The Southwestern College Sun

and a partner in survival. They considered a living, sacred entity. During the winters they gathered acorns and hunted in the mountains, during the summers they gathered small plots of crops they had cultivated earlier along the way. During summers they traded with the Yuman People in present-day Arizona.

For at least 12,000 years the Kumeyaay and their forebearers inhabited a vast area of life-supporting land from what is now Oceanside and Encinitas in the north to the beaches and mountains of Ensenada to the south. They also gathered food and traded as far east as modern day Yuma and Las Vegas. On this Indigenous Peoples’ Day they gathered at the sleepy Tecate port-of-entry in front of the tiny U.S. Border Patrol station to demand a cessation of the desecration of their land and religious sites by Homeland Security construction crews and heavy machinery. Tecate, a border hamlet tucked high in the dry mountains about 90 miles east of Southwestern College, is symbolic because it is separated by the rest of the original frontier community which is now Tecate, Mexico by the border drawn after the Mexican-American War of 1846–48, an international border was drawn between Mexico by the border drawn after the Mexican-American War.

The Berlin Wall or the Korean War. These borders are an effort to sheared by the border much like the Berlin Wall or the Korean War. These borders are an effort to sheared by the border much like the Berlin Wall or the Korean War. These borders are an effort to sheared by the border much like the Berlin Wall or the Korean War. These borders are an effort to sheared by the border much like the Berlin Wall or the Korean War.

Homelands of the Old Ones

Kumeyaay People have lived in the region for at least 12,000 years. Kumeyaay People have lived in the region for at least 12,000 years after traversing the Bering Strait Land Bridge during the ice age. They are thought to have lived primarily west of the Lymanza Mountains, though they are known to have wandered great distances north to acquire trading materials and west to trade with the Yuman People in present-day Arizona.

Kumeyaay moved back and forth from the mountains to the ocean with the seasons, harvesting plants and small plots of crops they had cultivated earlier along the way. During summers they gathered acorns and hunted in the mountains, during the winters they would live closer to the beaches. They were acute stewards of the land, which they considered a living, sacred entity and a partner in survival. As Spaniards, Mexicans and Americans invaded their homelands, Kumeyaay were forced to the arid foothills and mountains. After an international border was drawn between the two countries right through the heart of Kumeyaay land. During the Indian Wars of the period from about 1865–1900, Kumeyaay lost much of their remaining land to greedy settlers, prospectors and other invaders. They also lost most of their culture and heritage for more than a century until Mexican Kumiai helped to reteach it in modern times.

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in the 1880s and 1890s during the period that marked the Indian Wars. Survivors were stripped of their language, culture and lifestyle. Children were forced into English schools, forbidden to speak theirImagePath language or practice any ancient customs. Some Indian schools lasted into the late 1930s and were not banned until 1978. Only in recent years have Mexican Kumeyaay who were able to maintain their Ipai tongue, food songs and other cultural treasures helped to reestablish the culture among the northern Kumeyaay of San Diego County.

Rodriguez said Kumeyaay are survivors who still pray, celebrate life and find ways to come together.

“Everything they have tried to do since 1492 to erase us as a people has been unsuccessful,” he said. “We still live in our traditional homeland. They have not taken that away from us. We still have our singers. We sing our traditional songs, which they tried to erase and make illegal until the American Indian Religious Freedom Act was passed on August 11, 1978.

“Singing, speaking and living our arts of resistance, Rodriguez said. There is power underneath.

“When we talk about the Holy Land, this is our Holy Land,” he said. “Each peak is holy. Each valley. Each and every one of you here is native from somewhere. To be able to hold that deep in your heart and allow it to grow is important.”

Americans should not be satisfied with “toleration,” Rodriguez said, because it is a mediocre standard at best and corrosive at worst.

“Toleration has a connotation, it’s negative,” he said. “Like I tolerate this heat or this incredible weather. Each and every one of us has something we can teach each other. We can be like a bundle of arrows. One arrow is easy to break. A bundle of arrows is unbreakable.”

Rodriguez pointed toward Baja California, where Kumeyaay on the other side of the border were conducting similar ceremonies.

“It is negotiable that we cannot come together as one People again because of this border and sing our songs together and celebrate our Indigenousness and our lives,” he said. “This is the best we can do right now. Someday we will all be together again.”

Broke Raines, a member of Saving Homeholds of the Indigenous and Enduring Land Desecration (SHIELD) represented a new generation of Kumeyaay activists.

“I wish we could just come together and have a gathering right here,” she said. “We can hear them and they can hear us. That’s the invisible line splitting us from being together.”

Indigenous Peoples have fought fires, provided shelter and shared traditional ecological knowledge of cultural bunches to prevent future large-scale fires. And, in the midst of these challenges, Indigenous families continue to be impacted by the federal government’s xenophobic immigration policies, and construction of a border wall could threaten cultural resources.

Baines said it was “beautiful” to see people unite to raise awareness, even during a pandemic. Education is the greatest tool, she said.

“Get educated on the Kumeyaay people,” she said. “That’s the biggest thing you can do. There’s a Kumeyaay Community College that’s open to all people. Courses include Kumeyaay history, culture and the Ipai language. Kumeyaay Community College is housed through Coyamita College and offers an Associate in Arts in Kumeyaay Studies.

California’s Native Americans are not alone when it comes to bioculture, he said. Baines, Apache, Tohono O’odham and San Xavier People in Arizona face the same struggle, as do Pueblo People in New Mexico.

“It seems to come we would like to plan a day where we are all on the border wall on the same day and creating a line almost as if we were holding hands,” she said. Rodriguez said Kumeyaay culture was like an earth poster shat by encroachment. Each community got a shard of the pot and when they come together, he said, they print them together to make a poster. They then add new clay and form a new bowl.

“It has our past, what we do today as present and we make it strong for our future.”