

BUILDING JUSTICE MUSIC THEME

Eliza Narration

Welcome to Building Justice, a podcast by Sacramento State's Center on Race, Immigration and Social Justice (CRISJ) . We explore critical issues affecting our communities with the hopes of creating a healthier and more just world.

ELIZA NARRATION

Placeholder is a project about holding and being held by place.

I'm Eliza Gregory. I teach photography and social practice at Sacramento State University. The seniors in photography and I have been researching relationships to land, as a part of the [Placeholder] project.

If I take any contemporary issue that I'm worried about right now, and I ask what's underneath it—what's causing it? what's informing it?—I eventually get to a ruptured relationship between people and the land they live on.

Most of us can't even really imagine what our relationship to land is.

We'll be taking you on nine short visits to people and places. Each person we speak with thinks about or works on building relationships to land, from various positionalities and fields. These visits connect the Central Valley to the Delta to the San Francisco Bay. Students in the senior cohort in photography have done the field recordings and produced the excerpts that you'll hear, with mentorship and additional production by Natalie Gregory.

Welcome.

Susan Schwartenberg

When you go back to wherever you live, look out your window. And ask yourself questions. Who lives there? How come the road is bumpy? How come there's no trees here? Or who decided what trees are here? Or do people have gardens? Where does the sun come in my window?

Narration

My name is Olivia Lopez, and I'm here with Angelo Hinojosa. We recently visited the Fisher Bay Observatory Gallery in San Francisco. Their exhibition is located on the second floor of the Exploratorium and features an indoor outdoor space with spectacular views of the bay, San Francisco's northern waterfront, and the urban downtown cityscape.

Narration

This gallery uses the views as an entry point for investigation of the history and dynamic processes in local landscape and the human impact. We had the pleasure of being guided by the senior artist at the Exploratorium, and the leader of the development of the gallery, Susan Schwartzberg.

Susan Schwartzberg

So on this side you see we have downtown San Francisco. And the interesting thing to me that I really tried to convey in particular is that there are both built and natural aspects on both sides. ~~of the room.~~

But I see a lot of trees and green stuff over there. I see a hill that... has probably been there for many centuries. So there's actually a lot of natural things over there. And over here, I see a bridge. That's an engineered structure. I see that island over there has been built. They've made that island. It didn't really exist 50 years ago.

So get that in your mind. That, you know, the built is buildings, it's engineering. There's probably a lot of things in the water that aren't natural.

One of the first things we started to do to try to understand where we are in California is we collected maps.

Maps are really way different than we think. I think mostly we think that they're charts, or they're about finding your way. But in fact, they're often cultural artifacts of somebody's idea about what a place is, or how they want to use a place. That's kind of a goal of mine, that you interrogate what you're looking at.

When you go back to wherever you live, look out your window. And ask yourself questions. Who lives there? How come the road is bumpy? How come there's no trees here? Or who decided what trees are here? Or do people have gardens? Where does the sun come in my window? Very simple things. Turn your apartment into an observing station.

These are all ways to think about your relationship to where you are. To place. And then think about where you grew up.

ELIZA NARRATION

We are a country founded on ruptured relationships to land—colonization and genocide of native peoples; abduction and transportation of people across an ocean to become slaves; immigration from one country to another, often because of persecution, starvation or

economic hardship. Each of those histories has separation from land at its core—traumatic movement across a region or across the world.

If you have no intergenerational relationship to a place, you're more likely to see it as something that can be exploited, rather than something that you are fundamentally connected to. And it's possible for that disconnect to be passed down to the generations that follow.

And so entering back into relationship with land has really high stakes—if we can't do it, we are writing ourselves out of ecologies. We are dismantling the ecosystems we live inside of and depend on.

So we went to the Delta, to take a closer look at a highly human-managed landscape—the capitalist colonial project is in full effect out there. What was once a vast floodplain habitat is now cities and large scale agriculture. In California, we are completely reliant on these water engineering projects for the food we grow and eat, as well as for the water we drink.

Our contemporary relationship to land—or lack of it—is being shaped by generations of government decisions.

But there are also some signs that values are shifting.

Narration

Hello, I'm Ryan. And I'm Angie. The Sac State Senior Photo Cohort visited the Sacramento River Delta in the town of Locke, 20 minutes south of Sacramento, on September 22nd with Dylan Chapple, who is the Environmental Program Manager at the Delta Stewardship Council. The DSC oversees the Delta Plan, which strives to maintain a healthy and thriving ecosystem, as well as the continued supply of water for both the residents and the pumps that push the water out of the Delta by not disturbing the community.

When we arrived at Locke, Dylan began to explain to us the importance of the Delta to California's water supply.

Dylan Chapple

So I'm Dylan Chappell, uh, and I'm an environmental program manager at the Delta Stewardship Council, which is a California state agency based in Sacramento.

Dylan Chapple

we have examples of a lot of the different aspects that make up Uh, both the delta as a place, as well as, you know, the human relationships with an agricultural landscape.

Those levees are holding back water that doesn't just sort of mean something for the local delta here, but that water eventually reaches about... You know, 25 to 27 million Californians every year. So, a lot of that water is exported down to Southern California.

About 40 percent of drinking water in Los Angeles comes from the Delta here, through mostly what we call the State Water Project.

Essentially, this allows that water up here in Northern California, where it's much wetter, to be moved down south. This water system has been called the most complex in the world, and if it's not absolutely the most complex in the world, it's certainly one of the most complex in the world. So, thousands of miles of canals, management, people working on it, it's a very actively managed landscape.

Narration

Dylan showed us the Delta Cross Channel in Locke, which was effectively built to collect fresh river water and send it to the state and federal water pumps. Unfortunately, this also restricts the local flora and fauna, such as salmon and the Delta River smelt, so a delicate balance must be reached with how we control the flow of water.

The Sacramento levee is currently deteriorating. However, this has revealed new opportunities for land and wildlife conservation. For the final leg of our tour, Dylan took us to the levee in West Sac that was deteriorating. So a new second levee was built behind it using longer lasting materials. The magic comes from what they are doing with the space in between.

Dylan Chapple

It's also pretty cool because if you are able to build a levee behind an existing levee, You can wait to actually take this levee down, which buys you a lot of time and peace of mind because you're able to do all this construction, but you're not having to actively fight flood, -while you're doing it.

But this space in between the two levees then ends up being a really cool opportunity for what we call floodplain restoration.

What you can see here now, all of these trees, so as opposed to these trees that just kind of came up naturally and you can tell are older because they're much bigger, those tall cottonwoods. Behind me here, these are young cottonwoods, and all of these were planted as part of this project on the Southport Levee.

So, what you see here is this, this multi benefit project, where you're putting a ton of money into protecting people living in West Sacramento, and you're also you're helping replace some of that floodplain habitat that was lost.

Narration

Basically, as you stand on the original levee, On one side, you see the Sacramento River and the edge of the pocket neighborhood. On the other side, between the old original levee and the new levee, you could see different types of flora and fauna that have moved into the space between, such as plants, trees, shrubs, and different species of birds.

Narration

Dylan taught us some new things about how to read the landscape around us.

When we look at a place, how much do we see? How can we learn to read the land—the history embedded in it, the more-than-human life and connections that are present? And if we could read the land better, what would that mean for our ability to be in-relationship with it?

Dylan

So when you're out here looking at the landscape, you have this mix of different things and everything you're looking at. It might seem like it was an accident that it ended up there, but it's really the result of these complex interactions between humans, their laws, the choices they make.

So, when you look at any landscape, um, it's really beneficial to think about it as something you could read almost like a book. So, um, you know, what, what the, the dry grass behind us tells us about what the needs are for levee safety.

What these native plants here on one side of the levee tell us. Versus the native plants, the sort of developing native plants that have been planted as part of a restoration on the other side. All of these are parts of this story that comes together to create the landscape that we see in front of us.

Dylan pointed out the cottonwood trees, and then there were fig trees next to them. Figs were brought with people emigrating from the Mediterranean, and were planted before irrigation practices began here in California, because they can withstand a dry climate.

So when you see fig trees out in the liminal, semi-wild spaces in the Delta, they represent the migration of people from Europe to this area. At the same time, Locke is one of the only historically Chinese towns in California, and is itself a record of the exploitation of Chinese workers in California, as well as of the destruction of wetland ecosystems in the name of “reclamation” for farming and urban development. Many Chinese workers were employed in that “reclamation” process, removing tules and building levees to reroute the water.

ELIZA NARRATION - We also tried to get better at reading the landscape at Heron's Head Park in San Francisco.

Narration

I'm Jesus. And I'm Shana. We will be talking about the Eco Center at Heron's Head Park in San Francisco. So the Eco Center is a self-sustaining learning center that serves as a model for sustainable living practices.

The site features energy systems, wastewater treatments, Rainwater harvesting, native plant landscape, permeable pavement, living roof, and sustainable building materials. When we first showed up, it looked like just a normal park. A lot of plants. Then I saw this lake.

It was like a big pond, really. Yeah, so later on, our tour guide, named Katherine, she explained to us that it was originally a cooling pond for a coal power plant, but... It's now a wildlife habitat. I did see a lot of birds. That's wildlife, right? Yeah, I think so.

The thing I remember the most about the place was the wastewater treatment.

What was your favorite part about the Eco Center? Um, I really enjoy just walking around. Um, when she gave us a tour of the whole park, it was pretty interesting to see all the different plants around, um, and kind of just imagining the harbor, how it was in the past. She pointed out a couple of pictures of what the harbor had actually looked like beforehand.

So, it's very interesting to see that.

So, it was cool to see also, um, the amount of young people that were there, touring the park, walking around. Yeah, they're definitely appealing to children.

And if kids can learn about that now, they'll be able to come up with better solutions than we have when they're older. Yeah, definitely starting off earlier. Getting them to think about problems that we're currently dealing with. Um, I think it'll be beneficial for us, long term. Agreed.

ELIZA NARRATION - WRAP UP HERON'S HEAD, INTRO ARBORETUM

A lot of what we've been seeing is the way that institutions shape our relationships to land, individually and collectively. Places like the Eco Center are trying to help people in a city or in a neighborhood reconnect to the land they live on, while also trying to restore the degradation of the land itself.

Back on campus, we visited the Arboretum and the Sac State Garden, and were able to trace the way decisions that the university is making impact our ability to connect to the land we learn on. What we discovered was a profound lack of investment in spaces that might help students, faculty, staff and community members build a relationship to land.

The people we met are doing amazing work, but the institution surrounding them doesn't seem to value it all that much.

Narration

Hi, my name is Amy and I'm Eyana and we recently had the pleasure of visiting the Arboretum on Sacramento State. Someone who has more knowledge of the Arboretum is Taylor Akers, a current grad student at Sacramento State.

She began as a volunteer in 2021 and is now a current employee while she works towards her master's in biology.

Taylor Akers

My name is Taylor Akers. I am a grad student here, so I'm getting my master's degree at Sac State in biology, and I'm concentrating in ecology, so the study of like ecosystems and larger scale nutrient cycling processes. But also conservation biology and my interest kind of career-wise is to do land management type work. There's a direct application that is kind of managing outdoor spaces like this arboretum-

In fall 2021, I was just volunteering in the Arboretum and, you know, doing the, doing my thing for a while. There was no funding for paying students to do the work that we were doing, but we were just out here, a group of us. And last December, Facilities Management acquired some money so that they could pay us to pull weeds and prune and pick up trash and things. So, here I am doing this work as a student. And basically there are just two of us student assistants who work out here.

Narration

It was very nice to hear from Taylor and her insight about the place. Me, personally, I've only been to the Arboretum about two or three times since I've been at Sacramento State, and I do believe that it is highly underappreciated, especially for how big it is on campus.

ELIZA NARRATION - WRAP UP ARBORETUM, INTRO SAC STATE GARDEN

The Sac State Garden is run by the Office of Sustainability. It's located behind the Cap Radio building, on campus. It's got fruit and veggies and herbs growing, native plants, bees, a model tiny house, and all sorts of interesting projects. Laura Gonzales, from the Office of Sustainability, was our host at the garden.

Laura Gonzalez

Hi, everyone. My name is Laura Gonzalez. I'm the Waste and Sustainability Coordinator at the Office of Sustainability at Sacramento State. Uh, my job is actually to try to reduce, uh, all greenhouse gas emissions related to the campus. And I spend a lot of time focusing on waste and waste reduction projects because we have a goal to reduce waste by 2030, but most people on campus don't know about it.

But we are here at the Cap Radio Garden today. The Cap Radio Garden started, I think it was 2015, by Cap Radio. This used to be just a lot, like, just with grass. But the groundspeople had to come every week, mow the lawn, and then water it. And there was nothing on it. And one day, they were having conversations, and someone came up with the idea of what about a garden?

Narration

Hello, this is Yancey, and This is Karla. And for this segment of the podcast, we are going to be talking about the Sac State Garden.

I'm going to talk about how I got lost. I did not know where the garden was. I was late for like 30 minutes. Again, it shows how the school doesn't really talk about the garden. We don't know about the garden. Yeah, we didn't know about the garden until this assignment.

It just encouraged me to want to harvest to me and, you know, build my own little crops or start something, you know, like a strawberry plant or something. But when you learn about the garden, it's like, okay, you're seeing how the school's connected to the garden through the food pantry.

Narration:

Here's Laura again.

Laura Gonzalez

So, when we talk about sustainability, we like to talk about food mileage, and we really don't know where our food comes from, and how many miles it travels to the store. where we pick the perfect apple. Uh, when you go to your food pantry on campus, you probably have less food mileage food you ever gonna encounter in your life because it only came from the garden to the campus.

I remember going with my roommate. She was the one that mentioned it. Before that, I did not know we had a food pantry and it was really helpful that she mentioned it because I was really struggling at that time. It was when I had barely moved here and I was just like really sad, you know, moving all the way over here by myself.

I don't think we acknowledge the food pantry enough. That's. We really don't. Such a big role about being a part of the campus. The garden sustains a part of the food pantry that sustains student life.

When I got to the pantry, I was amazed of how many items they had and how fresh like the fruit was. And, it's just, it's like a hidden gem.

ELIZA NARRATION - WRAP UP SAC STATE GARDEN, INTRO EGGERY - So Sac State has a garden nobody knows about, that provides food for students who really need it. We are living in the Central Valley of California, where an astonishing amount of food is produced, and we have food insecurity all around us. It's a little hard to comprehend.

The fact that very few of us in the US grow our own food is definitely related to our eroding (or absent) relationships to land—growing your own food has been a historical mandate for connection to the more-than-human-life around you. Now we live in this limbo where we still eat, but we've severed the connection between ourselves and our food, which would have been the thing that connected us to dirt and bugs and plants and animals and water and sun and weather.

So we met with someone in Oak Park, in Sacramento, who is trying to repair that connection between food, and people, and the neighborhood he lives in. Here are students Jon Wong and Mindy Huynh.

Narration

We are joined with Alex Hoang, local community leader who introduces us to the Eggery in Oak Park, Sacramento. Here he is presenting us to the small suburban lot that was turned into a community garden.

Alex Hoang

Right now we're in Oak Park, which is Sacramento's first suburb. So on this lot here, this is a lot where a home used to be 30 years ago. And so 30 years ago it burned down and it's sat empty ever since. ~~So~~ as a neighborhood we came together and we converted it into a community garden. But then one thing we recognized is we have all this food waste. Every restaurant produces kitchen waste, kitchen scraps, every home does. And ultimately, it either goes in the trash, or the best thing they can do is compost it.

Where in this way, we're collecting all the food waste in the city, concentrating it on this lot full of chickens. And the chickens are helping us compost in that they're eating the food waste. They're scratching and kicking it apart to do the composting process. And we're able to get the eggs. Give it out to the community for free and then the compost goes on to plant more fruits and vegetables and more food in the community.

Alex

Um, so over time, this neighborhood has essentially become a food desert. So what's special about this site is it's right here on the street, in the middle of the city, in an urban environment.

We're closely located to all the people where they can... Come on their own, drive up, walk up, come on bikes, and then they'll drop food off directly to the chickens. So it takes

a lot of the labor out of the system where, potentially, the government is needing millions of dollars to truck your waste to another outside contractor and process it to nothing. Versus we're turning that right back into food within the community.

Part of the, this being community, people just walk their dogs as normal. So now this is a place for you to actually come to as part of your routine.

Sarah and Jennifer

My name is Sarah. I live, um, over in Tahoe Park, so really, um, near to the community. And, um, Jennifer, my wife, uh, works for Meals on Wheels, and as we have been delivering in the neighborhood, we noticed, the Eggery,

And I was charmed by the chickens and we also volunteer at the food bank and we noticed, you know, when you, you know, we get donations from, um, local grocery stores and then there's food that it's not quite, um, it's not quite usable, but it's not like so bad that we put it right into the compost pile.

And so we pack that up, we bring it out here to the chickens, and so on Thursday afternoons after our shift at the food bank, we come out, we open the door, we put the food through, and the little chickens just have a field day. And we have a field day. And it's nice to just take a food product where there's so much waste, there's so much waste in the grocery industry.

So that's how we ended up here.

Alex

I think this is a normal human thing that all families, everybody did for generations. It's only recently where we've been disconnected from our food system.

people have an interest in this stuff, but they don't even, they're not aware of it. A lot of people have never even seen a chicken before, let alone connected that that makes an egg.

Yancey

I've never been around chickens in person. the chickens themselves were a new experience.

Alex

When people throw away their waste, it means nothing. But when you throw away your waste or bring it here, and you see that it's turning into something, that's when it really connects everybody together.

ELIZA NARRATION - WRAP UP EGGERY, INTRO CULTURAL ROOTS NURSERY

I love the idea that garbage can be a vehicle for relationship-building. Not something I've considered before, but definitely something I experience. My kids and I take our kitchen scraps out to our own chickens all the time, and we connect with each other *and* the chickens (and the yard itself) in the process.

Cultural Roots Nursery is founded on that same idea: that food connects us to the land. Cultural Roots also operates with the conviction that food has the ability to build a bridge back to places we've left and now long for. I spoke to them a year ago, and students Kristina Belantes, Binh Nguyen, Zoey Velarde and Ethan Smith have brought that conversation into this narrative.

I spoke before about the severed or damaged relationships to land that every person in the US has somewhere in their family history. The farmers of Cultural Roots Nursery speak to that idea beautifully.

Here's Cultural Roots.

Zee, Leigh, Chris

I'm Zee Hassan, and I'm a co-founder of Cultural Roots Nursery. My name is Li Schmidt. I am another co-founder of Cultural Roots Nursery. Hi, my name is Chris Jadallah. I'm a friend and collaborator of Cultural Roots Nursery. And we started this business to increase the availability of culturally relevant plants. Specifically, those plants important to our individual cultures.

Eliza

How did you guys develop your own values around land?

Zee, Li, Chris

Chris

I can say that my values around land are very much intertwined with my Palestinian identity. There's a concept that's called Samud, which in Arabic means rootedness. And it's like a guiding value that a lot of Palestinians hold that has to do with connection to land.

Most Palestinians for a long time were Falaheen. That means like peasants or people of the land. I come from a long lineage of Falaheen, people who tended and stewarded olive groves in the village of Ramallah for many, many centuries. And it's from those

values that I've developed my own kind of land ethic and connection and desire to live in better relation with land and support its regeneration.

For me, my connection to land came from three, four years of farming that I did prior to starting the nursery and specifically working on organic farms that were growing a really wide range of things. And I think through those experiences, I really gained an appreciation for how to produce food that is more in relationship with place and trying to work with nature instead of monocropping and using pesticides.

Yeah, similarly, my relationship to land came from working on various farms and mostly just spending time sitting with those plants and weeding and harvesting and planting and through those acts of farming, I gained a really great appreciation for our food system and the plants and the land and the soil. And it's through that where I feel most connected to my culture.

Eliza

So the thesis that I'm working with, with this project, is basically underneath a lot of our contemporary social issues that we're talking about is a sort of ruptured relationship to land what do you think about that? Do you think that a broken relationship to land has consequences for individuals and our society as a whole? What do you think those consequences are?

Zee, Leigh, Chris

The first thing that comes to mind for me is that our relationship to land was severed against our choice and against our will. After the Nakba, which means catastrophe in Arabic. which is in 1948. Many Palestinians were forcibly displaced. We became internal refugees within Palestine or external refugees and have been longing to return to their land since then. And that right of return is still denied. So I think actually building a relationship to land in the places where We Are Now in Diaspora has been a really powerful tool of like cultural survivance. It wasn't by choice that my family like lost its connection to land. It was a bigger system or structure that made that happen.

I think for me, what I think about is what this question is dispossession and why people are disconnected from land. If I just think about like Chinese farmers, so back in the late 1800s, six out of seven farm workers and farm laborers were Chinese. But then through laws like the Chinese Exclusion Act, many Chinese farmers were dispossessed from the ability to continue farming. If we just look at California today, myself as a Chinese Taiwanese American farmer, I don't really have many people to look to, but there's a very real reason why that is. And so I think it's a bigger structural problem and we can't really address people becoming connected to land again. How can we repair or remove the structures that have created that disconnection in the first place?

There's a parallel that can be drawn between the amount of POC farmers and the foods that we like to eat available in our local food system. I think that has been... Denied from

us and that was a choice that was made long ago. And so it feels like it's in our hands to make that change if we want to see it. It's like we're giving them the ability to grow that food and get that connection to the land that we have.

Zee, Leigh, Chris

I love thinking about how plants connect us across time and space.

Plants literally carry, plants and seeds literally carry history in them. They're shaped by the choices of people, going back many, many generations. Like this, what is kind of a metaphor for the future, but a seed, like this small, hard, durable thing that can last and be dormant for many years, but then grow into a beautiful food producing plant.

I want a future where there's much more, not just biodiversity, but biocultural diversity, where we have more and more of these plants growing. We're able to kind sustain our, our various foodways and our cultural lifeways. And at the same time live in better relation with the land that we're doing the growing on.

ELIZA NARRATION

Seeds as packages of information that get sent across space and time—that idea fills me with so much delight. And hope.

Any project about relationships to land in a nation built on colonization needs to confront painful ongoing histories. And that is difficult. Difficult to confront. And sometimes those histories themselves are difficult to locate, especially as a non-native person, which I am. But we were able to begin the process of locating homeland histories thanks to Pam Gonzales and her colleagues at the Cache Creek Conservancy.

I'd like to note here that the stories of colonization told from personal perspectives are not easy to share, either in person or through media like a podcast. The trauma those stories illustrate is ongoing, and to tell them can cause more harm. Many people who do the incredible work of cultural education, cultural translation, and sharing homeland history do not wish for that work to be recorded. So we are going to introduce you to the people we met, and share a little bit of what we learned, but the real heart of the stories we are gesturing toward has to be shared in other ways.

A special thanks to Tracy Gonzales for sharing her story of recovery.

Narration

Hi, my name is Zen, and I'm Olivia, and we're here today to talk to you about the Cache Creek Conservancy, a nonprofit organization dedicated to the restoration and preservation of the

Cache Creek Watershed in Northern California. We came out here to learn from a few people who help caretake this land, the history behind the conservancy, and the importance of land restoration.

Let's talk to one of the board members about the history behind this land.

Jim Barrett

My name is Jim Barrett. I'm a retired family physician, and I really, uh, enjoy being out here in nature at the Cache Creek Nature Preserve. My understanding is that as the settlers started coming in, Sutter could not really get over here because the tules were so dense along the Sacramento River that they really couldn't get over here very well. Got about as far as Poudre Creek, but apparently didn't get up to Cache Creek that much.

The Hudson Bay Company came down from the north about this far and a fellow named William Gordon was a fur trader, And he worked along Cache Creek And that's why it's called Cache Creek because they would cache the furs along the creek and then come along later and pick them up. So that's where the name came from.

Eliza

And they've been trapping what?

Jim Barrett

Beavers. Yeah, because they were sending all the beaver pelts over to Europe. And as you probably read, you know, North America just got wiped out of all the beavers. Um, but fortunately, they're coming back.

Jim Barrett

Cache Creek gravel. They had to use Cache Creek gravel for the footings of the Carquinas Bridge. They had to use Cache Creek gravel for the runway at Travis Air Force Base. So, society wanted this gravel. So they kept mining it out. During the 1970s, they started mining the creek channel.

Narration

It's really informative to hear about the history behind the colonization of this land. Yeah, something we kept coming back to in our discussions on this day was the importance of homeland history, learning about how and why land was taken from Native people, and more importantly, who caretook this land and how before that.

We were able to talk to a few Native community members about their relationship to this place and how they are restoring their connection to the land.

Pam Gonzales

Hi, I'm Pam Gonzales, and I am Wintun, Hutchinum, and Concow, and I have been a volunteer with the Tենnegan Gathering Garden for Maybe 23, 24 years now, and I was introduced to this place by, I'll call her my sister friend. She's a, was a weaver and a language teacher. So, and she was from Quetzal Dehe, I'm from Cachil. So, that's how I got introduced to this place and I can't let it go. It's exciting to have visitors out and for young people to be able to use this space as outdoor classrooms because that's exactly what it is.

Tracy Gonzalez

My name is Tracy Gonzalez. I am Hutchinum, Redwood, Wintun, Riverband, and Mountain Maidu, Concow. I'm enrolled with the Round Valley Rancheria, and I'm a committee member for the steering committee for Tending and Gathering Gardens.

Narration

To educate a bit about the Tending and Gathering Garden that Tracy mentioned, it is a part of the Conservancy that holds space for pesticide-free native plants that Native community members have access to use for things like basket weaving, medicinal use, consuming, and any other uses they may have.

That is a really great example of how the Conservancy has aided in restoring broken relationships to land.

Tracy Gonzalez

This Tending and Gathering Gardens is also a healing place, not just, just a gathering place. So I'm going, um, in May it'll be six years of recovery. Um, I didn't do the conventional 12 step program. I used this space, Tending and Gathering Gardens, for healing and getting back to my culture and, um, just being outdoors.

You don't, I mean, whatever your culture is, it doesn't have to be Native American, but whatever your culture is, your culture had baskets, your culture did all these things also, no matter where you came from. So this is basically what I used it for, also was connection, getting back with myself, and connection in a safe and sober place.

Narration

What would you say is your biggest takeaway from this experience, Olivia?

I would say my biggest takeaway from visiting the Conservancy was thinking about how land and nature can be used as medicine in our lives. One thing that Pam said that I don't think I'll ever forget is, walk, smell, look, and listen, and you'll leave blessed.

ELIZA NARRATION

We've been reading a book called Becoming Native to this Place by Wes Jackson, and talking about that idea—what does it mean to become native to somewhere? Is it possible? What does it consist of?

I think the first part is engaging with Homeland History, which, as I mentioned, we were lucky to begin accessing through Pam at Cache Creek. In his book, A Primer for Forgetting, Lewis Hyde talks about the fact that you can't forget what you've never remembered. And in California, most of us don't know the history of the land we live on, especially the pre-colonial history. So that feels really really important.

But the next step might be to build a relationship with the land you live on in the present. And the Field Station at Crissy Field has taken up that charge. It's offering a series of ways to engage with the land around it, so that visitors can take concrete actions to build their curiosity about, and connection to, that place.

Here are students Trevor Dahm and Evalina Carrillo.

Please note: this final segment does contain a mention of planned suicide.

Narration

The tide pushes to the shore in view of the Golden Gate Bridge, home to the Presidio National Park at the Field Station. Our stewards of the land, Crystal and Doug, introduce us to one of San Francisco's landmarks.

Crystal

Before we get started, I want to tell you a little bit about myself. Um, some of you know my name, Crystal Barilla, so. I'm one of the park guides here at the field station for the Presidio Trust.

Crystal

This is a national park, and most people don't realize it. We're in an urban space. We're in San Francisco. And one of the things that you associate with national parks is wildlife. So, deer, the park guides, and even visitors are stewards. This is a new park. We're walking on top of tunnels. So this roadway was built to replace an old overhead freeway that was called Doyle Drive. Doyle Drive was designed back when this was a military base, but in the 90s when this was transitioning to a national park, Doyle Drive had to be redone because of a big earthquake in the late 80s.

At the forefront of that design process, the most important thing for us was to work the roadway around the landscape. This park is just one example that you guys are going to see today of how we are mending those ruptured relationships.

Narration

Walking inside the field station, steward Doug takes a moment to open the space to us.

Doug

But basically when you come into this kind of space, it's about connecting ourselves to the land that surrounds us. So everything that's in here is from the Presidio, from Cool Maps that we use to make sense of the place to Army era tables that they would've done army things on. Thinking about the plants that you see around here. These are all plants that you guys will see. And so we very intentionally curate the space based on the place that surrounds us, so that includes the changes that happen over the seasons.

Doug

It's been fun seeing people who come into a space not really knowing what the place is, because the field station is kind of a foreign concept for most people when they enter, and so watching them process it, kind of have some mental boxes checked, and then kind of running free, not thinking they have to do this or that, like when you go to a museum. Here it's very freeform.

Crystal

You know, this idea of bringing people in and having them be a part of it, they're a part of the conversation, and based on those conversations, we edit, we evolve. And that is something that's very special.

We have these postcards, and it's part of our community curation. And so many people fill those out every week. You talk about measuring success, and there are so many things that people come in, and they won't say to us, because maybe they're too shy, but they put it on that postcard. There was a postcard that I have. It was very heavy, and they said they were considering suicide that morning. They had this analog experience away from media and anything digital and just being able to sit there and have tea and talk to us—it literally changed their life.

ELIZA NARRATION The stakes are high. One thing I've learned this semester, as we've read and traveled and listened, is that the health of relationships between people is often connected to the health of those people's relationships to land. Crystal's story speaks to that for me, as well as Tracy's story of recovery from addiction by spending time at Cache Creek.

This whole class—all these field trips—is really about making art from these experiences, and making change using that art.

Crystal and Doug

I am so incredibly proud of you guys, and so genuinely stoked that you guys have chosen to follow art, and to choose that as your path. If you look at history, art has always been a reflection of what's happening in society. On behalf of Doug, on behalf of all the guides and natural resources team in the park, we are so proud of you and thank you so much for choosing your path and being you guys. Thank you.

Trying to locate something that's missing is difficult. When I ask students to make art about the fact that most of us don't have a relationship to the land we live on, that is pretty challenging. How can we see something that isn't there?

These field trips have been an effort to fill in some of the blank space. Perhaps the right metaphor is echo-location—if we can at least bounce ideas and feelings and perspectives off this concept, perhaps we can identify the shape of the void. So we are starting with that, and with our own lives, and roots, and the ground we are standing on.

We are connecting ourselves to land, to places, and to each other. We are searching for pathways toward repair.

Narration:

You can see the art we've made from these experiences at Verge Center for the Arts starting on November 25th! The exhibition, [Placeholder: Living Precariously] will run from Saturday November 25th-Sunday, December 10th. Join us for an opening reception on November 30th from 5-8 pm, and a Second Saturday reception on December 9th, from 5-8 pm. Verge Center for the Arts is located at 625 S. St in Downtown Sacramento. Check out vergecontemporary.org for more details.

This experiential research would not have been possible without our gracious hosts. Susan Schwartzenberg at the Exploratorium's Bay Observatory Gallery; Dylan Chapple from the Delta Stewardship Council; Katherine Galeas Veliz of the Heron's Head Park Eco Center; Laura Gonzales-Ospina from the Sustainability Office at Sac State; Taylor Akers, Biology Masters Student and Arboretum Steward at Sac State; Alex Hoang of The Egger; Chris Jadallah and Li Schmidt of Cultural Roots Nursery, and Zee Hassan of Kula Nursery; Pam, Tracy, Jim and Jolene from the Tending and Gathering Garden at the Cache Creek Conservancy; and Crystal Barillas and Doug French at the Field Station at the Tunnel Tops in the San Francisco Presidio.

CREDITS:

This podcast was produced and directed by Eliza Gregory and Natalie Gregory, with sound editing by Anton Doty and music by Andrew Barkan and Polly Hall. Student contributors include:

Zoey Velarde

Angelina Povio
Angelo Hinojosa
Trevor Dahm
Ryan Porter
Jonathan Wong
Evalina Carrillo
Olivia Bailey
Zen Carlson
Amy Tejada
Olivia Lopez
Ethan Smith
Jesus Sanchez
Yancey Mejia
Mindy Huynh
Karla Legorreta
Eyanna Brown
Binh Nguyen
Kristina Marie Belantes
Shana Press

Building Justice required Outro VO

Building Justice final MUSIC
