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Industrialization & Impact on Indigenous Tribes in Maine

Regarding the collective inhabitation of the Wabanaki peoples, comprised of several indigenous tribes including the Maliseet, Micmac, Passamaquoddy, and Penobscot peoples, therein lies a substantial problem perpetuated particularly in this case by the state of Maine throughout history. This problem is the marginalization, oppression, and exploitation of indigenous land, culture, and people, an exploitation heavily influenced by the wave of industrialism. As the demand for large-scale manufacturing dramatically increased, the demand for natural resources did as well. Likewise, as the demand for transportation surged to move these manufactured goods, the interests of indigenous tribes were cast aside, and sacred land became means of transportation by road, locomotive track, and so on. Indigenous people across the country were tricked, used as political pawns and robbed of their rightfully owned, sacred land. In this blatant expression of racism and completely unwarranted and clearly targeted aggression, Maine was no exception. Though the state of Maine has made real efforts in recent years to increase recognition and advocacy for its indigenous citizens, it's a far cry to equate this to righting all of the wrongdoings committed by the state up to this point.

Stemming from the end of the War of 1812, industrialization rapidly took to the northeast (Early Industrialization). As a result, new infrastructure was introduced to the area, such as

water-powered textile mills established along rivers (Early Industrialization). As indigenous land belonging to established tribes proved itself to be increasingly useful to English settlers during the industrial revolution, the means to remove these innocent people became increasingly barbaric.

“Indeed, the history of relationships between indigenous peoples and industrial corporations is one fraught with conflict and often characterized by exploitation and violations of fundamental freedoms and human rights suffered by indigenous communities, including rights to lands, territories and resources” ([UN.org](https://www.un.org/)). The issue of industrialization negatively afflicting indigenous peoples transcends the use, misuse, and usurping of land. Rather, it is in fact a serious human rights issue. Historically, the English have manipulated indigenous peoples and stripped them of basic necessity. Such transgressions and manipulations include—but are certainly not limited to—forcing indigenous tribes to surrender weapons though they were needed to hunt, and kidnapping indigenous peoples and selling them into slavery (Maine State Museum). After many tribes tried to take a neutral approach to maintain peace, many indigenous peoples were forced to participate in the war between the English and the French, aligning with the French in order to preserve their land, their families, their life. This tactic worked to a certain point, though it was far from desirable for many indigenous peoples, however when the French began to withdraw themselves from the area, “weakened by widespread death from wars and disease, the Wabanaki faced repeated waves of English settlements deeper into their lands” (Maine State Museum).

Such a negative impact seems almost unthinkable, though it’s an undeniable reality in the wake of a post-industrial era. Retrospectively, it’s a difficult thought to grapple with that an innocent group would be so inhumanely treated and marginalized based on the value of their land

(though it is hardly the first instance of this nature in American history). With knowledge of such an unjust pattern of oppression, exploitation, and marginalization, it's important to talk about possible solutions moving forward.

In terms of assessing a solution to this problem, there are an array of possibilities. Something to also recognize is that there are also two sides to this problem, first: How can we as Americans possibly make up for the transgressions committed over the course of *hundreds* of years, particularly in Maine to the Wabanaki people? Second: How can we make a commitment to never let this happen again?

To tackle the first question, the unfortunate reality is that there is no way to go back and undo such a horrific past, which would be the only reasonable thing to equate to solving this problem. However, there are an array of possibilities as to how to *attempt* to make it up to indigenous peoples of Maine, whose ancestors will never be able to have it made up to them. For example, one constructive means of doing so on an individual scale would be to donate to the Wabanaki people. One way to do so would be through resources such as www.wabanakireach.org, whose mission statement is to “support the self-determination of Wabanaki people through education, truth-telling, restorative justice, and restorative practices in Wabanaki and Maine communities” (WabanakiReach.org). Other options would be to increase education on Wabanaki culture, land, and history, in order to better honor and respect the people.

In terms of making sure the state of Maine never lets such a past repeat itself, it is important for state government to prioritize having equal, fair discourse with its indigenous peoples. As opposed to usurping land belonging to an indigenous group by force, it is important

for future government to instead receive consent, and come to a fair agreement in the event that this sacred land should be needed.

All things considered, I conclude that there is a most favorable solution to this problem. Such a solution entails, to put it frankly, more education. As someone who lived in Maine for the first 18 years of my life, I can deduce firsthand that there is nowhere near enough education, awareness, or advocacy for the Wabanaki people and all they have endured by simply living on the land they rightfully own. Being the people who first discovered the land, cared for it, sowed from it everything necessary to sustain life, establishing homes and families, passing it on through generations, they stake rightful claim in it. The acts committed against these people on behalf of the English in the wake of the industrial revolution are completely unforgivable, and these innocent people deserve justice. By increasing education, a ripple effect should occur. At once, the population will become more aware of these indigenous tribes and their histories, thus increasing respect and forethought on their behalf. On a larger scale, increased education will also push state government to remain respectful and thoughtful when making decisions that will impact the indigenous population. Without true knowledge of people afflicted by state-level decisions concerning sacred land, it's incredibly easy to forego empathy and concern, especially when voting is involved. Increasing education will effectively improve conditions on a Maine-citizen level, but also on a governmental one. Maine government, if insincere in their claims to now care for the indigenous population, will at the very least be held accountable by informed citizens. The culmination of these things will aid in solving the problem of oppression and marginalization, and ensure it does not repeat itself.

CITATIONS

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