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How Paul Landacre’s Wood Engravings of the Coachella Valley Region Reflect the Erasure of Indigenous Populations in an Emerging Capitalist Framework

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How Paul Landacre's Wood Engravings of the Coachella Valley Region Reflect the Erasure of Indigenous Populations in an Emerging Capitalist Framework

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Art interpretations inherently imply a high degree of subjectivity and diversity in thought. When observed from a historical context, art not only serves as a vessel for understanding, but also an impetus for learning. Such is the case with Paul Landacre's *Indio Mountains*, originally published in his 1931 book, *California Hills and other wood engravings*,[1] and his *Coachella Valley* block depicting the same region from a few years later in 1935-1936.[2] Landacre created wood engravings and other illustrations from the 1930s until his death in 1963, specializing in images of the California landscape and of nature, abstract art, and smaller portrait drawings that he supplemented with commercial work and book illustrations to stay financially afloat.[3] While Landacre's *Indio Mountains* block — entirely devoid of human occupation — illustrates either the Santa Rosa or San Jacinto Mountains and brush at the base of the mountains, his *Coachella Valley* block depicts mountains from the same area, but with a silhouette of the Southern Pacific Railroad instead of brush at the base. For the general viewer, however, looking at the artwork in a contemporary lens would be remiss without acknowledging the centuries of history and people that have shaped the landscape and the region itself.

Originally the home of several indigenous groups, primarily the Cahuilla Indians, the land encompassing the Coachella Valley and its surrounding mountains have been permanently tainted by years of European settlement. The invasion of Euro-American settlers led to myriad commercial and industrial projects displacing many from their homes, such as the creation of the Southern Pacific Railroad. From the *Indio Mountains* and *Coachella Valley* blocks, a further understanding of the historical background of the region, the time period when Landcare etched the wood engravings, and Landacre's own life chronicles how indigenous groups fell enslaved to

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[1] Paul Landacre. *California Hills and other wood engravings*, foreword by Arthur Millier, 1931, Clark Library Press Collection, Press coll. Ritchie Lib. F070

[2] Paul Landacre. *Coachella Valley* [wood block] about 1935-1936, Box 22, Paul Landacre Archive (Press Coll. Archives Landacre). William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

[3] "Paul Landacre Wood Engravings," Catherine Burns Fine Art, 2020, https://paullandacreprints.com/bio/.

the exploitative and profit-driven interests of the capitalist economy, wherein they were not only displaced from their homeland, but also forced to abandon their traditional lifestyles of farming, hunting, and gathering.

Background Behind the Coachella Valley

Those seeking to better understand Landacre's wood engravings of the Coachella Valley should start by exploring the beginnings of the region itself and the lifestyles of its original inhabitants. The Coachella Valley lends itself to a rich history of human activity from more than 13,000 years ago,[4] long before European settlers first discovered California in the 1540s.[5] Geographically, Coachella Valley sits to the east of coastal Southern California.[6] As early inhabitants populated California, they settled into groups that each developed their own regional specializations with different understandings and usages of the terrain at hand.[7] In the Coachella Valley, the indigenous population is primarily comprised of Cahuilla Indians, along with smaller groups, such as the Chemehuevi, Serranos, and San Luiseños. Despite facing unpredictable rainfall, earthquakes, strong winds, and fires that could greatly affect the resources available, the Cahuilla learned to schedule labor depending on the season and make use of the unstable resources they had to live comfortably.[8]

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[4] Terry L. Jones and Kacey Hadick. "Indigenous California" in *Ecosystems of California* edited by Harold Mooney and Erika Zavaleta, 169-184. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016.
[5] Damon B. Akins and William Bauer. *We Are the Land*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2021.
[6] Lowell J. Bean, Sylvia Brakke Vane, and Jackson Young. *The Cahuilla and the Santa Rosa Mountain Region: Places and Their Native American Association: A Review of Published and Unpublished Sources*. Riverside, CA: Bureau of Land Management, 1981.
[7] Jones and Hadick, "Indigenous California" in *Ecosystems of California*.
[8] Lowell J. Bean, Lisa J. Bourgeault, and Frank W. Porter. *The Cahuilla*; Frank W. Porter III, General Editor. New York: Chelsea House Publishers. 1989.

By the time of European contact, the Cahuilla Indians and other indigenous groups had been separated into politico-religious clans and divided into lineages that each owned territory around the area for hunting, gathering, and other land uses.[9] Each unit and clan was incorporated into a wider network of other clans, and the Cahuilla transcended language barriers and established amicable trade relationships and political marriages with neighboring tribes.[10] Cahuilla Indians participated in a "mixed economy" established among California Indians, where tribes traded food, raw materials, manufactured goods, and other luxuries between each other.[11] The Cahuilla people highly valued reciprocity, the concept of "giving in return as much as or more than one has received."[12] While the Cahuilla's long standing practices of reciprocity focused on ensuring that all parties were taken care of, it did not translate well in their interactions with the Europeans, who did not share such ideals. Although California Indians initially formed positive trade relationships with early European explorers, trade for the Europeans gradually became fueled by self-interest and maximizing profit.[13] It foreshadows the capitalist framework forged, first through the mission and rancho systems, and later through commercialism and industrialization, the latter of which is symbolized by the railroad in Landacre's *Coachella Valley* block.

The Introduction of Money-Driven Economies

Even though the Cahuilla did not have exposure to European contact until later in the 18th century, they quickly became absorbed into a money-based economic system that ousted both their rights to their land and their traditional lifestyles. From communicating with their

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[9] Bean, Vane, and Young. *The Cahuilla and the Santa Rosa Mountain Region*
[10] Bean, Vane, and Young. *The Cahuilla and the Santa Rosa Mountain Region*
[11] Benjamin Madley. "Chapter 1" in *American Genocide*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017.
[12] Bean, Bourgeault, and Porter. *The Cahuilla*.
[13] Akins and Bauer. *We Are the Land*.

coastal neighbors, the Cahuilla and other Indians in the Coachella Valley already knew of the Europeans when Juan Bautista de Anza's 1774-1776 expedition attempted to pass through their region.[14] Spanish missions, such as the neighboring Mission San Gabriel, and later ranchos, slowly integrated the Cahuilla into profit-driven labor systems. As Spanish influence spread and increasing numbers of Cahuilla began earning wages from them as a supplement to their existing food sources, they adopted Spanish ranching and farming techniques, customs and practices, the Spanish language, and Catholicism.[15] Although they adapted to and engaged in early capitalist systems that the Europeans introduced, California Indians such as the Cahuilla viewed money as a "source of innumerable evils" that they attributed "mischiefs prevalent among Europeans, such as treachery, plundering, devastation, and murder."[16] Once established, early economic structures such as the mission and rancho systems gave rise to American capitalist systems, destroying indigenous livelihood and inciting what can only be described as "economic genocide."[17] By forcing Cahuilla Indians to increasingly rely on money-based subsistence instead of their original trade-based lifestyles in order to stay alive, the missions and ranchos increasingly contributed to the erasure of indigenous farming and hunting techniques and culture.

After the United States' victory in the Mexican War in 1848, capitalism gradually evolved to dominate the California Indians' everyday life. As Euro-Americans continued expanding their land ownership by buying and acquiring titles to millions of acres of Indian

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[14] Bean, Bourgeault, and Porter. *The Cahuilla*.
[15] Bean, Bourgeault, and Porter. *The Cahuilla*.
[16] Meriwether Lewis, et al. *New Travels Among the Indians of North America : Being a Compilation, Taken Partly from the Communications Already Published, of Lewis and Clark, to the President of the United States, and Partly from Other Authors Who Travelled Among the Various Tribes of Indians ... with a Dictionary of the Indian Tongue* / Compiled by William Fisher. Philadelphia: J. Sharan. 1812.
[17] Brendan C. Lindsay. *Murder State : California's Native American Genocide, 1846-1873*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press. 2012.

land,[18] land soon became regarded as real estate and something to earn profit off of.[19] Money became the primary driver of American interest, and indigenous groups became an obstacle. For instance, an 1868 report from the Indian Peace Commission proposed to "civilize" the Indians because "it costs less to civilize than kill."[20] Decisions on how to engage with indigenous groups harped upon a cost-benefit analysis and neglected the humanity of the people themselves. Prominent Cahuilla leaders Juan Antonio and Antonio Garra attempted to confront growing Euro-American interests with two opposing strategies: "coexistence and cooperation with whites" to "preserve tribal sovereignty and self-determinations" versus organizing a "general rebellion" to drive the Americans from California, respectively; neither worked.[21] By supporting industries such as the railroad, the United States continued to use tribal land to maximize profit, ignoring the interests of indigenous groups regardless.

Railroads: Defining Symbols of Capitalism

As the United States continued taking over indigenous land for economic gain, new industries emerged to further the country's capitalist economy, none better encapsulated by than the railroads. The Southern Pacific Railroad (SPR), as depicted in Landacre's *Coachella Valley* block, epitomizes the displacement of Cahuilla Indians from their original homes in lieu of building railroads. The section of the SPR that ran through the Coachella Valley first connected Los Angeles to Indio in 1876, and then to Yuma, Arizona, the following year, in what became

[18] T. C. McLuhan and William E. Kopplin. *Dream Tracks : the Railroad and the American Indian 1890-1930* ; with Photographs from the William E. Kopplin Collection. New York: Harry N. Abrams.1985.
[19] McLuhan and Kopplin. *Dream Tracks : the Railroad and the American Indian 1890-1930*.
[20] *Report of the Indian Peace Commissioners : Message from the President of the United States Transmitting Report of the Indian Peace Commissioners.* 1868. Washington?: [G.P.O.?].
[21] Clifford E. Trafzer. *A Chemehuevi Song : the Resilience of a Southern Paiute Tribe* ; Foreword by Larry Myers. Seattle: University of Washington Press. 2015.

known as the Sunset Route.[22] In total, the Sunset Route covered approximately 9,000 miles of railroad tracks.[23]

The Southern Pacific Company (SPC), the company responsible for the SPR, operated as "America's first land holding company,"[24] granted land subsidies from Congress to build railroads across the United States. Congress conditionally granted an estimated 7,526,400 acres to the SPC, and the SPC owned the patent to approximately 1,040,430.03 acres, "a good part thereof since sold by the company to innocent purchasers."[25] In addition to owning the land that the railroads themselves traversed, the SPC was granted the surrounding land that could be sold to merchants or other settlers who wanted to live near the railroads for high prices. Since the land granted to them by Congress came at no cost to the SPC other than the mere agreement of completing railroad construction and operation, they would earn a 100% profit off the land. The present-day Cahuilla Reservation only encompasses a total of 18,884 acres,[26] which pales in comparison. From sheer numbers, the amount of land granted to the railroads demonstrates how the government prioritized corporate interests over indigenous natural rights to the land, effectively removing indigenous groups from their own land.

While the Cahuilla and other indigenous groups fought for the land they had inhabited for thousands of years, the United States government freely gave away millions of acres to railroad magnates. Although reservations in Southern California were primarily established after the railroad land grants, a majority of the land Congress had allocated to the SPC and other railroad

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[22] Erle Heath. *Seventy-Five Years of Progress: Historical sketch of the Southern Pacific*. Dec. 1945. Box 6, Folder 16. Southern Pacific Railway Collection. Library, Department of Special Collections, University of California, Los Angeles.
[23] Heath, *Seventy-Five Years of Progress: Historical sketch of the Southern Pacific*.
[24] "The SP Story: Southern Pacific Railroad History Center: United States." SPRHC. https://www.splives.org/the-southern-pacific-story.
[25] Committee on Public Lands. Report, *Lands granted to the Southern Pacific Railroad Company* §. H.R. Rep. No. 706, 49th Cong., 1st Sess. 1886.
[26] "Serving the Needs of Native Americans." SCTCA. https://sctca.net/.

companies had originally belonged to various indigenous reservations and was legally not under their control and jurisdiction.[27] Despite providing transportation of both people and goods across the United States, the founders of SPC acquired an enormous amount of wealth from their company at the very expense of tribal lands and peoples; money replaced indigenous livelihood. The railroads brought even more American soldiers and land-hungry settlers and encouraged further colonization of their lands,[28] and although some California Indians found work under railroad companies, most indigenous peoples found themselves dispossessed of their own land in favor of what the president deemed necessary for "public interest."[29] Ultimately, they were forced to "abandon their homes, dismantle the center of their world, and move into a disoriented world of fragments."[30]

The SPC and other railroad companies not only unfairly profited from indigenous land, but also appropriated both their land and culture with marketing tactics. Various pamphlets circulated by the SPC describe how the states its railroads ran through represented an "empire built on rich new resources, booming new industries, expanding agriculture, and swift transport."[31] By incentivizing people to settle near the railroads and industries to build near the railroads, SPC marketing materials promote Euro-American acquisition of previously indigenous land and further replacing of indigenous groups with capitalist structures.

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[27] Bean, Bourgeault, and Porter. *The Cahuilla*.
[28] Sam Vong and Manu Karuka. "The Impact of the Transcontinental Railroad on Native Americans." Smithsonian Institution. National Museum of American History, June 3, 2019. https://www.si.edu/object/impact-transcontinental-railroad-native-americans:posts_059392b9d25b09c980fd1c039adcb3bb.
[29] Alessandra Link. "150 Years after the Transcontinental Railroad, Indigenous Activists Battle Corporate Overreach." *The Washington Post*, May 10, 2019. https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2019/05/10/how-indigenous-activists-fought-transcontinental-railroad/.
[30] McLuhan and Kopplin. *Dream Tracks : the Railroad and the American Indian 1890-1930*.
[31] "Here's how our *Golden Empire* grows." Box 7, Folder 4. Southern Pacific Railway Collection. Library Special Collections, University of California, Los Angeles.

Not only did the SPC and other railroad companies explicitly transform the narrative of indigenous land to something to be capitalized upon, but also they misrepresented and romanticized Indian culture and people in their marketing materials. In an instructional book for employees on how to deal with train passengers, the SPC drew parallels to their jobs with traditional Indian powwows. The Santa Fe Railway, an adjacent railroad company that also ran through Southern California, had specific routes and trains named after traditional Indian roles and tribes in an effort to construct the Indian as "a meaningful emblem that would galvanize the American imagination."[32] As with other depictions of indigenous people at the time, such marketing materials go beyond simply taking indigenous land, but also profiting off of the very essence of who California Indians are.

Reservations in Southern California

The reservation system highlighted the enduring erasure and takeover of indigenous land and subsistence and championing of capitalism over basic altruism. Albeit in an effort to protect Indian land from increasing populations of non-Indian settlers, President Ulysses S. Grant established the Cahuilla, Torres-Martinez, Cabazon, and Morongo reservations in the area in 1876.[33] By Grant's executive order establishing the Agua Caliente Indian Reservation for Cahuillas in the same year, however, only even-numbered sections of land bordering the railroad were available, thus creating a "checkerboard" pattern in reservation land boundaries (fig. 1).[34] It follows earlier reports stipulating that reservation allotments do not "interfere with the established highways of travel and the contemplated railroads to the Pacific ocean."[35] The lack of

[32] McLuhan and Kopplin. *Dream Tracks : the Railroad and the American Indian 1890-1930*.
[33] Bean, Bourgeault, and Porter. *The Cahuilla*.
[34] Denise Goolsby. "Southern Pacific Railroad Made Path through the Wild." *Desert Sun*, August 23, 2014. https://www.desertsun.com/story/life/2014/08/24/southern-pacific-railroad-history-coachella-valley/14446763/.
[35] McLuhan and Kopplin. *Dream Tracks : the Railroad and the American Indian 1890-1930*.

continuous boundaries in reservations such as Agua Caliente proved difficult in terms of living solely off resources from the land. The Cahuilla struggled with supporting themselves financially since their land allotments could not support efficient farming. In addition, they could no longer rely on traditional hunting and harvesting techniques to sustain themselves, as Spanish cattle had already eaten most of the plants in the area. Instead, they increasingly employed Euro-American farming techniques[36] and resorted to wage labor and other menial jobs, enslaving themselves in the overarching capitalist framework that the railroads and other industries brought upon.[37]

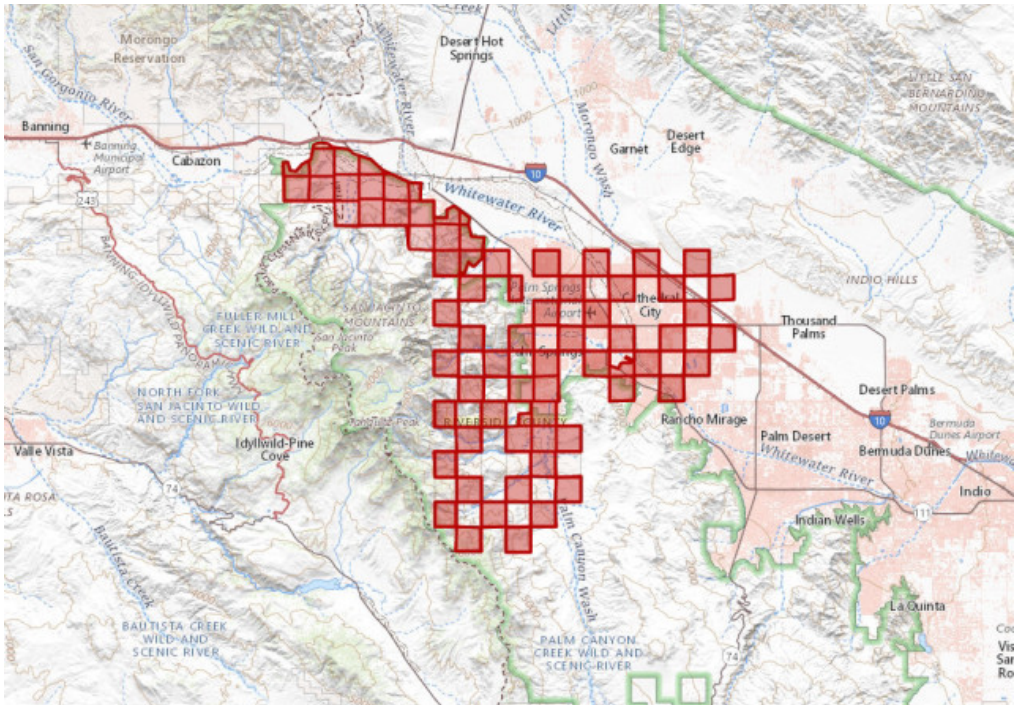

Figure 1: Land Patents In Agua Caliente Indian Reservation showing reservation's "checkerboard" pattern. From https://thelandpatents.com/lands/indl-1934324.

Connections to Landacre's Coachella Valley blocks

When the capitalist economy finally burst in the 1930s with the advent of the Great Depression, originally silenced indigenous practices reentered daily life. Since early money-driven labor and economies formed with early European settlers and steadily grew into

[36] Bean, Vane, and Young. *The Cahuilla and the Santa Rosa Mountain Region*
[37] Bean, Bourgeault, and Porter. *The Cahuilla*.

corporate commercialism and capitalism, the collapse of the American economy finally allowed indigenous groups to revisit their roots and reclaim parts of their pre-European lifestyles. For instance, many Cahuilla working elsewhere in Southern California moved back to reservation lands to save money, and they returned to traditional farming and hunting practices to sustain themselves.[38] Nevertheless, they still remained restricted to reservation lands, and the capitalist economy had become so ingrained into everyday life for all California residents that they could not escape the financial hardships the Great Depression brought upon.

Much of Landacre's work, including his *Indio Mountains* and *Coachella Valley* blocks, was created during the Great Depression and the years before and after. Originally from Ohio, Landacre eventually settled in with his wife, Margaret, in Los Angeles in the late 1920s, where he practiced wood engraving and lithographic techniques with the intention of not copying nature, but rather using it as "an inspiration for design."[39] Since the Landacres did not own a car, Margaret's coworker, Fay Fuqua, and Fuqua's roommate, Ethel Ingalls, took the Landacres on road trips along the California coast that he eventually compiled into his first book, *California Hills and other wood-engravings*.[40] On a few different trips, they stopped by the city of Indio, from where Paul's sketches eventually transformed into the *Indio Mountains* and *Coachella Valley* blocks.[41] Even though he achieved critical acclaim for his artwork, Landacre did not reap the financial rewards of his success while also experiencing the effects of the Great Depression. In order to stay financially afloat, he often supplemented his personal wood engravings with commercial work and book illustrations. In addition, his friends Jake Zeitlin and Delmer Daves

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[38] Bean and Bourgeault. *The Cahuilla*.
[39] *Pasadena Star News*, February 22, 1941. Box 10, Folder miscellaneous. Paul Landacre Archive (Press Coll. Archives Landacre). William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, Los Angeles.
[40] Daniel Hurewitz. *Bohemian Los Angeles*. University of California Press, 2007.
[41] Hurewitz, *Bohemian Los Angeles*.

organized the Paul Landacre Association, in which subscribers paid a monthly fee to receive a new print every month.[42]

For Landacre, the subtle differences between the *Indio Mountains* and the *Coachella Valley* blocks demonstrate his own life experiences throughout the Great Depression. The difference from including brush to the railroad in the foreground of the images can be interpreted as his acknowledgement of industrialization in the wake of needing money from commercial work. The replacement of the brush with the railroad silhouette may not be deliberate on Landacre's part, but does parallel the content of his commercial work promoting corporations and capitalist ideals around the same time period.

The marked difference in content between his personal works, almost completely lacking human activity and societal involvement, and his commercial work, featuring images that explicitly further corporate gains, suggests that Landacre also had to submit to the capitalist cycle of making revenue to sustain him and his wife. For instance, Landacre's wood engravings for Dole advertisements in newspaper clippings in the mid-1930s emulates depictions of indigenous people in the Hawaiian Islands from early European explorers. The emphasis in Landacre's prints on the native people of Hawaii complement the advertisements' descriptions of the islands as "exotic isles" in order to heighten the reader's curiosity in both visiting the Hawaiian islands and sampling Dole Pineapple Juice.[43] In other newspaper clippings, Landacre's work depicts a World Petroleum oil rig from Standard Oil (1958),[44] one of the largest monopolies alongside the railroad companies. Since Landacre likely did not have much control over the content of his commercial work for financial security, his work reflects how he also complied

[42] Ward Ritchie and Lawrence Clark Powell. *Of Bookmen & Printers : a Gathering of Memories / by Ward Ritchie*. Los Angeles, California: Dawson's Book Shop, 1989.
[43] *Saturday Evening Post*, September 28, 1935. Box 58, Folder 4. Paul Landacre Archive (Press Coll. Archives Landacre). William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, Los Angeles.
[44] *Petroleum World and Oil*, August 21, 1958. Box 5, Folder Miscellaneous. Paul Landacre Archive (Press Coll. Archives Landacre). William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

with societal values during his time — indigenous people continue to be thought of as an "other," and industrialization of the land is championed over traditional land stewardship.

Concluding Remarks

Ultimately, Landacre's *Indio Mountains* and *Coachella Valley* wood engravings do not explicitly exhibit the histories of landscape in regards to its indigenous inhabitants and the erasure of their culture and original lifestyles with rampant industrialization and profit-driven economies. They do, however, prompt discussion and research into such topics, as the artworks serve as a lens into the time period when Landacre lived and of Landacre himself. An informed reading of his works therefore requires an understanding of how America's erasure of indigenous practices and culture in lieu of a capitalist narrative in the 1930s is reflected in Landacre's blocks. Simply viewing the artwork without further thought would neglect the unspoken history of the region, such as the Cahuillas, early European settlers, and the SPR's land occupation. Landacre lived during a time when money and capital took precedent and were consequently needed in order to survive. As a result, he found himself also stuck in the capitalist framework, oftentimes resorting to commercial work and book illustrations to make enough money for everyday expenses. To conclude, Landacre's wood engravings of the area, devoid of human activity other than the railroad silhouette, do not explicitly comment on the exploitation of the area, but implicitly demonstrate how everyone, including himself and indigenous groups in the region, were forced to fit into the growing capitalist framework. Developing the modern-day capitalist economy came at the cost of indigenous erasure, and further research into the topic may include firsthand narratives of the Cahuilla Indians, as well as a comparison of the indigenous and Euro-American economic systems.

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