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William Honnold and Pomona's Legacy of Colonial Exploitation

Every day, hundreds of students at Pomona College walk through the colonnaded façade of the Honnold-Mudd library to study, print, or just grab a cup of coffee. From the prestigious Claremont Colleges, they go to graduate schools at Harvard, MIT, and Stanford, pursuing lucrative careers in politics, marketing, and finance.¹ Few have time to stop and wonder where the self-perpetuating wealth, the fountains, and four-story stacks come from. Few know where the Claremont Colleges got their money or who William Honnold even was. Though the names of Pomona's greatest donors are memorialized in the colossal stucco structures they financed, the actions behind those names are seldom publicized or understood. In his theory concerning "Power and the Production of History," anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot challenges conceptualizations of history as a series of facts or a static record and understands its creation as a process of silencing which can occur in the creation of those very archives.² William Honnold's contributions to Pomona College, and the colonial origins of his wealth in Southern African mining, reveal the origins of the school's power. His legacy in higher education of the region ties global colonialism to the processes by which Pomona has gained influence since its founding in 1887.

This analysis examines the roots of Pomona's wealth in colonial exploitation abroad to understand the origins of the school's power, using William Honnold's life and donations as a case study. Primarily using his papers in the Claremont Colleges Library Special Collections, as well as those of his friends and business partner Herbert Hoover, it pieces together the

¹ "Where do Grads go? Class of 2021 First Destination Report" Pomona College, Accessed November 13, 2022.

² Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2015), 25-29.

development and movement of his wealth in the early 20th century alongside the establishment of Western higher education and settler empires. This investigation focuses on Honnold's philanthropy later in life, and the implications of his donations to like Pomona. It views the loud history and repeated commemoration of Honnold's good deeds as an incomplete story, one told by those with power and by those who benefited from his largesse. This story is one with important missing pieces—one revealing of the source of his wealth and power in mining and business exploits as well as silenced narratives and voices. Since, as Trouillot states, these “silences are inherent in the creation of sources, the first moment of historical production,”³ this study not only recognizes that no source can deliver a perfectly accurate play-by-play of events but embraces history as a complex, dynamic, and often nebulous human creation. In his lifetime William Honnold benefitted financially from the powerful positions he held, and his memorialization at the Claremont Colleges has entrenched in their history the silencing of those off of whom he profited.

William Honnold's mining enterprises are at the center of this inquiry into his power and the systems he upheld. Their critical significance lies in both the very physically extractive nature of mining—the taking of tangible wealth in the form of diamonds, gold, ore—by those who have power in a region, as well as in the processes and the symbolic weight of such industry. The structures which allow for large-scale mining, industrial and societal, aid the development settler colonies. Muriam Haleh Davis' article “Settler Entanglements from Citrus Production to Historical Memory” addresses a similar duality; across settler colonies in Israel, California, and North Africa (Algeria) she recognizes that citrus production played a crucial role in the formation of racialized labor hierarchies and power structures. While each region has a

³Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 51.

climate suitable to citrus cultivation, the processes involved in large-scale exports of fruit and huge industry were a commonality that supported Davis's claim that "citrus came to symbolize the landscapes of settler colonies."⁴ While her discussion centers on the California "citrus rush" from 1890 to 1945, she recognizes the gold rush as well. This paper approaches the colonial system within which William Honnold and Pomona grew their wealth and power as a product of similar processes, only with mining being the focus of comparison rather than citrus. While Davis looked at the exploitative extraction of North African settler colonies through citriculture, specifically Algeria, this essay will consider mining in Southern Africa as a similarly multifaceted means by which colonial beneficiaries grew their own wealth and power.

William Honnold, Mining Extraordinaire

William Lincoln Honnold may be remembered for his success as a businessman, his positions in government, and his philanthropy, but he didn't come from wealth or even much power. Born in Illinois in 1866, the son of a reverend, Honnold studied at Knox College and went on to attend the University of Michigan.⁵ His eventual memorialization by the president of Pomona College, then, as a man with "great honors and distinction"⁶ and his tribute as the Board of Fellows of Claremont College's "most distinguished member, its wisest counselor and a colleague noble in thought and noble in action,"⁷ then, was a far cry from his humble beginnings. The systems which afforded a man like Honnold such social mobility as to become chairman,

⁴ Muriam Haleh Davis, "Settler Entanglements from Citrus Production to Historical Memory." *Middle East Research and Information Project*. April 27, 2022.

⁵ Special to the New York Times, "William L Honnold Mining Engineer, 84" *New York Times*, May 7, 1950, 108.

⁶ James A Blaisdell's speech at the dedication of the Honnold library, "A tribute to the donors," 1952, Cabinet 11 dwr 2, William L. Honnold Papers, H.Mss.0381, Special Collections, Honnold Mudd Library, Claremont University Consortium (Collection hereafter cited as William L Honnold Papers).

⁷ "Tribute to William Lincoln Honnold from the Board of Fellows of Claremont College," Cabinet 17 dwr 4, William L Honnold Papers.

director, board member, honorary trustee, and eponym of a library, are important to understand as they guide us to those which allowed Pomona to accumulate such wealth and power into the 21st century.

Honnold's first success came from mining endeavors in North America. As an undergraduate, he was Superintendent of the California Exploration Company and prospected gold bearing claims for the Thorpe Gold Mining Company of San Andreas.⁸ After earning his bachelor's degree in Mining Engineering from the Michigan College of Mines in 1895, he was appointed to the position of Consulting Engineer for the Consolidated Mines Selection Company.⁹ He traveled widely, advising on mining endeavors in Arizona, California, Mexico, and the Yukon Territory, prospecting for gold, coal, and other metals.¹⁰ Though not unsuccessful, this point in Honnold's career was relatively more valuable for the experience he gained than in profit, as it gave him a reputation for being a skilled prospector. Nevertheless, his career in the Americas grew his power as he built a reputation for being a cunning businessman and engineer.

Honnold's biggest success and profits in his engineering career came from his exploits in various regions of Southern Africa, especially the Far Eastern Rand District of South Africa. In 1902, he moved to Johannesburg after the English Consolidated Mines Selection Company appointed him Consulting Engineer of all the corporation's operations in South Africa.¹¹ At the time it was estimated that Southern Africa—a British colony—held over two billion dollars'

⁸Newspaper clippings from the News of the Los Angeles First National Trust & Savings Bank, the board of directors of which Honnold was a member. Article "Wm L. Honnold," Feb 1, 1928, p. 1, 8, box 11, folder 13, William Honnold Papers (hereafter referred to as Wm. L Honnold biography, News of the Los Angeles Bank, 1928)

⁹ Wm. L Honnold, News of the Los Angeles Bank, William L Honnold Papers.

¹⁰ William L Honnold's Mine Reports in Arizona, California; and the Yukon Territory, 1899-1900, Box 1, the William Honnold Papers.

¹¹ Wm. L Honnold biography, News of the Los Angeles Bank, 1928, William L Honnold Papers.

worth of gold in areas of the region that had not yet been mined. In 1912 he became managing director in South Africa, and Chairman of the Boards of Directors of various subsidiary companies such as Brakpan Ore Mines.¹² With Ernst Oppenheimer, Honnold founded the Anglo-American Company, which succeeded the Consolidated Mines Selection Company in South Africa and, under Honnold's direction, expanded geographically and in extractive scale; the company mined copper in Southern Rhodesia and established itself for diamond mining, for which it is known today.¹³ As William Honnold rose through the ranks of mining corporation management in the Transvaal (a district of present-day South Africa) and across the Witwatersrand region, his reputation, personal wealth, and social connections grew.

Honnold's ascendance up the rungs of corporate and governmental society in the US and abroad relied directly on exploitative colonial systems which, though in place when Honnold moved to Johannesburg, were perpetuated by his actions as board member, director, and an otherwise powerful member of the many mines he planned and oversaw. While he was an experienced engineer and a well-regarded businessman, the extremely high profits of his Southern African mining projects were clearly padded by the low wages of native workers on whose land companies such as The Consolidated Mines Corporation mined and thrived.¹⁴ In a 1907 booklet titled "Notes On Labor Reorganization on the Rand", Honnold outlined for the board members various "schemes" to lower production costs; each plan highlighted the financial benefits and downsides of employing Indigenous South African, white, and Chinese immigrant

¹² Twelfth Annual Report of The Consolidated Mines Selection Company, 1915, Annual Reports [5 of 60], *The Claremont Colleges Library Special Collections Online Repository*, accessed December 8, 2022, <https://tcclsc.omeka.net/items/show/188>.

¹³ Anglo American Corporation. "Our Products: Diamonds." Accessed November 21, 2022, <https://www.angloamerican.com/products/diamonds?product=diamonds>.

¹⁴ The Consolidated Mines Selection Company Director's Report, Balance, Sheet, and Profit and Loss account for 1914, Box 1, Folder 9, "Annual Reports [37 of 60]," *The Claremont Colleges Library Special Collections Online Repository*, accessed November 29, 2022, <https://tcclsc.omeka.net/items/show/220>.

laborers in different proportions. Honnold used Social Darwinist reasoning to divide labor along racial lines to maximize payoff and wrote that the employment of African labor would require “bossing up gangs of Native Labor, and, generally doing such work as might be profitably entrusted to [the native African]. Compensation would necessarily be low for this class.”¹⁵ Honnold was not only aware that his profits were made on the labor of underpaid South African laborers, but he reinforced racial hierarchies to increase corporate financial gain; to him, mining was about minimizing production costs, and the lives of African workers were just another number in his calculations.¹⁶

Not only was Honnold dismissive of Africans who worked in his mines, but he used his positions of power to undermine the humanity and dignity of those of African descent. In his paper titled “The Negro in America,” which Honnold presented to the Johannesburg Fortnightly Club in 1908, Honnold addressed racial tensions in the US as the product of a competition for profits between races in which white people were evolutionarily favored. His claim to authority on the subject was his experience living in both South Africa and the US and thus his ability to compare the predominant populations of each region. He wrote that “the native’s limitations are the white man’s opportunities” and made claims that American slavery was beneficial to native Africans because it selected them for strength and endurance. To Honnold, physical endurance and ability to produce was the only characteristic of value in those of African descent because otherwise they were predisposed to a life “somewhat advanced beyond nomadic savagery” as they were “notably improvident... and peculiarly deficient in will-power.”¹⁷ Honnold’s racist

¹⁵ Notes On Labor Reorganization on the Rand by W.L. Honnold, June 21, 1907. Box 3, Folder 11, The William L Honnold papers.

¹⁶ Brakpan mines consulting Engineer’s report, 1914, Box 1, Folder 9, The William L Honnold Papers.

¹⁷ The Negro in America, a paper by William L Honnold, presented before the Johannesburg Fortnightly Club in South Africa, May 21, 1908 May, box 3, folder 3, The William L Honnold papers.

theories, besides lacking a basis in evidence, were clear justifications for the exploitative labor practices from which he obtained his fortune. In the echo chamber of the Johannesburg Fortnightly club, an elite group of colonial administrators which denied Africans access to their meetings, Honnold found support for his ideas and gained power from the platform their meetings gave him.¹⁸

The racially hierarchical and exploitative labor practices of Honnold's large English corporations in Southern African regions were standard practice for colonial production systems in the US as well as abroad.¹⁹ Mining industry often develops in feverish cycles around the world, known as rushes, which are defined by immigration and consequently new social and economic systems. Mountford and Tuffnell compare the rushes for gold in both California and Southern Africa, explaining that while mining operations in both regions changed the social and political landscape drastically by cornering Indigenous populations into wage slavery, those in the Transvaal were more definitively the "systematic exploitation of indigenous labor" because "the gold mining industry had created a coercive labor system that delivered two hundred thousand unskilled black workers annually to the mines from as far north as Central Africa."²⁰ Though he did so to a greater extent in the later years of his career, Honnold consistently profited from the deeply stratified conditions of colonial societies in both the North American West and Southern Africa. Because the African mines he initiated and oversaw had greater yield and operated on a larger scale than those in the western hemisphere, they presented optimal

¹⁸ Paul Rich, "Race, Science, and the Legitimization of White Supremacy in South Africa, 1902-1940." *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 23, No. 4 (1990): 671.

¹⁹ Haleh Davis, "Settler Entanglements from Citrus Production to Historical Memory".

²⁰ Benjamin Mountford and Stephen Tuffnell, *A Global History of Gold Rushes*, (University of California Press, 2018), 12.

conditions for the kind of heavily racialized and exploitative labor divisions from which Honnold profited most.

The story of ill treatment and pursuit of capital with little regard for its moral implications is not always an easy one to research. Indeed, Honnold's seemingly incredible demonstration of the American "bootstrap" theory hides the rapacious nature of his business dealings and the powerful connections he was privileged enough to form. Of course, in the archives available at the Honnold-Mudd library, the firsthand accounts of the Anglo-American Corporation's "boys"—as African workers are referred to in the ledgers—are nonexistent.²¹ But in this history it seems that the silencing of Honnold's low regard for workers in Southern Africa and the origins of his wealth took place most brazenly at what Trouillot would classify as the moment of fact retrieval, in the creation of narratives which celebrate Honnold's life. This silencing is evident in the dedication of the Honnold Library itself. On October 21st, 1952, many men powerful in business, academia, and politics came to sing Honnold's praises, all echoing gratitude and reverence for his contributions to the education and enlightenment of mankind in front of the white columns of their new library while crafting a narrative of his greatness which contributed to their own academic privilege and socioeconomic power.

Honnold gained practice as a mining engineer in the American West—in California, Arizona, Mexico, and the Yukon—before making the bulk of his profits from the Union of South Africa. Mines like the ones he helped establish there "played an important role in the making of settler colonial societies,"²² on the lands of Native Africans much like the ones he prospected in California. By a comparable process, Pomona College has long allowed its students to practice

²¹ Honnold's papers were donated by the Honnold Foundation in 1955.

²² Mountford and Tuffnell, *Global History of Gold*, 8.

build their professional skills in a smaller environment before turning them loose to build careers in the greater settler empire that is the US. Through extraction in Honnold's case, and through elite education in Pomona's, the wealth of the Claremont Colleges has its roots deep in settler colonial systems.

Government, Education, and Philanthropy

As Honnold rose in rank through corporate hierarchies, he not only grew his wealth but also his social and political power in the US and abroad. His friendship with Herbert Hoover is an excellent example of the kinds of networks within which he gained both social and financial capital. Long before Hoover's presidency in 1929, Hoover and Honnold had fused a friendship over their shared interest in mining. They corresponded regularly from at least as early as 1902, often working together to gain access to information, special appointments, or new opportunities.²³ Hoover often consulted Honnold for prospecting expertise, and in turn would recommend him for jobs in government, business, and education.²⁴ In 1915 this relationship brought Honnold's time in South Africa to a close, when he was brought onto the Commission for Relief in Belgium (CRB), of which Hoover was the director.²⁵ Because of his work for the commission in Belgium and France, Honnold was highly decorated, receiving various medals and awards from both countries' crowns as well as the US.²⁶ Even after his presidency, Hoover maintained a close relationship with Honnold, going on fishing trips and writing regularly.²⁷ This

²³ October 14, 1902 letter from Hoover at Bewick, Moreing & Co Mining Engineers & Mine Managers to Honnold, box 3, folder 11, the William Honnold Papers.

²⁴ Letter in which Hoover recommends Honnold for a job at Stanford, box 3, folder 11 the William Honnold Papers.

²⁵ Branden Little, "Commission For Relief in Belgium," International Encyclopedia of the First World War Last updated October 8, 2014.

²⁶ Wm. L Honnold biography, News of the Los Angeles Bank, 1928, William L Honnold Papers.

²⁷ Image of Hoover & Honnold on deep sea fishing cruise, Los Angeles Times article, October 26, 1933, box 15, folder 30, the William L Honnold Papers.

friendship formed early in both men's careers, and each used the friendship to grow his influence and power, but the advancements in Honnold's career resulting from their connection are most conspicuous.

Even before Hoover explicitly advanced his career, Honnold frequently found himself in influential government positions. These offices, particularly in education, were not only public service but another facet of the power he wielded. During his time in Johannesburg, he was appointed by the British colonial government to a seat on the Council of Education in the Transvaal.²⁸ Then, once in Belgium, he served as director of the CRB's Educational Foundation upon appointment by Hoover.²⁹ After his move to Los Angeles in 1922, Honnold immediately involved himself in local school policy. He was Chairman of the Board of Fellows of the Claremont Colleges, as well as a trustee of both Pomona College and the California Institute of Technology.³⁰ Honnold is one of many such benefactors, thus his contributions speak volumes about the origins of the wealth of these institutions. His donations inextricably entangle higher education and colonialism, as do the implications of his and others' lasting memorialization at these institutions.

Later in his life, Honnold's philanthropy ensured that his wealth and his name, together, would be structural in the prestige and experience of American higher education. In 1929, he established a fellowship "of unusual size and character"³¹ which annually selects a member of the Pomona College graduating class to whom it awards \$1500. The William Lincoln Honnold

²⁸ Wm. L Honnold biography, News of the Los Angeles Bank, 1928, William L Honnold Papers.

²⁹ Branden Little, "Commission For Relief in Belgium."

³⁰ Wm. L Honnold biography, News of the Los Angeles Bank, 1928, William L Honnold Papers.

³¹ William Lincoln Honnold fellowship creation and description, 1929, vertical Files Cabinet 8, Drawer 33, the William L Honnold papers.

fellowship can be used to continue one's studies in America or abroad and is allotted with the goal to "stimulate a high quality of scholarly work among the faculty as well as among the students in Pomona College."³² Honnold established a similar foundation at Knox College in Illinois, where he studied as an undergraduate and from which he earned an honorary degree in 1895. In creating programs which would fund the various endeavors of graduates of these schools long after his death, Honnold both made the schools more powerful and permanently affixed his name to that power.

The Honnold Legacy

Though he died in 1950, Honnold's wealth and power have remained present in influence at the Claremont Colleges—especially Pomona—ever since. In his history of the college, President Wilson Lyon of Pomona remembers Honnold saying often that "Claremont will be one of the great academic centers of the world."³³ A major part of his efforts to help the schools realize this dream was a provision in his will which left \$1,250,000 for the construction of a library to be shared among the Claremont Colleges.³⁴ The building was completed in 1952, and at its dedication, to a group of specially invited guests, chairman of the Board of Fellows Harvey S. Mudd called the occasion "the most significant event in the history of Claremont College."³⁵ The Honnold library is a lasting testament to the process by which Honnold's wealth has fostered

³²William Lincoln Honnold fellowship creation and description, 1929, vertical Files Cabinet 8, Drawer 33, the William L Honnold papers.

³³ Wilson Lyon. *The History of Pomona College, 1887-1969* (Claremont, CA: The College, 1977), 386.

³⁴ Oxford Bodleian Library cables its best wishes for dedication day to the Claremont Colleges, 1952 Drawer 56, cabinet 14, the William L Honnold Papers.

³⁵ Lyon, *Pomona College*, 445.

a self-perpetuating narrative of his greatness by other powerful men within an already-powerful institution.

This narrative is inseparable from and unashamed of Honnold's connections to exploitation and extraction abroad. Upon his death, which was mourned across the Claremont Colleges, many sung his praises, clearly viewing his success in business as one of his greatest attributes. The Board of Fellows, of which he had been the president, calligraphed in ornate gold script in a memorial book that "He was a citizen of the world and a statesman in humane and constructive endeavors as displayed by the part he took in healing the wounds of Europe after the first World War and earlier in laying the foundation of what has become the greatest mining enterprise in the British Empire."³⁶ Though the Anglo-American Corporation made its profits mining stolen lands and undermining the humanity and sovereignty of African peoples, the board viewed the profits he made as a great achievement, even as a worthy cause, since they benefited Europe in its time of need following World War I.

Repeatedly, in celebrating Honnold on many occasions and dedicating the library in his honor, the Claremont Colleges have focused on his contributions to European recovery and American higher education, but the narratives spun conflate his success economically with his high moral character. James Blaisdell, in a tribute to the donors, recalled that "he was a devoted man... he wanted to help. Such a simple word, but it's the heart of the solution of world problems. And in the solution of that problem he was a partner; and so this great building comes, glorious in all its appointments."³⁷ We can only assume that this partnership refers to any one of

³⁶ Tribute to William Lincoln Honnold from the Board of Fellows of Claremont College, 1951, drawer 69 cabinet 17, the William Honnold Papers.

³⁷ James A Blaisdell's tribute to the donors at the dedication of the Honnold library, 1952, Cabinet 11 dwr 2, William L. Honnold Papers.

many business alliances Honnold entered, whether in the mining industry or later, with his many real estate and other business deals. In blurring the line between Honnold's success and his high character, powerful men like Blaisdell ingrained in the history of Pomona and the Claremont Colleges a narrative that the schools are virtuously entitled to the power and influence they wield in society, academia, and business.

Honnold's life is a story of power – governmental, social, economic, and academic. In his memorialization at the Claremont colleges and the lasting wealth he has left behind in institutions of higher education, he has helped to produce a history that has successfully silenced the exploitative colonial aspects of his successful career. Even after his death—especially after his death—Honnold's legacy at the Claremont Colleges is widely known yet the sources of his power left unaddressed. Processes which endow students with power—fellowships, access to a library—all carry the stamp of this man and his ill-gotten wealth, but because a narrative has already been spun about his upright character, it will take active effort to expose what is hidden in the archives. Trouillot might refer to this as taking history into our own hands, but it is really the duty of any researcher who seeks to produce an honest history of Honnold, Pomona, and of higher education today. Unearthing all the silences in this history may not be possible, but we have to start somewhere, and that somewhere might be in the extensive archives, the ledgers and papers and correspondences, of the Honnold-Mudd Library.

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