



PRESS RELEASE

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“ABENAKI” GROUP OF MISSISQUOI: RESEARCH FINDINGS REVEAL TROUBLING IRREGULARITIES IN THE STATE OF VERMONT’S RECOGNITION PROCESS

Ndakina, July 31st, 2023 - In light of the recent research findings presented by Dr. Darryl Leroux in his groundbreaking article, [*State Recognition and the Dangers of Race Shifting*](#), Abenaki Heritage wishes to draw attention to the recognition of the “Abenaki” Group of Missisquoi and of its three offshoots by the State of Vermont, and to raise serious concerns about some potential conflicts of interest and irregularities in the State’s recognition process.

Even more troubling, Dr. Leroux's research, published in the leading, peer-reviewed *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* of the University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA), reveals that nearly 98% of the members of these groups have no Abenaki ancestry nor any Indigenous ancestry whatsoever.

The historical backdrop behind the controversy is intriguing: In the early 1700s, a significant village, Missisquoi, was created in present-day Swanton, just a few miles south of the US-Canada border. This community and its ties with the Abenaki of Odanak are well documented. Also widely acknowledged is the fact that after the American Revolution, the real Missisquoi Abenaki moved to Odanak (approximately 100 miles north of Swanton) in Quebec to reunite with their relatives, and that Missisquoi village was abandoned by the year 1800.

Over time, the Abenaki of Odanak returned, both occasionally and permanently, to their ancestral territory, establishing their presence in areas like Orleans County, Albany, and Waterbury. However, in 1974, a new group identifying as Abenaki emerged in Swanton. In 1982, this group filed a petition for federal recognition with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which, after a long process, was ultimately rejected in 2007. Despite this federal rejection, the group we now know as the Abenaki Nation of Missisquoi, along with its three offshoots, the Nulhegan Abenaki Tribe, the Elnu Abenaki Tribe, and the Koasek Traditionnal Band, were granted state recognition by Vermont in 2011 and 2012.

Dr. Leroux's research examines the claims to an Indigenous identity made by the four state-recognized “Abenaki” tribes in Vermont through an analysis of their petition for federal acknowledgement and applications for state recognition, as well as decades of census records and centuries of vital records. A detailed analysis of their claims demonstrates that

these groups are not Abenaki tribes, but instead are comprised of the descendants of French Canadians who immigrated to the Champlain Valley of northwestern Vermont in the mid-nineteenth century. In this case study of what the anthropologist Circe Sturm has called “race shifting,” Dr. Leroux demonstrates “*how the politics of recognition, which do not include the kin-making and relations of Indigenous nations, serve the interests of settler colonialism under the guise of decolonization*”, and attributes the emergence of race shifting along three vectors: the move away from white identity post-Civil Rights era; the lack of a tribal presence in Vermont; and the flaws in the state recognition process.

These revelations are significant and cast a shadow of doubt on the state recognition process, which is meant to honor Indigenous communities. Instead, the process in this case appears to have been misused, therefore leading to the recognition of groups unrelated to the real Abenaki, causing potential harm to the genuine heritage and cultural identity of the Abenaki Nation.

“We call on the relevant authorities to investigate these irregularities in the state recognition process and to take appropriate actions to rectify any injustice caused. In light of this new, overwhelming evidence, we insist that there needs to be a transparent and fair reassessment of the recognition status of the ‘Abenaki’ group of Missisquoi and its offshoots”, expressed Rick O’Bomsawin, Chief of the Abenaki Council of Odanak and spokesperson for Abenaki Heritage.

About Abenaki Heritage

Abenaki Heritage is an organization founded by the Abenaki Councils of Odanak and W8linak and by the Grand Conseil de la Nation Waban-Aki Inc. (GNCWA). The latter, founded in 1979, is the Tribal Council that brings together the Abenaki bands of Odanak and W8linak and whose mandated committee has identified its mission’s three main elements: Representation, Development, and Administration. Through Abenaki Heritage, the political representatives of Odanak and W8linak, supported by the GCNWA, are responsible for the ongoing mobilization campaign directed at its members residing in the United States of America.

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Source: Abenaki Heritage <https://abenakiheritage.org/>

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