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Hist 490

Defining Genocide in Northwestern California: The Devastation of Humboldt and Del Norte  
County's Indigenous Peoples

**Introduction: Theories and Euro-American Justifications for Genocide**

In recent years, historians and the American public have increasingly debated whether or not the crimes that have been committed against Native Americans in the United States constitute genocide. However, according to the United Nations, genocide is defined as:

any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life, calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; [and] forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.<sup>1</sup>

All of these crimes (and more) were committed to some degree against Native Americans across the United States between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. Although the Humboldt and Del Norte region was conquered by Euro-Americans later than the rest of the US, genocidal crimes were especially prevalent within the counties of Humboldt and Del Norte in Northwestern California. The genocide committed against the Indigenous Peoples of Northwestern California was carried out by vigilante groups with the support of the California state government as well as the US federal government. I argue not only that genocide, as defined by the UN, was committed

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United Nations, Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, December 9, 1948, United Nations Treaty Series.

against Native Americans in these counties, but also that genocide has had a lasting effect on the Native Americans in the area through continued oppression. These groups include the Tolowa, Wiyot, Yurok, Karuk, and Hupa.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, most of the accounts of the massacres are from the Euro-American perspective, which makes them biased. In addition, they often failed to identify which tribes they attacked. While this is unfortunate, knowing the tribe that was attacked is not necessary for deciding whether or not genocide was committed against Natives Americans in the region.

A key component to the argument that genocide was not committed against Native Americans is the fact that disease killed more Native Americans than any traditional form of genocide.<sup>3</sup> This argument led some historians to conclude that the collapse of America's Indigenous population cannot be defined as a genocide. Despite the fact that this is still being debated among historians, there is a plethora of evidence to suggest that the acts committed in the far reaches of the Northwestern California were in fact acts of genocide.<sup>4</sup>

Some historians believe that disease could not be effectively controlled as a weapon prior to World War I, which led to the belief that it could not have possibly been used to commit genocide against the Native Americans. There are several reasons why some of their deaths may have not been avoidable, including the Native Americans' lack of immunity and the highly contagious characteristics of the diseases. Nevertheless, there are numerous accounts of Indigenous people being inoculated with deadly diseases with the intent to kill them. Although it

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<sup>2</sup> The term "Indian" is used in this work to refer all Indigenous people in the Humboldt Bay area in late 1800's the decision to use this term is based on the its legal definition in United States as defined in 25 USU.S. Code § 2201. I have included all of the names of the tribes that I know were involved in certain atrocities, but with other accounts the most specific term used is Native American or Indigenous Peoples.

<sup>3</sup> Benjamin Madley, "Campus Dialogue on Race,"*Tolowa Genocide*, November 2, 2016; Humboldt State University, Arcata, California; , 2016, mp4.

<sup>4</sup> Madley, "Campus Dialogue on Race,"*Tolowa Genocide*, 2016.

is true that diseases (especially smallpox) were by far the number one killer of Native Americans during the nineteenth century, it does not negate the fact that disease was often spread with the purpose of killing Indigenous peoples.<sup>5</sup> While disease (both incidentally and intentionally inflicted) was the main reason for Native American deaths, they were still subjected to many other genocidal acts, like massacres, enslavement, and relocation.

Disease alone cannot explain the genocide of Native Americans in the region. There was also an anti-Native American ideology that fueled the government-sanctioned massacres of Indigenous people and culture.<sup>6</sup> There are two popular theories that explain how Euro-Americans excused the genocide of Native Americans: racial-eliminationist ideology and legal utilitarian justification. Racial-eliminationist ideology was a belief that Euro-Americans would naturally develop and take over the lands of the Indigenous Peoples because they were not as technologically advanced or “civilized.” Euro-Americans believed that Native Americans could only benefit from being conquered and taught the “proper” way to live. This led people of the time to believe that Euro-Americans were justified in taking whatever they wanted from the Native Americans, even if it meant killing them in the process. In 1851, California Governor Peter Burnett stated that “[A] war of extermination will continue to be waged . . . until the Indian race becomes extinct . . . . The inevitable destiny of the race is beyond the power or wisdom of man to avert.”<sup>7</sup> Euro-Americans believed that the extinction of Native Americans was inevitable, and they also thought of them as non-humans, which is illustrated by the use of the term “exterminate,” since the word is most often used to discuss vermin. Natives were seen as

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<sup>5</sup>Adam Jones, *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2017), 156.

<sup>6</sup> Euro-American is used throughout the paper to refer to people of the Caucasian race. The sources typically use the term whites. I chose this term because it is more specific than simply saying white or Caucasian.

<sup>7</sup> Benjamin Madley, “When the World Turned Upside Down,” in *New Directions in Genocide*, edited by Adam Jones (London; New York: Routledge, 2012), 174.

subhuman by Euro-Americans, which was one of their motivations, or rather excuses, to steal land and enslave women and children with impunity. This mentality also made the Native American deaths seem inconsequential to the Euro-Americans.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to racial-eliminationist ideology, legal utilitarian justification was a belief that Indigenous people did not use their land properly and that European encroachment was justified because of Native Americans' "failure" to exploit their ancestral lands. This theory relates to the legal term *vacuum domicilium*, which means "empty dwelling."<sup>9</sup> This term suggested that, because Native Americans had not used the land in the way that Euro-Americans saw fit, they had no right to own or continue occupying their ancestral lands. In the capitalist minds of Euro-Americans during the nineteenth century, they could not understand why a person would not want to use their land to make money. As a result, if a person was not using their land for crops, cattle, or mining, it was seen as a waste of valuable resources. All of these beliefs gave Euro-Americans the excuse they needed in order to begin the genocide of the Native Americans.

These theories of justification for Native American genocide were evident in the way that Euro-Americans treated the Indigenous Peoples. Relations between the Euro-Americans and the Indigenous population of Northwestern California became increasingly hostile as they began to interact. Native Americans did not trust the American settlers because of the Natives' displacement that was caused by unfulfilled promises by Euro-American settlers like Redick McKee, along with the California and US governments.<sup>10</sup> Starvation as a result of their displacement forced Natives to steal from Euro-Americans in order to survive. In addition, according to Native Americans, the new strangers who arrived in their land were outside the law

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<sup>8</sup> Ray Raphael and Freeman House, *Two Peoples, One Place* (Humboldt County Historical Society, 2011), 109-110.

<sup>9</sup> Jones, *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction*, 148.

<sup>10</sup> Hoopes, *Lure of Humboldt Bay Region*, 39.

and had no rights as far as the Indigenous Peoples were concerned.<sup>11</sup> In Native American culture, property rights were extremely respected, but only when it was the property of another Native American. This meant that some Native Americans felt it was permissible to steal from people who were not indigenous to the area, especially those that were causing their genocide.<sup>12</sup>

Euro-Americans viewed Native Americans as pests encroaching on their new found land rather than people who had been there for centuries before them. This, and their superior weapons, made it easy for Euro-Americans to steal from the Indigenous Peoples. The lack of supplies gave the Indigenous tribes motivation to steal from Euro-Americans. Theft gave Euro-Americans a motive to kill Native Americans, which caused Native Americans to kill more Euro-Americans in acts of vengeance.<sup>13</sup> Euro-American negative attitudes towards Native Americans can be easily seen in an issue of the *Humboldt Times*. It complained of Native Americans stealing food to survive and stated, “Unless the government will provide for the Indians, the settlers must exterminate them.”<sup>14</sup> This explicitly says what Euro-Americans’ intentions were at the time: genocide. This perpetual cycle of violence was one that the Indigenous Peoples of Humboldt and Del Norte Counties had no hope of winning, as the Euro-American had superior weapons and supply systems. Hatred towards the local tribes and the fact that Native Americans had to steal food and supplies from Euro-Americans to survive combined to create what Benjamin Madley termed “pedagogic killing” which was then used as an instrument of Native American genocide.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Raphael and House, *Two Peoples, One Place*, 109-110.

<sup>12</sup> Raphael and House, *Two Peoples, One Place*, 109-110.

<sup>13</sup> Benjamin Madley, *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe, 1846-1873* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 64.

<sup>14</sup> “Indians Leaving the Reservation,” *Humboldt Times*, March 3, 1860.

<sup>15</sup> Madley, *An American Genocide*, 48.

Pedagogic killing was what Euro-Americans did in order to “teach” Natives that they should not damage or take anything that a Euro-American settler owned, even if it was on Native American land or done in retaliation to Euro-American crime. An early example of this can be seen in 1852. In a letter addressed to their “Fellow Citizens and the People of Union Town and Humboldt Bay,” B.F. Jameson, T.D. Felt, and Kennerly Dobyns wrote, “The Indians have murdered two of our citizens, under circumstances truly horrible, and at a meeting of the citizens of the valley it was unanimously agreed to commence war upon them immediately.”<sup>16</sup> They promptly went on to kill more than twenty Native Americans, none of whom were suspects in the murder of the two Euro-American citizens of Humboldt County. Euro-Americans used any excuse to attempt to exterminate Native Americans from land that they were eager to exploit.

These theories of justification for the genocide of the Native Americans, coupled with the belief that uncontrollable disease caused the massive amounts of death, has led some historians to argue that the extermination of Native Americans in the United States was an inevitable fact of *Manifest Destiny*. In reality, massacres, enslavement, and relocation all contributed to the genocide of Native Americans in the region combined with disease. The hatred that the Euro-Americans felt towards the Natives combined with the theories of racial-eliminationist ideology, legal utilitarian justification, and the theory of pedagogic killing explain how Euro-Americans excused the genocide. As a result of these ideologies, laws were passed that encouraged the formation of militias and thus the killing of Native Americans on such a scale that could be considered genocide.

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<sup>16</sup> Hoopes, *Lure of Humboldt Bay Region*, 55.

## Legislation Legalizing Genocide

Euro-Americans passed laws that allowed vigilante groups to be formed in an attempt to end this violent cycle by systematically murdering the Native Americans of the region. Beginning in 1850, many state and federal laws were passed that gave impunity to persecutors of genocide. One such law was the “Act Concerning the Organization of the Militia,” which called for a permanent militia of all free, white, and able-bodied citizens and gave rise to vigilante groups that would devastate the Native American population in Humboldt and Del Norte County.<sup>17</sup> This began the period of state-sponsored militias, making the massacre of Native Americans in California funded by the state government.<sup>18</sup>

Other laws that were passed made the militia men’s work more lucrative, which caused more people to join the militia and fuel the genocide. On 3 March 1855, Congress approved the 1855 State Militia Act, which provided militiamen who had served for at least fourteen days with 160 acres of land.<sup>19</sup> Congress also passed a law that increased the salary of the militia’s adjutant and quartermaster, allowed for militias to be armed more extensively, exempted militiamen from jury duty, mandated regular drill exercises, and required all Euro-American men not in the militia to pay an annual twenty-five cent tax to fund the militia.<sup>20</sup> This law made militias into professional and lethal units by furnishing them with greater quantity of superior weapons and training them on tactics while also punishing men who did not join the militias with a tax. After

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<sup>17</sup> U. S. Laws, Statutes, Etc. . . An Act More Effectually to Provide for the National Defence by Establishing an Uniform Militia Through the United States, Printed by Francis Childs and John Swaine, Philadelphia, 1792, Pdf, <https://www.loc.gov/item/rbpe.2180120a/>.

<sup>18</sup> One reason that this was a popular position to apply for was that militiamen were paid relatively well. Privates were paid five dollars a day and, for comparison, miners in the Central and Southern Mines of 1851 were paid between three to eight dollars, typically. \$5 in 1850 is equal to \$157 in 2018, when adjusted for inflation. Madley, *An American Genocide*, 190.

<sup>19</sup> As brought by Madley, *An American Genocide*, 236.

<sup>20</sup> Madley, *An American Genocide*, 238.

this, the 1856 Militia Act doubled the militia tax to fifty cents annually for non-serving males and provided a militia manual on training and tactics to all militia officers.<sup>21</sup>

Other legislation was also passed that made Natives unable to defend themselves which allowed Euro-Americans to more easily commit genocide. “An Act for the Government and Protection of Indians” was passed on 22 April 1850. This allowed any Euro-American to apply to a Justice of the Peace for the removal of Native Americans from their land. Any Euro-American could also apply for a Native American child to be an indentured servant until they came of age.<sup>22</sup> This legislation falls under the United Nations definition of genocide because it is an example of forcibly removing a child from one group to force assimilation into Euro-American society. Relocation also contributed to the loss of culture because it interrupted families and stopped the traditional ways that Native Americans taught their children.

Other laws also exploited the Native Americans of the area which made it easy for Euro-Americans to commit genocide. Any Native American found loitering, going to places that sold alcohol, begging, or doing anything that “lead to an immoral or profligate course of life” could be brought before a justice of the peace and ruled a vagrant, who could then be hired out to the highest bidder.<sup>23</sup> It also allowed a justice of the peace exclusive jurisdiction over any matters dealing with Native Americans. This is considered a genocidal act because it is forcibly removing a person from a group and enslaving them. It may not have been done in order to prevent births within the group, but relocation to do slave work would likely have had this effect anyway. Another law was passed later on that prohibited Natives, blacks, and mulattos from testifying in court against a white person, ensuring that Euro-Americans would never be found

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<sup>21</sup> Madley, *An American Genocide*, 244.

<sup>22</sup> “Coming of age” was 18 for males and 15 for females.

<sup>23</sup> Madley, *An American Genocide*, 159.



guilty of any wrongdoings.<sup>24</sup> This guaranteed that Euro-Americans would be able to legally massacre Native Americans because the majority of people in the area had a racial ideology and would not testify in favor of a Native American.

Other Californian legislation that was passed further deprived Natives of the means to protect themselves and allowed genocide to take place. One such law was called the “Act to Prevent the Sale of Firearms and Ammunition to Indians” and was passed on 24 March 1854. This made the sale of firearms and ammunition to Native Americans illegal and punishable by a fine of \$25 to \$500 and/or a jail sentence from one to six months.<sup>25</sup> This law ensured that Native Americans would have much inferior weapons compared to Euro-Americans, ensuring white dominance of the area. The act also punished anyone selling Native Americans weapons, guaranteeing that anyone sympathetic to the plight of the Native Americans could be punished for attempting to make the fight fair.

The cumulative effect of these laws and legislation was that Native Americans were denied the basic human rights that settlers expected from their own government. These laws made it legal for Euro-Americans to enslave, kill, and commit crimes against Native Americans. The Indian Commissioner Edward P. Smith rationalizes not making Native Americans citizens of the US in 1874. He stated, “No amount of appropriations and no governmental machinery can do much toward lifting an ignorant and degraded people, except as it works through the willing hands of men.”<sup>26</sup> This was written after the massacres had mostly ceased in the region, yet it suggests that Euro-Americans believed that Native Americans could not become citizens because

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<sup>24</sup> "An Act for the Government and Protection of Indians," "Act of 1850," accessed March 29, 2018, <http://www.indiancanyon.org/ACTof1850.html>.

<sup>25</sup> A \$500 fine would cost a person about \$14,800 in 2018. Madley, *An American Genocide*, 227.

<sup>26</sup> Francis Paul Prucha, *Documents of United States Indian Policy*, 3rd ed. (Lincoln, Nebraska: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2000), 144.

they were too “ignorant and degraded” to be worthy of citizenship as a result of their perceived inhumanity in the eyes of the settlers. This is important because it was an attempt to justify the fact that Native Americans did not have basic rights under the US Constitution. According to the Euro-Americans of the time, Native Americans had not earned their citizenship and were denied citizenship as a result. Without Native Americans having US citizenship there was no way for their genocide to be prosecuted. Though these are all typical examples of genocide, there are other aspects of the UN’s definition of genocide that also apply to this situation. While they are not the most common examples that come to mind when first thinking of the term, other crimes committed against the Native Americans were just as devastating to them as the laws that legalized their deaths.

### **Attempts at Relocation and Euro-American Hatred**

The prejudice of Euro-Americans towards Native Americans led them to attempt to solve the perceived “Indian Problem” in the region, first through relocation, later through military intervention that was intended to keep the two groups at peace. Both of these attempts were thwarted by the local population’s disdain for the Native American tribes of the area. When Euro-American settlers first arrived in Humboldt County, there was little opposition from the Native Americans. The Native Americans were open to trade since the new settlers had goods that they had never been seen before. Despite the relatively warm welcome from the Native Americans, prejudice led Euro-Americans to commit heinous crimes.<sup>27</sup>

Hostilities began soon after the Euro-American settlers arrived. In mid-May 1850, the schooner *Eclipse* got stuck on the sandbar in Humboldt Bay. A few Euro-Americans stripped the

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<sup>27</sup> Owen C. Coy, *The Humboldt Bay Region, 1850- 1875* (Los Angeles, CA: California State Historical Association, 1929), 137.

ship of anything valuable, and two Native Americans followed, taking some leftover sails and ropes. This triggered the *Eclipse* Captain Harry La Motte to go and search for the stolen property with a group of men. The group of men burned an entire village and murdered two Wiyot boys because of the “theft” of items that they had originally considered useless. In retaliation, a group of Natives killed two Euro-Americans at Eel River.<sup>28</sup> This began the cycle of pedagogic violence against the Native Americans that became characteristic of California, especially Humboldt and Del Norte County, during the nineteenth century; however, before the killing fully commenced, attempts were made to resettle the Indigenous Peoples of Northwestern California away from the newly arrived Euro-Americans with Redick McKee’s expedition of 1851.

McKee was a colonel in the US military and one of the United States Indian agents in California. As an Indian agent, he was charged “to maintain peace, to distribute presents, and to reclaim ex-neophytes.”<sup>29</sup> Upon seeing the conditions for the Native Americans in the lower Eel River Valley, he attempted to create a reservation for them and set aside land on the south side of the Eel River. He then made a treaty with the Native Americans, granting them a portion of the Eel River Valley for themselves.<sup>30</sup> McKee saw this as a great victory, but when the US Senate met to ratify the treaties, they were rejected, and despite McKee’s promise, no reservations were made. Congress refused to pass the treaties due to the racial ideology of the time: racial-eliminationist ideology and legal utilitarian justification. Racism and the perceived notion that Native Americans were wasting the land they already inhabited influenced Congress to reject the treaties that would establish reservations.

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<sup>28</sup> Jerry Rohde, "The Sonoma Gang," North Coast Journal, September 11, 2008, Accessed March 22, 2018. <https://www.northcoastjournal.com/humboldt/the-sonoma-gang/Content?oid=2127928>.

<sup>29</sup> In this instance, ex-neophyte refers to Native Americans who had been “converted” to the Euro-American way of living and had since returned to the Native community. Hoopes, *Lure of Humboldt Bay Region*, 35.

<sup>30</sup> Coy, *The Humboldt Bay Region, 1850- 1875*, 139-141.

Instead, when McKee proposed the reservations to Congress, they responded with the Act of 30 August 1852, which formally rejected the eighteen treaties and appropriated \$100,000 for “the preservation of peace with those Indians who have been dispossessed of their lands in California, until permanent [areas] be made for their future settlement.”<sup>31</sup> The fact that the reservations had not been granted to the Natives was never explained to them, which caused the Natives to believe that they would have protection and their own land. In reality, the Native Americans of the region were in a situation that worsened over time due to aggressive Euro-American settlers. These settlers did not set aside land for reservations since they wanted all of the land to themselves and saw the Native Americans as pests that “wasted” valuable land and resources. By not setting aside land, Euro-American ensured the continued cycle of pedagogic violence because there was no land that Native Americans were safe to live on without the fear of Euro-American encroachment.

There were other efforts to solve the perceived “Indian Problem” of the Humboldt Bay region after McKee’s attempts to relocate the region’s Native Americans. Instead of moving Natives to their own settlement where they would be separated from Euro-Americans, the US government decided to appoint troops to the region to keep peace between the two groups. Fort Humboldt was established on 30 January 1853 by the United States Army. Companies B and F were sent to Humboldt County in order to protect settlers from “savage” Native Americans.<sup>32</sup> The fort was intended to protect Euro-Americans as well as the Native Americans from each other, but had little success in keeping the two at peace. The way the newly arrived settlers in Humboldt County perceived the Native people was the main reason for the establishment of Fort Humboldt.

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<sup>31</sup> Hoopes, *Lure of Humboldt Bay Region*, 51.

<sup>32</sup> Raphael and House, *Two Peoples, One Place*, 134.

After the fort was established, the hatred for the Native Americans was evident. After receiving reports of 130 whites being killed and \$240,000 worth of property destroyed, Governor John Bigler decided to send troops to set up the military fort in Bucksport. Colonel McKee sent a contradicting report to Governor Bigler, stating that the Euro-American settlers were actually the problem in Humboldt, not the Native Americans, and urged prosecution of the offenders.<sup>33</sup> The fact that Governor Bigler did not listen to McKee and pursue prosecution of these criminal Euro-Americans reflects how Native Americans were viewed by the majority of locals in the Humboldt and Del Norte region.

In a report to Governor Bigler, General Ethan A. Hitchcock wrote, “such a post would be most favorable for holding in check not only Natives, but the whites who are so ready to create disturbances on the slightest provocation.”<sup>34</sup> Euro-Americans were not only trying to defend themselves from marauding Native Americans, they were also looking for any excuse to create hostilities between the two races as a reason to exterminate them. Another example of how settlers in the region perceived the local Indigenous Peoples can be seen in the *San Franciscan Bulletin* on 18 June 1860. It stated that “Even the record of Spanish butcheries in Mexico and Peru has [seen] nothing so diabolical. Humboldt County has been the scene of a great portion of these outrages.”<sup>35</sup> Settlers of the region obviously hated the Native Americans, and it was well known even outside of Humboldt and Del Norte County. In another article located in the *Humboldt Times*, a discussion of events in Palestine was put into comparison with the lives of the Native Americans. In this article it stated that “The country is in possession of the Arabs,

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<sup>33</sup> Coy, *The Humboldt Bay Region, 1850- 1875*, 142.

<sup>34</sup> Hoopes, *Lure of Humboldt Bay Region*, 54.

<sup>35</sup> “Indian Butcheries in California,” *San Franciscan Bulletin*, 18 June 1860 in Joel R. Hyer and Clifford E. Trafzer *Exterminate Them: Written Accounts of the Murder, Rape, and Enslavement of Native Americans during the California Gold Rush*, Michigan State University Press, 1999, 129.

who, in the point of civilization, are but a small remove above the wild Indians of this continent.”<sup>36</sup> Even though the Indigenous peoples had been there a great deal longer than the American settlers, they were seen as foreign and used as a means for comparison to people that Euro-Americans saw as backward and uncivilized.

Humboldt County’s residents’ attitudes are further demonstrated in the *Humboldt Times*, when the murder of Arthur Wigmore was discussed. After a Native named Billy allegedly killed Wigmore and threw his body into the slough on the Eel River, locals demanded that the soldiers at Fort Humboldt take action. This led to Captain Henry M. Judah’s guiding a group of ten privates to search for Wigmore’s murderer. When they found the two Natives they believed to be responsible, they were given orders that reflected how they were supposed to deal with issues that pertained to Native Americans. The orders stated that “US troops must prevent acts of hostility if possible and when necessary chastise the Indian tribes guilty of committing them. However, when murder has been committed it was for the civil authorities to confine and punish the authors.”<sup>37</sup> Civil authorities wanted Native Americans exterminated, while the military had been ordered to protect both groups, so if the military had been in charge maybe the military would have been able to keep the prejudice of the settlers from resulting in genocide. While the final outcome of Wigmore’s murder case was the release of the two Native Americans responsible, it was not like this with most cases in the region.

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<sup>36</sup> *Humboldt Times*, September 16, 1854.

<sup>37</sup> Hoopes, *Lure of Humboldt Bay Region*, 110.

## **The Devastation of the Native Americans in Humboldt and Del Norte County: Massacres and Reservations**

One of these other cases was the “Red Cap War.” This so-called war was fought between Euro-American settlers of Klamath and Humboldt and the Native tribes of Karuk, Hupa, and Yurok. This was provoked by a Euro-American man who attempted to rape a Karuk woman and wounded a Karuk man severely on 10 December 1854. In retaliation, the Karuk killed what they thought was the rapist’s bull, but he had actually sold the bull to another person. The Karuk offered compensation for their mistake, but the man refused, and Euro-Americans used this act of retaliation as their excuse for an attack on the local Indigenous population. By the end of this “war,” eight Euro-American men had been killed, while 70 to 80 Native Americans had been massacred, which caused the Native Americans to retreat into the mountains while vigilantes were “hunting them down like deer.”<sup>38</sup> The massacre was eventually stopped by Captain Judah, which proved the army had the power to stop genocide, but they often chose not to. These types of events occurred frequently and normalized such genocidal actions within the region as well.

Another such massacre was the Yontocket Massacre, also known as the Burnt Ranch Massacre, which occurred in 1853. It resulted in the deaths of over 450 members of the Tolowa tribe. The culprits threw babies into fires, along with ceremonial regalia and other items. This is an act of genocide because the Euro-Americans not only killed a significant majority of the Tolowa people, they also destroyed any sign of their culture by burning ceremonial items.<sup>39</sup> While this was a horrible event that destroyed much of the Tolowa people and their culture, it was just one in a long line of genocidal massacres.

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<sup>38</sup> As brought by Madley, *An American Genocide*, 235-236.

<sup>39</sup> Madley, *When the World Turned Upside Down*, 178.

With the introduction of state sponsorship on expeditions to massacre Native Americans in 1854, the Klamath Mounted and the Coast Rangers in Del Norte County were created and added as California State Militia Cavalry units.<sup>40</sup> At a similar time, the Tolowa tribe was gathering at a place called Etchulet to perform a sacred ceremony. The Coast and Klamath Mounted Rangers surrounded the ceremony and proceeded to massacre 30 to 65 of the Tolowa tribe. The Tolowa only had three guns with them, and anyone who ran from the rangers was hunted down.<sup>41</sup> Not only was this massacre completely unjust, it was paid for by state with the “Act for the Suppression of Indians,” which appropriated \$5,000 for campaigns to kill Native Americans.<sup>42</sup> This is yet another genocidal act under the UN definition, and it was paid for by the state of California, which was supposed to be protecting both groups—at least, according to the military’s orders. Furthermore, residents of Smith River Valley supported the Etchulet massacre. The *Herald* attempted to justify the act, stating:

[T]he descent upon the Lagoon Ranch [Etchulet] happened to prove fatal to the very worst class of Indians. It would be unjust to blame the companies for acts of cruelty, reported to have been perpetrated by individuals, without giving them credit for their readiness in lending assistance to the settlers when the safety of the latter was considered to be in imminent danger.<sup>43</sup>

Since Etchulet was near Smith River, Euro-Americans thought that because there was a Native American tribe within the Smith River Valley’s community’s general vicinity, the massacring of 30 to 65 people was justified. Obviously not all Euro-Americans in the area condoned the violence against the Native Americans, but enough supported it that none of the perpetrators were punished.

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<sup>40</sup> "Klamath Mounted Rangers," California Militia and National Guard Unit Histories, February 8, 2016, Accessed March 13, 2019, <http://www.militarymuseum.org/KlamathMountedRangers.html>.

<sup>41</sup> Madley, *When the World Turned Upside Down*, 182.

<sup>42</sup> Madley, *When the World Turned Upside Down*, 184.

<sup>43</sup> As brought by Madley, *When the World Turned Upside Down*, 183.



Another one of the worst massacres in Humboldt County history took place on 26 February 1860. Located on Indian Island, where the Wiyot gathered for their sacred ceremonies, the tribe was sleeping. Early the next morning, a group of men rowed out to Indian Island on Humboldt Bay, where they proceeded to slaughter any person they could find using knives, hatchets, and axes. The only documented firsthand account of the massacre was written by Mrs. Jane Sam, a local Native woman who survived the massacre. She recounted the events of that day:

Men went in all the houses and blocked the doors so Indian could not get out... They took everything in the houses that belonged to the Indians Bead, and other things. All women and children killed because they could not get away. A few men got out safe.<sup>44</sup>

Not only did the perpetrators of the massacre kill defenseless and unsuspecting people, they also stole from them. Other reports stated that the victims were mostly women and children, and the *Humboldt Times* justified the act as necessary for the protection of citizens and even stated,

If in defense of your property and your all, it becomes necessary to break up these hiding places of your mountain enemies, so be it; but for heaven sake, in doing this, do not forget to which race you belong.<sup>45</sup>

In conjunction with this massacre on Indian Island, two other massacres were committed on the Eel River and at South Beach on the same day. All three attacks killed approximately 150 Native Americans.<sup>46</sup>

Due to racial-eliminationist ideology and legal utilitarian justification that was discussed previously, Euro-Americans felt a racial superiority when compared to Native Americans and they thought this justified the massacring of 150 people in a single day. Therefore, to Euro-Americans, it was moral to do whatever was necessary to get rid of Natives as long as they did

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<sup>44</sup> Jerry Rhode, *Wiyot History Papers*, HSU Special Collections, 2014, 1.

<sup>45</sup> "Indians Leaving the Reservation," *Humboldt Times*, March 3, 1860.

<sup>46</sup> "Indian Massacre," *Humboldt Times*, March 3, 1860.

not sink to their level in doing so. Genocidal acts were committed against the Wiyot tribe in this instance because they further decreased the tribes' chances to reproduce their numbers by killing many women and children. These horrible acts further normalized the act of massacring large groups of Natives in Humboldt County and set the stage for the violence that took place against Native Americans throughout the remainder of the 1860s.

Prior to the Civil War, the killing of Native Americans was done mostly by vigilante groups like the one at Indian Island. Once the war began on 12 April 1861, regular soldiers in California were withdrawn. This influenced Secretary of War Simon Cameron to telegraph California Governor Downey and request that he enroll infantry and cavalry units to form the California Volunteers. These men agreed to join the US Army for three years, and by the end of the war, 15,725 had enlisted.<sup>47</sup> This group, combined with vigilantes, devastated the Native American population of Humboldt County more effectively than ever before as a result of being federally supplied, trained, and funded. Colonel Francis J. Lippitt was put in command of these troops. Colonel Lippitt ordered the preservation of Native American lives upon threat of death and disapproved of vigilante groups. He also commanded that they were “not to make war upon the Indians but bring them in and place them permanently on some reservation where they can be protected without bloodshed whenever it is possible.”<sup>48</sup>

While not as extreme as earlier massacres, reservations could still be considered genocidal due to the horrible conditions that the Native Americans were sent to live in. For example, when discussing the Smith River Reservation in Northern California, the *Humboldt Times* said “no attempt has ever been made by officers in charge . . . to look after, or care for any

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<sup>47</sup> Madley, *An American Genocide*, 299.

<sup>48</sup> As brought by Madley, *An American Genocide*, 301.

[Indians].”<sup>49</sup> Native Americans at Smith River were not given blankets, clothes, or tools and suffered from measles, diarrhea, and other epidemics.<sup>50</sup> Jane Sam, the survivor of the Indian Island Massacre, was also sent to the Smith River Reservation. She described how she and other Native Americans were treated there:

Not treated well on Res no shoes hat no clothes for children . . . nothing was given to those that worked no pay. Men folks that go out to hunt grub for a living, gets jailed whipped with black snake, women and children same just for trying to get something to eat. This is why Indians could not get along on Res—not treated right. I run away every chance I could get. Indians get sick on Res.<sup>51</sup>

Life on the reservation was horrible and resulted in the deaths of many Native Americans from disease. Euro-Americans of the time did not see them as human and did not recognize any of their fundamental human rights, so they treated them as such by forbidding them to hunt and not providing them with an adequate amount of food. This constitutes genocide because it is the act of placing the “conditions of life” on a group. This means that they were not provided with adequate food, water, or shelter to survive. Additionally, this account suggested that some Native Americans were being kept as slaves since they were forced to do work without pay. While Lippitt was technically one of the few people in California who did not advocate for the blatant murder of Native Americans, it only lasted a short time. On 7 April 1861, US Army General Wright ordered Lippitt “to make a clean sweep.”<sup>52</sup> Along with this order, the *Humboldt Times* condemned Lippitt’s policies, which persuaded him to take a new approach.<sup>53</sup>

According to Lippitt, these peaceful tactics of capture would no longer suffice and he intended to teach “these ignorant savages the folly of such conduct but by inflicting on them a

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<sup>49</sup> *Humboldt Times*, July 17, 1858, p. 2 and October 2, 1858, p. 2.

<sup>50</sup> Madley, *When the World Turned Upside Down*, 186-187.

<sup>51</sup> Rhode, *Wiyot History Papers*, 2.

<sup>52</sup> As brought by Madley, *An American Genocide*, 301.

<sup>53</sup> Hoopes, *Lure of Humboldt Bay Region*, 125.

terrible punishment.”<sup>54</sup> By July 1862, the army had taken over 800 prisoners and placed them in a corral located inside Fort Humboldt. The conditions were horrible and resulted in a high mortality rate, which forced Lippitt to move the Native Americans to a peninsula across the bay from Bucksport.<sup>55</sup> The *Humboldt Times* reported that it would be sufficient to hold any number needed: “These Indians are better managed, and with them a better system of control has been inaugurated than any we have ever witnessed on a reservation.”<sup>56</sup> The Native Americans were then moved to the Smith River reservation. This upset people in Humboldt County because it was easy to escape from and resume the fight against Euro-Americans, and about half of them did.<sup>57</sup> After this, vigilante groups formed and began to “help” the army by attacking and killing as many Native Americans as they could find. Lippitt found their tactics barbaric, but the community supported them. The public view was that the military presence in Humboldt was unnecessary because of the feeling that the militias were sufficient protection. This influenced the removal of troops from Fort Humboldt, but it was not the only reason.<sup>58</sup>

According to Colonel Lippitt, the newly formed militia group called the Mountaineer Battalion was undisciplined and should not be mixed with his Humboldt Volunteers, and the Humboldt Volunteers withdrew from Humboldt County in order to avoid association.<sup>59</sup> Once Lippitt departed, his tactics of capture and “protect” left with him. On 13 July 1862, the Humboldt Military District was given to the commander of the Mountaineer Battalion, S.W.

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<sup>54</sup> *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, John Hanna Jr., 956, “*United States Congressional Serial Set*.” *Google Books*, US Government Printing Office, 1892, Accessed March 29, 2018.

<sup>55</sup> Hoopes, *Lure of Humboldt Bay Region*, 126.

<sup>56</sup> *Humboldt Times*, September 6, 1862.

<sup>57</sup> *Humboldt Times*, October 4, 1862.

<sup>58</sup> Hoopes, *Lure of Humboldt Bay Region*, 128.

<sup>59</sup> *War of the Rebellion*, Francis J. Lippitt, 188, “*United States Congressional Serial Set*.” *Google Books*. Accessed March 29, 2018.

Whipple, who was also a pro-extermination newspaper owner and editor in Humboldt County.<sup>60</sup> For the remainder of the Civil War, Whipple and his Mountaineers entered the wilderness and killed Natives indiscriminately until he met the Hupa Tribe and was bested in battle, which led to his replacement.<sup>61</sup>

Whipple was replaced by H.M. Black on 17 February 1864, and the Natives were devastated by his tactics, which were reportedly “zealous and indefatigable.”<sup>62</sup> His success led to the near end of hostilities by the summer of 1864. When Black was sent east to teach at West Point, Whipple was appointed once again to command the Mountaineers. Whipple continued to use the same energetic tactics that Black was known for, and the “wars” between the Euro-Americans and the Native Americans would not come to a total stop until the Hupa Treaty was signed in August of 1864.<sup>63</sup> While some small skirmishes still occurred after the signing, it is still considered the end of the Indian Wars in Humboldt and Del Norte County, and the end of the American Civil War soon followed. All of these events directly contributed to the genocide of Natives in the region because massacring and “inflicting conditions of life” are included under the UN definition. What is equally important is that these acts normalized the destruction of Native Americans culture which carried on after the blatant massacring had come to an end.

### **Lasting Effects of Genocide in Humboldt and Del Norte County**

Unfortunately, the end of the slaughter did not mean the end of unequal treatment for the Indigenous peoples of Northwestern California. Although the massacres had stopped by the

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<sup>60</sup> Hoopes, *Lure of Humboldt Bay Region*, 130.

<sup>61</sup> Hoopes, *Lure of Humboldt Bay Region*, 130.

<sup>62</sup> *War of the Rebellion*, G. Wright, 247, “*United States Congressional Serial Set.*” *Google Books*. Accessed March 29, 2018.

<sup>63</sup> Hoopes, *Lure of Humboldt Bay Region*, 132

twentieth century, there was still continued cultural oppression. One example of this were the attempts to force Native Americans to assimilate into Euro-American culture even before they were granted citizenship in 1924.<sup>64</sup> Forced assimilation can be considered genocidal because it involves forcing the children of a group to be raised separate from their family unit. This resulted in a loss of culture, but also an inability for Native Americans to replenish their numbers because of the separation from their tribes. One of the most invasive forms of forced assimilation, and the most common in the US, was boarding schools. By forcefully removing children from their homes and forcing them to assimilate in Euro-American society it stripped Native Americans of their cultural identity and resulted in cultural genocide.

A document from 1889 on the “Supplemental Report on Indian Education” stated why Euro-Americans felt the need to force Native Americans into these boarding schools. It said, “[T]he Indians are far below the whites of this country in their general intelligence and mode of living . . . Education is the medium through which the rising generation of Indians are to be brought into fraternal and harmonious relationship with their white fellow-citizens.”<sup>65</sup> The troubling aspect of this statement is that it fails to acknowledge the Native American perspective of whether or not they wanted to live in the Euro-American style. Most of the Indigenous Peoples of the area wanted to continue living in their traditional way, and the introduction of the boarding school system interrupted families and stopped the passing of culture and language from one generation to the next, which was an act of violence against the Natives as Euro-Americans destroyed their cultures.

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<sup>64</sup> "Act of June 2, 1924," National Archives and Records Administration, Accessed March 03, 2019, <https://www.archives.gov/historical-docs/todays-doc/?dod-date=602>.

<sup>65</sup> Prucha, *Documents of United States Indian Policy*, 176-177.

William A. Jones in the “Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs” in 1901 explains a Euro-American perspective on why Native Americans had a problem with Euro-Americans forcing their children into boarding schools. It stated:

Here [the Native American] remains until his education is finished, when he is returned to his home-- which by contrast [to the boarding school] must seem squalid indeed-- to the parents to whom his education must make it difficult to honor, and left to make his way against the ignorance and bigotry of his tribe. Is it any wonder that he fails? Is it a surprise if he lapses into barbarism? Not having earned his education, it is not appreciated.<sup>66</sup>

In this instance, Indian Commissioner Jones blamed Native Americans’ failure to assimilate on the fact that they did not appreciate the education that had been provided to them for “free.”

These boarding schools were free in the traditional sense, but stripped the Native Americans of their traditional cultures by removing them from the only place in which they could learn about it: their family homes. Each tribe had unique cultures, languages, and customs, meaning that a Native American could only learn about their traditions through tribal relations. By interrupting these families and forcing them to abandon their culture and customs they created an education system that completely devalued and ignored Native tribal traditions and practices while placing Euro-American traditions at the center of civilized living. Euro-Americans assumed that Native American children did not receive any real education at home, which dismissed Indigenous People’s ancestral ways of teaching and learning that is an important part to all Native American societies.<sup>67</sup> Native Americans resisted assimilation because they were trying to preserve their own traditional ways of living in the face of overwhelming pressure to abandon them.

Examples of these boarding schools were found in multiple different locations throughout Northwestern California and the US. There was the Chemawa Indian Boarding school, the Hupa

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<sup>66</sup> Prucha, *Documents of United States Indian Policy*, 198-199.

<sup>67</sup> Alex Alvarez, *Native America and the Question of Genocide, Studies in Genocide: Religion, History, and Human Rights* (Rowman & Littlefield 2014), 144.

Boarding school, and the Sherman Institution within this particular region.<sup>68</sup> Oral histories by members of the Yurok, Karuk, Hupa, Wiyot, and Tolowa discussed the Indian boarding schools they attended. These oral histories were all recorded in the early 2000s and the people interviewed were all born between 1920-1940. While their age may have caused them to forget some details of the events they were recounting, this is still a valuable source because it is the only way to gain an indigenous perspective on the topic of boarding schools, especially in Northwestern California. Frank Richards of the Tolowa tribe reported that schools were either classified as “Indian” or “Caucasian” until the 1940s.<sup>69</sup> This segregation suggests that Euro-Americans felt the same racial superiority that was obvious and normalized when they were attempting to exterminate the Native Americans through massacres and so-called wars. The only difference is that Euro-Americans were now destroying Native American culture and tradition rather than killing them directly.

The way Indigenous children were taught was also different than Euro-American children. Boarding schools taught Native children how to read and write, but they mostly focused on teaching trades like carpentry, housekeeping, and farming. This implies that Euro-Americans did not believe Native Americans were as intellectual as Euro-Americans because they refused to teach Native American children the same way as Euro-American children. Almost every interview that touched on the topic of boarding schools reported that Indigenous children were never taught about the history of Native Americans in California. Native American children sent to boarding schools were forbidden and punished for speaking in their own language, which had the longest lasting effects of the near extinction of their traditional languages. Multiple accounts

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<sup>68</sup> Chag Lowry, *Indigenous Living Biographies collection*, HSU Special Collections, 2014.

<sup>69</sup> Frank Richards and Marian Lopez, *Indigenous Living Biographies collection*, Interview by Chag Lowry, May 4, 2001, “HSU Special Collections,” 2014.



recounted being punished for speaking their Native language. One account even said that they were given extra work as a punishment for speaking their Native tongue.<sup>70</sup>

It is easy to see how this could be traumatizing for a child. They were stripped of everything they knew and forced to live in a way that was completely different than how they were raised. Evelina Hoffman reported that she was denied contact with her family while at the Hoopa Boarding school during the 1930s. As a result, she said the matron of the school felt like her mother.<sup>71</sup> This is a prime example of an interrupted family and a genocidal act as a result. Typically, the younger years of a child's life are important for establishing a sense of self. When the child was taken away from their family and forced to live as a Euro-American, it made it exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to learn and continue their traditional customs.

Many of the oral histories gave accounts of running away from their school in order to avoid assimilation. Most of the people interviewed said they were not forced to go to boarding school by Euro-Americans and their experiences were not always negative.<sup>72</sup> However, boarding schools was one of the few options available if a Native American wanted to gain an education, and attending boarding school stripped children of their culture and traditions by moving them away from their family. After the fact, boarding schools have come to be seen as unsuccessful and even cruel, with the Canadian government apologizing to the Indigenous Peoples of Canada in 2008 for forcing them to attend such schools because it fits within the UN's definition of genocide.<sup>73</sup> While the United States has not made a similar declaration, these schools still had negative effects on the Native American population in the US.

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<sup>70</sup> Lena Nicholson and Elsie Bacon, *Indigenous Living Biographies collection*, Interview by Chag Lowry, March 23, 2000, "HSU Special Collections," 2014.

<sup>71</sup> Evelina Hoffman and Jessie Van Pelt, *Indigenous Living Biographies collection*, Interview by Chag Lowry, December 16, 1999, "HSU Special Collections," 2014.

<sup>72</sup> Frank Richards and Marian Lopez, *Indigenous Living Biographies collection*.

<sup>73</sup> Alvarez, *Native America and the Question of Genocide*, 154.

In addition, this new generation was also unable to be integrated back into their traditional cultures because they no longer fit into their home communities due to their loss of language, traditions, and customs.<sup>74</sup> Forced assimilation created a generation of Native Americans that were unable to integrate into Euro-American society because of the prejudice and negative stereotypes that existed. Alex Alvarez, a genocide specialist at Northern Arizona University, comments on what these acts did to Native American people by saying that “Destroy[ing] the bonds that unite a people as a people . . . effectively destroy[s] that population.”<sup>75</sup> Unfortunately, even though boarding schools had been ended, damage to Native American heritage and culture continued to be inflicted on these communities after forced assimilation.

Another example of continued oppression is traditional Native American lands being desecrated in Northwestern California. This can be seen with the way that miners destroyed rivers with their mining techniques during the nineteenth century. The destruction of ecological resources such as salmon, an important traditional food source, caused a decline in population of the Native American communities in the 1850s. In addition, grazing animals introduced by settlers took prairie land that elk and deer used to eat acorns and graze. All of these foods were staples for Native American tribes of Northwestern California and the introduction of settlers and their domesticated animals destroyed food sources that had sustained the Indigenous Peoples for centuries.<sup>76</sup> Euro-Americans also stopped the Indigenous tribes from creating small forest fires in order to prevent much more destructive fires. This resulted in the death of many trees because

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<sup>74</sup> Alvarez, *Native America and the Question of Genocide*, 155.

<sup>75</sup> As brought by Alvarez, *Native America and the Question of Genocide*, 156.

<sup>76</sup> Jack Norton, "If the Truth Be Told: Revising California History as a Moral Objective," *American Behavioral Scientist* 58, no. 1: 83-96, doi:10.1177/0002764213495033, 87.

they could not sustain the larger fires that occurred because of accumulated brush that Natives had not been allowed to burn.<sup>77</sup>

However, this was not the last time Euro-Americans desecrated Native American land in this region. The Klamath River is considered sacred by some of the Indigenous People of Northwestern California, especially the Yurok, and fishing was an important way to sustain themselves and a staple of their diet.<sup>78</sup> However, this did not stop Euro-Americans from restricting Native American access to this highly valuable resource. When Euro-Americans wanted to exploit the salmon rushing up the Klamath River, they opened canneries and allowed the Indigenous people to work for them by netting and canning salmon. When an energy company built a dam and restricted the amount of salmon that could go up river, the canneries blamed the salmon shortage on the Native Americans. This resulted in the government banning Yuroks from fishing in 1933, even on reservations. Commercial and tourist fishing continued, but it was made illegal for Native Americans to fish from their sacred river. Raymond Mattz, a local Native Yurok, was arrested for gillnet fishing and told to pay a fine of one dollar so that they could release him. He refused in order to fight for Native American fishing rights. The case ended up going all the way to the United States Supreme Court, and after seven years the Yurok were granted access to their sacred river, the Klamath.<sup>79</sup> The Yurok were denied access to their sacred river for over 70 years; however, the Wiyot had lands stolen from them for much longer.

Another obvious example of Euro-Americans stealing the Indigenous peoples land in Humboldt County is the fact that Indian Island, one traditional home of the Wiyot people, has yet

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<sup>77</sup> Eleanor Smith, *Indigenous Living Biographies collection*, Interview by Chag Lowry, February 23, 2001, HSU Special Collections, 2014.

<sup>78</sup> Evelina Hoffman and Jessie Van Pelt, *Indigenous Living Biographies collection*.

<sup>79</sup> Jack Kohler, "River of Renewal," Cultureunplugged.com, 2009, Accessed February 18, 2019, <http://www.cultureunplugged.com/documentary/watch-online/festival/play/7457/River-of-Renewal>.

to be returned to the Wiyot tribe. Because of this tragedy, the Wiyot people have not done their traditional dances since the massacre.<sup>80</sup> This will hopefully be changing due to the unanimous decision by the Eureka City Council to transfer the island back to the Wiyot tribe.<sup>81</sup> This shows yet another example of the Native Americans in general in Northwestern California being stripped of their culture through violence, but fortunately it is finally being returned in part to at least one tribe, though it is hardly adequate compensation for the suffering the Wiyot have had to endure and the aspects of their culture that remain permanently lost to them. While these two cases ended in favor of the Indigenous people of the area, other conflicts did not always end well.

One recent example of Euro-Americans exploiting traditionally Native American land is when the government decided to build a highway that was over a sacred Native American site. This road became to be known as the G-O Road because it stretched from Gasquet to Orleans. In 1988 *Lyng v. Northwest Indian Cemetery Protective Association (NICPA)* the Forest Service argued that the "completion of the road was very significant to the development of timber and recreational resources in the area." Marilyn Miles counterargument for NICPA was that, "these practices go to the very core of the religion for a substantially large number of people, and if they cannot be conducted, if they have that same type of belief, but you physically would be terminating this particular religion for these people by allowing the government to act out in a very public way."<sup>82</sup> The Supreme Court sided with the Forest Service and upheld the decision to build the road from Gasquet to Orleans, which desecrated sacred Native American land. This

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<sup>80</sup> Irene Carlson, *Indigenous Living Biographies collection*, Interview by Chag Lowry, July 27, 2000, HSU Special Collections, 2014.

<sup>81</sup> Philip Santos, "Eureka City Council Advances Transfer of Indian Island Land," *Times*, December 5, 2018, Accessed March 21, 2019, <https://www.times-standard.com/2018/12/04/eureka-city-council-advances-transfer-of-indian-island-land/>.

<sup>82</sup> Cutcha Risling Baldy, "The G-O ROAD Thirty Years Later," *News from Native California*, (Fall 2018): 19-21,24.

shows some of the injustice that continues to plague the Indigenous peoples of Northwestern California deep into the twenty-first century.

Besides injustices like taking land from Indigenous peoples, Euro-Americans have also stolen pieces of Native American culture. Euro-Americans have been stealing “wagon fulls” of religious regalia after massacring Native Americans since the nineteenth century.<sup>83</sup> However, Euro-Americans were using archaeology as an excuse to rob Native American gravesites up until the 1980s. One man of the Yurok tribe, named Walt Lara Sr., reported witnessing Euro-Americans robbing graves at the village of Chapek an astounding 15 times during his lifetime. Lara also specifically called for the returns of otter skins that were used for ceremonial purposes.<sup>84</sup> Other stolen items include ceremonial regalia, baskets, and even human remains. Members of the Yurok tribe are still attempting to take back some of their stolen items from museums.<sup>85</sup> Imagine that events such as these had happened in a Christian burial ground during the twentieth century. There would surely be a huge public outrage, yet there is little support for Native American tribes to recover their stolen items. This is an example of oppression that has carried over into the twenty first century.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the Indigenous peoples of Humboldt and Del Norte County were subjected to genocide as defined by the United Nations when Euro-Americans arrived in California in the mid-nineteenth century. State and Federal legislation made the massacres not only possible, but

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<sup>83</sup> Walt McCovey, Jr., *Indigenous Living Biographies collection*, Interview by Chag Lowry, March 16, 2000, HSU Special Collections, 2014.

<sup>84</sup> Walt Lara, Sr., *Indigenous Living Biographies collection*, Interview by Chag Lowry, March 22, 2000, HSU Special Collections, 2014.

<sup>85</sup> Lena Nicholson and Elsie Bacon, *Indigenous Living Biographies collection*.

they ensured that there would be no negative legal consequences for the perpetrators of the genocide. The California State and US Federal government contributed directly to the genocide of Native Americans in Humboldt and Del Norte Counties. This genocide has had lasting effects on the Indigenous communities through historical trauma and oppression that continued even after the massacring had come to an end through the theft of their ceremonial land and items. Euro-Americans did not just kill, rape, enslave, and starve Natives—they completely destroyed their culture and their chances of ever regaining their traditional customs by killing most of the Native Americans within the region. In most cases, Euro-Americans refuse to acknowledge that genocide took place and refuse to give back traditional lands and items as a result. It is important to note that while Native Americans are usually viewed as part of the past, they are still an important community that exist today and are still facing the consequences of this continued oppression.<sup>86</sup> Historians will certainly continue to debate over whether or not genocide was committed against Native Americans across the US in general, but this research will help to prove that genocide was in fact committed against the Indigenous Peoples of Northwestern California and hopefully encourages understanding and compassion for those who still suffer from this genocide.

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<sup>86</sup> Kerri J. Malloy, "Nowhere Is the Word Genocide Used: Americans Terminal Narrative," My Favorite Lecture, Plaza Grill, Arcata, California, April 3, 2019.

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