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The Sound Of Navajo Country: Music, Language, And Diné Belonging (Critical Indigeneities)



Synopsis

In this ethnography of Navajo (Diné) popular music culture, Kristina M. Jacobsen examines questions of Indigenous identity and performance by focusing on the surprising and vibrant Navajo country music scene. Through multiple first-person accounts, Jacobsen illuminates country music's connections to the Indigenous politics of language and belonging, examining through the lens of music both the politics of difference and many internal distinctions Diné make among themselves and their fellow Navajo citizens. As the second largest tribe in the United States, the Navajo have often been portrayed as a singular and monolithic entity. Using her experience as a singer, lap steel player, and Navajo language learner, Jacobsen challenges this notion, showing the ways Navajos distinguish themselves from one another through musical taste, linguistic abilities, geographic location, physical appearance, degree of Navajo or Indian blood, and class affiliations. By linking cultural anthropology to ethnomusicology, linguistic anthropology, and critical Indigenous studies, Jacobsen shows how Navajo poetics and politics offer important insights into the politics of Indigeneity in Native North America, highlighting the complex ways that identities are negotiated in multiple, often contradictory, spheres.

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Customer Reviews

An ethnography of Navajo country and other popular music cultures, with interviews with central musicians. Instead of showing the similarities between all Navajo people, Jacobsen explains how they differ in class, race, and tastes. The cover of the book depicts the author in cowboy boots and hat with a dark guitar and Native American style blue bracelet, earrings and belt. The author put herself on the cover because she is a pretty well-known, touring singer herself. The book includes a note on "Orthographic and Linguistic Conventions," which explains proper pronunciation of Navajo words. The "Introduction" opens with a clash between a woman and a convenience store worker that ends with the older woman insulting the cashier: "What kind of Navajo are you?" in the Navajo language, which the cashier could not understand as she was listening to heavy metal. This explains the generational and cultural clashes that this book details. These two women could be bonding over their shared identity, but instead they are fighting over their differences. The book also includes maps and other visual aids and statistics that explain the current state of the Navajo Nation and the Hopi Nation within its borders in Arizona, Utah, Colorado and New Mexico. The narrative describes various components of this complex Navajo identity, such as the KTNN local popular country music station, and popular bands like the Wingate Valley Boys, alongside the impact of the American Indian Movement. This book is more conversational than scholarly, and yet there is plenty of statistics and historical fact to educate readers. Most of the discussion is about language and various components and styles of musical performance. Navajo residents who enjoy country music should take pleasure in reading this account and re-discovering their heritage. Scholars of culture and music will find plenty of evidence to use in their own scholarship on this topic.

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