Lost Cultures: Living Legacies

Episode Title: The Tongva: A Lasting Influence on Los Angeles

Episode Summary:

Los Angeles today is an influencer on the global stage, thanks to its most well-known industry, Hollywood. And its very name hints at the earlier influence of colonizers from Spain and Mexico in the area. But who were the original influencers of the L.A. Basin? And how did this Indigenous culture help shape the way Angelenos and tourists experience the area today? Guests Kimberly Morales Johnson and Desireé Martinez, both members of the Gabrielino-Tongva community, guide us through the history of their people and tell us about the efforts to reestablish and revitalize their culture after past endeavors have attempted to limit and even erase it. They also share how visitors can interact with their history and culture in a responsible way.

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=== Part 1: Cold Open. ==

Desireé Martinez: Basically, the reason why I'm doing what I'm doing is because in fourth grade, here in California, we learned about the California missions and the native people that were in the missions. And we took a trip to the Southwest Museum, which was one of the only institutions that describe California native peoples. And during that visit, the docent was telling us about Mission Indians and that was a catchall term for native people that are associated with a particular mission. And I had a friend of mine raise her hand and asked the docent, "Are there any more, are Mission Indians still alive?" And the docent said, "No, they're extinct." And by then, I had already told everybody in my class that I was Gabrielino. And so they looked at me like, "Well, she says that they no longer exist, so how can you be Gabrielino?" And the Southwest also has these dioramas that are basically pictures of Indian life fixed in time and their little figurines, half naked and living in our traditional kizhes? And so like, "Well, how can you be Gabrielino if you don't live in a kizh and you are living just like us?" So there was always that question. And of course, I knew that we weren't extinct, and so trying to figure out, "How can I combat this?" And then in sixth grade I learned about archeology. And that's when I thought, "Okay, well, the docents go to archeology and anthropological texts in order to learn about people." The books – and at that time, it was like three books that were on the Gabrielino
— stated we were extinct and no longer exist, so I said, "I'm gonna find a way and do archeology in order to combat that misinformation that's in the texts." My name is Desiree Martinez and I'm a member of the Gabrielino-Tongva community. I'm a practicing archaeologist and I'm also president of Cogstone Resource Management, which is a cultural resources firm here in California.

Music: Lost Cultures theme begins as bed.

Alisha Prakash (Host): Too often, the history of America as many people know it begins with the arrival of European explorers or colonizers. For instance, people may learn that the Spanish were the so-called “first” to arrive and make a home in California. But as we know, across America, Europeans were never actually “first.” Welcome to Lost Cultures: Living Legacies a podcast from Travel + Leisure. I’m your host, Alisha Prakash.

=== Part 2: Series & Episode Intro. ===

Music: Lost Cultures theme fades up from bed to full volume, then back down to bed.

Alisha Prakash (Host): What can we learn about a place by delving into the people who once lived there? In what ways do cultures build upon each other as populations come and go? How do they complement each other, interact, and leave their marks on the people that come after them? And are cultures truly ever lost, even if the people move on?

Music: Lost Cultures theme fades back up to a climax, then ends. After a beat, incidental music fades in, as bed.

Alisha Prakash (Host): Hundreds of thousands of people lived on the land that is now California before the first Spanish colonizers arrived. At the southern end of the state, near the modern day border with Mexico, there were the Tipai and Quechan peoples. While in the north, near what is now Oregon, there were the Tolowa, Karok, Shasta, and Modoc peoples – among others. In between those two areas were dozens more indigenous groups – or “First Peoples,” as we now refer to them. And among those groups were the Gabrielino-Tongva people – a group whose culture was one of peaceful co-existence with the natural world around them. But if you’re unfamiliar with the Gabrielino-Tongva people, there is a reason for that and it’s similar to why you may not have known about the culture we discussed in our last episode. Just as the Ainu people of Japan faced oppression, discrimination, and forced assimilation by the nation that grew up around them, so have the indigenous people of the Los Angeles Basin. Similarly, though, efforts are being made to preserve and revitalize the culture and traditions of the Gabrielino-Tongva people.

Music: incidental music fades back to bed.

Alisha Prakash (Host): So who are they, exactly? Let’s turn back now to Desireé Martinez.

Desireé Martinez: The Gabrieleno-Tongva community are the original inhabitants of the Los Angeles Basin and the four Southern Channel Islands of San Nicolas, San Clemente, Santa Catalina, Santa Barbara, as well as parts of Orange County, Riverside County, San Bernardino County.

Kimberly Morales Johnson: The archeological records show us that we lived primarily by water. We had over a hundred villages throughout Los Angeles and parts of Orange County, all the way out to Riverside County.

Alisha Prakash (Host): We also spoke with Kimberly Morales Johnson, a member of the Gabrieleno-Tongva from the San Gabriel Band of Mission Indians. She serves as tribal secretary, is a PhD student in Native American studies at UC Davis, and is also the vice president of the Tongva Taraxat Pxaavxa Conservancy.

Kimberly Morales Johnson: We had the Four Southern Channel Islands. We had ways to go back and forth. San Pedro was known to us as the Bay of Smokes. So, we had this maritime culture, if you will, that was part of the larger maritime culture. Our cosmologies, our stories about the stars, how we navigated. It's all interrelated, and it all shows this Indigenous way of living that was here, I believe, since time immemorial.

Desireé Martinez: We had Gabrieleno-Tongva community members living up from Malibu all along the San Gabriel Mountains, as well as part of the Santa Monica Mountains, all the way down to Aliso Creek in Orange County and all the way in parts of Riverside as well as Rancho Cucamonga.

Alisha Prakash (Host): It is thought that the people now known by many as Tongva, but also by others as Kizh, may descend from people who migrated into the area from what is now Nevada. This migration may have begun around 4,500 years ago, though some think it may have been more like 10,000 years. And it is believed to have forced out an earlier indigenous group. But this is not necessarily in line with the traditional beliefs of the Tongva people.

Desireé Martinez: Contrary to the archaeological interpretations out there, our oral traditions state that we emerged from the secret site of Puvungna, which parts are currently on the
campus of Cal State Long Beach as well as Rancho Los Alamitos. And so we emerged from there and we learned how to be people at Puvungna.

**Alisha Prakash (Host):** And what may this life have been like?

**Kimberly Morales Johnson:** When Father Crespi came through a little bit later in the 1700s, he said, "What we found here in Santa Monica is a paradise. There's three flowing rivers. There's an abundance of food. The people are so friendly. It's a nice place to live." He talks about taking naps underneath the trees. He talks about waking up to just beautiful music being played because we were known to have flutes and dancers, and it was beautiful, thriving culture, and there's a couple of pictures that have depicted those scenes. It is, it's absolutely beautiful and it looks very peaceful and serene. And I always tell people we were really the first beach people, and we were able to relax, and I don't think we were too stressed out about anything. The archeological evidence also shows that we were up in the hills, up in the San Gabriel Mountains, where we would trade with five to eight different tribes. They found our artifacts all the way up to Russia. The Russians came down because they wanted the sea otter pelts because they have more hair per square inch than any other animal, so they were the warmest. So, they would travel all the way down here for that. So, I know that we had a thriving economy. We had strong family ties, and we had everything that we needed because we lived in harmony with Mother Earth.

**Alisha Prakash (Host):** Often, those of us who are not part of Native American or First Peoples cultures tend to inaccurately think of them as somewhat monolithic groups. But while this is certainly not true in the macro sense because each First Peoples group is different from the others in any number of ways. It is also not true more specifically of the Tongva People.

**Desireé Martinez:** So the way that the Gabrielino-Tongva organized themselves was that there was no overarching chief of every single person that was Gabrielino-Tongva. Instead, you had a leader at the village level and the village was basically an extended family. So you might have, you know, the grandma, the grandpa, all their kids, and their kids' kids. Villages usually range anywhere from 50 to 100 people. Villages would come together during various ceremonies for seasons in order to go together to collect resources such as acorns or go hunting or for ceremonies if there was a death in the family or a celebration of the transition from childhood to puberty. You could have as many as 200, 300 people come together in those instances. And when we think about identifying yourself people would identify themselves by their village name. But the highest authority was in the village and the person that was the leader was identified through descendancy. So it was a hereditary leadership role. And there are documented at the time of contact at least 50 villages that were widespread over our traditional homelands. And we were given instructions at Puvungna from our god, Wyot, as well as our cultural leader Chingishnishon how to live with all of the ancestors and other beings that were on the land.

**Alisha Prakash (Host):** We asked Kimberly to explain the basic creation story of the Tongva people.
**Kimberly Morales Johnson:** I'd like to start with first saying that we have seven different creation stories, the first one that is actually written was by Father Boscana, and it involves a rock and fish and water, and the rock broke open, which is where the fish came from, and then went into the water and life was spread through that. I'm definitely paraphrasing it, but the reason why we keep that story kind of at the center, and I think all Native people keep their creation stories at the center, is because it establishes “place.” Because Creator put us in a place for a reason. The Tongva people were created after the water, after the animals, after the plants. So, we are actually the lowest of all of this creation, but we are to take care of it and live in harmony with it.

**Desireé Martinez:** As Gabrieleno-Tongva people, see ourselves as caretakers of our relatives and those relatives includes the plants, the animals, the water, the land, the rocks. We have a responsibility, a reciprocal responsibility to them. And that's something that has been severed because of colonization and the genocide that occurred with the Spanish, the Mexican and the American settlers coming into our land.

**Kimberly Morales Johnson:** And I feel that we've flipped a lot of that narrative, including pushing people who were the original caretakers of the land out of the way in a form of erasure due to colonization.

**Alisha Prakash (Host):** The first known contact the Tongva people had with the Spanish was on October 7, 1542, when ships from an expedition led by Juan Cabrillo arrived at the island of Santa Catalina.

**Desireé Martinez:** So we, actually, were one of the first communities that were contacted by the Spanish settlers, and then obviously, through time, other settlers as well, with first contact being at Catalina Island within our territory. But really, the colonization of what was called Alto, California at that time didn't occur until 1769 with the establishment of the San Diego mission by the Spanish.

**Alisha Prakash (Host):** The 1769 expedition from Spain to California was led by Gaspar de Portola, who would also become the territory’s first governor. With him was a Franciscan priest named Junipero Serra, who would found several missions in the area with the purpose of converting the indigenous people to Catholicism.

**Desireé Martinez:** One of the reasons why Alto, California was so of interest to the Spanish is that they would pick up trade items from the Philippines and go down to Acapulco, and then from Acapulco, they would go over to the Spanish realm to be traded into Europe. And those journeys were hard, so they needed someplace to stop over in order to get food, get water, etcetera, somewhere along the coast. And so to be able to create spots where they could do that and have what ended up being pueblos of settlers who would then be farming the land and providing those foodstuffs to the ships was necessary. And so that was one of the big impetuses for the Spanish to come up from Mexico and establish these pueblos and then the presidios to
protect the pueblos, but then also at the same time wanting to Christianize the “heathen” Indians. And so you had missionaries come up, establishing 21 missions up and down the coast of California. And in Gabrieleno-Tongva territory, you had the San Gabriel mission being established in its original location, in the Whittier Narrows area and then it being destroyed and moved to its present location in San Gabriel a few years later.

Alisha Prakash (Host): The San Gabriel Mission was founded in September of 1771, the fourth of the 21 missions established in the area. And since the Tongva people lived in such harmony with their environment, it’s unfortunately no surprise that the sudden influx of colonizers had a profound impact on both that environment and how the Tongva were able to interact with it.

Desireé Martinez: Depending on where Gabrieleno-Tongva community members lived on the landscape dictated what they were eating. For instance, I do archaeological research on Catalina Island. So the island Tongva really focused on maritime foodstuffs. So you had seals, deep sea fish, as well as clams and other marine life and they fed on that. Particularly thinking about the islands there, for instance, there's no deer originally on those islands. So if they were eating deer, it was being brought over from the mainland. So those villages that were on the coast on the Mainland were also using the marine resources there. As you start getting into the foothills, in the mountainous areas, you start to see the focus on those animals and plants that are within those foothills – particularly acorns. And that's not to say that all of the other villages didn't also have acorns as well, but the villages and peoples living near those resource areas were more dependent on those types of plant resources than others. And then when you start getting into the plains and the prairies, again, you know, animals shift, but there was a really big reliance on what was available in the environment. Once colonization occurred and the settlers start bringing in their own animals and plants that started to impact our ability to have access to our traditional foods. So when the cattle and the sheeps and the goats started coming in, they actually loved the native plants and would graze and eat those pretty much almost out of extinction. And so the communities that were alive during that colonization, had to then focus on the animals and plants that were brought in by the settlers. So a lot of what we're trying to do as a community today is to reintroduce our traditional foods, thinking about chia, thinking about cactus, prickly pear, Catalina cherry, different types of foods that are available to reintroduce our own communities into what our ancestors ate. And in fact, we have a community called Chia Cafe, which has members of the Gabrieleno-Tongva community, but also members of the Chumash, Juaneño, as well as other indigenous community members and non-indigenous community members that go around and teach about our native foods. There is actually a cookbook that's called, ‘Cooking the Native Way’ that describes various foods as well as their uses as medicine. And they not only are teaching our own communities and other Indian communities, but also teaching the general public about these foods, as well as recipes that people could actually make in their homes.

Music: incidental music fades back to bed.
Alisha Prakash (Host): But of course, the Spanish colonization didn’t only affect the Tongva people by impacting their environment. Sadly, a scenario that has played out time and time again throughout history once again happened in the Los Angeles Basin and surrounding areas. The colonizers, arriving to claim a place that was already inhabited by an indigenous culture, brutally oppressed the people they encountered. And it is this brutal oppression that laid the initial infrastructure of what is, today, the second largest city in the United States.

Desireé Martínez: So quite literally, our blood, sweat and tears are in every inch of Los Angeles. And we never get highlighted being, in some instances, really slave labor building that infrastructure.

Desireé Martínez: So starting with the mission period we, the Gabrieleno-Tongva community, built the infrastructure of modern-day Los Angeles. And this is something that I've talked about and created a Tongva walk with other Gabrieleno-Tongva community members, where we went down into Downtown LA, by La Placita and Olvera Street and talked about basically our silenced history that the pueblos and the missions were established in order to create these resources for the trading ships and obviously to also feed the settlers, but, you know, in order to do that, you need that infrastructure. So thinking about irrigation, the Zanja Madre, which is the main irrigation ditch that went up and down in Los Angeles and then fed to the various fields the missions had. Then when you have land being granted to ex-soldiers and them having their own ranches, we’re the ones that dug those ditches. All of the pueblos, all of the houses that were created with mud bricks, we’re the ones that shaped those mud bricks. We’re the ones that dug it, created it, and then ended up building those pueblos.

Alisha Prakash (Host): It is important to recognize, however, that many Tongva people resisted the oppression of the Spanish colonizers and that this resistance came in many forms. Some resisted by holding on to their traditions in private, even as they participated in the Catholic sacraments thrust upon them by the Mission clergy. Some held on to their food traditions by weaving them into the cuisine brought by the missionaries. And some even participated in full-on revolts, which occurred throughout the Mission system. The best known of the revolts specifically at Mission San Gabriel was led in 1785 by a woman named Toypurina and a man named Nicolás José, who conspired to assassinate the priests with the help of male Tongva warriors. But the priests, tipped off by some of the Tongva people loyal to them, instead imprisoned the would-be revolutionaries and put them on trial. According to the LA Times, Toypurina said at her trial, “I hate the padres and all of you, for living here on my native soil, for trespassing upon the land of my forefathers and despoiling our tribal domains.” This Mission Period lasted into the early years of Mexico’s independence from Spain, until the Mexican Secularization Act of 1833 transferred ownership of all the missions from the Catholic Church to the Mexican government. But while those who had been enslaved were freed, their oppression continued in different ways. For instance, the Mexican government granted large tracts of land to colonial Mexican families, while very little land was ever given to the Tongva people or other indigenous people in the territory. Due to this unfair distribution of land, many of the Tongva people moved further inland away from the new colonists, while others moved into the city of Los Angeles or went to work on the ranches built on land that should have belonged to them,
but didn’t. The Mexican occupation of Tongva lands lasted a relatively short time, though, and officially came to an end in 1848 as a result of the Mexican-American War. With the nearly two-year war at an end, California was among the vast areas of land the United States took control of as victors in the conflict.

**Kimberly Morales Johnson:** The United States came in and California became a state, and they weren't quite sure what to do with the California Indians. We were explained on the documents as “The Indian Problem.” So, they would do things to dehumanize us, and they would say, "These savage Indians. They’re tribelets." They weren't tribes because if you think about tribelet. I always think of a rib versus a riblet, a tribe versus a tribelet. It's a way of diminishing the power of a tribe, and that's exactly what they did. The other term they used was “band.” So, they wouldn’t say that you are a tribe. They would say, "You're just a little small band of Indians."

**Alisha Prakash (Host):** Kimberly told us she believes the lives of the Tongva people in California were very serene before the Spanish and other colonizers arrived.

**Kimberly Morales Johnson:** And then we survived the first wave of genocide, which were the missions. The second wave of genocide was the Mexican government and the US government, and then, really, the Gold Rush. The Gold Rush and that they had bounties on our head in 1852, where the state of California would pay for a dead Indian. I think about that often, and I see that my family found... And we've been criticized for this. Our family found a place of security and safety near the San Gabriel Mission, and so I think that we always kinda hung out there as well as other members of our community stayed within the San Gabriel Mission, and they felt secure and safe there. Other members ventured out, and, you know, everybody has their own different family story, and I don’t fault anyone for moving away from San Gabriel. But we were Spanishized. And so, our words became like Spanish. Some of our customs became like Spanish. But some people still spoke the language, and they would sing the songs. They would sing their songs to their kids, and then I am thankful for surrounding tribes that were federally recognized, because they were able to teach us a lot about our culture, and we’ve also been able to go back to some of the amateur anthropologists who took an interest in our culture, who documented things. A relative of mine is Dona Victoria Reid, and she married a Scotsman named Hugo Reid, and Hugo Reid wrote letters about the state of the Gabrielnino Indians to the Los Angeles Star, which was the first newspaper in Los Angeles. He accounted a lot of our culture there. So, when we go back to revitalize or we go back to do research, we're able to pull from a lot of different sources. And some of them, you know, we have to be careful because we're not sure under what circumstance the information was acquired, but for some of them, we're able to say, "This lines up with what the Cahuilla have taught us. This lines up with what the Liseño have done. So, this is something that we know that is most likely true."

**Alisha Prakash (Host):** And so, while the story of the Tongva people did not end with the colonization imposed by Spain, Mexico, or the United States, it did become much more varied.
As a result, the history of any one Tongva family or person may be wholly different from that of another. But as our guests have mentioned, efforts are being made to reclaim traditions that were in many cases, nearly lost...

*** Part 4: Today/Destinations. ***

**Alisha Prakash (Host):** We asked Kimberly Morales Johnson and Desiree Martinez to tell us about some of the initiatives they’re involved with or aware of that are aimed at revitalizing the Tongva culture around Los Angeles, as well as some of their own recent family history and traditions.

**Kimberly Morales Johnson:** I knew from the time I could understand I was a Gabrielino Indian because at the time in the '70s, that was the word that was being used throughout my community. And I knew this because my father and my mother, my grandparents would go to the San Gabriel Mission to the fiestas. They would go to the San Gabriel Grapevine Room. San Gabriel was a city before Los Angeles was a city, and so that’s where the Spanish missions were first located, and so this annual tradition, sometimes semi-annual traditions, of going back to this area. I always knew it was gonna be fun, and I loved being there because everybody looked like me and they knew my name. They would pinch cheeks. I remember my sisters and I would complain about the pinching of the cheeks, but they loved on us and they showed us this is where this happened at the mission, and this is where this happened, and here's a picture 'cause they had pictures of my aunty and my grandmother up on the wall in costumes. And so, I knew of these traditions. It was a little bit later that some of our tribal members started to work for organizations like Indian Health and Indian Education, and so they were able to bring back some of the culture that had been lost, like basket-weaving, our traditional foods and that type of thing. So, then I kind of walked away from all of that San Gabriel stuff and did my teenage and college stuff, and then I had children. And a lot of the old-timers had passed by around the year 2000, and so I contacted a few of the elders, the aunties that I was still in contact with, and I said, "I have kids. I met you when I was seven. (laughs), do you remember..." "Oh! Kimmy, I know... Come to my house," and so I showed up with a baby on my hip and my daughter's hand, and we went into my Aunty Barbara's back house and she took us under her wing, and we started to spend time with surrounding tribes. The surrounding tribes in Riverside in San Bernardino County were able to hold on to more of their traditions because they're federally recognized and we were not. And there's a whole story behind that. But going out to those reservations, then I started talking to my family more, and they were like, "Oh, you'd been there before when you were a little girl," and then all of a sudden, I started to remember, we did. We would go out to the Cahuilla Reservation for just different events. They would have fiestas or cooking events or whatever, and so it was just coming full circle for me. And we continued that. We've continued that. My daughter is now 27. We've been doing this since she was like 3 or 4
years old. It's been one of those things that has given us a higher purpose, and also given me a deeper appreciation of who my family was and who they are today.

Desireé Martinez: One of the big things that we've been trying to do as a community is unite ourselves. Because of colonization, a lot of our culture went underground. And because it was family based, you had families continuing traditions, but only amongst themselves. And one of the big things we're trying to do is now come together as a larger community in order to reestablish those connections, so that it's more than just family gather. Well, we're all related, so it is family gatherings, but to have a larger connection. And one of the things that we ended up doing in 2018 is to welcome the Polynesian canoe that was making its way down the coast of California and we did a welcoming with them on Catalina and we brought out our wooden plank canoe, the Moomat Ahiko, and we had our paddlers paddling and we were able to bring together lots of community members from all different families in order to welcome them. So one of the big things that happens in Native American communities is that you don't enter onto somebody's land without asking permission. And there usually is a gift exchange. And so that's what occurred is that as they were coming in and our Moomat Ahiko went and met them and brought them to shore, and at the same time, we were singing to them, singing a welcoming song. And then they came on board. And then we exchanged gifts. And that was such a native thing that's tradition, that's protocol. And it's very rare that we're able to do that as a larger community. And it wasn't just us, it was also members of the general public that were living on Catalina that also joined us as well. And so it was just really amazing to be there, to be surrounded by community, doing this welcoming and the singing and then having the gift exchange and the people on the Polynesian canoe were tired but appreciated being welcomed in such a warm and traditional way. And so that memory really sticks out to me, and, you know, making the gifts the day before and sitting on the beach in Abaline and making bracelets for them and stuff like that. you can't get any more native than that.

Alisha Prakash (Host): We'll be back with more after the break.

=== AD BREAK ===

Alisha Prakash (Host): I'm Alisha Prakash, and you're listening to Lost Cultures: Living Legacies, a podcast from Travel + Leisure.

Alisha Prakash (Host): Kimberly and others in her community specifically identify as the "Gabrieleno San Gabriel Band of Mission of Indians" or "Gabrieleno Tongva." And since these names are taken from the Mission that is responsible for nearly wiping their culture out, and the term “band” was originally used to diminish the Tongva, we asked why they choose to identify themselves this way.

Kimberly Morales Johnson: My grandfather, unfortunately, died when my dad was only nine years old, complications of alcoholism, and there’s a story behind that. Los Angeles, within the city limits, they would ask for Indian laborers. Indians were paid with alcohol on Fridays, and then they would be arrested by Friday night for vagrancy. They would be jailed, and then sold
on the slave market on Monday morning, and then work the whole week to be paid with alcohol on Friday, so this cycle continued. So, when I think about my grandfather that I never met, I'm sure that he was a result of that. I think about myself, and I am a first generation college student because it takes generations to get past some of these things that impacted us so much, that were imposed on us. But if I don't say that I'm Gabrielino, and my grandmother and my grandfather only knew themselves as Gabrielino, then I feel like I am somehow erasing them from the narrative. So, I feel that I need to say Gabrielino. So, during that time, we would have secret tribal meetings, from what I understand. Sometimes they were in peoples' backyards. Sometimes they were up, I guess General Patton had a ranch up in the Sierra Madre area, and a lot of Gabrielinos worked for him. I know my family worked for a man named Richardson, and they would find little, secret ways to have their meetings. And when there were different court cases that came up, like Docket 80, and the Indian agents would come out to to Southern California. They would ask about the Gabrielinos, and they would find us in San Gabriel. And so, my family is part of those original lawsuits. My family is part of those original voting memberships, Mission Indian Federation, little organizations that the Indians put together. My family were a part of that. So, if I say I'm not a part of San Gabriel Band of Mission Indians, or I'm not enrolled, that, to me, is somehow erasing part of this history.

Alisha Prakash (Host): So how else are the Gabrielino-Tongva of today working to restore their culture and overcome the historical traumas that their family members have suffered?

Desireé Martinez: We continue to be a part of the greater Los Angeles community, but again, a lot of our history and a lot of our contributions are silenced. One of the things that we're trying to do is to rectify that silencing by working with cultural institutions in state, local, and federal agencies to tell that story. We've been working with the Autry Museum of the American West in order to update their human nature exhibit. There's an exhibit that just opened called Waterways that talks about the importance of water to the Gabrielino-Tongva community. We're also working in updating the Becoming Los Angeles exhibit at the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History because a lot of our history of the development of Los Angeles was missing in that exhibit when it first opened. And so our community has been working with them on updating that, and in fact, we built a mini ti’at which is our wooden plank canoe to go on to display in that exhibit. So, we are highlighting that history in many ways that we can so that the general public can understand the contributions we had in the past, but also, you know, helping to shape Los Angeles currently. One of the big things that we're trying to do is to make those reconnections to the land, to the plants and the animals. About nine months ago, we started the Gabrielino-Tongva Basketry Collective, where we currently have 27 Gabrielino-Tongva people learning to do basketry. So California basketrys are well known for using the coil method, and we didn't have any Gabrielino-Tongva basket weavers. And so working with master basket weaver Abe Sanchez, who's not Gabrielino-Tongva himself, but has been taught by a number of well-established and well-known master basket weavers up and down California and he's coming together with us monthly in order to teach us that. But part of the basketry is going out and making those collections of the juncus, of the deer grass, of all of the basketry materials. And right now, Los Angeles really lacks places for us to be able to make that collection.
Kimberly Morales Johnson: We have been limited, I would say, in Native food preparation as well as basket-weaving because Los Angeles is a concrete jungle. And so, our plants have not been able to thrive, unfortunately, and that includes our food sources and being able to pick seasonally, which I believe also contributes to the massive wildfires that we've had, because if you don't have people looking at the land and, and tending to it, yes, things are gonna go out of control. So, the reeds along the LA river were in abundance, and all those reeds were used for our baskets, and then the LA river is contaminated and it's got really bad pathogens in there, and so I was never taught to gather anything from there. I was taught to go out to the reservations out in San Bernardino and Riverside County, where there's less people, and they have safe gathering areas. Same thing with the food. Our food has been polluted by the exhaust of cars, by pesticides and whatnot.

Kimberly Morales Johnson: We were able to make connections with the Forest Service so we could gather our acorns, and then we were able to learn the process from other people. And I know I had acorn as a child, and then I didn't have it again until I was a mom. So, like 25 years later because the acorns, nobody was really processing it, and mind you, sometimes we still use a mortar and pestle. But sometimes we use a blender. And I feel like that's okay, too, because some people churn butter in maybe a wooden bucket, but some people can still buy it at the store. I think it's important that we just remember that we still eat our Native foods. My daughter knows how to process a lot of foods, even more than I do at this point, and that's what I wanted. My dad does not even know when to gather acorns. So, I see this trajectory. You know, like, I know some things. My dad questions himself, but he's part of this lost generation, where they were very ashamed to be Indians because the other thing that California did, is they called us all diggers because we dug roots for our food. But now I tell him, "I'm excited. I hope somebody calls me a digger because that means that I know exactly what roots to pick and how I can sustain life for my family." But there's also this embodiment, I believe, when you eat from Mother Earth, and I believe that it strengthens you, just like when you're speaking our language. I believe it's giving back to Mother Earth because that is the language that was given to us, that is the language that Mother Earth understands, and our bodies understand how to process our Native foods more than it knows how to understand some of the processed foods that we see in the stores today.

Alisha Prakash (Host): There is also a movement called LandBack which advocates that indigenous groups should be given the power to make decisions over lands that were originally theirs.

Kimberly Morales Johnson: So, in 2016, a woman went to a political convention, and she heard about this idea called LandBack, and she had to sit back and think about her own privilege, and the fact that she had inherited multiple properties. And she had one in particular that her grandmother had told her had remnants of this fire circle that she believed belonged to the original people. So, she started making phone calls, and she found a Tongva community member who made phone calls, and I was contacted along with another community member, and by two elders, and they said, "There's this house. And they wanna donate. This woman
wants to donate it." We worked with this woman. We ended up making connections with a few organizations. We were able to close escrow. It took that long for us to do some fundraising and close escrow in March of 2022. But, when we're on that land, we're all together as a community working for one common purpose, and that is to have a place for our people to gather for generations to come. So once we get it together, we have meeting space; we have a place where we can have language classes, basket-weaving, food demonstration. We can have ceremony there. That was the big reason that our aunty wanted us to have it, was for ceremonial space. And in the meantime, we've also been able to house a community member who needed emergency housing. I think one of the most beautiful things about this property is that we have video of bobcat visiting us, bear visiting us, and coyotes visiting us, and so we feel that we're in a good place and right where we're supposed to be, and able to commune together but also with Mother Earth to return this piece of land back to a place of serenity and harmony as close to what we can get to how our ancestors lived as possible, but we will need some modern conveniences. We know that, so... (laughs)

Alisha Prakash (Host): That property is the Tongva Taraxat Paxaavxa Conservancy... and, by the way, the “Wallace” that Kimberly mentioned is Wallace Cleaves, a professor at UC Riverside and another member of the Gabrielino-Tongva community.

Desireé Martinez: For the last 15 or so years, members of the Gabrielino-Tongva community have been working with Pam Munro, who is a professor emeritus at UCLA, in order to reestablish the Gabrielino-Tongva language. Unfortunately, a lot of our language was beat out of us during the mission period and a lot of families were taught Spanish and then English instead of the traditional language. You did have some families that still retain some of the words, but conversations in the traditional Tongva language weren't occurring. And so with the help of Pam Munro as well as other members of the Gabrielino-Tongva language committee, they are looking through the ethnographic record in order to capture those words that were recorded in the language by past ethnographers and anthropologists, but then looking at our sister languages to see what we can come up with in order to recreate the words and the language. And so they meet regularly and they have translated a lot of songs and phrases, and then the people that are in that language group have now created prayers in the language. So it's really great to hear that occurring and we actually have two twin girls who've grown up in the language by participating in that. So to be able to have that occur, you know, something that was, was definitely lost, now coming back and flourishing is great.

Kimberly Morales Johnson: UCLA has worked with us as far as language revitalization. I'm studying our language right now, making those resources available. We have a group of Tongva people that are getting together to celebrate basket-weaving, and they've been weaving together once a month for the past year, and revitalizing basket-weaving is so important. We have people working on Native foods, and I believe that it's for all the community. It's not for one group. All of us should be doing this so we can come together. It strengthens us. It's like a piece of rope. You know, one has a strand over here and a strand over here and let's get together and twine that rope together so that we can become really, really strong in knowing who we are as a people. And I feel that when people start to reconnect with their culture and
their community, they are no longer caught up in a world of not knowing who they are, or feeling like they don't belong because I know that my dad, for years, felt like maybe he didn't necessarily belong to the larger culture because he had something intrinsic inside of him that he knew was different, and I believe a lot of Indigenous people have that same gnawing inside, that maybe they don't feel that they belong to a dominant narrative because they don't, they have a different value system or a different way of celebrating. But how do you connect with others? That's the journey and that's the beauty in all of this.

**Alisha Prakash (Host):** In addition to the places already mentioned, we asked our guests where people can go to responsibly learn about the Tongva people and culture...

**Desireé Martinez:** Yeah, one of the big ones is Kuruvungna Springs, which is a cultural center that's open on the first Saturdays of every month. And it is run by the Kuruvungna Springs and is on the campus of University High School. The community has an agreement with University High School to be able to use the buildings that are there for our cultural gatherings as well as for teaching. I previously mentioned that there's a couple of exhibits, one at the Autry Museum of the American West as well as the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History where people can go and see artifacts and learn about the Gabrielino-Tongva community. But if people wanna learn more about the special places they can go to Mapping Indigenous LA.

**Desireé Martinez:** Mapping Indigenous LA was created in order to talk about a lot of the contributions of Native Americans to Los Angeles and Los Angeles has one of the largest Native American populations, and that had a lot to do with what occurred in the '50s and '60s where you had native people from other states and reservations who were compelled to come to a larger city and promised jobs and housing, etcetera. And so you have a lot of these urban native people who are living in Los Angeles, but their story is never told, and most importantly, the original inhabitants, the Gabrielino-Tongva people, our history is not told as well. So the project was started by faculty at UCLA in order to gather this information and provide these story maps of how the communities wanted to talk about themselves. So trying to talk about indigenous communities throughout Los Angeles and then working with those committees to figure out how they wanted to show themselves to the general public, so that it could be a tool for the general public, but also for our own communities. And part of that was also curriculum development. So on the website, there are resources that have been vetted by the Gabrielino-Tongva community, that we refer to for teachers who are interested in teaching about the tribe to use as resources. Because a lot of information in previous curriculum that was out there was outdated, again saying, "They were extinct," or use language in the past like, "They used to this. They used to that," and we wanted to make sure that anything that's being used currently by teachers was again from the Gabrielino-Tongva perspective in how we want ourselves to be presented and taught about.

**Desireé Martinez:** One of the big things that we always stress and we don't really talk about is the exact location of where those villages are. We've had a lot of impacts to our history through development, where a building will go in and will uncover artifacts and uncover ancestors and their burial gifts and we wanna stop that. So we don't usually share the exact location of where
things are, just general locations because we wanna make sure that people don't go in and start digging and start looting. Because that's what has happened throughout time is that you had a lot of these amateur archaeologists, they weren't archaeologists, because archaeologists didn't exist in the late 1800s, but you basically had people who were curious in the past and would go in and dig up stuff. And that's one of the things we're now trying to do is get back our ancestors and get back our items from those museums and private collections so we can rebury them and so the ancestors can be treated respectfully, as they should have been in the past.

**Kimberly Morales Johnson:** Anywhere along the coast is just so meaningful, especially on a clear day when you could see Pimu, which is Catalina Island. Looking at that island and realizing that our people were canoeing back and forth for generations, I think that it's just such a beautiful sight, especially off the tip of Palos Verdes. There's a little place called Abalone Cove there, and a couple years ago, they put up a little marker. It's just gorgeous. Puvunga is at Cal State Long Beach, and I think if you drove around the campus, you would be able to spot it because there's prayer poles up because we're constantly fighting with the university to preserve that piece of land. Etiwanda Nature Preserve was a major gathering site for us and the Serrano Indians of our sacred plant white sage. Unfortunately, we live in a time where white sage is being poached and exploited, and so people have gone up there and they pick these large duffel bags full of the white sage, destroying the plant, so that because it's in movies; it's on Amazon; it's at Five Below; it's in yoga studios, and so our white sage is being exploited. But if you just go to Etiwanda Nature Preserve and you just take a walk and clear your head, and I always tell people, "Just sing a song that makes your heart happy. Put on your headphones," you can feel the power of that land just by being out there in nature. And I believe that any of the trails that are back in the hills, that are a little bit off of the beaten path, just listen to the land and the land will speak to you. Listen to the water. It will speak to you. I think it's when we get busy in our own self, in our own minds, especially if you're in downtown LA. It's hard to do it. But if you're in nature, Mother Nature was our first gift. So, go out there and talk to her, and I think that there's a lot of lessons to be learned.

**Alisha Prakash (Host):** We asked our guests to correct misconceptions about their culture and its place in the world today…

**Desireé Martinez:** The biggest thing that I would like people to know is that we're still here and we've always been here. We haven't left. We did go into hiding and that was necessary because laws were aimed at destroying the community, headhunters quite literally out there wanting to get paid for scalps and heads, so that the “Indian problem” could be exterminated. We're not lost and we're not found. We weren't discovered or anything like that. We've always been here and we just want the ability to be able to return to the responsibilities that were given by our creator and our cultural leader · and reestablish those connections to our relatives, the plants, the animals, to take care of the land, the water, the air in whatever way possible.

**Kimberly Morales Johnson:** I think that we live in a society that speaks and adheres to convenience and immediate gratification: "I need to know it now or it didn't happen." And what happened to our people is this influx of other people. We stayed the same, and the city came
up around us, and we stayed in San Gabriel, and we kinda kept our heads down, and drank water and ate our acorn and minded our business and continued things as if the whole world around us wasn't happening. We continued in a very strong, silent way. I think about my dad and my grandmother, and they were so busy just trying to survive, trying to keep food on the table, as were so many Tongva families, people who are marginalized for whatever reason, that they didn't let the outside world really affect them. And now we live in this age of social media, and I see all this #Tongva because people wanna be a part of something, and it makes me almost laugh because I'm going, "Where were you 30 years ago? We need you (laughs) 20, 30, 40 years ago." And now, people are popping up left and right: "Oh, no. I'm Tongva. Oh, no. I'm Tongva." And I'm like, the struggle was when they removed a thousand of our ancestors out of Biona Creek in 2004 to put in a drainage ditch. The battle was at Cal State Long Beach at Puvunga when they destroyed a sacred site of our religion. The battle continues in different sites throughout Los Angeles, where they've removed us because we became inconvenient. But we've still been here, and the larger, more dominant voice has been very successful at quieting us, at telling us we don't matter. We don't count.I feel like we're still fighting, but we've been fighting against larger institutions that had a bigger plan, and unfortunately, like the drainage ditch, what ended up happening there was they put in million-dollar housing, right there along Playa Vista. And we will never win against... My husband calls it the green man. We'll never win against the green man. We will always just be an inconvenient part of the landscape compared to capitalism.

Desireé Martinez: Well, I trace my lineage from my maternal grandmother and I've known nothing else, and so it's a sense of pride. And of course, my ideas about being Gabriélino-Tongva has changed through time, as I've learned more. So growing up and being brought up as a Catholic because that's the religion that was forced upon our community and learning about the Catholic Church's practices against our community, learning about the genocide, the cultural side, forced labor, you know, and all of the other tragedies that the Spanish, the Mexican and, and American governments have lashed upon our community makes you sad. And, you know, learning and hearing about that trauma does wound you physically, spiritually, and emotionally, but then also, you know, as an archeologist, I get to see what our ancestors created and what they did and how they lived upon the land. And those are the stories that I'm trying to bring not just to the general public, but also to our own community as well.

Music: Lost Cultures theme fades up to full volume and plays for a moment.

=== CREDITS ===

Music: Lost Cultures theme fades down to bed.
Alisha Prakash (Host): Thank you to our guests, Desireé Martinez and Kimberly Morales Johnson. Be sure to follow Lost Cultures: Living Legacies on Apple Podcasts, Spotify or wherever you listen to podcasts. And we’d love your feedback. If you could, please rate this podcast and leave us a review. We’d really appreciate it. You can also find us online at travelandleisure.com/lostcultures. In our next episode, we’ll explore the Aboriginal culture of Australia, so make sure to come back for that. Until then, enjoy your travels!

Music: Lost Cultures theme fades up for a moment, then back down to bed.

Alisha Prakash (Host): Lost Cultures: Living Legacies is a production of Travel + Leisure and Dotdash Meredith. I’m your host, Alisha Prakash. Lottie Leymarie is our Executive Producer. Jeremiah McVay is our Writer and Co-producer. Dominique Arciero is our Audio Engineer and Editor. Stacey Leasca is our Researcher. Kyle Avallone is our fact-checker. This episode was reviewed by Bryan A’Hearn, a panelist on Dotdash Meredith’s Anti-Bias Review Board, as well as Mackenzie Price, Director of Anti-Bias Initiatives. Jennifer Del Sole is Director for Audio Growth Strategy & Operations at Dotdash Meredith. Nina Ruggiero is Digital Editorial Director for Travel + Leisure. Maya Kachroo-Levine is Luxury and Experiences Editor at Travel + Leisure.

Music: Lost Cultures theme fades up to full volume and plays out.