

Elias Castillo

October 1, 2017

Clerk of the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors
Board of Supervisors
East Wing 10th Floor
70 West Hedding Street
San Jose, CA 95110

Dear Supervisors:

In the history of mankind, faith has been all important to much of the world's population. Whether it be Christian, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddah, Shinto, Indigenous people, or many others, all of them need sites where they can gather to reinforce the beliefs that will grant them happiness.

Those religious places, beautiful buildings or specific locations, are of utmost importance to them. One need only mention the temples, synagogues, mosques, churches in Europe, Japan or India, or visualize Mecca in Saudi Arabia, Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome, Notre Dame in Paris to realize their spiritual value for the millions of persons who worship in these majestic centers.

Yet, Indigenous populations of the New World suffered terribly in a forceful destruction of their massive temples in Latin America, first by the Spanish Conquista that eradicated their beliefs and complex civilizations, in many ways far advanced from their counterparts in Europe. Later, in North America, Europeans from England, Germany and other European countries arrived and continued the genocidal atrocities that Spanish Catholicism and Spanish Conquistadores had started.

In California, Friar Junipero Serra almost succeeded in wiping out the beliefs that established the value of goodness, generosity and respect among the native populations of this state. Maniacally, as proven by irrefutable evidence published by the Order of Friars Minor, known as the Franciscans, a Roman Catholic order of the Catholic church, Serra established policies to be followed within the Missions he began establishing in 1769 along the coastal areas of California. In one letter, published by the Academy of American Franciscan History, a Franciscan organization, he advocated that in a civilization as savage as that of the California Indians, the use of "blows" was the only way to control the tens of thousands of native peoples imprisoned for life within the eventual 21 Catholic Missions that

were built in California and adhered to Serra's twisted beliefs. Any Mission Indian caught speaking their native language was also severely whipped or beaten under his policies.

Native religious sites and even idols were forbidden under Serra's prohibitions and were likewise to be destroyed forever and wiped away from the Natives' minds.

Nevertheless, tribal elders of the different California Indian nations managed to secretly describe the locations to survivors of the barbarous conditions within the missions fixing these sites in their minds.

One of those locations is in the southern part of Santa Clara County on what is now known as the Sargent Ranch near Gilroy. To the Indians it is called *Juristac* and the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band of Costanoan/Ohlone Indians are its caretakers. They are honor-bound "to protect, restore and provide stewardship to these lands so they can sustain all peoples until the last sunrise," states Valentin Lopez, Amah Mutsun Tribal Chairman.

A private firm is seeking permission from Santa Clara County to extract sand and gravel from it for at least 30 years on nearly 320 acres of the ancestral tribal land near Gilroy.

Yet, to the Amah Mutsun, *Juristac* is as holy as Jerusalem, the Middle East city that is held sacred by Jews, Christians and Muslims. "There can be no doubt that the mining project would be the equivalent to tearing down Jerusalem to make way for a sand and gravel mining pit," Chairman Lopez has said.

To allow the desecration of this site by allowing sand and gravel mining on it would be an abominable decision by the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors. It would further the destruction of American Indian faiths and set a precedent to continue that shameful path against Native civilizations that have already suffered atrocities, murder, lies and dishonesty when, in reality, they are this nation's first inhabitants.

Thank you,

Elias Castillo

Addendum:

I am the author of *A Cross of Thorns: The Enslavement of California's Indians by the Spanish Missions*. I have been invited for a book reading at UCLA on Nov. 8 by Dr. Benjamin Madley, author of *An American Genocide*. I have already done book readings at UC Berkeley, where Dr. Kent Lightfoot launched a new class to teach my book and at

Oklahoma State University where Dr. Laura Arata, began a similar class for my book. Other campuses where I have spoken on my book are San Jose State University, Sonoma State University, UC Santa Cruz and Serra, San Diego and Costa Mesa community colleges. I will be speaking in December at Foothill Community College and have been invited to speak again at UC Berkeley and Oklahoma State University next year. Aside from campuses, I have also spoken before the San Francisco Commonwealth Club, The Saratoga Historical Foundation and the Unitarian Church in San Francisco and Santa Barbara.

I am a former journalist with The Associated Press and San Jose Mercury News, a three-time Pulitzer Prize nominee and winner of 14 journalism awards.