

FOREWORD TO THE SECOND EDITION

by Matthew Sakiestewa Gilbert



MY INTRODUCTION TO Don Talayesva's *Sun Chief* came in graduate school at the University of California, Riverside. I had a worn paperback copy of the eleventh printing (1971), which, like many other Hopi books I owned, had once belonged to my father. People back home on the Hopi Reservation in northeastern Arizona often talk about this book. Some have stories to tell about Talayesva's life, things not recorded in the book. As a Hopi student, I read *Sun Chief* with much enthusiasm and interest. Eager to learn about the Hopi, especially from one of our own, I carefully studied every page. I was fascinated by Talayesva's story, and I closely analyzed its contents, including the book's two photographs. I was especially intrigued with the cover photograph of Talayesva by Fred Eggan. I looked at this picture carefully. Wearing black pants, a ribbed white shirt, black leather shoes, and a beautiful Hopi sash around his waist, Talayesva stands confidently in front of a field, perhaps his own. His eyes, partially closed from the glare of the sun, peer forward, looking, waiting, ready to welcome all visitors to the Hopi world behind him.

When Yale University Press published *Sun Chief* in 1942, the Hopi were among the most researched indigenous peoples in the Americas. Although Hopi author Edmund Nequatewa had worked with editor

Mary-Russell F. Colton to produce *Truth of a Hopi* in the mid-1930s, white ethnographers and other scholars still dominated the field of Hopi studies. They viewed Hopis as “subjects” to be studied and written about, and they published their accounts in leading academic journals and in various edited collections. Anthropologists such as Mischa Titiev spent years interviewing Hopis, including Talayesva, on the Hopi Reservation. His highly regarded book on Old Oraibi informed other great works by Peter M. Whiteley and Jerrold E. Levy. Titiev, and those scholars who came before him, meticulously wrote down their observations and studied the ways of their Hopi informants. But while academics situated Hopis at the center of their scholarly inquiries, Hopis did not publish their own books or articles with university presses. Instead, they relied on white scholars to make their voices heard. And white scholars relied on the Hopi to validate their research, provide and interpret information, and bring a sense of authenticity to their work.

The success of *Sun Chief* set in motion a wave of similar books on the Hopi. In the years following its publication, other non-Hopi scholars and writers collaborated with our people to create autobiographies that sought to enlighten the public on Hopi history and culture. During this “as told to” era in Hopi studies, Vada F. Carlson recorded the life story of Polingaysi Qoyawayma to publish *No Turning Back* (1964), Louise Udall worked with Helen Sekaquaptewa to write *Me and Mine* (1969), and Harold Courlander edited Albert Yava’s account to produce *Big Falling Snow* (1978). For many years, these publications, combined with *Sun Chief* and Edmund Nequatewa’s *Born a Chief* (1992), were the most-referenced works on our people, but none of them were solely written or published by Hopis themselves. At this time, white scholars and other well-established authors were the ones who had the academic credentials and resources to publish books on our people. Even previous editions of *Sun Chief*, an autobiography, did not list Talayesva as the author. As a Hopi person, I always wondered about this. Why did the Press not list Talayesva as the author of his autobiography? Why was Leo Simmons’s name the only one shown on the spine of the book? Perhaps this speaks to a time when Hopis did not publish their own accounts, or a time when university

presses preferred to situate Hopis as “informants” rather than the authors of their own books.

The field of Hopi studies today, however, looks very different than it did in the first half of the twentieth century. Beginning with Frank C. Dukepoo, who in 1973 became the first Hopi to receive a Ph.D., Hopi scholars have ventured beyond the reservation to receive advanced degrees, and they have secured faculty appointments at colleges and universities across the nation. Hopis are now producing scholarship on the Hopi people, using the skills they honed in graduate school to rearticulate, and at times reinterpret, our history and culture. Some of these scholars are examining the Hopi language, sustainability, health, and a host of other disciplines. Young Hopi scholars such as Darold H. Joseph and Jeremy Garcia are developing culturally responsive and relevant curriculums to use in our schools on the reservation, and Trevor Reed is using his research to repatriate Hopi music, once archived in Columbia University’s Center for Ethnomusicology. Taking the lead role in their research, these and other Hopi scholars reflect a new direction in Hopi studies. They represent the ways Hopis have benefited from works such as *Sun Chief* to better develop and write their own scholarship in the twenty-first century.

My work on the Hopi boarding school experience at Sherman Institute, an off-reservation Indian boarding school in Riverside, California, has been personally informed by *Sun Chief*. In November 1906, Talayesva and my grandfather, Victor Sakiestewa, left the village of Oraibi by wagon for Winslow, Arizona, where they boarded a Santa Fe train for Southern California. Together they attended Sherman Institute, a school that U.S. government officials designed to weaken Hopi and other American Indian cultures and to train Native students in industrial trades. They received the same class instruction; participated in similar extracurricular activities, including Protestant services; and returned to their village of Old Oraibi together. But after they arrived on the reservation, their lives diverged dramatically. My grandfather never felt content to be back at his village. He wanted to continue his education beyond the mesas and sought enrollment at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania and the Greenville Indian School in California. He eventually worked as a plumber in

Tuba City, Arizona, and encouraged his children to pursue their education at schools off the reservation, including the Ganado Mission School on the Navajo Nation in eastern Arizona. Talayesva, in contrast, kept close to home and attempted to reclaim his identity as a “traditional” Hopi and chief of the Sun Clan.

Talayesva’s recollections of his life after his time at Sherman are full of many details. But one account in particular will always invoke pride in me as a Hopi person. In the summer of 1912, the Hopi experienced a severe drought. Crops suffered under the intensity of the sun, and the clouds did not provide rain. People wondered why this was so. Talayesva then remembered that before he went to school in California, Mennonite missionary Heinrich Voth had stolen Hopi “ceremonial secrets” and “carried off sacred images and altars” to the Field Columbian Museum in Chicago, and he had “become a rich man.” Talayesva recalled that people at Oraibi were afraid of Voth and “dared not lay their hands on him” for fear of imprisonment. Talayesva referred to Voth as a “wicked man” who had treated the Hopi very poorly. But after Talayesva had been educated in a Western school and learned about the Protestant faith, he was no longer afraid of Voth or any other Christian missionary. And so that same year of the drought, he heard that Voth, now an old man, had stopped by Talayesva’s mother’s house for a visit. Talayesva was furious, and he went straight to the house and ordered Voth to leave: “You break the commandments of your own God,” Talayesva said to him. “He has told you to avoid all graven images; but you have stolen ours and set them up in your museum.” He then called Voth a “thief and an idolater” who would “never go to heaven.”

The showdown with Heinrich Voth is significant for several reasons. In the past, readers of *Sun Chief* often focused on Talayesva’s detailed accounts of Hopi ceremonies or the descriptions of his many sexual encounters. They wrote at length about his dreams and the tragedies that he encountered throughout his life. But in his confrontation with Voth, one is able to see Talayesva at his very finest. Here the young Hopi from Oraibi used the knowledge that he gained at school to rebuke and even chastise Voth for his un-Christian behavior. He turned the Christian Bible against the old Mennonite missionary

and exposed his hypocrisy so others might see. He recounted specific passages in Voth's holy book and used them to his advantage. Voth, who was most likely surprised by Talayesva's intelligence and nerve, came from a line of people who considered Hopi adults to have the mental capacity of children. He did not expect this response from Talayesva or any other Hopi. "I knew the Hopi Cloud People despised this man," recalled Talayesva, "and even though he was now old and wore a long beard, I had a strong desire to seize him by the collar and kick him off the mesa."

Talayesva's desire to kick Voth over the mesa edge also speaks to the cultural tensions on the reservation during the early 1900s. Over the years, writers including Robert V. Hine, who wrote the first Foreword to *Sun Chief* in 1963, have often observed that Talayesva was "caught between two cultures." They portray the Hopi from Old Oraibi in a constant struggle between, on one hand, adopting or accepting American ways and, on the other, holding to Hopi beliefs and practices. While Talayesva experienced tensions between Hopi and Western culture, he also embraced these tensions to create a Hopi reality for himself in the twentieth century. Hopi culture, at least how Talayesva understood it, did not always stand in opposition to American values or practices, nor did it stay stagnant from time immemorial. He had the ability to adopt or adapt aspects of Western culture to fit with beliefs in Hopi society. He made Western culture work for him, but he also rejected and fought against it when it imposed on him certain cultural norms or expectations as a Hopi person.

Although Talayesva operated within the Western world, the tensions he experienced among his own people cannot be overestimated. These tensions were far more complicated and intense than the ones he encountered in the white world. In his book, Talayesva recalls that Hopis on the reservation became increasingly suspicious of him and his friendship with the book's collaborator and editor, Leo W. Simmons. They accused Talayesva of selling Simmons secrets about Hopi ceremonies and other religious practices. In response, Hopis at Oraibi started a rumor that Talayesva was receiving money from officials in Washington, D.C., for selling dead Hopi bodies. Even though anthropologists and other museum officials in Washington thought

very highly of Talayesva, many Hopis back home remained unimpressed with him and his accomplishments. They despised him for sharing religious information with Simmons, and they ostracized him for telling privileged Hopi knowledge to the world. Every reader of *Sun Chief* should be cognizant of the reality that although Talayesva produced a remarkable book, he did so at great cost to himself and his village community.

While *Sun Chief* remains a valuable historical and cultural resource, it does have its limitations. In his book *God Is Red*, Lakota author and theologian Vine Deloria, Jr., once argued that Native autobiographies of the 1930s and 1940s, including *Sun Chief* and *The Son of Old Man Hat* (1938) on the Navajo, did not sufficiently “inform the modern American public about the nature of Indian life” or give people enough “information about Indians to make an intelligent choice as to how best to support Indian goals and aspirations.” “Could these books have correctly informed the reader,” Deloria asks, “on the struggle of the Navajo and Hopi against Peabody Coal Company at Black Mesa or explained the protest at the Gallup ceremonial?” Although *Sun Chief* is a fascinating account of a specific era in Hopi and American history, it fails to speak to the broader issues that Deloria raised. For example, at no point in Talayesva’s narrative does he discuss the establishment of the Hopi tribal government in 1936, the single most important political development for Hopis during the 1930s. Instead, readers learn about Hopi culture and religious practices and superstitions. We learn about life as one Hopi lived it during and after the Indian Progressive Era, but we receive very little information to help us understand the larger issues of Hopi self-determination or the political and legal struggles Talayesva’s people faced in the 1930s and beyond. For these discussions, one ought to read *Sun Chief* alongside the work of Hopi historian Lomayumtewa C. Ishii and non-Hopi scholars Justin B. Richland and Emily Benedek.

Today’s reader should also know that in the more than seventy years since Talayesva published *Sun Chief*, much has changed for the Hopi. Although the people continue to practice their religious ceremonies and many still speak the Hopi language, the Hopi and Western worlds have become increasingly intertwined. This is evident in

our tribal government, including our tribal courts, where Hopi individuals such as Fred Lomayesva, Patricia Sekaquaptewa, and Delfred Leslie, all of the Hopi Appellate Court, have adjudicated cases on the reservation by relying on Hopi tribal law that combines elements of Anglo-American legal practice with principles from Hopi custom and tradition. It is further evidenced in our growing tourist economy, our efforts in sustainable living, and advancements in telecommunications. Furthermore, as Leigh J. Kuwanwisiwma once said, the Hopi people are now “global,” and no single factor has contributed to this more than the development of the Internet. Hopis today use the Internet to conduct business and to stay connected with people throughout the world. While Hopi artists were among the first to use the Internet to market and sell their work, Hopi activists of the present also regularly use websites, email, and social media to advance their agendas and to remind the people of cultural values and responsibilities.

Regardless of its historical and political limitations, *Sun Chief* remains a remarkable and honest account of Don Talayesva’s life between 1890 and 1940. While it does not reflect life for all or most Hopis during this period, it provides readers with a window into the once-secluded world of the Hopi people. Scholars and students will no doubt continue to consult *Sun Chief* in the future. It will continue to be the focus of masters theses and doctoral dissertations. Professors and other instructors will assign it in their courses, and students will further argue and theorize about its contents. And a new wave of Hopi scholars will use *Sun Chief* to inform their work and critically analyze it from one of many Hopi perspectives. Surely, if Talayesva were still with us today, he would be amazed and perhaps even embarrassed by his book’s popularity. But he would also be glad to see that his story was still being told to the Hopi and non-Hopi worlds that he knew so well.