Conservation for Whom? The History of Conservation & Social Justice

Cal-IPC Symposium, October 27, 2021

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Picture this: “the DDT lawsuit”

The plaintiffs were nervous. By 1969, Rachel Carson’s book, Silent Spring, had certainly made the impact of using the pesticide DDT to spray crops more visible in the public eye, but it provided them little to no support or encouragement because their arguments against the use of DDT hadn't been tested in a court of law. They were challenging a power structure deriving economic benefits from DDT. But ultimately, their lawsuit became the basis of the successful petition to force the EPA to ban DDT, a victory of recognized importance in the environmental movement.
DDT Lawsuit = United Farmworkers & Dolores Huerta
The big questions

• **Why** was conservation emerging as a field in the mid to late 1800’s what were some of the driving ideologies and values of those who were at the helm?

• **Who** shaped the contours of the conservation movement? Who was at the helm?

• **For whom and what** were conservation practices carried out? Whose ideas, connections to place, and well-being were centered, and whose were ignored, sacrificed or sought to be extinguished in that process?

• **How was conservation carried out?** What were the practices used by conservationists to set aside lands for conservation purposes?
Driving ideologies
Colonialism

- **Colonialism**: a belief that a group of people from one place have the rights over the people, land, water, and/or resources of another place.

- **Settler Colonialism**: A type of colonialism where the colonizers stay on the land they colonize and never intend to leave. It seeks to erase or assimilate.
Divine Right of the “Exceptional”

Doctrine of Discovery → Puritan Exceptionalism → Manifest Destiny
White Anglo-Saxon Supremacy

A strangely dirty and irregular life these dark-eyed, dark haired, half-happy savages lead in this clean wilderness ... they seem to have no right place in the landscape.
- John Muir

The intelligence and ability of a colored person are in pretty direct proportion to the amount of white blood he has.
- Madison Grant

It might be wise for us American citizens to consider calling a halt to the mass influx of even more millions of hungry, ignorant, unskilled, and culturally-morally-genetically impoverished people. Let us close our national borders to any further mass immigration.
- Edward Abbey
Transcendentalism

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life... I wanted to live so sturdily and so Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life... to drive life into a corner to know it by experience and be able to give an account of it in my next excursion.

(Henry David Thoreau)
Birth of modern U.S. conservation
What else was happening?
Moments in Black History

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1859: Eminent domain used to displace Seneca Village in Central Park
The Freedmen’s Bureau, depicted in this 1868 drawing, was created to give legal title for Field Order 15 — better known as “40 acres and a mule.”

- Alfred Waud/Library of Congress
1865: Jim Crow Laws, land access, & conservation policy
1900s-1940s: Racial zoning, racially restrictive covenants, red-lining, and “slum” clearance

www.mappingprejudice.umn.edu
1916: Start of Great Migration & NPS; Publishing *The Great Race*
1921: Tulsa Massacre
1921: Sundown laws continue to be enforced
Moments of Black resistance and reclamation

1893: Oldest Black beach resort opened in Highland Beach, Maryland

1964: Civil Rights Act
Moments in Indigenous History
1769-1893: Rancho Period: Spanish missionization of CA
1820–1887: Removal, Reservation, & Treaty Period
1850s: Indigenous removal in California

1850: Act for the Government & Protection of Indians

1851: Mariposa Battalion & Indigenous removal in what is now Yosemite NP

1852: U.S. Senate refusal to ratify treaties with 18 CA tribes
1862: Homestead Act & Morrill Land Grant Act
1887-1930’s: Allotment & Assimilation Era
1906: Antiquities Act
**Late 1945-68: Indian Termination period**

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**Indian Land for Sale**

Get a home of your own with a perfect title and possession within thirty days. Easy payments.

**Fine Lands in the West**

**Irrigated, Irrigable, Grazing, Agricultural, Dry Farming**

In 1910 the Department of the Interior sold under the Indian Allotment Act Indian land as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Acres</th>
<th>Average Price Per Acre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>5,211.21</td>
<td>$7.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>17,013.00</td>
<td>24.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>1,684.50</td>
<td>33.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>13,034.00</td>
<td>9.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>5,441.00</td>
<td>36.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>23,610.70</td>
<td>9.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>34,664.00</td>
<td>13.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>1,026.00</td>
<td>15.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>120,445.00</td>
<td>16.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>6,750.00</td>
<td>41.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>1,065.00</td>
<td>12.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>865.00</td>
<td>20.64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the year 1911, it is estimated that 350,000 acres will be offered for sale.

Walter L. Fisher, Secretary of the Interior.

Robert G. Valentine, Commissioner of Indian Affairs.
1964: Wilderness Act (same year as the Civil Rights Act)

"A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain."

-- The Wilderness Act, 1964
Moments of Native Resistance & Reclamation

- 1924: Indian Citizenship Act (though it wasn’t considered a win by many)
- 1968: American Indian Movement
- 1969: Occupation of Alcatraz
Moments in Asian American History
1860s: Chinese laborers build railroads for access to public lands
1882-1924: Chinese Exclusion & Immigration Acts
1887, 71: Chinatown burnings & massacre (San Jose, LA)

IN MEMORY OF

THE BURNING OF SAN JOSE CHINATOWN

MAY 4, 1887

ON THIS SITE ON MAY 4, 1887
A MYSTERIOUS FIRE, DELIBERATELY SET,
DESTROYED SAN JOSE’S CHINATOWN.
THIS WAS THE LARGEST CHINATOWN
SOUTH OF SAN FRANCISCO, A COMMUNITY
OF BACHELORS AND OF FAMILIES.
THE PREVIOUS CHINESE BOUNDARY WAS
1899-1922: Punjabis arrive in NorCal; 1908: Hostilities against Punjabis
1910: Angel Island detention center opens; 1940s: Japanese internment
1913: CA Alien Land Law precludes Asian land ownership
Moments of Asian Resistance and Reclamation

1898: *US v. Wong Kim Ark* upholds birthright citizenship

1965: Filipinx Farmworkers play major role in CA grape union victory
Moments in Latine
History
1848: Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo
1898: Occupation of Puerto Rico & Cuba
1951: World War II & Bracero Program

Figure 14. A description of the demand for Mexican laborers (Source: Northwest Farm News, September 9, 1943).
1902: Reclamation Act (opens lands for homesteading)
1954: Operation Wetback
Moments of Latine Resistance & Reclamation

- 1917: Puerto Ricans granted citizenship
- 1962: Establishment of United Farm Workers
How has this history shaped your work?

- Conservation philosophy → humans are separate from and bad for nature; humans as conquering nature (“loving parks to death,” tragedy of the commons)
- Restoration → erasure of Indigenous ways of tending and devaluing Indigenous connections to plants
- Science → erasure of Indigenous ways of knowing (TEK); valuing White/Western knowledge over Black, Latine, Asian knowledge; and purity-based science rooted in eugenics
- Mapping → erasure of Indigenous place names
- Partnerships → disregarding tribal sovereignty and treaties; lack of engagement with Tribes and BIPOC
- Naming → naming of plants with colonial and racist terms or eponymous names memorializing White supremacists
- Park & recreation planning → lack of accessible, safe, or welcoming outdoor spaces for BIPOC and immigrant communities; green gentrification
- Conservation advocacy → Conservation work siloed from environmental/food/climate justice work
- Conservation easements → use restrictions on land
- Plant/land valuation → plants and land is seen as a resource to be owned and valuated as such (we own land!)
Our radical imagination is a tool for decolonization, for reclaiming our right to shape our lived reality.

Adrienne Maree Brown
Pembroke-Hopkins Park Community
Pembroke-Hopkins Park Community

- The Kankakee Sands is an area that was viewed as agriculturally unimportant due to its sandy soil and sold to previously enslaved Black people in the area.
- It provided the predominantly Black community with some farming opportunities, despite the poor soil quality.
- Conservation groups became interested when they learned it was a black oak savanna and held other ecologically important qualities. The Nature Conservancy came in with a top-down approach and bought 2300 acres, flexing more financial power than the Hopkins Park Community could.
- This lowered tax revenue and left community members out of decision-making.
- In 1995, the residents formed the Community Development Corporation (CDC) to better organize and take actions related to their needs.
- The Field Museum in Chicago then conducted a community survey to better understand what the community wanted. This led to TNC placing a moratorium on further land acquisition until they built better relationships with the CDC as well as donating land back to the community.
Rematriation, Cultural easements & Indigenous land trusts

Sogorea Te' Land Trust
An Urban Indigenous Women-led Land Trust in California's East Bay

Sustaining a timeless relationship in the Feather River region
Native Homelands
Mt. Umunhum & Cultural Easement

“The easement grants the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, made up of descendants of indigenous people taken to Missions San Juan Bautista and Santa Cruz, permanent rights to help steward the mountaintop for natural resource conservation, cultural relearning and public education in partnership with Midpen. Mount Umunhum is a sacred site to the Amah Mutsun people and is central to their creation story.

In exchange for the benefits to the Tribe under the easement, the Tribe will provide significant volunteer educational, cultural and natural resource advising services to the District and the public, as well as the more general public benefits of deepening the region’s understanding of Native American human history on Mount Umunhum and surrounding areas.”

-- MidPeninsula Open Space Trust
Northeast Farmers of Color (NEFOC)

TO ADVANCE LAND SOVEREIGNTY

In the northeast region through permanent and secure land tenure for Indigenous, Black, Latinx, and Asian farmers and land stewards who will use the land in a sacred manner that honors our ancestors dreams - for sustainable farming, human habitat, ceremony, native ecosystem restoration, and cultural preservation.

COMMUNITY VISION

CONSERVATION

COMMONS
Northeast Farmers of Color (NEFOC)

- developing stages of consultation and beginning partnership outreach that centers the voices of Indigenous communities and traditional leadership within NEFOC LT
- exploring ways of honoring Indigenous sovereignty using tools such as cultural respect agreements, conservation easements, rights of first refusal, voluntary taxation and land rematriation.
- Aiming to acquire 2,000+ acres of land in the next five years through land return, donation, rematriation, and purchase; and connect farmers to land through facilitating up to 50 leases during this period.
- developing and expanding existing collaborations with allied and sibling organizations to ensure farmers and land stewards of color have secure access to resources, including training, education, markets, business development, and financial planning.
- working at local, regional, state, and national levels to create policies in support of Climate Transition, BIPOC land access, and Indigenous and regenerative land management.
Indigenous-led land tending & internships
Ancestral Lands Program

“Our vision is to lead our Nations back to ecological and cultural well-being by engaging underrepresented Indigenous youth and young adults in conservation service programs that reconnect participants to the land, their cultural heritage, and their traditions. We work to remove barriers to participation, education, and employment by partnering with local community organizations, agencies, and institutes of higher learning to create paid service and career training opportunities, personal and professional development, and pathways to postsecondary education and employment.”
Team Traditional Ecological Knowledge is a program for indigenous youth in the Southern Willamette Valley in Oregon to explore and restore connect to wetland environments. Students learn about natural seasonal cycle of living things and tribal relationships. They learn about food, clothing, shelter, law, tools and technology, and more.

- Students chose a topic to study through changing seasons and are connected to Native educators to support their learning.
- LTWC facilitates this opportunity, though does none of the education themselves. LTWC welcomes the opportunity to learn, though it is not expected for the students or educators to share the learning with LTWC.
Yurok land & carbon offsets
Yurok land and carbon offsets

This is an innovative intersection of indigenous land justice and climate resiliency efforts. The Yurok’s carbon-offset project helped the tribe buy back, to date, nearly sixty thousand acres—up from five thousand. By managing its land for carbon storage instead of timber harvest, the tribe is generating credits to sell to businesses that must reduce greenhouse gas emissions as part of the state’s effort to slow climate change. Essentially, by keeping the trees healthy, they’re supporting keeping carbon in the ground.
Closing reflection questions

• What conservation work do you support and what are the values behind it?
• What assumptions are you making about the communities and tribes with whom you engage (or don’t engage)?
• Who benefits from your work? Who is harmed? And who is left out of the process?
• Who drives the decisions at your organization?
History resources

- **1619 Project**, curated by Nicole Hannah-Jones.
- Beth Rose Middleton Manning, *Trust in the Land: New Directions in Tribal Conservation*
- Carolyn Finney, *Black Faces, White Spaces*
- Dorceta Taylor, *Rise of the American Conservation Movement: Power, Privilege & Environmental Protection*
- https://www.centerforfoodsafety.org/blog/5097/activism-as-art-giving-dolores-huerta-her-rightful-place-in-american-history
- Justin Farrell, *Billionaire Wilderness*
- Karl Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, & the Hidden History of American Conservation*
- Latino Americans: Timeline (PBS)
- Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks*
- Paul Ortiz, *An African American and Latinx History of the United States*
- Robin Wall Kimmerer: *Braiding Sweetgrass*
- Robert Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement*
- Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, *An Indigenous People's History of the United States*
- Scene On Radio podcast, Season 5
- Sue Fawn Chung, *Chinese in the Woods*
- Showing Up for Racial Justice, *Hallmarks of White Supremacy Culture* (citing Tema Okun & Kenneth Jones)
- The Wilderness Society & the Avarna Group, *Public Lands in the United States, Examining our past to build a more equitable future*
- This Land podcast