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Saturday, February 25, 2012

# Resurrection for Recognition: The Spanish Missions, Anthropology, and Muwekma Ohlone Federal Recognition

*I'm currently writing a History of Art and Visual Culture essay on Native American photographic representations in the early twentieth century, so I've been reading through old essays and notes I have from various American Studies courses I took last year. As I was reading through this paper I wrote for a Native American studies class, I realized I hadn't posted it to my blog, so I figured I'd share it now.*

When the Ohlone Native Americans of the Monterey and San Francisco bay areas first encountered Spanish explorers like Captain Pedro Fages and missionary Juan Crespí in the 1770s (Brown 1), they had never before seen such “light-skinned creatures” (Margolin Ohlone 158), nor their glass beads, metal or mules; they concluded that the Europeans were “children of the Mule—a...powerful animal-god” that “had blessed them with stupendous magical powers” (158). Years later, the Ohlone recounted this initial impression to missionaries. By then, they had for years been virtually enslaved in the Spanish mission system, struggling against the conversion of their spirituality and lifestyle, straining to hold onto their traditional

## About Me



### Green Gal

California, United States

I'm a writer, community organizer, photographer, person who bikes, and happy human. I enjoy exploring how we can better connect with ourselves, places, people, nature, and what it means to be alive.

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I love reading comments and finding new blogs to follow, so if you read something you like, please comment!

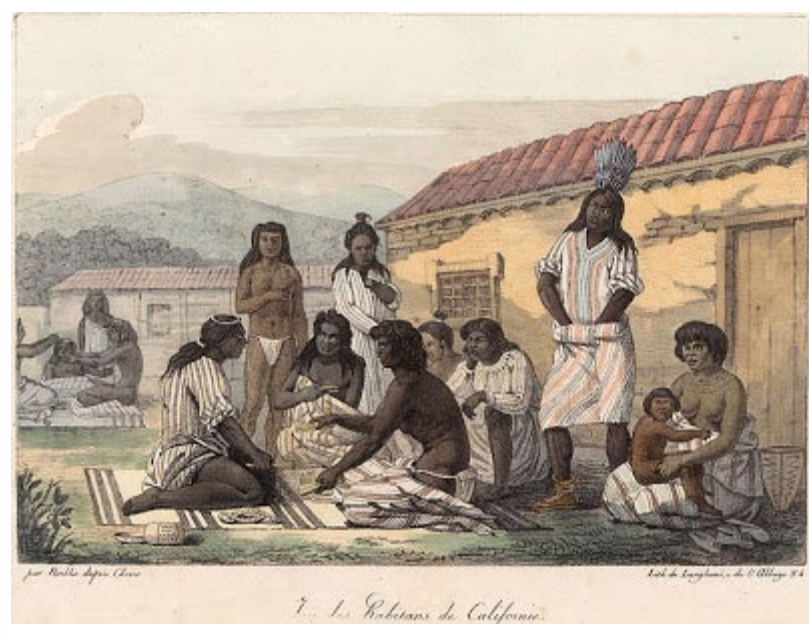
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culture. Christian Eurocentric methods enacted by the Spanish and later by European-Americans to eradicate indigenous ways led to a modern-day Ohlone culture largely composed of “faint images” (Yamane v) and “faded traditions” (vi) that are becoming more vibrant as the struggle for cultural survival continues. This resurrection is fueled by the collective and personal need of Native American individuals and communities throughout North America to revive their traditions and cultural identities before they “disappear from the earth,” only to be found in the stagnant world of “written texts” (Margolin Way 203). The Spanish mission system devastated many aspects of Ohlone culture; these losses and subsequent anthropological classifications have made it difficult for the Ohlone people to gain federal recognition of tribal sovereignty.



To begin, the term “Ohlone” is actually a broad linguistic classification that was created by anthropologists in the early 1900s and encompasses several different tribes that experienced “similar post-contact histories” in the missions (Field, Cambra and Leventhal 35). The anthropologists that categorized Native tribes in California used language similarities to geographically delineate political territories, an inaccurate representation of their complex identities and relations (35). The compartmentalization of tribes in this way “reflects the world those anthropologists lived in,” and this “ethnic naming and boundary making...has played an important



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role in federal Indian policy” (Field, Cambra and Leventhal 29). One tribe under the classification of Ohlone, the “contemporary reorganized tribal entity” of the Muwekma Ohlone, which is composed of descendants of Native people from the “San Francisco peninsula and the South and East Bay, as well as interior regions around modern-day Stockton and farther inland” (20), is one of many tribes across the United States struggling to gain federal recognition (21).



Prior to Spanish control of California, the Ohlone people, as well as all Native tribes, possessed tribal sovereignty, or the ability to govern themselves with no external authority from which they needed to request recognition (Kickingbird 2). However, the Spanish did gain control, and the lives of the Ohlone were irrevocably altered in the following centuries. Spain acquired California in 1769 and sent various expeditions to traverse the landscape (Field “Complicities” 196). These explorers encountered Native Americans, like the Ohlone, along with the verdant abundance of the New World. With these explorers came Catholic missionaries, who

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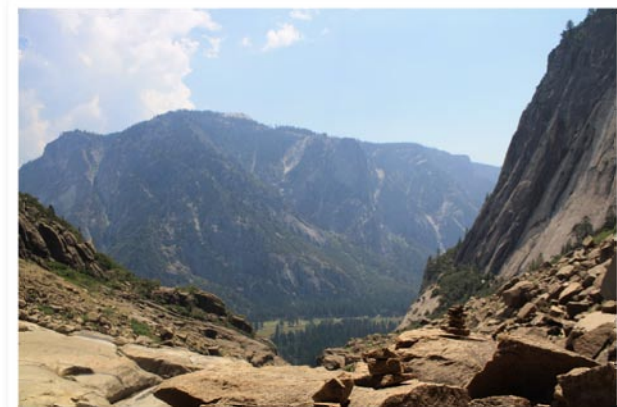
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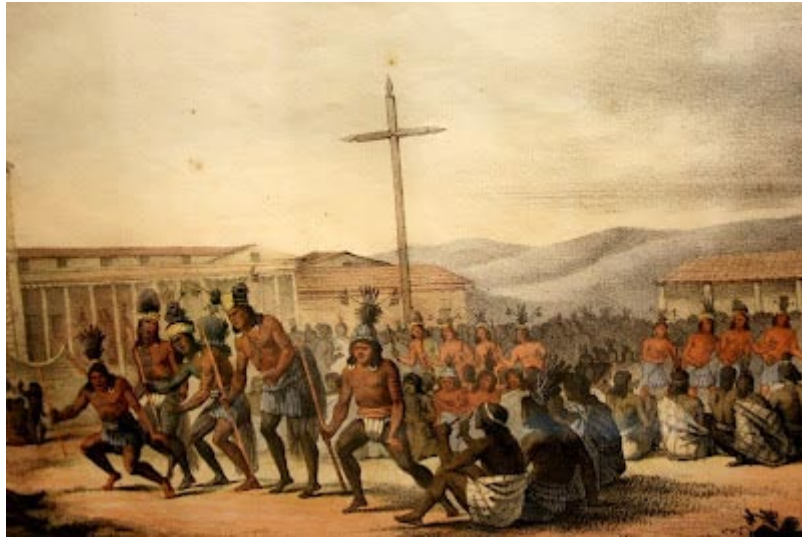
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established twenty-one missions throughout the coastal areas of California over the next fifty years (Margolin Way 160). The Spanish viewed the Ohlone and other tribes as uncivilized “heathens” (Brown 6), who they soon “enculturated” into their mission system (Bean xxii); in time, more than 50,000 California Natives would be baptized into Catholic “neophytes.” In the perspective of the Catholic Fathers, the Native peoples were rescued from their “heathen” culture in order to save their souls and replace their “savage” ways with the “civilized,” “good” ways of Europe (Berkhofer 10-11). This was the first of a series of encounters with Europeans in which the Native way was “wrong,” and the European way was “right.” Beginning with the Spanish, the dominant value system of Europe has historically been the basis for the “standards of measurement” used to evaluate Native Americans throughout the United States (Berkhofer 11). The Native peoples in the missions were forced into a European framework that attempted to convert them to a new religion and teach them the European lifestyle.



In 1816, Russian artist Louis Choris observed of the neophytes at Mission Dolores in San Francisco, “I have never seen one laugh, I have never seen one look one in the face” (Castillo 276). Life in the missions placed “psychological stress” on Native peoples like the Ohlone, who had “undergone a coerced transformation into a slave society” (276). The original “Utopian” goal of the missionaries was to “set up the perfect Christian community of which the Indians were to be the beneficiaries” (Margolin Ohlone 159). They were to be “weaned away from their life of nakedness, lewdness, and idolatry” to learn proper conduct and obtain skills in the

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G+1 2

#### Henry David Thoreau

*As a single footstep will not make a path on the earth, so a single thought will not make a pathway in the mind. To make a deep physical path, we walk again and again. To make a deep mental path, we must think over and over the kind of thoughts we wish to dominate our lives.*

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“civilized arts” (159). The Ohlone and other Native peoples did not submit to mission doctrine as effectively as the missionaries had hoped, and strict disciplinary policies were used to try and force conversion of the Natives to Christianity and European ways (Castillo 280-281).

Native Californians were “often drawn to the missions by the desire for technology, food, or protection from disease” (Beebe 260), but once they entered the mission and were baptized, they became subject to the complete authority of the Spanish Fathers, “who felt directly responsible to God for the souls of the newly baptized Indians” (Margolin Ohlone 160). For the Fathers, baptism meant “a permanent commitment, an irrevocable choice for Christianity” (Beebe 261). When neophytes escaped from the crowded, diseased missions, soldiers or converted Natives were sent to retrieve them (Margolin Ohlone 160). Those who escaped repeatedly were “whipped, bastinadoed, and shackled” (160). There was no permanent return to traditional life for those who became baptized as long as the missions were in place.

In the missions, Native peoples experienced greatly altered lifestyles, in which they had to endure major alterations to their diet and live in “barracks-style” housing (Field, Cambra and Leventhal 20). The missionaries attempted to replace their neophytes’ traditional beliefs with Christian religious ideas and European political and social ideas (Bean xxii). Additionally, the missions “were designed to settle and defend the lands” Spain had obtained, as well as supply “detailed information on new lands” and “[encourage] migration of Spaniards to the empire’s frontiers” (Rawls 14). The land that the Ohlone had depended on for subsistence for thousands of years was therefore used by the Spanish for agriculture and cattle grazing, which stripped it of resources (Castillo 280). These practices “depleted” (280) the Native peoples’ food sources. Simultaneously, Native populations greatly declined due to deaths from introduced diseases, such as measles, smallpox and syphilis (Margolin Way 163), which were worsened by unsanitary conditions in the densely-populated missions, “dietary deficiencies” from their altered diets, and a “lack of medical care” (Rawls 18). These factors led to the “collapse” of villages that had once been “independent...economic and civic centers” (Castillo 280).

In addition to the physical collapse of Ohlone society, children in the missions were restricted to learning European methods of making clothing and tools, and they practiced agriculture and brick-building, among other skills considered useful by the Spanish (Margolin Ohlone 162). Had they been raised in Ohlone villages, instead of

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*"Besides the noble art of getting things done, there is the noble art of leaving things undone. The wisdom of life consists in the elimination of non-essentials." - Lin Yutang*

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“spinning and weaving cloth” (162), they would have been making traditional “capas of woven rabbit skin” and tule skirts (4). Essentially, the neophytes were in many cases, “Hispanicized not only in religion but also in social organization, language, dress, work habits, and virtually every other aspect of their lives” (Rawls 14). The missions were successful in altering the lifestyles of the neophytes in the system, such as the Ohlone, who were subsequently forced into labor on Mexican rancheros following the secularization of the missions in 1821, at which time Native peoples could finally leave the missions (20). Far from being free under Mexican control, many Native peoples, who had been taught discipline, were exploited for the skills they had obtained, and their ability to return to traditional life was further diminished in this continued coercion (19). The methods of their traditional culture were not passed on to new generations as fully as they had been in the past, and overtime, many customs were lost, only to be found in the records of white anthropologists who were attempting to “salvage ethnography from the last living members” of the cultures they believed would soon be entirely “dead” (Berkhofer 30).

One such anthropologist was Alfred Kroeber, who worked in the Department of Anthropology at UC Berkeley in the early 1900s (Field, Cambra and Leventhal 20). He once said of the missions: “It must have caused many of the Fathers a severe pang to realize, as they could not but do daily, that they were saving souls only at the inevitable cost of lives” (Rawls 18). Not only were many Native lives literally lost, but culturally, they were all severed from their roots. In Kroeber’s Handbook of the Indians of California, he declared the Ohlone an extinct group, which led the United States federal government and the California state government to deny them and other such anthropologically classified tribes any recognition (Field, Cambra and Leventhal 20). Anthropology and the response of the government have led to “many decades of collective social and cultural invisibility” for those tribes Kroeber classified as extinct (20). Kroeber made his classifications based on the scarcity of “material culture and knowledge about daily lifeways” (20) that was first caused by the missions, and subsequently caused by many other factors resulting from westward expansion and policies of the United States government.



bike/walking:

# miles round trip X days ridden = M

M X gallons of gas used for each mile driven in your car  
= S

S X 19.4 lbs carbon dioxide per gallon gas used =  
Pounds of carbon dioxide you've prevented from  
entering the atmosphere

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#### Labels

Alviso Adobe Community Park animals Autumn  
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The process of applying for and obtaining federal recognition from the United States is challenging, expensive and time-consuming, and the Muwekma Ohlone tribal entity has been working toward it for about twenty years (Field, Cambra and Leventhal 21). The Verona Band, the ancestors of the present-day Muwekma Ohlone, was federally recognized until 1927 (28), after Kroeber's Handbook was published in 1925 (20). In order to gain recognition today, the tribal entity must prove to the Branch of Acknowledgement Research (BAR) of the Bureau of Indian Affairs that there have been "historic continuities" from 1927, when the Verona Band lost its recognition, to 1982, when the Muwekma Ohlone tribal entity was established (28). The evidence does exist and the BAR "substantiated" it, but ultimately in 2002, the BAR denied the entity's petition by "dismiss[ing]" the most critical evidence of these continuities (28). They continue to fight for their recognition.

For the Muwekma Ohlone, repatriation of material culture that is currently stored in museums and claiming its "cultural patrimony" can "increasingly characterize the Muwekmas' relationship to aspects of their history" (Field, Cambra and Leventhal 44). This is often difficult, however, because the identities and relations between tribes were undocumented or inaccurately depicted by early anthropologists and thus, proving "continuous patrimony" (37) is more difficult for groups like the Ohlone, who did not receive extensive documentation (36-37). Despite these barriers, the Muwekma have continued their "struggle against more than two centuries of cultural dismemberment" (43). To challenge Kroeber's "verdict of extinction", the tribal entity created a cultural-resource-management firm to provide evidence that their culture is not extinct (22). These efforts have exposed the extant vitality of Ohlone culture, whose supposed extinction was widely-accepted "by the public, anthropologists, government officials, schoolteachers and others" (23). Ironically, present-day Ohlone have had to search through the records of the same people who sought to extinguish their culture in order to relearn forgotten traditions and provide evidence of their continuous cultural survival. The often racist and biased records of Spanish

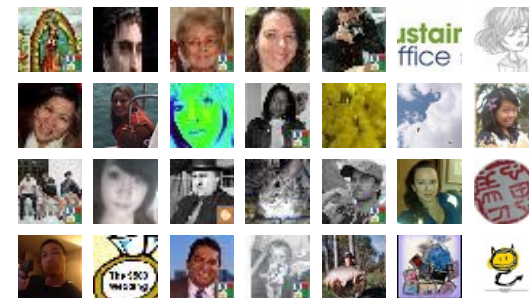
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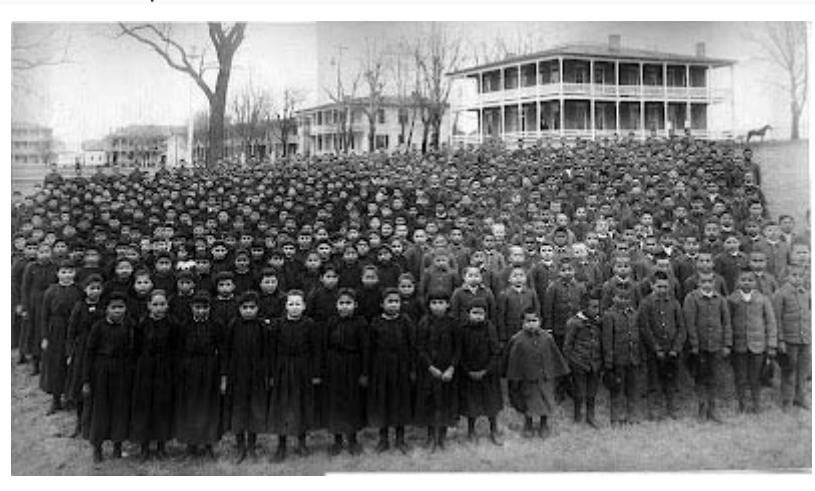
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missionaries contain details of Ohlone life at the time of contact, and the ethnographic records of anthropologists have preserved their traditions in writing and recordings.

Though the missions and anthropological classifications have been two major hindrances to cultural stability and recognized tribal sovereignty of the Ohlone, it is important to recognize the historic prevalence of similar Eurocentric practices. The missions are only one example of many ways that European society has attempted to “destroy the ‘Indian’ in the ‘race’ in favor of the ‘man,’ as [Captain Richard H. Pratt, founder of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School] was fond of saying” (Berkhofer 171). Another example is the boarding school system of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that removed “uncivilized” Native children from their tribal homelands and taught them “submission to authority” and “vocational” skills to become useful, Americanized, though still second-class, citizens (Lomawaima 81-82). In both the mission and boarding school systems, those in power measured the Native people according to the European value system without regard for the inherent value or importance of Native culture.



Carlisle School

Still today, much of European-American society measures other cultures according to this scale, where white American culture is considered normal and non-white American culture is abnormal or intolerable. For example, the Christian religion in dominant American culture is viewed as a standard, normal belief system, but the traditional beliefs of the Ohlone and other Native peoples are often considered “make-believe,” “primitive” and mythological (Anzaldúa 59) to many people raised



and firmly entrenched in popular American culture and dominant discourse. It is unfortunate that these views are still prevalent because this continues to make it difficult for tribes like the Muwekma Ohlone to gain federal recognition of their tribal sovereignty; this sovereignty is inherently theirs as an indigenous culture that recognizes its power and celebrates its continually vibrant and fully alive cultural identity (Kickingbird 1-3).

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*This paper was written for American Studies 80E, taught by Professor Renya Ramirez at the University of California, Santa Cruz. It was turned in March 3, 2011 during Winter Quarter.*

Posted by Green Gal at 8:33 PM 

This post is

Labels: college, Native American, Ohlone Indians, Santa Cruz

## 4 comments:



**visionurdream** October 17, 2013 at 11:04 AM

Horse Tuuxi (Hello),

I enjoyed ready your writings on the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe. I would like to use some of the information for my paper. I am a member of the Muwekma Ohlone tribe. I am taking an American America and Politics course, and I am writing a paper on the Muwekma Ohlone re-recognition process. I am to write about events within the

last five years. I am wondering if you can refer me to current resources to do my research for my paper? I have mostly exhausted the Internet and I am looking for articles or maybe some websites that I may not have searched yet. Any information you could provide me will be much appreciated. Kis horse ek-hinnan (Thank you).  
'Utaspu meene (take care),

Donna

Reply



**Green Gal** November 30, 2013 at 1:36 PM

Donna,

I apologize for never getting back to you. Thank you for reading my blog! I haven't done any further research beyond this paper on the Muwekma Ohlone re-recognition process, and any resources I know of online are listed after this article.

However, I do know someone who may be able to help you though! Dr. Melissa Nelson, director of the Cultural Conservancy, recently spoke at my university, and she might be a great person to reach out to for some more resources or information. The Conservancy's website is <http://www.nativeland.org/> and you can find Dr. Nelson's contact information under "Contact Us." I encourage you to email her and explain the research you're doing and what kind of information you're looking for.

Best of luck with your research!

Green Gal

Reply



**Coyote Woman** October 7, 2014 at 2:37 PM

Nice work

It is a frustrating process, and on top of that it's a strong tactic the government enjoys to discourage unity of indigenous peoples - "let them fight amongst themselves". I see both sides of the argument - the perks to federal recognition - the great things we can do, our ancestors can be re-entered to the ground and so much more just to be 'recognized', but I am saddened how this encourages angst and the burden of guarding one's self/family/tribe and not connecting with other bands to unite in the larger community efforts....and WHY? why do we as

Indigenous peoples have to work our ass off to "prove" who we are (in that federal recognition process - that is damaged) instead of expecting the gov't to prove who we are not? sorry, random tangent... again - nice work

-Kanyon SR  
Ohlone - Mutsun  
www.indiancanyonlife.org

Reply



**Arthur James III** May 3, 2015 at 10:22 AM

Well, some Afro-Centric folks claim th e darker skinned member are Black Africans. Is this correct?

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