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Yellow Dirt: An American Story of a Poisoned Land and a People Betrayed. By Judy Pasternak.

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Fremont rock art is characterized by a distinctive anthropomorphic figure with a large head and a broad-shouldered, trapezoidal torso. Other prominent elements are circular designs usually described as shields, concentric circles and spirals, and a variety of other abstract elements. Mountain sheep are the most commonly depicted animals, with bison and deer represented at many sites (*The Rock Art of Utah*, 6). Fremont rock art is perhaps represented in its purest form in the Classic Vernal style concentrated in the Uinta Basin in northeastern Utah. In the most famous examples, anthropomorphs are portrayed in themes of conflict and bloodshed, including the taking of trophy heads and scalps.

A close tie can be seen between rock art and Fremont figurines. Unbaked clay figurines in the Pilling collection were painted in red, buff, blue, and black paint; were detailed with appliqué; and were pendant necklaces of teardrop-shaped stones. Similar decorations are apparent in petroglyphs of Fremont anthropomorphs in the Southern San Rafael style in central and eastern Utah. Another connection between Fremont rock art and material culture can be seen in a petroglyph panel at Nine Mile Canyon depicting a hunting scene in which the dominant figure appears to wear a mask reminiscent of a deer-scalp headdress like one found in a nearby Fremont archaeological site. The Sevier style in western Utah contrasts markedly with Fremont rock art elsewhere. Trapezoidal anthropomorphs are less frequent, but the continued occurrence of horns, helmets, ear bobs, and other ornaments show linkages with the way humans typically are represented in Fremont rock art.

Simms concludes that Fremont rock art reflects two important aspects of Fremont society. On the one hand, Fremont society was small in scale in that it involved dispersed communities in which the practice of rituals and expressions of religion would have included individuals, local groups, and local places. On the other hand, although religious specialists or shamans probably produced some Fremont rock art, ritual and religion superseded individuals and local groups and were expressed in rock art across widely dispersed communities and regions. Simms points to the depictions in the Classic Vernal style of heroic individuals, sometimes with symbols of violence, interpreted as attempts to link ancestors with people of the present, as examples of Fremont rock art operating at a higher level than that of individual shamans.

Traces of Fremont contains the single best collection of images of Fremont rock art available. By its nature, this is not a tightly focused volume. Gohier's photographs and Simms's essay do not always fit neatly together, but they do complement one another. Their joint presentation succeeds in enhancing the photographs and the essay. With the basic work of description and mapping of rock art styles largely completed in earlier studies, Simms poses larger

questions about rock art in Fremont society that no doubt will garner attention in future investigations.

Gohier's evocative images of Fremont art and artifacts set this volume apart as something special. One does not need to have an interest in the Fremont culture or rock art in order to appreciate the impressive quality and range of the photography. Some elements of culture are better captured by photography than by any other medium. *Traces of Fremont* illustrates the important contributions that an artist's eye can make in cultural studies, as the photography compels the reader to want to learn more about the people who left behind such fascinating traces.

Rick Minor

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Yellow Dirt: An American Story of a Poisoned Land and a People Betrayed.
By Judy Pasternak. New York: Free Press, 2010. 336 pages. \$26.00 cloth.

In *Yellow Dirt*, former *Los Angeles Times* journalist Judy Pasternak unveils the tragic circumstances leading to the poisoning of Navajo lands and waters and of four generations of Diné peoples. Reminiscent of turn-of-the-century muckraking journalism, the first half of this fact-based exposé chronicles the transformation of *leetso* (the Diné word for "yellow dirt" or uranium) from a naturally occurring element in the environment to the deadly main component in the US military arsenal: first in the Manhattan Project and then in the Cold War arms race. Following on the heels of the Great Depression, companies like the Vanadium Corporation of America (VCA) and Union Mines arrived on the reservation offering much-needed jobs and infusing cash into the local economy. Thousands of Navajo men went to work in the mines with no protective equipment or changes of clothing, hauling uranium-laden ore with their bare hands for processing at the mills. Children played in the mines and on tailings piles, wives laundered work clothes by hand, and resourceful Navajo salvaged rock from the mines to build houses and mixed the dust with water to make mortar. Once known for their low rates of cancer, the economic boom quickly turned sour when formerly strong and healthy Navajo people became ill. The last half of *Yellow Dirt* follows the Navajo people in their struggle to learn the true nature and scope of their uranium exposure, a fight that continues today. Pasternak's series, which ran in the *Los Angeles Times* during 2006, spurred Congressman Henry Waxman and others to assist the Diné in holding the Indian Health Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA),

Nuclear Regulatory Commission, and the Department of Energy to account for negligence and cleanup.

A key theme woven throughout this book is one of trust, and Pasternak emphasizes from the outset that the Navajo had a sacred and special relationship with the federal government. By the Treaty of 1868, the American government assumed the role of guardian and trustee of Navajo lands and welfare (19). Few Diné spoke English well into the twentieth century, and they lived off the land in small log and adobe-covered hooghans. In the wake of Pearl Harbor, the American government embarked on a frenzied effort to find domestic sources of uranium for Franklin Roosevelt's "arsenal of democracy," and one of the largest deposits of radioactive ores in the United States was located beneath the reservation (29). Out of both a sense of patriotism and desire for economic development, the tribal council permitted the BIA to negotiate mining leases on its behalf—leases that clearly stipulated that the land was to be returned to the Navajo "*in as good condition as received*" (49; emphasis in original). In 1946, the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) agreed to purchase all uranium at a fixed price, at once giving the "guardian" of Navajo welfare a direct interest in keeping the costs of uranium production down. Thereafter, Pasternak argues, any thought of Navajo welfare was lost in a conflict of interest between large mining companies and the federal government.

Although *Yellow Dirt* implicates the mining companies and explores the role of corporate negligence, Pasternak focuses on the broader question of government responsibility. Who governments ultimately answer to—people or corporations—is an important issue and one that affects all communities, Native or otherwise. As early as the mid-1800s, radioactivity was linked to cancer, and by the turn of the century the dangers to miners were well-known. Despite this, government agencies such as the AEC and the Public Health Service studied the Navajo and their illnesses throughout the 1950s without informing them of the results. Companies like VCA simply closed the mines and left the reservation, and Pasternak notes that this is when the federal government was obligated to do something. Most disconcerting, she offers compelling evidence to show that government agencies actively silenced whistleblowers and fought the Navajo every step of the way. *Yellow Dirt* most importantly shows that corporate responsibility is mere illusion so long as governments work against rather than for individual citizens and communities.

By combining archival research with the history and oral histories of Adakai, his son Luke Yazzie, and surrounding communities, Pasternak reveals the terrible shadow that uranium cast over their daily lives. In the milling process, arsenic-laden uranium ore was ground up and the detritus dumped in tailings piles from which it blew into the air and leached into water tables. Absorbed by plants and consumed by people and livestock, contaminated air,

water, and land cumulatively gave the Navajo a combined exposure several times that of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. But because radon gas—the by-product of uranium decomposition—is odorless, colorless, and tasteless, even the tribal council faced linguistic and cultural barriers when it tried to inform people of the dangers. The land had supported Diné people for thousands of years, how could it be that it was poisoned or that the water in the middle of the desert was no longer drinkable?

Painstakingly researched, oral interviews, newspapers, journals, and government reports are used to great effect. However, at times the reader is overwhelmed with facts presented at the expense of analysis. The five pages of principal characters listed at the beginning is the first sign that some details may have been better placed in footnotes or contextualized in tables and appendices. For instance, between 1940 and 1970, the amount of uranium taken from the land, fluctuating prices, number of miners employed, percentages of illnesses, birth defects, and other statistics scattered throughout the book would have been more effective if presented in tabular form. Similarly, because Pasternak repeatedly references the importance of the breach in the Navajo-federal relationship, an appendix containing the text and history of the 1868 treaty would have assisted readers in understanding its significance. It is equally surprising that Pasternak has included only a small collection of photographs, one of which is a poorly sized map of abandoned uranium mines. Larger, detailed maps of the hundreds of abandoned mines and tailings piles as well as their proximity to occupied hooghans would be expected given the importance that she places on the difficulties of eradicating uranium from Diné housing. *Yellow Dirt* is nonetheless written to appeal to a broad readership, so she is to be commended for raising awareness of the Diné and their ongoing struggles with uranium poisoning. However, academics and others looking to have these issues situated in a broader historical or theoretically based literature may be found wanting.

This story, after all, is about more than government neglect and corporate greed in the twentieth century, and Pasternak's treatment of Navajo and Cold War history, in particular, is brief and clichéd at times. On one hand, this creates the impression that prior to the arrival of uranium miners, Navajo life was relatively pristine. An argument can be made that uranium mining is one of many instances of exploitation in an ongoing and interconnected history of colonialism (see Ward Churchill and Winona LaDuke, "The Political Economy of Radioactive Colonialism," *The State of Native America*, 1992, 241–66). On the other hand, those wishing to situate this tragic story in a broader history of the atomic age and Cold War secrecy might consult *The Myths of August* (1994) written by former congressman and attorney for Navajo radiation victims, Stewart Udall. *Yellow Dirt* employs a great deal of Navajo oral history;

however, Pasternak shines in uncovering evidence exposing corporate and government negligence. The book would complement the *Navajo Uranium Miner Oral History and Photography Project*, which was published in part in *The Navajo People and Uranium Mining* (2007) and edited by Doug Brugge, Timothy Benally, and Esther Yazzie-Lewis.

A vast literature situating uranium mining and other resource-extractive industries in the context of colonialism, human rights, and environmentalism exists that Pasternak has not referenced. For instance, the impact of racism and notions of biological inferiority are directly relevant to her discussion of children born with deformations known as Navajo Neuropathy. For years, scientists linked the deformities to genetic defects, which Pasternak attributes to shoddy science and a lack of funding and interest. Rather, preconceived notions about inherent defects and “inbreeding” in indigenous cultures precluded medical experts from looking anywhere else. Researchers later traced Navajo Neuropathy to the consumption of uranium-contaminated water by pregnant women.

Overall, *Yellow Dirt* is a worthwhile contribution to an important subject; one that is part of a broader exploitation of North America’s indigenous populations and lands by profiteering corporations aided by government parsimony and neglect. Not only was the health of Diné peoples sacrificed for little or no benefit, but also future use of the land undoubtedly remains in question, as uranium will continue to poison lands and waters for many years and lifetimes to come. *Yellow Dirt* appears at a crucial time in our own history, as concerns about the environment and dependence on fossil fuels have renewed interest in nuclear power, putting even greater pressure on indigenous peoples to allow mining on their lands. The quest for profits at the expense of people concerns us all, for, as Winona LaDuke has argued, when we poison the land and water, we not only threaten the survival of indigenous peoples but also threaten to destroy ourselves (see *All Our Relations*, 1999, 5).

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