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ND: Hi there, this is Nate Duchene recording this podcast for English 492 senior thesis, Cal-State Northridge Professor Colleen Tripp. Today is December 10th.

ND: So what I want to talk about today is specifically manmade disparity of the old West. Specifically, natural resources, vast fortunes, the roots of colonialism, the old West, and putting it into an Aristotelian story arc, because that's what I know, even though I sort of resent it.

ND: So the story of Los Angeles and California is one of the concentration of wealth through the exploitation of natural resources and manmade scarcity. I mentioned this early in the class that I grew up in the Pacific Northwest and split my childhood between Seattle and Portland. Based upon my fragmented knowledge and of those two primary towns, apart from the gold rush and warfare that California had, the foundational governmental and industrial corruption is the same. In that light, I could spend time talking about the West as a whole, but since my wife and I have only lived in California for about a decade, I think it'd be a great occasion to speak more specifically about California and the history I learned in this class. So let's start off with the sort of the early history and mission systems. Specifically, the fundamental roots of California, that being.

ND: Spanish conquest and the Franciscan mission system from 1770-1803.

ND: I think Deborah Miranda said it really well in Bad Indians, which we read this quarter. The population of California native tribes before the Spanish Missions system was about a million people.

ND: Basically, the lives of those tribes kind of ended overnight. And over the course of 60 years, 80% of the indigenous population here died. I think she puts it well in quote she uses is that "the Franciscan missions in California were ill-equipped, badly managed places which were run by limited numbers of Spanish priests and soldiers with a plentiful capital of Indian labor. I mentioned this in class this quarter that we were at the Santa Barbara Mission a couple of years ago. The graveyard there is jammed full of the headstones, and it's really alarming to see how few of those headstones have Spanish names. Most of them Spanish Christian names on top of an indigenous surname, so that was sort of a giveaway to me on the plight of tribes here in California.

ND: So jumping into that book a little further in for California as part of Alta, California, Spanish-speaking province of New Spain until the 1822 Mexican Independence.

ND: And with the Treaty of Hidalgo in 1846 and the end of the Spanish American War, Mexico California ceded to America, but in 1848 gold was discovered at Sutter's Mill in the Sierra Nevada and. The cessation of California, along with the beginning of the gold rush had devastating consequences for both the Native Americans and Mexicans living in California. The pursuit of instant wealth drew an inbound crush of European American settlers to California.

ND: This caused widespread prospecting and violence. Most alarmingly, legislation that ran through both the state and federal governments, which approved a state-sponsored genocide of Native Americans in 1850. So really, the gold rush in 1848-1850 basically extinguish any possibility of normalcy for tribes in California. And really permanently severed them from the land. Now, disturbing as this is, I want to focus on the public resource for the thesis that I'm trying to support here—the land.

[00:06:38] So to quote my Native American Lit professor from last quarter, Scott Andrews at CSUN, "the purpose of colonialism was always, always about the land." In indigenous culture, the people belong to the land, while in a capitalist society, the land

belongs to people. So there is a natural sort of cultural incongruence, among other things, that dispossessed American tribes of their culture and identity.

ND: There is a great quote from Desmond Tutu about the European conquest of Africa.

ND: It's very fitting here because of the Spanish mission system, the Spanish conquest of California coming in under the auspices of religion. Desmond Tutu mentioned the European conquest of Africa, which similarly had some elements of religion as well.

ND: "When the missionaries came to Africa, they had the Bible and we had the land. He said, let us pray. We close their eyes. And when we opened them, we had the Bible and they had the land." This to me is very resonant here, given the experience of the author and tribes in California.

ND: So sort of moving on to rising action here with the story arc. Let's talk a little bit about Los Angeles Aqueduct in Chinatown. So is population of California grew throughout the second half of the 19th century.

ND: The boosterism era here in Southern California drew Americans to work in industries like motion pictures, aerospace, real estate, agriculture and beyond.

ND: This vast crush of population created a vacuum for another natural resource, one that is particularly lacking in supply in arid Southern California—water.

ND: So when water began to run dangerously low around the turn of the century, Chief engineer of Los Angeles, William Mulholland looked up to the Owens Valley in the Eastern Sierras. He devised a plan and lobbied for Los Angeles voters to approve a $1.5 billion bond to purchase land and water.

ND: So the inauguration of the work on what would become the L.A. aqueduct, which was completed in 1913. Well, I find sort of very fitting in my thesis here is that as that was going on 1905-1913, Mulholland equipped, a syndicate of moguls, the San Fernando syndicate, with some very familiar names with the information to buy of land in the San Fernando Valley to profit from the newly irrigated land of the former high desert.

ND: Robert Towne, native Angelino and legendary screenwriter with dozens of sort of household credits for Hollywood films, recreated and laid out this whole scheme brilliantly in Polanski's 1974 film, Chinatown.

ND: Just to set the scene I want to describe, the city engineer Hollis Mulwray, who is based on Mulholland, refused to build a new reservoir in Los Angeles due to a previous accident. This was based upon the St. Francis Dam accident in nineteen twenty eight, which killed 431 Angelenos when it failed.

ND: Jake Gittes hears Mulwray at a hearing as he lays out his case for rejecting the reservoir. He turns up dead shortly thereafter. This prompts the Gittes, Jack Nicholson's character, to take on the case.

ND: Being prompted by Hollis's actual wife, Evelyn, this case specifically the the plot of. This municipal plot is this is the spine of the film. Gittes uncovers the San Fernando Syndicate plan to runoff water to build pressure on the city and Hollis, as well as to buy up land in the valley to profit from the new reservoir.

ND: However, before Gittes does take on the case, and there are two expository scenes that really emphasize thesis that I'm trying to make here and support here. Specifically Gittes observing Mulwray at the ocean and searching for Mulwray at Stone Canyon Reservoir.

ND: First, after Gittes watches Mulwray speak at City Hall, he follows him to a dry riverbed and then to a beach where after a day of of watching the man stare out at the sea, he witnesses a deluge of freshwater running off into the ocean. This all seems very abstract at the moment and makes little sense. It's one of those films you have to see multiple times before it really registers. But, it pays off eventually.

ND: It turns out that the reasoning behind Gittes staking out or spying on Mulwray was a ruse to ruin Mulwrays name and it was setup by the San Fernando syndicate by Noah Cross to basically get what he wants—the new reservoir.

ND: So after Gittes finds out he's been setup with the fake case, he's confronted by Mulwray's actual wife, Evelyn. She asks him to go up to Stone Canyon Reservoir to look for Hollis, who is now missing. Later Mulwray turns up dead, but Gittes discovers that water is being intentionally siphoned off into the ocean for the purposes of building the new reservoir.

ND: As I mentioned, of pushing forward the agenda of the syndicate. He eventually uncovers the full scheme to profit off the Public Works project again, which points back to the accumulation and controlling access to California's natural resources for individual gain.

ND: The last issue I want to point to here is Who Framed Roger Rabbit and specifically public access to low cost transportation. I've spoken about natural resources, land and water, for instance. Now I want to talk about a manmade resource—infrastructure.

ND: So in California, infrastructure particularly includes roads, aqueducts, railways, amongst many other things. L.A. is a large town in terms of square mileage. I think I've read that it's 60% larger than New York City with half the population density. So with that measure, there's a lot of additional ground that people have to cover and the city of L.A. has long been bemoaned nationally and internationally, for that matter, as difficult to navigate due to its size and the fact that it is clogged with traffic and smog. But like everything else that I'm discussing in this podcast, both of these were the result of private enterprise. They were created by design.

ND: From roughly from roughly 1901-1951 different iterations of the Pacific Red Car Railway system provided low-cost streetcar service all over L.A. County and beyond is actually electric as well, so very light on consumption of natural resources. So, from 1938-1950, a cartel of companies including notably General Motors, Firestone and Standard Oil Trust of California, invested in a what you would call a shell company now with an unsuspicious name, National City Lines that invested in and gain control of transit systems in 25 cities all over the US, Oakland, as well as Los Angeles.

ND: However, the purpose of the investment was to reduce the availability of public transit and to increase the public reliance on cars, roads and fossil fuels. Now, what I

realized prior to this class, I've heard of this scheme previously, but what I hadn't realized prior to this class is that the conspiracy was actually proven in a court of law.

ND: In 1949, National City Lines investors were convicted of monopolizing interstate commerce. So it's not only some sort of conspiracy theory, it was proven in a court of law. So I guess if anybody ever asked me that in the future, I can point to this case.

ND: So the General Motors streetcar conspiracy theory was dramatized in 1988 in Who Framed Roger Rabbit as fictitious Cloverleaf Industries schemes to buy ToonTown, which for all intents and purposes, is akin to a public housing project.

ND: Also in the scheme is the red car system. The plan is to pave them both over with freeways.

ND: Now, at the beginning of the film, we see Eddie Valiant. Is a struggling drunk guy who has basically no reason to have a car because the public transit system is so robust. Over the course of the film, we see that there is a strong public reliance of lower to middle class Angelenos on the transit system, which judge Judge Doom Christopher Lloyd's character is scheming with another syndicate is to diminish and force the public to have a reliance on cars. Roads. And fossil fuels, so forth.

ND: While this isn't a natural resource like land and water, I do think that infrastructure is a public resource, one that the public should have wide unfettered access to. However these are resources that are built with public money and yet like land and water, all three of them have been manipulated and a scarcity has been created so as to accumulate a vast fortunes.

ND: And I think this is sort of part and parcel for capitalism, but specifically it is part of the American experience.

ND: Thank you very much.