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ygnacio-De Soto and Johnson: 6 Generations: A Chumash Family's History

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California's First Maritimers

Bruce M. Mitchell
Baltimore: PublishAmerica LLLP, 2008, 89 pp., \$16.95
(paper).

Reviewed by Jack Hunter
Caltrans, San Luis Obispo

This book was not written for either the professional archaeologist or the knowledgeable layman. The author states that most people get little information on Native Americans after the fourth grade, and that would seem to be the audience at which the book is aimed. With the exception of museum visits, the bibliography cited draws on published sources exclusively, with little if any unpublished materials being examined. The book's title is a misnomer, because its contents consist largely of generalizations about indigenous California coastal cultures after contact, gathered from those published sources and recounted in a casual, rambling style. The exciting new direction of anthropological research that is aimed at Pleistocene seafarers traversing open waters to explore and settle coastal and insular land masses at lowered sea levels is mentioned only in passing.

The book's content involves an average of 3–4 pages devoted to each Native American group located on the California coast, beginning with the Diegueño/Kumeyaay in San Diego County and proceeding north up the coast to the Tolowa of Del Norte County. Less than half of each section generally pertains to maritime topics, with the remainder consisting of tangential details not particularly germane to the subject at hand.

This book is greatly in need of an editor. For example, the table of contents lists an index, which is not present. There are no individual citations for statements that are made; instead, each section concludes with up to a dozen references that are repeated in a bibliography that follows the summary chapter.

With the exception of references to rafts, balsas, dugouts, and plank canoes, there is no discussion of watercraft styles, construction, or navigation details within these pages. The work is completely devoid of explanatory images or illustrations, and there is not even a map of the cultural areas discussed. It appears as though the publisher was content to go to press with the draft manuscript. It might be acceptable as reading for elementary and high-school-age students, and it highly praises Native American society and resiliency against the depredations of Euroamerican colonialism.



6 Generations: A Chumash Family's History

Film based on a script by Ernestine Ygnacio-De Soto and John R. Johnson; produced, directed, and photographed by Paul Goldsmith, ASC; John R. Johnson, executive producer. Copyright Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, 2009. Running time: 56 minutes 45 seconds. (Price \$18.00, order from Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, estore@sbnature2.org.)

Reviewed by Glenn Farris
Research Associate, UC Berkeley Archaeological
Research Facility

In this beautiful video, Barbareño Chumash descendant Ernestine Ygnacio-De Soto shares the story of six

generations of the Indian side of her family, reaching back to the arrival of the Spanish expedition of Portolá in 1769. The story, as told through the eyes of women in six generations of Ernestine's family, is the result of her collaboration with John R. Johnson of the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History. In both his anthropological and personal interest in the culture and history of the Chumash Indians, Johnson picks up where the famed linguist, John Peabody Harrington, left off in his ongoing interest in Ernestine's family. Harrington was introduced to the Ygnacio family by famed California anthropologist Alfred Kroeber. Harrington became virtually part of the family over 50 years of interaction, to such a degree that in his declining years Ernestine's mother, Mary Yee,

cared for him for a few years prior to his death in 1961. Johnson has worked intensively with the voluminous field notes left by Harrington and has shared his findings with De Soto, which often sparked memories of her childhood when she would see this strange, tall white man spending many hours with members of her family and patiently scribbling down notes. Only later in life did she appreciate the legacy that had been left to her and other members of the Chumash tribe, a legacy which, working with Johnson, she then turned into the script for this captivating video.

Using old drawings, photos, old film footage, live interviews, and dramatic readings by Ernestine of her family's story, filmmaker Paul Goldsmith has woven together an important testimony to the vibrancy of a people brought into the California missions around Santa Barbara. Tina Foss, curator at the Santa Barbara Mission and instructor in Native American studies at Santa Barbara City College, adds further historical context to the events that paralleled the family history related by Ernestine. In the first half of the film, the background story is developed mainly through interviews with De Soto, Johnson, and Foss. In the second half, we increasingly see the one-woman performance that Ernestine has presented on numerous occasions before live audiences, who have been captivated by the delivery and the very personal connection that Ernestine brings to this important piece of history.

There were a few bits in the video that puzzled me, such as the sudden appearance of an image of Marin

County Coast Miwok Indians drawn by Louis Choris in 1816 as part of an illustration of the history of the Chumash after contact. In addition, I question the suggestion that if the Mexican Revolution of 1810–1821 had not occurred, the planned scheme of transforming the missions into parishes would not have been delayed. There were also some old film images meant to illustrate the Chumash revolutionaries of 1824 fleeing into the San Joaquin Valley that might have had more impact if they had been somehow explained, and while showing an image of an impressive rock art motif at Painted Cave in San Marcos Pass, I felt that the camera panned over the image too quickly to allow it to be properly appreciated.

Even while focusing on the story of her Chumash ancestors, Ernestine does not ignore some of the other ethnic groups in her family background, especially her mother's Chinese husband, from whom the name Yee came. However, the fact that she could trace her lineage from daughter to mother on back through six direct generations strengthened her connection.

This video would be appreciated by all viewers who have an interest in the human story of the Chumash people, and although it might be most valued by residents of the Santa Barbara and Ventura County areas, the essential story would be embraced by a much wider audience. It would be wonderful if more such linear, personal histories of Indian families could be developed to help inform and educate the general public.

