

Statement on Abenaki Ethnocide in History, Scholarship, and Social Media

The Indigenous Abenaki people of the Northeast have, for generations, been subjected to both genocidal attacks (killing of people) and ethnocidal attacks (killing of culture) by colonial settlers and their descendants. In the colonial era, these threats took the form of murderous attacks on families and villages in war-time. In the modern era, these threats have included eugenic sterilization [<http://www.uvm.edu/~lkaelber/eugenics/VT/VT.html>], forced separations of children and families, misrepresentations of history, and other attacks that the United Nations classifies as “ethnocide.” By definition, ethnocide includes both a “mental element” – “the intent to destroy” – and a “physical element” – when perpetrators deliberately take actions to cause “serious bodily or mental harm” [<https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/genocide.shtml>].

In response to these attacks, Abenaki people were forced to fight, flee, or assimilate to survive. Some families relocated northward to present-day Quebec; others remained in present-day New England. Knowing this history, we recognize and respect the presence and sovereignty of Abenaki citizens of the Odanak and Wolinak First Nations in Quebec. We also recognize and respect the sovereignty of our Abenaki neighboring nations throughout our territories who, despite centuries of challenges, are actively seeking to reconcile with the colonial settler communities around them. We are not in competition with any of these peoples, and we welcome peaceful interactions with all of them, provided there is mutual respect. As a sovereign nation ourselves, we will always assert our rights to support our citizens, wherever they choose to reside. We will continue working for the benefit of Nulhegan citizens and all Abenaki people while educating the communities in which they live. We must do this for the survival and security of our tribe and for the next generations to come.

In 2011 and 2012, under subdivisions 1-8 of VT Statute No. 107 – "An Act relating to state recognition of Native American Indian tribes in Vermont" [<https://vnaa.vermont.gov/recognition/act-107>] – the Vermont Commission on Native American Affairs, the Vermont State Legislature, and the Governor of Vermont formally acknowledged the state-to-state status of the Missisquoi, Nulhegan, Koas, and Elnu Abenaki Tribes. More than half a century of efforts by innumerable Abenaki tribal leaders, along with both Native and non-Native researchers, served to verify the evidence of Abenaki continuance. Yet, our claims to homeland, ancestry, and our very existence are constantly under attack by cyber-stalkers and scholars who “allege” that we do not exist for their own purposes.

Sadly, we find it necessary – in this time of increasing hate speech, cyber-stalking, lateral violence, slander, bad-jacketing, and other forms of harassment – to name this invasive, unethical, and prejudicial “research” as “ethnocide.” Harassment conducted via the internet does not constitute “research” – it is a federal crime, classified as “malicious cyber activity” [<https://privacyrights.org/consumer-guides/online-harassment-cyberstalking>]. We reject the use of racially-biased, defamatory, abusive, profane, threatening, and/or offensive discourse about ourselves or any other Indigenous people. We do not condone, and we will not participate in, research that violates professional standards of ethical conduct and informed

consent. At the very least, researchers must proceed with integrity, fairness, and respect, while explicitly avoiding denigrating or in any way jeopardizing the health and welfare of their research subjects [<https://www.asanet.org/about/governance-and-leadership/code-ethics>].

Native American and First Nations histories, kinship networks, and political relationships are complicated. No individual or agency holds the authority to validate family histories or dictate what, exactly, constitutes Indigenous identity. Under the precepts of tribal sovereignty in the United States, federally-recognized and state-recognized tribal nations hold the sovereign right to govern themselves, to dictate their own membership requirements, and to enact legislation or other programs to protect themselves and their culture [<https://www.ncsl.org/research/state-tribal-institute/an-issue-of-sovereignty.aspx>]. No tribal nation holds the inherent right to dictate the citizenship of any other tribal nation, or to direct research against any other nation without their consent. Thus, with all of this in mind, we suggest that anyone interested in our history – or in the history of any Indigenous nation – should consult with reputable researchers and tribal scholars who have a trusting relationship with that particular nation.