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And Then There Were None: A Comparative Analysis of Anglophone Displacement of Indigenous Populations in California and South Africa

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And Then There Were None:
A Comparative Analysis of Anglophone Displacement of Indigenous Populations in California
and South Africa

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History Honors Thesis

Table of Contents

Introduction..... 3

Chapter 1: “Striking Gold”..... 5

Chapter 2: “The Mineral Revolution”..... 17

Chapter 3: “The Search for Absolution”..... 35

Bibliography.....51

Introduction

This honors thesis analyzes the displacement and subjugation of indigenous populations following the discovery of valuable minerals in California and South Africa. The 1848 discovery of gold in California, coupled with the 1867 discovery of diamonds and 1884 discovery of gold in South Africa offers two models in which justification for indigenous population exploitation for labor and land dispossession was crafted through the ideology of racial “difference.”

This thesis will answer the fundamental questions Benjamin Madley poses in his provoking article, “California’s Yuki Indians: Defining Genocide in Native American History.”¹ Primarily, should scholars reevaluate the assumption that indirect effects of white settlement, like disease, rather than deliberate actions, like murder, were the leading cause of death in indigenous encounters and land dispossession? Madley asserts that the catastrophe in California constituted genocide under the 1948 United Nations Genocide Convention, challenging Guenter Lewy’s claim that, “Genocide was never American policy, nor was it the result of policy...the sad fate of America’s Indians represents not a crime but a tragedy.”² This thesis will therefore seek to explore the level of U.S. government involvement in the genocide through legislation such as the Act of the Government and Protection of Indians passed in April 22, 1850 and extend to the Dawes Act 1887 and its subsequent repercussions.

In South Africa, a perceived need for the white population as a whole having to be preserved as a matter of policy from the infiltration of nonwhites did not develop until the late

¹ Benjamin Madley, “California’s Yuki Indians: Defining Genocide in Native American History,” *Western Historical Quarterly* (2008): 307.

² *Ibid.*, 331.

1800s after the Mineral Revolution and discovery of gold and diamonds.³ Significantly, it was the racial division of labor and the rationalizations that ensued from the Mineral Revolution that paved the way to what would eventually lead to institutionalized white supremacy. By engaging in a comparative analysis, a more comprehensive understanding of both California and South Africa indigenous subjugation and land dispossession can be achieved.

Chapter 1 – “Striking Gold” discusses the Gold Rush in California and examines how native populations were exploited for labor and analyze the extent of government involvement in the extermination of Native Americans, systematically illustrating how events that transpired in California fit the United Nations definition of genocide. Chapter 2: “The Mineral Revolution”: Chapter 2 draws parallels from the previous chapter, with labor for mining diamonds and gold in South Africa serving as the driving force for setting the stage for apartheid, further perpetuating white supremacy and the exploitation and segregation of black labor. Chapter 3 – “The Search for Absolution”: The third and final chapter of this thesis analyzes the strikingly different ways California, and by extension the United States, has chosen to remember the Gold Rush and alleged “Indian Wars” in comparison to the aftermath of apartheid in South Africa being dealt with in large part by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).

³ George Fredrickson, *White Supremacy, A Comparative Study in American and South African History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 122.

Chapter 2 – “The Mineral Revolution”

“Every ounce of gold taken from the bowels of our soil will have yet to be weighed up with rivers of tears.”

-Stephanus Johannes Paulus Kruger

At the dawn of 2010, South African President Jacob Zuma hailed the coming year as, “the most important year in our country since 1994.”⁴ President Zuma praised the socio-economic transformation of South Africa in building, “an inclusive society out of the racial and ethnic divisions of the past,” as a testament to South Africa’s continued progress over the past eighteen years since apartheid ended in 1994.⁵ However, the 2010 World Cup brought about relocations of South Africans that harkens back with disturbing accuracy to the days of apartheid, forcing the international community to face the haunting question of whether or not South Africa has truly undergone the transformation so ardently articulated by President Zuma. Perhaps the global community can find clarity in answering this complex question by analyzing America’s history of disenfranchising nonwhites in the land of their birth, which created an exclusive and divided society comparable to that of South Africa.

Both the United States and South Africa have battled with attempts to justify and explain the removal of their respective original inhabitants. These events have been greatly contested by historians and have had a momentous effect on the telling of history itself and its subsequent perception. The dangers that invariably arise by refusing to study South African history in a comparative and global context can blatantly be seen in the 1880’s coined term “mfecane.” The concept of the “mfecane” was rooted in the nineteenth-century view of the wars of Shaka, essentially deeming Zulu leader Shaka as wholly responsible for annihilating and scattering tribes across the subcontinent.⁶ At the very height of apartheid, historian D.J. Omer-Cooper alleged in 1966 that it was the rein of Shaka, whose new military tactics assimilated conquered tribes and outright massacres led to the complete disappearance of previously independent tribes

⁴ “2010 New Year Message to the Nation,” African National Congress, accessed November 29, 2010, <http://www.anc.org.za/3709>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Dan Wylie, *Myth of Iron* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2006), 437.

that were the cause of mass migrations inland that effectively depopulated and conveniently cleared the way for white settler areas of the Transvaal, the Orange Free State, and Natal.⁷

Although not a historian, Thomas Mofolo's 1981 novel *Chaka* nevertheless had a monumental effect in perpetuating the ideas presented by Omar-Cooper, illustrating Shaka as a crazed warrior king who killed men, women, and children indiscriminately, burning their villages and crops, which led to starvation that resulted in cannibalism in his attempt to spread his kingdom.⁸

Mofolo contended that, "all the nations joined the stampede of the southward flight, and they killed each other with such viciousness that sometimes they waded through the blood of the slain."⁹ With Shaka's dying words being, "the white man is coming, and it is he who will rule you, and you will be his servants," Mofolo not only maintained that Shaka was responsible for the civil wars that led to mass migrations, his novel further served to illustrate the notion that white domination was destined and inevitable.¹⁰

However, in 1988, revisionist historian Julian Cobbing asserted that there was in fact no self-generated internal revolution and the alleged near-genocidal results of Zulu expansionism were concocted as justification for the effects of slave and cattle raids that depopulated the areas of white settlement.¹¹ Historian Dan Wyle advanced Cobbing's thesis, and although conceded that Cobbing could be faulted at numerous points, asserted that Cobbing's "The Mfecane as Alibi" proved that Shaka could no longer be fully blamed for an alleged savage outburst of self-

⁷ J.D. Omer-Cooper, *The Zulu Aftermath, A Nineteenth-Century Revolution in Bantu Africa* (United Kingdom: Longman Group, 1966), 35-36, 38-39.

⁸ Thomas Mofolo, *Chaka* (Oxford: Heinemann Publishers, 1981), 141, 136, 167.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 136.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 167.

¹¹ Julian Cobbing, *The Mfecane as Alibi, Thoughts on Dithakong and Mbolompo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 498.

consuming, purely black-on-black violence.¹² Furthermore, Cobbing and Wyle have served to promote the idea that Zulu, and by extension, South African history can no longer be simplistically divorced from world history. Cobbing's allegation that the “mfecane” was used to legitimate South Africa’s racially unequal land division has had a jarring effect on the apocalyptic rhetoric that has long served to implement a divisive and dangerously misleading “Afrocentric” and “Eurocentric” historiographical approach.

The official apartheid ideology institutionalized by the Afrikaner National Party from 1948 to 1994 was contingent upon the approach assailed by both Cobbing and Wyle, as can be seen in a 1977 South African Department of Information pamphlet stating, “After the frontier wars of the 18th and 19th centuries and large-scale depopulation of the interior as a result of the wars of genocide committed by the Zulu king Chaka, the Whites and Blacks by and large retained the respective White and Black homelands into which the country had come to be divided.”¹³ However, upon inspection, this ideology proves to be unfounded.

Similarly, the notion that Native Americans left areas of white settlement depopulated due to their use of land only for hunting became the accepted rationalization for extinguishing their territory.¹⁴ By the early eighteenth century the principle that “civilized” cultures took precedence over “savage” hunters and gathers had become an established principle of international law as codified by the Swiss jurist Vattel, which was incorporated into the widely acclaimed theory of social evolution that gauged human progress in terms of the great transformation from “barbarism” to “civilization” characterized by the advent of sedentary

¹² Wylie, *Myth of Iron*, 439.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 345.

¹⁴ George Fredrickson, *White Supremacy, A Comparative Study in American and South African History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 35.

agriculture.¹⁵ Just like the alleged Shaka wars, it was necessary to distort reality. In America, this was accomplished by exaggerating the Indians reliance on hunting and by interpreting their occasional movements and migrations as genuine nomadism.¹⁶ However, the desire to seize both cultivated and uncultivated Indian territory required yet another rationalization that English political sovereignty over the indigenous' territories superseded tribal rights to possess or allocate land, allowing Indians to lose their land through purchase, fraud, treaties in which coercion was often involved, and land settlements resulting in wars.¹⁷ It is essential to bear in mind that behind all these policies existed the settlers' conviction that they had a natural God-given right to the soil because they were civilized and the Indians were not.¹⁸

As did the colonists in America, the Dutch trekboers in South Africa seized upon the cultural distinction of religion between themselves and the indigenous. Slavery in the Cape was initially legitimized by the rationale that the slave trade spread Christianity by removing "savages" from societies inaccessible to missionaries to Christian colonies where their souls could be saved, emphasizing the combination of heathenism and captivity rather than pigmentation.¹⁹ However, the presumption that a baptized slave had a right to emancipation resulted in Dutch encouragement of Islam amongst slaves, not due to religious tolerance, but because of the practical advantage of having Muslim slaves.²⁰ When the British took over the Cape, they called for increased missionary activity to counter this phenomenon and by 1834, slavery emancipation under British rule was underway.²¹ For Afrikaners, these changes

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 72, 75.

²⁰ Ibid., 82.

²¹ Ibid., 83.

perceived as *gelykstelling*, the equalization of status between blacks and whites, threatened not simply a system of labor, but a coveted way of life, and their response can be illustrated in The Great Trek from 1836 to 1838, a movement that asserted simultaneously their right to rule arbitrarily over nonwhites and their right to be free of any authority over themselves.²²

Remarkably, the white settlers in South Africa who fought for freedom were not inclined to extend the kind of “liberty” they demanded for themselves to the nonwhites over whom they ruled as slave-owners or conquerors.²³ Increasingly, Afrikaners defended the enslavement of nonwhites by emphasizing race as the single greatest differentiator.²⁴ By the 1840s and 1850s, a special sense of mission emerged among the Afrikaner trekkers that there was a divine plan to establish independent white Christian communities in the Orange Free State and the Transvaal that laid the foundation for Afrikaner nationalism that would eventually claim the entire country of South Africa in the name of racial supremacy.²⁵

Although religion was used as justification for land acquisition in America and South Africa, both indigenous populations lost their ability to make a substantial economic contribution to white colonists that caused a fundamental shift in the way they were perceived that must also be taken into account. As the Indian trade in America rapidly became marginal and readily dispensable, the desire for territorial expansion became paramount.²⁶ Once Native Americans had exhausted their supply of furs and skins for the white market and the Khoikhoi had lost their ability to provide cattle to the Dutch East India Company, their continued survival as

²² Ibid., 167-169.

²³ Ibid., 138.

²⁴ Ibid., 166.

²⁵ Ibid., 52-53.

²⁶ Ibid., 31.

independent societies no longer made a contribution to the success of white settlements.²⁷ It was at that exact point that trading interests became subservient to the desire of white colonists to expropriate the land still occupied by the indigenous populations.²⁸ The end result for the indigenous peoples was loss of land, cultural cohesion and any independence and power previously held due to their ability to economically contribute to the colonists.

Another notable, yet often overlooked correlation in the dispossessing of land in regards to both the South Africans and Native Americans is disease. This shared phenomenon must be taken into consideration when analyzing the reasons why the European takeover in South Africa and America was executed with relative ease.²⁹ It is also crucial in understanding what initially established a “no go” zone for settler occupation in the Cape. Trypanosomiasis, a parasite carried by the tsetse fly, caused sleeping sickness in humans and was also devastating to cattle and horses.³⁰ Before quinine and other drugs came into general use, malaria and the tsetse fly discouraged settler occupation in areas where they were prevalent.³¹ As in the case of Native Americans, disease brought by Europeans most likely accounted for a greater proportion of South African indigenous mortality than the wars that were fought either with the colonists or among themselves for control of the trade that the whites had inaugurated.³² While there are examples of coercion, the extent to which indigenous peoples were willing trade participants remains contested.³³ However, it cannot be forgotten that seemingly shortsighted rapacity can only be properly explained by reference to the entire traumatic package of seismic disruptions

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ William Beinart and Peter Coates, *Environment and History: The Taming of Nature in the USA and South Africa* (London: Routledge, 1995), 10.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Frederickson, *White Supremacy*, 37.

³³ Beinart, *Environment and History*, 22.

inflicted by territorial encroachment, Christianity, and disease.³⁴ The Native American smallpox epidemics that broke out in 1713, 1735, and 1776 resulted in the disappearance of entire tribes, as did the coinciding smallpox outbreaks in the Cape Colony in 1713, 1755, 1767, and 1812.³⁵

Another key element just as easily forgotten is that of their respective frontier environments. In both America and South Africa, drought coinciding with the spread of disease played a pivotal role in the migration of tribes and, in the case of South Africa, helped further stimulate the incursion of slavers.³⁶ The desolation of famine, exacerbated by smallpox, brought with it an inability for communities to defend themselves from intruders.³⁷ To attribute the conquering of American and South African indigenous peoples to physical weakness or intellectual inferiority is an egregious error that exposes an underestimation of the strength and power of both the Native Americans and indigenous South Africans. There is no doubt that the extraordinary migrations of the indigenous Americans from Asia to Alaska and the Bantu-speaking Africans colonizing southern Africa would not have been possible without opportunism and ingenuity.³⁸ The rationale that tribes were simply “not developed enough” to counter the attacks and infiltration of whites on their homeland serves to further solidify and perpetuate the fundamentally flawed rationale that “savage” South Africans and Native Americans were overwhelmed by “civilization.”

Curiously, there has existed in both countries a powerful desire to portray the image of the frontier without including the original inhabitants of that frontier. The Euro-American perception of wilderness has been that of a physical environment freeze framed at the point after

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Beinart, *Environment and History*, 37; Wylie, *Myth of Iron*, 348.

³⁶ Wylie, 348.

³⁷ Ibid., 250.

³⁸ Beinart, *Environment and History*, 4.

the Indians have been cleared away but before the settlers have arrived, with such fictions being maintained in the context of recreational tourism.³⁹ As an empty, seemingly untouched landscape locked away and undiscovered for centuries, national parks represented a perfect Eden, and served as a visual manifestation of God's original design for America.⁴⁰ President Zuma's declaration that 2010, "must be the year in which we work together to make the Soccer World Cup the biggest turning point in the marketing of our country," was by no means the first time South Africa worked toward creating an image that would entice a larger number of tourists. Although the primary argument for national parks and reservations in South Africa initially derived from concerns about predatory hunting and game reserves rather than tourism, game animals themselves became a recurrent motif in white colonists' conception and projection of themselves.⁴¹ With game viewing becoming a crucial tourist experience of the "wilderness" for whites, and Piet Grobler emboldened by American financial success serving as minister of lands at the time of South African park legislation, South African tourism soon became to resemble the American model.⁴²

Alongside South African legislation to preserve the wilderness came the desire to introduce into legislation the long held principle of territorial segregation.⁴³ The Native Land Act of 1913 epitomized the South African government's determination to implement a national 'native policy' that was rooted in previous local policy. Its central provision was to deprive Africans of the right to acquire land outside their existing areas of occupation, and to prohibit

³⁹ Ibid., 85.

⁴⁰ Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 70.

⁴¹ Beinart, *Environment and History*, 78, 77.

⁴² Ibid., 78.

⁴³ Brian Willan, *Sol Plaatje: South African Nationalist, 1876-1932* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 159.

whites from acquiring land within these areas, now defined as “Scheduled Native Areas.”⁴⁴ The Native Land Act in 1913 served as an essential stepping-stone for the Afrikaner National Party to implement the 1950 Group Areas Act that racially divided the entire country of South Africa. The utter demolition of Sophiatown in 1955 serves as an example of the apartheid government’s acute fear of hybrid culture that fueled such legislation.⁴⁵ The enormous contention brought about by these relocations culminated into what would be a pivotal change in the anti-apartheid movement. The Sharpeville massacres in the township of Sharpeville near Johannesburg on March 21, 1960 led the Afrikaner National Party to illegalize both the African National Congress (ANC) and Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), forcing both organizations to go underground and catalyzing an entirely new militant approach by the anti-apartheid groups that began an era of violent resistance within South Africa.

Although never engaging in violence, Steve Biko, the renowned father of Black Consciousness, spoke of the violence, degradation, and psychological as well as physical oppression brought on by townships stating, “it helps to build up the sense of insecurity which is part of a feeling of incompleteness; you are not a complete human being.”⁴⁶ With diamonds having been discovered in 1867 and gold in 1884, South Africans who “squatted” on privately owned land had been subjected to a form of labor tenancy, a requirement that they work several months of the year for the landlord in return for simply being allowed to remain where they had lived for generations, a system that can be accurately surmised as an adaption of the traditional pattern of coercing black labor that had its ultimate roots in slavery and Khoikhoi indentured

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ David Coplan, *In Township Tonight!: South Africa’s Black City Music and Theatre* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 195.

⁴⁶ Steve Biko, *I Write What I Like*, “What is Black Consciousness?” (London: Bowerdean Press, 1978), 111.

servitude.⁴⁷ The fact that induced migrations were familiar devices made it easier for the South African government to aid in enforcing such policies in the mines, and by extension, to the entire South African urban population, with the closed compound being used as a model for British townships.⁴⁸ The results were that the average urban South Africans were, like black miners, deemed as threats to society and their homes perceived as havens for criminals and gangs, with forced migrations rationalized as being the only viable solution to control and contain the South African population.

A devastating consequence of forced migration shared by South Africans and Native Americans was the systematic breakdown of the family. Although some African families experienced increased prosperity coinciding with the discovery of diamonds and gold by producing food for the urban markets, many families experienced periodic separation as the men traveled to mining towns or white farms to work for several months at a time, leaving women with greatly extended responsibilities for the household economy.⁴⁹ By the year 1900, a number of Africans were living permanently in the towns and becoming the nucleus of an urban proletariat.⁵⁰ South African miners often formed their own family bonds in attempt to recreate their biological family now far out of reach, as so perceptively depicted in Peter Abraham's influential novel *Mine Boy* published in 1946.⁵¹

Revered South African journalist Sol Plaatje witnessed in Kimberly the devastating effects that alcoholism could have in an attempt to placate the grueling mine work and appalling housing conditions, with many of his articles singling out alcoholism as the primary reason for

⁴⁷ Frederickson, *White Supremacy*, 216, 220.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 220.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Peter Abrahams, *Mine Boy* (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1946).

the deterioration of his people.⁵² The corresponding prevalence of alcoholism in Native American reservations and South African townships today reveal the overwhelming extent to which both societies have yet to piece together their families and culture so badly mangled by the dispossession of their land.

In a 1970 letter to the Students' Representative Council Presidents, Steve Biko wrote, "The blacks are tired of standing at the touchlines to witness a game that they should be playing. They want to do things for themselves and all by themselves."⁵³ Because of the depth of redemption symbolized in the triumphant image of Biko's vision quite literally being brought to fruition with South Africans not only participating, but facilitating one of the most revered games in the world by being chosen to host the FIFA World Cup in the summer of 2010, the resulting displacement of South Africans due to the World Cup is even more disconcerting. In striving to make South Africa more appealing to tourists, the South African government moved many of Cape Town's homeless to Blikkiesdorp, Afrikaans for "Tin Can City," which is a settlement of corrugated metal shanties east of Cape Town, and similar actions in numerous cities were carried out across the country.⁵⁴ Although the alleged purpose of Blikkiesdorp was to provide temporary shelter for an estimated 300,000 Cape Town residents waiting for government housing, residents have attested that they were forcibly relocated, and that these relocations have been anything but temporary.⁵⁵ Identical to the townships Biko spoke of, "placed long distances away from working areas," Blikkiesdorp is located far away from Cape Town, with no stores or

⁵² Willan, *Sol Plaatje*, 318-319.

⁵³ Biko, *I Write What I Like*, "Letter to SRC Presidents," 15.

⁵⁴ "South Africa Hides Its Homeless Ahead Of World Cup," National Public Radio, accessed November 4, 2010, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story.php>.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

schools, and an hour's walk to the nearest train station.⁵⁶ Desolately isolated communities such as Blikkiesdorp, resulting from forced relocations by the government, harkens back with disturbing accuracy to South Africa's apartheid history of forcing Africans out of sight at all costs, leading to South Africans yet again being made homeless in the country of their birth.

When accepting the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993, Nelson Mandela stated that, "We live with the hope that as she battles to remake herself, South Africa will be like a microcosm of the new world that is striving to be born...freed from the horrors of poverty, hunger, deprivation and ignorance, relieved of the threat and the scourge of civil wars and external aggression and unburdened of the great tragedy of millions forced to become refugees."⁵⁷ Upon analyzing South Africa today, it becomes clear that much of Mandela's vision for the country has yet to be fully realized. Despite progress over the past eighteen years since the legal end of political apartheid, the current statistics of over 80% of commercial farmland still in the hands of whites, half the population living below the poverty line, an average life expectancy of only 49 years, nearly a quarter of the population unemployed, and 5.6 million men, women, and children HIV positive, all speak to the fact that although much has been achieved in South Africa, much remains to be done.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Biko, *I Write What I Like*, "What is Black Consciousness?" 101; "South Africa Hides Its Homeless Ahead of World Cup," National Public Radio.

⁵⁷ "Acceptance Speech of the President of the African National Congress at the Nobel Peace Prize Award Ceremony," African National Congress, accessed November 29, 2010, <http://www.anc.org.za/4114>.

⁵⁸ "South Africa: People," Central Intelligence Agency, accessed November 29, 2010, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sf.html>.

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