

## Session for 2021 AAA Annual Meeting

### Title: **Alfred L. Kroeber: The Man, His Work and His Legacy**



#### **Session Abstract:**

Alfred Louis Kroeber (1876-1960) was once considered the “Dean of American Anthropology.” He was Franz Boas’ first Ph.D. student at Columbia University and the heir to his reputation—despite their intellectual disagreements. Kroeber was the founder and the predominant intellectual force in the University of California (later Berkeley) department of anthropology from 1901 until his retirement in 1946. He published more than 550 works—books, papers, reviews—on a wide range of topics in ethnology, linguistics, history, and archaeology. His subject was the whole world of humans and their cultures, their pasts and their interconnections. As Heizer et al. wrote, “The search for cultural patterns obtrudes in papers on such diverse subjects as changes in women’s fashions, prehistoric South American art styles, Mohave epic tales, classificatory systems of relationship, arrow releases, basketry techniques and designs, aboriginal American Religious cults, or Romance languages.” His book *Anthropology* (1948) is a remarkable compendium of facts and ideas about the world’s peoples and cultures, and his massive edited enterprise, *Anthropology Today*, encompassed the vast range of the field as of 1952 (1953). Kroeber became known outside of anthropology as a result of Theodora Kroeber’s book *Ishi in Two Worlds* (1961), published soon after her husband’s death. The legacies of his linguistics and ethnography are invaluable to many California Indian groups and individuals.

In the light of the recent decision by the University of California, Berkeley to un-name Kroeber Hall it is particularly appropriate for the AAA, the ASA, the HOA, and GAD to offer a session to present a retrospective on the work of this important figure in the history of American anthropology.

#### **Participants**

Herbert S. Lewis (Organizer, Presenter)

Stanley Brandes (Presenter)

Ira Jacknis (Presenter) [zoom]

Paul Shankman (Presenter)

James Stanlaw (Chair, presenter)

Jack Glazier (Presenter)

Nicholas Barron (Presenter) [zoom]

Nancy Scheper-Hughes (Presenter)

## **Titles and Abstracts of Papers:**

### **Herbert S. Lewis**

#### ***Alfred L. Kroeber: The Man, His Times, and His Work.***

A. L. Kroeber's career began in the 1890s at the very birth of the modern discipline of anthropology. His sixty-plus years of active research and writing spanned the field's growth in size from a handful of avid amateur ethnographers, linguists, and archeologists to a discipline taught to at least the M.A. level in more than 80 American universities. He witnessed its development from an almost exclusive concern with the study of American Indian cultures and languages in an attempt to record as much as possible of the "old ways" before they disappeared, to a social science concerned with contemporary cultures all over the world. Although he described himself as a natural historian who felt like a changeling "in the house of social science," his own contributions to three of anthropology's fields, to cultural history, and to ideas about the nature of culture and language, never flagged.

This paper will introduce the panel with an overview of some of Kroeber's distinctive characteristics, achievements, and impacts. The range and variety of his scholarship was remarkable and the papers in this session, all dealing with different aspects of his work, will not even scratch the surface. It is a sad reflection on anthropology today that the accomplishments of A. L. Kroeber are unknown and his name is recognized today primarily as a result of its removal from a building.

### **Stanley Brandes**

#### ***Alfred Kroeber and the Forging of a Discipline***

Alfred Kroeber devoted much of his career to the forging of a new discipline: anthropology. He did this in two ways, first through practical demonstration, specifically the practice and promotion of fieldwork methods; and, second, through theoretical scrutiny, particularly the delineation and exploration of the culture concept. Largely due to his efforts, the culture concept became associated almost exclusively with anthropology, thereby creating a niche that begged to be filled with academic appointments. Kroeber's investigations spanned the full range of human phenomena, from the exposition of minute ethnographic detail, as illustrated in much of his California native research, to global intellectual and artistic transformations taking place over the course of millennia. In this sense, he was a pioneer in pushing anthropology beyond the bounds of small-scale, non-Western, non-literate societies into the realm of civilizational history.

### **Ira Jacknis**

#### ***Anthropology from the Margins: Alfred L. Kroeber in Zuni, 1915–18***

Over his long career, Alfred L. Kroeber became best-known for his Native Californian ethnography, along with contributions to anthropological theory in the early twentieth century. During the 1910s, however, he made three important field trips to the New Mexican pueblo of Zuni: in 1915 and 1916 (for the American Museum of Natural History) and in 1918 (for his home institution of UC-Berkeley).

At first, Kroeber was asked to focus on kinship and social organization, but he suggested making an artifact collection for a new Southwest gallery. Although he never wrote up his

ethnographic objects, Kroeber is now famous for his collection of potsherds and its contributions to theories of typology and seriation in archaeology. In addition to these domains, he conducted important ethnographic research on language and ceremonialism. Just after his last trip, he drew upon his experiences to formulate a theory of cultural patterning and configurations, approaches later associated with his fellow Boasian Ruth Benedict.

Alfred Kroeber's work in Zuni would have been impossible apart from a reticulated network of personal relationships, including Elsie Clews Parsons, Leslie Spier, Alfred Kidder, as well as predecessors such as Frank H. Cushing and Matilda Coxe Stevenson; in addition, of course, to his many Native consultants.

In fact, it was Kroeber's seeming marginality to most of these worlds that allowed him to creatively extend Zuni ethnography in unprecedented ways. This still under-appreciated research turned out to be critical in the later development of Kroeber's own thought, as well as serving as important contributions to regional Zuni and Southwestern studies.

### **Paul Shankman**

#### ***Kroeber, Mead, and the Perils of Public Anthropology***

In 1931, A.L. Kroeber provided a lengthy and harsh review of Margaret Mead's *Growing Up in New Guinea* (1930) for the *American Anthropologist*. Labeling Mead an "artist", Kroeber criticized her for offering "sensationalism" and mere ethnographic "scraps" compared to Malinowski and for writing a book that was theoretically inadequate. He also wondered if Reo Fortune, Mead's husband and research partner, would provide the data missing in her book. While Mead responded to Kroeber in a lengthy private letter, his review of her book, as well as other similarly negative reviews of Mead's work at that time, raise broader questions about the perils of writing for the public, about what constituted the legitimate subject of ethnographic research, and about the extent to which women's work deserved professional recognition. This paper examines these questions.

### **James Stanlaw**

#### ***Alfred Kroeber and the Development of Linguistic Anthropology***

Alfred Kroeber is largely known today as one of the founders of American anthropology, and contributor to culture theory. Most know that he was an early AAA president, but fewer know he was also president of the Linguistic Society of America. Here, I will take a retrospective look at Kroeber's equally important contributions to early American linguistics.

Julian Steward said "During the first four decades [of anthropology in] ... the twentieth century, language was definitely secondary to ethnological studies and teaching ... [and] language skills were definitely incidental." Kroeber as the exception, and his "... devotion to linguistics was truly remarkable in view of the history of linguistic studies in the United States".

Kroeber arrived to anthropology through language: "I came from humanistic literature, entering anthropology by the gate of linguistics." But his linguistic work usually had some larger theoretical goal in mind. For example, when Kroeber began his ethnographic survey of California, he was not just gathering convenient data, but was attempting to solve a perplexing puzzle: why, according to the classification of Indian languages of the day, did California show half of the diversity found in all of North America? Kroeber's answer, according to Dell Hymes, was a "remarkably original step in the study of New World languages, one that has never been adequately

followed up.” Hymes also called Kroeber “the greatest general anthropologist that American anthropology has known.” But Kroeber remained a linguistic anthropologist until the very end of career, including his last three publications in 1961.

### **Jack Glazier**

#### ***The Kroeber-Ishi Story: Cinematic Versions***

This paper considers three films on the Kroeber-Ishi relationship: *Ishi in Two Worlds* (1967), a companion piece to Theodora Kroeber’s famed 1961 book of the same name; *The Last Yahi* (1993), an acclaimed documentary; and *The Last of His Tribe* (1994), an HBO drama mixing historical fact with dramatic fictions. The narrator concludes *Ishi in Two Worlds* with these words: “What does Ishi mean to us today? No more than what we remember of him.” We remember what filmmakers, writers, and anthropologists and their critics want us, audience and readers, to remember. Until Theodora Kroeber’s book, Ishi was little known except by a few California anthropologists and the rare reader of the dispassionate Yahi entries in Kroeber’s monumental *Handbook of the Indians of California*. The three films reflect the relationship between anthropology and broader cultural currents. *Ishi in Two Worlds* celebrates salvage anthropology, Ishi’s humanity, however opaque its nuances, and the “anthropologist as hero.” It premiered when anthropology was at its self-confident apex and before the full effect of 60s deconstruction had taken root. Moderate postmodernist questioning resonates in the other films. Both *The Last Yahi* and *The Last of His Tribe* depict Ishi with considerable agency whose personal qualities affected Kroeber and the direction of his professional and personal life.

Alfred Kroeber lived in his own time not ours, but like other pivotal historical figures, he transcended that time. He exposed contemporaneous racial fictions disguised as science. Ishi’s effect on Kroeber was part of that unmasking.

### **Nicholas Barron**

#### ***Anthros, Agents, and Federal (Un)Acknowledgment in Native California***

This paper reconsiders Alfred Kroeber’s relationship with the federally unacknowledged tribes of California. As depicted in the recent debate surrounding the “un-naming” of Kroeber Hall at the University of California, Berkeley, it has become increasingly common to hear that Kroeber and his early 20<sup>th</sup>-century anthropological writings are principally responsible for the present-day, federally unacknowledged status of Indigenous groups including the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe of the San Francisco Bay Area. Without dismissing the impact of Kroeber’s legacy, this paper enhances the current conversation by adopting a co-productionist framework (Jasanoff 2008), drawing upon the existing literature in the history of anthropology (e.g., Buckley 1996; Field 2003; Lavery 2003; Ray 2006), and highlighting the under-appreciated role of the Office of Indian Affairs during the 1920s. With this approach, I argue that the narrative that has been articulated in the Kroeber Hall discussion, while not without merit, ultimately simplifies the relationship between anthropology, the state, and Indigenous peoples in the context of California. This simplification endows anthropologists and anthropology with an inordinate degree of historical causality, which unwittingly absolves government functionaries and institutions of their own culpability. My objective is neither to praise nor defame Kroeber and his work. Rather, I seek to better trace the multitude of factors that have contribute to the political marginalization of Indigenous peoples in California.

**Nancy Scheper-Hughes**

***Goodbye Kroeber, Kroeber Hall, and the Man Called Ishi***

On January 27, 2021 the name of Alfred L Kroeber and Kroeber Hall were washed away for academic and ethical crimes he did not commit. A tiny ceremony took place while a worker chiseled away the metal letters of KROEBER HALL, clunk by clunk. The symbolic 'beheading' took place during a dangerous epidemic in front of the locked UC Berkeley doors of the anthropology building and a ghostly empty campus. The process of de naming began with a secret letter signed by diverse campus faculty that was supported by the Chancellor. Without a trial, let alone a fair one, the legacy of Alfred Kroeber, father of California anthropology and founder of the Department of Anthropology was convicted by undergraduate Berkeley students who identified Kroeber as a white supremacist and worse. The UC Berkeley Cal newspaper referred AL Kroeber as the perpetrator and leader of the California genocide long before Kroeber ever step foot in California. However, to avoid conflict during a terrible time— both Covid deaths and the death of historical truth— the department of Anthropology and the UC Berkeley Chancellor of the University of California, Berkeley decided (against what they knew) to allow a populist attack against AL Kroeber who spent his life studying the languages and 'cultures' of Native Californians.