

Manuel Salazar

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The Reason for Renaming Patrick's Point

Located in Humboldt County, just West of the 101, stands Patrick's Point, a beautiful state park filled with trails, trees, and miles of sandy beaches connected to the Pacific Ocean. This park offers various activities including camping, hiking, and beach enjoyment while being expressly accommodating towards children and animals. By all accounts this park is an incredible destination for all those who enjoy nature and the serenity that comes with it.

However, such serenity has come at a cost. The name of this park “Patrick’s Point” is stated to be in reference to Patrick Beegan “an Irish immigrant who laid claim to the North Coast peninsula in the 1800’s” (Vanderheiden, I, 2021). Patrick came to establish ownership of this land by completely disregarding and even killing the Yurok natives who had been living on the land for centuries prior to his arrival. In this paper, we will be discussing why it was necessary that the name of this man be revoked from the park’s title, and why the adoption of the park’s new name “Sue-Meg” is a step forward in the fight to establish social equity for the native Yurok population. First, we will establish a geographical analysis of the land to identify significance. Next, we examine the history of how a genocidal colonizer was able to claim ownership of the land to begin with, while also illustrating what this land meant to Yurok people prior to it being taken from them. Once the historical context has been presented, an argument will be made discussing why the name change would give credence to Native American suffrage and how current efforts such as the “Reexamining Our Past” initiative is finally creating legislative action on the part of these communities. Through this analysis, I hope that more people will come to

know the history and meaning behind this park and the justice that is due for the Yurok people who have suffered in silence for far too long.

For hundreds of years before the park was founded, the native Yurok population “spent their summers in the Abalone Point area of the headlands” (Walker, T, 2019). Founded in 1851, Patrick’s Point is a 640-acre park in the center of California's coastal redwood region within the city of Trinidad. The park is situated at 73 meters above sea level and averages a yearly temperature of 21 Celsius. Much of the land’s topography is covered in vast quantities of trees of varying species, such as spruce and pine. The land isn’t covered in forestry is made up of sandy beaches and cliff sides that overlook the ocean. The area is also rich in wildlife of both the aquatic and land animal varieties. Common northern California forest animals and bird species call the trees their home, and whales and sea lions can often be seen swimming near the shores. There are several miles of hiking trails to explore, a native wildlife garden, and even a recreation of the Yurok villages that once inhabited the region. That last point is of particular interest as it is in the Yurok’s use of the land that one can truly see the significance this land’s geography carries. The warmer summer temperatures of the region allowed the Yurok to hunt game and fish for food during these periods, before immigrating elsewhere once it became colder. The large amount of vegetation also meant that these forests were plentiful in various species of edible plants and berries which provided the Yurok with a balanced nutrient-rich diet. This tribe also understood the connection between herbal remedies and health; thus, the tribes would often place vegetation gardens throughout their villages in order to later use in herbal remedies and culinary practice. In a homage to these principles, a traditional garden was placed in the park in 1997 with plants like those that the Yurok would have used.

While physical land use is only a single aspect of the park's history, the buildings that were chosen for recreation within Sue-Meg village are vastly more significant. Of the buildings constructed, the "traditional style family houses, a sweat house, changing houses, a redwood canoe, and a dance house" are particularly fascinating (Walker, T, 2019). On the surface, many of these would be locations that not many would take significance from, yet these locations of leisure and spiritual importance most likely signified a great deal for the Yurok. We often make the mistake of assuming that native populations weren't as advanced or sophisticated as the white settlers that later came and colonized much of California. But this could not be further from the case. Native populations were not only more familiarized with the land's geography but also knew how to better make use of the natural resources. These individuals were able to coexist peacefully within this geographic region for hundreds of years without depleting the land of resources or other creatures. Whether this is due to a higher significance in nature and spirituality within the Yurok people is a matter of opinion. But the structures they choose to recreate do seem to strengthen this principle. And the fact that many Yurok natives who still inhabit the land continue to bring individuals to this area to educate them on tribal customs (Walker, T, 2019) shows the principles that these individuals most value. This village is sadly one of the last remaining structures that tells the history of the region's native people; a history of deep rich culture that will sadly be lost if further efforts to preserve their customs are not realized. We should show empathy to the Yurok people, but just as important is a respect for their accomplishments and cultural significance. For decades, despite the best efforts of the colonizers and the government to destroy what little they have, they have continued to protect their land, culture, and history from the white washing and gaslighting of the United States.

Yet what I find abhorrent are the lengths the government is willing to go through to whitewash events. For most of history, this country would sooner name a park after a genocidal colonizer rather than after the very natives who have lived on this land for centuries. So ingrained is this country's disdain for natives that we chose to brush aside the crimes of Patrick Beegan and named a beautiful piece of land after such an awful man. As he was the first individual to have ever "settled" on the land, he was granted exclusive ownership over the region. What would follow once he was appointed the owner would be a massacre. According to reports during the period Patrick "Beegan was accused of murdering numerous Native Americans during his time, including a Yurok child" (Vanderheiden, I, 2021). He would be persecuted by the government for his actions, yet would never face justice, his only penalty being how he "lost his property after evading law enforcement" (Vanderheiden, I, 2021). Yet despite being stripped of land ownership, the title of Patrick's Point remained. Whether through negligence or malice, for decades the government did nothing to change the title of the park despite knowing the negative association between that man and the native Yurok population. He may not have been venerated as a hero, but his name continued to remain as a hallmark in the region, uttered excessively when it should have been removed in its entirety.

Luckily, in 2021 change was made to better address the issues that the Yurok population has endured over the decades. On September 30th, the California State Parks and Recreation Commission voted to officially change the name of Patrick's Point to the much more suited "Sue-Meg State Park" (California Department of Parks and Recreation, 2021). This decision is significant for a variety of reasons, one of which being that this is the first instance of "renaming state-owned land in California" (California Department of Parks and Recreation, 2021). Prior to this, the names of state-owned land masses had not been changed even if the history or name

scheme of such locations was controversial. What this ruling signifies is a possible new precedent that the California State Parks and Recreation Commission may be able to follow to change the names of similarly controversial locations. While previously doing such actions was unheard of, if the committee finds that the circumstances of any other case are similar enough to that of the Patrick's Point case, then there may exist grounds for legislative action. And this is not simple speculation, as further advancements in the Reexamining Our Past initiative seem to support the notion of future change. The Patrick's Point case was originally one of five key cases chosen to spotlight California's racist and controversial history (an issue that is not talked about enough). And in the wake of this specific victory, other lesser victories seem to have followed. Of the four other locations two are currently seeking public input into the concept of a more inclusive name change and the other two have gone forward with releasing statements on how their locations have historically been centers of prejudice and their newfound goals to educate visitors on such discrepancies.

The other importance of this name change is in the cultural significance it holds for the Yurok people. When legislation to officially change the name of the park to that of Sue-Meg was finally passed, many native Yurok people spoke about how this may well be "a turning point in the relationship between tribes and the state" (Vanderheiden, I, 2021). For decades these people have continued to lose their land and culture, all while the California government did little more than watch it all transpire. When discussing what they thought of the name Patrick's Point, one Yurok member stated: "This place is named after an individual who harmed the Yurok. That can't be OK for the Yurok. That can't be OK for the state of California" (Vanderheiden, I, 2021). Now they have taken a step forward and won back what was taken. No longer will the Yurok be haunted by the name of the white settler who slaughtered the tribe and escaped justice. The name

of the Sue-Meg Park instead may remind them of their culture and their ancestors who inhabited the region for hundreds of years before anyone else. For many years, the small mock town of Sue-Meg which was meant to be an informative hub for surface level understandings of the Yurok culture, somehow became an anchor that connected many Yurok people with their culture and history. The Yurok were the original owners of those lands, and as such it's only fitting that the land be returned to them under a name that best signifies their struggle.

And while future policies remain uncertain, this victory for the Yurok people is not one that will soon be forgotten. When discussing the matter of future state park name changes, Ginsburg (a member of the committee that chose in favor of the name change) stated “that we are guided by some policies and procedures and standards to help us evaluate these naming going forward,” (Vanderheiden, I, 2021). Ultimately, the goal in these procedures will be to pass legislation that changes the names of parks under the basis of inclusivity. However, the process of changing them oftentimes is not limited to what is right or wrong. Legislation that prohibits name changes is still very much in place. And the same bureaucratic barriers that have kept the names of colonizers in the public eye for so long may just be the very same reason that no changes can be reached for an extensive period. Despite this, many (including the Yurok) remain hopeful that procedures will be followed to ensure that the most equitable and humanitarian verdict may be decided.

Through this essay we have established why the name of Patrick’s Point is controversial and why changing the name of the park to Sue-meg was one of the most equitable means of making amends with the Yurok population. We examined how the geographical background of the land was tied directly to the native Yurok population, and how it allowed them to thrive for hundreds of years prior to their colonization by white settlers. We further elaborated on these

notions of culture and topography being closely linked by making note of the abundance of resources being available up until contact with settlers, particularly one Mr. Beegan. Patrick Beegan was then used as a Segway to discuss the horrors of the current namesake and the need for change. Allowing a genocidal individual to be the proud namesake of the park for decades was problematic to say the least. Individuals that were already aware of the founders' complicated past and still refused to act fed into the government's systemic forms of prejudice. Luckily, things have recently changed for the better, as we discussed within the final notes of our work. Through legislative action and community outreach, enough people were made aware to care about the issue and change was made. This change is a demonstration that most individuals do not wish to purposefully uphold oppressive systems of power. And if individuals become aware of the historical malice associated with the systems that they are supporting, then such support quickly disappears. In many ways it was beautiful to have witnessed native American advocates, community members and members of the board come together to overturn what was clearly a cut and dry situation.

It's infuriating to know that these systems managed to stay for such a long period of time, but change is coming. This is only a small indicator of the activist change to come. Native Americans and other marginalized California groups deserve justice for the oppression they have endured for decades now. We cannot denounce the atrocities this man committed if he is still given a platform in the form of name recognition. There exists an association with named locations; often we assume that an individual must have done something truly amazing to have a landmark named after them. And that's what many individuals living in the region were inadvertently led to believe. This false narrative needs to be stopped. The Local governments within these issues choose one of two forms of action. Either they can keep the current name but

proactively teach visitors about the genocidal past of the park's founder, or the name of the park should be changed to something else entirely. Following these practices will lessen the impact that historical subjugation has had over the native Yurok people. Such a practice can have even more profound effects if policymakers are willing to change the title into something that reflects the principles of the Yurok, who have been those most affected by this conflict. Additionally, we are aware that names and phrases hold power. By changing the names of those oppressive locations that have a historical significance in the realm of prejudice, we can give power back to the people that were once oppressed. Let this victory for the Yurok people be the catalyst for widespread name changes all over California.

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Revisions Addressing Peer Feedback

All the peer feedback I received was incredibly insightful and greatly helped me revise my essay. When reading my peer's comments, I noticed a trend of critiques with both my grammar and writing structure. To address these issues I went back and fixed any and all grammatical errors such as: implementing commas, fixing spelling errors, and revising sentences for clarity. Some peers also found a few of my word choices to be a bit problematic. In the latter half of my writing I began to use the term "The Native Population" instead of addressing the native Yurok people by their tribal name. I addressed these issues by going back editing out such crude terms, along with removing any instances of me speaking on behalf of the tribe. Another large change I made was the restructuring of one of my body paragraphs. Thanks to my peers, I came to the realization that my body paragraph statement of "denounce the atrocities this man" would better serve as a conclusionary call to action. This would neatly sum up my main argument and hammer in the notion that the name change for the park was necessary in order to distance itself from it's racist and homicidal past. Finally, at the suggestion of Professor Brinkley I went back and edited any topic sentence that may have either lacked substance or appeared incomplete. This served to strengthen both the body paragraphs and my essay as a whole.