

Social Drivers of Health

CA Area Medical Best Practices Conference



Dr. Cutcha Risling Baldy
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Institute

November 3, 2025

Learning Outcomes

Define social determinants of health and explain how they uniquely impact Native American communities through both historical and contemporary systems.

Analyze the historical relationship between Western science, medicine, and Indigenous peoples, including the marginalization of Indigenous knowledge systems and the medicalization and criminalization of Native identities and practices.

Identify key events in California Indian history and how these contribute to intergenerational trauma and current health disparities.

Explore how Indigenous-led cultural revitalization efforts function as forms of prevention, healing, and resistance to structural health inequities.

- k'iwinya'n-ya:n: man,
person, people,
Indians [literally, *acorn-eater*
er]





MISSING PERSON

Emmilee Renea Risling



Age: 32
Native American
5"2
160 lbs
Brown Short Hair- 1" long
Brown eyes
Dark complexion

Last seen in the down river
area of Pecwan on 10/16/21

Please contact Humboldt Co.
SD at (707) 445-7251 if seen



We are less than
2% of the
population.

*To' Kee Skuy' Soo Ney-Wo-Chek' (I
will See You Again in a Good Way)*

Progress Report from the Yurok
Tribe and Sovereign Bodies

Institute. This report notes there
are 165 documented MMIWG2

cases in California, making

California the fifth highest number
nationally. The report also notes:

"Northern California outranks

many states, and if it were a state,
would be in the top 10, with 105

cases."



1 IN 3

NATIVE AMERICAN WOMEN
WILL BE **RAPED** IN THEIR LIFETIME



39%

WILL BE
SUBJECTED TO
**DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE**



10 TIMES

MORE LIKELY TO BE
MURDERED THAN OTHER
AMERICAN WOMEN
ON SOME RESERVATIONS



52%

OF VIOLENT
**CRIMES ON
RESERVATIONS ARE
NOT PROSECUTED**

- Suicide is the second leading cause of death and 2.5 times the national rate for Native youth ages 15-24.
- Native Americans have higher rates of suicide than any ethnicity and higher than the general population.
- Native American children represent 8.4% of children in foster care but are less than 2% of the population.
- Violence accounts for 75% of deaths for Native youth age 12-20.
- High school dropout rates for Native youth are double the national average.
- 22% of females and 12% of males reported to have attempted suicide.
- The suicide rate has increased 139% for Indigenous women between 1999-2017.

An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz

“...there is a direct link between the suppression of Indigenous sovereignty and the powerlessness manifest in depressed social conditions.” (211)

“...sovereignty equates to survival – nationhood instead of genocide.” (211)

“Social Determinants of Health”

Standard clinical care addresses disease, but **many health outcomes are driven by the conditions in which patients live:** e.g., poor housing, lack of safe water, limited jobs/income, internalised beliefs about community health and racism.

When a patient comes to your clinic, beyond diagnosis/treatment, ask: **What are the social conditions? Are they stable housing? Safe neighborhood? Employment? Community supports? Are there barriers rooted in historical injustice or environmental justice?**

Economic stability (income, employment, job quality). **When income goes down, risk of premature death goes up.**

- Education access & quality.
- Healthcare access & quality (including culturally safe, respectful care for Native peoples).
- Neighborhood & built environment (housing, transportation, clean water/air, infrastructure).

Social & community context (social support networks, racism/internalised beliefs, community identity). **Studies show that self-rated health is lower with internalized beliefs about communities/belonging.**

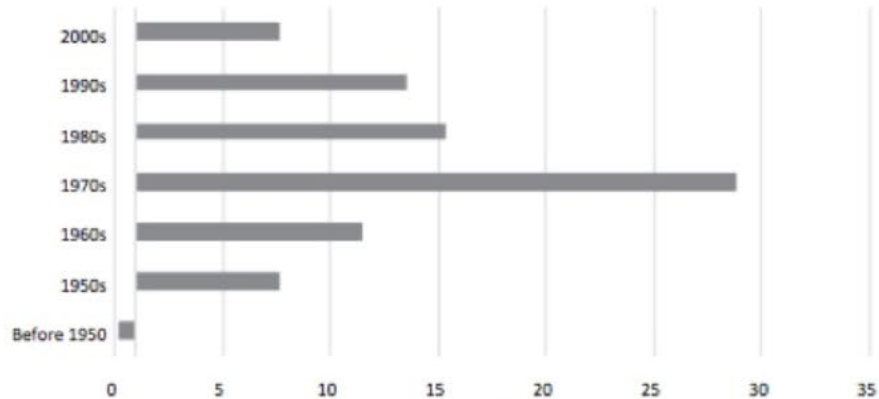


FIGURE 12. When did diabetes first appear in your family?

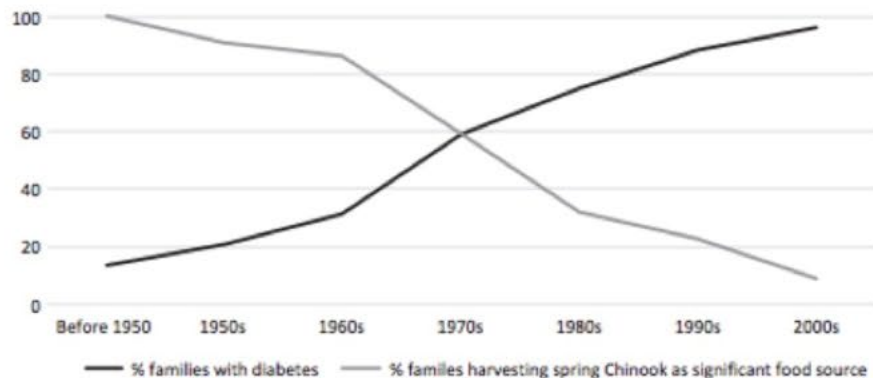
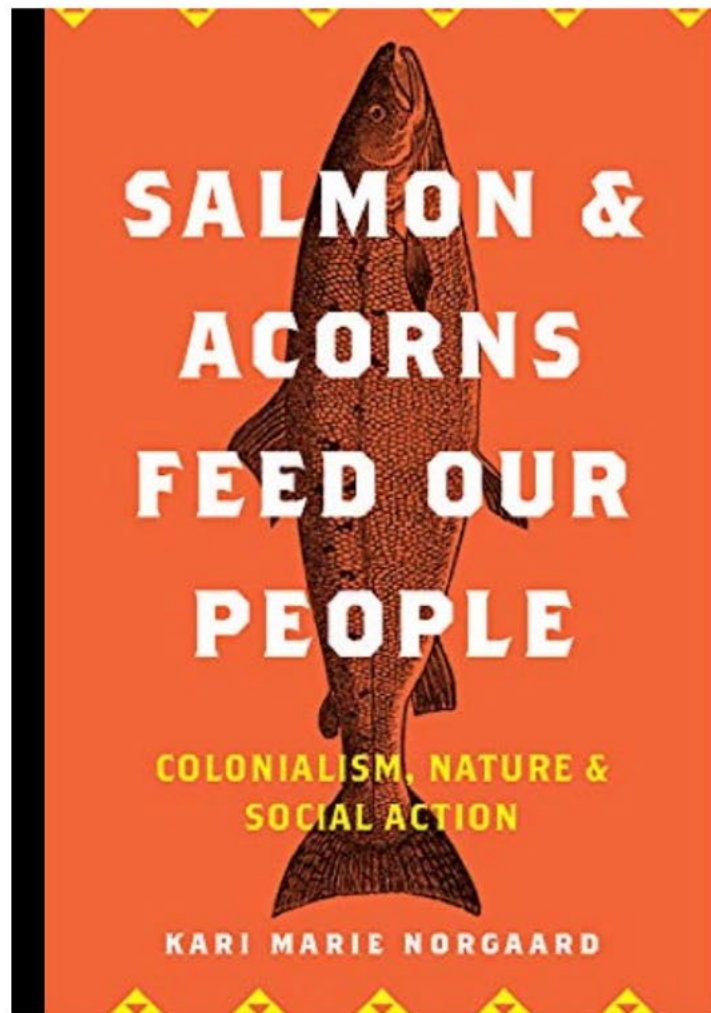
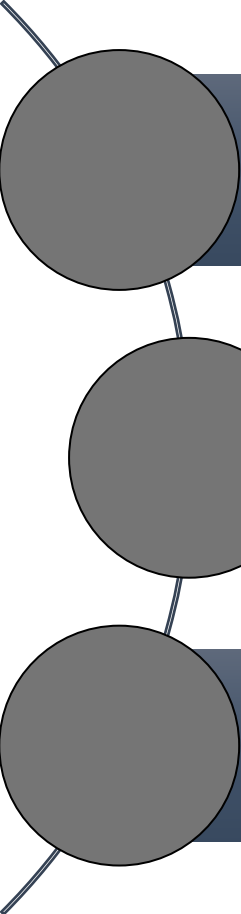


FIGURE 13. Spring Chinook decline and diabetes rates.



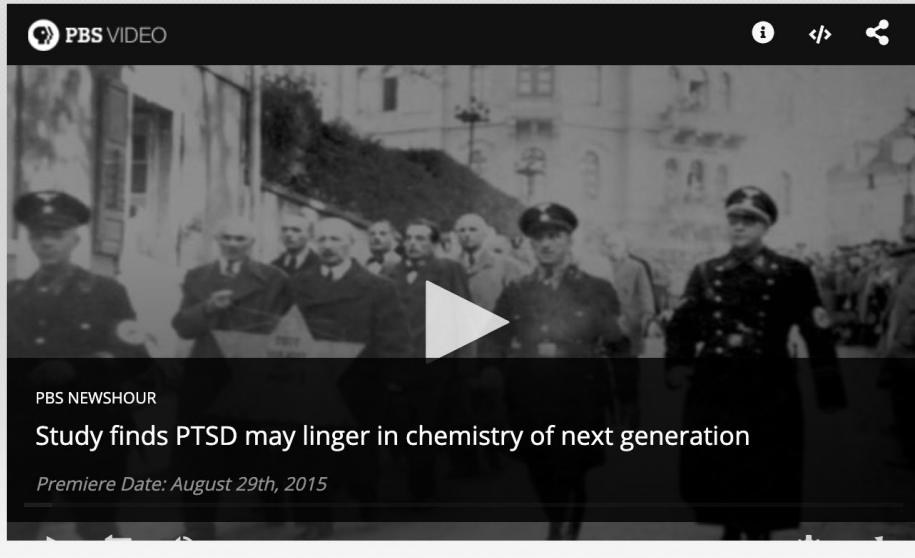


mass trauma on a population in the form of colonialism, slavery, war or genocide

affected population shows physical and psychological symptoms in response to the trauma

initial population passes these responses to trauma to subsequent generations, who in turn display similar symptoms

Can trauma be passed to next generation through DNA?



Intergenerational Trauma: Understanding Natives' Inherited Pain

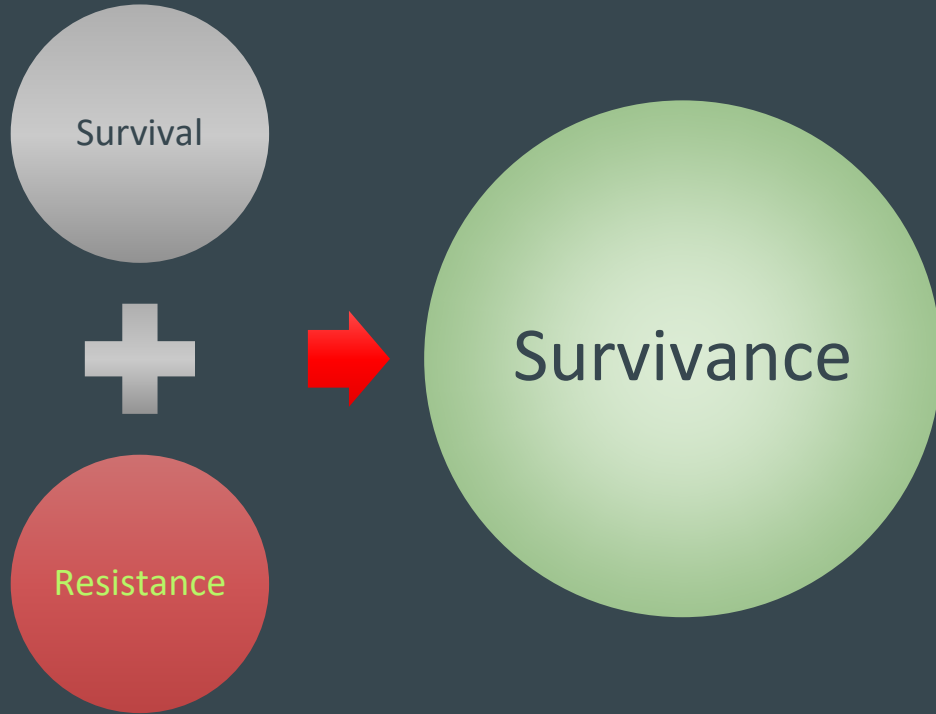


Native Americans Have 'Always Known': Science Proves Genetic Inheritance Of Trauma

Extreme stress and trauma causes the body to release glucocorticoids, hormones which can permanently alter how cells express genes.

by *Kit O'Connell*

Survivance



- Dynamic, inventive, enduring (instead of absence, tragedy, powerlessness)
- Vizenor argues that many people in the world are enamored with and obsessed by images of the Indian as victims or as “dying Indians”. Native survivance, on the other hand, is active and vibrant instead of historical absence and silence.

Science/Medicine & Indigenous Peoples

- The development of scientific thought was part of “modernism” signaling the end of feudalism. This was at the same time as exploration and “discovery” and systematic colonization.
- Indigenous people become “others” or “objects of research.” These objects of research do not have voice and do not contribute to research or science.
- Health/Human Services were at first funded for military intervention and then as religious/philanthropic agencies as an assimilation tool. Requirements like: change dress, behavior, language, family home dynamics.

Samuel Morton

- American physician and Natural Scientist
- Claimed Caucasians held the largest brain capacity opposed to Indians holding a slightly smaller capacity and blacks having the smallest brain capacity.
- Research: “ Exhaustive study of human skulls in an effort to PROVE that white people were superior to others” (Cooper,87)
- “the American Race is marked by a brown complexion...They are crafty, sensual, ungrateful, obstinate and unfelling, and much of their affection from their children may be traced to purely selfish motives. They devour the most disgusting foods uncooked and uncleaned, and seem to have no idea beyond providing for the present moment”



- Minik and the visiting Inuit
- 1897 Fraz Boas brought six living Inuit people to live in the American Museum of Natural History.
- “During the first two days in town, some 30,000 New Yorkers paid twenty-five cents each to view them..”
- By the end of their 8 month stay, three of them were dead from tuberculosis.
- Minik (youngest) would visit his father’s grave often.
- Boas had authorized the autopsy and studying of his father’s remains and body Minik had buried in the grave was “an imitation corpse from a man-sized log.”
- Boas believed that his “experiment had paid off handsomely.”



Alfred Kroeber & Ishi



As to disposal of the body, I must ask you as my personal representative on the spot in this matter, to yield nothing at all under any circumstances **If there is any talk about the interests of science, say for me that science can go to hell** We propose to stand by our friends. Besides, I cannot believe that any scientific value is materially involved. **We have hundreds of Indian skeletons that nobody ever comes near to study.** The prime interest in this case would be of a morbid romantic nature...

Canton (Hiawatha) Asylum for Insane Indians (1891-1934)

“An epidemic of ‘demented Indians’”

Falsely imprison over 400 men, women and children until closure in 1934.

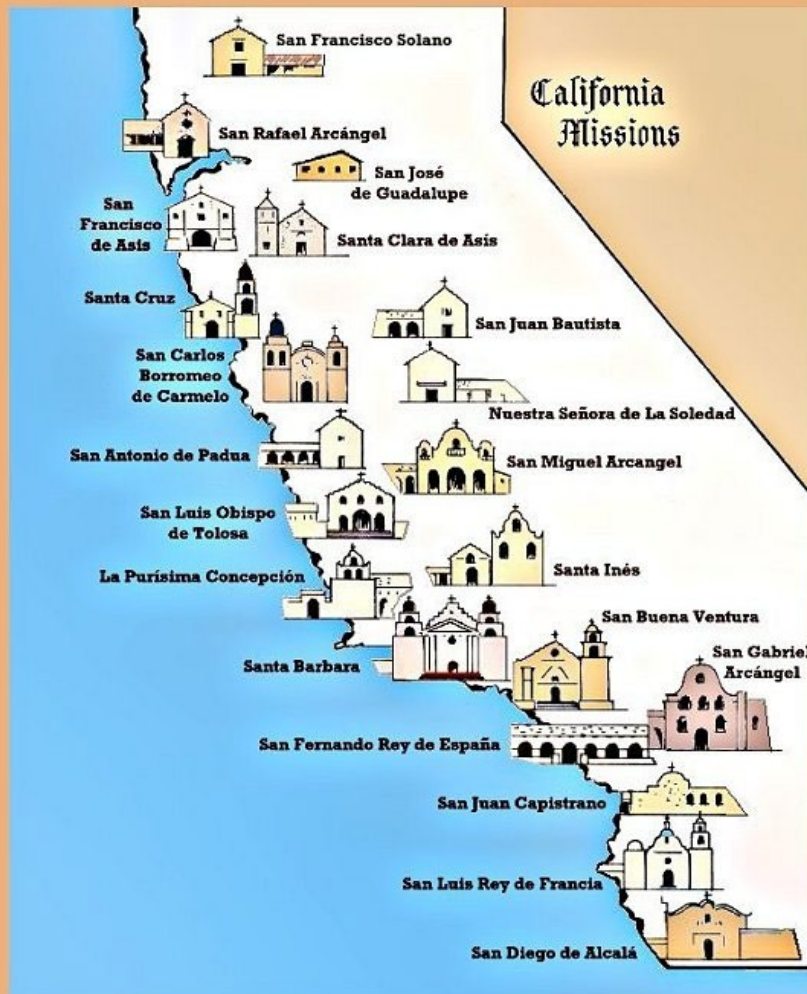
- Records indicate that Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) agents who found Native persons to be unruly (e.g. resisters and advocates who sought to expose BIA issues) were sent to Canton.

Stories of escape, documentation of families who lobbied for years for release of loved ones.



California History

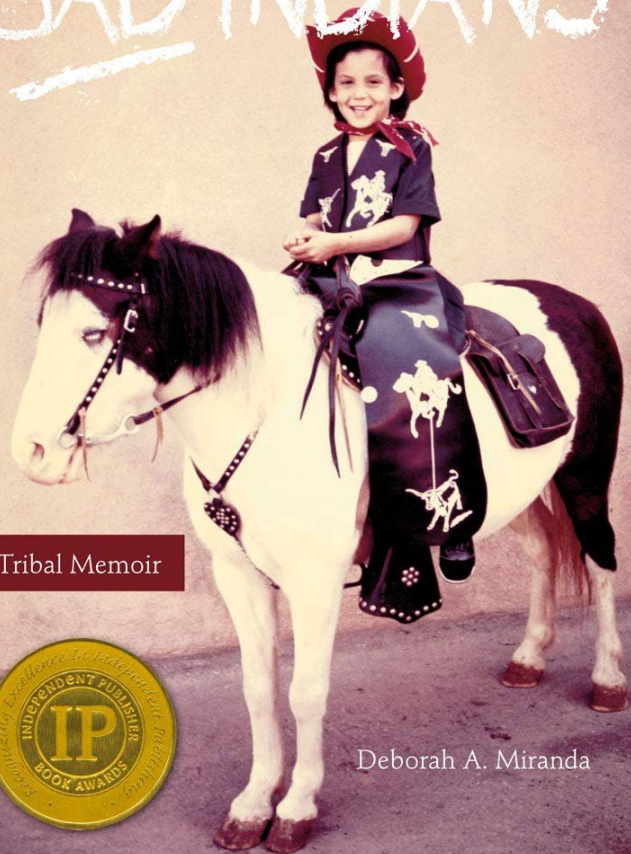
- Sherburne Cook (1978) estimates that death of Native persons in California between 1770 and 1900 was over 90% of the original population.
- Cook explains this “near devastation” in three waves:
 - Spanish Missions (1769)
 - End of the Missions (1821) to the Mexican-American War (1845) ranching and trading
 - Gold Rush (1849)



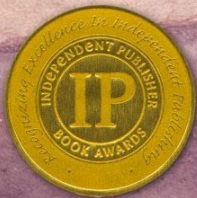


"It is evident that a nation which is barbarous, ferocious and ignorant requires more frequent punishment than a nation which is cultured, educated and of gentle and moderate customs." - Father Lasuen

BAD INDIANS

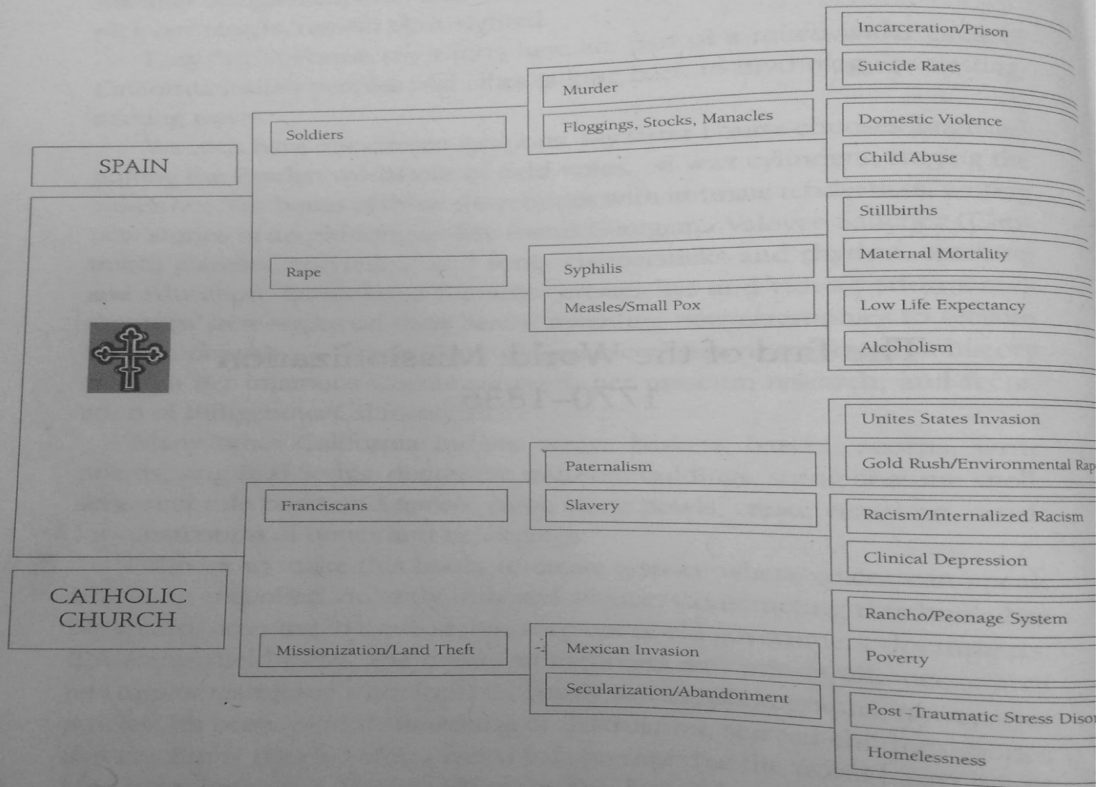


A Tribal Memoir



Deborah A. Miranda

The Genealogy of Violence, Part I



The Gold Rush



FOR
CALIFORNIA!
DIRECT

EXTRAORDINARY INDUCEMENTS!!
THIRTY-FIVE DAYS TO GOLD REGIONS!

The "California Steam Navigation Co."
(Incorporated in the United States from the "S.S. and S.P. CO.")

STEAM SHIP!
NICARAGUA

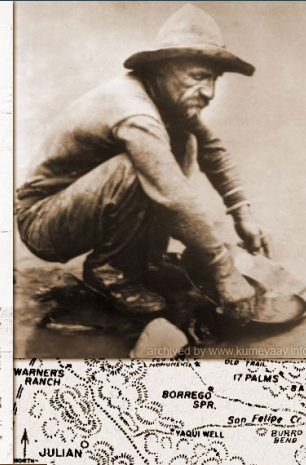
On **FRIDAY, MARCH 23d, 1849.**
Via the River St. Juan and Lake Nicaragua, across the Isthmus of Colon.

Capt. BRIDGES, of the U. S. Topographical Engineers.

200 JACK ASSES!

The Quickest, Safest and Cheapest!!
Price of Passage Through Ninety Dollars!
To be paid in ROCKS, Silver and Gold Coins, Silver only.

For further particulars apply on board, at the foot of South Street, N. Y. or to the undersigned Agents for the Company. Applications to agents in most situations may be sent post, addressed to the Company's Agents.
BRIDGES, BROTHERS & Co, 147 Wall Street, opposite the Bull-Head.



The Genocide of CA Indian people was legalized and supported by law, the state, the government, and citizens

- Act for the Government and Protection of Indians (1850-1863)
 - Legalized enslavement of California Indians
 - Allowed for the kidnapping/ enslavement of Native children
 - Encouraged killing of Native parents
 - Indians could not testify in court

Indian Boarding Schools: “Kill the Indian to save the Man”

A black and white photograph of a large group of Native American children, likely students at a boarding school, sitting in many rows on a lawn. They are wearing uniform, light-colored clothing. In the background, there is a large, two-story building with a porch, which is the boarding school. The scene is outdoors with some trees visible.

- Forbade native language
- Forbade Native religion and religious practices
- Separated from families
- Cut hair, select new “Christian” names
- Military regimentation
- Manual Labor
- Uniform dress
- “...a complete transformative experience, training Indians for their place as a detribalized social and economic underclass.”

Forced Sterilization of Native Women by Indian Health Service

- Between 1970 and 1976 sterilized 3,406 Native women. 36 under the age of 21. Per capita this is like sterilizing 452,000 Non-Native women.
- Physicians and healthcare professionals in IHS coerced women. Tactics included threat of withdrawing future healthcare provisions or threatening custody of Native American children already born.
- Some women told they were going to have appendectomies and then were given “incidental” tubal ligations.
- Research indicates that Indian Health Service has “singled out full-blooded Indian women for sterilization procedures.”

Indian Child Welfare Act (1978)

- Studies revealed that large numbers of Native children were being separated from their parents, extended families, and communities by state child welfare and private adoption agencies even when fit and willing relatives were available.
- ICWA requires caseworkers to make several considerations when handling an ICWA case, including:
 - Providing active efforts to the family;
 - Identifying a placement that fits under the ICWA preference provisions;
 - Notifying the child's tribe and the child's parents of the child custody proceeding; and
 - Working actively to involve the child's tribe and the child's parents in the proceedings.
- Recent research on systemic bias in the child welfare system yielded shocking results. Native families are four times more likely to have their children removed and placed in foster care than their White counterparts. So in spite of the advances achieved since 1978, ICWA's protections are still needed

Six markers of “cultural continuity”

Two B.C. researchers have looked closely at how cultural factors impact youth suicide rates.

They identified six markers of “cultural continuity:”

- achieved a measure of self-government;
- litigated for Aboriginal title to traditional lands;
- accomplished a measure of local control over health, education and policing;
- and created community facilities for the preservation of culture.

First Nations communities that had all six markers of “cultural continuity” had suicide rates of zero. Yes, zero.

“First Nations communities that succeed in taking steps to preserve their culture, and that work to control their own destinies, are dramatically more successful in insulating their youth against the risks of suicide,” the researchers concluded.

“Cultural Continuity as a Protective Factor Against Suicide in First Nations Youth” by psychology professors Michael J. Chandler and Christopher E. Lalonde.

Community Interventions

- Is your approach “strength-based” or “deficit-based?”
- Build an approach that is based within the Indigenous community philosophies, upholding relationships with Indigenous communities and extending research opportunities to Indigenous communities.
- Link your approach to Indigenous languages, using Indigenous words for understanding things (like health, wellness, mental health, sustainability, etc.)
- Find ways to address structural problems such as racism and prejudice, poverty and misogyny.

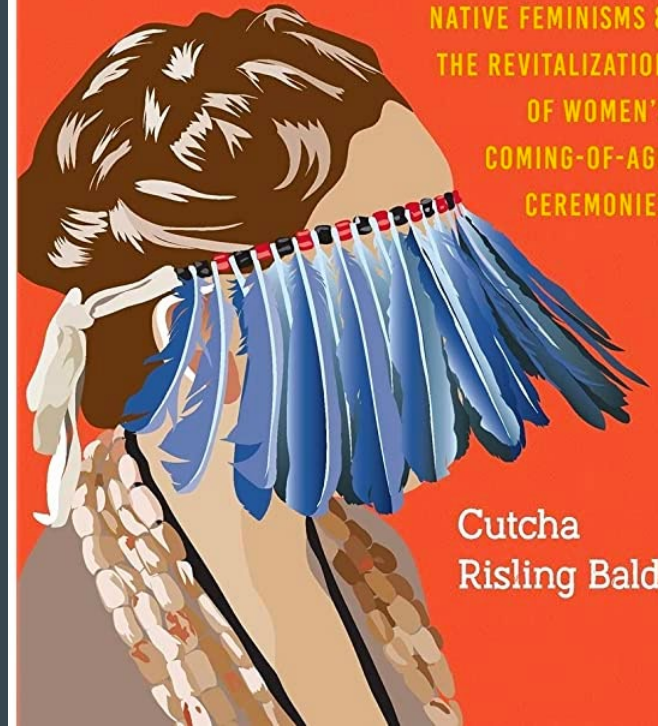




“In my mind historical trauma is the continuation of unhealthy patterns of behavior. Unknowingly, we give these to our children and I had wanted that to not happen. What I had hoped I was doing was balancing her spirit. ...putting on what I characterized as a suit of armor so that in going out into the world...to know who she is as a Hupa person, [so] that nobody would be able to disrupt anything. She knows who she is and can call on that strength at any given time; call on the strength that is Hupa, the land, the people, the language [and] the ancestors.” Melodie George-Moore (Hupa Medicine Woman)

we are dancing for you

NATIVE FEMINISMS &
THE REVITALIZATION
OF WOMEN'S
COMING-OF-AGE
CEREMONIES



Cutchá
Risling Baldy

A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding a bundle of dried, light-colored roots or plant matter. The background is a soft-focus natural setting with green foliage. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent teal color, and white text is positioned in the lower-left area.

TENDING
NATURE

Indigenous Land Stewardship



M Mongabay

Largest dam removal ever, driven by Tribes, kicks off Klamath River recovery

As of Oct. 5, the four lower Klamath hydroelectric dams have been fully removed from the river, freeing 676 kilometers (420 miles) of the river and its...

Oct 17, 2024



Rou Dalagurr
Food Sovereignty Lab & Traditional
Ecological Knowledges Institute

Indigenous Foods Festival In-Person Activity

**THIS ACTIVITY IS A PRE-REQUISITE FOR OTHER
SELECT FOOD SOVEREIGNTY WORKSHOPS**

**Gathering for Indigenous
Empowerment**
Thursday, APRIL 7th
2:30 p.m. PST, BSS 166

Join us for the Indigenous Foods Festival activity with
Marlene Daunk and Karley Zinn!
Special woodland appropriate shows, and bring
your own food for potluck sharing. We will be
making food here before we get to the workshop. **Bring
your own food!**

REGISTER HERE!
[QR Code]

ACTIVITY
We discuss opening
relationships with landscape and
coexisting in a good way - a way that
respects Indigenous sovereignty
and self-determination of land.

Bring company
together!

Call Patty
[Phone Number]



Rou Dalagurr
Food Sovereignty Lab & Traditional
Ecological Knowledges Institute

SATURDAY, MAY 4th
**Indigenous
Foods
Festival**

NEW!

11 am - 3 pm
101 Street Neighborhood Center
101 St, Berkeley, CA 94702

NEW

FEATURING: MOSES EFFO, MOHARR

QR Code

Powered by Sustainable Berkeley Institute for Food (SBIF) Food Institute.

Rou Dalagurr
Food Sovereignty Lab
Fall 2022 Film Series

FEATURE FILMS
Why? Plaza - Outside of the FSL
Bata Location - Native American Film

What happened in the 1970s? It is
movement for that period. It was
response to the state of California. Before
the end of the 1970s, food, people, and
and culture had to be in response to food
and culture. The 1970s was the end of the
and the end of the 1970s. It was the end
of the 1970s. It was the end of the 1970s.
[Image of film poster]

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[Image of film poster]

Sponsored by
[Logo]

Rou Dalagurr: Food Sovereignty Lab and Traditional Ecological Knowledges Institute

**HSU NAS FOOD SOVEREIGNTY LAB &
CULTURAL WORKSPACE PRESENTS
NOVEMBER 2020
FOOD SOVEREIGNTY SPEAKER SERIES**

EVERY MONDAY 1PM - 2:30PM [Instagram icon] [Facebook icon] [Twitter icon] [YouTube icon]
LIVE STREAMED ON FACEBOOK AND ZOOM [Facebook icon] [Twitter icon] [YouTube icon]

NOVEMBER 2ND
Panel: HSU Food Sovereignty Lab & Cultural
Workspace: History & Vision

NOVEMBER 9TH
State of Indigenous Food Sovereignty in the
United States with Dr. Devon Mihesuah

NOVEMBER 16TH
Panel: State of Indigenous Food Sovereignty in
California

NOVEMBER 23RD
Panel: Fire & Food Sovereignty

NOVEMBER 30TH
Indigenous Food Sovereignty & the Timing of
Climate Change with Dr. Kyle Whyte

FREE REGISTRATION: <https://tpep.org/world.edu/events-calendar>







SEE OUR
PHOTOS &
VIDEOS HERE!



**"This is helping me stay sober"
-FSL Youth Council Member, Age 17**

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS
YOUTH LISTENING SESSION

Our Food Relatives Video Series

Watch now!



<https://www.youtube.com/@hsunas8603>



Donate to the Food Sovereignty Lab:

hsu.link/fsl



Notes @ The end

The missionaries, colonizers, governors & agents said we (California Indians) were some the "laziest" they'd ever seen. Our "laziness" was our ability to be with each other, to pray, to laugh, to take the time to greet our relatives, to listen to an elder as long as it took, to tell a story, to sing before beginning. We lived long lives, we could all drink the water, we could all breathe. We rested. To grow old in a good way.

- Cutcha Rising Baldy (June 2023)

DECOLONIZING

the

BODY

Healing,
Body-Centered
Practices for
Women of Color
to Reclaim
Confidence,
Dignity &
Self-Worth

Kelsey Blackwell

Foreword by
Christena Cleveland, PhD

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

REST IS RESISTANCE

A MANIFESTO

TRICIA HERSE

FOUNDER OF

THE NAP MINISTRY

This book is a testimony and testament of my refusal to donate my body to a system that still owes a debt to my Ancestors for the theft of their labor and DreamSpace. I refuse to push my body to the brink of exhaustion and destruction. Let the chips fall where they may. I trust myself more than capitalism. Our refusal will make space for abundance. We will have to learn and...

*Imagine a world without oppression.
Take more time here. Visualize softness.
Breathe deep.
Envision a world centered in justice.
Stay here.*