

The Green Mountains extend 250 miles.  
Photograph by Denis Tangney Jr, iStockphoto

# Land Acknowledgement

We open in the recognition that restorative justice practices are not new. Mohawk, Abenaki, Wabenaki, Mohican, and Haudenosaunee nations practiced restorative justice for millennia before European settlers disrupted the natural order of the land and its people and created the boundaries of the settler state of Vermont. The United States Government and European settlers used genocidal violence and ethnic cleansing to forcibly remove sovereign Indigenous democracies as a way to acquire land, criminalizing the spiritual and cultural practices of the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island in the process. The punishment-based colonial criminal justice system they established has always been and continues to be used as a tool for Indigenous genocide.

Despite a relatively brief history of oppressive, punishment-based criminal justice, the colonized state of Vermont is slowly remembering and embracing the old ways of practicing restorative justice on this land, albeit in a colonized context. There is an exceptionally fine line between appropriation and appreciation of Indigenous cultural practices. Authentically adopting restorative justice practices comes with the responsibility to recognize and actively unlearn the conditioned tendencies of dominant colonizer culture. It requires constant commitment to deep cultural harm reduction and regular practice sitting in the discomfort of the complexity of this work.

