

Evaluation of the ute indian culture



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Native Americans of North America are an immense part of the history of mankind. Though natives originated in parts of our country that we now call states, these individuals are often forgotten about. But how can such significant people be forgotten? The answer involves centuries of events which include European migrants through the lands that Native Americans called home for thousands of years. Several centuries ago, Native American tribes throughout the country had no choice but to give up their land to the Europeans, losing access to areas where they hunted and gathered for as long as they had known. The Ute Indians are known as the oldest residents of Colorado. In the late 1800s, the first reservations were established in Colorado and Utah for the Ute Indian tribes (Potter). The Ute people once inhabited a large majority of Colorado, nearly half of Utah, and a small portion of Arizona and New Mexico, however; the modern-day Utes inhabit only a small portion of what was once theirs (Jefferson et al. 5). This paper examines how Ute Indian culture has changed over the last two hundred years.

Determining the first humans to live in the Americas has long been studied by archaeologists and others that study early Native American cultures. In anthropology, history and culture is often defined by artifacts that were left behind by humans. According to Potter, “ The Ute people are generally believed to have first appeared as a distinct people in AD 1000–1200 in the southern part of the Great Basin, an area roughly located in eastern California and southern Nevada.” As many Native Americans did, the Ute people migrated East as other locations were

often occupied by other inhabitants. Interestingly, the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains had not yet been populated due to the intense terrain and difficulty being able to hunt and gather. The Ute Indians are thought to have inhabited the Four Corners region of Colorado around 1300 and continued to scatter across the Rocky Mountains of Colorado for next couple centuries (Jefferson et al. 7). The Ute people continue to have a significant impact on the Four Corners region of Colorado to this day, which will be discussed below.

According to Jefferson et al., “ The language of the Utes is Shoshonean which is a branch or a dialect of the Uto-Aztecan language. It is believed that the people who speak Shoshonean separated from other Uto-Aztecan speaking groups about the time of Christ” (7). It is known that Native Americans are grouped together by their languages. The Utes spoke one language from this family, and the Aztecs spoke another. Although their languages were from the same family, these two groups of people were not able to understand each other (Doherty 4). The differences in Native American tribes and cultures are substantial.

In order to distinguish foraging groups from settled groups, anthropologists refer to these seasonal migrants or subdivisions of a tribe as bands (Bailey and Peoples 110). The Utes were concentrated into seven bands before the Europeans came and include: The Mouache band of southern Colorado and New Mexico almost to Santa Fe, the Capote band of the San Luis Valley in Colorado, the Weeminuche of valley of the San Juan River, the Tabeguache (also known as Uncompahgre) of the valleys of the Gunnison and Uncompahgre Rivers in Colorado, the Grand River Utes (also called Parianuc)

of Colorado and Utah, the Yampa band of the Yampa River Valley and adjacent land, and the Uintah Utes of the Uintah Basin in Utah (Jefferson et al. 3).

Over the centuries, these bands were combined. The Mouache and Capote now make up the present-day Southern Utes with headquarters in Ignacio, Colorado. The Weeminuches are now called the Ute Mountain Utes with headquarters in Towac, Colorado. The Tabeguache, Grand, Yampa, and Uintah now comprise the Northern Utes on the Uintah-Ouray Reservation with headquarters in the town of Fort Duchesne, Utah (Doherty 6).

The term *culture* is a huge part of anthropology. Culture is a learned, shared knowledge as well as influences of behaviors and actions of a given group of people (Baileys and Peoples 21). As mentioned above, the Utes territory once stretched from the Great Salt Lake southwest to the Four Corners region and included most of Colorado and portions of New Mexico. All food gathering was dependent on where they were located. There were some differences between what various Ute bands ate. Utes in the western part of the Ute territory tended to eat more plant foods, while those in the eastern part depended more on hunting large animals. Utes were known to migrate seasonally, also called nomadism (123). The Utes ate a long list of plants, but one major food source specifically was nuts from the pinon pine tree. There were forests of pinon trees in the higher elevations throughout the Ute range, and harvest varied year to year. Nevertheless, during pinon gathering time, the whole camp would move to the pinon forests and stay there until they were forced to descend to lower elevations by snow or cold weather (Doherty 10).

Ute men helped women with the collection of plant foods during the busiest times, however; their main activity was providing meat. One of the largest benefits of being forced to the mountainous regions of Colorado was that it was extremely game-rich (Potter). Their territory was heavy in buffalo, elk, deer, antelope, mountain sheep, moose, rabbit, and other animals. Due to easy access of several rivers and lakes, they were also able to fish (Doherty 14). The Utes were some of the toughest Native Americans in that they were able to survive and adapt to their mountainous territory. Ute culture also highly values family life and children.

All members of a camp helped in gathering food, hunting, and fishing. The Utes were known to participate in games, and dances as part of their social and religious activities (Doherty 22).

When we think of Native Americans, we don't always imagine them with horses. However, in the late 1600s after the Pueblo people in New Mexico revolted against the Spanish, the Spanish were forced to abandon their settlements and return to Mexico (Doherty 26). In their flee they left behind a large sum of their livestock, including many horses (26). The horse changed many Native Americans way of life, giving them the ability to travel greater distances, and providing overall power. Horses helped make the Utes one of the most powerful tribes in the Four Corners region (Potter).

In the nineteenth century, large events began to take place and the Utes territory slowly began to dissipate. The first real loss of their lands began in 1847 when the Mormons settled in the area of the Great Salt Lake (Doherty 28). The Mormons were wise in their choosing of their location. They chose it

because it was then still a part of Mexico, but it was also not actively occupied by the Ute or the Shoshone to the north (28). The Mormons did not occupy the land out of power, but rather had the desire to get along with their Native American neighbors (29).

The Mexican-American War was the next loss of the Utes' lands, which thus, changed and shaped their culture. The United States defeated the Mexicans and forced them to sign the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, which in turn required the Mexican government to give up its claim to New Mexico, Arizona, California, Colorado, Utah, and Nevada (Potter). This was a significant change for the Ute. Ranchers and miners were now able to bring their herds of cattle on the land that was most needed by the Utes for their hunting and gathering (Doherty 29). After living for nearly centuries in relative peace and harmony in the Great Basin, both the Ute's land and their way of life were lost over the span of one generation. Next, large mineral deposits were

spotted in the San Juan Mountains, and the US government negotiated an agreement that 3.45 million acres be given over by the Colorado Utes (Potter). This affected the Utes' territory tremendously. There were several other significant events involving the Utes and the federal government that followed. In 1887, the federal government passed the Dawes Act, " which divided the nation's Native American lands into allotments that belonged to individual tribal members. Family heads were to receive 160 acres and single individuals 60 acres, although the allotments were more haphazard. The thought was that with land of their own, Native American individuals could live more conventional American lives" (Potter). The unallotted land left

behind eventually became up for grabs to white homesteaders at low prices as with many Native Americans' land during this time.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Ute controlled most of what is now Colorado and Utah. Now, by the end of the nineteenth century, they had three small reservations. With millions of acres of their once resourceful-rich land, the Utes were not able to provide for their tribe and families anymore and have had to rely on the United States government more and more. On reservations, resources eventually become scarce. All the skills that they learned culturally were now not as useful. Regrettably, this is the same problem other Native Americans living on reservations throughout the United States face. The Natives were forced to succumb and adapt.

In modern day, poverty is one of the largest problems the Utes face. It is reported that on average, a Ute family has half the income of the average non-Indian in the United States (Doherty 30). Unemployment is huge, and alcohol abuse is a known problem in many reservations across the country. Many Utes were also forced to live in proximity on lands that were not traditionally theirs, creating a barrier among some of the people. And unfortunately, high-school dropout rates among Natives are high (Potter).

Despite all these problems, the Ute Indians are working hard to hang onto their heritage. To this day, the Utes are still known as “ The Mountain People” because of their impressive adaptability to living in the mountains, and connection with the mountains (“ The Original Coloradans”). Most of their ceremonies were banned when the Europeans were first taking over, but nowadays, the Utes are proud of their ceremonies and dances and are

bringing them back in celebration (“ Culture”). The goal of the Utes is to build their language and spiritually back up. On the Uintah Reservation, many Ute’s are learning to read and write in their native language (Jefferson et al. 37). There is now an increased awareness of the need of an education among reservations, and many are attending off-reservation schools in attempt to become better educated. Other improvements include the Ute Mountain casino to help boost the economy, as well as partnership with the BLM for projects (Potter).

The Ute Indians are truly a remarkable people in many ways. First, by their ability to adapt and survive in the elements and seasons of the Rocky Mountains centuries ago. Second, by their religious, social, and cultural background. Third, by the fact that they have been in this region of the world for some 10, 000 years. Just to list a few. The Utes have been through and have had to overcome a lot along the way. A question arose while completing my research that has me wondering; How can we (non-Indians) help and continue the improvements of the Utes’ culture? What more can we provide and contribute to show our respects to those that have been here centuries before us? I now have an immense respect for the three reservations that remain in the Four Corners region and believe that there is more that we can do. Whether they want the help may be questionable. Native American Reservations receive funding from the United States government to this day, however; I believe we can provide more for them than money. I believe

we have the ability to share and provide more resources to them, such as hunting game or harvesting crops. The original residents of this area have had enough taken from them that I believe it is a time to try and give back.

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