

Trial of the Genocide of Native Californians

A Role Play

BY AIMEE RIECHEL

INTERVIEW BY MIGUEL ZAVALA

Aimee Riechel teaches at Mission High School in San Francisco and has been an integral member in the development of Ethnic Studies in the district. Mission High School is composed of a diverse student population that includes immigrant youth from Latin America and African American students.

MIGUEL ZAVALA: Can you first provide some context about how you approach Ethnic Studies?

AIMEE RIECHEL: Teaching Ethnic Studies and workshops in San Francisco Unified [School District] have grounded me and allowed me to develop my pedagogical approach. I would say that it's to give students skills to become critical thinkers of the world around them, to give them opportunities to grow as learners and to see themselves as true intellectuals. And foremost to develop a sense of love in themselves, their histories, and their communities, thereby seeing hope in change they can take part in. Students can then change their society at whatever level that may be.

ZAVALA: How did you learn about the Genocide of Native Californians Role Play?

RIEHEL: It is based on *Rethinking Columbus: Rethinking the Next 500 Years*. It was developed in 2008 through a collective of teachers who have developed Ethnic Studies curriculum within San Francisco Unified. Working with Peter Hammer within the district in cooperation with Allyson Tintiango-Cubales at the College of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State, we came up with guiding questions and goals for the entire 9th-grade Ethnic Studies course. So the role play activity emerged as part of

a larger unit on California Indians and the Spanish mission system.

ZAVALA: Sometimes learning activities are construed as isolated components, and I appreciate how you all designed it within a broader unit. Can you speak more about the California Indians unit?

RIEHEL: It was originally part of a larger unit on systems of oppression, with a focus on Spanish missions as an example of oppressive systems. We changed our approach to Ethnic Studies then, shifting from groups of people to broader conceptual themes. So the unit used to be called "Native Californians" but it changed to "Systems of Oppression." Within the district currently, the role play is not used anymore—but I use it within my modern world history curriculum and it fits within teaching about systems of oppression, specifically focusing on colonization, gender, class, and race. That is currently where it fits within modern world history, by looking at how colonization was perpetuated. The role play, as I teach it, gives students a local example of colonization by focusing on the ways the Spanish and then Americans colonized California. I want to add that teaching conceptually—about systems of oppression, for instance—gives students frameworks for understanding the world around them. These frameworks can therefore be taught in any course and are not bound to a particular historical period.

ZAVALA: How do you set up the role play?

RIEHEL: For me it's a culminating activity for teaching about the colonization of Native peoples, espe-



ally in areas where the Spanish missions expanded their empire. So in my world history class, I focus on southern Brazil then bring it back to California, which connects to them. Our high school is called Mission High School and so this history is important to students because it is so localized. We set it up within the context of what are the missions, what is missionization, what is colonization, and how do the missions work to colonize people? We look at the missions as a system of oppression and how they operated to physically and culturally destroy whole groups of people. In order to set it up as a culminating activity, students develop plenty of background information through their engagement with texts, film, primary sources—which enables them to dive into each of the roles. And the role play comes right before students are asked to do a final assessment in the form of a reflection on the material they have learned as part of the larger unit.

ZAVALA: It sounds like an enactment, where learning is embodied and comes to life. What challenges have you encountered in facilitating the role play?

RIEHEL: With any kind of role play activity that requires some form of acting, that pushes teachers and students to be out of their element; as teachers we fall into simplifications, asking students to read material and regurgitate information. Students don't have opportunities to learn from the experience—so whatever you are going to do, any kind of activity that is arts-based—especially an assessment that is experiential and less traditional—you have to ask yourself, "How am I letting students present what they have learned?" So how do we know students are really embodying these concepts? Are students expressing their knowledge through these particular modalities that I am asking them to perform? So I have them write things first, practice or rehearse, and reflect—so they go through an entire process. So before they engage in the trial in front of the whole class, they are learning about different points of view and how to debate. I give them feedback as they rehearse, which is a part of the ongoing reflection within the role play.

ZAVALA: It reminds me of the work with migrant farmworker youth where theater of the oppressed

is used. Yet this requires conceptual development, reading, but also practice, which takes place in what Boal terms "forum theater." I have a last question on recommendations for teachers. You have mentioned some, such as writing, reflecting, and rehearsing. What other recommendations do you have for someone who wants to reinvent the role play?

RIEHEL: I think it's important for teachers to see this as a localized example of what happened to Indigenous people. But this might not connect with students who live in another part of the country. So it's important to learn about the history of Indigenous people in their communities, what happened to them, and how to work on that level. Like any lesson, you can't just implement it, you have to contextualize it. How do you make something like this come alive for your particular students? *

Genocide of Native Californians Role Play

Lesson Plan

Length: Two days

Grade level(s): 9th, 10th, 11th

Subject area(s): World History, U.S. History, Ethnic Studies

Theme: Formation of the Colonial System and Early Resistance, 1849-70

Readings: United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, select texts on the Spanish colonization of California

DAY 1: PREPARING THE DEFENSE

I, the prosecutor from the International Court of Human Rights, am bringing charges against several groups involved in the colonization of California.

Your task is to defend, represent, or try to play the role of various figures involved in the Spanish colonization of California. Your group will be assigned a specific individual or group that you will defend against the charges before them.

Specific steps for Day 1:

1. Read the charges brought against you and your co-defendants. The following groups are charged:
 - The Spanish Empire
 - Bartolomé de las Casas
 - Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda
 - The Catholic Church/Junípero Serra
 - Spanish landowners
 - The Spanish army
 - Native Californians who resisted
 - Native Californians who willingly participated in the missions
2. You may not agree with the views or actions of this person/group, but it is your responsibility to try. Create a defense that deals with the following issues:
 - You can deny or accept the charges.
 - If they are not guilty, then who is and why?
 - If they are guilty, then how might this group/person justify their actions?
 - How would the person/group you are defending speak, if they could?
 - Did Indigenous Californians deserve to be seen as or treated like the Spanish treated other Spanish?
 - Are these charges fair? Should people with a modern conception of human rights be able to look back and judge those who did not have a modern conception of human rights?
3. Each member of the group needs to have a speaking part in the defense. No one should be silent.

Charge 1: You violated Articles 4, 15, 18, 20, and 23 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and are responsible for the cultural genocide of Native Californians. You, either directly or indirectly, contributed to the destruction of thousands of years of Indigenous traditions, history, religion, and way of life.

Charge 2: You violated Articles 3, 5, and 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and are responsible for the physical genocide of Native Californians. You, either directly or indirectly, participated in the physical destruction of Native Californian societies.

Use the sources of information that you have been given throughout this unit to help construct your defense.

DAY 2: DELIVERING THE VERDICT

You will also hear the defenses of other figures, and you will be responsible for delivering a verdict on their innocence or guilt based upon what you hear. You can find the accused guilty of one, some, or all of the charges.

You will use the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to justify the verdict that you deliver.

Genocide of Native Californians Role Play

Groups

THE SPANISH EMPIRE

You are not an individual, but a system. Your desire to expand your power and dominate others directly led to the destruction of Californian Native culture. Your desire to have colonies that enriched you allowed you to tolerate the erasing of the histories and traditions of many different people. It can be said that you expanded into the New World to compete with various other European nations, but you used your colonies to enrich yourselves at the expense of those who originally inhabited them. Without you there would be no motivation to explore, nor to establish missions from which Native culture was attacked. You believe that your culture was vastly superior to those cultures in California and believed that under your "guidance" these people could be brought into the "civilized" ways of European nations.

BARTOLOMÉ DE LAS CASAS

You are known as the defender of the Indians. You argued against Sepúlveda that Native Americans should not be forced into Christianity through conquest, but through good example. You believe that Native Americans, though sinful, are not beyond redemption and have the potential to become Christian. You are not opposed to colonization or the expansion of the Spanish Empire and think that it does not need to be as brutally done as it was in the past. You are accused of helping create the philosophical and theoretical justification for conquest and conversion that led to the destruction of Indigenous Californians in particular and Indigenous people in the Americas in general.

JUAN GINÉS DE SEPÚLVEDA

You believe that Native Americans are barbaric savages who should be conquered before they are converted to Christianity. You believe that they have committed crimes so severe as to barely make them human, chiefly that they practice cannibalism. You believe that they cannot be reasoned with and that they understand force more than the word of God. For you, there is little, if anything, worth saving in Native Americans and that if many die, then so be it. A principal belief in your life is that might makes right and that those who are mighty have power by the will of God. You are accused of helping create the philosophical justification for the enslavement and conquest of Native Americans.

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH/JUNÍPERO SERRA

Your organization is responsible for creating an environment that justified conquest and colonization. Your belief in the superiority of your own religion empowered people to feel justified in destroying, both physically and culturally, millions of Native Americans. Some members of your organization believed that Native Americans were not equally human to Catholic Christians and that their deaths were justified. Some argued Native Americans should be saved from eternal damnation by allowing them to have a choice, while still others said that they should be forced to convert. Members of your organization destroyed ancient relics and artifacts that they believed to be pagan/un-Christian. Some argued for the enslavement of Native peoples, while others against.

Junípero Serra was your most prominent representative in California. He was responsible for bringing the mission system to California. He oversaw the conversion, both forcibly and willingly, of hundreds if not thousands of Native Californians. It was under your protection and with your endorsement that he entered what would become California with the intent of converting and "civilizing" its people.

SPANISH LANDOWNERS

Your desire for land and riches drew you to the New World, where you took the land from its original inhabitants through trickery or deception. You claimed to be the rightful owners after encouraging the original inhabitants to trade for it, even though in their minds land belonged to everyone and could not be owned. You oftentimes exploited the Native Californians by not paying them for work, underpaying them, or forcing them to work for you directly. You drove many of them away from their ancestral hunting and gathering grounds, forcing them to look to the Spanish in order to not starve. You oftentimes supported the beliefs and arguments of Sepúlveda, who justified the taking of Native lands because they were not Christian. With you came deadly diseases that decimated the Native population as well.

THE SPANISH ARMY

You directly participated in the killing and conquering of Native Californians. It was you who, under the orders of the Spanish Empire and the Catholic Church, forcibly converted or killed thousands of Native Californians. You then defended the lands that were taken from Native Californians with force and brutally suppressed all resistance. Many of you raped Native women and stole from other Native people. You came to the New World seeking wealth and to spread the Spanish Empire's power. Without you, none of the destruction of the Indigenous population could have transpired.

NATIVE CALIFORNIANS WHO RESISTED

You are responsible for provoking a violent response from the Spanish and creating a justification for colonization. Had you accepted or tried to compromise with the Spanish, there might be a chance that your culture, lands, and heritage may have survived.

NATIVE CALIFORNIANS WHO WILLINGLY PARTICIPATED IN THE MISSIONS

To save your lives, you chose to do as the Spanish wished. In doing so, you made sure that your children, your children's children, and all of your descendants lost their culture. Your language, religion, and ways of life have been all but lost because you collaborated with your occupier.

Genocide of Native Californians Role Play

Defense Brief

Name _____ Defendant _____

Do you accept the charges? _____

Why/why not?

Justification 1 (evidence):

Justification 2 (evidence):

Justification 2 (evidence):

Did Native Californians deserve to be seen or treated like the Spanish treated other Spanish?

Why/why not?

Are the charges fair? Why or why not?

- Be sure to use the language of the U.N.'s Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- Be sure, if you are not guilty, that you implicate someone else.
- For help with your arguments, refer to your readings and your teacher.

Who Is the Most Guilty? Why?

	CHARGE 1		CHARGE 2	
	Guilty of Cultural Genocide	Why?	Guilty of Physical Genocide	Why?
Spanish Empire				
De Las Casas				
Sepúlveda				
Junípero Serra/ Catholic Church				
Spanish Landowners				
Spanish Army				
Resisting California Indians				
Compliant California Indians				
		TOTAL		

Genocide of Native Californians Role Play

Genocide of Native Californians Trial Voting Instructions

1. Distribute the ballots to the class.
2. Explain that students are limited to 12 total votes, and may only give 0-3 votes for each group.
 - a. A 0 vote means that the group is not responsible at all.
 - b. A 3 vote means the group is very responsible.
 - c. A 1 or 2 represent limited guilt.
3. The left side is guilt over cultural genocide, and the right side is guilt over physical genocide.
4. When students have cast their votes, collect them.
5. Copy the below chart onto the board or butcher paper.
6. Have a student volunteer read the ballots to you as you write tally marks representing guilt.
7. At the end, add up the votes cast. The groups with the most tally marks are most guilty, and those with the least tally marks are least guilty.
8. Note: In criminal trials, unanimous verdicts are required. Make sure that students don't go away thinking that people are convicted of crimes by majority vote.

Genocide of Native Californians Role Play

Trial Ballots

PHYSICAL GENOCIDE

CULTURAL GENOCIDE

Spanish Empire

De Las Casas

Sepúlveda

Catholic Church/Junípero Serra

Spanish Landowners

Spanish Army

Resisting California Indians

Compliant California Indians

TOTAL

- You have a total of 12 votes to cast for physical genocide and 12 votes for cultural genocide.
- You are limited to 0-3 votes per group. Zero votes means they are not responsible at all. Three votes means they are very responsible.
- Before turning it in, make sure your votes add up to 12 on each side.