

**UCLA**

**American Indian Culture and Research Journal**

**Title**

First Families: A Photographic History of California Indians. By L. Frank and Kim Hogeland.

**Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4bh504jw>

**Journal**

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 32(4)

**ISSN**

0161-6463

**Author**

Barnd, Natchee Blu

**Publication Date**

2008-09-01

**DOI**

10.17953

**Copyright Information**

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

Whidden's command of language is at times gently powerful. The pages of *Essential Song* display a knack for descriptions of northern life and music making that remains free from authorial indulgence and true to the instructive intent of her scholarship. This skill is evident from the earliest pages in which she describes deliciously the soundscape of the Canadian north in spring (1). Another fine example is her section on the Goose Dance, a couple's dance no longer practiced by the Cree. Despite its relevance in connecting Cree song craft to the northern Canadian environment, Whidden relegates some of her most potent and gently affectionate descriptive material on the Goose Dance to a footnote at the back of the book (20n3). Other passages such as her elaboration on Cree song as traditional ecological knowledge and a tool of survival for the northern hunter sparkle with concentrated clarity (49–50).

Respect for community-based knowledge and Native North American agency is important in Whidden's writings. Her customary desire to highlight the perspectives of Cree musicians is evident throughout the text. The selective and ingenious adaptation of nonindigenous musical forms is likewise an apparent subtheme throughout *Essential Song*. More personally, I think that Whidden's informative statements on pre- and early-contact intertribal exchanges between the Inuit, Ojibwe, and Cree groups are perhaps the author's most fruitful subthemes. Whidden states clearly that her work is primarily interested in exploring the impact of European music on Cree music making (31). But her fleeting development of regional Northern Canadian intertribal reciprocity provides an insightful counterclaim against the aphorism in which indigenous people "walk in two worlds"—a claim challenged by Vine Deloria, contemporary artists such as Bob Haozous, and the cosmopolitan border-crossing and cultural dynamism of pre- and early-contact peoples. By threading this subtheme into her broader narrative, shaped during her past three decades of research, Whidden gently raises an important issue on which the next generation of scholars should contemplate in the coming thirty years.

*T. Chris Aplin*

University of California, Los Angeles

**First Families: A Photographic History of California Indians.** By L. Frank and Kim Hogeland. Berkeley, CA: Heyday Books, 2007. 283 pages. \$23.95 paper.

L. Frank and Kim Hogeland's historic compilation offers its readers a warm and personal look at Native California through an immense collection of mostly private family photographs. L. Frank and Marina Drummer collected pictures and stories that depict several generations of Native families from every part of the state. In all, the book boasts nearly 1,500 images and numerous brief anecdotes from the photo albums and homes of California Indian families. Kim Hogeland served as the organizer for the collected photographs and stories and contributed contextualizing essays loosely connected to the gathered materials. Hogeland's chapters also reflect a division of the state into

seven cultural-ecological regions, roughly following Robert Heizer and Albert Elsasser's distinctions in *The Natural World of the California Indians* (1980). The major variation arises from their splitting of the Central and Southern regions into Coastal and Inland pairs (thus Central Coastal, Central Valley and Western Sierra Nevada, Southern Coastal, and Inland Southern), and the incorporation of the Colorado River area into the Inland Southern region.

The variety of images is beautiful. There are the typical historical photographs of elders engaged in traditional practices and figures in ceremonial regalia. Although these are amazing images, the photographs of everyday people doing everyday things make this book intriguing and spectacular. The activities of Native peoples have never been confined to so-called traditional practices, and this collection highlights this reality and expands the realm of what is traditional for some families (for example, riding motorcycles). Most notable are the abundant images of athletes, musicians with their instruments, voyagers preparing to board airplanes, fishers with their enormous catches, families laughing and smiling, men posturing, and lovers embracing.

Although many images are historical in the standard sense, they do not strand Native people in the past. The narratives and more recent images suggest the depth and extent of survival. Readers unfamiliar with Native communities and families in California are likely to come away from this book feeling as if they have missed a lot. They would be right. The families in these pictures and accounts are shown everywhere across the state, doing all kinds of special and routine activities. Together, they document the daily continuation of peoples who must constantly fight to keep their identities, if not to prove their very existence. This is the explicit intent of the authors, and the book's greatest contribution.

In all, the comprehensive approach of *First Families* marks its strength and value, as well as its necessary limitations. The best moments occur where pictures are accompanied by comments from family members who offer stories about the individuals in the images or discuss the activities being presented. This combination gives the sense that one is sitting in the living room or outside on the porch listening to those ever-too-quick stories about relatives and past family exploits. Hogeland generally does a solid job of framing the stories and photographs with generalized histories and cultural accounts of California Indians. Where families shared pictures of Indian cowboys, for instance, the accompanying text discusses the history of horses and horse handling during the Spanish colonization era, as well as sharing narratives about more recent rodeo stunts. Brief sketches of the materials, meanings, techniques, and uses of acorn processing or basket weaving in traditional and contemporary Native California appropriately accompany images of each. For anyone with a passing knowledge of California Indian histories and cultures, however, the brief stories offered by the families will prove far more interesting than the more generic historical overviews and cultural segues.

I would like to offer a comparison between *First Families* and another book produced by Heyday, Brian Bibby's *Deeper Than Gold* (2005). Both combine the use of image and narration in presenting rich glimpses into the world of Native California. Where *Deeper Than Gold* takes its readers past the façade of

the state's mythical birth during the devastating gold rush period, *First Families* more extensively takes its readers past the façade of the state's life as a non-Native space. These texts dramatically reveal that indigenous geographies persist in the landscape and in the memories of California's Native peoples. Bibby's text greatly benefits from its limited scope. *Deeper Than Gold* focuses on only one (the Sierra foothills) of the seven regions covered by L. Frank and Kim Hogeland. On the one hand, *First Families* is far more ambitious, and more widely significant. On the other hand, *Deeper Than Gold* features a healthier dose of direct commentary from Native Californians about Native Californian life in the Sierra foothills.

Expectations for a more in-depth, narrated focus on regional communities should be expected of books like *Deeper Than Gold*. Nevertheless, the biggest disappointment is that the central text of *First Families* does not more directly and more fully reflect the narratives gathered by Frank and Drummer, or at least more directly narrate the pictures. The introductory essays implicitly promise as much, maybe just by virtue of the writers' enthusiasm over the stories shared with them. As a reader, I mistakenly expected a few more of the kind of narratives included in a book like Deborah Dozier's admittedly slimmer and more focused *The Heart Is Fire* (1998). Without the fuller treatment of the collected narratives to go along with the photographs, the unique contribution of *First Families* lies most squarely in the fabulous collection of images, which alone are worth the book's cost. The general overview approach does make the book more accessible to those not familiar with California Indian cultures and histories. This follows the publisher's admirable and explicit statement of purpose to make accessible books. I am also willing to give the authors the benefit of the doubt and presume that the stories shared with Frank and Drummer are understood to be separate from the images shared. The degree of trust implicit in offering these photographs signifies an already commendable accomplishment. Perhaps it was simply too much for me to expect to hear more of the stories as well.

As a further example of the unexpected imbalance between the images and collected (original) narratives, some of Kim Hogeland's essays seem slightly forced, such as in the section on northeastern California, where she turns to a discussion of the California Ghost Dance. Although the Ghost Dance, Bole-Marú, and Big Head practices are culturally and historically important for California, Hogeland does not explicitly establish the relationship between her essay and the photographs. The inclusion of sometimes divergent essays and photographs appears to be an effort to make up for an understandable lack of original material for some sections, or a forced desire to make each section relatively equal in length (to give them all fair treatment). The publishers also rehash a few historically common photographs, like those of Ishi and Kintpuash (Captain Jack). Likewise, the story and images of Ishi are obviously not derived from the research trip taken by Frank and Drummer.

Despite these criticisms, anyone deeply interested in Native California should own this book. *First Families* is an excellent fit for an introductory-level course focusing on Native California, California history, or social history. As

a firm believer in the power of images, especially for pedagogical purposes, *First Families* offers an unparalleled resource. In the uphill battle of trying to make California Indians seem real and relevant in the eyes of the mainstream, this “photo album” serves as an easy first incursion. Non-Native students will recognize the photographs for their banality, and thus make important connections between their families and those of California Indians. The value of such recognition cannot be overestimated. The more Native people are seen as the complicated human beings they are, the more they can be removed from the confines of history and mythology, and the more effectively we can engage in the collective practices of decolonization.

Native Californian readers will find validation for the diversity and multiplicity in their own lives in these photographs. They will likely enjoy the quirky neocolonial antics they apparently share with other Native families. They are also liable to find themselves ranging the spectrum of emotions, looking at friends and family passed, relationships changed, places transformed. Yet these are exactly the kind of images that also generate and rekindle memories, reinforce familial bonds, and recall happy events past. *First Families* ultimately offers a wealth of empowerment.

*Natchee Blu Barnd*

Independent Scholar

**Households and Hegemony: Early Creek Prestige Goods, Symbolic Capital, and Social Power.** By Cameron B. Wesson. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008. 230 pages. \$55.00 cloth.

Cameron B. Wesson draws attention to “the long term significance of the household as a social and economic force—particularly in relation to authority positions or institutions” and claims that this significance “has remained relatively unexplored in North American archaeology.” Although this claim may be true, a key question is whether archaeology, as a discipline by itself, has powerful enough analytical tools to deal philosophically and comparatively with the nature of authority in societies, particularly those without a written language, and if its scholars without functioning language skills are able to research and interpret effectively the oral traditions and the self-images of these societies. This is not to say that efforts in integration should not be made.

Wesson draws information from ethnohistorical records and data from the Fusihatchee project, which is one of the largest excavations in Alabama history. He attempts to examine social, economic, and political transformations in Creek culture beginning in the sixteenth century. According to Wesson, these changes redefined the relationship between Creek households and authority. Contact with outsiders and what Wesson calls “prestige goods,” traditionally associated with Creek “elites,” contributed to the weakening of chiefly authority, the increase in individual decision making, and the increase in the power of Creek households. That is the thrust of the Wesson thesis.