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REVIEWS



Being and Becoming Ute: The Story of an American Indian People. By Sondra G. Jones. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2019. 573 pages. \$70.00 cloth; \$29.95 paper; \$29.95 electronic.

In *Being and Becoming Ute: The Story of an American Indian People*, Sondra G. Jones chronicles the history of three bands, from their desert origins to modern life, in two locations—the Ute Mountain reservation in southern Colorado, and, more than three hundred miles north, the Uintah and Ouray Reservation in Utah. Keeping the theme of establishing identity in a changing world at the center of her study, the author writes that defining what it means to be “traditional” is a journey. In eighteen chapters, she ably turns a scholar’s eye to government documents, Indian agency and military records, diaries, travel accounts, and the journals and letters of ordinary citizens to be found at the Smithsonian, Mormon and Catholic archives, and various state and local historical societies in New Mexico, Colorado, and Utah. In addition, Jones is quite upfront about her personal experiences with the Utes, including the fact that her anthropologist husband has participated in the Sun Dance a number of times. I was reminded favorably of another scholar who seamlessly blended personal knowledge with a detailed and well-rounded tribal history: Stewart Rafert, the author of *The Miami Indians of Indiana: A Persistent People, 1654–1994* (1996). Like that one, this is a deeply researched and well-written account.

The first two-thirds of the book chronicles competition and trade between the Utes and various European and American groups through the end of the nineteenth century. In the later chapters, Jones turns to the way “codified and enumerated tribal entities” handled federal policies and resources (6). In the opening chapters, Jones describes a people who migrated, interacted with others, and changed long before Europeans arrived. Hunting and trade with more sedentary people increased after the Spanish introduced horses to the Great Plains, but horses and guns meant more violence as well, including the taking of captives and conflict with both Spanish military forces and other Plains tribes. In the early nineteenth century, fur-trading Americans arrived, and they “expanded animal and Indian trails into rough commercial thoroughfares that were used by subsequent waves of American emigrants . . . and trading forts that became the nuclei of future Euro-American settlements” (49). Jones dives deeply into first-person accounts for an excellent chapter on these trade routes.

With a chapter entitled “Colonization: Utah Territory,” the first of two that focuses on the relationship between the Utes and Mormons before the Civil War, the narrative shifts from trade to treaty-making and -breaking. Chapters that follow also effectively characterize settlers in the territories of Kansas and Colorado as colonizers who expected Native Americans to give up their wide-ranging hunting grounds, become farmers, and allow Americans to take over the balance of the land for themselves. Jones

does an excellent job of showing the tension and conflict that resulted when a people who organized their society around bands had to negotiate with government officials looking for a “Confederated Ute” position that did not exist. Government authorities who expected all peoples they labeled “Utes” to abide by treaties negotiated with a few tribal leaders were replicating strategies used two hundred years earlier in the East. Jones also focuses on issues of conciliation, containment, and removal that ended by the last decades of the nineteenth century with the establishment of the two reservations.

The author has chosen to begin discussion of the evolution of Ute identity in their new homes—during the twentieth century and beyond—with religion. The Sun Dance drew upon old symbols and sayings that can be traced back to the Utes’ first days in the desert, and newer tribal events like rodeos and powwows as people traveled back and forth between the two reservations “echoed a bygone Ute nomadism of summer and fall social gatherings” (249). Both the religious and the secular gatherings reinforced the Ute community and Jones’s continuing the narrative through the 1990s effectively highlights changing strategies in regard to identity. Subsequent chapters analyze the story in a more traditional fashion. As federal policy cycled from the Indian New Deal in the 1930s, to termination in the 1950s, and back to self-determination in the 1970s, Jones chronicles tension between full-blood and mixed-blood Utes as they adapted to each swing of the pendulum. The epilogue provides an excellent overview of the tribe’s evolution and describes the Utes as a people who “shared an easygoing acceptance of life” (419). They worked hard and played hard, too, and despite living in two states and hundreds of miles apart, continued to cherish and share a strong ethnic identity and common history.

In an earlier study, *Violence Over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (2006), Ned Blackhawk ably applied the theme of colonialism to Native American history in the Great Basin, and his epilogue on the Shoshone of Nevada remains one of the best things I’ve read on the topic. While *Violence Over the Land* largely focuses on the Utes as well, *Being and Becoming Ute* spans a greater period of time and covers a wider range of topics, making it a perfect follow-up to the earlier work. In addition, the alternating chapters on Utah and Colorado provide an interesting comparison of Ute strategies for dealing with Mormons and non-Mormons.

Being and Becoming Ute is also a powerful story of the semi-arid American West in terms of competition for resources, be they furs, land, and silver in the nineteenth century or natural gas, government funding, and tourist dollars in the twentieth. Nothing feels compartmentalized in this book—Jones does an excellent job of explaining the links between economic, political, and cultural change over the centuries. Photographs and maps are used to good effect, and Jones tells an in-depth story well without ever becoming bogged down in too many details. *Being and Becoming Ute* is at once a tribal history and a regional history, well-grounded in both primary and secondary source research, and written in an accessible style. Sondra Jones’ work will be of interest to scholars and general readers alike, and I highly recommend it.

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