

## Unerasing Shoshone Testaments of Survival, Faith, and Hope

Darren Parry. *The Bear River Massacre: A Shoshone History*. Salt Lake City: By Common Consent Press, 2019.

*Reviewed by Farina King*

Although Darren Parry claims to not begrudge the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, he does not hold back when addressing the injustices and wrongs that his people have faced at the expense of the Utah-based denomination. The former Chairman of the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation's book unerases and shares the story of his people leading up to, surrounding, and following the Bear River Massacre of 1863 through his narrative and attached appendices. While several of the chapters examine the horrifying conflict between the Shoshone people and white settlers, Parry also looks at his family's close relationship with the Church and how it relates to Mormon history. As a practicing member of the Church and a child of mixed European-American and Shoshone heritage, Parry embodies the intimate entanglements of Mormon white settler colonialism and Indigenous perseverance in what is now identified as the Intermountain West.

Parry refers to a variety of sources from historical documents, photos, histories, and scholarly literature. But his most unique and unquestionable source is the oral tradition and stories of his Shoshone people and ancestors. He also shares Shoshone documented sources from oral histories and other private and personal collections to illuminate perspectives and lived experiences of his people that are often silenced and overlooked, including in the appendices. Parry follows in the footsteps of his paternal grandmother, Mae Timbimboo Parry, who advocated for Shoshone history and the acknowledgement of the Bear

River Massacre, one of the worst mass killings in American history that left “more than 400 dead children of that Great Spirit who created us all” (52). Parry and his grandmother are direct descendants of massacre survivors and Shoshone leaders.

European Americans have historically framed the Shoshone and other Indigenous peoples as thieves and lowly criminals. This irony occurred among Christians, including Latter-day Saints, who claimed that they knew the true religion that could bring salvation to Native Americans, who were viewed as “pagans” and “ignorant.” Parry also underscores the “irony that these Mormons, who were pushed from their homelands as victims of hate, would soon do the same violence to others” (30). Intentionally, these settlers prioritized land grabs, dispossession, and removal of Indigenous peoples from their ancestral homelands. Settlers coveted Indigenous land and justified their force and displacement of Indigenous peoples in myriad ways including the simplistic viewpoint that the land was “wilderness” unused by Indigenous peoples, who did not know what was good for themselves.

Parry’s Shoshone ancestors struggled to coexist with white settlers who encroached and depleted their resources. Indigenous peoples resisted and retaliated when settlers or their livestock crossed boundaries. This is the “theft” that white settlers accused Shoshone people of committing, which they used to justify “punishment” such as a Latter-day Saint bishop Henry Ballard did when he wrote: “‘The Lord raised up his foe [referring to Colonel Patrick Connor, leader of the Army] to punish them [the Shoshone] without us having to do it’” (31). The punishment, however, was an excuse to subjugate and demoralize the Shoshone.

In the Massacre at Boa Ogoi, Bear River, the US Army was the butcher and executer of this “punishment” and violence to crush the hope and influence of Indigenous peoples. Connor’s militia tortured, raped, and attacked Shoshone people in a genocidal affront. Yet, this travesty is remembered as a “battle” to this day. Some communities

have started to revise the narrative, thanks to the work of Parry and others who have called out the human injustice and crime of massacre and genocide, but there are still claims that the violence turned from a “battle” to a “massacre.” It was never a battle. It was a last-ditch effort of desperate Shoshone men and warriors protecting their families and loved ones.

Parry points out the different monuments that have been erected, never by Shoshones but by Mormon settler descendants, marking in stone a distorted history. Only recently, in 2021, did the International Daughters of Utah Pioneers replace the plaque of the “Battle of Bear River” with one of the “Bear River Massacre.” While we debate history and monuments, Parry’s book exemplifies how monuments are not history. They are representations and appropriations of history for propagating certain values of the groups that create and initiate the monuments. They reflect the respective groups that install them—their values, their sources, and their empowering stories.

Sagwitch, Darren Parry’s ancestor and a massacre survivor, nearly begged to join the Church—the same church in which members called for the extermination and punishment of his people. The missionary George Washington Hill initially turned him away, but he later baptized him and 101 of Sagwitch’s people in Boa Ogoi, distinguishing them as Latter-day Saint converts (68). Parry refers to Sagwitch’s dream and prophecy that he would join the Church (67). Some scholars have dismissed this telling of the dream and Sagwitch’s conversion, but oral tradition must be considered and respected.

Even though Shoshone converts like Sagwitch and his family dedicated hours of labor to building the Logan Temple and paid tithing for its construction, and even though massacre survivor Yeager Timbimboo spoke at a general conference in 1926, Latter-day Saints continued to wrong the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation into the 1960s by evicting them from their homes in Washakie, Utah, and only compensating them with fewer than two hundred acres (124). They also set

fire to Shoshone homes during this period to dispossess them of their land (87).

In the appendices, a number of the testimonials include references to how those of Washakie were othered or marked as different, even outcasts, among diverse Shoshone peoples and communities because they were “Mormons” without a land base (126). Parry now embarks on many great journeys with and for his people. As readers, we follow and learn from his connections and sources of these intimate ties that formed through the violence and struggles between different peoples who converged at Boa Ogoi and the ancestral homelands of the *Newe*—Shoshone. And, for many of us, this is the first time that we hear a Shoshone, *Newe*, perspective.

FARINA KING {king64@nsuok.edu}, a citizen of the Navajo Nation, is associate professor of history and an affiliate of Cherokee and Indigenous Studies at Northeastern State University, Tahlequah, Oklahoma. She is the author of *The Earth Memory Compass: Diné Landscapes and Education in the Twentieth Century*. She is currently writing about Latter-day Saint Native American experiences between the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century.

