

Denial of Genocide in the California Gold Rush Era: The Case of Gary Clayton Anderson [ABSTRACT]

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This article critically examines historian Gary Clayton Anderson's attempt to deny that the treatment inflicted upon California's Indigenous people during the Gold Rush Era was genocide. Not only a matter of academic interest, this examination is also important to ongoing discussions following both California Governor Gavin Newsom's 2019 apology to California's Indigenous peoples for genocide and the creation of the Indigenous-led California Truth and Healing Council. Pointing out serious flaws in Anderson's argument that the population of California Indians in 1851 was much lower than historical demographer Sherburne Cook's widely accepted estimates, the article explains how Anderson consistently diminishes the extent of violence against Native California communities. The essay further considers problems with Anderson's criteria for genocide and his use of the category of "ethnic cleansing" as an alternative to genocide. It concludes with the proposal to take a structuralist approach to the issue, rather than an intentionalist one.

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