Who Was Chief Paulina?
Restoration History and the Reconstruction of Paulina’s Identity in Popular Memory

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HC444 Decolonizing Research: The Northern Paiute History Project

Some Background Information:
Chief Paulina was a war chief and a Northern Paiute of the Hunipuitoka band. His life, specifically beginning at the time of the creation of the Warm Springs Reservation in 1855 and ending around the time of his death in 1867, was full of conflicts. Dominant culture during his life and now secondary literature as well as public imagination have cast Chief Paulina as the stereotypical “ignoble savage.” He has been demonized and distorted into a bullet-proof, blood thirsty, violent war leader who cared for little but the thrill of raiding.

What’s the Point?
My argument is that Chief Paulina was, instead, a skilled leader who cared for his people and fought bitterly to protect his homeland. He made necessary decisions, based on the information and resources he had at his disposal, to care for his people and keep their land.

To Prove this:
I assess the existing historiography, but focus on original primary sources, including oral histories from Chief Paulina’s great-great grandson, Wilson Wewa, to compile a timeline of Chief Paulina’s life to clearly display the extant evidence on this subject. I then focus on certain areas of interest that humanize the person behind the legends and compare the conclusions I reach as a counter-narrative to those articulated in secondary literature and area museums.

Why worry?
This paper challenges the popular portrayal of Chief Paulina and provides the information to support tangible change in how he is remembered, specifically by making this restoration history available to public knowledge.