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In 2003, about a year after we moved to Santa Barbara, we took the kids to the Museum of Natural History. The curators had put together two or three entire rooms devoted to the Chumash Indians, the “original” inhabitants of the regions around Santa Barbara. They’d placed the Chumash in rooms adjacent to the ones devoted to the natural world, as it must have appeared to European settlers—in one room, there were stuffed versions of the snowy plover, the Channel Island fox, black and brown bears, and sea otters, and then in the next, there were statues of Chumash people, some sitting and weaving baskets, and others lining their canoes with the oil that seeped from the sea beds nearby. One gets the sense, after walking through the Museum, that once the Europeans arrived, the plovers, foxes, bears, otters, and Chumash were all in big trouble. The Museum of Natural History showed how the region once looked, “naturally,” before it was all swept away.¹

It all happened so slowly at first, and then it was fast: Juan Cabrillo, a Portuguese captain, was the first European to sail his vessel in and around the harbors of Santa Barbara and Goleta. He arrived in October 1542. In the late 18th century, the Franciscan fathers made their way into what was Alta California—beginning in 1769, Father Junipero Serra and his friars established a set of missions from San Diego to Sonoma, California. Just before the last mission was built in 1823, however, Alta California became part of Mexico, only to become part of the United States just twenty-five years later. California’s population doubled every ten years—people came from everywhere, by land, by rail, and by sea. When lots of Chinese people came, white folks in California freaked out. Legislators from this state pushed hard for a Chinese Exclusion Act, passed in Congress in 1882. In graduate school, I studied the origins of this rule, and so that was how I became an Asian Americanist.

In 1913 and in 1920, the California state legislature and California voters decided separately that families like mine—people of Asian descent—should not buy or own land in the state of California, but shortly after World War II, the United States Supreme Court struck down these Alien Land Laws, such that by 2002, my wife Gowan and I purchased the house on Cambridge Drive in an uneventful sale. In the language of another time, my family and I were “Orientals,” and “aliens ineligible for citizenship.” Not fifty years ago, our children would not have been allowed to attend integrated schools; Gowan and I, being born in Korea, would not have been able to pass into American citizenship, and then vote; and as “aliens ineligible for

citizenship,” we would not have been allowed to purchase property in the state of California. I suppose it was progress, that none of these things were true for us in 2002. But there were other truths too disturbing to ignore: even though my family and I had nothing to do with the original displacement of the Chumash, we got to own a small parcel of what was once their land.

I was an Assistant Professor of Asian American Studies, and I started teaching Asian American Studies 2 in 2002. The oldest Chumash settlements date to about 13,000 years ago; Cabrillo got here less than 500 years ago; and California became part of the United States about 170 years ago. I’ll be 48 years-old in May 2018. None of this is a long time, and so it’s endlessly fascinating to consider how the present connects to the past.

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Imagine being a Chumash person in October 1542. What did it feel like, making baskets and lining canoes, much like your ancestors had done for thousands of years, and then seeing off of the coast a largish ship with big sails? As these unidentified floating objects got closer, you might see strange, funny looking people who didn’t look at all like any other people you’d seen before. These circumstances had happened before—strange ships, odd looking people, even magnificent beasts that were unfamiliar, especially horses. In the Bahamas, or in Massachusetts or in Jamestown, native people encountered Europeans and their animals (and their germs). But each time, such events, from the perspective of native peoples, must have felt so disorienting, frightening, and terrifying—did they think that their lives could remain the same, and then how did they cope, over time, with the sinking reality that nothing would ever be the same? Try it yourself: tomorrow, if strange beings came to Earth in unidentified flying objects, how would we react? How would *you* react? What might your parents recommend for you? Would life go on, or would things just never be the same? I wonder how many of you would continue to do the readings for my class.

Imagine if the space aliens had advanced weapons systems, if they vaporized an earthling or two, if they acted as though they were superior beings (after all, they found us, not the other way around), and if they came with exotic religious beliefs, and then demanded that we believe them or die. What if they also brought exotic, alien space germs that casually wiped out thousands of human beings who came in contact with them. In the midst of all that death, what if the aliens were indifferent, because it meant fewer earthlings and more Earth for them. If things did unfold in this way, well, I might advise you to skip your homework, go home and be with your families. And why? It’s because I’ve been a student of American history, and that history would suggest that these beings will have their way, and that even if a few aliens might have great empathy for what was happening to the earthlings, we’d be lucky if some of us even survived their arrival, luckier still if they chose to settle and started calling *this* planet *their* home.

It’s a thought experiment, but it’s more familiar than you might think. It’s true, that most Americans do not think deeply or daily, I think, about Native Americans, about the Chumash, or the Massachusetts, or the Chicago Blackhawks, or the Florida Seminoles, or the Cleveland

Indians, and yet I do think that Americans have imagined themselves suffering similar fates in their science fiction, in their collective obsessions with UFOs, in their movies and books and other cultural productions. It seems that every year, in another blockbuster or bestseller, Americans imagine a technologically advanced civilization doing to them what they once did to other unsuspecting people. The space aliens use probes, they reduce people to animals or things, they turn us into slaves or into raw materials, and they kill and vaporize without a care. Once in a while, we get an E.T., a gentle alien botanist, but then the same director imagines an apocalypse set in America, a war of the worlds. Just like in the original novel, published by H.G. Wells in 1898, human beings only survive this war because the aliens died—they had no immunity to our earthly germs—and yet this was exactly the opposite of what had happened when Europeans came to the Americas. It's a radical way to think about immigration, as a kind of trauma and displacement, a helplessness in the midst of a powerful, indifferent other, huge in number, well-armed, and arriving on your head and rearranging everything. European migrations traumatized the original inhabitants of North and South America. Perhaps that history—our history—has left a profound, indelible, and recurring imprint on the American imagination.²

If space aliens did arrive, and gradually and then suddenly took over as the Europeans took over, perhaps in time the aliens might establish their own Museum of Natural History, a version of the Earth from the time when they found it, so that younger space aliens could see how primitive this planet once was. There might be dioramas of you and me in Embarcadero Hall or in Girvetz Hall, with the same PowerPoint presentation repeating over and over again. To be truly realistic, a few of my students would be paying attention to their social media feeds, rather than paying attention to the lecture. Generally, though, to keep the diorama safe for families, there might be no exhibits about the vaporizing and mass die-offs of human beings, because showing things how they really were—that would just be too upsetting for the younger space alien children. When my children were in their twos and threes, I did not want them to see the Chumash depicted as the slaves of the friars, or buried in big dead heaps, their bodies black with pox and measles. Such dioramas would have required too much explanation, and I'm sure that my children at that age would not have understood or appreciated the frightening events that the Chumash had suffered.

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If Native Americans experienced the Europeans as a collective trauma arising from migration, then we might also consider how Europeans forced Africans to come to the New World in the most awful way. Europeans brought Africans in chains. Over hundreds of years, Europeans brutalized Africans in the most haunting conditions, and they sold them into lives that were unspeakably bleak and terrible. Many younger students in college might think that professional historians may have already examined this part of early modern history in all of its

dimensions, but that's not so. Too many people were too ashamed, I think, to deal with this past honestly.³

Only in recent decades have many prominent historians examined critical aspects of slavery in the United States and throughout the Atlantic world, but even then, most would agree, I think, that we're not as fully informed or as learned as we should be about this great collective sin. There are many obvious reasons why: like the history of Native Americans, the history of early African migrants to the New World is fraught with trauma, death, the erasure of self and family and entire communities. Europeans and their descendants preferred, perhaps, not to think about what they and their fellow citizens had done, and prior to 1960, some of the most prominent American historians offered "mainstream" American history in ways that diminished the history of African Americans, that suggested or insisted that their history wasn't central to American history as a whole. Nothing could be further from the truth—African slave laborers were essential for the plantation economies in the New World, and they cultivated and harvested its most important cash crops, including sugar cane, tobacco, and cotton. Their labor made fortunes for many thousands of Europeans.

And just because Europeans were (are?) ashamed by the manner through which they extracted this labor does not excuse the other crime of denying that history. We ourselves brutalize the victims when we fail to acknowledge what really happened—how do *you* feel when someone has hurt you, but then fails to apologize or even acknowledge your pain? How would *you* feel if those around you failed to see or refused to see that you were robbed, beaten, chained, and worked to death, only for the benefit of the very people who had robbed, cheated, chained, and worked you to death? If someone took just one year of *your* life, put you in chains, and made you work for him, for how much would *you* sue, and just how long should such a criminal be in jail for kidnapping, false imprisonment, and these other heinous felonies? It's no wonder that Europeans had many self-serving reasons for avoiding such discussions.

Indeed, Americans may have repressed the history of slavery, but perhaps, like the history of Native Americans, it's never been far from our minds. In popular works and in science fiction, slavery has always been a recurring theme: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) are obviously about slavery, but so are *King Kong* (1933) and *Song of the South* (1946). Uncle Remus is the narrator in *Song of the South*, and he tells colorful stories about Br'er Rabbit (the clever African slave), Br'er Fox (the mean white person), and Br'er Bear (the stupid white person). Br'er Rabbit's closest descendant might be Bugs Bunny, a cartoon character who entertained many thousands of American children, including me. I did not know, when I was five or six, that Bugs Bunny represented, in an abstract way, a younger enslaved African American man who must make his way through Yosemite Sam (the mean, heavily armed white man) or Elmer Fudd (the stupid, heavily armed white man). But if you watch the cartoons again, from this perspective, it's easy to see that they're (white American) adaptations of African American folklore, although in these adaptations, white people can feel comfortable cheering for the innocent bunny as he outwits the

evil fox and dippy bear, as well as the mean and stupid white men who always seem to be so careless with their big guns.

If Br'er Rabbit and Bugs Bunny represent Africans in one way, the many versions of King Kong represent Africans in another. Kong's story represents a lot of interesting things: he is master of his domain on Skull Island, which is full of prehistoric creatures; Kong is physically imposing, so strong and a giant compared to the white men who find him; and when Kong sees that white girl for the first time, the white men worry that Kong wants her most of all. The white men drag him in chains, put him within the hold of a ship, and sail him across the ocean. But when Kong gets free in New York City, well, he chases after the blonde again. For a moment, please let's appreciate the silliness of this story: if *you* were King Kong, if you really were a gigantic ape, and if you'd suffered through all of those traumas and you were lucky enough to escape, would you be obsessed with finding that blonde? I would not. His characterization, I think, reflects best the fears of white men, these slave masters who may have suffered an inferiority complex among the taller and more striking African men that they'd captured. The thought of white women being with such African men—this might have been so horrifying to white men that Kong has always died in every version of these stories. White men have done the killing, every time. In other words, no one has yet imagined an alternative ending where King Kong and the blonde get together and enjoy a happy fun family life in New York City, where Kong is a respected professional at an investment bank, and where Kong, Jr., walks to the elite private school with his blonde mom every weekday. In real life, white men legislated against such possibilities: they approved rules against miscegenation as early as the 17th century, and they reaffirmed those rules again and again and again until well into the 20th century. King Kong has been made and re-made and made again, booted and re-booted many times, but so have our miscegenation rules to prevent Kong from ever having the blonde.

With your friends, late in the residence halls, you might also discuss how a lot of our contemporary science fictions are still also about slavery. *The Matrix* movies (1999, 2003, and 2003) are about slavery, as is *Blade Runner* (1982), the *Alien* movies (1979, 1986, 1992, and 1997) and their sequels (too many to list here), *A.I.* (2001), and *Ex Machina* (2014). Many of these stories feature robots—human make robots—but this is not that different from the fact that humans made slaves, too. It's just that, in real life, Europeans used Africans to make slaves not long ago; in our science fictions, humans use metal and plastics and other “biological material” to make robots and androids, who then become their slaves. The underlying expectations of the masters with respect to their slaves remains consistent: we made you for our benefit; you must do as we command; if you do not do as we command, we can and will do awful things to you. And even though human beings make the robots, the human beings often experience an inferiority complex with respect to these robots, just like in other stories about masters and slaves.

Star Wars (1977) and its many sequels are about slavery, too. The former slave is at the center of the action, and he is the character who struggles most with good and evil, and with consequences for the entire galaxy. Watto owned Shmi, Anakin Skywalker's mother, and Watto owned Anakin himself, because slave status was matrilineal in the United States. Anakin's

special talents helped to make him an emancipated white man, but then, when he goes bad, he literally becomes a tall black man, and his voice shifts to that of a distinguished African American actor. Darth Vader remains hyper talented as he turns evil, and yet he must still obey a master, even as he plots to destroy that master and to reunite with his family. Did Darth Vader enslave himself, at least until he died, or did the evil Emperor manipulate Anakin to become the Emperor's slave? Please discuss. You'll note that Darth Vader killed his own master, just like many American slaves killed their masters, too. Such acts of murder were also suicidal, and so it was for Darth Vader. C3PO, R2D2, and the other droids of the *Star Wars* universe are slaves, too, although they're of a kind that can't or won't rebel. It's as if they're programmed to be slaves: "It's our lot in life," laments C3PO. We feel bad for them, though, when Luke just gives them away to Jabba the Hutt as "gifts" in *Return of the Jedi* (1983). R2D2 is the bravest, smartest, most trustworthy droid ever. He's like a slave owner's dream come true.

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Like my own children, many of my students may have learned about slavery through the Pixar movies. The toys in *Toy Story* (1995) are slaves. And Nemo, Marlon, and all of the sea creatures in Dr. Sherman's dental office in Sydney are slaves as well. When I saw *Finding Nemo* (2003) with my daughters, the movie reminded me of a classic slave narrative, as well as those stories of the thousands of African Americans who sought their family members in the wake of emancipation. White slave owners, including George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, had used newspapers to post ads about their runaway slaves. President Washington took out this ad in the *Philadelphia Gazette* in 1796: "Absconded from the household of the President of the United States, ONEY JUDGE, a light mulatto girl, much freckled, with very black eyes and bushy hair. She is of middle stature, and delicately formed, about 20 years of age." Oney Judge never returned to the Washington household—she married, she had children, and she died on her own terms surrounded by her loved ones in New Hampshire in 1848. If you were Oney Judge, would you have returned to President Washington, or would you have preferred life without him?⁴

After slavery, the former slaves took ads in some of those same newspapers to describe and to reunite with their long-lost family members. Consider this one, published in the *Southwestern Christian Advocate* in 1880, and posted by Rufus Rollins: "I was the last one sold out of nine...I was sold to a man in Mississippi named James Pollard, and he caused me to be run to Texas. I heard that mother and five children were living in Logan County, Kentucky. The boys are Lewis, Charles, and Moses; girls named Louisa Ann and Shrildar. Mother's name was Letty. Address me at Paris, Texas."

In *Finding Nemo*, when Marlin, the clown fish, swims thousands of miles to find his son Nemo, he becomes something of a legend, and many fish and other sea creatures yearn to help him. He tried so hard to see his son again. Imagine, though, if Marlin didn't make it—if, say, he was eaten by a shark or digested by a whale—what if Nemo got free but didn't know how or if

he could ever see his father again? You'll remember that before Marlon and Nemo were separated, Nemo was upset with his over-protective father, and Nemo said to his father, "I hate you." What if they could never reconcile? Marlin had lost every member of his family to a barracuda, except for Nemo. The attack hurt Nemo himself: his egg was broken, and so his front right fin did not form like the left one. Nemo, because he is still a little clown fish, cannot appreciate how there are some traumas you just can't get over, and that this is why Marlin is so over-protective. There are many profound reasons why Marlin and Nemo would want to see each other again, after Dr. Sherman "rescues" Nemo from off of that protective reef. Perhaps Mr. Rollins, the last one sold out of nine, had similar reasons to want his family again, or maybe he just wanted to see his mother Letty, for whom he devoted her own sentence. I don't know whether the good people at Pixar made these connections when they were making these movies (probably not), but Rufus and Letty, Nemo and Marlin—they seem like the same people.

The more sadistic white slave-masters in American history appear in these movies as well. Darla and Sid are familiar for those of us who've studied slavery. In *Finding Nemo* and in *Toy Story*, Darla and Sid stand in for the sadistic masters, the torturers and murderers of fish and toys. Darla is as clueless as she is murderous, because she shakes all of her fish to death: "Wake up fishy!" Sid is a sadist: he blows up his toys, or "experiments" on them by ripping them apart and making "mutants." In American history, we have records of white men who executed slaves by using dynamite. Several prominent Southern physicians performed ghastly medical experiments on enslaved women to further their knowledge of gynecology and human reproduction, which in turn benefited the masters.⁵

Moreover, within *Toy Story*, Buzz and Andy and the other toys must hide or cover their humanity from these sadists and from the human beings in general: the toys pretend not to be thinking or feeling beings who can read or understand what's happening to them. They also struggle to accept that they must be loyal to beings who simply don't see or treat them as human. They form close family connections to one another—in slave families, many "aunts" and "uncles" and "brothers" were not related by blood, but they considered and treated one another as family members, because so many of their blood relatives were sold off, murdered, or unable to be together. Mr. Potato Head, Slink, Andy, Buzz, Hamm, Barbie, Little Bo Peep—they are such different toys, and yet they love one another like family. The humans do not show their toys that level of empathy or love. Indeed, when their property is no longer amusing or useful, the human beings discard their toys, just as the white masters often abandoned their elderly or disabled slaves throughout American history.

Buzz and Andy do not rise up to kill their human masters, but this happened quite often in real life. Try out that thought: if some (white) Sid-istic boy could sell you or dispose of you, or tie your mother and your brother to dynamite, or otherwise harm them in unimaginable ways with impunity, wouldn't that maybe make *you* murderous? Perhaps it would make you crazy: lots of slaves lost their minds and they became mentally ill, sometimes dangerously so. Consider Bubbles, from *Finding Nemo*, or the Mutant Toy Baby in *Toy Story*. In that story, the toys take

their revenge upon Sid by showing that they can *talk*. Their revenge is to make *Sid* paranoid and crazy.

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Some stories are not for children. Some stories tell of a different kind of crazy. In *Planet of the Apes* and in all of its sequels, white people imagine what it might be like if the apes took up guns, took over, and became really murderous. The story originates in a French novel published in the 1960s, but American audiences will be most familiar with Caesar, the leader of the apes, who becomes cognizant, who organizes other apes, and who leads a rebellion against the humans. In the novel and in the movies, we are to sympathize with the apes, if only because so many of the humans—representing white people in general—are so cruel and inhuman. American slave owners often gave their slaves noble Roman names, like Caesar, Cicero, or Julius, as if to use these names like a cruel joke. So, to see the apish Caesar rip through humans in a contemporary multi-plex is to see our own American history acted out again and again. Caesar is Nat Turner. Ape Caesar will become much more like the real Caesar, killer of men, leader of armies, and the undisputed founder and ruler of his world. Although he himself was naked, Caesar's descendants dress in the finest leather, like the members of the Black Panther Party. It's a strange cultural jujitsu, to see a theater full of young white men, the target audience for these movies, cheering for the murderous apes as they take on and take down the (mostly white) humans to impose their own world order, their own planet of the apes.

Slavery and the history of slavery are not just American pre-occupations. Pierre Boulle wrote *Planet of the Apes* in France in 1963, and Roald Dahl published *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* in England in 1964. The Oompa Loompas are slaves—they reflect (again) the myth of “happy slaves.” Mr. Wonka said that he “rescued” them from Loompaland, and that they'll gladly work only for food in his chocolate factory. The Oompa Loompas sing and laugh and play, even though they've experienced an internment within that factory for several generations, a fact that the townspeople don't even know. (Our spies say that in North Korea, entire families are born inside prisons, and it's just disturbing to think that maybe the North Koreans got this idea from Roald Dahl.) In the early versions of his novel, Dahl imagined the Oompa Loompas as African pygmies, but his editors persuaded him to rewrite them as light-skinned and golden-haired, so that the illustrations for his book wouldn't look so obviously racist. This was how Willy Wonka was enslaving happy *white* Oompa Loompas, getting them to sing and dance and to make chocolate all day so that he could build fantabulous glass elevators and great big chocolate rivers. Augustus Galoop, Augustus Galoop, he's a vile nincompoop, but Roald Dahl, Roald Dahl, he was maybe kind of a racist. We thank God that Dahl's editors encouraged Dahl to change the Oompa Loompas to be kid-friendly, but if you read the story again from this perspective, it's quite upsetting and not at all fit for children.

In fact, the story may be damaging, because impressionable young children might recess the idea, in their minds, that Willy Wonka's slaves were always happy and cheerful. If they then

hear that American slaves were happy and cheerful, later when they are grown-ups, that myth will sound familiar, as if they'd read about it in a children's fairy tale. They might be more prone to believe the myth, because the actual history of American slavery is far darker, far more terrible, and far more violent, and they've never been exposed to that darker version. I, however, can easily imagine that at least one or two or a dozen Oompa Loompas might have wanted to murder Willy Wonka, burn his ashes, and then toss his remains into that great chocolate river. It's not as difficult for me to imagine, because I came across this story from Missouri: a slave woman named Celia murdered and then burned her master, a man who'd raped her for years.

Celia bore two of her master's children before she was nineteen years old. "On the night of June 23, 1855, Newsom crept into her cabin and tried to force her to have sex with him. Celia took a stick and bashed his head with it, killing him, according to court documents. Then she pushed his body into a roaring fire in her cabin's fireplace. The next day, his bones were carried out in the embers." The great Missouri River runs through Callaway County, where these events took place, when Celia was just 19, when she considered what to do with her tormentor's ashes. In that County, in that state, the good people had passed rules against sexual assault, so that no man could "compel [a woman] to be defiled." The judge and jury did not find for Celia, however, nor show any mercy, for she was a slave, and they agreed that the rule against sexual assault should not apply to a slave woman fending off her master. They ordered Celia hanged.⁶

How should we judge the people who judged her in this way—they said that *she* was wrong. Was Celia wrong to have defended herself as she did, at just 19 years of age? (Was Princess Leia wrong to have murdered Jabba the Hutt, and with the very chain with which he had enslaved her?) Willy Wonka was, like Newsom, without a wife, and the male Oompa Loompas wore skins, the women wore leaves, and the children wore nothing. What would a 15 or 19-year-old female Oompa Loompa be wearing around Willy Wonka? Would we have judged as harshly, if one or two or a dozen Oompa Loompas killed Mr. Wonka when he was attempting sexual assault, and they then burned his body? Would we have accused them of an injustice for throwing his ashes into that great brown Missouri River?

We should never, ever discuss such things among very young children. Some topics should be off limits until that age when most people start college, and even then, I'm not sure everyone is ever ready to hear such stories. They are, of their very nature, poisonous and traumatic. They are stories for which "trigger warnings" were invented. They are horrible for me to tell again, but I tell you these stories because I want to assure you—that myth about "happy slaves"—it just isn't true.

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I could go on, but in short, I believe that you've seen and experienced many stories of slavery and dispossession, even though you might not be fully aware of it. Without meaning to, Americans (and others) re-tell stories about slavery, often repeating its most incorrect and harmful myths, and only sometimes coming to grips with its horrors and terrors. Slavery was

intimate, violent, and awful. It ruined and twisted millions of people, black and white. Like many kinds of trauma, though, it's never gone away in the American imagination, and we wonder whether it will ever go away. To this day, many white Americans deny the humanity of African Americans, and they reject the idea that African Americans are even human, or that they can be American in the way that white people can be American. Our current President questioned the American-ness of his predecessor many times, despite overwhelming evidence about the circumstances of his American birth and pedigree.

Even though apes and monkeys and fish have never taken ads to look for their long-lost family members, white people will say that people who did do these things—people who look like Rufus and Letty—just aren't people, that they were never people, and so slavery was never a crime. It boggles the mind, how some people are capable of such delusions—whether they're like this to avoid shame or responsibility or guilt, we can only guess. We can only hope that they'll get the help that they need to figure out the origins of their own delusions, to come to grips with the overwhelming evidence that they're the ones who need help.

In a similar way, in many of our contemporary stories, we feel very badly for people who are the victims of careless, cruel, and horrible aliens. European Americans themselves *were* those careless, cruel, and horrible aliens—it's not difficult to imagine what in fact happened, because our history tells us what happened. We imagine the fantastic and the disorienting because Native Americans did experience the fantastic and the super weird when the Europeans came upon ships and started re-arranging everything. As I sit here in my home or in my office, even though I didn't murder or displace a single Chumash person, I know that I am the unintended beneficiary of a great historical crime. My house is awesome, and I love my job, and I'd have a hard time giving these things up: how best, though, can I live a life in light of the things that I know? I do not know yet, for I am not as wise as I should be to answer such a question. Meanwhile, while I have and enjoy these things, I think I ought to try my best to appreciate this life, to mourn what happened, and to understand and to acknowledge that there were other people who once lived in this stunning place and considered it their home, too.

It's a history lesson, but it's not just about history. Since 1965, many Americans of European ancestry might have considered this land *their* land, although most of their ancestors just got here. Yet even for them, as they are surrounded now by people who love pho, kimchee, kebabs, tacos, shrimp masala, and tebsi, we should have empathy. For someone raised on potatoes, meatloaf, and apple pie, the food choices nowadays must be so disorienting. These folks must be seeing aliens all over again, coming on planes and walking and driving across the southern border, taking away and endangering all that they hold dear and familiar. Frightened and threatened, worried that they will lose their dominant place in this country, they might be prone to doing the careless and the stupid, maybe voting for someone who *is* careless and stupid. What strange things fear makes us do. Please, we must assure our fellow citizens, we might be able to understand what you're feeling, and if you're not a self-absorbed narcissist who someone thinks that world is ever only unfair to you, you might be able to see that these feelings of fear and disorientation are recurring ones, felt by many millions of Americans, and across the entire

expanse of American history since at least the early 17th century. So much of our art and science fiction these days has been precisely about those fears and worries, played out for every generation, again and again.

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In college, your professors will ask you to see, as best you can, things as they are, things as they were. Many of us are also here to warn you as well: if you, too, deny the humanity of people who appear different from you, if you take what doesn't belong to you, if you lack basic empathy for other people, and even if you are simply careless and self-centered and shake your fish until it dies, you will be repeating patterns that are horrifying, patterns that span generations in this pained and tortured country. No reasonable person will study the awful and the terrible in the hopes of *repeating* the same kinds of crimes, over and over again. It's like that with most other things in your life: if you know, for example, that diabetes runs in your family, and if you learn that you are pre-diabetic, you *must* give up the cheesecake. Your bio professor can explain to you exactly why—her lessons will serve as a warning. Knowing your family, knowing your history, no matter how awful one or both might be—that might save you from yourself. Perhaps just as importantly, this knowledge can save you from hurting other people, on purpose or through carelessness.

I teach at a major research university, one of the finest in the world, and I wish that this one and every one like it contains people of good will, including fine scholars who will offer painful lessons about the past so that we will not be like many of our more terrible and damaged ancestors, who, by the way, happen to look *just like us*. We bear their genes, we carry their histories, but I hope, I hope that our learning together will prove that we are not fated to make the same mistakes.

Endnotes

¹ I've been to the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, the Smithsonian Museum in Washington DC, and the Field Museum in Chicago. At least until 1990, all of them had displays and arrangements similar to the Museum of Natural History in Santa Barbara—the curators depicted Native Americans as part of the natural world, almost as if they were in a “state of nature.” When I visited, the Field Museum had vast spaces devoted just to Native American costumes, rows and rows of costumes, arranged and displayed without any people (even mannequins) in them. For a history of these museums and of curating, one that focuses on the influential Field Museum in Chicago, see Lance Grande, *Curators* (2017).

² In a forthcoming book, Diana Pasulka, *American Cosmic* (2019), one scholar examines the intersections of UFOs, American history, American popular culture, American religion, and American science. As far as I know, there's no scholarly book that connects UFOs with themes in Native American history, at least not the way I've explained it here in this essay.

³ Prior to 1970, many prominent American and British historians offered histories of slavery that we now regard as ridiculous. Slaves were generally “happy,” some said, while others insisted that slavery really was the best thing for Africans in the New World. For a partial view of that older historiography, see Robert Fogel, *The Slavery Debates, 1952-1990* (2003). In the last four decades, many outstanding scholars have written about slavery in much more realistic, complex, and accurate ways—my favorite authors would include James Walvin, James Horton, John Hope Franklin, Ira Berlin, Brenda Stevenson, Edward Baptist, Ibram Kendi, Eric Williams, Annette Gordon-Reed, Edmund Morgan, Sven Beckert, Matthew Karp, Diana Berry, Anne Bailey, and Deidre Owens. This is but a partial list—we are living in a time when many dozens of scholars have published studies of slavery in all of its dimensions, every year, and they've offered far more nuanced and detailed scholarly treatments than ever before.

⁴ For an excellent history of George Washington and Ona Judge, see Erika Armstrong Dunbar, *Never Caught* (2017).

⁵ See, for example, Marie Schwartz, *Birthing a Slave* (2006), and Deirdre Owen, *Medical Bondage* (2017).

⁶ Now, I love Roald Dahl's novels, and I gave my own children a complete set of his books, including *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, which is one of my favorites, and now one of theirs. I do not mean to scar anyone's childhood, and yet I do think that knowing about these things—Dahl's not-so-latent racism, as well as the need for white folks to keep reiterating the myth of the “happy slave”—adds to a more mature, nuanced understanding of this man's art and literature. I do think it underscores the point that I'm trying to make here: white folks often think about slavery even when they're not really aware of it, even when they're writing stories for their children and for their pleasure. Again, it's like a trauma that they can't forget, even as they forget or ignore huge aspects of the real harm that their ancestors caused through institutions like slavery. To see an account of Celia's ordeal, see: DeNeen Brown, “Missouri v. Celia, a Slave,” *Washington Post* (Oct. 19, 2017).