

Dear Editor:

In 2007 my husband and I bought the so-called King Philip House on Bristol's Mount Hope, the former summer home of Rudolph Haffenreffer, Jr. It sat on a two-acre parcel surrounded by about 450 acres of additional land that the Haffenreffers gave to Brown University via several donations in the 1950s.

Our intent was to renovate the well-worn structure for the use of and eventual ownership by the Pokanoket Tribe of the Wampanoag Confederacy. We even named the road leading to the house "Pokanoket Place." but our road sign has since been removed.

Our house was less than one-hundred yards from the famous King Philip's Chair, a natural depression in a large quartz outcrop called by authoritative colonial historian Thomas Williams Bucknall "the most important Native American geologic site in New England."

We found the base of the chair, where Chief Sachem Metacom (a/k/a King Philip) held tribal councils, littered with debris and a small dilapidated shack. We asked Brown University's aid in joining us to clean-up its site. The response was slow and reluctant.

When the Great Recession foiled our grandiose plans for house and site renovation, our mortgage on the property was foreclosed by Newport Bank in 2015. The purchaser at the mortgagee's sale was Brown University. Since that date the house remains virtually unchanged.

In recent years, the reconstituted Pokanoket Tribe has made repeated efforts to regain at least a portion of its Mount Hope Land. The Heritage Harbor Foundation, presided over by my husband Patrick, has funded the publication of a booklet about the Pokanoket and their heritage in part to advance the tribe's goal of reacquiring the land of its ancestors. Brown University has curbed their claims and has delayed decisive action on a compromise agreement made with the Pokanoket in September 2017 regarding use and disposition of the property.

Given my brief outline of this needlessly complex situation, I was annoyed to read the story in the *Providence Journal* of Thursday, February 4 titled "New study of

slavery and taking of Native Land.” It told of a \$4.9 million grant to Brown and two other academic collaborators “To study historical injustices and the relationship between colonization of America by Europeans and racial slavery and European taking of Native American Lands in New England. This study should begin at Mount Hope, that huge parcel donated to Brown by the Haffenreffer and held tenaciously against the desires and demands of the Pokanoket.

Anthony Bogues, director of Brown’s Center for Study of Slavery and Justice, the grant’s major recipient, states that “our nation was founded on two major acts of deep historical injustice: racial slavery and Native America dispossession.” Slavery was ended in 1865. Native American dispossession still exists in 2021 on the Mount Hope lands.

The purpose of the \$4.9 million grant is to “study, teach and publish” in essence to generate words without deeds. Brown has made a habit of doing just that where Native Americans are involved. In 2015, using the historically fallacious ground that the religiously devout Columbus countenanced Native American slavery, Brown proudly renamed Columbus Day “Indigenous People’s Day” while tenaciously maintaining its control over the lands at Mount Hope.

I suggest that Brown put its newly-found grant money and some of its \$4.7 billion endowment where its mouth is. Transfer the bulk of the Mount Hope acreage back to the Pokanoket, not in trust but free and clear, while returning and upgrading the existing Haffenreffer Native American Collection and Research facility. For good measure, it should donate and renovate the King Philip House as a visitor’s center for King Philip’s Chair.

This gesture to the Pokanoket, a tragic victim of the ingratitude, greed, and land hunger of the sainted Pilgrims, would dispel the hypocrisy from Brown’s noble declarations and well-funded studies.

Gail Cahalan-Conley of Bristol is a businesswoman and philanthropist who chairs the Advisory Council of the Rhode Island Heritage Hall of Fame.