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Flutes of Fire: Essays on California Indian Languages. Leanne Hinton. Berkeley: Heyday Books, 1994, 270 pp., \$18.00 (paper).

Reviewed by:

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Flutes of Fire, by Leanne Hinton, is a moving account of the struggle to preserve California Indian languages. This is a wonderful book that will delight readers. It is well written, well edited, and full of useful information. It is timely and important, and does justice to its subject. Once begun, the book is hard to put down.

The book includes an introductory chapter followed by five parts comprised of 21 chapters. Many of the chapters are revisions of articles which the author first published in her column on language in Heyday Books' *News from Native California*. In the Introduction, Hinton describes the mosaic of California Indian languages. Of the original 100 or more languages, only about 50 are still spoken, and most by only a few elders. Hinton says that these languages are "in the ultimate crisis in a life-and-death struggle" (p. 14). Sadly, she notes that half a dozen or so of the last speakers died while she was writing this book.

Chapter 1, which Hinton co-authored with Yolande Montijo, is a comprehensive overview of the "living" California Indian languages; in other words, those which still have speakers, and are thus not yet "dead." The authors note that "The continued existence of almost fifty Native Californian languages . . . is an indication of the great cultural strength of California Indian communities" (p. 21). Unfortunately, there are no children learning any of the California Indian languages as their primary lan-

guage. The languages are spoken primarily by a small number of elders, and as the speakers die, so too may the languages. But we are reminded of people's "tenacious loyalty to their languages" (p. 21). In recent years, many young people have begun to learn their California Indian languages as second languages; thus there is still hope for the future.

Chapters 2-4 are concerned with aspects of California Indian languages at work and play, including song, "Coyote Talk" (the California Indian custom of making the animal characters of their stories talk in humorous ways), and the vocabulary of direction.

Chapter 5 concludes the first part of *Flutes of Fire* with a discussion of language and the structure of thought. Hinton illustrates how a language reflects and encourages a certain world view on the part of its speakers. Languages are seen as "windows to whole systems of beliefs and values" and we are reminded that if we lose the California Indian languages, "we lose along with them all their special and wonderful ways of portraying our world" (p. 69).

Chapters 6-9 concern language and history. Hinton discusses the relationships which exist between California Indian languages (Chapter 6), and the migrations that some of these relationships may indicate (Chapter 7). California Indian place names are the subject of Chapter 8. Chapter 9, which is authored by Robert L. Oswalt, concerns loanwords exchanged between Russians, Native Alaskans, and California Indians at Fort Ross during the settlement's 1812 to 1841 occupation.

Chapters 10-14 concern themselves with words. These chapters highlight different aspects of California Indian languages, such as the range of counting systems (Chapter 10), specialized vocabularies (Chapter 11), word complexity (Chapter 12), men's and women's talk (Chapter

13), and songs without words (Chapter 14). Hinton notes that, "A single word in a California Indian language may have to be translated by a whole sentence in English" (p. 109). To demonstrate this, the author presents a word from Ishi's Yahi language: *pop-sta-k'au-ram*. This word translates into something like "He hit them straight on with his arrows from where he was hiding."

Chapters 15-18 concern some aspect of language and dominion. These chapters examine the origin of California tribal names (Chapter 15) and the relationship between the naming of the Digger Pine (*Pinus sabiniana*) and the derogatory treatment of the California Indians by the Americans of the nineteenth century (Chapter 16). Chapter 17 is an examination of the government's former attack on California Indian languages, while Chapter 18 discusses the Native American Language Act of 1990, which recognizes the right of Native Americans to use their native languages.

Chapters 19-22 are concerned with keeping the languages alive. Chapter 19 examines John Peabody Harrington and concludes with a discussion of how Harrington's data are being used to revitalize and transform contemporary California Indian cultures. In Chapter 20, Hinton examines California Indian "writing systems." The author looks at various systems for recording information, such as the use of *Dentalium* shell beads, knotted ropes and notched sticks, rock carvings, and calendar stones. Also discussed are contemporary methods of transcribing California Indian languages, such as by means of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) or the phonetic alphabet known as "Unifon."

Chapter 21 discusses what is being done to keep the languages alive. Hinton describes a unique conference, held in Marin County in 1992, at which a number of California Indians met to discuss what could be done to save their languages. One of the recommendations that came out of the conference was to establish

master-apprentice language programs, the topic of the final chapter.

Flutes of Fire concludes with Chapter 22, in which Hinton describes the six master-apprentice language teams that have recently been established in California. The two members of each team are introduced and honored, and by the time we have reached this point in the book, we realize the great importance of their work. Each team meets regularly so that the master can instruct the apprentice and, in doing so, pass on an entire language from one generation to the next.

Flutes of Fire is a thorough and scholarly work, and yet it is readable too. For this reason, it will appeal to a wide audience, and, in its own way, help to improve the chances that the California Indian languages will survive to grace the next millennium.



Natural History of the Colorado Plateau and Great Basin. K. T. Harper, Larry L. St.

Clair, Kaye H. Thorne and Wilford M. Hess, eds. Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1994, viii + 294 pp., 41 tables, 20 figures, \$27.50 (hard cover).

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Syntheses of numerous natural history fields have recently become available in both book and article format. Most syntheses have focused on either broad or regional geographic coverage of