KROEBER AND THE INDIAN CLAIMS COMMISSION CASES

Omer C. Stewart

The role of A. L. Kroeber in Docket 31-37, Indians of California vs. The United States of America, before the Indian Claims Commission, may well serve as the symbol of a change in anthropology in America. Kroeber and other anthropologists serving as expert witnesses on opposite sides in litigation before the U. S. Indian Claims Commission have marshaled in a new dimension of applied anthropology. A short history of Indian claims cases, particularly for California Indians, and a review of the contribution of anthropology to hearings under Public Law 726 - 79th Congress, 2nd Session (H.R. 1497) known as The Indian Claims Commission Act of August 13, 1946, 60 Stat. 1049, will reveal the extent of the changes which have come about.

At the outset we should be reminded that claims cases against the U. S. Government by Indian tribes are not new. In 1863 the law establishing the U. S. Court of Claims as amended bracketed Indian tribes with foreign countries and required all to obtain from Congress special permission to sue the U. S. Government. Nevertheless, a large number of claims were adjudicated during the last century. The procedure was for the tribe and/or its attorney to obtain a special act of Congress, called Jurisdictional Act, to allow a tribe to sue the government in the Court of Claims. Not only were years required to obtain congressional approval for such special laws, but additional years were needed to get a decision from the Court of Claims because of its chronic backlog of cases. Even more discouraging than the delays, from the point of view of the Indians and their attorneys, was the frequent very explicit and limiting phraseology of the bills of authorization, which in turn were followed to the letter by both the Court of Claims and the Supreme Court.

Notwithstanding the slowness of legislation and of court action from January 28, 1884 to May 7, 1945, one hundred fifty-two separate cases were authorized by Congress and reached the Court of Claims. It will be of interest to review the decisions rendered before the passage of the Indian Claims Commission Act of 1946:

69 tribal claims, definite in amount, totalling almost one and a half billion dollars, were dismissed by the Court of Claims with no payments;

35 tribal claims, indefinite in amount, were dismissed by the Court of Claims without payment;

15 tribal claims, definite in amount, were allowed to recover as follows:

- Amount claimed $303,700,145.62
- Net judgment paid 20,217,227.76;

17 tribal claims, indefinite in amount, were paid:

- Net judgment $17,536,726.37;

10 tribal claims cases pending as of May 7, 1945, with $55,942,955.50 claimed;
6 tribal claims cases pending as of May 7, 1945 without definite amounts claimed.

In other words, during the seventy-one years preceding the Indian Claims Commission Act of 1946, the Court of Claims declared that $37,753,954.13 should be paid the Indians to satisfy legal claims against the government, whereas payment of about two billion dollars had been requested. A review of many records reveals the curious fact that, in spite of the interest and knowledge that local anthropologists might always be expected to have concerning the American Indians, and in spite of the extent of the litigation, in all this time anthropologists, so far as I could discover, had nothing to do with either the obtaining of the permission to get into court or with the hearings in the Court of Claims, with two exceptions. The exceptions were the remarkable work of Dr. C. Hart Merriam, biologist turned ethnologist, on behalf of the Indians of California leading to a decision dated December 4, 1944, requesting Congress to pay them $5,024,842.34, and the testimony of Dr. John P. Harrington in the Alcea Case (103 C.Cls. 494) in 1945.

The claims cases of the Indians of California rest ultimately upon original Indian title, which was recognized by the eighteenth and nineteenth century laws of Spain and of Mexico and by the United States in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, proclaimed July 4, 1848. They are supported by Acts of Congress of September 30, 1850, and February 27, 1851, appropriating $50,000.00 to pay the expenses of a treaty commission to negotiate with the Indians of California to extinguish their Indian title to the lands of California, and by the 18 treaties signed by the Indians but not ratified by Congress. Traveling to get the treaties signed was a major exploring expedition as reported in "The Journal of the Expedition of Colonel Redick M'Kee . . . through Northwestern California . . . 1851," by George Gibbs, and printed by Henry R. Schoolcraft in his History . . . of the Indian Tribes of the United States, Part III, 1853. (The Journal was reprinted in the Hearings for the Indians Claims Commission Act, 79th Cong., 2nd Session, June-July, 1946.) While M'Kee was negotiating treaties in northern California, O. M. Wozencroft and G. W. Barbour were getting treaties signed in central and southern California. Funds were exhausted before all tribes were visited. After the last treaty was signed January 7, 1852, with the Diegueño Indians, the 18 treaties were delivered to the Senate by President Millard Fillmore, June 1, 1852, with recommendation for ratification by officials of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

By coincidence, the first California State Legislature was in session when the 18 treaties were sent to the U. S. Senate and the California Legislature memorialized the U. S. Senate not to ratify the treaties because the area to be assigned the Indians was evaluated at $100,000,000. It was then, on June 7, 1852, that the California senators succeeded in having the treaties classified as secret and hidden away in Senate files, where they remained until 1905 when the injunction of secrecy was removed. In many other ways the Gold Rush miners' disregard for the rights of the aborigines characterized California for at least three decades.

The Century of Dishonor by Helen Hunt Jackson, published in 1881, pricked the conscience of America to the extent that many people of good will decided to do something about the Indian problem. The Indian Rights Association was founded in Philadelphia in 1882 with a California branch to follow soon. In Ramona,
1884, Mrs. Jackson so dramatized the poverty and misery of the Mission Indians of southern California that the Bureau of Indian Affairs bought many small farms to be permanent rancheros for landless Indians in California. Many of the reforms in Bureau administration were achieved by the publicity given Indian problems by the Board of Indian Commissioners from 1881 to 1933. The Board was composed of important citizens appointed by the President of the United States and authorized to visit reservations, investigate conditions and recommend administrative and legislative reforms.

In 1883, Mr. A. K. Smiley, an appointee of President Hayes to the U. S. Board of Indian Commissioners, sought to gain public support for needed changes in Indian affairs by a conference of interested and influential citizens convened at his summer lodge at Lake Mohonk, New York. The Lake Mohonk Conference on Indian Affairs became an annual meeting of officials, missionaries, Indians, and laymen who came together to seek ways to improve the conditions of the Indians. For nearly forty years the Lake Mohonk Conferences brought together annually two to three hundred citizens dedicated to helping the Indians. Few anthropologists ever attended these conferences. Many of the same people were listed as members of the Indian Rights Association, the Lake Mohonk Conference, the National Indian Association and many local organizations formed to help the Indians. From the Society of American Indians (1910) to the National Congress of American Indians (1941) several organizations of "Indians to help Indians" sought assistance from all friends of the Indians to get laws passed which would allow the various tribes to have their claims adjudicated. Again, few anthropologists were members of such organizations.

Perhaps the most important man to help the California Indians get heard in court was Frederick G. Collett. In August, 1946, when he appeared before the congressional committee on Indian Affairs during Hearings on the Indian Claims Commission Act, he identified himself as follows:

I am not an attorney. As a beneficent missionary among the Indians since 1910, I have a keen interest in their effort to secure a just and final settlement of the claims of all Indians. A large portion of my time for more than a quarter of a century has been devoted to advocating remedial legislation by the California State Legislature and by Congress.

From 1914 until his death in an auto accident at Willits, California, November 13, 1955, at the age of 70, Collett devoted his time to getting a hearing for the Indians of California. California Indians and their non-Indian friends were organized into various complex corporations for the purpose of maintaining Collett in Washington and Sacramento as a lobbyist. There was probably no hearing by any congressional committee on Indian Affairs from 1914 to 1955 at which Collett did not appear.

Since there were rival associations of California Indians, it is difficult to assess the value of any one group compared to the others. Collett claimed at times to represent 17,000 California Indians, but others questioned his influence and his motives so that he became a really controversial figure. However, Collett helped, without doubt, to secure the passage of the California Indians Jurisdictional Act of May 18, 1928, which authorized the California State Attorney General to sue for payment for the reservations the Indians had never received. Collett attempted later to have it amended to allow the Indians
to be represented by private legal counsel because he thought private counsel might obtain a better award than the Attorney General of the State of California working without additional recompense. It was during the Hearings before congressional committees concerned with the California Indians Jurisdictional Act from 1920 to 1928 that C. Hart Merriam testified.

No anthropologists were asked to testify before the Committee on Indian Affairs preceding the enactment of H.R. 4497, the Indians Claims Commission Act, August 13, 1946. Only two names of professional anthropologists, those of A. V. Kidder and Gene Weltfish, appeared in support of the bill, and they were given only as members of the Indian Committee of the American Civil Liberties Union. One might properly inquire why anthropologists should be so conspicuous by their absence when legislation of such great importance to American Indians was being considered. Since the Society for Applied Anthropology had been formed in 1941, one might ask particularly: "Where were the applied anthropologists?"

Perhaps in the desire to establish anthropology as a science and profession, anthropologists have felt it necessary to keep apart from politicians, missionaries and do-gooders, whose views might delay and confound the acceptance in more scientific circles of anthropology as a scientific discipline. At any rate anthropologists, while considering themselves the experts on aboriginal cultures of America, have seemed to avoid involvement in modern Indian Affairs. However, America's first home-grown anthropologists did not feel this way. Lewis H. Morgan, for example, was always involved with the practical affairs of the Seneca. John W. Powell made special studies of the Great Basin tribes for the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 1872 and often testified before congressional committees. George Bird Grinnell wrote and spoke regarding the contemporary conditions of the Plains Tribes from the time of his first visit in 1870 until his death in 1938. Warren K. Moorehead, archaeologist, from 1888, museum curator and teacher at Phillips Academy from 1901 to 1938, was associated with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, but only as investigator. Moorehead was appointed a member of the Board of Indian Commissioners by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1909, a position he kept until the Board system was dissolved in 1933. This, however, is a very small proportion of American anthropologists over this long period, and all four could be classified as "dedicated amateurs."

Professional American anthropology began largely as a museum science of the strange and exotic. Not until just before World War II when Commissioner John Collier employed a number of anthropologists was the pattern altered. A few remained in the Indian service during Collier's whole term of office and beyond, but a larger number found practical, applied anthropology not congenial to their training and interest. The War Relocation Authority, several military services, and even President Franklin D. Roosevelt in the White House used anthropologists during World War II in some practical situations. However, in March and June 1945, and in June and July 1946, congressmen failed to call anthropologists to testify regarding the proposed Indian Claims Commission Act.

It is against such a background that starting in 1950, dozens of anthropologists were approached and asked to testify as expert witnesses in cases involving millions of dollars. Kroeber received a letter from the attorneys for Indians of California, Docket No. 37, written on June 23, 1952. The
attorneys for Indians of California, Docket No. 31, approached him on January 8, 1953, and were told he had "signed up two months ago... to work exclusively" for the attorneys for Docket No. 37. Docket No. 31 and Docket No. 37 were finally consolidated by order of the Indian Claims Commission.

Neither Kroeber nor his associates, Robert F. Heizer, Edward W. Gifford, Samuel A. Barrett, S. F. Cook and Donald Cutter, had previously testified before the Indian Claims Commission. Since I had testified twice, Kroeber invited me to Berkeley to tell him about my own experiences preparing exhibits and testifying, and also my reactions to courtroom procedures. Later I was invited to be present when the Indians presented their case in Berkeley, in June, 1954, and also to serve as Kroeber's understudy during cross-examination of the witnesses for the Government in San Francisco, September, 1955.

In spite of the historic reluctance of anthropologists to be involved in modern Indian problems which still prompted a few established members of the profession to refuse employment by either side, Kroeber, past 75, entered energetically and wholeheartedly into restudying the ethnology of California in order to present accurately and completely the information pertinent to the case. Realizing the research required to prepare for the searching and detailed questioning by Department of Justice attorneys, Kroeber and Heizer, with the help of a number of graduate students, combed the massive literature on California ethnology to assemble, reproduce if necessary, and tabulate, data on all ethnological points at issue.

Kroeber prepared a new map of the aboriginal linguistic groups of California, changing boundaries which had been drawn for the Handbook of California Indians in 1925 where new evidence had become available. (It is interesting that the 1925 map needed so few modifications!)

In accordance with the Indian Claims Commission Act and with decisions of earlier claims cases that had been reviewed by the U. S. Supreme Court, aboriginal Indian title could be established by evidence that an identifiable group used and occupied a definable area, at the exclusion of others, since time immemorial. Kroeber quickly recognized the types of data to be presented and then worked to assemble and review the publications which contained the relevant material. Kroeber's Handbook of California Indians was, of course, the primary basis for the case of the Indians of California, but an additional 186 exhibits were required to present ethnographic, historical, botanical and archaeological data not covered by the Handbook.

Kroeber spoke or submitted to cross-examination for three hours a day for ten days. It was a masterful performance by a gifted scientist and talented, energetic scholar. Because of timing and emphasis, change of pace, and dozens of other practices which kept the interest of the Commissioners and others in the courtroom, Kroeber was an exceptionally impressive witness. The fifteen main points covered included a definition of anthropology, an explanation of ethnological procedures, an evaluation of ethnogeography and demography, a characterization of California Indian political-territorial groups, an exposition on land use for food and other purposes, etc. Heizer added ethnographic details and the evidence for length of occupancy from archaeology. Gifford and Barrett presented details for particular areas from their own decades of experience.
Cook and Cutter testified regarding evidence from Spanish documents. All of the witnesses demonstrated great erudition; Kroeber, however, was the most significant presence; he seemed at all times the "ideal witness."

Because of Kroeber's age and health in 1954, the attorneys for the Indians wished to present their case as soon as possible, even though to do so required them to allow a full year to intervene between the presentation of the case by the petitioners and the presentation of rebuttal evidence by the defendants. To have scholarly and professional ability to match the witnesses for the Indians, the Department of Justice secured the services of some of Kroeber's most successful and honored students. The University of California at Los Angeles served as research center and supplied graduate students to do the mechanical chores. Ralph Beals was coordinator for the preparation of exhibits and also prepared the opening and summary statements.

The attorneys for the Department of Justice are at a real disadvantage when handling cases based on aboriginal use and occupancy. It is simply a matter of fact that most ethnographic reports tend to support the claims of the Indians. However, in order to protect the American taxpayer and comply with the Indian Claims Commission Act itself, the Department of Justice must make the best defense possible. In addition to purely legal consideration, the attorneys for the government found that Kroeber's former students, Julian H. Steward, William Duncan Strong, Harold E. Driver, Erminie Brooke Wheeler Voegelin, Walter R. Goldschmidt, Abraham M. Halpern, and Ralph L. Beals could testify that the Indians of California gained most of their subsistence from a relatively small proportion of their territory. Some regions, like the tops of the mountains, deserts and dense forests were seldom visited. This was called the ecological theory of land use. It was proposed that the Indians of California were so devoted to salmon, deer and acorn as food that a good approximation of total land use could be reached by measuring the length of the salmon streams and converting linear miles to square miles and adding that to the area of oak forests. By such means it was calculated that the Hupa gained 80 to 90 per cent of their subsistence from 20 per cent of Hupa area. For Northern Pomo 11 per cent of territory supplied their needs. For most of the linguistic groups in California the Government's anthropologists testified that less than 25 per cent of the territory was used. Kroeber and the other experts for the Indians had expressed their opinion that all of the territory was used for some purpose.

A separate hearing accorded the Pit River Indians (Achomawi and Atsugewi), for which I was employed after the California Indian case, allowed me to test the government's ecological theory in detail. There are records in anthropological literature of 60 animals used by Pit River Indians--birds, reptile, fish, mammals, insects--(antelope to yellow jacket larvae) which are found scattered throughout the length and breadth of the area. Water fowl, crawfish, water fowl eggs, frogs, mink, beaver, muskrat, otter, minnows, and suckers were taken from streams, marshes and lakes. Fifty-five plants used for food, clothing, weapons, boats, medicine, houses, etc. were individually of limited distribution in the area, but collectively were spread over the entire Pit River area. Eagles and mountain sheep were found on the mountain tops, where young men stayed during initiation. Jack rabbits, antelope, sage hens and sage hen eggs were obtained from the extensive sage brush plains.
It might be best to let Associate Commissioner Louis J. O'Marr himself explain why the Indian Claims Commission accepted Kroeber's interpretation of complete aboriginal land use in California and rejected the Government's ecological theory of partial use, by citing from the Opinion of the Commission rendered July 31, 1959 (8 Ind. Cl. Com. 1, pp. 31-36), viz.:

**LAND USE AND OCCUPANCY**

"One of the most difficult, if not the most difficult, questions we have to decide is what California lands the petitioners actually occupied and used for their subsistence, that is, the lands they exploited for their day to day existence.

"We can proceed with our inquiry with the basic fact, which nobody questions, that Indians occupied and used California lands from time immemorial and as the aboriginal inhabitants thereof. The native population is unknown, but estimates range from a high of 700,000 to 260,000 by Dr. Merriam and 133,000 by Dr. A. L. Kroeber. (Pet. Ex. RH-125, pp. 68-71). These Indians were not an homogenous group, but were made up of many groups or tribelets which compose many linguistic divisions or nationalities in California. It has been estimated by Dr. Kroeber that there were 500 or more Indian groups in California about the time we acquired California from Mexico in 1848. (Record pp. 29-30, 129, 153 and 498). These tribelets occupied and used fairly well defined areas dependent in sizes upon the economic resources of the particular area and the population requirements of those living in it. Of course the degree of use of lands varies with conditions, as Dr. Beals, a witness for the defendant, described it:

'The evidence, it seems to me, shows clearly that there was a great deal of difference in the intensity of use. Some areas which had no economic resources were simply, if visited at all . . . traversed in getting from one place to another.' (Trans. p. 1645).

And Dr. Kroeber (Def. Ex. 188), a witness for petitioners, states respecting land use by the Indians of California:

'Land "actually used and occupied" by native groups is going to be hard to define because it slides off in a gradient. A site settled with houses is certainly both occupied and used. But the watershed ridge that bounds the valley of this group might never even be visited except in pursuit of a wounded deer, or perhaps chiefly at a gap through which a trail ran to the next valley harboring a distinct but friendly group. In between these extremes were all transitions of utilization; frequent, limited, occasional, rare; practically none.'

The difference in use was caused, as the above statements imply, by variations in climate, topography, elevation, soil vegetation, etc., all of which determine the quantity of economic resources in the various sections of the state. It is not necessary that the Indians prove that each of the 500 or more tribelets occupied and used every acre of the lands they claimed; that was not and cannot be done, as witnesses for the petitioners have frankly admitted. There is comparatively little proof of actual occupation and use of specific tribelet areas in California, and
if proof of such use is necessary, the petitioners have failed in their proof, however, there is proof by noted anthropologists, based upon years of study of Indian culture, habitats and ways of providing their subsistence, that the Indian groups used and occupied the lands in accordance with the Indian way of life. It must be borne in mind that in aboriginal times these Indians obtained their subsistence from the natural products of the soil and waters of the areas they occupied. Such an economy did not require an intensive cultivation of the soil for the Indians of necessity exploited the places which provided the necessaries of life. The resources the Indians relied upon for subsistence were not uniformly distributed; they were largely seasonal and in scattered places, requiring travel of considerable distances in their gathering, fishing and hunting activities. Game animals moved from place to place in search of food and had to be followed. The importance of flora and fauna in all regions of the state cannot be gainsaid, and the search for such resources was continuous and covered areas that were unproductive as well as those that were, because of the variations in the production of the natural resources from year to year or even from season to season in many years.

"Furthermore, it is plain that because of the uneven and rather sparse distribution of the available natural resources in the state, large areas of land were needed to provide subsistence. The Indians' permanent and main habitats were, in general, in locations which provided the greatest abundance of natural resources, but they were required, and generally did, extend their searches over large areas beyond their places of permanent settlement. The record is replete with proof of temporary camps occupied by the Indians in their seasonal gathering, fishing and hunting operations which covered large areas in the mountains, plains and deserts. It is no doubt true, as the Government contends, the higher elevations in the mountains and some large desert areas produced little of economic importance to the Indians, but such places had limited uses and were a part of the areas claimed and defended when necessary by the tribelet occupying it.

ECOLOGY OF CALIFORNIA

"The Government has introduced into this case an ecological analysis of the natural resources of California available to the Indians and the way those resources affected the extent of the use of the lands by the Indian inhabitants. The petitioners condemn the ecological approach as not only novel in Indian litigation but speculative. However, the Government has presented similar defenses in other cases heard by the Commission, although not labeled ecological analysis. See Coeur d'Alene Tribe v. United States, 4 Ind. Cls. Com. 1; Chinook Tribe v. United States, 6 Ind. Cls. Com. 177. There are several other cases in which the defendant presented testimony concerning 'nuclear areas' and 'primary subsistence areas' which are similar to the ecological approach.

"The primary value of the ecologic approach to the problem of land use and occupancy by the Indians of California lies in the paucity of proof of actual use and occupancy of the lands, as we understand the Government's position. The proof of actual use is in the main based upon anthropological studies and research. Proof of actual use by Indians of given areas is of the most general character, and, considering it in the aggregate, the
areas constitute but a relatively small part of the total lands involved in this case, Area B. We must, as the anthropologists did, reason and assume from our knowledge of the culture of these aborigines that they lived and had their permanent abodes in places best suited to their economic life and which they exploited as the primary sources of their subsistence and at the same time, or at least in connection therewith, they exploited the available resources in the less productive territory surrounding or in the vicinity of their settlements.

"An ecologic analysis of the area here under study involved the division of the territory into a number of zones according to their economic importance: (1) those of intensive use--these generally included the settlements or surrounding territory consisting of about one-fifth of a claimed area from which as high as 80 per cent of the subsistence was derived; then follows, (2) zones of less intensive use; (3) seasonal use; (4) infrequent use; and (5) the least use of any but, nevertheless, used for crossing, trailing or occasional use of sacred places located therein, and perhaps, on occasion, to defend the more important areas. Obviously, the analysis above mentioned concerned the state as a whole in its general application, but it was applied to specific lands, some of which are in Area B.

"We believe the study of the economic resources of the state and their relationship to the quantity of land required to support the Indians in their way of life has value in understanding the economic picture. However, we cannot accept the Government's thesis that the resources of the state or any part thereof can be determined mathematically by assigning a large percentage of subsistence derived from a small part of a given territory and reduced percentages of subsistence in other areas of a territory claimed by a particular tribelet. The testimony and ethnographic literature, of which there are volumes in evidence, show that the Indian groups ranged throughout their respective territories in their gathering, hunting, and fishing exertions. While these Indians were never considered nomads, their exploitation of the available resources in a given territory required frequent and extended traveling within the territories claimed. We believe it unrealistic and contrary to the Indian mode of life to restrict Indian territorial rights to the lands which would simply provide adequate subsistence and disallow their land claims to the areas which were of secondary importance or supplemental to the main sources of supplies. We suspect territorial expanse was as much the desire of these primitive peoples as it is characteristic of the white man for there is much ethnographic evidence that the Indian groups in California moved about their respective domains gathering wild foods as they ripened or captured available wild game, and during a normal season would visit and use the whole territory to which they asserted ownership as their exclusive places of abode.

"We know of no decision by the courts or the administrative officers of the Government which limited Indian land claims to those lands which provided them with the common necessities of life. The requirements of the Indians were so varied that they could only be obtained from a large area for salt, edible seeds and insects, flint and other important supplies were in most cases not available in the confined areas of valleys but obtainable from desert areas."
"The Commission therefore concludes that the Indians have proven aboriginal Indian title to all of said lands in Area B except those Spanish or Mexican grants located therein."

California Area A lands were those of groups like the Pit River, Washo, Modoc, Yuma, etc. which were allowed to present separate petitions. In spite of the fact that the Department of Justice has appealed the decision of the Indian Claims Commission to the Court of Claims, the Opinion rendered stimulates hope that the final order will be in favor of the Indians.

Since 1946 there have been at least fifty anthropologists involved in the Indian Claims Cases as expert witnesses for the Government or for the Indians. Attorneys did not seek anthropological testimony for either side in the initial cases. Following an order for a rehearing by the Court of Claims in an appeal of a Northern Paiute case, and also a rehearing of a Chippewa case, anthropologists have participated in nearly every case since where aboriginal title was an issue. That anthropologists have also proved useful to the government is apparent. Otherwise it would not have obtained their services. That anthropologists have benefitted from this serious application of their knowledge to practical problems, far more than from the monetary remuneration they received, is also true.

Incidentally, after having participated in the Indian claims cases as expert witnesses, anthropologists will find themselves less inclined to return to the ivory tower of the past. In fact, today, the ivory tower in anthropology seems to be disappearing. Anthropologists are finding themselves useful on all fronts, for example, anthropologist Dr. Philleo Nash is Commissioner of Indian Affairs. I think the large number of anthropologists who assisted in settling the claims cases has helped to bring about this situation. That A. L. Kroeber was among those who participated helped a great deal.