CLUB PAPER
CXXXIV

AMERICA'S LAST NATURAL MAN
The Story of Ishi

by

STEPHEN P. THOMAS

THE CHICAGO LITERARY CLUB
2008

AMERICA'S LAST NATURAL MAN
The Story of Ishi

by

STEPHEN P. THOMAS

THE CHICAGO LITERARY CLUB
18 December 2006

© 2006 by Stephen P. Thomas
(All rights reserved)

America's Last Natural Man

EMERGENCE

This story starts near a slaughter-house in the late afternoon on August 28, 1911, in Oroville, California. Oroville ("gold town") is on the east side of the Sacramento Valley about 150 miles northeast of San Francisco. Workers leaving the slaughter-house in near 100-degree heat happened upon a man, barefoot, dressed in rags and crouched in brush, obviously near starvation. He was immediately suspected of thievery. He offered no resistance to the workers. They called the local sheriff, who took the man into custody and placed him in the Oroville jail. The captive uttered a few words, but nothing which could be understood by anyone present. The *Oroville Register* reported on the following day:

> An aboriginal Indian, clad in a rough canvas shirt . . . was taken into custody last evening by Sheriff Webber. . . . In the Sheriff's office . . . he made a pathetic figure crouched upon the floor. He is evidently about 60 years of age. . . . Over his shoulder a rough canvas bag was carried. In it a few man-

zanita berries were found and some sinews of deer meat. By motions, the Indian explained that he had been eating these. . . . Apparently the Indian has never come in contact with civilization, except as he has assisted in robbing some lonely cabin near his hiding places.

. . . The attire of the Indian, his general appearance and his presence here, are strongly indicative of the fact that he belongs to the Deer Creek tribe of wild and uncivilized Indians. These Indians were originally proud and warlike, and their frequent depredations upon the white settlers led to an organized war against them. . . . Two years ago a surveying party drove the Indians from their last hiding place. As far as could be ascertained, the remnant of the once proud tribe at that time consisted of four bucks and one squaw. . . . It is believed that the aborigine who was captured last evening is either the last surviving member of the party, or that he was the one delegated by the others to make a foray upon the slaughter-house.

While in custody, the man was given food as curious townspeople looked on. He looked back at his onlookers, not showing fear and taking a lively interest in the strange food given to him, including bread and butter, a doughnut, an orange, a banana, a tomato. He showed obvious distaste with the banana until he was shown that it must be peeled before it is eaten. On the strength of this learning he proceeded to try similarly to peel the tomato. On August 30 the *Oroville Register* reported:

In the weird pantomime, which has in all ages been the medium through which people of different tongues converse, the Indian found on Monday . . . yesterday told as best he could the story of his wanderings. The tale more firmly confirms the belief that the Indian is the last surviving member of the uncivilized Deer Creek Indians. . . . All day long

> there was a continual stream of people passing upstairs to the cell in which the Indian was kept. It is estimated that there were fully 1,000 people who viewed the Indian yesterday.

The Oroville authorities were in a quandary. The man in their custody could not be charged with any crime. He was not hostile in any aspect of his behavior. He showed no interest in being returned to the hills from which he had come. He did not react in any way to suggest that he was even distantly related to any of the other Native Americans in the area who were brought to see him. The Oroville authorities then received an urgent telegram from A. L. Kroeber in San Francisco, as follows:

> Sheriff Butte County. Newspapers report capture wild Indian speaking language other tribes totally unable to understand. Please confirm or deny by collect telegram and if story correct hold Indian till arrival Professor State University who will take charge and be responsible for him. Matter important account aboriginal history.

Alfred L. Kroeber sent this wire in his capacity as the chair of the new Department of Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley. Kroeber, born in New Jersey in 1876, received a PhD in anthropology in 1901 (only the second such degree awarded in the United States) from Columbia University where he was a protégé of Franz Boas, founder of modern anthropology in the United States. Boas believed in fieldwork rather than the anecdotal, armchair, "my travels among the aborigines of (whatever)" kind of anthropology fashionable among the Victorians. Kroeber soon settled on a position in the new department of anthropological studies at Berkeley, passing up overtures from Chi-

cago's Field Museum. His special interests were the language and culture of indigenous tribal communities, particularly those in California and Mexico. But Kroeber was a true generalist, equally at home in linguistics, archaeology and cultural studies. He soon became a giant in his field, remaining so until his death in 1960. He served as department head at Berkeley for more than forty years and wrote more than five hundred books and articles. What's more, he looked the part of the serious scholar, and was much emulated in academic fashion, aspect and demeanor for two generations.

Back to Kroeber's telegram. He and the Oroville authorities soon received approval from the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington to bring the "wild Indian" to San Francisco. Kroeber sent Tom Waterman, another former anthropology student of Columbia's Franz Boas, whom Kroeber had hired in 1907 in his growing department. Waterman had done exploratory work to no avail in 1908 in the Oroville area, looking for evidence of elusive, remnant Native American people. A small group (including an elderly woman) had been stumbled upon in hiding in a remote canyon cave by a surveying party earlier that year.

Waterman came to Oroville by train and tried to communicate with the captive using vocabulary lists he and Kroeber thought might be helpful. There was no success until Waterman tried the word in the Yana language for yellow pine—*siwini.* Instant success, as the man's eyes lit up and he repeated the word, tapping on his wooden cot, "siwini, siwini." It soon became clear that this man (he was soon to be named *Ishi,* the word in his language for "man") was a Yahi. The Yahi were a tribelet from the southernmost range of a tribal group known as the Yana, never very extensive in population. They had lived, possibly for several thousand

continuous years, in the westward-facing foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountain range along the fringe of the east side of the northern Sacramento Valley.

There had been limited contact between the elusive Yana and the Spanish and other early ranchers in the valley, but the end of these people came with the gold miners of 1849. By 1865 only a small southernmost remnant of the Yana was left in their pre-European settlement range. In simple terms, it was a genocide, not accidental, not well-organized, not mandated by any public authority, but deliberate and effective. Here are some numbers from a 1906 Congressional report to the Bureau of Indian affairs. There were about 260,000 Indians in California in the early 1800s. This number was reduced, primarily in the 1850s, and mostly by some 200,000 miners, by more than 90 percent. The known remainder, just above seventeen thousand, were by 1906 scattered among the general population or on a few reservations. This was mainly because the new people, the *saldi*, the white men, had fire sticks that could make holes in the bodies of the Yana people. There was no chance for coexistence when the miners started work in the caves and streams which the Yana had used for many centuries. One of my sources states that the California gold rush of 1849 resulted in the largest human migration since the Crusades. Ishi was born during this era, perhaps as late as 1860. When he was found in Oroville he was the last Yahi alive, having survived essentially as a fugitive for his entire life, the last two or three years alone. The dying woman the surveyors had found in the cave in 1908 was Ishi's mother.

Waterman returned with Ishi to San Francisco by train on September 4, having excitedly written to Kroeber just before leaving Oroville:

> He recognizes most of my Yana words. . . . I get a few endings that don't occur in Northern Yana. . . . he has some of the prettiest cracked consonants I have ever heard. . . . He will be a splendid informant.

From Ishi's perspective it had been a big week. He had emerged from a life of isolation, possibly unintentionally as a result of exhaustion and hunger. He had every reason to expect to be immediately killed by the saldi who captured him. Strangely, they had not harmed him, but instead had fed and clothed him. Now he was being taken away by a saldi who could speak some of his language on a huge smoking, whistling, serpent-like demon which he had always assumed from his vantage point in the hills gobbled up all the saldi which it managed to pull through its skin so as to devour them inside.

WHAT'S THE CONNECTION HERE?

Someone asked me as I was telling them about preparing this paper, "Of all the thousands of subjects to write about, why are you writing about this California Indian who has been dead for many decades?" Here's my answer. My father was born in Kentucky in 1907. His ancestry has been traced back no further than to his grandparents, although he told me he thought he might be related to a "Thomas" who came through the Cumberland Gap with the Daniel Boone group in the 1770s. I cannot verify this. My grandmother, Anna Susan Osborne, born in 1879, was a twin. A grandson of her twin sister told me a few years ago that he was convinced, upon seeing his grandmother after she had died in the late 1950s, he was looking at a Cherokee woman. The

same conclusion can be drawn from pictures of my grandmother in her later years. Thus it is at least plausible to me that there is some Cherokee or other Indian ancestry in my paternal line. The records are very sparse when it comes to frontier communities in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Kentucky. There was frequent cohabitation or contact involving settler men and local Indian women. The primary reasons for this were that women were reluctant to move away from older and safer communities in the East to the dangerous conditions on the frontier and that mortality of women on the frontier was high, particularly during and after childbirth. So there was a chronic shortage of women west of the Atlantic states, and thus the inevitable attraction of frontiersmen to Native American women.

My father's family came north from a backwoods farm in Hodgenville, Kentucky (birthplace of Abraham Lincoln), to Bloomington, Illinois, around 1915. My father was then seven or eight years old. World War I and the 1920s provided good employment opportunities to his father and older brothers in the upper Midwest. But by the early 1930s my father (one of eleven children, most still at home in those Great Depression years) elected not to finish high school but to travel west on freight trains with friends, spending three or four years knocking about doing ranch work, odd jobs, later joining CCC and WPA work projects. He went through Colorado and Wyoming on these travels, eventually through California from north to south, and finally through Arizona and Texas coming back to the Midwest sometime after 1935. It was his grand tour, and he had many stories about this period which he told over the years. I wish now I had paid greater attention to them.

In the early 1970s, visiting my parents at their home in Peoria, Illinois, I came upon a book about Ishi which was a discard from the local library where my father was a board member. This book was mostly pictures and intended for young readers. I have not come upon it again in my work for this paper, but I have a very clear recollection of being impressed both with the story and the photographs. By that time I had been back several years from service in the early 1960s with the Peace Corps in Africa where I lived for more that two years in close contact with indigenous people (my own grand tour). I have no recollection of talking about Ishi with my father, but he had a great interest in the prehistory of North and South America and read extensively in this area. I am sure that is how the Ishi book came to our house.

Now push the fast forward button and move up about thirty years to the present. I am currently a student in the Master of Liberal Arts degree program at the University of Chicago. In the early 2006 term I took a course with Professor Bertram Cohler which had an extensive reading list in later nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century sociology, anthropology and psychology (Karl Marx, Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, Claude Levi-Strauss, Sigmund Freud and others). One of the books assigned was *Tristes Tropiques* (1955) by Claude Levi-Strauss. This superb French scholar was born in 1908 and is still alive today. He is the originator of what has come to be termed the school of structural anthropology, broadly meaning that what is important about *things* is their relationship to other *things* rather than the *things* themselves. Thus communities and people are studied according to their social structure, particularly in relation to structural opposites such as young/old, women/men, married/unmarried, high status/low status, acceptable/unacceptable behavior, and so on.

Tristes Tropiques is part autobiography and part a kind of thinking man's travelogue concerned with Levi-Strauss's work in central South America in the 1930s and 1940s. He has refused to sanction any English language rendering of the title of his 1955 book because of the special affective quality of the title in French, which connotes a sadness for what is gone, never to be replaced, having been destroyed mostly by deliberate or inadvertent contact with the external world. *Tristes Tropiques* is thus literally *sad tropics*, but the connotation is deeper than that. As I was reading this book I came upon the following passage:

> It must have been an extraordinary advantage to have access to communities which had never yet been the object of serious investigation and which were still quite well preserved, since their destruction had only just begun. Let me quote an anecdote to illustrate what I mean. An Indian, through some miracle, was the sole survivor after the massacre of certain savage Californian tribes. For years he lived unnoticed in the vicinity of large towns, still chipping stones for the arrow-heads with which he did his hunting. Gradually, however, all the animals disappeared. One day the Indian was found naked and dying of hunger on the outskirts of a suburb. He ended his days peacefully as a porter at the University of California.

I immediately wrote in the margin: "ISHI! Why didn't he use his name?" I had no recollection of hearing or seeing anything about Ishi during the preceding thirty years since my encounter at home with the Ishi book back in the 1970s, but the name came immediately and forcefully to mind. So I did some checking and soon learned that no biography of Ishi even existed prior to Theodora Kroeber's well-received

work *Ishi in Two Worlds,* published in 1961. Thus Levi-Strauss, writing in 1955, may have recalled some reference to this man in the professional literature of his day, but there is no reason he would have ever seen or heard the name Ishi, the name assigned to him by his keepers at the California museum.

That is the background regarding my renewed interest in Ishi. A few weeks ago I was traveling with a naturalist group in the Hopi/Navajo country of northeastern Arizona. We were at the home of Ruby Chimerica, a Hopi weaver, storyteller, community leader and ambassador, who was speaking to us of the fragility of Hopi culture. The Hopi language and much of the culture are well documented. The Hopi dance tradition is alive and well. But for decades English has been the language of the schools. Many Hopi adults know little of the Hopi language, speaking English even at home. There are about fifteen thousand people listed in the present Hopi tribal register. Are they enough to insure the long-term survival of the spoken Hopi language? Probably not. By contrast there are more than two hundred thousand Navajos, and their cultural preference is to have as little contact with Anglos as possible. Thus the very complex Navajo language has better prospects of longer-term survival than the Hopi language at present. Now back to Ishi, the last speaker of the Yahi variant of his Yana language, one of many which is gone forever as a living language. Before European contact there were as many as one thousand such languages in North America. *Tristes pour Nord Amerique.*

FORTUITOUS TIMING

In the fall of 1911 Kroeber was about to open a new departmental museum in San Francisco in a former law school

facility on Parnassus Heights next to the medical school looking over Golden Gate Park toward the ocean. The university at Berkeley had acquired this property in 1903 mainly to store the collection of donor Phoebe Apperson Hearst, an avid collector of art objects and archaeological materials. Her husband had been a wealthy mine owner. Her son was William Randolph Hearst, the newspaper tycoon. Caretakers regularly lived in the museum to see to its security and that of its collections. These living quarters were not elaborate, but comfortable and sufficient. Ishi was brought to the museum, met Kroeber for the first time, and soon settled into its living space. The press and the public were demanding information about him, especially his name and that of his tribe. After all, every Indian has a name and a tribe—such as Little Beaver from the Blackfeet and the like. Ishi's real name, what he was called by his own people, will never be known. It is not clear that he ever shared his tribal name with anyone, as it would be a cultural taboo for him to tell his name to strangers. Thus Ishi—meaning man. And for his tribe—*Yahi,* his word for his people, rather than the more prosaic designation, i.e., a member of the Mill Creek Group or a Southern Yana.

The museum which was now his home opened to the public a few weeks after Ishi's arrival in San Francisco by train, then ferry and streetcar. Thousands came on Sunday afternoons to see Ishi, seated with Kroeber, demonstrating the arts of his people, making arrowheads and spear points, bows and arrows, imitating the calls of animals and especially making fire with little more than his bare hands and a wooden fire drill. Ishi soon learned enough English words and city customs to move freely about the museum, its grounds and surrounding city streets. His cheerful de-

meanor produced many casual friendships. He was a frequent guest at the homes of museum staff and departmental faculty, including that of chairman Kroeber. Over time his only regular duties consisted of the Sunday afternoon sessions with the public and part-time work in the museum as a janitorial assistant. He was paid $25 a month from museum funds. He loved to be with children, and they with him.

Ishi was in contact with other Indians in San Francisco, especially an elderly mixed Yana/Maidu gentleman from an area north of Ishi's Yahi country. This was Sam Batwi, who knew enough both of English and Ishi's language to serve as a communications bridge in the early days. Ishi did not like Sam, a bearded, wire-spectacled, fancy-dressed, know-it-all and generally condescending person who looked upon Ishi as a hapless bumpkin from the woods, totally unschooled in modern and city ways.

We have spoken of the three most important people in Ishi's post-emergence life—Kroeber, Waterman and Batwi. To these three Saxton Pope ("Popey" to Ishi) should be added. Pope was a surgeon who was Kroeber's age and taught at the medical school adjacent to the museum. Pope examined Ishi early on and became his doctor. Pope soon became fascinated with Ishi's archery skills and Ishi with Pope's sleight-of-hand tricks. It is fair to say they became soul brothers, spending much time together. Ishi's entire method of handling his bow and arrow (how he stood or crouched, the placement of his hands on the bow, string and arrow, and the manner of release) is found nowhere else in Native American culture, but is found in Mongolian or Asiatic practice. This lends credence to the suggestion that Ishi's people were directly descended from Asian ancestors and that this aspect of their culture had remained unaf-

fected by contact with other groups of Native Americans through several millennia.

As time progressed, one of Ishi's favorite (and potentially dangerous) pastimes was to wander the halls of the hospital, visiting patient rooms, chatting amiably as best he could in broken English and Yahi with persons who were often very ill. These patients, as well as hospital staff, generally welcomed and were encouraged by his visits. In all the reading I have done, while I have found references to Ishi's being startled, confused, and even repulsed by the strange ways of the saldi, he always remains cheerful and never expresses resentment or anger. No wonder he survives to this day as a beloved figure by those who feel they have come to know him.

The United States Bureau of Indian Affairs had taken no interest in Ishi or his people prior to his emergence. But two months after they had approved his removal from the Oroville jail to the care of Kroeber and Waterman, the Bureau wrote to their agent in California:

> It is difficult to form a clear idea as to the possibilities in this Indian as regards civilization. . . . As this Indian has been in the care of the authorities [at the museum] for some time, they have had opportunity to make observations and to gain some idea of his intelligence, and capacity for civilization. Make inquiry with special reference, first, to the possibility of training him to conform, at least to a reasonable degree, to the customs of civilized life; and, second, as to the possibility of training him for the performance of simple manual labor.

Kroeber, understandably incensed when he read this directive, replied succinctly and directly, as follows:

> I beg to state that from the outset Ishi has conformed very willingly and to the full extent of his understanding, to the customs of civilized life.

There was some further correspondence with the Bureau in 1914 in which they observed that Ishi's mental development, according to the opinion they had received, "was not beyond that of a six year old child." Kroeber again replied confirming that Ishi was doing well and preferred "his present condition" to a permanent return to his old home. The Bureau record ends there.

Inevitably, the time came to consider a return visit with Ishi to his homeland. It took Kroeber and Waterman some time to persuade Ishi to make this excursion. He had several objections: (1) There were no beds, chairs or tables around his Mill Creek ancestral home; (2) it could be cold, wet or both, and there were no roads or trails; and (3) there was very little to eat in this place.

Ishi may also have had some residual fear of being abandoned in the land of the dead, left alone among his murdered people. Many had never been given proper funeral rites according to their custom. But Kroeber and Waterman were insistent and Dr. Pope was anxious to join them, along with his eleven-year-old son whom Ishi knew well. So off they went to Deer and Mill Creek country in early May 1914, spending a month with Ishi, visiting the hunting grounds, fishing streams and places where he had resided in his more-than-fifty continuous years in the outdoors. The Yahi followed the seasons, spending spring and early summer close to the lush new growth in the Sacramento Valley, moving higher in the foothills as the summer weather heated the lower elevations, being always mindful of the need to store

non-perishable food (seeds, acorns, nuts, and dried fish and meat) in secure areas to be consumed during the cold winter months. Ishi demonstrated to the party the full range of his survival techniques.

I love to camp and spend as many nights outside each year as possible from spring well into the fall. It takes work to live outdoors even if you don't have to find your own food, make your own clothes, baskets and tools or be continually looking for firewood. In Ishi's case it was also necessary to be mindful of the fact that you would be hunted down and killed if you let strangers or their dogs become aware of your presence through the slightest sound, scent, footprint, wisp of smoke or other sign.

The expedition was a great success. Much was learned for the anthropological record, and Ishi genuinely enjoyed being safe in his old home territory in the company of his new friends. One of the few times of distress to Ishi occurred when one of the party killed and brought to camp a rattlesnake, insisting that it be cooked and eaten. Ishi would have no part of this. These snakes were to be totally avoided, and never handled in a way disrespectful to their life, which could unleash their power to do evil. Ishi was surprised that the party survived this incident. They all happily retuned to San Francisco on June 1, 1914.

DEATH IN A MUSEUM

Ishi developed a troubling cough in December 1914. During January 1915 he was thoroughly checked by Dr. Pope and others in the hospital next to the museum. Tuberculosis was suspected but could not be confirmed. By late spring he had bounced back and spent the summer

with the Watermans, where a linguist worked extensively and insistently with Ishi each day, recording all he could of the Yahi language. Ishi weakened again at the end of the summer and came back to the museum in September to be closer to Dr. Pope—Popey, as Ishi called him.

Through the balance of 1914 and into 1915 it was apparent that Ishi was gravely ill with tuberculosis. Meanwhile, thousands were dying almost daily on the battlefields of Europe, and a great influenza epidemic was about to begin which would take several million lives. (Dangerous times. My own mother was a few months old.) Kroeber was in the East and in Europe on a one-year sabbatical during most of this time but kept in close touch regarding Ishi's condition. Ishi spent time in the hospital but near the end was relocated to a room in the museum where an exhibit was dismantled so that he could have lots of sunlight and a view of the nearby park. Kroeber and Edward Winslow Gifford, the museum director, corresponded about funeral details as the situation worsened. Ishi died on March 25, 1916. Kroeber had written to Gifford on March 24, in a letter not received until just after Ishi's funeral:

> Please stand by our contingently made outline of action, and insist on it as my personal wish. There is no objection of a cast (death mask). I do not, however, see that an autopsy would lead to anything of consequence, . . . Please shut down on it. As to disposal of the body, I must ask you as my personal representative to yield nothing at all under any circumstances. If there is any talk about the interests of science, say for me that science can go to hell.

Ishi's remains were cremated and placed in a Pueblo Indian jar in Niche 601 at Mount Olivet Cemetery south of

San Francisco, near what was until recently, but not then, called Candlestick Park. A handful of people attended the funeral, including Waterman, Pope and Gifford, who reported the basic details to Kroeber in a letter dated March 30, stating:

> The only departures from your request were that a simple autopsy was performed and that the brain was preserved. The matter was not entirely in my hands—in short what happened amounts to a compromise between science and sentiment with myself on the side of sentiment. . . . [Ishi] told Pope sometime ago that the way to dispose of the dead was to burn them, so we undoubtedly followed his wishes in that matter. In the coffin were placed one of his bows, five arrows, a basket of acorn meal, ten pieces of dentalium, a boxful of shell bead money . . . , a purse full of tobacco, three rings . . . all of which we felt sure would be in accord with Ishi's wishes. . . . The inscription of the jar reads ISHI, THE LAST YANA INDIAN, 1916.

THE REST OF THE STORY

Ishi's death and burial were noted in the press as he had achieved fairly widespread notoriety as the "wild Indian who lived in a museum." Then the screen went blank. For nearly fifty years essentially nothing was said or written about Ishi. Virtually nothing by Kroeber or by Waterman or Gifford or anyone else who had known Ishi personally. Why? I mentioned earlier how I backed into the probable reason for the oblique reference to Ishi in 1955 by Claude Levi-Strauss. I went to the Web and started gathering some information. Most of it started with references to Theodora Kroeber's *ISHI in Two Worlds,* published in 1961. More than

one million copies have been printed. It was a best-seller, translated into several languages and excerpted in *Reader's Digest.* Theodora Kroeber's book led in many ways to Ishi's rebirth, just as the work of another scholar, Orin Starn, we shall soon learn, undertook work which led quite recently to the reburial in his home territory of Ishi's entire physical remains, not just those placed in Niche 601.

We have to return to Alfred Kroeber. In 1913 Kroeber's first wife, the beautiful and charming Henriette Rothschild, died of tuberculosis at the age of thirty-six. Then Ishi died in 1916. Kroeber at age thirty-nine was much shaken by these events. He was not well himself, suffering from what he would learn was Meniere's disease, which led to his deafness in one ear. He was exhausted from fourteen years of work on his 995-page *Handbook of the Indians of California,* which was published in the 1920s and remains influential today. He later termed the time from 1915 to 1922 his *hegira,* a kind of exodus episode. He entered psychoanalysis and in due course qualified and practiced for a time as a lay analyst. He did not sever ties with the university at Berkeley or with anthropology. He pressed on and muddled through.

Now I turn to Theodora Kracaw, as she was known before she met and married Alfred Kroeber. Theodora was born in 1897. Her mother had been raised by a pioneer family on a Wyoming ranch. Theodora grew up in the West, spending her first eighteen years in the gold-and-silver mining town of Telluride, Colorado, riding her Navajo-trained pony. Her early years were spent in close connection with the culture and company of Native Americans in Colorado. As a Berkeley student in 1918 she took a class with Alfred Kroeber. Then in 1919 she married a frail San Francisco lawyer who died in 1923, leaving Theodora, at age twenty-six, with two

small children. In 1925 she reconnected with Kroeber (twenty years her senior) at a reception for Margaret Mead. They were soon married and by the end of the 1920s had two more children of their own.

The Kroebers remained happily married for decades. Theodora and others occasionally pressed Alfred to do something to preserve Ishi's story, to which he always demurred. I think it was grounded in his aversion to the anecdotal school of anthropology and to the dangers of generalizing from a sample of one. He was an academic, not a storyteller. There may also have been deeper issues in which he found it difficult in retrospect to decide whether he had done the right thing in bringing Ishi to San Francisco. In the late 1950s, by which time Kroeber was well into his seventies, Theodora took up this project herself, with the spectacular results noted above. She single-handedly resurrected Ishi, or at least his story.

Theodora was a sensitive and skilled writer, but not a professional historian and neither a scholar nor an academic. She had the help and encouragement of one of Kroeber's successors at Berkeley, Robert Heizer, full access to the archival records at Berkeley and the museum, and daily access to her husband, one of the few people then living who had known Ishi. Was her book, therefore, complete and accurate? It is a commonplace to say that those who turn raw historical events into a contemporary narrative often leave their own fingerprints on the account they produce. I will not judge Theodora negatively. Without her, this story would not have been told. She may have guarded her husband's reputation with great care. She may have romanticized Ishi as emblematic of a healing process among diverse elements of American society which was emerging in the

late 1950s and is still a work, a process, in progress today. She may have occasionally failed to dig deeper into areas of the record which did not suit her ends. So what? She remains the sine qua non of this story.

Orin Starn is a professor of cultural anthropology at Duke University. He grew up in an academic family in Berkeley in the 1960s and 1970s, dropped out of college for a time in the early 1980s, spent some time on the Navajo reservation (I have a niece who is now in her fifth year working among the Arizona Navajos and completing a dissertation), and returned to college at the University of Chicago, studying anthropology. In the late 1990s Starn decided to take a fresh look at the Ishi story, it being almost forty years since Theodora Kroeber's book was published. Starn refers to Ishi as one of his childhood heroes. The result, some seven years later, is Starn's engagingly written book, *Ishi's Brain* (2004). (Three word summary: times have changed.) It is a kind of academic version of "CSI," the popular TV series concerning crime scene investigations.

Here is a brief outline of Starn's perceptive detective work and the outcome: Recall Kroeber's mandate that there be no autopsy of Ishi—"Science can go to hell." An autopsy was performed. Starn found the report. Ishi's brain was removed and preserved and, according to second- or third-hand oral reports which reached Starn, sent off to the Smithsonian where it had later been destroyed. Berkeley said, "Not true." The Smithsonian said, "Not true." Starn pressed on until he found this note to Kroeber dated December 30, 1916, in a bundle of papers in the Berkeley archives: ". . the National Museum will be very glad to receive the brain of Ishi which you offer to present, . . ." Starn soon found a letter to the Smithsonian written by Kroeber on

October 27 of that year: "I find that at Ishi's death last spring his brain was removed and preserved. There is no one here who can put it to scientific use. If you wish it, I shall be glad to deposit it in the National Museum collection."

Starn *now* confronted the Smithsonian with this record. At length the museum acknowledged that the brain had been placed with them and that it was still there. Starn had headed down this trail in part because Art Angle, a Native American activist from Ishi's general area, had become aware of the Ishi story and felt his remains should be returned to the ancestral grounds under the Native American Graves Protection and Restoration Act of 1989.

After a lengthy, convoluted, legally complex and contentious process, Ishi's entire remains were united and returned to his homeland. They were placed in a basket and buried in the ground near Deer Creek sometime late in 1999. This was not a public event. There is no marker. Those few present took an oath of secrecy.

ENDNOTE

In April 1962 Fred H. Zumwalt Jr. wrote to Theodora Kroeber thanking her for *Ishi in Two Worlds* and recalling in vivid detail many happy hours he spent with Ishi during Zumwalt's childhood in San Francisco. Here is a brief excerpt including a real global village scene from his letter of April 24:

> My name was difficult for him so that he gave me the name of MUT . . . His name for our Chinese laundry man was "Kite" after "Kite" brought me a dragon-kite, dried

> lichee nuts, ginger and brown sugar sticks on Chinese New Year in 1915. Ishi loved the sugar sticks and the kite but not the lichee and ginger. Kite showed Ishi how to fly the kite and we must have been a sight to watch, the Chinese with black baggy pants, wearing a que, a black skull cap and felt slippers, Ishi in a scotch plaid wool shirt, but barefoot and I in a sailor suit. . . . . It is said "no person is truly dead until no one left on earth has any recollection of that person" so Ishi lives again brought back to life by your efforts.

Ishi understood the word *goodbye* but was reluctant to use it. He preferred "You go, I stay" or "You stay, I go," it seems, because there was too much finality in *goodbye.* So I will say to you—in Ishi's manner, "We can *all* go now."

Bibliography

Heizer, Robert F. and Theodora Kroeber, eds. *Ishi the Last Yahi: A Documentary History.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979.

Kroeber, Alfred L. *A Roster of Civilizations and Culture.* Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1962.

Kroeber, Clifton B. and Karl Kroeber, eds. *Ishi in Three Centuries.* Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 2003.

Kroeber, Theodora. *Ishi in Two Worlds.* Berkeley: University of Californaia Press, 1961.

———. *Ishi, Last of His Tribe.* New York: Random House, Inc./ Bantam Books, 1964.

———. *Alfred Kroeber—A Personal Configuration.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970.

Riffe, Jed and Pamela Roberts, producers and directors. *Ishi, the Last Yahi.* DVD for WGBH, Boston. Shanachie Entertainment Corp, 1994.

Starn, Orin. *Ishi's Brain: In Search of America's Last "wild" Indian.* New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004.

This paper was written for The Chicago
Literary Club and read before the Club on Monday
evening, the Eighteenth of December,
Two Thousand and Six.
This edition of three hundred copies
was printed for the Club in the month of
October, Two Thousand and Eight.

PRINTED
IN THE U.S.A.