

**Indigenous Voices of San Juan Capistrano: The Acjachemen (Juaneño) Indian Community**

**OVERVIEW:** An online collection of videos, giving voice to one of Orange County's first people by collecting, preserving and sharing stories and perspectives from tribal members.

**CHALLENGE:** The Acjachemen are one of Orange County's indigenous people. Popularly referred to as Juaneño (a term attached to the tribe during their involvement with Mission San Juan Capistrano in the 1770s), they possess a unique cultural awareness of Orange County that spans its entire history. As the area known as Orange County today has grown and developed over the past 200 years since Mission San Juan Capistrano was founded, few people are aware that the indigenous Acjachemen people still live here today, observing many of the same traditions they always have.

**SOLUTION:** OC Public Libraries (OCPL) partnered with Mission San Juan Capistrano, the City of San Juan Capistrano, OC Department of Education and Berkeley's California Preservation Project. The committee worked with Humanities Advisor, Stephen O'Neil, a local Cultural Anthropologist who has been involved with the Acjachemen community since 1978. With the assistance of the humanities advisor, library staff contacted tribal members who were willing to share their personal stories. The goal was to seek representation from the various official tribal entities, including the perspective of male and female tribal members, tribal elders and younger tribal members. Twelve staff members were trained to conduct interviews and to edit the interview footage into short digital videos in January 2017 by Media Arts Center San Diego. After the training, three interview and video editing teams were formed using staff members from various library branches. Between January and June of 2017, these video teams contacted and interviewed 17 tribal members at various locations throughout Orange County. On the advice of the humanities advisor, the raw interview footage was preserved for the benefit of future researchers.

**INNOVATION:** The collection was created by interviewing and filming Acjachemen tribal members and it is hosted on OC Public Libraries' website ([www.ocpl.org/acjachemen](http://www.ocpl.org/acjachemen)). This project provides a technological and generational bridge for connecting tribal elders with the greater Orange County

**Indigenous Voices of San Juan Capistrano: The Acjachemen (Juaneño) Indian Community** community. In the interest of distributing these videos for free to the public, a dedicated project web portal (<http://ocpl.org/acjachemen>) was created. To develop additional avenues of access, the committee added the videos to OC Public Libraries' local history website OC Stories and shared them with Berkeley's California Preservation Project who backed up the video files at two distinct geographical locations and shared them with the Internet Archive's California Light and Sound Collection (<https://archive.org/details/californialightandsound>). Through OC Stories and CA Light and Sound, the videos will also be shared with Calisphere and the Digital Public Library of America (<http://dp.la>) where they can easily be accessed by students and researchers.

**RESULTS:** Based on survey feedback from the programs, 89% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the project gave them a better understanding of people in their community, 94% agreed or strongly agreed that the project provided them with a greater appreciation of diversity in their community, and 85% agreed or strongly agreed that the project enlarged their understanding of California and being Californian. One unforeseen outcome was that the project enabled tribal members no longer residing in the San Juan Capistrano area to reconnect to their heritage and culture. This was especially meaningful for tribal members with younger family members who may not have even known about or understood the significance of their Acjachemen ancestry.

**REPLICABILITY:** This program could be replicated to collect, preserve and share personal stories and perspectives from various members of the local community. While this project was focused on giving voice to the indigenous Achjachemen people and providing them a platform to record, preserve and share their stories and culture, it could easily be adapted to increase public awareness of other groups in Orange County.

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