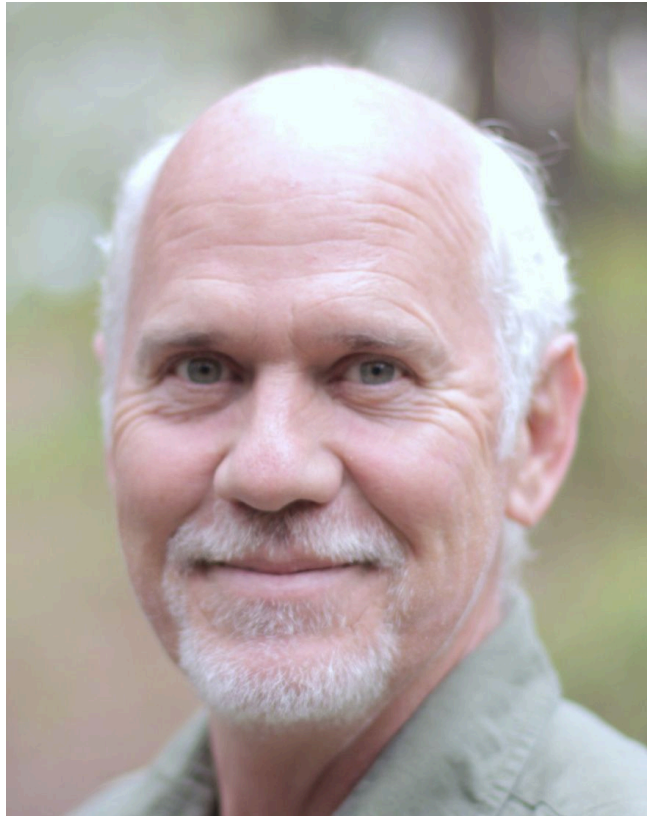


In My View: Restoration, Restitution and Reparations

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“Hey all! Just found out I’m ‘woke’ ... All this time I just thought I was good at history.” Jon Stewart

It is concerning to see how history is being “whitewashed” in other states. Politicians are deciding what information is suitable to be taught. They say that some students might feel discomfort or guilt when presented with a true account of history.

It is difficult to be comfortable with all aspects of our history, but it is important to learn and remember.

The history of America is filled with atrocities committed during the colonization of our country. When Europeans “discovered” the new world there were already people living here. In the ensuing years the indigenous people were slaughtered, their land was taken, and their culture oppressed. Children were separated from families and placed in mission boarding schools where students were often abused, forced to abandon their language and forsake their cultural traditions.

In 1853, one of the most lethal massacres in American history occurred at Yontocket in Del Norte County. Six hundred Tolowa men, women and children were murdered, and the village burned. More massacres followed with more than 900 Tolowa killed over a 7-year period.

Today this attempted genocide would be prosecuted as war crimes, but there is no record that any of the perpetrators were ever held accountable. There was no justice then. Can we provide some justice now?

What can be done now to correct these injustices and somehow make this right? I have observed three activities that are small steps in the right direction. This includes restoration, restitution, and reparations.

Restoration

“The action of returning something to a former condition.”

Two notable examples of local restoration are the removal of the Klamath River dams and reintroduction of the California condor.

Thanks to the leadership of local tribes, removal of the Klamath dams will commence this year. This will help to restore the historic salmon runs which provide sustenance for tribes and are an integral part of their culture. Nearly half a billion dollars have been secured for this joint state, tribal and corporate undertaking. The demolition plans are drafted. The contractor is in place. Final permits are approved.

The Yurok Tribe, in partnership with Redwood Parks, is also leading the conservation effort to reintroduce the California condor (prey-go-neesh) into the Klamath basin. The Yurok perspective was presented in the North Coast Journal (10/7/22), “the restoration of this sacred species is an important element of a far-sighted plan to bring balance back to the coastal rainforest ecosystem in Yurok ancestral territory.”

Restitution

“The restoration of something lost or stolen to its proper owner.”

It would be challenging to give all the tribal lands back to the rightful owner, but there are steps being taken to at least recognize and honor the original place names.

As part of an initiative to identify and rectify derogatory names attached to state parks, in 2021 the California state park formerly known as Patrick’s Point was renamed to Sue-meg, the indigenous Yurok name. The area called Patrick’s Point dates back to the mid-1800s and was named after homesteader Patrick Beegan, who was accused of murdering numerous native Americans.

Speaking in support of this name change, Yurok Tribal Chairman Joseph James said, “Though justice could not be served for those who died, we can move in the right direction.”

In 2022, Peacock Bar was renamed in a collaboration between the Redwood Parks and the Tolowa Dee-ni’ Nation. The new name See-tr’ee-ghin-dvm-dvn is the original name of one of the three villages that the Tolowa inhabited in this area.

According to an article in the Del Norte Triplicate (11/26/22), “George Peacock immigrated to the area in the 1850s and took over the village. When the Tolowa refused to leave, they were executed, and their orphaned children were kept as indentured servants.”

Though restoring a name is not as useful as returning ownership of the land it is at least symbolically meaningful.

The State is also considering more substantial actions.

On September 25, 2020, Governor Newsom made it the policy of the State of California to “seek opportunities to support California tribes’ co-management of and access to natural lands that are under the control of the State of California.”

There is a proposal to establish co-management agreements between the State and the Tribes whose ancestral lands lie within Jackson Demonstration State Forest in Mendocino County. This will give tribes access to their ancestral lands and could set a precedent for other state and federal lands that were once occupied by local tribes.

Reparations

“The making of amends for a wrong one has done, by paying money to or otherwise helping those who have been wronged.”

Reparations is the most significant action that a government can take to right the wrongs of the past.

The New York Times (1/4/22) reported that the Canadian government announced that it had reached the largest settlement in Canada’s history, paying \$31.5 billion to fix the nation’s discriminatory child welfare system and compensate the Indigenous people harmed by it.

The agreement forms the basis for a final settlement of several lawsuits brought by First Nations groups against the Canadian government. Of the overall settlement, half will go toward compensating both the families and children who were unnecessarily removed over the past three decades.

The rest of the money will go toward repairing the child welfare system for First Nations children — who are statistically far more likely to be removed from their families — over the next five years to ensure families are able to stay together.

On January 21, 2023, officials announced that the Canadian government and 325 First Nations have agreed to settle a class-action lawsuit, seeking reparations for the loss of language and culture brought on by Indian residential schools.

Canada agreed to pay the \$2.8 billion of settlement money into a new trust fund that will operate for 20 years. The fund will be run independent of the federal government and will be governed by a board of nine indigenous directors.

There are no similar initiatives being proposed in the United States, but these are worthy of consideration.

Learn from History

I am not suggesting that everyone has a responsibility to contribute to the restoration, restitution or reparations for the harm done to our native American brothers and sisters. But if we remember the impacts that the conquering of America had on indigenous peoples, we may be more sensitive to the justification for supporting corrective action.

We are collectively better off if we can learn from the historical injustices of our past. Then as a society we can strive to make amends and do better in the future.

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