The Network of Resistance:
Northern Paiute Opposition to Imprisonment at Yakama Reservation, 1878-1884

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Abstract:

After the Bannock-Paiute war ended in 1878, General Howard and the US army led approximately 550 Northern Paiute Indians on a trail of tears from Oregon Great Basin to the Yakama Reservation in southern Washington with intent for them to remain there permanently as prisoners of war. While at Yakama, the Northern Paiutes faced discrimination from the Yakama Indians as well as mistreatment by Indian Agency that failed to provide adequate food, shelter, and clothing to the Paiutes. The Northern Paiutes refused to accept internment in Yakama and engaged in resistance, primarily through civil disobedience, in attempt to return home to Oregon. This paper investigates the nature of the Northern Paiutes’ resistance while at Yakama between their arrival in 1878 and departure in 1882. The current understanding of this history focuses on Sarah Winnemucca’s lectures and activism, and the role of the individuals in the Department of War and Department of Interior in advocating for the Northern Paiutes. I demonstrate that the Northern Paiutes refused to be passive victims, and that their resistance was one of the primary reasons for their return home as well as the Yakama Indian Agent James Wilbur’s resignation. I introduce a resistance network framework, which better accounts for the plurality of actors and motives. I use primary sources mostly in the form of correspondence between government officials, and partly from the existing body of secondary literature.

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“From the stories I heard from my grandpas from Umatilla, our past people didn’t look at boundaries. There were areas that overlapped. If they were warring tribes, one tribe stayed out if they knew the other tribe was there. As they left, they’d move in and use the same area, too. There were no definitive lines. It was hard for my ancestors that were on the Snake River. When the Homestead Act was made and all that land along the Snake River that the farmers were buying up and the ranchers were buying up for their cattle herds and for farming, they were telling those pockets of tribal people: “You can’t stay here.” They sent soldiers to bring in those groups of people who were not on the [Yakama] reservation, [saying]: “You have to move to Yakama, where we can protect you.” But our people were [wondering]: “What kind of protection are they giving? All the people in Yakama, or even in Warm Springs, or in Umatilla reservation — all the people on the reservation are starving. They’re sick, and we’re not sick, and we’re not starving. We’re still eating roots, we’re still eating wild game, and yet you’re trying to make us go there.” And, then, the fences went up, the barbed wire fences. Our people didn’t know what they were. In southeast Oregon, my dad’s people cut them down because that was changing the migration of the mule deer. They cut the fences down so that they could get through them and get into their root areas, or hunting areas. They didn’t know what a fence was. The land was never meant to be cut up to be owned by anybody. It was a resource given to our people by the Creator, to have forever.” – Wilson Wewa

In 1878, the United States military under the authority of General Howard rounded up over 500 Northern Paiute men, women, and children from southeast Oregon and marched them to the Yakama Reservation in south-central Washington. By the end of 1884, all of the Northern Paiute had returned to Oregon, despite the efforts of Howard and the Department of the Interior. This story covers a brief but foundational period in Northern Paiute and Oregon history. The Northern Paiute internment at Yakama

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1 Jr. Rex Buck and Wilson Wewa, “‘We Are Created from This Land’: Washat Leaders Reflect on Place-Based Spiritual Beliefs,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 115, no. 3 (2014): 313, doi:10.5403/oregonhistq.115.3.0298.
offers a case study in the complexity of the settling and unsettling of the Pacific Northwest. As washat leader and oral historian Wilson Wewa indicates, the removal to and imprisonment at Yakama has important connections to the history of colonialism, tribal sovereignty, resource management, and land ownership in Oregon. Following the lead of many native and non-native historians, culture keepers, archivists, and museum curators in Oregon, I present a narrative that highlights the nuanced intricacy of colonialism in Oregon and centers the Northern Paiute as the primary actors in their history.

The Northern Paiute tribe have received very little attention in the study of Oregon history. This is in spite of the fact that their ancestral lands span the largest geographic breadth of Oregon tribes, their longevity of residence in Oregon, and their rich cultural history. Most of the work – academic and otherwise – on the Northern Paiute tribe has centered on Sarah Winnemucca, a Northern Paiute woman who collaborated with the United States army in a war against some bands of her tribe and later wrote and lectured across the country on behalf of the Northern Paiutes. The remainder of the historical literature on the Northern Paiute appears as chapters or mentions in broader tribal histories and military history of the conflicts between the Northern Paiute and United States. More often than not, the Northern Paiutes’ history appears as a footnote in other stories of Oregon’s past. Take for example William G. Robbins’s recent article about the recent Malheur Wildlife Refuge occupation by an extralegal militia the Oregon Historical Quarterly. Robbins details the history of Euro-American landownership and ranching in Oregon, but only makes one mention of the Northern Paiute. He writes, “Beginning with the U.S. Army’s removal of the Northern Paiute people to sub-marginal locations during the late 1860s, the county has been the setting for struggles over the control of land and water, with geography playing a significant role

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in land-ownership patterns.”\textsuperscript{4} Robbins does not turn his attention to the involvement of the Northern Paiute in these struggles despite the fact that the Burns Paiute tribal leaders were at the forefront of the dialogue about the Malheur occupation.\textsuperscript{5} Their presence in the conflict contradicts Robbins’s exclusion of the Northern Paiute by beginning his story with their “removal to sub-marginal locations,” likely referring to the Yakama affair. Robbins is certainly not alone in this characterization; other works also treat the Yakama affair as the end of the Northern Paiute history when their agency was fully stripped from them by an unsurmountable colonial force.\textsuperscript{6}

I argue that rather than marking the final defeat of the Northern Paiutes, the Yakama affair is a powerful moment of Northern Paiute resistance to settler-colonialism. Furthermore, this history resists binary characterization with Northern Paiute and Euro-Americans as homogenous actors in constant opposition. Rather, I embrace a model of resistance that recognizes a plurality of actors each with their motivations and goals, allowing for alliances between colonizers and natives and conflict within the tribe. This history will offer a lens into the broader context of Northern Paiute and Oregon history and seeks to open a conversation about the Northern Paiutes’ unique but familiar experience with colonialism.

Understanding Northern Paiute history is important in its own right, but can offer further context for the history of natural resource management, semi-arid environments, cattle ranching, cultural confluence in the West, and other interests of Oregon historians.

The Northern Paiute tribe used three tactics in their resistance. First, many of them simply escaped. For the most part, escapes had to occur quietly and in small numbers to be successful. Second, they engaged in civil disobedience, avoiding any symbolic gesture indicating they accepted Yakama as their legitimate home. Third, the prisoners capitalized on a stigma of fear surrounding the Northern Paiute after the “Snake” and Bannock Wars (through threat of property destruction or violence, both explicit and

\textsuperscript{6} This is largely because of the emphasis given to Sarah Winnemucca who advocated on behalf of the Northern Paiutes during the affair.
implicit). They benefited from strong leadership at Yakama, a network of Northern Paiute advocates outside of Yakama, and alliances with some United States government actors. I will first provide context for understanding the history of the Northern Paiute-United States relations. Then I will discuss the resistance upon arrival and how quickly the Yakama affair became a problem for high ranking government officials. Once it entered the national dialogue, native and nonnative advocates began to argue on behalf of the prisoners at Yakama. Finally, I will detail the civil disobedience at Yakama and the final escapes.

Context

To fully understand the Northern Paiute internment at Yakama and their resistance, it is important to contextualize the story in a broader history of Oregon and colonialism. The internment and resistance at Yakama resulted from intersecting phenomena in Northern Paiute history: The devastating and genocidal “Snake War”; their status as non-treaty signers; and the complexity behind their homelands and the short-lived Malheur Reservation. The Snake War was a foundational period in Oregon history lasting from 1855 to 1868. Ironically, this conflict began with the Treaty of Middle Oregon in 1855, which signed away Northern Paiute land in the present-day Warm Springs reservation to a number of Columbia River tribes. When the United States military further provoked the Northern Paiute and some of the northern bands retaliated with raids, the Warm Springs tribes joined the US army against the Northern Paiute. What began as raids over contested land evolved into a genocidal war against the Northern Paiute, whom the US called the “Snake Indians” to dehumanize them and justify their “extermination.” The war, which resulted in the death of two thirds of the Oregonian Northern Paiute tribe, finally ended in 1868 when Old Chief Winnemucca – father of Sarah Winnemucca – agreed to a peace deal with the United States. Although the terms of peace allowed the Northern Paiute to stay on their ancestral lands, the Bureau of Indian Affairs insisted that they be forced to a reservation. Because the leaders protested being removed to Klamath or Siletz reservations, President Grant established the Malheur Reservation in southeastern Oregon by executive order. The Northern Paiute did not sign a treaty with the United States

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7 This is a controversial point in Oregon’s native history under ongoing debate.
with the peace deal nor the establishment of the reservation. Their status as a non-treaty tribe has been a burden, often denying them the same power as other tribes to negotiate as a sovereign state.

While it was a promising resolution on paper, in time, the Malheur Reservation brought even more conflict between the Northern Paiutes and the white settlers. The first agent of the reservation – William Rinehart – sought to drive the Northern Paiutes off of the reservation to open up the land for more white settlers. He insisted that the reservation was not Northern Paiute land and deprived them of resources, forcing them into abject poverty. This period of deepening animosity and tension also saw the rise of strong leadership. Chiefs of various bands began to challenge the white settler authority, such as the spiritual lead Oytes and tribal band leaders Leggins and Egan. Furthermore, Sarah Winnemucca, who had been raised by a white family in Nevada, began her political advocacy for the Northern Paiutes at this time.

In 1878, a number of Paiutes including Egan and Oytes’s bands joined the Bannocks in their uprising, which surmounted to a brief and devastating war for the Northern Paiutes. Rather than push the white settlers away as intended, the war gave anti-Indian colonizers such as General Howard—a military leader of this conflict—a reason to punish the Paiutes, remove them from their homeland, and cede their land to miners, ranchers, and farmers. This war not only polarizing for the relations between the Northern Paiute and United States government, but also within the Northern Paiute tribe. While many Northern Paiute people did join in arms with the Bannock Indians, including the band of the spiritual leader named Oytes, others remained neutral. The war ended with the killing of the leader Egan, and notably with Sarah Winnemucca acting as an informant to the US Army. Lasting just over two weeks, this unusually short war had devastating consequences for the Northern Paiute. As swiftly as the Malheur Reservation had been signed into existence, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs terminated it. Without a treaty, the Northern Paiute could not challenge this maneuver. In November 1878, the Secretary of Interior and Secretary of War ordered the Paiutes who participated in the war to the Yakama Reservation in Southern Washington. Of the Paiutes brought to Yakama, less than half—primarily from the band of the leader

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known as Oytes—had fought in the Bannock War. A majority of the others were members of the Tagatoka (tube-eater) band under the leadership of Leggins. Historian James Gardner calls the 350-mile journey from Camp Harney to Yakama the Paiute Trail of Tears. Of the 543 Paiutes that left from Camp Harney in early January, only 510 arrived at Yakama a month later. Many froze to death on the trek, which crossed two mountain ranges. They arrived at Yakama starving, devastated, starving, underclothed, and demoralized. At Yakama, the Paiutes faced the hardship at the hands of the Yakama Reservation Agent James Wilbur and the “civilized” Yakama Indians. Wilbur was a devout Christian and saw himself as a missionary. The Paiutes were already skeptical of these “missionary” agents, like William Rinehart at the Malheur Agency, and criticized Wilbur for being “another Rinehart.” They were eager to leave from the start, and Sarah Winnemucca soon departed from Yakama to tour on a lecture series across the country.

Arrival and Resistance

Almost as soon as they arrived, the Northern Paiute were determined to return to Oregon. In the first winter at Yakama, 24 Paiute escapees arrived at the Warm Springs reservation to the surprise of the agent there, John Smith. At Warm Springs, they met another 25 Paiutes who had been living there for some years. Soon after, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Hiram Price ordered Smith not to provide any supplies to these escapees and insist that they return to Yakama, but the escapees were able to subsist through hunting for the next few years. Denying supplies and aid had been a common method of the federal government to exert control over the Paiute since the end of the Snake War and the establishment of Malheur.

9 Ibid., 739.
10 A map of this is included in Appendix A.
11 James Gardner, Oregon Apocalypse: A Hidden History of the Northern Paiutes, forthcoming, 745-49. This work is frequently cited, but the page numbers listed in this paper are subject to change under revision of the book. Contact the author of this paper for assistance locating a particular citation.
12 It’s unclear exactly when they arrived. The earliest and most specific date is Smith’s reference to an order from Price in February 1880. In his letter dated December 20, 1881, Smith says the Paiutes were not sent back immediately due to the “lateness of the season.”
13 John Smith to J. H. Wilbur, 20 December 1855. Office of Indian Affairs, Correspondence and Records of the Yakama Indian Agency (Formerly I6), 1870-1910. [This collection is hereafter referred to as OIA. Additionally, the title of letters lists the writer and recipient as they were written in the letter.]
14 Ibid.
While relatively small and seemingly inconsequential, these two dozen escapees became the subject of a battle of control between outside Northern Paiute and various government actors and provided an early indication to the Northern Paiute that they could effectively escape from internment. In the wake of the escape in spring 1880, Agent Wilbur insisted that the Northern Paiute were content at Yakama with adequate housing and an eager attitude towards work.\footnote{James H. Wilbur to R. E. Trowbridge, 22 May 1880, \textit{Report of the Secretary of War}, 133.} Despite receiving minimal and inadequate supplies at Warm Springs, the 24 escapees were determined to stay. They repeatedly told Agent Smith that they would rather stay at Warm Springs without supplies than go to Yakama and receive provisions from the Government. Further, they demanded that Smith allow their families to join them at Yakama. Smith wrote to Wilbur expressing his inability to understand the persistence of the Northern Paiute in their refusal to return to Yakama.\footnote{John Smith to J. H. Wilbur, 20 December 2015, \textit{Office of Indian Affairs, Correspondence and Records of the Yakama Indian Agency (Formerly I6), 1870-1910}. [This collection is hereafter referred to as OIA]}

Smith also acknowledged the likelihood that the Paiutes would only further resist returning to Yakama. “As they ran off from your reservation,” he wrote “it is not unlikely some of them some of them may steal away from this reservation before spring now that they know they must return to your agency…and some may run off unknown to me or my Indians until sometime afterwards.”\footnote{Ibid.} In the early summer of 1881, Chief Natchez requested that the Northern Paiutes at Warm Springs be allowed to join him and the other Paiutes at Fort McDermitt. He estimated an “approximately sixty” Paiutes at Warm Springs indicating knew about the escapees at Yakama and was attempting to assist them in avoiding the jurisdiction of Price.\footnote{R. F. Bernard to Assistant Adjutant General, 28 June 1881, \textit{Report of the Secretary of War}, 137-8. Smith said a total 49 Paiutes were at Warm Springs. Either way, Natchez knew that there were a few dozen more than the 24 that arrived after the Bannock War.} Just a few months after Natchez’s request, in fall 1881, Superintendent of Indian Affairs Price sent a letter to Smith ordering him to send the Paiutes back to Yakama immediately. Because of a miscommunication and slow response from Price, the message was not clearly conveyed to Smith until December. Smith requested authorization to provide the Paiutes with supplies so they could survive through the winter, to which Price agreed. The Warm Springs Agent Smith found himself powerless to fulfil the Natchez’s request nor Price’s order, and instead
attempted to negotiate a medium between the two; in the end the people were able to remain at Warm Springs, but with minimal government aid.

Wilbur’s determination to keep the Paiute people at Yakama was largely a result of outside pressure. He received letters from General Howard, officials from the Department of Interior, and settlers from and around the Malheur area all expressing desire to keep the Northern Paiute prisoners at Yakama. In spring 1880, Curry, a man from Canyon City, wrote to Wilbur warning that the white settlers there would meet a return of the Paiutes with armed resistance.\textsuperscript{19} The same day, General Howard wrote to Wilbur expressing concern that if they returned they would starve and that the white settlers would be hostile towards them.\textsuperscript{20} A week later, Wilbur wrote to Commissioner Trowbridge expressing his desire to keep the Paiutes at Yakama, citing the concerns brought up by Curry and Howard. He briefly acknowledged their frustration with being held at Yakama for so long: “While in this restless, uncertain state of expectation it could hardly be expected they would manifest much interest in my plans for their future.”\textsuperscript{21} Wilbur then asked if the department had reached a verdict. On June 30, 1880, Trowbridge replied to Wilbur stating, “All reports show that if the Piutes\textsuperscript{22} attempt to march across the country from Yakama to Malheur, it will be attended with great risk of life along the way; consequently the Secretary advises that you hold them at Yakama at the present,”\textsuperscript{23} thus reversing the order of the Schurz letter.

It is important to note Wilbur and Price’s narrative about the Northern Paiute being perfectly content at Yakama, and it is worth unpacking to understand the ideological forces that the Northern Paiute were resisting at Yakama. On the surface, this narrative had the immediate goal of justifying the internment at Yakama and Wilbur’s request to force the escapees back to Yakama. However, this claim begged the same question of Wilbur’s contemporaries as it does for the modern reader: if the Northern Paiute were content at Yakama, why were they escaping? The glaring contradiction calls for deeper

\textsuperscript{21} James H. Wilbur to R. E. Trowbridge, 22 May 1880, \textit{Report of the Secretary of War}, 133.
\textsuperscript{22} This was the most common spelling of “Paiute” at the time.
analysis. It was in part because of the fear of the threat of the Northern Paiute returning to a hostile settler populace and the potential for future conflict. However, if this were the only component, the BIA officials would have simply left it at that. Wilbur and his superiors were wholly convinced of the aptitude of the Christian civilizing project. They believed they could quickly convert the Northern Paiute into an agrarian, Christian people in the immediate aftermath of a bitter war against settlers. This narrative that the Northern Paiute were content at Yakama sought not only to force the escapees to Yakama, but also to justify the ideological underpinnings of the settler-colonial apparatus that had led to the Bannock War and forced removal. The escape controversy served as a platform for the Secretary of Interior and other officials to justify imprisoning the Northern Paiute at Yakama. Further, the capacity of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Department of the Interior to keep the Northern Paiute at Yakama was a matter of proving the capacity of the “civilizing” and Christianizing forces of settler colonialism.

Native Advocacy

While the Paiutes were beginning to escape Yakama, Sarah Winnemucca was touring the country contesting the BIA’s narrative about the Northern Paiute. While she aided General Howard and the army in settling the Northern Paiute uprising, she could not stand the injustice her people faced in the immediate aftermath. After raising awareness with lectures in San Francisco and other major cities, she gained enough publicity to organize a meeting with Secretary of the Interior Carl Schurz and President Rutherford Hayes. She convinced Secretary Schurz to send tents to the Northern Paiutes at Yakama and to allow the Paiutes to leave. Schurz wrote a letter to Agent Wilbur stating “those of the Pi-Utes [sic.], who in consequence of the Bannock war, went to the Yakama Reservation and whoever may desire to rejoin their relatives, are at liberty to do so, without expense to the government for transportation.”

Winnemucca eagerly departed for Nevada to share the order with the Paiutes there before going to Yakama to inform the Northern Paiute prisoners.

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24 The reader should note that there was turnover in government positions such as the Secretary of Interior during the period this paper covers. When it is not relevant to the experience of the Northern Paiute at Yakama, I do not elaborate on the change in position.
25 Gardner, Oregon Apocalypse: A Hidden History of the Northern Paiutes. Schulz’s letter is included in its entirety in Appendix B.
Winnemucca and her sister arrived at Yakama in spring 1880 with the letter from Secretary Schurz. To her surprise, Schurz did not inform Wilbur of his order. By her account, when she told him about the letter, Wilbur replied, “Sarah, your people are doing well here, and I don’t want you to tell them of this paper or read it to them. I will give you fifty dollars and write to Washington and see if they will keep you here as interpreter.” He said she would only receive her pay from previous work as interpreter if she agreed not to share the letter with Paiutes. She made no promises.

About a week later, the Leggins and the other prisoners demanded that she meet with them. When she arrived at their encampment, Leggins stood up in front of the Paiutes and, having heard rumors of Schurz’s letter, condemned Sarah Winnemucca for not sharing it. When she read the letter to them, the Northern Paiutes were overcome with joy, and Leggins said they would prepare to leave immediately and presented a choice to all the Paiutes to stay at Yakama or leave with him. Winnemucca recalled their response: “Every one cried, ‘Why ask us: We are all dying off here. Who wants to stay here? We will all go,—yes we will all go if we have to crawl on our hands and knees.'”

The Paiutes eagerly went to meet with Agent Wilbur to discuss their departure, but he refused to meet with them for four days. Their excitement to leave grew into frustration until, finally, Wilbur agreed to a meeting with Sarah Winnemucca. Once again, Wilbur refused to acknowledge the letter. She harshly criticized his treatment of the Paiutes, and decided to leave and continue lecturing. That was the last time they saw each other, but Sarah Winnemucca would continue correspondence with the Paiutes throughout their internment at Yakama as they continued to struggle and agitate against the forces keeping them there.

The Northern Paiute at Yakama sought help from other Northern Paiute leaders outside the reservation as well. In summer 1882, J. J. Lewis, a Paiute leader at Yakama wrote to Natchez asking for help with returning the Paiutes to Fort McDermitt:

My Dear Friend Natye,

27 Ibid., 237.
It is a long time since you have written to me. I hope you did not forget us. Are you trying anything for my people towards going to their old home! The Piutes are nothing to eat at Simcoe Reservation. My people there are willing to go to their old home on the foot, if the government should let them of and will never fight again. You try hard and come and see us right away; or, do your people don’t care for my people any more! Legou, the chief, is almost blind, and Oitye don’t want to go home to Camp Harney. My people want to go—about forty-three lodges, and Oitye six.

Yours, truly,
J. J. Lewis

Here Lewis urges Natchez (Natye) to assist his people at Yakama, who had not had much contact with the prisoners since the initial escapes to Warm Springs. Lewis emphasized the worsening state of the Northern Paiute at Yakama: Leggins (Legou) health was deteriorating and he was going blind, the people had nothing to eat, and the leaders were divided on the question of return with Oytes (Oitye) fearing retaliation from settlers at Camp Harney.

After receiving several letters with similar requests, Natchez and other band leaders elected Leggins as the new Chief of the Northern Paiute, and used this reason to demand his return to the Northern Paiute homeland. Although, the Department of Interior did not meet Natchez’s demands, the increased pressure from the Northern Paiute in the Great Basin no doubt further pressured the government given the residual fear of the tribe after the wars. Further, Natchez traveled across the region including to San Francisco to meet with General Irvin McDowell.

Nonnative advocacy

Stationed at the Presidio in San Francisco, McDowell – best known for his defeat at the First Battle of Bull Run – passionately believed that the forced removal and imprisonment at Yakama was an undue injustice. McDowell had been an ally to the Northern Paiute since before the Bannock war when he fought for the right of some tribal bands to remain in their ancestral lands outside of a reservation. When the army came to round up the Northern Paiute and remove them to Yakama, Natchez and Old Chief Winnemucca visited him in San Francisco to ask for his help. He insisted to Howard that there was no

28 J. J. Lewis to Natye, 1 July 1882, Report of the Secretary of War, 118.
pretense for forcing innocent people off of their ancestral land, but his criticisms turned out empty.  

Suspicious of Agent Wilbur’s claims that the Northern Paiute were embracing his civilizing and Christianizing process, McDowell worked with another general Miles sent an interpreter to the reservation. The interpreter, Arthur Chapman, arrived unannounced at Yakama in October 1881. He met with Chief Leggins who relayed the situation from his perspective and sent his report on the condition of the Paiutes to General Miles on December 19, 1881.

When Chapman arrived, he estimated that there were about 440 Paiutes, including 300 of Leggins’ band. Judging by this number, about two-dozen other Paiutes either died or escaped since arriving at Yakama (accounting for the 24 Paiutes that had escaped to Warm Springs). Leggins informed Chapman about further maltreatments the Paiutes faced from the Agency and the Yakama Indians. The leader explained that the government had violated its obligation to the Northern Paiute by removing those who had not been involved in the war. The Paiutes were underfed, under-clothed, and had no housing. Additionally, the Yakamas had been stealing supplies and horses from the Paiutes. Leggins told Chapman “my people are put here to die with cold and hunger.” After the meetings, Agent Wilbur and the Commissioner of Indian Affairs Price threatened Chapman with arrest forcing him to leave, but Chapman promised the Northern Paiute he try to secure an escort that spring.

Realizing Chapman would be unable to fulfil his promise to see through the return of the Northern Paiute, the Northern Paiute found more allies in the army. In 1882, some Northern Paiute escapees arrived at Camp McDermitt, on the Oregon-Nevada border where Natchez and his band were located. Furious that the Northern Paiute continued to escape, The Secretary of Interior Henry Teller and Commissioner Price notified the Department of War that the Northern Paiute would only receive provision if they were at Yakama, and that the army should take no steps in aid the escape. They further

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30 Ibid., 783.
31 Arthur Chapman to Nelson A. Miles, 19 December 1881, *OIA*.
32 Ibid.
requested that the Department of War return the Paiute escapees at Camp McDermitt to Yakama.\textsuperscript{34} While Secretary of War and others in the army did not want to see the Northern Paiute at Yakama against their will, they felt they had no choice but to follow the orders to ensure the Northern Paiute continued to receive the government aid.

The Secretary of War agreed to this proposition and on 30 March 1883 assigned General Schofield to bring the Paiutes back to Yakama. Soon after, Schofield wrote to the Adjutant General stating that he received the order, but after the Northern Paiute at Camp McDermitt explained the injustice in their imprisonment, Schofield expressed reluctance in compelling them to return. By now, Sarah Winnemucca’s advocacy and Arthur Chapman’s report had shifted the narrative about the Northern Paiute’s desires and compelled government officials to respect the autonomy of the the Northern Paiute people. Some back-and-forth between the Department of War and Department of Interior ensued about whether the Northern Paiute should be forced back to Yakama against their will. The former generally opposed removal by force, often citing the logistical problems in such a maneuver, while the latter argued that the Northern Paiute could best receive resources at Yakama.\textsuperscript{35}

During this time, General Schofield proved himself to be a vital advocate for the Paiutes and their resistance network. He wrote a letter to the Adjutant General of the Army in the fall of 1883, again advocating for the Paiute people at Yakama. He called for more supplies before removing the Paiutes at Camp McDermitt, claiming that the resources allocated were insufficient. He delayed his orders from the Secretary of War by continuously demanding more supplies General Schofield went on to say, “I beg leave to suggest that the best practical disposition of the matter would be to place these Indians upon a Reservation with some of their own kindred people. This could be done at far less cost than to send them back to Yakama, and they would probably be far more content and less troublesome in future,” thus reiterating the argument that the Paiutes should have their own land.\textsuperscript{36} Schofield continuously pushed the the “escort” date back as far as he could, giving the Paiutes more time to escape from Yakama, and giving

\textsuperscript{34} H. Price to Secretary of Interior, 23 January 1883, Records of the Adjutant General’s Office.
\textsuperscript{35} Sanford to Assistant Adjutant General, 8 June 1883, Records of the Adjutant General’s Office.
\textsuperscript{36} Schofield to Adjutant General, 9 April 1883, Records of the Adjutant General’s Office.
the outside advocates such as Sarah Winnemucca, General Miles, and General McDowell more time to argue on their behalf.\textsuperscript{37}

The nonnative advocates of the Northern Paiute – Arthur Chapman and Generals McDowell, Miles, and Schofield – used three rhetorical tools to argue on behalf of the prisoners: an appeal to humanitarianism, economic logistics, and a looming security threat. General Schofield’s initial letter to challenge the order of forced removal uses all three:

“I also desire to say that I do not understand ‘escort’ as used in this case to mean a force to compel the removal of these Indians against their will. The force necessary for such a purpose would be for greater than that now available in the Department of California. Although these Indians are not numerous and are very friendly to the whites, they are understood to be strongly attached to their present homes. Any attempt to remove them by force would probably result in costly and bloody war.”\textsuperscript{38}

The nonnative advocates represented the imprisonment as a humanitarian crisis due to the destitute state of the Northern Paiute and the lack of consultation with the Northern Paiute. In his statement above, Schofield wrote, “Although these Indians are not numerous and are very friendly to the whites, they are understood to be strongly attached to their present homes.”\textsuperscript{39} Here, Schofield highlighted the attachment the Northern Paiute had to ancestral lands and the inhumanity in removing them from a place where they felt such a strong connection. Arthur Chapman emphasized this in his report to General McDowell, inserting Leggin’s belief that the Northern Paiute were left at Yakama to freeze and starve to death. They also maintained that it was logistically more difficult to keep the Northern Paiute at Yakama than allowing them to leave. General Schofield wrote, “I beg leave to suggest that the best practical disposition of the matter would be to place these Indians upon a Reservation with some of their own kindred people. This could be done at far less cost than to send them back to Yakama, and they would probably be far more content and less troublesome in future.”\textsuperscript{40} Here, Schofield insisted that it is an economically better decision to bring the Northern Paiute home. Third, they contended that holding the Northern Paiute at Yakama was a greater threat than allowing them to leave. The allies articulated this through both subtle

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{40} Schofield to Adjutant General, 25 September 1883, \textit{Records of the Adjutant General’s Office}. 
hints and explicit warnings. General Nelson Miles wrote that if Arthur Chapman were allowed to escort the Northern Paiute back to Southeastern Oregon, it “may prevent an outbreak in the spring,” suggesting the prisoners would take up arms to force their way out. 41 General Schofield made this same threat more explicitly months later referring to the escapees at Camp McDermit: “Any attempt to remove them by force would probably result in costly and bloody war.” 42

These tools demonstrate the values that the allies had. Skeptical of the BIA’s ability to “civilize” and “Christianize” the Northern Paiute, these army officials instead sought peaceful coexistence through a new reservation policy. While the primary ways they argued for the Northern Paiute involved economic impacts or threat of violence, they did insist on the humanity of the the prisoners and their rights to live on their ancestral land. Further, given that these men were often reporting on the information that Northern Paiute leaders were conveying, we can in part read these rhetorical tools as the leaders’ voices arguing on their own behalf with actors in the executive branch.

In a broader contextual scope, the advocates’ discourse is a direct response to the anti-Paiute racism emerging after the Snake War. In the midst of the Snake War, the army and governor Woods used the term “Snake Indians” or simply “snakes” hence the name of the conflict. This slur contains two important components important in understanding anti-Paiute racism. First, the association with an animal evidences the dehumanization the nonnatives used against the Northern Paiute to justify Governor Woods’ “war of extermination,” just over a decade before the Yakama affair. Second, snakes themselves bear a connotation of danger or toxicity which parallels the portrayal of the Northern Paiute as a “savage” and warlike tribe. This “savage” narrative is perhaps most pronounced in the post-Snake War portrayal of Chief Paulina who, until very recently, has been since portrayed as a blood-thirsty war chief by nonnative accounts (and whose name marks numerous geographic places such as Lake Paulina). 43 The advocates insistence on the humanity of the Northern Paiute sought to dispel the dehumanization that the US army instigated. By highlighting the injustice enacted on women, children, and civilians who lacked clothing

41 Nelson A. Miles to Division Headquarters, 7 January 1882, OIA
42 Schofield to Adjutant General, 9 April 1883, Records of the Adjutant General's Office.
43 Gardner, Oregon Apocalypse, 389-401.
and food, the advocates put a more sympathetic story to the interment than the decades of the “snake” rhetoric would have allowed. On the other hand, the advocates weaponized the stigma against the Northern Paiute to imply a looming threat of another bloody conflict. They recognized the surmounting fear of the Northern Paiute in the previous decades, and utilized it to suggest that the Northern Paiute would once again take up arms to defend their right to return home. Read in this way, the advocacy served the immediate goals of returning the Northern Paiute to southeast Oregon, but did not dispute the harmful anti-Paiute racism that would continue in the years following. In sum, the Northern Paiute, lacking a treaty, substituted charisma and alliances within the federal government to articulate sovereignty and autonomy over their residence.

**Resistance Through Civil Disobedience and Strike**

Given this context of the policy debates and public advocacy by both nonnatives and the Northern Paiute, we can better understand the resistance occurring on the ground at Yakama. After the revocation of the Schurz letter, which should have granted the Northern Paiute the right to leave Yakama, the prisoners escalated their resistance beyond occasional escapes. Elation turned frustration spurred within the leaders a greater determination to leave Yakama by their own resistance. Soon after Wilbur refused to acknowledge Secretary of State Schurz’s letter, some of the Northern Paiute threatened to burn down the agency and leave by the light of the burning buildings, instilling a new fear within the Indian Agent.44

In fall 1881, one week after Chapman’s arrival, Wilbur wrote to Price revealing the severity of the Paiute resistance. He wrote that those in Oytes’s band were hard workers and demonstrated desire to remain at Yakama, but that the remainder of the Northern Paiutes were anxious to leave. In this letter, he revealed the Paiutes’ civil disobedience: “their hopes have been kept alive by their leaders, - Leggins, Paddy, and others, who urge them to do no work, accept of no lands, and never consent to remain here.”45 Wilbur believed that if the leaders were removed, the rest of the Paiutes would follow Oytes’s example.

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45 James Wilbur to H. Price, 1 November 1881, *Records of the Adjutant General’s Office*. 
All of the pressure from the Northern Paiute took a toll on Wilbur, who began to crack under the weight of all the opposing forces surrounding him. He wrote to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, “I do not believe it would be for their interest, – I am sure it would not be for the interest of the Department – their atrocities committed without the slightest provocation when they took up the hatchet, deserve no favor; but their departure would relieve me of inexpressible annoyance and vexation, and end the suspense and uncertainty under which for two years I have labored.” Further, the interpreter Arthur Chapman claimed Wilbur believed, “It was wrong that these people were ever brought there,” and that it would “require a military force to keep them another year upon the reservation.” While Chapman’s paraphrasing of Wilbur may be exaggerated given the Interpreter’s loyalty to the Northern Paiute, Wilbur was clearly exhausted and demoralized by the tribe’s reliance and determination to leave. Under the pressure of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs Price, Wilbur allotted more land for the Northern Paiute to cultivate, in hope that this may contribute to their efforts to “civilize” the tribe. All but 40 initially refused to go to the land he allotted them and that “it required great firmness and some pressure to induce them.” Wilbur’s solution, then, was just more “civilizing” of the Northern Paiute. While the resistance from the Northern Paiute had begun to dissolve the Agent’s composure, Wilbur was not yet ready to give up on his and the BIA’s mission.

The Northern Paiute understood that their constant resistance to Wilbur’s orders were taking a toll on the agent, and they further challenge the agency’s authority. In summer 1882, Leggins’s band of Paiutes left Yakama with the intent to return to Fort McDermitt. Paddy Cap, another Northern Paiute band leader at Yakama, tried to stop the Paiutes, but said Leggins pushed through his words. The Paiutes traveled across the Columbia to The Dalles where the Indian Sheriff stopped them, arrested the

46 Ibid.
47 Arthur Chapman to Nelson A. Miles, 19 December 1881, OIA.
48 H. Price to J. Wilbur, 20 March 1882, OIA.
49 Wilbur in H. Price to Secretary of Interior, 23 January 1883, Records of the Adjutant General’s Office.
50 Assistant Adjutant General to A. M. Randol, 15 August 1882, Report of the Secretary of War, 118.
51 H. Price to James Wilbur, 3 August 1882, OIA.
leaders, and detained Leggins in jail for a short period.\textsuperscript{52} The Department of War saw this as an opportunity to help the Paiutes join the rest of their tribe in Nevada. Soon after, General Miles and General McDowell telegraphed the Secretary of War asking for permission to escort the escapees to Winnemucca Reservation in Nevada. Miles made the case that it would be best to help them, believing “a portion of them [would] attempt to rejoin their friends in the south even without permission.”\textsuperscript{53} Although the Secretary of Interior Teller denied this request and demanded the prisoners be escorted back to Yakama, the escapes proved to be the last straw for Agent Wilbur who resigned a month later.\textsuperscript{54}

With Wilbur resigning in the aftermath of the escape attempt, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs Price felt pressured to retaliate and constrict the capacity and desire of the Northern Paiute to oppose their internment. In winter of 1882, a commanding officer at the Fort reported that a band of 161 Northern Paiute people were “in a destitute and starving condition.”\textsuperscript{55} The Department of War denied a request to fund supplies for these people, and they had to kill cattle in the surrounding area to survive the winter. Commissioner Price saw an opportunity here: because many of the Northern Paiute at Yakama sought to join those at Camp McDermitt, the commissioner urged the removal of this group to Yakama. This would further open southeastern Oregon to settlers, and diminish the resolve of the Northern Paiute to leave Yakama.\textsuperscript{56} Price convinced the Secretary of War to order General Schofield to escort those at Camp McDermitt to Yakama, which Schofield refused as discussed above. A bitter back-and-forth ensued with the Secretary of Interior feeling deceived by Price, Schofield continuously stalling the “escort,” and Price relaying his perspective wherever he could in pursuit of the total removal of Northern Paiute from Oregon.\textsuperscript{57}

The Northern Paiute at Yakama did not wait to hear the outcome of this policy debate. During the spring and summer of 1883, they began escaping en masse. They did so with the implicit consent of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{52} Gardner, \textit{Oregon Apocalypse}, 790.
\item \textsuperscript{53} Miles to Assistant Adjutant General, \textit{Report of the Secretary of War}, 121.
\item \textsuperscript{54} Gardner, \textit{Oregon Apocalypse: A Hidden History of the Northern Paiutes}, 796.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Colville P. Terrey to Assistant Adjutant General, 29 December 1882, \textit{Records of the Adjutant General's Office}.
\item \textsuperscript{56} Commissioner Price to the Secretary of Interior, 23 January 1883, \textit{OIA}.
\item \textsuperscript{57} Commissioner Price to the Secretary of War, 24 January 1883, \textit{OIA}; General Schofield to the Adjutant General of the U.S. Army, 9 April 1883, \textit{Records of the Adjutant General's Office}.
\end{itemize}
Agent Milroy who had replaced Wilbur and did not want to repeat the previous Agent’s failure and frustration. Milroy insisted to Commissioner Price and the Secretary of Interior that there was nothing he could do to stop the escapes.\(^{58}\) According to one settler in eastern Oregon, during this time, some 300 to 400 Paiutes managed to escape back to Oregon and Nevada, completely deserting the Yakama reservation by October 1883.\(^{59}\) Only in April 1884 did the Department of Interior finally agree to accept that the Paiutes would not be imprisoned at Yakama anymore. They reached an agreement with the Department of War that the best policy would be to allow the Paiutes to stay at Pyramid Lake, Duck Valley, or Walker River reservations.\(^{60}\)

The story of the Yakama Affair resists both the triumphal narratives that have dominated western American history and declensionist narratives of destitution and defeat. The Northern Paiutes forcefully removed to the Yakama Reservation refused to remain passive victims. Instead, they continuously engaged in resistance through escape, strike, and public advocacy. This resistance was organized into a network of advocates and leaders dedicated to seeing the return of the prisoners. This method of resistance allowed the Northern Paiute to diversify their approach to opposition, which would prove effective and vital in returning the Paiutes home. This pluralistic and heterogeneous understanding of resistance complicates a paradigm of a binary conflict between colonial and native actors.

This brief but foundational story provides a lens into the immensely complex web of social and cultural history surrounding the Northern Paiute. Hopefully, an understanding of the resolve of Northern Paiutes to remain in their homeland, the stigma and anti-Paiute racism, and the history of conflict with ranchers, settlers and other Euro-Americans will encourage inclusion of Northern Paiute history into the dialogue of Oregon and the region east of the Cascades.

\(^{58}\) R. H. Milroy to H. Price, 8 June 1883, OIA.
\(^{59}\) Meldrum, John M., 17 October 1883, Records of the Adjutant General’s Office.
\(^{60}\) Secretary of Interior H. M. Teller to Secretary of War, 23 April 1884, OIA.