



Title of Book: *Precious Cargo: California Indian Cradle Baskets and Childbirth Traditions*

Author of Book: Brian Bibby

Year of Publication: 2004

Summary:

Brian Bibby's book, *Precious Cargo: California Indian Cradle Baskets and Childbirth Traditions*, is a text dedicated to exploring the variety of cradles that the Native peoples of California used/use to carry their children. The book contains an introduction about the history and importance of cradle baskets in California and three proceeding chapters organized by the style of the baskets. Chapter one is about sitting cradles and the different Indian nations who use this method; namely the Pomo, Hupa, Tolowa, Yurok, Winu, and the Atsugewi. Chapter two describes rectangular lie-in cradles with hoods. The cultures who are discussed in this section are the Western Mono, Chuckchansi/Choinumne, Wukchumne, Mono Lake Paiute, and the Washoe. The third and final chapter is concerning the ladder-back cradles made by the Mohave, Pai Pai/Kumeyaay, Ipai, Cahuilla, Serrano/Cahuilla, Chumash, Maidu, Atsugewi, and Northern Sierra Miwok. The book concludes with an essay about cradle baskets in Central California by Craig D. Bates.

This book is written in an accessible language, making it a great read for a general audience. The reasons that *Precious Cargo* is such an engaging book are the plethora of photos of beautiful basket cradles, the voices of basket weavers included through interviews, and the use of Indian languages. Bibby's work on basket cradles in California and the peoples who weave them is a good place to begin for those who wish to gain a deeper insight into the cultures of Indigenous peoples in California.



Make sure you read

The most important and interesting sections in *Precious Cargo* are those which contain interviews with contemporary and ancestral California Indian basket weavers. Interviews with weavers such as Vivien Hailstone, Loren Bommelyn, Ruby Pomona, and Leona Chepo, among many others, provide incredible insights into the skill weaving requires and shows how dearly California Indians love their children. The great care devoted to how Indian children are carried is a central theme of the text. The organization of the book into the three distinctive basket cradle styles is also conducive to cultural comparisons especially with the cosmological/epistemological information provided by interviews with elders. These interviews often indicate that the creation of basket cradles was dictated to the people by important figures in origin stories. By citing origin stories as the reason why basket cradles are woven in a particular way the elders are claiming that child rearing is a spiritual endeavor. These sections on basket cradles should be used to argue that basket weaving is essential for the perpetuity of California Indian cultures and is an expression of sovereignty.



Did you know?

Quick Facts:

1. California Indian basket weavers have always been open to new ideas, and a prime example of this is the adoption of the Euro-American baby rattle in the last century. Basket weavers in California have adapted the baby rattle by weaving them with traditional basketry materials (Bibby: 27).
2. Gender is commonly marked on basket cradles by the objects that the basket is adorned with. Among the Pomo, a girl's basket may have miniature baskets attached to it where a boy's may have a dove's head (Bibby: 38-39).
3. The selection of basketry materials is absolutely essential to weaving a sturdy basket. The materials chosen for weaving baby cradles reflect the vast environmental knowledge of the Indigenous peoples of California (Bibby: 47).
4. The Western Mono traditionally did not allow a baby basket to be reused, each child had their own and it would be put in a pine tree when it was no longer needed. The idea behind this was that the strength of the child would match that of the tree as it grew (Bibby: 67).
5. Cradle baskets in California had mattresses of fur, tule, or soft bark to ensure the comfort and wellbeing of the infants (Bibby: 79-80).

Review provided by Stephanie Lumsden, M.A. (Hoopa Valley Tribe). University of California, Davis

Stephanie Lumsden received her M.A. in Native American Studies from the University of California, Davis in 2014. In 2011 Stephanie received her BA in Women's Studies with a Minor in Native American Studies from Portland State University. Her Master's thesis research focuses on Native American women and the prison-industrial complex in California.

