Native American Health

Then and Now

By

Sue Johnson

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Dedication

This book would not have been possible without the support and mentoring of two valued colleagues: Pamela Dickerson, PhD, RN, NPDA-BC®, FAAN and Eric Wurzbacher, BA.

Their input and advice was invaluable and enabled me to explore Indigenous perspectives on health and healing then and now.

I second John Lowe's sentiments in the Preface, that this study "serve as a catalyst for dialogue, reflection, and ultimately, positive change". Our Indigenous people deserve no less.

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Preface

Before the Pilgrims landed and the Virginia colony began, what is now the United States was populated by multiple indigenous tribes. Each tribal society practiced its own customs to promote health—physical, social, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual. This is the story of those health and healing practices and how interactions with settlers and explorers affected their health—then and now.

Native tribes are in multiple locations throughout the United States and many of them were relocated (voluntarily or involuntarily) to different geographic regions. To help the reader understand health & healing and impact of health on interaction with White culture, each tribe's entries will begin where the tribe originated and progress to their current location(s).

Foreword

As we embark on this compelling journey through the pages of "Native American Health—Then & Now," we are invited to explore the rich tapestry of Indigenous tribes that inhabited what is now the United States. As a Native American, I appreciate this exploration as not merely a historical chronicle but an essential understanding of the intricate relationship between these tribes and their holistic approach to health – physical, social, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual.

The author, drawing from a deeply personal connection to the subject matter, takes us back to their roots in Bradford, Pennsylvania, near the Seneca Reservation at Onoville, New York. This proximity unveils an intimate perspective on the impacts of historical events like the construction of the Kinzua Dam a project that reshaped landscapes and, more importantly, disrupted the lives and traditions of the Seneca Nation.

The narrative unfolds with a poignant reflection on the consequences of the dam's construction, highlighting the forced relocation of communities, loss of homes, and the erosion of cultural practices. Through the lens of the Seneca Nation's struggle against the backdrop of the Flood Control Act of 1936, we witness the tragic collision of promises made and promises broken, as the United States Supreme Court ruled against the tribe, relying on racist ideologies.

The author's exploration of this historical injustice serves as a microcosm of the broader narrative woven throughout this book. From the New England Tribes to Native Hawaiians, each chapter unearths the unique health and healing practices of Indigenous peoples while shedding light on the enduring impact of colonial encounters. These encounters, often marked by displacement, violence, and cultural suppression, have left indelible marks on the physical, social, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual well-being of Native American communities.

As we delve into the chapters that traverse the diverse regions of the United States, we are confronted with the stark realities faced by

Indigenous tribes – the Carlisle Indian Industrial School's assimilation efforts, the harrowing Trail of Tears during the Southern Tribes' Removal Period, and the complex dynamics of Tribal Gaming in the Midwest. Additionally, we examine the pervasive issue of violence against Native women among the Great Plains Tribes, the intricacies of tribal government and recognition in the Rocky Mountain Tribes, and the challenges posed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and reservations in the Southwest.

The author's narrative prowess guides us through the intricate tapestry of Indigenous experiences, weaving together stories of resilience, cultural reclamation, and the ongoing pursuit of holistic health. It is a poignant reminder that the history of Native American tribes is not confined to the past; it reverberates through time, impacting generations and shaping the present reality.

This book stands as a testament to the resilience of Indigenous peoples, urging readers to reflect on the importance of understanding and respecting the diverse health and healing practices that have sustained these communities for centuries. As we turn each page, let us be mindful of the collective responsibility to acknowledge the profound contributions of the First Americans and strive for a future marked by mutual respect, understanding, and healing.

May this exploration into Indigenous perspectives on health and healing serve as a catalyst for dialogue, reflection, and, ultimately, positive change.

John Lowe, RN, PhD, FAAN

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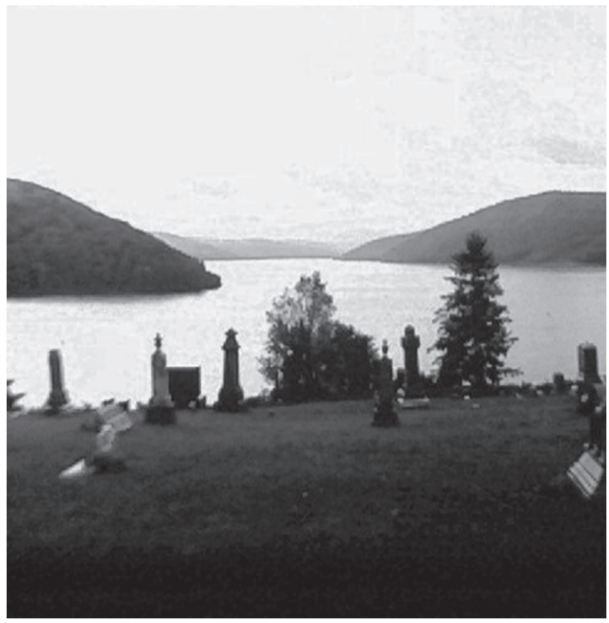
Introduction

This is my seventh book, and it is truly special to me. I was born and raised in Bradford, Pennsylvania 15 miles from the Seneca Reservation at Onoville, New York. In 1960 when I was a high school freshman, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers began construction of what would become the Kinzua Dam to protect Pittsburgh from flooding and pollution. I didn't understand the legal or tribal issues. I just remembered that the great Seneca chief Cornplanter was buried in a cemetery on reservation land that would be flooded. Supposedly, he was reinterred on higher land and his marker was removed to reflect this. I went to the new site a few years later overlooking the new Kinzua Dam to see his marker.

Cornplanter Memorial 1970



Cornplanter Cemetery overlooking Kinzua Bay 1970

I knew the Seneca had towns buried under tons of water, but didn't understand how it all happened until I was older and studied the history of the area. When Pittsburgh flooded in 1936, Congress passed the Flood Control Act of 1936. After World War II and Korea, Congress and the Corps of Engineers moved forward with construction of a dam that would eventually cost the Seneca nine communities and 10,000 acres of their Allegany Territory. 600 people lost their homes when residents were forcibly relocated and their towns burned. The Seneca tried to legally challenge the Dam based on the Treaty of Canandaigua of 1794. The treaty established Seneca territory as all of Western New York. According to the treaty negotiated with George Washington's consent, "the United States will never claim the same, nor disturb the Seneka Nation ... in the free use and enjoyment thereof: but it shall remain theirs, until they choose to sell the same to the people of the United States, who have the right to purchase." (Diaz-Gonzalez, 2020).

The Seneca Nation believed in Washington's promises and the treaty and fought the case to the Supreme Court. In ruling against the tribe, the Court relied on racist ideas to defend their decision. Allowing the federal

government to displace the Seneca Citizens, they used a passage from an earlier case *Beecher v. Weatherby* that the government would "be governed by such considerations of justice as would control a Christian people in their treatment of an ignorant and dependent race" (Diaz-Gonzalez, 2020).

The tribe hired a civil engineer who believed the Kinzua Dam was not an optimal flooding solution. He developed and presented the Conewango-Cattaraugus Plan for a diversion dam near Coldspring, New York. The plan had several advantages, including having Lake Erie as an outlet with much greater water storage. Flood protection would increase, there would be more opportunities for hydropower exploration, and the lake at Conewango didn't have the seasonal fluctuations of Allegany Reservoir. He and the Seneca Nation delayed the project for three years with support from celebrities like Eleanor Roosevelt and Johnny Cash. However, in 1957 the Corps hired an engineering firm to evaluate all plans. The Corps was the firm's largest client and they stated that the Conewango-Cattaraugus plan would cost too much.

Groundbreaking began in 1960 and losses were not just physical. The New York State public education system had pushed assimilation for Native children for many years. The Seneca language could not be spoken in school and the loss of homes affected traditional Seneca life, including use of the language at home. According to Stephen Gordon, a Seneca elder, "They wanted us to become a part of the melting pot. And in order to do that, it was important that the education system drill it into us that you have to learn English, you have to learn mathematics, you have to learn history. And that your history doesn't matter" (Diaz-Gonzalez, 2020).

Since its completion in 1965, the Kinzua Dam operates by the Corps varying the amount of water in the 27-mile-long Allegany Reservoir-holding it during heavy precipitation and releasing it in dry spells. Most of the sediment is near the reservoir's northern border in the Seneca Allegany Territory. Climate change and water-resistant structures and roads in the floodplain are causing flooding upstream to communities that never experienced flooding before (Diaz-Gonzalez, 2020).

The Seneca Nation has worked successfully to reclaim its culture, language, and ceremonies so its young people can integrate these into their lives. They continue to love their remaining land and care for it as their ancestors did.

What happened to the Seneca also happened and still happens to other Native American tribes. Their painful history is not unique, but Whites like me must understand what these indigenous people brought to the land we know as the United States and how interaction with White culture has impacted their physical, social, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual health.

They deserve our respect as the First Americans!

Sue Johnson

Chapter 1
New England Tribes

Several tribes lived in the New England area prior to and after the arrival of White settlers. They were the Abenaki, Micmac, Pennacook, Pequot, Mohegan, Narragansett, Nipmuc, Woronoco, and Wampanoag tribes.

Abenaki

Abenaki means People of the Eastern Dawn and the tribe lived in Vermont, New Hampshire and parts of Massachusetts and Maine as well as in eastern Canada. Currently, there are four state recognized Abenaki tribes in Vermont and other Abenaki tribes that are not state or federally recognized. Each of the four state recognized tribes has its own website: the Elnu Abenaki Tribe of Southern Vermont; the Koasek Traditional Band of the Koas Abenaki Nation in Central Vermont; the Abenaki Nation of Missisquoi St Francis/Sokoki Band; and the Nulhegan Band of the Coosuk Tribe Abenaki Nation (Abenaki Arts & Education Center, 2018).

Note: State and Federal recognition will be discussed in a later chapter.

Health & Healing Then

The Abenaki word for medicine is Nebizun. Its root word Nebi is Abenaki for water, which was important for its healing powers, highways for travel and maintaining the plants, fish, birds, animals, and other wildlife essential to the Abenaki way of life (Longtoe Sheehan, 2022). Healers or shamans, mostly male, routinely went alone into the woods for fasts of several days where they received a sacred prayer, ritual or healing medicine from the Creator. They used a variety of treatments to cure the sick including sweating, herbs, and plant-based medicines such as laxatives, salves, and teas. They also believed in special, magical remedies using dance and symbols. When the person was near death, food was withheld, a practice that occurs in modern society where dying individuals may refuse food and fluids (encyclopedia.com, 2018).

Health & Healing Now

Today a female spiritual elder uses traditional Abenaki medicine to help people dealing with homelessness, divorce, addiction, abuse, sexual violence, or suicidal ideation. She spent many years learning the prayers, sacred rituals, and ceremonies she uses to voluntarily provide spiritual guidance. She believes that services like hers should be free and does refer individuals in active withdrawal or psychiatric crisis to agencies that can provide intensive support and treatment. Suicide prevention is especially important because Abenaki believe the spirit of a person who has committed suicide is trapped between two worlds and must seek the Creator's forgiveness before moving on. This healer willingly shares her knowledge with all who ask and supports Abenaki who don't know about their native traditions. This may include officiating at a baby naming ceremony or praying at the bedside of a dying relative. Besides keeping the Abenaki health traditions alive today, the healer has acceptance by Abenaki people who distrust mainstream White culture (Picard, 2019).

Impact on Health of Interaction with White Culture Then

Other history texts will relate the impact of wars and colonization on indigenous tribes. Since the focus of this manuscript is on health practices

then and now, the story of eugenics and the Abenaki people is applicable here. In the early 1900s public and private agencies were created in Vermont to help needy children. Between 1925-1928 the Eugenics Survey of Vermont conducted research and identified families the surveyors considered degenerate. The Vermont Commission on Country Life was created in the following three years to promote positive eugenics and "normal" families. After 1931 Vermonters were educated about eugenics and how to solve the problem of the "unfit" in the state with sterilization as an option. Since some Abenaki had intermarried with French Canadians, the Abenaki were considered to have "bad heredity" making them targets for sterilization until 1957 (uvm.edu, 2013). Young women were sterilized at 15 without knowledge about what the procedure meant for their future. Being listed in the eugenics survey resulted in denying Abenaki heritage (Hardy, 2021).

This tragic period of ethnocide (killing of culture) included a mental intent to destroy as well as physical sterilization to prevent procreation.

Impact on Health of Interaction with White Culture Now

Vermont has acknowledged and apologized for state-sanctioned eugenics and the Abenaki Alliance is willing to work with the newly appointed Truth and Reconciliation Commission by sharing their cultural and lived experiences to create more positive, beneficial, and compassionate relationships. They are using physical, social, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual health to help create a more inclusive future for the tribe and other Vermonters (Abenaki.edu.org, 2023).

Micmac

The Micmac (Mi'kmaq) Nation is located in Presque Isle, Maine. Twenty-seven other bands live in Canada. Micmac means "my kin-friends". The tribe was federally recognized in 1991. They continue to make a variety of traditional baskets and work on economic opportunities (Micmac-nsn.gov, 2023).

Health & Healing Then

Medicine to the Micmac tribe was a spiritual way to heal illnesses of body, mind and spirit. Sacred plant medicines were given to villages with sick people by strangers who were plant persons in human form. After the villagers helped the stranger, he showed them his true identity and showed them how to prepare medicinal plants by putting them in teas. Some of these plants were strawberry, teaberry, sweet flag, yellow birch and pine. If the illness was severe, the afflicted person was concerned about an evil eye or bewitchment. Shamans called 'puoins' were called to share their spiritual knowledge to cure the sick person. The puoin would ask the sick person about dreams and activities to determine the cause of the illness and what medicines to use. The puoin also sang special songs and dances to help draw out the illness. When this happened, he would put the illness into an object so the sick person could destroy the object to aid in recovery (Mic-nsn.gov, 2023).

The Micmac also used medicine bags or pouches worn around the neck. These bags contained medicine to fight off illness. Contents included herbs to drink in tea and symbols for strength and power, such as a bear claw. The puoin selected the contents of the medicine bag. Along with stones, bones, and rattles made from declawed animals, the bags contained birchbark figures to represent spirits. The rattles and singing by the puoin were integral in returning the sick person to health (Mic-nsn.gov, 2023).

Health & Healing Now

Today the Micmac (Mi'kmaq) Nation has a health clinic that includes grief counseling, chronic disease management, community health services that include health maintenance (diabetes, heart health, elder health, youth health), home and workplace safety, assistance in accessing health care services, and referrals and tracking outreach services (Mic-nsn.gov, 2023).

The behavioral health program respects each person's path to recovery and well-being while honoring the cultural beliefs of the community. Behavioral health providers offer several services in the office and refer community members for outside resources, including mental health

counseling, substance use disorder counseling for the person and affected others, tobacco cessation treatment services, and adult case management (Mic-nsn.org).

Impact on Health of Interaction with White Culture Then

The Micmac tribe was the largest indigenous population in New England and Eastern Canada in 1600 with about 26,000 members. Since 27 of the 28 Micmac bands lived in Nova Scotia, the Canadian Anthropology Society studied their population decline in the centuries since then due to dietary changes, alcohol, reduced resistance to endemic diseases, destruction of game and lands for hunting and gathering, and deliberate starvation and exposure. By 1843 the Micmac population there was reduced to 1,300 from these causes. As Micmac moved from a diet of mainly meat and fish to European dried foods, hardtack, and brandy their resistance to endemic diseases was reduced. The English also served poisoned food to the Micmac on occasion and infected them with smallpox due to "poisoned" woolen goods in trading. French soldiers also inadvertently contracted typhus at sea and transmitted this disease to the Micmac on arrival resulting in the deaths of 1/3rd of the tribe or about 4,000 people Outbreaks of smallpox, whooping cough, measles, typhus, typhoid fever and infectious hepatitis occurred in multiple years. When the Canadian government offered vaccination for smallpox, many Micmac were suspicious and refused to take the vaccine. The English also embarked on a genocide campaign by burning large tracts of forest lands that destroyed the natives' settlements and the game they relied on for food, clothing and trade items. During cold Nova Scotia winters, the Micmac faced malnutrition, starvation and exposure without clothing or blankets. New diseases followed these poor living conditions, including tuberculosis, rheumatism, and bronchitis. In 1867 the Canadian government assumed responsibility for the indigenous population resulting in 2,048 Micmac in the 1921 Census of Canada (Miller, 1982).

Impact on Health of Interaction with White Culture Now

The Mi'kmaq Nation in Maine with 1,489 members has a Health Department with clinic appointments offered five days a week except for Federal and Tribal holidays. The clinic's purpose is to educate and

provide “services that encourage and promote responsibility for personal, family, and tribal wellness” (Mic-nsn.gov, 2023).

Pennacook

The Pennacook tribe is extinct today. Originally, the Pennacook were a large Confederacy of about 12,000 living in 30 villages in New Hampshire, Vermont, and Massachusetts. Their name is from “penakuk” meaning “at the bottom of the hill.

Health & Healing Then

The Pennacook lifestyle was identical to the Abenaki. Their leader was a sachem who used supernatural powers to mediate between tribal members and spirits (Wikipedia, 2023).

Impact on Health of Interaction with White Culture Then

The Pennacook were adversely affected by epidemics of smallpox, typhus, measles, influenza, and diphtheria contracted from direct contact with European and English settlers. As their population dwindled, the Pennacook participation in conflicts between the French and English resulted in dispersal into the Abenaki tribe and into Canada. Today, many of their descendants are among the Abenaki tribe in New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Maine, and Canada ((Weiser-Alexander, 2021).

Pequot

The Pequot people live in Connecticut which was their original homeland. Many historians believe their name means “destroyer”, but the Pequot call themselves the “fox people” (mptn-nsn.gov, 2023). There are two Pequot bands today: the Eastern Pequot Tribal Nation in New London (state, but not federally recognized) and the Mashantucket (Western) Pequot Tribal Nation in Mashantucket (federally recognized). Today, the tribe owns a successful casino on one of the oldest, continuously occupied reservations in North America (mptn-nsn.gov, 2023).

Health & Healing Then

The Pequot used herbs for medicinal purposes. Fresh white pine needles were steeped to make a tea to treat colds. Infusion of the inner bark and that of the sugar maple were cough remedies (mptn-nsn.gov, 2023).

Health & Healing Now

Today Pequot Health Care manages health care and prescription plans for Native tribes and other commercial enterprises (mtpn-nsn.gov, 2023).

Impact on Health of Interaction with White Culture Then

Many of their traditions along with their language were destroyed in the Pequot War of 1634-1638 with English colonists where many tribal members were killed, enslaved or dispersed (Wikipedia, 2023). The Pequot War decimated the tribe and over the next 200 years, the Pequots fought to keep their remaining land. The Eastern Pequot Tribal Nation was granted their current reservation of 224 acres in 1683 (originally 500 acres or more) and continue to live there growing crops, basket weaving, hunting, and holding traditional gatherings (easternpequottribal-nation.org, 2021). By 1856 the reservation of the (Western) Pequot Tribal Nation was only 213 acres due to illegal land sales.

Impact on Health of Interaction with White Culture Now

By the 1970s the tribe began developing economic self-sufficiency and revitalizing their culture. The Pequot have worked to become self-sustaining, by seeking additional tools, material, and equipment to achieve that goal They also created a community garden to educate and sustain those in need and engage in selling cord wood, maple syrup, and garden vegetables as well as a swine project and opening a hydroponic greenhouse (easternpequottribalnation.org, 2021). They have placed in trust 1,250 acres by successfully suing to reclaim their land (mptn-nsn.gov, 2023).

Mohegan

The Mohegan tribe, known as the "Wolf People", lives in Connecticut and is federally recognized. The tribe has followed the Mohegan Way—living and working cooperatively within the tribe and in the non-native community—since Sachem Uncas who left the Pequot tribe in the 1600s and allied his Mohegans with the English. This decision preserved enough of the tribe's autonomy to maintain its identity and achieve ultimate success. Today, the Mohegan Tribe owns and operates six casinos and hotels, the Connecticut Sun women's basketball team, and plans to open a resort in South Korea in 2023 (The Mohegan Tribe, 2023).

Health & Healing Then

Corn was a source of spiritual and physical nourishment. Parched corn was ground as yokeag by women for the annual Corn Festival to thank the Creator for this gift (the Mohegan Tribe, 2023).

Health & Healing Now

Corn is celebrated today by the Mohegan at the Wigwam Festival. Wigwam means "welcome" or "come in the house" and it includes crafts, food items, storytelling, and traditional dance. The Tribe donates over $1 million annually to support community organizations. Their Uncasville Medical Center provides primary and specialty care for the tribe and the community. The Mohegan Tribal Fire Department provides basic and advanced life support, with fire and hazmat support 24/7 to the region (The Mohegan Tribe, 2023).

Impact on Health of Interaction with White Culture Then

Alliance with the English kept the Mohegans from many of the illnesses and depredations that plagued other tribes. The Mohegan Way helped the tribe maintain its traditions while maintaining beneficial relationships with their non-native neighbors and educating them about Mohegan culture.

Impact on Health of Interaction with White Culture Now

When their land claims case was resolved in 1995, the Tribe negotiated an agreement with Connecticut to permit Class III gaming and opened a casino that is a major economic success for the tribe and the entire region by investing in education, housing, and paying tribute to Mohegan cultural tradition (Burgess & Spilde, 2004).

Narragansett

The Narragansett (a federally recognized tribe) live in Rhode Island. Their name comes from "people of the small point", a reference to their homelands. They were farmers who grew corn, squash, and beans, hunters, and fishermen (Alchin, 2017). Today, their Department of Community Planning and Natural Resources works to develop a sound economic base leading to job creation and expansion of existing businesses while protecting the natural environment (Narragansett Indian Tribe, 2022).

Health & Healing Then

The Green Corn Ceremony was a sacred ceremony where corn was presented to the Creator or Great Spirit (Alchin, 2017) Medicine men and women influenced the tribe by preserving historic and cultural traditions in the past and today (Santiago, 2019).

Health & Healing Now

Today, the tribe has health care programs about: dental services; smoking cessation; mental health counseling; financial assistance; education about other healthcare services in the state; Medicare savings programs; nutrition and yoga classes; heat wave education; and pandemic education. Wellness bags are distributed at the Annual August Powwow (Narragansett Indian Tribe, 2022).

Impact on Health of Interaction with White Culture Then

The Narragansett were not affected by the infectious diseases brought by White colonists in the 1600s. However, in 1675 they joined King Phillip of

the Wampanoag tribe in an effort to drive the colonists out of Massachusetts and many of their women, children, and old men were massacred in their winter camp in the Great Swamp. After that, the tribe dispersed. Some were killed and others sold into slavery. Hunting and farming areas were depleted, and the colonists introduced hogs to the coastal area which destroyed clam beds (a traditional food source for the Narragansett). As reservation lands were sold for debt, the Narragansett fought to keep their remaining land and traditional ways. The State of Rhode Island illegally "detribalized" them in the 1880s. The tribal council continued to function, and the Narragansett Tribe of Indians was finally recognized and incorporated in December 1934. They reclaimed 1,800 acres of tribal land in a lawsuit in 1978 (Narragansett Indian Tribe, 2022).

Impact of Health on Interaction with White Culture Now

The Tribe is involved with federally-funded programs through The Department of Indian Health Services and the Bureau of Indian Affairs to provide services to members for their physical and mental health (Narragansett Indian Tribe, 2022).

Nipmuc

The Nipmuc Nation of about 600 people resides on the 3.5-acre Hassanamisco Reservation in Massachusetts. They are known as "the people of the freshwater pond" because of their location along rivers and streams, but called themselves the "Beaver Tail Hill People" (Pakachoag or place where the river turns). They lived by hunting, gathering, planting and harvesting crops and were good stewards of the land. They even took corn to starving colonists in Boston. They are currently a state recognized tribe which focuses on preserving the land, self-sufficiency, and the heritage of their ancestors (nipmucnation.org, 2021 & Oleson, 2014).

Health & Healing Then

The Nipmuc had a complex social structure and their own religion. Their farming and medicine skills were superior to the White culture in the 1600s. They used digitalis to treat heart conditions and buried fish heads as fertilizer for crops.