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#Landback

It is a rallying cry. It is a movement. It is a call to move beyond simply acknowledging injustice; to act and make things right. If you are as of yet unfamiliar with the Landback movement I would encourage you to invest a few hours and do some research. In short Landback is the return of land to Indigenous peoples. It is really the next logical



the last dozen or so years. It is forcing the next question in this dialogue. "Now that you acknowledge that the land you occupy is stolen from Indigenous peoples; Now that you recognize that you have no real moral authority to own the land, How do you intend to make this right?"

Throughout my career in social justice I have attended rallies focused on land return. I have spoken about the need for predominantly white institutions (including but not limited to Christian churches) to give Landback. I have written and been published calling for land justice for Indigenous people. Landback, for a long time now, has been very important to me. But I didn't quite know how important it was until the end of 2024.

On a Friday in late December I was awakened by my partner at the ungodly hour of 3:30 am! Through my sleep encrusted eyes I saw her smile excitedly as she told me we were going to go to the airport. I was already packed and I just needed to get up and get dressed. My inquiries as to our final destination were met simply with "Don't worry about it Babe." It wasn't until we printed out our luggage tags that I discovered that we were on our way to Albany NY. She said "You've never



we're going".

I am a citizen of the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians. Our current reservation is located in Shawano County Wisconsin. However, our ancestral homeland is the Hudson River valley in New York, from Manhattan to around Lake Champlain in upstate NY. I have been to NY city a number of times, but it is difficult to feel a sense of Indigeneity in lower Manhattan. So this would be the first time I visit upstate New York, the homeland of the Mohican People.

The trip was filled with an assortment of experiences that brought a wide range of complicated feelings. I am still processing many of these emotions. There was a certain oddity to being in a place where my ancestors make up a significant portion of the folklore of the area. Seeing depictions of my ancestors in murals and a statues brought both a strange sense of pride at the recognition as well as frustration at the ways these depictions were so heavily colonized and romanticized.



My partner pretty much had our itinerary for the weekend set. None of this itinerary was made available to me! She loves to surprise me. So it really meant nothing to me when our GPS said that our next destination was the Papscanee Island Nature Preserve. However when we arrived and I saw the sign for this site, the gravity of where we were quickly descended upon me. There in the lower corner of the sign was the official government seal of the Stockbridge-Munsee Band



Landback! We drove as far as we could in our rented sedan and got out to explore in a secluded spot.



As I looked out over the frozen Hudson river, from seemingly nowhere tears filled my eyes. My partner gently held my hand as my shoulders



here before, this place, this home, this history

brought forth tears that I didn't even know that I needed to shed. I had no conscious memory of this place, I had never been there, but my spirit knew. This is what is known as ancestral memory. It wasn't the aesthetics of the spot that did it. I have been in more beautiful landscapes. It wasn't ugly but it wasn't pristine. There were industrial smokestacks in the distance, and the garbage and tires that always seem to show up along a river's edge. It wasn't the beauty of the place that did it. It was the connection. It was knowing that the first in my ancestral line stood right here on this spot and beheld in amazement as the sun broke over the ridge in this valley.

What is the importance of Landback? It is to be able to plant your feet in ancestral soil and feel the earth beneath you release her memories. For me it is to stand in a spot and know that the first ever words in your language were spoken there. The first ever laugh, the first child's cry, the first storyteller, all held here! It is to stand, leaning against a tree to hold you upright as you cry. Tears that come not from just your body, but your spirit, and not just your spirit but generations of your ancestors are at this moment crying through your



122 Franklin Avenue West, Suite 100, Minneapolis, MN 55404
Voice: 612-870-3600 Fax: 612-870-3622 mcc@mnchurches.org

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