

“THE WORLD HAS CHANGED, AND THE WIYOT CHANGED WITH IT:”  
THE SOCIO-POLITICAL PROCESSES AND RATIONALE OF CULTURAL  
LANDSCAPE DECOLONIZATION ON WIYOT ANCESTRAL LAND

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A Thesis Presented to

The Faculty of Humboldt State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Social Science: Environment & Community

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July 2020

## ABSTRACT

### “THE WORLD HAS CHANGED, AND THE WIYOT CHANGED WITH IT:” THE SOCIO-POLITICAL PROCESSES AND RATIONALE OF CULTURAL LANDSCAPE DECOLONIZATION ON WIYOT ANCESTRAL LAND

Mark Christopher Adams

This thesis examines recent successful efforts by the Wiyot Tribe in Humboldt County, California to resist and reverse forms of settler-colonial oppression with tangible and unprecedented results. The original inhabitants of Humboldt Bay: the Wiyot, and their allies in the local community, have overcome settler socio-political resistance in three contentious, public disputes to preserve and restore tribal sovereignty over ancestral land and culture. While much has been written about the history of the United States as a settler-colonial project, more research is necessary to understand the processes of grassroots decolonization efforts to alter cultural landscapes. Using a combination of feminist and critical geographic theoretical methodologies, archival research, and qualitative interview methods, this thesis informs gaps in the academic discourse on decolonization, focusing on potential strategies that can be replicated elsewhere. The results of this research recognize a historical, legal, and moral justification for decolonization and an emphasis on reading cultural landscapes as an effective decolonization tool, seeking to analyze the Wiyot’s successes in ways that can illuminate tactical strengths and their potential use in future decolonization struggles.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to express my deep gratitude to the Wiyot Tribe of the Table Bluff Rancheria without whose guidance, kindness, and gracious permission, this thesis would not have been possible. The tribe's wisdom, values, and fortitude in regaining their rightful sovereignty and lands have inspired not only this thesis, they have inspired me as a geographer to focus on Indigenous perspectives within a larger context of improving the lives of all people, globally. Special thanks to Ted Hernandez, Cheryl Seidner, and Jessica Cantrell who have graciously given me hours of their time to ensure the Wiyot Tribe's voice is paramount in this process.

My committee members: Chair Dr. Leena Dallasheh,, Dr. Nicholas Purdue, and Mr. Kerri Malloy deserve the utmost credit for their expertise and my heartfelt thanks for their instruction in theory, methodology, and thesis writing, never letting me deliver anything short of my best work. You have helped and inspired me to transform into a more nuanced, effective, and critical-thinking human being.

I must also recognize other key Humboldt State University faculty and staff for their important roles in my academic journey: Dr. Matthew Derrick for opening my eyes to landscapes and how to write like a geographer; Dr. Rain Marshall for introducing me to the injustices committed against Indigenous people in America; Peggy Stewart and Terri Fischer, E&C support staff who have always been there when I needed them. You have my eternal thanks.

Finally, I cannot thank my partner Angie enough for her love, kindness, wisdom, and patience in this process, which was physically, mentally, and emotionally challenging to say the least. Her advice and comfort, as well as, her Indigenous roots in Humboldt County, helped tremendously to keep myself and my research grounded.

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## INTRODUCTION

The northern, coastal California county of Humboldt has recently been the focus of several, high-profile, successful efforts by Indigenous tribes to resist and reverse ongoing forms of settler-colonial oppression, achieving tangible results. Specifically, the original inhabitants of Humboldt Bay, the Wiyot, have overcome settler socio-political resistance in three contentious political disputes to preserve and restore some tribal sovereignty over their traditional land and culture: the permanent removal of a public statue of US President McKinley, the return of the Wiyot's most sacred religious site - Tulawat, and their victory to preserve another religious site, Tsakiyuwit, from commercial development by Terra-Gen – all in 2019 (Fig. 1). These successful tribal efforts signal a possible shift in attitudes among Humboldt County's settler population toward addressing the legacy of a troubling settler-colonial past that continues to harm the Indigenous population.<sup>1</sup> For the Wiyot, this means changes in the geographic landscape that produce the tangible results of the return of land and sovereignty (Hernandez). Together, these recent Wiyot victories offer a pedagogical opportunity for both settlers and Indigenous people not only to effectively further arguments for undoing the harmful legacy of a colonial past, but to also improve processes of tangible and meaningful decolonization.

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, “settler” refers to the non-Indigenous population of Euro-Americans who have resided on traditional (pre-1850) Wiyot lands. I have chosen the word *Indigenous* to describe the original inhabitants of North America such as the Wiyot, rejecting orientalist terms such as “Indian” or “Native American.” Alternatively, I refer to *First Nations* peoples in this thesis to reflect the fact that Indigenous tribes are original, sovereign entities.

Figure 1. Map of Wiyot Ancestral Land (Humboldt State University)



The primary goal of this thesis is to inform gaps in the academic discourse on decolonization, focusing on the processes of grassroots decolonization efforts to alter cultural landscapes. The significance of Humboldt County as a site of decolonization studies is demonstrated by the confluence of several factors: a large Indigenous population, a history of brutal genocide against peaceful native people, and a site of recent important steps toward decolonization, offering an opportunity for settlers and Indigenous people to improve processes that return Indigenous land and sovereignty. By understanding why decolonization is needed in Humboldt, what forms it should take, and how to apply them based on academic research and community feedback, I hope to provide a valuable addition to decolonization discourse. To help inform these processes, I will analyze community decolonization efforts in Humboldt County headed by the Wiyot Tribe, examine the history of settler colonialism here, and discuss settler and Wiyot interview data that sheds light on perceptions of that history, as well as, perspectives on decolonization.

While celebrating the Wiyot's successes, this thesis seeks to engage the community to elaborate the current shortcomings of how society approaches decolonization. Emphasizing the reasons for decolonization, as well as, the modes, my main argument is two-fold. First, genocide and land theft occurred in Humboldt County, including crimes of mass murder by the state and Federal governments, constituting the moral and legal justification for decolonization there, and second, that a focus on Indigenous-led, settler-backed, grassroots efforts to decolonize the cultural landscape

through persistent, direct civic action, is a highly effective approach to confronting ongoing forms of settler-colonial oppression.

Using Geography and Social Science methods, and based on archival records and interview data, I make several supporting assertions to advance the argument for decolonization of Humboldt County's *cultural landscape*. First, the Wiyot have legal and moral claims to a redress of historical grievances documented in the chronology of deliberate, officially organized genocide and land theft committed by the settler population as defined by the 1948 United Nations Genocide Convention and the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). As I will explain, these legal frameworks have their challenges, including participation and enforcement. However, they are internationally recognized, respectively defining genocide and codifying the equal rights of Indigenous people while simultaneously encouraging governments around the world to address the genocidal crimes committed against them.

The use of the term *genocide* to analyze this history is controversial.<sup>2</sup> In arguing that settler actions in northern California constituted genocide, I rely on the definition clearly articulated in Article 3 of the 1948 United Nations Genocide Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. It states,

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<sup>2</sup> Certainly, when applied to the settler narrative of the American West, full of pioneers, cowboys, homesteaders, and heroic US cavalymen, evidenced by both mainstream historical publications and educational textbooks which actively promote the story of a "conflict" between two peoples, born of resistance to the inevitable, civilizing American nation-state project (Stanton 665; Ward xvii).

“genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group as such: (a) killing members of the group; (b) causing bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) forcibly transferring children of this group to another group” (United Nations, “Genocide”).

As I will exhibit in Chapter 2 of this thesis, the Wiyot were victims of an organized, officially sanctioned genocide to remove them from land deemed necessary for that project. Furthermore, each of the genocidal acts were committed by settlers, backed by the state, against the Wiyot and other Indigenous groups in Humboldt County.

An obvious question before I proceed is why should the 1948 Genocide Convention apply to the crimes of genocide in 19<sup>th</sup> century Humboldt County? Another is why haven't they? Historian Jack Norton elucidates the reasons and makes the argument that there is no statute of limitations to the international law, only resistance by the United States in confronting its settler-colonial past (Norton 123). It had signed a draft of the resolution in 1946, expressing that the spirit of the 1948 Geneva Convention was to address atrocities committed by the Axis during the second-world war, yet the final Compact was never ratified by Congress. (Norton 119-121). In 1968 the UN General Assembly adopted a principle that there was to be no statute of limitation for acts of genocide in any nation-state, irrespective of the date of the resolution (Norton 123).

Despite the problem that the United States has no legal obligation to address genocide, there is a clear legal case for reparations to the Wiyot of some kind, such as land return.

Passed in 2007 by an overwhelming majority of 144 nations in the General Assembly, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) is the most comprehensive global standard in existence for the rights of Indigenous people (United Nations, “Indigenous”). The UNDRIP’s 46 articles provide a universal framework of minimum standards for the survival, dignity, and well-being of Indigenous people (United Nations, “Indigenous”). Building on existing human rights standards as they apply to the specific situation of Indigenous people, the declaration makes a clear case for decolonization (United Nations, “Indigenous”). It states that “Indigenous peoples and individuals are free and equal to all other peoples and individuals and have the right to be free from any kind of discrimination, in the exercise of their rights, in particular that based on their indigenous origin or identity.” (United Nations, “Indigenous”). It also declares, “Indigenous peoples and individuals have the right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture” (United Nations, “Indigenous”). Article 8 speaks clearly to a redress of grievances, including returning “dispossessed land,” illustrating the unquestionable morality of returning ancestral Wiyot land whenever possible. Article 26 of the declaration states that “Indigenous peoples have the right to the lands, territories, and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired” (United Nations, “Indigenous”).

Unfortunately, the United States did not originally vote in favor of the Declaration, citing its large Indigenous population, claiming much if not all land in North America was “dispossessed” (Richardson). It also expressed an uneasiness with Indigenous self-determination and control over natural resources (United Nations, “Indigenous”). Like its failure to ratify the final version of the 1948 Genocide Convention, this example of the difficulty the United States has in confronting its past and present settler-colonial oppression of Indigenous people further illuminates the need for decolonization. Although the US signaled support for the non-binding treaty in 2010, it has yet to codify or enforce the Declaration, citing that it is not a “current statement of international law” and that the US government only needs to consult Indigenous tribes, not seek their consent (Carpenter 82). Regardless, compliance in the form of further decolonization measures has the potential to show “good faith in the fulfillment of the obligations assumed by the United States in accordance with the Charter” (United Nations, “Indigenous”).

My second argument for the decolonization of Humboldt County’s *cultural landscape* is centered on the historically important successes in the cases of the McKinley statue, Tulawat, and Terra Gen actions. These efforts have demonstrated a gradual, but accelerating cultural shift in settler attitudes toward decolonization, marked by a noticeable increase in settler awareness of Indigenous history and experience, as well as, a decrease in resistance to decolonization in the area. As I will demonstrate, years of persistent activism by the Wiyot to return their land and sovereignty, and preserve their culture have created ongoing public discourses that have served to educate the

population on the history of genocide and lingering oppression toward Indigenous people. Another result of this education has been the formation of settler/Indigenous alliances that have proven to be highly effective in addition to the development of social and political decolonization processes that could potentially be replicated elsewhere.

Finally, decolonization requires an altering of the *landscape* to reflect not only that Indigenous people are still thoroughly present, but that the land settlers occupy is rightfully Indigenous peoples'.<sup>3</sup> I deliberately use the term *presenting*, in contrast with its opposite, *absenting*, to describe processes of colonization and decolonization. As I will explain, landscapes are constructs that reflect the dominant culture, in this case, the settler landscape of Humboldt County that is built for the settlers' needs. Through this constant reflection, the landscape physically *presents* the settlers' claims to the land in the form of settler-built infrastructure such as roads and cities, but also culturally in the form of the language, media, educational systems, businesses, etc. Conversely, the Indigenous are also *absented* from the landscape through the same process, starting with their physical removal from the land and persisting in the form of ongoing settler-colonial activity to exert control over it.

This thesis will demonstrate that the process can be reversed. Indigenous people can be *presented* and the harmful legacy of a settler-colonial past *absented*. Removing symbols of settler-colonialism (visible and invisible) and adding markers of Indigenous

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<sup>3</sup> As I will describe in Chapter 1, a landscape in geographic terms, is a weave of multiple threads, including cultural and physical inputs.



presence is one way to produce a landscape that actively decolonizes the settler culture (mind, attitudes, perceptions). More importantly, so does the return of Indigenous land.

The *absenting* and *presenting* of Indigenous people from the landscape lies at the heart of settler colonialism and decolonization because it is land - how it's interpreted, historicized, and managed that determines the relationship between settlers, Indigenous, and the troubled past they share. The data I will present later will indicate that as the Indigenous peoples of Humboldt County's history culture and land rights become increasingly visible on the landscape, they are increasingly *presented* as part of that landscape. As I will exhibit, this has the potential to generate increasing solidarity from settlers to defend Indigenous land and sovereignty.

After a brief, but important discussion of my positionality, I follow in Chapter 1 with a Methods section - an explanation of my research methodology including the geographic disciplinary perspective and settler-colonial theory I am employing. Next, in the Chapter 2, I provide an overview of the settler-colonial history of genocide in Humboldt County followed by Chapter 3: Results, a coded analysis of settler interview data to reveal patterns in perceptions and understandings of settler colonialism. In Chapter 4: Discussion, I make the case for decolonization in Humboldt County and examine the three cases of successful decolonization outcomes by the Wiyot. The purpose of this section is to clearly convey suggestions for improvements in process that are based on meaningful, tangible decolonization successes on the ground, learned through persistent activism by the Wiyot and settler allies.

## Case Studies

The wave of successful decolonization in Humboldt County began on February 28, 2019 when the citizens of the city of Arcata, California made national news by removing the statue of former US President William McKinley from the Arcata Plaza, after voting to defeat one of the most controversial measures in its history. Measure M would have prevented the Arcata City Council from carrying out its previous February vote to remove the statue. The first of its kind, the removal is seen by many residents as an appropriate solution to Wiyot concerns about the official sanctioning of symbols of settler colonialism and inequality in the public sphere, represented to them by the statue (Pitino). To others, it was a disrespectful attack by extremists on “traditional” norms of the public landscape and waste of time and money (Pitino).

However, the Wiyot’s efforts were not limited to the removal of symbols of oppression from the public landscape, having successfully pursued two other high-profile initiatives to respectively reclaim sovereignty and protect ancestral lands. The October 2019 return of Tulawat or “Indian Island” to the Wiyot Tribe from the city of Eureka marked another historical first: an American city had returned land to a tribe settlers once tried to exterminate (Greenon, “Dulawat”). The island, located in Humboldt Bay, is the sacred center of the Wiyot universe and was the site of a horrific massacre in February 1860 of Wiyots, mostly women, elderly, and children by local, white settlers.

Despite these victories that suggest recognition of historical injustices, the Wiyot continue to face threats to their rights, as well as, their cultural and physical existence.

One such threat came in May of 2018 when the energy firm Terra-Gen had applied to construct forty-seven, 600 ft. wind turbines on Wiyot ancestral land along Bear River Ridge, south of Eureka. (LoCO Staff 2019). Known to the Wiyot as Tsakiyuwit, the windswept ridge is a sacred prayer site on ancestral land overlooking the Eel River Valley and their stolen territory (Greenson, “Terra Gen”). The proposed wind energy project faced fierce opposition from the tribe, environmentalists, and other county residents, concerned that the project would have partially destroyed ancestral ground and endangered the ecosystem, including several endangered bird species (Greenson, “Terra Gen;” Hernandez). After a series of contentious, public meetings, in which the Wiyot and allies presented their objections, the project was voted down by county supervisors in December of 2019. (LoCO Staff 2019).

In determining that these recent cases are decolonization, I rely on successful outcomes to resist settler-colonial oppression in Humboldt County to define what I mean by *decolonization*. Although the term “decolonization” has existed since the 1930s to describe a “breaking free” of a colony from its sponsoring nation-state or *metropole* through legal means or revolution, historical processes over time have advanced discourse on the subject (Betts 1; Eyers). While the heyday of decolonization in the 1950s through the 1970s highlighted the creation of new, independent nation states as the end of colonial oppression, continuing forms have compelled a definition that moves beyond merely formal changes in political authority and toward tangible decolonization (Betts 2-3). Unlike the wave of successful African independence movements that peaked in the 1960s, decolonization today describes a set of processes that together move

towards undoing of the effects of colonialism, in the case of the Wiyot, *settler colonialism* (Betts 33-34). The contemporary baseline definitions for decolonization vary considerably and include actions such as settler removal (physically and/or symbolically) from Indigenous land, return of Indigenous land, and ongoing resistance to forms of settler state oppression (Eyers).

### Positionality

It is important to note the Wiyot's extraordinarily successful decolonization efforts have been spearheaded by the Wiyot themselves, informed by their own history, and certainly do not need permission or justification by any researcher or policy maker. Instead, my hope is to augment the moral and ethical case for further decolonization efforts in solidarity with local tribes, such as the Wiyot. Before I conclude this introduction, it is important to note my *positionality* and how this critical factor limits my overall understanding of the history and effects of settler colonialism on the Wiyot people. There are a few caveats to highlight in any research attempt involving Indigenous history, without which could lead to a clumsy, distorted interpretation of the meaning of important events. First, to obtain a proper, nuanced understanding of the history of settler-colonialism in Humboldt County, I position myself in the proper context of being a settler ally of the Wiyot. I understand that the elimination of the binary construct of settler/native is one of many prescribed goals of decolonization and agree with Svirsky's assertion for collaborative struggles in settler societies, "binarism's structural continuity

does not preclude the future, and more specifically it does not prevent the emergence of non-settlerist collective forms, however fragile these forms were or are” (Svirsky 434-435). Despite my position as a settler - someone who approaches history from a settler’s base of knowledge, if not subjectivity, I have a role to play as a decolonizing influence among the settlers. To be effective in that role, and properly contextualize my research, I have embraced the fact that European forms of knowledge or epistemology are but one thread among many in the fabric of a landscape.

Thus, a second caveat further requires an acknowledgement of positionality: *epistemology*. Defined as “both the theory of knowledge and theorizing of knowledge, including the nature, sources, and frameworks, and limits of knowledge,” epistemology plays an important role in any discussion of history involving Indigenous people as there is no one set of knowledge, no matter how hegemonic and widely accepted, that comes close to completely explaining the settler-colonial experience, especially for the Indigenous (Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo 57). As David Welchman Gegeo and Karen Ann Watson-Gegeo discuss in their paper, *How We Know’: Kwara'ae Rural Villagers Doing Indigenous Epistemology*, sociologists agree “that knowledge is constructed by communities, epistemological communities, rather than collections of independently-knowing individuals” (Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo 58). In the case of the archival knowledge I am using, I am consulting a Euro-American settler epistemology community, of which I am a part. However, my knowledge is limited to what my community interpreted, fore-grounded or backgrounded, and chose to record. The historical data itself derives from European forms of data collection and record-keeping –

written and often standardized. It stands apart from more immemorial forms of communicating and analyzing information for example, through the oral histories so prevalent in Indigenous cultures. In fact, it is features like oral history that illuminate Indigenous epistemology. Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo define it as “a cultural group’s ways of thinking and of creating, reformulating, and theorizing about knowledge via traditional discourses and media of communication, anchoring the truth of discourse in culture” (Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo 58). The obvious differences in how Humboldt’s pristine landscape was treated by the Indigenous peoples here versus the white settlers who arrived to capitalize on the intact, seemingly inexhaustible cornucopia of natural resources allude to fundamental differences between the two in not only values, but understandings and interpretations of what’s knowable, sustainable, and valuable. It is with this understanding of the limits of my positionality and awareness of the limitations of European forms of knowledge in telling the whole story of settler colonialism in Humboldt County, that I examine that history.

## CHAPTER 1: METHODS

To inform my conclusions, I will endeavor to answer three main research questions. First, why decolonize Humboldt County? Examining the history of genocide, current injustices, and legal justifications will be key. Second, what are the social and political processes observed in recent decolonization efforts in Humboldt County? Third, what can we learn from them to improve future decolonization efforts? Related questions are: What is *decolonization*? What is a *landscape*? What do the terms *genocide* mean *settler colonialism* mean and did they occur in Humboldt County?

As a geographer and social scientist, I employ a hybrid research methodology incorporating a feminist geographic analysis of spatial landscapes (post-structural), combined with human data, filtered through *settler colonialism theory* (post-colonial geography) as a research framework for historical analysis. The resulting methodology will ensure I conclude this thesis with practical suggestions for decolonization process improvements. I have chosen an intensive, case study research design format because the recent, successful decolonization efforts by the tribe provide a unique set of cases - an exciting point in time and place to study decolonization processes. Helen Newing writes that the case study format allows this research to “aim at a detailed understanding of the case that has been selected, both for its own sake and in order to add to the broader theoretical understanding and generate theories about underlying issues” (Newing 46). Unlike other extensive formats, the case study will help me advance the discussion by “choosing an extreme or unusual case that appears to contradict current theories”

(Newing 47). For this thesis, epistemology has been key to understanding how both settlers and Indigenous people interpret decolonization. Realist and positivist approaches, based in dominant historical narratives, have not been adequate to obtain the experiential data to understand the way people interpret symbols such as McKinley's statue. As George Lakoff writes, "Our conceptual system emerges from our constant successful functioning in our physical and cultural environment" (Lakoff 180). Thus, I have sought to understand the constructed views toward the world of both colonized and colonizer (Lakoff 80).

I began my research framework with positivist understandings of geography - sound axioms for reading *landscapes*, such as those produced by Don Mitchell and Pierce Lewis.<sup>4</sup> However, to ensure I approach landscapes from an Indigenous standpoint in addition to a settler one, I have explored deeper understandings that transcend hegemonic narratives, such as discourse and history written by Humboldt's Indigenous people. My inclusion of human interview data (both settler and Wiyot) speaks to what Thomas Schweizer refers to as "Hermeneutics" or a Humanities-based approach, that is grounded in interpretation and seeks to "proceed along the lines of text interpretation and empathetic understanding" (Schweizer 47). For example, the reciprocal relationship between the observer and a statue is informed not just by the object itself, but by historical narratives and experiences interpreted by the observer. The Wiyot have clearly

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<sup>4</sup> Positivism refers to the modern Western tradition of a unified, empirical methodological framework that applies to all sciences and humanities (Schweizer 42). For more on positivism and its critiques see Thomas Schweizer's article, "Epistemology: The Nature and Validation of Anthropological Knowledge" in *Handbook of Methods in Cultural Anthropology*, edited by Russell Bernard.



expressed that the McKinley statue represented a painful reminder of the genocide their people experienced at the hands of white settlers (Hernandez, “Decolonization;” Pitino). This drives my inclusion of Standpoint Feminist Epistemology and Indigenous Epistemology. It is the Indigenous experience on the cultural landscape that I am illuminating, therefore Indigenous authors like Jack Norton and Jerry Rohde are crucial speakers. The fact that dominant narratives of these statues are rooted in hegemonic patriarchal, Euro-American, Christian culture compels me to ask questions generally rooted in Feminist geography, itself rooted in feminist epistemology, as landscapes are interpreted through less dominant cultural lenses differently, in this case between the hegemonic settler culture and Indigenous peoples (Cantrell, Lewis 15-16). For example, asking Indigenous people how *they* experience the cultural landscape and what forms of decolonization *they* desire are important for an accurate and nuanced approach to researching decolonization processes.

Having developed a positivist/ethnographic research framework, I commenced with archival research, exploring the history of genocide and colonization in Humboldt County in horrifying detail. I was able to interrogate written history and the discourse on these histories from historical and contemporary Euro-American and Indigenous perspectives, celebrating settler-colonial progress and witnessing its crimes, respectively. Next, to ensure a humanities-based approach, I obtained qualitative interview data from approximately a dozen settlers to gauge their understanding of the shared colonial past between them and their Indigenous neighbors and help determine why settlers have a difficult time confronting it. Using geographical axioms of landscape analysis, I

combined both archival and interview data to synthesize a rational, geographic approach to determining how decolonization can be realized in concrete ways.

Finally, I employed Participatory Action Research or (P.A.R.), working with the Wiyot Tribe as a settler ally for important reasons. First, as previously explained about positionality, I am not here to “help” or “study” the Wiyot. Such a patronizing, disrespectful approach to research does not serve the tribe’s interests which are paramount in this thesis. Second, exploring Indigenous, submerged (not part of hegemonic culture) identities and attempts at dehegemonization of the landscape provide me an opportunity to participate in what John Gaventa calls “the reappropriation of knowledge,” the “development of knowledge,” and the “social production of knowledge” (Gaventa 122; Gomez-Barris 43). This is new geographic research that incorporates European, positivist geography and ethnographic, human data, much of it from Indigenous sources. This means ethnographic work not as an activist, but as a listener who respectfully advocates for human empathy, dignity, and understanding in solidarity with Wiyot goals of decolonization. Though my goal is to interrogate my own culture’s (settler) processes of decolonization, some of my interview questions were generated by the Wiyot people, affording an opportunity to foreground Indigenous lines of inquiry in data collection. Speaking to key figures: Ted Hernandez, Chairman of the Wiyot Tribe, Jessica Cantrell, a tribe member and former Wiyot historian, and a group interview of the Table Bluff Wiyot Tribal Council, were key to ensuring my research does not speak for the tribe, but rather the tribe speaks for my research.

## Human Subject Interviews

IRB 18-160

Approved May 20, 2019

For this thesis, I conducted a human subject study using grounded theory methods to ensure participants' subjective meanings were obtained through an interactive interview and analysis process furthered informed by the theoretical frameworks of geographic landscape analysis and settler colonialism (Charmaz 675-679). Using a semi-structured interview approach, I questioned a total of 13 human interviewees, divided into two groups, with two respective sets of interview questions.<sup>5</sup> The first group consisted of 11 settlers and the other, two key Wiyot tribal members. In each interview, I asked questions in a systematic and consistent order, allowing interviewees the freedom to digress, ask questions themselves, and explore tangents for improved context (Berg 81). I conducted twelve interviews in person at a public place of the interview subject's choice, such as a coffee shop or park, and conducted one over the phone. All interviewees completed a Humboldt State University-approved consent form per IRB requirements. Most interviewees remain anonymous, however a few wished to be quoted, having directly participated in one or more of the case studies researched.

Interviewees were not statistically sampled. Rather, I utilized a theoretical sampling technique to qualify settler contacts, focused on obtaining a large sample of interviewees in the Humboldt County community, who for the purposes of this study, can

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<sup>5</sup> See Appendix B

be classified as *settlers* (Charmaz 689). As a settler and longtime Humboldt County resident myself, I utilized local connections, largely defined by long-standing relationships with educated professionals, blue-collar workers, community activists, Indigenous leaders, and nearby Humboldt State University students. This afforded me an opportunity to obtain a substantial variety of human data. It is important to note that due to the timeline of this thesis, I was not able to interview settlers about their thoughts on the Terra Gen project vote which occurred after I had collected most of my data. However, as I will demonstrate, the Humboldt settler community reaction to the project establishes a link between all three cases (McKinley, Tulawat, and Terra Gen).

I defined the first group of 11 settlers as permanent residents of Euro-American descent, having lived in Humboldt County at least three years. Once I qualified these identifying features, I began the interviews with demographic questions to understand who the settler is based on age, time lived in Humboldt County, education level, and how each person culturally (heritage, ancestry) identified themselves. The interviewees ranged in age from 20-73 and many had lived at least 10 years in the area. Several settlers stated they were life-long residents. They tended to be educated with the majority possessing bachelor's degrees. Culturally, settlers overwhelmingly identified as European, often highlighting specific national identities such as German or Italian. A significant portion identified themselves as White, while several interviewees identified as constructed settler labels such as American and Californian. Several settlers also claimed blended European/Indigenous heritage. Together these responses allude to the fact that today's settlers are complex cultural constructs that replaced Indigenous people on the land. Two

of the settlers, Arcata City Councilman and former Mayor Paul Pitino, and local activist Kelsey Reedy, Campaign Manager for *No on Measure M* (ballot measure to prevent the statue's removal), were directly involved in the removal of the McKinley statue. In addition to contributing to the settler data sample, both provided crucial insight into the processes of decolonization and I have quoted them where necessary.

After obtaining settler demographic data my line of questioning turned to understandings of settler colonialism, recent cases of decolonization, and general attitudes toward Indigenous people. I also sought to interpret attitudes about the McKinley statue, and gauge settler support for decolonization efforts. Most importantly, I wanted to understand what worked in these efforts and what did not, what supported these efforts and what hindered them. The goal of this thesis is to inform decolonization process.

The second group consisted of Wiyot tribal members (Ted Hernandez, Chairman) and Jessica Cantrell (former Wiyot historian), contacts I have known in the Humboldt Indigenous community for over three years, as well as, the Wiyot Tribal Council. The perspective they offered was critical to understanding the Indigenous experience and like Pitino and Reedy, their direct involvement in decolonization efforts has helped shape my understanding of successful decolonization processes. My formal questioning of the Wiyot began when I conducted a group interview of the Wiyot Tribal Council in May of 2019, taking the opportunity to exercise Participatory Action Research (P.A.R.). Determined to ensure the tribe's voice is foregrounded, I received the council's views on decolonization, settler-colonialism, and what questions I should ask of the settler

population. The Council's input heavily influenced my line of questioning bearing in mind they strongly expressed a desire to educate settlers about the history and presence of the Wiyot in Humboldt County. I conducted two more interviews after the majority of settler interview data collection with Ted Hernandez and Jessica Cantrell to provide texture and context to what I had learned with that group. I focused my line of questioning to understand how the Wiyot interpret settler colonialism and decolonization, what successful strategies the tribe has employed to realize decolonization goals, and how the Wiyot and settlers can work together in future efforts. There is value in understanding settler behaviors toward Indigenous people at the receiving end of it. It is also of paramount importance to qualify from the Wiyot's standpoint, how decolonization should proceed, especially given the unique set of successes the Wiyot have achieved in such a short time.

Finally, all interview data was recorded as M4a files, manually translated to text, and subjected to a rigorous, two-step process of initial and focused coding. From this data, I identified key words and phrases that indicated recurring themes or narratives to draw conclusions for decolonization process improvements.

### Key Theoretical Framework: Landscapes

Geographer Pierce Lewis, who first developed *axioms for reading landscapes*, described the *cultural landscape*, meaning that a landscape is not simply a set of physical features that just *is* (Lewis 11-12). Instead, the basic principle of understanding a

landscape is to recognize that “all human landscape has cultural meaning” (Lewis 12). The business and street signs in Eureka are in English instead of the Wiyot language, Soulátluk. Some of the buildings date back to the era when Tulawat was attacked (Van Kirk). Given this deliberately produced scene before me, I am compelled to ask what role does a cultural landscape play in reinforcing settler historical narratives? Could we learn something about the history of Humboldt County and how to approach decolonization by *reading* this landscape and if so, how?

Lewis’s seventh axiom, The Axiom of Landscape Obscurity answers this by explaining that without a more analytical research framework to evaluate what one is reading it is almost impossible to learn *how* and *why* a landscape came to be even if the structures can be traced historically (Mitchell 33). Interrogating the structures of settler colonialism on the landscape requires new axioms, provided by geographer Don Mitchell, that provide the theoretical and methodological framework, “designed to form an analytical and normative basis, by providing a historical and materialist methodological foundation for what the landscape is and does, and for what a more just landscape might be” (Mitchell 33). One can interpret a landscape, “but only when set within a theory, and especially a historical analysis” (Mitchell 31). This requires a decidedly Marxist focus on relations of landscape *production*, the following axioms based on an understanding that space is property in a capitalist system (Mitchell 33). As I will later illustrate, the white man’s “property” was the codified basis for not just settler colonialism, but also genocide.

Thus, Mitchell's first new axiom for reading landscapes is highly useful for my purposes. Axiom 1: The landscape is produced, states, "it is actively made: it is a physical intervention into the world and thus is not so much our 'unwitting autobiography' (as Lewis put it) as an act of will" (Mitchell 34). This provides insight for decolonization because it reveals social processes that have affected the *relations of landscape production*, that is, *who* produces the landscape, as well as, *how* and *why* that is the case (Mitchell 34). The following equally useful axioms further detail the inputs of relations of landscape production.

Axiom 2: Any landscape is (or was) functional explains that landscapes are produced through investment by capital or the state and serve both a social role, as well as, an economic one (Mitchell 35). They are sites of *value exchange*, functioning to one, realize value (make a profit) or two, create the conditions for doing so (Mitchell 35). The latter recognizes a landscape is also a place where people live with certain requirements that the landscape must provide for the labor force to function. As I will show, the settler-colonial project aims to ultimately replace the Indigenous population to implement that value exchange; the labor force to be comprised of settlers.

Mitchell's remaining four axioms also offer some use in this research. Axiom 3: No landscape is local, explains that landscapes are often a result of distant inputs, informed by ideas diffused from elsewhere, such as the Euro-American settler-colonial project that had been repeated around the North American continent for two centuries (Mitchell 38). This realization provides important context when studying settler-colonial



projects as familiar patterns of events are repeated elsewhere in the story of colonization in North America, thus informing settler colonialism as a repeatable research framework.

Mitchell's Axiom 4: History does matter, states that a landscape actively supports a specific historical narrative. As Mitchell describes, a landscape is a site of memory and identity, both individually and collectively. (Mitchell 42). The settler-colonial project almost completely erased or *absented* the Wiyot from the Humboldt Bay region where they once had scores of villages, replacing them with settler infrastructure (McKee). The resulting landscape was built to support the settlers' history, memory, identity, and most importantly, relations of power as described by the closely related Axiom 5: Landscape is power (Mitchell 43). As Mitchell states, this axiom is the "an expression of who has the power to define the meanings that are to be read into and out of the landscape, and, of course, to determine just what will exist in (and as) the landscape" (Mitchell 43).

Finally, Axiom 6: Landscape is the spatial form that social justice takes, is key to understanding why landscape analysis is a sound method for decolonization study. As Mitchell states, "As a concretization of social relations, and as a foundation for the further development of those relations, landscape literally marks out the spatial extent and limits of social justice. The spatial form of the landscape is both the result of and evidence for, the kind of society we live in" (Mitchell 45). The landscape is literally everything we spatially experience as humans. Properly read and adjusted, it can be the canvas on which we practice tangible forms of decolonization, using these Axioms for reading landscapes to inform a logical, disciplined approach.

### Key Theoretical Framework: Settler Colonialism

The channel for my focus of decolonization established – the landscape, I require a theoretical framework to properly read Humboldt County’s cultural landscape, informed by a chronology of officially organized and sanctioned theft of Indigenous land; one that also offers clues on how to reverse the legacy of that theft. To understand the settler motivations for atrocities visited on the Wiyot, I apply the framework of *settler colonialism* as described by scholars Patrick Wolfe, Caroline Elkins, and Susan Pedersen.

Based on these scholars’ work, I understand settler colonialism is not a brief period of conquest and domination complete with the massacres, removals, and cases of indentured servitude I will describe here, but an ongoing reality for both colonizer and colonized, settler and Indigenous (Elkins and Pedersen 3). As Elkins and Pedersen describe, “settler colonialism cannot be an essentially fleeting stage but must be understood as the persistent defining characteristic, even the condition of possibility, of this new world settler society” (Elkins and Pedersen 3). Indigenous people were defeated in Humboldt County, but the project continues, forever incomplete as the settlers continually reenact through “their land, labor, and population policies that effort to make the Indigenous disappear” (Elkins and Pedersen 3). Again, the project is actively and constantly reified and reproduced on the landscape to *present* the settler culture and *absent* the Indigenous one. Pramod Nayar describes, settler colonialism as a “violent invasion, usually accompanied by the massacre and complete extermination of the local inhabitants, such as the aboriginals and the Native Americans – and this *genocide-*

ethnocide is one of the central features of the settler colony” (Nayar 137). I will demonstrate in Chapter 2 that genocide, like its parent settler colonialism, were definitive elements of Humboldt County’s history.

A settler-colonial project seeks not to just extract resources, but to replace the Indigenous population with settlers; (Elkins and Pedersen 3). In contrast, the imperialist or standard colonialism that defined most European 19<sup>th</sup>-century and 20<sup>th</sup>-century ventures in Africa, was an exercise in securing military advantage or trade, coercing the racially-subjugated Indigenous population to fill the role of cheap labor to facilitate profitable resource extraction (Elkins and Pedersen 11; Wolpe 454). Settler colonialism distinguishes itself from other forms; its goal the violent, complete removal of the Indigenous population from the land, rather than compelling it to serve as a slave or low-wage labor force (Elkins and Pedersen 3)<sup>6</sup>. The reason for *replacing* the Indigenous population is *land*. As Elkins and Pedersen elucidate, “The presence of a settler population intent on making a territory their permanent home while continuing to enjoy metropolitan living standards and political privileges creates a quite different dynamic” (Elkins and Pedersen 3). As Wolfe explains, the invasion of Indigenous lands that is settler colonialism “is a structure, not an event” (Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism” 2). The settler-colonial project most often requires, as it did on California’s North Coast, the

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<sup>6</sup> There are exceptions. South Africa’s settler-colonial project forcibly took Indigenous land, but it also employed a system of domination and control to create a racially subjugated and coerced, cheap, Indigenous labor force, dependent on the settler-colonial paradigm of Apartheid for survival. (Wolpe 425-426).

“practical elimination of the natives to establish itself on their territory” in order to create a new settler society (Wolfe, “Native” 389).

The white invaders of Wiyot land had not merely arrived to set up a timber colony, but rather to “evolve their own distinct culture in the new land” (Nayar 138). They had come to restructure the landscape totally. The Wiyot inhabited lands white settlers demanded as their patriotic, Christian birthright. As Richard Widick explains, they were “bearers of social and cultural relations into the redwood region from the outside, and their bodies fueled the energetic operation of these relations on landscapes they reached” (Widick 146). There was to be no room for the Wiyot in a place that was so “inviting for capitalists” (Widick xviii). There was to be no room for any Indigenous people in the new America.

Widick’s assessment alludes to a major driving factor of the wider settler-colonial project in the United States: *The Master Narrative*. Since the 1600s, when English colonists arrived in North America, not necessarily to trade with Indigenous people, not to subjugate them, but to replace them on the land, the settler-colonial project had been in constant motion, confiscating Indigenous land, and moving ever westward (Takaki 26). By the time of the massacre at Tulawat in 1860, the larger settler-colonial project in the United States had already taken over 132 million acres of Indigenous land and reduced the populations of First Nations peoples to just over 300,000 within its borders (Otterstrum 69; Reddy 12). The capitalists Widick refers to were overwhelmingly Anglo-Saxon Calvinists, driven by what Ronald Takaki calls, *The Master Narrative*, a concept thoroughly embedded in American mainstream culture (Takaki 4). This idea that

American frontier history represents a great migration and struggle to transform a continent of wilderness into a “manufacturing civilization” by “Americans” (Takaki 4-5). This new construct of whiteness, in contrast to the Indigenous “other,” was advanced by famous orators such as Frederick Jackson Turner (Takaki 4-5). The corresponding *manifest destiny* of conquering the continent embraced Anglo-Saxon racial superiority as a guiding principle (Takaki 164). At the end of Mexican-American War in 1848 that secured California for the expanding American settler-colonial project, a US Congressman remarked, “This continent was intended by Providence as a vast theatre on which to work out the grand experiment of Republican government, under the auspices of the Anglo-Saxon race” (Takaki 164).

One of the core rationales for the settlers’ theft of land in the pursuit of the “city on the hill” is the concept of *terra nullius*, Latin for “empty land” (Wolfe, “Native” 391). This medieval idea that possession and ownership of property should be distinguished “between Christians who are entitled to own land and barbarians/non-Christians who are not” serves as the legal and cultural justification for settler-colonial practices (Nayar 154). Settlers deliberately reject Indigenous practices, including sustainable resource management and agriculture, to enable the “claim that the land was devoid of memories, cultural heritage, history and therefore civilization itself (Nayar 154). *Terra nullius* creates an illusion for the settler, a cultural ideal of unoccupied ‘wilderness,’ almost as though Indigenous people are not part of the landscape. (Nayar 154).

The view that Indigenous land is “unoccupied;” a land to be “discovered” and open to development as the settler sees fit, is necessary to facilitate its theft (Navar 153).

In a geographic context, the *absenting* of Indigenous people from the landscape creates a blank canvas for the settler-colonial project to take place. As Widick states, “By envisioning free land as unoccupied space, it erases native presence and signifies their place as outside the coming market” (Widick 148). That coming market was the “self-sustaining, inexorable force of cultural occupation and expansion” - American-style Capitalism (Widick 132). What was empty cannot be stolen, only settled, and exploited for the market, ostensibly for the good of all. In 1846, *The Californian* newspaper displayed this attitude by writing, “we shall encourage immigration and take special pains to point out to agricultural immigrants those sections of unoccupied lands, where the fertility of the soil will most amply repay the labors of the husbandman” (Widick 147-148). However, the newcomers did not stumble on to empty land. Like the rest of the Americas, there was no terra nullius. Instead, they found many long-standing nations of people - first nations like the Wiyot. (Norton 5-10).

Patrick Wolfe describes how settlers, convinced of their superior claim to the land, typically employ a “logic of elimination,” which could be called a step-by-step guide to genocide: Frontier homicide, land allotments, as well as, child abduction, boarding schools, religious conversions, and other forms of forced biocultural assimilation are used to clear the land of Indigenous cultural presence (Wolfe, “Native” 388). For the Wiyot, this meant horrific levels of officially sanctioned violence and depravity toward a peaceful, respectful people who were not considered worthy of human rights (Wiyot 2019). Newspapers, such as the *Humboldt Times*, routinely racially denigrated the Wiyot and other Indigenous North Coast people, calling them “diggers,”

advocating for their wholesale removal or elimination (Norton 77-91). However, Wolfe describes the settler-colonial dynamic as a logic of elimination, not so much for racial reasons, but instead for access to territory (Wolfe, "Native" 388). As one of Humboldt County's original settlers exclaimed, he and others arrived in Humboldt County to replace the "savages" in a land of "untold treasures" with the plucky, energetic Anglo-American (Widick 153). As Wolfe states, "settler colonialism destroys to replace" (Wolfe, "Native" 388).

## CHAPTER 2: SETTLER COLONIALISM IN HUMBOLDT COUNTY

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the settler-colonial history in Humboldt County - a brutal history of genocide including organized murder, removal, and forced cultural assimilation that can be historicized and connected to continued generational trauma and poverty prevalent in many Indigenous communities, including the Wiyot (Cantrell). To help redress such grievances and support continued decolonization efforts in Humboldt County, I put into proper context what happened during the settler invasion of the area. I elucidate some of the history of organized, sanctioned genocidal acts of violence and dispossession by Humboldt's settlers against the Wiyot and other local, Indigenous populations on whose ancestral land the Humboldt settler-colonial project continues today. In this historical discussion I make a chronological, archivally-based appeal for justice for the rape, theft, and murder of the Wiyot people, part of a system of genocide, within an officially sanctioned settler-colonial project of invasion and land acquisition. Together, along with the legal arguments presented, such as the 1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide, I use historical evidence displayed through the lens of settler-colonial theory to explain how genocide occurred in Humboldt County to present a sound argument for decolonization within a larger study of decolonization processes.

The definition of genocide applies to the settler project in Humboldt County because settlers committed these acts "with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group" (United Nations, "Genocide"). The Wiyot



were among the many First Nations targeted for removal in Humboldt County. The settlers committed the crimes of theft and murder in line with the goals of settler-colonialism to remove the Indigenous population from the land. Therefore, the actions of the settlers in Humboldt County cannot be simply described as just random “tit-for-tat” killings. Rather they were a collection of settler crimes committed with the intent to destroy the Wiyot, each one meeting one of the UN definitions of genocide. Although genocide is not always a feature of settler colonialism, as I will establish, it was a central tool of the settler-colonial project in Humboldt County.

To properly examine this history of genocide in Humboldt County it is important to begin by noting that murder was only one component of a campaign of removal visited upon the Wiyot and other tribes. It is also important to note that these components were officially sanctioned and directed by government authorities. The documented history shows that settlers employed a genocidal system comprised of several components, all used together to remove Indigenous people from the land. Not only were the crimes against the Wiyot brutal, they directly correspond to the list of acts that each constitute genocide per Article 3 of the 1948 United Nations Genocide Convention on the Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (United Nations).

The massacres I will discuss in this chapter, as well as, the many other crimes against humanity settlers committed against Indigenous people in North America, are often described in the dominant historical narrative as depraved acts during the chaotic westward expansion on this continent (Stanton 658). The horrific massacre at Tulawat, aka “Indian Island,” that I discuss in detail in this chapter, stands as a stark example of

this narrative. It was framed by local newspapers at the time as a brutal, detestable, yet inevitable result of the culmination of over a decade of worsening conflict between white settlers and the Indigenous people of the area (Stanton 659) It has often been historically-framed as one of a myriad of unfortunate, regrettable, yet inevitable events, resulting from stubborn Indigenous resistance to the settler-colonial project (Stanton 659). These massacres and many other outrages against the Wiyot and other Indigenous tribes demonstrate more than just the chaotic, indiscriminate killing of a people as the dominant narrative purports but as I will show, a systematic destruction of a people- a genocide, knowingly and officially perpetrated by white settlers as part of a deliberate settler-colonial project.

To develop this chapter, I use archival sources, including special collections within Humboldt State University to document and situate the history of settler colonialism and genocide in Humboldt County from both dominant and submerged Indigenous perspectives.<sup>7</sup> These sources, mostly from period reports of both settler and Indigenous origin, provide first-hand accounts of the incredible violence visited on a people who, despite peacefully living with and even working for the settlers, were considered by them to be in the way, occupying prime, productive coastal land - the object and prize of the early settler-colonial project in Humboldt County.<sup>8</sup> Using the settler colonialism theoretical framework, I provide a chronological overview of

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<sup>7</sup> In this context, missing and hidden from the dominant (ethnocentric) narrative and discourse regarding a set of events and their meaning (Gomez-Barris 11-12).

<sup>8</sup> “Productive” in the settler context - the most valuable for settlement and/or resource extraction (Elliot 13).

Humboldt's history, using specific examples of organized genocidal acts against the Wiyot.

I initiate the historical discussion focusing on the 1840s and 1850s for two reasons. First, as a settler I am not qualified to tell an extensive history of the Wiyot before European contact. My focus is on other settlers and the need to recognize the damage done by settler colonialism in Humboldt County; to take steps to repair that damage, and to form effective alliances with Indigenous people to guide that activity. To advance that argument, my emphasis must be on how and why the genocide happened. Second, these decades mark the pivotal period of dramatic change for the Wiyot, the focus of this chapter (Norton 107; Wiyot, "Programs"). By examining this period, I will exemplify key themes in the settler-colonial framework that explain the injustice of what happened to the Wiyot.

### Settler Colonialism Reaches Humboldt

Beginning in the sixteenth century, Spanish, British, Russian, and American ships repeatedly sailed past Humboldt's coast, rarely stopping, except for the occasional otter fur hunt (Widick xvi; Rohde, "Wiyot").<sup>9</sup> This largely remained the case until the annexation of California after the Mexican War of 1846-1847 and the discovery of gold

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<sup>9</sup> Humboldt's coastline was first visited by Europeans in 1775 when the Spanish expeditionary ships Santiago and Sonora under Captain Don Bruno de Heceta, briefly stopped in a bay, naming it Trinidad, the site of today's town of the same name (Elliott 18, Norton 66). After declaring the area for Spain in the name of the Christian god, they visited cruelty on the nearby Yurok village Tsuari, seizing goods and kidnapping several residents before leaving (Norton 66).

in the late 1840's (Madley 42; Widick xviii). The arrival of American soldiers and settlers in northern California would introduce the genocidal settler-colonial project to the Indigenous people there.

The organized mass murders of the North Coast's Indigenous people had roots in earlier, premeditated "defensive" operations by Federal soldiers to "protect property" before California became a state. (Madley 42-43, 61-65). Mass killings of Indigenous people in northern California began as soon as American troops entered the region in early 1846 while it was still under Mexican control during the Mexican American War of 1846-1847 (Madley 42-43). The massacre of two hundred Wintu along the Sacramento River by Captain John Fremont and his guide Kit Carson's 1846 US Army expedition marked the beginning of a new paradigm in California's history: the organized removal and erasure of its Indigenous people (Madley 42-47). It also lays bare the justification for most these massacres to come: a preemptive, "pedagogic strategy" of "teaching them a lesson" to terrorize the Indigenous into submission (Madley 48). The idea was to teach the survivors not to challenge the white settlers. As one of Fremont's men exclaimed after the massacre, "The Indians had received a wholesome lesson from our party" (Madley 48). Kit Carson added, "(it) would be long before they ever again would feel like attacking the settlements. It was perfect butchery" (Madley 48). In this case, Fremont's action was in response to a large, nearby Wintu World Renewal Ceremony that was deemed a "war dance" and a numerical threat by the local white settlers.

(Madley 43-45).<sup>10</sup> The preemptive, organized killings of Indigenous people that occurred during California's transition from Mexican to US control foreshadowed the series of genocidal massacres of even greater scale to come in the next decades.

Those massacres signaled the US form of settler colonialism that would soon be the new paradigm in California under American rule (Madley 43). The situation for California's Indigenous people changed dramatically when the United States and Mexico signed the Treaty of Hidalgo in February of 1848, formally replacing Mexican authority (Takaki 163). One month later, the *Californian* newspaper announced large quantities of gold had been discovered on the South Fork of the American River, sparking the state-wide "Gold Rush" and prompting thousands of American fortune seekers to pour into the emerging state, eager to stake land and resource claims (Madley 67, Takaki 165).

One of the earliest arrivals of this wave of American newcomers to Humboldt originated from mining camps in what is now Trinity County. To get the gold mined there to market quickly, Josiah Gregg and his party sought a route West to the Pacific Ocean, encountering Humboldt Bay in 1849. (Elliot 83; Widick xviii). After brief contact with the Wiyot, the party moved on to Sonoma, but their presence signaled a "rediscovery" of Humboldt Bay by Euro-Americans (Elliot 95).<sup>11</sup> California's early

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<sup>10</sup> Although a Mexican state, Alta California was already home to numerous white, American settlers at the time. Many had become Mexican citizens, while many more squatted illegally and lobbied for annexation by the US (Takaki 161-162).

<sup>11</sup> Gregg's party encountered grizzly bears near Table Bluff and Gregg himself was wounded by one of the animals, later tended to by a Wiyot medicine man who had heard about the injured white man and rushed to help, although Gregg later complained of the "treacherous villains" demanding payment for medical services rendered, an example of the future "othering" that would help inspire the genocide to come (Elliot 93-94, Rhode).

newspapers, such as the *Alta California*, had called for the extensive exploration of California's coast for a passable and usable port and it was only a matter of time before the settlers found a way into conveniently located Humboldt Bay (Elliot 95; Widick 149).

### Early Settlement and Violence

That time came when on April 14, 1850, the merchant explorer vessel *Laura Virginia* entered Humboldt Bay and began the process which had been repeated across the much of the North American continent: clearing the landscape, including removal of the Indigenous population to make it suitable for resource extraction (Widick 149; 155-156). It is important to note that Humboldt Bay was not the first site of settlement in Humboldt County. Miners who had followed Gregg from the goldfields in the Trinity Mountains to the East were looking for sea trade routes and had constructed a small settlement at Trinidad (Norton 67). However, the *Laura Virginia's* landing in the much larger potential seaport of Humboldt Bay marks the beginning of intense settlement as the crew quickly set about claiming parcels (Elliot 100-101).

The settler-colonial project itself immediately created the conditions for widespread mass murder in Humboldt County by stealing land for capitalist extraction. The rush for land claims and blatant disregard for Wiyot sovereignty meant that violence was inevitable and quick. Backed by the U.S. Federal government, the settlers had legal authority to settle anywhere they chose within US territory. In 1841, the U.S. Congress had passed the Federal Preemption Act which allowed anyone who surveyed a parcel(s)

of land and could squat on it, to purchase up to 160 acres, as long as it was part of the public domain (Widick 158). This meant that the Wiyot's traditional land was considered terra nullius and because the newcomers were intent on taking it any positive relationship between the Wiyot and the settlers was ultimately doomed to end in displacement and marginalization for the former.

The violence that would escalate over the years to come began almost instantaneously when the settlers landed later that April at Spruce Point, West of today's Humboldt Hill, to establish another settlement but were impeded by the Wiyot village of Djorokegochkok (pronounced, approximately, Chaw-ro-ke-utch-kuk), encountering resistance (Rohde, "Sonoma"). This first murder of Humboldt Bay's Indigenous people by the settlers, the incident stands as an early example of the hubris of racist settler colonialism, its mission to replace the Indigenous "other" on the landscape. Killings of Indigenous people to remove them were often justified by settlers as a punishment for "thieves" (Madley 97-98). The supposed "thievery" related to the scavenging of a wrecked settler ship, the *Eclipse* by Wiyot teenagers (Madley 97; Rohde, "Sonoma") The settlers used the theft as a pretext to destroy the village and as a stark reminder of both how little Indigenous life was worth to the newcomers, not only did the settlers execute the "thieves," but according to Harry LaMotte of the Laura Virginia Company who was there, "William H. Sansbury, a member of the Union Company, looked at the two young Wiyot guides and said, "I judge these fellows know too much about this, we may as well leave them right here." He drew his pistol and shot the boys dead" (Rohde, "Sonoma"). The Wiyot guides were inhuman to these settlers, deserving death simply for witnessing

the murder of their people. The die for genocide was cast. The land was to be emptied and violence that would build to a mass scale was an eventuality.

The settlement of Humboldt immediately intensified. Armed with Federal legal claim over Wiyot land, settlers began to commercially extract timber, salmon, and furs, as well as clearing land for farming and ranching. (Widick 134).<sup>12</sup> Land seizures were occurring all around Wiyot villages and soon extractive activities took their toll on the formerly stable way of life of North Coast Indigenous peoples who longer had access to their food supply, driving them into the hills to subsist on a dwindling stock of natural food sources (Widick 134). The seized land was fenced off and transformed to support the settler project's goals, including resource extraction (Fort Humboldt). For example, imported European livestock and annual grasses began to dominate the landscape, replacing the sustainable ecosystem of game and year-round vegetation (House 177). By 1853, "after just 3 years of colonization, wild game was already becoming scarce and cattle populous on what had been indigenous commons" forcing Indigenous people to poach cattle, often on land that was once home to robust meadows and forests ecosystems, now cleared of timber and deer (Widick 133). The Indigenous people of the area had lived in relative equilibrium and sustainability with nature however, there was nothing sustainable about how resources were treated by settlers as they quickly commodified the Wiyot's lands (Elliot 104; House 57-61; Widick 103-104).

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<sup>12</sup> Legal as defined by the settlers' codes, ignorant and/or dismissive of Indigenous sovereignty



To understand the industrial scale and rapidity of the this takeover and the level of degradation and marginalization the Wiyot experienced, it's useful to briefly list a few production numbers for the settlers' enterprises, keeping in mind they occurred on land formally accessible and productive to Humboldt's Indigenous people. By the mid-1850s, Humboldt County had produced an astonishing 27 million board feet of lumber, 80,000 pounds of butter, 50,000 pounds of salmon, and boasted almost 4,000 head of cattle (Widick 134). While the settlers enjoyed a spiraling up of food resources, Indigenous people saw their traditional sources disappearing. To the East, the over 2,000 miners occupying the Trinity River had destroyed so much riverbed and diverted so much water that entire salmon runs vanished (Norton 38).

The result was deprivation for the Indigenous people of the area that would further result in acts of settler brutality. Early violent incidents between settlers and Humboldt's Indigenous communities are commonly characterized in the dominant discourse as "tit-for-tat" conflicts, evidence of an inevitable "clash of cultures" (Fort Humboldt). Nonetheless, it was hardly an assemblage of unfortunate misunderstandings resulting in violence. With dwindling access to their traditional food sources, the Wiyot were forced to take cattle from private settler stock to survive, angering the owners and sparking brutal retaliation (Fort Humboldt). Rapes and kidnappings of women and children by settlers also resulted in escalating violence (Norton 42-48, 68). In the new settlement at Trinidad, despite a kind and respectful reception from local tribes, within weeks of their arrival, the white settlers had already murdered several Yurok and burned their homes at Big Lagoon, eighteen miles to the North (Norton 67-68). The public

perception of these events was captured by the newspapers of the time (Norton 67). Although they condemned the burnings, killings, and murders by settlers, as was usually the case, the Indigenous people were portrayed as the instigators of trouble (Norton 67). Incidents of individual and small-scale violence continued through the early 1850s with rising numbers of murders and rapes by settlers as their numbers increased in Humboldt County, then Klamath County in the new US state of California (Widick 134). After numerous poaching incidents and violent confrontations with some deaths of both Indigenous people and settlers, settler calls for decisive action to end the troubles rang out from California newspapers (Madley 222, 235, 240-241).

### Genocide Begins in Humboldt County

For the Wiyot and other Humboldt tribes, two monumental events after California's annexation to the US accelerated the settlers' desires to remove Indigenous people from the land as soon as possible. First, gold was discovered in large quantities along the Trinity River in 1849 and by the middle of 1850, thousands of miners were already camped there (Norton 38). Prior to 1849, Indigenous people provided much-needed labor in the gold mines but by that year, organized killing of them had begun in the goldfields of the Sacramento Valley and surrounding areas (Madley 71-72). The desire for settler access to gold and other resources on Indigenous land, increasing incidents of rape of Indigenous women by settlers, Indigenous retaliation, and the subsequent grossly disproportional violent retribution by settlers, advanced a new

paradigm of organized, preemptive killing that would spread across northern California in the next decades.

Second, the deliberate failure of the Federal government to ratify treaties with California tribes in 1852 allowed state and local authorities to implement a policy of outright removal through genocide (Madley 210-211). As early as 1850, the Federal government intervened to try to impose settler-colonial order. Given the intended permanency of the settler-colonial project in northern California, the US government had appointed congressionally mandated special commissioners to negotiate the ultimate surrender of the Indigenous people of the area, including the Wiyot (Madley 165; Norton 70). Having no option to push them any farther West, many settlers supported a plan for “domestication and improvement” of the Indigenous people through signed treaties, rather than extermination (Madley 164). Federal agents Redick McKee, G.W. Barbour, and O.M. Rozencraft met the 406 tribal leaders and 119 tribes, signing eighteen Federal treaties with them to exchange their land for 7,488,000 acres of reservation lands, complete with full material support such as clothes, food, education, etc. (Madley 165; Norton 70). Many tribal leaders refused to sign but coercion, threats, and the presence of heavily armed troops escorting the commissioners forced compliance (Norton 70-71). While the treaties signaled a possible solution to any further conflict between settlers and Indigenous people, at the same time catering to settler notions that an orderly transition to reservations would be swiftly accomplished, there was a problem. The US Congress never specifically authorized any discussions over land and by the time McKee and

company had begun negotiations as many as 200,000 white settlers were already in California (Madley 164; Norton 70).

Regardless, the California Legislature immediately formed a special commission to evaluate the treaties, citing that many of the proposed reservation lands were in gold-rich areas (Madley 169). Instead, they argued the state's Congressional representatives should endeavor to "induce the Federal government to remove the Indians of this state beyond its jurisdiction" (Norton 71). No reservation was going to disrupt the settler-colonial goal of acquisition and exclusion of land for resource extraction. Under immense pressure from California representatives who continually cited the hardship of white settlers who would be forced to vacate Indigenous land, Congress failed to ratify President Filmore's eighteen treaties, thus defaulting on the agreements (Madley 167-168). Even worse, the treaties and all related documents were sealed for fifty years to hide that fact (Norton 72). This was a deceitful, moral crime (California's tribes were never informed of the failure to ratify) and a massive betrayal of Indigenous people who had surrendered land and sovereignty in exchange for safety and sustenance (Madley 168). The Wiyot and other tribes' constitutional sovereignty to grant land and rights was simply ignored, bypassed by Congress and the state of California (Norton 73). After calls by US President Filmore warning of settler violence if something wasn't done, Congress authorized five (far less than the 19 promised in the rejected treaties) reservations in

California with \$250,000 in appropriations to fund them, however, they were to be left with no US Army protection (Madley 170-171).<sup>13</sup>

Humboldt County's Indigenous people soon experienced the consequences of this lack of protection. As the Wiyot and other Humboldt tribes like the Whilkut, Sinkyone, and Chilula were brutally driven by militias to the Klamath Reservation they entered a militarized concentration labor camp (Norton 74). Having just suffered their own "Trail of Tears," they were subjected to a new nightmare. According to several Wiyot survivors of these camps, deprivation, rape, murder, and torture by the local, settler militia guards were common, as was slavery; the men forced to labor for their rations (Norton 74; Rohde, "Wiyot"). Forced to abandon their traditional lands, the people slowly starved on meager rations of rotten food, usually only a handful of flour, never receiving meat, sugar, or coffee. (Rohde, "Wiyot"). Hunting or fishing was strictly forbidden as was leaving the reservation (Rohde, "Wiyot"). Militia guards forcibly shaved the eyebrows of Wiyot dancers caught escaping to sacred places for ceremony and parents watched as their children were whipped for sneaking away (Rohde, "Wiyot"). Hangings were carried out for serious offenses (Norton 64, 74). Since there was no Federal troop presence to defend them, settlers often raped women on the reservations (Fort Humboldt). During the winter of 1856-1857 the situation became so desperate for the Indigenous prisoners on the Round Valley reservation that 300 inmates (most likely Yuki from Mendocino

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<sup>13</sup> Superintendent of Indian Affairs for California Edward F. Beale and US Army Colonel T.J. Henely established reservations at Fort Tejon, Mendocino, Klamath, Round Valley, and Nome Lackee, near Colusa; all of them limited to a maximum of 25,000 acres each and decidedly not on gold fields (Castillo; Madley 170).

County) died from the “effects of packing them through the mountains in the snow and mud” (Madley 260-265). Growing hungry, angry, and desperate, inmates often fled the reservations to live in the mountains and resist the invader by force, rather than freeze or starve (Fort Humboldt, Madley 261). Others had never been captured, evading the settlers, and continuing to live on traditional lands (Fort Humboldt).

From the settlers’ point of view, the threat posed to life and property by the continued presence of Indigenous people in California demanded Federal action. The California Legislature passed a statute in 1851 titled, “Joint Resolution in relation to establishing Forts on our Borders,” demanding US troops be sent to protect them from “Indians” who were “now at war, with the citizens of this state,” (Fort Humboldt; Johnston-Dodds 19). Federal military help eventually arrived however, the troops sent in 1853 to erect and occupy Fort Humboldt in present-day Eureka proved ineffective in both pleasing the settlers and protecting the Indigenous population who were legally wards of the Federal government (Fort Humboldt; Madley 17). Attempting to strike a balance between the needs of both, troops had provided goods and medical services to the local tribes and intervened to stop settler violence, adding to a growing distrust of Federal intentions and loyalties by the settlers, as well as their frustration (Fort Humboldt).

Failing to reach a solution with the Federal government, the state of California finally declared a genocidal war on its Indigenous people, setting the stage for the massacres to follow. In 1851, California’s first Governor, Peter H. Burnett stated, “A war of extermination will continue to be waged between the races, until the Indian race becomes extinct” (Madley 173). California had already passed two militia acts in 1850

that respectively created both volunteer and compulsory militias made up of 35,000 white settlers, among 300 different units (Madley 175).<sup>14</sup> Citizens could organize them and petition the state for funding and supplies, driven by statewide militia taxes (Madley 174, 244). Many of the men who did the actual killing were recruited from the same groups of barbaric vigilantes who had been murdering, kidnapping, and raping California's Indigenous people for years, what the New York *Century* newspaper called "filthy-wretches who infest the frontier settlements and commit such deeds" (Norton 76, 89). Regardless of their social standing or motivations, the state now had the men, the money, and the laws to carry out mass murder with dependable troops. Between 1850 and 1861 California militiamen mounted twenty-four expeditions, murdering 1,342 people (Madley 175). Officials presented these incidents of extreme violence during such expeditions as "battles" against "warriors, but the reality was starkly different (Madley 279). Militia leaders like Walter S. Jarboe, head of the Eel River Rangers, routinely murdered women and children (Madley 279) This kind of organized, mass murder was accompanied by the countless vigilante killings fueled by local bounties for Indian scalps, as well as, a market for Indigenous slaves (Madley 197-198).<sup>15</sup> Another act of betrayal to California's tribes, the Federal government reimbursed California for these expeditions to the tune of over \$900,000 (Norton 76).

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<sup>14</sup> Militias had colorful names like the "Eel River Minutemen" and the "Humboldt Home Guard." They were commonly referred to as "volunteers", "regulators" and "dragoons" Most were merely social clubs (Madley 174-75).

<sup>15</sup> The city of Shasta near Redding, CA offered \$5 for every Indian scalp (Madley 197).

The incidents of mass murder that followed are too numerous to discuss here, speaking to the sheer scale of violence. Yet, a few stand out as examples of the premeditated, brutal, and organized nature of these atrocities: the later massacres of the Wintu at Hayfork in 1852, near the Trinity River, the Tolowa at Yontocket and Lake Earl in 1854, near the new settlement of Crescent City, and the massacres of the Yurok, Karuk, and Hupa along the Salmon and Klamath during the “Red Cap War” of 1854-1855 (Madley 234-235; Norton 50-56). This series of militia operations was organized, as one militia member exclaimed when speaking of the actions against the Yurok, “to exterminate the treacherous tribe the we now exist amongst” (Madley 235-236). Each of these cases, like the massacre of the Wiyot at Tulawat, involved an unprovoked decision to preemptively murder hundreds of men, women, elders, and children to clear them from the area (Madley 232-237; Norton 50-56). Militia armed with rifles, pistols, axes, and knives often surrounded Indigenous villages as the inhabitants slept, attacking at dawn, killing every person they could find (Madley 232-237; Norton 50-56).

In addition to mass murder, slavery also continued during this time. California’s interim military administration (1846-1849) had instituted controls on Indigenous movement by requiring a pass for any Indigenous person employed by a settler as a laborer to avoid arrest (Madley 146-148). Militia death squads would often kidnap Indigenous children after murdering the parents, claiming them as prisoners of war and selling them like stock (Madley 109; Norton 47-49). This repugnant business fetched from \$35 to \$200 a person as domestic laborers were auctioned off despite Federal laws that banned domestic slave trading (Madley 109). These murderous raids to kidnap



dozens of women and children were so lucrative, they were often primary reasons for attacks on entire villages (Madley 279-280; Norton 49).

By the late 1850s, as more settlers arrived and tensions with the Indigenous people of Humboldt continued to rise, there arose numerous calls from public officials and newspapers for a final solution to the problem of “treacherous natives” who commit “repeated depredations” (Norton 74-77; Widick 135). Newspapers presented the justification for violence as settler frustration stemming partially from a lack of action by Federal authorities (Norton 74-77; Widick 135). An editorial in the *Humboldt Times*, similar to so many others around California at the time, explained the rationale for Indigenous removal: “Indians are still killing the stock of the settlers of the backcountry and will continue to do so until they are driven from that section or exterminated” (Madley 185-187; Widick 135). Calls for some action to erase the Indigenous of California were accompanied by articles praising murders by settlers and reinforcing settler paranoia (Norton 68). In 1857, that same newspaper, citing a failure of the Federal government to take concrete and final steps to remove the Indigenous people from Humboldt, was calling for settlers to attack Indigenous villages (Norton 75-76). By 1858, the *Humboldt Times* was calling for genocide, asking, “Removal or extermination now being the watchword with all classes of our people the next question arises, how are we to proceed?” (Norton 77). However, it is important to note the frequent cries from newspapers for the murder and removal of Indigenous people in Humboldt were no different from those frequently echoed all over the state (Madley 221-222). Indeed, it was this frequent encouragement and praise for organized genocide throughout the state that

helped make massacres like “Indian Island” possible, normalizing violence against Indigenous people.

By the time of the “Indian Island” massacre in 1860, the legal frameworks, financial incentives, and media justifications for the mass murder of California’s Indigenous people were well in place and economic support was forthcoming. Although settler vigilante violence against the Wiyot had already occurred, the next phase was not simply an escalation (Widick 135-136). Regardless of the fact that the Wiyot around Humboldt Bay had peacefully lived with the settlers, serving as laborers and guides, the orders to carry out the genocide of Indigenous people were coming from the highest levels of state government, both directly and indirectly, and this “state-sponsored Indian killing machine” had come to Humboldt Bay (Madley 173; Widick 135-136). Driven by their own racist propaganda, the settlers of Humboldt county saw themselves as citizens, burdened by the depredations of Indians and justified in taking action to remove them to protect life and property (Norton 76-77). Taking the state’s lead, in 1858 Union (Arcata) and Eureka leaders levied local taxes to form volunteer militia companies and “assumed the responsibility for declaring war against the Indians” (Norton 76). However, the arrival of additional Federal troops shortly afterwards prevented local officials from carrying out their campaign (Norton 76). The already formed militia instead spent the next few years conducting their own “wars” against the local tribes (Norton 78). In truth, they conducted massacres, kidnappings, and forced relocation to reservations, often through outright deceit, such as fake peace conferences to lure Indigenous people into captivity (Norton 78-80).

One of these militias would turn Tulawat into a mass murder scene. Formed in the Eel River Valley, south of Eureka, the Hydesville Dragoons, led by Captain Benjamin Wright, numbered 46 men and was formed to provide income for settlers when the fishing season ended (Madley 282). The citizens of nearby Hydesville had raised the \$1,000 to initially equip the group (Norton 85). After murdering about 40 Wiyot near the South Fork of the Eel, Wright's application for state recognition and financial support was denied by Governor Downey, partially due to unfavorable reports of unsanctioned settler violence from Fort Humboldt's commander (Madley 282). The enraged Captain Wright vowed to "kill every peaceable Indian man, woman, and child in Humboldt County' (Madley 282; Norton 81).

### The Indian Island and Eel River Massacres

Early on the morning of February 26, 1860, a small group of Wright's dragoons quietly slipped across Humboldt Bay in the damp air and darkness and landed on the shore of Tulawat, part of the small salt-marsh island across from the city of Eureka where they viciously murdered as many as 200, mostly Wiyot elderly, women, and children. (Norton 88; Widick 129). Often called, "Indian Island," Tulawat is the spiritual center of the universe of the Indigenous Wiyot people who have lived along the bay and surrounding coastline for thousands of years before white settlement (Wiyot Tribe, "History"). The island was an easy target for the killers as most of the Wiyot men were away at the time hunting in the forest, performing a part of the sacred, annual World

Renewal Ceremony at this center of the universe (Madley 282). Usually lasting seven to ten days, the site became a temporary village each year, home to men, women, children, and elders from the Eel and Mad River as they danced and sang (Madley 282; Wiyot Tribe, “History”).

A few days before the massacre, Robert Gunther, a cattle rancher, purchased the island from a Captain Moore and became one of the witnesses to the massacre, hearing screams and gunshots coming from the island around 4:00 AM (Norton 87). Although there were a few survivors, only one survivor was interviewed: a thirteen-year-old Wiyot girl named Jane Sam, aka Jennie Sam or Jennie Sands (Rohde, “Wiyot”). Her account is corroborated by Gunther himself, having interviewed her when he ventured out to the aftermath the next morning. (Norton 87).

According to multiple witness accounts, it appears that Wright’s dragoons split up and rode out in the darkness that early morning of February 26, attacking multiple Wiyot settlements over the next three to five days (Madley 283; Rohde, “Wiyot”). Tulawat, Eel River, Mad River, Fernbridge, Rio Dell, and the north and south spits of the Humboldt Bay jetty were all attacked as 30 to 100 people at a time were brutally slain by these death squads (Madley 283; Rohde, “Wiyot”). In total, as many as 300 Wiyot were killed by Wright’s forces across the region in at least five massacres (Madley 283; Widick 136). At Tulawat, approximately four to five men in two canoes paddled silently to the island from Eureka and began killing dozens of mostly women, children, and elders as they slept with knives, axes, clubs, and pistols, barring the doors of the houses to prevent escape (Rohde, “Wiyot”). Jane Sam was able to hide in a refuse pile on the other side of

the island, watching as those who played dead were discovered and ruthlessly dispatched (Rohde, “Wiyot”). After the killing was done and the island fell silent, the perpetrators burned the Wiyot’s possessions and houses, stealing what they wanted (Rohde, “Wiyot”). Later that morning, some Eureka and Union (Arcata) citizens, including Gunther, rowed out to the island to survey the damage and collect the bodies. The horror of what happened is best described by the Union (Arcata) *Northern Californian* newspaper writer Bret Harte, a witness to the carnage of broken bodies laid on a Union dock,

“The writer was upon the ground with feet treading in human blood, horrified with the awful and sickening sights which met the eye wherever it turned. Here was a mother fatally wounded hugging the mutilated carcass of her dying infant to her bosom; there a noo of two years old, with its ear and scalp tore from the side of its little head. Here, a father frantic with grief over the bloody corpses of his four little children and wife; there, a brother and sister bitterly weeping, and trying to soothe with cold water, the pallid face of a dying relative. Here an aged female still living and sitting up, though covered with ghastly wounds, and dying in her own blood; there, a living infant by its dead mother, desirous of drawing some nourishment from a source that had ceased to flow” (Madley 283).

As news of the massacres spread around the country, newspapers, such as the *San Francisco Bulletin* and *Alta California*, condemned the slaughter of what they called “non-combatants” by “filthy wretches, creatures, and babe-killers,” matching the tone of the *Humboldt Times* which derided the “indiscriminate slaughter of helpless children and defenseless squaws” (Madley 283-284; Norton 84, 89). The *Times* then went on to justify the act, stating that removal or extermination were the “two and only two alternatives for ridding our county of Indians; either remove them to some reservation or kill them” (Madley 284). This simultaneous condemnation of the atrocities at Tulawat and general support for genocide became a refrain in subsequent articles from the Humboldt paper.

Ridiculing the criticisms of outsiders, Humboldt's settlers complained the massacres were defensive measures against "diggers" who had "cruelly and savagely butchered" their loved ones (Norton 90). This projection continued with more twisted logic, arguing the US government failed to protect the Indigenous people from settlers (Norton 91-92). Indeed, when Bret Harte wrote his editorial in the *Northern Californian* on March 17, 1850, suggesting that perhaps the settlers themselves were to blame for the massacre, he was forced to flee the area by an angry mob (Madley 284; Widick 139).

Clearly, given the actions the settlers had taken earlier to raise militias, their shameful culpability was publicly visible. They had openly organized these militia death squads and funded them. A list of the members of the Hydesville Dragoons was available at the time of massacres, and those names are still recorded today (Norton 86). Despite this, the 1860 grand jury on the matter failed to bring anyone to trial (Norton 84; Rohde, "Wiyot"). Regardless of the legal outcomes, the immorality of these acts was inescapable as even some dragoons were less than enthusiastic about murdering the Wiyot, several having been pressed into service by their neighbors (Rohde, "Wiyot"). Ms. Jane Duncan, a Wiyot elder who once forcibly lived with one of the dragoons recalled that at least one member was threatened by her husband to participate and another hanged himself in remorse afterward (Rohde, "Wiyot").

The settler's employed a terrible array of legal and illegal tools to attempt to erase the Wiyot, but they could not erase the evidence of their crimes. At Tulawat, they left behind what Benjamin Madley describes as the four types of evidence that any prosecutor would look for in a murder case (Madley 10). First, and most importantly, there are the

assertions and admissions of the settlers themselves that the mass murder of the Wiyot occurred: officials and journalists justified the slaughter. Second, both settlers and Wiyot witnessed the events as bystanders. Third, the bodies laid out for all to see, documented by journalists like Harte at the time, provide forensic evidence. Finally, there's Jane Sam, the only survivor and firsthand witness. The case of the indiscriminate slaughter of friendly, innocent people as they peacefully slept, in a place of healing and renewal, brings the genocide into sharp relief, laying bare a crime scene that indicts the entire settler-colonial project in Humboldt County.

Over the next few years, attacks against Wiyot villages continued, the survivors marched off to Klamath and other reservations by Federal troops (Fort Humboldt). Many were herded a hundred at a time into a roofless corral at Fort Humboldt, supposedly for their protection (Norton 92; Fort Humboldt). There they died in huge numbers from disease, assaults, depression, and rapes from both soldiers and nearby settlers at Buck's Port (Norton 93; Fort Humboldt). Children were stolen by settlers and sold as slaves (Norton 93; Fort Humboldt). The killings continued, as did the deprivations and cruelty of the reservations, as militias roamed the countryside, undeterred by the new Fort Humboldt Commander who stated, "twelve years have demonstrated that the two races cannot live together upon terms of friendship" (Norton 92). Many were shipped south to the Mendocino Reservation (Fort Humboldt). The Wiyot had been removed from Humboldt Bay.

## Boarding Schools

As generations of dwindling numbers of Indigenous people continued to suffer on reservations, they faced a new form of genocide – the erasure of culture. From the late 19th century through the middle of the 20th, surviving generations of North Coast Indigenous children were sent to “Indian schools -boarding institutions as far away as Los Angeles and Oklahoma, where they were subjected to forced labor and cultural assimilation (Norton 112-113; Whalen 132). Based on the Jeffersonian principle that people are a product of their environment, The purpose of these schools was to transform the environment of the Indigenous child from that of the reservation, still intact as a cultural landscape of language, dress, and dance (Whalen 129). As one of the founders of Indian schools, General Richard Henry Pratt claimed, their purpose was for Indigenous people to “be educated in English, trained in our industries, and brought into contact with our civilization as much as possible” (Whalen 129).<sup>16</sup> They were “white people in training,” the logic being that Indigenous people must learn to live like the settler, although opinions differed on if they could ever *be* the settler, rather than just unskilled labor (Whalen 129).

The attendance at these schools ranged from voluntary to compulsory, but it cannot be argued that Indigenous parents had much of a choice, given that so many were coerced by government officials to acquire the white settler’s skill sets (Norton 119; Whalen 138). Many children attended to help their people, but many also did so at the

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<sup>16</sup> Pratt was a US Army veteran of the Plains Indian Wars; an “Indian killer” himself.



barrel of a gun (Whalen 138). Pratt and others, working with churches, charitable settler foundations, and Office of Indian Affairs agents withheld annuity payments to tribes or used soldiers to force parents to give up their children, tying the children up and dragging them away if they tried to run (Whalen 138). Regardless of how they arrived, most lost their language and ability to reproduce their culture, also suffering emotional scars obtained from years of abuse at the hands of the school staff (Whalen 138-139). The mechanisms and tools for what were essentially Anglo-American reeducation camps ranged from public shaming and humiliation by instructors to violence and terror (Whalen 138-139). Many schools were run in a military-style, the boys receiving regulation haircuts upon entry. Both boys and girls had their clothes taken from them, handed military uniforms or respectively, plain work dresses in return (Whalen 139). Children who showed any defiance were beaten, sometimes severely (Whalen 139). These institutions took children away from their parents and aimed to separate minds and bodies from their geographical and social birthright in the name of education (Welch and Riley 3). Isolation, beatings, mental abuse, and withholding of food were common features of the boarding school system that supplemented the existing generational trauma already carried by Indigenous people (Welch and Riley 3). What was left of the tribal cultural system that rooted Indigenous people like the Wiyot socially, forming the basis of the traditional family, was mostly destroyed in them (Whalen 139).

## Legally Erasing Wiyot Land

The final aspect of genocide is the codification of Indigenous *absenting* through settler legal frameworks that have allowed settlers to appropriate Indigenous land (including reservation land) and limit the legal agency of Indigenous people through the cynical use of laws regarding “surplus” or “public” lands. While this thesis could examine an entire chapter’s worth of the legal works against California’s Indigenous people, the Dawes General Allotment Act of 1887 and the subsequent amendments stand out as the most important tools of *absenting* or erasure deployed by the settlers.

The Dawes General Allotment Act provided 160 acres to each “head of household” and individual Indigenous males (Norton 113; Takaki 221). Ostensibly, the idea was to rid the Indigenous people of their “habits of nomadic barbarism” and savagery” by making them responsible land-owners (Takaki 221). The reality was a massive scheme to steal more land from tribes as the very first results of these allotments were to break up the large tracts of reservation lands into “surplus” tracts that could be sold by the federal government to settlers (Takaki 222). In 1902, the US Congress added a requirement that upon the death of the owner, allotted lands under the Dawes Act must be sold at public auction by the heirs (Takaki 223). Four years later, the Burke Act allowed these lands to be auctioned to settlers (Takaki 223). Further, the 1903 US Supreme Court decision *Lone Wolf v. Hitchcock* codified the Federal government’s ability to ignore the terms of any treaty with any tribe, affirming its absolute power over Indigenous people (Marshall 2017). The intent of the decision was clearly articulated by

an Office of Indian Affairs official at the time who explained that it allowed the Federal government to dispose of Indigenous land without their consent (Takaki 224). He added that without such a decision, it would take fifty years to eliminate the reservations (Takaki 224). This admission is a final historical reminder of the brutal, unmistakable intent of settler colonialism in Humboldt and the rest of the United States: the complete erasure of Indigenous people from the landscape.

These legal frameworks were designed had the desired effect of erasing the Wiyot for three reasons (Marshall). First, they helped effect the loss of Indigenous land, the gain of land being the master goal of the settler-colonial project. This undermined the communal ownership of land central to Indigenous social order and culture, essentially breaking up communal society. Second, the Wiyot, like all Indigenous people, are tied to the land; physically bound to the ecosystem and landscape through culture and practice. The loss of land means loss of connection to the life support systems that sustain the people. Third, Lockean concepts of property and ownership were foreign to North Coast Indigenous people meaning its theft, even its “ownership,” by anyone, was an assault on their cultural values.

## Conclusion

The evidence I have presented in this chapter clearly demonstrates that the history of White settlement in Humboldt County is defined by settler colonialism - a project to erase the Wiyot and all other Indigenous people from the landscape through a campaign

of multi-faceted genocide. This genocide was not limited to mass murder, but included acts of kidnapping, slavery, theft, rape, and cultural destruction through forced assimilation that meet total, and in part, the UN's definition of genocide for several reasons. (United Nations) First, the settlers were definitely "killing members of the group" when they organized mass murders of Indigenous people and second, rapes and other forms of violence, as well as, the loss of their traditional land caused great "bodily or mental harm to members of the group (United Nations). Third, the acts of mass murder and forced relocation to reservations (which separated Indigenous people from their land) are examples of the "deliberate inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or part" (United Nations). Removal to reservations in the 1850s through the 1870s doomed the North Coast's Indigenous people to further abuse such as rapes, trauma, and loss of connection to social structures and the environment they depended on for survival. The compulsory assimilation of Indigenous children through boarding schools to erase Indigenous people by erasing their language and ability to reproduce their culture was another form of "calculated destruction" (United Nations). Boarding schools are also an example of "forcibly transferring children of this group (Indigenous people) to another group (settlers)", clearly illustrating the genocidal nature of compulsory cultural assimilation (United Nations). Enslavement of Indigenous people during this time and was also a significant driver of declining Indigenous populations as settlers kidnapped children from their parents - another forced transfer of children (Norton 79-80). Not only did the settlers of Humboldt County carry out genocide, they employed multiple tools to effect it.

However, it cannot be emphasized enough that although some random acts of violence by settlers against Indigenous people did occur, most were sanctioned by all levels of government in a series of coordinated efforts to erase Indigenous people completely from north California. These deliberate crimes against humanity are well documented and even celebrated by the perpetrators and the news media of the day, despite the horrors like “Indian Island” that compelled occasional public outrage. The unmistakable guilt of the settlers for genocide is laid bare and the crimes against the Wiyot and other Indigenous people in Humboldt have largely been unaddressed.

Crimes were committed but it is critical to the argument for decolonization to note the human cost of the multi-faceted, genocidal settler-colonial project. As Ted Hernandez explained, it wasn't just the genocide, removal, and loss of the tribal community system that created such despair among the Wiyot people, but an ongoing generational trauma, not only rooted in massacres but also in a profound disconnection to culture and place (Hernandez, “Tulawat”). “The boarding schools did a lot of damage” (Hernandez, “Tulawat”). The Wiyot suffered tremendously, losing most of their members but also their most sacred spaces, as well as, much of the cultural capital they carried internally, tied to the land and beaten out of them as children in the Indian boarding schools (Hernandez, “Tulawat”). This compels the question: How do we fix the damage?

## CHAPTER 3: RESULTS

### Settler Interviews

Noting the importance of settler positionality relative to the results of local decolonization efforts, I collected data from settler interviews that provides an overview of settler decolonization attitudes and awareness - key factors that both improve local support for decolonization, but also create resistance to such efforts.<sup>17</sup> Since the main goal of this thesis is to inform processes, it is imperative that one understands the impacts of decolonization efforts on the settler population. This is critical to gauge data showing that the settlers of Humboldt County are generally aware of decolonization efforts, believe that land theft and mass murder of Indigenous people occurred there, and are supportive of further decolonization efforts, with certain caveats.

These conclusions reveal recurring patterns in settler responses that highlight three corresponding, main issues: awareness of local efforts to decolonize, awareness of the history of settler colonialism and genocide in Humboldt County, and positions toward decolonization efforts and future activity, such as support for land return. As I will establish later, the three are linked, one precipitating the other toward more settler support for decolonization efforts and less resistance.

Awareness of local efforts to decolonize stood out as an initial reason why settlers were willing to support them and engage in seeking greater awareness of the issues. This

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<sup>17</sup> See Appendix A for detailed, graphic representations of the data.

awareness is directly linked to the discourse created by these events. For example, almost every interview subject displayed detailed knowledge of at least one of the case studies cited in this thesis: the removal of the McKinley statue, the return of Tulawat, and the Terra Gen project. Interviewees typically volunteered that they acquired case knowledge from public discourses in traditional and social media that were generated either by the controversy or success of the campaign to decolonize.

Second, the data shows that the settler awareness of the horrific local history of settler-colonial genocide of the Indigenous population in Humboldt is linked to awareness of decolonization efforts. Through the same or related discourses about settler-colonial history, including academic sources, they were generally able to connect settler-colonial oppression of Indigenous people to the wider national project of settler colonialism (although the vast majority are not familiar with the term settler colonialism) and ongoing injustices. Citing the example of Tulawat, settlers framed the colonization of Humboldt County in terms of land theft and mass murder, providing an example of this link, pointing out the barbarity and cruelty of the slaughter of innocent people by the area's settler forebearers. There was genuine disgust for these events, but unlike the view of local newspapers in 1860, there was no corresponding justification for the slaughter. I also detected a shame and frustration among most settlers that it took so long for the Wiyot to attain justice in this matter.

Third, noting settler positions toward decolonization helps gauge the effectiveness of decolonization efforts and education. The data shows that most of the settlers supported local decolonization efforts and continue to do so due to a change in awareness

of past and current settler-colonial forms of oppression. Although all were college educated, they had obtained most of their historical knowledge of genocide and ongoing oppression from the public discourses generated by decolonization efforts. The data suggests the more aware of genocidal acts toward local Indigenous people the interview subject is, the more favorable their attitude toward decolonization efforts.

However, settler support for decolonization was not total. Two cases I asked interviewees about: the return of Tulawat and the removal of the McKinley statue yielded some differences in settler support, revealing the differing contexts settlers place these two cases in. While support of the return of Tulawat to the Wiyot Tribe was unanimous, the removal of the statue, although favored by a 2/3 majority of interviewees (reflecting the public vote in Arcata) was not. In contrast to the settler desire to atone for a massacre of innocent people, the fate of the statue of William McKinley was not so morally clear to the interviewees.

I identified two issues that explain the difference in support. First, despite the high-profile nature of the statue removal and the educational opportunities afforded by the public discourse generated through activism, there is a lingering ignorance on the part of some settlers of the past and present injustices visited on Indigenous people by public officials like McKinley. For example, although largely seen as a colonizing figure unfriendly to Indigenous people, such as the native Hawaiians, McKinley is also seen as hero of the American Civil War, having served on the Union side. During public hearings on the removal some Arcata residents expressed the persistent, stated, and mistaken belief



among some of the U.S. population that service in the Federal Army automatically makes one an abolitionist (Horwitz, Pitino).

Second, in those same hearings some residents expressed a desire to preserve the “traditional” appearance of the Arcata Plaza by preserving the statue, echoed by some of the interviewees. They also expressed a profound sense of loss over the removal. Interestingly, the interview data did not reveal that opposition to removal had anything to do with McKinley’s status as a former U.S. President, but rather a belief among these few “traditionalist” settlers that the Arcata Plaza icon should have been left alone by agitators who want to cause trouble (Pitino).

This geographically situated notion of “tradition” appears tied to a sense of *place*, in this case, a sense of place created and maintained by the settler through symbolism, such as the statue of a settler political leader-McKinley. Place is not infinite, but rather it is a bounded space, delineated by familiar, physical markers (Matthews and Herbert 12-13). It has affective and emotional meaning to people and it something that is produced and maintained on a cultural landscape. (Matthews and Herbert (12-13). As Mitchell describes, landscapes are deliberately produced, they reflect history, and they reinforce power structures. They define our interaction with them and are reflection of the community. However, this “place” is subjective, existing to some, but not all. The Wiyot do not see a plaza dominated by the statue of a colonizer as an inclusive place.

Although, support for decolonization among settlers is high, the finer details and caveats of decolonization are where opinions diverged significantly. Even settler interviewees, who stated support for decolonization, expressed some resistance to the

idea. For example, at least 1/3 of interviewees cited limitations on returning land that has value to settlers. They indicated they respect Indigenous sovereignty, but prefer to retain agency over decolonization decisions, such as what land is returned and how it is to be used. In both the Tulawat and McKinley Statue removal cases, decolonization efforts succeeded in changing the landscape of Humboldt County through land return and removal of a symbol of settler colonialism from the public square. Yet, in both cases, settlers asserted their agency over Indigenous people, at the very least, as arbiters of Indigenous rights on traditional Indigenous land. In the case of the return of Tulawat, at least half of the settlers mentioned the “unused” and “worthless” value of the island, while a sizable minority voiced concern about returning land owned by settlers, especially their own homes. Settlers often cautioned that decolonization has limits due to the settler-constructed social, economic, and political systems that exist today. They noted the difficulty in overcoming what they perceive as permanent changes to the landscape in the form of settler physical, cultural, and legal infrastructure.

Despite these issues of controls and limits on decolonization, most settlers were supportive of greater Indigenous inclusion in political decision-making processes. In addition, over a 1/3 of the interviewees expressed a desire to see Indigenous people lead decolonization efforts, deferring to tribal councils and individuals to define decolonization in Humboldt, recommend the actions to be taken in the community, and lead campaigns. In contrast to other interviewees, they indicated a reluctance to dictate the terms of decolonization to Indigenous people, often citing that Humboldt County is

Indigenous land, therefore Indigenous people should frame what decolonization is, as well as, guide the Humboldt County community in decolonization efforts.

Having expressed general support for the inclusion and, for some, the leadership of Indigenous people in decolonization processes, when asked about the future, two key responses continually stood out as foci for decolonization activity. First, there is a desire among the settlers to decolonize the *landscape*. Only a few settlers used this term, but most recognized that an Indigenous population in Humboldt exists, that symbols of settler-colonial oppression also exist, and that the McKinley statue and “Indian Island” are prime examples of these symbols.

The settlers desire to remove some of their influence from the landscape is a positive step forward but also problematic. Even though the aim of decolonization is to return Wiyot land and sovereignty, a large majority of settlers expressed a desire to open public spaces to create a more culturally inclusive and neutral environment for all. This idea was revealed when the topic of what should replace the McKinley statue arose in settler interviews. A popular response was to suggest building an open, communal, neutral space of some kind, determined by the whole community, not necessarily the Wiyot. It is important to note that many settlers see inclusion as a multicultural, two-dimensional flattening of the landscape that ignores race and relations of power to improve conditions for marginalized cultural groups (Taylor 11). The state is not to recognize any culture, but rather, it is to use its power to open space to all, equally (Taylor, 11).

Second, the *education* of settlers is not only a result of decolonization activity, but many feel it should be a focus. Given the increased awareness of Humboldt settlers of the historical and contemporary experiences of Indigenous people, there is a large-majority recognition that the entire story of white settlement across the United States has not been told. Settlers often linked resistance to decolonization to the glaring gaps in U.S. education curriculums that deliberately mask crimes of genocide and land theft within hegemonic narratives celebrating the formation of the settler-colonial state and society. Furthermore, they mentioned the knowledge of Indigenous people and the history of settler colonialism they learned from the public discourse generated by decolonization efforts was almost completely missing from their K-12 public education experiences. They expressed a desire for reform toward a more accurate portrayal of the settler-colonial history of Humboldt County and the greater United States.

Finally, Arcata City Council Member and former Mayor Paul Pitino, and Kelsey Reedy, Campaign Manager for *No on Measure M* and a leading settler activist in the campaign to remove the McKinley statue, provided additional input on decolonization processes, having both been directly involved in the removal of the McKinley statue. Their detailed assessments of the civic process they participated in surprised me, and as I will explain later, surprised them as well. Most importantly, their responses to questions about the political processes they observed as the community debated and voted on the removal helped illuminate what has worked and what has not worked in decolonization efforts. In conjunction with critical data from Indigenous activists, their input supports specific and proven strategies that may be replicated elsewhere. Both Pitino and Reedy

took away from their experiences advocating for, and in Pitino's case, carrying out the removal of the statue. Both testified to the fact that direct, persistent action by coalitions of settlers and Indigenous people, as well as, the education of the settler community, were the key factors in that success. In addition, both made it clear that a default position of accepting no less than tangible results, such as the complete removal of the statue, was crucial to securing victory.

### Wiyot Interviews

Wiyot tribal members also illuminated the successful strategies they have employed and continue to employ along multiple tracks in the struggle to overcome ongoing forms of settler-colonial oppression. In addition, they provided reliable, epistemological insights that helped bring context to the settler data I had collected. Both Ted Hernandez, Chairman of the Wiyot Tribe, and Jessica Cantrell, former Wiyot historian, have been heavily and actively involved in recent, successful decolonization efforts, but the modes and foci of these efforts differ considerably. The interviews I conducted with them revealed an emphasis on three key elements of decolonization: education, settler/Indigenous solidarity, and direct civic action.

Having worked with Pitino and Reedy on successful projects such as the McKinley statue removal, Ted Hernandez emphasized the same decolonization strategy of direct, persistent action over time, accepting no less than tangible results. Speaking about three cases I discuss in this thesis, he specifically emphasized the educational

benefits of decolonization efforts stating, “It’s very beneficial. Anything to help educate people is a good thing” (Hernandez, “Decolonization”). He elaborated further, “They [settlers] can learn the history of the Wiyot, our culture, the culture of the people here, learn what we’re about” (Hernandez, “Decolonization”).

When asked about the largest barrier to decolonization in Humboldt, he was quick to point out the fear and ignorance many settlers have about Indigenous people: “People don’t know the history of what happened here. They don’t know why we protect our land. We want people to know the history of California. We don’t have any hard feelings” (Hernandez, “Decolonization”). Cheryl Seidner, former Chairwoman of the Wiyot Tribe echoed the last point during my interview of the Table Bluff Council in May of 2019, explaining that Humboldt is a mixed settler/Indigenous community and although past injustices must be recognized, the Wiyot want to move forward with the settler community toward mutual respect and understanding (Wiyot Tribal Council 2019).

The desire of the Wiyot to work with the settler community to decolonize the Humboldt landscape is large step forward in that effort, especially given the successful track record of collaborative efforts between the Wiyot and settler allies in recent efforts such as the Terra Gen controversy when, despite a brutal history of genocide, settlers stood with their Indigenous neighbors. Hernandez’s emphasis on settler ignorance implies that by no means have the Wiyot forgotten the genocide, but rather they want to reclaim what was wrongly taken from them and address decolonization as a community.

To help facilitate change, Hernandez added that education is important to consider in how the Wiyot shift settler attitudes toward decolonization, but so is process. He

emphasized that the success of all three cases cited in this thesis (McKinley statue removal, Tulawat return, and the halting of the Terra Gen project) were due to focused, local action to directly petition government and partner with governmental bodies, such as the city councils of Arcata, Eureka, and Rio Dell, respectively. “It’s working and networking with the community” stated Hernandez, “We changed minds about us and stood together” (Hernandez, “Decolonization”). Finally, the Wiyot Chairman offered pivotal insight into what decolonization is to the Wiyot, “Protecting our land. Those windmills (Terra Gen project) are bad because they hurt the land and all the wild things around here. We want people to recognize it’s Wiyot land.” (Hernandez, “Decolonization”).

Reiterating settler/Indigenous solidarity and community education in her interview, Jessica Cantrell’s role as a historian for the Wiyot has been instrumental in the ongoing work of helping to shape settler attitudes toward Indigenous people and correct historical and ongoing settler-colonial narratives. Like Hernandez, she emphasized that she had no hatred for toward settlers for past or current injustices: “I don’t look at people and be like, oh, I hate those people because their ancestors murdered my ancestors” (Cantrell). Rather, she expressed a desire for settler recognition of crimes of genocide, as well as, a commitment to work toward undoing the damage caused by settler colonialism in practical, tangible ways, for example, the return of land whenever possible. Recognizing Humboldt County is a mixed settler/Indigenous community, she expressed that communication between the two groups is key to fomenting the educational opportunities that can alter settler attitudes toward Indigenous people, “I want you to

recognize that this happened [genocide] and like how are we going to move forward? It's not like you guys can just ship off back to where your ancestors came from. It's unreasonable because, this whole community we [settlers and Indigenous] built, and I think Humboldt as a community, as a whole, is a very good place to live" (Cantrell).

Cantrell's last point is important. As I've mentioned, settler colonialism aims to replace the Indigenous population on the land with a new, settler society construct on a new settler landscape. Over time, as the settler-colonial project advances, solidifies, and reinforces itself through laws such as the Dawes General Allotment Act, Indigenous people are further and further absented from the landscape. Despite this absenting, the failure of the project to eliminate the Indigenous presence has resulted in a sort of permanency, both settler and Indigenous part of the new settler-colonial order. The Indigenous people of Humboldt County remain, a triumph to their resilience. Cantrell's statements recognize the mixed settler/Indigenous make-up of the area that compels a community response to settler-colonial oppression and enables them to pursue tangible and meaningful decolonization.

Like Ted Hernandez, Cantrell also highlighted education as important to decolonization efforts. Although they provide educational opportunities for settlers in the moment, Cantrell's complimentary efforts have focused on spending many hours in local public schools tutoring children in Humboldt's Indigenous history and ongoing forms of settler-colonial oppression. She expressed her observations from class experience regarding American school textbooks that deliberately omit terms such as "genocide" or "settler-colonialism," contributing to false narratives about the history of the United



States, California, and Humboldt County. Despite this problem, Cantrell claimed settler attitudes in Humboldt are changing. She also noted that the years of public discourse generated by the return of Tulawat to the Wiyot, contributed to recent efforts among K-12 educators to correct the historical curriculum, such as replacing the increasingly unpopular California Mission Project with a report on a California Indigenous tribe of the student's choice.

## CHAPTER 4: A DISCUSSION ON DECOLONIZATION PROCESS

In this chapter, I will engage in a discussion of process, focusing on improvements that have yielded tangible results for the Wiyot and could be possibly replicated elsewhere. The data I have gathered shows that Wiyot-led movements to protect their land and culture offer a remarkable opportunity for both settlers and Indigenous people to learn successful strategies to employ in future decolonization efforts. The pedagogical value of studying successful decolonization outcomes in Humboldt cannot be ignored given the tangible successes the Wiyot have achieved: the removal of a statue of a former US President from a public square by popular vote, the return of Indigenous land by a city in the United States, and the prevention of further dispossession and desecration of tribal land. This and other examples of Wiyot resistance illuminate the cumulative socio-political effects of decolonization outcomes in Humboldt County, revealed through interview data and settler reactions to decolonization activity.

### Decolonization of Wiyot Land

The goal of this thesis is not limited to a study of process improvements. It also serves as reminder of why decolonization of Wiyot land (and all Indigenous land) is so important. The Wiyot do not simply “deserve their land back.” As I have exhibited in Chapter 2, they are victims of well-documented crimes of genocide committed by settlers with the support of every level of government, from Federal to municipal. This historical

review has shown that settlement in Humboldt County was marked by officially sanctioned genocide and land theft as defined by the United Nations and that decolonization is now the international standard for the treatment of Indigenous people. The two UN resolutions I have cited earlier: the 1948 United Nations Genocide Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and the 2007 Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) respectively function as statutory, although imperfect frameworks for determining if genocide occurred and the impetus for addressing its legacy.

Whether the Euro-American settler-colonial state is legally bound to confront its past or not, there is clearly an imperative from the standpoints of both human rights and international standards of justice to engage in tangible forms of decolonization. The work of effecting decolonization can be long and difficult to execute. That said, the Wiyot should not have to wait. Unlike the settlers who may want to atone for past injustices, decolonization is a matter of survival for Indigenous people. The Terra-Gen project threatened to destroy ancestral land that provides the foundation of Wiyot culture and family, illustrating the continuing oppression the Wiyot face in a persisting settler-colonial paradigm. This and the many others settler actions across the United States have had cumulative and devastating effects on the social and physical health of Indigenous communities.

Indigenous people experience acutely severe social and health outcomes compared to the rest of American society, such as high rates of suicide, alcoholism, teen alcohol, and drug use, diabetes, chronic liver disease, and low life expectancy (CDC 12;

HCDHHS 2013; Urbaeva, et al. 2681). Indigenous people in the United States consistently see worse social and health outcomes than their White neighbors (Heron 12; UDHHS). The common reason for most these outcomes is a generational trauma associated with a loss of traditional culture and cultural space (Welch and Riley 3). When settlers confiscated Indigenous land, removed the people to reservations, and forced Indigenous children to attend boarding schools, they disrupted families and communities, destroying effective socialization practices and creating a sense of hopelessness (Greenon, “Yurok;” Urbaeva, et al. 2681-2683). Decolonization efforts to reconnect Indigenous people to culturally-important spaces, ancestral land, and traditional practices, have been shown to improve social conditions (Janelle, et al 3). Given the dire conditions many Indigenous people suffer today, and the given over 150 years of mostly inaction by settlers to liberate their Indigenous neighbors from oppression, decolonization is long overdue.

### Lessons Learned

The need for decolonization in Humboldt being an urgent matter for the Wiyot, it is essential that activists scrutinize the recent victories achieved so as not to overlook important strategy lessons the Humboldt community has learned about education, solidarity, and scale. These events and the research data I have exhibited in this thesis provide clear lessons for future decolonization activity in Humboldt. They reveal a clear pattern of practices and a focus on altering landscapes that amount to a process for

achieving meaningful decolonization results. Emulated elsewhere, this process could also yield meaningful results.

The successful decolonization processes observed in Humboldt County can be distilled and summarized as follows: local, persistent, Indigenous-led decolonization campaigns, joined in solidarity by White settlers, directly targeting decision makers, over long periods of time, if necessary. Combined with a focus on landscapes as a channel for decolonization to ensure the results are tangible and meaningful, this produces multiple, linked effects within the wider community that accelerate the decolonization process, producing additional, tangible, and meaningful decolonization outcomes. Public debates, news articles, and presentations generated by decolonization efforts produce a discourse that highlights both the current and past injustices of settler-colonial genocide. The interview data demonstrates a clear link between this discourse and increased settler awareness and support for decolonization. That increased awareness and support is an effective decolonizing force, mobilizing many settlers to stand up for their Indigenous neighbors, whose land and sovereignty is threatened, as well as, take steps to address settler-colonial narratives in educational systems that distort the history of genocide and land theft that occurred against Indigenous people, such as the Wiyot. In this section, I will examine this process as applied to the cases presented, demonstrating how it has enabled the successful return and defense of Wiyot land and solidarity.

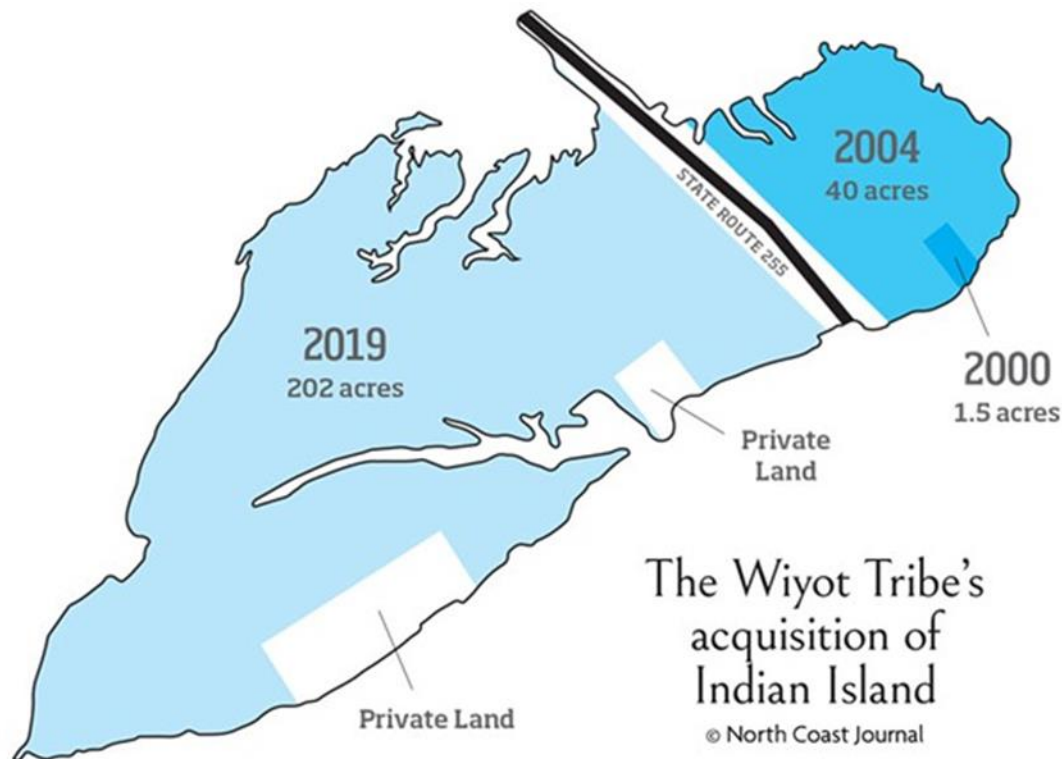
#### Direct and persistent action

First and foremost, the Wiyot's persistent, direct petitioning of the local governing bodies responsible for decision making, sustained over long periods of time,

has been an essential lesson in process. Indeed, both the return of Tulawat to the Wiyot Tribe and the removal of the McKinley statue were successful campaigns that took many years to bear fruit, but the steadfast determination of the Wiyot to reclaim their cultural sovereignty and return their center of the universe resulted in victories.

Wiyot persistence to return the center of their universe, Tulawat, was key to victory (Fig. 2). The Wiyot Tribe began the process to return Tulawat in the 1970s, and by the 1990s had helped generate awareness for their campaign by holding a candlelight vigil on Tulawat for their murdered ancestors on the anniversary of the massacre there. Tribal Chairwoman Cheryl Seidner and allies then embarked on a long campaign of fundraising and coalition building, constantly educating the community about what happened on “Indian Island” and the need for its rightful return to the Wiyot Tribe (EPA 4). After four years of grassroots efforts conducting bake sales, benefits concerts, and collecting donations from churches, schools, and other Humboldt Indigenous tribes, the Wiyot were able to raise enough money to purchase 1.5 acres of the island, the original site of Tulawat village in 2000 (EPA 4).

Figure 2. Tulawat land transfers (North Coast Journal)



After several more years of further petitioning by Seidner and the Wiyot, the Eureka City Council made an unprecedented decision to return city-owned land next to the Tulawat Village site to the Wiyot Tribe in 2004 (EPA 6). In total, over 40 acres of land were returned to the tribe, but the Wiyot were not finished returning their center of the universe (EPA 6). They immediately got to work restoring the landscape, then ecologically devastated from years of settler activity. By addressing long-standing environmental damage on the island, the Wiyot proved rightful stewardship over the land, and engendered a shift in settler thinking over rightful ownership (EPA 2-6). In 2015 the

Eureka City Council voted unanimously to return the all the publicly held portion of the island (some private parcels to remain), to the Wiyot Tribe completing the transfer in October of 2019 (Greenson, “Dulawat”). Seidner and the Wiyot’s resolute commitment to getting their most sacred land back reaffirms the power of direct, persistent, local action to decolonize. However, the cases presented here represent only the beginning of decolonization in Humboldt County. It is important to note that Tulawat had been deemed “surplus” land by the City of Eureka in December of 2018, meaning it had no value, thus easier to return to the Wiyot, especially given its poor environmental condition (EPA 1; Greenson, “Dulawat”). Direct action needs to be further implemented to challenge settler resistance to further tangible and meaningful decolonization efforts to return land, especially land of functional value to the settlers.

Likewise, the Wiyot’s direct and persistent petitioning of government was key to the removal of the McKinley statue. Although media discourse surrounding the removal peaked in 2018, local Indigenous activists approached Arcata City Council member Paul Pitino in 2006, asking to move the statue that had stood at the center of the Arcata Plaza since 1906 (Ferrara; Pitino; Rove). Aware of McKinley’s controversial colonial past, Pitino brought the issue up in Council but was unsuccessful in moving the issue forward beyond the discussion of creating a plaque to both commemorate McKinley’s assassination and criticize his presidency (Pitino).

The issue of statue removal resurfaced when in 2015, the City of Arcata’s Parks and Recreation Committee began work on just such a plaque (City of Arcata, “Parks and Rec”). This eventually generated backlash from members of the Wiyot Tribe and the



general public who spoke directly to the Arcata City Council, demanding the removal of the statue in late 2017 (City of Arcata, “Special Meeting 10/17, 11/18”). Citing McKinley’s support for crimes against Indigenous people such as the annexation of Hawaii, as well as, the Dawes Commission, responsible for the theft of Indigenous land, the Wiyot Tribal Council had previously voted unanimously to advocate for removal (Stansberry, “Wiyot”). The Council agreed and voted 4-1 in February of 2018 to remove the statue, but the dissenting member succeeded in gathering support for a ballot initiative (Measure M) to prevent removal (City of Arcata, “McKinley”). Regardless, voters defeated the measure and the statue was removed in February 2019 (City of Arcata, “McKinley”). Persistent, direct, and local action by the Wiyot and settler allies to decolonize, in this case, appealing to the City Council and then the voters, accomplished the goal of removal.

#### Indigenous and settler coalitions

Direct, local, and continual decolonizing action has been proven to work in Humboldt County, but who joins, assists, and leads efforts to change the landscape is a crucial matter. In each case presented in this thesis, the Wiyot were not alone as they fought to protect their land and culture. The results of these cases and the interview data demonstrate that a coalition led by Indigenous tribal councils and people, and joined by settler activists, is a powerful political voice that actively, tangibly decolonizes (Pitino, Reedy).

In the case of the McKinley statue removal numerous members of the community stood with the Wiyot including the Seventh Generation Fund, a non-profit group

“dedicated to Indigenous Peoples' self-determination and the sovereignty of Native nations,” the Humboldt State University (HSU) Chapter of MeChA, HSU students, and local social justice activists (City of Arcata, “Special Meeting 10/17, 11/18;” Seventh Generation Fund). The return of Tulawat would not have been possible without the many years spent by Seidner and others forming political, social, and economic relationships with the settler community including cities, businesses, and social justice organizations to generate the civic and financial momentum need to purchase and return ancestral land (EPA 4-9). When the Terra-Gen company proposed a wind turbine farm on top of Bear River Ridge in 2018, the decolonization Indigenous/settler infrastructure was already in place (Burns, “Wind”). A broad coalition made up of Humboldt Indigenous and settler communities (including city officials of nearby Rio Dell) overwhelmed public meetings to express their support for the Wiyot’s opposition to the project on their ancestral land, demonstrating community solidarity and communicating a public mandate to listen to the concerns of Indigenous people (LoCO Staff).

These coalitions are critical to decolonization as settlers have an important role to play as allies. They educate their neighbors about the issue, gather signatures for petitions, and stand with their Indigenous neighbors at protests and city council meetings. The point is not to “help” the Wiyot, but to act as settler allies, listening to Indigenous people and engaging with fellow settlers to build community solidarity (Reedy). Activist Kelsey Reedy sprang to action as soon as the Wiyot approached the council in 2017 to remove the McKinley statue, stating, “it doesn’t take anything more than the Wiyot Tribe asking for it” (Reedy).

Indeed, interview data supports the notion that many settlers think that not only should Indigenous people be part of the solution, they should define what decolonization is and lead decolonization campaigns (Reedy). By supporting Indigenous people in this way, communities can help to avoid making the mistake of turning decolonization into settler-directed “empty signifier,” a way to avoid conversations about more difficult modes of decolonization, such as land return (Tuck & Yang 7). Decolonization is a process worked out by settlers and Indigenous people together, but it must be Indigenous people who lead them to ensure tangible and meaningful results, such as the return of land occur. Jessica Cantrell makes this clear, “It’s not hard to actually listen. Giving us back what we asked for in our treaties. It’s not that hard” (Cantrell). Otherwise, settlers retain control of the process, decolonizing on *their* schedule, to address *their* needs, for example, the symbolic atonement of a written apology by a city for a massacre, whose perpetrators are long gone. Rather, tangible acts, such as the return of Tulawat to the Wiyot Tribe (which the Wiyot demanded for decades), return the land that was stolen, land that the Wiyot people are culturally and spiritually tied to (Hernandez).

One of the challenges of such a collaborative approach that arose in the interview data is the definition of *decolonization*. While I have defined the term for the reader, my definition, that of settler activists, and that of the Wiyot and other Indigenous tribes may differ considerably and may be subjective. For example, the settler activist’s agenda for social justice for Indigenous people may lack the critical input of that group, as has been the case in the past (Reedy). During the McKinley statue removal debates, Kelsey Reedy, one of the architects of the campaign to remove the statue, related the transformative

moment when she asked the Wiyot what decolonization meant to them (as I did) at a Wiyot Tribal Council meeting, “I just took a word and was like my definition as a white person is exactly what everyone else thinks” (Reedy). It was then that Reedy adjusted the campaign to foreground the Wiyot’s position to guide her activity on the campaign, checking with them often to ensure the outcome for the Wiyot would be tangible -total removal of statue. This case indicates that it is critical to successful collaboration in decolonization that Indigenous people define what are successful outcomes, lead the efforts to secure them, and that settler allies communicate, that they ask the most important question of all: What can I do?

#### A focus on landscapes

According to the interview data provided by settler and Wiyot activists, as well as, the positive effects of successful, tangible, landscape-focused decolonization activity (statue removal, land return, and land preservation), I have identified landscapes as the most effective channel for decolonization. The settler-occupied cultural landscape is also where settler colonialism is sustained and therefore, the channel for tangible decolonization. This research demonstrates that landscapes are both where Indigenous people have been absented, and where they can be presented. The settlers have stolen Wiyot land and replaced the original inhabitants on the superseding cultural landscape, essentially erasing the Wiyot, condemning them to near oblivion. This research elucidates this process can be reversed through the alteration of the cultural landscape.

Remembering Mitchell’s geographic axioms for reading landscapes, we know that the cultural landscape of Humboldt County is (and was) actively produced by the settlers

to reflect their values and culture, erecting monuments to themselves, such as the McKinley statue and a highway bridge that crosses over the Wiyot's center of the universe, Tulawat (Mitchell 34). His 3rd Axiom: no landscape is local, speaks to this fact, reflecting Euro-American presence and agency on the Humboldt County cultural landscape of cities like Arcata and Eureka, connected by highways advertising American hamburgers. In contrast, Wiyot culture has been almost erased (Mitchell 38). The landscape doesn't just reflect the settlers' values and culture, but actively supports their presence on the landscape. As Mitchell's 2nd Axiom states: any landscape is functional (Mitchell 35). Humboldt County's cultural landscape is peppered with businesses, farms, roads, and the homes of the settlers where they work, travel, live, worship, and so on. It presents the settler and the settler-colonial project.

So much so that the most sacred place on Earth for the Wiyot, Tulawat, amid horrific violence, was taken from them and tuned into a functional landscape for the settler - Robert Gunther's cattle pasture (Stansberry, "Arkley"). Later, Gunther leased the portion of the island where the village of Tulawat once was to a boat repair company in 1870 (EPA 2). Over next 120 years, settlers dumped chemical paints, solvents, hazardous metals, petroleum, and other toxins all over the site, resulting in extensive contamination of the groundwater and soil until the boat yard was closed in 1990 (EPA 2). Contamination and erosion also threatened the ancestral burial ground there, as well as, cultural artifacts contained in the several middens on the site.<sup>18</sup> To the settlers, the space

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<sup>18</sup> A midden is a mound or deposit containing shells, bone, or other artifacts of human settlement. (EPA 3).

was purely used to support their activities, altered to feed cattle and fix boats, presenting their claim to the land and actively absencing the Wiyot and their cultural history. The example of Tulawat and the settler-produced and maintained landscape as functional space helps to explain why the interview data demonstrates settler resistance to tangible gestures such as land return or the removal of symbols of oppression like the McKinley statue that Indigenous experience as oppressive, but are normal landscape features to the settler (Cantrell; Hernandez; Pitino). At the very least, according to the interview data, many settlers express the desire to retain control over what is returned and how it used, only wanting to part with land they deem “surplus” (Burns, “Wind” 1-3). Settler colonialism aims to take land and keep it.

Regardless, the Wiyot’s presence on the island has already helped to *present* the people there, highlighting the relationship between Indigenous people and their ancestral land. Before getting most of it back and after securing an EPA grant in 2001 to clean up the island, the Wiyot began removing debris, cleaning and replacing the soil, replanting native flora, and installing anti-erosion measures, completing work in 2014 (EPA 8). Work also began to preserve and protect the middens through erosion controls (Doran and McVicar). Instead of a landscape that absents the Wiyot, the people have transformed the space into one that presents them. The proof of the transformation was in dance. On March 28, 2014, the Wiyot Tribe ended its period of mourning and hosted the first World Renewal Ceremony in 154 years. Cheryl Seidner, former Chairwoman for the Wiyot Tribe explained the importance of this land in decolonization, “The world has changed, and the *Wiyot changed with it*,” Cheryl Seidner noted. “We don’t live in redwood slab

houses anymore, but we still need our traditions. We still need something to hold on to. And when we gather on Indian Island, we are saying, ‘we’re still here, and we are putting the pieces of our culture together’ (EPA 19)

Because settler-colonial features or structures also *absent* the Indigenous people, tangible decolonization is extremely difficult. Unfortunately, given the time passed and the privatization of land parcels, the Wiyot face an uphill battle to undo a settler-colonial project that has shown remarkable permanence and resilience in the form of resistance by settlers to meaningful decolonization, such as the return of land. Decolonization is difficult. To be tangible and meaningful for the Wiyot, it requires dramatic changes to the settler-colonial relations of power, a giving up of settler privilege, and the most difficult, giving back Indigenous land and sovereignty. As Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang emphasize, decolonization is unsettling, but it must be to be meaningful to Indigenous people (Tuck & Yang 3). However, as with all three cases I have cited, a focus on the visible landscape that both settlers and Indigenous people exist on, has the potential for the tangible return and defense of Indigenous land, sovereignty, and dignity as settlers become more aware of the experiences of their Indigenous neighbors.

In pursuit of tangible results, the Wiyot have shifted the paradigm of decolonization in Humboldt County due to their strategy of focusing on landscapes. In all three successful cases presented here, the landscape was the focus of decolonization: the removal of a symbol of settler-colonial oppression from the public square, the return of an island riddled with environmental damage, once used a cattle grazing area and a shipyard, and the preservation of Wiyot ancestral land from industrialization by settlers

(EPA 2). The Wiyot adeptly understand that despite the settler cultural landscape being a source of oppression, used as a medium to reify the settler's claim to the land, it is also where tangible decolonization happens (Hernandez, "Decolonization"). At the very least, whether land is returned, or statues removed, decolonization actively reproduces the landscape to change the settler-colonial paradigm, reminding the settler of Indigenous presence and agency (Mitchell 34). Thus, as Mitchell's 5th Axiom, landscape is power suggests, and the voices of Indigenous interviewees confirmed, decolonizing the landscape has the potential to alter the relations of power. As settler data interview data confirms, after each successful decolonization campaign, the absented Wiyot are increasingly presented, thus less invisible to the settler.

At the most, it means the return and preservation of Wiyot ancestral land, the literal undoing of the main goal of settler colonialism. As Mitchell states in his 6th Axiom, the landscape is the form that social justice takes (Mitchell 45). The cultural landscape that exists in Humboldt County is malleable, changeable, and most importantly, tangible, in the form of land and the visible and invisible structures acting on it that can be removed, transferred to new ownership, and protected from exploitation. By focusing on landscapes, the Wiyot can move beyond what Tuck and Yang call, "settler moves to innocence," that is, attaining results that do not just "turn decolonization into a metaphor," such as "decolonizing" language in the classroom (Tuck & Yang 1, 3). As Fanon describes, what is needed on the landscape is a "change in the order of the world" to alter power-relations (Fanon 35). For the Wiyot and other Indigenous people to



flourish, oppressive settler-colonial structures must be removed, and land returned (Cantrell, Hernandez, “Decolonization”).

### Education and settler support for decolonization

The final point of process to illuminate why the Humboldt settler community increasingly support the Wiyot in decolonization efforts is the one that I cannot emphasize enough: *education*. As alluded to earlier, it is not only a long-term strategy to gain support for decolonization, it is the result. How does this occur? I have cited three cases, as well as, interview data, to reveal a loop-like pattern of education – decrease in settler resistance – education. Like a snowball, each time the Wiyot or another Indigenous group scores a victory, and settler awareness and knowledge of Indigenous people’s history and suffering grow, it becomes that much easier for the Wiyot to pursue further decolonization efforts (Cantrell, Hernandez, “Decolonization”). This research indicates a direct link between decolonization activity and settler resistance, illuminating critical points that support the case for a focus on education in decolonization process improvements.

The interview data suggests that both the McKinley statue removal and Tulawat return efforts generated a public discourse that raised settler awareness of the genocidal history of the beautiful area they live in, helping to *present* the Wiyot on the settlers’ cultural landscape and in their minds. The fact that most interviewees acquired knowledge of the plight and history of the Wiyot and other Indigenous people in Humboldt County from following this discourse is vital to understanding changing settler attitudes toward confronting settler colonialism and the legacy of genocide.

For example, before the Eureka City Council agreed to return most of Tulawat back to the Wiyot Tribe, the Eureka Mayor Frank Jager, (a grandfather of two Wiyot girls) drafted a formal letter of apology to the Wiyot that directly blamed the citizens of Eureka for the massacre, however after legal review by the city, the portion regarding culpability was removed for unfounded liability reasons (Greenson, “Island”). The letter and the sentiment were not lost on the community and after public pushback and elections that changed the makeup of the Eureka City Council in 2018, the city’s attitude changed (Greenson, “Island”). The Council asked the Wiyot Tribe what they could do as new council members to help improve relations. The answer was consistent: "Give us back the island” (Greenson, “Island”).

In a symbolic act, the former Mayor of the City of Eureka, Frank Jager, read the original letter aloud and affirmed support for the language contained within it, part of a public ceremony that honored a much more tangible form of decolonization, the return of the island on October 21, 2019. Former Wiyot Tribal Administrator Maura Eastman explained how education made the difference, stating, “We would talk to people and share what we were trying to do, and everyone was so supportive. The support just grew, and people were behind us. That made all the difference” (EPA).

Opposition was muted to the land transfer, except for the outspoken criticism of a prominent real estate investor who threatened to challenge it in court. The investor, Rob Arkley, argued that since the city owned the land, it was illegal to give the island to the Wiyot. Instead, he argued in July of 2017 that the city should offer the island for public sale or convert it to a community park, stating, “they want to give away Indian Island to

the Wiyots. Well, I use Indian Island. I like it. My kids do. We're giving it away to the natives! We already gave them one thing. Now we're giving them another?" (Burns, "Arkely" 1-2). Such a disposition would have ignored the Wiyot's long-standing desire to return their sacred land and once again foregrounded the needs of settlers on their most sacred site of all – Tulawat. As the interview data reveals, many settlers know what happened there and want to fix it, having learned about those horrors from The Wiyot's persistent efforts to return the island. Public condemnation of Arkley's comments was swift and overwhelmingly in support of the Wiyot's position to return it (Cresswell).

Another example is the swift settler reaction to the Terra-Gen project in 2019. Unlike the many years spent achieving victory in previous efforts, settler solidarity and support at Humboldt County Supervisor meetings for the Wiyot was swift and overwhelming from the beginning, standing against the wind energy project (Hernandez, "Decolonization;" (LoCO Staff). A supporter of the project tried to minimize the Wiyot's claim in the final contentious Humboldt County Board of Supervisor's Meeting on December 17, 2019 to vote on the projects, asking, "Is all land sacred or just the land they seek to control" (LoCO Staff)? Her comments prompted angry cries from the crowd, including charges of racism and shameful behavior. The settlers stood up to protect Wiyot land as the measure was voted down that evening (LoCO Staff).

These cases clearly link education to decolonization. In addition, settler interview data reveals a link between education level (college vs. high school), understandings of history, and support for decolonization of Wiyot land. Thus, the much slower, but equally important work of formally educating settlers, such as Cantrell's work in local schools as

a Wiyot historian, should also be taken as an important lesson in process with the hope and expectation that future generations will more robustly support tangible forms of decolonization.

Finally, this work is difficult but there is a historically informed, moral (and arguably, legal) imperative for settlers to support the Wiyot in the decolonization of the Humboldt County cultural landscape, built on stolen land. Resistance among settlers remains due to identity issues, economic forces, time passed, and a cultural landscape that reinforces settler-colonial narratives. Large scale decolonization efforts have not been successful (proved by the persistence of the settler-colonial landscape) but successful efforts at local, small scales to slowly decolonize the landscape and influence settlers have. These efforts have met resistance but in each case education, direct petition to government (or the voters, which may be more effective and is possible in California), and persistence by coalitions of settlers and Indigenous people to decolonize landscapes have been highly successful strategies. Each effort is an opportunity to educate settlers about past, withering resistance decolonization activity. Each effort teaches the activist community about effective process. Ted Hernandez summarized the Wiyot's processes well: "It's going straight to the source, the governing body. It's working with and networking with the community. We changed minds about us and stood together" (Hernandez, "Decolonization").

The successful processes I have observed and identified are part of an exciting beginning, on a long road to ending settler-colonial oppression of Indigenous people in Humboldt County. The formula of long-term, local, persistent, Indigenous-led, settler

supported action to educate communities and transform the cultural landscape should continue to be employed, refined, and improved. Profound changes have yet to be realized, however, the swift community reaction to the Terra Gen project's threat to Wiyot land provides evidence of increased decolonization momentum and the potential for process improvements.

## CONCLUSION

Given the successes the Wiyot have achieved, including greater settler support for decolonization, what lies ahead in the future? California Governor Gavin Newsom's speech acknowledging genocide in June of 2019 marked a shift in state discourse about settler colonialism in California (Cowan). Newsom was not shy about reading state documents detailing the same officially sanctioned and supported crimes I have described here (Cowan). This encouraging sign from the state that once had decided to murder its Indigenous population may yield the kind of future decolonization that increasingly, meaningfully ensures the Wiyot culture will thrive.

There are more exciting projects on the horizon for the Wiyot. Some settler groups have created innovative ways to acknowledge their occupation of Wiyot land, such as the Humboldt Green Party's Wiyot Honor Tax, which shares party funds with the Wiyot Tribe (Pitino). Driven by past successes and appreciation for their Indigenous neighbors, they are partnering with the Wiyot to pursue new decolonization initiatives, such as the altering of additional settler-colonial structures on the cultural landscape. Both the campuses of Humboldt State University and the nearby, College of the Redwoods rest on Wiyot land. Working with students and administration, the Wiyot have begun the process of altering buildings and official seals at these sites to reflect the Wiyot language, Soulátluk (Hernandez, "Decolonization"). The Arcata City Council has been actively discussing what to replace the McKinley statue with, with an exciting consideration to create an open space with a ground mosaic of Wiyot design (Pitino).

Land return is the only acceptable, ultimate solution to land theft in Humboldt County, but these incremental steps hold promise as steps toward that goal (Cantrell).

Can this activity be replicated elsewhere? Could the process model of constant, direct pressure on local government by Indigenous-led coalitions of residents make a difference in other places where settler colonialism and genocide have occurred? Yes, if the scale is just that: local. The status quo of decolonization in the past often focused on huge organizations, launching unsustainable movements that seldom achieved tangible goals (brown 52). Instead, adrienne maree brown argues to transform the world, one must transform oneself first, that is, start small (brown 53). In other words, “what we practice at the small scale sets the patterns for the whole system (brown 53). By replicating this process model at similar, local scales elsewhere, activists engage in a “fractal” strategy, cloning a successful process models so many times, they moves upscale to more greatly affect the settler-colonial paradigm, decolonizing in more widespread ways, such as state or national legislation (brown 50-53).

Across North America, Indigenous people are both struggling with the implications of settler colonialism, such as continuing threats to their land and sovereignty, and successfully fighting against them. The 2016 Dakota Access pipeline protests, where local Sioux activists, supported by settlers, directly engaged a corporation determined to risk the safety of their water supply (Levin). While initially defeated on the ground, their activism shed a bright public spotlight on the plight of Indigenous people in

the United States, creating public discourse about this injustice (Levin).<sup>19</sup> One of many such demonstrations around the United States and Canada, the resistance to settler-colonial exploitation of Indigenous people is growing and there are increasing calls for the recognition of past settler crimes. Perhaps there is room for more study on how to reach tangible solutions to the oppression of Indigenous people by applying what the Wiyot and their settler neighbors have already learned in Humboldt County so that Indigenous people and settlers everywhere can move forward together as healthy communities.

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<sup>19</sup> On July 6, 2020, in a victory for Indigenous people, a Federal judge ordered the shutdown and environmental review of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) after determining its construction fell short of environmental standards. As of the time of this thesis publication (late July 2020), the owning corporation, Energy Transfer LP, refuses to abide by the order, citing a lack of jurisdiction by the court over its operations (Adams; Dakota Access Pipeline).



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## APPENDIX A

Figure 3. Settler cultural identification

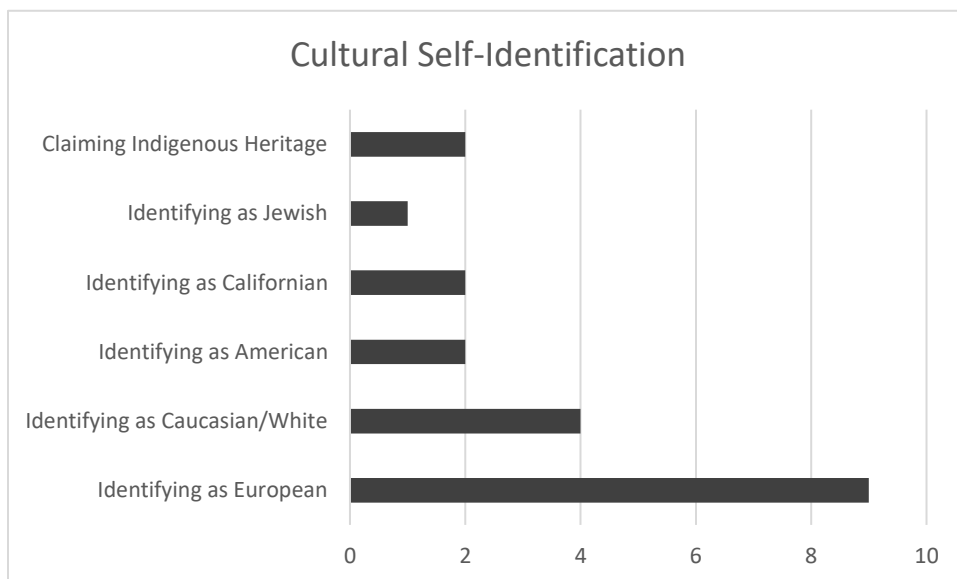


Figure 4. Settler education

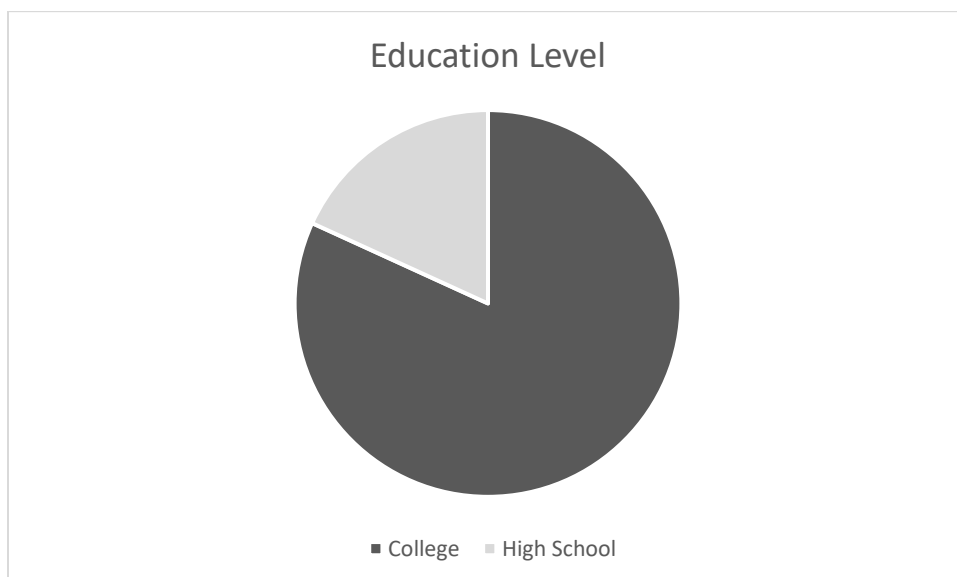




Figure 5. Settler case knowledge



Figure 6. Settler understandings of settler colonialism

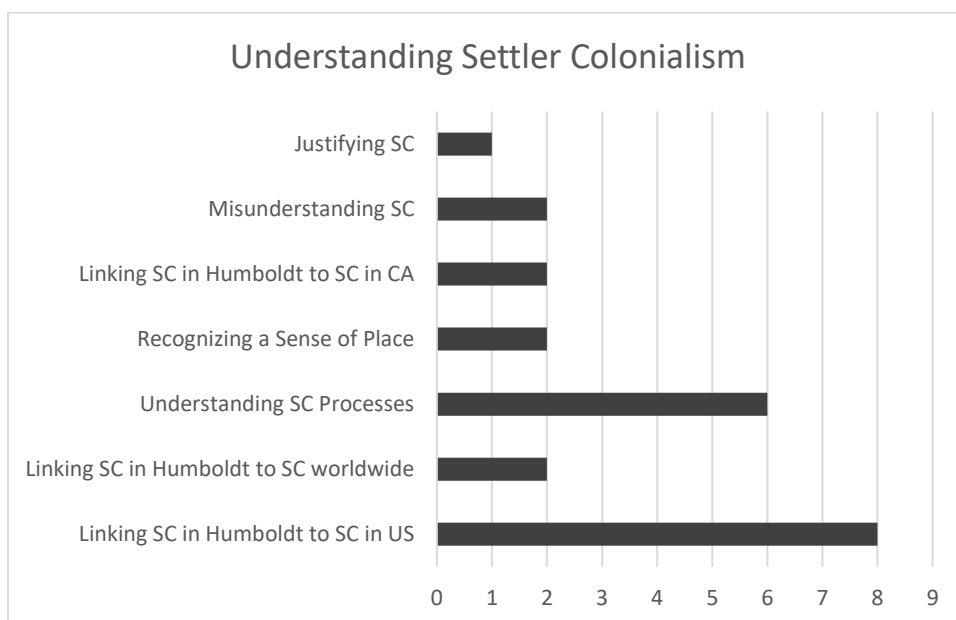


Figure 7. Settler framings of settler colonialism

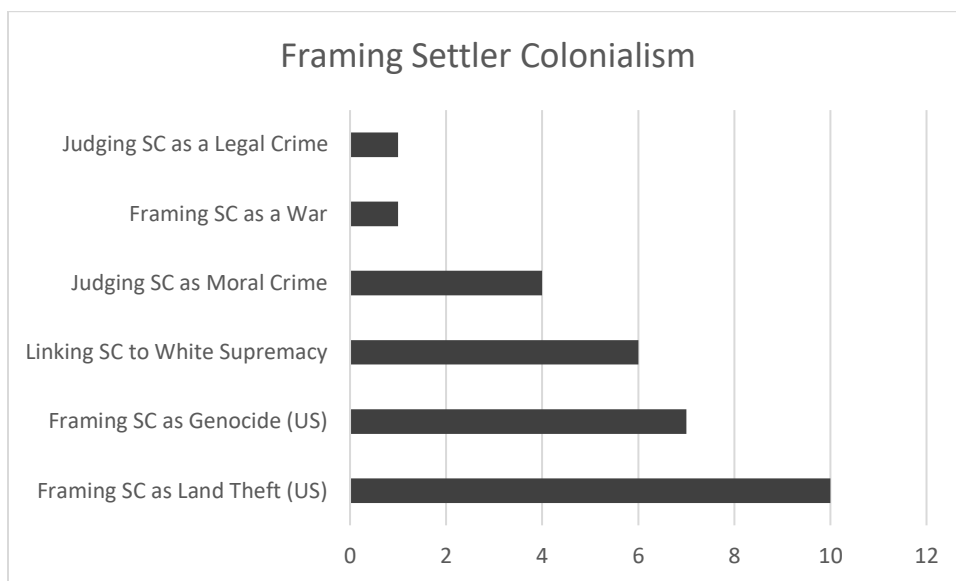


Figure 8. Settler perceptions of William F. McKinley

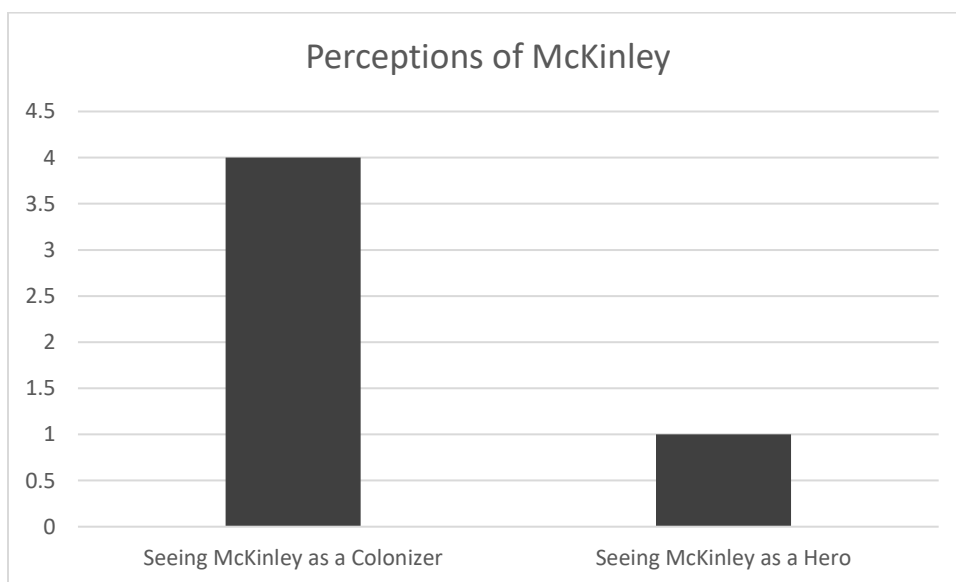


Figure 9. Settler attitudes toward Indigenous people

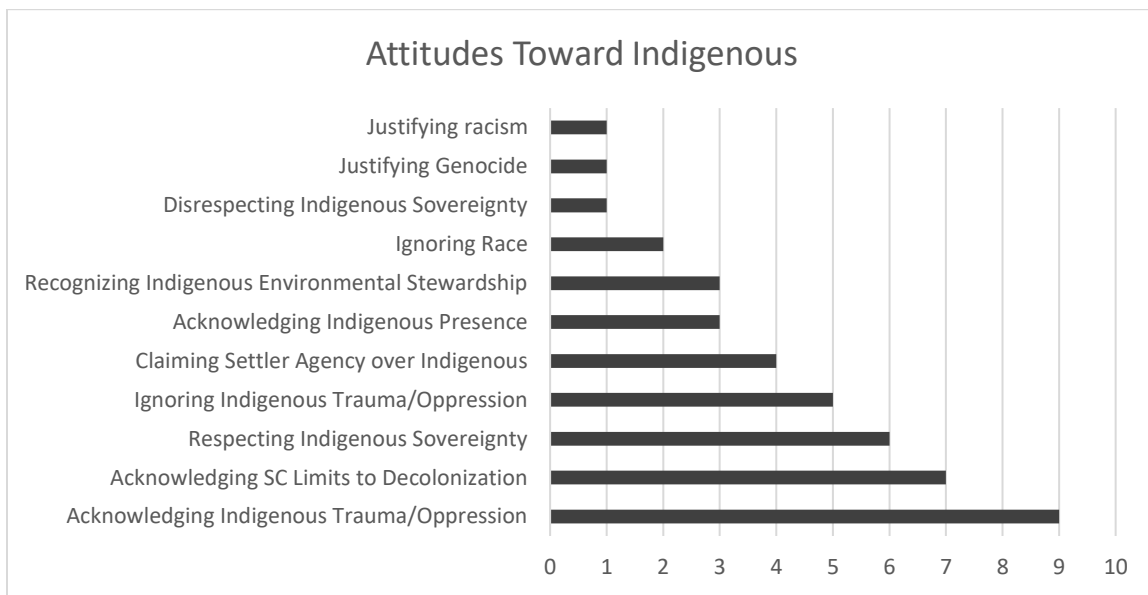


Figure 10. Settler support for McKinley statue removal

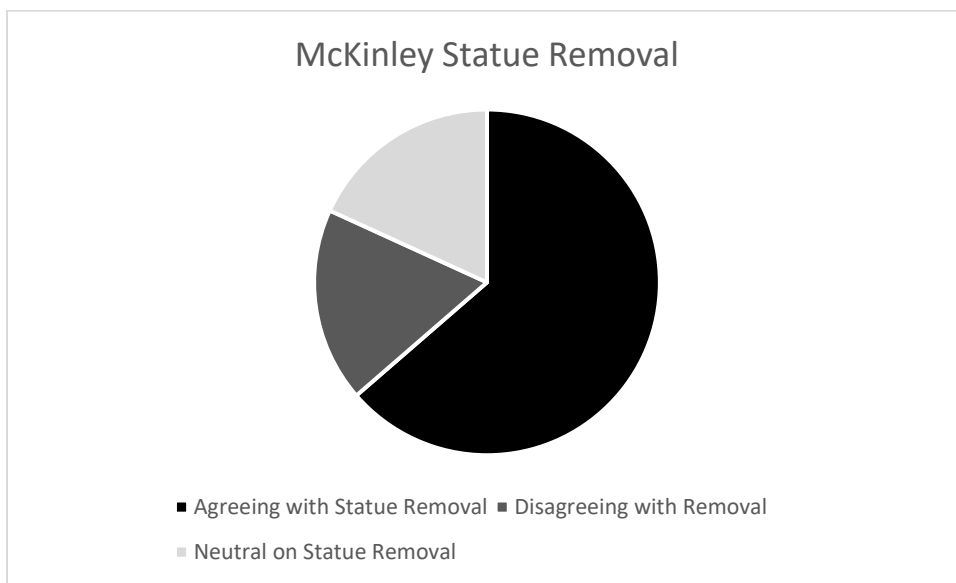


Figure 11. Settler support for decolonization

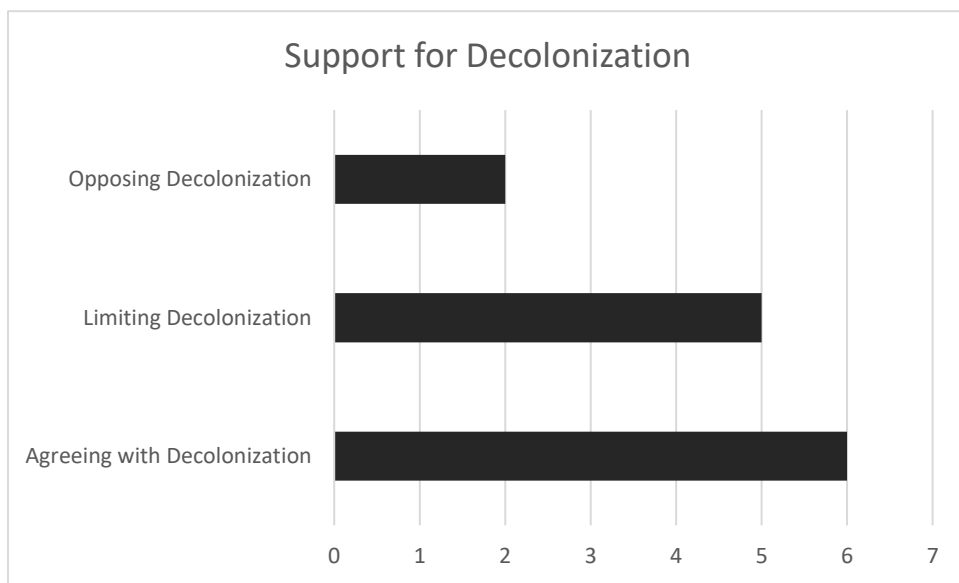


Figure 12. Settler support for the return of Tulawat

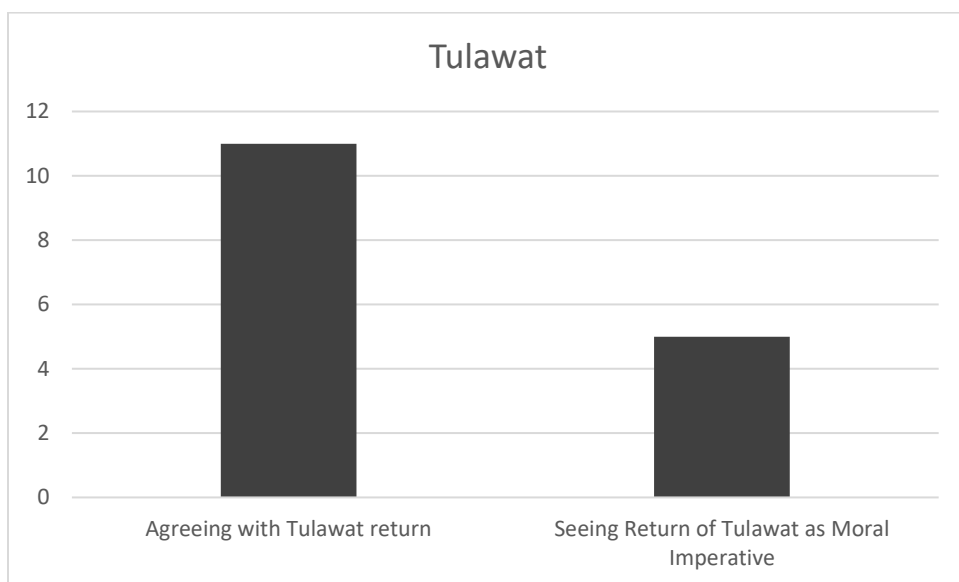
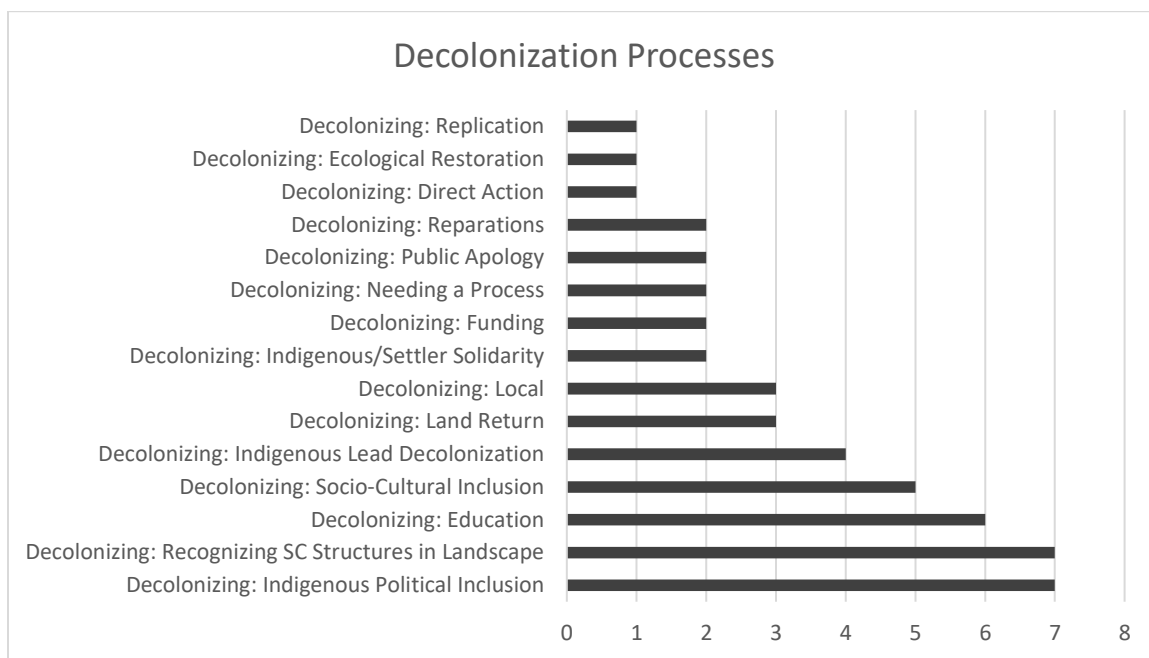


Figure 13. Settler ideas of decolonization



## APPENDIX B

## Settler Interview Questions

- 1) What is your age?
- 2) How long have you lived in Humboldt County?
- 3) What is your occupation?
- 4) What is your educational background?
- 5) How would you describe your cultural heritage and recent ancestry?
- 6) What do you know about the controversial issue of removing the statue of former President William McKinley from the Arcata Plaza?
- 7) Do you agree with the voters' decision to remove the statue?
- 8) What is it that makes you agree or disagree?
- 9) What do you know about the Eureka City Council's decision to return most of "Indian Island" or Tulawat to the Wiyot Tribe?
- 10) Do you agree with the Eureka City Council's decision?
- 11) What is it that makes you agree or disagree?
- 12) What do you know about relations between Native Americans and White people in Humboldt County since "settlers" first arrived?
- 13) What do you know about the history of relations between Native Americans and White people in the United States?
- 14) What does the term "colonialism" mean to you?

- 15) What does colonialism look like in Humboldt County?
- 16) Do you agree that steps should be taken to confront colonialism in Humboldt County?
- 17) What is it that makes you agree or disagree?
- 18) \*If you agree, what should be the next steps to confront colonialism?

### Interview Questions for Wiyot

What is your age?

2. What is your occupation?
3. What is your educational background?
4. How long have you lived in Humboldt County?
5. What is your understanding of what happened between the Wiyot and White people when settlers arrived in this area in the mid-19th century?
6. How does the legacy of those events affect relations between the Wiyot and White people in Humboldt County?
7. How can that legacy be undone to correct past and present injustices?
8. How do you see relations improving between Native Americans and White people?

\*\*I ask the following questions as a White settler myself, fully aware of my own positionality and epistemology. I frame these questions in terms of a double-movement settler-colonial/decolonization paradigm\*\*

1. What questions do you have for White people in Humboldt County about what happened between the Wiyot and White people when settlers arrived in this area in the mid-19th century?
2. What questions do you have for White people in Humboldt County about steps toward undoing the legacy of those events (decolonization) to correct past and present injustices?



## APPENDIX C

## A Communal Experience: The Wiyot before Setter-Colonial Invasion

According to the important Hupa-Cherokee author Jack Norton's book on the genocide of Humboldt's Indigenous peoples, the world that existed for Humboldt's Indigenous peoples before white settlement was a sustainable, communal one (Norton 26-32). A beautiful, rugged seacoast featured lush, ancient redwood forests, rolling, open prairies, and rich, tidal wetlands that dominated the Wiyot's physical landscape (Norton 1; Widick xiii-xix). The mild climate and coastal ecosystem produced an abundance of game such as elk, deer, eels, abalone, and plentiful fish species such as salmon, a staple protein of Humboldt's Indigenous peoples that sustained them not only physically, but culturally (Norton 1-11). The Wiyot and other tribes harvested meadow grasses to craft elaborate baskets, seashells for making beads and redwood for plank houses (Norton 11, 15).

Historical records contradict settlers' discourse that claimed the north coast's Indigenous tribes were child-like "savages" (Elliot 45; Norton 37). For example, up to 100 complex languages, classified into five different language groups, were spoken by California tribes before white settlement (Madley 23). As Norton exhorts, "This was not a primitive world" (Norton 37). The abundance was not guaranteed for the Wiyot. California's Indigenous people maximized the environment's supply of products by modifying and altering landscapes through techniques like setting fires to clear

undergrowth and promote open spaces for game (Madley 18). The ingenious survival practices of Indigenous people were informed by a deep sense of spirituality and cooperation and religion were central to traditional north coast Indigenous culture, forming the basis for tribal unity and community (Norton 25-28). For example, like other local tribes, the Wiyot's tradition of the World Renewal Ceremony addresses the human failures that necessitate a re-balancing of the world and universe. California tribes such as the Wiyot, Hupa, Karuk, and Yurok have been in North America for well over ten thousand years but their traditional beliefs tell of their original ascension from the "center of the universe" or centers of the world" (Norton 3; Wiyot 2013). The mores, customs, and sacred ceremonies of the people revolve around this view as the people were not merely on the land, but *of* the land, sustained by a Creator (Norton 3). These sacred places, like Tulawat, serve not only as a spiritual force but as a geographical locator of that territory (Norton 25; Wiyot 2013). It is in these sacred places that tribes dance in ceremony, balancing the earth to ensure food, honor, health, strength, luck, and happiness (Norton 32). As Norton describes, "Their society and lands held them together. They were of the land, sustained upon it by a Creator who had walked their earth, one who had laid out its valleys, riffles, and ridges, and finally instructed them in the ways of life" (Norton 3).

To survive on the land the Creator gave them, and embracing the notion that the Earth would provide abundant food for all, the North Coast's Indigenous people worked out systems of cooperation with each other for the harvesting of the periodically recurring and bountiful supplies of salmon that would visit them each year (House 59-61; Norton

9). They took care when and where to construct dams to ensure those tribal groups upstream would have access to their fair share (House 59-61; Norton 9). Each group had respected areas for hunting and gathering, utilizing medicinal plants, acorns, pine nuts, venison, grasses, salt, etc. and participated in a far-reaching, sophisticated system of barter and currency for the trading of these and other commodities (Madley 23). Coastal groups like the Wiyot and Yurok traded items such as grasses and abalone to the inland Hupa, Wintu, and Shasta, who in turn supplied items such as venison and acorns (Norton 11). Indigenous tribes also used currency in the form of seashells (dentalia) of various values (Madley 23). The Wiyot enjoyed a vibrant economy, but as Norton explains, with vastly different social and cultural norms compared to the white invaders (Norton 7). Prestige in Humboldt's Indigenous societies came with exercising "good judgment, communal interest, and dedication to the mores and customs of the tribe" (Norton 7). Honor, wealth, and respect were not solely dependent upon social status, nor could they be gained by the individual's exploitation of others in a communal society (Norton 9). There was no exploitative capitalism here (Norton 11).

There was no "state" either. The Wiyot did not have a strong, central government with police and courts to mitigate conflicts (Norton 25-26). A communal set of social "mores, customs, and sacred ceremonies," rooted in morals and ethics, was used to apply order (Norton 26). Internal disputes were mediated by a headman and compensation was paid till all parties felt respected (Norton 26-28). The people understood that proper, reciprocated behavior was key to the community's survival goals (Norton 26-28). The purpose of this communal society was to support the individual within an integrated

existence with the group and the environment, for example, social roles were well understood, yet women had full equality (Norton 28-32). Conflict among tribes was rare and competitions over tribal identities almost non-existent, as was competition for food which was abundant in Humboldt (Norton 9). Disputes with other tribes did occur, but retaliation through warfare was typically not a driving factor, rather, compensation for some insult or grievance was (Fort Humboldt). These were not martial societies, nor was warfare central to the lives of California's Indigenous people (Madley 2). Instead, mediation and compensation were used to solve conflicts (Fort Humboldt).