Bitter legacies: a *war of extermination*, grave looting, and culture wars in the American West¹

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And so they are ever returning to us, the dead.

(W. G. Sebald, 1993)

I don't think we ought to focus on the past.

(Ronald Reagan, Bitburg Cemetery, 1985)

Let not your sorrow die, though I am dead.

(Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*)

In 2012, the 'Corpses of mass violence and genocide' annual conference turned a critical eye on *agents of injustice* and asked, what do practices of *mass destruction* tell us about larger political, social, and cultural issues? At the 2013 conference, we asked, what do practices of *exhumation* of victims of mass destruction tell us about larger political, social, and cultural issues? What does it mean to turn a critical eye on *agents of justice*, on *ourselves*?

Introduction

I have lived in the United States, mostly in Berkeley, since I left Manchester, UK, in 1963. And for almost forty of those years I have been lucky to own a share of a vacation cabin in northwest California in a wondrous place called Big Lagoon, a coastal village surrounded by ocean, lagoon, and forest. The area is typically described in tourist

guides as having a 'wilderness feeling', a pristine place 'where you can connect with Nature'.²

My relationship with this place was always associated with life – with renewal, restoration, and revival – until my forty-year-old son Daniel died in 2006, leaving a request for a 'Viking funeral' at Big Lagoon. After his death and spectacular send-off, my relationship with Big Lagoon changed, as did my research and pedagogical interests.³ I know from personal experience how death can transform the meaning of a place, its historical and cultural associations. (Does anybody remember that lovely pre-1933 resort and artists' centre in Germany known as Dachau?)

I started reading up on Native American, especially the local Yurok, death ceremonies, and quickly realized that our ceremony for Daniel reflected a 'promiscuity between the living and the dead' that has a long history in funerary practices around the world.⁴ I also came across a brief reference in a technical archaeological report to the allegation that in the 1930s local collectors had dug up Yurok graves in Big Lagoon (about a quarter of a mile from our cabin) and taken away their contents, body parts and all.

This was news to me. My son's farewell on my mind, I felt compelled to take action, helping to organize a Coalition to Protect Yurok Cultural Legacies at O-Pyuweg (Big Lagoon) and, later, investigating the practices and politics of archaeological exhumations. To carry out this research, I had to leave the rural quiet of Big Lagoon and travel to museums in New York, Washington, DC, and Europe, and delve into long-forgotten archives, shuttered cabinets, and basements stacked with human remains.

The focus of this chapter is the exhumation of Native American gravesites in the American West in the twentieth century. But to understand this history's bitter legacies requires a larger context and backstory, one in which archaeological-scientific abuse was one of three interrelated catastrophes that indigenous people experienced.

Catastrophe one: destruction

The Native people of what became California lived for thousands of years in decentralized, but by no means provincial 'tribelets', speaking a variety of languages, living relatively good and long lives. Then, to use Yurok imagery, it was 'the time when stars fell' and the world lost its balance.

The 'grisly statistics' tell the story of changes in California's indigenous population over a period of about 150 years. From, minimally, 300,000 in 1769, to 200,000 in 1821 under Spanish occupation (1769–1834), to 30,000 in the 1850s under American rule, to a nadir of about 15,000 in the 1900s.⁵ It is a decline of well over 90 per cent, comparable to that of Tutsis under the Hutu regime, albeit over a much longer period of time.⁶

There is a tendency to divide what happened in the West into two master narratives: one emphasizes the unfortunate, unintentional result of diseases that shredded Native immune systems from the late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries throughout the Americas, what Tom Bender refers to as 'the greatest human demographic disaster in the historical record'.⁷ The other narrative emphasizes the role of human agency in population reduction in the second half of the nineteenth century, variously attributed to policies of 'extermination', the discovery of lucrative natural resources (gold and lumber in California), and malign neglect.

Scholars generally agree (with a few dissenters) that what happened under American rule in California meets the standards of the United Nations post-Second World War definition of 'genocide'.⁸ In the early 1940s, historian John Caughey used the term 'heartless liquidation',⁹ while demographer Sherburne Cook preferred 'social homicide'.¹⁰ More recently, novelist Larry McMurtry puts it colloquially: 'During the Gold Rush, exterminationists were thick on the ground. Indians were killed as casually as rabbits'.¹¹

Following the suggestion of Elissa Mailänder, 'destruction' might be a better, more general, and less legalistic term to describe what happened to the Indians of California because their demise involved everything from massacres to psychological torture and starvation, 'fast as well as stealthy and slow killings'.¹²

I think it is useful to understand Native deaths resulting from disease and malice as interrelated, just as Holocaust scholars regard the estimated 20 per cent of Jews who died in the camps from malnutrition and exhaustion as victims of genocide.¹³ No doubt Spanish and American colonialisms had their own particular regimes of domination, but it is helpful to take the long view that the period from the mid-eighteenth to late nineteenth centuries is interconnected and part of the 'violent process of nation-making' occurring worldwide.¹⁴ The loss of life under Spanish colonialism in what is now central and southern California was driven by contagious diseases, but the mission system was authoritarian and brutal, marked by 'the sight of men and women in irons, the sound of the whip, the misery of the

Indians'.¹⁵ The susceptibility to disease was facilitated by policies that removed Indians from their land, banished their cultural traditions, disrupted familial relations, and tried to replace long-standing ways of understanding the world with Catholic dogma.¹⁶

The missionaries gave the neophytes a short course in Christianity before converting them *en masse*. But when they died *en masse*, they received burials fit for savages, not Christians: they are stacked ten and more deep in anonymous pits underneath the grounds and iconic buildings of one of California's leading tourist attractions, its missions. 'We don't know the exact location of their burial', says a guide at Mission Dolores in San Francisco, referring to 11,000 mostly Ohlone corpses.¹⁷ I am reminded of a witness to the genocide of Armenians in Turkey in 1916 who reported that the dead were 'past counting'.¹⁸

In February 2012, I accompanied Louise J. Miranda Ramirez, tribal chairwoman of the Ohlone/Costanoan-Esselen Nation, as she conducted a blessing over the 'graves of the ancestors' in the cemetery behind the basilica at the famous Carmel Mission. As I followed her around the small symbolic cemetery, she studied the ground carefully, stooping every few minutes to pick up items from the ground. 'Look', she says, 'these are human bones dug up by gophers. I've asked them to bring in soil and cover the graves with some protection, but they don't do anything.' It was hard for me to look at the pieces of human remains. Ramirez was almost matter-of-fact. 'I do this every time I come here, every time'.¹⁹

Under the American regime, many thousands died as the result of an organized, politically endorsed 'war of extermination', via what California Governor Peter Burnett called 'the irregular mode of warfare'.²⁰ In one county alone, between 1850 and 1864, fifty-six massacres of Native people occurred.²¹ Burnett recognized, albeit with 'personal regret', that such a war 'must be expected'. Certainly there was guerrilla-style resistance in the rugged northwest, but Native fighters were no match for the sudden influx of hundreds of thousands of miners and settlers, backed up by greed, a sense of entitlement, and armed militias.

Many (maybe as many as half) Native people in California also died from malnutrition, disease, and psychological despair. Between 1850 and 1950, Yurok life expectancy halved.²² A decade of post-Gold Rush massacres, bounty hunting, indenture and debt peonage, impoverished misery, kidnapping and selling of children as servants, agricultural workers and maids, was followed by concentration in penal colonies or 'reservations', and systematic efforts at cultural

annihilation by so-called 'Friends of the Indian'.²³ As Richard Pratt told a social work conference in 1892, 'All the Indian there is in the race should be dead. ... Kill the Indian in him, and save the man.'

What happened to the Native populations of California was similar to what happened in many places to other self-sufficient, pre-capitalist rural communities, but worse because destruction rather than assimilation was the prevailing mode of conquest. 'Their story', observes Albert Hurtado, 'shows clearly the human costs of bringing California into the ambit of the modern world economic system'.²⁴

Agents of modernization not only destroyed and reorganized what was left of Native communities. They also dug up their graves and appropriated their dead.

Catastrophe two: exhumation and looting

Between the late eighteenth and mid-twentieth century in the United States, Native remains were taken from graves without familial or tribal permission and transported to museums, universities, laboratories, and private collections. This harvesting of corpses in the name of science, education, collecting, and sport was especially prevalent in California in the twentieth century, coinciding with the rise of professional anthropology and the expansion of public museums, and facilitated by the fact that decimated and defeated Native communities on the west coast were unable to protect their ancient village sites.

Unauthorized exhumation was not an exclusively American phenomenon. In the 1830s, British scientists brought back Tasmanian Aborigine corpses to London. Hundreds, possibly thousands of Aboriginal remains from Australia ended up in universities and collections in England and Scotland.²⁵ Dutch colonists sent the head of an Ahanta king in Ghana back to the Netherlands in 1838, where it was kept at Leiden University's Medical Centre until repatriation in 2009.²⁶ By the end of the nineteenth century, there were perhaps 300 Maori preserved heads in collections around the world.²⁷ Similarly, in the 1900s German scientists removed hundreds of Herero Namibian remains from southwest Africa for research in Berlin.²⁸ But the scope and volume of the practice in the United States was unprecedented.

Between the 1780s, when Thomas Jefferson excavated a thousand human remains near his home in Virginia, and the 1960s, when the Red Power movement successfully challenged the right of archaeologists and scientists to treat their dead as specimens, between 600,000

and 1 million Native grave sites were excavated. We will never know the exact number, but I do not think 1 million is an unreasonable estimate.²⁹

The looting of graves was linked to the rise of the modern museum and scientific curiosity about human origins and human differences. Initially, exhumation was motivated by the search for rare Native artefacts, a global enterprise generated first by international military operations. George Vancouver's Pacific expedition (1790–95) had several collectors on board, including George Hewett, whose Yurok collection eventually ended up in the British Museum. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the trade in collectibles was led by wealthy patrons of the arts who financed a frenzy of collecting. As the market for Native artefacts boomed worldwide, entrepreneurial traders, ambitious anthropology departments, local museums, amateur archaeologists, hobbyists, and 'pothunters' joined the hunt.³⁰

Most artefacts were acquired through trade, but in places such as California, where Native survivors were desperate for basic necessities, anthropologists and collectors rarely paid market value. The distinguished, liberal, Berkeley anthropologist Alfred Kroeber had no compunction about trying to hustle Native men twice his age or dismissing their desire to preserve their past. 'The intrinsic value of an old house', he instructed his staff in 1909, 'is practically nothing these days, and the people are attached to them chiefly for sentimental reasons.'³¹

The artefacts removed from graves or bought cheap from impoverished tribes ended up in private collections and public display cases around the world, from Moscow to San Francisco, as museums competed to accumulate 'a kind of Noah's ark collection, two from each area, two of each type'.³² Researchers and scientists were unable to keep up with the avalanche of materials that filled up the basements and display cases of museums.³³

By the mid-nineteenth century, there was also a brisk trade in Native body parts, propelled by the popularity of commercial and recreational collecting, scientific curiosity, and the heritage industry.³⁴ Scientists in universities and museums joined the hunt in the hope that Native bodies would shed light on the origins of the species or on racial typologies of human difference. They were particularly interested in the bodies of Indians, who, they believed, had been metaphorically frozen in time since the Stone Age, and whose remains therefore were thought to hold the key to 'secrets of human origins', as well as provide physical evidence for claims about European superiority and Native degeneracy. This perspective

was anchored in the scientific racism that dominated American eugenics.³⁵

In widely read treatises – such as Samuel Morton's *Crania America* (1839), Ales Hrdlicka's *Directions for Collecting Information and Specimens for Physical Anthropology* (1904), and Edward Gifford's *California Anthropometry* (1926) – the measurement of brain cavities, nostrils, and degree of slope in foreheads generated all kinds of essentialist scientific quackery to justify the civilizational superiority of white Europeans and innate inferiority of Native peoples.³⁶ Morton, Hrdlicka, and Gifford encouraged amateur archaeologists to dig up graves and send them any remains they discovered. 'The fresher the product, the better', wrote Hrdlicka in his 1904 manual.

There has been a tendency in popular and scientific literature to blame 'local pothunters' for the desecration of sacred lands for fun and self-aggrandisement, but the responsibility for ignoring the long-time record of Native opposition to excavations, for profiting off sorrows, for suspending human needs in the name of science, and for crass insensitivity can be distributed among a wide array of respectable individuals and established institutions.

There were three primary groups involved in excavations of graves: local collectors – many of whom considered themselves self-educated archaeologists contributing to scientific knowledge – who were involved as traders and hobbyists; teachers and museum curators, who encouraged sales and donations of ceremonial artefacts to build up collections for educational purposes; and academic researchers, whose surveys and digs in Indian country were important to the development of academic anthropology.

An important distinction, however, must be made between the people who conducted the excavations and nationally celebrated patrons of culture with big pockets and large egos, men and women such as George Gustav Heye, Collis Huntington, and Phoebe Hearst, who imagined themselves to be making and not just collecting history. Heye, a New York banker, acquired the largest number of Native American artefacts collected by a single person – 800,000 items, enough to fill his own museum in 1919. Heye commissioned expeditions around the world, paid dealers to look out for rare grave goods, and bought up collections from regional collectors.³⁷

While the removal of Native human remains from gravesites was done in the name of Science – to explain the origins of the species or to identify racial differences among 'civilizations' or to account for the apparent 'natural' demise of Native peoples – the overwhelming majority of exhumations violated the most basic

scientific procedures (not to mention prevailing ethical and legal standards regarding burials). The provenience of Native corpses was for the most part not documented; body parts were routinely mixed together; and corpses were never identified by name. Moreover, scientists harvested far more corpses than they could ever study. Tens of thousands of Native dead were stashed in boxes, cellars, and personal collections, only to be resurrected for display in cabinets of curiosities, museums, schools, and international expositions.

In California, a skull collected on Santa Rosa Island was included in the US exhibition at the Columbian Historical Exposition in Madrid in 1892. In the 1920s and 1930s, Ralph Glidden, a self-styled archaeologist, filled and decorated the Catalina Museum of Island Indians with hundreds of crania and bones taken from Tongva and other graves.³⁸ By 1948, Berkeley was boasting to *Life* magazine that its Native American collection included 'more than 10,000 Indian skeletons, many of them complete'. A full-page photograph depicted a room full of human remains and a graduate student using a 'craniometer to measure an ancient Indian skull'. A colleague recalls seeing human bones displayed on the Berkeley campus in the landmark Campanile in the early 1960s. To this day, the Favell Museum in Klamath Falls, Oregon, proudly displays Native artefacts looted from graves.³⁹

Acknowledgment of crimes against humanity and the repatriation of corpses and artefacts was a central demand of the American Indian movement for more than a hundred years. This struggle culminated in the passage in 1990 of a significant piece of national legislation, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), which set up a process for returning human remains and grave goods to officially recognized tribes. While the legislation fundamentally changed relations between governments, museums, universities, and tribes, after twenty-three years in force less than 5 per cent of human remains has been repatriated and NAGPRA is stuck in bureaucratic wrangling and recriminations.

The University of California is the main repository of Native remains in the Far West. Here too repatriation is stalled. The Davis campus retains more than 90 per cent of its collection.⁴⁰ 'There are more dead Indians on the Davis campus than alive', says a Native American activist working on a film about the Anthropology Department's morgue.⁴¹ As of June 2013, Berkeley had repatriated only 315 of its 10,000 remains. Why so little progress?

First, the process is slow and expensive, as claimants must make their ponderous way through institutional committees. The legal

burden is on tribes to prove provenience and provenance. Secondly, tribes unrecognized by the federal government until recently had no legal right to make a direct claim. Thirdly, some university scientists, concerned about losing samples that might reveal new findings in the future, are making it difficult for their institutions to comply with NAGPRA. Finally, and most significantly, as a result of unscientific methods of work, the majority of exhumed remains are unidentifiable as to origins or tribal affiliation.

From the perspective of Native Americans, there is also considerable ambivalence in pursuing repatriation of corpses. For many elders, the remains are now spiritually as well as physically contaminated. Yurok funeral rites, for example, ensured that the dead did not contaminate the living. Once the dead were buried, the survivors urged their spirits to find a resting place, never to return. Exhumation violates the journey from life to death. There is also a quandary about where reburial should take place, given that the original burial sites are often unknown or on land that is no longer owned or controlled by Native communities.

There are no easy solutions to this impasse, but museums and universities could begin a process of reconciliation by interrogating their past involvement in the looting of graves, issuing formal public apologies for decades of malpractice, accelerating the repatriation process, and offering land or compensation for reburials.

Meanwhile, the genocidal and archaeological past weighs heavily on the present here and now, aggravated by a cultural cover-up that promotes silence, amnesia, and fanciful narratives of History.

Catastrophe three: cultural cover-up

The catastrophes that struck Native communities in California were well known and publicized in the late nineteenth century. Reformers who advocated cultural over physical destruction spoke out against the 'sin' of the 'brutal treatment of the California tribes'.⁴² 'Never before in history', wrote a popular journalist in the early 1870s, 'has a people been swept away with such terrible swiftness, or appalled into utter and unwhispering silence forever and forever'.⁴³ But by the early twentieth century, racist views about Native people predominated, and the brutality of colonial settlers was retrospectively justified. How did this happen?

The production of California history was a popular enterprise, regularly incorporated into grandly produced 'theatres of memory',

such as world fairs and local spectacles, and into travel books, memoirs, adventure stories, textbooks, and magazines that exported the 'California Story' far beyond the state, long before Hollywood entered the picture. It was not the work of handpicked professional historians or a master political authority, but rather the creative invention of independent writers, journalists, boosters, and businessmen who, as Mailänder suggests in the case of state functionaries in Nazi Germany, incorporated ideology into their own cultural practices.⁴⁴

The Orwellian shaping of the 'California Story' to 'make lies sound truthful and give an appearance of solidity to pure wind' reminds me of several examples from the 2012 conference.⁴⁵ How Hitler promoted cultural stereotypes of partisans in Eastern Europe as inherently barbarous. 'The struggle we are waging there', he said in August 1942, 'resembles very much the struggle in North America against the Red Indians.'⁴⁶ How the Argentine military command, from the 1950s through the 1970s, inculcated in rank-and-file soldiers 'a negative conception of otherness' that prepared them for the work of assassination and disposal of bodies during the 'dirty war'.⁴⁷ And how the techniques of genocide in Rwanda were facilitated by images of the Tutsi body as foreign and unnatural.⁴⁸

The California experience, however, differs in one important respect from these examples. With its weak state apparatus in the 1840s and 1850s, the construction of a fully articulated cultural rationale *followed* rather than preceded the era of destruction. We do not really know in any detail how or if the perpetrators justified their actions.

The creation of a public narrative of the state's past both excused and legitimated racist and racialized images of Native Americans, making it easier for future generations to sleep untroubled and evade a reckoning with the region's tragic and sorrowful history. The logic of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scientific racism was central to framing the near extermination of Native peoples in the imagery of natural rather than social history, subject to inevitable processes of erosion and decline, rather than as the result of human intervention and genocide.

California's anthropologists played a significant role in allowing a racist narrative to prevail. Of course they knew about the catastrophes that accompanied the Mission system and Gold Rush, but they chose public silence. 'What happened to the California Indians following 1849 – their disruption, losses, suffering, and adjustments – fall into the purview of the historian', wrote Alfred Kroeber in 1954,

‘rather than the anthropologist whose prime concern is the purely aboriginal, the uncontaminatedly native.’⁴⁹ Many Native people to this day hold Kroeber accountable because as one of the country’s leading anthropologists he had resources and authority to influence public opinion. Of course, no one person, even Kroeber, wielded such power, but he became the personification of amnesia.

The ‘California Story’ created a cultural firewall between past and present, successfully embedding a particular historical narrative in everyday life, namely that: (1) Native people were a *disappearing race*, despite the fact that in the American northwest they not only persisted during the worst of times, but continued to live and work in the region, have children, practise ceremonies, and give interviews to anthropologists. (2) Native people were *predestined to extinction* as a result of their own biological weaknesses – murder and contagious diseases were not something done to them, but something they did to themselves. (3) Native people were either *sub-human or super-human*, never fully human: *racially different and racially inferior*, or an exotic remnant of a time when the human race lived with and in Nature. (4) Native people were *childlike and in need of the firm hand of civilizing institutions*, thus the retrospective defence of the mission system (bringing to mind the post-Reconstruction defence of slavery as a means to civilize savage Africans). (5) In the aftermath of military defeat, dispossession, and forced poverty, Native people’s best hope of salvation was through economic and cultural *assimilation*.⁵⁰ (6) Native groups, with few exceptions, were *passive and devoid of resistance*, and therefore complicit in their own demise (comparable to 1940s and 1950s images of Jews during the Holocaust as sheep too easily led to their slaughter), despite a long history of opposition, from guerrilla warfare in the mid-nineteenth century, to young men and women in boarding schools at the turn of the century plotting their future resistance, to political organizing against looting of graves from the early twentieth century.⁵¹

By the 1930s, a popular textbook could relegate the ruin of California’s Native people to a footnote.⁵² A typically sunny version of California history, written in 1962, described Spain’s mission policies as designed to keep the Indians ‘contented with food and with cloth for clothes or else they would go off to live as they pleased’.⁵³ And as late as 1984, an elementary school textbook transformed the bloody horrors of the 1850s into a mild case of culture conflict: ‘The people who came to look for gold and to settle in California did not understand the Indians. They made fun of the way the Indians dressed and acted.’⁵⁴ (Imagine a German textbook that says, ‘When the Nazis

came to power in 1933, they did not understand the Jews. They made fun of the way the Jews dressed and acted.’) And the current required textbook, written in 2006, does not do much better. Colonialism is reduced to an educational self-help project – ‘in the 1500s, European countries wanted to learn about new places’⁵⁵ – while the thorny problem of genocide is simply skipped. The textbook leaps from the Spanish teaching lazy Indians how to ‘work hard’ in the eighteenth century to pictures of happy tribal self-government today.

The upbeat version of the ‘California Story’ as a place of entrepreneurial ingenuity and cutting-edge modernity numbs us to the state’s bloody history. This practice of ‘scrupulous forgetting’, to use German historian Jörg Wollenberg’s phrase, is echoed in California’s sanitized public history that erases its tragic past, turning profound injustices into a narrative of progress. In this respect, California echoes Turkey’s official amnesia about the genocide of Armenians⁵⁶ and post-Second World War Yugoslavia’s silence about massacres in Croatia.⁵⁷

Searching California for public remembrances of its tragic past is as frustrating as searching Lisbon for public recognition of the central role of the slave trade in Portugal’s glorious past.

In San Francisco, a large wall text on ‘Treatment of Indians’, prominently displayed in the Mission Dolores museum, interprets the near-demise of Native peoples under Spanish colonialism as a matter of natural inevitability. ‘Unable to solve complex medical, social and environmental problems, the Indian population was drastically reduced, especially through disease. ... Whether Spanish, English, Russian, or even if no settlers had preceded the Americans, the result would have been the same.’⁵⁸

Elsewhere, in California, there are no plaques or markers along the state’s ‘Redwood Highway’ inviting travellers and locals to consider the thousands of Native peoples who lost their lives and then their dead. No memorials that ask us to reconcile a place of extraordinary beauty with the horrors of history. Nothing to disturb the public image of northwest California as an ‘outdoor paradise’ and ‘eco-tourist’s heaven’.

California continues to be shaped, culturally and socially, by bitter legacies and divisions. Doing justice to the past means speaking the unspeakable, making human-made tragedies a matter of public recognition, creating histories that speak to all the diverse populations of the region, and recognizing that the United States is not exceptional but one among many nations, that we too – just like a Germany, a Rwanda, a Cambodia – need to come to terms with our sorrowful past.

Never too late

It's never too late to honor the dead.

(Toni Morrison, 2008)

Experts working on specialized projects relating to crimes against humanity – historians, forensic scientists, social scientists, lawyers, medical researchers, anthropologists, and archaeologists – face several challenges, in addition to doing the job competently and thoroughly. To acquire a deep knowledge of the mass destruction that motivates this work so that, however technically specialized the focus, one stays morally and ethically rooted in the quest for social justice. To develop collaborative, cooperative, consultative, and often slow and time-consuming relationships with the descendants of the dead who after all are the main beneficiaries of such work. To not only humanize the victimized, reified dead but also consider whether they have any rights that outlive their deaths. To be alert to the social-political uses and abuses of scientific knowledge, its eugenic past and present, and its misappropriation by popular culture. And to be prepared to articulate and defend this work in the public sphere, to be citizen-scholars aware of wider responsibilities beyond academia.

In the United States, exemplary work is done at the African Burial Ground National Monument in New York. Here, after years of grass-roots organizing, a collaborative project between community groups, government agencies, historians, and scientists generated a respectful, moving, and educational memorial to the thousands of Africans who were interred in the 'Negroes Burial Ground' in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in a few acres of marshy, god-forsaken land outside the city's palisades. The remains were discovered in 1991 when ground was excavated for a federal building in what is now prime real estate in Lower Manhattan. Today, you can learn about the daily lives of Africans and the importance of slavery to New York's economic development in large part as a result of the analysis of human remains by Howard University scientists. There is hope, then, for partnerships between Native people and anthropologists, and the possibility that science can enhance the humanity of history. But the lesson of the New York monument is that it takes struggle, determination, organizing, and the persistence of a long-distance runner to do justice to the past.

It is not the search for knowledge, the use of technical expertise, or the application of scientific techniques that should worry us.

Rather, we need to be sensitive to unequal relations of power between investigator and subject; to ensure that we pay as much attention to the social responsibilities and contexts of our work as we do to our disciplinary skills; and to make sure that the products of our work are used in politically responsible ways.

Notes

- 1 This chapter was originally presented at 'Search and Identification of Corpses and Human Remains in Post-Genocide and Mass Violence Contexts', 2nd Annual and International Conference of the Research Programme, 'Corpses of Mass Violence and Genocide' (European Research Council), 9–11 September 2013, University of Manchester, UK.
- 2 Unless otherwise noted, documentation can be found in T. Platt, *Grave Matters: Excavating California's Buried Past* (Berkeley, CA: Heyday, 2011).
- 3 Since 2006 I have taught a course called 'Obituary', written a book titled *Grave Matters*, and published pieces named 'Dead end', 'The living and the Dead', 'Memento mori', 'To die for', 'Death's double standard', and 'Life after death'. And now here I am participating in a conference about corpses.
- 4 P. Ariès, *Western Attitudes towards Death from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), p. 25.
- 5 A. L. Hurtado, *Indian Survival on the California Frontier* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 1.
- 6 R. Korman, 'The Tutsi body in the 1994 genocide: ideology, physical destruction, and memory', in É. Anstett & J.-M. Dreyfus (eds), *Destruction and Human Remains: Disposal and Concealment in Genocide and Mass Violence* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), pp. 226–42.
- 7 T. Bender, *A Nation among Nations: America's Place in World History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), p. 21.
- 8 See for example B. Kiernan, *Blood and Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); and J. Rawls, *Indians of California: The Changing Image* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1984).
- 9 J. W. Caughey, *California* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1940), p. 391.
- 10 S. F. Cook, *The Conflict between the California Indian and White Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1943).
- 11 L. McMurtry, *Oh What A Slaughter: Massacres in the American West, 1846–1890* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), p. 56.
- 12 E. Mailänder, 'A specialist: the daily work of Erich Muhsfeldt, chief of the crematorium at Majdanek concentration and extermination camp (1942–1944)', in Anstett & Dreyfus (eds), *Destruction and Human Remains*, pp. 46–68.

- 13 According to van Pelt, 1 million Jews died from starvation and disease. See R. J. van Pelt, 'Sinnreich erdacht: machines of mass incineration in fact, fiction, and forensics', in Anstett & Dreyfus (eds), *Destruction and Human Remains*, pp. 117–45. In some camps, such as Majdanek in Poland, two-thirds died this way. See Mailänder, 'A specialist'.
- 14 Bender, *A Nation among Nations*, p. 162.
- 15 M. Margolin, *Introduction to Life in a California Mission: The Journals of Jean François de la Pérouse* (Berkeley, CA: Heyday, 1989), p. 48.
- 16 This interpretation is ignored in public history and public education, where a generally benevolent and simplistic narrative prevails. A battle of ideas is taking place as the Catholic Church seeks to canonize Junipero Serra (architect of the mission system) in celebration of his 300th birthday.
- 17 T. Platt, 'The result would have been the same', <http://GoodToGo.typepad.com>, January 2012.
- 18 R. H. Kévorkian, 'Earth, fire, water: how to make the Armenian corpses disappear', in Anstett & Dreyfus (eds), *Destruction and Human Remains*, pp. 89–116.
- 19 T. Platt, 'I am here for our history', <http://GoodToGo.typepad.com>, 1 March 2012.
- 20 Governor P. H. Burnett, Governor's Annual Message to the Legislature, 7 January 1851, *Journals of the Senate and Assembly of the State of California* (San Francisco: G. K. Fitch and V. E. Geiger, 1852), p. 15.
- 21 R. Raphael & F. House, *Two Peoples, One Place* (Eureka, CA: Humboldt County Historical Society, 2007), pp. 172–8.
- 22 M. Ferreira, 'Sweet tears and bitter pills: the politics of heath among Yuroks of northern California' (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of California, 1996), p. 20.
- 23 The selling of Indian children by their dispossessed and impoverished families reminds me of the Armenian parents who sold their children before their deaths during the 1915–16 Turkish genocide. See Kévorkian, 'Earth, fire, water'.
- 24 A. L. Hurtado, *Indian Survival on the California Frontier* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 218.
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