

## **Statement of Strong Turtle, Pokanoket Tribal Historian, on the Commemoration of the 2023 Juneteenth Holiday in Newport, RI**

As we commentate this sobering holiday it is important to take into account the deep history that slavery has had in this land even before the United States came into being.

Before the first enslaved Africans arrived in Jamestown Virginia in August of 1619, the evil of slavery was already poisoning the shores of New England.

As early as 1614 the famous English explorer John Smith would record in his “History of New England” the deeds of captain Thomas Hunt. Who kidnapped 27 indigenous people and sold them into slavery in Spain. He was the first of many in the years to come.

We know the story of Tisquantum or Squanto as some of you have heard. How Massasoit Osamequin commanded him to use the knowledge he had gained as a slave in Europe to serve as a liaison between the Pokanoket and Plymouth colony in its first year.

What you may not know is the role that figures such as Roger Williams played in the indigenous slave trade here. How Governor John Winthrop as early as 1640 was receiving correspondence from the governor of Bermuda for Indian slaves. That many indigenous people in Southern New England after the King Philips War who were not outright sold into chattel slavery to the Caribbean islands were reclassified as “indentured servant” for generations which was identical to slavery in all but name. Yet this story in history is often overlooked.

Slavery everywhere should be condemned and as we acknowledge the wrongs of the past, we must also embrace truth. We are all connected and if we ignore the oppression and stories of one group, we are silently erasing them from the pages of history. For human dignity is a universal right. If we fail to stand in solidarity with this truth, we are condemning ourselves to repeat the mistakes of the past.

