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I have been following this issue ever since moving to Maine (Kennebunkport) from Chicago in 1994. I knew nothing about Maine except that I needed its pines and ocean. (I became semi-aware of inappropriate and racist naming almost from day one. I had rented my first home online from a politically savvy Penobscot woman with a large family, all grown, who were constant companions.) There was (and is) an identified N---- Island in our community, but the sign is small and no one talked (or talks) about it.

Over the past five years, I have become involved in projects online and in the Kennebunks trying to sort out (along with historian Tom Bradbury and a local conversation group organized by historians Dan and Claudia Sayre, and Bill and Monica Grabin) an accurate historical picture of the contributions and lives of the Black and Native residents in our area especially, but also around the state and into New Hampshire and Massachusetts. Meadow Dibble has been a great inspiration, and I occasionally sit in on open meetings of The Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous & Tribal Populations.

I am now a senior part-time academic anthropologist (originally from California), no longer the wide-eyed, enchanted world traveler but a PhD who should have known better than to romanticize an extremely distorted history of Maine. Renting my first home from the granddaughter of (now deceased) Chief Ranco of Wells supplied me with an instant multi-generational family who treated me as family. I made the incorrect assumption that the Wells-Kennebunk-Arundel communities were at least somewhat knitted across racial identities. I did not understand their dismay at the way local places (graves, for example) they had known across their history had been renamed and reimagined. I had no idea about the profound ethnic/racial contributions of tribal members and Black slaves and freemen and women--not to mention the sanctity and dignity of these people in the face of hideous racism.

It shames me to this day when I recognize the depth of my stereotype of the tribal and Black people I met. I came to Maine ignorant of their incredible contributions to life and resources they nurtured over hundreds (if not thousands) of years. The splattering of N-Island names across the state is horrid. Changing the name of an originally Native or Black brook or bridge or island or building (et cetera) after a more recent local hero or heroine destroys history. I had not a clue about the slave/sugar trade, or any idea that the huge ancient "Sea Captain" mansions in Kennebunk were about just that. These captains' mansions are currently presented to the public as the legacy of our exceptionally brilliant shipbuilding and seagoing heritage.

Racist naming of any kind just perpetuates mistaken stereotypes. There is so much more to what Maine actually "is" that this proposed legislation will support. It's not an easy task, but the youngest generations will quickly pick it up. Then maybe we will have a reputation for having done something that will correct the sacred historical lies that present names reinforce.