

Title of Thesis: CALIFORNIA MISSION BELL MARKERS: A
STUDY OF HERITAGE AND CULTURE

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Mission bell markers line the El Camino Real Highway, which is referred to as the 101 Freeway in contemporary times. Mission bell markers can also be found in public spaces throughout California. These mission bell markers were installed beginning in the early 20th century. To many, these mission bell markers hold a variety of symbolic representations. For some people, these mission bell markers are a symbol of their culture and heritage, while many others view these bells as an oppressive instrument of colonialism. Most of the California missions put forth a narrative of benevolence and a skewed view of history. This narrative glorifies and celebrates Spanish occupation and colonization while distorting California Indian culture and identity. The significance of this work brings awareness to the myth of the mission. The myth of the mission is one of a complex romanticized history that capitalizes on tourism and perpetuates the dominance and erasure of California Indigenous peoples. This thesis was also written to bring awareness to the California 4th grade mission curriculum that is put forth by the state of California in most public schools. This curriculum teaches a fabricated narrative of Spanish and California Indian relations. This curriculum, like the California mission's narrative, perpetuates the myth of

California Indian extinction. The 4th grade mission curriculum needs to be thoughtfully and respectfully revised. To explore the symbolism that mission bell markers hold to different individuals two surveys, an anonymous survey and a three-question survey were conducted. The results of these two surveys shed light on how certain groups of people and different individuals feel about mission bell markers that are found throughout the California landscape.

Heritage is complicated and complex. There are different conceptions of mission bell markers that exist within different descendant communities and the public. These symbols hold different meanings to different people. How can highly charged perspectives of the California mission bell markers held among Indigenous and Californio descendant groups be reconciled in public heritage?

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by

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Chapter 1: Introduction

California mission bell markers hold a strong symbolism and represent different things to different people. This study was done in order to ask and analyze, what do mission bell road markers along the El Camino Real Highway, and mission bell markers in public spaces symbolize to different people. How can highly charged perspectives of the California mission bell markers held among Indigenous and Californio descendant groups be reconciled in public heritage?

This research aids in identifying, clarifying, and educating readers about how complex the symbolism of these bells is among different individuals and groups of people. This research is relevant and matters because along with the symbolism of the bell among the public, people need to be aware of and understand the symbolism that these mission bell markers hold for many California Indian peoples, many whom are mission descendants. Although many California Indigenous peoples persisted within the California mission system, a vast amount of them perished within the system. It is also important that the California 4th grade mission curriculum be critically and thoughtfully revised.

The 4th grade mission curriculum is put forth by the State of California through the California Department of Education based in Sacramento, California (California Department of Education 2017). Most public schools in California are required to teach this curriculum to 4th graders and visit a California mission. Schools visiting California missions that are run by the Catholic Diocese of Monterey are taught a narrative of this time in California history. Growing up in California, I went

through the fourth-grade mission curriculum. I visited Mission San Juan Bautista, in San Juan Bautista, California, which is run by the Catholic Diocese of Monterey. It was there where I learned a distorted history about the California mission system, the Spanish Padres and Soldiers, and the California Indians. My class was taught that the Spanish Padres and Soldiers and the California Indians all lived together in peace, while the Spanish Padres taught the California Indians life skills such as farming and blacksmithing. It was a false and idealized curriculum that is still being taught, and this is one of the reasons why I chose to write this thesis on this particular topic.

California mission bells have been around since the California mission period beginning in 1769. California mission bell markers did not make a prominent appearance throughout the California landscape until mission bell markers were installed along the El Camino Real highway beginning in 1906. For example, this led to mission bell markers being placed in public spaces as well. In the last few years California mission bell markers have become a popular and controversial topic in some areas of California. Two mission bell markers have been dismantled in Santa Cruz, California, upon the request of local California Indian tribes. Before it could be officially dismantled, a third mission bell marker in Santa Cruz was stolen during a protest.

There are 21 Spanish missions throughout California. Currently, eighteen of these missions are run by the Catholic Diocese of Monterey. Three of the California missions, La Purisima Mission State Historic Park, Mission San Francisco Solano State Historic Park, and Santa Cruz Mission State Historic Park are currently owned and operated by California State Parks. When visiting the California missions there

are obvious differences between the ways State Parks and the Catholic Diocese operate the missions. Missions run by California State Parks are inclusive of California Indian perspectives and tell the hard truth of the California Indian experience within the missions. Those run by the Catholic Diocese carry on a narrative of California Indian erasure and extinction, framing them as a people of the past. The California missions run by the Catholic Diocese also focus on and celebrate Spanish occupation.

During the summer of 2023, I completed an internship through California State Parks at the Santa Cruz Mission State Historic Park (SCMSHP). During my internship at SCMSHP I was able to observe and participate in the fourth-grade mission curriculum at the park. I appreciated how the interpreters of the park did not reinforce the false narrative and told a truthful history of the mission that was age appropriate. The 4th grade curriculum at SCMSHP focused on California Indian culture and lifeways, and how their cultures changed with the arrival of the Spanish. It is appreciated how the interpreters made students aware of the atrocities that happened to California Indigenous peoples within the mission in an age-appropriate manner. The interpreters also made a point to focus on Native resilience and persistence while navigating through the hardships and loss of culture and identity that the mission period bestowed on them.

This topic was also chosen because mission bell road markers and bell markers in public spaces have been a controversial topic for quite a few years in California. In June of 2019 the city of Santa Cruz decided, with the request from local California Indian peoples, to remove a mission bell marker that was located on the

campus of UC Santa Cruz. This bell marker was removed in partnership with UC Santa Cruz and the local Amah Mutsun Tribal Band. (UC Santa Cruz News Center 2019). This was the first out of three mission bell markers to be removed in Santa Cruz. I attended the bell removal ceremony in 2019. The removal ceremony included California Indigenous speakers, singers, and prayers before and after the bell marker was removed. The ceremony was then followed by a luncheon on campus at the UC Santa Cruz arboretum. In 2020, a second mission bell marker was dismantled and stolen from the Santa Cruz Mission Plaza Park during a protest (Oetting 2021). I attended this protest but did not witness the mission bell marker being dismantled.

In August of 2021, the last mission bell marker present in Santa Cruz was removed from a public space located within the downtown Santa Cruz area. This bell was removed due to requests from the local Amah Mutsun Tribal Band (Remove the bells.org 2024). I attended this removal also. The removal ceremony was held on Mission Hill, at Mission Plaza Park, which is located down the street in close proximity to SCMSHP. The event was sponsored by the UC Critical Mission Studies organization. The UC Critical Mission Studies organization is a partnership between diverse California Indian tribal communities that are systemically affected by the California mission system, and non-Indigenous and Indigenous faculty at UC Santa Cruz, UC Los Angeles, UC Riverside, and UC San Diego (Critical Mission Studies.ucsd.edu 2021). The removal ceremony included Indigenous speakers and singing, which was then followed by a one-mile march down Mission Hill into downtown Santa Cruz to the site of the remaining mission bell marker (Remove the Bells.org 2024). These powerful and emotional removal ceremonies allowed for me

to witness the historical symbolism of these bells and hear the painful perspectives that the California mission system and mission bell markers have bestowed onto many California Indigenous peoples.

In January of 2022, the nearby city of Gilroy, my hometown, decided to install a mission bell marker in the middle of their downtown region. There were many objections by local Indigenous peoples and their supporters about the bell installation. The bell's installation was also protested by three of the seven Gilroy City Council members. Many local community members, Amah Mutsun tribal members, and other local tribal members went to Gilroy City Hall to protest the bell marker installment, only to be dismissed by four City Council members and the mayor of Gilroy, who are all in support of the bell marker display downtown. Growing up in Gilroy and going through the fourth-grade mission curriculum, and currently residing in Santa Cruz witnessing all of this, I was inspired to dive deeper into what these mission bell markers symbolize to different people in California.

Thesis Outline

The first chapter of this thesis presents the historical background, which will lay the foundation and context of the history of the California missions, the El Camino Real highway, and mission bell markers. This chapter will discuss how mission bell road markers along the El Camino Real highway and bell markers in public spaces found their place throughout the California landscape. This chapter will discuss mission bell markers in pop culture and the role they play in tourism. It will explain the background of elite civic club women and their role in the installation of mission bell road markers along the El Camino Real highway and bell markers in

public spaces. The last section of the historical background chapter will discuss the modern restoration of the mission bell road markers along the El Camino Real and in public spaces.

The next section will be a theoretical analysis of California mission bell road markers and bell markers in public spaces. This chapter will go over the social power of mythmaking and collective nostalgia that has played into the romanticization of the California missions and bell markers. This chapter also touches on the myth of California Indian extinction that is perpetuated by the California missions and their colonial symbols of the landscape. Through mission bell markers, this falsified narrative lives on. The power dynamics pertaining to the power of myth making, collective nostalgia and heritage, and California Indian identity within the mission system will be analyzed in this chapter.

The methods and data collection chapter will present my experience as an intern at SCMSHP. The history and background of the Santa Cruz Mission will be laid out to give a context of the park and how the historic park is run. The methods section of this chapter will discuss the methods taken to learn what these bell markers symbolize to people and how different individuals feel about mission bell markers. This section will explain in detail the procedures applied in order to collect anonymous responses about mission bell markers from park visitors and event attendees of the park. This section of the chapter will also discuss and give examples of how participants were selected to participate in the three-question survey pertaining to mission bell markers. The three-question survey is not an anonymous survey, although one participant requested to remain anonymous. A sample template

of the email and consent form that was sent to anticipated respondents is included, so the reader can view how said participants were approached to participate in the three-question survey.

The following results chapter will present the data collected from the three-question survey and the anonymous post-it responses from the mission bell marker exhibit. The anonymous responses collected are broken up into separate themes in this chapter; positive: those who view bells as a positive symbol, negative: those who view mission bell markers as a negative symbol, history: those who view mission bell markers as a symbol of California history, and mixed/unsure feelings: those who have mixed feelings or are unsure about mission bell markers. Figures are listed in a table to display the total amounts of responses in each theme. A bar graph and pie chart are presented in this chapter which breaks down the themes present in the anonymous response results. A list of key anonymous responses to the bell exhibit and responses to the three-question survey about mission bell markers were selected to display in this chapter. All responses to both survey components can be viewed in the appendix of this thesis.

The Analysis chapter will present what has been found within the data collected on a deeper level of examination. Each theme of anonymous responses will be analyzed in connection to the history of the California missions and the myth of the mission. The three-question survey component will also be examined in connection to the California missions and the romanticization of the mission period. A main focus in this chapter will be the comparison of Californio descendant responses and California Indigenous people's responses. Californios are descendants

of Spanish colonizers and settlers during and after the California mission period.

These two groups of descendants have the most direct and deepest ties to mission bell markers, while displaying the most contrasting responses to the three-question survey.

This section is written to analyze and bring awareness to the power dynamics that play a role in California mission history.

This thesis was written in order to bring acknowledgment to the social power that goes into the power of myth making. Myth making has the ability to seep into actual history and reinforce a false narrative, which can sometimes skew and/or distort one's culture, heritage, and identity, or in the case of Californio descendants, glorify one's heritage. The myth of the mission has been successful at perpetuating and reinforcing a fictitious history that California Indigenous peoples are a primitive people of the past when this is clearly not the case. California Indigenous peoples are here with us today. This fantasy past and false narrative lives on through mission bell road markers and mission bell markers in public spaces and the California 4th grade mission curriculum.

Chapter 2: Historical Background

In the late 18th century Spanish missionaries brought the idea of bells to the Alta California landscape. Led by Padre Junipero Serra, who founded nine of the 21 California missions, Spanish missionaries made their way from Spain and the Franciscan headquarters in Mexico City, through coastal Alta California to establish a series of 21 missions. The California missions and the El Camino Real highway are looked upon by many as places of heritage. The mission bell road markers lining the historic highway and bell markers in public spaces are looked upon as symbols of California history and heritage. In Elizabeth Kryder-Reid's book, *California Mission Landscapes: Race, Memory, and the Politics of Heritage*, she writes that the California Missions Foundation states on their website, "Nothing defines California and our nation's heritage as significantly and emotionally as do the 21 missions that were founded along the coast from San Diego to Sonoma" (Kryder-Reid 2016). This statement can be true for some individuals and groups of people, although this isn't a factual history, it is a history based on myth and nostalgia, and for many California Indigenous people, the California missions and mission bell markers are a symbol and a painful reminder of enslavement and erasure of culture and identity.

The California missions were established between the years of 1769 and 1823. In July of 1769, the first California mission was established in San Diego, Mission San Diego de Alcala (Starr 2015). All 21 California missions were built near large Indigenous populations. This was done with the intention to spread Catholicism and convert California Indigenous peoples. Junipero Serra believed that all California

Indian peoples needed to be saved from their “uncivilized” ways, and once they were baptized, they became mission property (Madley 2016). The missions served as places of hard labor, agriculture, and exportation, while using California Indian labor for their means. All California missions, once established, had a bell or a series of bells hung on their premises (Hackel 2013). These mission church bells tied the spiritual aspect of the bell to the commercial. Mission bells set the rhythm of work and worship at each of the California missions, ringing when it was time to wake up, time for work, and time for mass. Mass was another aspect of the California mission system that California Native peoples were expected to participate in while in the mission. Valentin Lopez, Chairman of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band states, “When they would build a mission, they would have a bell there. That bell was meant to control them. It would ring in the morning when it was time to get up. It would ring when it was time to work. It would ring when it was time for lunch or dinner. It would ring when it was time for them to say prayers. They were controlled by those bells. It’s just a way of controlling and dominating the California Indians... Those mission bells represent slavery, they represent brutality, whippings, rape, and the breaking up of families” (Ramirez and Lopez 2020).

These 21 California missions are all connected by a road approximately six hundred miles long. This road begins in Southern California’s city of San Diego and extends to Sonoma County located in Northern California. This road is referred to as the El Camino Real or the Royal Highway. This “road” was already in existence when the Spanish explorers and Junipero Serra arrived in Alta California. Before the Spanish claimed this road as their Royal Highway, it was a vast network of

Indigenous trails and trade routes (Dunbar-Ortiz 2014). Currently the El Camino Real highway is referred to as the 101 Freeway or the 101 Pacific Highway.



Figure 1: Route of the *El Camino Real* with locations of historic mission sites. (Photo: Courtesy of Gilroy Dispatch News)

In 1963 the California Scenic Highway Program was established through state is to protect and enhance the natural beauty of certain California highways in an effort of conservation. The goal of establishing the highway as a scenic highway was also another way to encourage the growth of recreational travel and automobile tourism (Caltrans 2023). Much of this El Camino Real/101 Freeway is designated as a scenic highway and “Includes grand vistas and unspoiled coastlines with hills and arroyos

full of biodiversity” (California missions foundation.org 2017). On the California Missions Foundation website, it is stated they are currently seeking to put a scenic 20 plus mile portion of the El Camino Real on the UNESCO World Heritage list.



Figure 2: Tourist with automobile on the El Camino Real Highway.
(Photo courtesy of SCMSHP).

North American expansion created more opportunities for those of higher economic classes to enjoy a lifestyle of travel and recreation. In June of 1864, the Yosemite Valley Land Grant was signed by former president Abraham Lincoln, granting California the Yosemite Valley. During the last decade of the nineteenth century, Congress established Yosemite Valley as its first park in California (NPS 2000). “This historic legislation marked the beginning of land preservation designed for public use” (Parks.ca.gov 2013). The development of a park system was a catalyst for California’s tourism industry to become prevalent. This allowed for many civic groups to come into fruition as they saw economic opportunities stemming from these parks and public spaces. The El Camino Real by this time was now wide enough to

accommodate horses and buggies, and soon to follow, the automobile. It was “In this setting, of boosterism, leisure tourism, and economic promotion, that the California Federation of Women’s Clubs (CFWC) and the Native Daughters of the Golden West (NDGW) were situated” (San Diego.gov 2019). Both of these California based women’s social organizations played key roles in the installation of the California mission bells that currently line the El Camino Real/101 Freeway. Together the CFWC and the NDGW endorsed the idea of lining the California highway with mission bell markers, and in 1904 the El Camino Real Association was established (San Diego.gov 2019). This is an example of how societal elites who moved to and resided within California were able to shape the character of the region through elitist social club movements.

The idea of mission bell markers lining the El Camino Real was originally first introduced by Anna Pitcher in 1892. Pitcher was an art director of the Pasadena Art Exhibition Association, which was an affiliation of the California Federation of Women’s Clubs. Her idea was praised but was not brought to life until 1906 (Welizarowicz 2016). Two years after the El Camino Real Association was founded, in 1906, mission bells were beginning to be installed along the historic El Camino Real and in public spaces by the El Camino Real Association and their affiliated group, The Native Daughters of the Golden West.



Figure 3: El Camino Bell Marker at Mission Soledad with Native Daughters of the Golden West dedication plaque at base.
(Photo by the author).

The Native Daughters of the Golden West (NDGW) is a non-profit fraternal organization that was founded in 1886. This organization was created shortly after their partner organization, The Native Sons of the Golden West, which was formally founded in 1875. NDGW was founded in the town of Jackson, California, which served as a thriving Gold Rush town during the 1850's. To become a member of these organizations you must have been born in California. In theory the organization is open to all Californians, but throughout history, both Native Daughters and Sons have been an all-white organization. Early in 1942 the Native Sons of the Golden West "In partnership with other nativist and other white commercial groups undertook a mass propaganda campaign for removal of West Coast Japanese Americans...their Grand Parlor voted to strip Japanese Americans of their citizenship" (Densho Encyclopedia 2023). 1942 is the same year that President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 into law, authorizing that all Japanese Americans in the West coast be relocated into internment camps (National Archives 2024). This gives us an idea of

the type of nationalist values, and the power to achieve these outcomes, that these organizations have held in the past, and still hold currently.

The NDGW Grand Parlor is located in San Francisco and includes different parlors running throughout California. The organization describes themselves on their website as a fraternal and patriotic organization devoted to the flag, God, veneration of pioneers, and preserving California's historical landmarks. The NDGW website has a page that accepts donations for their mission and mission bell restoration project as well as other California restoration projects. In the past the organization has put on many events at various California missions in celebration of the Spanish padres and missionaries (NDGW 2022). The NDGW advocates and works towards reclaiming the past through exclusion and romanticizing the very aspects of our troubled national history that many are working towards bringing to light. In all their efforts to restore the California missions, erect mission bell markers, and celebrate Spanish occupation, California Indians are never mentioned nor included.

The power dynamics in this mission movement displays that the restoration of the California missions and erecting mission bell markers was targeted towards a white audience. The exclusion of California Indigenous peoples can be seen as a form of white nationalism that has no room nor place for non-whites in this dark portion of history in California. Although many California Indians persisted within the mission system, this eurocentrism makes it a point to romanticize a white European history to mask and dismiss the atrocities that many California Indian peoples were subjected to during this period. This movement hides the fact that many California Indians were not accepted into this white society, and many were treated like animals. "The

Spanish colonization of California involved a process of dehumanization. As they did with livestock, Spanish missionaries and soldiers used excessive corporal punishment as a means of instruction and behavioral modification. Missionaries taught Indians to use goads and yokes to control the livestock, while using whips and stocks to control Indigenous peoples themselves” (Rizzo-Martinez 2022). Within the 18 California missions run by the Catholic Diocese of Monterey, the exhibits featuring California Native peoples portrays them to be a primitive people and a lost civilization of the past, which contributes to reinforcing the myth of California Indian extinction.

Mission Bells in Pop Culture and Tourism

The El Camino Real mission bells were installed to mark the “Royal Highway” and attract more tourism to the missions. In an article “California Mission Bells: Listening Against the Fantasy Heritage” by Dr. Grzegorz Welizarowicz of the University of Gdansk, states “One of the strongest elements providing tacit epistemic support for the reigning ‘Mission Pastoral’ is the ubiquitous presence of mission bells in both imaginary and real California landscapes...These and countless other artistic expressions enshrined the bell as a metonymy of Christian benevolence” (Welizarowicz 2016). In other words, the missionaries' strategies of dominating the landscape and Indigenous peoples are hidden by the idea of religion and benevolence that is symbolized through aesthetically pleasing mission bells in the imaginary and real California landscape.

The California missions also capitalized on their history as authors repeatedly continue to eternalize a romanticized history. Dr. Kryder-Reid explains that “Writers and artists who saw the missions’ crumbling walls and decaying roofs as picturesque

ruins of a romanticized past perpetuate those images in articles, artwork and popular literature, which cement the missions in the popular imagination and feed readers appetites for similar experiences” (Kryder-Reid 2016). One of many novels that fits this description is Helen Hunt Jackson’s, *Ramona*. In Dr. Michelle Lorimer’s book, *Resurrecting the Past: The California Mission Myth*, Dr. Lorimer discusses, although Hunt Jackson’s intentions were to bring awareness to the disgraceful conditions of Indian affairs at the time, the scenic landscape and halcyon atmosphere of the waning Spanish era portrayed by Hunt Jackson attracted the bulk of readers’ attention (Lorimer 2016). Dr. Lorimer further explains Hunt Jackson’s romanticized novel inspired tourists to visit the missions with book in hand, searching for specific locations mentioned throughout the book. Another problematic author was Charles Lummis, who worked for the Los Angeles Times in the 1890s. Lummis repeatedly sought to lure tourists into California with his highly glamourized history of Spanish California in his articles and write ups. Lummis promoted Spanish padres as gracious colonizers and treated Spanish colonization and Native experiences as two unassociated experiences (Lorimer 2016). With the reinforced rhapsodized vision of the California missions, they became tourist destinations and places of heritage by the 20th century. The missions began to “Create false equations of Indigenous and settler experiences on the landscape, erase tragedies of colonialism, and perpetuate stereotypes of pristine non anthropogenic landscapes” (Daehnke 2012). This type of narrative can currently be found within the California missions that are run by the Catholic Diocese. Currently eighteen of the California missions are run by the

Catholic Diocese of Monterey, California, with three of them being owned and operated by California State Parks.

Modern Restoration of the Bells of El Camino Real

In the gift shops of the California Missions that are run by the Catholic Diocese you can purchase mission related souvenirs that aid in solidifying the myth of the mission. A popular item is the miniature El Camino Real bell marker. Along with the miniature souvenir bell markers that are found in many of the mission's gift shops, you can also order yourself a full-sized mission bell. California Bell Company is a company located in Saratoga, California, and was first established by Harrye Rebecca Forbes, also known as Mrs. A.S.C. Forbes. “Forbes first designed the markers as miniature mission bells, said to be modeled after the bells of the Old Plaza Church in Los Angeles, and approximately 158 bells were installed along the El Camino Real by 1915” (Los Angeles Almanac.com 2023).



Figure 4: Photo of miniature mission bell marker souvenir. (Courtesy of SCMSHP volunteer).

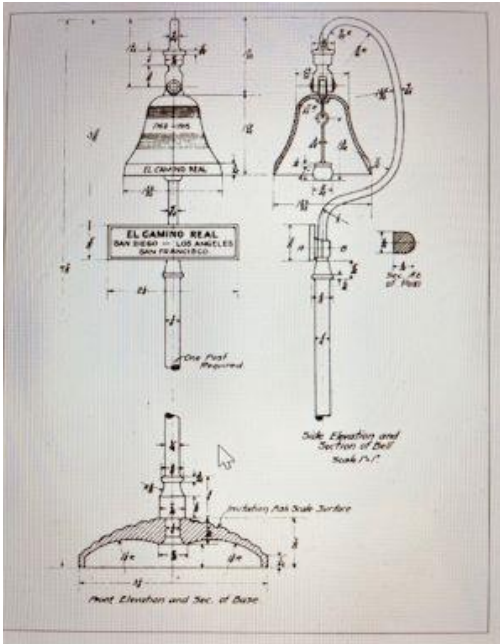


Figure 5: Mission bell marker design by A.S.C. Forbes.
(Courtesy of SCMSHP).

The bells are cast in the 20th century to this very day. The California Bell Company prides themselves on being the originators who cast the first bells of the 1906 El Camino Real (California Bell Company 2023). The company offers a variety of different styles of bells for purchase. On the California Bell website you can order a replica of an El Camino Real bell marker, or you can order bells that are replicas of different mission bells. The company also offers mounting poles and hardware so you can install your personal bell to look just like an El Camino Real bell marker. On their website, Californiabell.com, they declare that the bells are proudly crafted in California by Californians, and your very own mission bell is only a phone call or computer click away.

The California State Automobile Association along with the Automobile Club of Southern California took responsibility for the mission bells lining the El

Camino Real within the years of 1926 through 1931. By 1949 there were a total of 286 mission bell road markers lining the highway placed approximately 2 miles apart from each other. Part of the myth of the mission and commercialization is these bell markers were placed in this manner to represent that one could follow these bells and reach each mission within a day's worth of travel on foot (California Highways.org 2020). The El Camino Real bell markers each hang from a "shepherd's crook" pole measuring 11 feet in height in order to make them highly visible to people traveling on the freeway (Los Angeles Almanac.com 2023). Over the years many of the bells have been lost to theft or vandalism. The California Highways web page discusses how in 1974 California State Legislature established Caltrans responsible for the mission bell road markers. In 1996 Keith Robison, who served as head of the Landscape Architecture Program Division of Design for Caltrans created the "Adopt a Bell" program, which allowed for people to adopt a mission bell road marker and have their bell maintained under the program. The California Federation of Women's Clubs made an effort to adopt as many bells as they could. In the year 2000, Robinson applied for, and received a federal grant to restore El Camino Real mission bell road markers on the state highway (California Highways.org 2020). The grant covered the cost of restoring mission bells along a portion of the 101 freeway from San Francisco to Orange County.



Figure 6: Caltrans workers installing an El Camino Road Marker in 2004. (Photo courtesy of SCMSHP).

In July of 2004 new mission bell road markers were installed in San Benito, Monterey, San Luis Obispo, and Santa Barbara counties. A total of 555 new bell markers have been erected to replace the damaged or missing bells. In 2011 forty more mission bells were installed along the 101 highway in Santa Rosa and Rohnert Park. It is stated on the California Highways web page that it has cost over \$2.2 million dollars in grants to erect these bells, with each bell costing approximately \$2,700.00 (California Highways.org 2020). Again, these modern El Camino Real bell markers were cast by The California Bell Company, and molded from an original bell cast from the early 1900's. The bell markers were not placed along the highway by the Spanish missionaries and/or Spanish soldiers. These bells serve as reminders of a false romanticized California history.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Approaches to Applied Research

The California missions, the El Camino Real highway lined with mission bell road markers, and mission bell markers in public spaces, have always been, and are currently looked upon by many as places and symbols of California history and heritage. The myth of the California missions is one of benevolence and beauty, while perpetuating the erasure of California Indians and their ancestral lands, and while also celebrating Spanish occupation. The social construction of mission bell markers as symbols of California heritage exists through the theoretical frameworks that create positions of power and power around the past. This past reflects a collective and constructed history that “obscures class relations of power, control and inequality” (Handsman and Leone 1989). Power relations between elite women's social clubs, the dominant culture, and many California Indians is very prominent in this aspect and time of California history. One of the primary methods of this critique builds on a model of inclusion, for which it lacks, Indigenous inclusion.

Social clubs of wealthy white women in southern California presented the bells of the El Camino Real, and bell markers in public spaces in order to promote automobile tourism in California. Not only is this fictitious past based on nostalgia and inaccuracy, but also exposes hierarchies of social class. The missions were targeted as tourist sites for a white audience. Not everyone could afford an automobile to participate in auto tourism of the El Camino Real. Dr. Paul Shackel discusses in his book, *Myth, memory, and the making of the American landscape*, how “Nostalgia is used as a tool for segregating classes...The automobile were to be

used exclusively by the elite who owned carriages. Those who could not afford the leisure and expense of these outdated modes of transportation could not participate” (Shackel 2001). These early women’s social clubs of California have created a fabricated history that does not reflect the true factual past. This boosterism exploits tourism strictly for capital gains, while at the same time excluding those who did not belong to the dominant culture. During this time in history only those of higher class could actually afford an automobile. “This heritage is deployed in the power dynamics of nationalism, colonialism, cultural elitism, Western triumphalism, social exclusion based on class and ethnicity, and the fetishizing of expert knowledge” (Kryder-Reid 2016). The romanticization of this particular time period in California history is characterized by violent displacement and the erasure of California Indian identity, culture, and lifeways.

California mission bell markers can also be found in public spaces in cities and towns throughout California, symbolizing this fabricated past, and reinforcing a colonial landscape. This is what some people, and many California Indians refer to as, the myth of the California missions. The myth of the California missions “Serves as an episodic element that advances a plot of dominance by linking the modern episteme of difference with a myth of origin” (Flores 2000). This is a power display which upholds a nostalgic cultural myth as more important than actual California history. The power of this myth and nostalgia erases and overlooks the fact that a great majority of California Indians were enslaved within the missions, while celebrating Spanish history and occupation.

The myth of the California mission, the El Camino Real highway, and mission bell markers are celebrated as a communal history that was originally created by elitist club women in the early 1900s, such as Anna Pitcher of the El Camino Highway Association, Mrs. A.S.C Forbes, founder of the California Bell Company, and the Native Daughters of the Golden West, to capitalize on tourism from this invented history they helped create. These clubs, especially the Native Daughters of the Golden West, “Promoted the preservation and interpretation of historical sites while simultaneously affirming their social standing through their affiliation with those sites...Their philanthropy through plaques commemorating their deeds registered the social value of their good works and proclaimed their status as patrons of a civic monument” (Kryder-Reid 2016). This history is deeply ingrained within the history of California, and there is even a fourth-grade school curriculum in California that promotes this false history. I went through this curriculum while I was in fourth grade. The mission bell road markers of the El Camino Real highway and bell markers in public spaces, in terms of heritage, can be viewed as one of a political act. Tourists viewing the bell markers of the El Camino Real highway and bell markers in public spaces are observing a colonial landscape. Due to the creation of this fabrication of history in the early 1900’s, tourists now are shielded from the atrocities that happened to a vast amount of California Indigenous peoples within the California mission system. This allows tourists to create their own personal experiences instead of learning the actual history behind the bells, their symbolism, and the landscape.

When discussing the El Camino Real highway and mission bell markers we must critically question why this history was invented. “Collective decision-making

power primarily rests in the hands of a few, which masks struggles for power among other parties. This sheds light on how colonial structures remain as hidden dimensions embedded in laws, policies, and practices, and are largely unacknowledged” (Biard 2013). The decisions made by a few to represent a fictional history to the public was created to deflect from the dominance and oppression that many Indigenous peoples have historically faced during the mission period and after for capital gains.

This contrived history of the California mission period was created to form an ideology of peaceful and collective outlooks upon this history. Mission bell markers have the power to imbed specific ideologies of power within the public imagination. They are “Social constructions that in the end serve capitalism well by fixing persons and groups into objective categories” (Matthews 2010). Those categories being Indigenous peoples, and the Spanish missionaries and soldiers. This history is successful in creating a collective sense of unity and cultural nostalgia for certain groups of people who visit the California missions and the El Camino Real highway. Mission bell markers can be viewed as a reinforcement of ideologies in a fabricated history. This ideology is one of benevolent Spanish Padres and soldiers, and “uncivilized savages.” This type of social power infuses silence and erasure of identity upon those who are at the other end of this history, by dismissing the history of Indigenous peoples in the California mission era. When visiting the majority of California mission sites, one will witness that “Native men, women and children are rarely referred to by name in the mission museum narratives and are instead referred to as neophyte, Christianized Indians, Indian laborers, or workers- in effect only in

terms of the service they provided as captives of the mission project” (Dartt-Newton 2011). The myth of the mission contributes to the erasure of California Indian identity, culture, and life ways.

Only three of the 21 California missions are currently making efforts towards being inclusive of Indigenous voices and experiences. Those missions are Mission Santa Cruz, Mission La Purisima and Mission San Francisco Solano, which are owned and run by California State Parks. The remaining eighteen California missions are owned and run by the Catholic Diocese of Monterey, California. When visiting the missions there are obvious differences between the ways State Parks and the Catholic Diocese operate the missions. Missions run by California State Parks are inclusive of Indigenous voices and tell the hard truth of California Indian experiences. California missions run by the Catholic Diocese reinforces a narrative that erases California Indian identity while glorifying the Spanish.

As we examine the power of myth making, we can see how “It endorses personal uses of the past that further disguise politically motivated and enacted class structures...visitors take away individualized messages whose socio-political content is hidden, first by the contrast with past misrepresentations, and then by verification through emotional response...It very effectively stalls any systematic movement towards critical understanding” (Leone and Handsman 1989). Many people believe the El Camino Real highway and the mission bell road markers along the highway were established simultaneously with the California missions, and put into place by the Spanish Padres, when this is not the case. California Mission “secularization and emancipation began in the early 1830’s” (Rizzo-Martinez 2022) which predates the

mission bell installation by many years. Mission bell road markers were not installed along portions of the highway until 1906 by white civic club women. This myth permeates throughout California history and obscures the true facts that we know. Leone and Handsman explain how viewing history in this manner can speak to human emotions and reinforces a shared collective feeling of nostalgia among many who view these bell markers in a positive manner.

Nostalgia can exist in one's mind or within a group of people as a subjective and sentimental view of the past. Nostalgia has the predisposition to allow certain groups of people to view the past collectively or individually with a favorable recollection of history. Nostalgia also has a way of blending with identity. "Collective nostalgia is often instigated when people perceive a discontinuity between the group's past and present. Collective nostalgia can play a homeostatic role by cementing social identity or mobilizing a return to what is seen as the group's authentic past" (Sedikides and Wildschut 2023). When certain groups of people view mission bell markers it empowers those groups to look upon these symbols as a reinforcement of social identity, as well as a collective shared heritage within that group. This identity and heritage have the ability to skew historical facts which have been appropriated from the myth of the mission and mission bell markers.

This history has been "Defined and redefined to meet specific social and political surfaces" (Leone and Handsman 1989). When many people view the El Camino Real highway and mission bell markers, they are not necessarily seeing a true landscape and history, but a view of something many people unconsciously want to see and believe. As the romanticized history of the California missions, the El

Camino Real highway, and mission bell road markers are repeatedly reinforced, it dismisses California Indigenous perspectives and experiences.

Chapter 4: Methods and Data Collection

During the summer of 2023, I completed an internship through California State Parks at Santa Cruz Mission State Historic Park (SCMSHP), in downtown Santa Cruz, California. This mission was founded by the Spanish Franciscan, Father Fermin Lasuen in August of 1791, and was founded as the 12th California mission, Misión la Exaltación de la Santa Cruz (ohp.parks.ca.gov 2023). This particular park does not include a mission church like all of the other California mission sites. The mission church replica is located a block away from the State Park, and is run by the Catholic Diocese of Monterey, California. SCMSHP is a small park that displays the only original surviving adobe building left of the thirty-two buildings that was once Mission Santa Cruz. The adobe is the oldest building in Santa Cruz County, marking its 200th year in 2024. The adobe site was acquired by California State Parks in the late 1980's and opened to the public in 1991 (parks.ca.gov 2024).



Figure 7: Adobe at Santa Cruz Mission State Historic Park (Photo by the author).

SCMSHP is located on a large bluff, referred to as Mission Hill, which overlooks the current downtown area of Santa Cruz, California. The single-story austere adobe has been restored to its original appearance. This adobe was built by and served as housing for the California Indian residents of the mission during the mission period. Exhibits inside the adobe tell the story of the mission through the lens of the Ohlone and Yokuts people residing within Mission Santa Cruz (parks.ca.gov 2023). The Ohlone and Yokuts were the California Indians who inhabited the local area and surrounding lands for thousands of years before the arrival of the Spanish. The adobe was originally constructed in 1824 and had a total of 18 rooms. Seven rooms are what is left of the historical structure. SCMSHP offers brochures to the public for free self-guided tours, as well as free guided tours led by State Park Interpreters and trained docents.

SCMSHP “Acknowledges that this site for California Native Americans is a site of great loss and trauma” (parks.ca.gov 2023). The park focuses on telling the story of the California Indian experience as opposed to focusing on and glorifying Spanish occupation, which serves as the main narrative of missions run by the Catholic Diocese. The missions run by the Catholic Diocese presents Native peoples to appear as a lost civilization and a primitive people of the past. SCMSHP recognizes the atrocities that happened on its grounds and feel it is their responsibility “To share this complex and difficult history with the public in an appropriate and respectful way” (parks.ca.gov 2023). SCMSHP also stresses the fact that California Indian peoples are still here with us today. SCMSHP holds many events in

collaboration with local Indigenous peoples, allowing them to speak their perspectives about the California mission system to the public.

SCMSHP is also involved with teaching the fourth-grade mission curriculum. During the school year the park hosts schools from all over the Bay Area, the San Joaquin Valley, and the greater Monterey Bay region. Growing up in California, I went through the fourth-grade mission curriculum. I visited Mission San Juan Bautista, in San Juan Bautista, California, which is run by the Catholic Diocese of Monterey. It was there where I learned a false and romanticized history about the California mission system, the Spanish Padres and Soldiers, and the California Indians. I was taught that the Spanish and the California Indians all lived together in peace, while the Spanish Padres taught the California Indians life skills such as farming, blacksmithing, and tending livestock.

SCMSHP received a grant in 2021 to create a virtual mission bell exhibit for their visitor center. The virtual bell exhibit, which is called: For Whom the Bell Tolls, is a touchscreen kiosk located within the visitor center in which visitors can learn about mission bells beginning in 1769, when the first California mission was established, to present time. The exhibit also displays information about the bell markers along the El Camino Real and the club women who played a key role in bell installation. The virtual bell exhibit explains to visitors how mission bells were used within the mission system to control California Indians, and how California Indian lifeways and culture were drastically changed. The virtual bell exhibit also displays videos from the bell removal ceremony of 2019, and videos of California Indigenous peoples speaking on their perspectives of the bell. The exhibit has many different

features and allows visitors to “go as lightly or deeply into each topic as you wish” (Parks.ca.gov 2024).



Figure 8: Virtual Bell Exhibit touch screen kiosk in the visitor center of SCMSHP. (Photo by the author).

During my internship SCMSHP requested that I help with updating and adding to the virtual bell exhibit. Although my internship has ended, I am still currently helping SCMSHP with the virtual exhibit. Julie Sidel, the head interpreter of the park, was very pleased with the variety of responses that I received from my three-question survey about bell markers, so she has decided to include some of the responses in the virtual bell exhibit. I am currently in the process of working with Julie on including responses from my three-question survey component of this thesis within the bell exhibit. We are also in the process of trying to locate and interview California Indigenous peoples who are in support of mission bell markers to add to the variety of perspectives. You can visit the virtual bell exhibit at

https://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=30583

Methods

In order to find out what mission bell road markers along the El Camino Real highway and mission bell markers in public spaces symbolize to different individuals, two experimental surveys were conducted. During my internship I was given permission by State Parks, and under the guidance of the head interpreter of the park, Julie Sidel, I was able to set up a table at events held within the park. This allowed me to interact and converse with the public about mission bell road markers on the El Camino Real highway and mission bell markers in public spaces. Julie constructed a portable El Camino Real mission bell exhibit for me to set up on the table. When the bell exhibit is not in use at events it resides in the park's visitor center for visitors to comment on. All data collection methods were conducted through and under the supervision of State Parks and all data collected are property of State Parks.



Figure 9: Portable Mission Bell Marker exhibit with anonymous responses next to virtual bell exhibit kiosk in the park visitor center. (Photo by the author).



Figure 10: El Camino Real bell marker replica outside park visitor center. 1991 cast on bell to represent SCMSHP founding. (Photo by the author).

The table was always set up within close proximity to an actual mission bell marker that is owned by and located within SCMSHP right outside the visitor center. I would like to note that the mission bell marker on the park grounds contains a sign explaining that for many people the bell represents a painful history, and the bell is “designed to help us better understand how these bell markers have symbolized different things for different communities over time” (parks.ca.gov 2024). As I stood at the table during each event, I encouraged conversations about mission bells among the public.



Figure 11: Author speaking with a visitor at a park event as a park volunteer looks on. Mission bell marker exhibit with anonymous responses in lower right corner. (Photo by SCMSHP).

To name a few of these events, I was able to speak and interact with the public at the Communities and Cultures event, which celebrated different cultures and diversity within the community and beyond. This event had about two hundred or so people attend. Another event I spoke at was Homeschool Day, which serves as a mission curriculum for homeschooled students ranging from K-12th grades. We had about 300+ students and parents attend. I was also able to help with a film screening event at the park titled, “It Needs to be Told: Native Californian Perspectives on the Missions.” The film screening event featured a panel of California Indigenous speakers who were featured in the film. This powerful eight-minute film is currently

featured in the adobe for park visitors to watch. This event had a much larger turnout than expected with about 100+ visitors. Each of these events had a very positive turnout. Some responses were also collected from the Summer Archaeology Program (SAP), which I helped manage. The SAP program consisted of approximately fifteen volunteers that were given an opportunity to participate in sorting through materials collected from a local excavation.

When members of the public at each event came to the table interested in the bell marker exhibit, they would inquire about the display. I had many great conversations and some hard conversations. I spoke with many event attendees and park visitors that did not know why the bells lined the El Camino Real highway, so I gave them a brief yet informative history and context. When visitors approached my table, I would ask them if they were familiar with the mission bell road markers lining the highway. Some would say yes, some would say no. If a visitor said yes, I would then ask if they knew who placed the bell markers there. No one was able to answer this question. The majority of park visitors thought the bell markers were placed along the El Camino Real highway by the Spanish padres, while others stated they had no idea. I would then educate them on the fact that the bells were placed along the highway by progressive club women beginning in 1906 in hopes to attract tourism to the El Camino Real highway and the restored California missions.

I would inform visitors of the fact that many people view the bell markers as a part of California history, while some even claim the bell markers to be a part of their heritage. I would also communicate to park visitors that although many people enjoy the bell markers or think they are interesting, to many California Indians they

are a symbol of oppression and a loss of identity and culture. Some visitors seemed disinterested, while other visitors were very interested and would ask more questions. A few visitors even sat down to engage in a longer, more in-depth conversation about the topic. Overall, the majority of park visitors thanked me for informing them and agreed to anonymously take part in my survey.



Figure 12: Bell marker exhibit with anonymous post-its in park visitor center. (Photo by the author).

To obtain the anonymous survey data, I would then ask and encourage individuals to write down anonymously on a provided post-it; what the bells symbolize to them and/or how they feel about the bells. After the park visitors anonymously wrote their response on the post-it, they would stick it to the bell

marker exhibit. At the end of each event, I would collect the anonymous responses and record them. Each anonymous response was transcribed from the post-it into a confidential Google Doc shared between SCMSHP and I. Due to the post-it responses being anonymous, nothing else was recorded into the Google Document, nor onto the post-it. When events were not going on in the park the bell exhibit was set up in the park visitor center. I was successful in getting a wide variety of responses from park events and the visitor center.

During my internship with State Parks, I was able to add another component of data collection. On behalf of State Parks and the approval and supervision of Julie, the head park interpreter, I sent out a three-question survey via email to different organizations, clubs, California Indian tribes, college professors, mission docents, and Californio descendants. Californios are descendants of Spanish colonizers/settlers that came to California during the mission period or shortly after. Julie, as well as the Santa Cruz District State Parks historian at the time, and a local archaeologist gave me some suggestions on who to email. I wanted to hear from those who were in support of the bell and those who are not in support so the data would not appear biased. When an email was sent to an anticipated participant, I would give a short introduction to introduce myself. I sent everyone the same email which looked like this:

Good morning xx,

My name is Amanda, and I am located in Santa Cruz, California. I am a grad student in an online cultural and heritage resource management master's program with the University of Maryland, College Park. I am writing my

master's thesis on mission bell markers, focusing on the mission bell road markers of the El Camino Real highway, and bell markers in public spaces, and what the bells symbolize to different people.

I am reaching out to see if you are interested in answering my three-question questionnaire via email about what the bells symbolize to you. If so, please see the three-question survey below. I would also like to have permission to use your responses in my master's thesis. If you do not wish to consent to your responses being used, just simply write, no consent. You can also choose to be anonymous as well.

Thank you so much for your time and have a wonderful day. Please contact me through this email or my provided phone number if you have any questions or concerns.

Amanda Dover
xxx-xxx-xxx

Respondents were given the option to respond anonymously or consent to have their name and profession included. Quite a few respondents agreed to participate in the three-question survey, but upon receiving my survey questions, they never sent it back. I emailed the survey to over thirty of the said potential respondents and only got responses from nineteen participants. The three-question survey was typed out on a Google Docs page, and at the top of the page I included a signature of consent section.

An example of the consent and three question survey:

I, _____, give consent to use my responses in Amanda Dover's master's thesis. Date: _____.

1. What does a mission bell symbolize to you? Does it evoke any specific feelings?
2. Do you view mission bells and mission bell road markers synonymously?
3. There has been some controversy over mission bell markers being removed. Do you feel that mission bell markers along the highway and in public spaces should be removed? Why or why not?

I received a wide variety of responses. I also received responses from three different members of the Native Daughters of the Golden West organization. One of them being a past Grand President of the organization. The members were very interested in the research that I was conducting, due to their organization playing a key role in erecting mission bell markers along the highway and in public spaces. Unfortunately, they requested to keep their responses private, so I cannot share their responses. I also received a response back from a member of the California Missions Foundation and a member of the Catholic Diocese of Monterey, who shared their thoughts but did not consent to me using their responses in my thesis. I reached out to the Santa Cruz Mission church replica that is run by the Catholic Diocese of Monterey, and a few other Catholic churches, but did not receive a response back from them.

My internship at SCMSHP allowed me to speak with a wide and diverse variety of park and event visitors. When I first started my internship, I blindly thought that most people knew about mission bell markers along the El Camino Real and bell markers in public spaces. I talked to many visitors who had no idea what they were, and some did not even know about them. I did take into consideration that many park visitors were not California residents, and some were not even from the United States. Although I did encounter quite a few Californians who were not familiar with the bells or the California mission system in general, which I found a bit surprising. Upon giving them a brief history and context, many of these visitors did become very interested, and many of them engaged in long conversations with me. These conversations have inspired me to keep the discussion about mission bell markers.

To process the data all anonymous survey responses were read and recorded in a shared Google Docs document between SCMSHP and I. The three question survey responses were emailed to the head interpreter of the park. All data is confidential between SCMSHP and I. Patterns, key words, personal opinions and individual's stances on the topic were sought out in all data received.

Regarding the three-question survey, although a variety of individuals were emailed, special focus was given to responses received from descendant communities, the Californio descendants and California Indians who are California mission descendants. This is because these two communities are descendant communities, and they are also minority communities that have direct connections to mission bell markers. Their voices are important and should be amplified. In the following chapter

I will present the results received from the anonymous post-its to the mission bell marker exhibit and from the three-question survey.

Chapter 5: Results

Upon completion of my internship at Santa Cruz Mission State Historic Park, I was able to get a substantial number of anonymous responses to the bell marker exhibit. As discussed in the previous chapter, park visitors anonymously wrote on a post-it how they felt about mission bell road markers along the El Camino Real highway and mission bell markers in public spaces. The visitor then stuck the post-it to the bell exhibit. I received a total of 128 anonymous responses from park events and the visitor center. Due to similarities and repetitive responses, I used a sample of 97 responses. I was successful at getting a wide variety of anonymous responses. I also noticed some patterns in the data I collected. Many park visitors anonymously stated that they enjoyed seeing mission bells along the highway, and they viewed them as a part of California's unique history. Most park visitors anonymously stated that they viewed the bells in a negative manner and as a symbol of oppression for California Indians. There were also quite a few responses stating that they were unsure or had mixed feelings about the bells lining the highway and in public spaces.

Figures, Pie Chart and Anonymous Post-It Responses to Bell Exhibit

Below is a bar graph and pie chart that was created to display the figures collected with the anonymous post-it responses to the bell marker exhibit. 97 responses total were used for this anonymous survey. In both the bar graph and pie chart, positive responses represent visitors who view the bells as a positive object and/or do not think that the mission bell road markers of the El Camino Real and mission bells in public spaces should come down. The negative section represents

visitors who view the mission bell markers as a negative symbol and should be removed. The history category pertains to anonymous responses that stated the mission bell markers are a part of California's history. The mixed/unsure portion represents visitors who are neutral, unsure, or have mixed views on the mission bell markers. Listed below the graphs you will find a small selection of the anonymous responses from each theme. All anonymous responses can be found in the appendix of this thesis. It is important and significant for people to read all the responses to understand the diverse opinions and perspectives that different individuals hold pertaining to mission bell markers.

Figures:

Anonymous Responses	
N=97	
Positive	15
Negative	45
History	21
Mixed/Unsure	16

Figure 13: Themes and totals.

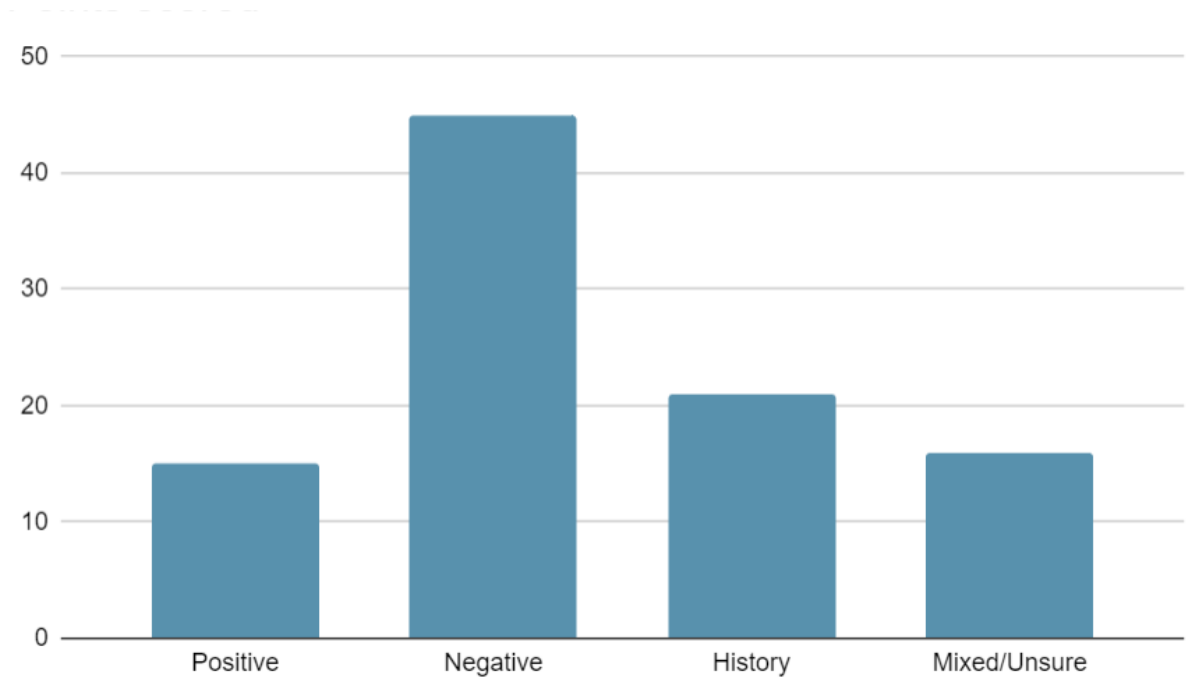


Figure 14: Bar Graph of themes broken down.

Pie Chart:

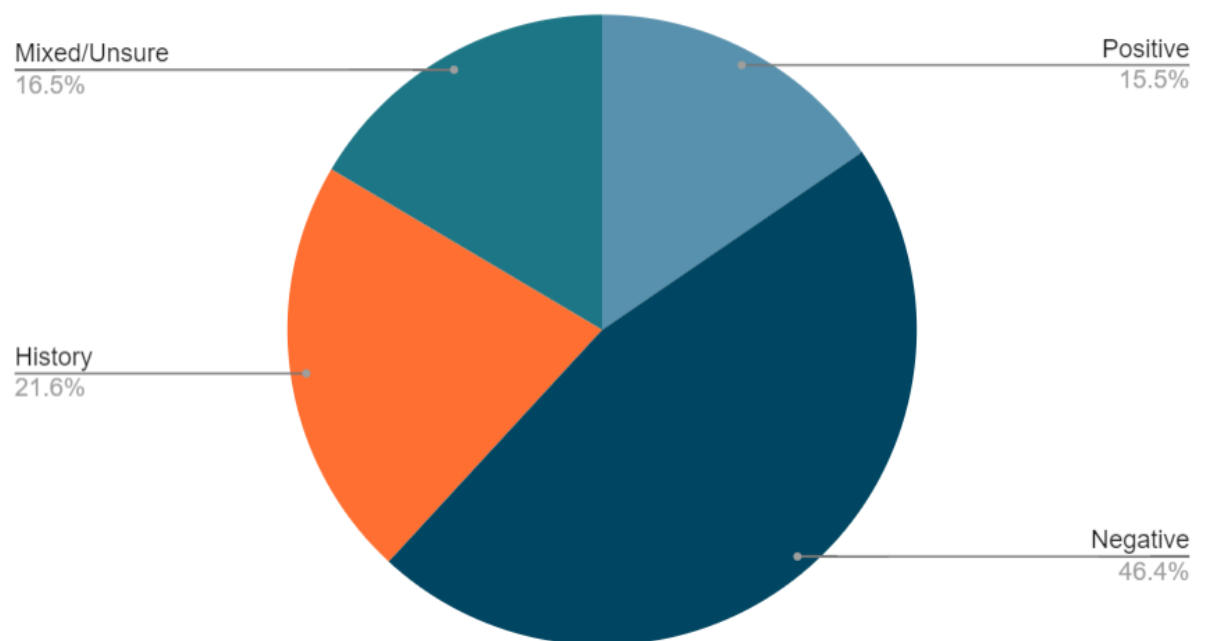


Figure 15: Pie Chart displaying themes. All graphs created by author.

Anonymous Park Visitor and Event Attendee Responses

Due to receiving a large number of anonymous responses, listed below is a sample of anonymous responses representing each individual theme. All 128 anonymous responses received are listed in the appendix of this thesis.

Positive Anonymous Responses

- The bells were put up as California was developing its road system. I think of the evolution of roads, animals, natives, settlers, and modern users. I like the bells!
- To me the bells are a symbol of freedom, they are beautiful.
- Put them back!
- Makes me think of my ancestors, both native and Spanish. Lots to think about.
- I love finding them on the highway.
- The road of faith isn't perfect yet hopeful.

Negative Anonymous Responses

- These bell markers are a passive form of cultural erasure. They are a symbol of a history that did not happen. Their continued existence is an active attempt at replacing real/factual history. Indigenous people are still here!
- Sound of oppression.
- A tourist gimmick in the early 1900s. Take them down.
- Generational trauma.

- I agree with the removal and love that there is an explanation as to why.
- Coming from outside of California, I viewed the bells on the freeways much as I thought of the Oregon Express, a Pony Express trail, which was a part of where I come from as another historical trail. I've been in California for decades now and know the bell's history- they make me sad.
- Genocide and slavery.

History Anonymous Responses

- These bells are part of our history - be it bad or good. Sorry to see them go.
- Historical and significant.
- The richness and diversity of our California history.
- History- for better or for worse.
- I have a miniature mission bell from the 1920's. Always a symbol of California and the history of the missions. Unique history.
- The roads marked by the bells were the beginning of California roads.
- History! Rehang the bells!

Mixed/Unsure Anonymous Responses

- An object to celebrate or an object to mourn?
- Was the bell about order? You hear it and follow orders?
- So many! History—oppression, religion, mixed feelings.

- I have no idea.
- Nada/Neutral.
- Multiple meanings to different groups of people.
- The bells mean home, for better or for worse. They are bloody in history, but also beautiful- a symbol not only of the past, but a desire for community in the age they were made and now.

Three Question Survey Component

The second component of my data collection is the three-question survey about mission bells. None of the three question survey participants attended any of the park events where I spoke about mission bell markers. As stated in the Methods Chapter, I reached out via email to over thirty organizations, tribes, individuals, professors, and Californio descendants located throughout California.

I managed to receive eighteen responses to the survey, which I was surprised at. I felt that I would have received more responses to these questions. I received five responses that did not give consent to share in my thesis. A few of the respondents chose to only answer one or two of the questions, while a few others shared a little more. I asked one Indigenous participant an additional question about her feelings on how she feels about many people dismissing Native perspectives on the bell. I also asked a Gilroy City Council member about how he felt about Gilroy installing a mission bell marker in the downtown area of Gilroy.

I had approximately six respondents agree to answer the questions, but when I emailed them the survey, they never sent their responses back to me. All respondents consented to their responses and identities being shared in this thesis, with one

participant requesting to remain anonymous and only be identified by their tribal identity. Listed below are a select handful of responses received. All the of the three-question survey responses received can be viewed in the appendix section of this thesis. In the appendix you will also find a list of all organizations and individuals that I reached out to who did not respond to the survey. As a reminder, the questions are as follows:

1. What does a mission bell symbolize to you? Does it evoke any specific feelings?
2. Do you view mission bells and mission bell road markers synonymously?
3. Do you feel that mission bell markers along the highway and in public spaces should be removed? Why or why not?

Responses are as follows:

- 1. What does a mission bell symbolize to you? Does it evoke any specific feelings?**

The mission bell symbolizes a dark time in history where the land that I currently live was taken by force from the Native Americans. They are a symbol of slavery and genocide. I am proud to be born and raised in California, but I feel anger and sadness in my heart. As a husband and a father, I can't imagine how that felt to have families split apart and put through so much brutality on the land that I live.

- 2. Do you view mission bells and mission bell road markers synonymously?**

Yes, I do. Growing up in Berkeley, California, and in the public education system, both the mission bell road markers and mission bells meant the same to me. The bells are connected to the missions.

3. There has been some controversy over mission bell markers being removed. Do you feel that mission bell markers along the highway and in public spaces should be removed? Why or why not?

Yes, I feel that they should be removed along the highway and in public spaces. Today they are meant to wash away the true history and somehow replace it with a better sounding story of how we are connected through commerce, economic development, and tourism along the El Camino Real. One argument from a fellow Council member, who purchased the bell for Downtown Gilroy, was that it wasn't a mission bell but just a highway marker.

4. I understand that Gilroy has placed a mission bell marker in the downtown area. Do you feel it should be removed?

Yes. I will continue to support any efforts to take it down. Any chance that I have in my position as an elected official to correct wrongs of the past, I will support.

-Zach Hilton, Gilroy City Council Member.

1. What does a mission bell symbolize to you? Does it evoke any specific feelings?

To me, the mission bells— at least as they appear along the roadside or in public settings— symbolize a romanticized version of California's colonial history. This

history explicitly celebrates the Euro-American heritage of the region while ignoring, or even erasing, the deep Indigenous history of California. As a settler scholar who is not originally from California, the bells do not evoke any particular feelings for me, perhaps simply disappointment that so much time and energy has been spent creating and defending such a one-sided version of the past.

2. Do you view mission bells and mission bell road markers synonymously?

Not necessarily. This is partly due to the fact that I work at Santa Clara University where we have a (reconstructed) mission church with bells on our campus, and there is an actual mission bell from the King of Spain in our campus museum. Santa Clara University is built on top of the ruins of mission Santa Clara. Those bells I see as part of the historical fabric, essentially as artifacts that are value neutral and that could be used to tell any number of stories, including the subjugation of Native Californians through the demarcation of time, etc. The roadside bells are also artifacts of *their* time, but to me, the story that they tell is one of a romanticized history, which often doesn't have much basis in fact (e.g., the El Camino Real didn't actually follow the same route as Highway 101).

3. There has been some controversy over mission bell markers being removed. Do you feel that mission bell markers along the highway and in public spaces should be removed? Why or why not?

I think in an ideal world, we would not be using public funds for the placement and/or upkeep of historical markers that are offensive or painful to certain communities, especially in this case communities who have already suffered tremendously due to the structures of colonialism. So, at a general level I support the removal of the

mission bell markers. In my experience at SCU, where we successfully removed a statue of Junipero Serra, it helped to have an official process that involved stakeholders, to ensure relatively broad buy-in. I am not sure what that would look like at a statewide level, but I think it can be successful in local contexts like UCSC and other places.

-Dr. Lee Panich, Archaeologist and Professor of Anthropology at Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, California. Author of *Narratives of Persistence: Indigenous Negotiations of Colonialism in Alta and Baja California*.

1. What does a mission bell symbolize to you? Does it evoke any specific feelings?

Studying California's twenty-one Franciscan missions changed how I see their bells. Before I studied the California missions, I could visit a California mission and overlook its bells. Now, the mission bells at California missions remind me of the work routines, the religious services, and the regimentation that they imposed upon California Indian peoples.

- Dr. Benjamin Madley, Associate Professor of History, UCLA, and author of *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe*.

1. What does a mission bell symbolize to you? Does it evoke any specific feelings?

For me, the mission bells symbolize the mythical story of Spanish heritage in California. They represent a time of nostalgia, in the early 20th century, when

California boosters sought to encourage tourism by putting together a romanticized version of the state's history that revolved around benevolent missionaries civilizing savages. On a deeper level, the mission bells would have historically represented the imposition of Spanish control, colonialism, and abuses. When I see the bell markers (or various versions of these bells), I am reminded of this campaign to rewrite history. As far as specific feelings, it evokes a sadness for me. A sadness about the realities of this tragic history, and a sadness for how we have covered up the genocide and trauma with these romantic idyllic false histories.

2. Do you view mission bells and mission bell road markers synonymously?

I do view them synonymously. The creation of these bell markers was meant to conjure up images from the original mission bells. It is hard for me to separate these - the original bells and their symbolic markers.

3. There has been some controversy over mission bell markers being removed. Do you feel that mission bell markers along the highway and in public spaces should be removed? Why or why not?

4. Yes. I do think that these bell markers, which so clearly evolved as part of a marketing campaign to rewrite history, have no place in staying. While they might be symbols of nostalgia for some non-Natives, this nostalgia is one that recalls warm fuzzy feelings from accepting lies rather than difficult historical truths. Pandering to this nostalgia prevents accepting the reality of actual history. I do think that we could replace these bell markers with other markers. Something that recognizes the millennia long history of Indigenous California and Indigenous Californians. Some have proposed replacing these with Indigenous staffs, representing the specific tribal

territories that the 101 passes through. I would vote for that. Anything that helps people understand and connect to the long Indigenous history of these lands would be preferable to symbols that act to erase that history.

-Dr. Martin Rizzo-Martinez, Former California State Parks Historian and Tribal Liaison- Santa Cruz District, and current Assistant Professor of Film and Digital Media at UC Santa Cruz. Author of *We are not Animals: Indigenous Politics of Survival, Rebellion, and Reconstitution in Nineteenth Century California*.

1. What does a mission bell symbolize to you? Does it evoke any specific feelings?

I am, like my mother's family before me, a practicing Catholic. Hearing about the removal of mission bells causes me to feel a lack of pride and connection to the sacrifices and contributions of my ancestors. I know for a fact that my grandmother and mother were always moved when they saw them. Seeing the bells along the road or in specific sites is one of the few things we Californio descendants have to remind newer immigrants of our contribution to the story of California. That should not be sanitized, excluded, erased, or canceled. The story of these families should be told and retold in a rich and nuanced way. It is part of our California heritage and our heritage as Americans.

-Greg Smestad, Californio descendant

1. What does a mission bell symbolize to you? Does it evoke any specific feelings?

A mission bell image is iconic. The romantic take on history that it symbolizes is both quaint and charming. It also represents the entire cloak of acceptance by Anglo society of Californios as acceptable “white”, and not the outsiders that other native Hispanics endured in Texas and New Mexico.

2. Do you view mission bells and mission bell road markers synonymously?

They are not the same. However, I know that most people today do not differentiate between them unless they are Catholic and experience the real bells in their church setting. It's a shame that they do. The highway bells have become targets of those who wish to erase both symbolism and actual history.

3. There has been some controversy over mission bell markers being removed. Do you feel that mission bell markers along the highway and in public spaces should be removed? Why or why not?

Those wanting to be politically correct or woke view the markers as symbols of oppression. They think the Catholic missions enslaved native Americans. That's a sadly uninformed, but currently popular view. Lost on them is that the removal of the bells is itself an assault on Hispanic history, culture, and people (Californios). Removing them indicates a rejection of Hispanics in general. History is layered. Add, don't delete.

-Alexander King, Californio descendant

1. What does a mission bell symbolize to you? Does it evoke any specific feelings?

For myself and my family, mission bells elicit feelings of joy, tenderness, and can be contemplative for us. When I hear the mission bells ring, they instantly catch my attention. The mission bells generate a sound which reminds me to be in the moment. I live in a small mission town, and often hear our mission bells on Sundays. The expression of sound and intended communication through the use of the bells may be lost to current generations because our lives no longer move to the same rhythms of the past. It is my understanding that the lives of Californios were enriched by bells. From calling people together for religious gatherings to the celebration of both life and death. Bells were also used, and still are to this day to: locate livestock, keep predators away, and provide a lulling, reassuring sound. From birth to death, bells were interwoven into Californios lives.

2. Do you view mission bells and mission bell road markers synonymously?

Yes, I do. I've seen those since I was a child and knew that the road they marked led to our missions in California.

3. There has been some controversy over mission bell markers being removed. Do you feel that mission bell markers along the highway and in public spaces should be removed? Why or why not?

No, I do not feel like the mission bell road markers should be removed. Many of the people who lived before you and I, even our parents, made great efforts to erect those markers. Seems those bells came from a time when Hispanic culture in Alta California was more appreciated than it is today.

-Joe Claus, Californio descendant, Blacksmith, and Videographer

1. What does a mission bell symbolize to you? Does it evoke any specific feelings?

The bells are a symbol of genocide and forced conversions during the mission period. Our ancestors lived their lives according to those bells, so the bells have a genocidal narrative behind the sound. Placing bells along the highway is a route for tourism and a route of the Spanish colonizers. Removing these bells is an act of decolonization.

-Carolyn Rodriguez, Ohlone-Amah Mutsun, UCLA grad student

1. What does a mission bell symbolize to you? Does it evoke any specific feelings?

I recognize that different people and communities celebrate these bells, but to me, when I think of these bells, these bells symbolize genocide to me. These bells symbolize noise. These bells symbolize a foreign religious and societal system that came to California in an oppressive fashion. When I think of mission bells it makes me think of a one-sided history. I think of the one-sided narrative that is always presented. When I was about six years old or so, going to school, a little boy told me that if I was Native American that meant that I was an Indian, and that meant that I was dead. I didn't exist. I went home crying, and my mother told me, "You are still here, you are you, and you are Native, you are Indigenous!", but this happened because of the limited narrative about Indigenous peoples, and it's because of how California mission history is taught and perpetuated.

2. There has been some controversy over mission bell markers being removed. Do you feel that mission bell markers along the highway and in public spaces should be removed? Why or why not?

I support the removal of the bells, however, not removing and erasing them as though they never happened. I want removal to happen with accuracy of history. Give them a second life, a second purpose to be something good or possibly place them in a museum and point out, this is when these things happened, this is why they were acknowledged, because to the people who put the bells up, they felt good about doing that and acknowledging the missions. Having the bells acknowledge the missions is a way of acknowledging California's unique history. I don't want to erase that, but I do want to point out how painfully one sided this history is. I recognize that there are diverse perspectives and there are Indigenous people with diverse perspectives, and some agree with me, and some do not. Some want them completely gone. I want people to discuss this issue. I want people to come together and raise awareness about this issue, and I really want the people who are against the removal, I want them to get more informed about the origin of the information they were given and see how problematic and limited that information was. If they are not removed, more information needs to be presented with them, whether it be a QR code to scan, or a secondary art piece attached, or something of that nature. We need more education, more awareness, and more consideration to this issue.

3. How do you feel about people who are against the removal and dismiss Native people's historical trauma associated with mission bells?

Their outlook comes from a lack of truth in history. It comes from revisionist history. It comes from manipulation of curriculum. They alter history and give it an emotional charge. When there is a lack of truth in history there is generally only one narrative, a one-sided narrative, and it's really frustrating because this narrative dominantly prioritizes the Spanish in the Spanish missions. This narrative points out that they brought civilization. What did they bring? They brought foreign animals which impacted landscapes and ecology, they brought germs. They try to impose their methodology and way of life into the territory. They stopped Indigenous peoples from speaking their languages. They stopped Indigenous peoples from hunting and organically tending the land. They enslaved Indigenous women and men; they punished Indigenous women and men. They kept women and children separate from the men, yet the rise of syphilis within the missions was astounding. The infant mortality rate was also astounding. The majority of infants did not survive into adulthood.

-Kanyon "Coyote Woman" Sayers Rood, Ohlone-Mutsun, Chumash, Indian Canyon, Hollister, California

1. What does a mission bell symbolize to you? Does it evoke any specific feelings?

Mission bells symbolize the domination and the destruction of our people and our culture. Many Indigenous peoples perished under the mission system. The bells symbolize death, rape, and destruction of our culture and environment. There is nothing to be proud of about that period of California history.

2. Do you view mission bells and mission bell road markers synonymously?

Yes. The bells lining the freeway are meant to honor and glorify the mission period. If their posts contained a sign, eulogies, dedicated to Native peoples who perished within the mission system I would feel different about them.

3. There has been some controversy over mission bell markers being removed. Do you feel that mission bell markers along the highway and in public spaces should be removed? Why or why not?

Yes, they should be removed. The bells represent the destruction of our culture. Those who support the bells are choosing not to learn the truth. There are plenty of ways to learn and see the truth, but many only want to believe what they are taught. They are perpetuating a lie, a myth. The Catholic church has allowed sins, crimes, and offenses against California Indian peoples. It happened right here in San Juan Bautista! The pope also canonized Junipero Serra. He was a known offender, with the atrocities he allowed to happen to us Indians. It's all about money to the Catholic church, so there is no incentive for them to change. All these atrocities against California Indians, that's what they want to honor and glorify with these bells. I believe that Spanish padres, Catholic priests, need to heal. I have reached out to the Catholic Diocese and said, let's heal together, but I got no response back. Creator will address all of this. The state of California has a responsibility to teach the true history not only to fourth graders, but to everyone. A lie is a lie until the truth arrives, and hopefully this will be recognized soon.

-Valentin Lopez, Chairman of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band

This project is currently an ongoing project in collaboration with SCMSHP. Although my internship with SCMSHP has ended, I currently still help with certain events and projects within the park. The bell marker exhibit is still currently on display at the SCMSHP visitor center. I stop by SCMSHP to check in and collect responses every few weeks. I add the responses into a Google Docs document that is shared between SCMSHP and myself. All responses for this project are confidential between SCMSHP and I. In the following chapter an analysis of the anonymous responses and the three-question survey will be presented.

Chapter 6: Analysis of Responses to Mission Bell Markers

Analysis of Data

Regarding this study, I found that the three-question survey component as well as the anonymous responses to the symbolism of mission bell road markers and mission bell markers in public spaces proved to bring in a variety of responses. Although the topic of mission bells is not a new one, the three-question survey and anonymous responses to mission bells is a new concept and introduces us to new questions and perspectives. As previously stated in the introduction, this research aids in identifying, clarifying, and educating readers about how complex the symbolism of these bell markers is among different individuals and groups of people. This research is relevant and matters because along with the symbolism of the bell among the public, people need to be aware of and understand the symbolism that these mission bell markers hold for many California Indian peoples. Although many California Indigenous peoples persisted within the mission system, a vast amount of them also perished within the system. It is also important that the California 4th grade mission curriculum be critically and thoughtfully revised and shift away from the erroneous narrative that is taught by a majority of the missions and schools participating in the curriculum.

Anonymous Park Responses

I will first discuss the anonymous responses collected at SCMSHP events that were held within the park, and the anonymous responses collected in the visitor center of the park. I received 128 raw data responses and am using a sample of 97. This

number was chosen due to having quite a few repeats and similar responses. Quite a few anonymous responses collected from the home school day event had to be edited out. The homeschool day event allowed me to gather anonymous responses from K-12th graders and some of their parents, but many responses from very young students were simply not applicable to my study. A few examples of the non-applicable responses from young students stated:

- Bells are loud!
- When I see a bell it reminds me of a hat.
- Bong!
- The church bell that rang 66 times!
- When you ring a bell you scare the devil and increase your luck
- Clang it!

There were also quite a few post-its from young students that simply drew a picture of a bell on a post-it. All anonymous responses are listed in the appendix of this thesis, including the non-applicable responses.

I found that there were a few recurring themes among all the collected anonymous responses. Most of the responses seemed to be either in support of mission bell markers, viewing it in a positive fashion, or against the bell markers, viewing it as a negative and oppressive instrument. A good portion of the responses also simply stated that the mission bell markers are a symbol of California's history. As shown in the pie chart in the previous chapter, I divided the responses up into four different themes based on the patterns of responses received: Positive, Negative,

History, and Mixed feelings/Unsure. A list of all responses can be found in the appendix section of this thesis.

The respondents that viewed the mission bell markers in a positive and supportive manner related the bell to nostalgia, fun to see on the El Camino Real highway, and called to rehang previously dismantled bell markers. Two respondents related the bell markers to church bells and one response related the El Camino Real highway as the road of faith. I did not include a religion category due to only receiving three responses relating to religion.

Upon speaking with park visitors throughout my internship, I was told many times by visitors that they thought the bells along the El Camino Real highway were erected by the Spanish Padres. These mission bell road markers were not installed by the Spanish Padres, nor were they installed with religion in mind. These bells were installed along the highway and in public spaces beginning in 1906 by elitist white club women with automobile tourism and economic potential in mind. The “El Camino Real encouraged Californians to put themselves in the Padre’s sandals and imagine a direct lineage from the European colonizers to themselves...A gasoline pilgrimage in the footsteps of the Padres” (Kropp 2008). Attaching the religious aspect to the mission bell road markers is another piece of the complex myth and romanticization of the California missions that draws a large portion of the public to these spaces. These positive responses make me question if the respondents were aware of the hardships and erasure of culture that a vast amount of California Indians faced within the mission system.

Another recurring theme identified was the number of respondents that viewed the El Camino Real mission bell road markers and bell markers in public spaces as a negative and/or oppressive instrument. A great majority of these responses that viewed the bells in a negative fashion reflected on the harsh conditions, and the erasure of Native culture that California Indians faced while within the California mission system. When the first mission bell marker was removed from the campus of UC Santa Cruz in June of 2019, along with a second removal from a downtown space in August of 2021, it was broadcasted on television and online news stations and newspapers. The removal created an opportunity for Indigenous peoples and allies to come forward and speak out about the bell as a tool of oppression and cultural erasure.



Figure 16: 2021 Mission bell marker removal downtown Santa Cruz. Amah Mutsun Chairman Valentine Lopez speaks to the large crowd with dismantled bell marker. (Photo courtesy of KAZU News).

Since the bell removals, more people have become aware of the poor conditions that the California mission system bestowed upon many California Indian peoples, and the negative symbolism that the bell holds for many Indigenous peoples. A few anonymous respondents stated that they were not from California, and upon moving to California, they were not aware of the history of the bell or did not know what to think of the bells. These anonymous participants also included in their responses that upon learning what happened to many California Indians within the California mission system, they now view the bell as a negative and oppressive object. One anonymous respondent stated that she was from the southern United States and saw a parallel between the mission bell markers and confederate flags and statues. This observation is very relevant as we are now in a time where throughout the United States historical colonial symbols and statues that were once viewed as a collective history are currently being called out and dismantled.

California is in a slow process of decolonizing colonial spaces and landscapes throughout the state. Cities in California, like Santa Cruz, have removed three mission bell markers from public spaces. Los Angeles, San Francisco, Carmel, and San Luis Obispo, which are all cities that contain a California mission, have recently removed statues of the prominent mission Padre, Junipero Serra (Egelko 2023).

“Decolonization allows Indigenous people to move toward healing. It entails developing a critical consciousness about the causes of Native oppression” (Lonetree 2012). When mission bell road markers and mission bell markers in public spaces are removed, many California Indigenous peoples view this as a form of decolonization, as well as healing from the traumatic past of the California mission system. The city

of Hayward had plans to install a mission bell marker and has since decided against it. “The city of Hayward, following talks in 2020 with local tribal representatives, reversed plans to install an El Camino Real bell in a public plaza” (Lopez 2022). Unlike these cities, the city of Gilroy decided to install a mission bell in its downtown area in January of 2022, which will be discussed later in this analysis.

The last major theme of anonymous responses is Mixed feelings/Unsure. Many park visitors expressed that they were not aware of the mission bell markers or were aware but did not know what they stood for, leaving them with unsure feelings about these symbols. SCMSHP hosts many visitors from outside of California, and many visitors are not from the United States. Statements that expressed not being aware of the mission bell markers are understandable from these visitors. Regarding visitors who grew up in California and responded that they are unaware of the California mission system and/or what happened to California Indians within that system, presents the need for more education on this part of California history.

From experience, the California education system does not go over the California mission system in depth, nor does it educate students about the atrocities that happened to a vast amount of California Indians within the mission system. The respondents that stated they had mixed feelings reflected feelings and beliefs that the Spanish Padres were trying to build community, but at the same time eradicating California Indian culture and lifeways. Another mixed view stated they were unsure if the bell should be something to celebrate or to mourn. These responses can only be analyzed upon face value, and this is a subjective interpretation of the anonymous responses. They were broken up into positive, negative, and unsure categories due to

the varying responses. The following three question survey pertaining to mission bell markers allows for a deeper and analytical analysis of this ongoing project, which allows me to analyze and speak on these responses on a deeper level.

Three Question Survey

Two patterns were present within the three-question survey component. The three-question survey which directly asks participants what mission bell road markers and bell markers in public spaces symbolize to them proved to bring in responses that were clearly in support of the bells or not in support of them. There were no mixed feelings or unsure responses to these questions. Quite a few of the responses to the three-question survey were emotionally charged, with strong feelings in support of mission bell markers, with the remainder in support of the removal or revision of mission bell road markers. Most participants answered all three of the survey questions. A few respondents decided to only answer the first question and give a brief and general summary of how they feel about the mission bell markers.

Negative Responses to Mission Bell Markers

Similarly to the anonymous post-it responses, all respondents who view the bell as a negative object related their responses to the ill treatment of California Indian peoples within the California mission system. A few of the participants stated that the mission bell markers were an object of boosterism in California's early tourism industry and should now be removed. The responses that viewed the mission bell markers in a negative manner came from scholars, California Indigenous peoples, and a Gilroy City Councilman. The Gilroy City Councilman, Zach Hilton, voted

against Gilroy's bell installation, and stated that he will continue to support the removal of mission bell road markers, and the recently installed bell marker in Gilroy. The mission bell marker was installed in downtown Gilroy in January of 2022, and is currently still standing (CBS News Bay Area 2022).

All the scholars that agreed to answer the three-question survey all viewed the mission bell markers as an instrument of oppression, colonial dominance, cultural erasure, and a celebration of Euro-American heritage. A few of the scholars also mentioned the bell markers being used as a tourism gimmick to romanticize and rewrite the history of California. One of the scholars mentioned that the mission bell markers should contain signage explaining the factual history of the California Indians and the California missions. Another scholar stated that mission bell markers should be replaced with Indigenous staffs representing the tribal territories that they stand upon.

All California Indigenous peoples that answered the three-question survey stated the bell was a symbol of genocide, colonial dominance, and the erasure of Native peoples as a whole. One California Indigenous scholar stated that mission bell markers to her are symbols of genocide and forced conversions, and how her ancestors within the mission were forced to live their lives according to the bell. She further stated that removal of these mission bell markers is an act of decolonization. Valentin Lopez, Chairman of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band stated that mission bell markers symbolize the breaking up of families and the destruction of his people, who are direct descendants of Mission San Juan Bautista and Mission Santa Cruz. Lopez further stated that those who are in support of the bell are choosing to ignore the truth

of what happened to California Indian peoples within the mission system and contributing to the glorification of the atrocities that happened to his ancestors. Lopez declares that it is the responsibility of the state of California to teach true history not only to 4th graders, but to everyone. Lopez also stated that he reached out to the Catholic Diocese of Monterey, suggesting that they heal together, but did not receive a response back.

Kanyon Coyote Woman Sayers Rood, Chairwoman of Indian Canyon Nation of Hollister, CA, states that the mission bell markers symbolize noise, a harmful and painful one-sided history, and perpetuates the myth of California Indian extinction. Kanyon Coyote Woman states that she also recognizes the diverse perspectives that are held between different people as well as different Indigenous peoples. She feels that the bell should either be in a museum with factual representation or to give them a second life, give them a second chance to become something positive. Kanyon Coyote Woman encourages hard discussions upon this issue and expresses that more education, awareness, and consideration is needed to address this crucial issue. Another California Indigenous voice who chose to remain anonymous elucidates that the mission bell markers remind him of the great lengths the state of California has gone to valorize colonialism. He states that mission bell markers are an instrument of romanticizing a colonial past and they should all discreetly be taken down.

Positive Responses to Mission Bell Markers

I noticed a pattern within the responses that view the mission bell markers as a positive symbol. All responses that hold mission bell markers as a positive object came from Californio descendants and one California mission docent. The

respondents who view mission bell markers in a positive fashion described the bells from an emotional stance, with most participants stating that they see mission bell markers as part of their heritage and/or culture. Almost all these respondents related the mission bell markers to the pleasant sound of a bell, and as an object that brought family together. A few of them related mission bell markers as a symbol of personal enjoyment, family, and religion. A couple of Californio descendants related the bell to a time when Hispanic culture was more appreciated than it is today in modern times. None of the positive responses acknowledge nor address the maltreatment of California Indian peoples within the mission system. One response gave an unprompted dismissal of the ill treatment that went on within the missions, going to a length of stating the enslavement and mistreatment of California Indians was false. All respondents who view the bell markers as positive stated that they are firmly against mission bell removal.

Only one Californio descendant mentioned California Indian peoples in her response, but not in relation to the maltreatment of Native peoples within the California mission system. Lynn Adams, Vice President of the Los Californianos Organization, explained that California needs the bell markers to let people know that this was the trail that Spanish soldiers and explorers, Juan Bautista de Anza, and Gaspar de Portola, followed while exploring Alta California. Adams further explains that it must be acknowledged that this trail was first used by Native Americans as a traveling and trade route. John Grafton, a Mission San Juan Bautista Docent and living history demonstrator stated that mission bell markers are a symbol of beauty, family, and a bringing people together. He also referred to the bell markers as relating

to a peaceful sound. For another Californio descendant the mission bell markers elicit feelings of joy and represent family. He too related the bell markers to the pleasant sound of bringing people together and celebrations.

Californio descendant, Alexander King, stated that mission bell markers represent California's Spanish/Mexican past. King states that he interprets mission bell markers as a symbol of Californio/Hispanic acceptance by Anglo society in a time that Hispanics were still considered outsiders. King explains that he feels the mission bell markers have become targets for those who wish to erase the bell's symbolism and history. He further states that people currently wanting to be politically correct or "woke" as he puts it, view mission bell markers as a symbol of oppression and enslavement. King states that he feels the enslavement of many Native peoples within the mission system is false and describes bell removals as an assault on Californio history and a rejection of their culture. One other Californio stated that he views the removal of mission bell markers as an erasure of Californio people's contributions to California history.

Analysis of California Indian and Californio Responses

This portion of the analysis is on the perspectives of California Indians/mission descendants and Californio descendants that was received from the three-question survey. Questions were distributed to California mission descendants and Californio descendants to set up this specific comparison. Californio descendants and California mission descendants are two descendant groups who have direct and deep ties to the California missions and the bell markers that represent these institutions, and we can learn a great deal about the symbolism of these bells through

them. There is a stark contrast between California mission descendants and Californio descendant perspectives regarding the symbolism of mission bell markers.

Californio descendant participants explained how the mission bell markers are a symbol of togetherness, bringing family together and personal joy. They also explained how the mission bell markers are associated with the pleasant and lulling sound of bells. In contrast, California Indian peoples described the bell as a form of noise and colonial dominance, due to Natives living within the missions having to follow a strict schedule bestowed upon them by the ringing of the bell. California mission descendants also associate the mission bell markers as a symbol of destruction of their culture and the breaking up of families. All but one of the Californio descendant participants acknowledged California Indian peoples, and that responses did not acknowledge the injustices that many California Indians faced within the California mission system.

California mission descendants perspectives on bell markers are based on factual history and events that happened to their ancestors. Californio history appears to be based on personal emotion and feelings of collective nostalgia. Although Californios feel a deep connection to mission bell markers and view them as part of their heritage this nostalgia has allowed for the myth of the mission to permeate into their perception of the past and into their heritage.

“Nostalgia has acquired a pejorative connotation and is often used as means of either ideological indoctrination or escapism or both, a distortion that allows people to shrink harsh realities or simplify difficult social issues as well as to

ignore past crimes and injustices in favor of dreaming themselves into a rose-tinted yet black and white past without guilt” (De Simone 2013).

This longing of the past by many Californio descendants fails to acknowledge that this heritage has unfortunately expelled the history of California Indigenous peoples within the California missions. This heritage comes from the myth of the California missions and mission bell markers. Californio heritage should not be dismissed. Although, it should also be acknowledged that this particular reference to heritage and bell markers is based upon an early 20th century myth that was created for the means of tourism. This heritage is related to the romanticization of the California missions and mission bell markers. This is referred to as the Spanish Fantasy Past. This term was coined in the 1940’s by lawyer and journalist who wrote about California politics and culture, Carey McWilliams (Moog: 2019). The mission bell markers were not erected by the Spanish Padres nor Spanish explorers. The bell markers were installed by elitist white club women for capital gains with automobile tourism and California mission tourism in mind, while also appropriating a mythical and fun Spanish heritage for a white audience. Two Californio descendants stated that the mission bell markers serve as a symbol of acceptance by Anglo society, and a time when Hispanic culture was more accepted.

“Depictions of the Spanish and Mexican historical periods during the early 20th century often blended the two distinct periods into one, erasing the culture of local Indigenous periods as well as Mexicans of Indigenous heritage, creating a pervasive social memory that placed emphasis on a Spanish fantasy past...Nowhere in this fantasy is there room for the

recognition of atrocities committed against the first peoples of California at the hands of colonial powers that violently enslaved them” (Meyer 2022).

As Californios became accepted into the newly settled white culture of California, a vast majority of California Indigenous peoples were still treated as “pagans and gente de razon, or people without reason, and to be treated as children” (Madley 2016). This is another reason why many California Indians/Mission descendants view mission bell markers as repressive instruments that need to be dismantled. Mission bell markers are only recently being dismantled due to California Indian peoples not really having a voice in society until the American Indian Movement (AIM) and the revival of Indigenous identities nationally and even globally. Historically they have been looked down upon as second-class citizens, and even below that. “European way of life was immeasurably superior to the primitive existence of the Indian” (Costo 1987).

The California mission system narrative and mission bell road markers carry on the perpetuation of erasing California Indigenous identity into contemporary times. Another factor that is tied to the bell markers is that California missions and mission bell markers carry on the myth of California Indian extinction. “By eulogizing the Indians as a vanishing race...mission tours turned Indian people into ghosts” (Kropp 2008). The eighteen California missions that are run by the Catholic Diocese of Monterey, continue this myth of extinction in the narrative they teach to visitors and to California 4th graders participating in the California mission curriculum. As Spanish culture is glorified within these missions, they continue to

push a false message that California Natives are a people of the past and fail to state that Native peoples are still here with us today.

Conclusion

This study was done in order to ask and analyze, what do mission bell road markers along the El Camino Real Highway, and mission bell markers in public spaces symbolize to different people. Nineteen responses to the three-question survey were received on how respondents felt about mission bell markers. Out of these nineteen responses, five did not consent to their responses being shared in this thesis. Out of the 128 anonymous responses received, a sample of 97 was used and broken into four different themes displaying how park visitors feel about mission bell markers. The majority of responses to both anonymous survey and three-question survey components supported the removal of mission bell markers. Responses to the anonymous survey and the three-question survey give us insight into the different perspectives held within different communities and individuals on the symbolism of mission bell markers. We have analyzed how the same symbol can elicit different responses in different people. This data shows us that one's own individual understanding and overall knowledge of mission bell markers, or lack of knowledge, can predicate how one views and responds to mission bell markers.

If people can read about and interpret the different personal experiences and perspectives that are attached to these symbols, they will be able to put the history and symbolism of mission bell markers in a more tangible context. Heritage is entangled with everyday society. Heritage can be seen as a complex relationship that connects humans with non-human objects and ideas. When symbols such as bell

markers symbolize one's heritage, it should be considered how this symbol can affect society and individuals as a whole. It is understood that all heritage comes from either myth, storytelling, and/or an inherited sense of identity. Unfortunately, this heritage is an obstacle towards California mission descendants seeking justice, i.e., bell removal. This raises further questions to be answered. How can this symbol be upheld with such importance when it is rooted in oppression and colonialism? Why is the myth of the mission considered more important and recognized more broadly than bringing to light the factual history and the ill treatment of Native peoples within the mission system? How do we resolve a dissonant heritage such as this one? What do we do when there are different opinions about mission bell markers and their symbolism? How do we reconcile these different perspectives?

Regarding the 4th grade mission curriculum that is taught in California public schools, the three California mission sites that are owned by California State Parks are inclusive of Indigenous experiences during the mission period and teach young students about the loss of culture and identity that California Indians experienced. If the California missions that are run by the Catholic Diocese would participate in relaying these experiences to young students in an age-appropriate manner it can have a positive impact in bringing more awareness to the history of California Indigenous peoples and mission descendants, the California mission system, and why these bell markers are a controversial symbol to many.

California Indian responses to the three-question survey come from a place of being systemically affected by the rippling consequences of the California mission system, colonialism, and colonization, and in some cases, generational trauma. These

responses are based on historical facts of what happened to many of their ancestors within the California mission system. Mission bell markers are a representation of the California mission system, and this is why many California Indigenous peoples view these symbols as a reminder of a painful past.

Californio responses to bell marker removal come from a place of collective nostalgia, reinforcing identity, and personal joy. This appears to be rooted in a perceived historical awareness in which the idea of removing mission bell markers is a personal attack on their culture and heritage. As one Californio descendant put it, removing mission bell markers is an assault on Californio history. This statement dismisses the fact that the mission bell markers are a representation of mission bells, which were used within the California mission system as an instrument of control and an actual assault on California Native people's lifeways, cultures, and identities. This collective form of nostalgia reinforces the rosy retrospection that surrounds the romanticized history of the missions and mission bell markers.

The argument to retain mission bell markers can ring hollow when one understands who created these bell markers in the past, why they were made, and who benefited from their creation. The actual history of these bell markers undermines the myth-based arguments used today to deny California Indian Peoples their justice. This misinformation can only lead to the crucial fact that more education and awareness must be brought forth about this complex history. Relevant portions of the school curriculum must be carefully and respectfully revised, in order to teach the true history of the California missions, mission bell markers, and why many people view these spaces and symbols as controversial. Although it is a dark and painful past

for many, it must be acknowledged, reckoned with, and corrected to reflect actual history.

This study is currently ongoing with SCMSHP. This study and the discoveries revealed are not only important, but also serve as an educational tool. Some of the responses received for the three-question survey will be featured in the virtual bell exhibit located in the SCMSHP visitor center. I did not receive any responses to the three-question survey from California Indigenous peoples expressing support of mission bell markers. To add more perspectives into the virtual bell exhibit, SCMSHP and I are currently working on locating and arranging interviews with California Indigenous peoples and mission descendants that are in support of the bell markers. Although the virtual bell exhibit will display a variety of perspectives on mission bell markers, the main focus of the exhibit is to communicate to the public how these symbols systemically affect California Indigenous peoples.

Appendix

A list of all the anonymous responses collected from each park event and from the park visitor center.

Communities and Culture Event

These bells are part of our history - be it bad or good. Sorry to see them go.

Put 'em back.

“An object to celebrate or an object to mourn?”

“Glad the updated story is now being told!”

History should not be erased.

I agree with the removal and love that there is an explanation as to why.

Sound of oppression.

Brutality of colonialism.

Oppression.

Great opportunity for re-contextualization, reinterpretation, and developing an angle of vision on our values as a society.

Generational trauma.

These bell markers are a passive form of cultural erasure. They are a symbol of a history that did not happen. Their continued existence is an active attempt at replacing real/factual history. Indigenous people are still here.

They did not respect the view of the Native beliefs, imposing European views.

Film Screening Event, It Needs to be Told: Native Californian Perspectives on the Missions

Oppression of Indigenous people

Pain and sad memories

Celebrating genocide

A tourist gimmick in the early 1900s. Take them down.

Tells time where you should be.

Complexity

Cultural genocide and forced labor.

So many! History—oppression, religion, mixed feelings.

Multiple meanings to different groups of people.

Until now, the bell symbolized the history of the missions, but now looking back at the past I have a different perspective.

The bell has not meant much to me personally, but I think that if others don't like it, I should respect that.

They represent the government's continued disregard for the historic harm done to Indigenous people of the region. Through the alignment of this symbol, they perpetuate government sponsored genocidal colonization. They entangle the identity of all Californians in this relationship with harm. Based on the way we look, people become victims or colonizers on sight in part because of the government's acceptance and support of this symbol.

Permanent loss of our Native languages and cultures. Irrecoverable.

The bells were put up as California was developing its road system. I think of the evolution of roads, animals, Natives, settlers, and modern road users. I like the bells.

Genocide and slavery

The roads marked by the bells were the beginning of California roads.

Forced labor, violent loss of culture and forced conversions.

Erasure of history

I feel deep sorrow and fear. The taste of soap in the mouths of children who made the 'mistake' of speaking their Native language. Mission bells represent the spiritual violence that suffered here.

Rhythm to the day and orientation

Genocide of the Uypi people

Colonial dominance, even of the actual landscape

Remove all mission bells!

I love bells but not necessarily these ones. Let's hear everyone's voice. Meeting the needs of Native American cultures.

Homeschool Day at the Park

Historical and Significant

Lovely

When I see a bell I think of a hat

I love bells. I think of BONG!

I have no idea

Bell= fun and cool

Church bells

Native Americans vs Spain

Yahoo! Bells!

They make me wish it was a very long time ago.

I like that bells have so much history and it's really cool, and I don't like it because it disturbs animals.

Seeing the bells on the road makes me wonder more about history.

I think bells are cool.

Really loud

I think they interrupt animals' sleep, so I do not like them.

The bells show the way to somewhere.

Leave them to remember.

I love finding them on the highway.

Its historical

I feel bad for the Native Americans

Bad for animals. Native Americans vs Spain

I hate them

Interesting

I like them

I feel good

The bell is cool

It is a waste of metal.

It makes my heartbeat.

Very annoying

I like them because it has history.

It makes me think of the color yellow. I like the sound of bells.

Nada/Neutral

Nothing

I like bells. I like playing with them.

When you ring the bell you scare the devil and increase your luck.

Bells are very loud

Loud

The church bell that rang 66 times

History

I love the bell

When I see a bell I think how did/do the people that ring the bell get to the bell?

It reminds me of history and organization.

They are loud when you ring them.

I think the bell was fine, but the way they were used wasn't.

The bells stand for the Native Americans movement and culture.

It makes me feel guilty

Mixed emotions, but also resentful and sad.

Its historic

They are very interesting.

The Native Americans

I hate them

To me the bells are a symbol of freedom, they are beautiful.

I like the Native Americans

Both sides were right and wrong.

The time when the Native Americans would wake up for church.

Bells rule the day

I have nothing to say about bells

I like how the bell is in history

I don't think it is a good thing.

They represent history.

Mixed views, Padres were community builders:) Native culture was destroyed:(

I think the bell looks cool

Clang it!

It is a reminder of history.

I like it sometimes

Traumatic past

Mission bells are a long way in the past.

They don't make me think of anything.

To me a bell means dinner time.

Not sure

Santa Cruz Mission State Historic Park Visitor Center

History! Rehang the bells!

The road of faith isn't perfect yet hopeful.

Put them back!

Propaganda, the bells of El Camino Real are propaganda. Mission bells and mission bell road markers are not the same.

As a person of European descent living in modern society I understand and have sympathy for the spectrum of perspectives which are held by descendants of both mission founders, and the Indigenous groups who experienced tremendous oppression and genocide within the mission system. Both sides of the story are relevant to telling the truths of history; however, neither side is my personal history, and objectively, I don't feel that it's appropriate for me to carry as deep of an opinion as should be felt by those whose families were directly involved. I don't know how these bells make different people feel; for some, I imagine their pride, valor, and a sense of belonging to an important place of "world history", and for others it's a reminder of extreme suffering.

Until now, the bells symbolized the history of the missions, but now looking back at the past, I have a different perspective.

Oppression! Resistance! Oppression! Resistance!

The richness and diversity of our California history.

History vs. Heritage. Heritage is the lies we tell ourselves about our history- we're not erasing history; it remains a symbol of oppression.

Thank you for this exhibit. I understand that many people feel that removing the bells is a slap in the face to their culture and heritage. To me, if they took a deeper look at the mission system, their pride in it might change. My great great grandfather "owned" enslaved people in the southern U.S. I know that and admit that and it's far from making me feel good or proud to see the confederate flag though he fought for Georgia.

History judges acts that at the time weren't wrong- but time reveals all. Forgiveness is key.

Summer Archaeology Program Volunteers (SAP)

A good time to look at history with new eyes- good discussions.

California does have a history!

The bells mean home, for better or for worse. They are bloody in history, but also beautiful- a symbol not only of the past, but a desire for community in the age they were made and now.

The bells are a tangible reminder of change, both of technology and ways of living.

History- for better or for worse.

I have a miniature mission bell from the 1920's. Always a symbol of California and the history of the missions. Unique history.

Was the bell about order? You hear it and follow orders?

Bells as a child were a wonderful marker. As I became more educated, I realized the representation of racism.

Coming from outside of California, I viewed the bells on the freeways much as I thought of the Oregon Express, a Pony Express trail, which were a part of where I come from as another historical trail. I've been in California for decades now and know the bell's history- they make me sad.

Three-Question Survey Questions

Responses from Scholars

1. What does a mission bell symbolize to you? Does it evoke any specific feelings?

To me, the mission bells– at least as they appear along the roadside or in public settings- symbolize a romanticized version of California's colonial history. This history explicitly celebrates the Euro-American heritage of the region while ignoring, or even erasing, the deep Indigenous history of California. As a settler scholar who is not originally from California, the bells do not evoke any particular feelings for me, perhaps simply disappointment that so much time and energy has been spent creating and defending such a one-sided version of the past.

2. Do you view mission bells and mission bell road markers synonymously?

Not necessarily. This is partly due to the fact that I work at Santa Clara University where we have a (reconstructed) mission church with bells on our campus, and there is an actual mission bell from the King of Spain in our campus museum. Santa Clara University is built on top of the ruins of mission Santa Clara. Those bells I see as part

of the historical fabric, essentially as artifacts that are value neutral and that could be used to tell any number of stories, including the subjugation of Native Californians through the demarcation of time, etc. The roadside bells are also artifacts of *their* time, but to me, the story that they tell is one of a romanticized history, which often doesn't have much basis in fact (e.g., the El Camino Real didn't actually follow the same route as Highway 101).

3. There has been some controversy over mission bell markers being removed. Do you feel that mission bell markers along the highway and in public spaces should be removed? Why or why not?

I think in an ideal world, we would not be using public funds for the placement and/or upkeep of historical markers that are offensive or painful to certain communities, especially in this case communities who have already suffered tremendously due to the structures of colonialism. So at a general level, I support the removal of the mission bell markers. In my experience at SCU, where we successfully removed a statue of Junipero Serra, it helped to have an official process that involved stakeholders, to ensure relatively broad buy-in. I am not sure what that would look like at a statewide level, but I think it can be successful in local contexts like UCSC and other places.

-Dr. Lee Panich, Archaeologist and Professor of Anthropology at Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, California.

1. What does a mission bell symbolize to you? Does it evoke any specific feelings?

I grew up seeing the mission bells along the highway and in the missions. During my life I have lived in three mission towns, so they were always around. I never thought anything of them until I got older and learned about the mission system. It's a tough one for me.

2. Do you view mission bells and mission bell road markers synonymously?

I do. The roadway has a connection to all the missions. I don't know how you'd separate those two things. Knowing what I know now, as a person who has done archaeology within the missions, I see the evidence of the tragedy that was the California Spanish mission project. I see the missions, I see the bells and it conjures up some over romanticized past, it's a blip in time. To advertise that and have it as the landscape in California I think is a slap in the face to victims of colonization in California.

3. There has been some controversy over mission bell markers being removed. Do you feel that mission bell markers along the highway and in public spaces should be removed? Why or why not?

If the Native community wants them removed, I am in total support of that. If Indigenous communities that were directly impacted by the mission system, if they see it as a blatant reminder of genocide and marginalization take them down. Should they be in a museum, or on display with signage that talks about that period of time, and how we over romanticize the mission period? I think it's an important learning tool. I'm not a fan of revisionist history, but did that happen, yes, did it impact

Indigenous peoples, yes, very much so. I don't want it to erase people's memory of what happened. It's an important reminder, but it shouldn't be there to glorify a false vision of the past. Until we have Native road signage that celebrates Natives, we shouldn't have festivals and other events that romanticize that time window of time.

-Dusty McKenzie, Archaeologist and Professor of Anthropology and Archaeology at Cabrillo Community College, Aptos, California

1. What does a mission bell symbolize to you? Does it evoke any specific feelings?

For me, the mission bells symbolize the mythical story of Spanish heritage in California. They represent a time of nostalgia, in the early 20th century, when California boosters sought to encourage tourism by putting together a romanticized version of the state's history that revolved around benevolent missionaries civilizing savages. On a deeper level, the mission bells would have historically represented the imposition of Spanish control, colonialism, and abuses. When I see the bell markers (or various versions of these bells), I am reminded of this campaign to rewrite history. As far as specific feelings, it evokes a sadness for me. A sadness about the realities of this tragic history, and a sadness for how we have covered up the genocide and trauma with these romantic idyllic false histories.

2. Do you view mission bells and mission bell road markers synonymously?

I do view them synonymously. The creation of these bell markers was meant to conjure up images from the original mission bells. It is hard for me to separate these - the original bells and their symbolic markers.

3. There has been some controversy over mission bell markers being removed. Do you feel that mission bell markers along the highway and in public spaces should be removed? Why or why not?

Yes. I do think that these bell markers, which so clearly evolved as part of a marketing campaign to rewrite history, have no place in staying. While they might be symbols of nostalgia for some non-Natives, this nostalgia is one that recalls warm fuzzy feelings from accepting lies rather than difficult historical truths. Pandering to this nostalgia prevents accepting the reality of actual history. I do think that we could replace these bell markers with other markers. Something that recognizes the millennia long history of Indigenous California and Indigenous Californians. Some have proposed replacing these with Indigenous staffs, representing the specific tribal territories that the 101 passes through. I would vote for that. Anything that helps people understand and connect to the long Indigenous history of these lands would be preferable to symbols that act to erase that history.

-Martin Rizzo-Martinez, Former California State Parks Historian and Tribal Liaison, Santa Cruz District, and current Assistant Professor of Film and Digital Media at UC Santa Cruz. Author of *We are not Animals: Indigenous Politics of Survival, Rebellion, and Reconstitution in Nineteenth Century California*.

1. What does a mission bell symbolize to you? Does it evoke any specific feelings?

Studying California's twenty-one Franciscan missions changed how I see their bells. Before I studied the California missions, I could visit a California mission and

overlook its bells. Now, the mission bells at California missions remind me of the work routines, the religious services, and the regimentation that they imposed upon California Indian peoples.

- Dr. Benjamin Madley, Associate Professor of History, UCLA. Author of *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe*.

Gilroy City Council Response

1. What does a mission bell symbolize to you? Does it evoke any specific feelings?

The mission bell symbolizes a dark time in history where the land that I currently live was taken by force from the Native Americans. They are a symbol of slavery and genocide. I am proud to be born and raised in California, but I feel anger and sadness in my heart. As a husband and a father, I can't imagine how that felt to have families split apart and put through so much brutality on the land that I live.

2. Do you view mission bells and mission bell road markers synonymously?

Yes, I do. Growing up in Berkeley, California, and the public education system, both the mission bell road markers and mission bells meant the same to me. The bells are connected to the missions.

3. There has been some controversy over mission bell markers being removed. Do you feel that mission bell markers along the highway and in public spaces should be removed? Why or why not?

Yes, I feel that they should be removed along the highway and in public spaces.

Today they are meant to wash away the true history and somehow replace it with a

better sounding story of how we are connected through commerce, economic development, and tourism along the El Camino Real. One argument from a fellow Council member who purchased the bell for Downtown Gilroy, was that it wasn't a mission bell but just a highway marker.

4. I understand that Gilroy has placed a mission bell marker in the downtown area. Do you feel it should be removed?

Yes. I will continue to support any efforts to take it down. Any chance that I have in my position as an elected official to correct wrongs of the past, I will support.

-Zach Hilton, Gilroy City Council Member

Mission Docent Response

1. What does a mission bell symbolize to you? Does it evoke any specific feelings?

For me, a bell is most importantly an object of beauty, both in its form and sound. In addition, it invokes very pleasant feelings in me because there was a "dinner" bell (which was shaped like a mission bell) on my parents' ranch. It had a beautiful sound, and when we heard it ring, we knew that we were going to gather together to partake in good food and rest! I think that historically, in California as well as many other parts of the world, the bell was a communication device which would bring people together, whether in times of sorrow or happiness. The sound would travel over great distances, and all within earshot would know that it was time to gather, for whatever reason the moment was. It also was a peaceful sound. Who could ever imagine going into battle ringing a bell.

2. Do you view mission bells and mission bell road markers synonymously?

The mission bell road markers were not put up by the missions of course, but nevertheless they are thought of as representing the missions, and we call them mission bell road markers. Therefore, I think that we have to view them as being synonymous with the missions.

3. There has been some controversy over mission bell markers being removed. Do you feel that mission bell markers along the highway and in public spaces should be removed? Why or why not?

I do not believe that the mission bell road markers should be removed. They were put up at a time when there seems to have been considerable interest and appreciation for Hispanic culture and history in California, and I think that was a good thing which should be continued in our present time. Also, my understanding is that they were donated to the state by various individuals, and I don't think that we should be tearing down things donated in good faith for the public good. In short, I think that we should be creating rather than tearing down.

-John Grafton- Mission San Juan Bautista Docent. Blacksmith and Living History Demonstrator.

Californio Descendant Responses

1. What does a mission bell symbolize to you? Does it evoke any specific feelings?

I am, like my mother's family before me, a practicing Catholic. Hearing about the removal of mission bells causes me to feel a lack of pride and connection to the

sacrifices and contributions of my ancestors. I know for a fact that my grandmother and mother were always moved when they saw them. Seeing the bells along the road or in specific sites is one of the few things we Californio descendants have to remind newer immigrants of our contribution to the story of California. That should not be sanitized, excluded, erased, or canceled. The story of these families should be told and retold in a rich and nuanced way. It is part of our California heritage and our heritage as Americans.

-Greg Smestad, Californio descendant

1. What does a mission bell symbolize to you? Does it evoke any specific feelings?

For myself and my family, mission bells elicit feelings of joy, tenderness, and can be contemplative for us. When I hear the mission bells ring, they instantly catch my attention. The mission bells generate a sound which reminds me to be in the moment. I live in a small mission town, and often hear our mission bells on Sundays. The expression of sound and intended communication through the use of the bells may be lost to current generations because our lives no longer move to the same rhythms of the past. It is my understanding that the lives of Californios were enriched by bells. From calling people together for religious gatherings to the celebration of both life and death. Bells were also used, and still are to this day to: locate livestock, keep predators away, and provide a lulling, reassuring sound. From birth to death, bells were interwoven into Californios lives.

2. Do you view mission bells and mission bell road markers synonymously?

Yes, I do. I've seen those since I was a child and knew that the road they marked led to our missions in California.

3. There has been some controversy over mission bell markers being removed. Do you feel that mission bell markers along the highway and in public spaces should be removed? Why or why not?

No, I do not feel like the mission bell road markers should be removed. Many of the people who lived before you and I, even our parents, made great efforts to erect those markers. Seems those bells came from a time when Hispanic culture in Alta California was more appreciated than it is today.

-Joe Claus, Californio descendant, Blacksmith, and Videographer

1. What does a mission bell symbolize to you? Does it evoke any specific feelings?

A mission bell image is pretty iconic. The romantic take on history that it symbolizes is both quaint and charming. It also represents the entire cloak of acceptance by Anglo society of Californios as acceptable "white", and not the outsiders that other native Hispanics endured in Texas and New Mexico.

2. Do you view mission bells and mission bell road markers synonymously?

They are not the same. However, I know that most people today do not differentiate between them unless they are Catholic and experience the real bells in their church setting. It's a shame that they do. The highway bells have become targets of those who wish to erase both symbolism and actual history.

3. There has been some controversy over mission bell markers being removed. Do you feel that mission bell markers along the highway and in public spaces should be removed? Why or why not?

Those wanting to be politically correct or woke view the markers as symbols of oppression. They think the Catholic missions enslaved native Americans. That's a sadly uninformed, but currently popular view. Lost on them is that the removal of the bells is itself an assault on Hispanic history, culture, and people (Californios). Removing them indicates a rejection of Hispanics in general. History is layered. Add, don't delete.

-Alexander King, Californio descendant

1. What does a mission bell symbolize to you? Does it evoke any specific feelings?

I myself think we need the road markers letting people know this was the trail that Anza, and Portola followed to bring the ancestors up from Mexico to California. However, even before Portola, this trail was traveled by Native American trading with other California tribes, and I think that needs to be acknowledged right up front. There are many Indigenous people who object to it being called by the Spanish name of El Camino Real. I do not know what they call it, in fact it may have had different names by different tribes. According to Father Font's and Father Crespi's diaries, the Native Americans they encountered were friendly and often pointed out the trail to show them the way northward.

-Lynn Adams, Californio descendant and Vice President of Los Californianos organization

California Indian Responses

1. What does a mission bell symbolize to you? Does it evoke any specific feelings?

I recognize that different people and communities celebrate these bells, but to me, when I think of these bells, these bells symbolize genocide to me. These bells symbolize noise. These bells symbolize a foreign religious and societal system that came to California in an oppressive fashion. When I think of mission bells it makes me think of a one-sided history. I think of the one-sided narrative that is always presented. When I was about six years old or so, going to school, a little boy told me that if I was Native American that meant that I was an Indian, and that meant that I was dead. I didn't exist. I went home crying and my mother told me, "You are still here, you are you, and you are Native, you are Indigenous!", but this happened because of the limited narrative about Indigenous peoples, and it's because of how California mission history is taught and perpetuated.

2. There has been some controversy over mission bell markers being removed. Do you feel that mission bell markers along the highway and in public spaces should be removed? Why or why not?

I support the removal of the bells, however, not removing and erasing them as though they never happened. I want removal to happen with accuracy of history. Give them a second life, a second purpose to be something good or possibly place them in a

museum and point out, this is when these things happened, this is why they were acknowledged, because to the people who put the bells up, they felt good about doing that and acknowledging the missions. Having the bells acknowledge the missions is a way of acknowledging California's unique history. I don't want to erase that, but I do want to point out how painfully one sided this history is. I recognize that there are diverse perspectives and there are Indigenous people with diverse perspectives, and some agree with me, and some do not. Some want them completely gone. I want people to discuss this issue. I want people to come together and raise awareness about this issue, and I really want the people who are against the removal, I want them to get more informed about the origin of the information they were given and see how problematic and limited that information was. If they are not removed, more information needs to be presented with them, whether it be a QR code to scan, or a secondary art piece attached, or something of that nature. We need more education, more awareness, and more consideration to this issue.

3. How do you feel about people who are against the removal and dismiss Native people's historical trauma associated with mission bells?

Their outlook comes from a lack of truth in history. It comes from revisionist history. It comes from manipulation of curriculum. They alter history and give it an emotional charge. When there is a lack of truth in history there is generally only one narrative, a one-sided narrative, and it's really frustrating because this narrative dominantly prioritizes the Spanish in the Spanish missions. This narrative points out that they brought civilization. What did they bring? They brought foreign animals which impacted landscapes and ecology, they brought germs. They try to impose their

methodology and way of life into the territory. They stopped Indigenous peoples from speaking their languages. They stopped Indigenous peoples from hunting and organically tending the land. They enslaved Indigenous women and men; they punished Indigenous women and men. They kept women and children separate from the men, yet the rise of syphilis within the missions was astounding. The infant mortality rate was also astounding. The majority of infants did not survive into adulthood.

-Kanyon "Coyote Woman" Sayers Rood, Ohlone-Mutsun, Chumash, Indian
Canyon Hollister, California

1. What does a mission bell symbolize to you? Does it evoke any specific feelings?

The bells are a symbol of genocide and forced conversions during the mission period. Our ancestors lived their lives according to those bells, so the bells have a genocidal narrative behind the sound. Placing bells along the highway is a route for tourism and a route of the Spanish colonizers. Removing these bells is an act of decolonization.

-Carolyn Rodriguez, Ohlone-Amah Mutsun, UCLA grad student

1. What does a mission bell symbolize to you? Does it evoke any specific feelings?

Mission bells symbolize the domination and the destruction of our people and our culture. Many Indigenous peoples perished under the mission system. The bells symbolize death, rape, and destruction of our culture and environment. There is nothing to be proud of about that period of California history.

2. Do you view mission bells and mission bell road markers synonymously?

Yes. The bells lining the freeway are meant to honor and glorify the mission period. If their posts contained a sign, eulogies, dedicated to Native peoples who perished within the mission system I would feel different about them.

3. There has been some controversy over mission bell markers being removed. Do you feel that mission bell markers along the highway and in public spaces should be removed? Why or why not?

Yes, they should be removed. The bells represent the destruction of our culture. Those who support the bells are choosing not to learn the truth. There are plenty of ways to learn and see the truth, but many only want to believe what they are taught. They are perpetuating a lie, a myth. The Catholic church has allowed sins, crimes, and offenses against California Indian peoples. It happened right here in San Juan Bautista! The pope also canonized Junipero Serra. He was a known offender, with the atrocities he allowed to happen to us Indians. It's all about money to the Catholic church, so there is no incentive for them to change. All these atrocities against California Indians, that's what they want to honor and glorify with these bells. I believe that Spanish padres, Catholic priests, need to heal. I have reached out to the Catholic Diocese and said, let's heal together, but I got no response back. Creator will address all of this. The state of California has a responsibility to teach the true history

not only to fourth graders, but to everyone. A lie is a lie until the truth arrives, and hopefully this will be recognized soon.

-Valentin Lopez, Chairman of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band

1. What does a mission bell symbolize to you? Does it evoke any specific feelings?

The bells remind me of tourism and the great lengths the State of California has gone to valorize colonialism. Most of the time, they're disappointing to see. At other times, such as driving the stretch of highway between Salinas and Paso Robles, they're ridiculous; it seems like there's a bell road marker every quarter mile on 101 northbound and southbound. How many bells do you need?

2. Do you view mission bells and mission bell road markers synonymously?

No. Although both reinforce a romanticized colonial history. They were/are used for different purposes.

3. There has been some controversy over mission bell markers being removed. Do you feel that mission bell markers along the highway and in public spaces should be removed? Why or why not?

Yes, because most people probably don't use them to navigate to the different missions anymore (we have fancy apps for that these days) and I'm guessing not many people notice them anyway (or know what they're for). Just quietly, discreetly take them down. If they remain, it would be good to balance the message with road markers that indicate the boundaries of different California Indian territories.

-Anonymous Coast Miwok/Pomo California Indian

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