

Ka'm-t'em: A Journey Toward Healing
Kishan Lara-Cooper and Walter J. Lara Sr.
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Decolonization is a multi-faceted project intending to undo the harms done by colonization and the suppressing of a people's lifeways and culture. As Michael Yellow Bird explains in the forward of *Ka'm-t'em*, decolonization is both an idea and a concept. As an idea, it is about the reaching within ourselves beyond the memory of colonization and bringing to the forefront our Indigeneity. As a concept, it is about action and agency or taking the necessary steps to overcome past, present, and future colonization. Walt Lara, Sr. and Kishan Lara-Cooper's book *Ka'm-t'em: A Journey Toward Healing* is about the path to decolonization and the cultural renaissance of the Indigenous peoples of what is now called Northern California. It is written for everyone wanting to learn about the strategies that the Yurok, Karuk, Hupa, Wiyot, and Tolowa peoples have taken toward a holistic renewal of health, culture, and spirit. The decolonization strategies include language and cultural revitalization, resistance to continued injustices perpetrated by Euro-American society, and a renewed reassertion of Indigenous rights.

Fittingly, this book begins with Kishan Lara-Cooper telling the Yurok creation story of *Ka'm-t'em*. This story is about the spiritual journey of a wise woman's basket and how she gifted her

spiritual wisdom to the peoples. The woman created a beautifully woven basket as a gift to the peoples and placed within it all the knowledge and treasures of the world. She then placed the basket in the water where the rivers join and allowed it to begin its journey down the river. The basket stopped at each of the villages where the peoples lived. The peoples rejoiced as they took in the wisdom and gifts within the basket and then they contributed their own prayers and knowledge and left the basket to continue its journey down the river. The basket stopped at each village along its journey collecting more knowledge along the way, until finally it floated into the Pacific Ocean where it resides still.

With this book, Walt Lara, Sr. and Kishan Lara-Cooper have intricately woven together the wisdom of many Indigenous peoples who have been instrumental in the protection and revitalization of the lifeways, cultures, ceremonies, and health of Indigenous peoples in Northern California and beyond. *Ka'm-t'em* is a collection of stories with chapters written by many respected Indigenous holders of traditional knowledge, educators, activists, artists, and Native youth. Included in this book are important historical lessons for all readers, but also contains an embedded message for the next generation of Indigenous lead-

ers to continue fighting for inherent rights, practicing cultural traditions and ceremonies, and to live life “in a good way,” in order to heal and maintain the balance of the world.

This book’s co-editors, Dr. Kishan Lara-Cooper (Yurok/Hupa/Karuk), Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Child Development at Humboldt State University and respected spiritual leader and wisdom keeper Walter J. Lara Sr. (Yurok), have roots in Indigenous Northwestern California that go back since time immemorial. They were both born and raised traditionally, in a manner that necessitated protecting and continuing the traditions, rights, and lifeways of their culture. Dr. Kishan Lara-Cooper earned her Doctorate of Education degree from Arizona State University with an emphasis in Indian Education and a specialization in language revitalization, community-based education, and culturally-based pedagogy. She earned her Master of Arts degree in Linguistics from the University of Arizona; and her Bachelor of Arts degree in Native American Studies from Humboldt State University. Dr. Kishan Lara-Cooper is actively involved with the revitalization of the woman’s coming of age ceremony, the flower dance, as well as the jump dance ceremony, which a ceremony for the continuance of humankind. Her dedication to her cultural traditions and to the decolonization of education for the benefit of future generations is profound and clear to all who know her or read her work.

Walt Lara Sr. is a revered Yurok elder and holder of traditional knowledge. Walt Lara Sr. has dedicated his life to the continuance of his culture and ceremonies. He has also been instrumen-

tal in bringing back important Yurok ceremonies to heal the Earth and the peoples. Some of these ceremonies had not been practiced for more than a century. Throughout his life, he has been a fierce advocate for the protection of the land and water, and Indigenous Earth based religion. Walt Lara Sr. co-founded the Northwest Indian Cemetery Protection Association (NICPA), a community-based organization formed to protect Indian graves from looting by grave robbers, universities, and government entities. The NICPA was key in the first repatriation of Indian remains and artifacts to the Yurok Tribe and the passage of the American Freedom of Religion Act. Walt Lara Sr. is a person whose actions and dedication have contributed immensely to the protection and revitalization of Indigenous culture, health and community in Northern California.

Ka’m-t’em: A Journey Towards Healing is written in a purposeful manner to relay wisdom about the struggle for decolonization in Indigenous Northwest California. This book demonstrates the successes of these struggles, as well as emphasizes the need to continue to resist colonization by practicing cultural traditions and fighting for Indigenous rights. The book is written in five parts. *Part One: The Weaving of the Basket: Foundations of Worldview, Epistemology, History, and Healing* contains chapters about the historic knowledge, worldview, and epistemology of Indigenous Northwest California. *Part Two: Lessons to be Learned: Testimonials of Resistance, Renewal, and Advocacy* includes chapters about the Indigenous social and environmental justice actions and movements that have occurred over the last half century in California. *Part Three: Songs to be*

Sung Again: Testimonials of Resilience and Beauty focuses on the importance of ceremony and on the strengthening and renewal of traditions that has occurred over the past several decades. *Part Four: The Basket Travels: Testimonials of Awakening and Next Steps* addresses sovereignty, education, and needed actions to further the goals of decolonization. The book ends with *Part Five: Pick Up the Basket: Testimonials from our Youth*. In this section, Indigenous youth express the wisdom they have learned from their Elders and those that came before them. These essays demonstrate the inner knowledge and strength of a generation of Indigenous youth who have grown up with traditional and ceremonial knowledge. This generation of youth are proof of the success for the struggle for decolonization and the renaissance of ceremony in Indigenous Northwestern California. They are also the key to the continuance of cultural and ceremonial work to heal the Earth, the peoples and all the energies of the world.

This book will awaken many senses and emotions within the reader. It tells of the historical injustices perpetrated upon peoples and also demonstrates the resilience and strength that has kept Indigenous peoples in California alive and thriving. It will renew a sense of responsibility to continue to fight for Indigenous rights and to pass on historical knowledge. It is also a roadmap of sorts that will convey to all readers the steps taken by Indigenous leaders in Northern California on the path to decolonization. I would recommend this book to anyone wanting to learn more about the peoples of Northern California and how they are working to

strengthen and renew their culture for the health and continuance of the peoples and the planet.



About the Author

Elizabeth Jackson is of Modoc and Hupa ancestry and an enrolled member of the Klamath Tribes. She received a Bachelor of Arts in Native American Studies and a Master of Arts in Sociology from Humboldt State University. She has more than a decade of combined experience working for Tribes, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and Indian health organizations. In the Fall, she will be starting a PhD program at the University of British Columbia where she has been awarded an Aboriginal Student Fellowship. At UBC she intends to continue researching climate change and other environmental and social justice issues impacting Indigenous communities.