

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Washo Shamans and Peyotists: Religious Conflict in an American Indian Tribe. By Edgar E. Siskin.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4v83w2ds>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 12(2)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Stewart, Omer C.

Publication Date

1988-03-01

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/>

dian Affairs, Sacramento Area Office, 1976), originally an in-house document, has a descriptive list of field offices, agencies, sub-offices, index and list of reservations and rancherias by county, a list of terminated rancherias, legislative information. This work includes a tribal directory, with official demographic, historical, legal, and ethnographic information on each tribe, physical descriptions of their land bases, descriptions of their governments and organizations, and identifies tribal officials, and includes addresses and phone numbers.

National Native American Cooperative's "Native American Directory: Alaska, Canada, United States" (San Carlos, Arizona, 1982), lists addresses, phone numbers and other basic information on California Indian communities. It includes most of the unrecognized tribes, as does a more recent work, "The American Indian Index," by Gregory W. Frazier (Denver: Arrowstar Press, 1985). Some users report that the latter contains many errors.

Eargle's work outdates some of these latter works, duplicates others, but by no means encompasses the useful aspects of all. Generally, Eargle's text compares favorably with other California Indian directories, local interest books, tour guides, and ethnographic works which examine California Indians, some of which are cited in the bibliography. These reference works differ in detail and editorial quality, evincing greater concern for utility than style.

Al Logan Slagle
Stanford University

Washo Shamans and Peyotists: Religious Conflict in an American Indian Tribe. By Edgar E. Siskin. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1986. 263 pages. \$25.00 cloth.

From June 5 to August 15, 1956, I completed a Culture Element Distribution Survey for Professor A. L. Kroeber which was primarily questioning the oldest, healthy Indians I could hire for twenty-five cents an hour to tell me about 3000 elements or "bits" of culture that had been present in his tribe. I questioned five informants concerning the Washo and one family concerning the Achomawi. The rest of the summer was asking the same questions to representatives of eleven groups of Northern Paiutes

scattered from Walker Lake, Nevada to Alturas, California. Among the twenty informants and interpreters interviewed in 14 groups only one Indian, a Northern Paiute interpreter on the Stillwater Reservation near Fallon, Nevada reported he had participated in peyote ceremonies, at Fort Hall, Idaho, and on several reservations in Oklahoma, over a five year period. From September 1937 to January 1938 I had the opportunity to be a participant observer in three complete all-night peyote ceremonies among the Ute.

In July 1938, as guide for Dr. S. F. Cook, we were participant observers of a typical peyote meeting conducted by Washo roadman and shaman Sam Dick. Those experiences as I described them to Kroeber, Lowie and Carl Sauer, my Ph.D. committee, convinced them that I should study the peyote religion of Nevada for my dissertation. I completed the thesis and passed my final examination in December 1939.

The experience with peyote in Nevada in 1956 and among the Ute in 1937 and 1938, although limited, was very helpful background for my Ph.D. thesis. First was the knowledge gained that peyote ceremonies were similar everywhere, which helped to support published accounts, especially those of Weston LaBarre. My experience in Utah, Colorado, and Nevada established that shamans and peyote members were not necessarily opposed to one another. Siskin names a Washo shaman, Sam Dick as his most helpful informant on peyotism. A Northern Paiute who lived in the Washo-Paiute Indian Colony in Reno was a shaman, a peyotist and an Episcopalian. Indians don't need the rule to have only one religion at a time.

Siskin made other errors, but most important is his view that shamans and peyotists are natural opponents and are always opposed. More often shamans and peyotists practice both religions independently and alternatively, and often are some Christian denomination separators.

The frequent statement that there is combining or mixing of peyote with Christian denominations is false. Peyotism is not syncretized with other religions.

In the late fall of 1938, Joe Green who usually lived in the mixed Washo-Paiute camp near Reno explained to me that he was an Episcopalian deacon, and an old time Paiute shaman and also a strong believer in the Native American Church (Peyote Religion). Peyotist, like him were also frequently members of Christian

denominations but no Indians told Christian missionaries that Indians were also peyotists or shamans. The missionaries never asked.

Omer C. Stewart
University of Colorado, Boulder

California's Chumash Indians: A Project of the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History Education Center. By Lynne McCall and Rosalind Perry (co-ordinators) in conjunction with six contributors. Santa Barbara: John Daniel Publ. 1986. 71 pages. \$5.95 Paper.

It would be gratifying if all of the major California Indian groups were represented by such an excellent summary as the present one. Designed for "the layman and tourist," it is a compact summary and covers virtually all aspects of Chumash life in such a way as to encourage also any newcomer to delve further into the comparatively vast literature of the Chumash or to visit places where Chumash cultural material is exhibited or interpreted for the general public.

All of the fine illustrations here are in black and white—there is no photography, yet the choice of illustrated material is so competently done that the reader may get a good overall view of the important material aspects of Chumash life. It is a pity that some of the spectacular polychrome pictographs found in the Chumash area, and which can fairly certainly be attributed to the recent ancestors of these Indians, could not be rendered in color. Nevertheless the black and white line drawings are adequate to represent at least the spirit of the rock art, which is probably the most impressive of native pictographic art in California.

During the past fifteen years or so, significant works on individual native Californian groups, such as those on the Chemehuevi (Laird), Cahuilla (Bean), or Ohlone (Margolin) have all been written as near-definitive ethnographic reports, for the general or professional reader. The Chumash guide under consideration, brief and comparatively simplified, thus stands as an authoritative though non-technical summary and certainly contains the kinds of things a casual visitor or indeed anyone interested in the Santa Barbara region might want to know about