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## **2009: FEDERAL RECOGNITION NOW: A Social and Political History of the Fernandeano Tataviam Band of Mission Indians**

The Fernandeano Tataviam Band of Mission Indians (Band) deserves federal recognition now. The Band has continued as a kinship-based social and political group from the 1700s to present. The Band was previously recognized at least as recently as 1892 when a Special Assistant U.S. Attorney recommended that the federal government take action to Fernandeano land rights. Federal recognition is long overdue and it is time for the United States to correct a terrible injustice that the Fernandeano Tataviam Mission Indians have endured for over 150 years.

### *The Pre-Mission and Mission Periods*

In the pre-Mission period, before 1797, the Band's ancestors formed into villages comprised of a single patrilineal lineage for the Takic speaking Tongva and Tataviam ancestors, and a matrilineal lineage among the Chumash ancestors. These lineages are: Chaguayabit, Cabuepet, Tujubit, and Suitcabit. Each lineage had a headman or leader, assistants, and ceremonial leaders. The women also had political and ceremonial ranks within each lineage. The lineages held territory, engaged in collective economic and ceremonial activity, and intermarried with other lineage groups of different dialects and languages to establish a complicated regional network of kinship, economic, and ceremonial ties.

The social and cultural ties and organization of the lineages established in the pre-mission period continued through the mission period from 1797 to 1846. While living at San Fernando Mission, the Band's ancestors adapted to mission life, nominally accepted Christianity, learned and took up new work skills within the mission economy, retained their traditional languages, and maintained many aspects of traditional social, ceremonial, and political life within the mission.

### *Dispossession: Land Rights and Community Survival*

Between 1847 and 1885, the ancestors of the Band received, held and were then dispossessed of Mexican land grants at Encino, Cahuenga, Tujunga, Rocha's grant, and Sikwanga, all located near the old Mission San Fernando on land formerly held in trust for the Indians by the Catholic Church. The dispossessions were illegal under Mexican law, which preserved land and village government for Mission Indians. Through the early American period the Fernandeanos lost additional land, and were forced to enter the American economy. In particular, the Fernandeano dispossession is highlighted by the famous case of Rogerio Rocha, Captain of the San Fernando Mission Indians (1852-1904), and his ultimate eviction from his land. Unfortunately, while a special U.S. Attorney requested it in one

instance, the federal government did nothing to protect the Fernandeños from the attacks on their land or the impacts of settlement and economic and political forces on their communities. Treaties, legislation, and court cases contributed to the failure of the United States to take up trust responsibility and protect Fernandeño land. Notwithstanding the displacement and other adverse effects of the land losses and effects of settlement, the Band maintained its social and political structures.

Between 1886 and 1951, the Band members lived in a highly discriminatory environment that discouraged use of Indian languages, the expression of Native identity and culture, promoted segregated living patterns, and discouraged actions to uphold band land and political rights. The community gathered and lived during this period in the old section of the city of San Fernando, a couple of miles east of the San Fernando Church grounds. Most worked as laborers, semi-skilled workers, and ranch hands. The San Fernando Mission Indians maintained organization and political leadership patterns based on lineage groups, and regional ties to related lineages in the area. After the Captain Rogerio Rocha passed in 1904, Antonio Maria Ortega was recognized as Captain by 1910, because he spoke the Tataviam language, and had considerable cultural and historical knowledge of the community.

#### *Nation Building and Cultural Renewal*

From 1952 to 2002, the Band retained the traditional political relations comprised of a coalition of cooperating lineages. The community met quarterly at family gatherings, while the adults, men and women, discussed political, social, and mutual help issues. The assembly of adult members came to comprise the general council and has had considerable power. Rudy Ortega, the grandson of Antonio Maria Ortega, was appointed Captain by community consensus in the early 1950s. In the 1971, Rudy Ortega was elected chief of the Band. Between the late 1940s and 1972, the Band considered American-style bylaws. In 1972 the Band formed a non-profit organization to apply for grants and carry on community benefit activities. In 1975 the band adopted new bylaws, creating a board of members and nonmembers to advise the Captain, while the General Council was not in session. The leadership engaged in a variety of community building activities, held cultural and community events, sought to protect indigenous rights, sought California and federal recognition, and worked to recover history, genealogy, and cultural knowledge within the community. In 2002 the Band adopted a constitution.

#### *The Contemporary Fernandeño Tataviam Band of Mission Indians*

For the past decade, the community residence patterns, political organization, and the continuity of the base coalition of lineages that form the community and general council. Contemporary life consists of community organization and benefit activities, efforts to recover land, efforts to gain federal recognition, cultural renewal of ceremonies, recovering language, relations with local government, local politicians, community agencies and organizations. The Fernandeño Tataviam Band of Mission Indians is one of those indigenous communities that will persist into the indefinite future whether the United States government recognizes them or not. The Fernandeño Tataviam Band of Mission Indians have demonstrated significant external recognition, community continuity and identity for over two centuries, and a long and consistent stream of recognized leaders and community-based political process. Larry Ortega is the current President.

The Band deserves recognition as an Indian tribe from the federal government; now.