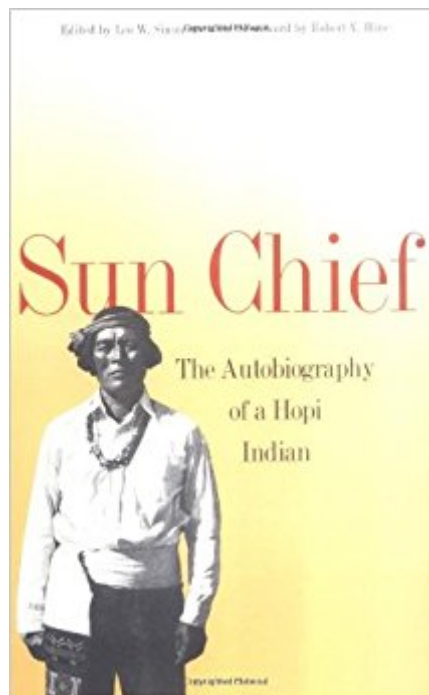




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Sun Chief: The Autobiography Of A Hopi Indian (The Lamar Series In Western History)



Synopsis

The story of Don C. Talayesva, the Sun Chief, who was born and reared until the age of ten as a Hopi Indian, and then trained as a white man until he was twenty. Although torn between two worlds and cultures, he returned to Hopiland and readopted all the tribal customs. This is his autobiography, written for Leo Simmons, a white man who was a clan brother.

Book Information

Series: The Lamar Series in Western History (Book 8)

Paperback: 488 pages

Publisher: Yale University Press (September 10, 1963)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0300002270

ISBN-13: 978-0300002270

Product Dimensions: 8 x 5.2 x 1 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 20 customer reviews

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Customer Reviews

Great book w/lots of details

It's a little ironic that they listed the "author" of the book as Leo W. Simmons when this is actually an autobiography of Don Talayesva. Nonetheless, it's an excellent account of the life of a Hopi man during a time of great change. Talayesva was born in 1890 and the book covers his life up to 1940. This was a period of great change for the Hopi in the pueblo of Oraibi. Talayesva lived through the great social conflict that caused the split of the village and the aftermath of that split, as the traditional ways at Oraibi were steadily eroded by the white Christian government, settlers, tourists, and missionaries. Talayesva's account of his life is an important and lasting record of the hard life of the traditional Hopi people. Unfortunately, nobody has taken the time to complete the account of Talayesva's life and I was left with a sense that the story is unresolved. Surely, he had another 10 to 40 years of life left after the end of the book, but that isn't covered here.

Sun Chief, Don Talayesva, reappears as "Ned", the author's main informant and translator, in Mischa Titiev's THE HOPI INDIANS OF OLD ORAIBI (U. Michigan Press, 1972) and his 1933-34 fieldwork diaries.

Outstanding!!! Eye witness account!!! Time to listen and learn!!!

Good book.

I got the book for a class assigned reading and I enjoyed it. You can tell it was just a flow of all of his memories and stories.

Nuvawungwa Orayvi Tuptsiw-ni-'yung-qa-m Kyaala'at Kyaatata'ypi

This was the first Book by a Hopi person I read. It was also the first book by a Hopi person published. Mr. Talayesva was actually Hopi-Tewa, Tewa being a group of Native "Pueblo" (pre-Spanish native sedentary village dwellers) who were asked by Hopi to come and help defend their northern boundaries from Ute invasions (successfully), and thus assigned lands and invited to settle and intermarry. Talayesva grew up in the village of Oraibi, and discusses his life from the story of his birth, his earliest recollections as a boy growing up, a young man initiated as a Hopi, and as a grown man. Very important, his experiences in every day life in Oraibi, experiences in ceremonial life and in the US Gov't mandated indian schools. I think what kept me riveted to this book was Don Talayesva's honesty and lack of manufactured drama. He begins by recounting his mother's pregnancy with him, how determined she was that he be healthy and resemble her husband, how she went to the medicine man when she felt pain and how he gave her a remedy to bind what he thought were twin babies into a single one (which turned out to be Don). The care his parents and relatives took before, during and after his birth. Talayesva describes the many family and community elements which bind the Hopi village together, and how he came to understand this as a young man through experience and being initiated through ceremonies. As a young man Talayesva sometimes gets into trouble and is corrected by his parents or other elders. His community's influence is important, but seems to wane as he begins to attend Anglo-run schools around 1900, where the traditional religious values of his culture clash with those enforced by missionaries and other teachers paid by the US Government. While the ethics of Hopi and Anglo are not that different, the dogma is, and school leaders strived to turn the Hopi children into something

they were not, leaving them stranded between the culture of their parents they have been raised with and that of the missionaries and a new government with little extra guidance. Talayesva describes his exposure to other Native Americans away at Sherman Indian School in Riverside, his return to Oraibi etc., after a bit of confusion and settling back in clarifying his view of himself as a Hopi man. It is clear throughout the book that there is no attempt to misdirect or lie, this is a Hopi man telling about his life without embellishing. Talayesva speaks honestly about his experiences without regard to prudishness or how others might judge him based on modern Anglo-Christian religious values. He does however show a clear sense of awareness of his own shortcomings and admits when he failed to live up to the ideals of a Hopi man's life. There is a lot of sorrow in Mr. Talayesva's later life, it is impossible not to sympathize and wish things could have been less painful for him. Albert Yava (also Hopi-Tewa) in his book "Big Falling Snow" expresses embarrassment over some of the more prurient details Talayesva relates about his youth (pg 81) and suggests the Yale editor dragged these stories out of him, but on the whole this does not seem to be the case. Talayesva's narrative is arranged in a sensible way one would expect of any human who had not chosen (or been taught) to "sell" (or protect) himself by omitting events which weren't necessarily laudable. Moreover this was arranged as an academic work, not a best-seller tell all. This autobiography resulted from longhand-recorded recollections kept in Don Talayesva's diary. Talayesva met with Yale editor Leo Simmons in Oraibi, and also during Talayesva's stay in New Haven for two weeks in March 1941, reading through and editing together his autobiography. It seems the editor did everything possible to obtain an accurate script which the author approved of. If it isn't a perfect model. This is the story of a human which reminds us to take care of one another and be patient.

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