

Unit Essential Questions:

1. What is cultural erasure and how does it impact communities?
2. Who should tell our stories, and why does it matter?

Lesson 2: Cultural Erasure and the Myth of Inevitable Extinction

LESSON INTRODUCTION

Time Frame: 2 Class Periods

Materials: Slideshow, Station notetaker

In this lesson, students debunk the assumption that Native American people no longer exist. They explore the settler concept of the “**Myth of Inevitable Extinction**”, the concept that Native people were destined to be eliminated from the earth due to inherent weaknesses within the community. It is an idea that is used by settlers to justify the genocidal treatment inflicted onto Native peoples.

As students explore examples of the myth, they consider the way that bias, audience, and purpose influence the way that Native people were/are discussed and treated by settlers.

Students then have an opportunity to learn about significant legislation and political movements that directly sought to assimilate, and/or eliminate Native American people from existence. As students learn about these movements, they begin to understand that the “Myth of Inevitable Extinction” is not based in fate or destiny, but rather, was a concept that settlers consciously used to justify violence against Native peoples.

To read more about the “**Myth of Inevitable Extinction**” read “**Reading for Teachers**” attached to the bottom of this lesson.

ENGAGE

Teacher Directions: Ask students to journal, answering the following prompt:

What does it mean for something to be extinct? When kinds of events or actions lead to extinction?

Discussion Tips:

Students might think about natural disasters that make things become extinct. Ask students if they can think of any human actions that cause or accelerate extinction.

EXPLORE

Teacher Directions:

Review the definition of erasure/cultural erasure on **slide 6**. Explain that this lesson explores some of the ways cultural erasure took place in California, pre 20th Century, and through the 1970's.

Explore the data on **slide 7**. Students will notice that there was a dramatic decrease in the Native population during the late 19th century. Encourage them to ask questions about how this occurred, what it meant for Native culture, etc. Students may be able to tap into prior knowledge about the Gold Rush/Western Expansion.

Briefly explain the legislation/movements on the timeline on **slide 9**. You may choose to show the video, which provides commentary on these events from a CA Native perspective.

Project each quote included in **slides 11-13** on the screen, and ask students to discuss the following questions with their partner:

Discussion Questions:

1. What does the speaker believe about Native people?
2. What words or phrases does the speaker use to convey their message?
3. Does the author benefit from the extinction of Native people? Why or why not?
4. How might the message conveyed in the text impact Native identity today?

Discussion Tips:

Students might need to tap into their prior knowledge of American history, the Gold Rush/Westward expansion, in order to reflect fully. When thinking about the impact the quotes/ways of thinking have on Native people, consider the following: How might the environment have been made more dangerous for Native people? How might the targeting of Native people impact families, culture, and daily life? You might also point out that Native people are infantilized by the speakers, talked about as if they have no agency over themselves, and no inherent value as human beings. Native people were largely treated like animals during this time, whose basic humanity was not recognized.

EXPLAIN

Teacher Directions:

1. Review the definition of the "Myth of Inevitable Extinction" on **slide 14**.

2. Review the example of the “Myth of Inevitable Extinction” on **slide 15**, asking students to notice the language used.

ELABORATE

Optional Activity:

Teacher Directions:

[before class] Set up 3 stations in the classroom (You may want to create 2 sets of 3, depending on class size). At each station, set up laptops with the slide and videos labeled “Station 1”, “Station 2”, and “Station 3”, included in the slideshow of this lesson.

Divide students among the stations. Provide students with a copy of the notetaker, attached to this lesson.

Provide students 10+ minutes to watch the video at their station and take notes in their notetaker.

Tell students when to rotate to the next station. Repeat.

Alternatively, you may choose to do a jigsaw activity, where groups of students are assigned one video, which they describe to the class.

Station Videos:

Station 1:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dmarnR8sgNE>

Station 2:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UGqWRyBCHhw&t=1s>

Station 3:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n2bpBAXvJew>

EVALUATE

Teacher Directions:

After students have completed their three stations, facilitate a class discussion answering the following questions:

1. How did settler communities in California attempt to erase the Native community?

2. Do the videos conflict with any history you have learned in school/museums/pop culture/etc.?
3. What most surprised you about the videos you watched? What do you wonder?

Bonus:

1. Based on our previous lesson and your own knowledge, how do you know that Native people are not extinct and still exist today?

VOCABULARY

Assimilate: to become absorbed and integrated into a society or culture.

Mission: a religious or political assignment that often requires travel to another country. Religious missionaries are sent throughout the world to convert people to a specific religion or belief system.

Legislation: laws that are followed and accepted collectively by a community.

Justify: to show or prove to be right or reasonable.

Inevitable: a situation that is certain to happen; unavoidable.

Extinction: (of a species, family, or other group of animals or plants) having no living members; no longer in existence.

STANDARDS

Common Core:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.7

Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person's life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.6

Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts.

Seven Essential Understandings:

A Redbud Resource Group, CIMCC Collaboration

Essential Understanding 5 - There were many federal policies put into place throughout American history that have affected Indian people and still shape who they are today. Many of these policies conflicted with one another. Much of Indian history can be related through several major federal policy periods: Colonization/Colonial Period 1492 – 1800s; Treaty Period 1789 – 1871; Assimilation Period - Allotment and Boarding School 1879 – 1934; Tribal Reorganization Period 1934 – 1958; Termination and Relocation Period 1953 – 1971; Self-determination Period 1968 – Present.

Essential Understanding 6 - History is a story most often related through the subjective experience of the teller. With the inclusion of more and varied voices, histories are being rediscovered and revised. History told from an Indian perspective frequently conflicts with the stories mainstream historians tell.

SOURCES

An American Genocide by Benjamin Madley

Bureau of Indian Affairs

Native American Almanac

CIMCC: Education Videos

Vox News

Seeing Our Native Students, Redbud Resource Group

Station 1:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dmarnR8sgNE>

Station 2:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UGqWRyBCHhw&t=1s>

Station 3:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n2bpBAXvJew>

TEACHER MATERIALS

Adapted by Redbud Staff from *An American Genocide* by Benjamin Madley

The Myth of Inevitable Extinction

Objective: Students will understand how The Myth of Inevitable Extinction kept White settlers from taking agency over their violent actions and perpetuated genocide against CA Natives.

Reading for Teachers:

The myth of inevitable extinction sought to attribute horrific actions against the Natives to nonhuman forces such as Providence, fate, and nature. This attribution often wrongly absolved

and deflected blame from White settler communities. If fate and nature were responsible for human events, then settlers were not morally responsible for the destruction of Native communities, fate was.

In 1830, President Andrew Jackson told the US Congress in his annual message that “humanity has often wept over the fate of aborigines [Natives] of this country...its progress has never for a moment been arrested, and one by one have many powerful tribes have disappeared from the earth.” Jackson saw such extinctions as unavoidable. While acknowledging that developing cities and communities in places recently occupied by Natives produced “melancholy reflections,” he also believed that the best way to make peace with Native extinction was to “make room for another” generation to flourish in its place.

This way of thinking is also found in newspapers from the time period. Horace Greeley, a famous newspaper editor, predicted “The Doom of the Indian,” that “Indian’s are to be annihilated-it is their fate.” By blaming the murder of Natives on “fate”, both Jackson and Greeley avoid addressing the human decisions that led to the conquest, colonization, and violence enacted against Native communities. Even if Natives were murdered at request of the state, their deaths were inevitable and at the hands of a higher power.

By the 1840’s, the myth of inevitable extinction was widely applied to California Natives. One traveler stated that Natives “must fade away”. One article in the *California Star* asked readers to “let the destined doom (an early extinction) of the red man hasted towards its close, without enlisting...fruitless sympathies and efforts to avert his fate.” In December of 1850, the *Daily Alta California* described California Natives destruction as unavoidable, suggesting that they would evaporate “like a dissipating mist before the morning sun.”

A Prophecy of Extermination

On January 7, 1851- a week before California officials started their treaty-making campaign across the state, Governor Burnett ushered in a new state-sponsored phase into the destruction of California Natives. During his “Annual Message to the Legislature,” Burnette prophesied that “a war of extinction will continue to be waged between the races, until the Indian race becomes extinct.” Ignoring federal and state treaty-making efforts, the governor declared annihilation inevitable: “The inevitable destiny of the race is beyond the power and wisdom of man to avert.” Burnett endorsed militia operations against California’s Natives, and pushed state legislatures to support the state-sponsored hunting and killing of California Natives. Following his address, violence greatly intensified, money was funneled into militia operations, and the massacre of Natives continued with the government in support.

STATION NOTETAKER

Station # ____ Historical Movement: _____

1. What occurred during this movement/time period?

2. Name 3 ways that Native communities were specifically impacted by this movement:

3. How did Native people resist the impacts of settler colonization during this movement:

4. How did this movement contribute to the erasure of Native peoples?

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