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Ishi the Last Yahi: A Documentary History. By Robert E Heizer and Theodora Kroeber, Eds.

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## Book Reviews

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**Ishi the Last Yahi: A Documentary History.** By Robert F. Heizer and Theodora Kroeber, Eds. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979. 242 pp. paper. \$6.96

The stark reality of the conflict-laden relationships between California Indians and White gold-seekers and settlers is nowhere more poignantly illustrated than in the personage of Ishi, the fabled last Yahi. Robert Heizer and Theodora Kroeber have assembled in this collection the primary out-of-print materials, unavailable to Mrs. Kroeber when she wrote her earlier biography of Ishi in 1962. These documents are organized in four parts relating to the history of the interaction between the Yahi and neighboring Whites, Ishi's entry into the outside world, his few remaining years at the University of California Museum of Anthropology, and his death in 1911. They create for the reader an impressionistic collage of the drama of Ishi's life.

Scholars of Indian history have attributed primary responsibility for drastic depopulation rates among most Indian groups to the combined effects of virulent European diseases and Indians' lack of familiarity with methods of combatting them. However, this collection of documents reveals another set of deadly factors that reduced Ishi's tribe down to just himself in the space of less than forty years.

As Whites rapidly inundated California's fertile valleys and hills after the gold rush of 1849, Indian inhabitants were pushed into less desirable areas. Further White population increase and agricultural development altered the local ecosystems so that Indians could no longer easily provide for their basic subsistence needs. The ensuing competition for resources began with minor Indian raids for food and clothing followed by swift White reprisals. Almost inevitably human deaths on both sides resulted from such encounters which escalated the conflict to a blatantly genocidal pitch. In a raid against the Yahi in retribution for stealing cattle, Norman Kingsley, a Californian, illustrated this brand of genocidal racism. The vigilantes had located their prey in a cave where the women and children had secreted themselves when Kingsley's perverse conscience began to get the best of him. "Kingsley could not bear to kill these children with

his 56-calibre Spencer rifle. 'It tore them up so bad.' So he did it with his 38-calibre Smith and Wesson revolver." (p.150) This type of mindset accompanied most campaigns against Indian people in California.

These deadly raids reduced the Yahi to the handful remaining in Ishi's small band. These few individuals then attempted to hide themselves in the most isolated and rugged reaches of the Mill and Deer Creek valleys of northern California for the next thirty years, raiding mountain cabins for food and crawling under the dense thickets so as not to create any visible trace of their existence. These harsh conditions of life persisted until 1908 when Ishi, alone and emaciated, allowed himself finally to be taken by those from whom he had hidden for so long. Disease was not the operative factor in this situation. The relationships in which Ishi's People found themselves embroiled in the late nineteenth century, byproducts of American expansion and colonial domination, caused the demise of the Yahi.

Upon his entry into the outside world, Ishi immediately became a symbol for those imbued with the progressivist tradition, which posits that human society evolved on a unilinear path from more "primitive," communistic relationships to the individualistic, contractual bonds of the modern capitalistic state. Cast as the sole survivor of a "stone-age" tribe, his subsequent experiences were interpreted as a drama of encounter between the "primitive" and the "civilized." His unfamiliarity with American technology and eagerness to take on many of the ways of his keepers reinforced their notions of their own cultural superiority. Having located their own culture at the apex of an evolutionary scale of human civility, Ishi's incredulity seemed to fit. Because he had been forced into an existence of isolation and self-reliance, his devoted scientists labelled his situation "aboriginal" and proceeded to studiously record and examine every facet of his behavior. Never before had they had such free and easy access to what they believed to be a "primitive mind."

In reality Ishi's life patterns were not "aboriginal" in the pre-contact sense of the word. Such an arduous existence would not have evolved without some threat from without. The response of Ishi's People to the growing White presence was first to attack the intruders in hopes of driving them away. Failing in this, they attempted to remove themselves from the situation as best they could. The way of life they developed represented a desperate adaptive response to the genocidal campaigns of their White neighbors. That they came to rely more on older technologies

for making stone and glass implements and bow-hunting in their quest is significant, but not the entire story. Ishi's anthropologists were fascinated by this example of a non-reservation Indian who had never been forced to endure any attempts at directed culture change by well-intentioned but misguided U.S. Indian policymakers and missionaries. They mistook his form of personal autonomy for aboriginality.

The materials assembled here should be employed with some care. The editors provide introductory comments for each major division of the book and for each selection contained within, but they are not extensive and interpretation is still necessary, as with all historical documents. Beginning students may require special guidance through the materials in order to get past the extreme brutality described in the first section and to grasp the dynamics of the complex processes in operation. It is also regrettable that no transcriptions of interviews with or reminiscences by Ishi himself were included. That four years of such intensive scrutiny should produce so few records of this sort is surprising. Especially in this regard, this collection of documents captures more of the interface of relationships between Indians and Whites and between ideology and reality, than of Ishi the man.

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**Essays in Population History: Mexico and California. Volume Three.** By Sherburne F. Cook and Woodrow Borah. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979. 333 pp. cloth. \$20.00

The volume of three essays is the final product of Sherburne Cook and Woodrow Borah's long and fruitful association in the field of historical demography. In Chapter I they reexamine the extent and timing of the precipitous decline in Native population that marked the first 100 years of Spanish rule in central Mexico. Information obtained from a recently discovered colonial document dated 1646 leads them to conclude that the nadir was reached between 1620-1625 at approximately 730,000, a figure slightly less than three percent of the 25.2 million estimate for the population of central Mexico in 1518. The 1646 document also contains records of Indian tribute payments and Royal revenues, which Borah and Cook use to develop an interesting