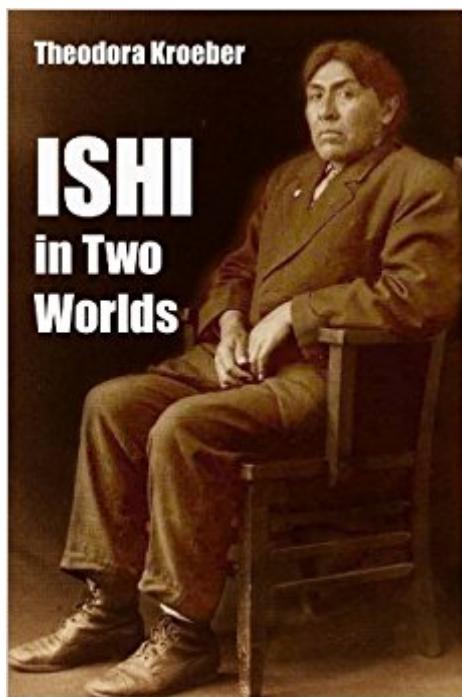


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# ISHI In Two Worlds: A Biography Of The Last Wild Indian In North America



## **Synopsis**

ISHI in Two Worlds tells the true story of the man known as the "last wild Indian in North America." His sudden appearance in 1911 stunned the country. His tribe was considered extinct, destroyed in bloody massacres during the 1860s and 70s. 1911 was a pivotal moment in American history, and the lowest point for Native Americans. The west had been won, and the country now spread from sea to sea. Contact with white men's diseases and violence had reduced their numbers from over ten million to less than three hundred thousand. Geronimo had surrendered twenty five years before. In California, there were only fifty thousand Indians alive. Most were living on reservations or had been assimilated into the general population. Yet here was one survivor, the last of his tribe, who refused to surrender. He had been hiding for forty years. When Ishi appeared, newspaper headlines across the country proclaimed the discovery of the Wild Man, the last Stone Age Man in North America. For Alfred Kroeber, an ambitious young anthropologist at UC Berkeley, this was great news. He had been searching for years to find unacculturated Indians so that he could document true aboriginal life in America. He arranged for Ishi to come to the Museum of Anthropology in San Francisco, where he lived for the rest of his life. Ishi only lived four more years, but during his brief stay he transformed the people around him. His dignity and sense of self, his tireless dedication to telling his stories and showing his way of life, and his lack of bitterness towards the people who had destroyed his own, amazed and impressed everyone who met him. Because of Ishi's courage and generosity, and Kroeber's meticulous notes and recordings, we have a glimpse of life in this country before the white man. Ishi embodied the entire history of Native Americans: their life before contact, the tragedy of their destruction, their refusal to disappear, their determination to carry their culture into the Twentieth Century. Alfred Kroeber's wife, Theodora, brought Ishi's story to the modern public in 1961 in her vivid book, Ishi in Two Worlds: The Story of the Last Wild Indian in North America. Its enormous popularity led to two more books by Mrs. Kroeber: Ishi, the Last Yahi: A Documentary History, and the children's book, Ishi, Last of his Tribe. These books have been in print for three decades and have been translated into sixteen languages. An award-winning film ISHI THE LAST YAH! is available on .com and from [www.jedriffefilms.com](http://www.jedriffefilms.com)

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## Customer Reviews

I read this book 40 (+) years ago at the library, just bought and re-read it while delving into the pedigree of the survival techniques and tools taught by practitioners here in the US. The book is, of course, about much more than that. In fact its transcendent theme is probably the adaptability of the individual human, ripped from his native culture and natural environment (both of which were decimated in Ishi's case, as in that of so many indigenous peoples, by European invasion and settlement). Ishi did adapt reasonably well to the Anglo-American world of the early 20th C to which he surrendered himself in a last desperate play for self-preservation; he persevered and even prospered after the trauma of seeing his tribe, family and natural environment destroyed. He did so in pretty unusual circumstances, as the ward of the anthropology museum at UC Berkeley, its benevolent staff and their family and friends. Most indigenous people were not so lucky: if not murdered, enslaved or pushed to the hostile margins of the human and natural environment, they were laid low by the infectious diseases bourn (albeit unwittingly) by their conquerors. A sobering read, worth going back to occasionally, just like Conrad's "Heart of Darkness", to remind oneself of how we got where we are, and who paid the price for it.

Great book - something everyone should read - especially those who think of North America's indigenous populations as "primitive." Instead, this book describes a very sophisticated culture estimated to have developed over at least 3000 years within the environment of California's Sierra

Nevada foothills. It tells the true story of savage and greedy men from the gold rush era invading their territory, robbing and murdering men, women, children and babies. After this, Ishi became the last surviving member of his tribe. Now he's gone, too. What an incredible loss. We should all think twice any time the majority or someone representing "the law" decides a particular set of human beings is "less than human."

This book is masterfully written biography; fully descriptive of the man and his culture in dimensions that one doesn't normally even think about -- highly sensitive, yet in no way soppy. That Ishi was the last of his people makes for a profound tale. Had I known him, however, I think I would have remembered him as much or more for a gentle and perceptive nature that seemed to characterize him as a person to the end. I wish I could have known him.

It isn't too common for me to start crying by the ending of a book. But this story brought me to tears. I really came to admire this reticent and dignified man, and the people who befriended him, and it saddens me to think of all the other people like Ishi who were mercilessly slaughtered. Ishi is really a representative of that hunted and slaughtered class, a class that existed right here on this California soil, and a slaughter which was perpetrated by people I thought I admired: the good old cowboy types. This is a story of epic character (Ishi's) and epic cruelty. Please do not misunderstand me: this is not a book which has any intent of guilt-tripping anyone. But it did take me by surprise, because you can talk about slavery all day long, or the Nazis, and I feel no relation, no nexus between myself and those crimes. But, here, I felt a little weird. The degenerate conduct is very close to home, literally and figuratively. I had cowboy guns and chaps as a kid, and I pretended to shoot Indians. And that is a really pathetic thing to pretend, because Ishi was an Indian, and I've learned he was just like you and me. He and his people were rational and empathetic. There had to have been a more humane way to co-exist."The true ghastliness of these events is that they were carried out not by alien monsters but by people shockingly like you and me."--Karl Kroeber in the Foreword to the book written by his mother. That's exactly right. This book describes how Ishi's family and tribe was basically hunted down and exterminated right in front of his eyes as a child, in at least two major massacres and a few other lesser atrocious moments. It breaks your heart. I always thought the Indians scalped the settlers. In this book, it is the local sheriff and his gang of quasi-criminals that is scalping the Indians, including their children, in retaliation for a theft of some beans or the killing of a cow, or some other handy excuse. "No state in the Union surpassed the Golden State in systematically and shamelessly harassing, murdering, and stealing from its native

inhabitants." Since I live in California, this strikes a painful chord as well. The data cited by Ms. Kroeber is compelling and I suspect unrefuted. The conduct she describes is well documented and uncontested. These Indian peoples were treated like vermin, just a little over a hundred years ago, right where your wine grapes are now growing, or nearby. I'm perhaps unduly emphasizing negative themes. I just learned of these events, or perhaps I should say I just finally comprehended them while reading the book. They struck me out of the blue. This education about nearby and recent enormous cruelties is just a part of the reading experience, however, and isolating these events does this fantastic story no favor, and I apologize. Rest assured, this is a life-altering book, and I've mentioned only the part which shocked me in a negative way. Ishi the man is a wonderful character, he is warmly introduced and developed here, and I can think of no character, real or fiction, which I came to care about more than Ishi. He was capable, strong, polite, free from bitterness, totally alone. His champions and protectors, Professors Kroeber and Waterman, and Dr. Popey, I came to admire and respect and envy. I loved the depictions of wild nature, and Ishi's ability to make handicrafts, a skill-set described in fabulous detail by Mrs. Kroeber. You may want to make an arrowhead or a bow based on her description. Ishi recommends Mountain Juniper for your bow-making, so heed his advice, he was master. The writing is first-rate. Mrs. Kroeber was herself a scientist, and her book takes an artful but methodical approach to the events--both tragic and hilarious-- it describes: the way of the Indians; the way of the Yana (Ishi's tribe); the experiences Ishi endured during his hard life in the wild; the discovery of Ishi; the revelations from Ishi; the "camping trip" with Ishi in his old home territory (and his anxiousness to return to the city: he learned to love beds, toilets, stoves, towels, and the other "clever" inventions of the white man); and Ishi's demise from tuberculosis. I am one of those people who marks up a book as I read it. My copy had virtually every page marked up by the end. This book is so thought-provoking and idea-rich on so many levels it will take me years to fully assimilate it. One of the newspaper reviewers is quoted on the cover: "A book every American ought to read." True. And, I suspect, every American will be deeply enriched and rewarded for the effort. But the ending is still sad, when you think of what Ishi endured and how little time he had in his hard, hard life to enjoy things. I kept imagining the things I would show Ishi if I had the chance: Disneyland; a Rolling Stones concert; a Benny Hill video, lasagna, a motorcycle ride. He only spoke about 600 English words by the end, but you will understand him very well. And, I'm confident, he will be someone you deeply respect.

This book is a must read, For anyone interested in the California Indian experience. I learned that essentially the Indians just wanted to be left alone. The behavior of the settlers in many cases was

appalling. The story of Ishi's association with white civilization is compelling I could not put the book down. Almost everyone who met him personally in his brief life came away in awe and respect of his character gentlemanly behavior

This is truly one of the best historical works of our time. I personally lived near where ISHI dwelled in Deer Creek Canyon between Red Bluff and Chico California. Not far from Lassen National Park at the junction of the North Tip of the Sierras and the Southern tip of the Cascade Range. The remainder of the Tribe before him were indiscreetly wiped out by early settlers of the area. and grandparents of early Ranchers.

This is an excellent and significant book. I have replaced it a couple of times over the years, because it doesn't always come back when lent out. This particular hardbound edition from U of California Press 1976 is the best I have owned with many more and sharper photos and at over 7x10 inches a well designed layout. As for the context - well, this is the real life story of when the Stone Age meets the sharp edge of the Industrial Age and all the tragedy mass humanity can bring upon the land. It is also the true story of how knowledge and our better character can bridge those worlds... You won't regret this read, it stays with you.

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