Title
'No Somos Animales:' Indigenous Survival and Persistence in 19th Century Santa Cruz, California

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**Introduction**

What happened to the people who called Santa Cruz their homeland?

- Tribal nations of people known today collectively as the Ohlone lived on these lands for tens of thousands of years before Spanish Colonial occupation began in 1769.
- Mission Santa Cruz was founded in 1791, beginning a local colonial process of violent disruption. This included forced relocation and the imposition of Spanish Catholic spiritual, economic, social, psychological, and ecological practices. By the closing of the mission in 1834, nearly 90% of native peoples who entered the mission had died.
- Yet the Indigenous people at Mission Santa Cruz actively challenged and resisted colonization in the form of outright rebellion, assassination of an abusive Padre, ongoing flights of fugitives, and rumors of poisoning.
- Today, little is known about this history, while contemporary Native peoples struggle against this erasure along with an ongoing struggle for rights.
- My research examines the physical violence enacted on local Native peoples through colonialism and links it to the epistemological violence of historical erasure of Native existence.

‘The Mission of Padre Killers’ – Mission Santa Cruz gained a notorious reputation among the local padres, but who were these Indigenous rebels?

**Approach / Methodology:**

- To conduct this research, I travelled to archives throughout Mexico and California.
- In order to understand the Indigenous perspective of this history, I have drawn on bodies of knowledge that allow for a closer reading of Indigenous categories and epistemes, including Anthropology, Archaeology, Ecology, and Psychology.
- Additionally, I compiled tens of thousands of individual missionary records from Missions Santa Cruz, San Juan Bautista, Santa Clara, and more. These included baptisms, burials, marriages, confirmations, godparenthood (padrinos), and marriage witness records. With this data, I’ve been able to trace the lives of families, tribes, kinship networks and individuals throughout the greater region.

**Research Problems:**

- Spanish and Mexican documents have recorded heavily biased accounts of Indigenous life. They frequently failed to recognize Indigenous politics and complexity, ultimately participating in an erasure of Indigenous experiences in the archives.
- This erasure becomes even stronger after Americans invaded in 1850. Americans had a tough time distinguishing between the Mexican settler community and the Indians. Many of the surviving Indigenous families disappeared from the official records, some moving, others passed as Mexicans.
- Historical studies of Indigenous Californians have been limited to demographic studies, revealing patterns of deaths, diseases, and devastating loss, but few have been able to move beyond broad analysis to identify stories of individuals, families, and kin.

**Research Project:**

My dissertation looks at Indigenous resistance and perseverance through 19th Century Santa Cruz.

**Map of local Indigenous tribal territories.**

**Conclusion:**

While Ohlone and Yokuts survivors found ways to navigate these challenging times, most Californians have learned little of their history or struggles. Instead we are taught flawed stories of families and individuals who challenged their oppressive conditions.

- The emergence of three distinct Indigenous communities which formed following the close of Mission Santa Cruz by 1839.
- The persistence of cultural and spiritual practices, rituals, language, songs and dances that helped these survivors to find strength and community.

**Implications**

While Ohlone and Yokuts survivors found ways to navigate these challenging times, most Californians have learned little of their history or struggles. Instead we are taught flawed narratives that continue to harm descendents. Contemporary struggles for State and Federal recognition face uphill battles in challenging misconceptions and romanticized notions of California mission life. My dissertation attempts to rectify this legacy of misinformation and offers a version of the this Indigenous past that reveals, rather than erases, the complex world of local Indigenous survival.