

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

The Northern Navajo Frontier, 1860-1900: Expansion Through Adversity.
By Robert S. McPherson.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4rz43611>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 13(1)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Trafzer, Clifford E.

Publication Date

1989

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/>

The design of the book is a triumph of subtle balances: spare, powerful, "unfinished," elegant. Profusely illustrated from historic sources and contemporary artists working in a variety of media, the overall effect is one of strength, love of tradition, lightness and joy. The psychological insight and lyric irony of Hul-leah Tsinhnajinnie's work is particularly notable. The tenderness, shy eroticism, warmth and gaiety (in the old sense of the term) of Patrick Mulvey's photographs are likewise welcoming and enthralling.

Among much fine work by younger and less well established writers, the single poem, "Horseshoes," by Joe Dale Tate Nevaquaya, demands special mention. Intense, compact, vulgar and sophisticated, creating an almost feral sense of relationship to the earth, Nevaquaya's politics, like Allen's, is a matter of implicitness:

"Evening radio static reports an icebox
robbed of its glacial memory
goes up in flatulent smoke."

No marketing of anger or self-righteousness here!

This is not to say that anger and rectitude are not legitimate responses to the manifest racisms/sexisms/genocides of the Dominant Culture. However, in literature these responses tend toward the rhetorical rather than toward living evocations of particular experience. There is an occasional tendency toward the rhetorical and didactic in the work of a few of the younger writers. But there is also a purity and clarity of voice, a power balanced by prudence, a deeply moved and moving discovery of identity, a thirst for wholeness and unity across the traditional lines and divisions of culture that, having had its origin in the berdache roles of the most ancient myths of the Americas, begin again to find expression and fulfillment here.

Alfred Robinson
D-Q University

The Northern Navajo Frontier, 1860-1900: Expansion Through Adversity. By Robert S. McPherson. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988. 133 pages. \$22.50 cloth.

Navajo Indians have been the subject of many books and articles. The drama of the Kit Carson Campaign, Navajo removal to *Hweeldi*, and tribal adaptation in the early twentieth century are topics explored by many fine scholars. One of the major gaps of study has been "regional" histories of Navajos. Today the Navajo Reservation contains more square miles than the state of West Virginia and is the home of many families and clans that have developed unique modes of survival. Most of the studies of Navajo people focus on the "tribe" as a whole, but McPherson has chosen to focus on one area of the Navajo frontier that heretofore has been largely ignored.

The Northern Navajo Frontier examines that part of the reservation in northern Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah with particular emphasis on those lands in the latter state. The author argues correctly that Navajo history cannot be viewed solely from the perspective of the United States government but must be seen through the Navajos as well. Rather than perceive the Indians as defenseless wards living at the will of agents, superintendents, and commissioners, Navajos must be viewed as actors in their history. During the era from 1860 to 1890, Navajo men and women helped make their own destiny. McPherson maintains that one of the most significant actions of the Navajos on the northern frontier was to expand their own lands. Families and clans pushed the frontiers forward in a defensive movement to counteract the expansion of Indians and non-Indians upon the Navajo country. Thus, while other Indians lost territory during the late nineteenth century, the Navajos gained lands.

After providing a brief introduction, McPherson examines Navajo relations with the Utes and Paiutes. Generally, scholars have emphasized the adversity between these people, but the author argues that the Paiutes served as a bridge between the Navajos and Utes. This created stronger cooperation between the groups in such areas as trade, marriage, and friendships. Navajo relations with Mormons are also explored, not only in terms of religious conversion but economics as well. Cattlemen in Utah exploited the environment, driving too many head onto lands unable to cope with the overgrazing. Indians, too, exploited the earth by overgrazing and killing far too many deer. McPherson's treatment of the Indian trade is excellent, demonstrating the importance of the trading post to the growth and development of the northern Navajo frontier.

The volume deals with many aspects of Navajo history that pertains to the reservation at large. Although some of the book examines Indian policies and governance by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, this is not the major focus of the work. In a short amount of space, McPherson thoroughly examines one area of the Navajo Reservation that has been largely ignored by scholars. He uses excellent documents drawn from many sources. He utilizes oral histories, books, and articles. He weaves a work as unique and beautiful as a Navajo rug, one which should receive the serious consideration of anyone interested in the tribe's history. The book is well researched and tightly written. Perhaps others will follow the example of this work and write other regional histories of the Navajo Reservation.

Clifford E. Trafzer
San Diego State University

Tradition and Change on the Northwest Coast: The Makah, Nuu-Chah-Nulth, Southern Kwakiutl and Nuxalk. By Ruth Kirk. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986. 256 pages. \$19.95 Cloth.

The Hopi Photographs: Kate Cory: 1905–1912. By Barton Wright, Marnie Gaede and Marc Gaede. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988. 164 pages. \$35.00 Cloth. \$19.95 Paper.

At a time when increased understanding of Native American life-ways by members of the dominant culture is as necessary as ever, the avowed concept behind the production of *Tradition and Change on the Northwest Coast* is most worthwhile. Yorke Edwards' Foreword informs us that it was intended to be a popular book—"good science well written for the public," "accurate information" conveyed with "enjoyment"—and to this end Ruth Kirk, well known for her natural history works and western guide books, was approached to cooperate with a team of scholars from the British Columbia Provincial Museum in Victoria. Moreover, while the text is haunted now and again by a wisp of a ghost of the notion that pre-contact cultures were somewhat static and purer in their Indianness—time begins to "flow," then