

Study Questions on *Ishi: The Last Yahi*
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These are some things to look for and questions to ask as we watch this documentary together.

1. Pay attention to any media accounts of Ishi. What words were used to describe him? Make note of these.
2. Pay attention to how Ishi is “seen” or visualized as an “other,” particularly in media accounts from the time period.
3. How were these ways of seeing and speaking about Ishi connected to the portrayal of native people in media (such as movies, newspapers, images)?
4. How much of Ishi’s story is bound up with image and spectacle?
5. How is the story of Ishi a story about how he became an object of modern knowledge? What was the consequence of that for him as a human being?
6. How is the story of Ishi and his people a story of “civilization”? How does this problematize terms like “progress” or “modern”?
7. What about manifest destiny?
8. Why did people make Ishi dress up as a native person and take pictures with him? What do you think they were seeing when they did this? Why—beyond the pragmatic concerns raised in the documentary—did they put him on public display in a museum and at the World’s Fair? What were people “seeing” when they looked at Ishi in these uniquely modern ways? What were they *doing* when they looked at Ishi in these uniquely modern ways?
9. What about the genocide of native peoples? Did you know that ordinary citizens were paid by the federal government to exterminate native people? What do you think it means that genocide was part of the modern American economy as recently as 100 years ago?

10. The documentary poses the question of what ordinary citizens did while their friends and neighbors casually and enthusiastically participated in genocide. For profit. Why do you think no one spoke up? What do you think you would do if you were raised to believe that one group of people (a minority from the point of view of the established order) was biologically inferior to another and, therefore, deserved to be exterminated?