

Ruobin Wei

Professor Kristen Rasmussen

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### Tracing Food Origin – ACES Reflection

In the project of Tracing Food Origin, our group was assigned to research the origin of the food that was presented in the kitchen of the Peralta Hacienda Historical Museum. We started our project with a tour of the museum, and then gathered information about the different foods from the museum website and some other credible sources. In addition, we volunteered at the museum for their Native American of the East Bay activity. While doing this project, I learned a lot about the lives, especially the diet, of the Ohlones, which are the Native Americans that lived in the Bay Area, as well as that of the Spanish explorers, who are also known as the Californios (Peralta Hacienda Historical Park, 2015). I also learned that the diets of both groups of people are highly shaped by trade and physical environment. In addition, while volunteering in the community, I realized that the visitors of the museum might prefer information presented in a casual way, whereas an academic research project would require me to present the same information in a more formal way.

Trade can influence people's diets to a large extent. For our project, we researched the origin of 71 food that were mentioned in the historical audios provided by the museums, some of them already on display in the museum kitchen. I was very surprised to see that only eight out of the 71 foods were native to California, the others all originated from other parts of the world. This shows that the influence of trade on people's diet is huge. Among the many trades, one of the major ones is the Columbian Exchange (Crosby, 2015). It is amazing to see that the soil of

California is able to hold and nourish so many foreign species to help support the diet of the people living there. I was amazed to learn about the variety of food that these people incorporate in their diet. Many of the food are plant-based, and the meat-based food come from many different animals. It looked like their diets were balanced and healthy.

Physical environment, or what the land can grow, also have a great impact on the diets of people. During my research, I realized that the early Native Americans seemed to rely more on wild foods then cultivated ones, and thus they often eat very seasonally. For example, when it is time to harvest berries, the native people will eat a lot of berries every day (Andersen, 2005); when fish gather in big schools at particular times of the year, the native people will catch a lot of fish to eat (Peralta Hacienda Historical Park, 2015). Contrary to the Native Americans, the Spanish explorers seemed to rely more on domesticated food such as cattle and cultivated crops (Peralta Hacienda Historical Park, 2015). This difference exposes the tight connection between physical environment and individual nutritional status under the biocultural framework. This shows that, sometimes, a large part of people's dietary habits, as well as culture, are shaped by what the land can produce.

During my one day of volunteering at the museum, Ms. Corinna Gould, an Ohlone activist and guest speaker of the day, told us about some histories of the Ohlones (2015). Apparently, the Spanish explorers kind of pushed the Ohlone culture away as time progresses (C. Gould, personal communication, March 21, 2015). Unfortunately, valuable elements in the Ohlone culture, such as language, began to fade away (C. Gould, personal communication, March 21, 2015). This shows that it is important for everyone to keep an open mind towards other cultures. The community members that came to listen to the presentation asked related and

very diverse questions, and I realized that it might be important to keep the mind flexible and vibrant when it comes to doing services for the community.

Another thing that I learned from this experience in the Peralta Community is that the community members that visits the museum might prefer to read information presented in casual ways instead of too formally. As our group was making the note cards, we debated whether to write the description of the food in first person narrative form, or to put them in bullet points which looked less busy. Taking into account the tone of the historical museum, our experiences during our first visit of the museum, and the possible expectations of the other visitors, we decided to use the narrative form without including index citation in order to make it easier for the visitors to read. We also laminated the cards to attract more readers. If we were to write the same information in a very academic way, the visitors might get bored and therefore not continue reading.

In conclusion, by doing this project, I learned that the foods consumed by the Bay Area native people as well as the Spanish explorers have very diverse backgrounds and that the trade and physical environment are two important factors that influence their diets. I also learned that the museum visitors are very eager to know more about the history of the Native Americans, and that community services should welcome all of these visitors and design the exhibitions based on their preferences in order to help pass these valuable, yet nearly-forgotten histories down to more people.

## Works Cited

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