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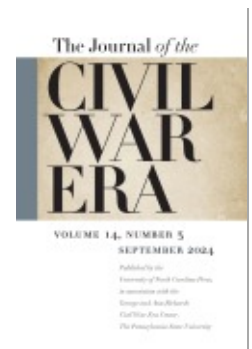
Scouting for the Bluecoats: Navajos, Apaches, and the U.S. Military, 1873–1911 by Robert S. McPherson (review)

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It is a political history that will be interesting to readers of this journal who do not normally pick up books on Native people, and Kantrowitz's use of Indigenous studies methods is accessible to nonspecialists and would be teachable to undergraduates. His explanations of kinship relations among bands, seasonal and migratory economies integrating Ho-Chunks and settlers, and Ho-Chunk political philosophies rooted in land stewardship are clear and legible. This is a book that historians of Native North America will find useful, and so will historians of the Civil War and Reconstruction.

For those of us who teach historical writing at the undergraduate or graduate level, the epilogue is a model for how to end a narrative and an outstanding example of making the "So what?" relevant. As Americans continue to debate to whom they will extend a pathway to citizenship in ways that echo the deeply white supremacist past iterations of this conflict, Kantrowitz reminds us not to ignore the complexity of that exalted status: "One response to this violent history of anti-citizenship and other forms of non-belonging is to insist that people be treated as full or equal citizens. Another response, one that takes a Ho-Chunk history of citizenship more fully into account, might be to say that such violence is part of the history of citizenship itself, rooted in the prerogatives of settlers" (167–68). Nineteenth-century Ho-Chunks recognized the protections and risks of citizenship as a tool enabling their freedom to live how and where they chose, a right at the heart of being Ho-Chunk and American.

Rose Stremmlau

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Scouting for the Bluecoats: Navajos, Apaches, and the U.S. Military, 1873–1911. By Robert S. McPherson. (Self-published, 2022. Reprint, Denver: University Press of Colorado, 2023. Pp. 248. Paper, \$24.99.)

Robert McPherson's self-published book proves an important point—it should be taken seriously by academics and anyone interested in Navajo history. Few scholars have taken the leap to explore the role that Navajo scouts played in the larger nineteenth- and early twentieth-century conflicts in the American Southwest. As the author points out, the World War II Navajo code talkers have stolen the show. Nineteenth-century

scholars focus almost exclusively on the Apache scouts, but the Navajo scouts provided just as much support to the U.S. Army as it attempted to either assimilate or “pacify” Native people in the U.S. West. McPherson supports this contention with some compelling evidence.

Navajos fought for a variety of reasons. Their service as scouts was only a small portion of their whole cosmology about warfare. The U.S. Army provided them an important lifeline in a time of constant upheavals. It did not hurt that the army paid them to locate and kill members of tribes toward which they had preexisting animosities. It was easy money in a boom-and-bust nineteenth-century economy with few opportunities for Native communities to thrive.

The trouble came in the 1880s and afterward when Navajos began policing and scouting their own. As scouts slipped between acting as U.S. Army constables and Indian police forces, they began to experience more conflict within their own communities. By the late nineteenth century, the hour was too late for the Navajo scouts to extricate themselves from the federal government. This point is well worth more study by scholars of the Civil War era owing to the supposed Reconstruction constraints on the military brought by the 1878 Posse Comitatus Act, which generally prohibits federal troops from serving as civil law enforcement. Tribal reservations seemed to be an exception to this rule, which the scouts exemplified repeatedly. Most authors also see the U.S. Indian Scouts and U.S. Indian Police as distinct units, but McPherson wisely sees them as intermixed and more complicated.

McPherson orients his book toward telling the Navajo perspective of being a U.S. Indian Scout. He primarily does so by using long, block quotations to let Navajo voices tell their own stories. While I would never let an undergraduate do this, I think McPherson is skillfully engaging in Indigenous epistemology and methodology. He lets Native people speak for themselves and without much side commentary, which is a stroke of genius.

Chapters 6 and 9 are the best examples of this approach and are a gold mine for scholars. McPherson uses block quotations in chapter 6 to let the scouts’ oral histories unfold in their own time and manner. The reader can take what they want from these stories and leave the rest. Scholars who may be unfamiliar with Indigenous history may not realize how rare these texts are; by unearthing them, we can finally hear them. Many of the scouts struggled with English proficiency and left few records behind, so these early twentieth-century oral histories provide rich and important details about their service that have been missing. Chapter 9 delves into the other

source for recording their voices: their testimonies to receive federal pensions for their military service.

The trouble with these sources is often what they do not say. The sources present military service as only good and honorable. Few veterans want to discuss the boredom, drudgery, or the occasional despicable acts in war. McPherson probes the stories and does find some indications of acts beyond the heroic narratives. For example, he relates a story from Hosteen Cly about the killing of innocent women taken captive. While this is the most extreme example of violence, McPherson adds in other more mundane details. He notes that Navajo scouts often abandoned their uniforms when out in the field because they found the uniforms too tight and not easy to run in. Navajo and Apache scouts also ran out of water in the Southwest and paid dearly for it.

Where the book falters is in providing some context from other works on the U.S. Indian Scouts and how they fit within a larger push by the army in the Reconstruction era. The author fails to mention the 1866 Army Reorganization Act, which officially birthed both the U.S. Indian Scouts and the Black regulars, popularly known as the "Buffalo Soldiers." The works of Fairfax Downey and Mark van de Logt would have helped provide some of this context but were not cited in the endnotes.¹

Another issue lies with the sources and citations themselves. While McPherson provides some endnotes, there is no commentary within them, nor is there a bibliography. The author inherited source material from a friend, V. Robert Westover, but his friend did not carefully keep track of where his sources came from at the National Archives. McPherson acknowledges this problem in his introduction and attempted to provide better citations, but this book may not be the best place from which to launch an archival trip.

Scouting for the Bluecoats contains nine chapters with an introduction, endnotes, and useful index. It also has one map and a whopping twenty-eight images. The images greatly help move the narrative along. The book is written in an engaging manner and would be of interest to anyone intent on learning more about the Navajo or the American Indian Wars. McPherson has added an important element to telling the story of the U.S. Indian Scouts by focusing on the Navajo scouts. If scholars are ever going to understand why the scouts fought, what they did, and why they matter, research will have to be done on a tribal level, as McPherson has successfully done here. His book helps us understand an overlooked history.

Ryan W. Booth

NOTES

1. Fairfax Downey, *Buffalo Soldiers in the Indian Wars* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969), and Mark van de Logt, *War Party in Blue: Pawnee Scouts in the U.S. Army* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010).

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American Burial Ground: A New History of the Overland Trail.

By Sarah Keyes. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2023. Pp. 272. Cloth, \$39.95.)

In *American Burial Ground*, Sarah Keyes examines the many facets of death, burial, and memorialization on the Overland Trail from the 1830s into the twenty-first century, showing how emigrant burials planted the seed of white possession and became “a symbolic and physical tool of territorial appropriation” (2). Keyes offers a much-needed revision to Overland Trails historiography. While the shift to the New Western History was essential, Keyes’s work demonstrates how crucial it is that scholars reexamine topics left in the past by the field.

Using travel narratives, memoirs, ethnohistory, and anthropology, Keyes provides an important corrective to histories of settler colonialism that overemphasize the state. Her work reminds us that the building of the American empire required more than bureaucracy and the army. Settlers needed to cross the plains, and some needed to die and be buried there to complete the transformation of dispossession. It was these bodies that linked the nation together in the American mind. The Overland Trail became a burial ground, and in its subsequent memorialization the land became American, rather than Indigenous. This transformation was not without resistance, as Native peoples continually inserted their voices into the conversation, using their own dead as a reminder of the violence of colonization.

Beginning her narrative in the 1830s, in chapter 1 Keyes adeptly recounts the ways in which antiremoval advocates, both Indigenous and white, used separation from burial sites in their arguments against deportation. She argues that by the time the Donner party met its terrible fate in 1846, the cultural discussion linking homeland graves to territorial expansion had already been in the works for decades, both in the resistance to removal and in the rise of Anglo sentimentality in the rural cemetery movement.