Nevada City, California narrates itself as an historic Gold Rush town, a place rich with history. The very landscape echoes these stories through monuments, Gold Rush artifacts, and place-names. The town has built its identity around claiming these narratives—centered on core American values of individualism, hard work, and exploration of the Western frontier. But Nevada City, and the California Gold Rush, also contain other stories—genocide of indigenous peoples, dispossession of land, and environmental destruction. These other histories are not discrete or located in a distant past; rather, they persist today, and their continuity is tangible.

Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in Nevada City this paper offers a critical reading of Nevada City’s landscape against histories of settler colonialism. How do we tell stories of landscape and belonging? What kinds of violence do these narratives entail? How can attention to affect direct us to reconsider the stories we tell? Ultimately, this paper is a call to Nevada City, and those who reside there, to reimagine its narrative history in ways that are historically attuned and justice-oriented.