

*Ordeal of Change: The Southern Utes and Their Neighbors*¹

By Frances Leon Quintana²

With an Afterword by Richard O. Clemmer³

Reviews Counterpointed by Richard O. Clemmer

Speaking also for Frances Quintana, we are appreciative of the positive and well-informed assessments by reviewers Kathleen Van Vlack, Michael Burney and Arthur Campa. Van Vlack brings up a point that unfortunately was not directly addressed in *Ordeal of Change*—a discussion of the effects of disease epidemics in the 19th and early 20th centuries. If data on other Native American groups in the West can be used for comparison, these were most likely smallpox in the mid-19th century and measles in reservation times. Smallpox affected the Hopi and Zuni periodically throughout the mid-19th century. Census counts do not start for the Southern Utes until 1880, but if agents' estimates can be taken at face value, it seems there were a total 1,520 Weeminuche, Moache and Capota who periodically came to the Cimarron and Abiquiu Agencies in 1874 (Leland 1986:609). By 1887, when the three bands had been settled on the reservation in southwestern Colorado, there were only 985 and this number holds more or less steady until 1894 when there is an increase to 1,016. By 1896, the population is reported as 1,159 (*Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs 1896*). It seems unlikely that this increase could have been through births alone; probably there was some population added from the "Blanding Paiutes," some of whom eventually came to be known as the "Allen Canyon Utes."

But the revealing population figures for the three bands are for the following decade. The population *decreases*: to 1,137 in 1897; 1,001 in 1897; 941 in 1901; 896 in 1904; and 807 in 1907 (*Annual Reports of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs 1897, 1901, 1904, 1907*). By 1910, numbers have dwindled to 698 (Leland 1986:612). Over a period of 16 years, this is a 40 percent population loss; if the 1874 figure is accurate, it is a 54 percent reduction within less than two generations. Although I do not have statistics for Ute Mountain, the Southern Ute population continued to

decline. In her book *Southern Ute Women*, Katherine M.B. Osburn (1998:76)⁴ lists the population as 362; by 1922, it is down to 329, reflecting a further 9 percent decline. The 1874 figure of 1,520 may be somewhat inflated, but it is not at all unlikely that smallpox devastated the bands shortly before or after their freedom was severely curtailed and they were forcibly relocated to the confines of a greatly reduced territory.

In reservation times, smallpox continued to plague the Southern Ute population as did tuberculosis and venereal disease (Osburn 1998:76). Measles may also have been a big killer, especially of children, well into the 20th century, if comparative data from other reservations are relevant. On the Fort Hall Reservation in southern Idaho, for example, a measles epidemic wiped out 20 percent of the population in 1917. Ironically, children living at the boarding school were largely unaffected. Agency personnel blamed the epidemic's mortality on unheated tents since three-quarters of the highly mobile Shoshone-Bannock population still used tents as dwellings (Heaton 2005:179). Although the Mountain Utes had begun to favor Navajo-style hogans by the early 20th century and two housing construction projects in the 1890s and 1920s supplied a handful of Southern Utes with log cabins and clapboard houses, by the 1930s most of the Southern Utes were still living in tents. If the epidemiology of measles among the Southern Utes was similar to that among the Shoshone-Bannock, successive measles outbreaks among children could have been mostly responsible for the continual population downturn.

Michael Burney's personal reminiscences and comments provide an insightful context to Frances Quintana's work. "...Colorado's native heritage", he says, "appears to be of little consequence to the general public." At the time that Frances (then Frances Swadesh) undertook her research while working on the interdisciplinary Tri-Ethnic Research Project, headed by Omer

Stewart, this was undoubtedly the case. Both Ute Tribes were still dealing with government muleteers who were riding herd on tribes under the "Termination or Rehabilitation" mandate. This policy anticipated that tribes such as the Utes would be targeted for enough "rehabilitation" until they were fit enough to be abolished! Frances sought to show that the Indian Bureau had never had an informed grasp of who the Utes were and the degree to which they were charting their own destiny and to which they used the Indian Bureau and its resources for their own purposes, not the government's. Thanks to Gary Cooper and John Wayne, the general public was, at that time, of the opinion that Indians were already largely vanished, except perhaps for a few quaint and colorful desert-dwellers in Arizona and New Mexico, and if the Utes had been brought to termination, only the general public in La Plata and Montezuma counties would have noticed.

But I disagree with Burney's assertion that the Utes' existence and Native American heritage generally still goes largely unnoticed. Three pieces of legislation have brought the Ute Tribes at least onto the horizon of the public's consciousness, if not into its full gaze. One is the legislation that finally funded the Animas-La Plata Project. As the most major waterworks project undertaken by the Army Corps of Engineers (aside from the rebuilding it will hopefully accomplish for the levees in New Orleans) in many years—and perhaps the last one that will be undertaken by its overseer, the Bureau of Reclamation—the project attracted the attention of the conservation movement. As a result, a lively debate ensued over the anticipated consequences and purposes of the project that attracted some attention not only in Colorado but also in Washington, District of Columbia.

The second piece of legislation is the Indian Gaming Act of 1988. For better or worse, the Utes are now on the recreation map of leisure consumers who "casino hop" up and down the Rocky Mountain spine, from Black Hawk to Sandia Pueblo. Finally, there is the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 (NAGPRA). This law grabbed the public's attention with the discovery of so-called Kennewick Man and the debate and controversy that

raged in its wake. The Utes have not gotten involved in a controversy such as the Columbia Plateau Tribes have done with Kennewick, but the issue has generally enhanced public awareness that Native Americans have a stake in interpreting the past because what is past for the public is very much a part of Native Americans' identities and self-definitions.

As Burney notes, NAGPRA has brought Native Americans much more participation in the cultural resource management (CRM) process, and thus also more into the public eye. In most parts of Colorado, the Ute Tribes have standing as the primary consultants when archaeological sites are identified. Although CRM usually does happen literally and figuratively on the fringes of the general public's backyard, the advance of suburbia to the borders of national forests in many places in Colorado has the potential to bring the consultation process into the awareness of even the gated elite. As both Ute Tribes continue to grow their economic power through judicious management of revenues from fossil fuel exploitation and gaming, they will likely make their political presence increasingly known.

And as Arthur Campa notes, the Utes will also benefit as plaintiffs to the legal efforts, spearheaded by the Native American Rights Fund based in Boulder, Colorado, to secure financial redress for thousands of individuals whose personal accounts and property have been thoroughly mismanaged by the federal government. I think as the 21st century moves on, Native Americans generally will gain greater political prominence and social recognition than they had for most of the previous century. ○

Notes

1. Lanham, Maryland: Alta Mira Press, A Division of Rowman and Littlefield, Publishers, 2004. 173 pages, dedication, maps, photographs, tables, abbreviations, preface, acknowledgments, eight chapters, afterword, notes, bibliography, index, about the authors. Cloth, \$72.00 and paperback, \$24.95 U.S.

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4. This book is a slightly revised version of Katherine Osburn's Ph.D. dissertation, cited below, which I used and cited in my "Afterword."

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