

# Native American Genocide: A Historiographical Analysis

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## Abstract

*After the Second World War, Holocaust studies became very popular in the United States which led American historians to reassess the atrocities of Native Americans under Euro-American colonization. Those historians who researched Native American mass killings and sufferings, hesitated to define those atrocities whether it was Holocaust, or Genocide, or Cultural genocide. In this paper, I am going to argue that over time, American historians constantly recontextualize the native Americans suffering from the holocaust to cultural genocide and even some historians end up in 'Genocide Denial'. When David E. Stannard marked it as a holocaust, MacDonald argued that equating these events could dilute the uniqueness of the Jewish suffering. He suggested that it should be understood within its own historical context possibly as ethnic cleansing or cultural genocide. Even some historians dared to deny this historical fact arguing that native Americans died not because of governmental deliberate action but rather because of diseases and starvation. In this paper, I am going to analyse why and how these historians changed their perspective over time.*

**Keywords:** American Native Indian, Holocaust, Genocide, Cultural Genocide, Genocide Denial.

After the Second World War, holocaust studies became very popular in the United States which led American historians to reassess the atrocities of Native Americans under Euro-American colonization. Those historians who researched Native American mass killings and sufferings, hesitated to define the atrocities whether it was Holocaust, or Genocide, or Cultural genocide. In this paper, I am going to argue that over time, American historians constantly recontextualize the native Americans suffering from the holocaust to cultural genocide and even some historians end up in 'Genocide Denial'. When David E. Stannard marked it as a holocaust, MacDonald argued that equating these events could dilute the uniqueness of the Jewish suffering. He suggested that it should be understood within its own historical

context possibly as ethnic cleansing or cultural genocide. Even some historians dared to deny this historical fact arguing that native Americans died not because of governmental deliberate action but rather because of diseases and starvation. In this paper, I am going to analyse why and how these historians changed their perspective over time.

As indicated previously, this paper aims to analyze and find out the trend of recent scholarship on Native American genocide particularly from 1993 to 2020. Most of the authors defined the native american atrocities from different perspectives and this paper examines how their perspective changed over time. When European colonizers arrived in the Americas, it is estimated that over 10 million Indigenous people were living across

the continent.<sup>1</sup> By the year 1900, this number had drastically decreased to fewer than 300,000.<sup>2</sup> Various forms of aggression targeted Indigenous communities, aimed at dismantling their societies. Though native american atrocities took place all over the United States, the recent scholarship mainly focused on native atrocities and mass killings that took place in California, Kansas, southern Illinois, and Oklahoma which occurred from the 1830s to 1870s.

**David E. Stannard (1993)** is a famous historian because of his use of the term 'American Holocaust'. He is particularly known for his book *American Holocaust*. He argued that European colonization of the Americas after the arrival of Christopher Columbus resulted in the largest series of genocides in human history which is still overlooked by the American government.<sup>3</sup> He wrote this book because he believed that recent scholarship on Native American studies has neglected the genocidal component. This denial typically has two main reasons. Firstly, there is an attempt to preserve the moral standing of the individuals and nations who are responsible for the genocide. Secondly, denial serves the purpose of perpetuating ongoing racist attacks against the genocide's survivors.<sup>4</sup> He compared this denial with the revisionists who deny the Jewish Holocaust by saying that it did not occur, or its scale is overstated.

He challenged those historians who denied the genocide of the Native Americans or who claimed it as cultural genocide or ethnic cleansing. He examined how a cultural belief system and racist purge motivated the colonialists to commit the

genocide. Stannard argued that "it is the central purpose of this book to survey some of the more virulent examples of this deliberate racist purge, from fifteenth-century Hispaniola to nineteenth-century California, and then to locate and examine the belief systems and the cultural attitudes that underlay such monstrous behavior".<sup>5</sup> He also claimed that Euro-American colonialists used microbial pestilence purposefully to eradicate the native peoples.<sup>6</sup> However, numerous historical evidence shows that many Euro-Americans suffered equally and died of diseases, adverse weather, and food shortages. I think Stannard ignored that evidence. He further argued disease and genocide were interdependent forces that drove natives to the brink of extermination. Particularly he focused on the gold rush. He showed how the gold rush led to accelerate the genocide. The gold rush led to an influx of American miners in California. They enacted laws that enslaved Native Americans in California. These newcomers initiated public campaigns aimed at the extermination of Native American populations.<sup>7</sup> Most of the historians who addressed native American genocide mainly focused on California atrocities. However, Stannard is quite different in this regard, though he did not exclude the stories of the native American sufferings in California. He examined more than four centuries and showed how the native Americans faced brutal killings throughout the entire period.

David E. Stannard is a very exceptional and brave historian as he not only tried to prove the atrocities of Native Americans as genocide but also, claimed native American genocide is the most horrific genocide compared to other genocides as it was

<sup>1</sup> Holocaust Museum Houston, "Genocide of Indigenous Peoples," accessed April 20, 2024, <https://hnh.org/library/research/genocide-of-indigenous-peoples-guide/>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Stannard, David E. *American Holocaust: The Conquest of the New World*. Cary: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 1993, page 25

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, page 40

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, page 51

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, page 60

committed against the most innocent people.<sup>8</sup> He argued, "Of all the horrific genocides that have occurred in the twentieth century against Armenians, Jews, Gypsies, Ibos, Bengalis, Timorese, Kampuchians, Ugandans, and more, none has come close to destroying this many—or this great a proportion—of wholly innocent people".<sup>9</sup> Stannard forgot to mention that native American tribes also killed Euro-Americans and kidnapped their children. They were not completely non-violent compared to Jews, Gypsies, and Armenians.

Genocide is completely connected with hatred. Hatred motivated even ordinary people to commit unthinkable atrocities. The victims of each genocide experienced at least some degree of hatred and propaganda. Stannard said Native Americans also experienced the same sort of public hatred toward them. American officials and media portrayed these indigenous people as beasts, dogs, snakes, pigs, and so on.<sup>10</sup> Some gentle people described them as Native people who are barely above animals. Others expressed disgust at mere physical contact which is comparable to touching repulsive creatures. This widespread dehumanization made the idea of eradicating these groups seem less troublesome to many.

Though there was some similarity between the holocaust and native American atrocities, the holocaust was a unique historical event in history. No nation experienced gas chambers, concentration camps, and large-scale deportations like the Jews. That's why American historians did not want to use the holocaust word anymore as it became obvious to them that native American atrocities are not comparable to the Holocaust. However, many historians became aware of the Native American mass killings after publishing

Stannard's book. Following historians found genocide is the proper word to define native American sufferings. They also find other similarities such as sexual violation against native women which also applied against the Jewish women. In 2005, Andrea Smith argued that rape was used to dehumanize the native women purposefully which could be considered as genocide.

During the 1950s and 1960s, Genocide Historians largely focused on torture, concentration camps, deportation, and mass killings when they researched on holocaust and Armenian genocide. However, Genocide Historians started considering sexual assaults such as rape were deliberately used to dehumanize ethnic groups, and this sexual assault was addressed by the definition of Genocide which is 'causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group'. Historians no longer considered genocide as only the physical destruction of human beings it also meant mental destruction. *Andrea Smith (2005) claimed* that sexual assault and violence were used to dehumanize native Americans like other established genocides such as Armenian and Cambodian genocides. He said that Euro-American colonialist committed sexual violence not because of their desire but because of their deliberative plan to dehumanize them forever.<sup>11</sup> Smith argued, "We cannot limit our conception of sexual violence to individual acts of rape —rather it encompasses a wide range of strategies designed not only to destroy peoples but to destroy their sense of being a people"<sup>12</sup>. Smith addressed many governmental documents and oral stories to prove that sexual violence was a deliberate state-sponsored racist reproductive policy. According to him, native women were historically targeted for sexual violence to stop them from reproducing.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid page, 320

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Ibid page, 332

<sup>11</sup> Smith, Andrea. *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2005, page 32-36

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, page 190

Smith also claimed that Euro-Americans not only violated native women biologically but also contaminated their environment, so that it could affect native women's reproductivity.<sup>13</sup> Smith explained how the federal government did medical experimentation on native women without their consent. It was a strong argument to prove genocide as perpetrators often used biochemical weapons to exterminate Jews, Roma, and other minorities. Medical experimentation is comparable to this kind of systematic killing policy. Smith used medical documents to prove his argument which became very convincing. He also explained how native women on the grassroots level refused and protested these programs. Native Americans could not stop these medical experiments because of their lack of credentials, and they became the objects of these medical experiments.<sup>14</sup>

**David MacDonald (2007)** strongly criticized the hijacking of the Holocaust concept to study native Americans<sup>15</sup>. According to him, the Holocaust is a unique historical event of the European Jews which became unequaled by any other genocide. Holocaust as a word has been industrialized by some historians who equate the sufferings of the Jews with the native Indians in the United States. These historians are simplifying the holocaust for public recognition of the Native Indian's past as the American audience was aware of the holocaust history. However, MacDonald argued that this approach to studying the native Americans may dilute the significance of the Holocaust. Even it can trivialize Jewish suffering.<sup>16</sup> MacDonald said that

every event is exceptional and has its context and background. Representing history through the lens of the Holocaust may simplify the history of one group and misguide the audience. David E. Stannard strongly criticized the concept of the uniqueness of the Jewish Holocaust. He said that some scholars want to undermine other atrocities to prove that Jewish suffering is unique and incomparable. Stannard quoted Michael Berenbaum who said, "We should let our sufferings, however incommensurate, unite us in condemnation of inhumanity rather than divide us in a calculus of calamity".<sup>17</sup>

MacDonald also examined why some scholars equated the holocaust with the native Indians' history. He claimed that these scholars wanted to demonstrate the moral guilt of the Western nations.<sup>18</sup> These scholars also wanted to remind the people of America that though they are highlighting the genocide and holocaust history, they are also carrying the legacy of the perpetrators of one kind of Holocaust. MacDonald is critical of this approach to portraying Native Americans as genocide victims. He suggested that scholars could highlight the atrocities referring to colonial crimes or terming them as ethnic cleansing, and cultural and linguistic destruction.<sup>19</sup>

MacDonald mainly criticized Stannard's book'.<sup>20</sup> When this book was published, the American Holocaust as a word became very familiar. Stannard argued that native Americans were victims of intentional killing just like European

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, page 195

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, page 200

<sup>15</sup> MacDonald, David. "First Nations, Residential Schools, and the Americanization of the Holocaust: Rewriting Indigenous History in the United States and Canada." *Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue Canadienne de Science Politique* 40, no. 4 (2007): 995

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, page 1005

<sup>17</sup> Stannard, David E. *American Holocaust: The Conquest of the New World*. Cary: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 1993, page 210

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 1007

<sup>20</sup> MacDonald, David. "First Nations, Residential Schools, and the Americanization of the Holocaust: Rewriting Indigenous History in the United States and Canada." *Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue Canadienne de Science Politique* 40, no. 4 (2007): 1004

Jews. They also experienced deportation, forced labor, starvation, and mass executions. However, MacDonald reasonably challenged the argument of Stannard. He argued, "while some disease was deliberately spread, most epidemics raged ahead of the explorers and colonizers and were hardly comparable to conditions in Nazi ghettos".<sup>21</sup> He not only challenged Stannard's argument but also challenged the methodology of Stannard. He claimed that Stannard's research is not a comprehensive study of the Native American past rather his work is a very selective reading of the past.<sup>22</sup> MacDonald was only critical of the Holocaust framing of American native Indian history. He did not deny the sufferings of the native Americans. Possibly he wanted to refer to their sufferings as ethnic cleansing or genocide. However, MacDonald did not clarify the definition and difference of both terms.

**Brendan Lindsay (2012)** defined native American killings as genocide and avoided the holocaust word. He mainly focused on the deliberate extermination of Native American populations for the acquisition of their land.<sup>23</sup> He examined how the democratic systems in the United States annihilated Californian Indians. He said this system was established through democratic means and it normalized acts of cruelty against Native peoples and finally pushed them to the brink of extinction by 1900. He said that ironically historians and American history textbooks overlooked the mistreatment of Native Americans and other nonwhite communities.<sup>24</sup> This period is highlighted by historians with the excitement of gold mining and the transcontinental railroad. This negligence and denial of the scholarship leads to reluctance among many Americans to acknowledge the genocidal aspects of California

and national history. He claimed that the overly positive portrayal of U.S. and California history in mainstream education makes it difficult to accept the reality of Native American genocide.

The main argument of Lindsay is that the majority of the property owners, adult white male U.S. citizens in California either tacitly or openly supported the systemic killings for eradicating Native Americans.<sup>25</sup> He mainly focused on the role of hundreds of thousands of white citizens regarding the murder of countless Native American men, women, and children. He argued that through apathy and inaction, these white American citizens facilitated the continuation of extermination. They carried out the extermination plan both through direct violence and indirectly via policies of cultural annihilation. He said that from the 1840s to 1873, the California genocide was the physical destruction of native Americans and was mostly perpetrated by the citizens. However, during the 1870s and 1880s, there was a transition from direct acts of genocide to a more insidious form of genocide through cultural annihilation.<sup>26</sup>

Lindsay explained how the imagined perception of white settlers regarding native Indians shaped animosity and fear toward natives. White settlers came to know about native people by secondhand accounts and inherited prejudices as they had lived in those areas where no indigenous people had lived. Lindsay claimed that this imagined misperception was one of the main factors behind the ruthless actions. Lindsay said, "these imagined experiences of Indians were powerful. Thousands of Americans going west hated and feared Indians without ever seeing or interacting with an Indian. This hatred and fear of Indians and greed for the

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, page 1003

<sup>23</sup> Lindsay, Brendan C. *Murder State: California's Native American Genocide, 1846-1873*. Lincoln: UNP - Nebraska, 2012, page 12

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

<sup>25</sup> Lindsay, Brendan C. *Murder State: California's Native American Genocide, 1846-1873*. Lincoln: UNP - Nebraska, 2012, page 15

<sup>26</sup> Ibid page 22

lands they occupied made genocide palatable and possible"<sup>27</sup>.

After the Second World War, Lemkin provided a complete framework for cultural genocide for understanding the non-physical eradication of any group.<sup>28</sup> During the 2010s, some historians started arguing that native Americans faced cultural genocide rather than actual genocide. *Shamiran Mako (2012)* brilliantly examined how Australia, the United States, Sweden, and Canada opposed the plan as Mako suggested that these countries felt moral guilt about what they had done with their native people.<sup>29</sup> These countries reasonably feared if they ratified this idea of cultural genocide, they could be potentially charged with their ethnocidal actions. That's why long before, cultural genocide or ethnocide had been excluded from the 1948 Genocide Convention.<sup>30</sup> It created a clear distinction between physical extermination and cultural obliteration. Mako examined how Lemkin's framing of the Genocide was compromised and politicized by the world leaders and he claimed it was one kind of denial of Genocide. Mako said, "However, the non-physical destruction facet of genocide, which Lemkin emphasized as part of his original usage of the term, is a fundamental factor for assessing the cultural destruction of a group because it exposes other categories of group destruction that are often overshadowed by the limited definition of the Genocide"<sup>31</sup>.

Mako covered in his article how various indigenous communities demonstrated a movement for including non-physical destruction within the definition of genocide. The rise of

indigenous people's movements in the 1980s rekindled these debates within the global community.<sup>32</sup> He said their movement had a significant impact on revitalizing discussions on the non-physical eradication of cultural groups at local and international levels. They globally utilized platforms like the Working Group on Indigenous Populations and the Permanent Forum to express their grievances.<sup>33</sup> These platforms served as crucial links between indigenous groups and state members. In the meantime, the International Criminal Tribunal gave a landmark verdict regarding Yugoslavia which played an important role in including cultural genocide within the existing definition of genocide. The International Criminal Tribunal established that cultural destruction can be considered a component of genocidal intent.<sup>34</sup> Mako applied some methodologies of political science to investigate this issue and used a legal approach to understand how international law helped to include cultural destruction as one kind of genocide. Mako did not claim that the Euro-Americans committed actual genocide. However, many historians are also critical of this cultural version of genocide. They reasonably argued that the definition of cultural genocide trivializes the sufferings of the native peoples as they experienced brutal forms of genocide like the Holocaust.

When historians were shifting from the holocaust to cultural genocide in terms of defining native American atrocities, *Benjamin Madley (2016)* once again strongly argued that native Americans went through genocide. His argument is very similar to David E. Stannard's thesis. However, he did not use the holocaust context for

<sup>27</sup> Ibid page 28

<sup>28</sup> Mako, Shamiran. "Cultural Genocide and Key International Instruments: Framing the Indigenous Experience." *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 19, no. 2 (2012): 175

<sup>29</sup> Ibid

<sup>30</sup> Mako, Shamiran. "Cultural Genocide and Key International Instruments: Framing the Indigenous

Experience." *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 19, no. 2 (2012): 180

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, page 182

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, page 184

conceptualizing his book. He focused on the demographical decline of native American populations. Demographical analysis is a very important approach for genocidal studies which was usually used by genocide historians after the Second World War. His approach was not quite new when his book was published.

Benjamin Madley (2016) discussed a key moment in California's history. In 1848 Mexican authority was replaced by the American role. This transition signified a drastic change for the local Californian Indian population.<sup>35</sup> Following the conquest, the US military and civilian government chose to reinforce existing discriminatory policies against the Californian Indians. That's why native Indians experienced a continuing severe demographic decline in their populations. Madley explained how this trend of decline started during the previous Russo-Hispanic period and accelerated after the American conquest. Under American rule, the Californian Indians experienced an alarming decline, dropping from around 150,000 in 1846 to merely 16,277 by 1880.<sup>36</sup> Madley argued that this drastic reduction was caused not only by diseases and starvation but also by more direct and violent means such as forced labor, homicides, battles, and massacres which impeded their ability to reproduce.<sup>37</sup> Madley further explained how a lack of legal control allowed such atrocities to occur. Madley referred to this killing as the 'System Destruction of California's Indian population.'<sup>38</sup> Madley proved his argument with the support of contemporary newspapers and showing state and federal governmental documents.

Benjamin Madley explained how genocide and the holocaust became widely known in the United

States in the late 1950s. In 1961, the trial of SS Lieutenant Colonel Adolf Eichmann became an important event in America, and the 'Judgement at Nuremberg' movie was released and became very popular. People were getting interested in Holocaust art and literature with civil rights activism. Many historians started a critical reevaluation of US history, including a focus on violence against indigenous peoples. In the late 1960s and 1970s, historians began to reexamine the nineteenth-century conquest and colonization of California and identified it as a Genocide.<sup>39</sup> Theodora Kroeber and Robert F. Heizer in 1968, William Coffey in 1977, and Jack Norton in 1979, who applied the Genocide Convention to describe the treatment of California Indians.<sup>40</sup> Historians Albert Hurtado and William T. Haen reinforced this view that the atrocities in California during the gold rush marked Genocide against Native Americans.

Benjamin Madley examined how societal, judicial, and political support helped perpetrators carry out this genocidal action. Additionally, the author argued that ordinary Americans also supported these mass killings.<sup>41</sup> This book challenges the conventional historical perspective that colonization and the spread of diseases were the primary causes of the indigenous population decline. Instead, Benjamin Madley argued that deliberate brutal action taken by the state and federal government was the main cause of their decline.<sup>42</sup> Madley compared the California genocide with other global genocides and placed it within a broader context. The author knew that one of the main elements for defining genocide in the context of the California genocide lacked which was the clear intent of destruction of the

<sup>35</sup> Madley, Benjamin. *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe, 1846-1873*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016, page 5

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, page 16

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, page 19

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, page 21

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, page 28

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, page 35

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, page 36

perpetrators. In the context of genocide, international law requires deliberate intent to define whether an event is genocide or not. However, the author widened the definition of genocide according to the Genocide Convention which acclaims that the definition of genocide does not require specific intent or motive, rather the author argued that genocide can vary based on territorial, economic, ideological, political, or military reason according to the principle of the Genocide convention.<sup>43</sup> Based on this broader context, the author claimed that the state government and federal government and its supporters committed genocide on California Indians.

Madley used Californian Indians' eyewitness accounts and oral history to examine the genocide of Californian Indians from 1846 to 1873. Though the author mainly utilized oral documents for this book, this project is not primarily based on ethnographic oral history.<sup>44</sup> The author also used some archaeological evidence. Madley was aware of the biases of the oral sources. He used non-Indian perpetrators and bystanders' sources who were often biased. These sources may have been exaggerated and concealed their genocidal intentions.<sup>45</sup> However, the author brilliantly examined a single event with the help of multiple accounts, so that he could mitigate the potential biases.

At this point, historians realized that because of the narrow definition of genocide compelled them to oscillate between genocide to cultural genocide as they knew there were some basic criteria of genocide missing in native American genocide. For that reason, in 2016, historians started to rethink the

definition of genocide and tried to make the definition board, so that they could easily prove how genocidal killing and atrocities were committed on native Americans. **Gary Clayton Anderson (2016)** examined the limitation of the definition of the original 1948 Genocide Convention.<sup>46</sup> Though the Convention's definition included mass killings, causing bodily harm to any groups, preventing births, and transferring children as an act of genocide, it did not consider political killings as genocide.<sup>47</sup> For example, according to this definition, Joseph Stalin's mass political killings are not considered genocide. Anderson claimed that some scholars framed the native Indians' atrocities as an example of political killings.<sup>48</sup> Anderson argued that the convention did not clarify the scale required for genocidal recognition. Rather it left ambiguity in distinguishing between murder and genocide.<sup>49</sup> He also said that this definition did not address the specific context of American Indians where violence often lacked a centralized organizational basis.<sup>50</sup> He said that compared to other genocides like the holocaust, there was no evidence of the central government's order to eliminate entire Indian peoples. Rather violence against American Indians typically involved isolated incidents with fewer than 300 casualties which suggested a lack of coordinated effort to annihilate all Indians.<sup>51</sup> But for being genocide according to the convention's definition, a central effort like Hitler's killing machine is required to be considered as genocide. The most violent single incident, Andrew Jackson's attack at Horseshoe Bend during the War of 1812, resulted in about 800 Indian deaths.<sup>52</sup> Anderson raised questions about what nature of killings would be constituted as genocide. The attacks on isolated Indian villages caused

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, page 22

<sup>45</sup> Ibid

<sup>46</sup> Anderson, Gary Clayton. "The Native Peoples of the American West: Genocide or Ethnic Cleansing?" *Western Historical Quarterly* 47, no. 4 (2016): 407

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, page 410

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, page 412

<sup>49</sup> Ibid

<sup>50</sup> Ibid

<sup>51</sup> Ibid

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, page 423



significant casualties but are still contested whether it is genocide or not.<sup>53</sup> Given the high number of non-combatant victims, these attacks were undoubtedly war crimes. Still because of the narrow definition of the genocide convention, native Indian mass killings are not getting genocidal recognition.

**In 2019, Jeffrey Ostler** came up with a new perspective and challenged both groups of historians who denied the genocide and who claimed genocide happened. He brought to light the native sources. He explained how settler colonialism was behind the genocide and challenged the conventional belief of demographic decline. Jeffrey Ostler explained how the American government used a unique and systematic elimination policy that impacted and affected Indigenous peoples more than the Spanish's horrific atrocities.<sup>54</sup> He argued that the Spanish could not manage to eradicate the native Indians. Even they had to acknowledge native Indian rights. In contrast, Americans effectively eliminated them in a manner that appeared effortless and lawful without any mentionable bloodshed. Tocqueville said, "It is impossible to destroy men with more respect for the laws of humanity".<sup>55</sup> Ostler tried to say that the American government annihilated the native people through settler colonialism. He claimed that the concept of settler colonialism is different from colonialism. Ostler said, "the colonizer says to the colonized, "You, work for me." By contrast, in settler colonialism, the colonizer says, "You, go away".<sup>56</sup> He argued, the American government not only eliminated the native Americans through war and violence but also through disease, material deprivation,

starvation, and social stress. He further claimed that deliberate rape was used to traumatize native women and left them unable to reproduce.<sup>57</sup> Warfare resulted in the burning of Indian towns and crops which led to material deprivation and starvation. This condition favored diseases. Lack of food, clothing, and shelter with forcible deportation made them more vulnerable to a variety of pathogens.<sup>58</sup> Ostler challenged the American government's policy of civilization. He strongly argued, "Thomas Jefferson's presidency (1801–1809), U.S. actions made it clear that despite talk of civilization and assimilation, the United States would ultimately pursue a third option for the elimination of Indians east of the Mississippi River".<sup>59</sup>

Most historians claimed that after the aggressive American expansion, the population of the native Indians declined drastically. However, Jeffrey Ostler argued that the indigenous population of the Eastern Mississippi increased from the 1780s to 1830. While the population of some nations declined, most of the nation's population remained stable. This does not mean that the American expansion was harmless. It highlights native American resilience and the ability to rebuild their communities after periods of devastation.<sup>60</sup> Ostler argued, "It is also a major rebuke to the central argument U.S. policymakers used to justify removal: that Indians were vanishing and needed to be moved to "save" them from total extinction".<sup>61</sup> The author used various primary sources produced by missionaries, traders, ethnographers, and government officials. Most importantly, he was able to use those sources which had direct contact with native people. Very few historians used this

<sup>53</sup> Ibid

<sup>54</sup> Ostler, Jeffrey. *Surviving Genocide: Native Nations and the United States from the American Revolution to Bleeding Kansas*. 1st ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019, page 5

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, page 6

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, page 7-8

<sup>57</sup> Ibid

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, page 16

<sup>59</sup> Ibid

<sup>60</sup> Ostler, Jeffrey. *Surviving Genocide: Native Nations and the United States from the American Revolution to Bleeding Kansas*. 1st ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019, page 25

<sup>61</sup> Ibid

kind of source which also gave us the perspective of native Americans. He also incorporated the writings of Native people themselves. The use of the sources made this book unique compared to other books.<sup>62</sup> However, this book lacked a clear conceptual framework. He was supposed to be concerned about the definition of the genocide. However, he did not try to clarify which definition he was going to apply to studying the native American atrocities. He claimed that previous historians only focused on the Cherokee removal and neglected other native American's atrocities. That's why he tried to bring into light on removals of the HoChunks (Winnebagos) and Sauks and Mesquakies (Foxes).<sup>63</sup> He also claimed that historians only examined the genocide of native Americans but ignored to mention how they survived. His book revealed how native people survived, and what survival strategies they used.<sup>64</sup> Genocide Denial is a common aspect of the study of Genocide. When historians proved native American genocide, some historians also started to deny the genocide. *Dr. Kaitlin Reed (2020)* examined how history professors and students denied California genocide nowadays.<sup>65</sup> He shared a story of a Maidu Student who challenged the perspective of his professor Maury Wiseman regarding the atrocities in California. His history professor suggested that genocide was not a perfect term as native people died primarily because of diseases.<sup>66</sup> Reed said that this kind of viewpoint aligned with historian Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz who labeled it as a terminal narrative that meant a natural disaster was responsible for the death of native people.<sup>67</sup> Such narratives indicated the

biological inferiority of native Indians. Historians James Fenelon and Clifford Trafzer identified several reasons for the reluctance to acknowledge the genocide against Californian Indians and Native Americans more broadly. Difficulty in establishing intent, the inapplicability of modern genocide models to these historical events, and a lack of clear chronological links between different policies contributed to the ongoing denial surrounding the Native American genocide.<sup>68</sup> Dr. Reed said, "California Indians are screaming out the truth, but "the collective silence on this genocide is so loud".<sup>69</sup>

While some historians strongly denied the Native American genocide, historians like Gavin Rowley claimed that at least native Americans suffered cultural genocide and it is still an ongoing process through different forms of discrimination, cultural assault, and racism. *Gavin Rowley (2020)* focused on the cultural genocide of the native Americans which continues up to the present day. Rowley argued that not only genocide was committed against Native Americans, but also that genocide has had a lasting effect on the Native Americans through continued oppression<sup>70</sup>. He said that despite the end of the massacres of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, indigenous communities in Northwestern California still faced cultural destruction. Before their citizenship recognition, many native Indians faced enforced assimilation into the Euro-American way of life. Such assimilation through the separation of children from their families not only destroyed their culture but also hindered their growth due to this disconnection<sup>71</sup>. Boarding

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, page 35

<sup>63</sup> Ibid

<sup>64</sup> Ostler, Jeffrey. *Surviving Genocide: Native Nations and the United States from the American Revolution to Bleeding Kansas*. 1st ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019. Page 45

<sup>65</sup> Reed, Kaitlin. "We Are a Part of the Land and the Land Is Us: Settler Colonialism, Genocide & Healing in California." *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations*, no. 42 (2020): 33

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, page 36

<sup>67</sup> Ibid

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, page 40

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, page 41

<sup>70</sup> Rowley, Gavin. "Defining Genocide in Northwestern California: The Devastation of Humboldt and Del Norte County's Indigenous Peoples." *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations*, no. 42 (2020): 89

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, page 92

schools played a significant role in this process. It extracted native American children from their homes and compelled them to conform to Euro-American norms<sup>72</sup>. It effectively constituted a form of cultural genocide according to the definition of the Genocide Convention. A governmental report of 1889 described that Native Americans were intellectually and culturally inferior to white society. Rowley said, "This segregation suggests that Euro-Americans felt the same racial superiority that was obvious and normalized when they were attempting to exterminate Native Americans through massacres and so-called wars. The only difference is that Euro-Americans were now destroying Native American culture and tradition rather than killing them directly"<sup>73</sup>. Rowley also claimed that this racial superiority overlooked the indigenous preference to preserve their own cultural practices. This new native American generation found it challenging to reintegrate into their communities as they lost their language, traditions, and customs. As a result, they were alienated not only from their native culture but also struggled to fit into Euro-American society due to existing prejudices of white American society. Rowley further claimed, "even though boarding schools had been ended, damage to Native American heritage and culture continued to be inflicted on these communities after forced assimilation"<sup>74</sup>.

These historians mainly used governmental documents, perpetrator's diary, and memories. Future historians should look for native American sources. Even historians might learn their language and collect their collective memories regarding these atrocities. Historians should not only focus on Californian killings but also find out other unheard stories of suffering. Native Americans also killed white Americans, and their families and even snatched their children. These stories should also

be added as it is also a part of the native American story. Future historians should contextualize how violence made both groups of people victims. These historians mainly looked at the native American genocide and compared it with other genocides. However, I think every historical event is unique. We should look at it within its own historical context. I also think that rather than comparative genocide, historians should examine native American atrocities within the context of settler colonialism and how and why this colonialism committed crimes against humanity. Future historians should take into consideration when these atrocities happened and what was the ideology of the particular time. We should not examine any event without consideration of the particular era and its ideology.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid

<sup>73</sup> Rowley, Gavin. "Defining Genocide in Northwestern California: The Devastation of Humboldt and Del

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid

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