History Of Utah's American Indians

Cuch, Forrest

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Setting the Stage:
Native America Revisited

Robert S. McPherson

The writing of Native American history can be said to have started when Christopher Columbus first waded ashore on San Salvador Island in the Caribbean. It has continued ever since. What preceded his arrival—the prehistoric phase of Native Americans—has generally been left to archaeologists and anthropologists to decipher and explain from physical remains. The initial contact, post-contact, and contemporary phases are the realm of historians, who write in keeping with longstanding conventions of their own trade. In both instances, facts, dates, and interpretation generally are presented from an Anglo American perspective that has evolved over centuries.

What this has meant to the Indian people is that rarely, if ever, has their view been predominant, if it has even been known. Calvin Martin, a noted Indian historian, put it this way: “We presume to document and interpret the history of a people whose perception of the world for the most part eludes us, whose behavior, as a result, is enigmatic. To ignore the Indian thoughtworld is to continue writing about ourselves to ourselves.” This has been especially true until recently.

Within the last twenty-five years, there has been a perceptible shift in the tide of writing that now insists on a more balanced treatment of the Indians’ view of events. However, this is at times a difficult thing to achieve. Native Americans in the past have been slow to come forth with their own story for a number of reasons, including fear of retribution, a desire to leave the past behind, reticence to speak as an individual for a group, and the belief that certain events are sacred, personal, and not to be divulged for public view. Whatever the reason, when one considers how much has been produced about these people, there are relatively few tribal histories written or sanctioned by Native Americans.

In the following pages, the reader will encounter six tribal histories composed either by Native Americans or their representatives. Each au-
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Part of Chief Washakie’s village encamped near South Pass in the Wind River Mountains. Photo taken by William Henry Jackson in 1870 while he was with the Hayden Survey. (Utah State Historical Society—USHS)

Author has used both written and oral sources to tell the story of the tribes living within the boundaries of Utah. The tribal histories are complex, as they speak of persistence and change, the past and the present, diversity and unity. What will be recognized early on is that there are common threads woven throughout each tribal account; but these may assume a different cultural pattern. Thus, each group enjoys a distinct identity.

Among the most prominent of these threads is a religious worldview that ties these people of Utah to a living, sentient creation. Their world is one of power, filled with holy beings who either help or hinder those who interact with them. Unlike most Anglo Americans, who separate themselves from a world they divide into animate and inanimate objects, the Indian worldview sees the land as an interconnected whole—with rocks, trees, animals, water, clouds, and a host of other participants in a circle of life.3 Human relationships exist with non-human entities, bonded by a mutual respect for the role each plays as a part of nature.

An example provided by the Navajo illustrates this type of connection between the land and its creatures, a characteristic viewpoint shared by all of Utah’s tribes. To the Navajo, deer were animals treated and hunted with respect. They were controlled by certain gods who made them avail-
able for man's use. Before leaving for the hunt, men participated in a sweat bath to purify themselves and to encourage the holy beings to give them the best meat. Ritualized behavior circumscribed the hunt, making the act of killing a deer a sacred event recognized as good by both the animal and the gods.

The disposal of entrails and other parts not used by the hunter was also treated in a ceremonially prescribed manner to insure that new deer would be plentiful. Failure to do so could affect the amount of rainfall, since Navajo people believed that deer were in close contact with the holy beings who controlled moisture. Because deer lived in the mountains, they were protected by thunder and lightning; their antlers were not brought home since they attracted electrical storms; and, because they fed on sacred, medicinal plants, to eat their meat was to ingest medicine. This type of thinking and practice is pervasive throughout traditional Native American life.

The roots of this worldview, so different from that of most Euro-Americans, lies embedded in religious beliefs. In order to understand how these Native American practices began, one must return to the creative period of time, when the earth was "soft" and creatures talked and acted like humans. The gods were close, visible, and involved, establishing the laws and forming the world for the People—the term many dif-
different groups used to identify themselves, using, of course, the appropriate word in their own language. Rivers and canyons, mountains and deserts, lakes and caves took their place in an orderly universe recognized and utilized by the tribes. Plants, insects, fish, and wildlife made their homes under the direction of the gods. The territory in which these creatures lived was bounded by familiar landmarks given to the bands and tribes by the holy beings.

A survey of any Utah map quickly testifies to the intensity of this relationship between the land and its early inhabitants. The state’s name itself comes from the Ute tribe. Other Ute names on maps include Wasatch (signifying a mountain pass or low place); Oweep (grass) Creek; Cuberant (long) Lake; and Ouray, Peteetnec, and Sntaquin (Ute leaders). From the Paiutes come Panguitch (fish), Parowan (harmful water), Paunsaugunt (place of beavers), and Parunuweap Canyon (roaring water). The Goshutes added Oquirrh (wooded or shining) Mountains, Onaqui (salt) Mountains, and Tintic (a Goshute leader). Both Washakie and Wanship were Shoshone leaders, while the Navajo have provided Cha (beaver) Canyon, Oljato (moon water), Nasja (owl) Creek, and Peshlikai (silver) Fork, among many other names on the land.5

To the Indians of Utah, these were places for hunting, fishing, gathering, and worship. They were sites where the People could contact the supernatural through ceremonies to invoke protection and sustain life through a holy means. A covenant based upon respect for these unseen powers, coupled with an intimate knowledge of the land, motivated the People to live within the guidance given them during the time of the myths.

This word “myth” holds a variety of meanings central to understanding the difference between the Native American and Anglo views of the world. To the former, the word defines a truth that is real—sometimes tangible, sometimes intangible—but always considered to be a powerful force in explaining why things are the way they are. Because this explanation is derived from a religious belief, faith and knowledge are mutually supportive in their explanations of physical and social relations. Victor Turner, an anthropologist who has studied the force of myths in society, calls them “the powerhouses of culture.” They define and guide people through the uncertainties of life.

The general understanding of myths by most non-Indian Americans is far different. Although biblical teachings are prominent in Anglo culture, there is a far greater dependence by most people on scientific methodology and practices to explain the physical world. This has led
white people to view myths of other peoples as amusing tales without true substance, powerless ramblings or fairytales about the supernatural. Superstition is considered to be the basis of myth. Factual proof, recorded events, and material culture—although intermixed by many with Christian dogma—have been a much more comfortable means of explaining the past for general Western culture. Thus, truth is considered to be something objectively discoverable through logic and observation. This stands in contrast to the Indian’s view of truth as a preexisting framework, partially revealed in myth to help interpret phenomena. This dichotomy in thinking has characterized relations between native peoples and Euro-Americans throughout the Americas, including Utah.

What, then, does this non-native worldview say about the evolution of cultural development in Utah? Archaeologists and anthropologists have sketched a fairly complete picture of what they believe happened before the historic tribes appeared. Although there is disagreement on dates and the interpretation of some factual evidence, there is general agreement among researchers on the sequence of events. A very brief synopsis of this analysis of prehistory follows.

Portions of the eastern Great Basin, western Rocky Mountains, and northern Colorado Plateau, which comprise the state of Utah, were the setting for the Archaic cultures that lasted from roughly 9,000 or 8,000 B.C. to the beginning of the Christian era (A.D. 1). Although there were climatological variations during this time, including more water and vegetation than are now found in the state, much of the semi-desert environment as it now appears was similar at the start of the archaeological record at the end of the last Ice Age, around 8,000 B.C. Over this long period of time, Native American groups have survived in an austere environment that required an intimate knowledge of the land and its resources. As Jesse D. Jennings, noted scholar of Utah’s prehistory, said: “The key to understanding prehistoric Great Basin human adaptation lies in the recognition of a myriad of microenvironments.... Instead of being the uniformly uninviting desert so often visualized, the Great Basin consists of hundreds of special and often rich environments where a widely varying mix of desired plant and animal species was available for harvest.”

The first period of human habitation in this environment (from roughly 9000–7500 B.C.) is known from scanty remains preserved in rock shelters such as Danger, Smith Creek, and Deer Creek Caves. Most of these sites were located on the margins of lakes and sources of water, some of which have since disappeared. Knife blades, projectile points,
Paiute Indians living on the Kaibab Plateau playing the game of "Ni-aung-pi-kai" or "Kill the Bone," now referred to as "The Hand Game." Photograph taken by John K. Hillers of the Powell Expedition sometime between 1871 and 1875. (USHS)

milling stones, and fire pits indicate a hunting-and-gathering lifestyle, much of which focused around sources of water.7

The next period (7500-4000 B.C.) is characterized by a more diverse use of ecological zones, ranging from high to low altitudes, for hunting and gathering. Seasonal occupation of various areas and a greater variety in diet resulted. Twined basketry, grinding stones, animal nets, and the spear thrower (atlatl) with dart were some of the simple but effective tools invented and made to work the environment. Excavations at Hogup Cave indicate how effective this lifeway was. The remains of four species of large mammals (deer, antelope, mountain sheep, and elk), thirty-two species of small mammals, and thirty-four species of birds have been
found there, indicating that they were part of the diet of the cave's inhabitants. Add to this thirty-six different types of plants, and one can see a widening variety in the diet of these early inhabitants of the land.\(^8\)

The final phase of this Desert Archaic Culture lasted from about 4000 B.C. to the beginning of the Christian era and is characterized by a large expansion of people into peripheral areas in the uplands and a decreased emphasis on living near lakes and basin areas. The diet of these people became more restricted in both plant and animal varieties, indicating a reduction in marshland habitat that forced these Native Americans to utilize other areas of the environment. At the same time, the bow and arrow replaced the atlatl, increasing their efficiency in hunting.\(^9\)

But there were even greater changes on the horizon, starting around 400 B.C. in the eastern Great Basin—the beginning of horticultural societies. The raising of corn, and later beans and squash, now offered an alternative to the more traditional hunting and gathering activities. From a strictly utilitarian perspective, domesticated plants increased the carrying capacity of the land. People could now better determine the amount of food available for their use and, if environmental conditions cooperated, could harvest not only what was needed immediately but enough to store for the future. As with many cultures in Native America, a slow revolution in lifestyles occurred, giving rise to a variety of sedentary cultures.

One of the most impressive prehistoric cultures in America was that of the Anasazi, found in the San Juan River drainage of the Four Corners region and extending into southwestern Utah and southern Nevada.\(^10\) This culture appeared in approximately 1000 B.C. and descendants are believed to live today in the historic pueblos along the Rio Grande and in the villages of Hopi, Zuni, and Acoma. The prehistoric ancestral pueblos have been generally subdivided into two major categories—Basketmaker (early and late) and Pueblo (Periods I, II, and III; examples of the later Periods IV and V are not present in Utah). This archaeological classification scheme is based on changes in technology, art, and subsistence patterns.

The relationship between the late Archaic and the early Basketmaker groups is unclear. Early Basketmaker life developed a technology centered on shallow pithouses, and it included circular storage pits, skillfully crafted baskets and sandals, feather and fur robes, and a greatly expanded tool kit. The people made their homes and stored their food in the rock overhangs of the canyon floors or amid the juniper and pinyon groves of the higher lands above. Their lifestyle still reflected a partial
orientation to the hunter-gatherer tradition in that the people seasonally moved to various sites to harvest their foods (although they returned to their villages to care for their crops), continued to use the atlatl for hunting, and foraged for wild plants as a supplement to their main diet of corn and squash. Bell-shaped underground chambers and shallow slab-lined storage cists located in protective rock alcoves held not only food supplies but also the Anasazi dead.

The Late Basketmaker Period started around A.D. 450 and is distinguished from the earlier phase by the introduction of beans, stone axes, pottery, and the use of larger, more elaborate pithouses with internal storage facilities and antechambers located to the south or east of the main room. These houses may be found alone, in small clusters, or in groups of a dozen or more dwellings. Other innovations during this phase were the appearance of pottery—gray utility and black-on-white painted ware—as well as the bow and arrow to replace the atlatl.

By A.D. 750 the Anasazi reached the next stage of development, that of Pueblo I. As the name suggests, there were some significant changes in their dwellings, although elements from earlier phases persisted. For in-
Chief Washakie of the Shoshone Tribe is seated in the center of this group of Indian leaders. (USHS)

stance, the Anasazi now built their homes above ground in connected, rectangular blocks of rooms, using rocks and jacal (a framework of woven saplings and sticks packed with mud) for construction materials. One or more deep pithouses have been found in each of the building clusters and may have served a ceremonial function. These rooms were equipped with a ventilator shaft that brought in fresh air, deflected it around an upright stone placed between the shaft and the firepit, and then evacuated the smoke by the entryway in the roof, a technique utilized by the Anasazi for the remainder of their stay in the Four Corners region. In Pueblo II times this structure became the common kiva.

The Pueblo II phase started about A.D. 900 and lasted for approximately the next 250 years. A change in climate in the general region provided an increase in precipitation, higher water tables that affected springs and seeps, and temperatures more conducive to agriculture. The Anasazi reacted by moving from clusters of populations in strategic locations to a far-ranging decentralization. Satellite worksites and living sites fanned out from the larger concentrations of people. At no previous time had there been as many settlements spread over so much of the land.
The final stage of Anasazi occupation in Utah, Pueblo III, occurred between about A.D. 1150 and 1300. The general pattern of events is characterized by a shrinking or gathering of the dispersed communities into a series of larger villages in areas that were more defensible. Large communal plazas, tower clusters around springs at the heads of canyons, more carefully crafted building techniques, and decreased regional trade relations are indications that Anasazi society was undergoing rapid and significant changes.

Archaeologists argue about what caused these cultural shifts and the subsequent abandonment of the area by the Anasazi. Some people place the cause on environmental factors such as prolonged drought, cooler temperatures, severe arroyo cutting, and depleted soils. Others suggest that the area was invaded by nomadic hunters and gatherers, ancestors or precursors of the historic Ute, Paiute, and Navajo peoples. Pueblo mythology points to internal strife and the religious need to purify the group through migration and pilgrimage to a new land in the south. No single explanation satisfactorily answers all of the questions; however, by A.D. 1300 the Anasazi had left the San Juan River area and moved south to places coinciding with their descendants’ present locations.

A less spectacular, but just as interesting, group of Native Americans called the Fremont lived in much of southwestern, central, and northern Utah contemporaneously with the Anasazi. Their origin, shrouded in the mists of the past, does not necessarily suggest they were close relatives of their neighbors the Anasazi. Some archaeologists suggest an influence by the Mogollon people farther south in New Mexico and Arizona, while others believe the Fremont sprang from indigenous roots in the Great Basin. The earliest dated sites discovered thus far are in northern Utah. Certainly those who lived closer to the Anasazi adopted many of their architectural, economic, and social patterns. As one moves farther north, there appears to be a general decreased dependence on farming and an increased reliance on hunting and gathering of foodstuffs.

This mobile lifestyle did not encourage the same florescence in the making of fine polychrome pottery, clustering of homesites, or intricate social and religious relations suggested by Anasazi ruins. Small settlements, rarely much larger than twenty homesites, varied in construction from pithouses made of wood and dirt to slab-lined or adobe homes. Many of these were tied to seasonal use.

These Fremont structures reflected these people’s ties to their environment. Food gathering depended upon the resources of a specific area
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(such as marsh, mountain, desert, and basin habitats), indicating a people willing to travel and not totally dependent on corn. Regional variations in these patterns have led to a sub-classification system that includes southwestern Utah, central Utah, Great Salt Lake, Uinta Basin, and eastern Utah groups. (The dividing line between the Fremont and Anasazi in southeastern Utah generally follows the Colorado River.) Like the Anasazi, the Fremont culture ceased to exist in an identifiable form around the same time—A.D. 1300.

One question often raised is what type of relationship, if any, did these two groups have with the historic tribes that soon filled the vacuum left by their departure. The Navajo have the most fully developed body of lore that outlines their interaction with the Anasazi. Briefly, the Navajo speak of their relations with the Anasazi in the worlds beneath this one; relations which continued after the People emerged into this, the Glittering World. Friendly associations eventually soured, giving rise to a period of conflict that ended in the supernatural destruction of the Anasazi because they fell into disfavor with the gods. Anasazi ruins and artifacts are now generally avoided by Navajos because of the powers contained within. However, some Navajo clans today claim ancestral ties with this prehistoric culture.12
The Utes, Paiutes, Goshutes, and Shoshone, on the other hand, show respect for the Fremont peoples and their sites, and some claim a vague relationship; but they do not have as complex a knowledge and teachings about them as the Navajo do about the Anasazi. This is one area where further research can reveal a Native American perspective not found in the archaeological record.

One reason that these tentative ties have not been pursued more actively is that there is still disagreement about whether these historic cultures were ever contemporaneous with the Anasazi. Language studies have been used to provide part of this answer. With the exception of the Navajo, who will be discussed shortly, all of the tribes in Utah belong to the large Uto-Aztecan language family and are part of its Numic-speak-
ing branch. Linguists place this group’s place of origin in southern California, and most agree that by A.D. 1000 some Numic speakers were roaming into the Great Basin area of Nevada and Utah. By the year 1300 they had spread into Colorado.¹³

What may be perceived as a fairly straightforward migration of people, however, is not that simple.¹⁴ In southern California at present there are three branches within the Numic family: Western, Central, and Southern, represented by the Mono, Panamint, and Kawaiisu people, respectively. Even though these people live in close proximity, their languages have some significant variation. Each of these linguistic branches, in fact, is closely related to those languages of tribes living in the Great Basin and Colorado Plateau—a distance of more than one thousand miles. Thus, the Panamint in California share close linguistic ties with the Shoshone and Goshute, the Kawaiisu with the Utes and Southern Paiutes, and the Mono Indians with the Northern Paiutes. According to Uto-Aztecan linguist Brian Stubbs, “This shows that the three groups (Western, Central, and Southern Numic) first separated in Southern California, then their language changed separately for a few centuries before some of each of the three groups later spread out into the Great Basin.”¹⁵

How much difference in speech is there between these three Numic branches? Perhaps the best way for a non-linguist to understand this is through a comparison. Within one of the branches, say between the Southern Paiute and Southern Ute, there would be differences in dialect and rate of speech, but generally, members of the two tribes would be conversant, perhaps comparable to an American and an Englishman trying to communicate. If one compares languages of different branches, for instance the Southern Utes with the Shoshone, problems of understanding increase dramatically. Difficulty in comprehension is now similar to that of an American attempting to understand a Dutch person (both languages belonging to the same Germanic branch of the Indo-European language family). Thus, each Numic-speaking group faced a linguistic challenge if it ventured too far afield from its home territory.

The Navajo were in a totally different situation, belonging to another language family—the Athabaskan. As will be pointed out in their chapter, the Navajo are believed to have come from Canada and Alaska to the north and to have arrived in the Southwest either at the same time, or, more likely, shortly after the Numic-speaking people. In terms of history and culture, they saw themselves in opposition with their neighbors the Utes, and to a lesser degree, the Paiutes. With a few exceptions, the
Utes were considered traditional enemies and the Paiutes friends and a source of labor. The main body of Navajos generally lived south of Utah in the future states of New Mexico and Arizona. Thus, they did not maintain strong relations with any of the other Numic-speaking tribes.

By the time of first contact with Europeans, all six of Utah’s tribes were living in their general historic locations. This is not to suggest that there would be no major shifts once the white man exerted force—take, for example, the push of Northern Utes from Colorado into the Uinta Basin—but only that the tribes had adopted a specific area they considered to be theirs. As the prehistory phase of Utah’s story closes, its written history opens. This is where many of the following tribal histories start.

Each group has its own separate narrative to share. Before looking at the individual stories, one might do well to consider some of the major trends in Utah Indian history and compare them to what has happened in the broader context of Native Americans in United States history. Relevant questions include: Just how similar or how different was the Native American experience in Utah? What factors caused any differences to exist? And what lessons can be derived from the historical record?

The Spanish were the first Europeans to have a significant impact on the tribes of Utah. Their physical presence was limited to an occasional entrada of exploration from their centers to the south, the expeditions of Juan Maria Antonio Rivera (1765) and Fray Francisco Atanasio Domínguez and Silvestre Velez de Escalante (1776) being the most notable. From these expeditions came the first known written descriptions of Native American groups living within the future state. To historians, these accounts are invaluable.

But the Spaniards’ most important contribution to the Indian people came in the form of the horse. The dispersion of these animals began in the early 1600s, spreading out from New Mexico to the north and east in an arc that first introduced them onto the Great Plains and then into the Great Basin. By the early 1700s, all of the tribes in Utah had some access to the horse, some adopting it as a means of transportation, others accepting it as a source of food.

In some instances, the horse became a dividing force between various groups that had heretofore shared the same language, culture, and values. Take, for instance, the Southern Paiute and the Southern Ute or the Goshute and the Shoshone. Both pairs of Native American tribes were closely related linguistically and shared a comparable technology. The big difference between the peoples was in where they lived and what
that environment could support. To the Paiute and Goshute, who hunted and gathered over a more austere territory, the horse appeared as a tasty addition in the food quest. Indeed, in some instances the horse competed for the same plant foods utilized by these people, and so they would want to eliminate the competitor. Also, Paiute and Goshute lands in southwestern and west-central Utah did not provide sufficient grass to sustain large horse herds, while the kinds of animals that were hunted generally did not lend themselves to a chase on horseback. Compare this to the situation of the Utes Northern who hunted herds of buffalo and deer and who could draw upon the richer resources of the mountains and valleys of eastern and northern Utah and the southern portion of Idaho. They were able to adopt a lifestyle more like that of the Plains Indians—a tepee-living, buffalo-hunting, horse-wealthy warrior society.

The differences between the Numic-speaking groups may have been accentuated by the introduction of the horse, but nothing encouraged large-scale warfare between the groups. True, at times the Shoshone fought the Utes and Paiutes, and the Utes preyed upon the Paiutes as a source of slaves to trade to the Spaniards and Mexicans, but most of the traditional enemies of these groups lay to the north and east of the Rockies, home of the Blackfeet, Arapaho, Comanche, Sioux, and other Plains tribes. Relations within the confines of Utah were usually peaceful, with a number of areas serving as general use among groups for hunting, gathering, and winter encampments.

In 1821, newly independent Mexico inherited from Spain a vast territory that stretched from California to Colorado, encompassing the future state of Utah. For the next twenty years, Mexico would hold title to the land but do very little with it other than to allow trading expeditions into the territory and cast a wary eye on the influx of American mountain men traversing streams in search of beaver. By 1830 the Old Spanish Trail connected Santa Fe, New Mexico, to Los Angeles, California, the main trail entering the state near Monticello, then passing through the future locales of Moab and Green River and Sevier Valley before exiting to the south in the Cedar City region. For Native Americans this 1,100-mile route brought trading groups traveling through the valleys of the Colorado Plateau and over large stretches of the Great Basin. It served as a conduit that introduced desirable trade goods. At this point in their history, the Indians were in control of their destiny and could selectively choose what they accepted from white men. This, however, was about to change.
In 1847, a year before the area that is now Utah went from Mexican control to that of the United States, a large contingent of Mormon pioneers entered the Salt Lake Valley. Up until this time, the region had been a place through which white travelers passed but in which few remained. Now, this valley, which had been shared by both the Shoshone and Utes, came under the plow of a determined lot of people—members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. What followed will be discussed in the chapters of this book. It should be asked at this point, however, if this experience was different for the Indians of Utah, or was it simply a continuation of the pattern of the westward movement of white immigrants encountered by other tribes across the nation.

Historians are mixed in their response. Certainly there were similarities in what and how some events unfolded. For instance, once the settlement process took on a feverish pace, its impact on Native American hunting and gathering practices in the territory soon proved disastrous. In a region like the Great Basin, where resources such as grass, water, and arable land were often restricted to relatively few locations, it was only natural that both Indian and settler would utilize them. In the broadest sense, the contest for resources between the two cultures was no different from what the Powhatan confederacy faced with the first colony of Jamestown, Virginia, during the early 1600s.

One certainly cannot miss the disruption to the native cultures in the future state of Utah. Everything seemed to conspire against them, from the cattle and horses that destroyed traditional food sources, to the loss of lands important in economic and religious practices, to the intense cultural biases that colored their daily relations with the newcomers. And, as with other Indian groups, ranging from the Pequot in Connecticut to the Sioux at Wounded Knee, the Utah Native Americans would share some dark, bloody pages of history. The 1863 massacre of some 250 Northwestern Shoshone encamped on the Bear River (just over the border in Idaho) testifies to that.18

The results of this frontier period were also similar to what had transpired elsewhere. The Native Americans lost their land, were placed on reservations, and then were either ignored or pressured into accepting the tenets of white civilization. This also fostered a mixed outcome—some people choosing to walk the white man’s road while others were determined to remain true to their traditional culture. In both instances, these paths led to prolonged periods of social, economic, political, and cultural disruption in the lives of individuals.

Yet, there is another side to the Utah Indians’ story—some things
that make it unique in the annals of frontier history. The most notable difference is the presence of large numbers of members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and their settlement of the Great Basin and Colorado Plateau region. In one sense, the Mormons fled problems in their own larger society by moving to a place they considered free for the taking; then, either intentionally or unintentionally, they created an even more disheartening set of problems for the people already living here. It did not take long to set this process in motion.

Before looking at the events, one should consider certain beliefs of the Mormons. A great deal has been written about the Book of Mormon with its suggested ties between the scriptural “Lamanites” and the Indians encountered on the frontier. From a purely ideological point of view, the Mormons believed that the Indians were a remnant of a people who fell out of grace with God, were given a dark skin as a sign of their spiritual standing, and who now lived in an unfortunate condition awaiting restoration to an enlightened state.

The church’s position was that it would serve as the vehicle by which these people would be raised both spiritually and in this world. Although it was patronizing from a cultural perspective, these beliefs led to the oft-quoted sound economic Indian policy of Brigham Young that it was
“Cheaper to feed the Indians than to fight them.” Assistance, not resistance, would set the tone of relationships. Mormon men called and appointed as special “Lamanite missionaries” would learn the language, work with different Native American groups, convert, and then lead them into the fold of Christ’s church. That was the plan. What happened in practice was often at odds with this and was often met by cultural and armed resistance.

Unlike many areas of western settlement, Utah, in its earliest stages, was engulfed by a systematic flow of pioneers who looked to a central organization for leadership. The U.S. Census of 1850, taken three years after the Mormons arrived and each decade thereafter, shows just how efficient this migration was. In 1850 the white population was 11,380; subsequent ten-year periods showed dramatic increases—to 40,273 (a 254 percent increase) in 1860; 86,786 (116 percent) in 1870; 143,963 (66 percent) in 1880; and 210,779 (46 percent) in 1890. In 1847, as the advancing frontier moved to Utah in the guise of the first Mormon wagon train, there was an estimated Indian population in the future state of 20,000. While these demographic estimates on both sides are dwarfed by comparison to the influx of people during the California gold rush of 1848–49, for instance, the impact on the scarce resources was great, and Native American tribes in the Great Basin felt it. The resulting competition proved to be all too one-sided.
The movement into areas peripheral to Salt Lake City was just as inexorable and organized as the initial entrance of the Mormons into the territory. From 1847 to 1857 there were sixteen cities and towns established within territory claimed by at least one of the Utah tribes except the Navajo. Some of these towns were established for a short time only, like the Elk Mountain Mission (Moab, 1855) which soon closed because of Ute hostility; but the Moab area was permanently settled some two decades later. The end result of this movement was to push sinuous tentacles of civilization deep into the hunting and gathering grounds that had been utilized for hundreds of years by the native peoples. As their resources diminished, so too did their patience.

Mormon theology and practice joined together to form an Indian policy that allowed for variations in response from each tribe. The Paiutes, for example, would provide the largest number of Mormon converts and adopted children of all of the groups in the last half of the 1800s. The Utes, on the other hand, waged two costly wars—the Walker War (1853–54) and the Black Hawk War (1865–68)—that the struggling settlers could hardly afford. The Shoshone and Goshute followed similar forms of resistance, although lesser in their scope.

The Mormon response to these conflicts has received differing reviews from historians, some insisting that they were waged with a stern but fair justice, tempered with love and understanding. Others have argued that once the initial spark ignited the conflict, attitudes of destruction and hate found on every other frontier became prevalent in Utah—there was no difference between Mormons and non-Mormons when it came to meting out the white man’s view of justice. Readers will have to determine for themselves how they see this issue.

On a more positive side, there were times when Indians were actively sought as allies in answer to external pressures being placed on the Mormons. A prime example of this is found during the late 1850s, as the settlers of southwestern Utah became increasingly concerned with events associated with the Utah War and the advance of federal troops under Colonel Albert Sidney Johnston. As early as January 1858, Mormons met with Navajos, Utes, and Paiutes to form an alliance that could oppose federal forces if they entered southwestern Utah. While nothing concrete came of these efforts, it does indicate an interesting reversal of traditional frontier practices. Certainly the earlier Mountain Meadows Massacre, in which Mormons and (perhaps) Paiutes killed more than one hundred California-bound emigrants in this region in 1857, could show the potential effectiveness of this type of alliance.
There were, of course, more peaceful relations and a desire of many Mormons to help the Indians as their natural resources diminished. The creation of four farms in Millard, Sanpete, Utah, and Tooele Counties was designed to help move the Indians toward greater self-sufficiency as they shifted from their traditional economies. This project eventually proved to be ineffective, but it had the blessing of both federal and Mormon officials. As Utah came under increasing federal control, however, the quality of Indian relationships generally assumed the form of government relations found in other parts of the West during the nineteenth century.

In the 1870s, federal policy began to coalesce into a more consistent program of change for the Indian. The next sixty years were filled with government initiatives that first grouped and then moved Indians onto reservations with resident agents; divided various tribes among Christian denominations for proselyting purposes; encouraged farming or simple skilled labor as a way of life; sent children to reservation schools or boarding schools as part of a systematic attempt at acculturation to Western culture; and created a series of legal codes designed to erase elements of the native culture. Indian resentment, underground resistance, and a general failure of many government programs followed.

Of all of the federal programs of this era, the most damaging was the allotment period (1887–1933), during which the government attempted to replace tribal land ownership with individual ownership of land parcels and sell any remaining lands to non-Indian people. The vehicle by which this was to be done was the Dawes Severalty Act of 1887. As an incentive, Indian adults received somewhere between 40 and 640 acres, depending on the suitability of the land for farming. This property, supposedly, enjoyed a protected status that forbade its being sold by the individual for twenty-five years, at the end of which time the owner would be recognized as an American citizen. (Blanket citizenship for Native Americans was not received until 1924 under the Snyder Act.) In reality, however, large chunks of both tribal and individual lands soon were sold. One example will suffice. Between 1890 and 1933 the Uintah-Ouray Reservation lost 523,079 acres through the Dawes Act. Add to this another 973,777 acres removed in 1906 as part of the Uintah National Forest, and one can begin to understand why this era in history was so difficult for Native Americans.27

A respite from the loss of lands and assault on Utah Indian cultures occurred in 1934, when Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Collier introduced the Indian Reorganization Act. Among this bill’s accomplish-
ments was the creation of tribal governments for self-determination; the stopping of the allotment process and the restoration of some of the lost lands; the development of reservation schools that encouraged pride in Indian culture; permission to return to Indian religious practices; an improvement in health care; and various programs to foster the growth of economic self-sufficiency. For most of the tribes in Utah, the Reorganization Act could not have been better news. The Navajo, however, proved to be an exception. This was not because of the above changes, some of which they wholeheartedly accepted, but because of the loss of their animals during the livestock reduction program. This overshadowed all else for them.

While the 1930s and 1940s brought increasing benefits to Utah’s Indians in the form of greater recognition and more employment—especially associated with the war industries of World War II—the 1950s would swing the pendulum of change in the other direction. House Concurrent Resolution 108, passed in 1953 and championed by Senator Arthur V. Watkins of Utah, attempted to end the trust relationship between the federal government and the tribes, thus mainstreaming Native Americans into the dominant society. In Utah, these efforts translated into termination of the Southern Paiute Tribe and of the mixed-blood
Uintah-Ouray Utes. Other tribes were more successful in their struggle to fend off the loss of lands and community.

The foregoing discussion provides an overview of events to be encountered in the following chapters. Specific information about six different tribal experiences lies ahead, with each author emphasizing what he or she feels most important in these very complex histories. The final chapter will provide a survey of contemporary Native American events in Utah. But, in spite of the complexity and change, the reader will find the constant theme of the people’s love for the land and their desire to maintain their cultural identity. These two ideas are inseparably intertwined, threading throughout these tribal histories.