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Indian Names and Naming Practices in the Sierra Nevada Foothills

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The linguistically classified Yokoch, Mono, and Miwok Indian people of the central-southern Sierra Nevada foothills are known for their large and widespread aboriginal population, their sizable and active contemporary population, their association with Yosemite and Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Parks, and their outstanding basketry traditions that are world-renowned. A study comparison of their traditional and postcontact naming practices and names revealed that the source and nature of cultural change in their case was northern Euroamerican hegemony.

THE late Elman R. Service's research on naming and political evolution brought the topic of naming practices to my attention in the early 1990s. My maiden name, Dick, although somewhat ignominious for its profane misuse in American popular culture, is a well-known and respected Indian family name in central California. My maternal grandmother, a descendant of Miles Standish, used to "read" phone books to see what families and ethnic groups lived in the community. I was predisposed, therefore, to study naming for clues regarding social organization and culture change. Previous California ethnographers recorded when and by whom Indian names were bestowed (e.g., Kroeber 1906; Gifford 1932:46-49; Gayton 1948b:166, 234, 273; Spier 1978:479). Another look at the data and recent native consultant statements cast more light on introduced customs and changes over time. The results could prove useful for comparison with other regions and cultures.

The subjects for comparison herein are the linguistically classified Yokoch,¹ Mono, and Miwok of the central-southern Sierra Nevada foothills (Fig. 1), who are noteworthy for their large, widespread aboriginal population, their sizable and active contemporary population, their association with Yosemite and Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Parks, and their outstanding basketry

traditions that grace museums around the world. This study of their names and naming practices revealed that northern European hegemony was the source and nature of culture change in historical and early modern times in the central California interior.

According to the most reliable estimate, there were more than 60 localized, dialectical "tribes" in the central California interior prior to Euroamerican contact (Latta 1977:63). Population estimates for the aboriginal Yokoch, Mono, and Miwok combined range from about 20,000 to about 36,000 (Kroeber 1925:882-883; Cook 1976:191-193, 236; Kunkel 1962:477, 497; Baumhoff 1963:231; Latta 1977:63). The aboriginal economy of these groups falls into the category of "collectors" (e.g., Binford 1980) or "complex hunters-and-gatherers" (e.g., Bean 1974:13). In general, their diet consisted of cooked acorns and salmon, supplemented by other seasonal plant foods, fish, and game. The largest groups had several year-round settlements or villages with about 200 or more inhabitants in each (Latta 1977:63). Other site types included intertribal gathering locations, seasonal camps, and resource gathering areas. The more than 7,600 recorded archaeological sites in Madera, Fresno, and Tulare counties (A. Baldwin, personal communication 1999) reflect both the wide-

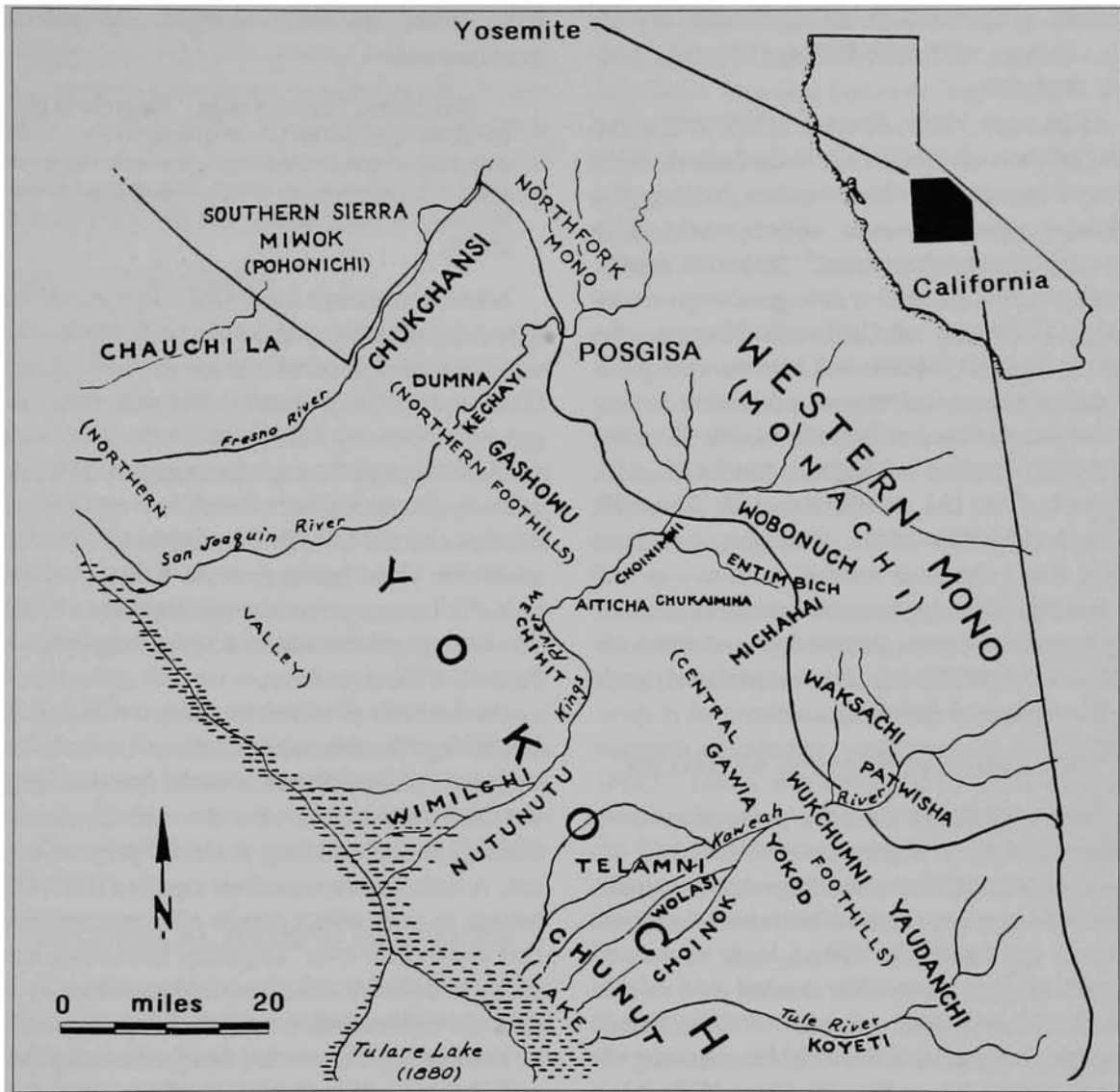


Fig. 1. Miwok, Yokoch, and Mono groups in the central-southern Sierra Nevada. (Map adapted from Gayton [1948].)

spread aboriginal population and the sometimes concentrated, sometimes dispersed historical period settlements.

NAMING RESEARCH

More than a century ago, Lewis Henry Morgan (1881:2, 8) noted that in prehistoric times, gens or clans (and individuals) were named after an animal or an inanimate object, never after a

person. More recently, Shoumatoff (1985) restated Engels' (1884) economic history, which was based on Morgan's research, by noting that family names and descent were associated with control over and inheritance of property. Farm land was usually the most important property to track for this purpose, but in nonfarming societies, personal names were sometimes used to legitimize use-rights to gathering areas and inheri-

tance of property such as ceremonial objects (e.g., LaPena 1978:327; Pilling 1978:145; Wallace 1978:686).

In the early 1900s, Kroeber (1925:499) noted that "[a]lmost all [California Indian] names were those of ancestors or older relatives," although a few were names of animals, objects, verbs, or in one case, the number seven.² Reported names, naming practices, and a few genealogies convinced University of California ethnographers that the Yokoch, Mono, and Miwok were patrilineal, with personal names and clan or moiety totems passed down on the father's side (Kroeber 1925:835; Gayton 1930:365, 1945:411, 413, 1948a:2, 103, 134, 1948b:166, 192, 234, 273; Gifford 1926:389, 393). However, it is more likely that indigenous naming customs—as well as movable property, resource gathering area use rights, trade contacts, knowledge, and ritual objects—were ambilineal, if not matrilineal, prior to European and American contact.

TRADITIONAL NAMING CUSTOMS

Martha (Wilcox) Tapleras (personal communication 1994), a Wukchumni-Waksachi (Y-M) elder, explained that according to their traditions, children are named after relatives on both sides of the family, or after a bird, animal, or legendary character. She named one of her grandchildren Limik, after the Prairie Falcon character in Foothill Yokoch fables. Among the Inyana (upper Kings-Kaweah River Yokoch) in particular, the maternal grandmother gives the child its first name. The paternal grandmother chooses its second name, which is now used as the middle name. During the traditional naming ceremony, the core value of reciprocity is reinforced by the baby being "given" to the grandmother who, in return, bestows a name and thereby a social identity on the infant. The stated reason for this custom is to show respect for the grandparents and to strengthen extended family ties (L. Franco, personal communication 1995). The Chukchansi apparently also derived names

from either or both maternal and paternal grandparents:

Sometimes, "not very often," the child is given the same name as one of the grandparents. In this way a name will be used through a series of generations. It becomes, in effect, a family possession because no other family will use it [Spier n.d.: 1/154].

Mono consultants have stated repeatedly that it is the paternal grandmother or father's sister who bestows personal names in their culture (Dick n.d.). Traditionally, this was done in a naming ceremony during which the infant was "pulled" through the top of a cradleboard basket made by the name giver. Later, in a smaller ceremony, a Mono-Yokoch elder explained, the maternal side of the family gave the baby a name as well (N. Turner, personal communication 1993). The latter practice could be a Mono adaptation to Foothill Yokoch culture.

On the basis of residence pattern data and intermarriage between the Northern Foothill Yokoch and Southern Sierra Miwok, it seems likely that the Pohonichi (Mi) were also matronymic and bilateral in their naming practices prior to contact. A male Miwok consultant reported that "You belong to your wife's people after you are married, not to your own" (Aginsky 1943:464), indicating that the Miwok prescribed matrilocality as did their neighbors and in-laws, the Chukchansi (Y).

Kroeber (1925) recorded that the historical Miwok included oblique totemic references in their personal names. For example, someone might be named Hauchu, referring either to a yawning bear or a gaping salmon, but only the person's closest relatives and friends knew which totem and associated moiety the name referenced. He thought this was probably a "secondary and comparatively late" addition to Miwok culture (Kroeber 1925: 453-454). Supporting this conclusion of a postcontact change, a Chukchansi-Miwok woman explained to Gayton (1948b:198) that moiety totem inheritance was "like children having the father's name the white way."

Whatever the group differences, it is clear that naming was considered an honor and a privilege in the central-southern Sierra Nevada foothills. Name-giving underscored the importance of grandparents in children's lives, and the naming ceremony itself reinforced family ties and the principle of reciprocity.

Multiple Name Custom

Prior to Euroamerican contact, Indian people often had several names, bestowed by both sides of the family. The restriction on speaking the name of a deceased person until after the annual coming-out-of-mourning ceremony practically necessitated such a custom (Kroeber 1925:55). As Kroeber (1925:499) noted, "a new appellation was assumed on the death of any namesake . . . the inconvenience caused by this practice was guarded against by the custom of each child receiving two names." Apparently, the two names were used alternately by the different sides of the family, not as first and last names. Other indications of flexible, ambilocal residence and bilateral (Hawaiian) kinship are in accord with this remembered naming tradition (see McCarthy 1993:55; Dick-Bissonnette 1997:229-231).³

HISTORICAL NAMING PRACTICES

Beginning around 1770, Spanish missionaries baptized central California Indians, giving them Christian names in the process. Examples from the Sierra Nevada foothills include the names Gregorio, José, Francisco, and Pasqual.⁴ Mission Indians or neophytes in the area are indicated by the last names of Soledad and Bautista, after Nuestra Señora de Soledad and San Juan Bautista missions located more than 100 miles west of the Sierra Nevada foothills. Spaniards and Mexicans also christened Indian people, mainly the elderly, during their expeditions to the California interior (Phillips 1993:47-51). However, mission survivors were relatively few in number in the study area. Pahmit (Bill Wilson), a Dumna (Y) man who grew up in the Friant area in the late 1800s, told Latta (n.d.),

"I know five or six Indians who been at Missions. One [or] two been Monterey. One [or] two been San Juan. One [or] two been San Miguel. They tell me 'bout the church there. They no like it." Some individuals from the foothill and mountain groups were killed when their villages were attacked, while others escaped into the mountains (Cook 1976:250). Some were captured or recaptured. Pico's expedition in 1825-1826, for example, captured 40 natives, one Christian (baptized Indian) from the Chukchansi area, and 10 runaways, "old and young," from Soledad Mission, who fled to the Kings River (Cook 1961:182). Contact-induced diseases and warfare killed many Indians in the lower foothills and the San Joaquin Valley who might otherwise have acquired Spanish names.

A more prevalent naming pattern in the study area began in the mid-nineteenth century, when American settlers staked claims to farm and ranch lands in the San Joaquin Valley, as well as to mining areas and summer grazing meadows in the high Sierra. Indian men employed by these settlers to drive cattle, shear sheep, or build roads often took the last name of their employer as their Euroamerican name. Sometimes this resulted in full siblings having different last names. A Wukchumni man known as Sam Garfield, for example, used the name of his father's or brother's employer in the Springfield-Porterville area, while close relatives in the tribal homeland near Three Rivers went by the surname Hunter (M. Tapleras, personal communication 1994).

In some cases, Indian children were adopted or became indentured servants. An orphaned Indian boy raised by the Sample family became known as Sam Sample (E. Sample, personal communication 1993). Another Indian boy by the name of La-ache was indentured for 13 years to Ira McCray in the 1850s "in the capacity of Domestic servant and general laborer" and given the name "Jack" (Fresno Historical Society Archives, as cited in Clough and Secrest 1984:20). Another source of last names was the first name of a white employer.

Thus, Tom, Dick,⁵ Bill, George, Charlie, Ed, and Pete became Indian surnames in a progression from, for example, "Tom's Indian" to "Indian Tom," or, using a place name to distinguish one man from another, "Dry Creek Tom." In the next generation or census, Tom would then become a surname.

Several Indian people in the study area took the names of early white settlers who left to fight in the Civil War. A white storekeeper on the Fresno River named James M. Rhoan or Roane left his surname behind when he returned to the South (English 1986:29). A "half-blood" Chukchansi man named George Rivercomb was born in the Friant area ca. 1858 (Latta 1977: 157, 443). His probable namesake, George Rivercombe, came to Millerton in 1853, settled in Burrough Valley, and then left to join the Virginia Confederates around 1861 (English n.d.:194; Clough and Secrest 1984:103).

Not everyone who ended up with a European name was associated with a particular person. Some came to be known by a place name or geographical feature near where they lived. Spanish military officer Alférez Gabriel Moraga is credited with naming the San Joaquin River to honor the Virgin Mary's father (Bancroft 1885:47; Rose 1992:13). The Posgisa Mono family name Joaquin (see Theodoratus et al. 1978:B5) probably derived from their home territory on this river.

While some foothill and mountain families remembered the Indian names of their parents and grandparents, only a few managed to be known by an Indian name in their dealings with whites. A man named Watokai (from the word *watak*, meaning pine nut) was a well-known tribal leader in the Centerville area in the mid-1800s (Kroeber 1906: 142). Joe Pohut (from the Wukchumni [Inyana] word *pohut*, meaning squirrel), and his cousin Henry Icho, (from the word for turtle in several Foothill Yokoch dialects), kept these Indian words as last names (Gayton 1948a:103; Latta 1977:609). Their contemporary, Tawpnow, was less fortunate. He often was referred to in the white community as Jim "Britches" due to a childhood incident, and his

Indian name was corrupted to "Tupino" (Latta 1977:609).

As with other California Indian groups, it was probably customary in the Sierra Nevada foothills never to speak one's own Indian name (e.g., Kroeber 1964:127-128), so even well-intentioned white people could only indirectly learn them. The loss of distinctive Yokoch, Mono, and Miwok names signifying individuals' heritage and their replacement with common Euroamerican first names was, of course, just one of many indignities suffered by these people in their dealings with whites (e.g., Planas 1991).

Nicknames were acquired throughout one's lifetime, reflecting the flexible nature of naming and the indigenous use of humor and ridicule as leveling devices. Gayton's (1948a:30) Chunut and Tachi (Y) consultants cited individuals with five or six nicknames. A Dumna (Y) man named Pahmit (Bill Wilson) acquired the nickname Lumpah, meaning "cave-in," after several unsuccessful gold mining efforts in the mid-1800s (Latta n.d.). More ignoble nicknames sometimes were bestowed by whites. One Indian man was nicknamed "Plez Work," probably by his boss, and an elderly Indian woman employed at the Wawona Hotel ca. 1900 was nicknamed "Short and Dirty" (C. Bates, personal communication 1987). Examples of nicknames in the area that became surnames include Patch, Goodeye, Polecat, and Buckskin.

Once officially recorded on a birth, baptismal, or wedding certificate, or for a land allotment (after the Dawes Act of 1887), family names were passed down to the next generation. Of the 426 households abstracted from the 1933 United States Bureau of Indian Affairs California Roll Book from the Sierra National Forest region (English 1986), European family names predominate (80%). These names were mostly of English and Irish origin, although a few are French, Swedish, Polish, and Hispanic. An untold number of Indian women married white men and took their names. One recognizable category derived last names from white men's first names (13%). A small number of family names

came from nicknames (6%). Only a handful of names were based on Indian words or names, or were followed by an Indian name in parentheses, suggesting that it was recognized outside as well as within the individual's family (1%).

WOMEN'S NAMES

A few Indian women's names are documented in the area. Examples include Kalapine, "an old doctress" at the Chukchansi Picayune Rancheria near Coarsegold; a Mono woman named Moiac, who lived in Crane Valley around 1870; Wahnokot (Maggie Icho), a Wukchumni basketmaker; and nine other Yokoch women interviewed by Frank Latta (1977:xxiv).⁶ In the mid-nineteenth century, women often were given an English first name, usually by an employer or client for whom they worked as a maid or laundress. Young women acquired last names when they married or remarried, but some elderly Indian women were known in the white community only by a first name. There were many Marys, Lucys, Janes, and Annies among them.

Around the beginning of the twentieth century, Christian missionaries introduced another naming practice, that of addressing a woman by her husband's last name, e.g., Mrs. Sherman (Christensen n.d.). While this Euroamerican custom acknowledged a woman's social rank (above children and unmarried women), it also slighted her identity apart from her husband's and symbolically separated her from her matrilineal kin. However, by the mid-twentieth century, the title "Mrs." was considered a more respectful way to address someone than by one's first name. Wearing an apron and serving coffee and cake also were interpreted by Indian women as "the white way" of honoring senior women who traditionally hosted gatherings. Women who in their youth had worked as maids for white families surely did not miss the subservient nature of their role but several Mono and Yokoch consultants made unsolicited comments about how kind their white employers were and how much they learned from them (M. Baty, personal

communication 1993; E. Sample, personal communication 1993).

While some Indians adapted to white society, others resisted with traditionalism. McCarthy (1993:71) noted North Fork Mono descendants who used their mother's last name when their father was non-Indian. In two prominent central Foothill Yokoch families, the daughters kept their maiden name (from their father's first name) when they married to remain identified with their Indian heritage (Noren n.d.). In one of these families, the mother was an accomplished basketmaker, and in the other the maternal grandfather and mother were respected healers. These examples demonstrate a social orientation towards the Indian community in modern times when the pressure to assimilate, and thus resistance, intensified.

PLACE NAMES

Place names in the central California interior that were derived from Indian names include Wah-toke Creek, after the aforementioned Centerville area "chief"; Lake Moic, in honor of a Mono woman named Moiac; Mt. Hogan and Hogan Road after a Chukchansi medicine woman named Molly Hogan, who lived to be over one hundred years old; and Tenaya Lake, named after a Yosemite Miwok elder (cf. Gudde 1998:390, 415). Other place-names in the area that are still in use today were derived from local tribal or place names, such as Yosemite, Wawona, Nipinnawasee, and Ahwahnee.

Squaw Leap on the San Joaquin River and Squaw Valley in Chukaimina territory were obviously named by Euroamericans but perhaps in translation of former Indian place names that referred to women.⁷ Two stories or legends have been recorded about the place name Squaw Leap. In one story, the setting is the Gold Rush era, ca. 1850. Yokoch Indian women (probably Dumna) are pursued by white miners near Fort Miller and jump off the high bluff into the river to avoid being captured and raped.⁸ In a very different (and probably older) Mono legend, the origin of salmon in the upper San Joaquin River is attributed to two In-

dian women, one of whom jumps into the river and turns into a fish when her sister refuses to babysit for her (Lynch 1973:56).

Squaw Valley (in eastern Fresno County) might have been so named by white hunters when Indian men were absent, fighting in the Mariposa Indian War (Clough and Secrest 1984:210). Another possibility is an explanation given by "one of the older Indian women," about fifty years ago, that a depression in a bedrock outcrop on the west side of the valley was a woman's footprint (Clingan and Clingan 1985:40). Accordingly, the rock was named Wootona, or woman's foot, designating the valley as women's land.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In the late 1920s, a Choinimni man known as Pony Dick Winatun stated that the Choinimni "followed the father in everything." Gayton (1948b: 148) interpreted his statement as a reference to "moiety, totem, and official positions, but not necessarily . . . professions such as doctoring." Alternatively, he could have been referring to or been influenced by postcontact changes, including acceptance of the Christian concept of "God the Father." Christian patriarchy was syncretized with traditional beliefs in the 1870 Ghost Dance movement (Bean and Brakke Vane 1978:670-671). Thus, translation problems or misunderstandings between the investigator and the consultant, along with a shift towards patronymy in the early twentieth century due to partial assimilation, probably contributed to a presumption of patriliney by ethnographers.

Accounts from other regions support the idea that patronymic naming and patriliney were introduced by outsiders. By the late 1700s, Spanish missionaries in coastal California began recording women's and children's names based on the husband's or father's new Spanish name (Johnson 1988:233). Working in the Northwest Coast culture area in 1928, Barbeau (1990:58, 63) noted that village and tribal moieties were not totemic or patronymic "until the coming of the white man." Bandelier found that "succession in the male line

among the Aymara of South America was a change introduced by Spanish legislation at the end of the sixteenth century" (Olson 1933:380).

A significant pattern in personal naming revealed by this study is the dominance of patronymy in the foothill Indian communities of central California by 1933. In comparison, McCarthy (1993: 86) found that "at least 50%" of the names listed for the North Fork Mono in the 1900 Census were Indian names. The small number of Spanish names reflects the few individuals who returned to the Sierra Nevada region from the Spanish missions, and the relatively less significant impact of Spanish and Mexican culture in this area compared to the mostly northern Euroamerican onslaught that followed.

In sum, a shift to patronymy in the central California interior resulted from approximately four generations of exposure to and interaction with Euroamericans. Although some traditional Indian customs continued to be handed down, the context of Gayton's (1948b) conclusion that the Yokoch-Mono were "strongly patrilineal" is late nineteenth to early twentieth century Euroamerica.

In related but broader research, ethnographic and archival data indicate that groups in the Sierra Nevada foothills had a matrifocal social organization that shifted towards patriarchy in response to Europeans and Americans but retained some of its gender egalitarianism (Dick-Bissonnette 1997, 1998). A possible alternative explanation to adaptation and assimilation was suggested by Johnson (1988), who concluded that on the basis of mission baptismal, marriage, and death records, elite families among the historical Chumash on the central-southern California coast were patrilocal while the residence preference or pattern for Chumash commoners was matrilocal. In this light, dual residence patterns reflect indigenous, stratified social organization.

According to a cross-cultural study of matriliney by Schneider and Gough (1961), there is nothing inherently contradictory about matriliney and socio-political complexity; thus, further explanation is

needed to account for patriliney in central California. Since Johnson's (1988) data are from the post-contact period, his findings could reflect contact-induced change, with perhaps differential rates of acculturation between elite and commoner Chumash families being due to their differential access to material wealth and power from the invaders.⁹

Further ethnohistorical, ethnographic, and comparative studies have the potential to shed more light on these related questions. The research presented here suggests that despite the fragmentary nature of the data, naming practices and associated customs can contribute insights into the often piecemeal process of acculturation and the variable nature of cross-cultural interaction.

NOTES

1. Yokuts, more accurately glossed "Yokoch," is a linguistic classification based on the word for "Indians" in several foothill dialects (Powers 1877:369). In this article, groups whose first language was a Yokoch dialect are indicated by (Y), transitional Yokoch-Mono groups by (Y-M), Mono by (Mo), and Southern Sierra Miwok by (Mi).

2. Wukchumni elders told Gayton (1948a:103) that during the first few weeks of a baby's life, before it was given a name, it was called "one-seven," then "two-seven," and so on. Thus, "seven," or "six" before the introduction of the seven-day week by the Spanish, was a term of address meaning "week-old baby." Mid-twentieth century genealogies indicate high birth and high infant mortality rates (Spier n.d.). The latter may partly explain why infants were not named immediately after birth.

3. Aboriginal population estimates alone are too unreliable to determine if ambilocality was a result of contact period depopulation, but other data point to a matrilocal or ambilocal residence pattern for this sub-region (Dick-Bissonnette 1997; cf. Kunkel 1962, 1974).

4. The first Spanish mission on the central coast, San Carlos Borromeo (Carmel), was established in 1770 (Castillo 1978:100). Juan José and Francisco were Kaweah (Y) "chiefs" who were "much respected by the people" (Stewart n.d.:11). Francisco could be the "Coweas [Kaweah] captain" of the same name mentioned in an 1850 account as "an old mission Indian from San Luis Obispo" (Derby 1852:39).

5. A white man by the name of James Dick lived "about a mile below Pinehurst" in the late 1870s (Clough 1983:137). My father's sister, who was our

family genealogist, could find no direct connection between our Scotch-Irish ancestors and the central California area prior to my natal family's relocation to Fresno in 1965. This anecdote points out, however, that last names that appear to be first names can be misleading.

6. A photograph of Kalapine can be found at the Huntington Library Photo Archives, Grace Nicholson Collection #D-55-3. In 1871, Moiac married George Sharpton, a French immigrant and carpenter, and their daughter Mary married cattleman George Teaford. Lake Moic, on the Teaford Ranch in Madera County, was named in the mother's honor (Dick-Bissonnette 1993). Crane Valley was a Chukchansi summer home and resource gathering area prior to encroachment by the North Fork Mono (McCarthy 1993:68). A dam built at the southeast end of Crane Valley in 1895 created Bass Lake (Clough 1983:83).

7. The American frontiersmen's derogatory term for Indian women, "squaws," originates from the Algonquian language (Hinton 1994:171). The term and the stereotypes associated with it are understandably offensive to contemporary Indian people.

8. Accounts of John Sutter (Phillips 1993:124-125), John Marsh (Lyman 1940), and Lewis and Clark's French-Canadian guide Charbonneau (Howard 1971), for example, describe the use and abuse of Indian women by frontiersmen. See Hurtado (1988, 1999) for historical accounts regarding the mistreatment of California Indian women during the Gold Rush era, and Planas (1991) for oral histories in the study area.

9. Elizabeth Colson (1977:383) suggested that male Indian leaders in colonial California were like Melanesian "Big Men," in that "[t]hey were tolerated because their communities needed them as power brokers in dealing with potentially dangerous strangers or with supernatural powers, but they were trading on this tolerance to create bases of political power."

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