

“They will be hunted down like wild beasts and destroyed!”: a comparative study of genocide in California and Tasmania

ASHLEY RILEY SOUSA

On October 1, 1849, the Steamer Edition of the San Francisco *Alta California* reported: “A gentleman from the South Fork of Feather river informs us that without the assistance of Indians in washing for gold, labor is attended with very unsatisfactory compensation.” The upper reaches of Northern California’s Feather River were nearly depleted of gold, leaving only those who had reliable access to Indian labor to wrest a livelihood from mining. Little more than a year later, in January 1851, California Governor Peter H. Burnett asserted, “that a war of extermination will continue to be waged between the races until the Indian race becomes extinct” (California Legislature, 1851, p 15). In the years immediately following California’s statehood in 1850, as Anglo American immigrants poured into California in search of gold, land, and opportunity, Anglo Californians struggled to reconcile two visions of California Indians—that of Indians as an indispensable labor force and that of Indians as obstacles to progress and development that must be exterminated. Although Burnett’s vision of the fate of California Indians eventually carried the day, it triumphed after a long public debate in which politicians, Indian agents, and newspaper pundits laboriously crafted and articulated a genocidal rhetoric which held that extermination was the only acceptable final solution to California’s “Indian problem.”

It is much more difficult to apply telling quotes to illustrate changing views of Tasmanian settlers toward indigenous Tasmanians. Many official British documents regarding the occupation of Tasmania were destroyed, as Clive Turnbull has asserted, “by persons aware that their contents were embarrassing to themselves or would prove so to their descendants” (Turnbull, 1975, p 1). Ironically, what documents do survive nonetheless chronicle much of Britain’s genocidal policy toward Tasmanian aborigines, especially after 1824. The principal accounts of the destruction of indigenous Tasmanians are derived from the papers of Lieutenant-Governor Colonel George Arthur, who served as the

British head of the Tasmanian colony from 1824 to 1837, and the letters of George Augustus Robinson, Lieutenant-Governor Arthur's appointed commissioner to the Tasmanian tribes. Both collections primarily document the escalation of the "Black War" and the "conciliation" of the tribes—both periods of intense genocidal violence against indigenous Tasmanians. In order to understand the development of Britain's genocidal policies toward Tasmanian aborigines, it is helpful to view the Tasmanian phenomenon in the context of other episodes of genocidal violence that have occurred in the context of settlement under similar circumstances. Understanding the process in a similar settler society can help one fill in the blanks created by those Tasmanian officials who saw fit to erase from the historical record their participation in the extermination of a people.

California in 1850, like Tasmania in 1824, was a rapidly expanding outpost of an imperial power. In California, the Gold Rush of 1848 precipitated the immigration of tens of thousands of gold seekers from the United States and abroad. The expansion of land grants in Tasmania after 1817 encouraged a more than 12-fold growth of the white population within a period of 13 years. Both settler societies invaded the homelands of nomadic indigenous tribes that practiced foraging over wide expanses of territory. In both societies, stock raising was the prominent economic activity that encouraged attacks by indigenous people on white settlements because of encroachment on land and resources. In both cases, white settlers devastated the indigenous peoples nearly to the point of extinction. Both settler groups were products of British imperial policy: the Tasmanian settlers were drawn from colonial Australia and white Californians principally from a former British colony—the United States. Both groups had extensive histories of exploiting and displacing indigenous people before the settlement of Tasmania and California.

The comparison of these two societies is useful not only in representing divergent opinions among whites in California and Tasmania, but also as a means of complicating assumptions about the nature of frontier settlement and the relationship between settler societies and indigenous populations. Frequently conventional accounts of American westward expansion and the British settlement of Tasmania portray white settlers as uncouth and avaricious land-grabbers who resorted to the basest brutality against native people, while inept but well-meaning public officials attempted unsuccessfully to restrain this behavior. In his 1994 account of the destruction of California Indians by white settlers, Tomás Almaguer argues, "it is important to note that the white men reportedly involved in these bloody skirmishes were typically singled out as the fringe of the new Anglo society ... Contemporaries viewing the conflict between these white settlers and Indians in the rural frontiers of the state repeatedly describe the Anglos involved as belonging to the 'lowest class of the white population'" (Almaguer, 1994, p 117; see also Prucha, 1984; Utley, 1984). Similarly, James Bonwick asserts with regard to the early placement of convict colonies in Tasmania, "The misfortune of the Natives of ... Van Diemen's Land was, that

the men who came to settle among them were chiefly of a class expatriated for their non-observance of rules of propriety” (Bonwick, 1869, p 30).

While some whites involved in the slaughter of native people in California and Tasmania certainly fell within the ranks of the “fringe” of society, most were ordinary settlers, well respected within their communities. In California, these ordinary settlers worked in tandem with the government of California, federal Indian agents, and even the United States Congress to carry out genocidal campaigns against Indians. Likewise, in Tasmania, the British imperial administration and the Lieutenant-Governors of Tasmania supported the grassroots movement to exterminate aborigines. State, federal, and imperial officials, contrary to the image of bungling but benevolent paternalists, responded with military and financial assistance to white vigilantes who perpetrated massacres, legal shields that protected them from their own actions against native people, and policies that increased the vulnerability of native people to white depredations.

Yet, as the comments of the frustrated Feather River prospector indicate, genocide was not always the favored policy of white settlers toward California Indians. The first European settlers in California, Spanish Franciscan missionaries in the eighteenth century, hoped to form a mutually beneficial relationship with Indians. The Franciscans intended to incorporate Indians into colonial society as subjects of the Spanish crown. Under the leadership of Father Juniaapero Serra and using Indian labor, the Franciscans established a chain of 21 Catholic missions along the California coastline from San Diego in the south to Solano in the north. In the missions, Indian neophytes labored long hours under deplorable conditions in workshops and fields, enriching these colonial outposts, providing food and supplies to nearby Spanish military installations, or *presidios*, and ostensibly learning the customs of “civilized” society and the Catholic faith. James Sandos describes this process as a function of Spanish imperial “state-forming,” in which Indians would undergo 10 years of instruction in Spanish culture and religion at the missions, then be resettled in *pueblos*, “to give Spain effective settlements on its northern frontier and to hold the territory against foreign encroachment”. When the missions were abolished, or “secularized,” by the newly-independent Mexican government, Indians continued to be indispensable to the smooth functioning of the northern frontier society. Instead of laboring for the friars, Indians continued their work under the command of large landowners and ranchers such as Mariano Vallejo, in a condition of near-slavery. The Spanish emigrants to California and their Mexican descendants envisioned indigenous Californians as an essential and desirable, if subordinated, component of the state (Heizer and Almquist, 1979, pp 5–8).

Even the early arrival of white Americans in Mexican California did not substantially alter the arrangement of Indian labor. One notable outcome of the new Mexican government’s anti-clerical secularization policy was the granting of sizeable tracts of land to settlers, including American immigrants to the Mexican frontier. The Americans adapted themselves to the Mexican system of

landholding and Indian labor, participating in the same abuses of Indian laborers. But, despite the Mexicans' and Americans' debasing treatment of Indians, their cruelties stopped short of outright extermination. Ranch owners like John Marsh, proprietor of Rancho Los Medanos, recognized that "throughout all of California the Indians are the principal laborers; without them the business of the country could hardly be carried on." These men recognized that California Indians had to be preserved if they were to continue to provide necessary labor to keep the ranches functioning (Almaguer, 1994, pp 50–51; see also Hurtado, 1988).

The United States' conquest of California in 1846 also did not have an immediate impact on the arrangement of Indian slavery, since white settlers continued to develop California's pastoral and agricultural economy with the sweat and toil of Indian laborers. Even James Marshall's discovery of gold at John Sutter's mill stream in 1848, which would later give rise to the greatest genocidal violence by whites against indigenous Californians, first only inspired a new use for Indian labor. John Sutter himself, for example, seized the opportunity of the gold discovery on his land by recruiting Indians to pan gold for him. Another rancher, John Bidwell, put a twist on Sutter's method by renting out his Indian slaves to his business partners for a handsome profit. Evidently, by harvest season of 1848, many other whites had caught onto this trend of employing Indian labor in the gold fields, for John Sutter found that the Indian workers had largely abandoned his New Helvetia ranch for more lucrative mining jobs, leaving him unable to harvest his crops (Hurtado, 1988, p 103).

For Anglo and Mexican ranchers, Indians made ideal gold miners. Since, as John Bidwell's business venture illustrates, Indians could be worked profitably without paying wages, masters could reap huge profits from Indian miners. The profits derived from mining could then be reinvested into cattle ranches and agricultural endeavors, creating an even greater need for Indian labor as the agricultural and pastoral economy expanded alongside mining. Thus, as Albert Hurtado has asserted, by the end of 1848 "Indian labor [bwas] more valuable than it had ever been" (Hurtado, 1988, pp 104–105).

Although the settlement of Tasmania proceeded almost directly into the settler society phase, white Tasmanians, like white Californians, only gradually developed the exterminationist outlook and rhetoric that culminated in genocidal violence between 1814 and 1830. Beginning with the first British expeditions to Tasmania in 1777, the earliest encounters between whites and indigenous Tasmanians were marked by generally cordial relations. British policy toward native people on these explorations was quite clear: the British Admiralty explicitly instructed Captain James Cook "to endeavour by all proper means to cultivate a friendship with the natives ... shewing them every kind of civility and regard" (Plomley, 1966, pp 21–22). A generation later the first permanent white settlements appeared on the shores of Tasmania. The settlers of these communities understood the value of the Admiralty's admonitions to Captain Cook in 1777.

These new communities on Tasmania's northern coast began as outposts to supply the sealing trade that sprung up and began to flourish in the islands of the

Bass Strait at the turn of the nineteenth century. Some historians and contemporary observers have emphasized the sealers' cruelty toward indigenous Tasmanians, pointing to the "kidnapping" of indigenous women to serve as workers in the seal trade and, presumably, sexual or domestic partners. N. J. B. Plomley argues that the sealers' relationships with indigenous women "were undoubtedly the principal cause of the extinction of the tribes of the north coast ... many of the women taken by the sealers would have succumbed to disease and many others to the cruelties inflicted on them." In addition, "removal of the native women from their tribes would have broken up the tribal economy and removed one of the sexes from the breeding population." Plomley also accuses the sealing settlements of urging indigenous women into prostitution, thereby further undermining indigenous communities (Plomley, 1966, p 24). In his analysis of the sealing communities, however, Lyndall Ryan challenges this view, suggesting that the bonds between indigenous women and white sealers may have been mutually beneficial economic arrangements that helped supplement indigenous economic activity. Further, since many of these sealing communities endured for decades, the sealers' reliance on indigenous women's labor may have actually preserved indigenous communities along Tasmania's north coast (Ryan, 1981, pp 66–71). Considering indigenous women's likely economic and domestic value to sealing communities, in Ryan's view, white sealers would have had incentive to maintain civil relations with local indigenous peoples.

Just as the use of Indian slave labor in California was reaching the heights of profitability, the social and economic order of California was changing. News of Marshall's gold discovery finally reached the eastern United States in December of 1848, precipitating an exodus of white American emigrants to California beginning in 1849. These newest immigrants arrived in California flushed with excitement at the prospect of attaining immense wealth through their own individual labors. At this nexus of economic visions—profit derived from individual initiative and profit derived from commanding Indian labor—the tide of white sentiment toward California Indians began to turn toward extermination. This transition, however, was not spontaneous, nor did it occur instantaneously with the advent of white numerical hegemony in California. For several years after the arrival of the "forty-niners" many white Californians continued to rely heavily on Indian labor and fought hard to maintain access to a viable indigenous workforce, even as a growing body of whites was articulating a new vision of Indians as irredeemable and undesirable obstacles to the economic and social development of California. As some fought to protect their right to Indian labor, many others looked to the day when California would be free of its Indian nuisance.

As California quickly transitioned into statehood, the California Constitutional Convention of 1849 kept Indian issues out of its considerations. The 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which formally ceded Mexico's northern provinces, including California, to the United States, concluded the Mexican War and formalized the United States' conquest of northern Mexico. A provision of the treaty stipulated that all persons who had been citizens of Mexico at the time of

the treaty, including Indians, would be eligible for citizenship in the new American states. According to Robert Heizer, the California constitutional delegates “sidestepped the question of recognizing non-whites as citizens with the right to vote” by allowing the new state legislature to decide the matter. The California legislature not only denied Indians the right to vote, but also excluded them from serving as witnesses “for or against any white” in the California court system (Heizer, 1973, p 5). Thus, the California Constitutional Convention, in cooperation with the legislature, took early steps in setting the stage for genocide. Without a voice in state government, or the ability to bring cases against whites in court, California Indians could not hope to put up effective legal resistance to further enslavement, exploitation, and eventual extermination by whites.

One of the first Anglos to take advantage of the institutionalized marginalization of Indians was none other than John Bidwell, longtime exploiter of Indian labor. In 1850 Bidwell, now a senator in the first California State legislature, introduced a bill entitled “An Act in Relation to the Protection, Punishment, and Government of the Indians.” Bidwell’s bill was a halfheartedly humanitarian attempt to provide for limited Indian participation in voting and protection from enslavement by whites, but its major thrust was to regulate Indian labor with a system of indenture and contract labor. The bill was never passed, but many of Bidwell’s suggestions were incorporated into a later bill entitled “An Act for the Government and Protection of the Indians.”

The new bill, passed on April 22, 1850, dropped many of the more charitable provisions of Bidwell’s earlier bill, including limited suffrage, and added a clause that provided for the removal of Indians from their traditional lands to smaller parcels of land called *rancherías*. The new bill upped the ante on regulating Indian labor, however, by creating a system for punishing Indian crimes through forced labor (California Legislature, 1850, pp 224, 323). Robert Heizer has characterized this law as “a crudely inhumanitarian one ... devised with the intent to realize some benefit, however limited, from the presence of an otherwise useless and threatening alien and unwanted population.” This bill viewed in light of the previous century of Spanish, Mexican, and American reliance on Indian labor, however, reveals that white Californians did not quite yet view Indians as entirely useless and undesirable. Although the gold rush had seized an increasingly prominent place in California’s economic order, the legislature conceded to the reality that Indians were still necessary to the smooth functioning of the pastoral and agricultural economy (Heizer, 1973, p 9).

Despite the probably early success of aboriginal–white relations in the sealing communities of Tasmania, British imperial policy quickly instituted an era of mutual antagonism between indigenous Tasmanians and white settlers. Britain initially settled Tasmania as a penal colony, beginning in 1803. British convicts lived and labored at first in closed, guarded communities and had little contact with the indigenous population. Before long, however, the Tasmanian convict colonies began to fall on hard times. They could not produce enough to sustain themselves and British imperial administrators would not give the attention to

effectively provisioning and managing these expatriated undesirables. Forsaken convicts, desperate to the point of starvation, were turned loose into the surrounding countryside to forage for survival. The presence of hundreds of convicts roaming the countryside and the corresponding depletion of the natural resources indigenous people relied on understandably alarmed indigenous Tasmanians and eventually led to violent backlash against the usurpation of their natural resources. Some of the more successful convicts gave up life in the penal colonies to live full time in the countryside as “bushrangers.” The bushrangers, living outside the law, subsisted partly by raiding indigenous villages for food and supplies (Turnbull, 1975, pp 38–41).

It is important to remember that many convicts were desperately starving during these early famine years of Tasmanian settlement. In contrast to Bonwick’s characterization of the “misfortune of the Natives” as being a class of whites who refused to follow “the rules of propriety,” the reality of the conflict between convicts and indigenous people was the Britain’s gross mismanagement of the penal colonies (Bonwick, 1869, p 30). But it did not take long for the bushrangers’ violence to transcend simple economic motivations. Among many bushrangers, the “art” of killing aborigines became the stuff reputations were built on. For example, one notorious bushranger, a man by the name of Carrotts, bragged of capturing an indigenous woman after killing her husband. He seized this opportunity to terrorize his captive by cutting off her dead husband’s head, “and hanging it around her neck, drove her before him as his prize.” Likewise, bushrangers Lemon and Brown delighted in tying down indigenous captives and using them for target practice (Turnbull, 1975, p 41).

This situation was exacerbated after 1818 by the influx of thousands of white settlers from Australia. The settlers joined the bushrangers in competing with indigenous people for land and resources. When Britain granted these settlers the right to land in Tasmania, they failed to secure title from the indigenous occupants. Consequently, the settlers felt entitled to exploit their land as they saw fit, while indigenous Tasmanians felt the sharp pinch of narrowing access to the game, plants, rivers, and land that sustained them. As with the economic competition created by the freeing of the convicts into the countryside, the economic competition between white settlers and indigenous people also sparked violence and raids on farms and livestock. In such cases, white settlers often behaved remarkably like the convict bushrangers. Massacres as well as murders of individual aborigines were widely reported throughout the 1820s. In addition, the settlers added a new component to the harassment of indigenous people: the kidnapping of their children to be used as domestic servants. For example, George Augustus Robinson consistently refers to the prevalence of detribalized indigenous children being kept as near-slaves (Plomley, 1966, p 27; Turnbull, 1975, p 78). As the years of white settlement wore on, the violence between settlers and aborigines grew to a fevered pitch. As early as 1807, well before the 1818 mass immigration of whites, one early settler by the name of Knopwood noted that “the natives have been very troublesome for a long time, but not so desperate as they have been lately” (Turnbull, 1975, p 41). Yet this knowledge

of indigenous “desperation” did little to ameliorate settler abuses in the decades to come.

If some settlers, such as Knopwood, were aware of indigenous grievances, the British administrators of the Tasmanian colony were even more so. On March 13, 1819, only one year after the institution of the land-grant program, Lieutenant-Governor Colonel William Sorrell issued a proclamation instructing “A careful Avoidance, on the part of the settlers and stockmen, of conduct tending to excite Suspicion of intended injury, and a strict Forbearance from all Acts or Appearances of Hostility” toward indigenous Tasmanians (Turnbull, 1975, p 58). In addition, the Lieutenant-Governor concluded his order by forbidding all colonists from taking “possession of a native youth or child unless it shall be clearly proved that the consent of the parents had been given; or that the child had been found in a state to demand shelter and protection” (Plomley, 1966, p 27). Although Sorrell’s proclamation rang hollow due to his ultimate reluctance to enforce it, it reveals that settlers and imperial officials alike were well aware of the problem of settler violence against and harassment of aborigines. His careful order against “Acts or Appearances of Hostility” reveals his knowledge that such behavior on the part of white settlers was a primary contributor to the interracial violence that plagued British Tasmanian communities and terrorized aborigines in the countryside.

In 1824, when Lieutenant-Governor Arthur succeeded Sorrell as head of the British Tasmanian colony, the attacks on aborigines by white settlers and the usurpation of indigenous land and resources had escalated to unprecedented levels in the southern settlements near the colonial capital of Hobart Town. The white population had skyrocketed since the beginning of Sorrell’s administration, leaving indigenous Tasmanians ever more desperate to protect their hunting and gathering grounds and numerically ever more vulnerable to settler depredations. Lieutenant-Governor Arthur, however, was even more reluctant than Sorrell to take political risks by advocating fair treatment for indigenous Tasmanians and their plight correspondingly declined. The white settlers were, by this point, “clamoring ... for the extermination or removal of the aborigines” and Arthur was unwilling to either enforce the previous proclamations against violence toward indigenous people or create any sort of permanent reservation on the island where indigenous people could live apart from colonial society, lest he incur the wrath of colonists at home or of imperial officials in London (Plomley, 1966, p 28). It would not be long before the white settlers of Tasmania seized upon Arthur’s reluctance to abandon talk of appeasing indigenous people, and elevate the discussion of indigenous issues to call for *either* removal or extermination.

As miners and other white settlers flooded into California in the early 1850s, the rhetoric on the place of Indians in California society shifted to consideration of Indian removal. Many of these white emigrants came from the Eastern and Midwestern states where removal had been the predominant Indian policy for most of the early nineteenth century. One of the most notable and notorious events in the Indian policy of this period was the removal of the Cherokee

Nation from the Southeastern United States to the newly-formed Indian Territory west of the Mississippi River in present-day Oklahoma. Although removal was a devastating event for the Cherokees, it had, for white Americans, conveniently solved the “problem” of Indian land title and sovereignty by nearly eliminating Indians from the Southeastern states. These white emigrants brought to California with them the conviction that removal had represented the most efficient and humane solution to dealing with Indians in their home states and hoped that California could effect the same convenient solution with respect to the Indians within its own borders (see Satz, 1975; Zinn, 1995, pp 124–146). In response to the growing debate over Indian removal in California, the federal government sent three professional Indian commissioners—Dr. Oliver Wozencraft, George Barbour, and Redick McKee—to California in 1851 to help the state deal with its Indian policy. Noting that “there is *no further west*, to which they *can* be removed,” the commissioners undertook to negotiate treaties for another kind of Indian removal—the removal of tribes from their traditional lands to reservations (*Alta California*, 1851). In 1851 and 1852 Wozencraft, Barbour, and McKee painstakingly negotiated 18 treaties with various California tribes that would have set aside approximately 7,488,000 acres and provided food and supplies in exchange for the Indians relinquishing title to their remaining tracts of land.

The work of the commissioners represented a second strain of opinion among white Californians in the 1850s, one that emphasized a policy of “domestication” of the tribes. Throughout the 1850s, whites used the term domestication to refer to settling Indian tribes on restricted tracts of land and training them to farm and tend livestock. The goal was to transition Indians from their traditional modes of subsistence—gathering wild plant foods, hunting, and fishing—which required them to migrate over wide expanses of land to locate food sources, to a sedentary lifestyle, thereby freeing millions of acres for whites to use. In addition to signifying the continuation of the necessity of Indians as laborers, the “Act for the Government and Protection of the Indians” also signaled a move toward a similar kind of reservation policy as the federal commissioners envisioned. In its second article, the act provided protocol by which a “white person or proprietor in possession of land” on which Indians lived would apply to local authorities to “set off a sufficient amount of land for the necessary wants of such Indians,” thereby creating a series of small *rancherías* scattered throughout the state (Heizer, 1974, p 220).

The San Francisco *Alta California* emerged as one of the foremost proponents of the reservation policy in 1851. Although initially not entirely sympathetic to the commissioners and their work, the *Alta California* was forced to conclude, “The Indians have a right to a portion of the soil ... And if we deprive them of that we must afford them the means of sustenance in some other way” (*Alta California*, 1852; Rawls, 1984, p 142). But not all white Californians agreed with the *Alta California*’s assessment of the commissioners’ reservation policy. A growing majority of white Californians in this period argued that the reservation policy would be harmful to California’s economy and to the interests of its citizens. Indians, reservation opponents argued, would monopolize this

profitable land and waste the valuable natural resources that whites might successfully develop. One particularly biting editorial bluntly asserted in protest, “it would be a piece of hardihood to point to any section of the State where [obgold] does not exist ... it would be a very difficult matter to place the Indians where there would not be some inducement to the white man to live.” If “the Indians are expected to cultivate the lands,” the editorial demanded sarcastically, would opponents of the reservations “have them placed upon a barren rock?” (*Alta California*, 1851). The commissioners themselves took a much more conciliatory tone, entreating the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to “take into consideration their poverty, the country they surrender, and particularly the expense of a war with them that would necessarily last for years, to say nothing of the gold mines they give up.” With these factors in mind, George Barbour assured the Commissioner, “I do not think you will conceive that we have given them too much” (Rawls, 1984, p 141).

Although sympathetic to the needs of indigenous Californians, especially when compared with the pro-removal white majority, the commissioners and their main advocate, the *Alta California*, helped to forward exterminationist rhetoric, even as they fought to secure lands and provisions for Indians. A notable trend in the writings of the commissioners and the *Alta California*'s editorials was their tendency to construct reservation policy as an either-or proposition that left little room for compromise between the two extremes of domestication and outright extermination. In a January 1851 letter to the *Alta California*, the commissioners argued that “the people of California appear to have left but one alternative to these remnants of once numerous and powerful tribes, viz: *extermination or domestication*.” A few days after the commissioners' piece appeared, the *Alta California* echoed the commissioners' assertion, pinning the state's entire hope for peaceable future Indian relations entirely on the commissioners' work. Calling for “immediate action” to avert “a long, bloody, and costly war,” the editorialist worried that “while we hesitate or lose time, the golden moment for pacification may forever be lost” (*Alta California*, 1851). A later editorialist continued this theme with what was now beginning to sound like an ultimatum: “you have but one choice—KILL, MURDER, EXTERMINATE OR DOMESTICATE AND IMPROVE THEM” (*Alta California*, 1852).

In November, 1826, as violence between indigenous people and settlers escalated in Tasmania the principal Tasmanian newspaper, the Hobart Town *Colonial Times*, issued its own similar demand, complete with boldface capital letters: “We make no pompous display of Philanthropy—we say unequivocally—SELF DEFENCE IS THE FIRST LAW OF NATURE. THE GOVERNMENT MUST REMOVE THE NATIVES—IF NOT, THEY WILL BE HUNTED DOWN LIKE WILD BEASTS AND DESTROYED!” The *Colonial Times* went on to suggest various nearby islands that might make good reserves where aborigines might “acquire some slight habits of industry, which is the first step of civilisation” or die out slowly and far enough away not to bother the white settlements in Tasmania. On December 29, the *Colonial Times* further

warned that “until the aborigines are sent out of the Island ... there will be continual slaughter on both sides which no human hand can possibly prevent” (Turnbull, 1975, pp 76–77). By defining British policy toward indigenous Tasmanians as a clear-cut choice between certain destruction and removal, the *Colonial Times* removed responsibility for genocidal acts from the shoulders of white settlers at the same time it shrouded the wholesale dislocation of the indigenous population of Tasmania in humanitarian garb. This absolution of guilt for the fate of indigenous people would profoundly impact Lieutenant-Governor Arthur’s policy in the upcoming year.

On November 29, 1827, Lieutenant-Governor Arthur’s secretary issued a statement assuring colonists that “his excellency feels assured that the black Natives may be driven from the settled districts, which has now become a measure of indispensable necessity, as they cannot by conciliating means be induced to retire from them” (Turnbull, 1975, p 79). This statement marked the beginning of Arthur’s commitment to expelling indigenous people from Tasmania altogether. Although Arthur privately acknowledged that “it is not a matter of surprise that the injuries, real or supposed, inflicted upon the blacks have been revenged upon the whites,” political pressures from London and from colonists in the vicinity of Hobart Town overrode his more humanitarian sentiments. In November 1828 he confirmed his intention to remove indigenous Tasmanians by declaring martial law against indigenous people, thereby facilitating their expulsion from the settled districts. This policy was devastating to aborigines because “it gave settlers more and more freedom to murder them and to do everything to wipe them out” as whites forced indigenous people further and further away from Hobart Town (Plomley, 1966, p 29).

But the indigenous people refused to be expelled from the areas of white settlement. Already suffering from depleted resources, many now depended on commerce with whites and even charitable handouts merely to survive. The refusal of indigenous Tasmanians to leave the settlements prompted Lieutenant-Governor Arthur to devise two strategies to encourage the removal of the aborigines. The first of these strategies was to subsidize settler militias to capture indigenous people for monetary rewards. As a second strategy, Arthur appointed George Augustus Robinson as a commissioner to the tribes and sent him into the countryside to negotiate for removal with the indigenous people themselves. Beginning in December of 1829, Robinson traveled throughout the island attempting to convince indigenous communities to relocate to one of several nearby islands, whereupon the British colonial government would provide for their needs. Robinson’s negotiating was far more successful than the colonists’ military activity in resettling hundreds of aborigines on Gun Carriage Island, Flinders Island, Swan Island, and other islands in the Bass Strait (Ryan, 1981, pp 124–146). By February 3, 1835, Robinson was able to report to Arthur’s secretary: “The entire Aboriginal population are now removed” (Ryan, 1981, p 170).

As the commissioners negotiated their treaties with the California tribes and debates raged furiously in the *Alta California*, private citizens were already

beginning to pick up on extermination as a viable alternative to negotiation with California Indians. As increasing numbers of white miners, farmers, and ranchers invaded Indian homelands in the early 1850s, they drastically undercut indigenous Californians' abilities to provide sustenance for themselves. By monopolizing the land and natural resources California Indians relied upon to make a living, these white invaders drove Indians throughout the state to destitution. Many Indians were forced to resort to raiding white settlements for the food, clothing, and supplies they needed to survive, leading to white retaliation that sparked a series of Indian wars in the early years of statehood. The whites who found themselves victimized by Indian raids could not possibly be surprised by this outcome. That whites driving Indians off their land and away from their resources was the root of Indian attacks on white communities was widely recognized as being the cause of the Indian wars that swept through the hinterlands in this period. The *Alta California* acknowledged in 1851, "our countrymen engaged in the mines are frequently in the habit of 'prospecting,' and it is by no means singular that they should have encroached on the reservations for that purpose." Another editorialist for the *Alta California* asked its readers to consider the "uncalled for oppressions" of Indians by whites in order to consider Indian war across the state "in a fair estimate" (*Alta California*, 1851).

The federal government was also made aware of the plight of indigenous Californians, not only by the work of Wozencraft, Barbour, and McKee, but also by the work of several other commissioners that presided over Indian agencies throughout the state. One such commissioner, Adam Johnson, ran an agency that covered territory in the far northern region of the state near the headwaters of the Sacramento River. In a letter to the United States Commissioner of Indian Affairs regarding a recent raid on whites near Bear River and Wolf Creek, Johnson provided a sympathetic report of the Indian grievances that led to the attack and deaths of several local settlers. "Their means of subsistence, which have heretofore been limited," Johnson asserted, "are now greatly diminished on account of the immigration overrunning their country." Further, Johnson stated, "I have been told of several acts of depredation which were instigated by the chiefs of certain tribes through the apprehension that their people must die of starvation in consequence of the strangers overrunning their country, feeding their grass, burning their timber, and destroying their dams on the streams" (Heizer, 1974, p 170). One concerned citizen, Pastor Sylvester Woodbridge of the Benicia Presbyterian Church, wrote to President Zachary Taylor himself, stating "that the Indians in the Sierra Nevada are driven in large numbers from their usual haunts, are consequently deprived of their customary food ... and hence are exposed to starvation ... They are often killed, because when urged by hunger, they have attempted to seize the horses and cattle of the American emigrants" (Heizer, 1974, pp 183–184).

Given the knowledge of the plight of California Indians and the ultimate causes of the Indian raids on emigrant communities, if pacification and domestication of indigenous Californians were still considered a viable goal, the state

of California and the federal government should have been poised to embrace the treaties being negotiated by the commissioners and their recommendations for a reservation policy that would provide for the needs of California Indians and secure peace in the state. But this was not to be. Throughout the commissioners' tenure in California, two Governors sat in the Executive office: Peter J. Burnett and John McDougal. Each Governor played his part in polarizing the discussion of Indian policy to the domestication versus extermination dichotomy, and each staunchly opposed the commissioners' efforts to secure the reservation policy. By actively opposing what they perceived to be the only alternative to exterminating California Indians, Burnett and McDougal threw the support of the state of California behind a genocidal policy intended to cause the extinction of indigenous Californians.

In an address to the California state legislature in January 1851, shortly before Wozencraft, Barbour, and McKee began their treaty-making expedition, Governor Peter Burnett informed his audience that white settlers would not stand passively in the face of further Indian violence in the hinterlands. The inevitable result of whites living alongside Indians, according to Burnett, was that "a war of extermination will continue to be waged between the races until the Indian race becomes extinct" (California Legislature, 1851, 15). Governor John McDougal took office shortly thereafter and contributed his piece to the call for extermination. In a message to Colonel J. Neely Johnson, a militia leader dispatched to meet with the commissioners as they treated with Indians in Mariposa county, McDougal suggested that "if the Indians are still found to be obstinate and intractable after your endeavors ... a vigorous prosecution of the war is our most efficient remedy." The war, McDougal insisted, "must of necessity be one of extermination of the many tribes" (California Legislature, 1851, pp 673–674). At the same time the commissioners were in Mariposa county attempting to sway the "obstinate and intractable" Indians of that region, McDougal was conspiring with the state legislature to undermine the peaceful work the commissioners intended to carry out.

Although McDougal entreated Colonel Johnson and his militiamen "to avoid studiously the commission of any act calculated to excite and exasperate unnecessarily the Indian tribes," he apparently had little faith in the power of negotiation, for he also sent along with those orders instructions "to practice the most rigid economy" in mustering and supplying a larger militia force for "whatever operations you may find it advisable to commence" (California Legislature, 1851, pp 673–674). Meanwhile, back in the legislative chambers of the state capital, the state Senate contemplated a bill that would provide for "further means to prosecute the war against the Indians" in Mariposa county. To the Indian commissioners, however, McDougal sent only a message assuring them of the state government's sincere desire for "relations of amity and friendship with the Indians." Furthermore, Governor McDougal assured the commissioners, "Col. Johnson will afford you every facility in his power to effect this object, and will cooperate with you in all measures necessary to ensure a return to those friendly feelings which are so desirable to us"

(California Legislature, 1851, p 678). He failed to mention that, should those feelings of amity prove not to be forthcoming, a well-armed militia with an eye toward exterminating the Mariposa tribes would be.

Despite the best efforts of the commissioners and the urgings of the *Alta California*, the United States Senate, responding to the hostility of a growing majority of white Californians and the intransigence of two gubernatorial administrations and two sessions of the state legislature, refused to ratify the 18 treaties submitted by Wozencraft, Barbour, and McKee in 1852 (Rawls, 1984, pp 141–147). Arguing that the reservations outlined by the commissioners' treaties would encompass valuable mining and agricultural lands and limit Anglo access to Indian labor, the California legislature actively opposed the reservation system. The legislature painstakingly reviewed each treaty, outlining its complaints, then ordered California's representatives to the United States Congress to oppose the ratification of the treaties (Hurtado, 1988, p 140). Contrary to its image as a voice of reason that attempted to moderate white settlers' abuses of Indians, the United States government—the Senate in this case—along with the California legislature and Governors, took an active role in denying the most fundamental security to indigenous Californians. By forcing them to remain in this precarious state, with no right to their lands and livelihoods, these state and national leaders put California Indians at the mercy of an increasingly violent and extermination-minded populace.

The Anglo citizens eagerly acted upon the state's and federal government's promise that California Indians would be left vulnerable. The exterminationist rhetoric espoused by state leaders and even the somewhat sympathetic editors of the *Alta California* helped to convince whites that, since the project of domestication did not work, the race war predicted by Governor Burnett was the next logical step in dealing with indigenous Californians. In the years following 1852, whites seized on this sentiment and perpetrated a series of punitive expeditions against Indians who had been left with no choice but to pillage white settlements in order to survive. Although the Office of Indian Affairs later provided for a new reservation system, the lands and provisions it set aside for Indian use were woefully inadequate to support the large numbers of Indians that settlers were attempting to drive off their lands. In addition, the federal government still failed to fairly secure the title from Indians for their homelands and many Indians refused to remove to the reservations so long as they could hope to support themselves in their traditional territories. Consequently, throughout the state, white militias continued to roam through the countryside, killing Indians at the public expense. Communities from Lake Shasta to Marysville raised funds to provide bounties for Indian scalps brought in by bounty hunters (Hurtado, 1988, pp 141–148; Rawls, 1984, pp 184–186). Perpetuating genocide against California Indians had gone from being simply a desirable policy goal to a profitable business.

By 1870, the population of indigenous Californians had plummeted to 50,000 people from 100,000 in 1850. Although the majority of the population loss was not directly the result of murder at the hands of white Californians, as Robert

Heizer has pointed out, much of it was directly attributable to white invasion. Considering that, after 1850, California Indians had to contend with “rivers so polluted by silt from gold mining that the fish runs were severely reduced and, in some cases, terminated; the game either killed off or so gun-shy that the bow and arrow was ineffective; hunted down like wild animals for whom bounty was paid; their women seized; their children kidnapped and sold outright or ‘indentured’; suffering from introduced diseases (especially venereal types) and wholly without medical care,” Heizer concludes that “it is actually surprising that by 1870 there remained as many living native Californians as there were” (Heizer, 1973, p 9). Perhaps California Indians recognized too that they were lucky to be alive in such numbers, or perhaps they felt sharply the loss of such great proportions of the families and communities that had sustained their efforts to remain free of the reservations. Either way, by 1870, the majority of Indian conflicts in California had drawn to a close and Indians submitted themselves to the poorly run and badly provisioned reservations. The genocidal policy of white California had succeeded in largely ridding California of its Indian population and the problems it posed for white invaders eager to monopolize Indian lands and resources.

For the white invaders of Tasmania, the failure of the British colonial regime to enforce laws protecting them from settler abuses led to the almost total destruction of the indigenous Tasmanian population. By the 1870s, the reserves set up for indigenous people in the Bass Straits islands had largely failed. Demoralized, under provisioned, and susceptible to European diseases in the cramped quarters of the settlements, indigenous Tasmanians quickly wasted away until only one quarter of the aboriginal population that existed at the time of white settlement in the early nineteenth century (roughly 300 people) remained in the prison-like reserves. In August 1830, Sir George Murray commented of Lieutenant-Governor Arthur’s new removal policy: “the adoption of any line of conduct having for its avowed or for its secret object the extinction of the native race could not fail to leave an indelible stain on the character of the British government.” Although removal was billed as the only *alternative* to extinction, as Clive Turnbull points out, “Britain had now been contemplating precisely this result for more than a quarter of a century without the slightest deviation in policy” (Turnbull, 1975, pp 116–117). With an eye to conveniently disposing of the indigenous population of Tasmania in a way that would ideally hasten their demise, but at least remove them as an obstacle to white hegemony, the British colonial regime in Tasmania proved itself an indispensable agent of genocidal violence in the extermination of indigenous Tasmanians.

Contemporary accounts of settler–indigenous relations in California and Tasmania seem to emphasize the notion that colonists had a very limited range of choices in dealing with native peoples, and this notion has haunted perceptions of these histories to this day. For those of us living in these former settler societies, our national myths indoctrinate us in the theory of inevitability in the guise of “manifest destiny” or the “white man’s burden.” Twenty-first century consumers of this history and mythology, if they are sensitive to cultural

relativism and political correctness, will lament the unfortunate but certain demise of indigenous peoples. Even professional historians are prone to conclude that, tragically, colonists had no choice but to rely on indigenous labor, that the colonial administration had no way of restraining settlers, that native people must fall before the onward march of progress, and so forth. Given the pervasiveness of these justifications, it can be difficult to put the behavior of these settlers in its proper context.

These myths and assumptions absolve people of responsibility and accountability for their own behavior. The contrast between the aims and values of white settlers and those of indigenous peoples—the explanations of this inevitability—are played up to the point of obfuscating the obvious: the invisible sweeping hand of history does not commit genocide, people do. Uncovering the combinations of structural factors—the intangible values, beliefs, and trends of the time—and individual action contributing to the act of genocide is the historian's contribution to figuring out why and how people have acted with such unrestrained yet organized brutality. In this era of reconciliation commissions and reparations, understanding these processes is more than a matter of intellectual curiosity. If, as many historians are wont to assert, we study history to understand and affect the present human condition, then studies of genocidal violence in its historical context are vital, not only to reconciliation and reparation, but to understanding and preventing genocidal violence in the present and future.

Bibliography

- Almaguer, T. (1994) *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- Anderson, W. L., ed. (1991) *Cherokee Removal: Before and After* (Athens: University of Georgia Press).
- Bonwick, J. (1869) *The Last of the Tasmanians; or the Black War of Van Diemen's Land* (London: Sampson Low, Son, & Marston).
- California Legislature (1851) *Journals of the Legislature of the State of California at its Second Session: Held at the City of San Jose, Commencing on the Sixth Day of January, and Ending on the First Day of May, 1851* (San José: Eugene Casserly, State Printer).
- California Legislature Senate (1850) *Journal of the Senate of the State of California at their First Session, Begun and Held at Puebla de San José, on the Fifteenth Day of December, 1849* (San José: J. Winchester, State Printer).
- Heizer, R. F. (1973) *Collected Documents on the Causes and Events in the Bloody Island Massacre of 1850* (Berkeley: Archaeological Research Facility, Department of Anthropology, UC Berkeley).
- Heizer, R. F. (1974) *The Destruction of California Indians: A Collection of Documents from the Period 1847 to 1865 in which are Described Some of the Things that Happened to Some of the Indians of California* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press).
- Heizer, R. F. and Almquist, A. J. (1971) *The Other Californians: Prejudice and Discrimination Under Spain, Mexico, and the United States to 1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- Hurtado, A. L. (1988) *Indian Survival on the California Frontier* (New Haven: Yale University Press).
- Plomley, N. J. B. (1966) *Friendly Mission: The Tasmanian Journals and Papers of George Augustus Robinson, 1829–1834* (Hobart, Tasmania: Tasmanian Historical Research Association).
- Prucha, F. P. (1984) *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press).
- Rawls, J. J. (1984) *Indians of California: The Changing Image* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press).
- Ryan, L. (1981) *The Aboriginal Tasmanians* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press).
- Satz, R. N. (1975) *American Indian Policy in the Jacksonian Era* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press).

GENOCIDE IN CALIFORNIA AND TASMANIA

Turnbull, C. (1975) *Black War: The Extermination of the Tasmanian Aborigines* (Melbourne, Australia: Lansdowne Press).

Utley, R. (1984) *The Indian Frontier of the American West* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press).

Zinn, H. (1995) *A People's History of the United States* (New York: HarperCollins).

Copyright of Journal of Genocide Research is the property of Carfax Publishing Company and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.