(Mis)Remembering the American West
Public Memory and the Erasure of Indigenous History in Telluride, CO

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ABSTRACT

This essay engages with structures of public memory in the small town of Telluride in connection with larger historical patterns in Colorado and the American West. Exploring how white settler colonialism and consequent structures of white supremacy have manifested in processes of social reproduction, it uses an ethnographic approach to analyze historic structures, informational plaques, and memorials in Telluride. It concludes that Telluride has emphasized its mining history, excluding the Ute Native American Tribe from its public memory and, consequently erasing histories of violence and land dispossession.

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT **2**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS **3**

PREFACE **5**

INTRODUCTION **7**

LITURATURE AND BACKGROUND **9**

SETTLER COLONIALISM, WHITE SUPREMACY, AND THE AMERICAN WEST 9

WHITE SUPREMACY AND SPATIALIZED VIOLENCE 14

PUBLIC MEMORY AND THE PROCESSES OF REMEMBERING 16

HISTORY OF THE SAN MIGUEL MOUNTAINS 19

METHODS **24**

DATA AND ANALYSIS **25**

CONCLUSION **36**

BIBLIOGRAPHY **39**

PREFACE

I have spent the past four years of my college career in a microcosm of a changing world. The fall of my senior year of high school in 2016, a highly controversial presidential race resulted with the election of Donald Trump to the executive office of the United States. This stark shift in American leadership affirmed a somewhat unrecognized facet of American culture, as white nationalist hate groups grew by 55% in the first two years after Trump's election (SPLC, 2020). I began college far from my home state of Colorado the same year that Trump took office. In 2017, I was a freshman at Middlebury College. Just a semester earlier, Middlebury had been enveloped in its own controversial event, with the invitation and campus-wide protest of Charles Murray—an American political scientist who has been labeled as an eugenicist by the Southern Poverty Law Center (Middlebury College, 2017; SPLC, n.d.). When I arrived at Middlebury, institution-wide conversations where underway to understand what had happened during that event, and what it meant to the Middlebury Community. Being a part of those conversations, I began to understand the importance of critiquing the communities I am a part of and working to understand them for what they are and not just what they appear to be. In the fall of 2019, I transferred to the University of Colorado in Boulder. That spring, everything shifted with the spread of the COVID-19 virus and the beginning of the world-altering coronavirus pandemic. As this disease spread across the US, social and racial inequalities became more visible with infections and deaths disproportionately affecting minority communities (Godoy & Wood, 2020). Then, that summer of 2020, after the violent killing of George Floyd, protestors of police brutality and racial inequity took to the street, becoming the US's largest ever social movement (Buchanan et al., 2020). All this happened as I shifted into my final year of college.

Having spent these past four years as a citizen and resident of the United States, and as a student at two different academic institutions, I have learned many lessons. One, in particular, has influenced the development of this project. I have learned the importance of examining the places that we spend time in and communities that we ourselves are a part of, to understand the way that they interact with larger systems, cultures, and societal patterns.

I grew up on the Western Slope of Colorado in a ranching town that sits between the San Juan Mountains and the Utah Desert. I attended school and spent most of my childhood in Telluride, CO. As I have gotten older, I have begun to reflect on this community and my place within it, identifying as a white woman. I have begun to question Telluride's history, growth and change, as it has become the celebrated resort town it is today—and I have also begun to reflect on its whiteness. This project has grown out of my study of geography, my interest in art and visuals, my curiosity for how the nuances of our environment affect us, and out of my wanting to deepen my understanding of the area that has, in many ways, been a home for me. Through this project, I wish to start a small conversation about how one of the communities that I am intimately familiar with is connected to larger patterns that shape spaces, places, and experiences across the American landscape.

INTRODUCTION

The year 2020 has prompted a lot of reflection not just into American histories of slavery, oppression, and injustice, but also how these histories are portrayed and reproduced in public structures. Some of the US's largest protests surrounding the Black Lives Matter Movement occurred in the summer of 2020 (Buchanan et al., 2020). One result of this racial reckoning across the states has been the removal and demolishment of Confederate monuments, including the removal of previous Speaker of the House of Representative's Portraits from Capitol Hill due to their connections with the confederacy (Kelsey, 2020). The removal of these statues, portraits, and memorials has prompted the deeper question, *what* in US history have we celebrated, and *what* have we forgotten? How is history shaped by the way that it is remembered and embodied in a landscape?

Most engagement with these questions has revolved around the Confederacy and the US South, exploring links between space, power, race, and memory (Shackel, 2001). However, US histories of violence extend from the initial colonization and expansion of the US to Western 'discovery' and frontier settlement to contemporary environmental struggles. It is important not to forget that American lands have been stewarded by the First Nations for thousands of years (Stoffle et al., 2018), and the displacement of Indigenous Peoples has been deeply central to the American origin story that occurred previously to and concordant with the enslavement of Africans. However, much of Native American history has been lost, forgotten, or disengaged with by the American public and, more specifically, by white America. Structures of public memory have removed Native Peoples from US memory. The memorialization and imbedded information in the landscape of the American West, in particular, illustrates the violence, dispossession, and erasure of indigenous people. This is particularly true in the state of Colorado,

which, through land struggles, treaties, Euro-American encroachment, and indigenous dispossession has come to be celebrated as one of the most beautiful environments in the American West.

This thesis analyzes the violent histories of the American West, exploring the ways that settler colonization, white supremacy, and indigenous erasure have played into the development of western states, focusing on Colorado and the Ute Nation. I introduce geographic concepts, including environment-human interactions, social reproduction in material culture, and processes of spatialization in the context of the American West. I also use concepts of public memory to demonstrate the way that public structures can act to remember specific histories or to forget others. Exploring Telluride, Colorado and the larger San Miguel County, I point to two specific public sites and unpack how a mining town turned elite ski resort has interacted with larger patterns of historical violence. Using the structure of a walking ethnography, I demonstrate how everyday spaces in Telluride have been constructed through white-settler frameworks. I conclude with examples of how institutions across the West can begin to reconcile with violent pasts by restructuring public memory to include histories that extend beyond the settler colonial project.

LITURATURE AND BACKGROUND

Settler Colonialism, White Supremacy, and the American West

The founding of the United States and its continued growth and evolution has been shaped by processes of settler colonialism. Settler colonialism is defined by Bonds and Inwood as "the *permanent* occupation of a territory and removal of indigenous peoples with the express purpose of building an ethnically distinct national community" (2015, emphasis in original). Applying this definition to the colonization and founding of the US, we can understand the processes that dispossessed First Nations and indigenous peoples from their traditional territories as Euro-American settlers claimed land and settled in the Americas. It is important to understand settler colonialism not as a historical artifact, an economic process, or an act of globalization, but as an operational system that has and continues to shape settler societies, including the US (Banivanua-Mar & Edmonds, 2010; Pulido, 2017; Reed, 2020).

Histories of colonization in the US began with European exploration and expansion hundreds of years ago. In the fifteenth century, with the European 'discovery' of the lands that we now know as the Americas, processes of settler colonialism began to rearrange both the landscape and people. The lives and territories of indigenous peoples who have lived on these lands for centuries were inextricably impacted as western exploration and settlement encroached on native lands (Mann, 2005). Understanding western expansion as a form of conquest, it is clear that exploration and settlement in the US where forms of invasion (Limerick, 1987). Both through direct violence, land theft, and through the continued repercussions of settler impact, indigenous people experienced genocide through the settlement of US lands (Reed, 2020).

Western claim to new lands across the American West was contingent on the disappearance of native peoples from these lands (Bonds & Inwood, 2015). The First Nations have stewarded the land across the US for centuries. However, by the end of the sixteenth century, the land and people in the American West—both through direct contact with settlers and through consequences of settlement and colonization—had been severely altered (Mann, 2005). By the nineteenth century, "westering Anglo-Americans had persistently seen 'new' areas as virgin, undeveloped, untouched wilderness despite the obvious presence of natives and despite the abundance of earlier Euro-American influences and activities" (Limerick, 1987, p. 15). Though the lands that settlers were encountering were, by no means, unexplored or unknown to man, westerners saw these lands as unclaimed and untapped resources and self-justified their taking. Traditional settler colonialist frameworks paint white settlers as "pioneers, frontiersmen, and bringers of civilization to the west." Consequently, Indigenous Peoples have been understood in settler stories and histories as "savages who were not making proper use of the land and its resources" (Limerick, 1987, p. 90). Through this framework, Native Americans are dehumanized and assumed to be uncivilized. Consequently, western expansion is understood as "progress." However, this understanding of the history of western expansion is steeped in harmful, dehumanizing conceptualization. It is important to begin to reframe this understanding of history to understand the full consequences of settler colonialization and resulting land dispossession from Indigenous Peoples was, and continues to be a form of extreme violence (Reed, 2020). In doing so, we can begin to uncover a more complete and honest understanding of US history.

The colonization and settlement of the Americas has coupled with the rise of white supremacy and racist ideology to justify the dispossession of lands from indigenous

communities. White supremacy is best understood as an institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation that harms people of color and privileges whiteness. Geographer Laura Pulido defines white supremacy through three key terms: awareness, taking, and believed racial superiority (2015). Awareness pertains to white communities understanding—though often partial—of the presence importance of people of color. In the context of continued native land dispossession, awareness applies to settlers awareness that US land was stewarded by Native Peoples. Taking applies to the act of land dispossession, which continues today through the development and governance of US land by the federal government. Believed racial superiority applies to the racial processes that have been and continue to be used to justify the colonial project. These processes include capital development, economic development, and resource extraction (Reed, 2020).

Colonialism, white supremacy, and resulting structures of racism are inextricable. The ideology of white supremacy has justified colonial projects by justifying white action. Racist ideologies that "constructed indigenous people as less than fully human" were an key part of colonial processes (Pulido, 2017, p. 572). Traditional understandings of racism define it as an individual action or bias against a person or community due to their race or ethnicity. However, a fuller definition of racism identifies the larger systems of oppression and violence that target people of color. The National Council of Churches Racial Justice Working Groups offers the explanation of racism as the "intentional or unintentional use of power to isolate, separate, and exploit others" (Energy Justice Network). They explain that, "both consciously and unconsciously, racism is enforced and maintained by legal, cultural, religious, educational, economic, political, environmental and military institutions of societies" (Energy Justice Network). The compounded effects of racism maintain a structure of white supremacy. These

structures have been key to the maintenance of colonial societies. White supremacy has acted as a "central organizing logic of western modernity, legitimating both European colonization and settler projects" (Bonds & Inwood, 2015, p. 720).

Historically, white supremacy and colonialism justified the invasion and dispossession of Indigenous lands in the US, for example through the Euro-American settlement of Colorado. However, just as settler colonialism is a perpetuated process, white supremacy is the best term to describe the continued reproduction of violence and land dispossession that has had a profound impact on the shape of US society. This impact can be seen both in social and material production—meaning our relationships with each other, to our economies, and in our physical landscape. White supremacy is a mechanism that acts to "underscore the material production and violence of racial structures and the hegemony of whiteness in settler societies" (Bonds & Inwood, 2015, p. 716). White supremacy is ingrained in social, political, and economic structures. As such, white supremacy manifests in the landscape, arranging geographies of people, places, and the relationships between them. One goal of this project is to apply the concept of settler colonialism and white supremacy to critique the spatialization and reproduction of white-settler landscapes in Colorado, as exemplary of the American West.

Colorado serves as an example of the invasion of the west by Euro-American settlers. The contemporary state of Colorado sits on land that was stewarded by native peoples for thousands of years; evidence of First Nations in the area has been traced back over 13,000 years (Stoffle et al., 2018). Forty-eight contemporary tribal nations are tied to Colorado's lands. However, this essay focuses primary on the Ute Indians, whose tradition lands included the territory in Colorado west of the front range of the Rocky Mountains, as well as much of Utah, parts of southern Wyoming, and Northern New Mexico. Ute history is discussed further in a later

section. Ute lands are estimated to have covered over 130,000 square miles (see *Map 1*) (Stoffle et al., 2018).

The US Territory of Colorado was created in 1861, but it was before that in 1859 that the Colorado Gold Rush began (THM, 2021). This gold rush brought a flood of settlers into what is contemporary Colorado. In this process, "Euro-Americans continued to encroach, use, usurp, and desire lands legally recognized by the USA government as belonging to the Ute people" (Stoffle et al., 2018, p. 7). As this happened, "these intruders sought both legal and moral arguments for taking these Ute lands, but mostly they used raw force" (Stoffle et al., 2018, p. 7). As westerners saw wealth in the resources of Colorado, including farmlands and mineral extraction, they invaded these lands. The Ute signed their first treaty with settlers in 1863, which reduced and confined their lands. However, settlers consumed with "gold fever" saw those boundaries as a threat to progress (Limerick, 1987; Park & Pellow, 2011). In 1868, another treaty was signed, reducing land, regulating Utes to reservations, and with loopholes giving privileges and access to Euro-Americans (Park & Pellow, 2011). Processes such as these were justified by colonial mindsets. Reed explains, "the Gold Rush marks a legacy of American Colonialism that relegated indigenous lands and bodies as wastelands" (Reed, 2020, p. 33). For most Anglo-American settlers, the process of coming to and "bringing civilization" Colorado "meant displacing the native, establishing and allocating property claims" of indigenous peoples, and "installing territorial, country, and town government, and setting up schools, colleges, and churches" (Limerick, 1987, p. 5). This began the process of white-settler reproduction in Colorado lands. The justification that allowed settlers to settle in these lands was rooted in concepts of colonial claim and white supremacy, which delegitimized those who already lived in those lands, saw their use of the lands as ineffective, and forcibly removed them from it.

White Supremacy and Spatialized Violence

Slow Violence is a concept that can help illustrate the violence caused by structures of settler colonialization and white supremacy. The settler project has caused lots of violence toward indigenous people. This violence in perpetuated today (Reed, 2020). White supremacy also maintains systems which cause intangible acts of violence. These types of violence, which often happen indirectly or over time, are prevalent today as we no longer live in an era of mass colonization but rather a society that has been shaped by structures of settler colonialization. Typically, we understand violence as a direct or intentional action that leads to an obvious, physical outcome. Slow violence, however, expands traditional definitions of violence to understand the slow and often unseen harm that an implicate act of violence can cause; slow violence is "characterized by ambiguous but not absent outcomes" (Rice, 2016, p. 176). Though the results of slow violence are present, they are not always easily quantifiable and often take a long time to manifest. The defining characteristics of slow violence are incremental onset, ambiguity, a lack boundary, and a lack of salience (p. 177). Slow violence is not always obvious because the consequences of violent actions are not always present immediately. However, an act of slow violence can cause immense harm to individuals and communities.

Slow violence is often used in the context of toxins or other nonvisible actors and their effect on human bodies and health. A common example would be long term asbestos exposure and the development of cancer (Rice, 2016). However, I wish to expand this concept as a way to explain the violence that white supremacy continues to manifest today. By acknowledging that violence can result in forms of harm other than physical ailments, we can understand the corrosive effects that white supremacy and racism have on people of color. The harm experienced by communities of color and, in the specific case of this project, indigenous

communities, through the built environments of white supremacy can be understood as slow violence. White supremacy is a form of violence that manifests in structural undertones that pervade inequalities and initiate harm towards communities of color. In this way, white supremacy and the systems and institutions that it maintains constitute a form on violence that is ambiguous, shrouded in larger political, economic, and social structures. These systems pervade processes of cultural production and reproduction. For this essay, I apply the concept of slow violence and white supremacy to the creation and maintenance of public memory and landscape and ultimately influencing the shape of public spaces.

One example that can be used to illustrate the violence of spatialized white supremacy is land dispossession and forced reservations of indigenous people. As discussed by Reed, "the theft of [indigenous] land was an important component of genocide" (2020). As settlers moved west and claimed entitlement to lands rich with resources and ecological wealth, indigenous peoples were displaced from these lands. As a result of Euro-American encroachment, reservations were created, drawing borders around areas that were often resource poor and far from Native people's traditional lands. The creation of reservations has played a large role in the dispossession of indigenous lands (Loften & Vaughan-Lee, 2019). As Park and Pellow write, "The displacement of natives from mineral rich lands and their relegation to reservations is a time-honored example of the use of borders and violence to maintain white supremacy and environmental privilege" (2011 p. 75). In the case of the Ute Indians, the first Ute reservations were drawn in 1868. However, in the late 1870s, the Governor of Colorado, Fredrick Pitkin adopted the slogan "The Utes Must go" and "fully supported tribal displacement and genocide." Pitkin advocated for "exclusive environmental privilege for whites" (p. 74). The Utes were pushed further west from their traditional homelands and the Colorado Territory was

overwhelmed with western settlers. This was an act of violence justified by concepts of white supremacy. Today, however, there are three Ute Reservations across the Colorado and Utah (see *Map 1*). Though the creation of these reservations is historical, the violence of their creation continues to harm Indigenous People. The repercussions of removal from traditional lands perpetuated violence toward Native People through separations from traditional lands and dispossession of ecological resources This is an example of slow violence.

Public Memory and the Processes of Remembering

Legacies of settler colonialism are perpetuated through structures of public memory. These processes continue to influence not just the physical shape of land, but also our collective understanding of this land.

Public memory is a type of memory that is formed by material objects; public features such as landscape, memorials; and social features that invoke engagement with the past. In this thesis, I focus primarily physical structures. Different forms of memory—including individual memories, social memories, and collective memories—work together to create public memory and historical understanding (Casey, 2004). Individual memories are unique to a single person. Social memories are shared by related groups or communities of people. Collective memories offer a way for unrelated people to remember and event from different perspective. Public memories are facilitated by all of these types of memory, creating greater understandings of events that are shared by larger social and societal groups (Casey, 2004). Public memories provide a structure from which "experiences of the past are cultivated and contained" (Phillips, 2010, p. 217). In doing so, public memories shape personal, social, regional, and national identities (Casey, 2004).

Public memory is important because it not only commemorates the past, but it also acts to shape the present. It offers a “reflection of present political and social relations” just as much as provides a reflection of history (Shackel, 2001, p. 656). Essentially, public memory interacts just as much with the present as it does with the past: “public memory is both attached to the past *and* acts to ensure a future of further remembering of that same event” (Casey, 2004, p. 17, emphasis in origional). Because of how memory can shape understandings of the past, it is important to consider how structures of public memory influence different aspects of everyday life.

Social reproduction is a term that describes the processes that “maintain everyday life and sustain human cultures and communities on a daily basis and intergenerationally” (Di Chiro, 2008, p. 281). Social reproduction occurs in political, economic, social, cultural, material, and environmental realms. In this thesis, I extend social reproduction to understand the ways the public memory acts to both create and maintain everyday life. When thinking about public memory in terms of social reproduction, we can understand not just how history shapes the present, but how public memory is remembered acts to maintain social, cultural, and societal structures.

Power dynamics play a large role in the creation of public memory. Official memory is often imposed by the elite, or those who hold privilege and power (Shackel, 2001). Memory can be shaped to “exclude an alternative past” or to “develop a sense of nostalgia to legitimize a particular heritage” (p. 657). In the context of settler colonialism, public memory in the US has been shaped and reinforced through structures of white supremacy, legitimizing settler histories, justifying settler land claims, and overwriting Native histories. Banivuana-Mar and Edmonds

contend that “the impact of settler colonialism is starkly visible in the landscapes it produces” (2010). Their examples include:

> the symmetrically surveyed divisions of land; fences, roads, powerlines, dams and mines; the vast mono-cultural expanses of single-cropped fields; carved and preserved national forest, and marine and wilderness parks; the expansive and gridded cities; and the socially coded areas of human habitation and trespass that are bordered, policed and defended. Land and the organized spaces on it, in other words, narrate the stories of colonization. (p. 2)

Beyond subtle features of the landscape, there are larger features, such as place names, and memorials that more directly perpetuate settler colonialism and white supremacy. For example, a recent survey found that nearly 1,500 federally recognized places’ names contain racial or other slurs, many of which are connected to indigenous histories (TWS, 2020). In using slurs or hurtful language, these place names perpetuate violence towards native peoples. In another example, writing about Boulder, Colorado, Limerick writes that for people interacting with spaces in and around the city, “the last thought on their minds is the idea of Colorado as a conquered, occupied territory, with a history of racial hatred and violence.” The violence that pervades Colorado history and the dispossession of Indigenous Lands can seem “lightyears away from the Colorado we know” (1987, p. 96). These examples show the ways in which contemporary public spaces can be shaped by settler colonialism: “The power dynamics of white supremacy, which center on whiteness and racism, act to shape and maintain the physical environment and public memory” (Shackel, 2001). Settler violence can be perpetuated through the memories that these places maintain and the perspectives that they perpetuate. This can be seen though the history of the state of Colorado and the Ute First Nation

History of the San Miguel Mountains

Ute History

The Ute Tribe is made up of seven bands, including the Yampa, Unitah, Parinuchu (Grand River), Uncompahgre, Mouacha, Capote, Weeminuche (Ute Mountain Ute). The name we know this tribe by today, Ute, is a Spanish derivative of Nuchu, meaning "the People" and the traditional name of the Ute (THM, 2021). The Ute were known to settlers as nomadic people, moving with the seasons. However, there is evidence that they practiced irrigated farming as well before the encroachment of settlers and the adoption of the horse, introduced by Spanish explorers 1600s (Stoffle et al., 2018; THM, 2021). Misrepresentations of Ute culture such as this played a role in the dispossession of Ute lands. Stoffel and others explain:

> The key argument for forcing treaties extinguishing Ute land title was that the lands should be used in the highest and best way - that is for farming and mining - as defined by Anglo- Christian dogma…Failing to recognize that the Ute people had been farmers before the horse, and that Spanish trade had already changed their economy, colonial settlers increasingly argued that the Utes did not farm (an assumption never questioned) and therefore should lose their land. It was argued that the Ute people had failed to evolve both socially and biologically towards 'Civilized Society'. (2018, p. 7)

Traditionally, different bands of Utes lived, ranged, and hunted on lands that, today, are included in the states of Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, and Arizona (see *Map 1*). In the 1860s, however, the Utes signed their first treaties with the U.S. government, giving US authority and access to lands. By the 1880s, the Utes had been pushed out of their territory in Colorado and

into Utah. By the end of the 1800s, they were regulated to reservations through treaties and land allotments (THM, 2021).

The San Miguel Mountains lay in the middle of traditional Ute territory. San Miguel is a Spanish name, but these mountains are known to the Utes as the "Shining Mountains" and were used as seasonal hunting territory, where family groups would travel in the summertime to hunt elk, dear, and other animals. After treaties signed by the Utes and US government reduced Ute lands to southwest corner of Colorado, this area remained in Ute territory. However, in the early 1870s trespassing settlers began prospecting for gold in these mountains. A treaty signed in 1873 ceded these mountains to the US government (THM, 2021). After that, histories of mining and Euro-American Settlement were solidified.

Today, there are 3 recognized Ute Indian reservations. The Yampa, Uintah, Grand river, and Uncompahgre Tribes are associated with the Northern Ute Indian Reservation in Utah. The Mouache and Capote are associated with the Southern Ute Indian Reservation in southwest Colorado. The Ute Mountain Ute are associated with a small reservation also located in southwestern Colorado (see *Map 1*) (THM, 2021).

Telluride, CO

Telluride, Colorado, is a small town settled in a box canyon in the southwest corner of Colorado. It is the largest city and local municipality in San Miguel County, named for the surrounding San Miguel Mountains and San Miguel River that is head-watered in these mountains. This area borders the Uncompahgre National Forest Area and the Uncompahgre Plateau. I chose to engage with Telluride for this project because, in many ways, it represents an

intersection of both rural and elite communities in Colorado. It is highly celebrated for its landscape of beautiful mountains, and the town itself is intimately connected to its environment. Telluride, in many ways, mirrors larger historical patterns of Colorado and the west, founded by mining and sustained by tourism. Both as a historical mining town and as a contemporary resort town, Telluride's economy has always been deeply reliant on its natural resources, whether they be minerals or stunning views and outdoor access. Because of this relationship, Telluride is an exemplary place to begin to analyze the way that Colorado and larger US's history is represented in landscape.

Telluride was officially established as a town in 1878 in the San Miguel Mining District. This was two years after Colorado received statehood and became the 38th state in the union in 1876. Originally, Telluride was named Columbia, but the name was changed in 1887. Telluride remained a small mining town until the crash of gold and silver markets in late 1800s and early 1900s. In the 1960, the town population began to grow again, and in 1972 the Telluride Ski resort opened. By the mid 1970s, Telluride transitioned from a mining-based economy to a tourism-based economy (THM, 2021). Today, the town is widely visited for its scenic mountain views, renowned ski resort, golf course, and hiking trail.

Despite huge fluctuations of visitors throughout the year, Telluride consists of a small community of locals. It has a population that hovers around 2,000 people, with major tourist visits fluctuating throughout the year. Its population demographics break down into 77% white (10% higher than the rate in Colorado), 18% Hispanic, 4% Asian, 1% Native American, 0% Black (Census Reporter, 2019). Telluride has a tourist driven economy and a renowned ski resort. It had landed in the top 10 ski resorts in North America several years running by various organizations— including #1 ski resort by Conde Nast Traveler six years out of the last seven,

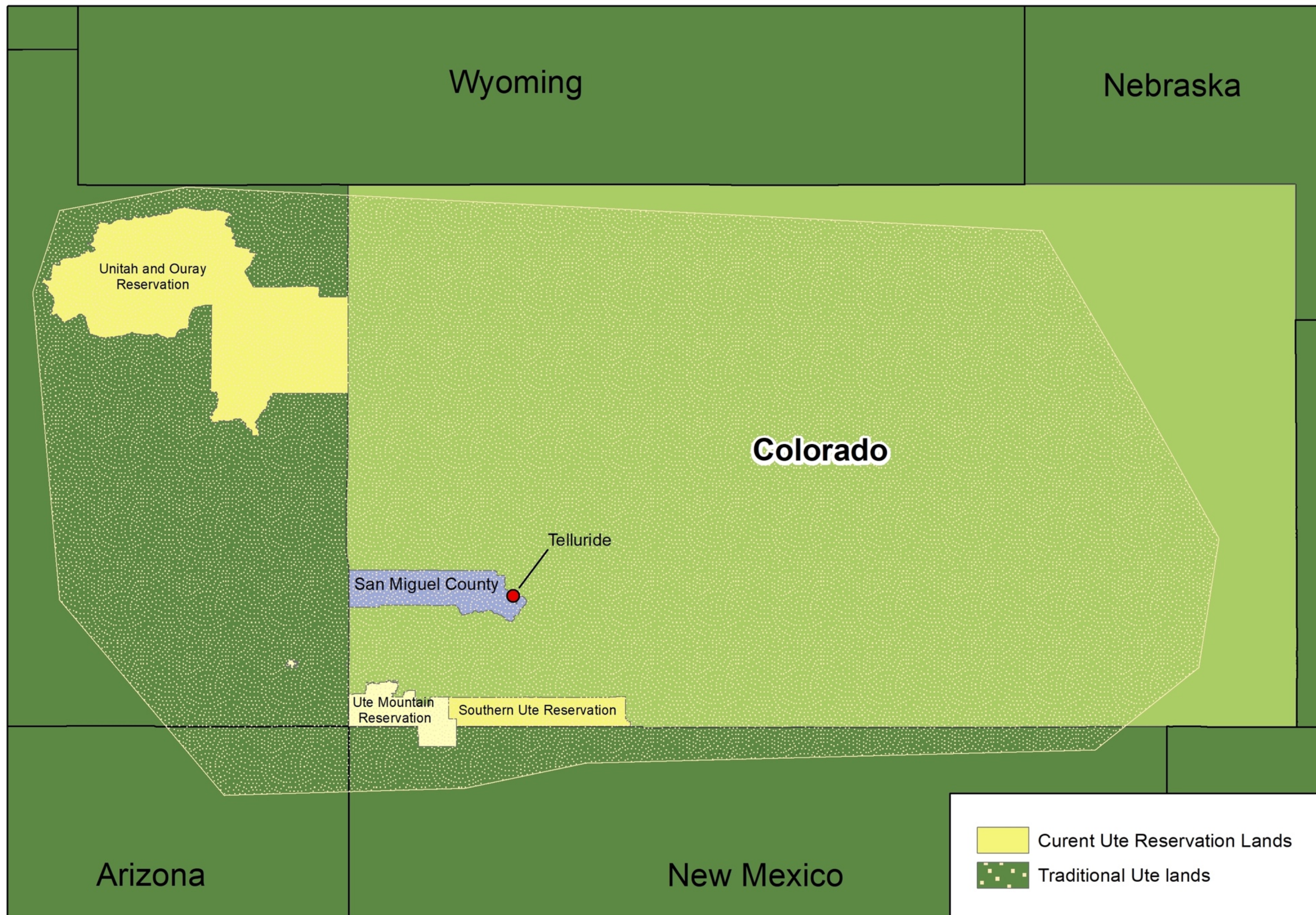
and #2 on Forbes list (Sander, 2020; Steiner, n.d.; Temblador, 2018; U.S. News, n.d.). Due to demand and limited space, a quick look at Telluride real estate markets shows that few, if any, houses sell for under a few million dollars in Telluride. Even so, many houses in the Telluride area are second (or even third or fourth) homes for wealthy elite and sit empty for much of year.

In 1964, Telluride was designated as a National Historic Landmark. The Town of Telluride website reads on its 'History of Telluride' page:

> Due to its significant role in the history of the American West, the core area of Telluride was designated a National Historic Landmark District…This listing is the highest level of historic status available to sites designated by the United States Secretary of the Interior. Telluride is one of only four other Colorado communities with this honor. (telluride-co.gov, n.d.)

The town also has a historical museum, which is housed in one of the most historical buildings left in the town. The museum sits a block from the main downtown road, in a building that was once a hospital. It is dedicated to the development and growth of Telluride as a town (there is one small room in the museum dedicated to its history pre-mining, with two walls detailing the geologic history of Telluride, and two walls with information on the Ute People, and early Euro-American exploders). This provides an example of Telluride's pride as a mining town.

Map 1: Traditional Ute Territory



METHODS

Through this project, I engage with Telluride's physical landscape and prominent memorials to understand specific structures of public memory, and how they commemorate and reinforce in Telluride's history. The town of Telluride itself covers 2.2 square miles. However, with several subdivisions—including Mountain Village and Lawson Hill—I chose to focus on spaces that are within the limits of historic boundaries of Telluride. I center my analysis on two main public sites are used in order to do this, which I have chosen because of their popularity and central location in Telluride: The Court House and Elks Park in downtown Telluride and the Gondola Station. Both of these locations are icon spaces in Telluride, easily recognizable landmarks that sit central to the downtown area and are only a few short blocks apart. They are interacted with by tourists and locals alike. I picked these two locations from reflection of my lived experience in Telluride, attending school and living in the area for over 20 years. They are spaces that, to my experience, embody an 'everydayness' of the Telluride lifestyle.

In collecting data and conducting analysis, I was inspired by techniques of walking ethnographies (Cheng, 2014). In analyzing how structures of public memory underwrite the 'everyday' experience in Telluride, I choose to approach data collection through an everyday method. Through the months of February and March of 2021, I spent several days walking though the Telluride downtown, using a camera to focus my attention and to capture material objects that embody public memory in public spaced around Telluride. Combining these experiences with my intimate knowledge of Telluride, I chose to direct most of my attention to Elks Park and the Gondola Plaza.

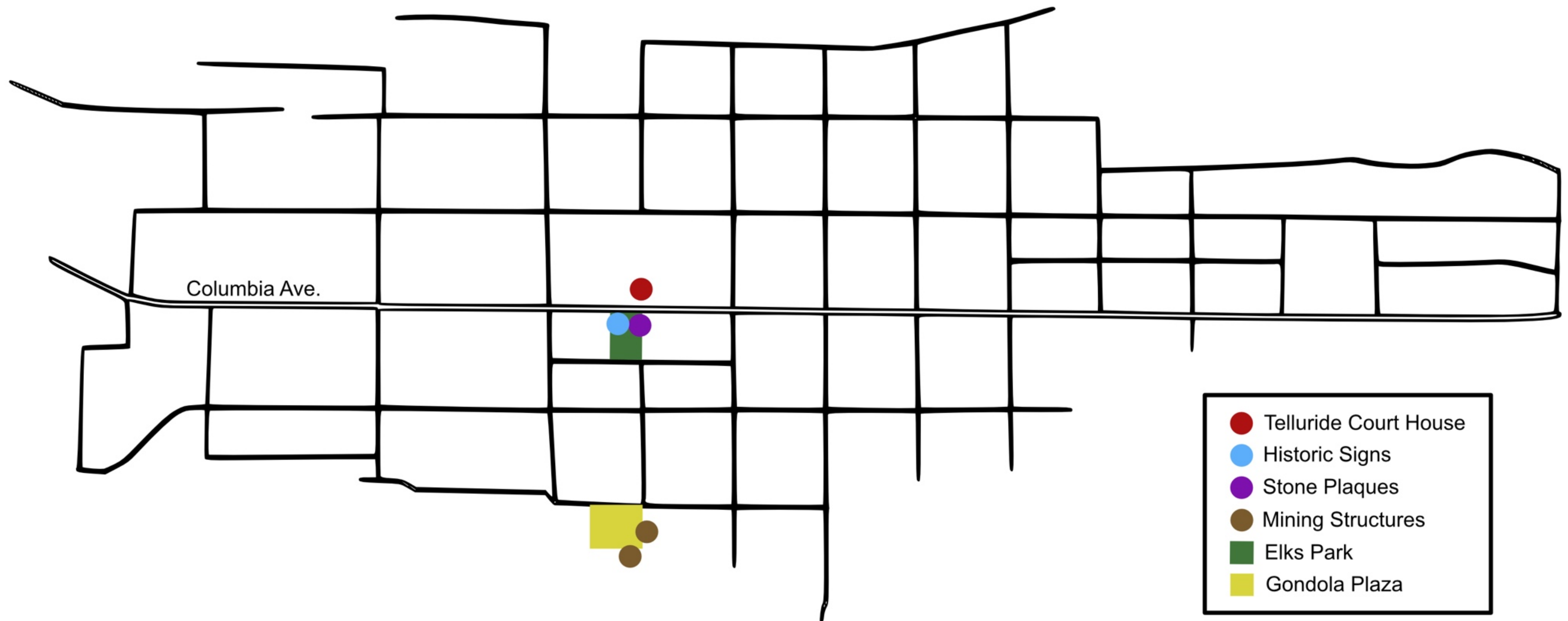
DATA AND ANALYSIS

In the photos bellow, which I captured during the months of February and March 2021, I engage with various physical structures and informational plaques in the central Telluride area. Through these images, I identify themes of the centralization of mining and disengagement from indigenous history in the area. Despite the acknowledgement and celebration of Telluride's place in US history, I note that permanent structures of public memorialization clearly lack mention of Native American history—the Ute tribe is only referenced once. The main focus of Telluride's memorialization is on mining. This, in effect, minimizes *who* lived in the valley before it was settled by Euro-Americans and it disengages from the violent processes by which the Telluride area was claimed by settlers.

I have ordered the photographs bellow by geography, historical timeline, theme, and relevance (see *Map 2*). I first engage with the downtown Telluride area and the Historic Courthouse because it is one of the most iconic Telluride landscapes, with a striking view of the mountains in the background. This courthouse is the most photographed composition in Telluride and sits in a highly trafficked part of downtown and neighbors the town government buildings. It is the first scene a tourist visiting Telluride might see, and it remains busy throughout the day as locals and visitors alike go about their business. Next, I move to the plaque that sits across the street from the Court house in Elks Park, which commemorated the establishment of Telluride as a historical landmark. I then move to a series of rock plaques bordering Elks Park, which provide information on Telluride's history. These plaques offer an example of Telluride's public memory surrounding settler histories. Next, I focus on mining structures and commemorations around Telluride, including a sign with mining information that sits next to the historical marker in Elks Park, a memorial with all of the names of miners who

worked in the Telluride Mines, and historical mining structures that sit in the Gondola Plaza. Finally, I analyze the Telluride Gondola Station because it exemplifies Telluride's contemporary identity as an elite resort town.

Map 2: Telluride Data Sites

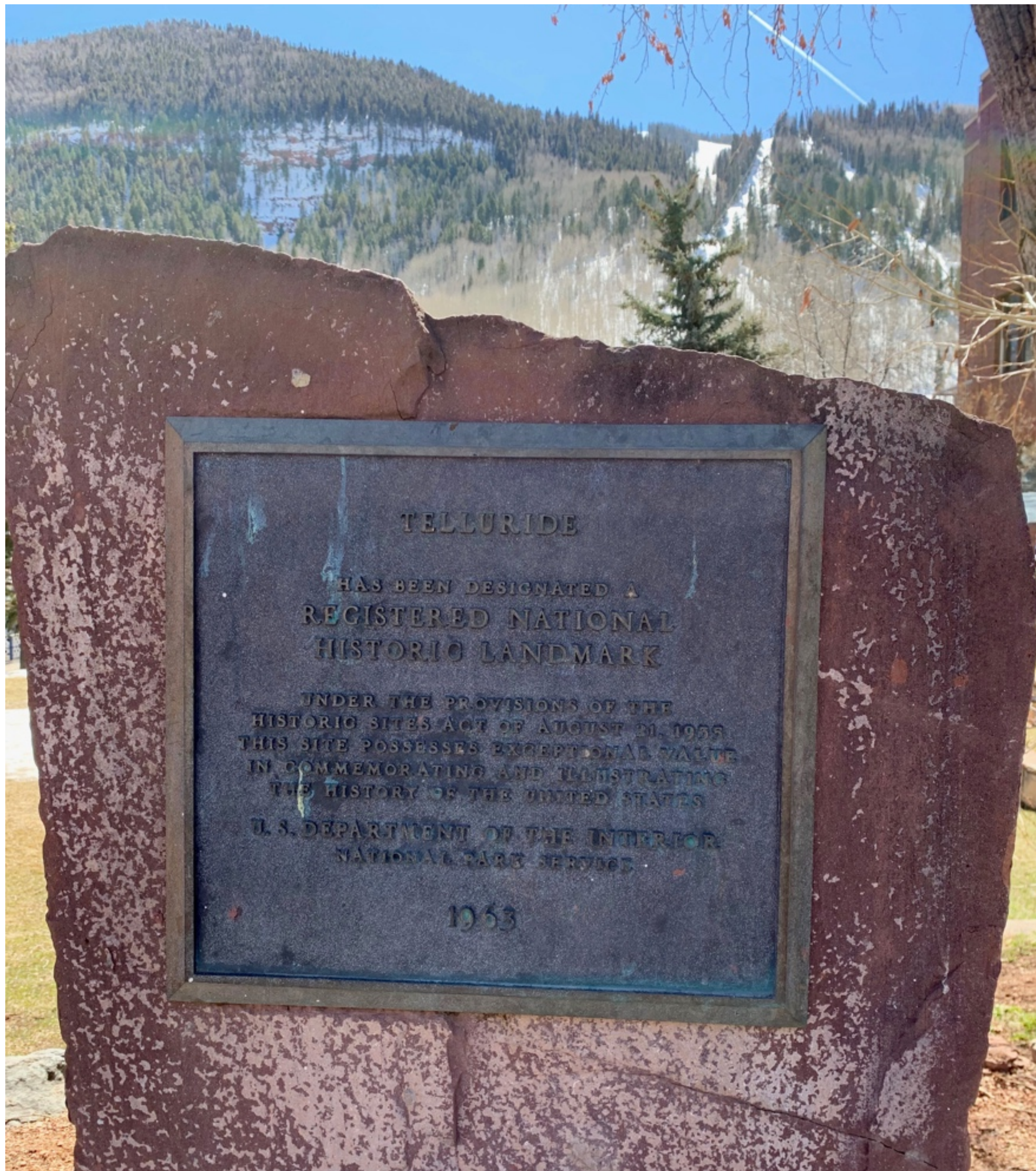


Telluride Historic Court House Photographed March, 2021

Telluride was designated as a historic landmark in 1964. There are many buildings in Telluride that hold historic value and are thus preserved. Of these buildings, the historic courthouse is perhaps one of the most prominent and iconic. This building includes a clock that was installed in in 1976. The building to the left of the courthouse is the Sheridan building, another historic building which hosts an opera house, restaurant and hotel. Its history is commemorated in a plaque across the street. As protected historical buildings, these structures are emblematic of Telluride's historical pride. However, these buildings only tell a story of the Telluride area's recent history—its settlement and development as a mining town. The historical buildings and landmark designation commemorate Telluride's development as a mining town, but not the history that came before. Through the commemoration and memorialization of structures such as these that were built and preserved through Euro-American settlement in the area, the presence of Native Americans becomes unobvious. This is an example of the way that Indigenous histories have been erased from the landscape, as we engage with and remember this land through its white history.

Elks Park Photographed March 2021

Elks Park is a small open space that sits directly across the street from the Court House. Sitting In the heart of Telluride, this park is frequented by locals and tourists. In the summertime, festival tents and music events occasionally happen in the park, but most often it is a site used by picnickers or people passing through on their way to downtown Telluride on Columbia Avenue. In the wintertime, there is a Christmas tree constructed from old skis placed in the center of the park (as seen in this photograph of the area). This 'tree' installment emphasizes Telluride's Identity as a ski town. This park also contains several permanent signs and plaques that help construct the town's public memory. These signs include a large wooden sign that details information on the mines that were operated in this area (seen in the bottom left of this picture). To the right of this sign is a small rock plaque that confirms Telluride as a Historic Landmark District. At the edge of the park, along the sidewalk, is a series of four rocks with plaques attached that contain historical information, including information on the founding of Telluride. Elks park is the most central and highly interacted with space in Telluride that contains pieces of the area's public memory through informational signs and plaques.

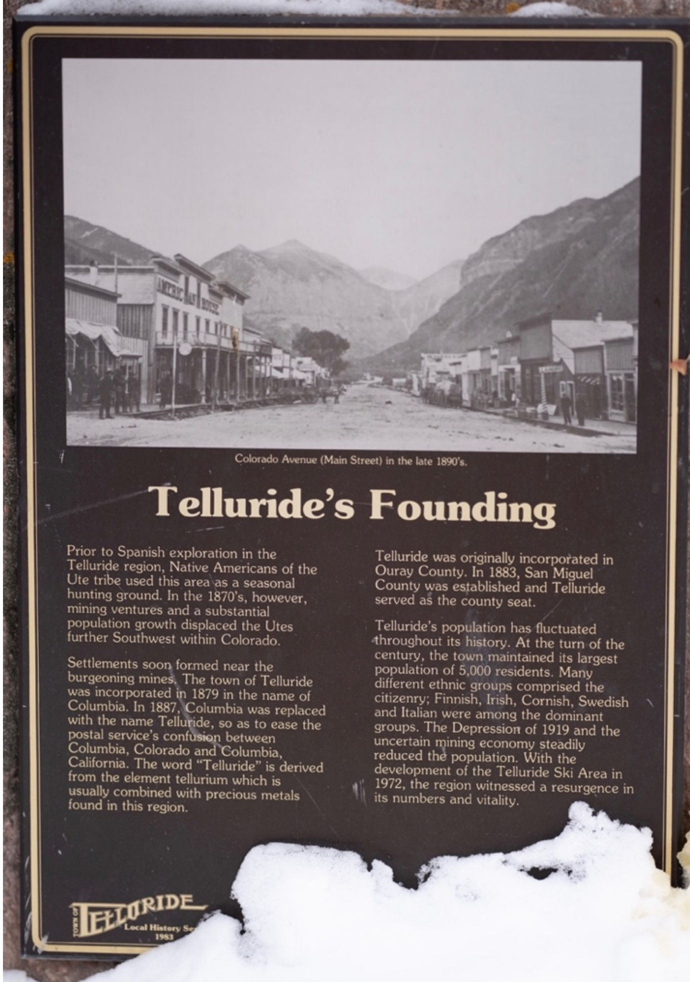


This plaque, mounted on a chunk of red rock emblematic of the colorful hues of Colorado, sits on the edge of Elks Park. It designated Telluride as a registered national historic landmark under the provision of the Historic Sites Act of 1935 by the US Department of the Interior. Telluride is one of two sites to receive this designation in Colorado, the second of which is the mining town of Silverton across the mountains. Telluride was given this designation based on its “exceptional value” in US history. By inferring from the surrounding informational plaques and preserved historic buildings, it is clear that this landmark’s designation is awarded based off of Telluride’s mining history. There is a clear lack of mention of Native History, and no engagement with the processes of indigenous land disposition, that removed Ute Bands from the land surrounding Telluride or justifies Euro-American settlement and mining exploits. This is an example of how white supremacy has re-written geographic histories.

Elks Parks rock plaques Photographed February 2021

These four plaques sit across from the Telluride Courthouse at the border of Elks Park. They were installed as a part of a local history series in 1991. The plaques include informational titles such as, 'Telluride's Founding' which details the Telluride area's past. I emphasize this plaque because it provides the only information on Native American presence. There is also a plaque commemorating 'A Milestone in the History of Alternating Current' situating Telluride in the history of the electric power industry; 'New Sheridan Hotel' which provides history on the historic building across the street; and 'Transportation' which contextualizes travel to Telluride throughout time.

Telluride's Founding Plaque Photographed February 2021

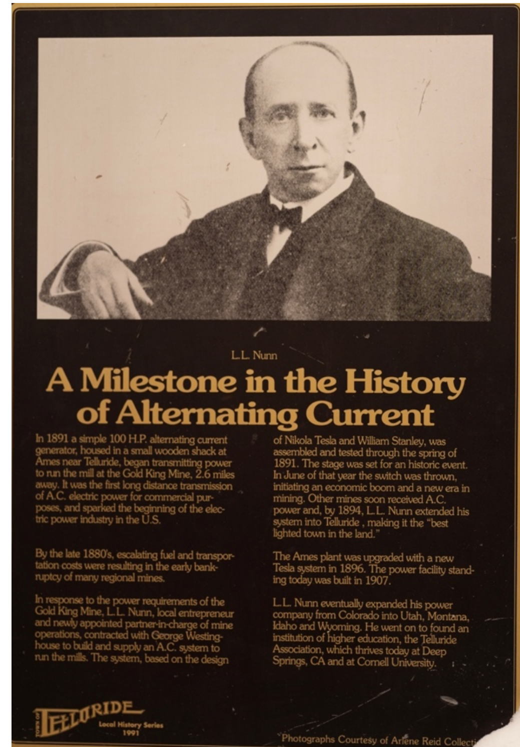


This Plaque is the rightmost of the series of historical information plaques. I want to highlight is for its mention of Ute Native Americans, the only mention of Ute history in and removal from the San Miguel Valley.

The Language used on this plaque centers colonial history, structurally beginning by mentioning Spanish exploration. The wording, "prior to Spanish exploration" minimizes the 13,000 years of Native American history in the area, situating its historical timeline in the beginnings of colonization, around 400 years ago when the Spanish began exploring the area and trading with the Ute. By condensing the Ute Nations history into two sentences, its long timeline in the Telluride area in overwritten by the extensive information provided on Telluride's mining history, which only included the past 150 years since Euro-American settlement in in the San Miguel Valley began. Further, the language used to describe the violent removal of Ute and the dispossession of their land is smoothed over, with the wording, "displacement." Historical analysis will reveal that the justification for Ute removal from these lands was for settler access to the mineral resources the mountains contained. It was not purely "mining ventures and substantial population growth" that led to Ute removal from their homelands and regulation to reservations. The minimal language on these signs is exemplary of how historical perspectives have been reshaped to further the settler colonial project, minimizing the violence of land dispossession.

This plaque is the leftmost is the historical information series. It details histories of movement through the Telluride area, and how people came to and from this area. Clearly missing is information on how Ute Bands moved through this land. Though the plaque mentions that mining prospectors arrived in the area by foot, it does not mention that they were trespassers on land that, by treaty, belonged to the Utes. The wording of the plaque makes it seems as though prospectors were the first to arrive in the area, which is not the case. Ute Tribes traveled to this area by foot to hunt. After the introduction and adoption of the horse into their culture, they also traveled to this area by horse. The absence of any mention of this information on this plaque is an example of the erasure of indigenous history from settler landscapes.

Alternating Current and Sherian Hotel Plaques Photographed Febuary 2021



These signs are the respective middle left and right plaques in the series. They detail information on Telluride's history, including the history of specific buildings and power-grids. However, there is no engagement with Native histories.

This sign in the top photo sits in Elks Park next to the historical landmark designation plaque. It contains information about the mines in the mountains surrounding Telluride. The sign in the photo bellow sits at the bottom of one of the mining structures in the Gondola Plaza. On it, all of the names of miners who worked in the Telluride mining districts are listed. With these signs, I would like to highlight that more space is dedicated to memorializing mining—including individuals who worked in the Telluride mines—than space is dedicated to commemorating the entire Ute First Nation that lived on these lands prior to settlement. This is another example of settler history eclipsing indigenous histories. The absence of stories other than Euro-American settler-histories acts to perpetuating white-supremacy though public memory and the built environment.

These mining structures, which sit in the Telluride Gondola Plaza, offer historical nostalgia and a physical reminder of the mining operations that happened in Telluride. These structures facilitate memories of Telluride as a mining town.

Gondola Plaza Photographed February and March 2021

The Gondola Plaza sits on the edge of the Telluride ski resort. It is one of the only free gondolas in North America, payed for by local taxpayers to provide transportation between Telluride and Mountain Village, which sits on the other side of the pictured mountain. The Gondola runs throughout tourist seasons, providing transportation as well as land access to the mountains for recreational activities such as skiing, hiking, and biking.

The Gondola leaves an impression in the Telluride landscape that emphasizes its identity as an elite town. However, this identity, created and maintained through histories of white settlerism, has remained distanced from the indigenous histories of the area.

CONCLUSION

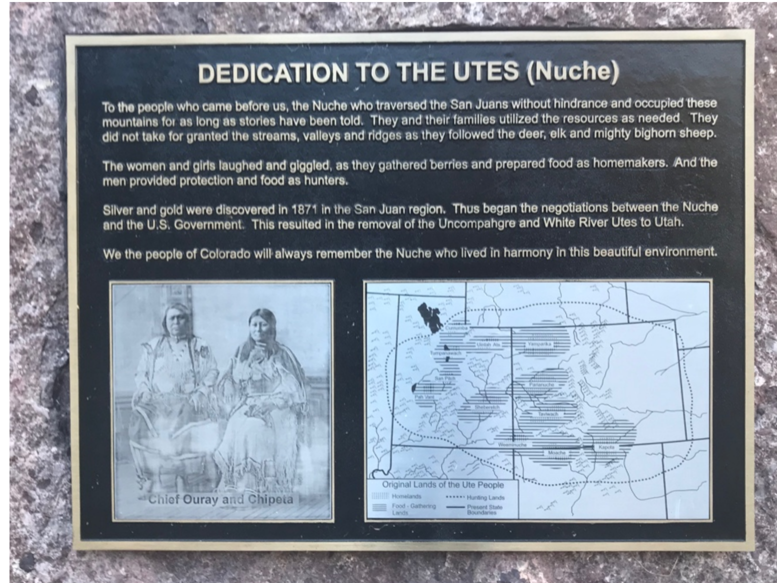
As the US begins to contend with its histories of violence, it is important to not only focus on the South, but also on the American West. From small towns to states, to entire geographic regions, histories of settler colonialism have shaped the US. These histories manifest in processes of social reproduction, which write violence into geographies as well as structures of public memory. In Telluride, Colorado, we can see how this town celebrates its history of mining. In effect, this overwrites other histories in the area, which have become less visible throughout processes of settlement and, in its brief engagement with indigenous histories, it appropriates and smooths these histories. Specially, in reference to Telluride's Founding, plaques and memorials only briefly mention the Utes long history in this area, condensing their long histories into two sentences that mention the Utes presence in the area prior to Spanish exploration, and their 'displacement' to reservations. In doing so, Ute histories are erased and appropriated to fit into public structures that privilege white history. One of the plaques in Telluride Elks park reads: 'this site possesses exceptional value in commemorating and illustrating the history of the United States." Perhaps this is quite accurate, as the processes of settlement and violence toward natives in Telluride mirror larger histories across the US that not only fail to acknowledge indigenous lands, but also fail to recognize the institutions of white supremacy that have caused the violent disposition of these lands. This project engages primarily with the representation of histories through the landscape. However, the next steps in understanding the repercussions of public memory and the way that it has centered on white history in the West could be collected through interviews and community analysis.

In order to begin to address legacies of violence that are written into American Landscapes, processes for reconciliation must begin. Several examples of this can be found, for

example through the Land Back movement, or through recently elected secretary of the US Department of the Interior Deb Haaland's proposed Reconciliation in Place Names Act (landback.org, TWS, 2020). However, perhaps Telluride can offer an example for the beginning steps of indigenous reconciliation just as it can offer an example of indigenous land dispossession. In 2014, San Miguel County, offered an official apology to the Ute Indians, which was delivered by a county commissioner to the Ute Tribal Council. It reads:

> San Miguel County apologizes to the Uncompahgre Ute people and their descendants for their forced removal from western Colorado in 1881 and their relocation to Utah…The county also extends a formal apology, government to government, to the Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray reservation. (Elliott, 2015; Sackett, 2014)

Further, a memorial dedicated to the Ute people (pictured bellow) was placed in Placerville, Colorado, in connection to this apology, about 20 miles from Telluride. It was worded by Ute Leader, Rolland McCook, to provide tangible recognition of the people who lived in the San Miguel mountains for thousands of years (Sackett, 2014).



San Miguel county has also recently replaced Columbus Day—a national celebration of the 'discovery' of the Americas—with Nation Indigenous People day (TI, 2020). Both of these actions constituting the beginning steps of acknowledging and addressing the violence that has occurred and been perpetuated towards indigenous peoples.

Reconciliation is a process that begins with an offense, then an apology, acceptance of the apology, restitution, and then reconciliation. As a whole, the US has barely begun to engage with long histories of violence toward Native Americans, and the process of reconciliation has barely begun. However, to address painful begins and to continue to grow as a country, it is imperative that this process is completed. In order to do this, the nation's public memory must be addressed and reshaped so that our public discourse is shaped not only though white privilege, but also includes a diversity of perspectives and stories. It is important that we do not forget or misremember the true origins and histories of the US as a country.

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