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Native Americans, the California Missions, and the
Long-Term Effects of Colonization

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Preface

The purpose of this essay is to finally acknowledge the atrocities the Native Americans faced at Mission Santa Clara throughout the California Mission period and how the long-term repercussions still affect Native Americans in California and the greater United States today. Too often, this part of history has gone untold and ignored on Santa Clara University’s (SCU) campus, as evidenced, for example by Beryl Hoskin’s 1961 publication entitled *A History of the Mission Library*. The Hoskin bibliography is a systematic description of both the Mission Santa Clara (MSC) Manuscript Collection and the Mission Library (ML) books inherited by the Jesuits, who retained the manuscripts as the records of sacraments they continued to administer while the Mission Church continued to serve the function of a parish church (1851-1926) and the library books as the core of the Santa Clara College library. Focused primarily on the manuscripts and books of the Mission Era, Hoskin explicitly states she won’t discuss the treatment of the Native Americans at the California Missions: “Much has been written about the treatment of the Indians by the Franciscans. This study does not plan to consider this subject except in passing. The missionaries were dealing with an uncivilized race of people, many of whom, however preferred the life in the mission compound” (Hoskin, 26). Hoskin’s bibliography perpetuated the use of colonizer’s discriminatory language towards the Ohlone and dismissed their voices. For example, Hoskin described the Ohlone tribe as “mild but intelligent [...] in spite of this in eight years these Franciscan Fathers had induced 700 of them to embrace a civilized life and become passibly [sic] useful Christians” (Hoskin, 26). This depiction of the Ohlone was unacceptable then and it’s unacceptable now, but there’s no integrity in pretending it never existed.
Today the Mission manuscripts and library books are housed in the University Library Archives & Special Collections (A&SC) at Santa Clara University, a modern university campus situated on the ancestral lands of the Muwekma Ohlone tribe. A&SC staff are conscious of the ways in which the cultural heritage and history of the Muwekma Ohlone are omitted from the University’s archival record because these collections signify and sometimes perpetuate European colonialist attitudes toward Native Americans in the Santa Clara Valley. In regards to archival practices and ethics, both the library and archival professional communities are already engaged in efforts to increase diversity and representation in library collections and the archival record. This includes collaborations with North American indigenous populations to increase the visibility of and appreciation for their cultural heritage and explore ways to remedy the effects of colonization. Both professions recognize the whiteness of library and archival collections and the ways these collections perpetuate ideas of whiteness as property (Leung, 2019). Leung defines whiteness as property as the perpetuation of whiteness in library collections — especially those in higher education — through housing collections written almost exclusively by white men about white ideas, white things, or people as well as things they stole from people of color then claimed as white property. This invalidates the voices and perspectives of people of color.

A recent example of archival professionals working to upend whiteness as property would be how, in 2007, a group of indigenous archival professionals joined together to create the National Conference of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums and endorsed the Protocols for Native American Archival Materials (Agarwal, 2018). As a result, libraries and archives throughout the United States began changing their policies and procedures for Native American holdings such as the Cline Library at Northern Arizona University; the National Anthropological
Archives and the National Museum of the American Indian at the Smithsonian Institution; the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, and the American Philosophical Society (APS) Library. The APS actually created its own protocols based on the Protocols for Native American Archival Materials and now “[...] works with over 80 Native American communities to identify culturally sensitive materials, develop best practices concerning accessibility and use, and share knowledge about existing collections” (Agarwal, 2018). An example of these protocols in practice would be when the APS library staff consulted with the Cherokee tribe’s Cultural Resources Department to convene a group of elders with authority within the community to evaluate whether certain sources were culturally sensitive or not. As a result of these consultations, researchers can view these materials on site but need to request permission to copy or reproduce them in their own work. Likewise, Washington State University (WSU) scholars collaborated with over 6 local Native American tribes to create Mukurtu, a content management system that allows the tribes to control access for electronic resources concerning their culture. Furthermore, in 2018, the Society of American Archivists officially endorsed the Protocols for Native American Materials which marked another step forward (Agarwal, 2018). Clearly, the handling and distribution of Native American cultural resources is a delicate issue.

The information in this essay should help readers develop a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of Native American history in the Santa Clara Valley through discussing the complexity of the cultural, religious, agricultural, and architectural assimilation that the Franciscan missionaries forced on the Native Americans. That means this essay will discuss both groups. By writing off the missionaries’ actions as part of the colonial aspirations of the
expanding Hispano-European empire and/or as a product of their time we run the risk of perpetuating their mistakes. We must analyze the factors that influenced their actions while at the same time uplifting the Native Americans, as this is their story more than anyone else’s. I can’t speak for them because I’m not Native American, but I intend to amplify their voices, and help make visible what has been rendered invisible by elements of dominant society. This approach is suitable for anyone wishing to advocate for any group they aren’t a member of themselves. While this essay is by no means exhaustive, I hope it equips readers with the information and tools that are needed to stimulate social change both in your communities and on a national scale.
Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe of the San Francisco Bay Area. This is ultimately their story to tell so I decided very early on — while writing this historical essay — that I would have to consult with them. I would like to thank Catherine Moore, the co-president of SCU’s Native American Coalition for Change (NACC) for all the helpful feedback she provided to make this essay as historically accurate and culturally sensitive as possible. I would also like to thank Kelci Baughman McDowell for her tireless work in recommending me books and answering my questions as well as Nadia Nasr for her thorough and well-written feedback to make this essay as accessible as possible to all readers. Other notable mentions include Dr. Lee Panich from SCU’s Anthropology department and Alan Leventhal from San Jose State University’s Anthropology department, College of Social Sciences. Your knowledge and engagement with local Native American tribes were indispensable in this process.
Part 1: Historical Background

The Alta California Mission period was a dark time for Native Americans both because of the enormous death toll they faced and the erasure of their culture. Between 1 to 1.5 million Native Americans were alive upon contact with the Spanish in 1769, and less than 20,000 were left alive by the early 1900s. Of that, the Muwekma Ohlone tribe, a Native American tribe with ancestry in the Bay Area, was estimated to have around 30,000 people prior to contact and declined to approximately 62 people by the 1920s. There are a number of reasons for this enormous death toll and the aftermath is still felt today. This essay will explore the immediate impact of Spanish colonization on the Native Americans’ way of life, culture, religion, ancestral lands, and health outcomes in post-contact California. This essay will also explore historical connections to modern day survivors of both the Spanish empire and the ensuing American conquest in order to illustrate the long-term effects of colonization.

First, it’s important to understand who the colonizers and Native Americans were. The colonizers were primarily the Franciscan missionaries backed up by the Spanish military who came from Spain to California to assist with colonization and spread Christianity. The California Native Americans included hundreds of groups of individual tribes with unique cultures, languages, and religions. Both groups had a completely different way of life, belief system, and set of priorities that this essay will further illuminate.

Important figures among the Spanish missionaries include Father Junípero Serra — the founder of Mission Santa Clara — who first came to the College of San Fernando de México in 1749 and who was canonized by Pope Francis in 2015. Later, he accompanied 13 other missionaries on an expedition to colonize Alta California (Hoskin, 1961). Serra’s canonization in
2015 by Pope Francis is controversial, at best, because of the many atrocities that Native Americans experienced due to his actions. However, there are contradicting accounts of Serra’s treatment of the Native Americans. For example, Serra is regarded as both a devoted missionary who treated California Native Americans kindly and “never doubting ‘his absolute right to flog his neophytes for any slight negligence in matters of the faith’” (Bancroft, 1884).

It would be oversimplifying to only look at one side of Serra, so it’s important to understand his theological and philosophical beliefs, and how those informed his relationship with Native Americans living in California’s missions. Serra held a Doctor of Theology degree from the Lullian University of Palma de Majorca, Spain and worked as a professor of philosophy and oratory before joining the Church (Hoskin, 1961). He favored Virgil’s poetry and taught classes about classic Greek and Roman philosophers — in particular Aristotle. This academic background informed Serra’s sermons which regarded people as consisting of two parts: “‘an inferior or sentient part, which he shares with irrational creatures,’ and ‘a superior or rational part which he shares with the angels’” (Beebe & Senkewicz, 2015, p. 55). It’s also important to note that Serra considered punishment a gift from God because Serra personally believed punishment allowed people to improve themselves and achieve salvation. These beliefs informed Serra’s approach as a missionary. Taking Aristotle’s phrase “fully human beings were ‘political’ — that is they lived in a polis, a city” (Beebe & Senkewicz, 2015, p. 58) to the extreme, Serra and many other missionaries regarded Native Americans as irrational sub-humans destined for slavery since they didn’t live up to Aristotelian standards. These beliefs also led the missionaries to infantilize the Native Americans (Beebe & Senkewicz, 2015).
Another important figure at Mission Santa Clara was Father Magin Catalá who worked closely alongside Father José Viader at Mission Santa Clara. Father Catalá, Viader, and the other missionaries supervised the Native Americans who produced or manufactured goods for use at the mission. Father Catalá contracted chronic inflammatory rheumatism which persisted throughout his time at the mission but still administered baptisms, preached to people, and visited the sick until he could no longer stand during the last four years of his life. Therefore, there are no records of Father Catalá performing baptisms after October 27, 1827. Father Viader had been managing the temporal affairs for some time but always consulted with Father Catalá. They wrote to the Spanish Viceroy in 1814 that the Native Americans at Mission Santa Clara spoke 3 different languages; 2 of which they perceived to sound the same. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Father Viader and Father Catalá also thought lowly of the Native Americans at Mission Santa Clara. They mentioned 3 positive traits that the Native Americans had and noted twice as many vices which were mostly false or not actual character flaws: “[…] lying, stealing, gambling, dancing, immoralities, and infant murder or race suicide. Superstitions also prevailed, in as much as offerings were made to demons and sorcerers were consulted” (Englehardt, 1909, p. 27). Guided by his belief that Native Americans practiced demon worship, Father Catalá frequently preached Christianity to them (Engelhardt, 1909, p. 27-28). Likewise, California missionaries in general referred to California Native Americans as los pobres meaning “the poor” or los miserables meaning “the miserable” because the missionaries believed the “carnal, ignorant, and stolid natives” (Engelhardt, 1909, p. 27) weren’t intelligent enough to understand the Blessed Sacrament (Engelhardt, 1909, p. 28). This belief is wrong on several levels. To start with, the missionaries primarily spoke Spanish and the California Native Americans generally
spoke their own native languages. Native Americans don’t worship Catholic demons and their intelligence wasn’t less than the Franciscan missionaries.

Furthermore, there were hundreds of independent Native American tribes in California, as seen in Figure 1. This essay will focus specifically on the ancestral Ohlone tribal groups whose aboriginal lands encompass seven counties surrounding the San Francisco Bay Area: San Francisco, San Mateo, most of Santa Clara, Alameda, Contra Costa, and portions of Napa, Santa Cruz, Solano and San Joaquin. Their ancestry is traceable to Mission Santa Clara, Mission Dolores, and Mission San Jose. Many of the records of their marriages, baptisms, and deaths are contained in the Mission Santa Clara Manuscript Collection housed in the Santa Clara University Archives & Special Collections.

Scholars estimate that the ancestral Ohlone people at the time of Spanish contact were comprised of approximately 50 independent groups with multiple villages, ranging in populations from 50-500 each. They lived in permanent settlements, only leaving when needed to gather resources or food. 

Figure 1. A 1925 map of Native American tribal lands and languages in California (Bancroft Library, 1925).
1994) or relocating based upon cultural stress (i.e., warfare) or natural disasters such as floods, fires, and epidemics. The Ohlone were skilled in hunting, fishing, harvesting a multitude of various seed-bearing and fruit producing plants, basket weaving, and architecture. Geometric designs and aesthetics were highly valued, so these appear frequently in their crafts. Tule — an indigenous crop to their land — was one of the primary resources used in clothing, houses, boats, and baskets. Whereas historians have typically referred to Native American dwellings as tipis, this term does not apply to the Ohlone. Their dwellings, constructed of willow and redwood tree bark, are more appropriately referred to as tule houses or rookoš rúwwa in the Chochenyo Ohlone language. The Ohlone ate a varied diet of salmon and steelhead trout, nuts, berries, etc. Anthropologists credit this varied diet as one of the main reasons the Native Americans were so healthy and successful pre-contact (Reilly, 1994, p. 31).

There’s a common misconception among scholars that shell mounds, which are scattered around the Bay Area, are accumulations of leftover shellfish. This dates back to the colonizer’s belief all coastal California Native Americans did was sit around and eat shellfish and, unfortunately, this erroneous belief made it into the historical narrative. In actuality, shell mounds are markers of grave sites, which may or may not contain shells. Upon closer inspection of the Emeryville Shellmound, a California Historic Landmark, a Berkeley archaeologist named Schenck was able to collect around 700 burials from the 60 foot high earthen mortuary mound before the Emeryville Mound was steam shoveled away in 1924 to make room for expanding industry (Emeryville Historical Society, 1997). This is yet another example of the politics of erasure and ongoing exploitation of Native American land.
Other Bay Area mounds located in areas surrounding what became Mission Santa Clara contained hundreds of graves in organized cemeteries located outside of villages; especially when the inhabitants believed in a spirit world that was dangerous to the living (Leventhal et al. 2011).

The Ohlone tribe kept stockpiles of food such as acorns, antelope, deer, elk, salmon, steelhead, or mollusks in reserve village sites to fall back on if there was a poor yield of crops that year due to drought or bad weather. Additionally, the California Native Americans chose the locations for their villages based off the availability of natural resources as well as other strategic conditions surrounding them (Schick, 1994, p.16.) Evidence shows that Santa Clara Valley was once sprawling with pines, oaks, sycamores, willows, and cottonwoods along stream banks as well as a wide diversity of other wildlife (Reilly, 1994, p. 14). This riparian habitat is nearly impossible to replicate now because it was formed through decades of interactions between the water, soil, climate, disbursement of seeds, migration of plants and animals, and human interactions. Northern California’s Native Americans had a profound connection to the nature around them, and they went to great lengths to maintain the natural balance in everything they did. In fact, the traditional clothing of the Ohlone tribe symbolized human utilization of and interdependence with nature (Reilly, 1994, p. 28).

The California Native Americans supported Northern California’s ecosystem through a variety of methods. To start with, they guarded and tended to the trees which, in turn, augmented the reproduction of fish. Insects and invertebrates fed on leaves or natural waste, thereby increasing their population and providing a plentiful food source for predators like fish, birds, and humans (Reilly, 1994, p. 16). When the California Native Americans hunted birds, they used
the entire body of the bird to prevent wasting precious resources (Reilly, 1994, p. 35). They also made heavy use of the rivers as a trade route, but their impact on the environment was minimal. They would float down the rivers and large fresh water lagoons in tule canoes to other villages and marketplaces to trade their goods, especially during inter-tribal trade feasts and major ceremonial events. Along the way, they gathered roots to eat and willow shoots, sedge roots, and ferns to make baskets to store their wares (Reilly, 1994, p. 27). This several thousand year old trading network was already well-developed and became subject to exploitation by the Spanish.

Prior to Spanish contact, the Native Americans’ way of life was highly sustainable, but the missionaries, in conjunction with the Spanish authorities, were formulating well-tested colonial strategies to assert their intellectual, biological, moral, religious, and military superiority. California’s Native Americans were generally viewed by Spanish authorities, and later Americans, with intense disdain, the most negative out of all Native Americans. The primary reason for this was the lack of western measures of civilization such as farming. While the Spanish missionaries had been growing crops in their home country for hundreds of years, the Native Americans in California didn’t have a need to grow crops because they practiced large-scale land management through selective burning of land which increased the seed and fruit yield and affected the carrying capacity to feed the large herbivores such as antelope, deer and elk populations (Blume, 1994, p. 5). Hoskin perpetuated the Spanish’s misconception that the Ohlone had no technical skills“[...] the rudiments of agriculture, of carpentry, and some of the handicrafts. Some were even taught to write [...] All the records point to the fact that the Indians were well fed, were not expected to work too hard, and that they were treated much like children” (Hoskin, 26). In reality, the missionaries actually made the Native Americans work
very hard for them despite what Hoskin’s bibliography suggests. For example, the Native Americans at Mission Santa Clara produced 12,000 tiles for the original Mission Church during the Mission period which is now the symbol of SCU (Santa Clara University Visitor’s Guide, 1965).

Upon contact with Spanish missionaries, the Ohlone already knew how to build houses, baskets, and many other handicrafts. However, the Spanish saw the Native Americans’ approach to sustaining themselves as a failure rather than an alternative way of life. This world view likely allowed the missionaries to feel justified in destroying California’s native way of life as they sought to replicate Spain’s environment in California and teach the Ohlone the rudiments of European agriculture, carpentry, and handicrafts. This attitude had a devastating effect on the surrounding natural resources, drastically changing the landscape by overgrazing the verdant stands of native grasses and replacing these with the rapid growing old world grasses which we see today. Where Native Americans sought to cooperate with nature, the Spanish saw it as something to be exploited. The missionaries’ livestock trampled seedlings, ate acorns, and grazed on the lower branches of trees which led to “browse lines” where leaves wouldn’t grow anymore. Prior to the Mission era, Northern California contained over 920,000 acres of riparian habitat. That number dwindled to approximately 12,000 habitats by the end of 1970 which is a loss of about 99% (Reilly, 1994, p. 14). This massive loss forced the California Native Americans to become dependent on the missionaries for survival and eroded their culture to the point that they would never be able to fully revive it again (Reilly, 1994, p. 26).

The constraints of European agricultural practices utilized in Missions Santa Clara and San Jose, coupled with a European diet and diseases, destroyed not only the ecosystem but also
the health and well-being of the Native Americans. The California Native Americans were highly mobile hunter-gatherers before they made contact with the missionaries. They ate a healthy diet of salmon and steelhead trout, nuts, berries, and more. All of this changed when the missionaries came along and forced sedentism, an unhealthy diet, Christianity, and the Spanish way of life on them (Reilly, 1994, p. 42). This new way of life forbade burning of the land which was harmful to the food supply for deer and discouraged the growth of grass and herbs used by humans and animals alike. As a result, the homeostasis of California’s environment was completely thrown off (Reilly, 1994, p. 42). Many of the Native Americans didn’t enjoy these changes, but they had little choice because the missionaries had guns while the Native Americans had bows and arrows (Milliken, 1995).

Dietary changes and communicable diseases from Europe took a significant toll on the Native Americans who lived in California missions. Missionaries introduced milk into the diets of Native American babies who suffered from lactose intolerance and were unable to thrive. Adding insult to injury, there was a host of communicable diseases — brought over by the missionaries — running rampant in the missions. Cholera became a huge problem because the missionaries destroyed the water quality by using the rivers as a vessel for dumping and waste. Thousands of Native Americans perished due to a lack of access to clean water and fresh seasonal foods (Reilly, 1994, p. 45.) It has been estimated that 6,000 Native Americans died and were buried at the 3rd Santa Clara Mission cemetery between the years 1781-and 1818 (Spearman, 1963, Hylkema 2007, Leventhal et al. 2011)

Religion was another key difference between the California Native Americans and Spanish missionaries. A popular Native American religion in Northern California was the Kuksu
or “God-impersonating” cult. A few major aspects of their religion were their god Kuksu, dancing, use of upside-down banjo-shaped abalone pendants, representing the spirit world. The dancers usually wore elaborate regalia that represented Kuksu — such as a complex tule headpiece and a feathered robe — that covered their entire body except for their eyes (Halpern, 1988). The Kuksu religion had a strong belief in — and connection with — the spirit world. The Ghost Dance of 1869-70 is a prime example of this. The major principle underlying the Ghost dance doctrine is that all Native Americans, living and dead, will one day be reunited on a reborn Earth to live a life of eternal happiness and youth without death, disease, or suffering. Each tribe expanded on this principle with their own cosmology — such as differing times for when the Earth would be reborn, but the general consensus was early spring — and each Native American had their own perception of eternal happiness. However, the purpose of the ghost dance was the same for each tribe that practiced it: communing with the dead through dancing, ceremony, and trance. The preparations for this dance and the ceremonies themselves were elaborate. The singers frequently assembled in round houses to rehearse songs for the next dance, the dance grounds were consecrated prior to the dance, and the dancers’ faces had to be painted — the designs often came from visions they had of their deceased relatives. The Ghost Dance (from 1869 through the 1870s and a second revival in the plains from 1889 to 1890), as referred to by anthropologists, was a melding of traditional Native and Christian belief systems that took place over four days because four is a sacred number to Native Americans (Halpern, 1988). This Ghost Dance was a messianic religious movement that evolved in response to the collapse of the real and spiritual universe amongst Native tribal communities. In 1869 it spread from Nevada through middle and northern California, up to Oregon and ended up amongst the Muwekma
communities associated with Missions San Jose and Santa Clara where teachers exported the religious revitalization back to the interior amongst the Miwok, Maidu and Coast Miwok tribal communities.

According to (Harrington, 1921-1934), many ceremonies surrounding the Kuksu religion were part of a secret society that included initiation into one of several controlled aspects of the ceremonial leadership, craft and regalia specialists and priesthoods. Three teachers named Tchiplitcu or Chiplichu, Sigelizu, and Yoktc, from Mission San Jose/Pleasanton, Pacheco, Contra Costa County, who settled near Knights Ferry went out during the 1870s religious revitalization movement of what anthropologists have called the Ghost Dance and more locally the round house religion as practiced at Alisal and other Muwekma rancherias; and up north the Bole-Maru (Dream Dance amongst the Pomo) and Bole-Hesi (Spirit Dance amongst the Patwin tribal communities). From the Pleasanton/Mission San Jose/Muwekma community at least four teachers are known to have visited the Sierra Miwok, Maidu of the Sacramento river region and the Coast Miwok of Marin County. Knowledge of the regalia making and accompanying ceremonies while to some degree were shared with multiple representatives visiting, learning and participating in these ceremonies, but songs and dances were owned by tribes and interested allies had to purchase some of these ceremonies and related religious knowledge from host tribal elites” (A. Leventhal, personal communication, May 6, 2019).

Some of the ceremonies included “giving the feather” to seven or fourteen leaders which entails placing a crow or eagle feather(s) on the leader’s head. The crow was the sacred bird of the Ghost dance and the eagle was sacred in many different Native American religions. If crow feathers were used, they would place two feathers at a slight angle to a small stick the leader
wore in their hair. These feathers were also consecrated prior to the ceremony. Stress and uncertainty was also an important part of the Ghost dance because it allowed people to experience visions of dying, going to heaven carried by eagles (symbolic of angels), and meeting their deceased loved ones. They achieved this through dancing until they fell under the influence of hypnosis. At this point, a shamanic hypnotist — often male — holding an eagle feather, scarf, or handkerchief would approach them and whirl the feather or handkerchief in front of their while keeping pace with the other dancers, but maintaining eye contact. This would continue until the individual fell unconscious into a dream state and the dance leader would move on to anyone else displaying signs of dream state (Mooney, 2012).

Unfortunately, the missionaries didn’t perceive the California Native Americans’ beautifully intricate religious belief systems very positively. Hoskin didn’t even question this biased perspective when describing a Native American character in a play the missionaries created to teach them about Christianity, “One of the Indians is, of course, slothful and timid, and listens to the suggestions of the demon” (Hoskin, 50). The missionaries had a completely unfounded negative perception of Native Americans. When asked to explain the Native Americans’ personal virtues to the Spanish colonies, many of California’s missionaries described them as poor and wretched, cowardly, indifferent to other people’s suffering, meek, obedient, and submissive. Mission Santa Barbara went so far as to say the Native Americans living there had no particular virtues, having only just heard about virtues and religion from the Franciscans. The missionaries regarded Native American religion as demon worship and the government outlawed many aspects of Native American religion because of this belief even after the California Mission period ended. On April 10, 1883 — 50 years after the end of the California
Mission period — the “Rules for Indian Courts” banned ritualized gift giving, all Native American dances and feasts, and medicine men. Punishments included imprisonment or withholding of rations for up to 30 days (Guéno, 2017). This was one of the landmark steps in destroying Native Americans way of life.

First-hand accounts from early Spanish explorers of the Bay Area at the time of contact prior to missionization provide a more holistic perspective about the socio-cultural-political complexity within the Ohlone/Costanoan aboriginal territory. One of the first-hand ethnohistoric observations of the Ohlone was made by Father Vincente de Santa Maria in 1775 who served as chaplain for the sailing expedition on the San Carlos. The expedition was exploring political authority and military capability of the Carquin (Karkin) Ohlone tribal group residing on the southern side of the Carquinez Straits in the vicinity of Martinez. Father Santa Maria noted:

“Yes on the 15th of August the longboat set out on a reconnaissance of the northern arm [of the bay] with provisions for eight days. On returning from this expedition, which went to have a look at the rivers, José Cañizares said that in the entranceway by which the arm connects with them [Carquinez Strait] there showed themselves fifty-seven Indians of fine stature who as soon as they saw the longboat began making signs for it to come to the shore, offering with friendly gestures assurances of good will and safety.

There was in authority over all these Indians one whose kingly presence marked his eminence above the rest. Our men made a landing, and when they had done so the Indian chief addressed a long speech to them […] After the feast, and while they were having a pleasant time with the Indians, our men saw a large number of heathen approaching, all armed with bows and arrows.

[…] This fear obliged the sailing master to make known by signs to the Indian chieftain the misgivings they had in the presence of so many armed tribesmen. The themi (chief) (sic), understanding what was meant, at once directed the Indians to loosen their bows and put up all their arrows, and they were prompt to obey.

The number of Indians who had gathered together was itself alarming enough. There were more than four hundred of them, and all, or most of them, were of good height and well-built” (Maria, 1971, p. 51-53).
Captain Commander Fages (governor of Alta California, Monterey) in 1775 also contributed first-hand descriptive accounts about aspects of aboriginal contact-period political authority, socio-political complexity, and redistributive economy among the Costanoan-Esselen groups in the Monterey Bay region:

“Besides their chiefs of villages, they have in every district another one who commands four or five villages together, the village chiefs being his subordinates. Each of them collects every day in his village the tributes which the Indians pay him in seeds, fruits, game, and fish. ...The subordinate captain is under obligation to give his commander notice of every item of news or occurrence, and to send him all offenders under proper restraint, that he may reprimand them and hold them responsible for their crimes. [...]”

Everything that is collected as the daily contribution of the villages is turned over to the commanding captain of the district, who goes forth every week or two to visit his territory. The villages receive him ceremoniously, make gifts to him of the best and most valuable things they have, and they assign certain ones to be his followers and accompany him to the place where he resides” (Fages, 1775/1937, p. 73-74).

The missionaries implemented policies that ultimately destroyed Native Americans’ way of life almost immediately after arriving in Alta California. Performing baptisms was one of the first steps to erasure and control. As previously mentioned, the California missions were rife with disease and the
Native American infants didn’t have the immune system to resist these epidemics. Modern scholars speculate that their parents consented to the missionaries baptizing their children because they believed the missionaries were attempting to heal their children by banishing evil spirits. Life expectancy for the Native Americans could be as little as two years before one of several family members died due to the disease vectors and conditions at the missions. It’s commonly believed that the Spanish forced the California Native Americans to convert, as in the case of the war against the Luechas of the Livermore Valley and their allies in 1805. Sergeant Luis Peralta attacked a Luecha village on January 19, 1805 “[...] killing ten, capturing four non-Christian men and 25 non-Christian women and children” (Milliken, 1995, p. 42). Some of the captured women were baptized at Mission San Jose and were later married at the Santa Clara Mission in August of that year. However, Spanish troops and Indian auxiliaries were used to round up and recapture runaway neophytes and bring non-Christians to the missions.

Therefore, it’s more likely that cultural hegemony coupled with indirect violence occurred. The Native Americans’ way of life wasn’t working as well in the mission system because the missionaries disrupted so many aspects of it through destroying the environment, outlawing cultural practices, etc. In an attempt to adapt, the California Native Americans often willingly went to the missions only to find life at the missions was not as good as it seemed. It’s important not to assign blame here because the Native Americans had little choice at the time. Some Native Americans did try to escape the missions, some succeeded, however the majority failed.
In mid-April of 1795, a group of the ancestral Muwekma Saclan tribe left Mission San Francisco on the guise of a *paseo*, to visit their homeland and relations. They didn’t return and on April 27, missionary Antonio Dantí — who was stationed at Mission San Francisco — sent a group of fourteen Native Americans from the mission to look for them. The Saclan were found two days later and they attacked their search party — only eight members of it were present. Oton was the sole survivor of this group and he returned to Mission San Francisco with the six individuals not involved in the confrontation. Father Dantí attempted to suppress the story, but the Native Americans living at the mission quickly found out. Many of them began leaving in droves once the news spread. By the summer of 1795, at least 280 Native Americans had fled Mission San Francisco. This flight was considered one of the largest threats to the missionaries’ hegemony in the Bay Area. The next year, the governor launched a military inquiry into the cause of the mass desertions. Several accounts revealed the missionaries were abusing and overworking the Native Americans and there was a threat of disease so they left (Milliken, 1995). The missionaries sent five expeditions after the Saclan during 1795-1805 and the tribe fought them off each time (Museum of the San Ramon Valley, 2018).

The missionaries further destroyed Native American culture through giving them a new Spanish name when performing baptisms at Mission San Francisco. It’s important to note that many of the teenagers and young children baptized at Mission San Francisco were orphans whose parents were killed in the Ssalson attack in 1776. Therefore, the missionaries saw themselves not only as spiritual mentors but as legal secular guardians, and they often felt obliged to use force to save the Native Americans from Hell. Geigner and Meighan (1976) noted that missionaries thought the following about Native Americans and superstitions:

“The Indians are very superstitious. They worship the devils offering them seeds and they
fast and dance in their honor in order to placate them. They practice vain observances. By using certain herbs, roots, and feathers and other items they believe they can free themselves from their enemies and from illness. They practice witchcraft by means of herbs, thorns, and other enchantments by means of which they attempt to injure others and obtain revenge. Finally, they believe all they dream about. To destroy such an accumulation of evil we know of no methods more opportune than frequent preaching and instruction, time and patience.”

Once they baptized the Native Americans, the missionaries espoused upon them traditional Christian values and punished them for any perceived infractions — in many cases these involved continuing to live their way of life. For example, California’s governor, Felipe de Neve, established a two-step policy in 1782 to punish and “rehabilitate” Native Americans who hunted animals. This involved administering 20-25 lashes as a punishment then giving the Native Americans only maize to eat or forcing them to wear non-native, Mission style clothing in an attempt to make the Native Americans conform to what the missionaries ate and wore. In Mission Santa Clara during 1777, a group of Native Americans killed some mules and took their carcasses to their village to eat. Spanish soldiers tried to arrest them and when they resisted, three of the village men were shot and killed (Milliken, 1995). It’s important to note this incident was hardly isolated. The missionaries and Spanish authorities frequently punished or killed California Native Americans for disobeying them. Certain laws and loopholes within laws that the American government passed also furthered efforts towards erasure.

The missionaries wanted to convert the Native Americans into “good, useful Christians,” so they aggressively acculturated the Native Americans to their European lifestyle. They forbade the Ohlone of Santa Clara Valley from speaking in their native tongue at the missions, teaching tribal history, and singing sacred ceremonies. The image below visually depicts the dramatic changes in Santa Clara Valley Native Americans pre and post-contact.
Figure 3. This drawing by Ralph Rambo depicts Native Americans pre and post-contact (Source: Arthur D. Spearman, S.J. Papers, Archives & Special Collections, Santa Clara University).
Part 2: Making Connections to Today

It’s easy to dismiss the discrimination and cultural genocide the Native Americans faced during the Mission Era as a relic of the past. However, one must realize that the effects of this era still carry over to today. This chapter will now explore historical ways that Native Americans have faced discrimination and marginalization which spill over into today, as well as newer issues including voter suppression laws, cultural appropriation, and fighting for federal recognition. Hoskin didn’t acknowledge any of this continued oppression in her bibliography but instead characterized the conclusion of the Mission era as a happy ending for the Native Americans at the expense of the supposed benevolent padres. “The property of the Indians, in California, was to be removed from the benign guardianship of the Padres and returned to their tribal or individual ownership. Spanish polity always recognized the right of indigenous Indians to their land” (Hoskin, 28). The Spanish never would have colonized the Native Americans, destroyed their ecosystems, and eradicated their culture in the first place if they respected Native American rights.

Throughout the 1830s, tens of thousands of Native Americans were forcibly relocated to reservations in what’s now known as the Trail of Tears because of how many of them didn’t survive the crossing. The Indian Appropriations Act of 1851 authorized the creation of Native American reservations in modern-day Oklahoma (Guéno, 2017). Once again, Native Americans were forced to move and the government’s promises of food and other supplies went largely unfulfilled. To make matters worse, the Native Americans’ ability to hunt, fish and gather food was severely restricted on these reservations. Illness, starvation, and depression became the norm for many. From the 1860s on through the beginning of the 20th century, the American
government created Indian boarding schools to eradicate Native American ideologies and
traditions by forcing American culture and Christianity on Native American children (Guéno,
2017). On top of being separated from their families and communities, school officials didn’t
permit children to speak their native tongue or wear traditional dress and hairstyles. The Dawes
Act of 1887 (also called the General Allotment Act) attempted to further assimilate Native
Americans into American culture (Guéno, 2017). The act favored the American-held ideal of
individual ownership of private property over the communal tradition of Native Americans.
Under the provisions of the Dawes Act, reservation land could be divided into allotments for
individual Indians and families. The law also changed the legal status of Native Americans from
tribal members into individuals subject to federal laws, terminating many tribal affiliations.
Government officials commonly created towns that didn’t exist and wrote tribes out of existence
to prevent having to buy land for California Native Americans. Government treaties that
promised to give Native Americans their land back were suppressed into secrecy. In fact, the
California Native Americans never lost legal title of California, but they didn’t have the right to
sue because many of them weren’t American citizens at the time. The government interpreted the
Fourteenth Amendment — which made everyone born or naturalized in the United States
citizens, with equal protection and due process under the law — in a way that excluded them.
Even the Muwekma Ohlone that enlisted in the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps to fight in World
War I couldn’t become citizens.

It wasn’t until 1924 that President Calvin Coolidge signed into law the Indian Citizenship
Act which granted full birthright citizenship for all Native Americans. Thanks to their newfound
citizenship, California Native Americans began suing, and Congress passed the 1928 California
Indian Jurisdictional Act which enrolled about 17,000 Native Americans; including Muwekma families. This resulted in a 1955 settlement which paid $150.00 (approximately $1,430.31 in present day money) for each surviving head of household who enrolled under the 1928 Jurisdictional Act for the value of the 8.5 million acres of land with interest back to 1852. Under the 1928 Act, Native Americans were not allowed to have legal representation. The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) said that they would represent the Muwekma Ohlone tribe's interest, but they never did. In 1972, the government awarded a second settlement of $668.61 (approximately $4,087.61 in present day money) for the value of the 64,425,000 acres of land also with interest going back to 1852. These settlements came about after over 70,000 American Indians served overseas during World War 2, including almost all of the Muwekma men eligible for service. Later, the Muwekma served during the Korean War, Vietnam, Desert Storm and Iraq, and some are still serving today.

The Muwekma became federally recognized through the Homeless and Landless California Indian Acts from 1906 and a few other initiatives under the jurisdiction of the Indian Service Bureau and identified as the Verona Band of Alameda County by Special Agent C. E. Kelsey. In 1905, the 18 unratified California Indian Treaties (which were negotiated between 1851-1852) surfaced from the U. S. Senate Secret Archives. “Mr. Charles E. Kelsey, a lawyer who resided on 12th Street in San Jose, was serving at that time as the Secretary for the philanthropic Northern Association for California Indians. In 1905, [Kelsey] was appointed Special Indian Agent to California by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs (Indian Service Bureau/Bureau of Indian Affairs) in Washington, D.C. Agent Kelsey was charged by the BIA to conduct a Special Indian Census, and identify all of the landless and homeless California tribes
and bands residing from north of Los Angeles to the Oregon border who were to come under the jurisdiction of the BIA and the ensuing Congressional Homeless Indian Acts. Based upon the partial results of Kelsey’s Special Indian Census, and the discovery of the 18 unratified California Indian treaties from the Senate archives, Congress passed multiple Appropriation Acts beginning in 1906 on through 1937, for the purpose of purchasing “home sites” for the many surviving California Indian tribes and bands” (A. Leventhal, personal communication, May 6, 2019).

It’s worth noting that gaining civil rights was not a simple task for the Native Americans. By 1927, Sacramento BIA Superintendent Lafayette A. Dorrington removed 135 tribal bands from the list of recognized tribes, starting with the Verona band of Alameda County. Dorrington wrote in 1929 that it was his personal opinion and belief in 1929 that the government shouldn’t buy land for California Native American (A. Leventhal, personal communication, Feb 8, 2019). Some progress was made in the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 (also known as the Indian New Deal) that encouraged tribal sovereignty and land management by tribes. The Act outlined new rights for Native Americans and reduced some of the earlier privatization of their collective property (Elliot, 2015). However, Native Americans still couldn’t vote in all states until 1965 when the Civil Rights Act was passed (National Constitution Center).

To this day, Native American tribes are still fighting for their rights and this is reflected primarily in their struggle to receive federal recognition as an official Native American tribe. With this federal recognition, tribes have the right to self-govern, run their own reservations and casinos, hunt, trap, and fish, and are entitled to receive certain federal benefits, services, and protections (U.S. Department of the Interior Indian Affairs). However, it isn’t easy to obtain
federal recognition. Today, there are only there are 573 federally recognized Native American and Alaska Native tribes and villages. Even though the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe obtained a formal determination of previous unambiguous federal recognition by the BIA on May 24, 1996, the Office of Federal Acknowledgement refused to reaffirm their non-terminated federally acknowledged status.

Just two years ago, the board of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District granted the Amah-Mutsun Tribal Band of Costanoan Indians from the Mission San Juan Bautista property rights to 36 acres at Mount Umunhum at the exclusion of the local aboriginal Muwekma Ohlone Tribe of the San Francisco Bay Area — located in San Jose, California — in a “cultural conservation easement” to pray and cultivate medicinal plants as their ancestors did pre-contact. Even the name Mission Santa Clara de Asís is the result of colonial erasure. The Ohlone tribe referred to the area as Támien in their native language, hence the first Mission Santa Clara was formally designated as Mission Santa Clara de Thámien, but the missionaries quickly changed the name to Mission Santa Clara de Asís after Saint Clare of Assisi.

The Republican party continues to discriminate against Native Americans in 2019 by suppressing their right to vote. In 2018, they passed restrictive voter ID laws in several states to create barriers for Native Americans including mandating a street address as well as a driver’s license, state ID, tribal ID or other form of identification to vote. Native Americans who live on reservations have P.O. boxes so they don’t have a street address and often lack transportation to travel long distances to obtain a driver’s license or state ID due to higher unemployment and poverty rates (Noisecat, 2018).
Another strong issue that Native Americans face today is cultural appropriation which is defined as “the borrowing from someone else’s culture without their permission and without acknowledgement to the victim culture’s past” (Wood, 2018, p. 1). One of the most common examples of cultural appropriation as it pertains to Native American culture is non-Native people’s inappropriate use of the Plains’ Indians feathered headdress. Many non-Natives who wear the headdress often wear it in a highly sexualized manner, as a fashion accessory, (Wood, 2018) or as a visual representation of the tagline “free spirit.”

Figure 4. A non-Native wearing a Plain’s Indian headdress. This represents the misuse of the headdress as a fashion accessory (Imgarcade).

Figure 5. This picture of Karlie Kloss at the Victoria’s Secret fashion show is as an example of the hyper-sexualization of Native American women and the misuse of the headdress (Getty).

Figure 6. This image is an advertisement for Cirque Du Soleil’s 2019 show “Volta.” The woman in this advertisement is misusing a headdress and geometric designs and referred to as “the archetypal free spirit” (Cirque Du Soleil).
Appropriation perpetuates sexualized stereotypes about Native American women — who are 2.5 times more likely to be raped than white women (Bleir, G., & Zoledziowski, A., 2018) — and erodes the headdress’ spiritual meaning. Additionally, Ziff and Rao (1997) outline four tangible ways that cultural appropriation affects marginalized groups. First of all, it impedes the group’s ability to define themselves and express their identity. Native American identity is already under threat as a result of forced assimilation during and after the Mission Period. Furthermore, even as Native American communities seek reconciliation, appropriation continues to push their culture into “an invisible Otherness.” Second, cultural appropriation benefits non-Natives at the expense of Native Americans. For example, when non-Natives make and sell dream catchers, proceeds from those sales generally don’t benefit Native American communities and they face the risk of their arts and crafts becoming irrelevant to American culture. This closely relates to the third point Ziff and Rao (1997) made that cultural appropriation allows outsiders to benefit from, and at the expense of, a marginalized group. Hapiuk (2001) asserts that Native Americans have lost as much as $160,000,000 from the sale of counterfeit goods passed off as authentic Native American arts and crafts. Fourth, and finally, cultural appropriation ignores the long history of discrimination against Native Americans and discourages the larger non-Native society from learning from these mistakes (Wood, 2018). An uninformed individual might see headdresses or dream catchers being sold at chain retailers and think Native Americans are finally getting the representation they deserve. This calls into question how an individual can know whether a retailer has obtained headdresses or dream catchers from a Native community. A good way to address this would be to buy from Native-American owned brands or attend an event hosted by a local Native American community where Native American artisans are present. On May 4, 2019,
the Native American Coalition for Change (NACC) student organization of Santa Clara University hosted the first annual powwow on the grounds of the Mission Garden. There were many Native American artisans selling their wares at this event. Popular literature such as the Teen Vogue magazine also highlight Native American owned brands so consumers know who they’re buying from (Reynoso, 2018).

Stereotypes of Native Americans continue to play out in popular culture, furthering the narrative of Native Americans as an “innocent noble child of nature” or a “vicious savage” (Riley, 1995). The 1995 Disney movie *Pocahontas* portrays the first stereotype through their depiction of *Pocahontas* as someone who’s deeply connected to nature. Her best friends were a raccoon and hummingbird, and she listened to a wise tree for life advice. The *Pocahontas* movie also portrays the “vicious savage” stereotype to a lesser extent, but it’s more apparent in the live-action film *The Last of the Mohicans*. A notable scene in this movie features a Native American army ambushing and killing a British commander by cutting out his heart while he is still alive. This is an extreme, unwarranted, and excessively violent portrayal of Native Americans. These stereotypes contribute to the popular conception of Native Americans as Other and legitimize bias and discrimination against them even today. They also paint all Native Americans with the same brush of “connected to nature,” a generalization that is problematic in the same way that saying all Christians are homophobic.

The conflation between ethnic ancestry and recognition within a tribal community is also a problem that reinforces stereotypes of Native Americans as a mythical, but presumably long-dead, group of people. Elizabeth Warren’s claims to Native American ancestry via a DNA test that showed a fraction of Cherokee heritage is a prominent example of this. In response to
Warren’s claim Cherokee Nation leaders issued a statement that said while DNA tests can determine lineage, they’re not evidence for tribal affiliation because sovereign tribal nations set their own requirements for citizenship. One may recall the Indian New Deal act that allowed sovereign tribal nations to have this legislative power. Neither Warren’s 2012 team for her Senate campaign nor Cherokee genealogists could find any direct-line ancestors to back up her claim. Instead of retracting her assertion, Warren instead defended her position by citing her maternal grandfather who "had high cheekbones like all of the Indians do." Simon Moya-Smith, a citizen of the Oglala Lakota Nation and editor of Indian Country Today, wrote for CNN that Warren owed Native Americans an apology for reinforcing "racist Native American stereotypes" and legitimizing the claims of people who identify as Native American for personal gain without actually engaging with Native American communities (Uyehara, 2018).

All of these ways that Native Americans have faced continuous discrimination and marginalization calls into question what reconciliation efforts look like. For the Muwekma Ohlone tribe of the Bay Area, reconciliation means language revitalization, sharing their culture with others, and raising awareness about their history. They have their own website: http://muwekma.org/. At the “Remembering Támien: A Conversation” panel at the de Saisset Museum in Santa Clara University on October 8, 2018, Monica V. Arellano — the Vice Chairwoman of the Muwekma Ohlone tribe — and San Jose State Anthropology professor Alan Leventhal made numerous recommendations that Santa Clara University might consider, beyond simply apologizing to the tribal community. They discussed building a future with the Muwekma Ohlone tribe by inviting them to talk about their history and current situation and creating scholarships for Native American students; questioning laws that oppress Native Americans and
taking a lead in effecting change by writing to Congress to push for federal recognition of local
tribes; and breaking the chains of a perpetual mythical history by advocating for changes in the
K-12 school curriculum to have accurate information or create improved lesson plans. Things
that Santa Clara University can do is clearly acknowledge it was built on Ohlone land, and at the
expense of a disadvantaged population: the Mission Garden is a massive unmarked graveyard for
Native Americans and the Mission Church logo is a symbol of extraction of Native American
labor.

Figure 7. A panorama of the Mission Garden at Santa Clara University (SCU).

Although built on Ohlone lands there are very few informational markers on or around the
campus reflecting that fact. This prompts the University, among other monuments and memorials
to colonialism, to reconsider Father Junipero Serra’s statue, revise the misinformation in the
Mission Santa Clara informational pamphlets available inside the Mission Church, and make
clear signage on historical landmarks that endures the elements. Toward some of these aims, the
University has published on its website a land acknowledgement for campus events
(https://www.scu.edu/diversity/resources/land-acknowledgment/), and outgoing University
president Father Michael Engh, S.J., recently announced in May 2019 to the campus community the appointment of an Ohlone History Working Group, including members from the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe and Santa Clara University communities. Father Engh has charged the group with the task of meeting over the next six months and submitting a written report to incoming President Father Kevin O’Brien recommendations and a proposed budget to identify better ways to acknowledge the Ohlone history of Mission Santa Clara and “[…] honor these Ohlone ancestors and their descendants in a way that is concrete, meaningful, and forward-looking” (Office of the President, e-mail correspondence to essential SCU staff, May 29, 2019).

Figure 9. A statue of Junipero Serra located on one of the lawns at Santa Clara University.

Figure 10. A pamphlet about the Mission Era that can be found inside the Mission Church.

Figure 11. The Mission Santa Clara sign located in front of the front doors to the Mission Church.
Although the Mission Santa Clara Manuscripts contain records of the Native Americans who lived at Mission Santa Clara, these records do not constitute Native American cultural materials. Their historical context is considered integral to the identity of the University and its legacy of the California mission system, yet they contain implicit and explicit biases that, if unaddressed, perpetuate negative stereotypes and patterns of oppression toward Native Americans. There are a number of ways that these materials could be balanced or reframed in order to improve cultural sensitivity toward the Muwekma Ohlone, whose lands form the core of the campus grounds where members of the Santa Clara University and surrounding communities live, work, learn and pray. In light of this, the Santa Clara Archives & Special Collections can add a statement to its current overview for the finding aid for the Mission Santa Clara Manuscript Collection about how certain resources within the collection contain a colonialist bias because of the authors’ viewpoints and/or because they reveal the missionaries’ perspectives of Native Americans. It can also point to resources in the collection that depict a more equitable account of the Mission era. For example, the Santa Clara University research manuscript series (Blume, 1994; Reilly, 1994; Schick, 1994; Skowronek & Pierce, 2006) is an excellent resource that describes the ecology of Santa Clara Valley, how the local Native American tribes interacted with it, and what effect the Mission system had on the ecosystem in a fair, impartial manner. (Halpern, 1988) is an informative, neutral description of the Kuksu religion and (Mooney, 2012) fairly discusses the Ghost dance. (Milliken, 1995) paints a sympathetic picture that describes the psychological consequences of Spanish cultural hegemony on the Native Americans. Above all else, the Santa Clara Archives & Special Collections should hold continuing conversations with local Native American tribes like the Muwekma Ohlone to best inform its archival practices and
avoid further exploitation. The Protocols for Native American Archival Materials state: “libraries and archives must recognize that Native American communities have primary rights for all culturally sensitive materials that are culturally affiliated with them.” The Mission Santa Clara Manuscripts and Library Books don’t constitute Native American cultural resources, but acknowledging the biases present within the collection is important from a social justice angle and helpful for researchers interested in Native American history.
Part 3: Conclusion

After reading this essay, one should understand how to stop the cycle of oppression and erasure through amplifying the voices of marginalized groups, discrimination still affects Native Americans — and many other groups — even in 2019, it’s never acceptable to write off racism simply as a product of the past, and change is both possible and occurring. Archival professionals across the country are building mutually supportive relationships with local Native American communities to break down whiteness as property.
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