

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Don't Let the Sun Step over You: A White Mountain Apache Family Life, 1860-1975. By Eva Tulene Watt with assistance from Keith H. Basso.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/04v428rd>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 28(4)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Nevins, M. Eleanor

Publication Date

2004-09-01

DOI

10.17953

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

to media and indigenous studies. Daley and James provide a commendable record of how Natives have found ways to tell their own stories in the mass media. It is a story that continues, of course, one that still features Native efforts to put the mass media to use in struggles to maintain self-determination.

Richard M. Wheelock
Fort Lewis College

Don't Let the Sun Step over You: A White Mountain Apache Family Life, 1860–1975. By Eva Tulene Watt with assistance from Keith H. Basso. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2004. 360 pages. \$50.00 cloth; \$24.95 paper.

With *Don't Let the Sun Step over You: A White Mountain Apache Family Life, 1860–1975*, Eva Watt and Keith Basso, after a seven-year collaboration, have created a compelling family narrative, a valuable historical document, and a bold act of cultural translation. For many decades both authors have been translating between the Apache and English languages and Apache and Western cultural frameworks. Eva Watt, an Apache elder and cultural adviser to the White Mountain Apache Culture Center, is also a recognized cultural ambassador who translates Apache views for wider audiences. Keith Basso is an anthropologist who has written extensively on Western Apache ways of speaking. He has developed an approach to Apache history that gives primacy to the meaning imputed to the past within Apache ways of speaking. He has focused on discourse genres such as place names, historical narratives, and now, with the work reviewed here, family stories. What emerges from Watt and Basso's collaboration is a document of considerable ethnographic and historical value that is also an innovative attempt to translate aspects of the form and use of an Apache historical genre for a wider audience.

The narratives contained in this book are Watt's family stories. The book begins with stories about her grandparents and other relatives during the early reservation period and continuing through her birth in 1913. From here she tells stories about her family during her childhood. Her account goes a long way toward disabusing readers of the notion that Apaches during the early postmilitary reservation period lived isolated, dissolute lives. On the contrary, her family traveled all over Arizona—laboring to build highways and dams, working for mining operations, and harvesting crops. To this transient work they brought their own considerable resources: techniques for drawing sustenance from the land and for maintaining relationships among extended family as they traveled considerable distances. In this way they were able to engage with the wage economy on some of their own terms. Watt also relates stories about boarding-school life and about her mother's illness and impairment that necessitated her return to her family's farm on the reservation. She tells stories about herself as a young adult leaving the reservation with several other Apache women to find work in Phoenix, marrying, and ultimately returning to the reservation with her husband and children. The last stories in the book recount the death of several important relatives: her grandmother, mother, and stepfather.

It is probably true, as the authors claim, that Watt's account provides a point of view and degree of information on Apache life over the past 150 years that is unapproached in standard historical treatments of Western Apache people. Students of Southwestern or Apachean ethnography may also mine this work for its wealth of ethnographic information. Readers will find descriptions of a now-defunct boy's puberty initiation practice; of cures wrought by medicine men, medicine women, and herbalists; and accounts of Silas John in the early Holy Ground movement. Many such stories make unique contributions to the published ethnographic record. I argue, however, that equally important to the value of this book is the fact that Watt's account is structured not by the anthropologist's interest in a particular ethnological topic or by Western notions of oral history or biography but in terms of an Apache discourse genre. She describes this genre as "family stories" and characterizes these as "stories about our relatives and where they went and all they used to do . . . so you can see what happened to them and know what they were thinking" (xv). She adds that these stories were once very common in Apache households. They were generally brief and were told in an impromptu fashion as people went about their business around the home.

This compilation of family stories is important not only as a written record of knowledge that might otherwise be lost but also for the format and framework in which the stories are presented. The authors make it clear they have designed their presentation to encourage readers to engage with the stories in a way that approximates Apache discursive practice. The authors opted to stay as close as possible to the form in which the stories were presented in speech. Rather than stringing her stories together in one explicitly coherent narrative, the book is composed of more than 170 short narrative vignettes of roughly one to four pages each. Each story can stand on its own or be related to other stories in the collection. In his introduction Basso presents Watt's comments about this format: "What's nice . . . is that you can go in and out of this . . . you can look in there [the book] anywhere and find out a little. . . . Then, if you want to, you can look in there again and find out a little more. That's kind of like how we used to learn our family's stories—not all at once, just one or two at a time, just now and then" (xxiv).

Watt makes it clear that this format is designed to allow readers, some of whom will no doubt be Apache, to approximate the process of learning these stories in Apache homes. Watt and Basso also specify some of the interpretive practices that shape the meaning and use of family stories in an Apache context. Unlike reading standard historical texts, this Apache historical practice is personal, immediate, and human-scale. People hear the stories and live with the memory of these stories in their minds. Over time the stories "work on each other" and connections between them begin to emerge, as do connections between the stories and aspects of a person's ongoing life. In this way the past becomes immanent in a person's thoughts and in his or her sense of self: The past becomes a dynamic part of the present. According to Watt, it sometimes seems as though those people from long ago never went away. She believes we can still see them and hear them talking. The authors suggest that readers might want to follow the same practice in their engagement with the book.

Although this book is composed of more than 170 separate stories, it is not difficult to navigate. Each story has a title heading. The stories are ordered in roughly chronological fashion and are placed within twelve chapters. Each chapter is introduced with a short statement from Eva Watt that sets the tone and time frame for the chapter as a whole. Watt's introduction to each chapter is followed by a list of all the story titles in that chapter. The chapters are further grouped into three parts that correspond to broad chronological periods in her family's life: their travels in search of work (1860–1929), what happened after the family settled back at the farm at Oak Creek (1930–1944), and events in Eva Watt's life after leaving home for Phoenix (1945–1975). A timeline is provided that traces important events recounted in the stories. Taken together, these provisions serve as an effective orienting key while still allowing each story to stand on its own. Copious period photographs accompany the stories, many featuring Watt's family members. There is a glossary of Apache terms and a useful, if not comprehensive, index. Basso provides a valuable introduction and footnotes to the stories. His sensitivity to the cultural framing of discourse is felt throughout in his editorial decisions and presentation strategy.

This book sets an important precedent for Native American (auto)biography and life histories. Other such works have paid attention to discrepancies between conventional Western notions of biography and Native American conceptions of the person and the past. To my knowledge, however, this is the first instance of a life history that has been traced to a particular historical genre within the speech community of its origin and in which presentation of the written text is modeled on that particular Native American speech genre. The authors translate not only the facts of Apache lives lived but a way of talking about those facts, a way of delivering the stories, of listening to them, taking them up, and using them. It is hoped that this approach to life history, in which personal narratives are valued not simply as statements of fact but as stories with uses and meanings in their communities of origin, serves as a model for future work and as a standard from which to reevaluate previous efforts.

M. Eleanor Nevins

Idaho State University

Forgotten Tribes: Unrecognized Indians and the Federal Acknowledgment Process. By Mark Edwin Miller. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004. 464 pages. \$59.95 cloth.

There was a time when James Clifford's "Identity in Mashpee" (1988), from the era of Eastern Indian land claims, was one of the only academic articles that discussed the American Indian experience with the issues raised by the federal acknowledgment process (FAP). The blossoming of new books about the subject indicates that the political and economic issues surrounding gaming have finally brought the acknowledgment debacle to a head for