

INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

Cultural Resilience through Ancestral Teachings

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Haku (hello), my name is Nakia Zavalla, and I am a community member of the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians, a federally recognized tribe located in Santa Ynez, California. We are one of the Chumash tribes located along the southern and central coast of California and adjacent Channel Islands.

My ancestors lived in a climate that had hot summers and mild winters. There were plenty of animals to hunt and fish to catch, and the people also gathered seeds, berries, and acorns for food. Our women made beautiful baskets of rush and all the things needed to live well. Our belief system is connected to the stars and to what we call the upper-world beings, such as Old Man Sun that carries the torch to light the world and Sky Eagle who stretches his wings to cause the phases of the moon. We observe times such as the Winter Solstice Ceremony to help determine the next year's rain and harvest.

My ancestors' traditional way of life came to an end when Spanish colonizers arrived to claim land in their so-called New World. The Spanish conquest was driven by desires to make fortunes and to convert the Native Americans to Catholicism. They completed their first mission in California in 1769 in San Diego, beginning an era of conversion to Catholicism and a cultural cleansing of thousands of Native Americans in California.

I am a seventh-generation descendent of a Chumash man named Qilikutiyyiwit, who was born in 1775 in the village of Kalawashaq. His wife, who was given the Spanish name Eulalia, was born in the same village in 1778. In 1804 the Santa Ines Mission was completed in our valley. My ancestor grandparents Qilikutiyyiwit at the age of twenty-nine and Eulalia at twenty-six entered into the mission. Their son, my sixth great-grandfather Benvenuto, was born in the mission system eight



years later, in 1812.

My ancestor grandfather Qilikutiwiwit and his brother were two of the leaders of the Mission Revolt of 1824. It started after a young boy was whipped and spread lies to both the missionaries and the Indians, telling each side that the other was planning an attack. Regardless of what sparked the revolt, the Chumash people were standing up against the harsh treatment they received from the *alcaldes* (guards) and the priests. The people also wanted to free themselves from mission life. In the revolt, Qilikutiwiwit and the other men gathered to plan the attack and looked to their traditional practices to help with guidance and protection. This demonstrated that despite the cultural cleansing and conversion that the people encountered, they still believed in the old ways and continued to practice their traditions and speak their language. Native interpreters were instrumental for negotiations with the Spanish and detailed explanations to both sides during and following the revolt.

We know much about this revolt because these stories have been passed down from Qilikutiwiwit's granddaughter, my fifth great-grandmother Maria del Refugio Solares. She was the only surviving child of the eleven children born to my sixth great-grandfather Benvenuto and sixth great Yokut grandmother, Shiguashajum/Brigida. Maria was born at Mission San Carlos Borroméo de Carmelo. Her parents brought her back to the Santa Ines Mission, where she lived most of her life.

She and her family endured within the mission system and kept speaking the Chumash language, following traditional practices, and sharing stories of the ancestors. Her father and grandfather passed down stories of life in the missions. Revolts occurred not only through action of the body, but also through protection of the culture and language. Colonization failed to culturally cleanse my ancestors of who they were or to pacify them as a people.

I also know this because today I speak our language. The old stories connect me to our cultural landscape, and I participate in cultural ceremonies that strengthen my connection to the Chumash world of my ancestor grandparents. My grandmother Maria said, "We prayed in the night," and this is the same night sky I look up to. These are the same stars and moon my grandparents and ancestors looked upon. The ancestors prayed or spoke about the purpose, meaning, and connection



of the weather to the moon, Milky Way, constellations, or the upper_world. This is proof of resilience. Through all the atrocities my family and my Chumash people have endured, *t'ini kiyaqay 'iti'*—we are still here.