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**Publication Date**

2020

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

(Re)writing California Native American Representations:  
Amah Mutsun Sovereignty and Educational Experiences of Tribal Elders

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements of the degree Master of Arts  
in American Indian Studies

by

Carolyn Terese Rodriguez

2020

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## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

(Re)writing California Native American Representations:  
Amah Mutsun Sovereignty and Educational Experiences of Tribal Elders

by

Carolyn Terese Rodriguez

Master of Arts in American Indian Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2020

Professor Mishuana R. Goeman, Co-Chair

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Exploring the misrepresentations in the mass media of California Native Americans identifies the root of dehumanizing stereotypes: American Literature. With a historical context of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, this thesis explores the stereotypical misrepresentations that supported European colonizers' genocidal actions against California Natives. As for misrepresentations impacting today's educational institutions, examining Amah Mutsun elders' academic experiences explains how biased ideals and stereotypes impact California Natives' livelihoods. This thesis uplifts California Native voices through indigenous literature, oral history, and storytelling to highlight accurate representations that honor their ancestors and their modernity to combat misrepresentations. Meanwhile, oral history and storytelling empowers the Amah

Mutsun community to nation-build and decolonize through cultural revitalization for self-determination to uphold sovereignty on their terms as a non-federally recognized tribe. Oral history also combines indigenous knowledge systems and education research, where oral history serves to prioritize the voices of participants.

The thesis of Carolyn Terese Rodriguez is approved.

Teresa L. McCarty

Ananda Maria Marin, Committee Co-Chair

Mishuana R. Goeman, Committee Co-Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2020

## **Acknowledgements**

My motivation to apply to graduate school and address California Natives' educational experiences blossomed with the loss of my close aunt, Virginia Luna. Before beginning the American Indian Studies Master's program, I unexpectedly lost my father, Alejandro Rodriguez. My first year of graduate school was not full of exciting challenges but consisted of grief and uneasiness. My spirituality assures my belief that everything happens for a reason. I must acknowledge and thank my aunt and father for serving as my guardian angels over these past two challenging years. I also wish to thank the other family members that I have lost over the years, including my most recent loss of a great mentor, as they always supported me and encouraged me to achieve greatness.

I am incredibly thankful for my loved ones and acknowledge their personal and financial sacrifices that enabled me to focus solely on my healing and academic goals. To my mother, step-father, boyfriend, and little sister, knowing that I have your support brings me the strength I need to overcome any challenge I face while following my academic and professional goals. I am also thankful for my Amah Mutsun community for supporting my research as I honor our ancestors' stories. I am honored to uplift Amah Mutsun voices while learning from those that come before me. As I enhance my Native identity and embody Amah Mutsun traditions, I will forever strive to give back to my community to ensure our tribal survival for future generations.

Lastly, the completion of this thesis would not have been possible without my thesis committee's support. I acknowledge the mentorship and expertise of Dr. Mishuana Goeman, Dr. Ananda Marin, and Dr. Teresa McCarty. I feel proud and privileged to call them my Advisors and role models. To my thesis committee, thank you for ensuring my academic success.

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## Introduction

I sat back in my chair. I felt my feet on the ground. I saw clearly. Things came together. It wasn't just her story she wanted me to know. While trying to help her, while trying to trace her story, I traced my own.

-Greg Sarris, *Mabel Mckay: Weaving the Dream*

American institutions (like education, the legal system, and mass media), and individuals (like White American writers) overwhelmingly define and uphold misrepresentations of Native peoples and other minority groups.<sup>1</sup> Although, Native Americans are more likely to be seen through negative stereotypical representations, as they also learn to see themselves through the lens of American society.<sup>2</sup> In mass media, there are an inadequate amount of positive, correct, and modern representations of Native peoples while misrepresentations ignore accurate ideas and portrayals. Harmful representations sustain and reinforce a cycle of biased ideals that disparately impact Native people. Biased representations create adverse outcomes through American institutions' policies and practices while influencing interactions between Native and non-Native individuals. Simultaneously, inaccurate representations also promote low expectations of Native peoples and provide both Natives and non-Natives with limiting beliefs about the possible types of success for Native Americans. Portrayals of Native peoples consist of intellectual inferiority and their ways of knowing the world presumed as incorrect and incompatible with society.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Eason et al. "Reclaiming Representations & Interrupting the Cycle of Bias Against Native Americans." *Daedalus* 147, no. 2 (2018): 70-81. [https://doi.org/10.1162/DAED\\_a\\_00491](https://doi.org/10.1162/DAED_a_00491).

<sup>2</sup> Leavitt et al. "'Frozen in Time': The Impact of Native American Media Representations on Identity and Self-Understanding." *Journal of Social Issues* 71, no. 1 (2015): 39-53. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12095>, 41.

<sup>3</sup> Eason et al., "Reclaiming Representations & Interrupting the Cycle of Bias Against Native Americans," 71-77.

As Native peoples endure stereotypes and discrimination, mass media and educational institutions also write Native Americans out of contemporary existence. If American institutions do not portray Native Americans in dehumanizing ways, then they entirely exclude Native people overall. Native peoples do not see themselves adequately represented in mass media, and their academic accomplishments are made invisible. For Native Americans in education, their invisibility hinders them from imagining and pursuing their own successful futures.<sup>4</sup> In all, Native students face an array of academic barriers that stem from misrepresentations, stereotypical ideals, and invisibility that adversely impact their academic achievement. With this thesis, I trace the history of both educational inequity and resiliency in California Native communities. I focus on the central role that American literature plays in creating stereotypes and biased ideals that lead to unjust educational conditions for California Native students. Then, drawing on Native American literature, oral history, and storytelling, I demonstrate the importance of uplifting Native voices to combat misrepresentations and biased ideals while upholding tribal sovereignty for California Native communities.

Explicitly, this thesis takes a step backward to identify the root of stereotypical representations stemming from American literature. As settlers wrote about civility and savagism, the structure of colonialism established Western educational institutions where subjects of study, like American Literature, played a role with stereotypical representations taking root in American society. Educational institutions produce academics that have imperialistic outlooks and biased ideals against Native Americans. Academia continues the erasure of Indigenous people by utilizing settler-colonial knowledge to illustrate inaccurate historical accounts and stereotypical representations that ignore Native voices and perspectives.

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<sup>4</sup> Eason et al., “Reclaiming Representations & Interrupting the Cycle of Bias Against Native Americans,” 75-77.

It is these representations that create a hostile environment for all Native Americans navigating American institutions. With specific regards to Western education, American settlers dominate the subjects of study in educational contexts. The Western educational curriculum is designed to exclude indigenous knowledge systems and deems cultural history and traditional practices irrelevant.<sup>5</sup>

Western education also sets academic standards for public, private, and home schools, while state governments mandate standardized tests from kindergarten to twelfth grade. Students must take core subjects, like English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, across their academic trajectories. While in college, students are again required to take general education core courses of English, Mathematics, Science, Arts, and Humanities alongside their major requirements. Students will learn from texts of American literature throughout their academic career as it appears in the curriculum. Thus, the root of stereotypical representations that stems in American literature has grown into students' educational coursework as the roots sprout into biased ideals and dehumanizing stereotypes concerning Native Americans. Most importantly, Western education holds Native American students to the same standards and requirements. Native students learn the same ideals and stereotypes that damage their well-being and limit their trajectory of academic and professional success.

Biased ideals and stereotypes lead to academic barriers where Native students face high rates of dropping out of high school or not attending college. There is a considerable amount of research demonstrating that Native American college enrollment continues to rise. However, Native students still make up only 1% of the student population in higher education.<sup>6</sup> Several

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<sup>5</sup> Eason et al., "Reclaiming Representations & Interrupting the Cycle of Bias Against Native Americans," 71-77.

<sup>6</sup> Shotton et al. *Beyond the Asterisk Understanding Native Students in Higher Education*. Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2013.

Indigenous scholars are already discussing enrollment patterns and retention rates amongst Native college students to focus on the academic barriers that they face. Nevertheless, there is a lack of literature within qualitative studies regarding California Native students and the unique historical disparities that they endure that funnels into their academic experiences. Native students are least likely to attend a postsecondary institution; meanwhile, students who seek out higher education are not receiving the resources that they need to succeed academically. Therefore, it becomes necessary to inquire into past educational experiences of both grade school and higher education from California Native elders to remove educational barriers while ensuring their academic excellence.

As a member of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, the purpose of this work is to combat misrepresentations of California Natives by emphasizing Native American literature, oral history, and storytelling to uplift California Native voices, especially the voices of Amah Mutsun elders. To combat misrepresentations, the (re)writing of California Native representations is necessary for promoting the academic excellence of Amah Mutsun youth. The method of placing “re” in parenthesis serves as an expression of California Natives claiming their fractured stories and inaccurate representations to revive and honor traditional histories.<sup>7</sup> They are writing whole stories and correct representations into the existence of mass media while building a future that utilizes the past as a foundation for ensuring the lasting legacies of cultural traditions. Thus, for the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, oral history and storytelling uphold Amah Mutsun’s sovereignty, resurgence, and self-determination. While our community culturally revitalizes to strengthen our Native identities, I argue that this is important for higher education retention. As long as Amah

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<sup>7</sup> Method is borrowed from: Baldy, Cutcha Risling. *We Are Dancing for You: Native Feminisms and the Revitalization of Women’s Coming-of-Age Ceremonies*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018.

Mutsun college students have community support and a strong identity and sense of self-worth, they will graduate college and succeed professionally.

### **My Experience with Native American Literature**

This introductory chapter intends to tell the story that led to the development and findings of this research. To create change for my tribe (and more broadly California Natives), I take on the role of story-listener and storyteller to share Amah Mutsun elders' stories.<sup>8</sup> I must tell my story since our stories are interconnected. Like the above passage from Greg Sarris and his book, *Mabel Mckay: Weaving the Dream*, as I trace the fractured stories of California Natives, I must also trace my own. As I dream about the future and strive to tell stories of three Amah Mutsun female elders, I begin by emphasizing my academic journey. To begin with my story, I am establishing my positionality and examination of Amah Mutsun oral histories to find strength in our collective stories. A reflection on our experiences allows for the appreciation of how our stories connect as a community.<sup>9</sup> Hence, my story is interwoven with the three elders' oral histories to identify the educational barriers and stereotypes that significantly impact California Natives in mainstream education. This thesis's motivation is to break the cycle of stereotypical representations of California Natives to ensure the academic success for Amah Mutsun youth and future generations that serves as a stepping stone for ensuring tribal survival and well-being.

During my academic journey, I realized that I had limited views of Native American Literature. As an undergraduate, I focused primarily on American fiction and poetry. At this time, I was also connecting with my tribal community and began learning about Amah Mutsun oral history and storytelling. Now that I am completing this thesis for my American Indian

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<sup>8</sup> Archibald, Jo-Ann. *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit*. Canada: UBC Press, 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Archibald, *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit*, 84-85.

Master's Degree at UCLA, I have come to realize that oral history and storytelling will always interweave with my research and community work. An essential reading that led me to this realization was *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* by Daniel Heath Justice. Justice challenged me to rethink my assumptions of Native literature, history, and politics to consider "ideas about relationship, kinship, respect, and responsibility that Indigenous people articulate, separately and together."<sup>10</sup> He demonstrates how Indigenous writers are sustaining, restoring, and establishing creative kinship as a whole and with the world.

Notably, in Justice's chapter "How Do We Become Good Ancestors?" he takes a step back from poetry and fiction to examine nonfiction memoir and political commentary. Justice expands all indigenous literature in all forms of the genre while honoring generations of oral memoirs essential to Native communities and kinship. Oral histories generate literary ancestors who leave behind stories on the world they helped secure for future descendants.<sup>11</sup> By honoring oral memoirs that portray accurate representations of the uniqueness and heterogeneity of Native peoples, oral history can push society past biased misrepresentations. For example, considering stereotypes that all Native Americans sleep in a teepee and wear feathered headdresses, California Natives rarely make the famous Indian cut since we do not fit into homogeneous stereotypes. Our customs and traditions differ from Native peoples that are indigenous to lands outside of California. Oral histories of California Natives illustrate our unique perspectives on kinship and how we perceive the world. By honoring our stories, this thesis illuminates accurate representation of California Natives.

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<sup>10</sup> Justice, Daniel Heath. *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*. Waterloo, Ontario, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2018, 28.

<sup>11</sup> Justice, *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, 116.



Oral history is essential to Native American cultures for passing on cultural traditions; meanwhile, oral history allows younger generations to learn from elders' personal experiences. Elder's experiences remind us of the various ways of viewing and living in the world, including the different ways we interact with one another, the land, and all other living things. Learning from elders is an important honor that ensures we carry forward their knowledge, views, hopes, and dreams while learning from their accomplishments and even their mistakes. To be a good ancestor, we must leave the world alive with stories of those that came before us, as well as our own. As long as we honor our oral histories, our relations will move beyond us for a better tomorrow. Justice asserts that we must look to oral memoirs to honor elders and the knowledge they hold and pass on to their respective tribal communities.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, my work honors three Amah Mutsun elders by learning from their lived experiences. My personal and academic story also honors the woman that shaped my academic trajectory: my aunt. My story centers around my aunt as her academic story interweaves with mine.

**kan-annaknis (my aunt)**

From childhood, my first best friend and first role model was my aunt, Virginia Luna. She was an excellent teacher and instilled in me the importance of receiving a higher education. She taught third grade for many years and passed away from breast cancer in 2016. When I reflect on her memory and think about our time spent together, I realize that her example and teachings influence my academic accomplishments. My mother was a single parent, and throughout my childhood, she helped my mother raise me. We spent time watching movies and playing games, and my aunt even taught me how to do various chores around the house.

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<sup>12</sup> Justice, *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, 155-156.

When I was in the third grade and coping with my parents' separation, I remember losing interest in school and not applying myself to complete any of my classwork or homework assignments. Although, my aunt was able to help distract me from my dysfunctional household by double-checking my homework for completion or tutoring me on reading, writing, and math. Through this, she encouraged me to excel academically no matter my circumstances. At the time, she had already graduated from California State University, Fresno, and was working to obtain her teaching credentials. When my aunt began teaching permanently, my mother enrolled me at the same elementary. Some of my best childhood memories are staying late with her after school as she prepared her lesson plans or graded classwork. My aunt truly cared for all of her students and always strived to ensure they succeeded academically.

After I graduated from the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC) with a Bachelor's degree in Literature, I began working for the UCSC Educational Opportunity Programs (EOP) office as the EOP Specialist. With this position, I had several responsibilities and worked behind the scenes to ensure the office ran as a whole. I served as an office manager, supervisor, financial analyst, event planner, and student programmer while working in a capacity to ensure first-generation UCSC undergraduates excelled academically. With the mission of student retention, I helped to remove academic barriers while providing resources to all students that visited the office. Additionally, I had the opportunity to supervise 10-13 first-generation students each academic year, while mentoring them to succeed both professionally and academically. As I offered mentorship, support, and guidance, I realized that my aunt's passion for helping students became my own. Because of my aunt's example and the bonds I formed with those I supervised, I realized that I was also passionate about encouraging students to

succeed personally and academically. My aunt's passion and hard work will always inspire me to prosper with my academics as I continue to find ways to help others thrive as well.

From my work at EOP, I also realized that I wanted to help more Native Americans obtain a college degree. I filled the position as the EOP Specialist for a little less than five years. I worked with a diverse group of students from all cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, including the LGBTQ community. Working with a diverse population helped me identify the personal and academic barriers that all minorities face and the commonalities within our own political and cultural struggles. As I worked with several students, I realized that there were only a few instances where I could support and mentor Natives. For example, throughout my time at EOP, I supervised 10-13 EOP students each academic year, and I vividly recall only hiring one Native American student. I witnessed the low numbers of Native Americans that attended UCSC, including the academic barrier of invisibility. Academic and personal accomplishments for Native Americans become invisible when Native students do not see themselves adequately represented in college institutions, faculty, or administration. Because invisibility hinders Native people from either pursuing a college education or completing their coursework to graduate, I only served a small number of Native students while working in student affairs.

As I now reflect on my undergraduate and professional work experiences at UCSC, I have come to identify the barriers that Native Americans face when navigating an educational institution. In other words, I am a first-generation college student that experienced first-hand the disparities that California Native students face while attending post-secondary institutions. My professional work with student affairs influenced me to apply to the American Indian Studies Master's program at UCLA since I became passionate about wanting to produce a piece of work that encourages more California Native Americans to receive a post-secondary education.

## **Research Questions**

My academic story thus far also serves as the conceptual framework for this thesis. My upbringing, educational, and work experiences, as well as having a strong role model, pushed my research forward to ground my work in Native literature, oral history, and storytelling. As I continue to grow as a Master's student, I began to design a research project that eventually led me to the more significant findings of this thesis: stereotypical representations of Native Americans are rooted in American Literature. I discovered the importance of indigenous literature, oral history, and storytelling, as I set out on this research journey by first exploring the lived experiences of Amah Mutsun elders. The research questions that initially guided the study for this thesis went through several stages of editing. When I first sought to learn about the educational experiences of Amah Mutsun elders, I began with four guiding questions:

1. What factors shaped Amah Mutsun elders' desire to seek higher education?
2. What were the elders' experiences with attending college?
3. How did the elders learn and develop Amah Mutsun cultural knowledge throughout their lifetime?
4. What are the elders' dreams for youth moving forward, while thinking of recommendations for ways to serve as role models for youth to seek a college education?

Once I gathered data and began the coding and analysis process, I noticed that the findings centered around dehumanizing and discriminatory experiences. Specifically, I began to draw connections with the demeaning stereotypes that the Amah Mutsun elders illustrated and the literary notions of civilization and savagism. Thus, the final research question that shaped this thesis's final assertions became: How are California Natives written about in literature and

other forms of mass media? As my research journey progressed, I came to interweave qualitative research methods with literary analysis.

### **Overview of Consecutive Chapters**

Because the findings and final assertions for this thesis center around my tribe, chapter one provides a historical context of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band. Primarily, the first chapter reviews the different periods of colonialism that my tribe endured, our fight for survival, as well as the events that led to the dispossession of our land and the termination of our federal recognition. Meanwhile, the chapter asserts that the Amah Mutsun people must continue to decolonize by revitalizing Amah Mutsun cultural knowledge to strengthen our cultural identity while upholding sovereignty and self-determination on our terms, outside of the United States governmental structures. Within the terms of this thesis, the definition of Amah Mutsun cultural knowledge is the ancestral indigenous ways of being and knowing the world that makes an individual a member of a specific tribal nation. Amah Mutsun cultural knowledge encompasses particular traditions (including language, spirituality, ceremonial dances and songs, traditional foods, food hunting, and gathering techniques, land management, and reciprocity with all-natural elements and animals) passed down orally from generation to generation. Learning our cultural knowledge will prove beneficial to overcome misrepresentations while finding educational success and financial well-being.

The second chapter of this thesis examines the structure of American Literature and the literary notions of civilization and savagism that American writers passed on from generation to generation. I build upon the work of Roy Harvey Pearce and Klaus Lubbers to assert that civilization and savagism notions transformed into stereotypical representations prevalent in mass media today. I narrow in on how Anglo-settlers wrote about California Natives by

analyzing an 1850 Alta California news article. I then take a step back also to analyze how Spanish colonizers portrayed California Natives. Specifically, I examine Deborah A. Miranda's poem "Los Pájaros," from her book *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir*. From her book, *We Are Dancing for You: Native Feminisms and the Revitalization of Women's Coming-of-Age Ceremonies*, I apply Cutcha Risling Baldy's epistemological framework of placing (re) in parenthesis. I make the case that Miranda is (re)writing California history by bringing awareness of how Spanish missionaries treated California Natives, especially women. As the second chapter also focuses on uplifting Native voices, I (re)write portrayals of California Native women by providing a literary analysis of an undated poem by anthropologist John Peabody Harrington titled "Ascención Solorsano." Ascención Solorsano is a vital ancestor to the Amah Mutsun people that ensured Amah Mutsun cultural knowledge was documented for future generations to learn and embody. With Harrington's poem, I provide an accurate representation of Amah Mutsun women. I argue that the process of (re)writing stereotypical representations of California Native Americans (as well as all other Native Americans) is mandatory to break the cycle of misrepresentations in mass media today.

Chapter three highlights the importance of Native Literature, oral history, and storytelling in relation to Amah Mutsun sovereignty and self-determination. Respectively, the chapter explores the revitalization of Amah Mutsun spiritual ceremonies and the resurgence of Amah Mutsun cultural knowledge to produce new knowledge for continuing to nation-build during modern times. The chapter calls for the need to rebuild the nation with oral histories and stories, as well as qualitative research. This thesis applies the work of Leanne Betasamosake Simpson and Bryan M.J. Brayboy with the importance of resurgence and oral histories as qualitative research. At this point in chapter three, I interweave a literature review and the theoretical

framework that grounds the research and main assertions for this thesis. Then, the chapter moves into my methods of researching while also reviewing the data. Chapter three discusses the importance of Native Literature, oral histories, and storytelling for the Amah Mutsun people. It also specifies how oral histories and stories impact qualitative research and the importance of conversational style in-person interviews. Chapter three lays the foundation for chapter four.

With chapter four, I present the final assertions premised on the lives of Amah Mutsun elders. As the chapter illustrates the educational experiences of the three elders that I interviewed, I also present data from a qualitative survey and field notes from two observations. Chapter four will show that Amah Mutsun elders experienced stereotypes and discrimination during grade school and college, but they also endured the structure of settler colonialism. They lived in poverty while receiving a poor education and lacking academic guidance in childhood. When elders enrolled in college, some faced challenges of balancing full-time work and academics, while others faced personal or domestic struggles. The chapter also discusses the elders' resilience as they continue to learn Amah Mutsun cultural knowledge and dream about the future. Explicitly, this thesis will conclude with the elders' dreams of youth having a secure Amah Mutsun identity as they find financial well-being and academic success within American society. As the elders also realize that educational institutions are not for every tribal member, they recognize the importance of encouraging youth to obtain a college education. An educated Amah Mutsun tribal member will have the power to utilize their teachings in a way to give back to the community while upholding Amah Mutsun sovereignty and passing on cultural knowledge to future generations. The lives of the elders have potent implications for promoting the success of California Native students as this thesis also discusses implications of (re)writing stereotypes that impact Native students in school as well as all other aspects of American society. The

overall implications of this thesis will indicate that because mass media representations are rooted in American Literature, stereotypical representations are best (re)written by uplifting Native American literature, oral histories, and storytelling.



## Chapter 1: Context - Amah Mutsun History

The United States holds the notion of governance and power over the postcolonial systems that today's federally recognized tribes negotiate and implement. The U.S. government grants Native American tribes with federal recognition through a process vested in nation-state structures and formations that purposefully fail to support the inherent sovereignty of Native peoples. Sovereignty stems from European colonial law and Christian ideologies that historically and legally consist of Indigenous peoples' seemingly rights to traditional lands, self-government, and cultural autonomy as long as those rights comply with the United States' criteria. Additionally, sovereignty discourse ignores indigenous epistemologies, perspectives, and identities concerning indigenous governance and culture. Meanwhile, without federal recognition, Native American tribes have no legal rights to upholding sovereignty. Over time, indigenous scholars and tribal communities rearticulated what sovereignty has meant and what it currently means to Indigenous peoples. For Native communities, sovereignty historically locates cultural relationships and identities of those that articulate and deploy sovereignty. As Native peoples find meaning in their histories or relations while strengthening their cultural identities, indigenous epistemologies of law and governance will move tribal communities past the colonial legacies of nationhood and sovereignty regardless if they are federally recognized or not. Thus, indigenous identity is a foundational structure for exercising sovereignty.<sup>13</sup>

With the ways that Indigenous peoples identify themselves and their communities, their self-determination informs the integrity of their political outlooks, agendas, and methods for upholding their respective sovereignty. For the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, to deploy sovereignty

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<sup>13</sup> *Sovereignty Matters: Locations of Contestation and Possibility in Indigenous Struggles for Self-determination*, edited by Joanne Barker. United Kingdom: University of Nebraska Press, 2005.

as a non-federally recognized tribe, they must continue to nation-build by defining their political agenda, including their decolonization and social justice strategies. Because decolonization “unsettles” the settler colonialism structure, it suggests that the Amah Mutsun tribe does not have to accept their current colonial conditions and can work towards transforming them while seeking social justice. Obtaining federal recognition is an unknown reality for the Amah Mutsun community, regardless of Tribal Council’s efforts with petitioning our status to the U.S. government. Therefore, decolonization is a path towards fostering Amah Mutsun cultural revitalization and self-determination with or without federal recognition. The Amah Mutsun community must decolonize through the means of cultural revitalization by returning to our traditional language, indigenous knowledge systems, political practices, and spiritual ceremonies to strengthen our cultural identities. From the point of European contact, tribal members assimilated and adopted cultural practices from Spanish, Mexican, and American societies in order to survive. Because colonialism inevitably shapes our way of thinking,<sup>14</sup> the Amah Mutsun community embarks on a new journey — one of cultural revitalization. We are decolonizing our everyday lives while strengthening our indigenous identity to employ self-determination and define sovereignty on our terms, outside of the U.S. government.

Enacting the decolonization of cultural revitalization will allow for our community to stand together with shared identities that honor our ancestors while promoting our well-being, educational success, and financial stability during modern times. The need to “return to traditional ways of participating in social and cultural functions of the community”<sup>15</sup> is the

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<sup>14</sup> Saliata, Kirisitina. “Decolonization.” *Native Studies Keywords*, edited by Stephanie Nohelani Teves et al., 301-308. United States: University of Arizona Press, 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Deloria, Jr., Vine. “Self-Determination and the Concept of Sovereignty.” *Economic Development in American Indian Reservations*, edited by Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, 22-28. New Mexico: University of New Mexico, 1979, 27.

primary goal of the Amah Mutsun so we can politically express our cultural identity in support of sovereignty. Although, as tribal members learn their culture and strengthen their identities, we will continue to see ourselves through the lens of stereotypical representations and biased ideals in mass media as determined by Indigenous scholars.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, as the next chapter calls for the (re)writing of representations concerning California Natives, this chapter provides a historical context of the violence that Amah Mutsun ancestors endured that led to our assimilation and the need for cultural revitalization in contemporary times. Chapter one reviews Amah Mutsun history and our journey to modern governance of upholding self-determination and sovereignty.

### **Spanish Period**

Prior to any European contact, the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band occupied the San Juan Valley in California for thousands of years. The Amah Mutsun community made up of approximately 20-30 neighboring villages stretched across the surrounding region of the Pajaro River Basin. Tribal members throughout the villages were united by cultural and religious practices as well as traditions. They shared methods of craftsmanship, fishing, hunting, and engaged in mutual ceremonial practices and dress. As the Amah Mutsun community established a way of life that they believed in and defended it if they felt threatened, they were unaware of the attempted erasure and damage that settler-colonial policies would bring forth.<sup>17</sup>

Spanish colonizers began their expeditions throughout California starting in the late 1700s. In 1769, José de Gálvez, a Spanish government official, began colonial programs extending the Spanish flag to Alta California. Expeditions began in southern Baja California by land and by sea, with San Diego becoming the first landing place. Meanwhile, the foundation of

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<sup>16</sup> Leavitt et al., ““Frozen in Time”: The Impact of Native American Media Representations on Identity and Self-Understanding.”

<sup>17</sup> Amah Mutsun Tribal Band. “History - Amah Mutsun,” Amah Mutsun History Comments. Accessed December 9, 2019. <http://amahmutsun.org/history>.

Mission San Diego de Alcalá took place on July 16, 1769, which later led to the establishment of 21 missions throughout the California coast. Father Junípero Serra, leader of the missionaries, and Gaspar de Portolá were among the colonizers. After the establishment of the first mission, Serra remained in San Diego as Gaspar de Portolá, and an exploring party journeyed up the coast to San Francisco.<sup>18</sup>

As Father Junípero Serra led the Franciscans into California in 1769, he served as a missionary that also became the first Father President of the missions. He held both positions until he died in 1784. Serra was mandated by the Spanish King to civilize California Indians and then release them upon their assimilation. Spanish law stated that the relationship between Franciscans and California Natives was of a custodian to a ward. As Franciscans baptized and converted California Natives to Roman Catholicism, the friars enforced the requirement of mission Indians living according to the church's rules. Hence, the missionaries enacted physical punishment towards mission Indians if there was disobedience. Corporal punishment took place when California Natives did not follow the missionaries' rules. The historical records of Junípero Serra illustrate how fugitive runaways were hunted by the military, found, and returned to the missions.<sup>19</sup> Here, it is essential to note that Junípero Serra and the other priests control historical records from the mission era since they ignored Amah Mutsun voices. In the records, the Franciscans excluded all California Native experiences, enabling their voices and stories to become invisible. The Franciscans prioritized their stereotypical perspectives in written documents while justifying their domination and cruel treatment of California Natives with the misrepresentation of savagism.

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<sup>18</sup> Phillips, George Harwood. *The Enduring Struggle: Indians in California History*. United States: Boyd & Fraser, 1981.

<sup>19</sup> Sandos, James A. "Junípero Serra's Canonization and the Historical Record." *The American Historical Review* 93, no. 5 (1988): 1253–1269. [www.jstor.org/stable/1873538](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1873538).

## California Missions

From 1769 to 1821, Spanish missionaries captured California Indians and enslaved them at California missions. Although the Spanish King mandated that California Indians should be released from the missions once they are deemed civilized, Serra and the Franciscans took it upon themselves to imprison mission Indians indefinitely until they worked themselves to death because of forced labor. Even though the overall goal for the Spanish missionaries was to fulfill their Franciscan vows to Christianize the Indians, the friars valued their slaves' souls far more than their physical and bodily existence on earth. Because the friars deemed California Natives as uncivilized savages, they believed that only Catholic baptism would ensure that upon the death of mission Indians, their souls would be kept free of sin as they ascended to heaven.<sup>20</sup> Franciscans treated mission Indians as savages that could only become civilized through death. Missionaries worked California Natives to death because of their self-serving agenda of economic growth for the Spanish government.

According to the missionaries' agenda of converting Natives to Catholicism and extending Spanish settlement, cheap labor was necessary to construct the 21 missions and maintain the surrounding ranchos.<sup>21</sup> Upon their arrival at Monterey Bay, the Spanish missionaries began to conduct their campaign to subjugate the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band's ancestors. "The Spanish soldiers forcibly removed the Indians from their villages and brought them to the Mission compound, separating children from parents."<sup>22</sup> Acquiring California Native slaves were seen as disposable workers that were low in cost for labor.<sup>23</sup> Through baptism, Amah

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<sup>20</sup> Castillo, Elias. *Cross of Thorns: the Enslavement of California's Indians by the Spanish Missions*. United States: Linden Publishing, 2015.

<sup>21</sup> Eargle, Dolan H. *Native California Guide: Weaving the Past & Present*. 2nd ed. United States: Trees Co. Press, 2000.

<sup>22</sup> Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, "History - Amah Mutsun."

<sup>23</sup> Madley, Benjamin. *An American Genocide: the United States and the California Indian*

Mutsun ancestors became the property of Missions Santa Cruz and San Juan Bautista and were not permitted to return to their land. If they attempted to run away, the Spanish military routinely dispatched soldiers to look for runaways to bring them back to the missions. California Natives did not naively welcome Spanish colonizers, nor did they exemplify the peaceful Indian stereotype. When the missionaries arrived in California with their military, California Natives were not sitting around smoking their peace pipe. They were not waiting around, ready to welcome the new arrivals so they could open up their land to them. Instead, they ran for their lives to avoid enslavement, or they attempted to run away to escape the missions' horrid conditions. Notably, as Spanish colonizers implemented their violent self-serving agendas, they relied on their biased perspectives and racist stereotypes to dispossess California Natives of their land, culture, and spirituality. Throughout the various historical records during three different periods of colonization, biased ideals and dehumanizing stereotypes materially shape the violent actions bestowed upon California Natives.

The founding of Mission Santa Cruz took place in 1791, as the founding of Mission San Juan Bautista took place later in 1797. Father Fermin Lasuen took charge as the lead friar at Mission Santa Cruz, and Father Felipe Arroyo de la Cuesta became the friar in charge at Mission San Juan Bautista. As Franciscans kept extensive mission records, Father Felipe Arroyo de la Cuesta meticulously kept documentation of several Amah Mutsun customs. In 1841, Father Arroyo de la Cuesta published the Mutsun language in Europe later in America, as he “translated prayers, songs, doctrines, confessions, and all primary vocabulary.”<sup>24</sup> Consequently, the enslavement of tribal members, at either Missions Santa Cruz or San Juan Bautista, erased all spiritual practices and ceremonial traditions from the Amah Mutsun culture. Once erasure of the

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*Catastrophe, 1846-1873*. United Kingdom: Yale University Press, 2016.

<sup>24</sup> Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, “History - Amah Mutsun.”

Amah Mutsun culture began, the high price that they faced was “the loss of many lives” as well as “the cessation of all cultural activities [*which define an Indian tribe*]: tradition, language, and religion.”<sup>25</sup> Tribal members were not allowed to speak the Mutsun language, nor were they allowed to conduct ceremonies. They faced punishment if they broke the mission rules.<sup>26</sup>

The friars had terrible, vicious punishments that they used to inflict on the mission Indians. The priests also appointed alcaldes, who were the most acculturated and trusted, to report findings of misbehavior. Alcaldes reported all infractions of the rules to the priest, while the priest then instructed the alcaldes to carry out the punishment. Meanwhile, Spanish soldiers supervised the alcaldes to ensure the appropriate execution of discipline.<sup>27</sup> Alcaldes, soldiers, and priests all administered punishment that consisted of whipping or flogging. For methods of discipline, missionaries used cat-o’-nine tails, corma, or a cudgel. The cat-o’-nine tails (a whip made of cow or horse hide that had nine knotted lines) became a source of bacteria that held and spread diseases. After beatings, the Natives’ wounds would become infected, and they would develop sores. Cormas (an apparatus of two pieces of wood hinged together to close around the prisoner’s feet) allowed slaves to continue being productive with their duties as they underwent lessons of obedience. For the cudgel, it was a wooden club used to quickly and spontaneously strike Natives that were misbehaving.<sup>28</sup>

Mission Natives also received whippings if they wept for the loss of their loved ones. Particularly, if women suffered miscarriages, they “were not allowed to grieve for their child; instead, they were accused of having an abortion and were whipped as punishment.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Eargle, *Native California Guide: Weaving the Past & Present*, 164.

<sup>26</sup> Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, “History - Amah Mutsun.”

<sup>27</sup> Webb, Edith Buckland., and Hodge, Frederick Webb. *Indian Life at the Old Missions*. United Kingdom: University of Nebraska Press, 1983.

<sup>28</sup> Miranda, Deborah A. *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir*. Berkeley, CA: Heyday, 2013, 15.

<sup>29</sup> Castillo, *Cross of Thorns: the Enslavement of California’s Indians by the Spanish Missions*, 2.

Missionaries humiliated women by forcing them to carry a wooden figure that represented a baby as they stood outside the mission church. Missionaries thought that humiliating women would prevent them from having abortions since some Native women attempted an abortion to spare their infants from enslavement. The priest haggled women to have children in the hopes of increasing the birth rate of slaves due to their self-serving agendas. Despite the priests' efforts, the death rate at the missions increased while the birth rate declined.<sup>30</sup>

As the Amah Mutsun dealt with punishment and battled assaults on their culture, they also suffered from foreign diseases brought by the Spanish. Diseases included smallpox, measles, and even venereal diseases. By 1833, there were 19,421 deaths at Mission San Juan Bautista alone. Due to the horrible treatment at the missions and the lack of capacity for tribal members to stay alive while enslaved, it becomes evident that genocide for the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band began with enslavement into the mission system. As genocide consists of killing a specific group of people, genocide is also a “cultural genocide” that has a “direct impact” on “people’s capacity to stay alive.”<sup>31</sup> Hence, the religious missionaries partook in genocide as they enslaved Amah Mutsun ancestors and directly impacted their capacity to survive, even though the missionaries believed they were saving their souls. Additionally, genocide also attacks Native “religion, speech, political freedoms, economic liberty, and cultural diversity.”<sup>32</sup> Therefore, the missionaries also enacted genocide when they forced Amah Mutsun ancestors to convert to the Catholic religion and punished them for speaking their cultural language.

### **Mexican Period**

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<sup>30</sup> Castillo, *Cross of Thorns: the Enslavement of California’s Indians by the Spanish Missions*, 2.

<sup>31</sup> Wolfe, Patrick. “Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native.” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387–409. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520601056240>, 398-399.

<sup>32</sup> Wolfe, “Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native,” 400.



After Mexico won its independence from Spain, life for the Amah Mutsun changed as more and more Mexicans began to arrive in the San Juan Valley. In 1833, the Mexicans forced the government to turn over California lands and to secularize California missions. Amah Mutsun tribal members were finally allowed to leave Missions Santa Cruz and San Juan Bautista. Amah Mutsun tribal members scavenged for land and worked on rancheros under a peonage-system where they worked as slaves. To survive, they either worked to shear sheep, herd cattle, cut lumber, harvest crops, and pound grain into flour. They even built houses, tan hides, clean houses, serve meals, or made adobe bricks.<sup>33</sup>

The need to scavenge for land was due to Mexican officials granting tribal lands to Mexican citizens instead of Amah Mutsun ancestors. For example, Francisco Perez Pacheco received the land grant of Rancho San Justo, instead of Amah Mutsun ancestors released from enslavement. Rancho San Justo is in the vicinity of Mission San Juan Bautista and was a ranch, among others, that Amah Mutsun ancestors maintained through forced labor. The U.S. Surveyor General later confirmed Pacheco's claim to Rancho San Justo in July 1859 after California transferred to the United States government.<sup>34</sup> By 1848, Anglo settlers began to arrive in California (Amah Mutsun territories) for the Gold Rush, and Mexico and the United States signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo after the Mexican-American War. Once the treaty was signed, Mexico lost its northwest territories, and California transferred to the United States government. Thus, Francisco Perez Pacheco submitted his land claim for Rancho San Justo to

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<sup>33</sup> Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, "History - Amah Mutsun."

<sup>34</sup> Terrell, J E. *Plat of the "Rancho San Justo" [Calif.] : Finally Confirmed to Francisco Perez Pacheco / Surveyed under Instructions from the U.S. Surveyor General by J.E. Terrell, Depy. Sur., July 1859.* Maps of Private Land Grant Cases of California. UC Berkeley, Bancroft Library, Calisphere, 1859. <https://calisphere.org/item/ark:/13030/hb5489n98q/>.

the United States District Court. He submitted his petition along with maps of the rancho<sup>35</sup> to secure his land claim, as Amah Mutsun ancestors were left landless. With no legal rights, Amah Mutsun ancestors were cast aside as land claims for their tribal land were submitted by Mexican citizens to the U.S. District Court.

### **American Period**

With regards to American citizenship for California Natives, The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo specified that Indians in the Mexican cession would become United States citizens. Although, Congress chose to ignore this provision, and the government quickly “intervened to restrict Indian rights,” where the “state constitution prohibited Indians from voting, serving on juries, and testifying in court against whites,”<sup>36</sup> which removed the legal rights of Amah Mutsun ancestors. Additionally, as California legislatures passed “An Act for the Government and Protection of Indians” in April 1850, facilitated the dispossession of land for California Natives as “section three of the act provided for the indenturing of Indians to whites.”<sup>37</sup> “Between 1852 and 1867, three to four thousand children were taken,” as well as “hundreds of Indian women who were seized for concubinage,” and Indian men were “apprehended for field labor.”<sup>38</sup> Amah Mutsun ancestors “were rounded up like cattle and forced to work, and their children were kidnapped and enslaved. Many were simply killed.”<sup>39</sup> In other words, California law created legal slavery despite Congress admitting California to the union as a slave-free state.

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<sup>35</sup> United States, District Court (California : Southern District), Land case. 375, Related Name Indexing Term. [*Diseño Del Rancho San Justo : Calif.*]. Maps of Private Land Grant Cases of California. Calisphere: UC Berkeley, Bancroft Library, 184?.

<https://calisphere.org/item/ark:/13030/hb758007c1/>.

<sup>36</sup> Phillips, *The Enduring Struggle: Indians in California History*, 63.

<sup>37</sup> Phillips, *The Enduring Struggle: Indians in California History*, 45.

<sup>38</sup> Phillips, *The Enduring Struggle: Indians in California History*, 46.

<sup>39</sup> Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, “History - Amah Mutsun.”

Around 1850-1852, the federal government attempted to establish military reservations to remove California Indians from the general public. While at these military compounds, treaty negotiations between the federal government and local California Indians took place. “Between April 29, 1851, and August 22, 1852, a series of eighteen treaties “of friendship and peace” were negotiated” between California tribes and “three treaty Commissioners whose appointments by President Millard Fillmore were authorized by the U.S. Senate on September 29, 1850.”<sup>40</sup> Amah Mutsun ancestors did participate and served as interpreters between government officials and other California Native Chiefs and were signatories to the treaty signed near Pleasanton.<sup>41</sup> Respectively, Amah Mutsun ancestors worked on the treaty published under exhibit G of the final documents submitted to the U.S Senate. The treaty was written at Bidwell’s Ranch on Chico Creek on August 1, 1851, between the U.S. Indian agent O.M Wozencraft and the “Chiefs, Captains and Headmen of the Mi-chop-da, Es-kuin, etc., Tribes of Indians.”<sup>42</sup> According to exhibit G, the following quote speaks of the tribal land that the tribes were negotiating for:

commencing at a point on Feather river, two miles above the town of Hamilton, and extending thence northwesterly to the northeast corner of Neal's grant, thence northwesterly along the boundaries of Neal's, Hensley's and Bidwell's grant to the northeast corner of the last named grant, thence northeasterly six miles, thence southeasterly parallel with the line extending from the beginning point to the northeast

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<sup>40</sup> Heizer, Robert F. *The Eighteen Unratified Treaties of 1851-1852 between the California Indians and the United States Government*. Berkeley: Archaeological Research Facility Department of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley, 1972. <https://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/anthpubs/ucb/text/arfs003-001.pdf>

<sup>41</sup> Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, “History - Amah Mutsun.”

<sup>42</sup> Heizer, *The Eighteen Unratified Treaties of 1851-1852 between the California Indians and the United States Government*, 47.

corner of Bidwell's grant to Feather river, and thence down said river to the place of beginning.<sup>43</sup>

In total, the eighteen treaties “would have set aside about 7.5 million acres to establish reservations for California Indians away from areas of non-Native settlement. However, responding to the pressures of settlers, the California legislature strongly urged the United States Congress to deny the treaties.”<sup>44</sup> Nonetheless, after the completion of the 1851-1852 treaties, they were never approved because the United States Senate failed to ratify them. The denial of the treaties took place in a secret session, where it took 50 years for the treaties to appear in public records again. “Without treaties specifying governmental obligations and without a large Indian land base calling for federal supervision, the United States paid only minimal attention to the legal rights and demands of the Indians of California.”<sup>45</sup> Thus, because the treaties were never signed, all California Indians at military camps (including the Amah Mutsun) became landless Natives, again.

Congress gave California State officials full jurisdiction regarding the conduct of Indian affairs and did not oppose any California Indian policy. Moreover, California legislation also contributed and made possible the continued catastrophe of genocide against all California Native Americans. On January 7, 1851, California Governor Peter H. Burnett, signed an executive order to exterminate all Indians and that “a war of extermination will continue to be waged between the races until the Indian race becomes extinct.”<sup>46</sup> The State of California

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<sup>43</sup> Heizer, *The Eighteen Unratified Treaties of 1851-1852 between the California Indians and the United States Government*, 47-48.

<sup>44</sup> Chilcote, Olivia. “For California Native Peoples the California Dream is Only a Myth.” *Pacific Standard* (2017). <https://psmag.com/social-justice/for-some-california-dream-is-only-a-myth>.

<sup>45</sup> Phillips, *The Enduring Struggle: Indians in California History*, 62.

<sup>46</sup> Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, “History - Amah Mutsun.”

initiated a campaign to pay from 25 cents to five dollars as a bounty for every killed Indian. The state-funded expeditions to exterminate the Indians, and throughout the campaign, the state paid over one million, two hundred thousand dollars in total. “Government officials apparently preferred to kill California Indians rather than make peace or honor treaties.”<sup>47</sup>

Anglo settlers viewed California Natives as primitive people destined to vanish. “These misconceptions were used to justify the theft and appropriation of California Indian land. Individual settlers and gold miners who killed or removed California Indian peoples from their lands often believed they were merely quickening a process that was bound to happen.”<sup>48</sup> Notably, this campaign of genocide illustrates the process of eliminating the Native. “The logic of elimination marks a return whereby the native repressed continues to structure settler-colonial society.”<sup>49</sup> As the government declared war between the races and paid settlers to kill Indians, government officials enacted genocide to exterminate the Amah Mutsun people as they continued to structure California as a settler-colonial society.

Then, in 1891, the President of the United States signed an “Act for the Relief of the Mission Indians.” The Act stated that a commissioner needed to select a reservation for all Mission Indians residing in California. Commissioners received the task of choosing a reservation from lands and villages within the specific territory that each California tribe formerly occupied. Each delegation was to be approved by the President and Secretary of the Interior. The Act mainly benefited the mission tribes of southern California who had already obtained land and had reservations, since it became apparent that the State of California opposed all other mission tribes from receiving lands or a reservation. Despite having federal recognition

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<sup>47</sup> Madley, *An American Genocide: the United States and the California Indian Catastrophe, 1846-1873*, 315.

<sup>48</sup> Chilcote, “For California Native Peoples the California Dream is Only a Myth.”

<sup>49</sup> Wolfe, “Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native,” 390.

at the time, the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band was “illegally denied a reservation in both San Juan Bautista and Santa Cruz.”<sup>50</sup> Anglo settlers relied upon settler colonialism logics to ignore and violate our legal sovereignty and autonomy as settlers continuously denied us of our tribal lands. Historical attacks on Amah Mutsun sovereignty continue to impact the lives of tribal members today (as will be discussed in chapter four of this thesis).

During the last half of the 19th century, hostility towards California Natives continued. The United States government completely eroded the moral boundaries of non-Natives when dealing with Natives because American society equated citizenship with humanity. American citizenship “was a tangible signifier of universalist claims, one that played persuasively upon notions of assimilation, incorporation, and patriotism attractive to white Americans.”<sup>51</sup> Citizenship is a force of political empowerment that prioritizes individuality by disempowering the collective power of tribal communities.<sup>52</sup> Thus, Amah Mutsun ancestors found themselves in a double-bind of not having individual civil rights because of their citizenship denial, and of losing their tribal-communal collective rights because of attacks on their sovereignty and autonomy. Because of the lack of citizenship rights and basic judicial protections, the Amah Mutsun become vulnerable victims to inhumane crimes. California crimes committed by the hands of non-Natives included “abduction, assault, kidnapping, rape, theft, murder, and massacres,” which resulted in the “thousands of deaths” of California Natives.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, “History - Amah Mutsun.”

<sup>51</sup> Deloria, Philip Joseph. “American Master Narratives and the Problem of Indian Citizenship in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era.” *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 14 (2015): 3–12. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537781414000504>.

<sup>52</sup> Deloria, “American Master Narratives and the Problem of Indian Citizenship in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era,” 5.

<sup>53</sup> Madley, *An American Genocide: the United States and the California Indian Catastrophe, 1846-1873*, 162-163.

Due to the treatment of California Natives, Amah Mutsun ancestors became aware of their statewide persecution. They saw their oppression as an unmistakable message that they needed to hide from extermination. Thus, the Amah Mutsun survived for generations by disguising themselves as Mexicans. Amah Mutsun ancestors already spoke Spanish because of Spanish and Mexican assimilative enforcements. They could pass as a Mexican that became an American citizen during the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Explicitly, two elders from two different lineages whose oral histories I analyze in chapter four, explained that their parents grew up thinking they were Mexican. While California Natives faced threats to their well-being, they inadvertently made themselves invisible by pretending they did not exist. The stereotype of invisibility extended beyond mass media and into the daily experiences and means of survival for California Natives.<sup>54</sup>

### **Loss of Federal Recognition**

In 1927, the federal recognition status of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band was illegally terminated due to Lafayette A. Dorrington's report. Lafayette A. Dorrington was a Second Lieutenant for the United States Army<sup>55</sup> and appointed as the Superintendent for the Indian Services (later renamed as the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs) in 1918. He served as the Superintendent of the California Sacramento Agency until 1930.<sup>56</sup> For the report, Dorrington was instructed by Congress to determine the land needs of California tribes in his jurisdiction.<sup>57</sup> He submitted his final report to the U.S government on June 23, 1927. His report listed about 230

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<sup>54</sup> Eason et al., "Reclaiming Representations & Interrupting the Cycle of Bias Against Native Americans," 77.

<sup>55</sup> *The sun*. [volume] (New York [N.Y.]), 02 Nov. 1898. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress.

<<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030272/1898-11-02/ed-1/seq-9/>>

<sup>56</sup> "Home - Ohlone/Costanoan-Esselen Indians." *Ohlone/Costanoan-Esselen Indians*, [www.ohlonecostanoanesselelnation.org/](http://www.ohlonecostanoanesselelnation.org/). (June 1, 2020).

<sup>57</sup> Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, "History - Amah Mutsun."

tribes, and of these nations, only 45 tribes received land and federal recognition. Approximately 8,500 Natives did not receive property rights or protection. As Dorrington's report led to the federal government illegally dropping federal recognition status to about 185 tribes, including the Amah Mutsun, there is no record that Dorrington ever visited the California coast between San Francisco and San Luis Obispo. Moreover, the Amah Mutsun nation never received notification that Dorrington was determining which tribes would get land, nor were they ever informed that they were no longer a federally recognized tribe. No due process to terminate them was ever initiated, to this day.<sup>58</sup>

Overall, the Amah Mutsun genocide began with Spanish colonialism and continued with the elimination of the Native when the State of California declared a race war on all California Natives.<sup>59</sup> Meanwhile, the logic of elimination sets the foundation of settler colonialism that has become a social structure that continues through time to oppress the Amah Mutsun continuously. Additionally, assimilating the Amah Mutsun tribe into the American culture also served as a strategy to eliminate the Native since elimination can transform into the notion that California Natives are only images of the past. Therefore, structural genocide ensured that the Amah Mutsun community lost their language, ceremonies, songs, ecological customs, land stewardship, as well as much of their cultural identity. Additionally, with the dispossession of their lands, Amah Mutsun people lost the heart of our identity and belonging.<sup>60</sup> “Indigenous peoples make place by relating both personal and communal experiences and histories to certain locations and landscapes—maintaining these spatial relationships is one of the most important components of

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<sup>58</sup> Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, “History - Amah Mutsun.”

<sup>59</sup> Citing all authors: Forbes, Castro and Madley

<sup>60</sup> Goeman, Mishuana. “Land as Life: Unsettling the Logics of Containment.” *Native Studies Keywords*, edited by Stephanie Nohelani Teves et al., 71-89. United States: University of Arizona Press, 2015.



politics and our identity.”<sup>61</sup> The need for contemporary tribal members to learn their cultural identity is rooted in our need to return to our land and culturally revitalize.

### **Contemporary Governance**

With regards to contemporary Amah Mutsun governance, the community is led by the Amah Mutsun Tribal Council that consists of tribal Elders and an Amah Mutsun Chairman. Since July 2003 and to date, Valentin Lopez has served as our Chairman. The tribe partakes in annual gatherings as well as regular membership meetings. The Council works within a “traditional Tribal structure, to resolve member concerns and carry on the business of the Tribe” since Council “is responsible for governing the day-to-day operations of the Tribe.”<sup>62</sup> A current task for Council is working with the Bureau of Indian Affairs to apply for federal recognition. Traditionally, the tribe had a headman that could be either a man or a woman, and the position was passed down from headman to headman with the full consent of the community. The Council consisted of elders who had traditional knowledge that advised the headman with all tribal affairs. Today, the selection for Council is an election process where tribal members gather for a meal, hear the candidates speak about their outlooks, and then cast their votes. With regards to the Chairman, the position will be up for election once Lopez is ready to step down. As the Amah Mutsun people uphold sovereignty without federal recognition, it has not always been easy. Our community remains vigilant in strengthening our tribal governance and decolonial methods of cultural revitalization to ensure cultural education for tribal youth.

Within the structure of colonialism, structural genocide is a long term activity that the Amah Mutsun community faces as they work to rebuild their nation. History has shown that the Tribal Band had to survive violence and trauma from both Spanish and Anglo settlers, and both

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<sup>61</sup> Goeman, “Land as Life: Unsettling the Logics of Containment,” 73.

<sup>62</sup> Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, “History - Amah Mutsun.”

Mexican and American government officials repeatedly denied their sovereignty. The tribe assimilated into both colonized societies while leaving behind the traditional lifestyles of our ancestors. Even though sovereignty has become a legal and political term during modern society, sovereignty also consists of cultural integrity to the degree that if a tribal community loses their sense of cultural identity, then the nation also suffers the loss of sovereignty. Moreover, sovereignty revolves around how “traditions are developed, sustained, and transformed to confront new conditions.”<sup>63</sup> Thus, with the denial of legal sovereignty and autonomy and as a non-federally recognized tribe, the Tribal Band’s sovereignty was denied due to the loss of their cultural identity caused by their dispossession from ancestral lands as well as not being able to practice ancestral traditions. Nor has the tribe had the opportunity of achieving economic liberty and growth, as the community strives to transform in order to confront current tribal issues and sustain itself during modern times.

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<sup>63</sup> Deloria, “Self-Determination and the Concept of Sovereignty,” 27.

## Chapter 2: Representations and Stereotypes - California Native American Literature

All my life, I have heard only one story about California Indians: godless, dirty, stupid, primitive, ugly, passive, drunken, immoral, lazy, weak-willed people who *might* make good workers if properly trained and motivated. What kind of story is that to grow up with?

-Deborah A. Miranda, *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir*

American society produces standards and norms for how one should act in the general public. Social representations convey how a person should talk and act, as well as how specific social groups behave. Representations of social groups are prevalent in media, film, and popular culture, and communicate to others how to interact with a specific kind of person, and what this kind of person is capable of achieving.<sup>64</sup> Concerning Native Americans, social representations consist of non-contemporary historical figures and dehumanizing stereotypes. As negative representations continuously transmit within American society, this chapter maintains that the structure of settler colonialism created these dehumanizing and harmful social representations of Native Americans via American literature. Specifically, settler colonialism involves the usage of literary practices to serve a specific purpose. In the case of American Literature, American writers historically used literature to express their progress with civilization in North America. Documenting civilization (how one should appropriately act in society) calls for the comparison between the civilized and the uncivilized—between the settler and the Native. In other words, a comparison between the civilized and the savage.

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<sup>64</sup> Leavitt et al., ““Frozen in Time”: The Impact of Native American Media Representations on Identity and Self-Understanding.”

Representations of savagism allowed for American writers to eliminate the Indigenous voice while creating the stereotype that Native Americans are barbaric savages. Not only did settler colonialism create other dehumanizing stereotypes of Native Americans (like being uneducated, dirty, or poor), colonialism's structure keeps these demeaning representations embedded in today's American society. Thus, negative stereotypical representations continue to impact Native people, especially when they navigate American educational institutions.

This chapter begins with the literary notions of civilization and savagism to contend that stereotypical representations of Native Americans pass down from generation to generation. Meanwhile, these negative literary representations have transformed and continue to impact the lives of Native Americans adversely through time. The latter part of the chapter narrows in on dehumanizing representations of California Natives to highlight the importance of Native writers, including Native voices. This analysis asserts the importance of Native authors utilizing the colonial framework of American literature to focus on Native voices and to rewrite stereotypical representations. This chapter also discusses the decolonizing praxis of Native feminism for cultural revitalization and resurgence to maintain that Indigenous literature also upholds sovereignty and self-determination for the Amah Mutsun people. The tribe must decolonize through a feminist framework by returning to our ceremonies, stories, and oral histories to find new knowledge that will combat stereotypes to ensure tribal survival.

### **Civilization, Savagism and Misrepresentations**

With *Savagism and Civilization: a Study of the Indian and the American Mind*,<sup>65</sup> Roy Harvey Pearce asserts that from 1609 to 1851, studying the savage meant that colonizers were inadvertently studying themselves. As early American writers wrote about the savage and

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<sup>65</sup> Pearce, Roy Harvey. *Savagism and Civilization: a Study of the Indian and the American Mind*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

colonial methods of trying to civilize or destroy Indigenous people, American writers reinforced their civilization by creating a social order that had no room for savages. By diminishing the civility of Indigenous peoples, American writers believed in their godly elevation as civilized men, including their responsibility to civilize the savage. With Pearce's book, he highlights colonial antecedents and origins to examine the concept of savagism that symbolizes Indigenous peoples. His work confirms that the settler idea and theme of savagism is "a counter-theme to a larger one, civilization."<sup>66</sup>

European colonizers believed their elevation to civilization was due to their imitations of their god. Settlers religiously believed it was their responsibility to bring order to the chaos of North America. They saw America as a natural wealth that was for their conquering, including the Indigenous peoples.<sup>67</sup> "As this idea of civilized progress came to be an article of American belief, so did the idea of savagism from which it took substance and to which it gave strength."<sup>68</sup> Progress meant that Americans could consider their own lives concerning Native Americans through the means of practicality, theology, and symbolism. Society believed that civilization could destroy the savage; meanwhile, giving in to temptations of savagism would likewise destroy any civilized man.<sup>69</sup> To state differently, if settlers acted like Native Americans, they were not imitating god and would not be acting correctly according to white society's civilized standards and norms.

American progress of civilization meant the reproduction and spread of false knowledge concerning the savage. Native American representations transformed into the imaginary construct of the literary Indian due to early literary works concerning civilization and savagism.

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<sup>66</sup> Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization: a Study of the Indian and the American Mind*, xix.

<sup>67</sup> Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization: a Study of the Indian and the American Mind*, 3.

<sup>68</sup> Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization: a Study of the Indian and the American Mind*, 49.

<sup>69</sup> Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization: a Study of the Indian and the American Mind*, 49.

The literary Indian concept “has long been understood and analyzed as a construct of Euro-American literary imagination or national feeling.”<sup>70</sup> Because American society believes Natives are savages, they ignore indigenous identities and dynamic aesthetic traditions when they write Indigenous peoples into stereotypical subjects and models of disapproval and disorientation.

Klaus Lubbers analyzes the influence of stereotypes on American writing regarding representations of Native Americans in his book *Born for the Shade: Stereotypes of the Native American in United States Literature and the Visual Arts, 1777-1894*.<sup>71</sup> Lubbers found that “mental fictions” of Native Americans produced by Anglo-American writers were “merely handed down from generation to generation.”<sup>72</sup> Inheriting literary stereotypes was also prevalent amongst American authors when Lubber determined that “in those rare cases where authors had a chance of looking for themselves and thus of forming their own opinion,”<sup>73</sup> they still wrote about Natives historically and stereotypically. Additionally, amongst the American writers that expressed interest in and sympathy for Native Americans, Lubbers observed that their writing “was clouded by stereotypical imagery” and “failed to puncture the ideological balloon” that sympathetic writers “as a whole helped to inflate.”<sup>74</sup> Thus, since the start of colonialism in North America, American literature regarding civilization and savagism created literary stereotypes that endure amongst generations of American writers. Like the structure of settler colonialism,

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<sup>70</sup> Calcaterra, Angela. *Literary Indians: Aesthetics and Encounter in American Literature to 1920*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018, 2.

<sup>71</sup> Simmons, William S. “Reviewed Work: Born for the Shade: Stereotypes of the Native American in United States Literature and the Visual Arts, 1776-1894 by Klaus Lubbers.” *The New England Quarterly* 68, no. 4 (1995): 660-64. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/365881>.

<sup>72</sup> Simmons, “Reviewed Work: Born for the Shade: Stereotypes of the Native American in United States Literature and the Visual Arts, 1776-1894 by Klaus Lubbers,” 661.

<sup>73</sup> Simmons, “Reviewed Work: Born for the Shade: Stereotypes of the Native American in United States Literature and the Visual Arts, 1776-1894 by Klaus Lubbers,” 661.

<sup>74</sup> Simmons, “Reviewed Work: Born for the Shade: Stereotypes of the Native American in United States Literature and the Visual Arts, 1776-1894 by Klaus Lubbers,” 661.

American Literature has become a structure that oppresses Native Americans during contemporary times.

Social representations are now widespread through mass media such as images, film, and television. Like American literature, mass media creates, transmits, and maintains stereotypical representations of Native Americans. Additionally, because of the Internet, dehumanizing portrayals of Natives are reaching a wider audience.<sup>75</sup> As demeaning representations are grounded in American literature, American society now has the option of engaging with stereotypes by reading, looking at images, or watching films and television. Similar to the concepts of civilization and savagism, representations from the media also convey standards for good and bad people in society. For White Americans and middle-class individuals, “the media provides an abundance of positive, varied representations, whereas, for others, such as working— class and racial —ethnic minority individuals, it provides a limited number of predominantly negative and narrow representations.”<sup>76</sup> Specifically for Native Americans, they “are typically depicted as 18th and 19th century figures (i.e., as teepee dwelling, buckskin and feather wearing, horse riding people),” meanwhile, if represented “as contemporary people, they are negatively stereotyped as poor, uneducated and prone to addictions.”<sup>77</sup>

Contemporary misrepresentations not only depict Natives as historical figures, but they also homogenize them as particular types of Native Americans like Navajo or Cherokee.

“Considering the diversity of Native American groups, these narrow representations not only define Native Americans as a homogeneous group “frozen in time,” but also render invisible

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<sup>75</sup> Leavitt et al., ““Frozen in Time”: The Impact of Native American Media Representations on Identity and Self-Understanding,” 43.

<sup>76</sup> Leavitt et al., ““Frozen in Time”: The Impact of Native American Media Representations on Identity and Self-Understanding,” 40.

<sup>77</sup> Leavitt et al., ““Frozen in Time”: The Impact of Native American Media Representations on Identity and Self-Understanding,” 40.

hundreds of diverse tribal cultures.”<sup>78</sup> Each tribal nation is unique with its languages, traditional practices, and knowledge systems. California Natives are distinct from all other Natives throughout North America. Yet, we share the same stereotypical representations with all other Native Americans. For example, homogenized representations are evident in the newspaper article, “Our Indian Policy.”<sup>79</sup> The *Alta California* published the article on June 1, 1850, and from the archives, I was unable to determine the author. The article begins by praising the intellect of American writers on indigenous history to enforce their influence on governmental policies concerning California Natives. The article believes that from years of studies and observations, American writers have gathered accurate scholarly information that should be considered by the government when dealing with California Natives. The article states:

To say that the U.S. government has failed in a perception of the masterly wisdom which characterizes the writings of Schoolcraft, and neglected to apply the teachings of his doctrine to our relationship with the tribes of Indians within our territories, were to yield but a poor tribute to the sagacity of American statesmen.<sup>80</sup>

When applying the argument that American writers wrote up notions of civilization and savagism, this quote suggests that the U.S. government failed to reference American writers’ scholarly works. They did not remember that Indigenous people are savages as the government developed policies concerning California Natives. The article homogenizes California tribes with

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<sup>78</sup> Leavitt et al., ““Frozen in Time”: The Impact of Native American Media Representations on Identity and Self-Understanding,” 43.

<sup>79</sup> “Our Indian Policy.” *Alta California* (San Francisco, California), June 1, 1850: [2]. *Readex: America’s Historical Newspapers*.  
<https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/readex/doc?p=EANX&docref=image/v2%3A111FCA65E54609B8%40EANX-11AE5028CA91FA78%402396910-11AE5028DE7B92D8%401-11AE5029059C5B08%40Our%2BIndian%2BPolicy>.

<sup>80</sup> “Our Indian Policy.” *Alta California* (San Francisco, California).



all other Native Americans instead of recognizing the uniqueness of California Indigenous peoples. We are all deemed uncivilized savages.

Aside from referencing the works of American writers, the article then moves into the need to guard the State of California. Specifically, the article states, “It would appear that California is sadly in want of some immediate adoption of policy to guard the interests of the new State against discord and dissension, arising from the harassing condition of her Indian affairs.” In other words, this quote says that settlers must protect their self-serving interest in having ownership of California lands against the rising and harassing dissonance of California Natives. The article insinuates that hostile feuds are growing fast on both sides of Anglo settlers and California Natives and that preventing violent confrontations is impossible.

With ideas of savagism instilled in the perspectives of Anglo settlers, they believed that they needed to fight the savage to protect their claim on California land. Based on prior portrayals from Native American representations, the article characterized California Natives with the following passage.

The habits of the California Indian are those in which indolence and vice predominate, but if he is incapable of moral suasion, he is neither to be charged with a natural inclination to crimes of deep moral dye. The vicious propensity with which he is imbued from the hours of infancy, is a marvellous fondness for free appropriation of the property of others. Idle, thievish, ignorant, degraded and brutish,- thus may we sum up, in short, the character of the California Indian.<sup>81</sup>

The above passage inaccurately depicts California Natives as having a lazy and immoral demeanor as well as a wicked behavior. With the line, “but if he is incapable of moral suasion,

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<sup>81</sup> “Our Indian Policy.” *Alta California* (San Francisco, California)

he is neither to be charged with a natural inclination to crimes of deep moral dye,” the article asserts to its readers that California Natives are incapable of upholding American moral ideals and have a natural inclination to commit horrible crimes against American civilization.

Furthermore, the next sentence in the paragraph suggests that California Natives possess an immoral character which they acquire at birth. The “immoral personhood” of California Natives is directly associated with living freely on land that is not their property. This sentence is commenting on the savage idea that Indigenous people have a marvelous fondness for the “free appropriation” of property..” As Anglo settlers made their claim to Native land, they dared to accuse Natives of appropriating their newfound property. Tribal land was not property. Perhaps Anglo settlers understood that land connected my ancestors to their identity and our indigenous knowledge systems. Thus, Anglo settlers deemed California Natives as ignorant thieves, who incapable of moral persuasion, appropriated the property of others.

The article continues by saying that the Spanish missionaries once civilized California Natives, but since the arrival of Anglo Saxon settlers, their moral character has diminished. The article asserts to its readers that California Natives are “loathed by the superiorly gifted occupants of their once happy hunting grounds as day by day the rapid accessions of white men upon these shores, bring the Indians in contact with their new masters.” In other words, the article is providing moral ground for Anglo settlers to loath California Natives as they conquer tribal land and become masters to enslaved California Natives. The Alta California newspaper article analysis has provided evidence of how the media negatively portrayed California Natives while encouraging Anglo settlers to hate the Indigenous people of California while condoning violence against them.

The newspaper article continues to say that the difficulties with the disgusting Natives bestowed upon the Anglo settlers are part of Manifest Destiny. Because settlers believed they are superior to Native people, the article explains that the Anglos will continue to be bothered by the savages until their Gold mining interests are safely secure. The article creates fear amongst its readers by insinuating that settlers must prepare for violent collisions between themselves and the collectivity of California Native tribes. The newspaper enforces a narrative that as Anglo settlers continue to mine and conquer California lands, there will be an uproar of attacks from California Natives so they must prepare for their protection. Hence, government officials must adopt policies that protect settler interests as they create policies that condone the savage. For this thesis, including an analysis of an 1850 newspaper article demonstrates the misrepresentations of California's Indigenous people. It also illustrates the violent demeanor of Anglo settlers as they stole California land and prioritized their financial gain with mining, over the bodies of California Natives. Therefore, this chapter asserts the importance of uplifting Native voices to combat the negative portrayals of California Natives.

### **Uplifting Native American Voices**

Since the start of colonialism, settlers continuously ignored Native American voices as they utilized literature to prioritize their perspectives when imagining an American identity and nationhood. American writers increasingly based their literature on myths of vanishing Native Americans as they drew connections between barbaric Indians and American successors. Native people usually appeared as part of history for nostalgic reminders of the days before modernity. American writers even attempted to gain sentimental access to native muses by wearing costumes and pretending to be mystic Indians while performing rituals. As American authors imagined Natives canoeing or hunting in the forests, they developed romantic representations of

Indians that loved nature. Among other stereotypical misrepresentations like archaic savagism, American authors initiated the imaginary construct of literary Indian. Imagining inaccurate representations and silencing Native voices enabled the literary Indian notion to stand for the stereotypical portrayals and racist generalizations of Native peoples in American Literature.<sup>82</sup>

As this chapter illustrates how the notions of civilization and savagism became embedded in mass media as stereotypical representations, this current section argues for the need to uplift Native voices. Thus, to combat these notions of savagism and the literary Indian, Angela Calcaterra's work, *Literary Indians: Aesthetics and Encounter in American Literature to 1920*,<sup>83</sup> becomes beneficial. Calcaterra introduces the theorization of cross-cultural influence in American literary history to understand Indigenous influences and appropriation in American literary studies to minimize the dominance of Anglo-American literary history.<sup>84</sup> Notably, Calcaterra draws attention to the aesthetic theories and practices of Indigenous communities to create space for the Indigenous imaginative perspective. Because Indigenous people are excluded and nearly nonexistent in American literary history, her analysis focuses on literary cultures and aesthetics of literary production to highlight the elegance of creative Native traditions and material culture. Calcaterra includes the sophistication of Indigenous authors made up of writers, orators, and performers during the early nineteenth-century.

*Literary Indians* elevate indigenous forms and stories from Native communities regardless if they produced extensive bodies of writing. For Native peoples, literature is a form of communication through cultural materials that describes and exemplifies the significance and influence of Native worldviews. As Calcaterra examines Indigenous literature, her work speaks

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<sup>82</sup> Deloria, Philip Joseph. *Playing Indian*. United Kingdom: Yale University Press, 1998.

<sup>83</sup> Calcaterra, *Literary Indians: Aesthetics and Encounter in American Literature to 1920*.

<sup>84</sup> Calcaterra, *Literary Indians: Aesthetics and Encounter in American Literature to 1920*, 2-7.

to the work of Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice. Calcaterra and Justice express the importance of elevating literary indigenous forms and narratives that the discourse of American literature frequently denies.<sup>85</sup> Specifically, in *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*,<sup>86</sup> Justice maintains that narratives of Indigenous people are central to their understanding of the world as well as their place in relation to it.

With Justice's book, he asserts that assumptions regarding what is literary and is not, are privileging some voices over others or even ignoring some voices entirely. For Indigenous voices, "writers, scholars, storytellers, and knowledge keepers have, since our earliest ancestors emerged as distinct peoples, worked to articulate lived truths and imaginative possibilities through spoken, written, and inscribed forms and project them into a meaningful future."<sup>87</sup> Justice maintains that colonialism is a literary symbolic diminishment of Indigenous peoples as a political entity in addition to their physical displacement. Thus, Indigenous literature is crucial in countering the colonial force of erasure and misrepresentations. As Native voices and stories are vocalized, inscribed, and embodied, they function to honor the survival and sacrifices of the ancestors that came before them to ensure survival during modern times for Indigenous peoples overall.<sup>88</sup> Indigenous stories are not only integral to survival; they are part of the indigenous traditions and knowledge systems. With Indigenous literature, Native Americans can maintain their rights and sovereignty as they work to uphold their reciprocal relationships with the contested lands of North America.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Calcaterra, *Literary Indians: Aesthetics and Encounter in American Literature to 1920*, 9.

<sup>86</sup> Justice, *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*.

<sup>87</sup> Justice, *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, xviii.

<sup>88</sup> Justice, *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, xviii-xix.

<sup>89</sup> Justice, *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, 5-6.

This chapter builds off of Calcaterra and Justice to call for the elevating of Native voices, the imaginative perspective, and indigenous aesthetics to (re)write representations of California Natives. Because non-Natives wrote historical portrayals of Native Americans, the (re)writing process requires the centering of Native voices so they can define their representations. As Indigenous narratives and oral history are central to their perceptions of the world and their place concerning it, prioritizing Native voices will work towards articulating lived truths and imaginative possibilities. Through written, spoken, visual, and inscribed forms, California Natives can work towards a meaningful future that includes positive representations and even accurate histories. Settlers used literary symbols to diminish Indigenous people's lives and perspectives. Native literature, oral history, and storytelling are crucial tools for countering colonial forces of misrepresentations and erasure. Native literature uplifts Native voices that are vital to honoring ancestors and ensuring survival for future generations.

### **(Re)writing California Native Representations**

With regards to (re)writing accurate representations and histories of California Natives, this thesis borrows from the work of Cutcha Risling Baldy. In *We Are Dancing for You: Native Feminisms and the Revitalization of Women's Coming-of-Age Ceremonies*,<sup>90</sup> Baldy discusses the decolonizing praxis of Native feminism as it ties to the enactment of sovereignty and self-determination. With Baldy's historical analysis of gender, women, and coming-of-age ceremonies in California, she illustrates the necessity of continuing cultural ceremonies and traditions that sustain California Natives. Specifically, Baldy highlights Hupa traditional knowledge and women's coming-of-age ceremonies to demonstrate an "epistemological framework that (re)writes, (re)rights, and (re)rites Native feminisms as foundational building

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<sup>90</sup> Baldy, *We Are Dancing for You: Native Feminisms and the Revitalization of Women's Coming-of-Age Ceremonies*.

blocks of Native culture and society.”<sup>91</sup> Baldy places (re) in parenthesis to express that Indigenous peoples are claiming and writing in present modern times, while also revivifying and building a future that involves the past for a foundation that speaks to a lasting legacy of both ancient and contemporary times.<sup>92</sup>

For uplifting California Native voices through the means of literature, oral histories, and storytelling, Baldy's methods are essential to (re)write representations of California Natives. Most importantly, indigenous forms of written, spoken, visual, and inscribed work ensures that the (re)writing of representations sits on the foundation of ancient and contemporary cultural legacies. With this (re)writing process, California Natives will uphold their sovereignty and self-determination by (re)righting and (re)riting the representations that will be made available for the future of mass media. Additionally, as Baldy emphasizes gender, women, and coming-of-age ceremonies with her framework, she enables California Native women to (re)write stereotypical and sexualized representations to (re)right and (re)rite their importance in Native communities.

### **(Re)writing California Native History**

With Baldy's second chapter, “California Indian History, Genocide, and Native Women,” she examines California's post-invasion and genocidal history that aimed for the total annihilation of California Native Americans and exploitation of Native woman bodies. Baldy takes her readers through the disruptive and destructive structures of genocide during the Spanish missions, the Mexican-American War, the rancho system, and the Gold Rush to document the violence against California Native women. As I elaborate on these three eras in chapter one, it is essential to note that women endured extreme brutality during these different periods, setting the

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<sup>91</sup> Baldy, *We Are Dancing for You: Native Feminisms and the Revitalization of Women's Coming-of-Age Ceremonies*, 30.

<sup>92</sup> Baldy, *We Are Dancing for You: Native Feminisms and the Revitalization of Women's Coming-of-Age Ceremonies*, 7-8.

tone for sexualized-misrepresentations of California Native women in mass media. Not only is Baldy's work necessary for (re)writing representations and histories of Native women, the work of Deborah Miranda provides us with an example of (re)written California history that brings awareness to the violent actions committed against California Native women as well as men. Additionally, because Miranda is from the Ohlone/Costanoan- Esselen tribe, this chapter uplifts the voice of a California Native woman.

With her book, *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir*, Deborah A. Miranda brings awareness to Spanish missionaries' mistreatment of California Native Americans. Miranda illustrates the violence of Spanish colonizers based on their documentation of California Natives, especially women, with her poem, "Los Pájaros."<sup>93</sup> In English, Los pájaros translates to The birds. She wrote the poem based on the writings of Junípero Serra from May 1773 and June 1774.<sup>94</sup> Instead of writing from the perspective of Serra, Miranda writes from the viewpoints of California Natives. In this way, I see her work as an example of uplifting California Native voices as she (re)writes California history. Curriculum for California schools excludes accurate history concerning the violence committed against California Natives. For decades, fourth graders took part in the "Mission Unit," where they learned about the civilized Natives who built the 21 California Missions.<sup>95</sup> With Miranda's poem, she challenges the incomplete narrative of California Natives to share their actual experiences. She begins the poem with the imagery of a California tribe seeing Spanish soldiers afar in the fields of their surrounding landscape as they also notice a great flock of birds.

Seeing your people come through the fields

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<sup>93</sup> Miranda, *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir*, 15.

<sup>94</sup> Miranda, *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir*, 3.

<sup>95</sup> Miranda, *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir*, 6.



we noticed a great flock of birds  
of various and beautifully blended colors  
such as we had never seen before.<sup>96</sup>

Because the first stanza begins with “Seeing your people come through the fields,” and ends with “such as we had never seen before,” it becomes apparent that Miranda is beginning her poem with the first point of contact between California Natives and Spanish colonizers. Miranda establishes her symbolism with the flock of birds (Los pájaros) with the second and third lines of this first stanza. The birds symbolize the magnificent beauty of various blended colors. Miranda establishes the beauty of her symbolism but does not yet allude to whom the flock of birds represents, although Miranda utilizes the flock of birds to reference an illusion.

With the symbolism of the birds, Miranda references the illusion of Spanish missionaries and soldiers arriving to colonize California and civilize the Natives in the name of their religion. Although, from the previous chapter, it is evident that Spanish colonizers arrived for self-serving and profitable reasons. The second and third stanza deepens this illusion further.

We noticed a great flock of birds  
swooping out of the heavens just ahead  
such as we had never seen before  
as if they came to welcome our newly arrived guests.

Swooping out of the heavens just ahead  
six or more soldiers set out together on horseback  
as if they came to greet their newly acquired hosts

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<sup>96</sup> Miranda, *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir*, 3.

in the far distant rancherias even many leagues away.<sup>97</sup>

In the second stanza, with the lines “We noticed a great flock of birds” and “swooping out of the heavens just ahead,” Miranda is reiterating the beauty of the birds as they swoop around in the sky. In other words, the birds are sacred and an extension of god’s heaven. The third and fourth lines, “such as we had never seen before,” and “as if they came to welcome our newly arrived guests,” the symbolism of the heavenly birds’ shifts to represent the soldiers’ arrival. As the birds swept down from heaven to welcome the arrival of the soldiers, Miranda references the first point of contact as well as the illusion that the colonizers are an extension of god. Miranda utilizes the symbolism of birds swooping out from the heavens as a metaphor for the work of Spanish missionaries and military soldiers. They were sent to California, in the name of the Catholic church, with the objective of civilizing California Natives. However, their purpose is an illusion since the enslavement of California Natives was actually for self-serving purposes and forced labor.

The third stanza, with the first two lines, reiterate the delusion that Father Serra and the soldiers colonized California in the name of god: “Swooping out of the heavens just ahead” and “six or more soldiers set out together on horseback.” With the swooping out of the heavens on horseback, Miranda illustrates the illusion of Spanish missionaries and soldiers arriving in California to convert the Natives to Catholicism. The next two lines of the stanza indicate that the soldiers on horseback rode as if they were going to greet the Natives throughout the rancherias of California. By mentioning “newly acquired hosts” and “the far distant rancherias even many leagues away,” Miranda alludes to the acquisition of California Native bodies and conquering native lands. Additionally, with the words “newly arrived guests” in stanza two, line

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<sup>97</sup> Miranda, *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir*, 3.

four, as well as “newly acquired hosts” in the third stanza, Miranda enforces the reality that California is native land and that colonizers will always be guests on the lands they conqueror. The true caretakers of California land and all the distant rancherias are the California Native peoples.

Miranda begins to break down the illusion of the Spanish settlers upholding god’s work in stanzas four and five. Miranda begins to illustrate the violence that the California Natives endured when they came into contact with soldiers throughout the many rancherias. The next two stanzas are as follows.

Six or more soldiers set out together on horseback.

Both men and women at sight of them took to their heels  
in the far distant rancherias even many leagues away,  
fleeing the soldiers, clever as they are at lassoing cows.

Both men and women at sight of them took to their heels  
but the women were caught with Spanish ropes.

The soldiers, clever as they are at lassoing cows  
preyed on the women for their unbridled lust.<sup>98</sup>

At this point in the poem, Miranda begins to illustrate California Natives’ capturing as the soldiers set out on horseback to catch the Natives in the distance. As the Native men and women caught sight of the soldiers in the far distance, they began to run for their lives, they “took to their heels.” With the third line of the fourth stanza, Miranda reminds us that the soldiers hunted California Natives throughout the rancherias of California, “many leagues away.” Miranda then utilizes the last line, “fleeing the soldiers, clever as they are at lassoing cows,” to metaphorically

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<sup>98</sup> Miranda, *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir*, 3.

illustrate that the Spanish soldiers captured California Natives in the same manner of lassoing cows. Miranda is providing her readers with the reality of what happened to California Natives: Spanish soldiers rounded them up like cattle, treated like animals, and captured for enslavement.

As Miranda (re)writes history with her poem thus far, it becomes apparent that California Native men and women ran for their lives when they saw the soldiers riding towards them on horseback. With the second line of stanza five, “but the women were caught with Spanish ropes,” Miranda begins to bring attention to the violence committed against California Native women. To do so, she begins by emphasizing the soldiers’ ability to lasso cows with their ropes by repeating the phrase “clever as they are at lassoing cows” in the third line. The action of lassoing cows places importance on the imagery of capturing and enslaving California Natives as merely a sport. Meanwhile, with the fourth line, “preyed on the women for their unbridled lust” Miranda illuminates the main prize of the sport: catching their prey of Native women. Spanish soldiers hunted and raped their prey. As Miranda writes this poem based on the writings of Father Serra, she brings to light that Serra was aware that California Native women endured the “unbridled lust” of his Spanish soldiers. Miranda (re)writes California history by poetically illustrating the truth of how Spanish soldiers captured and committed violent acts against Native women.

For the last two stanzas of the poem, Miranda continues to (re)write California history concerning the demeaning actions committed against Native women and men by Spanish missionaries and soldiers. Stanzas six and seven are as follows.

The women were caught with Spanish ropes.

Indian men defended their wives-

prey for the Spaniards’ unbridled lust-

only to be shot down with bullets.

The Indian men tried to defend their wives  
of various and beautifully blended colors  
only to be shot down with bullets  
seeing your people come through the fields.<sup>99</sup>

These last two stanzas discuss what happened to the men that stood to protect their wives from the Spanish predators. Specifically, the first two lines of stanza six provide readers with the imagery of Spanish soldiers lassoing California Native women with their ropes as the “Indian men” defended their wives. With the following line, Miranda repeats the words “unbridled lust” to enforce the historical fact that with their lust, Spaniards raped and violated California Native women as Junípero Serra repeatedly stood by and merely documented these horrible actions in his writings. According to Serra, it was his job to care for and civilize California Natives; instead, he allowed the Natives to endure cruelty. At the same time, Spanish soldiers did as they pleased with female bodies and “shot down with bullets” any man that stood in the way of their “unbridled lust.” Miranda confirms the imagery of Spanish soldiers shooting down and murdering California Native men with the second line in stanza six, “Indian men defended their wives-,” and the first line in stanza seven, “The Indian men tried to defend their wives.” By drawing these two lines out from their stanzas and placing them side by side, Miranda provides us with the imagery that men defended their wives but failed. The men’s failure is made clear with how Miranda shifts “defending their wives” to “tried to defend their wives.” Meanwhile, with the repetition of the line, “only to be shot down with bullets” in stanzas six and seven, Miranda invokes the reality that when men honored their wives by attempting to protect them from Spanish predators, they were unable to defend their wives because of the soldier’s firearms.

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<sup>99</sup> Miranda, *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir*, 3.

With the last three lines of stanza seven, Miranda honors California Native women by returning to the metaphor of the birds. For the second line, Miranda restates line 3 from the first stanza of the poem: “of various and beautifully blended colors.” Because the great flock of birds symbolizes sacredness and great beauty, it becomes apparent that the birds represent California Native women. Miranda affirms that California Native women are beautifully unique, with various features and skin tones. Miranda reminds her readers that Native women are sacred and honored and cherished instead of hunted down as prey for sexual gratification. Here, Miranda (re)writes the representation of California Native women. Unlike the writings from Father Serra, Native women are individually beautiful and are honored, respected, and protected by their husbands as well as their communities. Native women are not sexual objects. With the last two lines of the poem, Miranda reminds her readers that despite the unique beauty of California Native women, Spanish soldiers raped them in the name of conquering Native lands and converting the Natives to Catholicism. The poem ends with the lines: “only to be shot down with bullets” and “seeing your people come through the fields.” California Natives tried to escape the soldiers’ ropes on horseback, but the Spanish soldiers raped the women and murdered the men.

As this chapter uplifts the voice of Deborah A. Miranda by analyzing her poem, “Los Pájaros,” Miranda (re)writes California Native history as well as representations for California Native women. The real history that Miranda tells is of the Spanish colonizers capturing and killing California Native Americans in the name of the Catholic church and Spanish government. As Miranda reveals the crimes committed against California Native women, she also (re)writes their misrepresentations of being sexual prey by honoring their unique sacredness of womanhood. Since the beginning of colonialism, Native women have been continuously targeted through rape and physical violence and still face high rates of victimization. For example,

“American Indian women are the most victimized group in the country. American Indian women have the highest rates of sexual and physical abuse. In fact, one in three Native women will be raped during her lifetime.”<sup>100</sup> Because mass media promotes standards and norms concerning the correct way to act in society, sexualized representations of Native women promote their sexual objectification in real-life experiences. With stereotypes like sexy Indian princess or sexy Indian squaw, non-Natives view these demeaning portrayals and develop similar outlooks of Native women. As the Spanish soldiers, they may view California Native women as prey and cause them violent harm. As Father Serra and the missionaries stood by as the Spanish soldiers raped Native women, violence against California Native women continued through the Mexican period and remains active in American society. Thus, to combat the violence against women promoted in mass media, we must uplift California Native voices to (re)write misrepresentations and incorrect history.

### **(Re)writing Amah Mutsun Representations**

By following the lead of Deborah A. Miranda, this section continues to (re)write representations of California Native women to display their importance to their tribal communities. Explicitly, I focus on a poem written by John Peabody Harrington regarding an Amah Mutsun ancestor named, Ascensión Solorsano de Cervantes, who was a part of the last generation born at the San Juan Bautista mission before secularization. Harrington was an ethnographer, linguist, and researcher from the Smithsonian Institution. He met Ascensión Solorsano by interviewing her to document Amah Mutsun oral history, the language, songs, ceremonies, native plants, and medicinal practices, along with much more traditional knowledge

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<sup>100</sup> Mithlo, Nancy Marie. “Americana Indian -- thinking twice about images that matter: Nancy Marie Mithlo at TEDxABQWomen.” *YouTube* video, 9:50. December 2012. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vdhWdgJI\\_ck](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vdhWdgJI_ck), 4:18-4:35.

that became lost to the tribe due to assimilation.<sup>101</sup> Harrington “left an extraordinary collection of notes on all phases of Mutsun life, giving great credit to Ascención.”<sup>102</sup>

At some point after meeting and coming to know Ascención, Harrington wrote an undated poem titled “Ascención Solorsano.”<sup>103</sup> With the poem, he illustrates the life of Ascención and the contributions she bravely made to her tribal community. Harrington’s structure for the poem is of three stanzas consisting of eight lines each. The first stanza is as follows.

Where on the height beside the meadow  
The ancient church its vigil keeps,  
Enfolded in the kindly shadow,  
‘Tis there a noble woman sleeps,..  
Whose deeds of mercy were uncounted,  
Whose duty found her unafraid,  
Whose charities increased and mounted  
The more she found them poorly paid.<sup>104</sup>

Harrington begins the poem with the location of Ascención’s home near Mission San Juan Bautista. The first four lines pinpoint the meadow near the “ancient church” that shadows the home of Ascención. With the second line, “The ancient church its vigil keeps,” Harrington references the Mission San Juan Bautista and the church that has regular vigils. Then, lines three and four illustrate that the mission overshadows Ascención’s home in the distance. These two

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<sup>101</sup> Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, “History - Amah Mutsun.”

<sup>102</sup> Eargle, *Native California Guide: Weaving the Past & Present*, 165.

<sup>103</sup> Harrington, John Peabody. “Ascención Solorsano,” memorial page for Ascención Solorsano *de Cervantes* (1855–1930). Find A Grave, database and images. Accessed June 9, 2020. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/12232559/ascencion-cervantes>.

<sup>104</sup> Harrington, “Ascención Solorsano.”



lines serve as a metaphor for how the dark history of the mission era casts over Ascención's life. Harrington mentions a noblewoman sleeping to enforce the reality that the violence haunts Ascención that our ancestors endured while enslaved at the missions. With lines five and six of the stanza, Harrington characterizes Ascención as an unafraid, merciful woman who continuously helped others. She helped so many people that her deeds are uncounted; meanwhile, she is brave and unafraid to uphold her duty as a medicine woman. The last two lines of the stanza, "Whose charities increased and mounted" and "The more she found them poorly paid," Harrington illustrates that Ascención continued to help others regardless if they had money to pay for her services. Ascención's home was the place of tribal activity where tribal members visited her daily to seek her support or to share information with her. Ascención took responsibility for helping tribal members with anything they needed, including obtaining employment, food, or medicine. She was a healer and social worker, and her leadership within "the first three decades of the 20th century was critical to the future of the Tribe,"<sup>105</sup> since the time had finally come to where tribal members could practice their culture publicly.

Moving on to the second stanza of Harrington's poem, he illustrates the early years of Ascención's life. Specifically, he refers to her time at Mission San Juan Bautista. The next eight lines of the second stanza are as follows.

Born mid the past's bright-burning embers,  
She learned the ways of earlier times,  
Talked with a vanished folk's last members,  
And heard the belfry's pristine chimes.  
That lore of earlier horizon,

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<sup>105</sup> Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, "History - Amah Mutsun."

Caught from her lips, shall not be lost -  
Her wisdom science now relies on,  
Her knowledge now is history's boast.<sup>106</sup>

With the first line, “Born mid the past’s bright-burning embers,” Harrington refers to Ascención’s birth while at Mission San Juan Bautista. Because embers are the simmering remains of a fire, “bright-burning embers” serves as a metaphor for Ascención’s birth taking place towards the end of the Mission era. Indeed, the Mission era was a destructive fire that burnt out once California Mission Natives were set free (although, another fire set ablaze). The next two lines, “She learned the ways of earlier times,” and “Talked with a vanished folk’s last members,” Harrington illustrates that Ascención learned ancestral knowledge from earlier times by speaking with other tribal members. Notably, because Ascención was the last tribal member that was fluent in the Mutsun language, talking with the “vanished folk’s last members” alludes to the reality that our language vanished due to the short lifespans of Amah Mutsun ancestors while enslaved. As Ascención learned Amah Mutsun cultural knowledge and spoke the Mutsun language as a child, Harrington reiterates her time spent at the mission with the fourth line, “And heard the belfry’s pristine chimes.” Each California mission had a tower of bells, and the pristine chimes rang according to the workday schedule. Bells directed the Natives when to wake up and told them when it was time to go to work. Bells rang when it was time for breakfast, lunch, dinner, bedtime, and even when it was time to attend church.<sup>107</sup> Here, Harrington alludes to the daily reality of Amah Mutsun tribal members while they were held captive by Spanish missionaries and soldiers.

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<sup>106</sup> Harrington, “Ascención Solorsano.”

<sup>107</sup> Miranda, *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir*, 9.

For lines five through eight in the second stanza, Harrington uplifts Ascención's voice and the knowledge she learned from her elders. Line five, "That lore of earlier horizon," refers to the oral history of Amah Mutsun ancestors that Ascención learned as a child. With line six, when Harrington writes, "Caught from her lips, shall not be lost -," he provides a metaphor of his and Ascención's work together. When Ascención spoke of our cultural knowledge, Harrington "caught from her lips" everything she was saying by writing extensive notes that are now archival material. "Ascención became a repository for Tribal history, learning stories from others and passing on traditions and Tribal lore to the next generation."<sup>108</sup> With the documentation of Amah Mutsun cultural knowledge, Harrington ensured oral history was saved and not lost because of genocide and assimilation. According to the last two lines of the second stanza, Ascención's "wisdom science" of medicinal plants and practices will live on as her cultural knowledge is now "history's boast." Harrington is asserting that the documentation of Ascención's knowledge will serve as an independent source of historical information for the future generation of Amah Mutsun tribal members.

Lastly, with the third stanza, Harrington praises and calls for the honoring of Ascención Solorsano. Because of Ascención, she saved Amah Mutsun cultural knowledge while telling Amah Mutsun oral history. With the last eight lines of the poem, Harrington writes:

Let her be known in near and far land  
As one whose act was true as word;  
Let mercy grace her with its garland,  
And service bless her with reward;  
Let all who love the ancient history

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<sup>108</sup> Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, "History - Amah Mutsun."

That once camped round the Mission spire  
Bless her who hath revealed its mystery  
And led us to its hidden fire.<sup>109</sup>

With lines one and two, Harrington testifies to the noble demeanor of Ascensión. He calls for everyone around the world to remember Ascensión as a woman who acted and spoke in truth. To honor Ascensión, with lines three and four, Harrington calls for “mercy” to “grace her with its garland” and for “service” to “bless her with reward.” Because of Ascensión’s mercy to help and provide a service for other tribal members, Harrington is elevating her importance to the Amah Mutsun community, and even American society. With line five, “Let all who love the ancient history” and line six, “That once camped round the Mission spire,” it becomes obvious that Harrington is calling for U.S. citizens to learn accurate history concerning California Natives. Harrington writes this poem to tell American society that the California mission history they know of is incorrect. Because they “love the ancient history,” it is their responsibility to correct their knowledge. With the last two lines of the poem: “Bless her who hath revealed its mystery” and “And led us to its hidden fire,” Harrington appreciates Ascensión’s bravery with revealing the destructive history of the California missions. Again, Harrington uses fire as a metaphor for the violent, genocidal acts committed by Spanish colonizers against Amah Mutsun ancestors and other California Natives. The “hidden fire” is the hidden voice of Ascensión and the oral history of California Natives. California Native voices reveal the brutal actions of Spanish missionaries and soldiers, and any opposing narrative to the civilizing of savages in the name of the Catholic religion is silenced and ignored.

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<sup>109</sup> Harrington, “Ascensión Solorsano.”

Ascensión is a great spiritual leader for our tribe, and with her oral history, Harrington makes it apparent that her lived experiences are also beneficial to American society. Harrington uplifts Ascensión's voice to combat the inaccurate history of Spanish colonizers and the Catholic missions. His work serves as an example of (re)writing California Native history by bringing awareness to American society that the history they are aware of, is incorrect. Because of this ethnographic work and his position with the Smithsonian Institution, Harrington's research led him to document California history from the perspective of Native voices. With Harrington's poem, he (re)writes representations of California Native women by writing accurate and positive representations of Ascensión Solorsano de Cervantes. Throughout his poem, Harrington describes Ascensión as a noble giver, helpful, merciful, unafraid, full of wisdom, and knowledgeable. Nowhere in his poem does Harrington describe Ascensión as a sexy Indian squaw, godless, dirty, stupid, immoral, or weak-willed. Harrington honors Ascensión and represents her as a strong, powerful, reliable, brave, and wise woman. Because of Ascensión's powerful leadership, the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band began to reemerge upon her passing in the 1930s. She is vital to the Amah Mutsun people since she succeeded in reinvigorating the Amah Mutsun identity. The community has become more robust with a new series of leaders, ushered in a new era of tribal growth.<sup>110</sup>

### **Closing Thoughts**

American writers judged Indigenous cultures as settler colonialism simultaneously worked to eliminate Native peoples. Literature concerns what is vital to a culture and determines which worldviews are privileged and honored. The start of this chapter begins with the worldviews of American writers and their notions of civilization and savagism. Within the

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<sup>110</sup> Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, "History - Amah Mutsun."

American literary discourse, American writers ignored the different types of literary and aesthetic forms (oral history, ceremonies, stories, etc.) concerning Native communities. American writers deemed Native Americans as unintelligent and incapable of engaging with literature through the colonial framework of reading and writing. As they praised their civilized lives with their writing, American writers silenced the Native voice by portraying Indigenous peoples as barbaric savages. Instead of writing accurate representations of Native people, they created dehumanizing representations. This chapter maintains that contemporary stereotypical representations are rooted in American Literature. Through time, literary misrepresentations of Native Americans transformed into stereotypes prevalent in mass media today (film, images, social and news media, etc.). With mass media, American society upholds biased representations that influence interactions between Natives and non-Natives while creating adverse outcomes through policies and practices of American institutions (especially education) that continuously oppress Native Americans today.

With regards to representations of California Natives, this chapter examines an 1850 newspaper article titled “Our Indian Policy.” The article characterizes California Natives as idle, thievish, violent, ignorant, and cruel. Anglo settlers believed in policies that would protect their new lands and profits while promoting violence against California Natives. The opening passage of this chapter further illustrates the stereotypes of California Natives. From the book *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir*, Miranda says that she only heard one story concerning California Natives. Growing up, Miranda heard that California Native peoples are “godless, dirty, stupid, primitive, ugly, passive, drunken, immoral, lazy, weak-willed people who might make good workers if properly trained and motivated.” With Miranda’s example, it becomes apparent that California Natives will encounter several stereotypes throughout their lifetime that may impact

their self-image. Therefore, as this thesis calls for the Amah Mutsun community to decolonize through cultural revitalization, combating stereotypical representations becomes essential with ensuring tribal members strengthen their cultural identity and self-worth.

Combating Native American stereotypes in mass media requires the (re)writing of misrepresentations by uplifting of Native voices and their literary and aesthetic forms. By putting the notions of Angela Calcaterra and Daniel Heath Justice into the conversation, it becomes evident that Native American literature serves as a tool for Indigenous authors to elevate Indigenous voices and narratives. Meanwhile, with Cutcha Risling Baldy's epistemological framework of (re)writing, (re)righting, and (re)riting, placing (re) in parenthesis affirms that Native peoples are claiming their stories and writing during modern times while restoring Indigenous aesthetics. As the latter portion of this chapter narrows in on (re)writing California Native representations, Miranda's poem, "Los Pájaros," and Harrington's poem, "Ascención Solorsano," honor California Native women while (re)writing their representations. Both poems also uplift California Native voices to (re)write the history of how Spanish colonizers enslaved California Natives. Miranda specifies the violence committed against women by Spanish soldiers, while Harrington illustrates the strength and bravery of Ascención Solorsano.

With Baldy's decolonizing praxis, Native feminisms serve as foundational building blocks for Native cultures to secure a contemporary future that stands on the lasting legacy of ancient traditions. Thus, for the Amah Mutsun community, uplifting our voices is necessary for (re)writing our history and representations as revitalize our culture and strengthen our cultural identities. With the physical and intellectual struggle of nation-building, tribal members must connect to our stories and land to find ways to generate new knowledge.<sup>111</sup> Thus, the next

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<sup>111</sup> Simpson, "Land as pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation," 15.

chapter will highlight the importance of oral history and a cultural resurgence for the Amah Mutsun community while upholding tribal sovereignty and self-determination.



### Chapter 3: Oral History and Education Research

Combining my interest with Native American literature and education research became the empirical reasoning behind this thesis. My interdisciplinary aspirations provided me with the avenue of producing a piece of work that articulates Amah Mutsun nation-building, the (re)writing of California Native American representations, and the educational experiences of Amah Mutsun elders as examined in the next chapter. Oral history and storytelling inform this thesis's overall construction as I tell the story of my upbringing while sharing educational and work experiences in the introduction. As part of my story, I also discuss my role model as our oral histories inform the study's conceptual framework. To tell my aunt's story and Amah Mutsun elders' oral histories, I must also tell my story when discussing the research. Because my usage of oral history is communal and educational, oral history and storytelling empower me to blur the line between indigenous knowledge systems and Western education research. For Native communities, oral history functions to ensure tribal survival for the future and the implementation of decolonization and cultural revitalization. Meanwhile, in academia, oral history becomes a qualitative research method that prioritizes the voices of participants. Here, I am blending cultural knowledge with academic knowledge<sup>112</sup> to produce a piece of work that creates change for future Amah Mutsun generations and future California Native college students.

As tribal nations historically passed on traditions from generation to generation, they did so by orality. According to William Bauer and his journal article titled "Oral History,"<sup>113</sup> cultural knowledge, morals, and traditions are taught to tribal members via traditional oral stories,

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<sup>112</sup> Brayboy, Bryan M.J. "Toward a Tribal Critical Race Theory in Education." *The Urban Review* 37 (December 2005): 425–46. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-005-0018-y>.

<sup>113</sup> Bauer, William. "Oral History." *Sources and Methods in Indigenous Studies*, edited by Chris Andersen and Jean M. O'Brien, 160–168. London and New York: Routledge, 2017.

without the reliance of written sources. Native Americans used oral histories to empower themselves and their communities, and oral history validates Indigenous ways of knowing the world as well as understanding the past, present, and future of Native communities.<sup>114</sup> Every nation had its own set of beliefs as well as different stories passed down to future generations. Oral histories are vital sources for understanding Indigenous people’s history, and tribal elders are the individuals that possess “the stories and established criteria for historical veracity. Age meant not a numerical age, but enough time on earth to learn oral histories and oral traditions and wisdom to deploy them at the appropriate moment.”<sup>115</sup> Bauer maintains that colonizers did not understand the concept of teaching through oral histories. They assumed Native peoples were uncivilized. Colonizers silenced Native voices as well as misinterpreted their history.<sup>116</sup>

Oral history is an essential tool for revitalizing Amah Mutsun storytelling and spiritual ceremonies. This chapter asserts that as the Amah Mutsun rebuild their nation by decolonizing through cultural revitalization, returning to indigenous practices of oral history and storytelling will uphold Amah Mutsun sovereignty. Tribal members will continue to learn about their culture, strengthen their Amah Mutsun identity, and start passing on oral histories and stories to younger generations in the future. Additionally, through a resurgence, the Amah Mutsun will connect to ancestral knowledge as they become immersed in their tribal language as well as their spiritualities to produce new knowledge and new answers on how to continue rebuilding their nation within modern times. While keeping on the importance of oral history, this chapter also discusses the power of oral histories for California Natives concerning qualitative research methods. As this chapter calls for the return of oral history practices for the Amah Mutsun

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<sup>114</sup> Bauer, “Oral History,” 166.

<sup>115</sup> Bauer, “Oral History,” 161.

<sup>116</sup> Bauer, “Oral History,” 164.

people, the overall research for this thesis (like the theoretical framework and my methods) are grounded in oral history. Particularly, the following pages of this chapter will illustrate the steps I took with qualitative research to collect the essential data needed for analyzing the lived educational experiences of Amah Mutsun elders as well as two field observations and a survey.

### **California Natives and Oral History**

The demonstration of power concerning California oral history is evident with the biography of Mabel McKay. Greg Sarris wrote McKay's biography titled *Mabel McKay: Weaving the Dream*.<sup>117</sup> Sarris is a member and current Chairman for the Federated Indians of the Graton Rancheria. McKay was an acclaimed Pomo basket weaver and medicine woman, and she kept her culture alive with her dreams, cures, and stories. With her biography, Sarris weaves the stories of McKay's life as he discovers his own story as a California Native of mixed heritage.<sup>118</sup> With the first chapter, "Sarah Taylor's Granddaughter, I never knew nothing but the spirit," Sarris begins by telling the story of his drive with Mabel McKay. They were returning to the Rumsey Reservation from a trip to Stanford University, where McKay gave a talk.

Sarris narrates that he at first struggled with how to write about McKay's life as well as how to start, and told her that the problem was that her stories were all over the place. He explained that readers wanted a theme so they could connect the dots of McKay's oral history. McKay responded by saying, "Well, theme I don't know nothing about. That's somebody else's rule. You just do the best way you know how. What you know from me."<sup>119</sup> Here, Mabel McKay refuses to tell her oral history as a story that fits American culture's expectations. McKay forces

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<sup>117</sup> Sarris, Greg. *Mabel McKay: Weaving the Dream*. 2nd ed. United States: University of California Press, 2013.

<sup>118</sup> Sarris, Greg. "Creative Work." Greg Sarris. Accessed February 8, 2020. <https://greg-sarris.com/creative-work/>.

<sup>119</sup> Sarris, *Mabel McKay: Weaving the Dream*, 16.

Sarris to write her biography in a format that demonstrates the differences between American and Indigenous authors. For example, American literature calls for linear storylines. However, McKay forces Sarris to write in a format that would be considered out of order as he jumps from story to story. With his writing, Sarris follows an indigenous method of storytelling by interweaving his oral history with McKay's as he jumps around to tell the many stories that makeup McKay's oral history. Most importantly, McKay's lived experiences provide the reader with distinct knowledge of her culture, spirituality, and traditional healing. With his book, Sarris produces an accurate representation of mass media by telling the beautiful and meaningful story of Mabel McKay's life.

The power of McKay's oral history and written biography provides a timeless story that can pass onto future generations of Natives and non-Natives throughout North America and even the world. Greg Sarris and his book, *Mabel McKay: Weaving the Dream*, are notable examples of this thesis that demonstrates a Native author that is writing accurate representations of California Natives into literary existence. His work has become my example for embracing my journey as a Native scholar to write accurate representations of California Natives and Amah Mutsun tribal members. Learning from the life of Mabel McKay, influences me to turn to the elders in my community to learn from their lived experiences as well. Throughout my research journey, as I learned about my elders' academic experiences, grounding my work in oral history enables this thesis to interweave Amah Mutsun sovereignty and cultural revitalization with (re)writing California histories and misrepresentations of California Natives. Thus, oral histories have a powerful impact on qualitative research methods.

### **Amah Mutsun Cultural Resurgence and Nation Building**

For this section, I return to the epistemological framework of Cutcha Risling Baldy, as discussed in Chapter two. Baldy's work highlights the (re)writing, (re)righting, and (re)riteing of Native feminisms by engaging with a Native feminist analytic of the oral tradition passed down by the K'ixinay First People. In other words, Native feminisms are rooted in the oral histories of California Native women as well as traditional knowledge passed down by ancestors. For the Hupa people, K'ixinay taught them how to live peacefully with the land, animals, and all-natural elements. The K'ixinay also provided "the Hupa with the methodologies by which to enact survivance before, during, and after colonization."<sup>120</sup> (Re)writing, (re)righting, and (re)riteing involves ancient knowledge originating from ancestors while providing a modern philosophical context of decolonization to build Native American futures.

For the Amah Mutsun people, cultural revitalization during current times becomes a vital part of the decolonizing praxis that (re)writes, (re)rights, and (re)rites Native feminisms concerning our oral histories, stories, and ceremonies.<sup>121</sup> According to Baldy, Native feminism consists of California Native women, women's coming-of-age ceremonies, and specific cultural practices that are essential for efforts of decolonization as well as tribal survival for California tribes. As the Amah Mutsun community works to nation-build by decolonizing through the means of cultural revitalization, the tribe must highlight Amah Mutsun feminisms. Learning from the lived experiences of female elders will promote a resurgence of Amah Mutsun histories, stories, literature, and ceremonies for future generations.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Baldy, *We Are Dancing for You: Native Feminisms and the Revitalization of Women's Coming-of-Age Ceremonies*, 43.

<sup>121</sup> Baldy, *We Are Dancing for You: Native Feminisms and the Revitalization of Women's Coming-of-Age Ceremonies*, 57.

<sup>122</sup> Baldy, *We Are Dancing for You: Native Feminisms and the Revitalization of Women's Coming-of-Age Ceremonies*, 71.

Resurgence applies to this thesis through the work of Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar, writer, and artist: Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. With “Land as pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation,”<sup>123</sup> Simpson explains the emergent process of a resurgence by utilizing Nishnaabeg knowledge systems. For the Nishnaabeg people, “the physical, real-world work of resurgence, movement-building, and nation-building is the only way to generate new knowledge” and that to partake in resurgence, tribal members must have a “deep, consensual engagement with Nishnaabeg processes.”<sup>124</sup> New knowledge must generate new answers on how to rebuild a nation; meanwhile, resurgence must stem from consensual relationships infused with kinetic movement based on lived experiences and embodiment. Resurgence highlights knowledge that is important and necessary to communal and emergent balances, and these knowledge systems must be intellectual, spiritual, and emotional. The Amah Mutsun “cannot just think, write or imagine”<sup>125</sup> their way into a decolonized future. They must culturally revitalize by teaching youth the Mutsun language, stories, songs, and ceremonial practices as well as other tribal customs and protocols.

To build off the work of Baldy and Simpson, one of the elders that participated in the study shared her work of learning Amah Mutsun songs while forming a women’s and children’s singing group. The latter portion of this chapter will further introduce this elder, but for now, her pseudonym is Catherine. I introduce her now since, as part of her oral history, she reflects on the importance of returning to songs and ceremonies. As I read through the following passage from

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<sup>123</sup> Simpson, Leanne Betasamosake. “Land as pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation.” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3, no. 3, (2014): 1–25. <https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/des/article/view/22170/17985>.

<sup>124</sup> Simpson, “Land as pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation,” 15-16.

<sup>125</sup> Simpson, “Land as pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation,” 16.

our conversation, I noticed how her words became an example of rebuilding our nation through Native feminisms and cultural resurgence.

So our songs are sacred, and they're healing. They were not sung for more than 200 years because it was against the law. (*female name removed*), she was from UC Berkeley....She's in the heavens now. But she's the one that gave us the songs. Because she studied our songs at UC Berkeley. So I think the singing not only is the rhythmic sound that you hear, but it's the connection of when we sing. It's the connection between us and creator. Because you can feel the heavens open and the sun-rays on your face, and you're born in your heart when you start singing. You just become oblivious to everybody else, and you feel so connected to creator. I think that's why the kids keep coming back, is because of that connection that they feel.

Catherine is sharing her experience with learning our traditional songs as well as her impression of tribal youth as they engage with and sing Amah Mutsun songs. Catherine explains that the tribe has not sung sacred songs for over 200 years and that a scholar at UC Berkeley studied our songs and gave the information back to the tribe. Because of the Harrington notes, our tribe can look back through the archives to create a resurgence of new information. Specifically, since the Harrington notes focus on the knowledge of Ascención Solorsano, our tribe is relying on Amah Mutsun feminisms to revitalize our culture. Our Native feminism consists of centering our tribal governance and efforts of decolonization around the knowledge of Ascención Solorsano, including a ceremonial woman's song and specific cultural practices. With Amah Mutsun feminisms, the tribe is learning from the lived experiences of Ascención Solorsano (as well as the female elders that participated in my study) to promote a resurgence of Amah Mutsun histories, stories, and ceremonies for future generations.

Based on the intellectual system of Amah Mutsun songs, Catherine emphasizes the sounds of the group's singing, which creates the emergence of resurgence through embodiment. When the singing group sings, Catherine believes they are connecting to the creator, and she expresses the embodiment of feeling "the heavens open and the sun-rays on your face, and you're born in your heart when you start singing." Catherine says that when she sings, she becomes oblivious to those around her. She also believes that the youth have a similar experience

as they sing when she says, “I think that’s why they kids keep coming back, is because of that connection that you feel.” For the singing group, they have a deep spiritual engagement with Amah Mutsun songs and ceremonies. When they sing, they feel the embodiment of their Native spirituality. With the singing group, Amah Mutsun tribal members are generating a resurgence of new knowledge regarding their intellect of Amah Mutsun songs and traditions, spirituality, and emotional feelings. Through singing, tribal women and youth are developing a resurgence of knowledge that spiritually connects them to the creator as the community also connects on a communal level.

The discussion of Amah Mutsun cultural resurgence is necessary for nation-building. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the importance of oral history as this section asserts that through the oral history of female elders (like Ascención and Catherine), the tribe can generate new knowledge. Generating new knowledge will allow for the embodiment of their spirituality to also generate new answers about how to continue rebuilding our nation and upholding Amah Mutsun sovereignty. Thus, oral history is an Indigenous tradition that becomes a fundamental tool with decolonizing through the means of cultural revitalization. The Amah Mutsun community needs to continue generating a spiritual resurgence to lead their work with traditional governance to ensure cultural survival for future generations. While oral history traditionally served as the means of disseminating cultural traditions and indigenous knowledge systems from one generation to another, oral history now serves as a fundamental tool for indigenous strategies of decolonization, cultural revitalization and resurgence.

### **Qualitative Research**

Besides the various oral history usage in Native communities, oral history also serves as a beneficial tool for conducting a qualitative research study to uplift Native voices. With education



research, oral history centers the study around the stories of Amah Mutsun women. Grounding qualitative research methods in oral history ensures that Amah Mutsun feminisms produce a newfound knowledge concerning three female elders' Western educational experiences. Once I started this research journey, I began by focusing on my tribe and wondered why the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band has low numbers of postsecondary-educated tribal members. We have Amah Mutsun elders who received a college education, but most of our elders decided not to attend a postsecondary institution. Additionally, within my generation, only a handful of us received a Bachelor's degree, and currently, just me and two other tribal members are pursuing a graduate degree. Therefore, as an Amah Mutsun tribal member, my positionality vis-à-vis the research site and participants are communal.

The conceptual framework for the study consists of my upbringing as an Amah Mutsun Native, and how I received emotional and academic support from my aunt to develop my drive of succeeding in college. Because of my academic aspirations and the realization that there are only a handful of tribal members with a Bachelor's degree, my interest in learning about the educational experiences of the Amah Mutsun elders began. I chose to work with the elders since I believe their stories and academic backgrounds will benefit the Amah Mutsun community. Working towards a decolonizing agenda of teaching youth cultural knowledge and how receiving a postsecondary education can become a platform for social and environmental justice. My dream is for the Amah Mutsun community to continue to prosper and build a future for generations to learn Amah Mutsun cultural knowledge and to strengthen their cultural identity while obtaining a college education.

### **Engaging with Research on Native Education**

During my first year as a Master's student, two critical readings helped me design this research study. For a literature review, I primarily focused on *Beyond the Asterisk: Understanding Native Students in Higher Education*<sup>126</sup> and "Language, Literacy, and the Image of the Child in American Indian Classrooms."<sup>127</sup> With *Beyond the Asterisk: Understanding Native Students in Higher Education*, the authors discuss Native American college enrollment. I learned that Native American students consistently make up the lowest percentage of the student population in postsecondary institutions, despite the increase of higher education enrollment for Native American students throughout the past couple of decades. For example, enrollment increased from 76,100 in 1976 to 181,000 in 2006; although, Native American "students remain less likely to enroll in college than their peers."<sup>128</sup> When moving past the discussion of Native American student enrollment in postsecondary institutions, data shows that Native American retention and graduation rates are some of the lowest rates when compared to other ethnicities. Thus, it becomes evident that Natives are least likely to graduate from college. For instance, "in 2008, 38.3% of Native American students completed a bachelor's degree, the lowest rate of all racial and ethnic groups and well below the national average of 57.2%."<sup>129</sup> Enrollment and retention rates for Native students are the lowest when compared to different ethnicities.

Indigenous college students also face invisibility in Western education. They make up only 1% of the student population, with only 0.5% of Native professors on campus (Native

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<sup>126</sup> Shotton, Heather J., Shelly C. Lowe, and Stephanie J. Waterman. *Beyond the Asterisk Understanding Native Students in Higher Education*. Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2013.

<sup>127</sup> McCarty, Teresa L. "Language, Literacy, and the Image of the Child in American Indian Classrooms." *Language Arts* 70, no. 3 (1993): 182-92. [www.jstor.org/stable/41482082](http://www.jstor.org/stable/41482082).

<sup>128</sup> Shotton, Lowe, and Waterman. *Beyond the Asterisk Understanding Native Students in Higher Education*. Sterling, 5.

<sup>129</sup> Shotton, Lowe, and Waterman. *Beyond the Asterisk Understanding Native Students in Higher Education*. Sterling, 7.

teachers in primary and secondary schools also only make up 0.5%).<sup>130</sup> To better serve California Native student populations, and because California Natives have low numbers in Native educators, non-Indigenous academic officials at postsecondary institutions need to understand the barriers that we face and our academic and personal needs to succeed.<sup>131</sup> Therefore, inquiring into the Amah Mutsun elders' academic backgrounds will help us understand the type of experience California Natives had while attending college. Upon reading *Beyond the Asterisk Understanding Native Students in Higher Education* and considering my experiences, I created research questions to frame my study to focus on academic barriers and dreams for the future. Meanwhile, for elders that attended college but decided to drop out, I wanted to learn more about their circumstances that lead to their decision. As this study examines the elders' academic background from grade school to college, I was curious to learn how grade school impacted the elder's desire to seek a college education. I hoped to learn of the type of dynamics that were in place between the elders and their past grade school teachers.

Discussing the dynamics between teachers and students is essential since students need a teacher that wishes them to succeed academically. Although this is not always the case, which can be elaborated further with Teresa L McCarty's discussion on the image of a Native child with her work, "Language, Literacy, and the Image of the Child in American Indian Classrooms." This piece became essential as it discusses the findings from "classroom-based ethnography — observations, interviews, children's writing, and quantitative assessments — to restructure the learning and teaching of language and literacy,"<sup>132</sup> within Navajo classrooms at

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<sup>130</sup> Leavitt et al., "'Frozen in Time': The Impact of Native American Media Representations on Identity and Self-Understanding," 43.

<sup>131</sup> Shotton, Heather J., Shelly C. Lowe, and Stephanie J. Waterman. *Beyond the Asterisk Understanding Native Students in Higher Education*. Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2013.

<sup>132</sup> McCarty, "Language, Literacy, and the Image of the Child in American Indian Classrooms," 183.

Rough Rock. The objective of the study was to expand the image of a student's academic ability. Explicitly, this literature discusses how educators sometimes form negative assumptions of a Native student's academic ability. As McCarty notes, "those assumptions, and the policies and pedagogical practices they entail, both reflect and help construct an image of the child — and eventually, the adult — and her or his language and learning potential."<sup>133</sup> Data from her study showed that deficit-view assumptions could negatively impact a student's language and learning ability. These assumptions need to transform into real assets that create positive images of Native children. Overall, this literature is vital to the study since the data in the next chapter will show that Amah Mutsun elders came into contact with educators that negatively impacted their academic development. Most importantly, at this stage of development with my research project, I had no idea that I would find qualitative data that would also pertain to savagism and stereotypes, as discussed in the previous chapter.

### **Theoretical Framework**

As I began to develop the theoretical framework for this study, I returned to the work of Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, as discussed earlier in this chapter. I chose Simpson's work since she elaborates on the importance of elders. She states that elders "are our geniuses because they know that wisdom is generated from the ground up, that meaning is for everyone, and that we're all better when we're able to derive meaning out of our lives and be our best selves."<sup>134</sup> Additionally, Simpson uses Nishnaabeg stories to address education systems that are "primarily designed to produce communities of individuals willing to uphold settler colonialism."<sup>135</sup> With her experience in education, from kindergarten to graduate school, Simpson felt as though she

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<sup>133</sup> McCarty, "Language, Literacy, and the Image of the Child in American Indian Classrooms," 182.

<sup>134</sup> Simpson, "Land as pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation," 7-8.

<sup>135</sup> Simpson, "Land as pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation," 1.

was coping with someone else's agenda, including curriculum and pedagogy. She did not feel connected to her homeland, language, history, nor her Nishnaabeg intelligence.<sup>136</sup> I appreciate Simpson's work since she argues that "Nishnaabeg must stop looking for legitimacy within the colonizer's education system and return to valuing and recognizing our individual and collective intelligence on its own merits and on our own terms."<sup>137</sup>

I agree with Simpson and frame this study to emphasize the wisdom generated by Amah Mutsun elders, from the ground up, to derive meaning from their experiences to benefit Amah Mutsun youth. The objective of this work is to encourage youth to obtain a college education. Additionally, I wish to be clear that the design of this research does not uphold settler colonialism, nor is it to seek legitimacy for the Amah Mutsun people within our colonizer's education system. I believe that if Amah Mutsun tribal members receive a college education, they are ensuring their survival, well as the tribe's well-being. Thus, my goal with the theoretical framework for my research was to highlight the importance of Native students learning both cultural and Western knowledge. Specifically, I planned to inquire into how Amah Mutsun cultural knowledge and Western knowledge can tie together to impact educational experiences for youth. Instead of being opposed, cultural knowledge and academic knowledge should blend to ensure the survival of future Native generations.<sup>138</sup>

The theoretical framework for this study is also informed and framed by Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit). TribalCrit emerges from Critical Race Theory (CRT). It provides a theoretical lens to address the array of issues facing Native American communities, including the lack of students enrolling and graduating from colleges and universities. TribalCrit has nine

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<sup>136</sup> Simpson, "Land as pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation," 6.

<sup>137</sup> Simpson, "Land as pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation," 22.

<sup>138</sup> Brayboy, "Toward a Tribal Critical Race Theory in Education."

tenets, although this study speaks solely to two (numbers five and eight). The fifth TribalCrit tenet, “problematizes the concepts of culture, knowledge, and power and offers alternative ways of understanding them through an Indigenous lens.”<sup>139</sup> For the eighth TribalCrit tenet, it “honors stories and oral knowledge as real and legitimate forms of data and ways of being. Stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory.”<sup>140</sup> Tent eight calls for a blending of cultural and academic knowledge to create knowledge that is key to survival. With this study, cultural knowledge is considered Amah Mutsun cultural knowledge, and academic knowledge stems from Western educational institutions; meanwhile, combining these two types of knowledge becomes vital to survival for future generations.

As the eighth tenant specifies that stories are data, this tenant allows for the research project to focus on the oral narratives of Amah Mutsun elders. “Oral stories remind us of our origins and serve as lessons for the younger members of our communities.”<sup>141</sup> Because stories serve as data, the next chapter will demonstrate a theoretical basis of intelligence stemming from the oral histories of Amah Mutsun elders as they become role models of tribal youth. Our elders dream of a future where our youth will know their cultural knowledge as they seek post-secondary education. Moreover, as I dream of a future where more Amah Mutsun youth will attend college, this project aims to improve the life chances and situations of our tribal community.<sup>142</sup> As the Amah Mutsun community works to rebuild our nation by cultural revitalization, encouraging youth to receive a post-secondary education is a part of our sovereignty and self-determination as we strengthen our governance and cultural identities. Thus, Amah Mutsun cultural knowledge and Western knowledge can be positioned as a whole entity to

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<sup>139</sup> Brayboy, “Toward a Tribal Critical Race Theory in Education,” 434.

<sup>140</sup> Brayboy, “Toward a Tribal Critical Race Theory in Education,” 439.

<sup>141</sup> Brayboy, “Toward a Tribal Critical Race Theory in Education,” 439.

<sup>142</sup> Brayboy, “Toward a Tribal Critical Race Theory in Education,” 440.

ensure tribal survival through the means of social and environmental justice. With this thesis, I assert that Western education can serve as a tool to ensure the academic success and financial well-being of Amah Mutsun tribal members.

## **Methods**

I chose to draw on Phenomenological research that led me to inquire into the lived experiences of the Amah Mutsun elders, to position them as experts, and to place primacy on their perspectives. Phenomenological research methods became necessary as I obtained a full description that provided the basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrayed the essence of elders' lived experiences.<sup>143</sup> I strived to analyze the lived experiences of the Amah Mutsun elders while viewing theory and cultural practices as a whole entity that became fundamental to the elders' past social interactions within academic settings. Additionally, a motivation of this study was to explore how the elders can become role models to help students obtain academic success while having a robust Amah Mutsun identity. My goal is to support change within the Amah Mutsun community.

## **Participants and Data**

The demographics of the participants in the study consist of elders from the ages of 45-65 years old. The academic and professional backgrounds of the elders differ while the majority of the participants live throughout the California Central Valley. I gathered the majority of the data in Fresno. However, I also traveled to Madera and Dinuba on separate occasions when I conducted two separate interviews and Santa Cruz for my second field observation. Overall, I collected six datasets that apply to this thesis, consisting of a survey-questionnaire, two observations, and three in-person interviews. Table 1 breaks down each dataset. It identifies the

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<sup>143</sup> Ravitch, Sharon M, and Nicole Mittenfelner Carl. *Qualitative Research: Bridging the Conceptual, Theoretical, and Methodological*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2016, 24.

dataset type (survey, observations, and interviews) and lists the date of data collection. The table also lists whom I collected the data from (only including pseudonyms), the location for the data collection, as well as the format type of the data. The findings from these datasets will be elaborated on further in the next chapter.

Table 1. Overview of the Research Data

| <b>Type of Data:</b> | <b>Data collected from:</b> | <b>By whom the data was collected (pseudonym):</b> | <b>Date of Data Collection:</b> | <b>Data Collection Location:</b> | <b>Data Format:</b> |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|--|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------|
| Survey               | Wellness Meeting            | 17 Anonymous Responses                             | 2/1/2019                        | Fresno, CA                       | questionnaires      |
| Observation          | Wellness Meeting            | Chairman   | 2/1/2019                        | Fresno, CA                       | fieldnotes          |
| Observation          | AMLT                        | AMLT Stewards                                      | 2/14/2019                       | Santa Cruz, CA                   | photos & fieldnotes |
| Interview            | Elder Interview             | Melissa  | 3/17/2019                       | Madera, CA                       | transcript          |
| Interview            | Elder Interview             | Veronica   | 3/21/2019                       | Dinuba, CA                       | transcript          |
| Interview            | Elder Interview             | Catherine  | 3/31/2019                       | Fresno, CA                       | transcript          |

Throughout the project, I worked with the Amah Mutsun Chairman as well as some Council members to arrange logistics for observations, issuing the survey, as well as identifying participants to interview. Additionally, the Chairman was able to provide feedback on the survey-questionnaire by making suggestions on the type of questions the survey should ask. I issued the survey during a Wellness Meeting that I was observing for the first dataset. I asked the meeting attendees to complete a voluntary handwritten questionnaire in an attempt to gather data that would represent the community as a whole. I asked for pseudonym names, age, gender, academic level, degree received, current place of residence, and other necessary information. The questions asked on the questionnaire were open-ended, and of “a mixed-method design with a quantitative drive, since surveys are generally planned around the requirements of quantitative



designs such as representative sampling.”<sup>144</sup> As I utilized the survey to sample the Amah Mutsun community to gain information regarding their academic backgrounds, a limitation was that I was not able to ask the survey participants follow-up questions regarding their short answers. Additionally, the answers on the survey were shorter and briefer compared to data that I obtained from meeting with elders.

To elaborate on the Wellness Meeting observation, Wellness Meetings are open only to tribal members and take place every other month. Wellness Meetings take place in Fresno at a Club House, where the tribe can reserve a multipurpose room. During Wellness Meetings, attendees will form a talking circle in the carpet area with chairs to allow for a comfortable environment. For the meeting that I attended, I was able to document how the Amah Mutsun community promotes healing from trauma and social issues. I conducted a one-hour and a half observation, and before the conclusion of the meeting, I was given the time to describe the scope of my study and announced that I was looking for volunteers to interview in-person. I then issued the survey, and after the survey, I had three volunteers come forward.

With the second observation, I traveled to Santa Cruz, CA, for an Amah Mutsun Land Trust (AMLT) observation. The Amah Mutsun community established AMLT in 2013 as it later became fully incorporated in 2015. The tribe created partnerships with public and private landowners within their traditional territory to restore our access to our ancestral lands of stewardship.<sup>145</sup> I conducted the observation to not only document current efforts of decolonization but to see how the AMLT Stewards were managing the land as they engage with and revitalize traditional ecological knowledge. The work of the Stewards is not open to the

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<sup>144</sup> Olson, Karin. *Essentials of Qualitative Interviewing*. London: Routledge, 2016, 38-39.

<sup>145</sup> *Amah Mutsun Land Trust*. Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, [www.amahmutsunlandtrust.org/](http://www.amahmutsunlandtrust.org/) (accessed June 2020).

general public, but I was able to observe the specific mountain they are currently working on. There, I conducted a one-hour and half observation and was also able to observe the AMLT home where Stewards are housed and feed for the two weeks they are conducting their work. They only work for the first two weeks of every month.

After each observation, I worked to be as descriptive as possible with writing up my fieldnotes, since my goal was to transform my jottings into a full account of what I witnessed. I took extensive field notes while at the Wellness Meeting, and several photos while at the AMLT observation. For the pictures, I took photos as I observed AMLT housing, the mountains, the scenery, as well as when the Stewards were cleaning out their equipment, excluding facial-identifying images. With writing up the field notes, I reconstructed “memories, prompted by jottings and headnotes,” as I wrote out “certain observational perspectives and certain members’ experiences.”<sup>146</sup> For the writing style, I chose to write in the first person since this style is useful for researchers that are a member of the group they are studying. Seeing the incidents through my eyes allowed for the data to provide an insider’s view of events as actions filter through my concerns as a researcher. The first-person point of view allowed me to present both observations in a natural unfolding way that documents the experience as seen from the participant’s viewpoint.<sup>147</sup>

As I ground my conceptual and theoretical framework for this thesis in oral history, I also had to ensure my methods upheld indigenous methodologies. With regards to the in-person interviews, I applied the conversational method of interviewing to gather data through the form

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<sup>146</sup> Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. 2nd ed. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2011, 94.

<sup>147</sup> Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, 95.

of oral stories,<sup>148</sup> while conducting phenomenologically based interviews that focused on the life-history of three elders. I met with each elder individually for about 60-90 minutes for in-person interviews that flowed like a conversation where I sat and listened to the participants' stories. I conducted each in-person interview in a comfortable and private location that was identified by the participants. I recorded each interview using two devices: my iPhone and iPad, to ensure that I was able to capture the full conversation. Then, I transcribed each file. I strived to have the participants reconstruct their experience within the topic of the study.<sup>149</sup> Hence, I always started with the question: "Where were you born, and where did you grow up?" Then, I would sit back and listen and ask the rest of my open-ended questions at random. For every question that I asked, I also built upon the elders' responses by asking follow-up questions. In other words, I used a mixed-method of structured and unstructured interviews.<sup>150</sup> I utilized my positionality as an Amah Mutsun tribal member and my prior communal relationships with the participants to structure the interview questions in a way that would respectively speak to my overall guiding research questions.

To address the low numbers of California Natives enrolled in college, an oral history of lived experiences from the elders will inform and help us understand the disparities that California Native students face overall, throughout their academic journey. I situate my work for the betterment of my community, which will then impact other Native Americans throughout California, and maybe throughout the United States. Not only is oral history essential to revitalize Amah Mutsun histories, stories, and spiritual ceremonies, oral history promotes the

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<sup>148</sup> Kovach, Margaret. "Conversational Method in Indigenous Research." *First Peoples Child & Family Review* 14, no. 1 (2019): 123-136. <https://fpcfr.com/index.php/FPCFR/article/view/376>.

<sup>149</sup> Seidman, Irving E. *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: a Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*. 4th ed. New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2013, 14.

<sup>150</sup> Olson, *Essentials of Qualitative Interviewing*, 38.

rebuilding of the Amah Mutsun nation. This chapter asserts that the Amah Mutsun people must decolonize with an Amah Mutsun feminist framework that revitalizes our culture to create a resurgence of new knowledge. Tribal members can learn Amah Mutsun cultural knowledge to strengthen their identity while ensuring the passing on of oral histories, traditions, and stories to future generations. Simultaneously, this chapter also discusses qualitative research and the importance of oral histories, stories, and conversational interviewing methods. I expressly provide my journey of conducting qualitative research to set up the next chapter for discussing the research findings. With this chapter, considering the importance of oral history allows for the examination of how my tribe can utilize the indigenous tool of oral history to uphold our sovereignty, as I also use the tool of oral history to conduct qualitative research.

## Chapter 4: Research Findings

As a Native scholar, the objective of my work is to tell the many stories of Amah Mutsun, California Indians. The story for this chapter is the central assertion from the research findings. The analysis will focus on interviews while weaving in data from the survey and the two observations that I conducted. With this chapter, it becomes evident that Amah Mutsun Elders experienced poverty and discrimination, were poorly educated, and did not receive guidance for a college education during their grade school years. As college students, they struggled with balancing full-time employment as well as personal or domestic struggles, and only a few Elders received a college degree. Furthermore, Elders recognize how the history of colonialism impacts their lives, and with resiliency, they are working to decolonize and continue learning their Amah Mutsun cultural knowledge. They are becoming role models for their community and working towards their dream of a future where youth will have a secure Amah Mutsun identity as youth seek out a postsecondary education while continuing to find ways of success in today's society.

In regards to studying, reducing and analyzing the data, I came to each dataset with an open attitude to seek what of interest emerges that is essential regarding the academic experiences of the elders, including their enactment of decolonization with the Wellness Meetings and AMLT.<sup>151</sup> After developing pseudonym profiles for each participant, I began to code and marked specific passages from the interview transcripts. I then placed the codes into categories and narrowed in on the common codes that were visible in the interview transcripts as well as the survey responses. Searching for common codes and categories enabled me to form

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<sup>151</sup> Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: a Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*, 119.

thematic connections that then created the final interpretations and assertions of the study.<sup>152</sup>

When I began to code the interview transcripts, I started in vivo coding to reference a word or short phrase that the participants said during their interviews. In vivo coding enabled me to capture oral histories from the Elders to prioritize and honor their voices and experiences.<sup>153</sup> Along with in vivo being my primary method of coding, I simultaneously used other methods like descriptive and processing coding. Descriptive data helped me to summarize “in a word or phrase — most often a noun — the basic topic of a passage.”<sup>154</sup> Meanwhile, with processing coding, I looked for words ending in “ing” to make a note of the action or activity that took place.<sup>155</sup> I found the methods of descriptive and processing coding to be useful when I analyzed my field notes from the observations. For the survey, along with utilizing in vivo, descriptive, and processing coding, I focused heavily on patterns and occurrences of similar responses from the elders.

After the first round of coding, the second round consisted of pattern and focused coding. Pattern coding enabled me to develop categorical labels and identify similarly coded data. As pattern coding organized the corpus of the data, focused coding became effective with developing the final determinations for this chapter. Focused coding enabled me to search for the most frequent and significant codes that then developed the most salient categories from the data, which then helped me determine my final assertions for this thesis. Lastly, throughout the full research project, I employed the process of bracketing. I utilized a journal to set aside and disregard my biases and assumptions while collecting and analyzing the data.

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<sup>152</sup> Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: a Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*, 121.

<sup>153</sup> Saldaña, Johnny. *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. 3rd ed. Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2016, 105-106.

<sup>154</sup> Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, 102.

<sup>155</sup> Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, 111.

To elaborate further on the research findings, discussing Amah Mutsun elder demographics is necessary. Here, the survey-questionnaire becomes beneficial. The survey provides a current account of how many tribal members attended college or a postsecondary institution. With a qualitative design, the survey served to sample the tribal community by gathering additional information concerning elders’ academic backgrounds. Unfortunately, the questionnaire only captures data from a small number of elders; although, the findings from the survey support the three in-person interview data. Furthermore, below are some pie charts that display the elder demographics for the 15 elders that participated in the hand-written survey.

Table 2. Amah Mutsun Elder Demographics

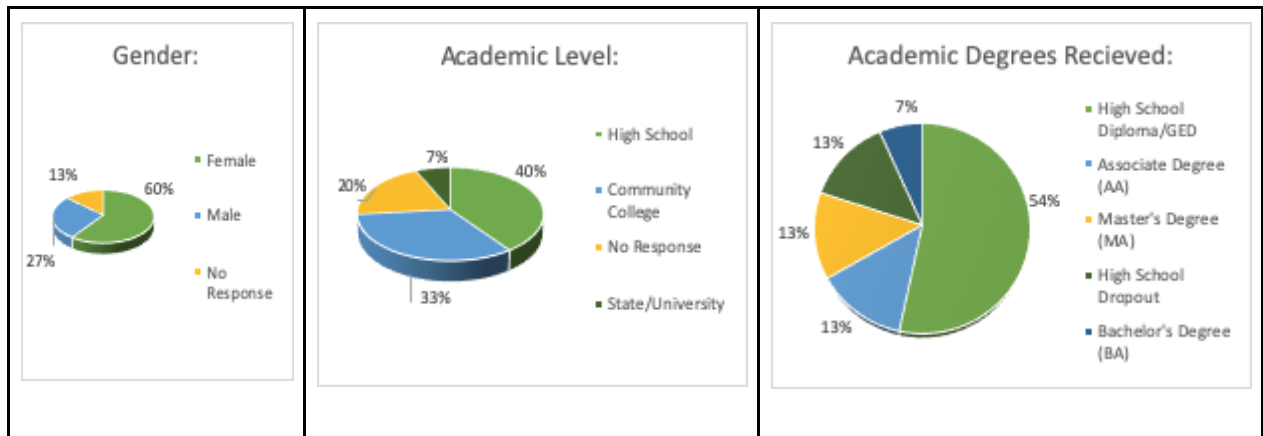


Table 2 provides a breakdown of gender, the academic level that each elder went up to, as well as the highest degree that was received. With a gender breakdown, it becomes evident that the majority of the survey participants were female, which limits the male voice’s perspective throughout the study. (Although this limitation becomes empowering when considering the importance of womanhood and resurgence, discussed in chapter three.) Moreover, the “Academic Level” pie chart shows that six elders made it as far as High School. Five elders

made it to Community College; one elder made it to a State/University; meanwhile, three elders did not specify the academic level they reached. The “Academic Level” pie chart shows that 33% of the participants went to community college; simultaneously, the “Academic Degrees Received” pie chart shows that only 13% received an Associate’s Degree. Most telling, the survey demonstrates that 54% (eight elders) only received a High School Diploma/GED; meanwhile, 13% (two elders) dropped out of High School. Of the Elders that graduated from college, 13% (two elders) received an Associate’s Degree, 7% (one elder) received a Bachelor’s Degree, and 13% (two elders) received a Master’s Degree. Thus, from the survey, it becomes evident that the majority of Amah Mutsun elders did not obtain a college degree.

Moving on to discuss the three in-person interviews, I interviewed an elder that went to college after high school, but they did not graduate; an elder that went to college and finished with a Master’s degree; and another elder that received a college degree later in life. Specifically, Melissa (pseudonym) attended a state university but dropped out to focus on work so she could financially help her parents. For Veronica (pseudonym), she received her Master’s degree from a state university as she overcame discrimination throughout her academic journey. Lastly, for Catherine (pseudonym), who is Melissa’s little sister, she received her Associate’s degree from a community college over the course of 32 years. Catherine was determined to graduate but kept taking time off due to pregnancy, domestic struggles, and health issues and surgeries.

### **Poorly Educated and Classroom Experiences**

Looking at the story of Catherine will help relate the study to the literature review regarding Dr. Teresa McCarty’s work.<sup>156</sup> When interviewing Catherine, she mentions her experiences with a few of her teachers and her academic performance. Catherine compares her

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<sup>156</sup> McCarty, “Language, Literacy, and the Image of the Child in American Indian Classrooms.”



fourth and fifth-grade experiences while referring to the difference between a negative classroom environment and a positive one. While reading the following excerpt from Catherine's interview, positive and negative classroom environments become vital to determining Catherine's academic performance as the excerpt also demonstrates Catherine's reactions to her teachers.

“Going through education in elementary, I had a few good teachers that were willing to teach me something, but I think I was still at a second grade level in the fourth grade. The fourth grade teacher, Mrs. (*last name removed*), she was abusive and she would hit all the kids. She would sock them, slap them, yell at them, smoke in the classroom. So I had already knew that I would have to curl up and sit in the corner, and be very quiet. So that was my survival, is to be quiet, be invisible. I was good at being invisible. Because that means I wasn't going to be hit or my hair pulled, or socked in the head by the teacher. So I made it through fourth grade. I think my grades were C's and D's. The fifth grade, finally, I think I seen the light in fifth grade. Mr. (*last name removed*), he gravitated towards children with color. He was a white man. Now I understand that he gravitated to us, and he wanted us to learn. So that's when I was above, and I was a fifth grader in a sixth grade class. So I was able to skip fifth grade and be in a sixth grade class. That's when I think my educational understanding and learning started happening, was in fifth grade.”

With this passage, Catherine first mentions her academic performance by stating that she was in the fourth grade with a second-grade level education. Then, she says her negative experience with the fourth grade by stating that she had an abusive teacher. She also inadvertently explains her coping mechanism when dealing with her negative learning environment. Catherine is demonstrating her response to physical and verbal abuse by trying to become invisible and remain quiet to avoid her teacher's attention. While an adult, Catherine is articulating the fact that she felt like she had to survive inside the classroom because Catherine did not want her hair pulled or for her teacher to sock her. Catherine articulates that survival was her priority instead of her education. Due to the abusive environment, Catherine did not excel academically and received C's and D's as she continued to work below grade level.

When Catherine reaches the fifth grade, she finally feels as though she is beginning to learn. The fifth grade was a positive experience for her, and she mentions that her teacher was a white man that gravitated towards working with children of color. Now that Catherine is an Elder and looks back at her childhood, Catherine believes that her white teacher gravitated towards

children of color because he genuinely wanted them to learn. Right as Catherine mentions her experience with a good teacher, she says that she began to work above grade level. Once Catherine was placed into a positive learning environment, she began to excel and was able to start working on sixth-grade level coursework. Thus, Catherine articulates that her ability to learn and gain an academic understanding within the Western educational institution began in the fifth grade. For Catherine, her educational background with elementary did little to ensure she was performing at grade level, and it was not until halfway through grade school that she was able to begin excelling.

With Catherine's story, it becomes evident that academic success links to the work performance of educators. Catherine's story relates to the findings of McCarty's study<sup>157</sup> that maintain when a teacher has deficit-view assumptions of their students, their views negatively impact the student's learning ability. In Catherine's case, we do not necessarily know what Catherine's teachers thought regarding their views of Catherine's academic abilities, but the way they treated Catherine impacted her academic achievement. When Catherine was in a negative learning environment, she performed poorly with her academics, although, while in a positive learning environment, Catherine began to achieve academically. Thus, this study contributes to McCarty's argument<sup>158</sup> by noting that a student's learning ability can be impacted positively or negatively, by the assumptions of their teachers. Teachers' assumptions include their biases concerning a student's academic performance as well as the type of learning environment that the teacher creates for their students.

Additionally, the institution of Western education failed Catherine since the institution did not protect her from an abusive teacher. Catherine's educational path to college was

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<sup>157</sup> McCarty, "Language, Literacy, and the Image of the Child in American Indian Classrooms."

<sup>158</sup> McCarty, "Language, Literacy, and the Image of the Child in American Indian Classrooms."

interrupted since she was not able to learn. Instead, she focused on developing coping mechanisms to abusive learning environments, which also speaks to the type of oppression that Native women face while navigating American society. As Catherine shares her experience during elementary, it becomes evident that toxic learning environments hindered her academic performance. Catherine's experiences did little to ensure her of having a robust platform from grade school to prepare her for attending a community college.

### **Poverty and Lack of College Preparation**

For Melissa's experiences, she mentioned high school and a lack of guidance concerning college preparation. In the following excerpt, as Melissa expresses her feelings regarding the lack of academic guidance that she received, pay attention to how she acknowledges that school is essential as she also discusses the importance of work and survival.

“And then here comes high school, the same thing. The counselor, no guidance, nothing. Nothing was said in our classes. Nothing was never really told about higher education. We still knew that there was college and stuff, but there was no guidance and no preparation. And then I still took my courses and stuff and everything, and I did okay, but then I started working at the age of 17 and I was still in high school. I probably was a junior in high school, because I knew that education was important, but at the same time you had to have survival, and that's when you had to work. And I didn't think about work because I always knew we had to survive, whether we picked grapes in the summertime for school clothes, worked in the wintertime pruning vines for, again, school clothes and food, and just surviving, paying our bills as a family unit.”

Here, Melissa is verbalizing her realization that she did not receive appropriate academic guidance. She is commenting that academic counselors did not offer her guidance, nor did her teachers prepare her for college. Melissa expresses that she knew education was important, and now that she thinks about her junior high and high school experience, she is currently frustrated with not having enough information to go to college and succeed. In other words, Melissa felt unprepared when thinking about what it meant to apply to college as well as attending.

Additionally, as she mentions the lack of academic guidance that she received, Melissa states that she had to think about survival at the same time. Melissa says that her family had to

work as a unit to survive. Melissa is discussing the importance of work because her family was low-income, and everyone would have to work in the fields to make ends meet. Therefore, Melissa is also left feeling unprepared for college because her family focused on working so they could clothe and feed themselves. Melissa felt unprepared for college academically and felt lost because she did not know how to prepare for college in general. Melissa draws on the connection between not being prepared for college and her family struggling financially. In Melissa's case, she had a hard time preparing for college because her priority was to work and help her family survive. At the same time, the institution of Western education did little to ensure she felt prepared and ready to attend a California state university.

### **Survival and Discrimination**

By examining Melissa's and Catherine's experiences during grade school, it becomes apparent that their primary focus was survival instead of their academics. With Melissa, her priority was to work and worry about financial struggles; meanwhile, Catherine's priority was to develop a coping mechanism to ensure she survived either a negative or positive learning environment. Veronica's experience touches on discrimination that she witnessed due to the bullying of her cousin, as well as the discrimination Veronica encountered when she rode the bus to school and played with her best friend.

Veronica remembers when she witnessed the bullying of her cousin. They attended the same Catholic school and were in the same grade. When reading the following excerpt, notice how Veronica refers to herself and her cousin as being Mexican while attending a Catholic school. Another aspect worth reviewing with the passage below is Veronica's reaction to the environment of the school because of Catholic administrators.

“Most of my memories are really ... because remember I'm really old now, so this was back in the sixties and seventies when discrimination was very, very rampant, and it was very, very obvious. I remember being in elementary school being discriminated against. Even at a Catholic school it was very, very obvious

that the Mexican kids were looked down upon. They were picked on and they were bullied then. Not me so much because I was really quiet and I didn't say anything or do anything, so I wasn't out there. My cousin, (*boy's name removed*), was going to Catholic school and the same grade I was. He was picked on and made fun of, and stuff like that. The other Mexican kids were too. That's one of my earliest thoughts about that.”

Veronica’s first memories with her elementary school are of discrimination. Now that Veronica is an Elder and is looking back at her memories from the sixties and seventies, she articulates the discrimination she faced. There are several incidents during Veronica’s interview, where she voiced the discrimination that she faced. However, the above passage highlights the discriminatory practices of Catholic school administrators as well as other students that did not identify as Mexican.

When Veronica says Mexican kids were looked down upon, she provides a picture of the campus climate at her Catholic school. The above excerpt did not necessarily give an instance for when a teacher looked down upon Mexican students; however, it demonstrates that Mexican children were often picked on and bullied by other students that were not Mexican, which were white. Thus, I argue that the discriminatory campus climate created by school administrators at Veronica’s elementary inadvertently encouraged white students to bully Mexican students. I cannot necessarily say that the white students, from Veronica’s oral history, learned discriminatory and hateful behaviors from the school administrators since there is a chance they learned this horrid behavior from their parents.

Like Catherine, Veronica’s reaction to navigating a negative learning environment was of remaining quiet. Veronica stated that she was reticent and did not say or do anything to bring attention to herself. Meanwhile, Veronica shares that she witnessed her male cousin and other Mexican kids bullied by white Catholic students. By analyzing Veronica’s passage, it also becomes evident that school educators did nothing to prevent bullying. Therefore, and once again, it becomes apparent that the institution of Western education has failed an Amah Mutsun

California Native student by allowing educators to create a campus climate that is unsafe for all children of color.

Furthermore, as Veronica's passage concerns the discrimination of Mexican children, she unintentionally discusses the colonization of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band. Historically, after the mission period and once Anglo settlers made their way to California for the Gold Rush, the Amah Mutsun continued to face land dispossession, violence, and genocide. For tribal members to survive, they began disguising themselves as Mexican. Amah Mutsun tribal members then became farmworkers and migrated towards the Central Valley, where the majority of current tribal members continue to reside. Meanwhile, Amah Mutsun lineages began intermarrying with Mexican families. Incorporating historical information when analyzing Veronica's passage provides an insight as to why and how Veronica experienced discrimination as a Mexican child. Now that Veronica identifies as both Amah Mutsun and Mexican, her elementary experiences highlight the historical struggles of Amah Mutsun ancestors and how their escape of annihilation led to the continuation of elders facing discriminatory violence. Veronica navigated a campus climate that discriminates against Mexican students, because that is where the history of colonization has led her. In other words, the structure of colonialism created a society where white educators and white students disrespect children of color while viewing them as deficient. Moreover, during Veronica's educational path that led her to obtain a Master's Degree, she not only focused on her academics during elementary but also had to stay quiet to ensure that she was left alone and not bullied by her peers.

While Veronica faced discrimination at school, she even encountered it while riding the bus. In the following passage, Veronica tells the story of when other children did not want to sit next to her on the bus ride to school because they believed she was a dirty Mexican. When

reading Veronica's story, it is also evident that Veronica can now articulate the kind of discrimination she endured as a child, as well as the perception that her peers had of her.

"I remember getting on the bus one time and nobody would sit next to me....Nobody would sit next to me. I know I've been called a dirty Mexican. They said I smelled. I was really young when they said this. I was like in third grade....In my little innocent mind, I couldn't conceive of why am I being called a dirty Mexican when I know I'm clean. I bathe every night you know? I have clean clothes on, so that's what I grew up with, with that kind of discrimination and that kind of perception of who I was."

Veronica remembers when no one wanted to sit next to her on the bus, and she associates this with her peers, calling her a dirty Mexican. Veronica explains that she was a young third grader with an innocent mind, and she could not understand why her peers called her dirty, especially since she showered every night. Now that she reflects on her childhood, Veronica realizes that she endured discrimination when no one wanted to sit by her on the bus as well as when her elementary peers called her a dirty Mexican.

At this point in our conversation, I asked her if it was mainly white students that called her a dirty Mexican. Veronica answered in the affirmative. My question then caused Veronica to remember her elementary best friend that was white. Veronica then told me the story of when she played at her friend's house. From the upcoming passage, make a note of how the friend's family responded to having Veronica visit their home.

"It was because one of my best friends at that time was a white girl. Actually she was Portuguese. They are very, very discriminatory. Her mom was white and they were farmers, and so they had money. She would invite me to go out and we would go out and ride horses and stuff. The brothers and sisters, I would hear them laughing and making fun of me behind my back and stuff like that. In her innocence, too, my best friend, her name was (*girl name removed*), she's the one who told me. She goes, "Well, my mom says you can't come over anymore because you smell. You're a dirty Mexican." And in my innocence, "But I take a bath every night."

Veronica begins this story by providing context for her best friend. She establishes that her friend is white and Portuguese, and comes from a wealthy family of farmers. Veronica says that she could hear the girl's brothers and sisters make fun of her when she played with her best friend and rode horses. Even though Veronica does not specify how the brothers and sisters made fun of her, we can only assume that the kid's bullying was stereotypical.

Furthermore, it becomes evident that the white, Portuguese children were taught stereotypes by their parents when Veronica's best friend says that Veronica can no longer visit their home because she is a dirty Mexican that smells. Children learn and develop discriminatory behavior primarily from their parents, among other adults that children have in their lives. When Veronica refers to her best friend's innocence, she is inadvertently articulating the notion that the little girl did not necessarily understand that her family was stereotypical and discriminatory. Even more so, with Veronica's innocent response that she takes a bath, Veronica has not fully comprehended that she is being discriminated against and stereotyped as a dirty Mexican. The friendship between Veronica and the girl was impacted by racist stereotypes as their innocence became tainted with discrimination.

Thus far, Melissa, Catherine, and Veronica have demonstrated that Amah Mutsun Elders have faced financial struggles, verbal and physical abuse, as well as discrimination during grade school. Their stories also demonstrate their ability to survive and cope with their surroundings. With Veronica's oral history, it also becomes evident that children learn stereotypical and discriminatory behavior from adults. Like the bullying of Veronica's cousin promoted by Catholic school officials. Here, I assert that Amah Mutsun elders overcame barriers like poverty, abuse, stereotypes, and discrimination during grade school, which prevented the elders from succeeding exceptionally with their academics. Unfortunately, these three elders were not able to focus on their academics while preparing for life after high school due to the structure of colonialism that pushed stereotypes into existence. Next is a discussion of the type of academic encouragement that the Elders received throughout grade school.

### **Desires to Seek Out a College Education and College Encouragement**



Research findings also demonstrate that Amah Mutsun elders received encouragement to either go to college or to find a job, and saw both paths as being successful in life. To elaborate further on the elders' desires to attend college as well as if they were encouraged to do so, the following synoptic table becomes vital. Table 3 breaks down the survey responses when the elders answered why they attended college, or not, and if anyone ever encouraged them to seek out a college education.

Table 3. Deciding to Attend College and Childhood Encouragement

|   | <b>Elders that Completed College<br/>(5 Applicable Responses):</b>  | <b>Elders that Did Not Complete College<br/>(4 Applicable Responses):</b>   | <b>Elders that Did Not Attend College<br/>(6 Applicable Responses):</b>   |
|---|---|---|---|
| <b>Why did you decide to attend a college institution? Were there any special circumstances?</b>        | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. College was a goal</li> <li>2. Wanted to get away from home/ had athletic scholarship</li> <li>3. Indirect Answer: Several attempts to finish degree from 18-50 years old/overcame domestic &amp; health issues</li> <li>4. Two Similar Responses: Employment Opportunities</li> </ol>  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Felt Personal Life was more important</li> <li>2. Found a good paying job/needed to financially help parents</li> <li>3. A young mother of three children and ex-husband made it difficult</li> <li>4. Indirect Answer: They would like to go back to college to study child development</li> </ol> | N/A   |
| <b>Why did you decide not to go to college after high school? Were there any special circumstances?</b> | N/A   | N/A   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Did not see the importance of attending college</li> <li>2. Did not have the finances to attend</li> <li>3. Dropped out of High School/on the streets as a gangbanger/went to Job Corps for GED/found work</li> <li>4. Indirect Answer: They would have wanted to be a substance abuse counselor</li> <li>5. Two Similar Responses: Did not finish high school</li> </ol> |
| <b>Throughout your childhood, what type of encouragement did you receive about going to college?</b>    | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Parents said if they don't educate themselves then they will be working in the fields</li> <li>2. Parents made sure they went to school</li> <li>3. Received extreme encouragement, always knew they were going to college</li> <li>4. Mother said receiving a higher education would help eliminate poverty status</li> <li>5. Indirect answer: Mom's goal was for her kids to graduate high school</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Received encouragement from parents</li> <li>2. Mom encouraged them to be a nurse</li> <li>3. Received encouragement from parents and sister</li> <li>4. "none"</li> </ol>  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Five Similar Responses: "none" or "0"</li> <li>2. One Response: God Mother/Nina taught them the importance of education</li> </ol>  |

For analyzing the surveys, I sorted the 15 responses by both their academic level, then by the degrees that each Elder received. The table is broken down by the five elders that graduated from college, the four elders that dropped out of college, and elders that decided not to go to

college. Most importantly, when looking at the “Elders that Completed College” column, it becomes evident that the five elders had desires to attend college; meanwhile, they also received encouragement to seek out a higher education from their parents. Hence, with the survey, it is evident that elders who attended college and received their degrees had to have a strong desire to seek out a college education and put in the hard work to complete their degree requirements. This finding reminds me of my conceptual framework since I associate my academic achievement with the encouragement that I received from my aunt.

When looking at the “Elders that Did Not Complete College” column shows various responses from elders explaining why they went to college or why they dropped out. This data is essential since it not only proves that college encouragement goes hand in hand with the Elders’ desire to go to college, it also demonstrates that the majority of the survey participants had a strong desire to go to college overall. By merely noticing that five participants received a degree and four participants dropped out of college, it becomes evident that nine of the 15 participants desired to go to college; meanwhile, only six participants did not wish to seek out higher education. With the “Elders that Did Not Attend College” column, it becomes most telling that of the six participants that did not go to college, only one of them received college encouragement. Significantly, the above synoptic table is vital to the study by demonstrating that California Natives will seek out a college education if they have the encouragement to do so.

Of the three elders that I interviewed, they also mentioned that they received encouragement to seek a college education. When I met with Veronica, I asked her whom she considered was the most important person in her life as she grew up. Veronica’s answer was her mom, who shared that her mom encouraged her to go to college. As the following passage

illustrates our conversation, pay attention to how Veronica describes her mother as well as Veronica's admiration for her.

My mom was the most important person in my world. I really looked up to her, especially as I became older, and even now, more so now that I think back and look on it. She was ahead of her time. She really, really was. She believed in things and she stood up for things. She is the one who encouraged me to go to college.

With this passage, Veronica reflects on her childhood and shares that she looked up to her mother. She shares that she still looks up to her mother, especially now as an adult. Veronica describes her mom as being ahead of her time, which I have interpreted to mean that Veronica's mother had an insight and intellect that set her apart from others. When Veronica says that her mother "believed in things and she stood up for things," she describes her mom as a strong woman that stands up for what is morally right. In all, Veronica's mother is Veronica's role model, especially now that Veronica is an elder. Like me, Veronica's role model encouraged her to go to college, and we both obtained academic access. California Natives must receive encouragement to go to college, and receiving this type of encouragement from their role model might motivate them, even more, to strive towards academic success.

Moving on to the encouragement that Melissa and Catherine received from their father, Catherine explains that he always talked about the importance of receiving an education. Specifically, Catherine explains that she grew up with her father, telling her that she either needed to go to school or to get a job. Catherine states, "He would always talk to us about educating ourselves....when we were younger. It was just said, 'If you're not going to go to school, then you're going to be out here working in the fields.'" In this quote, Catherine is speaking for both herself, Melissa, and their other sisters. Hearing her father, Catherine began to seek a college education because she wanted a higher-paying job that would offer financial security. During Melissa's interview, she mentions that their father always talked about the

importance of school; although, Melissa has a different perspective from Catherine. Melissa also values financial security from working; however, she never finished college and found a profession other than working in the fields. Therefore, when Melissa's and Catherine's father talked to them about going to college, he also taught them the value of finding financial security. Even though Melissa and Catherine both desired to go to college because of encouragement from their parents, their oral histories demonstrate the complexities of obtaining a college degree due to financial and personal issues. The next section will demonstrate the type of struggles that California Natives face while attending a Western college.

### **Elder's College Experiences**

With the 15 survey responses, there was one optional question for only if it applied to the participants. The last item of the survey asked the elders to share their experiences with attending college. Synoptic Table 4 illustrates the responses from the five Elders that received a college degree as well as the four Elders that went to college but dropped out.

Table 4. College Experiences of the Amah Mutsun Elders

|   | <b>Elders that Completed College<br/>(5 Applicable Responses):</b>   | <b>Elders that Did Not Complete College<br/>(4 Applicable Responses):</b>  |
|---|--|--|
| <b>What was your experience with attending a college institution?</b> | <p><b>1. Elder with MA:</b> “Went to Indian Dept &amp; told I didn’t qualify due to quantum blood levels.”</p> <p><b>2. Elder with MA:</b> “I loved being involved in a variety of clubs/organization, of course along with maintaining academic performance.”</p> <p><b>3. Elder with BA:</b> “I was a loner. I took a lot of literature classes (about 13 classes) to see how others lived.”</p> <p><b>4. Elder with AA:</b> “I went right after school for a year. However when I returned back 15 years later to Community College I was more responsible.”</p> <p><b>5. Elder with AA:</b> “My experience with learning was sometimes bias. I always hate when they say all natives are alcoholics. The teaching was always bias and the whole truth is never told”</p> | <p><b>1.</b> “My Experience was good in Community College.”</p> <p><b>2.</b> “I found that the college kids lost total respect for their elders.”</p> <p><b>3.</b> “It was good, but being young I thought much different. I wish I could have made the decision to stay in school and receive a degree in a profession”</p> <p><b>Note:</b> the 4th Elder in this category chose not to answer this question on their survey.</p> |

When you compare the responses from the five elders that graduated from college, their experience with attending college varies. Although, I feel as though all of the answers are of negative experiences. I have come to this interpretation because the elders could not connect with other Natives on campus due to blood quantum levels. Moreover, elders had trouble making friends, they needed to work on being more responsible, or the elders hated the negative stereotypes of Natives that they were learning. I see only one response that lists a positive experience during college, which was when the elder was active with student organizations.

When looking at the four responses from those that did not finish college, their answers were very brief, and most of the responses were of a good experience while in college. Specifically, two said they had a good experience while one elder complained about young college students that they interacted with; meanwhile, one elder chose not to answer this

question. Overall, the above synoptic table demonstrates a mixture of positive and negative college experiences for the elders.

For an example of a negative experience, Veronica's oral history is essential. Veronica shared that she experienced discrimination while attending a university in California. After she shared her experience with discrimination during grade school, she began to elaborate on the type of discrimination that she also experienced on her first day of college. She mentions that she was taking an Environmental Studies course, where she was the only Mexican student. While reading the passage below, be sure to note the interaction between Veronica and her white peers.

"I sat up in front and all the kids were sitting behind me. There's no Mexican kids in environmental studies. I've always been kind of a lead in that. There's no Mexican kids learning about stuff like that, about the animals and environmental science, and stuff like that. So I noticed that during the class was starting, and I turned around and looked, and I swear there was a circle around me. I was right here and everybody was one row behind me on the right, so nobody was sitting in the chairs next to me or right behind me."

Here, Veronica explains that she decided to study a topic that was mainly studied by white students. On her first day of class, she notices that no one is sitting next to her. Veronica articulates that none of the white students wanted to sit by her. She explained that they purposely sat a row behind her as far away from her as possible. Veronica's experience demonstrates that discrimination can take place in a college classroom when all of the white students sat accordingly to ensure that Veronica was an outsider. Therefore, as the synoptic table above shows that elders have negative and positive experiences with attending college, Veronica's story further demonstrates the type of discrimination she experienced during her first year of college. In other words, the above passage signifies that discrimination is a barrier that Amah Mutsun college students face due to how their peers treat them. Overall, I believe the college experience for the elders can continue to be studied to find ways to address the barriers that they face, specifically discrimination and stereotypes.

Once California Natives enroll in college, some must balance their time with school and work. As California Natives focus on their financial survival, there may be times when their work impacts their academics. For example, when Melissa discussed her college experience, she mentioned that she worked full-time to support her family while she enrolled at a state university. Melissa shared that her parents struggled financially and that her paycheck would help with the bills. Although, through time, Melissa's academics began to suffer because she worked full-time. Even though Melissa briefly states that she had a good college experience, the passage below primarily focuses on financial and academic struggles. Melissa's upcoming story notes how the struggles that Melissa faced impacted her decision to drop out of college. Throughout the passage, I also notice Melissa's reflections concerning her academic performance.

I did go to college, and I enjoyed college....I still had my struggles, but I knew I had to work. If I worked I was okay....I just went to school, and I continued working but I was battling working full-time and trying to go to school at the same time....I just wanted to get into the nursing program and do nursing....so when I went to the first year of (*name of college removed*) I was struggling a little bit, because work was interfering with my studies and this and that, so I know that I probably didn't do too well as I could have done....And then when I applied for the nursing program at (*name of college removed*) it was too hard. I couldn't get in. I couldn't get in, so I had to go, "Okay, that's fine," so I just kept on working, and I just kind of continued working...I didn't have a good foundation from the beginning of primary to middle school to high school, I did the best. Probably if I had a stronger foundation, I probably done very well and better, and I wouldn't have had all those struggles where I struggled and I was trying to survive. So I got to the point where I can struggle in education or just go to work and be okay, so I kind of went down, just work and be okay.

Melissa begins the story of her college experience by sharing that she enjoyed college but that she struggled academically and that having a job was necessary. Melissa explains that she knew she would be okay if she worked. While Melissa went to school and continued working full-time, she battled with balancing out her responsibilities. At this point in Melissa's story, she discusses her academic goals of getting into her college's nursing program. Melissa alludes to her poor academic performance during her first year of college as the reason the nursing program denied her application. She points to her work hours as interference to her studies, which causes



her to struggle academically. Melissa admits to herself, “I probably didn’t do too well as I could have done.” Therefore, work interfered with Melissa’s ability to excel in her coursework, and it was too challenging for Melissa to follow her goals of being a nurse. Once the nursing program denied Melissa’s application, she told herself, “Okay, that’s fine,” and she just kept working full-time. Here, in Melissa’s story, she begins to reflect on other reasons why she struggled with her academics. Melissa realizes that she did her best despite not having a secure academic foundation for succeeding in college. She articulates that her weak foundation is due to her receiving an inferior education at the beginning of her primary years.

With Melissa’s reflection, it becomes evident that California Natives must receive excellent schooling during grade school to enable their academic excellence in college. For example, Melissa says, “Probably if I had a stronger foundation, I probably done very well and better, and I wouldn’t have had all those struggles where I struggled and I was trying to survive.” In other words, Melissa is saying that if she had a robust academic foundation, then she would have excelled academically; meanwhile, her only struggle would continue to be managing her time between school and work. Melissa needed to work in order to survive and support her family. With the unfortunate ending to Melissa’s college experience, she makes it clear that she got to the point where she no longer wanted to struggle with her coursework. Melissa’s coursework produced negative results; meanwhile, because work was an essential means to Melissa’s financial survival, work had a positive outcome that allowed her to support her family. Therefore, when Melissa says, “So I got to the point where I can struggle in education or just go to work and be okay,” it is evident that she decided to drop out of college because she was tired of adverse outcomes. She knew that as long as she continued to work, she would be okay and able to survive. In all, Melissa needed a strong educational foundation to excel in her coursework

while working full-time. The option of not working and just focusing on academics is not a reality for the majority of California Natives. We face financial barriers that force us to support our families as we struggle to excel academically. With the story of Melissa's college experience, it becomes evident that California Natives need an outstanding education through grade school to excel in college but also need a strong educational foundation to prevent any struggles that arise while working full-time.

To discuss other struggles that California Natives face while enrolled in college, shifting to Catherine's oral history is vital. Catherine obtained her Associate's Degree from a community college, although it took her several attempts to complete the requirements for her degree. During her academic journey, Catherine experienced struggles with her marriage, her child's disability, and health issues. The events in her life led her to complete her degree on the third attempt. Her story began when she first attended community college after high school. She said her coursework was not challenging and that she was able to retain and comprehend what she was reading and learning. She even made the dean's list. Catherine then explained that when she met her ex-husband, she became sidetracked with college. With the below passage from Catherine's story, she explains that she fell in love and no longer felt that school was important. As I read through this portion of her story, I note how her marriage impacted college enrollment.

What happens to me while I enter (*name of college removed*) is I meet my daughter's father, and I get sidetracked. My studies were not important to me any longer because I fell in love with this man, and we got married. I still went to school when I was pregnant with my daughter. I was still in college, I was still trying....Then because of her father being addicted, having his addictions, and alcoholism, I had to become the breadwinner and go to work. So my education was put on hold from that point.

At first, even though Catherine began to lose interest in college when she fell in love and got married, she continued with her coursework. She continued to go to college even as she became pregnant with her daughter. Then, Catherine's marriage takes a turn for the worse, and she dropped out of college to financially support her family. As she tried to continue with her

academics, her husband developed alcoholism and a substance abuse problem. Because of his addictions, Catherine became the sole breadwinner and needed to focus on work to support her household. Catherine dropped out of college and put her education on hold since financially supporting her family became the main priority. With this first chapter in Catherine's academic experience, it is evident that California Native college students face personal struggles that affect their enrollment. From the array of personal issues that California Native college students might face, Catherine dealt with relationship issues. She dropped out of college so she could focus on her financial responsibility for supporting her daughter.

When Catherine was thirty-four, she decided to return to community college. Catherine said she was no longer on the dean's list but that she did well academically and received As and Bs. At this point in Catherine's life, she also started a new relationship. Catherine went to school part-time, and after five years in her second relationship, she became pregnant with her second daughter. She planned to continue with her coursework, but there were complications with the birth. Her daughter was born with an immediate health issue and a hearing disability. In this second passage concerning Catherine's struggles, it becomes evident that her daughter's health became Catherine's priority over attending college and completing her degree requirements.

Five years after that relationship, I ended up pregnant. ...I was going to return and finish school, and then my second daughter was born with difficulties. So she had a tumor in her lung, and her left lung was removed. Her left ear was closed. She's a unilateral ... she has unilateral hearing. So all of my time went into my daughter with speech, with all of her team of doctors. ...so my education again was put on hold because of my second daughter. I had to make sure that she was going to be able to function and educate herself, and do what she needs to do.

With this second chapter in Catherine's educational journey, she returned to school as she began dating her second partner. Once Catherine became pregnant with her second daughter, she planned to finish school. Although she was unable to return to college because she had a difficult pregnancy, and her daughter was born with health issues.

Catherine's daughter was born with a tumor on her left lung and needed immediate surgery to have it removed. The daughter was also born with unilateral hearing since her left ear was never fully developed. Catherine was no longer able to uphold her academic responsibilities and dropped out of college for a second time. Her daughter's health became her main priority since all of Catherine's time went into doctor's appointments and her daughter's speech. When Catherine says, "I had to make sure that she was going to be able to function and educate herself, and do what she needs to do," it is evident that Catherine focused on providing her child. Catherine ensured that her daughter had the appropriate resources and tools to address her daughter's disability. She made sure her daughter received the best medical care to ensure her daughter excelled in grade school while following her goals. Before Catherine could focus on her education, she focused on her daughter's development. With regards to California Natives, Catherine's story confirms that some California Native college students are parents that must prioritize the well-being and academic development of their child over their education.

In 2015, when Catherine's second daughter turned ten, she returned to community college for the third time. Catherine was about 49 years old. She expresses that her grades were A's and B's with a couple of C's. During Catherine's third chapter of attending college, she became sick and also desperate to complete her degree requirements. In the following passage of Catherine's story, I appreciate Catherine's determination to overcome her health issues and continue her coursework.

So dealing with my own illnesses with RA, with arthritis, pneumonia and then they found a tumor in my intestines. I had to have major surgery there, I almost lost my life....I was attending (*college name removed*) and I had the surgery. This time I went back to school with staples on my abdomen because I could not afford another time of giving up. So I went back....It was like I had surgery one week, and the next week I was at school walking. That's how desperate I was, I got desperate just to finish.

Right as Catherine returned to college and was close to completing her degree requirements, she was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis and soon developed pneumonia. Catherine also indicates

that there was a tumor in her intestines and that she had major surgery. As Catherine reflects on her illnesses that almost took her life, she specifies that she was attending college when she had her surgery. Catherine says, “It was like I had surgery one week, and the next week I was at school walking.” Here, it becomes evident that Catherine was determined to return to school to finish her degree despite her medical condition. She illustrates that she went back to school with staples still in her abdomen because she was desperate to finish her coursework. At this point in her academic journey, she was done with taking breaks and remained diligent with her aspirations. In the end, at the age of 51, Catherine completed her degree requirements and received an Associate’s Degree in 2017.

Catherine’s collegiate journey demonstrates her perseverance in following her academic goals. Catherine dropped out of college twice but kept returning to school until she completed her degree. Like Catherine, some California Native college students are unconventional and receive their college degrees later in life. Therefore, to truly understand the college experiences of California Natives, we must acknowledge that some are spouses, mothers, and financial providers that have several responsibilities besides their academic coursework. This section of the chapter shows that college experiences from the Amah Mutsun elders demonstrate that they experienced a mix of positive and negative experiences while attending college.

Regarding the personal college experiences of Veronica, Melissa, and Catherine, they demonstrate that California Natives face an array of struggles that impact their academic success. Notably, Veronica experienced discrimination from her peers, while Melissa struggled with her academic performance and managing both school and work. With Catherine’s story, it becomes evident that California Native college students are likely to face domestic, parental, and health struggles throughout their collegiate journey.

**Amah Mutsun cultural knowledge and Decolonization**

The Amah Mutsun elders are crucial to our community’s resilience since they teach us the ways of our ancestors to ensure our tribe engages with decolonization. Although, from the study, I have learned that the majority of the elders are still learning their cultural knowledge. Table 5 demonstrates that across the board, the majority of the elders did not begin learning Amah Mutsun cultural knowledge until their adulthood.

Table 5. Learning Amah Mutsun Cultural Knowledge

|   | <b>Elders that Completed College<br/>(5 Applicable Responses):</b>  | <b>Elders that Did Not Complete College<br/>(4 Applicable Responses):</b>   | <b>Elders that Did Not Attend College<br/>(6 Applicable Responses):</b>   |
|---|---|---|---|
| <b>What do you remember learning about the Amah Mutsun culture during your growing up years OR during your adulthood?</b> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Father said they were Indians. Realized during adulthood they were living off the land with a vegetable garden and raising rabbits during childhood. In adulthood, learned: ceremonies, sweating, talking circle, and singing. Now, they have started growing their own garden and hope to start raising rabbits.</li> <li>2. First memory: father always saying they are CA Indians. Remembers receiving government payment for land in the 1970s when they were a teenager (they said the payment was insulting)</li> <li>3. Always knew they were native but learned about traditions as an adult.</li> <li>4. Knew they were Native; didn’t know about tribe affiliation; and have learned a lot of knowledge that was lost from CA missions.</li> <li>5. Indirect answer: “Learning Dance &amp; Language”</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. They did not learn who they were until adulthood.</li> <li>2. They became aware of their ancestors in the last two decades and continue to learn at Wellness meetings.</li> <li>3. They only learned that they were Native but never learned about their culture or traditions.</li> <li>4. They learned about medicinal and food plants, songs, and how to use fire to tend the land.</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. They always knew they were Native but their parents never talked about it. They are also Hispanic and grew up in an all-white neighborhood, when it was bad to be either Native or Mexican. They are the youngest of their siblings and neither of them learned about their lineage until the tribe started coming together regularly when they were in their early 30s. They are 54 and learning about their ancestors has helped their faith.</li> <li>2. Learned they were Native when they were 19 because they grew up in foster care &amp; CPS system. Got involved as an adult.</li> <li>3. They didn’t know they were Native until they were 58 years old; they are just learning.</li> <li>4. Learned that they are a CA Indian with different customs/ cultures as other tribes.</li> <li>5. Learned about plants and medicines and what they are used for. Learned how to take care of mother earth by taking care of their land.</li> <li>6. They didn’t learn much but about trauma, the planet, land, and history.</li> </ol> |

For most of the elders, they knew they were Native as a child but did not learn about the culture; meanwhile, some elders had no idea they were Native until later in life. Historically, assimilation is the reason for why the Elders did not learn their cultural knowledge, or why they never knew they were Native until adulthood. Thus, as our community continues to nation-build, we must enact decolonization to teach everyone the ancestral knowledge to ensure our tribal survival for future generations. Regarding the data from the field notes, both observations illustrate the various ways that the community is decolonizing.

For the two observations, I believe the discussions that took place amongst the community during the Wellness Meeting, as well as the work of the Stewards, will highlight the importance of Amah Mutsun cultural knowledge as both observations also demonstrate how the Elders are working towards decolonization. With the Wellness Meeting, the community met in Fresno at a Club House, where the tribe regularly reserves a multipurpose room. The room has a kitchen, an eating area with tables and chairs, and an open carpet area with couches and recliners. During the Wellness Meeting, attendees formed a talking circle in the carpet area with chairs to allow for a comfortable environment to discuss the topics of mental health, antidepressants, foster care, and drug abuse.

For the Amah Mutsun Land Trust observation, I had the opportunity to learn about the work of the Stewards in the Santa Cruz Mountains. I took several photos to demonstrate how the Stewards are partaking in traditional ecological knowledge while managing the land to honor ancestral land management practices. Notably, they are working on a mountain to return it to the same condition before colonialism in California. Figure 1 and Figure 2 display the AMLT home as well as a Steward in their working, protective gear.

*Figure 1. Amah Mutsun Land Trust Home*

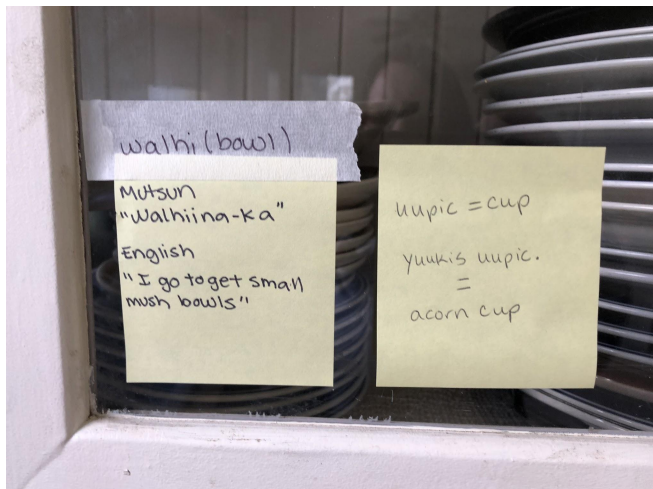


*Figure 2. Amah Mutsun Land Trust Steward*

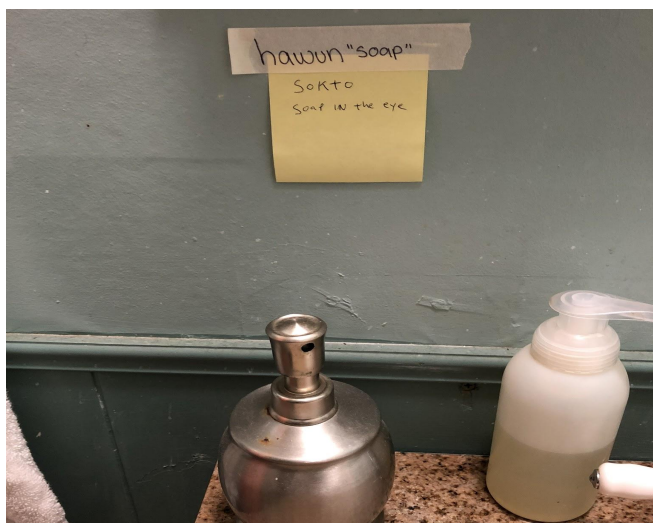
The location of the house in the above photo is the Santa Cruz Mountains. Only the tribe and non-tribal members working with us on our projects have access to the area. I took the photo on the right when the Stewards were leaving the mountain they were working on for the day to return to the AMLT home to clean out their equipment. Due to rainy weather on the day of the observation, I was only able to observe the Stewards clean out their equipment. Also, because of



the rain, I had more time to observe the AMLT home and realized that the Stewards are starting to learn the Mutsun language. Language revitalization became evident when I saw several post-it notes throughout the home that listed translations for specific household items. Figures 3-5 provide more of a context in regards to enacting decolonization by language revitalization and resurgence.



*Figure 3. Amah Mutsun Vocabulary - Dishes*



*Figure 4. Amah Mutsun Vocabulary - Soap*



*Figure 5. Amah Mutsun Chainsaw*

Figures 3-5 are from the AMLT home. Figures 3 and 4 demonstrate how the Stewards are working on learning the Mutsun language. Meanwhile, Figure 5 illustrates the type of chainsaws the Stewards use to manage the land. They have gained their ancestral ecological knowledge while finding ways to use modern equipment. Overall, these photos are relevant to the theoretical framework of the study since the Stewards are combining both cultural and western knowledge. Knowledge learned from Western society can be used in conjunction with tribal knowledge to move the Amah Mutsun communities toward a form of social justice. “In this way, formal, western education becomes a tool of empowerment and liberation for the community,”<sup>159</sup> so our tribal nation can continue to prosper, decolonize, and to work against assimilation for the survival of our cultural and traditional knowledge.

### **Closing Thoughts**

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<sup>159</sup> Brayboy, “Toward a Tribal Critical Race Theory in Education,” 438.

The stories from Catherine, Melissa, and Veronica demonstrate that the Amah Mutsun elders grew up living in poverty while receiving a poor education and lack of college preparation. They endured both positive and negative learning environments as their teachers' work performance adversely impacted their academic success. While in elementary, they developed coping mechanisms to survive discrimination, bullying, and stereotypes. Explicitly, Veronica witnessed the bullying of her cousin as she endured stereotypes from her peers. From Veronica's lived experiences, she proves this thesis's assertions: California Native students endure stereotypical representations due to interactions with non-Natives. The children from Veronica's childhood discriminated against her based on representations from mass media. Meanwhile, Veronica came into contact with discriminatory classmates when they purposely sat away from her during their lecture.

This chapter affirms that Amah Mutsun elders had a strong desire to seek out a college education. Those that received encouragement to attend college from their role models achieved academic success. Meanwhile, the elders that attended college and dropped out also received encouragement, but they failed to mention if they had a role model. The majority of the elders that decided not to attend college did not receive college encouragement. Regarding the Amah Mutsun elders that attended college, there were a few elders with positive experiences; however, the majority of their experiences were negative. Because of oral history, it is indisputable that California Native college students face an array of barriers and struggles that impact their collegiate journey. Some can overcome their challenges to secure their college degree; meanwhile, others decide to drop out because they feel a college education is unessential to their financial survival and well-being.

Lastly, as this chapter also mentions that elders are learning Amah Mutsun cultural knowledge during their adulthood, they are engaging with decolonization through cultural revitalization and community healing during Wellness meetings. With the Amah Mutsun Land Trust, Stewards are engaging with traditional ecological knowledge and language revitalization. Besides, this chapter briefly mentions how the Stewards are combining indigenous knowledge systems with western practices to create a resurgence of new techniques for decolonizing a Santa Cruz mountain. Combining indigenous knowledge with western knowledge will be discussed further concerning dreams for the future in the following conclusion.

### **Conclusion: Amah Mutsun Dreams**

California Indians, however, have many other stories. They aren't easy; they are fractured. To make them whole, what is needed is a multilayered web of community reaching backward in time and forward in dream, questing deeply into the country of unknown memory - an extremely demanding task.

-Deborah A. Miranda, *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir*

Breaking the cycle of discriminatory ideas and educational disparities demands that Native people take control of their representations. Taking control requires that representations are defined by Native people to accurately and positively portray Native Americans living during contemporary times, as well as what they are capable of achieving. Accurate representations of Native people will break the cycle of disparate outcomes as well as demeaning stereotypes and discriminatory ideas about Native Americans.<sup>160</sup> Illustrating successful possible outcomes for Native people requires that Native-defined images provide accurate and distinct understandings of the various tribes throughout North America. Non-Natives continuously ignore, and obscure nuanced representations of Native Americans that have always existed.<sup>161</sup> Meanwhile, prioritizing Native voices to define accurate representations is not enough. Breaking the cycle of bias perceptions does not rest solely on Native Americans since non-Natives, and American institutions must also systematically foster societal change. Specifically, White individuals have a responsibility to acknowledge their legacy of benefiting from the settler colonialism's structure.

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<sup>160</sup> Eason et al., "Reclaiming Representations & Interrupting the Cycle of Bias Against Native Americans," 75-77.

<sup>161</sup> Eason et al., "Reclaiming Representations & Interrupting the Cycle of Bias Against Native Americans," 75-76.

The same structure intentionally misunderstands and devalues Native peoples and their ways of life while attempting to obstruct the well-being and existence of Natives.<sup>162</sup>

With this thesis, I interweave Native literature, oral history, storytelling, and lived experiences of three Amah Mutsun elders to examine the relation between stereotypical representations and academic experiences for California Native Americans. As explained above in *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir*, by Deborah A. Miranda, there are several California Natives' stories, and our stories are fractured or entirely erased by American society. To (re)write history for California Natives and break the cycle of stereotypical representations, this thesis maintains that we must uplift California Native voices to (re)write dehumanizing portrayals. Additionally, Native voices include the individual as well as tribal communities.

For the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, my work takes on the demanding task of documenting educational memories and dreams of the elders that participated in the study. The purpose of my work is to reach backward in time to learn from the elders' lived experiences and explore how California Native Americans navigated educational institutions. Simultaneously, this thesis observes that the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band will continue to thrive with nation-building while decolonizing through the means of cultural revitalization. With the importance of oral history and Amah Mutsun resurgence, the tribe can look forward in time to visualize tribal well-being and survival for future generations while upholding tribal sovereignty.

### **Reiteration of Chapters**

As the research for this thesis interweaves literary and educational ideologies, it also interweaves my academic story with the stories of the elders. In the introductory chapter, I begin with the importance of telling oral histories and telling stories of tribal elders. I also tell my

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<sup>162</sup> Eason et al., "Reclaiming Representations & Interrupting the Cycle of Bias Against Native Americans," 77.

personal story regarding the experiences that led me to this work. I speak of my upbringing of living with my single mother, aunt, and grandfather, and how my childhood shaped my academic trajectory. While having my aunt as a role model, I excelled academically and developed a passion for addressing educational disparities that impact Native Americans. Once I enrolled in the UCLA American Indian Studies Master's program, my study began to unfold for my research to draw a connection between American literature and stereotypical representations that impact the educational experiences of California Natives.

The research for this thesis is personal as I also strive to highlight Amah Mutsun sovereignty as well as tribal well-being and survival. The first chapter of this thesis highlights Amah Mutsun history. The chapter provides context for the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band as well as how my tribe survived three different periods of colonialism. From 1769 to 1821, Spanish missionaries enslaved my ancestors at Missions Santa Cruz and San Juan Bautista. In 1833, when Mexico won its independence from Spain, the Mexicans secularized the California missions, and my ancestors began to work as slaves on ranchos under a peonage-system. In 1848, California Natives continued to suffer when Anglo settlers began to arrive in California for the Gold Rush. California then transferred to the United States government after the Mexican-American War.

Meanwhile, once California Governor Peter H. Burnett signed an executive order to exterminate all Indians on January 7, 1851, my ancestors claimed to be Mexican to escape genocide while ensuring that youth were not killed, kidnapped, or sold into slavery. As government officials enacted genocide to exterminate California Natives while structuring California as a settler-colonial society, they threatened Amah Mutsun sovereignty and destroyed our federal recognition. Hence, the first chapter illustrates that as a non-federally recognized

tribe, the Amah Mutsun people can uphold tribal sovereignty and survival on their terms, outside of the U.S. Government. As I continue my academic journey and learn about my culture, my tribe will continue to nation-build, thrive, and decolonize through cultural revitalization.

With chapter two, it becomes evident that stereotypical representations of Native peoples began with American literature. The second chapter begins with grounding the literary concepts of civilization and savagism to demonstrate that misrepresentations of Native Americans have been passed down amongst White American writers from generation to generation. Meanwhile, through time, dehumanizing and incorrect representations of Native peoples became embedded in American society and continuously disseminated through mass media. For example, the chapter discusses an 1850 newspaper article to demonstrate that Anglo settlers portrayed California Indians in dehumanizing and stereotypical ways. Thus, the literary concept of savagism transformed into stereotypes and biased ideas amongst non-Natives. Stereotypes are oversimplified and exaggerated beliefs about Native American communities and individuals that distort fundamental characteristics. There are hundreds of culturally distinct federally recognized or non-federally recognized tribes in the United States, but the most typical stereotype is that all Native Americans are alike.<sup>163</sup> Notably, stereotypes that California Natives endure stem from Spanish colonizers as well as Mexican and Anglo settlers.

The second half of chapter two focuses on uplifting Native voices to (re)write representations of Native people. The chapter asserts that to break the cycle of stereotypical representations, specifically California Native portrayals, Native people must continue to provide accurate representations through Native American Literature. I expand upon the method of

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<sup>163</sup> Grandbois, Donna M., and Sanders, Gregory F. "Resilience and Stereotyping: The Experiences of Native American Elders." *Journal of Transcultural Nursing* 23, no. 4 (2012): 389–396. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1043659612451614>.



placing (re) in parenthesis from Cutcha Risling Baldy and her book, *We Are Dancing for You: Native Feminisms and the Revitalization of Women's Coming-of-Age Ceremonies*, to express that California Natives are claiming their fractured stories to write them and make them whole during modern times. California Natives are revivifying and building a future premised on the past as a foundation for honoring traditional histories to ensure their lasting legacy during contemporary times as well as into the future. For California Natives, Baldy's decolonizing praxis that (re)writes, (re)rights, and (re)rites Native feminisms will enable tribal sovereignty.

This thesis maintains that (re)writing representations of California Natives is crucial for combating dehumanizing representations. This (re)writing process is necessary for the survival of Amah Mutsun sovereignty and self-determination. I make this evident in chapter two by providing a literary analysis of two poems. With the poem "Los Pájaros" by Deborah A. Miranda, I demonstrate how Miranda (re)writes California history by bringing awareness of how Spanish missionaries wrote about California Natives; especially women. Because California Native women endure sexualized and demeaning stereotypes, I (re)write the narrative by providing a Native feminist analysis of an undated poem by anthropologist John Peabody Harrington titled "Ascención Solorsano." In my tribe, Ascención Solorsano is a prominent figure that ensured Amah Mutsun cultural traditions were passed onto future generations by sharing her knowledge with Harrington. As Harrington worked with Solorsano to document Amah Mutsun cultural knowledge, he acknowledged her strength as an influential leader. Overall, his writings demonstrate accurate and positive representations of an Amah Mutsun, California Native.

Moving forward, chapter three highlights the importance of oral history, stories, and qualitative research. Because mass media needs accurate representations of California Natives, oral histories and stories help to tell the many stories of California Natives, including the Amah

Mutsun Tribal Band. Oral histories and storytelling (re)write stereotypical representations and are essential to ensuring tribal well-being and survival. At the start of chapter three, I reiterate the conceptual framework for the research: my upbringing and having a positive role model, as well as my academic achievements and aspirations to attend college. I then conduct a literature review to point out the gap in research regarding California Native students while also recognizing that teachers' deficit-view assumptions can negatively impact a student's academic success.

Concerning the theoretical framework of the study, I apply the indigenous theory that elders generate wisdom and derive meaning from their lived experiences. I also build upon the theory that addresses the issues of Native peoples throughout the United States: Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit). Of the nine tenets that outline the principles of TribalCrit theory, this thesis utilizes tenets five and eight. The principle listed for tenet five ensured that this study utilized an Indigenous lens; meanwhile, tenet eight provided the notion that stories are theory. Tenet eight theorizes that indigenous knowledge systems and western schooling should work together, instead of one being prioritized over the other, to ensure survival for future generations. For the data, I issued a survey, conducted two observations as well as three in-person interviews. I observed an Amah Mutsun wellness meeting where the tribe practiced community healing, where I was also able to issue the hand-written qualitative survey. For the second observation, I observed Amah Mutsun Land Trust Stewards engage with traditional ecological knowledge to demonstrate how the Amah Mutsun tribe is decolonizing during modern times. Lastly, the three in-person interviews allowed me to narrow in on the oral histories of three elders: Melissa, Catherine, and Veronica, to illustrate their educational experience and the type of stereotypes and discrimination that they endured throughout their lifetime. Even though I conducted three interviews, the sessions went more like a conversation, and I heard their compelling stories of

strengthening their cultural identity during adulthood. Additionally, the three elders demonstrate a willingness to serve as role models for their community to ensure the survival of tribal knowledge.

As this thesis argues that misrepresentations of California Natives began with American literature, findings from the study demonstrate how Amah Mutsun elders survived educational experiences based on dehumanizing representation from mass media. Furthermore, chapter four expands the focus on educational experiences and academic barriers of California Natives during grade school and college. Not only did Amah Mutsun elders experience discrimination, but they also lived in poverty, were poorly educated, and did not receive guidance for obtaining a college education. As college students, there were challenges with balancing full-time employment, personal or domestic struggles, and only a few elders graduated from college. Lastly, the elders also articulate how settler colonialism impacts their lives, and with resilience, the elders are working to decolonize and continue learning their Amah Mutsun cultural knowledge. They are working towards their dream of a future where youth will have a secure Amah Mutsun identity as youth seek out a postsecondary education while finding success within American society.

### **Amah Mutsun Dreams**

Implications stemming from the research are the dreams of the Amah Mutsun elders and the future they wish to build for Amah Mutsun youth. To elaborate further on the dreams of the elders in their own words, two passages from Melissa's interview come to mind. Melissa is articulating how Amah Mutsun Natives can be successful within a modern society. Meanwhile, when reading the passages, notice how Melissa is also specifying how tribal members can receive a Western education.

“...the Western world is successful, and we could be successful with it, but long as we know who we are... Because if you don't know where you come from, if you don't know who you are, I feel you're always going to be lost, because you're in a world that wasn't meant to be. We weren't meant to be in a western

world. We were meant to be in our own native lands, and our own cultural and everything else, but it's just the way things happened.”

“...we have to be stronger being a minority, being Amah Mutsun. We have to be stronger and learn as much as knowledge to be one step ahead. Like I said, the law was created not to benefit us. I think the law was to benefit colonialism, but we can learn the law because the books are there for anybody to read, and learn, and succeed...Anybody can be successful with an education or without an education.”

To synthesize the two passages, Melissa is articulating that Amah Mutsun Natives should be living off the land, practicing our cultural traditions. She says that we are not supposed to live in a Western world, but we do, and so we must find ways to be strong and powerful to become successful in American society. I interpret Melissa's usage of the word strong to mean being courageous, goal orient, and resilient. Melissa also highlights that to succeed during modern times, we must know who we are and where we come from as Natives. Hence, the elders' dreams comprise of Amah Mutsun youth, knowing who they are as California Natives while finding ways to be successful in modern society.

The dreams of the Amah Mutsun elders speak to and build upon the research of Donna M. Grandbois and Gregory Sanders in their journal article, “Resilience and Stereotyping: The Experiences of Native American Elders.”<sup>164</sup> Grandbois and Sanders examine the resilience of Native American elders as they navigated environments of negative stereotypes (like the elders in this thesis). Grandbois and Sanders found that Native elders value their traditions, cultural identity, and spirituality, as they associate this finding with the term resilience. Elders connect their Native identity with the creation of their resilient nature. Having a strong Native identity provided them with the resilient strength to manage daily issues productively (like employment, family well-being, self-sufficiency, and youth development).<sup>165</sup> Elders from Grandbois and

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<sup>164</sup> Grandbois and Sanders, “Resilience and Stereotyping: The Experiences of Native American Elders,” 389–396.

<sup>165</sup> Grandbois and Sanders, “Resilience and Stereotyping: The Experiences of Native American Elders,” 390-391.

Sanders' study, as well as the participants in this thesis, demonstrate the importance of having a secure Native identity. With Melissa's above passage, she articulates that the Amah Mutsun people can be successful in the Western world as long they know who they are. Melissa's perspective differs from the elders in Grandbois and Sanders' study since she is learning about her cultural identity during adulthood. With Melissa's negative educational experiences and her resilience to seek financial security, she experienced firsthand how it felt to navigate American society without a secure Native identity. Thus, her lived experience becomes vital in maintaining that Amah Mutsun youth must have a strong cultural identity to ensure their success during contemporary times.

Because Native elders endured stereotypes throughout their lifetime while surviving and thriving in American society, their experiences are informative with understanding the power of resiliency.<sup>166</sup> Grandbois and Sanders provide an understanding of how resiliency enabled the elders in their study to survive despite traumatic experiences resulting from colonialism, assimilation, genocide, racism, and stereotypes. In Melissa's above passage, she notes that our community does not benefit from colonialism. Thus, tribal members must remain resilient while obtaining an education and securing financial well-being. The definition of resilience is elders being able to thrive and mature while increasing their competence when facing adverse circumstances. Resilient elders also have close relationships with the significant people in their life while displaying an easy temperament, self-mastery, and planning skills.<sup>167</sup> When Melissa says that, "we have to be stronger being a minority, being Amah Mutsun. We have to be stronger and learn as much as knowledge to be one step ahead," she articulates that Amah Mutsun youth

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<sup>166</sup> Grandbois and Sanders, "Resilience and Stereotyping: The Experiences of Native American Elders," 391.

<sup>167</sup> Grandbois and Sanders, "Resilience and Stereotyping: The Experiences of Native American Elders," 390.

must thrive and mature while facing adversity. Youth must form close bonds with their tribal community to strengthen their cultural identity while gaining the skills to manage daily issues productively. Resilience for Native Americans is essential to their well-being of mental and physical health.

As the elders work to decolonize by culturally revitalizing Amah Mutsun knowledge systems to teach youth about their Native identity, they are also serving as community leaders and role models. For Native youth, having a strong, self-relevant role model yields an array of psychological and performance benefits that promote a higher self-efficacy that enables academic excellence and proactive career behavior.<sup>168</sup> For example, in the journal article, “The Impact of Self-Relevant Representations on School Belonging for Native American Students,” Rebecca Covarrubias and Stephanie A. Fryberg<sup>169</sup> examines how positive representations influence feelings of belonging in education for underrepresented youth, explicitly Native American middle school students. Because school belonging plays a crucial role in a student’s academic outcomes, Covarrubias and Fryberg assert that self-relevant role models help to increase school belonging for Native youth. Precisely, a self-relevant role model shares “defining characteristics (e.g., ethnicity, gender, social class background)” that are “important to the person the role model inspires.”<sup>170</sup> Building upon the work of Covarrubias and Fryberg, it becomes evident that elders serving as role models for tribal youth will have more significant implications for ensuring that youth find success during modern times.

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<sup>168</sup> Covarrubias, Rebecca and Fryberg, Stephanie A. “The Impact of Self-Relevant Representations on School Belonging for Native American Students.” *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* 21, no. 1 (2015): 10-18. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0037819>.

<sup>169</sup> Covarrubias and Fryberg, “The Impact of Self-Relevant Representations on School Belonging for Native American Students.”

<sup>170</sup> Covarrubias and Fryberg, “The Impact of Self-Relevant Representations on School Belonging for Native American Students,” 10-11.

Amah Mutsun elders wish for tribal youth to find ways of being successful within our colonized society. They define success by receiving a college education and securing financial stability while having a secure Amah Mutsun identity. Although the elders expressed that a college institution is not for everyone and as youth determine what interests them, they can also seek a trade or attend a vocational school. Alternatively, they can focus only on finding employment. The ways of success are made evident in the above passage when Melissa says, “Anybody can be successful with an education or without an education.” Regardless, if Amah Mutsun youth find a meaningful career based on their interests, then youth can bring their newfound knowledge back to the community. Learning Amah Mutsun cultural knowledge will allow for youth to bridge their Native culture with American societal norms to foster resilience and self-confidence to maintain healthy well-being as they pass down traditions to future generations.<sup>171</sup>

With receiving a college education, Amah Mutsun youth can combine their Amah Mutsun cultural knowledge with their Western schooling to further our decolonizing practices of cultural revitalization. For example, a tribal member can go to college to become an environmental scientist while incorporating traditional ecological knowledge into their studies to produce research that uplifts California Native knowledge systems. Their research will be beneficial to Western academia and our community once the tribal members share their work with the collective of the tribe. Additionally, a college education can become a useful tool for activism when it comes to the dismantling of our colonized society. Having a secure Amah Mutsun identity will allow us to think critically of our government and speak up in the name of

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<sup>171</sup> Grandbois and Sanders, “Resilience and Stereotyping: The Experiences of Native American Elders,” 392-394.

social and environmental justice. Protecting our rights as California Natives, both socially and environmentally, will ensure our tribal survival while upholding our sovereignty.

### **Implications Concerning Stereotypes in Education**

By examining the elder's academic experiences during grade school and college, it becomes evident that the elders had negative experiences while attending Western schooling overall. Findings from the elders' lived experiences demonstrate that youth will have an easier time navigating educational institutions if they remain resilient while embodying their cultural identity. For example, cultural resilience entails being secure with your identities and capabilities (regardless of stereotypical representations) while having a robust and cohesive support system from family and tribal communities. If Native people stand together, there is strength in their communal unity since solidarity excludes the individual. Meanwhile, the findings demonstrate that developing resilience requires that you are proud of who you are while also being proud of your community. Making resilient attributes of Natives public may also reduce stereotypes overall.<sup>172</sup>

Having a secure Native identity, while remaining culturally resilient, will enable California Native youth to overcome educational challenges and barriers, explicitly biased ideals and misrepresentations. As this thesis asserts that stereotypical representations of Native people limit educational opportunities and outcomes for Native students, mass media also ignores Native Americans. For example, Natives are often absent from portrayals of "many professional positions, such as teachers, professors, doctors, and lawyers."<sup>173</sup> According to the authors of "Reclaiming Representations & Interrupting the Cycle of Bias Against Native Americans," they

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<sup>172</sup> Grandbois and Sanders, "Resilience and Stereotyping: The Experiences of Native American Elders," 392-394.

<sup>173</sup> Leavitt et al., "'Frozen in Time': The Impact of Native American Media Representations on Identity and Self-Understanding," 41.



contend that modern misrepresentations and bias ideas against Native Americans perpetuate a cycle of low expectations and discrimination that reinforces educational adversities.<sup>174</sup> Eason et al. assert that inaccurate and biased perceptions of what is achievable for Native students systematically oppress Natives from engaging with and succeeding in educational institutions.<sup>175</sup> With the assertions of this thesis, the work of Eason et al. enforces the observance that to pave the way for Native students' academic success, we must (re)write representations of Native students. American society must change the way they understand and treat Native students within Western education to break the cycle of biased perceptions to alleviate oppression and educational disparities.<sup>176</sup>

Breaking the cycle of stereotypical representations also requires that dominant institutions ensure that policies and practices set the tone for positive, productive, and unbiased interactions with Native Americans. "More generally, this responsibility hinges on a commitment to building a more equitable system that uplifts people from all backgrounds and allows all people to understand and recognize the needs, voices, and contributions of communities of color."<sup>177</sup> Because institutional practices and policies specify norms and scripts that shape everyday interactions with the general public, policymakers should promote school environments that are free from discriminatory representations that influence the academic potential of Native students.<sup>178</sup> As Native Americans live in a society constructed by colonizers,

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<sup>174</sup> Eason et al., "Reclaiming Representations & Interrupting the Cycle of Bias Against Native Americans," 71.

<sup>175</sup> Eason et al., "Reclaiming Representations & Interrupting the Cycle of Bias Against Native Americans," 76.

<sup>176</sup> Eason et al., "Reclaiming Representations & Interrupting the Cycle of Bias Against Native Americans," 76.

<sup>177</sup> Eason et al., "Reclaiming Representations & Interrupting the Cycle of Bias Against Native Americans," 77.

<sup>178</sup> Leavitt et al., "'Frozen in Time': The Impact of Native American Media Representations on Identity and Self-Understanding," 49.

strategic and targeted actions to change biased ideas and stereotypical representations will allow for an accurate understanding of Native Americans to then produce equitable outcomes for Native students both in the present and in the future.<sup>179</sup>

### **Future Research**

The implications of this thesis benefit both the Amah Mutsun community as well as California Native students. The research, thus far, asserts that for the Amah Mutsun people, as we nation-build and revitalize our culture, the survival of the Amah Mutsun community is premised on youth learning cultural knowledge while navigating today's society. If youth have a secure cultural identity, regardless of how they find success within American society, they can bring back their knowledge to the community to ensure the well-being of the tribe. A strong cultural identity means that Native students will know who they are as they decide which life path to pursue. As I draw a connection between American literature, mass media, stereotypes, and educational experiences, this thesis continuously calls for the (re)writing of Native American representations. Creating systemic change for California Natives involves American society uplifting Native voices and Indigenous literature, oral history, and stories to create accurate and positive representations of Native students.

In closing, the work of this thesis is a stepping stone for my future dissertation work. Because Amah Mutsun youth must have a secure cultural identity as they navigate American society, I wish to create a research project which will enable me to work closely with youth. I am interested in the phenomena of how today's youth are benefiting from their Native identity and if their cultural identity impacts their academic performance. I wish to learn more about our tribal youth's views to see how they are embodying Amah Mutsun cultural knowledge.

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<sup>179</sup> Eason et al., "Reclaiming Representations & Interrupting the Cycle of Bias Against Native Americans," 77.

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