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REVIEW – SOUTHERN PAIUTE: A PROFILE

Reviewed by Zachary R. Jones

William L. Hebner, *Southern Paiute: A Profile*. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2010. Hardback: \$34.95.

At first glance some readers of *IJMS* may wonder why a book about the Southern Paiute is reviewed in this issue. The answer, however, becomes all the more clear as the contents of this poignant new book are unpacked, ultimately detailing the intimate and bittersweet relationship between the Paiute people and Mormons in the American West over the last 160 years. This relationship is most publicly known because the Southern Paiute are the Native American Indian people that the LDS Church and portions of the Mormon laity have regularly blamed for various levels of participation in the Mountain Meadows Massacre since this terrible event occurred in 1857. The recent publication *Massacre at Mountain Meadows* (2008), research supported and oversaw by the LDS Church, still places aspects of blame on the Paiute for the Massacre, while simultaneously works to protect and guard the image of the overall church and LDS prophet Brigham Young. *Southern Paiute*, for the first time on this level, provides accounts of the Mountain Meadows Massacre from numerous Southern Paiute elders. This book is not, however, only important to scholars of Mormonism because of its Mountain Meadows connection, it also details aspects of how Mormonism sought to eradicate Paiute culture and language through Indian placement programs, as well as documenting aspects of genocide carried out by Mormons against the Paiute. The profoundness, depth, and honesty of this book are unparalleled on many levels. Few books of this magnitude emerge today, making this volume vitally important in Mormon studies.

Southern Paiute: A Profile is a simple, yet well organized, and powerful book. With photography of Paiute elders by Michael L. Plyler, editorial work by William L. Hebner (both not of Southern Paiute ancestry), the book contains segments of 29 oral history interviews by

Hebner with Southern Paiute elders. The book's interviews are organized according to the eight tribes/bands of the Southern Paiute, giving a geographic and cultural perspective from the eight groups. Unlike other non-Native anthropologists and historians who have interviewed the Southern Paiute over the years, Hebner states he did not ask specific or tailored questions as typically occurs within focused academic research projects. Hebner instead simply allowed the Paiute to talk about their lives and on whatever topic they felt was of importance to them. However, as editor of the book, it is evident that Hebner prioritized content about Mountain Meadows Massacre by including ample statements from the Southern Paiute about it. The Mountain Meadows controversy and its connection to the Southern Paiute, however, cannot be overlooked. In the words of Southern Paiute Vivienn Caron-Jake, the "on-going lies held against us for one hundred and fifty years about the butchery at Mountain Meadows well represent" the complex relationship between the Southern Paiute and the LDS Church (xi).

Before detailing additional content on Southern Paiute and their relation to Mormonism, it's important to discuss some aspects of the Southern Paiute background and content of the overall book. The Southern Paiute traditionally resided in the present day areas of Utah, Arizona, Nevada, and California, before their lands were taken and most of their population was decimated through genocides carried out by federal government policies and Euro-American settlers. Scholars should know this book does not focus on Mormonism, but is rather an account of the Southern Paiute people's recent past. Some of the topics addressed in the book include; Southern Paiute land encroachment by the Navajo and American settlers, an overview of how the federal government interacted with Southern Paiute over the last century, how federal recognition of the Southern Paiute as a tribe was stripped from them in 1954 and was not restored until 1980 (which included the loss of their land, much still unreturned), the "adoption" or placement of Southern Paiute children in Mormon homes during the 1900s, aspects of racism and genocide, and the loss of their culture and language through colonization and assimilation efforts from outside cultures. The words of the Southern Paiute who speak in this book testify of the legal, ethical, and moral wrongs endured by their people, and the gravity of the issues they raise should not be dismissed.

In regards to the place of Mormonism in Southern Paiute life, Hebner's commentary and the words of Southern Paiute speak volumes. Hebner argues that the Mormons "were usually the root of

Southern Paiute loss in Utah” (18). Hebner, who writes the book’s Introduction, begins with an overview of Mormonism’s perception of the Southern Paiute. Hebner acknowledges the diverse stereotypes that the Southern Paiute have endured, often in silence, within Western culture, ranging from “hapless diggers (a widespread western epithet for Indians) to New Age touchstones” (4). Hebner then cites the LDS and Book of Mormon theology that people of Native American Indian descent are “Lamanities” who, to quote LDS President Brigham Young, “became so wicked that God cursed them with this dark and benighted and loathsome condition” (4). Brigham Young, according to Hebner’s research, perceived the Southern Paiute as being “worse” than general Lamanites, and Young stated that the Southern Paiute were direct descendants of the thieving Gadianton Robbers from the Book of Mormon. Other LDS leaders of the period, such as Bishop Edward Hunter of southern Utah, called the Southern Paiute “loathsome, effeminate specimens of humanity” (4). Yet Southern Paiute who encountered Mormonism or LDS missionaries were taught that they could literally “white and delightsome” by accepting Mormon doctrines and forsaking their traditional way of life. Quoting Apostle Spence W. Kimball from a 1960 *Improvement Era* article, Kimball expressed pleasure as he reflected on a photograph showing Southern Paiute who had attended Mormon schools and how the Southern Paiute had begun to become “white and delightsome” (53). While some research has been done on the subject of Mormon perceptions of the Southern Paiute, Hebner encourages additional study.

Another aspect spoken of in the book by the Southern Paiute is the “adoption”, “foster care”, or placement of Southern Paiute children in Mormon homes, which on some levels was carried out during the early settlement of Utah by Mormons and then later formalized during the twentieth century. In 1852 Brigham Young championed the adoption or purchase of Southern Paiute children because, to quote Young, it was “a new feature in the traffic of human beings; it is essentially purchasing them into freedom instead of slavery” (52). While a number of studies have focused on the topic of placement, the words of various Southern Paiute on the topic are revealing. Eunice Ohte, a Southern Paiute child who was placed in a Mormon home and taught Mormon theologies, remarked later in life how it painfully “stuck with me” when told she could become “white and delightsome” by accepting Mormonism (53). Other individuals like Patrick Charles simply stated that he

“wasn’t happy in placement” (55). Hebner argues that the whole process of “Southern Paiute adaptations to the white world have not been by choice,” but by forced assimilation (54). Southern Paiute Gary Tom stated that “acculturation is just a form of silent genocide” (42).

In regards to the Mountain Meadows Massacre, the book contains numerous oral history testimonies of Southern Paiute. Hebner makes a valid point that the Paiute have most often remained silent and have refrained from speaking or defending themselves against allegations of participation in the Mountain Meadows Massacre. However, at the time that his interviews took place an unusual outpouring occurred. Hebner argues that this transpired from a number of reasons. One includes the 1999 construction work on the Massacre site and memorial, when construction crews accidentally uncovered the remains of those murdered. Utah officials, such as then Governor Mike Leavitt, and the LDS Church, quickly worked to seal off the area and not allow forensic anthropologists access to the site, leaving many issues unresolved for some, including the Fancher family descendants. Other aspects that also contributed to the outpouring included the work towards the LDS Church’s published version of events, *Massacre at Mountain Meadows*, wherein various Church historians interviewed the Southern Paiute for oral history about the Massacre, but then neglected to use the oral histories in the book. The book also continued to shift blame onto the Southern Paiute. Hebner finds fault with the LDS Church for its continual cover up of what took place at Mountain Meadows. In Hebner’s words “Much as been written, and will continue to be written, about this horror, as it stands as a timeless, universal caution to the murderous ownership of truth, of how good men conjure evil in the name of god and can become so invested in their own cover-up that in time they become the only people who believe it” (9). Today the Southern Paiute still wait for an official apology from the LDS Church for the blame wrongly placed the Southern Paiute, but such an apology has yet to occur. Within this atmosphere Hebner stated he encountered a number of elders who spoke on the subject either more openly or for the first time.

For the Southern Paiute, according to oral history they knew about the Massacre as it happened, and they feared it would cause unjust harm to their people. Eleanor Tom recalled the oral history her 102 year old grandmother, Mabel Wall, passed on to the family.

There was two Indians that saw what was happening with the white people dressed as Indians. They heard gunshots and whooping and hollering. Granpa said we never did that hollering. One following them, saw them wash their faces off. They came back saying it was the Mormons. Those Mormons did that to their own people. One went ahead to Sham to tell them what he saw. They knew right then and there they'd be blamed. They then went from band to band to tell what they saw. They blamed all that on the Indian people. (79)

Stories about the events at Mountain Meadows were spoken of within the Southern Paiute communities with seriousness, and sometimes in passing. Willie Pete recalled he father pointing out where the Massacre took place and telling him about the events one day while driving past the Massacre site. Pete's father stated he knew where the bodies were buried, recalled stories of the Paiute hearing the shooting and learning about what happened, seeing Mormons "washing the mud from their face" and noting their disguised costumes—worn by Mormons to implicate the Southern Paiute, and the subsequent effort of the LDS Church to blame the Southern Paiute (114). Others, like Arthur Richards, spoke bluntly and directly. He noted that the LDS Church and some historians "made us look like hell in some of those books they wrote. We never say nothin' about it. ... We took blame for a lot of things. In those days Indians didn't know how to talk English. When they did, do you think the whites would believe them? No." (88)

While much can be said about this book, and the Southern Paiute being blamed for the Massacre, elders like Arthur Richards are most angry that people debate and discuss Mountain Meadows endlessly, but pay almost no attention to acts of genocide against his people by the Mormons who settled Utah. Richards is very correct, this topic is often under-discussed and understudied by the general non-Native American Indian community. Perhaps the most fundamental contribution of this book is its numerous accounts of genocide against the Southern Paiute carried out by Mormon settlers. The accounts are graphic and detailed, and should be examined by scholars. One account, by Arthur Richards concerns a massacre at Circleville, wherein the local LDS leadership lured in a group of Southern Paiute people and killed them, and decapitated the victims. Southern Paiute witnessed the atrocity, found the desecrated bodies in a wagon, and "pulled out the [decapitated] heads of a child and a woman" (88).

Clifford Jake, another Southern Paiute elder, recalled another violent encounter and the motivations behind it.

Wagon train come from Salt Lake. Had orders from Brigham Young. Killed some of the young boys, throw babies up in the air, shoot them down, sexual to the young girls then kills them, what they did. ... Tried to wipe us out, just because we had pretty good land. The wagon gave twenty dollar gold piece for each Indian killed. Poison the water too, the other side of Richfield. The Mormon people. They want land. (73)

In summary, this book is powerful, painful, emotional, and brutal and has great value to scholars. Some of the brief accounts provided in this review give a sense of the magnitude of Southern Paiute and Mormon relations. This entire topic and these individual subjects require additional study. The widespread notion that the genocide of Native American Indians did not occur in Utah and elsewhere in America is still held by the general public, but hopefully powerful books like this help combat stereotypes, racism, historical inaccuracies, and help the Southern Paiute people heal and be given the place they deserve in American society. I heartily recommend and praise this new volume by William Hebner and the contributing Southern Paiute people.

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