

White Supremacist Roots of American Environmentalism



Dr. Kaitlin Reed
Katie Koscielak

Lifelong Learning Lounge
Humboldt State University
August 3, 2020

Presenters

Who are we and what biases do we bring to this?

Katie Koscielak

- Born Anaheim, CA (asthmatic LA basin 1980s), Irish/Polish Ancestry
- Raised age 2 - 18 in Napa County
- Privileged- white, she/her, straight/cis, able-bodied, educated, middle class family
- B.A. Geography (Human/Cultural) UC Berkeley
- M.A. Social Science HSU, graffiti/murals as counter-hegemonic tool for reclaiming identity & community resilience
- Background in education (tutor in Richmond, CA), art/music, community organizing, farming/gardening, writing
- Food sovereignty & Zero Waste

Dr. Kaitlin Reed

- Yurok/Hupa/Oneida; enrolled Yurok
- B.A. Geography, Vassar College
- M.A. Native American Studies, UC Davis
- Ph.D. Native American Studies, UC Davis
- Charles Eastman Fellow of Native American Studies, Dartmouth College, 2018-2019
- Assistant Professor of Native American Studies, Humboldt State University
- Current book project: *“From Gold Rush to Green Rush: The Ecology of Settler Colonialism in California”*

I begin by acknowledging that I am on the land of the Wiyot peoples which includes the Wiyot Tribe, Bear River Rancheria and Blue Lake Rancheria. Arcata is known as Goudi'ni meaning “over in the woods” or “among the redwoods.” The persistence of the Wiyot peoples to remain in relationship with these lands despite their attempted genocide, compels me to spread awareness to my inner and extended community regarding the true history of this space. I strive to hold myself and others accountable for the continuation of colonial acts which neglect to include the voices and needs of these Tribes, while remembering to lead with compassion.

PS: Land acknowledgements are useless unless they compel you to *do* something.

1. Go listen to this interview with Dr. Hayden King (Anishinaabe) about why he regrets writing the land acknowledgement for his university:
<https://www.cbc.ca/radio/unreserved/redrawing-the-lines-1.4973363/i-regret-it-hayden-king-on-writing-ryerson-university-s-territorial-acknowledgement-1.4973371>
2. Check out this CBC Comedy sketch: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1375680535920065>
3. Find out whose land you're on! <https://native-land.ca/>

Overall Goal & Learning Outcomes

Overall 1: Learn to consider and incorporate justice and decolonization into environmental, sustainability, and climate action work, activism, perspectives, and lens.

Overall 2: “justice” & social dimensions cannot be “parsed out”; these themes are embedded throughout all conversations, actions, and considerations of environmental/sustainability work

Learning outcomes:

1. Learn how settler colonial land dispossession is ongoing and continues to erase Native American presence and ecological knowledge systems
2. Learn how the "fathers" of American Environmentalism were proponents of white supremacy and this concept remains embedded within contemporary movements
3. Learn how contemporary environmental tropes, discourse, and epistemology continue to rely on settler colonial orientations to land that separate humans from nature

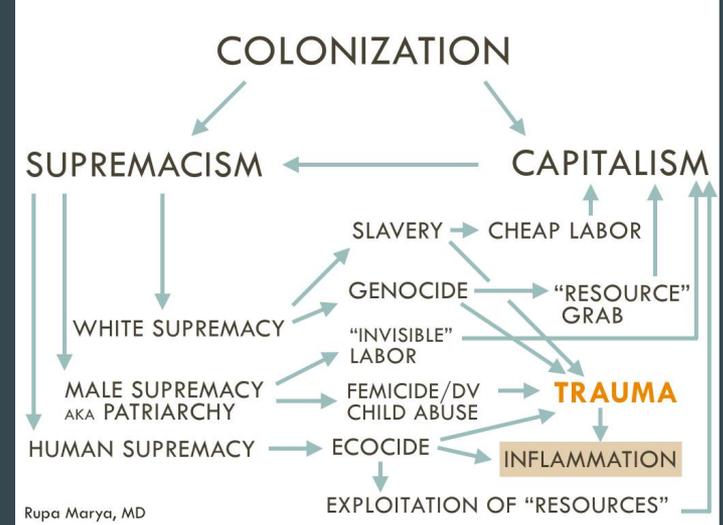
Keywords

- **white supremacy:** historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations, and peoples of color by white peoples and nations of the European continent, for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power, and privilege; read more here:

http://www.pym.org/annual-sessions/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2017/06/What_Is_White_Supremacy_Martinez.pdf

- **settler colonialism:** a continuous set of structures designed to claim land and to do whatever is necessary to erase Indigenous claims to land and to do whatever is necessary to erase Indigenous claims to land, territory, and history; can be considered one of the pillars of white supremacy; read more here:

<https://unsettlingamerica.wordpress.com/2014/06/06/settler-colonialism-primer/>



- **environmentalism:** a predominantly white social movement focused on the welfare of the nature/environment that seeks to conserve/preserve elements of ecosystem (specific animals, plants, etc.), or entire habitats (e.g. rainforests); frequently in tension with Native American nations. read about an example here:

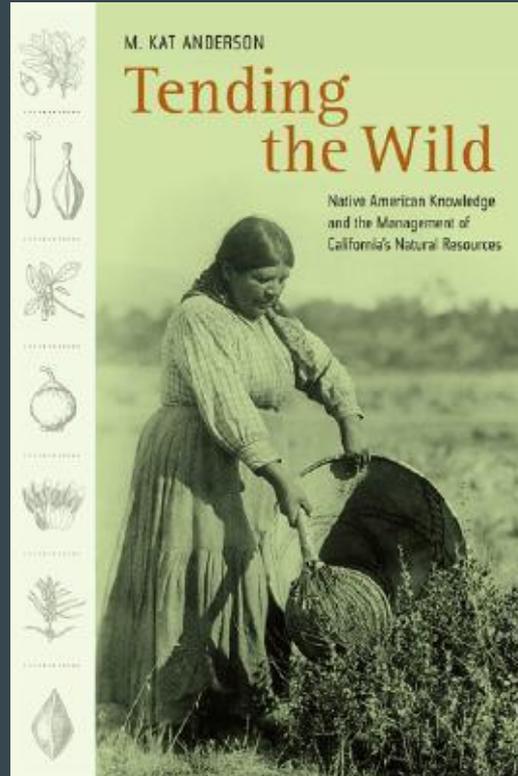
<https://www.kcet.org/shows/tending-the-wild/when-green-groups-fought-native-rights-the-timbisha-shoshone-in-death-valley>

Journal Exercise

1. Word Association: Brainstorm a list of words that you associate with “environmentalism,” “nature,” and/or “wilderness.”
2. Do you know whose land you’re on right now?
 - If the answer is yes, bullet journal everything you know about them.
 - If the answer is no, go find out! You can find that information at native-land.ca, and spend the remainder of the journal session reflecting on *why* you think you don’t know this information.

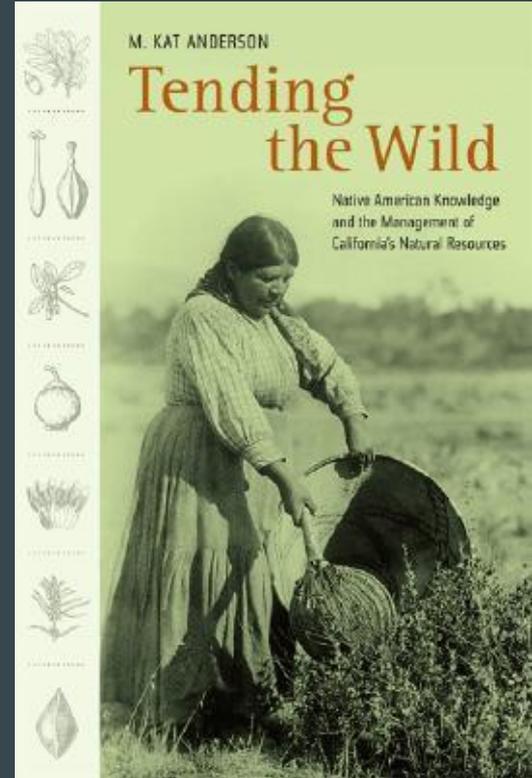


“The New World is in fact a very old world.”



Traditional Ecological Knowledge

- “collective storehouse of knowledge about the natural world”
- “how nature works and how to judiciously harvest and steward its plants and animals without destroying them”
- “product of keen observation, patience, experimentation, and long-term relationships with plants and animals”
- “knowledge built on a history, gained through many generations”



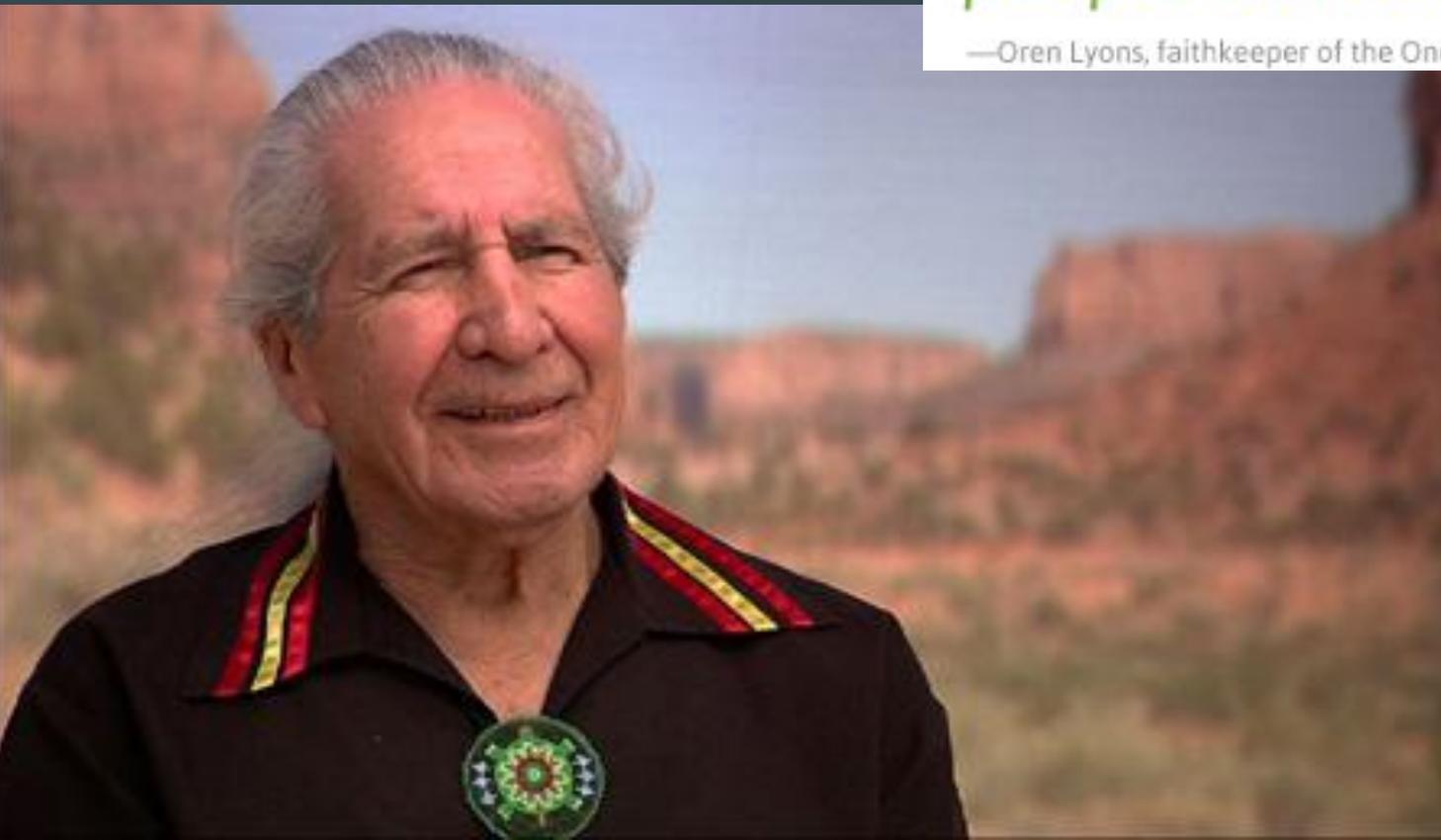
Importance of Land

- Land as sustainer (food, water, shelter, clothing, medicine, etc.)
- Land as identity
- Land as ancestral connection
- Land as healer; ceremonial cycle tied to land base
- Land as moral responsibility
- Land as mother; women as first environments
- Land as source of knowledge; living knowledge

“Land has both material and metaphorical power for Native communities because many indigenous cosmologies are inextricably linked to their land bases. The importance of land stretches far beyond its role as the space on which human activity takes place; for Natives it is a significant source of literal and figurative power. Within Native studies, land has been theorized as the living entity that enables indigenous life.”

*“What you people call your
natural resources our
people call our relatives.”*

—Oren Lyons, faithkeeper of the Onondaga



Colonialism & Imperialism



Settler Colonialism

- Land, not labor, is key. Indigenous peoples are replaced by settlers erased through: genocide, assimilation, interbreeding (including rape)
- Settler colonists are here to stay. Land itself is the profit.
- The singular goal of the settler state is the elimination of the Native to gain access to land.



- Coined by John O’Sullivan, “manifest destiny” first appeared in an article entitled “*The Great Nation of Futurity*” in 1839
- He writes:

“Our national birth was the beginning of a new history, the formation and progress of an untried political system, which separates us from the past and connects us with the future only; and so far as regards the entire development of the natural rights of man, in more, political and national life, we may confidently assume that our country is destined to be the great nation of futurity.”



American Progress,
lithograph print, c.

an Progress,
lithograph print, c. 1873,
n 1872 painting of the
title by John Gast.

Congress, Washington, D.C. (digital id:
9855)



The MOST IMPORTANT concerns to settler colonialism is land/water/resources

Reason #1: settlers want to make Indigenous land (1) their new home and (2) a source of capital

Reason #2: the disruption of Indigenous relationship to land represents a profound violence. This violence is not temporary (with the arrival of the settler), but must be reasserted each day of occupation.

Source: Tuck, Eve, and K. Wayne Yang. "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1.1 (2012): 1-40.



“The singular goal of the settler state relative to Indigenous peoples is the elimination of the Native in order to gain access to the land.”

Patrick Wolfe argues:

- Settler colonialism is continuing and ongoing. It is a “structure, not an event”
- Elimination can take place in a multitude of ways and are part of the structure of settler colonial society.

Patrick Wolfe

“Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native.” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8.4 (2006): 387-409.



Table 1. Settler-colonial elimination projects.

Form of Elimination	Examples
Physical/Genocide	Massacres Forced/Coerced Sterilization
Cultural/Assimilation	Boarding schools "Indian offences"
Political/Termination	Ending political status Voiding/Not affirming treaties
Discursive/Erasure	Underrepresentation Misrepresentation

J.M. Bacon (2019). Settler colonialism as eco-social structure and the production of colonial ecological violence. *Environmental Sociology*. 5(1): 59-69.

Re-thinking colonialism to prepare for the impacts of rapid environmental change

Nicholas James Reo · Angela K. Parker

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© Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht 2013

Abstract This essay demonstrates how key concepts from ecology can be applied within historical analyses in order to gain insights regarding contemporary environmental change. We employ a coupled human and natural systems conceptual framework in a nascent historical analysis of rapid societal and environmental change in colonial New England, where European colonization led to stark and rapid transformations. Introduced diseases reduced indigenous communities to a fraction of their pre-contact levels. European agriculture and associated pest species, deforestation and overharvest of ecologically influential species were among key aspects of the rapid changes in colonial New England. Cross-continental biotic introductions initiated reinforcing feedback loops that accelerated the transition of human and natural systems into novel states. Integrating colonial history and ecology can help identify important interactions between human and natural systems useful for contemporary societies adjusting to environmental change.

1 Introduction

Recent and projected climatic change could lead to the most drastic, rapid environmental changes in North America since those that followed European colonization. Yet colonial history has rarely been studied for insights applicable to current environmental change problems. In this essay, we suggest that new and existing research on environmental and colonial history can generate insights applicable to current mitigation and adaption efforts in the face of rapidly changing environments. We briefly explore an example of this new line of inquiry, examining existing scholarship on New England's colonial history for lessons concerning human responses to rapid environmental change. We engage history and ecology to show how partnerships between historians and scientists studying linked social and

This article is part of a Special Issue on "Climate Change and Indigenous Peoples in the United States: Impacts, Experiences, and Actions" edited by Julie Koppel Maldonado, Rajul E. Pandya, and Benedict J. Colombi.

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- Must also understand settler colonialism as ecological phenomena
- What does it mean to “turn back the ecological clock”?

Table 2. Examples of eco-social aspects of elimination.

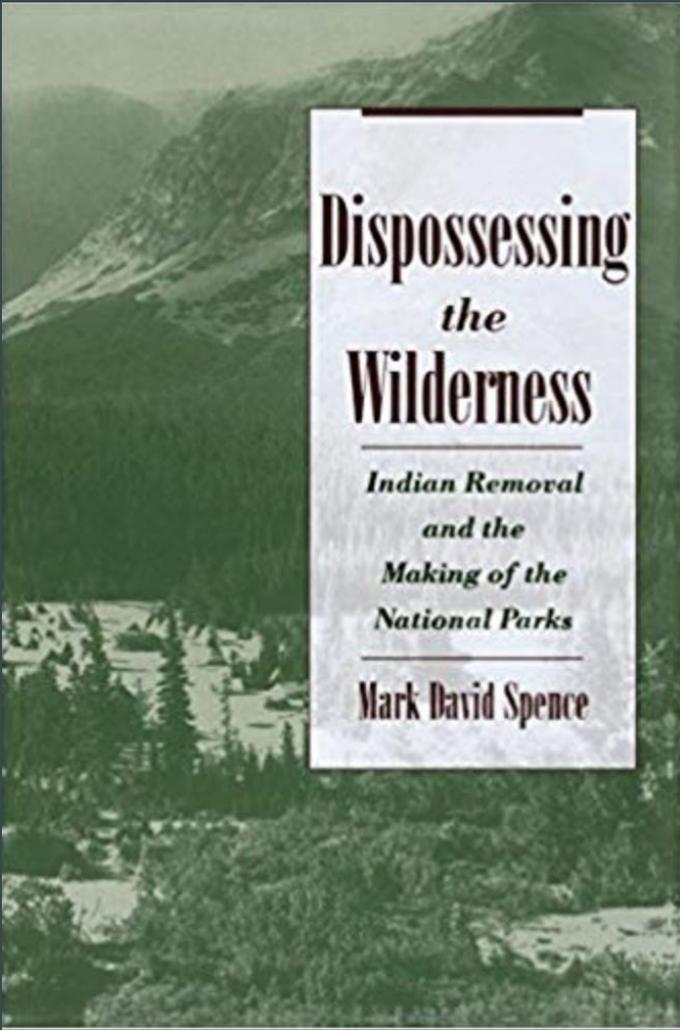
Form of Elimination	Eco-Social Examples
Physical/Genocide	Poisoning of food/water Taking of water
Cultural/ Assimilation	Disruption of ecological knowledge The Dawes Act and loss of tribal land holdings
Political/ Termination	Post-termination land losses Loss of usufruct treaty rights
Discursive/Erasure	Renaming of culturally significant places Repurposing of culturally significant places

J.M. Bacon (2019). Settler colonialism as eco-social structure and the production of colonial ecological violence. *Environmental Sociology*. 5(1): 59-69.

Wastelanding

“Remaking Native land as settler home involves the exploitation of environmental resources, to be sure, but it also involves a deeply complex construction of that land as either always belong to the settler – his manifest destiny – or as undesirable, unproductive, or unappealing: in short, as wasteland.” (7)





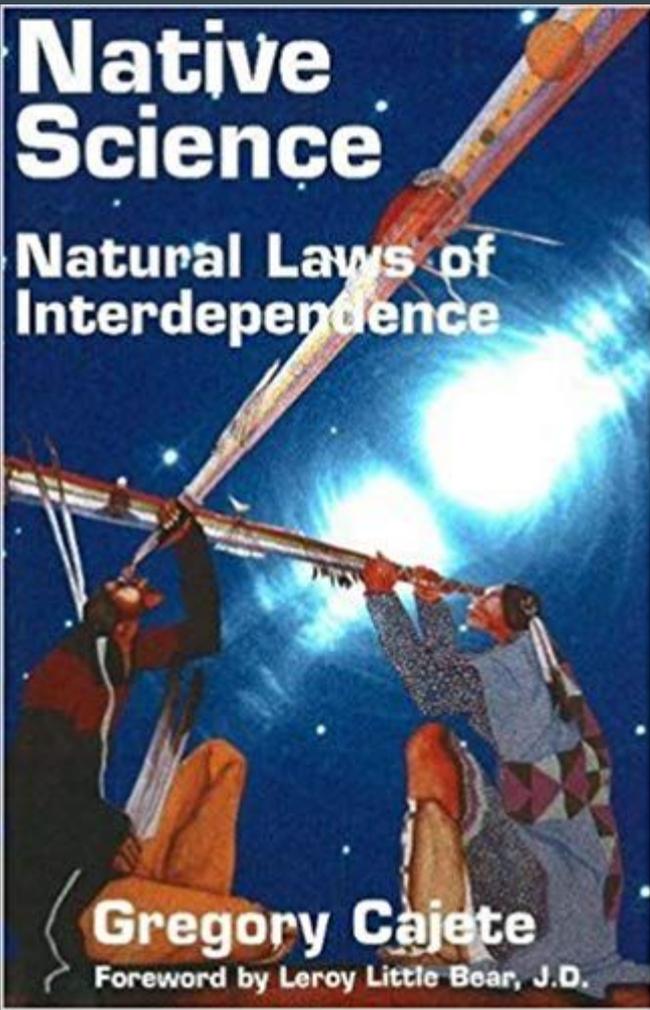
Dispossessing
the
Wilderness

*Indian Removal
and the
Making of the
National Parks*

Mark David Spence

Wilderness

- Removal of Indians to **create** wilderness
- Creation of national parks has dispossessed Indigenous peoples
- “Green grabbing” continues...
 - Carbon offset programs
 - Ecotourism



Ecological Applications, 10(5), 2000, pp. 1333–1340
© 2000 by the Ecological Society of America

TRADITIONAL ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE: THE THIRD ALTERNATIVE (COMMENTARY)

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²*Department of Natural and Social Sciences, Haskell Indian Nations University, Lawrence, Kansas 66046 USA*

Abstract. Contemporary Western attitudes concerning the management of natural resources, treatment of nonhuman animals, and the natural world emerge from traditions derived from Western European philosophy, i.e., they assume that humans are autonomous from, and in control of, the natural world. A different approach is presented by Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) of indigenous peoples of North America. Although spiritually oriented, TEK converges on Western scientific approaches. TEK is based on close observation of nature and natural phenomena; however, it is combined with a concept of community membership that differs from that of Western political and social thought. TEK is strongly tied to specific physical localities; therefore, all aspects of the physical space can be considered part of the community, including animals, plants, and landforms. As a consequence, native worldviews can be considered to be spatially oriented, in contrast to the temporal orientation of Western political and historical thought. TEK also emphasizes the idea that individual plants and animals exist on their own terms. This sense of place and concern for individuals leads to two basic TEK concepts: (1) all things are connected, which is conceptually related to Western community ecology, and (2) all things are related, which changes the emphasis from the human to the ecological community as the focus of theories concerning nature. Connectedness and relatedness are involved in the clan systems of many indigenous peoples, where nonhuman organisms are recognized as relatives whom the humans are obliged to treat with respect and honor. Convergence of TEK and Western science suggests that there may be areas in which TEK can contribute insights, or possibly even new concepts, to Western science. TEK is inherently multidisciplinary in that it links the human and the nonhuman, and is the basis not only for indigenous concepts of nature, but also for concepts of indigenous politics and ethics. This multidisciplinary aspect suggests that TEK may be useful in resolving conflicts involving a variety of stakeholders and interest groups in controversies over natural resource use, animal rights, and conservation. TEK may also have implications for human behavior and obligations toward other forms of life that are often unrecognized, or at least not emphasized, in Western science. We present examples from community and behavioral ecology where a TEK-based approach yielded unexpected and nonintuitive insights into natural phenomena. Understanding of TEK may be useful in helping scientists respond to the changing public perceptions of science, and new cultural pressures in our society.

Key words: belief system; conservation; ecology; environment; Indian; indigenous; Native American; resource management; Traditional Ecological Knowledge.



"For many native shrubs and trees, repeated pruning or burning was not only harmless but beneficial as well. Their repeated resurrection, while appearing to take tremendous energy, may have paradoxically kept them young and vigorous." (Anderson 236)



OUR MOST SHAMEFUL
WASTE!

 Remember— Only you can
PREVENT FOREST FIRES!

U.S. Department of Agriculture
Forest Service

© 1970



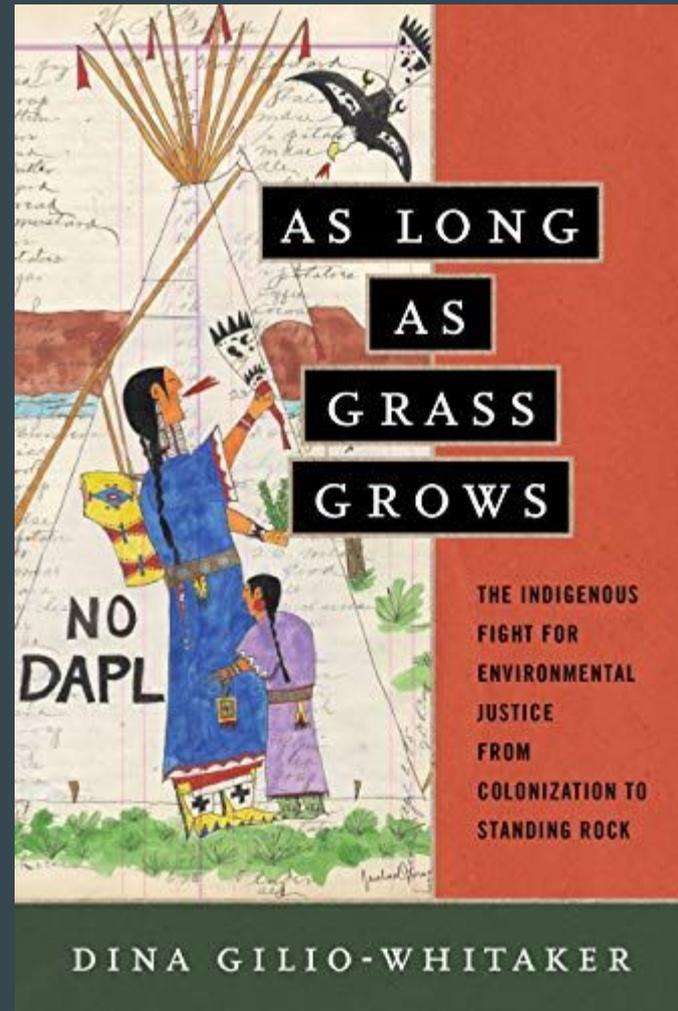
This shameful waste
WEAKENS AMERICA!

Remember— Only you can
PREVENT THE MADNESS!

PS: For more information on the relationship between fire suppression and settler colonial ecological violence, go read Chapter 2 of *Salmon & Acorns Feed Our People* by Kari Marie Norgaard!

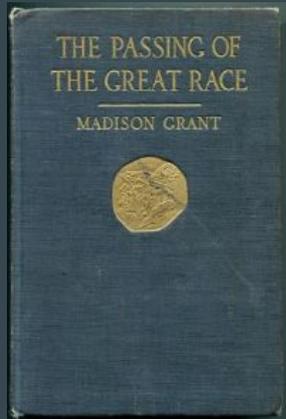
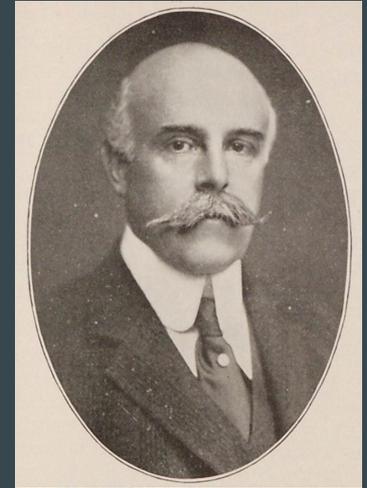
You can buy her book her here:
<https://www.rutgersuniversitypress.org/salmon-and-acorns-feed-our-people/9780813584195>

“Many historians trace the genealogy of the modern environmental movement to the ideas of mid-nineteenth-century naturalists and the creation of the national park system, and the preservation movement that started it. Born from the Manifest Destiny ideologies of western expansion, the preservation movement was deeply influenced by a national fixation on the imagined pre-Columbian pristine American wilderness and the social Darwinist values of white superiority.” (92)



Birth of American “Environmentalism” & Conservation

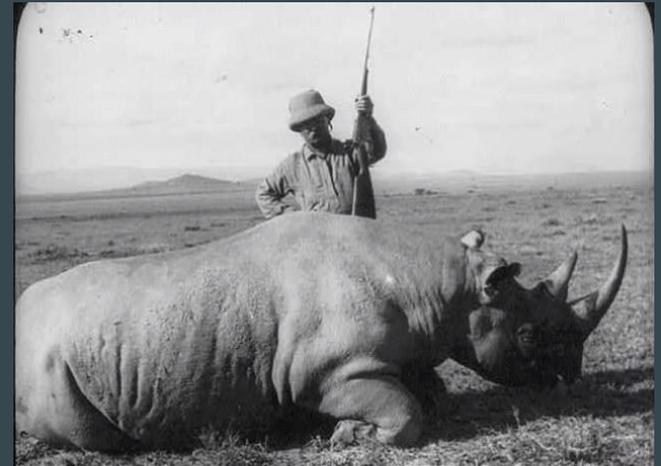
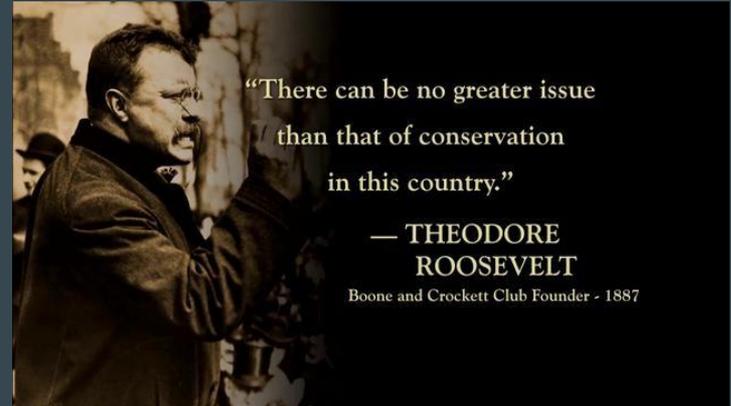
- American Colonial legacy, Manifest Destiny
- Madison Grant 1880s: Manhattan aristocrat, Yale, Columbia Law School
- Wildlife Zoologist, created Bronx Zoo
- Created first orgs dedicated to preserving Bison & CA Redwoods
- Helped create national parks, game refuges



- Grant authored 1916 book
- Basis of White Supremacy- racial theory wherein Nordics were natural aristocracy, marked noble
- Adolf Hitler admired Madison Grant, called book “my bible”
- Successfully lobbied for anti-immigration laws and bans on interracial marriage; preached forced sterilization

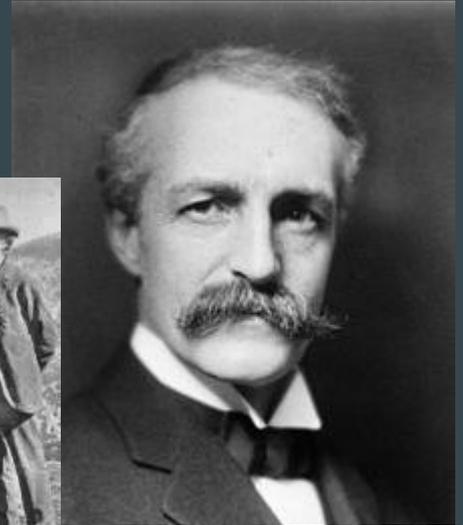
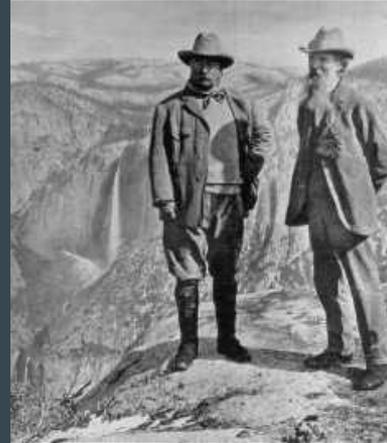
“Father of Conservation”

- Teddy Roosevelt: “wild nature” worth saving
- But primarily in order to continue big game hunting for recreation
- Moose, mountain goat, redwood tree resemble the decline as a single threatened, declining aristocracy (like the Nordics)
- Conservation predicated on white supremacy and the privilege of affording access to certain types of people for certain types of activities
- Themes of control, dominance, power; nature is a hierarchy w/white men on top



“Fathers of Conservation” Continued

- Gifford Pinchot: theorizer & popularizer of conservation, forester, Yale School of Forestry, eugenicist
- John Muir: Loved animals and plants, ambivalent about humans
- Lamented “dirty and irregular life” of Indians in Merced River Valley
- 1901: “As to Indians, most of them are dead or civilized into useless innocence”



What John Muir Missed: The Uniqueness of California Indians

Lawrence Hogue | September 16, 2016

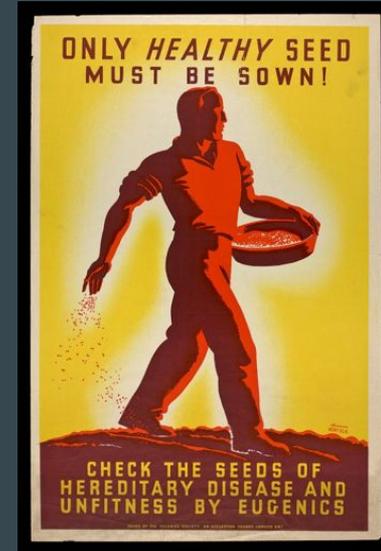


A Cahuilla woman harvests fruit from carefully tended palms in 1905. | Photo: Edward S. Curtis

<https://www.kcet.org/shows/tending-the-wild/what-john-muir-missed-the-uniqueness-of-california-indians>

Intersections between Eugenics & Conservation

- Eugenics: control reproduction to eliminate “genetically unfit” and promote the reproduction of the “genetically fit”
- Intersection of genetic superiority with environmentalism:
 - Desire to preserve the ‘best’ within human populations (purity)
 - Desire to preserve the ‘best’ within nature (purity)
 - Theme of eliminating “pollution” (within ‘racial stock’ and in nature)
 - Use of “science” to bolster the point
 - Use of eugenics to curb population growth & forced sterilization



Ecologically Noble Savage

“The noble savage was a recuperated version of the ignoble savage, the wild beasts of the forest who needed to be excised from the environment because they were obstacles to ‘progress.’” (Dina Gilio-Whitaker)

- Earliest portrayals of Indians by European settlers: we’re no different than animals
 - George Washington: “Indians and wolves are both beasts of prey, tho’ they differ in shape”
- Rooted in scientific racism (Indians aren’t fully human; not meant to live into “modern” era)
- Overlooks the meaning of environmentalism *and* mischaracterizes Native peoples’ actual relationship to land
- Doesn’t reconcile problematic notions of preservation, access, and dispossession



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j7OHG7tHrNM>

Critiquing Noble Savage & Ecological Indian Tropes

- Temporally bounds Native peoples in the past
- Grossly oversimplifies complex relationships, culture, and management practices with land
- Fetishizes without recognizing nuance
- Erases white supremacist genocide, violence, dispossession
- Romanticizes and attempts to reclaim the loss of “purity”
- Maintains & underscores rhetoric of separating people from environment

TENDING THE WILD

TENDING THE WILD

The Problem With The Ecological Indian Stereotype

Dina Gilio-Whitaker | February 7, 2017



Iron Eyes Cody, a Sicilian-American actor born as Espero Oscar de Corti, provides a convenient example of the Ecological Indian stereotype.

Environmental Racism

- “issue that mainstream middle-class white environmentalists had failed to consider, i.e., that people of color and poor communities were facing ecological risks far greater than they” (Mohai et al., 2009)
- “ethnic minorities, indigenous persons, people of color, and low-income communities confront a higher burden of environmental exposure from air, water, and soil pollution from industrialization, militarization, and consumer practices” (Mohai et al., 2009)
- 1968: Memphis Sanitation Strike
- 1982: Warren County, North Carolina, landfill designed to accept PCBs (low income African American community)
- 1987 United Church of Christ study: race was most important factor in predicting where hazardous waste sites would be located



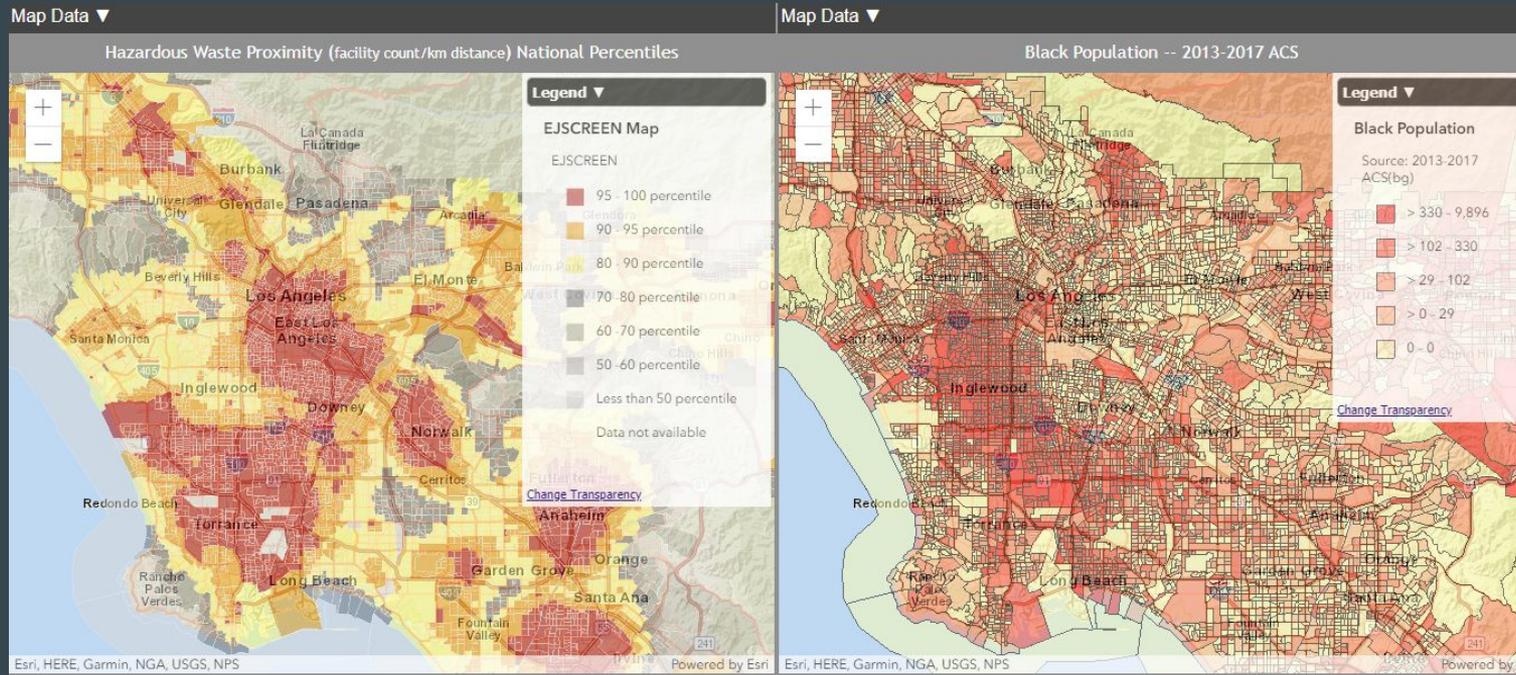
Protestors block the delivery of toxic PCB waste to a landfill in Afton, North Carolina, 1982.

Ricky Stille

Environmental Justice

- Robert Bullard: “all people and communities are entitled to equal protection of environmental and public health laws and regulations.” (1968)

<https://ejscreen.epa.gov/mapper/comparemapper.html>



Expanding the lens: Indigenization of Environmental Justice

As Long As Grass Grows: The Indigenous Fight for Environmental Justice, From Colonization to Standing Rock by Dina Gilio-Whitaker

“Indigenous peoples fighting for political autonomy from the hegemony of the State are fighting the forces of colonialism while simultaneously fighting capitalism- all aimed at control of land and resources...” (p 24)

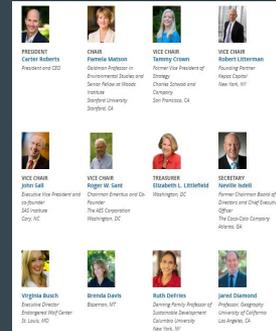
“Creating economic surplus is possible from not only the exploitation of Indigenous lands but the commodification of them also-- that is, the construction of land as property.” (p 26)

- Consider conceptions of settler colonial justice- authority of the ‘nation-state’, legal frameworks, distributive justice (distributing both risks & benefits equally)
- What about “social, cultural, symbolic, and institutional conditions underlying poor distribution in the first place”?

Power & Privilege in Environmental NGO's

- Non-whites less than 2% of combine 754 employees in Audubon Society, Sierra Club, Natural Resources Defense Council, Friends of the Earth
- In 2014, [Green 2.0](https://e360.yale.edu/features/how-green-groups-became-so-white-and-what-to-do-about-it) Dorceta Taylor report, "Diversity in Environmental Institutions," 88% of staff and 95% of boards were white.
- (<https://e360.yale.edu/features/how-green-groups-became-so-white-and-what-to-do-about-it>)
- Add'l Resource: The Rise of the American Conservation Movement: Power, Privilege, and Environmental Protection by Dorceta Taylor 2016
- See recent statement from Michael Brune, ED of Sierra Club: <https://www.sierraclub.org/michael-brune/2020/07/john-muir-early-history-sierra-club>

WWF
BoD



Sierra
Club BoD



Audubon
Society
BoD



Break-Out Sessions

For the next fifteen minutes, you have the opportunity to reflect and discuss the material we have just presented. Here are the ground rules:

- Be respectful. We're here to learn from each and build alliances to dismantle structures of oppression.
- Make sure everybody gets an opportunity to share.

Discussion Prompts

- First, introduce yourself to your group. What brought you here today?
- Please share some of the words you brainstormed in the opening exercise.
 - Are there any words you're thinking differently about now?
 - Are there any words you'd remove now?
 - Are there any words you'd add now?
- In what ways do you envision the material presented today impacting or influencing the work that you do or aspire to do?

So what the heck do I do now?

- Educate yourself and everybody around you
- Find out what environmental threats are currently impacting tribal communities where you live
- Be inclusive of tribal nations in environmental decision making
- Let's work together to return stolen lands
- Work against dichotomy of environment separate from people, separate from justice

Native American Heritage Month 2019

"They've managed the forest forever. It's why they're key to the climate change fight."

did you know...

Research shows that granting Indigenous groups formal rights to their lands is one of the most effective ways to conserve forests. One study tracked what happened in the Peruvian Amazon after Indigenous groups received official titles to their land. Using satellite imagery to estimate forest loss, researchers found the deforestation rates plummeted by 75% during the next two years. Another wide-ranging analysis showed that secure land rights were significantly correlated with forest preservation - or even gain - in South America, Central America and Africa.

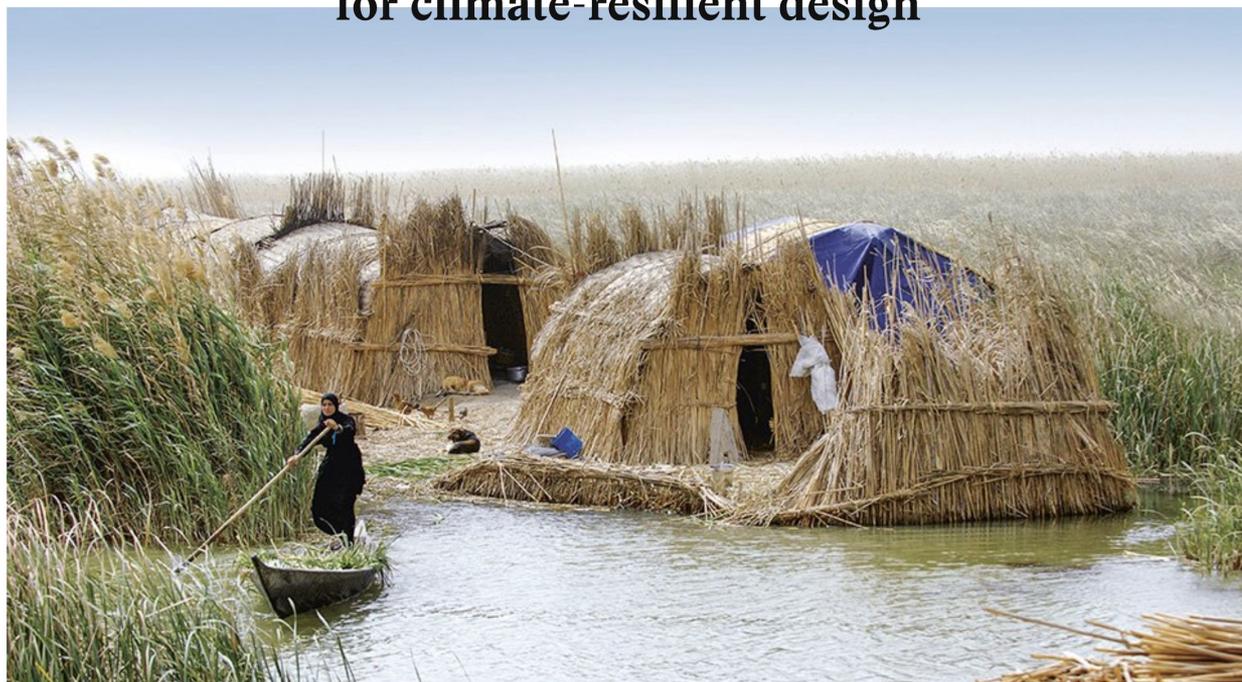
<https://www.latimes.com/environment/story/2019-11-05/climate-change-forests-indigenous-peoples>



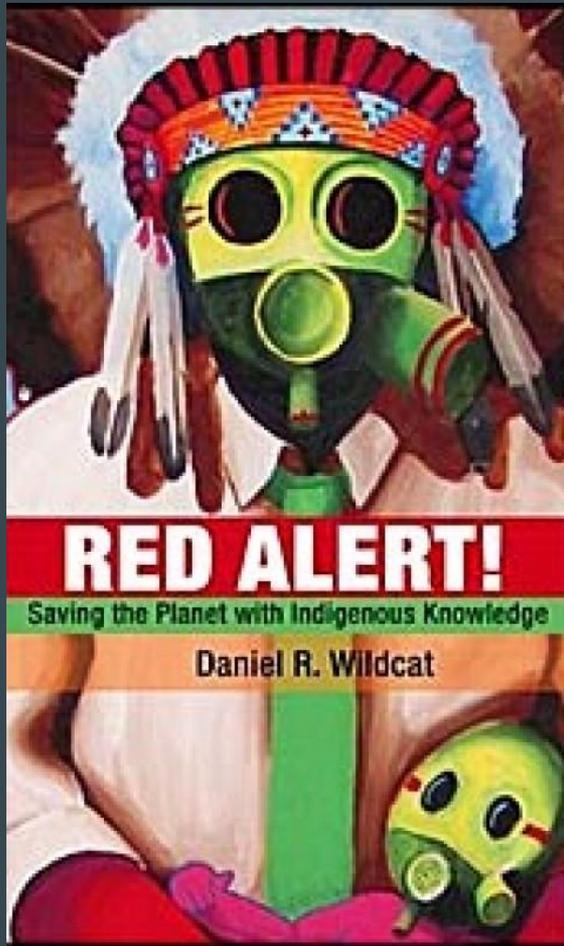


News

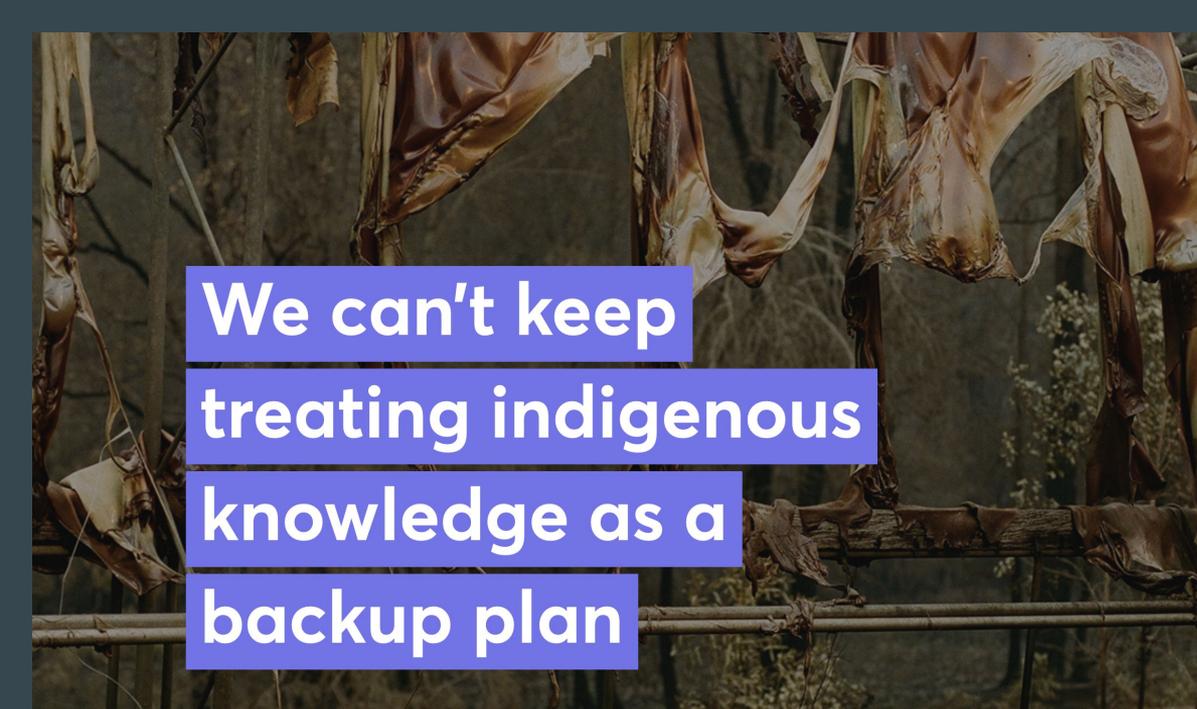
First-ever compendium of indigenous technologies provides a powerful toolkit for climate-resilient design



<https://www.gsd.harvard.edu/2020/02/first-ever-compendium-of-indigenous-technologies-provides-a-powerful-toolkit-for-climate-resilient-design/?fbclid=IwAR3CCGJmc7-Cf5xyTFWqGOqurkB6qw73-pRgR5JNYYcFGtykBCYnFVUZLtk>



“The most difficult changes required are not those of a physical, material, or technological character, but changes in worldviews and the generally taken-for-granted values and beliefs that are embedded in modern, Western-influenced societies. In this respect, what humankind actually requires is a climate change -- a cultural climate change, a change in our thinking and actions -- if we are to have any reasonable expectation that we might mitigate what increasingly appears to be a period of dramatic plant and animal extinction.” (5)



**We can't keep
treating indigenous
knowledge as a
backup plan**

By Zoe Madden-Smith

**Australia is on fire and Aotearoa's seas are rising.
Why are we waiting for a climate crisis to listen to
indigenous knowledge?**

<https://www.renews.co.nz/we-cant-keep-treating-indigenous-knowledge-as-a-backup-plan/>

We're 5% of the global population and we protect 80% of the world's biodiversity.