

**A History of Racism and Prejudice:  
The Untold Story of the Northern Paiute**  
*The Portrayal of the Past in the Present*

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## The Role of the Historian

Historians hold the key role in presenting information from the past – how they choose to present this information is vital to how we, as readers, perceive history. Since there is no opportunity to revisit times and places of the past, historians must rely on limited resources to construct an accurate depiction of events long ago. In the case of the Northern Paiute people, government records, letters, reports, and oral histories will have to suffice. As white settlers came and colonized, the Paiutes faced racism and prejudice from the Euro-Americans and the U.S. government. Likewise, the Paiutes have historically faced prejudice, and even enslavement from other tribes.<sup>1</sup> These feelings of prejudice and racism eventually culminated in an extermination campaign of the Paiute people that can be labeled as genocide.

A historian must present a view of Native Americans that is not biased toward telling a history of savagery, nor conversely romanticized by telling a history that is so overwhelmingly sympathetic that it retains minimal scholarly value.<sup>2</sup> There are a few differing views on how best to conduct research on Native Americans. One argument is that the scholar must remain emotionally removed from the subject, so that the final work remains as objective as possible, or else the work becomes blinded. Another line of reasoning states that the best work comes from being as involved as possible; this allows the scholar to obtain valuable information and to allow the subject of the material – the native people – to become involved.<sup>3</sup> This latter method can help to correct an important problem in current research that views native people as “objects” of

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1. James Gardner, *Oregon Apocalypse: The Hidden History of the Northern Paiutes* (Summary prepared for HC 441/431 class), 21-37.

2. Elizabeth Cook-Lynn. *A Separate Country: Postcoloniality and American Indian Nations*. (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2011), 15-16.

3. Eva Marie Garroutte. *Real Indians: Identity and the Survival of Native America*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 104-106.

research, and creates a lack of interaction between the author and subject that leads to misrepresentation. When anthropologists and historians are completely uninvolved with the process, the resulting work simply reflects the author's perception with no connection to the subject.<sup>4</sup>

Another aphorism states that the winning side writes history, and the history of the settlement and colonization of the United States is no different. The story that is written in textbooks often paints Native Americans negatively, or excludes them from the history completely. For historians of the period, given that little has been documented from indigenous knowledge, this further exacerbates the problem of limited resource material.

As you read through this paper, please consider the difficulties in writing about this subject, and the struggle of writing a reasonably objective, but somewhat involved, history. This history in particular is marred with accounts of bloody wars and examples of murders upon murders, which is never easy to investigate. The prejudice and racism the Northern Paiute people faced throughout much of the Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century is terrible. I am naturally more inclined to become involved with my subject as I write, and I think engaging with people is an invaluable source of information. However, my heritage is neither Northern Paiute nor Native American, I was not raised on a reservation, and I do not face the cultural prejudices that native peoples face. I cannot pretend to write an account that clearly reflects the Paiute perspective. In this paper, I will attempt to remain relatively objective, while still empathetically examining a side of history that has been rarely explored and then sometimes inaccurately portrayed by historians. I hope to correct some common misconceptions and synthesize my findings in an account of a history that is generally unknown.

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4. Linda Tuhiwai Smith. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Zed Books, 2012), 64.

Beginning during the settlement of the American West and Oregon in the 1850s, many Indian agents, settlers, government officials, early ethnographers, and public and academic historians have dealt with some aspect of the Northern Paiutes in their writing. These documented accounts comprise the few records that have been kept. Although that writing has come from many different sources and many different time periods, the portrayal of the Northern Paiutes has changed little, if at all. The Northern Paiutes have continuously been regarded as a savage and primitive people, which reflects both Euro-American racism and inter-tribal prejudice. From primary documents such as letters, to the work of early historians such as George Bancroft, to recent accounts from modern authors such as Gale Ontko, a uniquely negative and derogatory image of the Northern Paiute has been passed down. Modern authors and historians use the same language as the early settlers, and call the Northern Paiutes the “Snake Indians,” a pejorative epithet that is both unacceptable and insulting to the tribe.<sup>5</sup> Members of many Columbia Plateau tribes traditionally characterized and deprecated the Northern Paiutes as “non-treaty signers,” which contributed to the overwhelmingly negative perception.<sup>6</sup> This externally constructed identity of the Northern Paiute represents an extreme example of the cultural process of “othering” by both Euroamericans and some members of neighboring tribes. Over time both real and imaged Northern Paiute physical and cultural attributes were essentialized and objectified to define the group as inferior to both white settler-colonizers and Columbia Plateau tribes.

There is little documentation of the Northern Paiute perspective during the arrival of white settlers in Oregon, which makes historical evidence extremely one-sided. Looking back through past accounts of the genocide provides insight into the beliefs of the Euro-Americans during the settlement of Oregon. These past accounts, though full of racist remarks and prejudice,

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5. Garder, *Oregon Apocalypse*, 32.

6. Myra Johnson-Orange, HC 441/431 classroom discussion, November 21, 2013.

are often the only written documents available to historians. Current historians must critically interpret these dominant-culture sources and carefully consider how to cite and qualify empirical evidence drawn from such materials. Events like the genocide of the Northern Paiute people that are so hidden from our well-known history are essential in creating a representative narrative. By looking to understand past events that challenge and disfigure the popular understanding of history, the public can gain a better appreciation of native peoples, particularly the Northern Paiutes.

### **History of Prejudice and Slavery**

The eminent psychologist Gordon Allport defined prejudice as “an avertive or hostile attitude toward a person who belongs to a group, simply because he belongs to that group, and is therefore presumed to have the objectionable qualities ascribed to the group.”<sup>7</sup> Two types of prejudices can be discussed in relation to the Northern Paiutes; firstly, the prejudice of the white settlers, and secondly, the prejudice of different tribes, or inter-tribal prejudice. Those with strong racist feelings may carry out actions in five stages: 1) talking about their prejudice; 2) avoiding the disliked group; 3) discriminating against the group; 4) performing physical violence that may occur from heightened emotions; and 5) extermination.<sup>8</sup> In the case of the Northern Paiute people, the prejudice felt from Euro-Americans was so extreme that the last stage of extermination was used as an answer. Most Euro-Americans formed generalizations about all Native Americans from either limited or no interactions at all.

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7. Gordon Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*, (Cambridge: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1954), 7.

8. *Ibid.*, 14-15.

The Northern Paiute people were often looked at as a lower caste system, as lesser beings.<sup>9</sup> This view was even true for some people Northern Paiutes who were ashamed of their identity.

Northern Paitue tribal elder Myra Johnson-Orange remembers neighbors who came daily to beat up her Grandmother for being Paiute, even though she was an old woman.<sup>10</sup> People were embarrassed about being Paiute, and taunted for not being treaty signers. However, this was not a reason to be ashamed, as the Northern Paiute people were bravely fighting for their lands and trying to defend their homes.<sup>11</sup> The arrival of the Euro-American settlers changed the dynamics between tribes and within tribes. According to Johnson-Orange, “somebody had to do the domestic work, and that’s what [the Euro-Americans] groomed our people for.”<sup>12</sup> She believes that Manifest Destiny is arguably the worst event to happen to the Northern Paiutes—and with the settlers came a new prejudice.

Where did this prejudice originate? In regard to inter-tribal prejudice, Johnson-Orange believes it may have stemmed from the harsh environmental conditions in which the Northern Paiutes lived. As a people who were historically nomadic and desert dwellers, Johnson-Orange remarks, “we were made to look like dirty Indians, dirty Indians was what we became.”<sup>13</sup> The idea of the surrounding area contributing to the impression of the Paiutes is again visited in more current works, naming the Paiutes as “Earth Eaters, Walking People, and Diggers,” and

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9. Myra Johnson-Orange, class discussion. Myra Johnson Orange is a tribal elder of the Northern Paiute from the Warm Springs Reservation. We were lucky to have her join us and allow answer questions about the history of the Paiute people. Her great-great grandfather is Oytes, a powerful spiritual leader in Northern Paiute history.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

describing them as “Hav[ing] No Meat . . . They grubbed a meager living from the hostile environment of the Great Basin . . . a land so poorly suited to survival that the best use they could put a horse was to eat him.”<sup>14</sup> These assessments are insulting and incorrect, and this quote is from a biased source. However, it does point to the environment as a reflection of the people, and the word “hostile” is used to describe the environment as it is likewise used to describe the Northern Paiute people in many prejudiced accounts.

Northern Paiute tribal elder and spiritual leader Wilson Wewa remarks that “[prejudice] does affect the way our people are treated today, and it’s probably no different than the prejudice that happened in the South, between the white people and the black people.”<sup>15</sup> The racism applied to the Native Americans during this time draws many parallels to the racism between African-Americans and whites in the South. Both included accounts of a white feeling of superiority over a race that looked different and had different customs. Also, the Northern Paiutes were regarded by neighboring tribes as a weak people, and thus as potential slaves.<sup>16</sup> The occurrence of inter-tribal slavery again reinforces a comparison to African-American experiences in the South. It has been said that “slavery was as important to Northwest culture as it was to antebellum southern U.S. culture: in both areas what best and most typically represents these cultures are the lives, actions, and values of their elites, and in both regions the elites built their

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14. Andrew Gale Ontko, *Thunder Over the Ochoco, Volume 1*. (Maverick Publications, Inc., 1993), 31.

15. Wilson Wewa, interview by author, November 13, 2013. Wilson Wewa is the great-great grandson of Chief Weahwewa and Chief Paulina, two extremely important and powerful chiefs in Paiute history. He is a member of the Northern Paiute of Oregon and a member of the Warm Springs Tribal Council.

16. Garder, *Oregon Apocalypse*, 78.

lives on slavery.”<sup>17</sup> However, there were also many differences between the forms of hereditary chattel slavery in the Trans-Atlantic world and American South, and forms of inter-tribal indigenous slavery in the Pacific Northwest and these two uses of the same word cannot necessarily be viewed as reflecting synonymous experiences.

Inter-tribal prejudice and conflict led to the capturing of war prisoners turned slaves. An unfriendly relationship between the Northern Paiutes and their neighbors, the Klamath, Tenino, Wasco, Cayuse, Umatilla, and Nez Perce, led to slave raids.<sup>18</sup> It was these neighboring tribes that branded the Northern Paiutes as the “Snake People” or “Rattle Snake people.”<sup>19</sup> Although the Northern Paiutes never accepted these monikers they were nonetheless adopted by Euro-Americans of the time, and are, in fact, still often used today. Women and children were often kept as slaves after battles, but men were usually killed because they were more dangerous and their heads provided bigger trophies to bring back.<sup>20</sup> Captured women and children were subject to torture and to ceremonies that celebrated the victor’s killings and scalplings.<sup>21</sup> It has been suggested that slaves were kept more for status and prestige than for economic value; indeed, it has even been reported that keeping slaves was economically draining.<sup>22</sup> Tribes in close proximity and with similar languages and cultures often enslaved one another after battles.<sup>23</sup>

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17. Leland Donald, *Aboriginal Slavery on the Northwest Coast of North America*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 311-312.

18. *Ibid.*, 33.

19. *Ibid.*, 37.

20. Donald, *Aboriginal Slavery*, 112.

21. Gardner, *Oregon Apocalypse*, 38.

22. Donald, *Aboriginal Slavery*, 295-296.

23. *Ibid.*, 106.



The history of slavery within the Northern Paiute people was different, and may not be thought of as harshly as their external slavery. If children were captured as part of a war, and the children were well behaved (i.e. did not attempt to escape), those children were raised as Northern Paiute.<sup>24</sup> An example of this is the story of Chief Egan, who was captured as a child from the Umatilla people. Chief Egan was well-behaved as a child and grew up as a Northern Paiute. He eventually married a Northern Paiute woman (sister of Chief Shenkah) and had Paiute children. Later, he even became a respected chief of the Paiute people, and leader in a great war against the attack of the white settlers.<sup>25</sup> This case shows compassion by the Northern Paiute people. This is not to say that the Northern Paiutes never captured war prisoners, but indicates that the Northern Paiutes were not always as animalistic and savage as they are frequently described.

Another common practice by native tribes in the Northwest was the custom of “roasting.” Roasting, or the act of burning intruders, was practiced by the Northern Paiute people and other tribes.<sup>26</sup> This practice may have caused increased tensions between tribes and led to the labeling of the Northern Paiutes as a violent people. According to Wewa, inter-tribal prejudice, like white prejudice, has not completely disappeared today. Marriages between different tribes on the reservation do occur today, which can cause some discomfort among in-laws.<sup>27</sup> There is still some deeply rooted inter-tribal animosity over events that occurred long ago. However, this may

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24. Wewa, interview by author.

25. J. F. Santee, “Egan of the Piutes”, *The Washington Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (Jan., 1935): 17-19, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40475707>.

26. Myra Johnson- Orange, class discussion.

27. Wewa, interview by author.

be more present in the older members of the tribes, as many of the children are of blended ancestry and are learning about many different cultures in their family. The current three tribes on Warm Springs Reservation: the Northern Paiute, Wasco, and Sahaptin, are all together known as the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, and it is possible now to consider the three tribes together as one. This mixing of tribes and new generation of children surely reduces some of the old inter-tribal prejudices.<sup>28</sup>

### **Genocide and War Tactics – The Use of Native American Scouts**

The “Snake” identity imposed on the Northern Paiutes contributed to the genocidal violence they endured in the latter-half of the Nineteenth Century. Historiographically, a limitation in the existing scholarship on the settlement of the Pacific Northwest has been the traditional hesitance to acknowledge the extermination of Native Americans. Most historians and scholars do not call it for what it is – a genocide. When most people think of genocide, they remember what happened to Jews in Nazi Germany. The quest of the U.S. Army during the so-called “Snake War” can be categorized in the same way as the quest of the Nazis in Germany, in that the goal was to exterminate all of the “Snake Indians” or Paiute people. The genocide of the Paiute people was justified by Oregon Governor Woods who “contended that the 1854 Ward massacre, perpetrated by Snakes, had demonstrated that Indian women were even more fiendish than the men--that they had initiated particularly revolting tortures for white women and children, and that without extermination there would be no peace.”<sup>29</sup> As he expressly called for the extermination of an entire people, women and children were not exempt from Governor Woods’ campaign. Furthermore, Governor Woods based his entire opinion of a people from a few

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28. Myra Johnson-Orange, class discussion.

29. Clark, Donna and Keith Clark, “William McKay's Journal, 1866-67: Indian Scouts, Part I,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 79, No. 2 (Summer, 1978), pp. 129, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20613623>.

examples, which did not reflect all tribes in the area. This massacre must be acknowledged as a historical fact, regardless of how ashamed and disturbed one might be to learn about a history of genocide in Oregon. Some people feel that the failures of the past should not be discussed, because remembering failure is not constructive for the future, and consider this “anti-American slander.”<sup>30</sup> But if we choose to ignore horrible events in our past, how can we base future actions on reflection and learning?

Major General H. W. Halleck provided a description of the unfolding war for the Secretary of War’s annual report for 1866-67, wherein he painted the genocide as inevitable.

Halleck asserted:

It is useless to expect whites and Indians to live together in peace. In revenge for savage barbarities, the frontier settlers kill the Indians without regard to their individual innocence or guilt. The military are powerless to prevent this, and the civil courts will not punish a white man for killing an Indian. Consequently, the Indians retaliate by murdering innocent whites, without regard to sex or age.<sup>31</sup>

This statement represents one of the more balanced descriptions by a white military officer.

Halleck acknowledged that the courts will not punish a white person for the killing of a Native American, and that the frontier settlers would happily kill innocent natives. While the statement surely does not paint the Native Americans positively, citing “savage barbarities” and the murdering of innocent whites, it does at least recognize that the Native Americans have a reason to be angry. However, in the beginning of the statement, Halleck defends the frontier settlers’ actions and implies that the Native Americans are responsible for the hostilities. In reality, the native people possessed land that the white settlers coveted, and the notion of Manifest Destiny and desire to obtain land made conflict between the groups inevitable.<sup>32</sup> This new prejudice by

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30. Ibid.

31. Ibid., 121-122.

the white settlers seemed to exacerbate the old inter-tribal prejudices, the awful effects of which are visible during the genocide.

The U.S. Army employed Native American Scouts (also known as Indian Scouts) as mercenaries or commandos during the “Snake War” to hunt the Northern Paiutes and to carry out their extermination campaign. Judge Humason from The Dalles suggested a “plan to fight Greeks with Greeks and Indians with Indians.”<sup>33</sup> Most white settlers favored the use of Native Americans in the army.<sup>34</sup> Placing Native Americans into the middle of a vicious war meant fewer white members of the army were at risk of injury and death. Instead, more Native Americans were killed. From the racist white perspective, this was a win-win situation. Native Americans in the army “offered the advantages of practicality, economy, and the substitution of Indian risk for white risk.”<sup>35</sup> By entering the U.S. Army, Indian Scouts received livestock taken from the Northern Paiutes, pay equal to cavalry soldiers, and a two-to-three week leave of absence in both fall and spring to care for their farms.<sup>36</sup>

It is suggested that the Northern Paiute people feared Native Scouts more than Euro-American members of the U.S. Army. In one documented account, a Northern Paiute chief supposedly “told the pale-faced commander it was not he whom he feared, nor his blue-coated soldiers . . . ‘It is there,’ and he pointed to McKay and the Warm-Springs Scouts.” This story

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32. Ibid., 122.

33. Letter from the McKay Papers, 1839-1892, Reel # F880 .M166 1948, Microfilm Collection, University of Oregon Microfilm, University of Oregon, Oregon, 8.

34. Ibid., 129.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid., 132.

cannot be confirmed, but it speaks to the fears of the Northern Paiutes and suggests that inter-tribal animosity was a major contributor to their genocide.<sup>37</sup>

It may be thought that the emergence of Euro-American settlers would drive the rival tribes closer together to defend themselves. Psychological analyses of prejudice have indicated that “acute and lethal persecution may drive all in-group members together, so that local animosities are dropped.”<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, the presence of the Euro-Americans could drive the tribes further apart, as it did by the use of Indian Scouts. Both of these effects can be observed at different times in this history. In more recent times, many of the tribes do work together and recognize the commonality of their situations and goals. However, in the Nineteenth Century, Native Americans were pitted against the other as Army Scouts, increasing both intra- and inter-tribal tensions between people of the same tribe and between people in different tribes. Myra Johnson-Orange explains that Indian Scouts “were to commit genocide on the Paiute people. They went out there to kill babies, old people, women . . . It’s a sad thing that was a real part of history that made racism a real thing in our community.”<sup>39</sup> The use of Native American Scouts was an effective war tactic in preventing the Native Americans from joining forces. This tactic was part of a broader system of colonization of the indigenous people. Euro-Americans exploited inter-tribal prejudice and used this animosity to forward their own territorial aims.

One of these Army Scouts, William McKay, was part Native American and part Euro-American. He was born in Oregon, but received medical training in the eastern U.S. Despite his “part white” status, McKay did not enjoy the same rights and privileges as other white colonizers.

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37. McKay Papers, Microfilm Collection, University of Oregon, 9.

38. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*, 152-153.

39. Myra Johnson-Orange, class discussion.

He was not wealthy in his later years, and did not obtain a position of power equivalent to many successful Euro-American war heroes, but instead had to work hard to retain his job as agency physician. His journal entries contain repeated instances of killing and imprisoning Northern Paiute men, women, and children. Women and children were killed along with the men. Most entries intermingle details on the weather, food, and killing Paiutes. There is little emotion behind his statements; indeed the journal is more log than diary. There is no indication of any guilt or remorse about his killing, even regarding the murders of women and children. After successfully commanding a group for the army during General Crook's 1866-68 campaign against the Northern Paiutes, McKay was asked to command again but deferred and became an agency physician at Umatilla reservation.<sup>40</sup> Another scout, a Wasco named Louis Simpson, describes the instructions he received during the campaign: "The order was given to us, the chief gave it to us soldiers: 'You shall slay the Paiutes. You shall rip open their bellies and cut their heads; you shall take hold of their scalps. And then you shall cut through their necks; you shall put the head of the Paiutes ten paces off.'"<sup>41</sup> These instructions speak for themselves and leave little to be misunderstood about the purpose of the campaign.

It is difficult to discern McKay's motives for joining the U.S. Army. It is possible this was his best job opportunity and to provide for his family. Indian Scouts may have viewed joining the military as a chance to join the winning side of a bloody war. However, we cannot discount that underlying their service record of violence and murder was a hatred and prejudice

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40. Donna Clark and Keith Clark, "William McKay's Journal, 1866-67: Indian Scouts, Part 2," *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 79, No. 3 (Fall, 1978), 305-308. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20613635>.

41. George Aguilar Sr. and Jarold Ramsey, *When the River Ran Wild!: Indian Traditions on the Mid-Columbia and the Warm Springs Reservation* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 211.

towards the Paiutes. This example of how inter-tribal prejudices played out would prove devastating for the Northern Paiute people. Moreover, the political and geographic consolidation of multiple tribes into “confederated” structures on single reservations by the federal government through the treaty-making process intensified these inter-tribal tensions. From the Euro-American perspective, Native Americans tribes were treated as a single people with a common culture. The generic label of “Native Americans” comes strictly from the Euro-American point of view.<sup>42</sup>

Sarah Winnemucca is another controversial Native American in this history. She worked for the U.S. government as an interpreter.<sup>43</sup> She was a great advocate for her people, and through the writing of her autobiography, *Life Among the Piutes: Their Wrongs and Claims*, she is one of few documented Paiute voices to provide a written history. Although initially afraid of white people, she was instructed to trust them by her Grandfather. In describing her own people, she said: “I can’t tell about all Indians; but I know my own people are kind to everybody that does not do them harm; but they will not be imposed upon, and when people are too bad they rise up and resist them. This seems to me all right. It is different from being revengeful. There is nothing cruel about our people. They never scalped a human being.”<sup>44</sup> Her evident pride in her people, and faith that they are good and righteous, is very different from the Indian Scouts. This voice lies in stark contrast to the dominant negative portrayal of the Northern Paiutes offered by so many other primary source voices during this time. She also describes how bad habits (such as swearing) are learned behaviors from the Euro-Americans:

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42. Background information from HC 444/431 class discussion.

43. Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins, *Life Among the Piutes: Their Wrongs and Claims*, 1883, [http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library/life\\_among\\_the\\_piutes/](http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library/life_among_the_piutes/).

44. *Ibid.*, Chapter 2.

Coyote is the name of a mean, crafty little animal, half wolf, half dog, and stands for everything low. It is the greatest term of reproach one Indian has for another. Indians do not swear,—they have no words for swearing till they learn them of white men. The worst they call each is bad or coyote; but they are very sincere with one another, and if they think each other in the wrong they say so.<sup>45</sup>

This presentation of the Paiutes as a sincere people without even the vocabulary for derogatory remarks lies in complete opposition to the typical portrayal of the Paiutes during that period. The specific example of name-calling may seem inconsequential, but it is indeed highly relevant and illuminating, given the pervasiveness of the derogatory epithet of “Snakes” imposed on the Northern Paiutes. Winnemucca addresses how such behaviors were a Euro-American introduction, rather than an inherent part of Paiute culture. Her love of her people drove her to work with the government and led her to Washington – where she devoted her life to improving life for her people. In contrast to the Indian Scouts, who may have joined the U.S. Army out of shame for their people and inter-tribal hatred, Winnemucca’s motivations feel honorable and heroic.

### **The Origin of Prejudice in Primary Sources – Indian Agents and Government**

Indian agents were placed on reservations for two very different reasons - to help their “charges” learn useful, and assimilating, skills, and to act as monitors. These agents provided the direct connection between the Native Americans and the federal government. They oversaw the purchase and distribution of rations, and taught the Native Americans how to perform “proper” forms of labor. Unfortunately, more often than not the agents proved to be harsh and cruel overseers who treated the Native Americans as less than human.<sup>46</sup> Such was the case of Malheur Reservation Agent William Rinehart, a white man with little evident intent to help the Paiutes. The Malheur Reservation located in eastern Oregon was created by executive order and

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45. Ibid.

46. Background information on Indian Agents from HC 441/443 class discussions.



concentrated the many Northern Paiute bands of Oregon. In his letters, Rinehart describes the Paiutes as being difficult to understand, and with no clear relationship to the government. He uses words such as “loafers” and “gamblers” to describe any Paiutes not relocated onto the reservation, where he felt they belonged.<sup>47</sup> Rinehart writes of denying rations to those who refused to labor, which could have had devastating consequences at a time when the people on reservations were entirely dependent on government rations for survival through the harsh winters.<sup>48</sup>

This picture of Rinehart drawn from the documentary record reinforces oral history accounts from Wewa of times when Rinehart did not distribute the blankets, sugar, flour, and other necessities from the government on the reservation.<sup>49</sup> Rinehart implemented the use of corporal punishment, and there are many accounts of Rinehart whipping men and even children on the agency. He justified his actions by claiming he was “with the military.”<sup>50</sup> He was known to charge the people for the produce that they had grown themselves, and he was certainly mistrusted by the people living on the reservation. Rinehart is similarly thought to have sold produce to local miners and livestock to a local ranch. The trail of money obtained from these sales remains unknown, but according to oral history, when confronted Rinehart lied and said that the beef had been distributed throughout the agency.<sup>51</sup>

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47. William Rinehart, from Special Collections and University Archives, 195.

48. *Ibid.*, 210.

49. Wewa, interview by author.

50. *Ibid.*

51. *Ibid.*

When spring came, many of the Northern Paiute people annually headed to the meadows, where their people had gathered different varieties of edible roots as food for thousands of years as part of their subsistence cycle. As the weather warmed, they also went into the mountains to hunt antelope and mule deer.<sup>52</sup> In his reports, Rinehart reported to the government that these Indians were abandoning the reservation. In his judgment, these traditional activities constituted abandonment. However, the boundaries of the one-million-plus acre reservation actually extended to include many of these sites, so the people had often not even technically left the boundaries of the Malheur Reservation. This alleged abandonment undermined the longterm stability of the Malheur Reservation. In the absence of a Senate-ratified treaty establishing the reservation a subsequent executive order could dissolve the reservation at any time.<sup>53</sup> Also, in a letter from Lindsay Applegate, a Sub-Agent at Yainax (located near Klamath Falls, Oregon), the so-called disappearance of the Native Americans from reservation meant “they left with hostile intent...and are now far from harboring feelings of amity towards whites.”<sup>54</sup> Their movement to practice old traditions was used by Applegate to impute that the Paiutes contemplated new hostility against white people. In this way, Rinehart’s reporting had a large and negative impact, further stalling the progress by which Native Americans could regain their footing. Although a few good agents have appeared in history, such cruel and unhelpful treatment of Native Americans by agents was all too common.

One of those benevolent agents, Sam Parrish, had preceded Rinehart and represented one of the few white voices that articulated a countervailing positive identity and image of the

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52. Ibid.

53. Ibid.

54. Clark, “*William McKay's Journal*”, 128.

Northern Paiutes. His removal, in fact, was most likely a consequence of his sympathetic leanings towards the Paiutes.<sup>55</sup> Parrish served as an advocate for the tribe. He wrote letters to the government to help explain the Native American response to an allegation “that their lives have been spent plundering and murdering immigrants and settlers.”<sup>56</sup> Parrish explained that there were two sides to the story, and “when parties of whites came through their country, Indian men, women and children were shot down on sight and that they the Indians therefore looked upon all whites (and with good reason too) as enemies who wanted to do them all the harm they could, and therefore they were compelled to fight.”<sup>57</sup> In his letters, Parrish often refers to the Native Americans paternalistically as “my Indians,” and displays a caring affection towards the Paiute people.<sup>58</sup> As opposed to complaining about their incompetence, he instead lobbies for the addition of a teacher and a blacksmith on the reservation. He inquires about building materials for a schoolhouse, hospital, and barn. This picture of kindness is consistent with oral histories, which tell of a man who taught the Paiutes to farm, and of a brief time of trust on the reservation.<sup>59</sup> Sadly, Parrish is one of few agents who have shown such kindness to the Native Americans throughout history. Unfortunately, his letters and portrayal of the Paiute people did not negate the dominant image of the Paiutes that was prevalent at the time, and that continues to prevail. His limited impact seems to reflect the dominance of the opposing view, and, in fact, Parrish was not well liked by the government due to these sympathies, and this led to his removal

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55. Wewa, conference call.

56. Samuel Parrish, from Special Collections and University Archives, 155-156.

57. Ibid.

58. Ibid.

59. Wewa, interview by author.

from the reservation.<sup>60</sup> Agents with empathy for their tribes were both uncommon and unpopular at the time, and accounts like his are by far the exception rather than the rule.

Joel Palmer, Bureau of Indian Affairs administrator and Oregon Superintendent during this time period, is another example of a white man in charge of tribal affairs whose accounts lack any sense of compassion and instead project an air of superiority. In a letter sent to a new special agent, he refers to the Northern Paiutes as hostile, savage, and ignorant.<sup>61</sup> His letter depicts the “Snake River Indians” as robbers and murderers of defenseless immigrants, which has instilled in them a sense of white weakness.<sup>62</sup> Palmer advises cooperation with military force, and throughout the letter an overwhelming sense of white superiority is evident, describing Euro-American citizens as “a civilized and Christian people.”<sup>63</sup> Palmer seems intent on displaying this white authority, and suggests saving women and children in order to impress on them the power and generosity of Euro-Americans. This severe display of prejudice was common, and is documented by many of the government officials who supposedly were advocates for the tribes they oversaw.

### **The Work of Early Historians**

Early historical accounts of the state of Oregon severely misrepresent local tribes and the events that involved them. Hubert Howe Bancroft wrote the *History of Oregon*, which was published in 1886. His main sources include Oregon newspapers (published by Euro-Americans), Indian Affairs Reports, and documents from the U.S. Senate. Given his exclusive use of Euro-

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60. Ibid.

61. Joel Palmer, Letter, from Special Collections and University Archives.

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid.

American sources it is clear that Bancroft's work is biased, and he often uses the terms "Snake" and "savage" when referring to Northern Paiute bands.<sup>64</sup> One of the most disturbing aspects of Bancroft's history is his explanation of his usage of the term "Snake". Bancroft writes:

I use the term Snake in its popular sense and for convenience. The several bands of this tribe, the Bannacks, and the wandering Pah Utes were all classed as Snakes by the people who reported their acts, and as it is impossible for me to separate them, the reader will understand that by Snakes is meant in general the predatory bands from the region of the Snakes and Owyhee rivers.<sup>65</sup>

This lack of distinction between the Paiute and Bannock tribes reflects a carelessness that is all too common in historical writing of this time period. Bancroft's refusal to clearly distinguish the Paiutes from the Bannocks set an invidious precedent for future authors who also liberally use the term "Snake" and apply it to the Northern Paiute and other neighboring tribes. This generalization has not only introduced misnomers into historical accounts, but also contributed to negative representations of the Paiute people by blaming them for the actions of other tribes that share the "Snake" label. His description of the Paiutes as predatory is also general and subjective. The Paiutes in Bancroft's account are depicted as cruel murderers, who killed many other Native Americans on reservations in revenge.<sup>66</sup> His portrayal of the Paiutes in his history of Oregon is overwhelmingly negative, which is a continued theme by present authors.

### **Prejudice in Modern Times**

More current work (published within the last decade) about the settlement of Oregon draws some unfortunate parallels to letters that date back to the Nineteenth Century. Books such as the series *Thunder Over the Ochoco* by Gale Ontko only reinforce stereotypes and

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64. Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The History of Oregon, volume 2*, The History Company, 1886, 237.

65. *Ibid.*, 462.

66. *Ibid.*, 464.

dehumanization of Native Americans, especially the Northern Paiute. The word “Snake” is used in reference to the Northern Paiutes in this series, the same way that the term Snake was used to describe the Paiutes in the 1800s. *Thunder Over the Ochoco* compares natives to wild animals while discussing how “the Oregon settlers assembled in early 1843 to organize a vendetta against wolves, bears, mountain lions and stray Indians.”<sup>67</sup> The comparison goes even further, with the natives being described as “perfectly naked, and wild as an animal.”<sup>68</sup> This continued depiction of the Northern Paiute people as less than human and ranked below other Native Americans represents an unchanged theme from a much earlier time.

A look at the bibliography confirms that Ontko’s work is built on one-sided narratives similar to the ones discussed earlier. He uses many sources from the non-Native perspective, such as journals from the North West Company (who were European traders). He also uses reports from the U.S. government and *Snake Country Journals*, which are written about interactions with the Native Americans again from the non-native perspective.<sup>69</sup> Sources from the U.S. government at this time are largely anti-Native American and pro-colonization and expansion, and clearly do not provide much support for the Native perspective. Ontko also uses newspapers from this era, which were run solely by Euro-Americans and reflected the popular negative view.

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67. Andrew Gale Ontko, *Thunder Over the Ochoco: Distant Thunder, Volume 2*, (Maverick Publications, Inc., 1994), 2. The author of this book is not Native, but grew up in an area with Native Americans. It is important to note that the information from this book does not come from a Native perspective, although one of the other more modern accounts I look at (*When the River Ran Wild!: Indian Traditions on the Mid-Columbia and the Warm Springs Reservation*) is written from a native voice.

68. *Ibid.*, 17.

69. Andrew Gale Ontko, *Thunder Over the Ochoco Vol. 1*, 1994, 16, 72, 74.

In addition to his Euro-American sources, Ontko takes the time to thank Wilson Wewa in the acknowledgements section of his book. This is very puzzling to Wewa, considering that he is a Northern Paiute tribal elder and the book is severely prejudiced against the Paiutes. In an e-mail, Wewa explains that “[t]here are also fabricated names in the acknowledgements. I asked descendants about the names mentioned in the book and we did ancestral research to corroborate names and we could find no evidence to substantiate the mentioned names.”<sup>70</sup> Although Ontko’s work appears scholarly, this is a major discrepancy that undermines the credibility of his book. Wewa also notes that Ontko never mentions the name of his supposed “befriended” Paiute informant, whom Ontko claims lived a solitary existence on Ontko’s property in central Oregon hiding from civilization. Moreover, although this seemingly fictional informant did not speak English he somehow still managed to convey knowledge of the Paiute to Ontko. It is unlikely that such a person ever existed. Wewa’s best explanation for these inconsistencies is “that Ontko more than likely never thought that Paiute scholars would read his book and find the untruths and fabrications. . . . My grandfather knew many of the old Paiutes that lived out there in the backwoods communities and would have had contact with this elusive figure, if he existed.”<sup>71</sup> Given that Ontko’s sources are either from the Euro-American perspective or romanticized and primitivist fabrications of the Paiute perspective, it is unsurprising that the resulting work is full of racist remarks and blatant prejudice.

Even a book that explicitly claims to be from a Native American perspective retains many of the same themes as above. Although *When the River Ran Wild!: Indian Traditions on the Mid-Columbia and Warm Springs Reservation* is written by a native author, George Aguilar,

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70. Wilson Wewa, e-mail message to Kevin Hatfield, December 12, 2013.

71. Ibid.

Sr. who is a member of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, he is of Wasco descent. The Wascos and Paiutes have a long and complicated history due to inter-tribal prejudice, and someone from the Wasco tribe may view the Paiutes negatively. This book similarly depicts the Northern Paiute as being a savage and violent people.<sup>72</sup> While it is acknowledged that the Wasco people wanted to retain “Snake” Indians as slaves, which is accurate according to other findings, the Paiutes are described as having been deserving of being enslaved.<sup>73</sup> One story discusses a raid and resulting murder of a pregnant woman and grandmother by the Paiutes.<sup>74</sup> This story is one of the few direct references in the book to the Paiutes, and is an unfair way to portray all Paiutes, as it contributes to the image imposed on them. Modern authors are responsible for providing the whole story – not just slanting history to exist in the way they want others to see it. These modern works of literature omit the majority of the story, and still claim to be reporting history.

Yet another modern work, *The Deadliest Indian War in the West* by Gregory Michno, further displays the same prejudice. He uses the same language of “Snake,” hostile, and savage; and describes the Paiutes as murderers and thieves.<sup>75</sup> One of the most intriguing parts of Michno’s book is his use of sources. Two of his main sources are Bancroft’s *History of Oregon*

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72. The author, George Aguilar Sr., of *When the River Ran Wild!: Indian Traditions on the Mid-Columbia and the Warm Springs Reservation* is native and from Warm Springs. He is of the Wasco tribe, and directed his book to the Kikst Chinooks.

73. Aguilar, *When the River Ran Wild!*, 169-170.

74. *Ibid.*, 208.

75. Gregory Michno, *The Deadliest Indian War in the West: the Snake Conflict, 1864-1868*. (Caxton Press, 2007), 24.



and Ontko's entire *Thunder Over the Ochoco* series.<sup>76</sup> By using these obviously biased secondary accounts as two of the main sources in his writing, Michno severely increases the prejudice in his own work. The trickle-down effect of biased historical accounts of the Northern Paiutes is glaringly clear in this example. Primary sources from the Euro-American perspective first document the "Snake" Indians and establish the initial image. These primary sources were in turn cited in the published works of early historians such as Bancroft, which credentialed this negative portrayal of Northern Paiutes in scholarship. Finally, over time, modern historians such as Ontko, Aguilar, and Michno constructs their narratives upon the work of early historians and primary sources of white historical actors without a critical, anti-racist, or de-colonizing re-evaluation of this history or depiction of the Northern Paiute.

The books of Ontko, Aguilar, and Michno all adopted a similar format in their professional and scholarly appearance. Although the books are easy to read and accessible to a lay audience, they also appear to cite many facts drawn from credible primary sources and previous scholars. Even the use of footnotes and many citations makes the work appear to be more accurate, which easily can mislead readers into thinking this is the true story of Western colonization. Without any previous knowledge of the Northern Paiute, a reader can easily believe the negative portrayal pictured in these books.

Does prejudice still exist today? Arguably yes, although not necessarily to the same extent as the rampant prejudice once was. The effects of inter-tribal prejudice have also slightly diminished over time. As Johnson-Orange points out, the new generations living on the reservations are mostly mixed, and her grandchildren have blood from many different tribes, and

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76. Ibid., 78, 359.

are also part Caucasian and Hispanic. As a full-blooded Native American, she has blood from two different tribes, and is three-quarters Sahaptin and one-quarter Paiute. Although only one-quarter Paiute, she identifies strongly with the Paiute people.<sup>77</sup> The mixing of cultures may contribute to the reduced prejudice between tribes, which is still held in some older members. Euro-American prejudice may still be prevalent, although not to the genocidal extent that it once was. Johnson-Orange remarks, “in the greater society, that racism and prejudice is still there”.<sup>78</sup> She feels that outside of the reservations, in the rest of Oregon, Euro-American prejudice is alive today. Many Euro-Americans and people of other ethnicities living in nearby towns adjacent to the reservation will not cross the bridge into Warm Springs. When visiting an elementary school in one of these communities, Johnson-Orange points out that all the kids are aware of is that Native Americans live in teepees.<sup>79</sup> This lack of education and awareness contributes to the problem of prejudice and racism in our society.

In order to counteract the trickle-down effect of prejudice reverberating from primary sources into secondary literature, historians and authors must interact with multiple sources and both sides of the story. It is incorrect to write about the Northern Paiutes after having read only primary source documents from government officials and Euro-Americans. Although documents from the Paiute perspective during this time are largely unavailable, conducting current interviews and listening to oral histories can help provide missing perspectives and information. Looking at accounts from past advocates for the Paiute people such as Sam Parrish and Sarah Winnemucca can help combat this one-sided view. As shown earlier, even sources from Native authors can paint an unfair portrait, due to the lingering effects of inter-tribal prejudice.

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77. Myra Johnson-Orange, class discussion.

78. Ibid.

79. Ibid.

Therefore, it is up to the author and historian to weed through biased accounts and search for a narrative that represents all groups, even if looking into the past brings a painful reality.

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