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Review Essay

UKOMNO'M: The Yuki Indians of Northern California, A Review Essay

William Oandasan

Virginia P. Miller. **Ukomno'm: The Yuki Indians of Northern California.** Los Altos, CA: Ballena Press, 1979. 112 pp. paper. \$6.95

This potent book is the most recent publication on the Ukomno'm (The People of the Valley, trans.), who are indigenous to Round Valley in the redwood bio-region of the coastal mountain ranges in Northwest California for at least 10,000 years. The first half of *Ukomno'm* is a condensed synopsis of the literature on this People. In the second half the book finds its essential significance and primary importance by filling one of many glaring gaps in what is known of the Yukian people: their demographic history and decimation. Virginia P. Miller's sources for the illumination of this macabre historical period (1855-65) of the Yuki tribe are the federal records and correspondences of government agents previously closed to the public and researchers alike; these sources and the uniqueness of chapter one makes Dr. Miller's *Ukomno'm* an example of the state of the art in indigenous demographic studies and a guide for further studies of the Yukian culture and in North American ethnohistory.

Stephen Powers (*Tribes of California* 1877) is the first published writer to observe the People popularly known as the Yuki Indians. It seems he did not take into much consideration that this People had only been in contact with Euro-America since the autumn of 1851 when Indian Commissioner Colonel Redick McKee first came upon them along the Eel River, nor that they had been relegated to reservation life since 1856 when the decimation of their numbers, and their "dark age," began. Consequently, Powers's derogatory commentary on this People in the early 1870s is at least unbecoming of the "healthy, vigorous"

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people of which Colonel KcKee wrote in September 1851, the "more intelligent and better formed" people in the Heintzelman letter of November 1855, and the "generally better looking set of Indians" reported by Simmon P. Storms in 1856. From Powers until the turn of the century there is nothing published specifically on the Yukian people by research scholars, although Alfred Kroeber, Pliny Goddard, Edward Gifford and others had made their acquaintance with this tribe. What is generally considered the first comprehensive, modern study of the Yuki tribe is George Foster's "A Summary of Yuki Culture" (1944). This work reflects a benevolent spirit toward the Yukian people in that Foster attempted to preserve their culture which, as other Native Americans', was thought at the time to be entering into extinction. There are of course other studies in the Boasian tradition that preceded Foster's publication, for instance, Edward Gifford's "The Cultural Position of the Coast Yuki" (1928), "Coast Yuki Myths" (1937) and "The Coast Yuki" (1939), Isabel Kelley's "Yuki Basketry" (1930)—with Kroeber's (turn-of-the-century attitude) "Yuki Myths" (1932) being the exception.

After Foster there is again a spare period of research publications focusing primarily on the Yukians. A few narrow-focused papers sporadically appear over the three following decades, e.g., "An Archaeological Survey of the Yuki Area" (Treganza et al 1950), "Some Yukian-Penutian Lexical Resemblances" (William Shipley 1957), "Some Plants Used by the Yuki Indians of Round Valley, Northern California" (L. S. M. Curtin 1957), "Yukian-Siouan Lexical Similarities" and "Item and Set Comparison in Yuchi, Siouan and Yukian" (William Elmendorf 1963 and 1964, respectively), "Whatever Happened to the Yuki?" (Virginia Miller 1975), etc. Dr. Miller's *Ukomno'm* includes all the work covered in these previous studies as well as work from private manuscripts and unpublished studies, theses and dissertations. But most significant, *Ukomno'm* includes materials gleaned from government records and correspondences that previously were closed to researchers, as well as includes statements taken from informed Round Valley residents.

The demographic studies of the Yukian tribe and the north-central region of indigenous California begins with Alfred Kroeber's historical estimates. Until 1956, Kroeber's estimate of 2000 Yukian people before Contact was the official count based on historical records, though there had been previous estimates ranging from 5000 to 12,000. One reason for Kroeber's low estimate, as Miller notes, is that there were approximately 100 Yukian

people alive when he started his population assessments. Another possible reason for this low estimate might have been that Kroeber was unaware of the genocide perpetuated against the Yukian people, as will be seen, or that he chose to ignore the atrocity. At any rate, the Yukian population had not suffered extensively from contact with the Spanish mission system, Mexican expeditions for slaves and the epidemics endured by the tribes in southern California and the Sacramento Valley. In 1956 S. F. Cook raised the estimated pre-Contact population to 6880 Yuki-ans. Cook's archaeological estimates were based on the excavations of Treganza et al in 1950, which uncovered 380 previously occupied Yukian sites, of which 225 were located in Round Valley. According to Cook, 1670 Yuki-ans lived in the valley, which would mean approximately 45 persons to a square mile, the highest population density in California at the time.

The first half of *Ukomno'm* begins in an unusual ethnohistorical style by conventional standards. After a forward briefly covering previous studies, appropriate acknowledgements for assistance and information, and an introduction to set the context of the study, the book begins with the religious myth of the Creation of the Ukomno'm. This beginning is significant in that it departs from the conventional studies of the origins of Peoples which usually review migration theories (which, as Miller suggests, would be inappropriate for this tribe) supported with archaeological artifacts, carbon-14 dating results and linguistic dispersal studies, and it further departs from an older tradition involving the Creation as understood in the Christian Bible. The second chapter on the prehistory of this People, though historically presented, is based primarily on the archaeological data uncovered by Treganza et al, and the physical anthropological hypotheses of Clement Meighan which must be updated for a finer view of this little understood field of study. The next chapter discusses Yukian life before Contact by category, e. i., "The Yuki Language Family," "Relations with Neighboring Tribes," "Sociopolitical Organization," "Material Culture," "Economy," "Life Cycle," "Religion and Ceremonies" and "Activities." In chapter four a review of early Euro-American contact is presented from the legendary meeting with trappers of the Hudson Bay Co. in 1770, to the speculation on a visit from a Mexican expedition, and finally with the first recorded meeting outside the valley with a party headed by Redick McKee in 1851.

In chapter five ("The Yuki Meet the Azbills"), which links the halves of this book, the first Yukian-Euroamerican relations can

be seen. On May 15, 1854 Frank and Pierce Azbill and their friend Jim Nephus were the first non-Indians to view and enter Round Valley; and they started almost immediately to kill the first group of valley people they came upon, who were peacefully enjoying a grasshopper feast. According to Pierce Azbill's account, the three "missourians" (sic) had emerged victoriously from a "battle" that left 32 Yukian warriors dead. However, Miller also balances Azbill's inflated account with a footnote from a Yukian viewpoint. In this version of the same encounter only a youth was killed and the Missourians were routed to escape simply because they were on horseback and the Yukians were on foot. In spring 1855 the Azbills left the valley with 1000 pounds of buckskins and 35 girls to sell as slaves in the Sacramento Valley. By the time the Azbills returned to the valley, settlers had already established home sites. A conflict between Yukian sovereignty and squater rights would inevitably lead to near genocide.

In the second half of *Ukomno'm*, Miller reconstructs the history of genocide against this People perpetrated during the decade from 1855 to 1865. Based on her reading of recently opened files of federal records and correspondences, Miller is able to raise the estimated pre-Contact population of Round Valley to a minimum of 20,000 people. In chapter seven, "The Beginning of Hostilities," the deposition of Dryden Laycock is cited in which he states that the first expeditions against the Yukians began in 1856 and that "an average" of "fifty or sixty Indians on a trip" were killed "two or three times a week." Although this testimony should not be used as the basis for thought on the decimation of the Yukian tribe, it is clear, nonetheless, that in ten years at this rate 28,600 Yukians could have fallen to premeditated genocide. Of course this "average" rate must have diminished as time moved and the actual number of people killed must thereby have been much less. However, there may have been many killed who could not be accounted for as well as many who died from malnutrition, exposure, disease, etc. and who disappeared through the slave expeditions of the post-Mexican period. Miller notes, as incredible as it may seem, that in spite of this high rate of killing, e.g., estimated at 200 to 250 a month, the Yukian people waited until 1857 to retaliate with the death of a White man, after being "goaded" into it, and their first "unprovoked" murdering of a White man was in February 1858.

A massive demise of an indigenous tribe in "Indian" history can often be attributed to military action. In this case of Round Valley, as Miller reports in chapter eight, "Soldiers in the Valley," the military, especially in respect for the leadership of Lieutenant Edward Dillon, took a sympathetic position toward the Yukian tribe. Miller cites many instances when the U.S. Army under Lieutenant Dillon attempted to protect and to extend some sense of justice and fair play to the Yukian people. In contrast to the military are the settlers' calculated expeditions against the Yukian tribe and the formation in 1859 of the infamous Eel River Rangers which was sanctioned by the California Governor John B. Weller. The Eel River Rangers were lead by Walter S. Jarboe who is described by Miller in terms of "an intense, almost pathological, hatred of Indians." Jarboe and his "Company of Volunteers" had carried out twelve raids before they were officially sanctioned by the governor, eventually tried to enlist the aid of the soldiers stationed in Round Valley (to no avail), and, worst, were an inspiration to other groups of vigilante settlers. For example, H. L. Hall and his volunteers in Eden Valley and settler groups along Long Valley carried out expeditions against the Yukians and other tribes who fled into the coastal mountain ranges for refuge. Those settlers in the valley terrorized with violence and death those Yukians who remained at the Round Valley reservation in fear and with hope of protection from the federal officials. Miller's research through government documents also shows that Jarboe filed no reports on the numbers of Yukians killed. She is nonetheless able to conservatively estimate that the expeditions of Jarboe and company, a number of settler raiding parties and the population decline due to exposure, starvation, disease, infant mortality, etc. resulted in a massive, premeditated act of genocide.

Miller shows the reasons for this atrocious genocide are many, varied and interconnected. Although Judge J. Montgomery Peters of the 13th Judicial District of California suggested Round Valley as a place to establish a reservation in order to avoid another "Indian" war, Thomas J. Henley, U.S. Superintendent of Indian Affairs in California, considered creating a reservation in the valley to expand his "empire." Throughout this decade Henley manipulated and deceived public opinion and officials in order to expand his power. For example, Henley had written in 1856 that it would be hard for settlers to acquire land in the valley without the aid of the federal Indian Dept. A year before the

Reservation was created in 1858, twenty-five settlers had already claimed and fenced spreads totalling thousands of acres, and Henley himself had become a co-owner of a cattle ranch in the valley. In 1858 federal Special Agent J. Ross Browne reported that nearly every landowning settler in the valley was connected to Henley "in some way or another." Or, in 1856 Henley had sent Simmon P. Storms to Round Valley to determine its suitability as a reservation to avoid another "war," and, Miller records, he "was very careful not to make any promises" he "could" not "carry out" and ironically he "didn't tell the Yuki" Henley was going to place other tribal peoples in the valley and make it a reservation. She adds that the Yukian people "undoubtedly thought" they would continue to inhabit the valley and a few caucasian Americans would live with and protect them from "undesirable whites."

Nevertheless, as the indigenous land base dwindled and the settlers' land base increased, the food sources for tribal sustenance also dwindled until the Yukians started appropriating pork and beef to survive, which seems certainly justified since the tribe would not be compensated for their territorial losses or natural food resources, not to mention mineral rights, for more than 100 years; this appropriation of food became the justification for the violent acts of reparation and also lead eventually to calculated acts of genocide perpetuated by the settlers. However, the quest of one man for personal empire and two Peoples' needs for land on one hand, and to avoid starvation on the other, are only the tip of the proverbial iceberg representing the stealthy ways that genocide against the Yukian people was justified.

In 1857 and early 1858 the Yukians were "goaded" into killing two *trashy* "frontier drifters" which in turn set a spark to a racial war. Miller morally condemns Henley for being a man in his position who "like any other man . . . saw what was inevitable . . ." but who "encouraged, and contributed to the consequent carnage in and around Round Valley." In June 1858, after suffering weekly massacres of approximately 150 Yukians, and with the appearance of 35 mounted U.S. Army troops and a raiding party from Sacramento, the Yukians were ready to try to live in peace with the settlers. At this point Henley, Miller writes, had a second chance to prevent a race war by using his influence to have the U.S. Commissioner of Indian Affairs evict the settlers and have them reimbursed for the improvements on the land.

However, Henley spent the summer of 1858 justifying to two federal investigators the administrative corruption and financial mismanagement under his control. Storm, for one instance, was a federal employee under Henley who owned land and built a ranch in the valley with Yukian labor and 5000 U.S. tax dollars. After being relieved of his post, Henley moved his home to Round Valley and used his political influence to fight the reservation and its occupants.

Miller also shows that conspiracy and ineptness are also factors to consider when reflecting on the genocidal campaigns. For instance, as a civilian Henley aided the settlers in establishing Jarboe's infamous Eel River Rangers with numerous petitions to his personal friend Governor Weller, which were filled with "exaggerations and lies about the ferocity of the Indians." While sanctioning Jarboe's Rangers, Weller also disbanded it, and in hypocritical fashion he condemned the Rangers in public but congratulated Jarboe in private. When Weller was replaced by Governor Downey in 1860, the new governor requested U.S. Major General Clark, Lieutenant Dillon's commanding officer, to send troops to Round Valley. After receiving a complete report on the atrocities and deplorable conditions, which he himself requested from Dillon, Clark replied to Downey that "I am satisfied that troops are not needed there." The Secretary of War also forwarded Dillon's report to the Secretary of the Interior, the one person who might have been able to represent the moral position of the Yukian tribe to Congress, but the Interior Secretary took no action. Due to conflicting reports from both the settlers who portrayed the Yukians as "hostiles" and those who "said they were peaceable and harmless," as well as reports from settlers and former Rangers on Jarboe's personal incompetence and fraudulent mismanagement of federal funds and supplies, Governor Downey appointed a joint committee of state legislators to investigate the problem. The recommendations of the committee of five were 1) to have the settlers evicted from the valley and compensated (four in favor), or 2) to have "a general system of peonage or apprenticeship [slavery], for the proper disposition and distribution of [all] the Indians" (J. B. Lamar, committee chairman). Although a clear majority recommendation was made, Downey took no action. During this time, Superintendent McDuffie, who replaced Henley, made numerous recommendations to his superiors in Washington that the whole valley be made a reservation and the settlers be compen-

sated. McDuffie even recommended the Yukian people be removed from the reservation to avoid their extinction. But these recommendations were never acted upon.

In January 1859 Lieutenant Edward Dillon of the 6th U.S. Infantry was ordered to Round Valley with troops to protect the Yukian tribe and prevent the onslaughts of the settlers, as well as to persuade the Yukians to return to the reservation. However, his superiors gave him no authorization to enforce his orders. The settlers, thinking the troops were sent to aid their activities, were "appalled" and "outraged" when they became aware of Dillon's mission. The settlers' reaction was not to cooperate with Dillon and even to work against him. Dillon also didn't have authority over the settlers, nor had he jurisdiction beyond the bounds of the reservation lands. Consequently the settlers continued their raids against the Yukian population with abandon.

This genocide also involves, as Miller relates, the conspiracies of settlers to undermine the integrity of the Valley's indigenous people. Like Henley and his prominent cohort Judge T. C. Hastings, the settlers had substantial monetary gains to make from the acquisition and exploitation of the tribal lands. For instance, when McDuffie was attempting to evict and compensate the settlers, they increased the improvements on the land from \$20,000 to \$50,000, a considerable sum at the time. But worst, settlers gave inflated and inaccurate reports specifying degenerate behavior and violent animosity among the Yukians, which resulted in the dastardly Eel River Rangers. The settlers also conspired to thwart any measure of justice afforded the tribal people, for they consistently "refused to testify against each other" except on rare occasions when pressure was applied to them. Whenever sufficient evidence was collected to bring a case to court, Judge Hastings "consistently let the offender[s] go." And, even more worse, this conspiracy of silence and injustice further escalated the murderous raids clandestinely inflicted on the Yukian people.

This genocide was also further aided as Miller displays, by the inadvertent ineptness of those parties sympathetic to the Yukian position. As stated, Lieutenant Dillon understood first hand the barbarous situation but was not authorized to enforce his orders to protect the Yukians, Governor Downey was too weak to come to a positive decision on the problem, and Superintendent McDuffie's recommendations went unheeded. But,

according to Miller, even the representatives of the three agencies that most benignly took sympathy with the victims of this genocide—the U.S. Interior Dept., the U.S. Army, and the California State Dept.—could not coordinate their efforts to benefit the victims. Instead, the lack of cooperation among governmental agencies can be safely presumed to be a result derived from a competition of interests and the manipulations of Henley and company. And the militant abolitionists of the Northeast U.S. were too far away and preoccupied with the slavery question raging prior to the Civil War.

Thus, the rather idyllic life of the *Ukomno'm* in their remote valley high in the Coastal Mountain Ranges of Northwest California was impacted with near genocide. And Dr. Miller has written *Ukomno'm* with objective distance while maintaining a strong notion for fair treatment for all parties concerned. The ethnohistorical spirit of Native American advocacy started with the hearings of the Indian Claims Commission in the late 1940s, and it has flavored this book with a sensitivity for the ethnic-identity movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s. However, the main problem with these chapters, and the whole book, is their brevity. While little is written on and otherwise known of this northern California tribe, there certainly is much to say about it, e.g., *Genocide and Vendetta: The Round Valley Wars in Northern California* (Beard and Carranco 1982), a popular but interesting book, is a fine example of a work that states quite a bit concerning a short historical period. Miller might have also broadened the scope of this erudite book by placing the Round Valley War in an ever expanding context of the Mendocino County, Northwest and Civil Wars current at the time. She might have also elaborated on the concept of "manifest destiny" which had been so often employed to justify war, genocide, exploitation, etc. of tribal peoples such as the *Ukomno'm*. Nevertheless, *Ukomno'm*, in spite of the conciseness of its noticeably lean chapters, gives the reader many sharply focused insights into the Yukian culture and its near destruction; it also utilizes new resources for research in indigenous demographic studies and exemplifies the new trend in ethnological writing.

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