of it as I stood under the shadow of the Dundee Dam. It was then that I saw how many traits white supremacy and settler colonialism have in

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common with dams. How their combined forces have fundamentally shaped the course of society just as dams artificially

alter the course of a river. They use their power to control people and resources just as dams control the flow of a river—and, as with dams, full life is only restored through their removal.

White supremacy and settler colonialism are structures that shape contemporary American society, just as dams shape habitat. All who live here travel through the deadened, toxic environment they create. All who live here have their lives altered by white supremacy and settler colonialism's power to determine the time, length, and course of our passage. When we fall one hundred feet into the roiling waters below, we think it was unavoidable. The experience of a life shaped by powerful, controlling, human-made systems convinces many of us that a series of dead ponds really is a river.

Thankfully not everyone is convinced. Many are still willing to share a river view.

Nearly twenty years ago, The Maine legislature passed LD 291, *An Act to Require Teaching of*

² Atlantic Black Box Project, 2019, <https://atlanticblackbox.com/>.

³ Lisa Brooks and Cassandra Brooks, "The Reciprocity Principle and Traditional Ecological Knowledge,"

International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies 3 (2010):11-28.

⁴ Maine Historical Society, "Holding Up the Sky," 2019, <https://www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/2976/page/4665/display>.

*Maine Native American History and Culture.*⁵ The legislation received little attention nationally, but it laid the groundwork for other Indigenous nations to push states to pass similar requirements.

The legislation was written and put forward by Donna Loring, the Penobscot Nation representative to the Maine state government, and Donald Soctomah, tribal representative from the Passamaquoddy Nation. Though it did not use the term decolonization, the law was, as Indigenous Education scholar, Penobscot Nation citizen, and relative of Donna Loring, Dr. Rebecca Sockbeson, puts it: “intended to function as an educational policy working toward anti-racist education and decolonization.”

The intentions of the law’s Indigenous authors, Dr. Sockbeson further explains, were trivialized by state inaction.⁶ A lack of effort to fulfill the requirements of the law became yet another way for the state to disregard Native communities and leaders and to perpetuate white ignorance.

A recent state-wide survey revealed what Indigenous leaders, educators, activists, and presenters already knew: that the law was not being followed and when attention was paid to the Indigenous people of this area, it all too frequently reinforced the colonial narratives of extinction and the white supremacist narrative of inferiority. Even after twenty years, the law that set a new precedent in the nation has not been institutionalized by schools.⁷

I’ve spoken with many educators over the past few years, the majority of whom are cisgender white women, like me. Many want to

honor their obligation to uphold state law and teach Wabanaki Studies, but they frequently are overwhelmed by the scope of what they do not know and are afraid of making a mistake.

The combination of white ignorance, fear, and the absence of institutional motivation and support has left the groundbreaking legislation passed in 2001 largely ignored in schools located in what is now called Maine. Dr. Sockbeson notes that “many call themselves ‘allies’ to Indigenous peoples in Maine, yet Wabanaki Studies Legislation has been left behind.”⁸

I first encountered LD 291 after nearly ten years of teaching in the Portland Public Schools. A Black colleague and I co-founded a course for Portland educators focused on the relationship between systemic racism and education. In our design process, we decided to reframe American history in terms of stolen land and stolen labor. I cannot recall the exact origin of this idea. We were reading and digesting a lot of information at the time, but when we hit on that concept, the entire course fell into place. We named white supremacy and settler colonialism as the defining structures of the United States of America, then we went out and told our colleagues.

Since its inception, the course has served nearly one hundred and fifty educators in our district. It has proven to be a foundational element of the district-wide equity work launched just a few years after the course’s inception. The class allows educators to reconsider history they learned long ago and to examine how systemic racism is at work in themselves, their schools, and the United States.

⁵ *An Act to Require Teaching of Maine Native American History and Culture*, http://www.mainelegislature.org/legis/bills/bills_120th/billtexts/LD029101-1.asp.

⁶ , Rebecca Sockbeson “Maine Indigenous Education Left Behind: A Call for Anti-Racist Conviction as Political Will Toward Decolonization,” *Journal of American Indian Education* 58, no. 3 (2019): 105.

⁷ “Research Findings,” Reclaiming Native Truth: A Project to Dispel America’s Myths and Misconceptions, June 2018, <https://rnt.firstnations.org/>

⁸ Rebecca Sockbeson, “Maine Indigenous Education Left Behind: A Call for Anti-Racist Conviction as Political Will Toward Decolonization,” *Journal of American Indian Education*-58, no. 3 (2019): 125.

The creation of this class was, unknowingly, our district's first small move toward decolonization.

When we were still in the planning stages for the course, I drove two hours north to the Penobscot Nation. It was there I met Chris Sockalexis, Officer of Historic and Cultural Preservation, and later James Francis, Director of Historic and Cultural Preservation and tribal historian. James agreed to spend a class period with the first group of teachers, and has been a regular guest speaker ever since.

For many white teachers who grew up in what is now called Maine, he is the first citizen of a nation within the Wabanaki Confederacy they have ever met. And for some teachers who grew up in the towns of Orono, Old Town, or other settler communities built on unceded Penobscot territory, he is the first Penobscot citizen they have spoken with at length.

In the fall of 2017, the Assistant Superintendent of the Portland Public Schools, Melea Nalli, and the then newly hired Equity Specialist, Barrett Wilkinson, met, for the first time, with Indigenous leaders from across the state. About a month before, I'd read an article in the local paper about a resolution in front of the Portland city council to change Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples Day. In it, Portland Superintendent Xavier Botana was quoted as saying that our schools taught about colonization and its destructive legacy.

I knew that teaching about the destructive impact of settler behavior and teaching about Indigenous peoples were far from being one in the same, and I knew, too, that we were rarely doing either one well within the Portland Public Schools. But when I read that article, it taught me to hope that we had district leadership who would support the implementation of a Wabanaki Studies curriculum.

I'd come to see LD 291 as anti-racist legislation that the white supremacist institutions of the state of Maine had left unfulfilled and to

see its implementation as a critical first step toward meaningful equity work.

As a personal second step, I reached out to the mother of two Passamaquoddy children who attended the elementary school where I worked as an ESOL teacher. We met for a cup of coffee and have since shared many more as we became partners, colleagues, and close friends.

Bridgid Neptune (Passamaquoddy) grew up in Mohtumikuk, part of the Passamaquoddy community near the international border between what is now called the United States and what is now called Canada. She works as a nurse practitioner in southern Maine, and also works tirelessly as a consultant to the development of Wabanaki Studies work in the Portland Public Schools. Our district's fledgling successes would not be possible without the support, feedback, and investment of Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, Maliseet/Wolastoqiyik, and Mi'kmaq advisors like Bridgid.

In addition to regular consultation from Bridgid and support from the Penobscot and Passamaquoddy tribal historians, James Francis and Donald Soctomah, the district Academic Team has met bi-annually with tribal advisors to gather feedback on how our work is progressing and on our proposed next steps. Roger Paul, Chief Clarissa Sabattis, John Dennis, Lilah Atkins, Maulian Dana, Lisa Sockabasin, Esther Anne, Starr Kelly, Richard Sillyboy, Gabe Paul, Rebecca Sockbeson, Darren Ranco, Donna Loring, Maria Girouard, and Chris Sockalexis have all participated in advisory meetings. The guidance of Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, Maliseet/Wolastoqiyik, and Mi'kmaq advisors is critical.

We cannot expect to do any decolonizing of curriculum without attempting to decolonize the process by which it is created. This kind of “dam removal” does not come easily to school departments. It requires supportive leadership, a commitment to equity, and the vision to understand the critical connection between decolonizing, anti-racist work and equity. It also requires patience, cross-cultural relationship building, and resources.

In my fifteen years of experience in education, this is not the norm of how schools do business.

Until I started working part time as the Wabanaki Studies Coordinator for the Portland Public Schools, I had no idea how little I knew about rivers, or even what there was to know about them. The Indigenous leaders, advisors, and friends I’ve been privileged to work with had not pointed this out directly, but instead have invited me to see, on many different occasions, that I do not have a river view.

I didn’t even know the term river view, let alone what it implied, until Penobscot and Passamaquoddy language teacher, Roger Paul, mentioned it during a tribal advisory meeting at the Abbe Museum.

I’d used the word *land* repeatedly in an early draft of a curriculum scope and sequence. On the first page I wrote some assertions about the importance of land-based education. I used *land* because that’s what was used in the articles I’d read about decolonizing land-based education. These articles were all full of the word *land*. They came from academics writing about the work happening within First Nations communities in the plains of what is now called Canada, an area, I later realized, with fewer rivers than the

Dawnland—one translation of the Indigenous name for the lands and waters of what is now called northern New England and the Maritime Provinces of Canada.

After reading through my description, Roger pointed out that the nations of the Wabanaki

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Confederacy—
Penobscot,
Maliseet/Wolastoqiyik,
Mi’kmaq,
Passamaquoddy, and
Abenaki—are river
people. “We have a

river view,” he said. I asked if landscape might be a more appropriate term. “It’s your language,” he joked good naturedly, “you decide.”

That morning, Starr Kelly, Curator of Education, had offered a tour of the museum to all meeting participants who arrived early. The Abbe Museum is a small Smithsonian affiliate and a national leader in decolonizing museum spaces. She summarized the decolonizing framework outlined in Amy Lonetree’s groundbreaking book *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native Americans in National and Tribal Museums*.⁹

Lonetree names (1) Collaborating with Indigenous People, (2) Privileging Indigenous Voices, and (3) Truth Telling as three guiding principles—some might also say critical commitments—of decolonizing work.

The curator went on to frame the museum tour through these principles so we could see how they have been applied to the curation of exhibits, use of space, and even the organizational structures of the museum. They had used Lonetree’s principles to reconsider the colonial conception of a museum. The power of this new (or newly popular) view had reshaped their organization.

⁹ Amy Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native Americans in National and Tribal Museums* (University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

The assistant superintendent, curriculum director, and I wrote furiously in our notebooks as she spoke.

Later in that same meeting I said that meaningful inclusion of Wabanaki Studies in any school-based curriculum would require that the content and the concepts move through the curriculum rather than being compartmentalized in some tiny section of it. “You’re describing a river,” John Dennis, Mi’kmaq educator, noted. “Oh,” I said, “I had no idea.”

On the three-hour drive back to Portland, my colleagues and I talked through everything we’d heard. “I’ve never had a day like this,” one of my colleagues said, “where I said almost nothing and was engaged the entire time.” We all agreed and discussed how we, too, might use the three principles of decolonizing that the Abbe Museum used to shape the development of Wabanaki Studies curriculum and, maybe, everything else.

Viewing settler colonialism as a structure rather than a moment in long-ago history is a critical first step in decolonizing work, Starr Kelly explained to the social studies vertical team when she presented to us. Settler colonizers come to stay—that’s not an event, it’s an ongoing invasion.¹⁰

Her presentation was titled *Can We Decolonize Educational Spaces?: A Critical Look at Settler Colonialism and Empire Building*. In it, she asked teachers of history to consider the ways in which they uphold empire-building as the pinnacle of civilization and how destructive that ubiquitous narrative is.

Even now, the Penobscot Nation is fighting for water rights to the Penobscot River. This is

why decolonization and cultural humility are named as guiding principles of the new social studies instructional vision crafted by a team of teachers, Indigenous parents, and students from the Black Students Union, just this year. Moves made toward decolonization allow for anti-racist work, social justice education, environmental education, and inquiry to be front and center.

Much of decolonizing in social studies begins with an assertion of interrelationship. The questions that follow require students and teachers to see relationships between structures, events, systems, and resources. These questions include:

What is the relationship between power and economics?

Between empire building, genocide, and enslavement?

Between settler colonialism and the founding of the United States of America?

Between dams and the dispossession of Indigenous peoples?

What is the relationship between the state of Maine and the tribal communities within its superimposed boundaries?

What is Indigenous sovereignty and why is it important?

What are treaty obligations? How can we uphold them?

Decolonizing requires students and teachers to ask critical questions of power, nation building, capitalism, and all of the other topics schools typically avoid engaging with.

In education, we often call this kind of student-led inquiry “best practice.” But anyone who has had the opportunity to learn, even a little bit, from Native educators knows that supporting an understanding of

¹⁰ Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387-409.

interrelationship—and not feeding students conclusions—is how Indigenous pedagogy works. No jargon, special terminology, or teacher training needed. Questions centered on understanding interrelationship¹¹ will underpin the pre-K-12 Wabanaki Studies scope and sequence currently under development. Bridgid Neptune will get first read of the compelling questions, then they will go to the tribal advisory group. Finally, COVID-19 protocols permitting, we will convene at the Abbe Museum once again.

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The questions will be revised and then will go to the Social Studies Content Team, where they will be refined once more. Then, finally, the team will be ready to construct units that support each inquiry. Some of that work will be reading, reviewing, and adapting curriculum that already exists—curriculum made by the Indigenous nations of the Wabanaki Confederacy in what is now called the United States and what is now called Canada. Some of that work will involve building new material. The whole process, though, will be guided by the first principle Amy Lonetree names: collaboration with Indigenous communities.

All this said, the principle of collaboration is often in tension with the normal bureaucratic channels of curriculum development. It takes a willingness on the part of district leadership in order to function, and even then it is a tightrope we're walking all the time. We know that what we

create will not be perfect. We know that teachers in our district will need massive professional development support. We know, too, that what is created now will need to be refined again and again and again as understanding grows and knowledge is refined.

This will take a commitment to collaboration: one that educational institutions in the state of Maine have yet to sustain. But I am heartened by the perspective Bridgid shared in a recent update presented to the Portland School Board. She wrote,

There's been no shortage of well-intentioned efforts and program on the Rez. We've seen plenty of 2-3 year grant-funded programs designed by non-Natives that fail to meet their objectives. They fail to center the community's voice, perspectives or strengths. They privilege their intentions, while ignoring our culture and identities. They are trying to "help," they say. This is not helpful, it's harmful. This inevitably leads to low expectations and mistrust. PPS has avoided those missteps and is leading the state in this work. They have, and continue to, center Indigenous voices and perspectives, which has earned them confidence and buy-in from community leaders, Elders, and young people. This has not been easy or quick, it is complex and emotional. Trust and communication needed to be rebuilt before getting started on tangible curriculum work.

One afternoon, I had lunch with James Francis, at the Boom House, which overlooks a massive dam spanning the Penobscot River in Old Town,

¹¹ Sometimes called compelling questions in the world of inquiry-based education. See the Inquiry Design Model, <http://www.c3teachers.org/inquiry-design-model/>.

Maine. When we entered, James ushered me over to the plate glass window to admire the river. I had never seen someone look at a river with such attention and interest. It was as though we'd just entered a room with a revered guest, and I had no idea who it was.

When I crossed the bridge over the Penobscot after dropping James off, I looked out at the river, trying to see what he saw. I watched the water swirl and ripple and pour toward the giant dam downstream. This was the first time I'd ever deliberately contemplated a river. And I had a flicker of understanding. Rivers. That was where to begin if one wanted to find a river view.

Highly respected aboriginal leader of the Dene First Nation, Georges Erasmus, says "where common memory is lacking, where people do not share in the same past, there can be no real community. Where community is to be formed, common memory must be created."

I first heard this quote while watching a campaign announcement video from the 2020 presidential candidate, Mark Charles. In his campaign, Mark Charles, a citizen of the Navajo Nation and a scholar of the Doctrine of Discovery, calls for a truth and conciliation commission—on par with post-apartheid South Africa—to be created in the United States.¹²

He makes a compelling case for why this is the only way to find truth, healing, and equality in a country based on land-theft, slavery, and the disenfranchisement of huge swaths of the population. In naming the absence of common

memory, Mark Charles points to the deliberate ways in which settler colonialism and white supremacy have worked in tandem to break

communities and prevent shared understanding in order to ensure power and profit for a select few. Building a common memory in order to create a true community where all people have dignity, safety, and equal access

to resources and justice is the long, long work of decolonizing.

Last spring, the Portland Public Schools hosted its first ever community dinner for Indigenous families. Huntley Brook Singers from Motahkomikuk set up in the middle of the Portland High School cafeteria and families gathered to eat, dance, talk, and learn about the Wabanaki Studies work underway.

Bridgid had posted the event in social media forums used by her community and done outreach through a network of friends and relatives scattered throughout her homeland. She hand signed and mailed invitations to the homes of students who appeared on a list painstakingly created by our district student data expert. The process of creating that list revealed data collection problems that run deep into the local, state, and federal data collection systems. The invisibility of Indigenous students in our district data was profound, and acts as a present moment example of the destructive aspects of settler colonialism.¹³ The drive to eliminate and replace Indigenous people that perpetuated nearly one

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¹² Mark Charles for President, <https://www.markcharles2020.com/>

¹³ Northwest Tribal Educators Alliance, "Obscured Identities: Improving the Accuracy of Identification of American Indian and Alaska Native Students," *Education*

Northwest (June 2017), <https://educationnorthwest.org/resources/obscured-identities-improving-accuracy-identification-american-indian-and-alaska-native>.

hundred years of war in this area is still at work in the data systems of today.

How can you build a common memory with a community when you refuse to see that it is even there?

As I watched him, I saw how the school system had failed him. It failed him because it could not see him. I wondered what it would've been like if he could've been seen.

During the community dinner, I ran into a student I'd known during my first year as a teacher. He hadn't been in my eighth grade English class, but was best friends with a boy who was. and they often hung around in my room in the morning and after school. The young man, who I will call Jason, had his daughter with him. She would be starting kindergarten in Portland in the fall.

I remembered Jason well. I had no idea he was a tribal citizen of a nation in the Wabanaki Confederacy. I doubted if any of his teachers had, or if they knew, what it would have even meant to them. Jason was constantly being disciplined in school. He struggled academically and seemed to drive his teachers crazy. I could tell he was bright and funny, and I enjoyed talking with him. But I was also a little relieved that he wasn't in my class.

Toward the end of the evening, Jason danced in a circle around the drum with his daughter and his nieces and nephews. He had his eyes closed. His feet knew exactly what to do, so he had no reason to look at them. As I watched him, I saw how the school system had failed him. It failed him because it could not see him. I wondered what it would've been like if he could've been seen. The entire trajectory of his life could've

been different if he had been seen and understood at school.

Our institution failed him, and had no idea.

Jason's sense of himself as a learner, his future opportunities, his connection to school, and his access to education were all collateral damage of white ignorance. An ignorance that can be, and is, deadly. His mother mentioned to me that he'd had many struggles. She didn't elaborate, but I heard Lisa Sockabasin in my head. Wabanaki Studies in every school is not just about curricular compliance, it's about visibility, dignity, and, above all, every person and community's right to wellbeing.

Wabanaki Studies is about public health.

Where common memory is lacking, there can be no community. Jason's daughter's first experience in a public school will have been dancing with her father and her cousins around the drum and hearing songs in Passamaquoddy. It isn't enough. I don't know if we'll ever be able to do enough, yet that moment marked a tiny starting point to a long journey toward building school communities where Indigenous students are seen and respected.

Recently, I received a digital copy of a map that shows the Presumpscot River watershed—in which the city of Portland is located—striped of roads, towns, and other development. It will be the anchor for a unit about what it means to be a water protector for third graders.

The goal for that unit, which will focus primarily on Passamaquoddy, Penobscot, Maliseet/Wolastoqiyik, Mi'kmaq, and Abenaki¹⁴ is water rights activism. This will replace the long standing third grade Portland history unit, a unit whose primary focus has been the study of colonial landmarks scattered throughout the city.

¹⁴ A people which has no current land base in Maine.

The shift toward Indigenous-led environmental justice movements marks a turning point because the emphasis will no longer be on preserving the story of settler colonial greatness but on, what award-winning Wolastoqiyik musician Jeremy Dutcher calls, “building sustainable relationships with this place we call home.”

Sometimes I’m asked why a white person is doing this work. It’s not without its complexities, certainly, but settler colonialism and white supremacy are structures built by white people. It is our work to unbuild them, too.

The teaching corps of Maine, like that of the nation as a whole, is disproportionately white and female. Every student in Maine will have many white cisgender women as teachers and so it falls to us, not Indigenous people, to figure out how to provide a meaningful, respectful, and accurate Wabanaki Studies education to Indigenous and non-Indigenous students alike. This requires white teachers to grapple with our ignorance, our resistance, our socialization, our fragility, and our endless anxiety about making mistakes.

My message to the many white teachers I’ve worked with is as follows. For those among us already seeking to do meaningful anti-racist work, look no further. For those hesitating to engage, that hesitation is ultimately about our fear of discomfort—because I’ve yet to meet a tribal citizen who didn’t already assume that we would make lots of mistakes. Take a deep breath, then join the Indigenous leaders, activists, artists, representatives, scholars, and citizens who’ve been fighting the public health crisis created by settler colonialism and white supremacy for centuries. Start by seeking the education you probably never received and push for that education to be included in all teacher education programs and all schools.

Because our inaction is not neutral. It is destructive.¹⁵

Last summer, twenty-five educators from the Portland schools and two Penobscot guides paddled down river from Sugar Island, where we’d just spent two days learning from Penobscot leaders on tribal lands. The majority of us were divided between two twenty-five-foot warrior canoes. Ryan Ranco, one of the guides, mentioned that he’d never seen the water so still. It was a perfect mirror.

We glided by the remnants of two booms—man-made barriers built in rivers to contain logs—leftover from logging days. I could see the image of each reflected in the water. The water was so still that the boom and its reflection were virtually indistinguishable. I would’ve believed Ryan if he’d told me the boom was a sphere suspended in water.

Everything is changed once seen from a river.

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¹⁵ , Rebecca Sockbeson, “Maine Indigenous Education Left Behind: A Call for Anti-Racist Conviction as

Political Will Toward Decolonization,” *Journal of American Indian Education* 58, no. 3 (2019): 125.