

### The Newspaper Warrior: Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins's Campaign for American Indian Rights, 1864-1891

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## Review

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**Carpenter, Cari M. and Sorisio, Carolyn.** *The Newspaper Warrior: Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins's Campaign for American Indian rights, 1864-1891.* University of Nebraska Press, \$75.00 ISBN 9780803243682

Asserting Minority Rights through the Mainstream Press during Reconstruction

While the post-Civil War era saw countless, small, alternative publications emerge to serve the interests of marginalized populations, there are fewer examples of individuals and groups who successfully used the mainstream press to further their own particular causes. Editors Cari M. Carpenter and Carolyn Sorisio argue that Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins was the exception—indeed, they argue that Winnemucca successfully negotiated her own self-presentation and the rhetoric surrounding American Indians in newspapers of the time, creating a form of resistance to stereotypical representations and prevailing prejudice. Given the persistence of anti-Indian ideology, this is an ambitious argument. But readers can evaluate the record themselves, because this anthology presents a carefully curated collection of newspaper articles, letters to the editor, editorials, and other content written either by or about Winnemucca from 1864-1891.

Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins was a Northern Paiute author and lecturer, who was most active in the years 1879-1887. Her primary work, *Life Among the Piutes: Their Wrongs and Claims*, was published in 1883. While that book was a significant achievement in providing an account of Winnemucca and the life of American Indians, Carpenter and Sorisio claim that the newspaper accounts in their collection provide a more extensive profile of Winnemucca and illustrate more completely her performative and rhetorical strategies. They present their argument in an extended introduction that provides a brief biography of Winnemucca, a discussion of the media's role in creating cultural understandings, and examples from this archive that illustrate Winnemucca's ability to manipulate rhetoric and representations as a form of resistance. Sorisio

has explored the latter idea in her previous publications, such as her article in a 2011 volume of *Studies in American Indian Literatures* (23, no. 1). She is a professor of English at West Chester University of Pennsylvania and the author of *Fleshing Out America: Race, Gender, and the Politics of the Body in American Literature, 1833-1879*. Carpenter is an associate professor of English at West Virginia University and the author of *Seeing Red: Anger, Sentimentality, and American Indians*. Both authors are scholars of American Indian history and of the cultural power of the media as a forum both for ideological perpetuation and resistance.

This collection may be read in the way the editors suggest—that is, as testament to Winnemucca’s ability to confound popular, but misguided, notions of American Indians in this era. It is also an important collection in that these newspaper accounts supplement other biographical accounts of Winnemucca’s life. For instance, the articles collected here provide more information about Winnemucca’s travels, her relationships, and her marital history than may be found in other works. Beyond the insight into Winnemucca and her life and work, the newspaper accounts in this collection also provide source material regarding events of the day, such as the Bannock War of 1878, about other influential figures of the day such as Elizabeth Peabody, and about the Northern Paiute Indians. Nineteenth-century newspapers contain not only evidence of events but also editorial content that is both compelling and insightful regarding the values and opinions of the time, and readers will find ample material here to suit both purposes.

It is important to note, however, that newspaper accounts must be read critically. For instance, had Winnemucca “imbibed a little too freely of the exhilarating cordial” (p. 67)? Was she “unbound, unwashed and uncombed” (p. 41)? Or was she “the heroic Indian woman ... said to be very great in her tribe and among the friendly Indians” (p. 77)? Carpenter and Sorisio acknowledge the subjective nature of the texts presented. On page 15, they write, “We train a critical eye on these newspaper articles ... reading them not as unfiltered truth, but as evidence of the complex representations that she [Winnemucca], in turn, negotiated.” In addition, they rightly note on page 16 that newspaper accounts were “influenced by the dominant culture’s assumptions regarding racial hierarchy and faith in the nation’s manifest destiny.” Especially in the late nineteenth century, as a nation grappled with its identity and its diverse population, the press was instrumental in cultivating and perpetuating notions of cultural identity and prevailing ideologies. The rise of alternative media at this

time is testament to the mainstream media's embrace of conventional, or popular, ideas that may have been commercially successful but often didn't reflect the needs of a diverse population in terms of class, gender, or race and ethnicity. Readers of this collection have access to the primary sources both of the prejudice and, perhaps, of the resistance to that prejudice. They can also decide for themselves if an editor's words are patronizing and colonialist or if Winnemucca is effective in her rhetorical strategies.

The archive is presented chronologically in three parts: West, 1864-1882; East, 1883-1884; and West, 1885-1892. According to the editors, selection decisions were based on three priorities: consistency, reader accessibility for further research, and fidelity to the original text. The entries are referenced with endnotes, rich with context and analysis. So the presentation here is reversed from other scholarly works that use newspaper accounts to support particular arguments or interpretation. While some readers might prefer more analysis or perhaps more arguments supported by and referenced to the newspaper accounts, the value here is in the carefully curated archives which invite one's own analysis and interpretation of the source material. In the end, Winnemucca speaks for herself, which makes this collection a truly valuable addition to the scholarship and literature about the American Indian experience in the latter decades of the nineteenth century.

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