

cultural changes for the Navajo. It is difficult to see how such changes can be identified, much less appreciated—with or without the evidence the textiles provide—unless a clear picture of traditional culture before the arrival of Europeans or, at least, before the arrival of Anglo-Americans has been developed. Nor does it seem likely that one can understand the ways in which it has not changed. No such analysis of Navajo traditional culture is presented in the book and it is clear that the authors do not feel that it is important. Nonetheless, the fact is, an accurate appraisal of culture change cannot be gleaned from anything less than a systematic study of the culture itself and it is a bit arrogant to suggest that it is possible to do so, merely through the analysis of a small segment of one aspect of a complex tradition.

Although the wealth of visual and factual data offered in *Navajo Pictorial Weaving: 1880-1950* is extremely valuable and is almost certainly available nowhere else, the book is disappointing. Presentation of a wealth of visual data and a multitude of potentially interesting facts that suggest relationships between the genre and Navajo traditional culture is simply not enough.

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Eichstaedt, Peter H.: *If You Poison Us: Uranium and Native Americans*.
Santa Fe, New Mexico: Red Crane Books, 1994, ISBN 1-878610-40-6
Cloth USA \$19.95.

If you prick us, do we not bleed?...

If you poison us, do we not die?

Shylock in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* (III.i.56-57)

In this meticulously researched book, journalist Peter Eichstaedt relates another tragic chapter in the history of genocide intrinsic to the colonization and "development" of the Americas.

He introduces his work with the explanation that it tells the story of "the sacrifice of lives, families, and land" that the Diné (Navajo), Laguna Pueblo, and other Aboriginal nations of the U.S. southwest have made in the interest of "America's quest for nuclear superiority." He recounts the terrible toll of death, disease and cultural dislocation that have resulted from the development of large-scale uranium mining on the Colorado Plateau. Sacrifice

continues because, as Buffy Ste.-Marie once sang, "uranium burns a hole in forever/it just gets out of control" (*Priests of the Golden Bull*).

Eichstaedt's work traces uranium mining and its effects on the people of the Plateau back to the late 19th century, when the ore was mostly sought out because it was associated with the rare metal vanadium. In addition it was a source of radium used in physics research and as a pioneering treatment for cancer. As the gigantic mineral wealth of the Plateau became clear, its people were systematically stripped of their rights by a series of legal and semi-legal swindles culminating with the 1919 *Metalliferous Mineral Act* which allowed for leasing to prospect for minerals on many Reservations. It is one of history's ironies that around two-thirds of U.S. uranium is found under Reservations, with much of the rest occurring in the Black Hills and the Pacific Northwest—areas surrounded by Reservations.

During the inter-war era, mining on the Plateau remained rather sporadic. This changed drastically when President Roosevelt approved the Manhattan Project. This 1942 decision triggered a frantic scramble for sources of uranium around the globe. By 1945 Navajo territory had contributed one-sixth of the 6,000 tons of ore needed to produce "The Bomb;" the rest came from the Belgian-controlled Congo (4,000 tons) and Canada (1,000 tons). However, it was President Truman's 1946 creation of the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) that marked the systematic integration of the Colorado Plateau, its people and its resources, into the U.S. war machine. To feed the AEC's huge appetite for uranium, a variety of American mining companies began operating on the Plateau. Some Navajo were cautiously supportive of this, for it meant jobs for Navajo miners and small-scale contractors.

Because the ore was "low-grade" and scattered, it had to be extracted manually, making the job even more dangerous. Typically, uranium mining involved small groups of men digging in what were known as "dog holes." Miners drilled shafts, blasted the unstable ore-bearing sandstone, waited for the dust to settle, then loaded the shattered rock into trucks. One miner told Peter Eichstaedt that it was normal to work from seven in the morning until eight at night, eating underground and with nothing to drink apart from such water as dripped from the walls of the mine.

The main cause of the health holocaust which struck the Navajo through exposure to radiation and radon gas was not the nature of the uranium deposits or ignorance of their toxicity: the dangers of working with uranium had been known to scientists prior to World War II. For page after page Eichstaedt chronicles the flagrant disregard for health and safety in such areas as ventilation and minimizing contamination which marked the operation of the mines even after token protection standards were introduced

in the mid 1950s. While conditions were scandalous throughout the uranium industry, it is hard to avoid the conclusion, based upon the evidence of racist attitudes toward the Navajo displayed by mining-company officials, that the people of the Plateau were considered expendable and that no money needed to be wasted on protecting them from the deadly ore.

By the 1960s a host of medical studies had brought to light a massive epidemic of cancer and lung disease among Navajo miners and their families, victims of the dust the former brought home on their clothes. In the early 1970s, efforts to seek restitution were spearheaded by a Navajo named Harry Tome. He was helped by some principled non-Natives, including politicians and officials of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, whose efforts were met largely with obstruction and indifference from the United States government. While Eichstaedt notes sustained support for the Navajo from Stewart Udall (for a time United States Secretary of the Interior and thus the official responsible for the Bureau of Indian Affairs), he does not lose sight of the fact that the Navajo obtained some measure of compensation basically through their own efforts.

The tangled history of the Navajos' attempts to seek compensation is too intricate to be explained here; the first legal claim was lodged in 1979 and for over a decade the courts and Congress tossed responsibility back and forth between them. But the campaign's momentum was building, helped by such developments as the growth of the antinuclear movement and the suspicious death of Karen Silkwood. The *Radiation Exposure Compensation Act* (RECA) was finally signed into law on October 15, 1990. Partial justice had been achieved, to the extent that money can never compensate for death and ruined health.

RECA established a fund for disbursal on "compassionate grounds" either to miners suffering from illnesses thought to have been caused by their having worked with uranium, or to their surviving family members. The latter provision was important in that, as Timothy Hugh-Benally told Eichstaedt, his fellow workers had "started dying in the 1950s." A Navajo ex-miner, Hugh-Benally had worked for Kerr-McGee, the corporation awarded the Bureau of Indian Affairs first contract—in 1952—to mine uranium on the Navajo Reservation. By 1980, of the approximately 150 Navajo miners who had worked underground in Kerr-McGee's mine near Shiprock, New Mexico, 38 had died of lung cancer while nearly 100 of the remainder were ill.

A most interesting part of the book is its account of the efforts of the Navajo people to reclaim and decontaminate their poisoned land. Relying mainly on their own initiative and ingenuity, they have provided a model other nations can emulate.

Eichstaedt's book is effectively illustrated with both colour and black-and-white photographs and includes maps and six appendices which provide crucial primary documents. Photographs of, and interviews with, Navajo miners aged 40 to 82 very affectingly round out the telling of a history that is at once tragic and inspirational.

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Gin Das Winan: Documenting Aboriginal History in Ontario. Occasional Papers of the Champlain Society (No. 2). Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1996, ISBN 0-9693425-6-X Paper CDN \$10.00. (Available from The Champlain Society, P.O. Box 592, Station "R", Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M4G 4E1.)

This 66 page paperback is very different from the "beautifully produced and splendidly edited volumes of documentary history" (p.iii) that are usually associated with the tomes published by the Champlain Society since its inception in 1905. In making this change the Society is attempting to move away from an image that is "perceived by some as a rather stuffy, elitist, scholarly organization with restricted membership" to that of a group dedicated to expanding its educational mission, preserving documentary records, and "sponsoring small focused colloquia such as the one that produced this collection of occasional papers" (p.iv).

While this vision for the Society is new and refreshing, the subject matter is true to its original and ongoing objective of maintaining "a keen interest in the history of the First Nations of Ontario and Canada" (p.iii). This collection is based on the symposium, "Documenting Aboriginal History in Ontario," held at Walpole Island First Nation on September 23, 1994. It was sponsored by the Walpole Island First Nation community, its Heritage Centre (*Nin.Da.Waab.Jig*), and the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation.

The collection though scholarly is not dry. Each paper includes extensive footnotes and bibliographies for those who wish to pursue the topic. Numerous maps, photographs, sketches and diagrams accompany the