



RE-READING ISHI'S STORY

INTERPRETING
REPRESENTATION IN
THREE WORLDS

NORMAN K. DENZIN

ROUTLEDGE


RE-READING ISHI'S STORY

Re-Reading Ishi's Story offers a manifesto of sorts through a critical reading of an anthropological classic, Theodora Kroeber's 1961 book, *Ishi in Two Worlds: A Biography of the Last Wild Indian in North America*.

The heart of the analysis involves a five-play cycle, built around Gerald Vizenor's trickster-survivance model. It gives Ishi a voice he never had in Kroeber's book and imagines an Ishi who was not the happy warrior in Kroeber's book. The author follows the story line in Kroeber's book, focusing on key events as recounted by Alfred Kroeber and his associates Saxton Pope and Thomas Waterman. Chapter 1 tells Ishi's story in his own words; Chapter 2 retells Ishi's capture narrative, which includes the recording of his story of the wood ducks; Chapter 3 builds on stories told about Ishi by Zumwalt Jr.; Chapter 4 criticizes Kroeber and associates for making Ishi return to his homeland, asking him to 'play' Indian; and Chapter 5 takes up his death and the recovery of his brain. The concluding chapters address repatriation practices, genocide, Indigenous ethics, discourses of forgiveness, and a performance autoethnography ethic for this new century, returning to the Kroebers and their autoethnographic practices.

This book continues a four-volume project on Native Americans, the postmodern Wild West shows, museums, violence, genocide, and the modern U.S. American use of the Native American in a collective search for an authentic identity (Denzin, 2015, 2013, 2011, 2008). It will be of great interest to scholars and students of qualitative inquiry, anthropology, and Native American studies.

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Interpreting Representation in
Three Worlds

Norman K. Denzin

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FOREWORD

Here I offer a manifesto of sorts, a critical reading of an anthropological classic, Theodora Kroeber's 1961 book, *Ishi in Two Worlds: A Biography of the Last Wild Indian North America*¹ (1961, 1964, 2002). There have been multiple printings, a children's version taught to more than one million California schoolchildren, films, videos, movies, and YouTube blogs. Ishi is everywhere. Kroeber saved Ishi for the ages. Her book is written and read against, alongside, and within its historical moment: the California extermination of 300,000 native Americans (1860–1870), the National Museum of the American Indian Act of 1989, the Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990, the American Indian movement, Red Power, Wounded Knee II, World War Two, the Nazi Holocaust, Hiroshima, the civil rights movement, tribal capitalism, indigenous mobilizations, indigenous history, sovereign rights, broken treaties, the Second Decade of the World's Indigenous People, the 2017 Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, and the Dakota Pipeline Resistance.

The rediscovery of Ishi's embalmed brain in 1999 reopened his narrative, creating firestorms surrounding his treatment by the Kroebers and the ethics surrounding the study of indigenous communities. The absence of a set of ethical principles guiding the study of indigenous subjects in 1911 makes Ishi's story even more relevant today as we enter the third decade of the world's indigenous people. This is the space my book enters—the post-repatriation Ishi. A new telling of Ishi, Gerald Vizenor's post-Indian, a model of survivance, Ishi a trickster, a joker (2003)—an Ishi who might have been.

More than 150 years have passed since Ishi (1860–1916) was born.² He continues to engage the imagination: he was unique, the last man of his world. His experience of sudden, lonely changeover from the Stone Age to the Steel Age was profound and unique (Kroeber, 1961, p. 10, paraphrase; Clifford, 2013, p. 91). He walked out of the wilderness into a museum. He was studied as a new species of insect by the scientists. They wrote down everything he did (Kingsley, 1911, p. 102). It is time to retell Ishi's story.

This Book

Where to begin. Let's start with Ishi of course. His is an episodic story, incomplete, and loosely strung across lacunae of time, ignorance, and events too painful for Ishi to relive in memory. My narrative follows the original outline of Kroeber's 1961 book, a fictional version (1964), which has been read by more than one million California school children. Kroeber's book is divided into two parts. Part One is Ishi the Yahi, which opens with Ishi's arrest outside a slaughterhouse in Oroville and then brings him to the Hearst Museum in San Francisco. The next six chapters detail the violent history and extermination of the Yahi by white ranchers and miners. Part Two turns to Mister Ishi, his new world, life in a museum, Ishi the craftsman, the brightest year—a trip back to his homeland. It ends with an epilogue, death in a museum.

The heart of my analysis involves a five-play cycle, built around Gerald Vizenor's trickster-survivance model. I follow the story line in Kroeber's book, focusing on key events as recounted by Alfred Kroeber and his associates Saxton Pope and Thomas Waterman. Chapter 1, "You Can Call Me Ishi: The Story of a Trickster," tells Ishi's story in his own words, comparing him to Ishmael, Melville's narrator in *Moby Dick*, another exiled trickster. Chapter 2, "Ishi and the Wood Ducks, Part 2, Part 2, or Ishi the 'Urban' Indian" retells Ishi's capture narrative, which includes the recording of his story of the Wood Ducks. Chapter 3, "Ishi the Happy Indian and Urban Warrior in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park," builds on stories told about Ishi by Zumwalt Jr. (2003) who shared personal childhood memories of Ishi with Theodora Kroeber after reading her book. I suggest Ishi was not as happy as Kroeber and Zumwalt said he was. Chapter 4, "Ishi in the Wilderness: Anatomy of a Life and a Death," criticizes Kroeber and associates for making Ishi return to his homeland where he was asked to play Indian (Deloria, 1988). Chapter 5, "Ishi's Brain: The Trickster's Revenge," takes up his death and the recovery of his brain (Starn, 2005). The concluding Chapters 6, 7, and 8 address repatriation practices, genocide, indigenous ethics, discourses of forgiveness, and a performance autoethnography ethic for this new century, returning to the Kroebers and their autoethnographic practices.

This book continues a four-volume project on native Americans, the post-modern west, wild shows, museums, violence, genocide, and the American use of the dark-skinned Native American in a collective search for an authentic identity (Denzin, 2015, 2013, 2011, 2008). The concept of the civilized, commodified Indian who is asked to play Indian for white audiences must continue to be challenged (Deloria, 1984, 1988).

Notes

- 1 This book steals from Kroeber's title, which was a misnomer on several levels. Ishi was neither wild nor the last Native American in North America. He was the last surviving member of the small Northern California Yahi tribe, which shared territory with the larger Yana tribe. The Yana comprised four language-speaking groups: the Northern Yana, the Central Yana, the Southern Yana, and the Yahi. Ishi was a member of the Yahi/

x Foreword

Yana group (Kroeber, 1961, pp. 6–7; Golla, 2003, pp. 208–209). The Yana of Northern California were destroyed during the California Genocide (1846–1873; Madley, 2016, p. 358). Vigilantes were paid 25 cents for each Indian scalp and \$5 for an Indian's head. In the 1871 Kingsley Cave Massacre, four cowboys kill 30 Yahi Indians. Ishi is one of a few survivors (see Kroeber, 1961, pp. 84–85). Throughout the book, I prefer to use a real tribal name or Gerald Vizenor's term "post-Indian." On occasion, I maintain the usage of "Indian" in a historical document, understanding that Ishi was turned into a simulation of a real wild Indian for political purposes.

- 2 See the appendix for Ishi's time line.

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Denzin, N. K. (2019). Ishi and the wood ducks, part 2, or Ishi, the “urban” Indian. *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, 19(4), 305–319. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532708618787470>



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DRAMATIS PERSONAE

These characters -+ appear throughout the plays in this book.

Adams, Rachel, professor

Amendola, Ralph Mrs., Marcella Healy, and her chums Bess, Dorothy Stevens,
Abbey Kelsey, Gata, and a young girl known only as a mystery child. Ishi's
playmates as young children

Angle, Art, (Maidu), leads efforts for repatriation and reburial of Ishi's brain and
ashes

Mr. Apperson, Yahí enemy, rancher in Yahí country

Batwi, Sam, Yana interpreter

Boas, Franz (1858–1942), father of American anthropology, advocate of salvage
anthropology

Booker, Pointius, provost

Boots, Old Yana woman, Ishi's best friend

Brown, Betty, Yana interpreter

Christians, Cliff,

Claudio,

Clifford, James,

Coyote, Wile E.: Ishi's old friend from Deer Creek and before

Curtius, Mary, journalist, *Los Angeles Times*

Deloria, Philip (Yankton Dakota), author of *Playing Indian*

Delores, Juan, Papago Indian, close friend of Ishi

Dunbar-Ortiz, Rosanne, Indigenous historian, activist (2014)

Elsasser, Albert, part of an archaeological survey that first discovers Ishi in the
mountain foothills

Foster, George, Berkeley anthropologist

2 Dramatis personae

Gifford, Edward, assistant curator University of California, San Francisco (UCSF), museum

Greene, George, keeper of the more than 1,000 native bones and skulls stored in the Hearst Museum

Hearst, Phoebe Apperson (1842–1919), philanthropist, founded the Phoebe Hearst Museum of Anthropology at UCSF in 1911, mother of William Randolph Hearst

Heizer, Robert, professor of anthropology, director of the archaeological survey, UCSF, close friend of Ishi

Hrdlicka, Ales, physical anthropologist, head of the Physical Anthropology Department at the Smithsonian, assembled its brain collection

Ishi One (T. Kroeber's Ishi), Ishi is an artist, but he cannot prove his tribal identity under the provisions of the Indian Arts and Crafts Act (Vizenor, 1995, p. 299, paraphrase)

Ishi Two (real Ishi, Ishi as Vizenor's trickster, Ishi-as-story-teller)

Ishi Three, Ishi-as-Ishmael, a radicalized Ishi #

Jerry and Billy, Zumwalt's pet spaniel and chipmunk, also Ishi's playmates

Jones, Indiana, fictional archaeologist, Kroeber's role model played by Harrison Ford

Joyce, Rosemary, director, Phoebe Hearst Museum

Kite, Zumwalt, family Chinese laundryman, teaches Ishi how to fly a kite

Kroeber, Alfred, 1876–1960, director, Anthropology Museum, UCSF, husband of Theodora Kroeber, close friend of Ishi

Kroeber, Clifton, professor, a Kroeber son

Kroeber, Alfred, Big Chieft, Ishi's name for Kroeber, Henriette Rothschild (1876–1913)

Kroeber, Karl (1926–2009), son of Theodora Kroeber, professor of humanities at Columbia University, coeditor of *Ishi in Three Centuries*

Kroeber, Theodora (1897–1979), wife of Alfred Kroeber, author of *Ishi in Two Worlds*

Lefebvre, Robert, manager of the Mount Olivet Cemetery, where Ishi's ashes were located in 1916

Lena, Lilly, famous London singer and dancer

Loud, Llewellyn, guard, assistant preparator, Hearst Museum

Madley, Benjamin, historian, author of *American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe, 1846–1873* (2016)

Members of the Vanishing Indian Traveling Medicine Minstrel Show in Ishi costumes

Meyer, Larry, director of the state Native American Heritage Commission