

Julianne Thomson
Orland
LD 2007

My name is Jules Thomson and I am a historian and archivist working at the Castine Historical Society. History has always been important to me, partly because of how much it shapes the present, and how surprisingly lasting those legacies can be.

I love Maine. Though I am not native to the state, it is my adoptive home that I chose above anywhere else and could never imagine leaving. I love it here because the history is deep and multilayered, the nature is unparalleled, and the people and politics are good, sensible, and down to earth.

Having said that, we have one problem that is so glaring and so shameful that it threatens to overshadow all of the state's political, social, and ecological achievements.

I am speaking of course about the relationship between Maine and the Wabanaki nations. Specifically, about the many wrongs perpetuated by settler governments both before and after statehood in 1820, which have largely gone unaddressed and unrectified. Some of this is a national story, and parallels the erosion of Indigenous sovereignty, land rights, religious freedom, bodily autonomy, and parental rights which occurred in virtually every part of the United States and Canada.

Much of it, however, is a Maine story - and one which Maine must immediately address. Beginning with the Phips Proclamation that officially endorsed the extermination of Penobscot men, women, and children, the story of injustice has continued up to the passage of the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act. The state's campaign of pressure and misinformation which typified this agreement, and its continued unwillingness to adjust the terms, is only the latest in an exhaustingly long string of treaty violations committed by European settlers against Indigenous Americans.

The federal government has since passed a modicum of legislation intended to mitigate some of these violations. Among them are the many rights afforded to federally recognized tribes but denied to the Wabanaki nations under the Settlement Acts. The separate-but-unequal status of the Wabanaki has been starkly evidenced by Harvard University's findings on income stagnation and low life expectancy compared to non-Indigenous Maine residents.

I would like to think the reasons for passing LD 2007 are obvious: Firstly, bringing Maine into alignment with Federal policy regarding American Indians. Secondly, dismantling the separate-and-unequal segregation of Wabanaki nations from other federally-recognized tribes. Thirdly, rejecting the racist paternalism that treats Wabanaki citizens as wards of the state and not as sovereign people in their own right. Fourthly, granting a modicum of justice to a people who have historically been - and who continue to be - victimized, dispossessed, impoverished, cheated, and manipulated by the state of Maine.

This is not just a political issue like so many others, characterized by deal-brokering and policy negotiation. It is a moral imperative with a clear solution and no room for equivocation, which needs to be realized as quickly as possible. I call on all of you today, and especially on Governor Mills, to search your hearts and to consider that any short-term expediency gained by rejecting this bill is negated by the racist and anti-humanitarian legacy that the current status quo represents.