
Conservation for Whom? The History of Conservation & Social Justice

Cal-IPC Symposium, October 27, 2021

Aparna Rajagopal (she/her)

Picture this: “the DDT lawsuit”

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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

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Colonialism

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- **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”

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Doctrine of Discovery \longrightarrow Puritan Exceptionalism \longrightarrow Manifest Destiny



White Anglo-Saxon Supremacy

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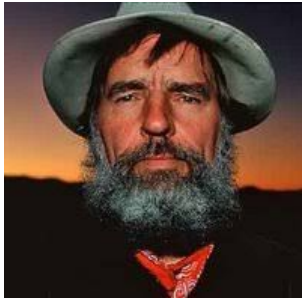
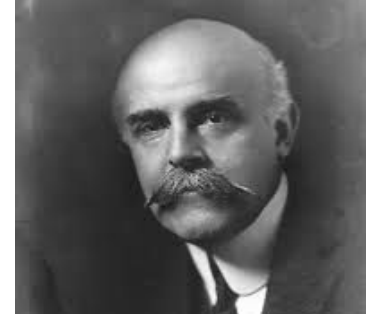


A strangely dirty and irregular life these dark-eyed, dark haired, half-happy savages lead in this clean wilderness ... they seem to have no right place in the landscape.

- 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

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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



1812



SIERRA
CLUB

1876



1905



1933

The Nature
Conservancy



1951

1964



Save The Redwoods
L E A G U E®



1918



1946

Wilderness Act



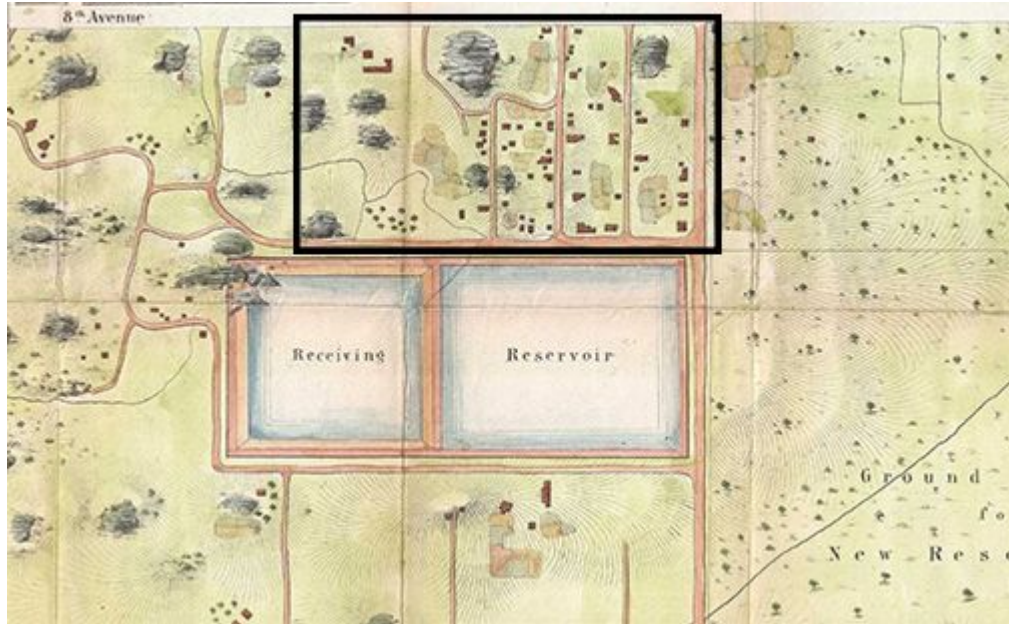
What else was happening?

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Moments in Black History

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1859: Eminent domain used to displace Seneca Village in Central Park



1865: General Sherman's Special Field Order No. 15

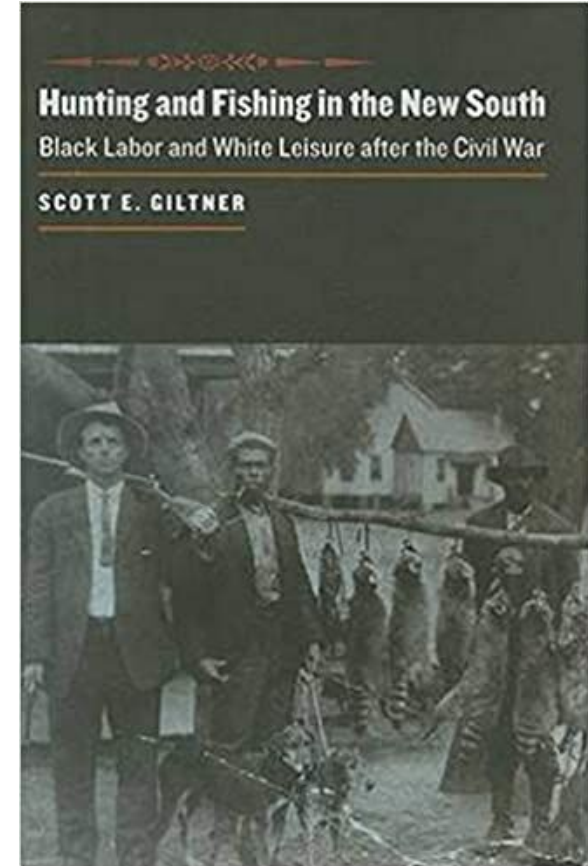


The Freedmen's Bureau, depicted in this 1868 drawing, was created to give legal title for Field Order 15 – better known as "40 acres and a mule."

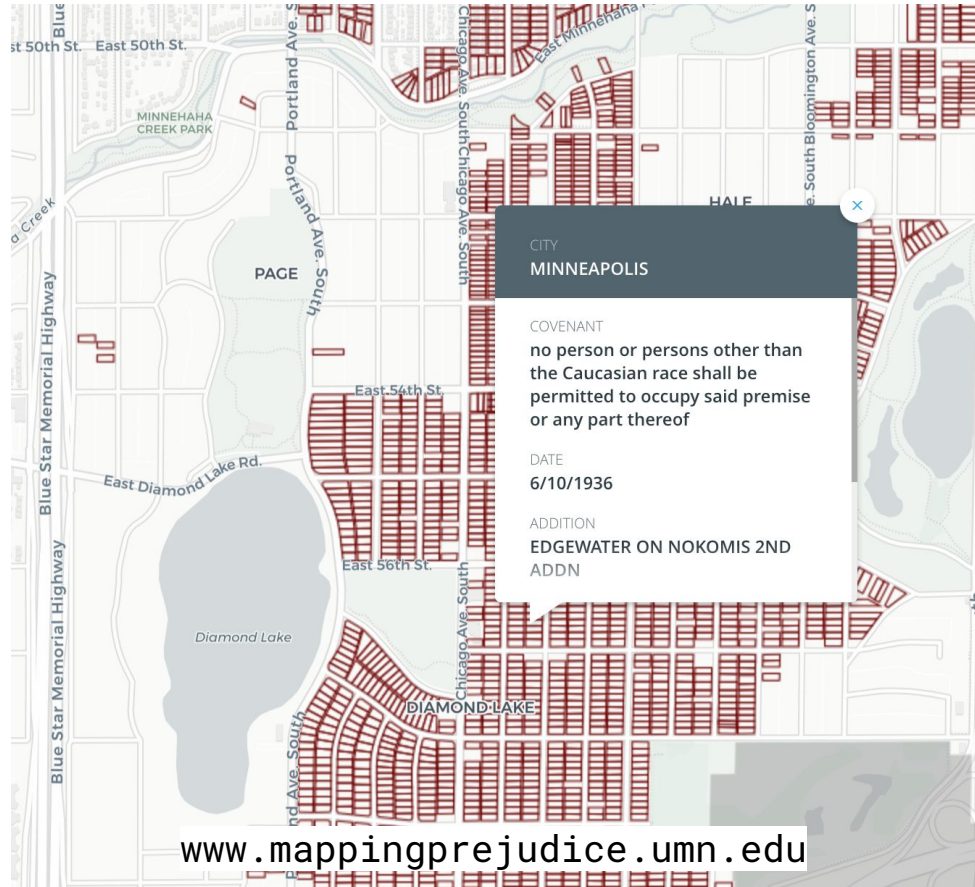
- [Alfred Waud/Library of Congress](#)

1865: Jim Crow Laws, land access, & conservation policy

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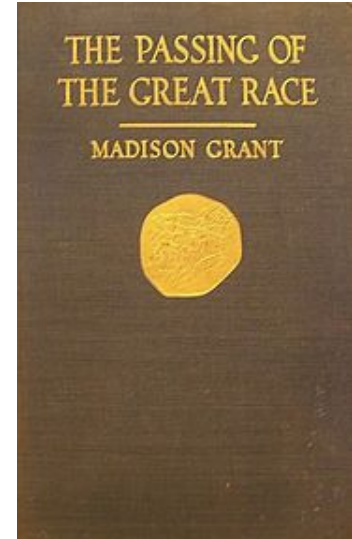
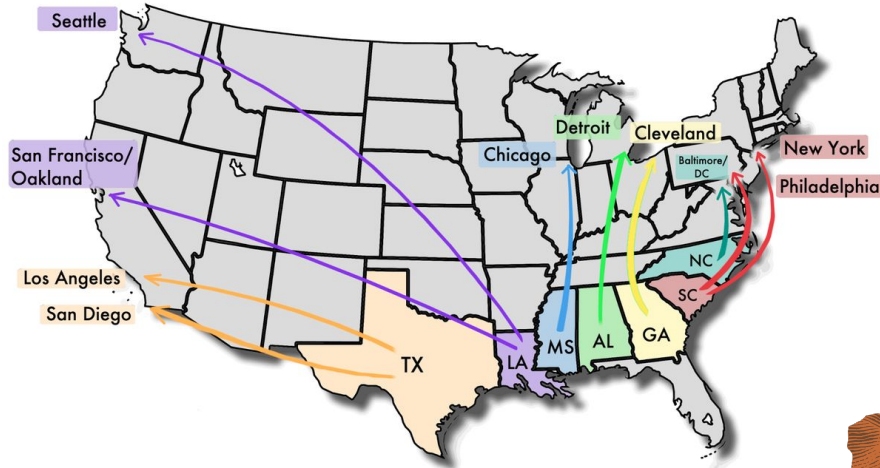
1900s-1940s: Racial zoning, racially restrictive covenants, red-lining, and “slum” clearance



1916: Start of Great Migration & NPS; Publishing *The Great Race*

The Geography of the Great Migration

The Migration of African Americans from the American South (1910-1970)



1921: Tulsa Massacre



1921: Sundown laws continue to be enforced



Moments of Black resistance and reclamation

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



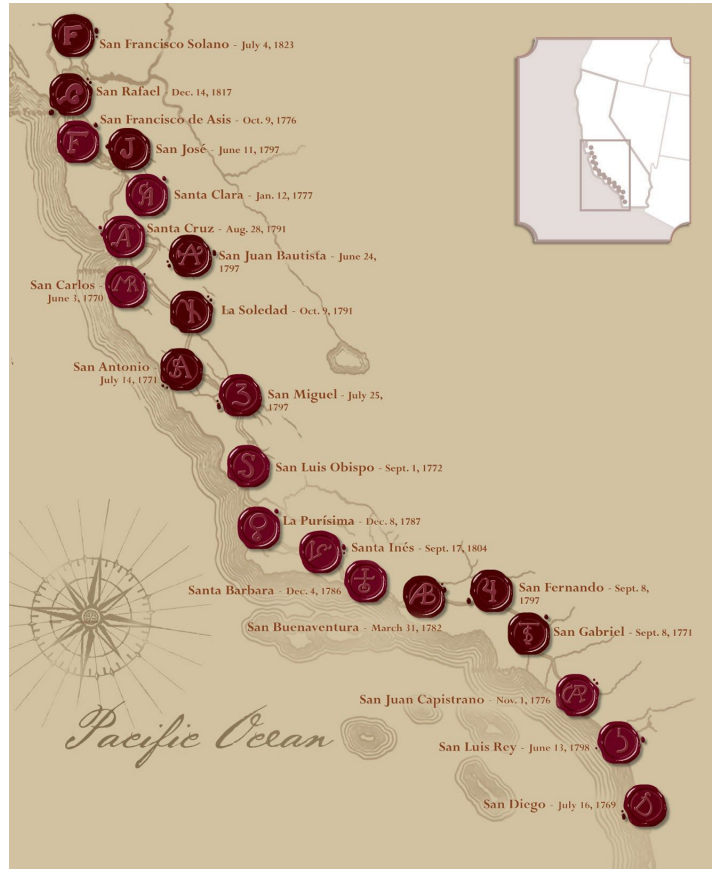
1964: Civil Rights Act



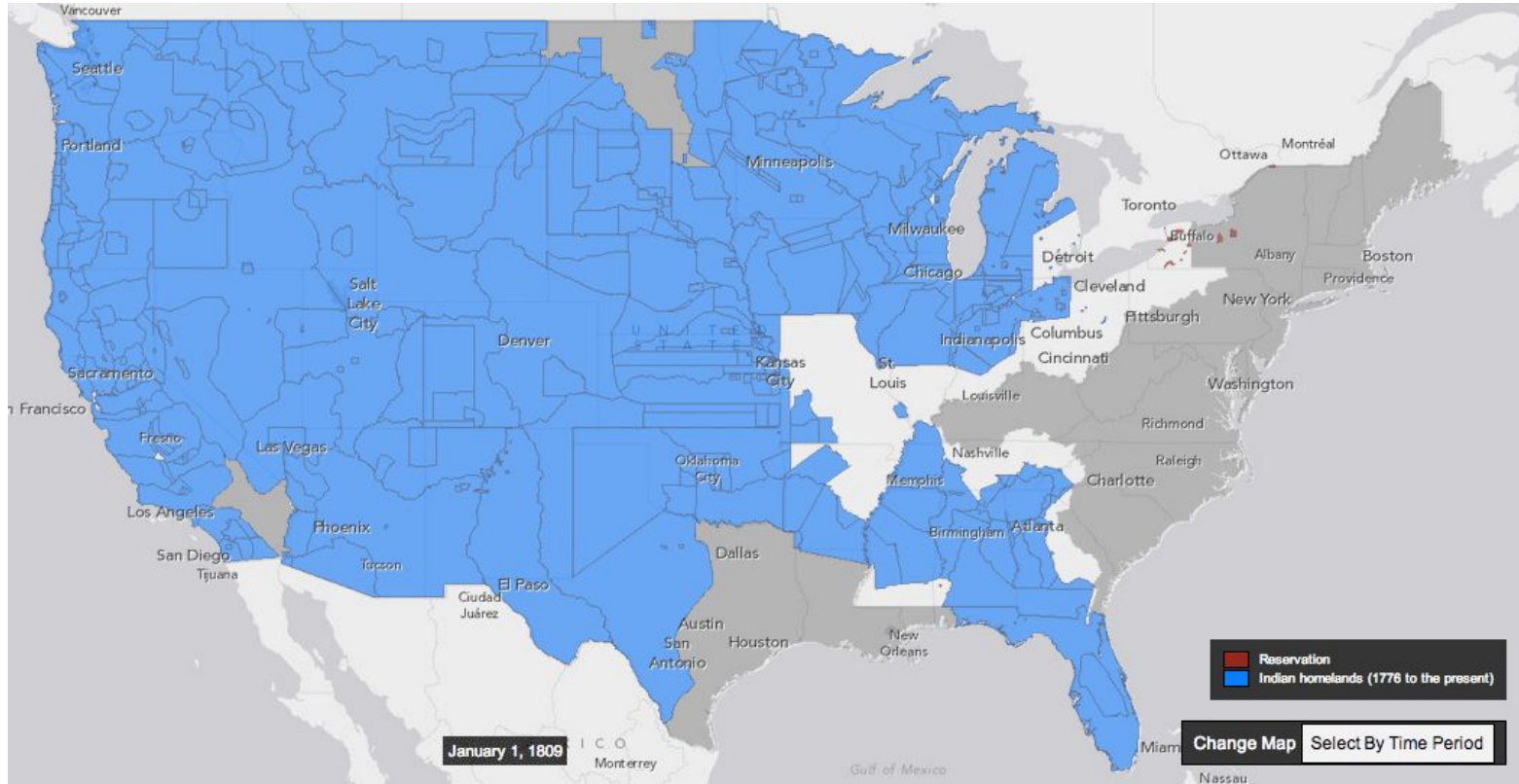
Moments in Indigenous History

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1769-1893: Rancho Period: Spanish missionization of CA



1820-1887: Removal, Reservation, & Treaty Period



1850s: Indigenous removal in California

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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



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INDIAN LAND FOR SALE

**GET A HOME
OF
YOUR OWN
EASY PAYMENTS**



**PERFECT TITLE
POSSESSION
WITHIN
THIRTY DAYS**

FINE LANDS IN THE WEST

IRRIGATED
IRRIGABLE
GRAZING
AGRICULTURAL
DRY FARMING

IN 1910 THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR SOLD UNDER SEALED BIDS ALLOTTED INDIAN LAND AS FOLLOWS:

Location.	Acres.	Average Price per Acre.	Location.	Acres.	Average Price per Acre.
Colorado	5,211.21	\$7.27	Oklahoma	34,664.00	\$19.14
Idaho	17,013.00	24.85	Oregon	1,020.00	15.43
Kansas	1,684.50	33.45	South Dakota	120,445.00	16.53
Montana	11,034.00	9.86	Washington	4,879.00	41.37
Nebraska	5,641.00	36.65	Wisconsin	1,069.00	17.00
North Dakota	22,610.70	9.93	Wyoming	865.00	20.64

FOR THE YEAR 1911 IT IS ESTIMATED THAT 350,000 ACRES WILL BE OFFERED FOR SALE

For information as to the character of the land write for booklet, "INDIAN LANDS FOR SALE," to the Superintendent U. S. Indian School at any one of the following places:

CALIFORNIA: Bishop, COLORADO: Gunnison IDAHO: Lewiston KANSAS: Marion Mulvane	MONTANA: Helena MONTANA: Crow Agency SOUTH DAKOTA: Mick Sioux Falls Wichita	NORTH DAKOTA: Fort Totten Fertile OREGON: Astoria Clatskanie Cannon Beach Longview Medford Rainier Seaside Tillamook	OKLAHOMA: Lawton and Fort Payne Okemah Weatherford UTAH: Albuquerque Farmington Flagstaff Hatch Shiprock	WEST VIRGINIA: Charmers Agency Coal Creek Newmarket Seven Springs Fair Bluff Brooksville Summit	WASHINGTON: Fort Stevens Fort Spokane Fort Union Friday WISCONSIN: Oconto
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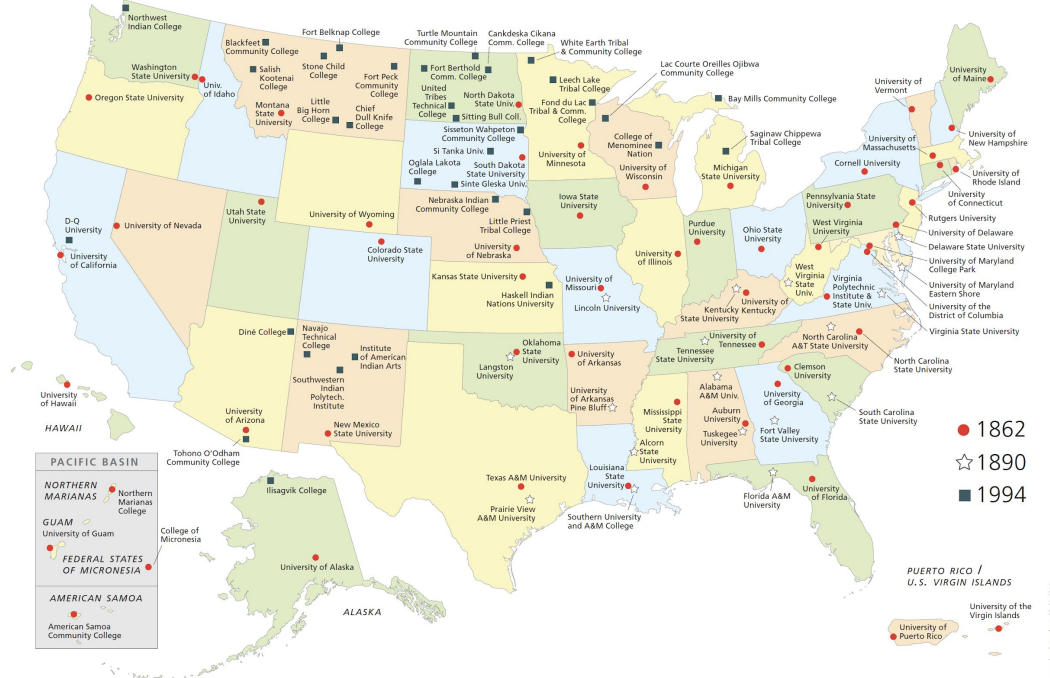
WALTER L. FISHER,
Secretary of the Interior.

ROBERT G. VALENTINE,
Commissioner of Indian Affairs.



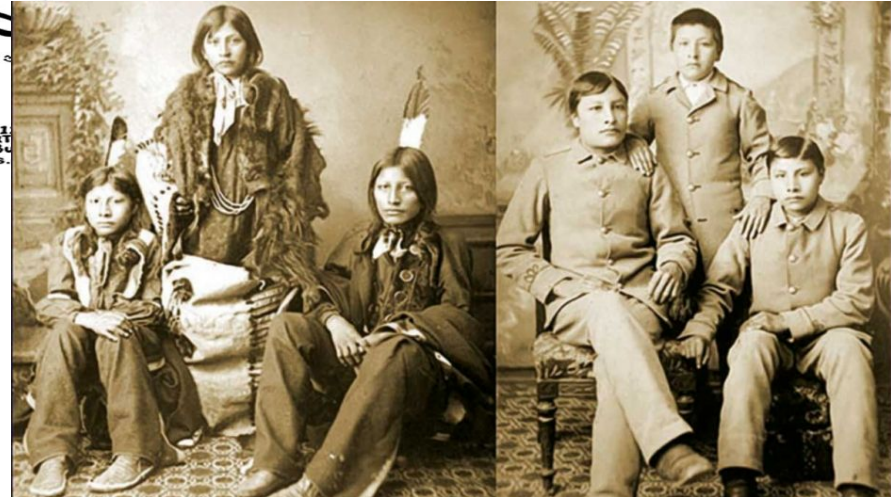
United States Department of Agriculture
Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service

Land-Grant Colleges and Universities

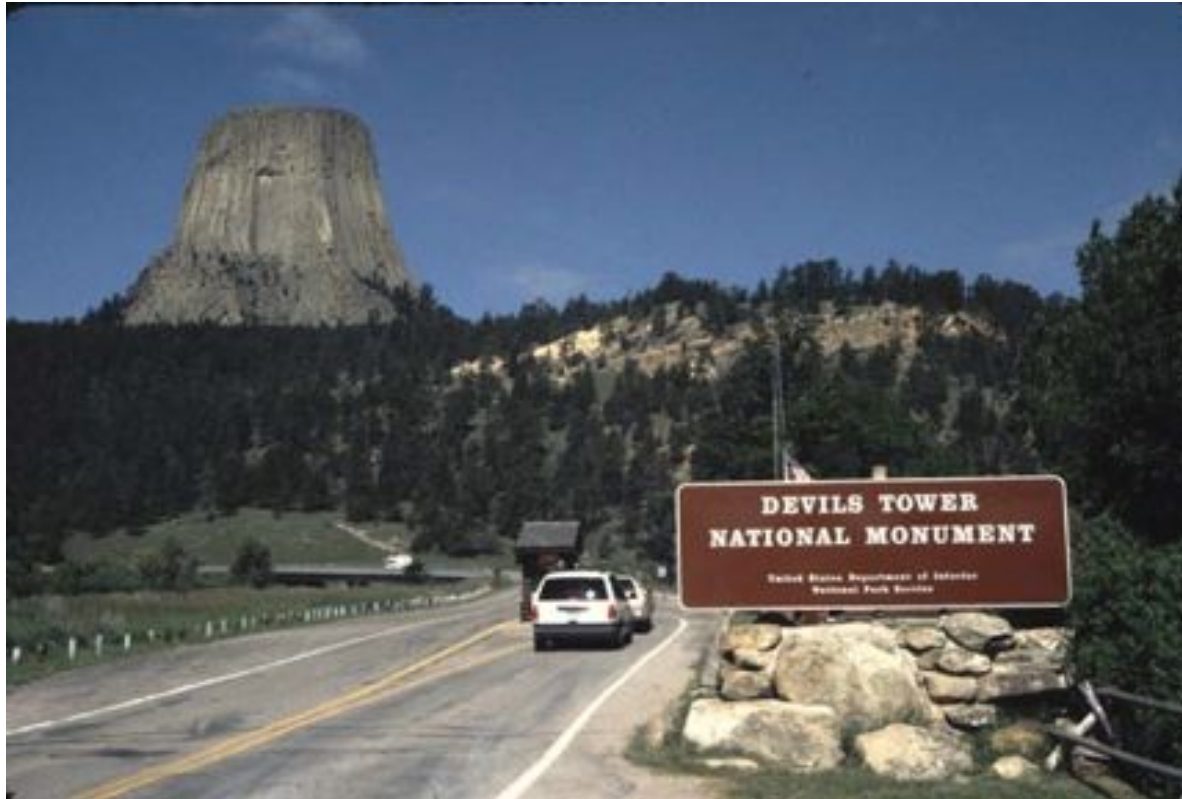


1887-1930's: Allotment & Assimilation Era

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1906: Antiquities Act



Late 1945-68: Indian Termination period



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EASY PAYMENTS



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COLORADO: Iguala.	MONTANA: Crow Agency.	OKLAHOMA: Anadarko.	OKLAHOMA: Wynadette.	Crow Creek.	Fort Spokane.
IDaho: Layval.	NEBRASKA: May.	CALIFORNIA: Carmichael.	OREGON: Klamath Agency.	Greenwood.	Tulsa.
KANSAS: Barton.	NEBRASKA: Winnipeg.	CALIFORNIA: Bartlett.	OREGON: Pendleton.	Lower Brule.	Tulsa.
KANSAS: Barton.	NEBRASKA: Winnipeg.	CALIFORNIA: Bartlett.	OREGON: Pendleton.	Pine Ridge.	WISCONSIN: Ossau.
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WALTER L. FISHER,
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Moments of Native Resistance & Reclamation

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- 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

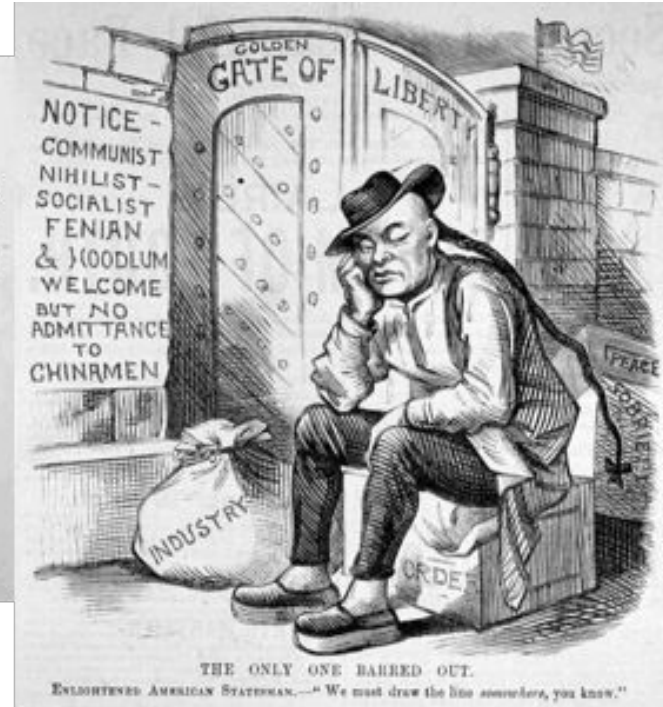
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1860s: Chinese laborers build railroads for access to public lands

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1882-1924: Chinese Exclusion & Immigration Acts



1887, 71: Chinatown burnings & massacre (San Jose, LA)

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1899-1922: Punjabis arrive in NorCal; 1908: Hostilities against Punjabis

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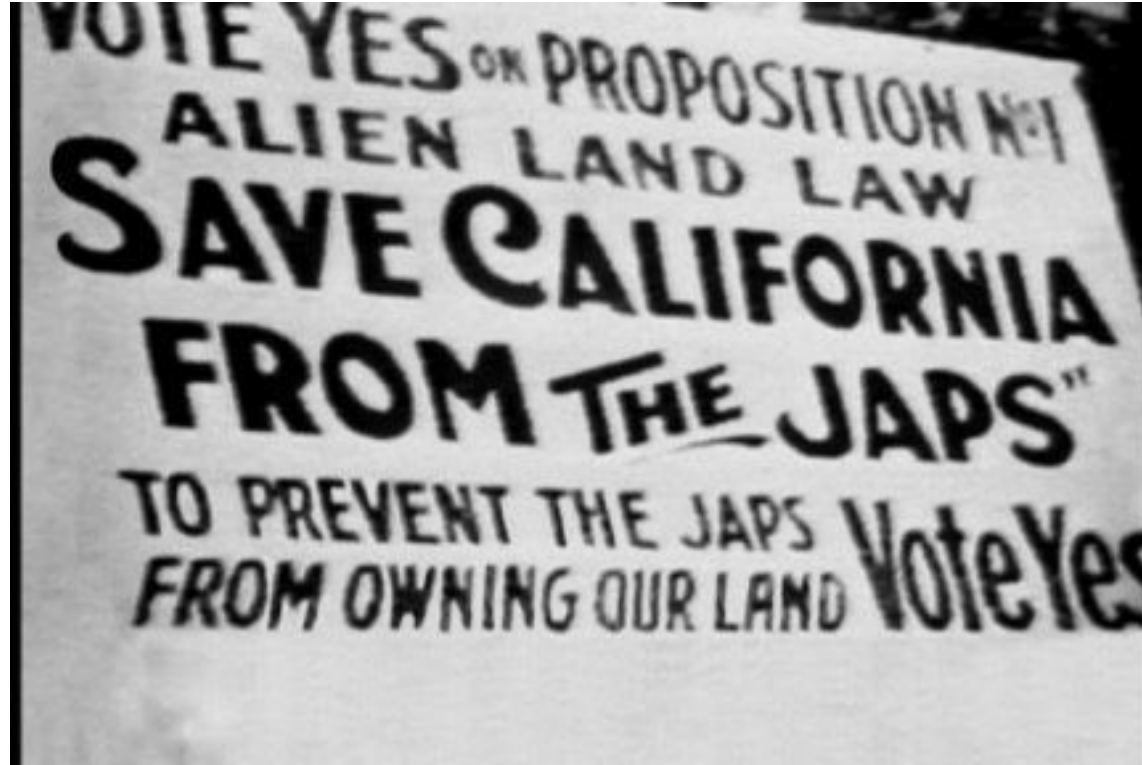
1910: Angel Island detention center opens; **1940s:** Japanese internment

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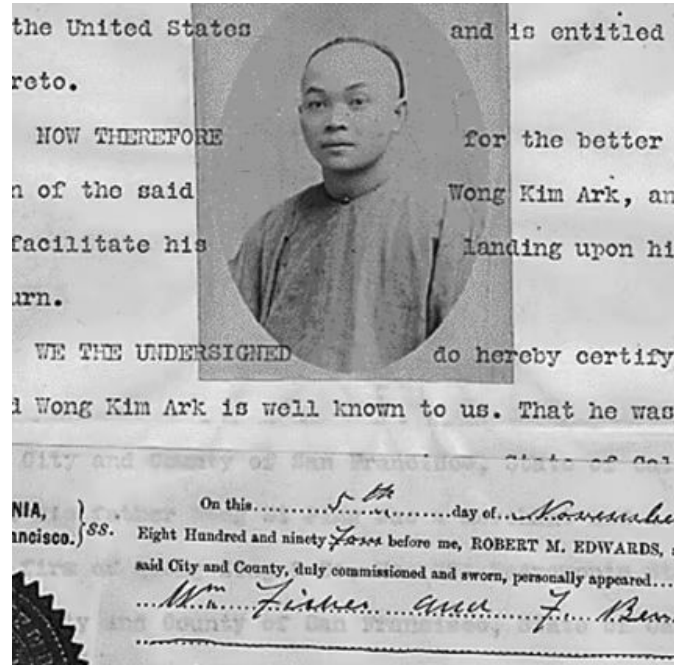
1913: CA Alien Land Law precludes Asian land ownership

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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

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1848: Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo



1898: Occupation of Puerto Rico & Cuba



1951: World War II & Bracero Program

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Mexican Workers Wanted in October

Farmers and orchardists in Washington state have placed orders for approximately 6000 imported Mexican workers for the month of October, according to reports sent to

Figure 14. A description of the demand for Mexican laborers (Source: Northwest Farm News, September 9, 1943).

1902: Reclamation Act (opens lands for homesteading)

IRRIGATED HOMESTEAD LANDS

Now Open to Entry under the Truckee-Carson Project in Churchill County

75 Choice 40- and 80-acre Farms lying west of Fallon open to entry
September 22, 1914

TERMS AND CONDITIONS THE LAND IS FREE

Water Rights furnished by the U. S. Reclamation Service at \$60 per acre, payable in 16 installments in 20 years, Without Interest. First installment of \$3.80 per acre, payable at time of filing. Next payment due 3 years later.

Residence on the land 3 months a year for three years necessary to secure title.

Cultivation of 1-4 of irrigable area in 3 years, and 1-2 in 5 years is required.

Water Supply under the Great Lahontan Reservoir is permanent and assured.

Lands in Private Ownership, with or without water rights, may be purchased now at attractive prices. At yet there has been no inflation of land values.

CHURCHILL COUNTY

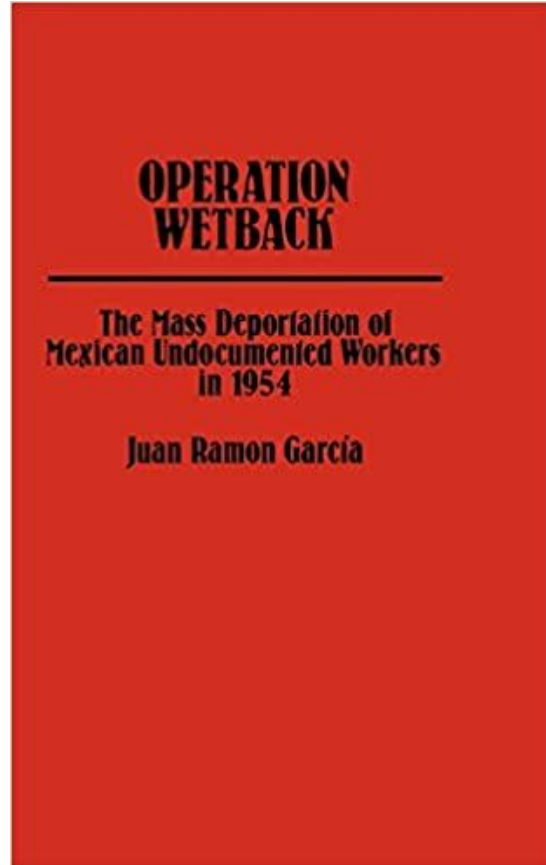
Is one of the best sections in the entire West for dairying, stock raising, truck gardening, sugar beet culture and general farming. Fallon has a half million dollar beet sugar factory which will operate and ensure extremely favorable prices condition. Fallon has the most complete machinery plant in Nevada, and high grade cars can be bought on the easy payment plan.

The Opportunity of a lifetime for the homeseeker exists **RIGHT NOW** in Churchill County. For further information Communicate with

Project Manager U. S. Reclamation Service

or Sec. Churchill County Chamber of

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?

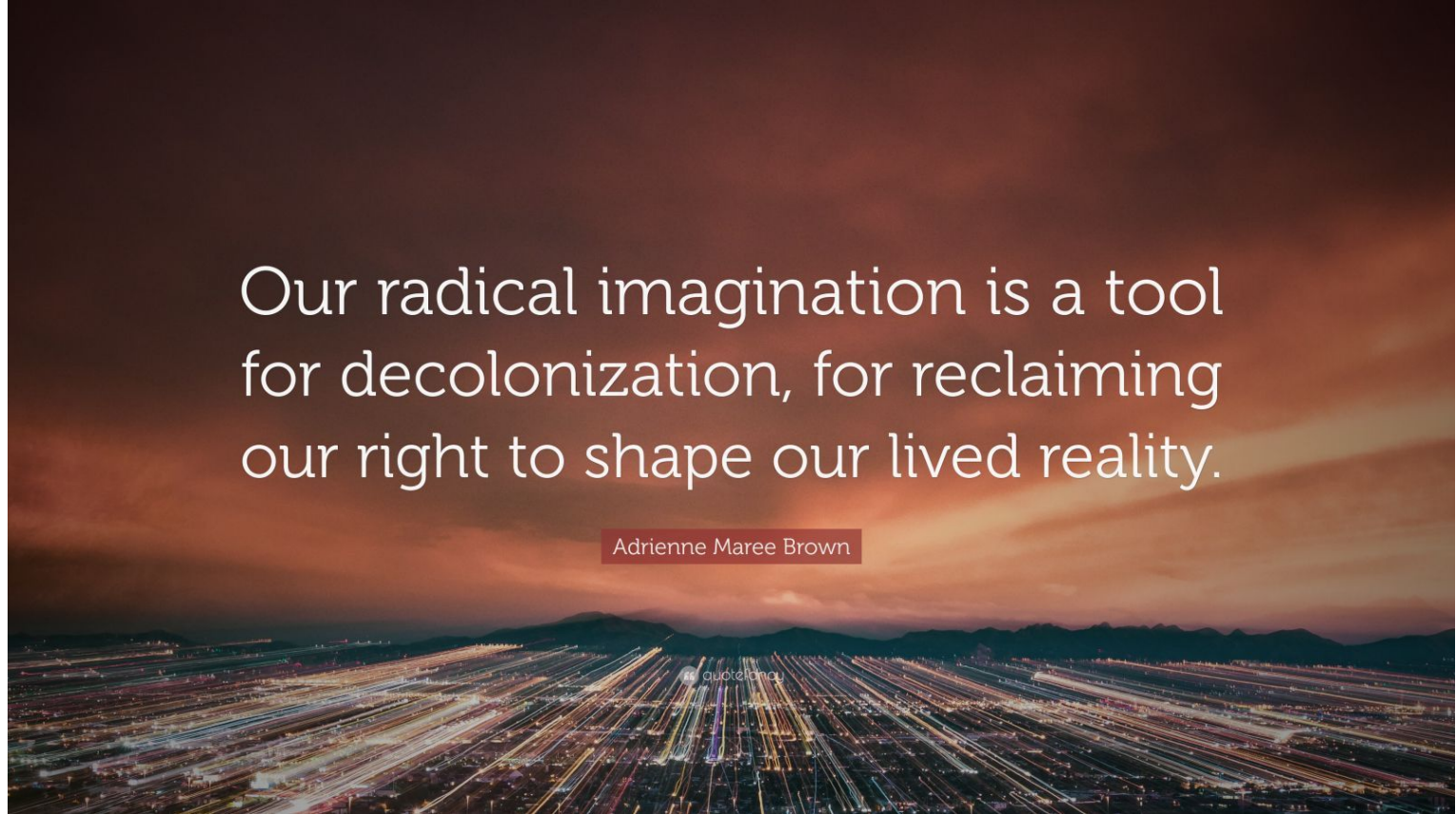
- ❖ Conservation philosophy → humans are separate from and bad for nature; humans as conquering nature (“loving parks to death,” tragedy of the commons)
- ❖ Restoration → erasure of Indigenous ways of tending and devaluing Indigenous connections to plants
- ❖ Science → erasure of Indigenous ways of knowing (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 valued as such (we own land!)

Case studies in reimagining conservation

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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



[OUR WORK](#)

[ABOUT US](#)

[GET OUTSIDE](#)

[GET INVOLVED](#)

[BLOG](#)



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

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CONSERVATION

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. W
- 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

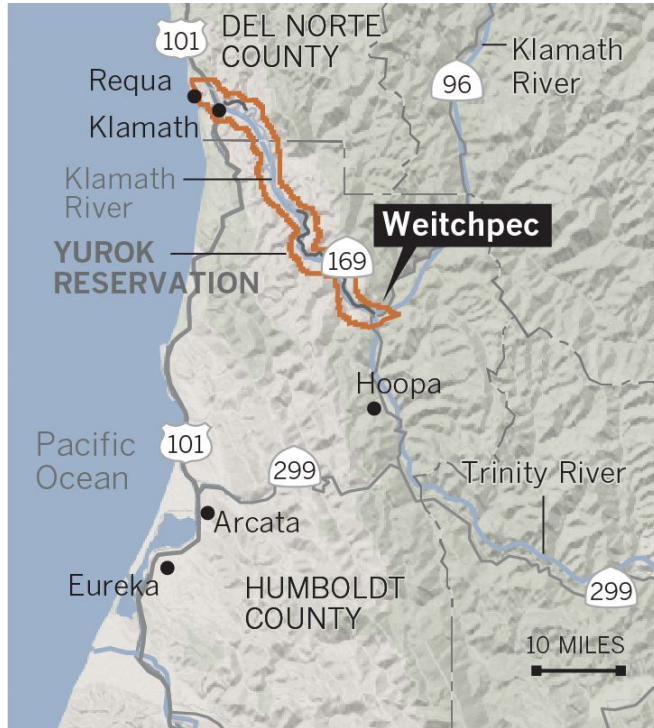


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Long Tom Watershed Council TTEK

- Team Traditional Ecological Knowledge is a program for indigenous youth in the Southern Willamette Valley in Oregon to explore and restore connects 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

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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

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- 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](#)
- http://www.slate.com/blogs/the_vault/2014/06/17/interactive_map_loss_of_indian_land.html
- <https://corpsnetwork.org/blogs/not-in-anyone-s-backyard-people-of-color-and-the-environmental-movement-part-i/>
- <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](#)
- Larisa Miller, [The Secret Treaties with California's Indians](#) (2013)
- [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 Forgotten History of Tribes: The Truth about Federally Unrecognized Tribes, <https://youtu.be/pnereaB7tDA>
- The Wilderness Society & the Avarna Group, [Public Lands in the United States. Examining our past to build a more equitable future](#)
- [This Land](#) podcast