

The California Indian Basketweavers Association: Advocates for the Use of Museum Collections by Contemporary Weavers*

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Abstract: Indigenous California basketweavers have collaborated with universities, museums, and government land agencies in recent years through participation in the decision-making processes regarding the management of natural and cultural resources. The California Indian Basketweavers Association (CIBA) has been at the forefront of these efforts, particularly as they relate to native plants used in basketry. Through grassroots efforts, they have also furthered relationships with museums, as basket collections serve as an important cultural resource for contemporary artists. The history of CIBA is first presented here, including weavers' involvement with basket documentation, followed by an examination of the nature of CIBA's relationship with museums, specifically regarding how collections are used. Suggestions for successful museum visits by museum staff and for weavers are offered in conclusion. [Keywords: basketry, weavers, collections, California]

Basketry is an invaluable component to many Northern California museum collections, while the preservation and persistence of native basketweaving is an important issue for Native Californians today. Native focused ethnographic museum collections in California include a predominance of basketry and other textiles, including regalia, cordage, baby cradles, and other items made from native plants. Many indigenous people today connect with their family, community, and ancestors through native plant gathering and the traditional craft of basketweaving. Basketweaving is a unique and enlightening point of departure to explore a set of interrelated themes including cultural heritage, grassroots activism for community solidarity and political engagement, indigenous perspectives on environmental management, and the use of historic basket collections in museums. The history and objectives of the California Indian Basketweavers Association (CIBA), and the nature and status of their relationship with California museums is examined here.

A political-ecological viewpoint (Rocheleau et al. 1996) offers one way to examine the reasons why CIBA was established, as well as some of the group's primary objectives, such as native plant management through methods of decreased pesticide applications and controlled burns and advocating economic and social empowerment of California indigenous women through basketweaving. Since the establishment of CIBA in the early 1990s, members have been at the forefront of environmental issues as these relate to the management of native plants used in basketry, and subsequently, weavers' involvement with museums has increased. Weavers bring a

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culturally specific and gendered perspective to natural and cultural resource management through participation in the decision-making processes with universities, museums, and land management policy makers. By examining CIBA's collaborative efforts with federal and state land management agencies we can better understand how dialogue between CIBA and museum professionals has developed in the last 15 years, particularly how basketry collections serve as an important cultural resource for contemporary artists. To research this, primary data was acquired in 2003 through interviews with weavers, on-site visits to ten museums in Northern California, and a review of recent literature pertaining to CIBA.

Basketweavers and the Establishment of Museum Collections

A significant amount of Native American basketry now residing in museums was collected around the turn of the 20th century, primarily due to field collecting excursions funded by museums and the tourist trade in basketry. Widespread beliefs about "vanishing races" during this period led to salvage ethnography, prompted by a heightened sense of urgency to collect ethnographic data under the view that Indian cultures must be documented before they completely disappeared. As a result, many American museums were established during this time period, and core collections of Native American artifacts developed (Berlo 1992; Bernstein 1989; Jacknis 1993; Gogol 1985).

Field collections assembled by both ethnographers and art dealers had profound affects upon basketweaving, such as the creation of the tourist basket, the exposure of highly skilled weavers to Anglo communities, and the re-creation of tradition in an economic exchange system (Cohodas 1992). Basketweavers during this time period made decisions concerning basketry form and design, but in interaction with a larger dominant society that, paradoxically, discouraged, sometimes by force, the continuation of indigenous values, language, and traditions (Bibby 1996:3; Cohodas 1992, 1997:4-10; Jacknis 1993; Washburn 1984).

The tourist trade in basketry was also at its height in the early 1900s, fueled by a romanticized image of the American West and a period of prosperity for the American upper class. Indigenous basketry symbolized, to this audience, the harmony of artistic skill with utilitarian purpose, a perspective conditioned by the Arts and Craft Movement, which was, in part, a rejection of industrialized, machine-made goods in favor of domestic, traditional, hand made crafts (Cohodas 1992, 1997).

There were several prominent California weavers from this period who are recognized individually as master artists, such as Washoe weaver Datsolalee (Louisa Keyser) (1835-1925); Maidu weavers Mary Azbill (1864-1932), Lucy Baker (1859-1920), Selina Jackson (born in 1874), and Amanda Wilson (1864-1946); and Karok weaver Elizabeth Hickox (1872-1947) and her daughter Louise Hickox (1896-1962). Though collectors recognized these weavers as skilled artisans, the commodification of basketry for museum and private collections and the written interpretations of the events and ideas surrounding this craft was a phenomenon controlled and manipulated primarily by art dealers and ethnographers. Ethnographers and collectors in California during the late 1800s and early 1900s, such as John Hudson, Stewart Culin, Charles Wilcomb, Alfred Kroeber, Roland Dixon, Lila Morris O'Neale, and naturalists such as C. Hart

Merriam are in many ways responsible for what we know about historic California basketry. Museum collections and their associated written accounts have been significantly defined by the baskets these individuals chose to buy or commission, how they chose to document the objects, and how they chose to identify makers, plant materials, and cultural contexts (Bates and Bibby 1993; Bernstein 1989; Jacknis 1993; Washburn 1984).

The period following World War II saw a noticeable decline in Native California traditional craft. In a context of Federal government assimilation programs and processes of social, economic, and cultural change generally, languages, oral histories, and traditional crafts were often not passed from one generation to the next. In California, indigenous ethnobotanical knowledge was often not passed to younger generations from their elders because of the difficulty in accessing plant materials due to the continued destruction of traditional gathering areas (Bibby 1996). However, a number of indigenous women, including Pomo weaver Elsie Allen (Bibby 1991:3), Maidu weaver Lilly Baker, Pomo/Patwin weaver Mabel McKay, and Karuk/Yurok weaver Vivien Hailstone, continued weaving during the post-War period and provided continuity in craft knowledge in their respective communities (Bibby 1996). Native Californian relations with museums did not begin with CIBA, but with these individuals who, as early as the 1960s, assisted in basketry documentation, demonstrations, and exhibits. These basketweavers served as an inspiration for younger weavers to come together and share their concerns and thoughts on the future of California Indian basketry (Ortiz 1991).

A Renaissance in Basketweaving: CIBA's Political-Ecological Approach

A positive outcome of CIBA's collective action in Northern California has been an increasing sense of community support for indigenous people generally and for women in particular. As CIBA states on their website regarding their objectives for social change:

We work at both the national and state levels to change public policies and to reform institutions, while at the same time empowering and supporting Native people in their communities. Our efforts have resulted in an increasingly visible and active role for California Indian women in challenging and changing institutions and public policies that result in economic and environmental injustice to Native people. We have enabled California Indian "stakeholders" to gain access to decision makers and to the decision making process. [CIBA 2003a]

Indigenous environmental activism in Northern California began in the early 1970s with the establishment of Ya-Ka-Ama Native Plant Nursery in Sonoma County, followed by the creation of the California Indian Basketweavers Association in the early 1990s. These organizations share important values, such as a concern for sustainable environmental practice and cultural heritage preservation. As early as 1986, the planning and grant writing for the first CIBA gathering was underway. Through public outreach and grants, weavers were able to obtain funding from the Folk Arts Program of the National Endowment of the Arts, the California Arts Council Traditional Folk Arts Program, the Fund for Folk Culture, and the Seventh Generation Fund (Greensfelder 1991:14). In June of 1991, the first basketweavers gathering was held at Ya-Ka-Ama Native Plant Nursery (Greensfelder 1991:14-15). There was an overwhelming response,

with participation of 65 to 70 weavers from all over California, many with the same concerns, such as where to gather materials, from whom to learn the skill of weaving, and how to access museum collections (Greensfelder 1991:15).

The not-for-profit organization of CIBA was established later that year by a basketweavers council, which became the first board of trustees, who approved a second gathering for 1992. As CIBA became more fully realized, the founding members were thrust into a leadership role to educate others and to fulfill the new role of consultants to museums and other agencies. Members soon realized that as an organization they were much more effective as a political entity in engaging federal and state agencies regarding access to and quality of plant materials and in voicing their concerns to museums than they were as individuals.

In 1992, CIBA board members met with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service policy makers. The nine women on the Basketweavers advisory council were asked to help identify and manage gathering areas in the 18 national forests in California and to organize themselves at the local level to facilitate dialogue in identifying gathering areas (Gendar 1992; Ortiz 1992). Some ideas brought to the table at this meeting included the need for a multi-cultural focus in the Forest Service work force and a closer partnership between Forest Service agencies and Native Americans. One major concern raised at this meeting was the dwindling amount of bear and deer grass. The Plumas National Forest has since conducted a successful bear grass burn in 2005, a process that allows the grass to re-grow faster, with plans for a second one using funding from a CIBA grant. More importantly, the Plumas National Forest is planning a permanent bear grass burn schedule, and possibly a management plan for other native species used in weaving, including redbud, deer grass, and willow (CIBA 2008).

In 1995, CIBA board members met with the regional forester at the USDA Forest Service headquarters in San Francisco. At the top of the agenda of this meeting was the problem of pesticide spraying (Alvarez 1995). The same plants gathered for herbal teas, baby cradles, and other baskets are targets for herbicide spraying, as they compete with commercially valued timber. Basketweavers have suffered numbness around the mouth after processing materials, as women usually split plant shoots with their teeth (Ortiz 1993). CIBA has effectively stopped herbicide spraying in some areas, including the Hoopa Reservation, but this continues to be an important concern. Recently, several national forests including Stanislaus, Sierra, and Eldorado, have lifted the ban on herbicide spraying after several years of non-spray policies (CIBA 2008).

The Vivien Hailstone Memorial Fund is a scholarship fund available through CIBA for weavers to finance visits to museums, pay for travel expenses to gatherings, and provide funds for any other activities that will support education and experience in weaving. The fund honors Vivian Hailstone, a Karuk/Yurok basketweaver who was instrumental in continuing the tradition of basketweaving during the post World War II period. CIBA has also helped facilitate access to National Park Service and Department of Parks and Recreation ethnographic collections. These activities have been accomplished primarily by educating others through participation in meetings and forums, sending out invitations to Indian gatherings, volunteer work at museums, public relations, and increasing awareness about issues important to Native Californians.

CIBA, as both an activist organization and a vehicle for the preservation of cultural heritage and ethnobotanical practices, has been largely propelled by its women board members who are elected to office annually by voting members. CIBA has a regional and global network of indigenous basketweavers, with members from tribal affiliations all over the state and shared regional gatherings with the Western Regional Indigenous Basketweavers. There are two types of members: voting members who are registered as California indigenous basketweavers and associate members who are registered as general supporters. Total membership has increased from 250 in 1991 to over one thousand today, which includes 260 voting members (indigenous basketweavers) and approximately eight to nine hundred native and non-native associate members (individuals, museums, tribes, and government agencies) (CIBA 2003a:11-12, 2008).

CIBA's mission is to "preserve, promote, and perpetuate California Indian basketweaving traditions while providing a healthy physical, social, spiritual, and economic environment for basketweavers" (CIBA 2008). This is accomplished by encouraging and enabling weavers to study traditional basketry styles and forms and to exhibit their work, promoting continued access to traditional gathering areas, encouraging solidarity and communication among weavers, monitoring pesticide use, and providing educational opportunities.

Basket Collections as Resources for Contemporary Weavers

The revitalization in basketweaving in the last 15 years is evident in an increasing number of weaving groups, classes, and community support, which has encouraged the dissemination of knowledge between and across generations concerning weaving skills and ethnobotanical practices. During this time, there has also been a transformation in museum practice, characterized by community integration, incorporation of indigenous knowledge and consultation, access to museum resources, and accountable collections management practices. Museums were affected, like many institutions in the 1960s and 1970s, by a mood of social criticism, public protest, and improved demographic representation in a nation with increasing cultural diversity (Harris 1999; MacDonald and Fyfe 1996:1-14). This ideological transformation is reflected locally in California by the recently established relationships between indigenous weavers and museums, in particular the use of basket collections by contemporary weavers. The renaissance in weaving has been significantly advanced through CIBA's political and environmental efforts. Just as native plants serve as a critical natural resource in weaving, museum basket collections are an important cultural resource. CIBA's efforts towards improved indigenous-museum interactions parallel their efforts in natural conservation.

For consideration of the museum-CIBA relationship, primary data (in the form of interviews with museum staff and tours of collections at each museum) was gathered from ten museums in Northern California that house California historic basketry and other textiles: including the Chester-Lake Almanor Museum; Plumas County Museum; Lassen Volcanic National Park; Mooretown Rancheria Cultural Center for the Konkow Maidu Indian Tribe; Oakland Museum of California; Turtle Bay Exploration Park; State Museum Resource Center (SMRC) at the California Department of Parks and Recreation; Phoebe Apperson Hearst Museum at the University of California, Berkeley; the Merriam Collection at the University of California, Davis; and the California Academy of Sciences. Interviews were also conducted in person with

three CIBA members, including two master weavers and teachers, and one founding CIBA board member. Additionally, recent literature on issues pertaining to CIBA was reviewed.

Basketweavers have been involved in the documentation of basketry since the late 1960s, and in recent years, many students of basketry have been utilizing collections to research technical skill, traditional forms, artistic developments, and family history. Based upon the primary data gathered, several scholars during the 1980s and 1990s, including Brian Bibby, Craig Bates, Larry Dawson, and Bruce Bernstein, have assisted in the documentation of California baskets at all of the museums included in this research. Since the early 1960s, well-regarded basketweavers have also been involved with documentation efforts, including Mabel McKay, Lilly Baker (the Plumas County Museum), Marie Potts (Chester-Lake Almanor Museum), Laverna Jenkins (Lassen Volcanic National Park), Rella Allen (the Oakland Museum), and Vivien Hailstone (Turtle Bay Exploration Park). These women have been involved in consultation and documentation efforts with museums on an individual basis. However, in the last 15 years, many more weavers, especially students of basketry, have also had the opportunity to access collections. This younger generation of weavers is utilizing collections for research and study in order to develop their own skills. CIBA members have largely facilitated this relatively recent renaissance in basketweaving and the increased use of collections for study.

Weavers primarily research or study historic basketry, cordage, and other items woven from native plants for four reasons: 1) to advance their own skill by examining various techniques and plant materials used; 2) to identify family baskets, or baskets that pertain to the weaver on a personal level; 3) for artistic inspiration; and 4) to acquire knowledge about specific traditions. A staff member at the Phoebe Hearst Museum who facilitates visits states that basketry is the primary ethnographic object requested for viewing by Native Californians, and the four types of information most commonly sought are construction technique, plant materials used, artist and provenience, and pesticide applications applied to the basket for preservation purposes.

Historic basketry and raw ethnobotanical materials housed in museums may also be important to understanding past ecosystems and change in plant health over time (Anderson and Moratto 1996). Some weavers, while studying items in collections, notice differences in the health of specific plant species used in historic baskets, compared to the same plant used today. For example, the bear grass today around Lake Almanor and Bucks Lake is a different color and less pliable. Sedge shoots are shorter, and many willow shoots are infested with bugs. CIBA member interest in such details, and the knowledge that it evokes, offers a unique perspective on the types of valuable information that is contained in ethnographic collections.

One interviewee stated that she would like to weave more traditional Maidu baskets, but finding a pattern can be difficult. However, both the CIBA gatherings and museum collections visits are helpful in learning about traditional Maidu designs. She also stated that the Achumawi tradition of twining with tule is rare, but that it does appear to be practiced today. With a grant from CIBA or the California Arts Council, she would like to research tule twining and learn this technique.

In some instances, weavers know more about a basket than is documented in the accession record or catalog card. Often a student in a visiting weaving class will identify a basket made by a family relation based on technique, placement of the pattern, and size. One interviewee and

basketweaving instructor stated that at least one student from every class has located a family basket in a museum collection. Baskets that are identified by students as being from their family often have no provenience information, and the student is able to assist in documenting possible makers or places of origin. A museum may not have the basket documented as such, but additional information such as the date and place of acquisition can help narrow the possibilities of makers. Many weavers, over time, become familiar with a particular design motif, and may develop favorite design and shape combinations, or they develop their own design. In some cases, makers can be identified by these particular traits that are unique to them.

Hosting Visiting Weavers: Classes, Programs, and Projects

Beginning in 1987, the Oakland Museum proposed new initiatives to strengthen relationships between the museum and Native American communities in California and to increase the documentation of and access to the Native American collections. To reach these goals the Oakland Museum has since developed a variety of projects, exhibits, and an artist-in-residency program. One of the plans includes the Lower Klamath River Basketry Research and Documentation Project. The goal of this project is to define typologies of baskets from this region, focusing on design motifs. Scholars and ethnographers will consult archival documentation, such as field notes, which will be supplemented by research and analysis from a variety of participants, including contemporary weavers.

The Phoebe Hearst has developed a structured Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) consultation program, a format which is also used for visiting basketweavers, including CIBA members. Due to a recent basket move project and the museum's systemized consultation program, there is increased access to basketry collections and more information can be shared with visiting researchers and weavers. Otis Parrish, the Tribal Vice Chairman for the Kashia Band of Pomo Indians, fulfills a vital role for the Phoebe Hearst Museum as both a NAGPRA committee member and cultural liaison between the museum and tribes. Though Parrish was hired initially to facilitate NAGPRA consultation visits, his role has expanded into the ongoing dialogue between tribal groups and access to collections, as well as outreach. There is about one tribal visit to the Hearst Museum per month and baskets are by far the most common type of object requested to study. Similar guidelines are used for other indigenous visitors who are not part of a NAGPRA visit, such as CIBA members. However, in contrast to NAGPRA consultation visits, the format for basketry consultations is generally more informal and less museum staff time is allotted.

The number of basketweavers visiting or using collections is nearly impossible to estimate, even on a yearly basis. This is partly due to the fact that most involvement with basketweavers has been for consultation on exhibits and for demonstrations; activities that do not necessarily utilize existing collections, making it difficult to delineate actual numbers of weavers involved in the general documentation and study of collections. However, the SMRC and the Oakland Museum have hosted many visits over the years, with the SMRC hosting individual weavers about once each month and classes about three times each year. In 1993, the State Museum Resource Center, Department of Parks and Recreation, established a new protocol that enhanced visitor access to the collections. Collection tours for the public were offered on a regular basis, and basketry

classes utilize the collection regularly (approximately three to four times per year). A computer terminal with access to the database is in the storage area, and a large area with tables is also set aside for study, photography, and classes. In May of 2003, one interviewee organized a basketweavers retreat at Turtle Bay. A group of about twenty basketweavers were able to study and spend time in collections with the assistance of about four museum staff. The C. Hart Merriam basketry collection housed by the Anthropology Department at the University of California, Davis, is one of the most well documented basketry and herbarium collections in California. Requests from weavers to access these collections occur about once a year, and about three times a year for all other researchers.

As discussed, basketweavers have been involved with all of the museums in this study in a variety of capacities, including exhibit projects and demonstrations at the Plumas County Museum, the Turtle Bay Exploration Park, Mooretown Rancheria, and the Oakland Museum. Informal and undocumented personal visits have occurred at many of these museums (e.g. Chester-Lake Almanor Museum). Artist-in-residency programs have been developed at the Traditional Arts Program at the California Academy of Sciences and the Oakland Museum. Students in basketry classes and attendees at basketry retreats have visited or have been directly involved with three museums: Mooretown Rancheria, Turtle Bay Exploration Park, and the SMRC.

Elements for Successful Collections Visits

Based on my interviews with weavers, it is apparent that a shared sense of protocol and mutual understanding has, in some cases, been lacking from museum visits. From the weaver's perspective, successful collections visits are dependent upon open and reliable communication, trust and mutual respect, long-term relationships between weavers and museum staff, and planning. Many of these variables are subjective, and cannot be easily programmed. However, well-established protocols or procedures for collections visits can help facilitate successful dialogue.

Most museums have a protocol for visitor access to collections, such as a visitor log, a required submittal of a research design, or object handling procedures. A procedural manual could be developed or initiated by CIBA, and submitted to museums, who can then amend it and incorporate their own policies, or vice versa. The objective of the procedures would be to facilitate trust, communication, and consistency for future visits. Museum staff members and the visitor contact person should coordinate with each other in advance regarding the number of visitors or class size, tribal affiliations, protocol for object handling and storage access, the estimated amount of time required, and the objectives of the visit. Museum staff should be prepared for questions about pesticide applications to baskets and inventories produced for NAGPRA. Both parties should communicate their concerns in advance regarding object handling, access to storage areas, the recording of conversations for permanent museum files, and photography.

The preservation and safety of baskets is a principle concern for both museum staff and weavers. Weavers are often familiar with the museum environment from their experiences with class visits

or individual research at other museums. While this can be an advantage, it can also lead to conflicting ideas between museum staff and visitors concerning protocol. Each museum has slightly different policies for collections visits and object handling, and staff should discuss this with the contact person prior to the visit. Museums should be prepared to set aside ample time for staff to assist in accessing associated documentation. Museums should also develop a procedure for recording which baskets were researched or documented.

There are three important elements for successful collections visits: 1) organization of collections and associated documents; 2) full access to storage areas and object handling; and 3) a mutual understanding between museum staff and weavers concerning collections protocol and procedures. Accessibility of collections depends upon the physical storage conditions and organization of information, such as catalog records, accession files, photographs, and other documentation. Funding sources, in general, were available to the museums in this study on a one-time only basis during the late 1980s and early 1990s—primarily in the form of grants from the National Science Foundation and Institute of Museum Services—to fund primary collections management needs such as storage, documentation, and automation. This is evident at several museums that house significant basketry collections, including the Phoebe Hearst Museum, the Merriam collection at the University of California, Davis, Turtle Bay Exploration Park, and the California Academy of Sciences as these museums have recently acquired improved curation facilities currently housing their collections.

Another museum practice that can facilitate research visits to museums is organizing collections by cultural affiliation. This allows an entire collection of baskets pertaining to a particular group to be viewed together and makes it easier for weavers to select those that exhibit masterful skill or interesting patterns from within that cultural group. Organization of collections by culture group rather than accession number or date received was observed at six of the eight museums with storage facilities. Weavers prefer accessing storage areas rather than selecting baskets to study based upon object information recorded in a catalogue file or computer record, though photographic documentation can greatly improve the selection process. Baskets can then be easily retrieved based upon the weaver's own observations and perceptions of the collections as a whole. For example, weavers may recognize a basket made by an artist with exceptional ability, though it may not belong to the set of baskets they had initially requested to view. Students find it particularly valuable to see examples of skillfully made baskets.

Full access to storage areas and handling baskets closely for study also allows weavers an opportunity to recognize family baskets, to study techniques, and to identify baskets that may have been incorrectly documented. Handling baskets is important in order to count stitches in a design or to examine the base start and rim finish.

Conclusion

Basketweaving can be examined as an axis point around which the issues of political activism, revitalization and preservation of cultural heritage, and the environment are linked. Today, many weavers use basketry collections to enhance their own skills through the study of traditional weaving styles and technology. This process often allows weavers to connect on a personal level

with their family and community history. To a large extent, the increased use of museum collections by weavers has been an outgrowth of the recent renaissance in basketweaving in California. This renaissance has been further propelled by CIBA, whose members organized themselves at the local level in the early 1990s to become a voice for California Indian women. Many contemporary weavers have been at the forefront of social and political projects to improve access to and inclusion in the decision-making processes regarding the management of native plant resources on state and federal property. Through similar methods, weavers have been increasingly involved with museums, in particular the study of basket collections. Based on data gathered from the museums, weavers have been primarily involved with collections for the purpose of documentation, even prior to the establishment of CIBA. Since then, one key difference in indigenous-museum dialogue is the use of collections by weavers for their own purposes: artistic inspiration, technical improvement, and to connect with their heritage and community history on a personal level. One primary example of this is the indigenous basketweaving classes now taught by CIBA members, in which museum collections are offered as an educational resource, with the museum itself serving as an educational venue.

CIBA has increased access to collections for weavers, particularly those owned by the National Park Service and the Department of Parks and Recreation. This has been achieved through education, invitations to attend CIBA gatherings, volunteer work in museums, public relations, “and making people feel comfortable with who we are” (CIBA 2003b). All of the museums included in this study have been involved with basketweavers in some capacity, CIBA members in particular. This has occurred in a variety of contexts, including exhibit and documentation projects, such as the Oakland Museum’s exhibit *Objects of Myth and Memory* (February 28-May 24, 1992) and the Lilly Baker Basket Project at the Plumas County Museum. Group visits have been conducted at the Phoebe Hearst Museum, the SMRC, and Turtle Bay Exploration Park. CIBA has organized basketweaving retreats and classes at Turtle Bay Exploration Park and the SMRC. Artist-in-residency programs were noted only at the Oakland Museum and California Academy of Sciences, two of the larger museums included in this study. In addition, there are an unknown number of instances in which weavers, in an unofficial capacity, or while studying baskets with a visiting class, have assisted in documentation, as noted at the SMRC, the Phoebe Hearst, and the Oakland Museum. The Oakland Museum proposed initiatives for increased access to ethnographic collections and involvement with indigenous people in the mid-1990s. In the last several years, the SMRC has worked toward improving access to their storage areas for visitors and researchers, especially basketweaving classes taught by CIBA members. Mooretown Rancheria Cultural Center is in a unique position as a tribal museum/cultural center. In 2003, they began to incorporate basketry classes for Konkow Maidu into their cultural program and discussed options for developing a native plant gathering area (Ruiz 2005). Also in 2003, the Merriam collection at the University of California, Davis has provided increased visitor access to baskets, specifically for weavers. In the years to come, Northern California museums may continue to refine and further develop their initiatives for collections access and use as well as protocols for visiting weavers.

The political-ecological dimension of CIBA’s relationship with institutions is most evident through their grassroots efforts towards inclusive rather than exclusive dialogue, which incorporates indigenous, gendered knowledge into the decision-making processes. In other words, the indigenous knowledge shared by weavers with museum staff is an inclusive approach

to the documentation of collections. Access to collections and the knowledge weavers gain from their study of museum baskets, in essence, affects the way in which we perceive collections—as a cultural resource relevant to contemporary issues (i.e., cultural heritage and community solidarity as expressed in CIBA’s mission)—and it informs our understanding of how museums serve local communities. As a grassroots organization, CIBA has enabled students of basketweaving and master weavers alike to come together and work with museums on their basketry collections. Basket collections are an invaluable resource for contemporary weavers, not only for continuity and preservation of this traditional craft, but also as one aspect that strengthens California’s communities of indigenous women.

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