

I am Abenaki and my family was named in the eugenics survey. I want to outline how this has impacted the 6 generations since and what it means for all the generations to come.

Our culture was a land based one with a rich oral history. When settlers arrived our lives were changed forever. The many threads that wove the tapestries of our identities were cut, destroyed by disease, war, loss of our land, forced assimilation, legislation and documentation, culminating in the eugenics survey. These are all different forms of genocide, but all are just as effective in erasing who we were as a unique people.

Last year, I heard one legislator voice concerns that genocide is an “ugly” word and felt it did not describe what the eugenics survey did. I will share the definition of genocide as stated in international law, Article Two of the United Nations convention held in 1946: Genocide is "any of the following acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, as such:

- Killing members of the group
- Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group
- Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part
 - - Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group
 - - Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group”

Documentation exists which shows the eugenics survey embraced forced institutionalization, sterilization, and forcibly taking children to be placed in homes which were not Abenaki. These actions were all part of the eugenics survey but also existed long before and after.

This genocide happened and was embraced by the legislature at the time. But how does one measure the loss of the connection to our ancestors, history, language, culture, spiritual beliefs, our identity as Abenaki? My own family roots were hidden and lost as names were anglicized and changed and it became unsafe to acknowledge or teach Abenaki culture and language. Through institutionalization and sterilization driven by the eugenics survey, some would never know the joy of having children... effectively killing all future generations. If my family had not hidden their roots, I might not be here today and in turn my children, grandchildren and their children would not exist.

As we grapple with rediscovering our Abenaki history and who we were and are, the threads must be picked up one by one and rewoven into the tapestry. But like any repair, it will always be there as a stark reminder of the damage caused by others who claimed our homeland as theirs. I believe an apology has to include the acceptance of responsibility for the eugenics survey and to ensure actions will be taken to begin the process of reconciliation and healing for all.

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