

# UC Davis Patwin Memorial: Resistance in Plain Sight

ARISA BUNANAN



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*WRITER'S COMMENT: When I set out to write this paper for a UWP 101 class, it was initially going to be about why European colonization of the Americas should be taught as genocides. However, after a discussion with my professor, I realized the endeavor would be a herculean one, and with her encouragement to select a local topic, decided to analyze the Patwin Memorial on campus, and how monuments of a "post-colonial" world teach us about a colonial past. Throughout the process of writing this paper, I found my voice as an art historian. By considering the entirety of this monument, its aesthetics, its history, its creation, I discovered a space of reflection that asked of me to consider all of the nuances, the downfalls, and the triumphs of the memorial's existence. I would like to thank Dr. Karma Waltonen for her fearlessness and unapologetic teaching style that made me a braver writer, and Native American Studies PhD Candidate Jessa Rae Growing Thunder, for her wisdom and vivaciousness as a teacher of Native American Studies.*

*INSTRUCTOR'S COMMENT: In UWP 101, students are allowed to choose their own topic for their term paper. I was excited when Arisa Bunanan chose a memorial site to evaluate. The narratives we create about the past are powerful, meaning we have to be careful in crafting them—we have the responsibility to tell stories ethically and to understand how stories about the past shape our future. Exploring how UC Davis grapples with the history of the land and its peoples is part of that work. Arisa's essay is powerful. When it was finished, I urged her to send it to Prized Writing, but I also offered to let it be*

*a guest column on my museum blog. The Prized Writing judges were right to steal that opportunity from me.*

—Karma Waltonen, University Writing Program

Parceled within a dappled pocket of sunshine, a small, embedded garden sits along a dirt path, carved out in its own spatial and temporal niche. Pedestal-like basalt pillars mark the path winding down into a spiral sitting area beneath the shade of a monumental tree by the banks of the waterway; these pillars tell stories of “air . . . thick with the smoke of . . . cooking fires, as the women . . . prepare a meal for the children and the elders” (UC Davis, *Patwin Memorial*). The Patwin Memorial (Fig. 1) on the UC Davis campus plays a secluded, yet momentous role. Dedicated in 2011 after the discovery of Patwin Native remains beneath the construction site of the Mondavi Center in 2002 (UC Davis, *Native American Contemplative Garden*), it was installed as a tribute to the Indigenous peoples who once inhabited the area. The tribute can be construed as a placating measure on the part of the university for continuing the construction, despite of having found remains at the location of the multi-million dollar performance center. Neither this memorial, nor its task of commemorating Patwin people, is well known on campus, and while its size does not diminish its significance, the circumstances

surrounding its construction warrant an evaluation.

The Patwin Memorial, also known as the Native American Contemplative Garden, is located between the Mondavi Center and the School of Law’s King Hall. It was conceptualized by UC Davis students and faculty of Native descent, members of the Patwin



Figure 1. UC Davis, UC Davis Patwin Memorial, UC Davis Arboretum, Davis, California, 2011.

community, Sid England (Assistant Vice Chancellor for Sustainability

and Environmental Stewardship), campus arboretum officials, and Tammara Norton and her team from the Far Western Anthropological Research Group.

The present evaluation of this memorial is not meant to indict UCD's handling of the Mondavi gravesite. Rather, it examines the effects of two events side by side: the discovery of the gravesite, and the construction of the memorial. The success of the artistic elements and placement of the memorial, will also be examined alongside the nuances that prevent a judgment about the rightness or wrongness of its creation. These include whether or not it respectfully represents the ancestors of the Patwin people, and its contribution to the awareness of Native presence on campus and overall progress towards decolonization.

**In his article** "Democratizing Monuments," Michael Kammen defines the criteria a monument must meet in order to be considered democratic. He reasons that in order for a monument to come into existence within a democracy, it must include aspects of non-specificity, memory, and didacticism (Kammen 287). The Patwin memorial possesses all three aspects, due to its non-specific representation of people with stone pillars, the element of memory embedded in the non-specific shapes (a circle), and the didactic (teaching) purpose of the words written on the stones. The memorial's spiral motif, as Sid England explained, intends "to evoke California Native basketry" (Parker), an art form and utilitarian practice pivotal to Natives in California. The memorial also alludes to the shape of a circle, a powerful symbol in Native American culture and religion. A Native monument at the Smithsonian implements a similar focus: the *Warriors' Circle of Honor*, designed by Harvey Pratt (Fig. 2), as explained in the Native American publication *Indian Country Today* (Schilling). Pratt—a member of the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribe, a Marine Corps veteran, and a forensic artist—submitted the concept and design for the *Warriors' Circle of Honor*, and explains the sacredness of the "circle of life," as timeless, unwavering in Native culture, "a matter of simplicity . . . strong among people" (qtd. in Schilling). Both of these monuments share a contemplative purpose and seek to create a space for reflection. Given the surface-level evaluation of its physical elements, then, the Patwin Memorial clearly meets the democratic criteria laid out by Kammen.

A closer examination of the basalt stones, carved with descriptions



Figure 2. Harvey Pratt, Warriors' Circle of Honor, Smithsonian Washington D.C., 2018. The scheduled ground breaking is in 2019; it will be open sometime to the public in 2020.

of Patwin life in the area intended to put the visitor in the same space that Natives inhabited, reveals a striking duality within the monument. These vague, idyllic snippets of painted scenes of daily life of the Patwin “[i]magine this path without buildings or roads” (UC Davis *Patwin Memorial*), reminding one of mission plaques bearing sanitized versions

of American history devoid of the brutalities of settler colonialism. In “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor” (2012), Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang examine the power structure imposed by settler colonialism at the founding of the United States. Settler colonialism—as opposed to external colonialism, which focuses on exploiting goods for the betterment of the imperial country’s economy—requires the destruction of a population inhabiting the land that the settlers wish to occupy. This means that the construction of a settler colonial power structure must be re-asserted onto the inhabitants daily, in order for the settlers to maintain their status at the top of the hierarchy (Tuck and Yang 5). This concept encapsulates all past and modern day institutions of the United States, including UC Davis, whether a system’s acts of Native erasure are implemented consciously or unconsciously.

The pervasive unconscious rhetoric of settler colonialism is enforced by hegemony, or the social, cultural, ideological, or economic influence exerted by a dominant group. Related to the history of hegemony is Manifest Destiny, the settler colonist belief in the God-given right to expand into the west of North America. One may imagine the concept of Manifest Destiny—an expression of Western belief in technological and industrial progress as the ultimate goal of civilization—as a drop of red food coloring, hegemony (dominance by a group) as a spoon, and society as a glass of milk. The harmful rhetoric is stirred into society until such rhetoric becomes indistinguishable from society and difficult, if not impossible, to filter out. Hegemonic ideology of settler colonialism

creates an assumption that somehow the Natives simply just faded away, that the “savage” gave way to the “progressive,” because of the concept of Manifest Destiny. By only addressing the past and not the events that led to the present, vast swaths of oppressive history of movement into California, which employed tactics of genocide, are erased. Despite the memorial’s presence, it becomes a ghost-like stand in. Visitors can read the stone pillars and feel shallow nostalgia about the beautiful wilderness and people who once lived on this land without feeling guilty about being a part of a system that perpetuates the myth of peaceful colonization.

This bias and oversight would be worse if the memorial didn’t also have a central stone in the middle of the sitting space listing “the names of 51 members of the Patwin known to have inhabited the region and forcibly been relocated to missions from 1817 to 1836” (Parker). Although these names powerfully acknowledge the people lost, the pillar’s words leave out the settler colonist in the historic narrative: “Then, now, and always a part of this land. The names you see on this column come from mission records and are of Patwin people who lived on this land and were removed to missions between 1817 and 1836” (UC Davis *Patwin Memorial*). Because there is no mention of the forced labor, abuse, and cultural displacement inflicted upon the Patwin who were relocated and upon their families and tribes, the white settler is given the omnipresent, invisible status of being present in history without being blamed. There persists a haunting feeling, one that maintains an inability to identify the exploitation of Native peoples that occurred because Western institutions were, in no small part, built upon cruelty and disregard for (non-White) life.

Measured by Kammen’s standards, the memorial seems to satisfy all the requirements for a democratic monument. This measure falters, however, when contrasted with the manifestos of Indigenous scholars like Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang, who reassert the fact that the United States was founded upon stolen land, regardless of honorific memorials. No amount of democratic monuments will inspire an acceptance of a placating apology without actual redistribution of land to the descendants of the Patwin tribe. Regardless of Kammen’s credibility as a writer and a scholar, he maintains a stance rooted in a Western perspective, denying or effectively downplaying that this land was forcibly taken from Indigenous peoples and, as such, that the democracy constructed upon it—and any standards for compensatory monuments—is of questionable legitimacy.

Just as removing statues of Confederate generals does not equate the erasure of the historical event of Confederate secession and its racist values, “righting” the wrongs of historical narrative by including Native Americans in memorials does not change the fundamental fact that their lands were stolen, the United States Federal Government committed genocide against their peoples, and they live in resistance to the settler colonial regime. In the same vein, just because UC Davis implemented the Patwin Memorial doesn’t mean they didn’t still build the Mondavi Center on top of Patwin burial grounds.

**What if more students** became aware of circumstances surrounding the Mondavi Center and the Patwin Memorial? Might demonstrations follow? Awareness is undoubtedly important. Still, educational efforts and even protest should unfold in consultation with and guidance from the Native community. Vine Deloria Jr., a Standing Rock Sioux widely regarded as the father of Native American Studies, writes, “[E]verywhere an Indian turns, he is deluged with offers of assistance . . . but rarely does anyone ask an Indian what he thinks” (225). Eve Tuck attributes this eagerness to “inquiry as invasion,” a result of neo-liberal faith in research, a product of the settler’s colonial rhetoric of Western progress being the ultimate goal of civilization. She asks of scholars and researchers to consider three things about “inquiry as invasion” in universities: one, that minorities are asked to speak only about their pain; two, that there are some forms of knowledge institutions do not deserve; and three, that scholarly intervention may not be the kind needed (Tuck). While it is very easy to issue a collective call to action, it is just as important to take a step back and evaluate the implications of said call. To view this memorial as either a triumph of education of Patwin struggles or as simply a blundering token of compensation would be a mistake. While non-Indigenous students’ and scholars’ aid in helping Indigenous students and scholars to expand their platform and influence in academia is welcome, any deliberation by a non-Indigenous person regarding something Native (in this case, what to do with a complex monument) prevents true coalition and support. Since the past cannot be altered, examination of what was produced as a result of this situation is crucial.

Despite its smallness, its underlying influences of a settler colonial regime, and the circumstances around its construction, the Patwin Memorial possesses an emotional potency that cannot—indeed, must

not—be ignored. It is just as important to acknowledge the memorial's presence as it is to critique its underlying rhetoric because, despite its imperfections, it is still a product of collaboration that included Patwin members and students and faculty of Native descent. Rather than viewing the location beside King Hall as a diminishment, we should view the Patwin Memorial's presence here as a sign of resistance and endurance of the Native community. Jessa Rae Growing Thunder, an Assiniboine-Sioux and Ph.D. candidate from the Native American Studies Department of UC Davis, describes Native resistance as persistent, enduring, and omnipresent regardless of the iron grip of the settler colonist regime. She asked her Intro to Native American Studies students to look at the Patwin Memorial's modest size not as something inhibiting its influence, but as something that still communicates a powerful message through a dialogue spoken through architectural interplay. By placing the memorial next to the imposing rectangular length of the School of Law, the university intentionally or not enshrined the space as a symbol of Indigenous resistance. The memorial reminds us of the injustices done to the Indigenous peoples by the United States Federal Government and its unjust laws. The little garden, the personification of Indigenous populations reduced to a minority by the grueling settler colonial machine, stands tall and unwavering between two giants: the Mondavi Center, with its feet rooted in gravesite soil, and the School of Law, with historic blood on its hands.

This duality makes it difficult to classify the memorial as a benign act on the part of the university or as cynical compensation. The solution is to take to heart Growing Thunder's proposition to interpret it as a symbol of resistance, to enter this university-designated "Native American Contemplative Garden" and to use the space to contemplate—regardless of whether or not the resulting thoughts are what the university intended. We can use it perhaps to contemplate the events that brought the memorial into fruition, the disparity between funds allocated for the Mondavi Center (\$57 million) versus the Patwin Memorial (\$214,000), or the better purpose those funds could have served had they simply been given to the Native American Studies Department. The inherently contradictory nature of this memorial that is neither right nor wrong, neither black nor white, may encourage visitors and readers of this essay to understand that not everything is so clean cut. Something born of good intentions can have bad underlying motivations; this does not make

the product inherently good or bad, but complex and worthy of lengthy examination and discussion that can facilitate true change.

Clearly, we should not conflate the Patwin Memorial with something that it is not. It is not a step towards decolonization. It is not an authentic apology issued by the University of California, Davis for the construction of the Mondavi Center. And it is not the most adequate representation of the Patwin people. The memorial is, rather, an act of social activism, mixed with the pangs of a Western institution's attempt to mitigate a literal act of sacrilege. But the creation of the monument itself displays a willingness by the university to acknowledge a wrong that was done, and to extend a hand towards a better future built upon mutual understanding.

So what is the Patwin Memorial? It is neither an official apology issued by UC Davis, nor is it an untainted symbol of Patwin representation. It is, however, still a product of Native collaboration, despite the circumstances around which it rose, and due to its duality as a reminder of injustice and a representative space, it is a symbol of Indigenous resistance.

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