

Ishi in Three Centuries (Review)

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Karl Kroeber & Clifton Kroeber, eds. Ishi in Three Centuries. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2003, 416 pp.

This book was conceived in the aftermath of the repatriation controversy that erupted with the discovery that Ishi's brain had not been cremated with the rest of his remains but instead had been removed during autopsy and stored for over 80 years in the National Museum of Natural History at the Smithsonian Institution. Ishi, a Yana Indian man who emerged from a life of hiding to live for a few years in the Berkeley Museum of Anthropology, and was celebrated in Theodora Kroeber's widely read book, *Ishi in Two Worlds* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1961). In the end, after a long and often painful process, Ishi's brain was returned to Yana country for burial along with his ashes. At long last, Ishi's relatives have been able to help Ishi in his final journey.

But while peace and care-taking surrounded Ishi's burial, the repatriation process, especially at the University of California Berkeley campus, produced division and rancor, pitting Native American against white, faculty against administration, and colleague against colleague. One casualty includes Alfred Kroeber (1876-1960) the man who was responsible for offering Ishi's brain to the Smithsonian. Kroeber was a student of Franz Boas, the founder of the Berkeley Department of Anthropology, author of the influential *Handbook of the Indians of California* (Wash. D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1925), and a friend of Ishi. Alfred Kroeber was also the father of the two editors of the book, Clifton Kroeber, Norman Bridge Professor of History emeritus, and Karl Kroeber, Mellon Professor in the Humanities.

As the product of two sons, the book could be seen as an effort to exculpate the father. In truth, the 100 or so pages addressed to the repatriation controversy are notably balanced, with statements from a wide variety of participants and observers. A historian of the University of California Berkeley, Department of Anthropology, (Buza-ljkko) offers a contextualization of Ishi's closest relationships after his arrival at the San Francisco museum. The author of the Smithsonian report (Speaker) details the various data used by the Museum in the Ishi repatriation case. The public apology issued by the former chairperson of the Department of Anthropology (Brandes) on behalf of the department is followed by the dissenting opinions of two central figures in the difficult intradepartmental process that preceded the official policy: Foster offers an explanation for why he believes that no apology was warranted, and Scheper-Hughes, who advocated for a much stronger apology, gives her interpretation of the process and its implications for Native peoples and the discipline of anthropology. Karl Kroeber, son and humanistic scholar, offers a metacommentary on understanding, repatriation, and humanistic scholarship. Finally, Karen Biestman, lawyer, professor and museum director, analyzes and questions the motives and effects of the passage of the California Assembly Concurrent Resolution (ACR) 25: the Remains of Ishi.

If K. Kroeber and C. Kroeber had chosen to publish only this set of essays on the repatriation drama, many readers might have been satisfied. Without question, this portion of the collection is interesting, fair, and important. The vision behind this volume, however, is more expansive. The twenty-two contributors include Native,

non-Native, and “cross-blood”, as well as writer, artist, archaeologist, activist, lawyer, and others. Moreover, the repatriation articles make up only one part of a five part book. The first section, “Ishi in San Francisco” includes the aforementioned history of Ishi’s personal relationships with department personnel (Buzaljko), an evocative and sweet recollection from a man who as a child knew Ishi (Zumwalt), and two analyses of Ishi’s San Francisco experiences. The first analysis (Adams) locates American class antagonisms in the popular press accounts of Ishi’s visit to a vaudeville show at the Orpheum Theatre, and the second (Weaver) braids Ishi’s story as “spectacle” with the stories of an enslaved Efe man who was displayed in fairs, a museum, and a zoo, and an Inuit man whose deceased father’s bones were kept in a museum.

In the sections “Ishi’s world revisited” and “Ishi’s stories”, seven academics analyze materials that remain from Ishi’s few years in San Francisco: the stone blades he carved, the records of his language use, and a few recorded stories. The sole archaeologist (Shackley) concludes from Ishi’s skillful but “atypical” projectile points that archaeological classifications of sociocultural (or tribal) identity on the basis of tool characteristics may be less secure in the chaotic times following the Anglo intrusion into the California area when group boundaries underwent tremendous revision. Starn also complicates the story of Ishi’s identity through an examination of Ishi’s language and some of the historical materials, ultimately refuting the presumption that Ishi was entirely innocent of modern American life. Golla, a linguist, reviews the contemporary knowledge of Yana, Ishi’s language, and Jacknis, a museum anthropologist, details the technologies that shaped the sound recordings made of Ishi. Perry, Luthin and Hinton, all linguists, delve more deeply into the actual stories Ishi told. Perry brings us translations of an origin story and the journey of the dead. Luthin and Hinton analyze the structure of the story of lizard and the story of coyote and his sister in order to highlight Ishi’s personal experience of deprivation and survival.

In the final part of the book, “Ishi as inspiration,” we hear from five contributors for whom the story and stories of Ishi stir and evoke the deep complexities of the continuing chronicle of the Native people of this land. Strankman, a retired court of appeals justice, reflects on Ishi’s refusal to reveal his true name who thus retains, despite his tremendous losses, a place of dignity beyond domination. Vizenor, writer and historian, also ponders the name and the enduring presence of Ishi’s exile and survival, while Owens, novelist and professor, ponders Vizenor’s play about Ishi (1995) and its humorous and clever rejection of the hyperreal archival Indian in favor of Native “survivance.” Each of the final two essays addresses a work of art inspired by Ishi. Dobkins, art museum curator, provides commentary on an oil painting by Frank Day, a Maidu artist who encountered Ishi as a child. Frank Tuttle, a Concow-Maidu artist, closes the book with his comments on his own oil painting, “What Wild Indian?”

As the contributors to this volume reveal, Ishi continues to possess an almost irresistible hold on the modern imagination, Native and non-Native alike. Ishi’s appeal is deserved, from his dignified and joyful survival in the face of the incomprehensibility of his losses, to the inspiration of his belated but finally enacted burial after the odd

and heartbreaking circumstances of his autopsy. Through their respectful inclusion of many different voices and perspectives, Karl and Clifton Kroeber have honored Ishi along with those who have allowed themselves to learn from the powerful lessons that Ishi embodies. Clifton and Karl Kroeber have insisted that the truth be told about the genocide that destroyed Ishi's people, and many other Native peoples of California. At the same time they clearly refuse to cast Natives as vanished and nameless victims. This collection makes a timely appearance as preparations are made for the 2004 inauguration of the National Museum of the American Indian, an institution that celebrates—as Ishi did—the undeniable survival of the Native peoples and cultures of this continent.

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