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**American Indian Culture and Research Journal**

**Title**

As if the Land Owned Us: An Ethnohistory of the White Mesa Utes. By Robert S. McPherson.

**Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/03d3746m>

**Journal**

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 37(3)

**ISSN**

0161-6463

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**Publication Date**

2013-06-01

**DOI**

10.17953

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*As if the Land Owned Us: An Ethnohistory of the White Mesa Utes.* By Robert S. McPherson. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2011. 448 pages. \$29.95 paper.

Living near Bluff and Blanding in Utah, the White Mesa Utes (at times also called the Allen Canyon Piutes) variously have been designated as “Southern Paiutes” on the basis of language, “a Paiute-Ute mix” on the basis of culture, and, because historically they never acquired horses and thus never flirted with the Plains culture that influenced the well-known Ute bands, have been called “Paiutes who never became Utes.” Robert S. McPherson, the author of this comprehensive, meticulously annotated work, does not eschew these designations, but rather tops them with a much more straightforward characterization: they are people of the land that animates them. McPherson manages this by introducing these Numic speakers through the oral traditions and *mythomoteur* that have specific references in the landscape. During his research McPherson not only consulted the archives of the “White Mesa Oral History Project” conducted in the 1970s, but was also fortunate in being able to interview White Mesa Nuche elders more than a decade prior to writing this book. Several of these elders reviewed the manuscript for accuracy. Another result of McPherson’s project was a small dictionary published privately by linguist Brian Stubbs.

Perhaps the “Ethnohistory” of the title is a bit of a misnomer. Scholars and government administrators alike have considered this small community to be elusive, enigmatic, and heterodox in identity, and this book’s narrative focus seems not so much to present a unique history as to locate the White Mesa Utes within a more encompassing historical narrative. This narrative is sandwiched between several chapters of ethnography—two in the beginning and three at the end—based on interviews. The narrative makes it clear that, over the last 150 years, the White Mesa people have had to navigate a problematic destiny among various neighbors and newcomers: Navajos, Mormon homesteaders, miners, traders, government administrators, and occasionally fellow Numa belonging to the Weeminuche band (354–356). Located on allotments during the height of the US government’s assimilationist policies, land that later came to be administered as part of the Ute Mountain Agency, at times the White Mesa Utes have functioned with their own tribal council, but are officially considered to be members of the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe. Erroneously, some members of the community came to be known for waging the “last Indian war” around 1920, but quite accurately, many were known for maintaining Paiute as their primary, even sole language well into the mid-twentieth century, supporting skilled basket makers up to the present, and keeping their children out of schools until 1923, when Mormon homesteaders

assisted government administrators in literally rounding them up and corraling them in a stockade.

Within its eighteen chapters, the book's primary original contributions lie in the wealth of photographs that the author has gathered from a variety of sources, and the ten chapters 1, 2, and 11 through 18. This is not to say the remaining chapters are not of value, but in general they mainly recapitulate material available in previously published works on the Utes. Much of two chapters are devoted to reviewing the "Polk and Posey War" (1915–1922) and the arrest, trial, and acquittal of Tse-ne-gat (Polk's son), who was accused in federal court of murdering a Hispanic shepherd. The discussion provides one of the book's striking historical reevaluations. As McPherson notes, the "great Indian uprising—or 'Posey's war,' as it is often billed," "appears to have been more of a white uprising spurred by past grievances," one that resulted in "a different type of struggle for the Utes: to maintain their culture's traditional beliefs and practices" (237). From almost the book's first sentence until its last, the voice of local Mormon historian Albert Lyman weaves its way through many of the chapters, especially his interpretation of many of the historical events that he witnessed between the Polk and Posey War and the mid-twentieth century, including the ongoing tension between Mormon settlers and the White Mesa community.

One of the book's most important contributions emerges in chapter 16, concerning the Worship Dance. Also called the "Round Dance of Friendship," this hallmark of Great Basin Numic ritual was reworked by Northern Paiute spiritual leader Wovoka and burst into the consciousness of the non-Native public in 1890 as the "Ghost Dance." As it did in a number of Native communities, the Worship Dance persisted among the White Mesa people long after the hullabaloo surrounding the "Ghost Dance" dissipated and Wovoka himself had passed away. Along with the Bear Dance and rituals of the Native American Church conducted by its small group of adherents, the Worship Dance continues to be one of the practices that binds people to one another.

Another point of interest is the discussion in chapter 18 of the installation of a uranium processing plant by Energy Fuels and its scheme to locate a Superfund tailings depository on its lease. The Monitored Retrievable Storage (MRS) idea was proposed as a temporary solution to the problem of storing vast amounts of high-level nuclear waste, and in the early 1990s more than a dozen tribal governments applied to be MRS sites. The MRS sites were to keep the waste for 40 to 50 years, but the safety of transporting and locating the nuclear waste came under question, and such waste now sits at 110 nuclear power plants and some Superfund cleanup sites. The White Mesa site and the Skull Valley Goshute site were the only ones that came close to implementation. White Mesa people mounted a protest and the plan was abandoned.

Ironically, it was Energy Fuels that funded the White Mesa Oral History Project and in a sense provided McPherson with a base for the oral history portion of his book.

As noted above, the book covers much of Ute history generally rather than concentrating exclusively on White Mesa. Nonetheless it should not be surprising that topics covered by other books released over the last forty years—most of which McPherson references—are treated cursorily or not at all: the Sun Dance, boarding schools and efforts to use them to make Ute women into Anglo-American homemakers, the details of reservation administration and Utes' emergence as self-governing gas and oil producers, and detailed references to deep history of Numic peoples in the Great Basin and their relationships with various groups of intruders.

At the same time, the uneasy encounters that emerge between the book's narrative and the anecdotes, recollections, and interpretations of local Mormon historian Albert Lyman—not to mention the reports and letters of various government "Indian agents"—underscore the tensions inherent in negotiating a subaltern people's story constantly tempered and mediated by other interlocutors. To compare McPherson's ultimate evaluations of Posey and Albert Lyman succinctly provides a perhaps unintended evaluation of this tension. McPherson writes that Posey emerges "bigger than life . . . rarely does a year go by without some white student writing a paper about 'Chief Posey'" (358–359), whereas Albert Lyman's legacy is that of someone who "did not get it right"; in 1952 Lyman asserted, "The Piutes of San Juan [County, Utah] . . . as a tribe and a people . . . are on their way out of this tangible world" (363–364).

Yet in spite of white sentiment in the 1920s that the "Utes" be just "kept out of the way," and Lyman's later insistence that this separation had been carried out to the point of their extinction, the future was to return to an intertwining of the fates of the Native and non-Native communities. It was the persistence, cooperation, and initiative of White Mesa Utes, the Ute Mountain Tribal Council, and a private health provider contracted to the Navajo Nation that provided Blanding with something the town had never had: a hospital. While the White Mesa Utes continue to negotiate their identity and independence with their fellow Utes in the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe's capital of Towaoc, McPherson makes it clear that they continue to persist as a group with a distinct history, destiny, and geocultural anchor.

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