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Introduction

In anticipation of the bicentennial celebration of the expedition of Lewis and Clark and the Corps of Discovery, the U.S. Mint issued a \$1 coin in 1999 bearing the image of Sacajawea, the Indian woman who accompanied the expedition and contributed to its successful journey to the Pacific Ocean and back.¹ While the coin has been heralded as a sign of long-overdue recognition of the contributions of American Indians by the government, it has also been widely criticized.

For some, the image of Sacajawea on the coin validates the conquest of the American West. Sacajawea, they argue, is celebrated because she “complied with the goals of white America,” not because she was an Indian woman. Others suggest that Sacajawea’s contributions to the expedition have been magnified by myth, and that her role in the journey does not merit the acclaim she has received. Still others point to the irony of an American Indian on currency that will be spent disproportionately by non-Indians. Or to the irony of the juxtaposition of the image of Sacajawea, who some claim was essentially a slave, and the word “liberty” that appears above it.²

While Sacajawea, the most famous Indian woman in American history, is celebrated, most Americans have never even heard of her people, the Lemhi Shoshones.³ After the Sacajawea coin was unveiled, some Lemhis joined the chorus of criticisms, but for reasons all their own. When Glenna Goodacre, the artist who designed the Vietnam Women’s Memorial in Washington DC, was commissioned to create the Sacajawea dollar, she went to the Fort Hall Indian Reservation, where many of the Lemhi Shoshones now reside, in search of a model,

as well as some cultural context for her work. However, rather than finding a teenaged Lemhi to model for the coin, Goodacre selected a twenty-three-year-old Shoshone-Bannock woman from a different tribe or band. The Lemhis voiced their disapproval over the physical appearance of the woman on the coin, whom they said did not resemble them, and over the depiction of Sacajawea carrying her baby in a blanket instead of on a cradleboard, as a Lemhi would have. The U.S. Mint's decision to use the Hidatsa spelling, Sacagawea, rather than the Shoshone, Sacajawea, was a further disappointment.⁴

The Lemhi Shoshones, then, were slighted even when the federal government endeavored with the best of intentions to celebrate one of their contributions to American history. Moreover, the timing of the matter only added insult to injury, because the Lemhis at the time were four years into the long and arduous process of petitioning the government for federal recognition—a politically prickly process that has become even more daunting for petitioners since recognition has increasingly become associated with Indian casinos in the wake of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act of 1988.⁵

But while the apparent slight of the Lemhis can be dismissed as an accident born of good intentions, it also illustrates larger aspects of their experiences and difficulties with the government during the course of the twentieth century. The issue of Indian identity, as William Hagan has noted, “has been a problem for individuals, tribes, and government administrators since the birth of this nation.”⁶ Who is Indian, who decides, and how? These questions are particularly perplexing when they involve tribes or groups not officially recognized by the federal government. In fact, it was only with the promulgation of Title 25 Part 83 of the *Code of Federal Regulations* in 1978 that the government established standards for answering them. The history of the Lemhi Shoshones in the twentieth century, then, points to the difficulties surrounding issues of Indian identity, at both the group and individual level, as well as the shortcomings of the criteria established for tribes or groups seeking federal recognition.

Prior to 1907 the Lemhi Shoshones were recognized as a political entity by the federal government, and they engaged in treaty making as such. Thereafter, however, the Lemhis' identity as a distinct group was obscured by a combination of federal Indian policy, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) decisions concerning the Lemhis, and decades of

interaction and intermarriage with the other tribes and bands on the Fort Hall Reservation. The Lemhi Shoshones were removed to Fort Hall after their reservation in their traditional homeland in the Salmon River country was liquidated in 1907, and they were subsequently enrolled as members of the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes of Fort Hall after a 1936 Indian Reorganization Act constitution was adopted on that reservation. Consequently, they fail to meet two of the criteria for federal recognition: residence in a particular area with which they are historically associated and membership in no other tribe.⁷

Indian communities generally were not organized as tribes—that is, discernable units with clear political authority and organization—prior to contact with non-Indians. The concept of an Indian tribe came about largely because it proved useful to the federal government in negotiating treaties with Indian peoples. It has taken on a separate significance for Indians, however, because of the sovereignty that tribal organization confers as a result of the special relationship between tribes and the government.⁸ Defining an Indian tribe, then, can be an ambiguous business with important implications. The current definition employed by the BIA's Branch of Acknowledgment and Recognition (BAR), moreover, is not the only one used by a federal agency; indeed, the BIA itself employed a less restrictive definition of tribe under the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, which recognized any tribal corporation that possessed reservation lands. The Census Bureau's definition of who is Indian, by contrast, is based solely on self-identification, while the Indian Health Service bases its definition on blood quantum or enrollment in a recognized tribe. Tribes themselves can be far more restrictive in determining who is or is not a member of an Indian tribe.⁹

A major shortcoming of BAR's criteria, especially from the Lemhi Shoshones' perspective, is their emphasis on continuity. As Raymond Fogelson explains, BAR "holds implicitly that once Indian tribal identity is lost or surrendered it can never be regained."¹⁰ Despite the assumptions underlying BAR's criteria, however, the hallmark of Indian culture and identity has been continuity, "although their expression has often been hidden from non-Indian view."¹¹

Historical events—like removal to and enrollment at Fort Hall, or BIA administrative decisions or procedure—have masked the continuity of Lemhi identity, but so too have historians. To date, accounts of

Lemhi history have generally closed with the advent of the twentieth century. Brigham Madsen, a leading historian of Shoshone Indians, for example, concludes his monograph on the Lemhis with removal and the death of Chief Tendoy in 1907, offering just a few paragraphs on the twentieth-century Lemhi experience.¹² Likewise, historian David Crowder, a biographer of Tendoy, dismissed the history of the Lemhis during the twentieth century by simply explaining that after removal they “subsequently lost their tribal identity.”¹³

The popular media also tends to overlook the existence of the Lemhis, though the approach of the Lewis and Clark bicentennial has restored some attention to them. The *New York Times* ran a front-page article in 1999 on the Lemhis’ efforts to resecure a land base in their Salmon River homeland. A recent book on Sacajawea by Kenneth Thomasma, author of the popular “Amazing Indian Children” series, even includes an introductory message from Rod Ariwite of the Fort Lemhi Indian Community.¹⁴

But other accounts in the popular media continue to marginalize the Lemhis. A recent *National Geographic* article about Sacajawea, for instance, though it does at least mention the Lemhi Shoshones specifically, casts doubt on their claim to Sacajawea as an ancestor and to the Salmon River country as a homeland. Author Margaret Talbot explains that the Lemhis hope that the Lewis and Clark bicentennial will facilitate “their hopes for federal tribal recognition and a return to the ancestral lands they say were stripped from them.” What she does not bother to mention is that the Indian Claims Commission confirmed their claim that their ancestral lands were stripped from them and awarded a multimillion-dollar settlement. Nor does Talbot mention that the Lemhis once had a reservation in that homeland before they were removed; Talbot simply states that the Lemhis “live on a reservation in Idaho.”

Talbot also glosses over the Lemhis’ claim to Sacajawea. While she relates the famous reunion of Sacajawea with her brother Cameahwait in 1805 in her article, she does not mention the moment, documented in the journals and elsewhere, when the Corps of Discovery encountered the Lemhi Shoshones, and Sacajawea indicated her identification of them as her people by sucking her fingers, a sign that these were the people who had raised her. Instead, the article quotes Amy Mossett, a Mandan-Hidatsa and Sacajawea “stand-in,” who speculates that

the fact that Sacajawea did not remain among the Lemhi Shoshones “means that Sacagawea had come to feel more like a Hidatsa than a Shoshone.” And like the coin issued by the U.S. Mint, the article uses the Mandan-Hidatsa spelling, Sacagawea, rather than the Shoshone.¹⁵

Taken together, federal Indian policy, accounts of the Lemhis generated by historians, articles like the one in *National Geographic*, and the gaffe with the Sacajawea coin collectively contribute to what can only be termed cultural theft, dispossessing the Lemhi Shoshones of aspects of their ancestry, cultural heritage, and identity. What follows is an attempt to write the Lemhi Shoshones back into the history of the twentieth century by focusing in particular on their enduring ties to their homeland in the Salmon River country. It is also in part a response to the exhortations of the “New Western” historians to provide a more inclusive history of the West, incorporating heretofore-unheard voices; to consider the West as a place and to try to understand the interplay between humans and their environment in that place; and especially to move beyond the Turnerian paradigm, which precludes a significance for the West and its frontiers in American history after the late nineteenth century.¹⁶

Paradoxically, the erosion of outsiders’ perception of Lemhi distinctiveness over the course of the twentieth century has coincided with the Lemhis’ ongoing effort to assert their cultural identity. The tie to the Salmon River country has been central to Lemhi identity, and they have been continually returning to the “River of No Return,” as the Salmon River is known, both literally and figuratively. Immediately after removal, a group of Lemhis left their new home at Fort Hall and returned to establish a permanent community in the town of Salmon, Idaho. The Lemhi “Indian Village” in Salmon relocated from time to time, but it persisted as a fixture in town through most of the century. Many of the Lemhis who were removed to Fort Hall also continued to return to the Salmon River country annually to visit, hunt and fish in traditional areas, and tend the graves of their ancestors. The Salmon River country, moreover, preoccupied the Lemhis who remained at Fort Hall politically as they sought to gain restitution for the seizure of their lands and the subsequent liquidation of their reservation. In addition, they have struggled to retain use of treaty rights to hunt and fish in areas to which they have been accustomed since time immemo-

rial, and ultimately, to once again secure a legitimate land base in their ancestral homeland.

Scholars have relied on several factors to measure American Indian identity. “Native American identity is minimally premised, both endogenously and exogenously,” Fogelson argues, “on three prerequisites: blood and descent, land, and community.”¹⁷ Anthropologist Greg Campbell in his work on the Lemhi Shoshones relied on several indicators of social identity: “A historical continuity in social heritage, whether factual or imaginary, that is acknowledged by the group members and by members of neighboring groups; a genealogical continuity, usually rooted in kinship and ideologies; political continuity; an association with a specific ‘place’; and shared cultural traditions.”¹⁸ This study draws on all these factors but emphasizes land in particular; the Lemhi tie to their homeland in the Salmon River country is the common thread that ties the following chapters together.

Land is central to Lemhi identity, and American Indian identity in general, for a host of reasons. “Native American identity was connected to the land, as a site of origination in narratives of ethnogenesis, as a home area where life was lived, and as a final resting place of mortal remains,” Fogelson explains. “Later, Native Americans came to accept Euro-American conceptions of land as a commodity that could be alienated through sale during treaty negotiations and be a source of recompensation through decisions of the Indian Claims Commission,” he continues. “Land lost through conquest or purchase continued to have sentimental value for those who once inhabited the area and their descendants.”¹⁹

While the heart of this study focuses on the twentieth-century Lemhi Shoshone experiences, these experiences cannot be understood when divorced from their broader historic context. Chapters 1 and 2 seek to provide that context. The first chapter introduces the Salmon River country and relates the scholarly debates that have emerged over the timing and nature of the earliest peopling of the area. The arguments of archeologists and anthropologists and linguists are juxtaposed here with Lemhi Shoshone oral tradition, which maintains that the Lemhis were created in the Salmon River country rather than migrating there from some other place. Little wonder, then, that the Lemhi Shoshones’ ties to their homeland have remained so strong.

Chapter 2 spans the nineteenth century, which for the Lemhis began with the arrival of the Corps of Discovery in 1805 and ended in their removal to Fort Hall in 1907. The arrival of Lewis and Clark can be viewed as the inauguration of non-Indian settlement in the Salmon River country, a process that ultimately resulted in the Lemhis' exile to Fort Hall.

Both chapters draw heavily on the work of anthropologist Greg Campbell, who argues that the nineteenth century saw the culmination of a long process of “ethnogenesis” that created the tribal nation historically known as the Lemhi Shoshones. While the term has been in use for some decades, scholarly literature on ethnogenesis is still emerging.²⁰ Ethnogenesis, as defined by Campbell, refers to the way that “societies emerge and recreate themselves in history through a series of transformative episodes, during which people, cultures and languages of diverse origins join to create new, hybrid and original ethnic constructions.”²¹ In *American Indian Ethnic Renewal* (1996), Joane Nagel defined ethnogenesis as “the process whereby new ethnic identities, communities, and cultures are built or rebuilt out of historical social and symbolic systems.”²² Campbell's work focuses primarily on the nineteenth century. He argues that the Indian peoples living in the Salmon River country began to coalesce into the distinct group known as the Lemhi Shoshones long before the nineteenth century, but this process concluded within the context of, and partly as a result of, increasing non-Indian settlement of the area. But Nagel's use of the term with reference to the resurgence of Indian identity and communities since the 1960s is also useful in understanding the Lemhi Shoshones' experience throughout the twentieth century. Just as the changes that the Lemhis faced during the nineteenth century helped to forge a distinct sense of identity, so too did the challenges they confronted during the twentieth century reaffirm their cultural ties.

The focus of the next three chapters shifts to Fort Hall, though the Salmon River country remained very much at the forefront of the concerns of the Lemhis there. Chapter 3 relates how the Lemhis organized politically soon after arriving at Fort Hall to pursue unpaid annuity monies offered in compensation for removal. They doggedly pursued their claim through a variety of avenues over the course of the next fifty years, forcing the BIA to grapple with the persistence of Lemhi identity. By 1939 officials had compiled a census of Lemhis

and their descendants eligible to receive payment. Slowly, individual per capita shares were distributed. But when it came time to dispense the surplus of the fund, the Lemhis were confronted with Shoshone-Bannock designs on it. In the end, the BIA ruled that the Lemhis held exclusive rights to the monies. At the same time it refused to allow the Lemhis to exercise those rights because it determined that “it is impossible to make a distribution to the Lemhi Indians because they, as such, are not presently identifiable on the Fort Hall Reservation from other Indians located thereon.”²³ The BIA’s refusal to recognize the Lemhis despite the 1939 census, however, only strengthened their identity and created confusion about their status at Fort Hall that carried over into the Lemhis’ Indian Claims Commission (ICC) case that followed, the subject of chapters 4 and 5.

As the controversy over the Lemhi annuity claim began to wind down, one of even greater magnitude began to take shape, as a multi-layered Shoshone land claim began to wind its way through the legal proceedings of the ICC. Chapter 4 recounts the first stage of these proceedings, which played out against the backdrop of the government’s shift in Indian policy to one of termination, or withdrawal of federal oversight. The Shoshone claim was one of several cases before the ICC that became a forum for the now-famous debates between anthropologist Julian Steward and his former student Omer Stewart. These debates over Great Basin sociopolitical organization, first introduced in chapter 1, continued beyond the proceedings of the commission into the academic realm.

The ICC indicated that it found Omer Stewart’s arguments more convincing when it delivered a 1962 ruling awarding four Indian groups the right to claim compensation for the wrongful seizure of their lands. The Lemhis were one of these groups, and the claim for their aboriginal territory, the focus of chapter 5, eventually resulted in a \$4.5 million settlement offer. When it became evident that their homeland and millions of dollars were on the line, many Lemhis organized to oppose the ICC award offer, but their efforts were in vain. Ultimately, all tribal members at Fort Hall held stake in all claims as a result of the way the ICC act was worded, a fact that remained unclear to many tribal members until it was too late. Nonetheless, when Fort Hall tribal members voted to accept the settlement award for the Lemhi claim, a number of the Lemhi minority sought unsuccessfully

to intervene to reverse the decision and gain control over it. In the end, the Lemhis' minority status at Fort Hall cost them control over monies offered in restitution for their homeland, and as before, the Lemhis would find the federal government unsympathetic to their objections because it failed to distinguish the Lemhis from other Indian peoples at Fort Hall.

Political organization associated with the Salmon River country helped to reinforce Lemhi identity at Fort Hall, but more tangible ties to their homeland also sustained that identity. Despite removal in 1907, a community of Lemhis clung fiercely to the landscape of the town of Salmon, Idaho. The Lemhi presence in Salmon, the subject of chapter 6, fluctuated in size as Lemhis from Fort Hall came for stays of varying duration to visit, tend to ancestral grave sites, and hunt and fish.

Salmon fishing in particular remained important for Lemhis after removal, whether they were from Salmon or Fort Hall. As anadromous fish runs declined during the course of the second half of the twentieth century, however, Indian treaty rights met with increasing opposition from state officials, angling enthusiasts, and others. Chapter 7 explores the controversy that emerged over Indian salmon harvesting, with a particular emphasis on the Lemhi Shoshones' struggle to retain access to their traditional fishing grounds. Their efforts culminated in *State of Idaho v. Tinno*, a 1972 Idaho Supreme Court case involving a Lemhi, Gerald Tinno, who was indicted for violating fishing regulations, though in the end the court upheld his exercise of tribal treaty rights.

The final chapter brings the story of the Lemhi Shoshones and the Salmon River country up to the present by focusing on the contemporary Lemhi campaign for land restoration and recognition. The Lewis and Clark bicentennial provides an auspicious occasion for realizing such goals, even though the odds against the Lemhis seem great.

1

The Lemhi Shoshones and the Salmon River Country

The Lemhi . . . declare that they originated in the locality now occupied by them.

Robert Lowie, 1906

Understanding Lemhi identity starts with the Salmon River country. The Lemhi Indian people's aboriginal homeland there is one of the more remote areas in the continental United States. The Bitterroot mountain range, which forms the Continental Divide, and the Beaverhead Mountains border it to the east and north, and the rugged Selway-Bitterroot and Frank Church River of No Return wilderness areas bar easy access from the west and north. Two mountain ranges to the south run parallel to the Bitterroots: the Lemhi and Lost River ranges. The latter boasts Borah Peak, Idaho's highest point at 12,662 feet.

The Salmon River's nickname—the River of No Return—reflects the isolation of the area. The terrain around the Salmon River canyon is rugged and mountainous—the river falls more than a vertical mile in a 390-mile stretch, and the canyon is over 6,000 feet deep in places, a depth greater than the Grand Canyon and second only to nearby Hells Canyon. There are various accounts of the origin of the moniker River of No Return. It has been attributed to Lewis and Clark; the Salmon River canyon, after all, was the only obstacle that forced the Corps of Discovery to backtrack. Other accounts credit the National Geographic Society for coining the phrase in its 1936 article describing an expedition it cosponsored with the United States Geological Survey.

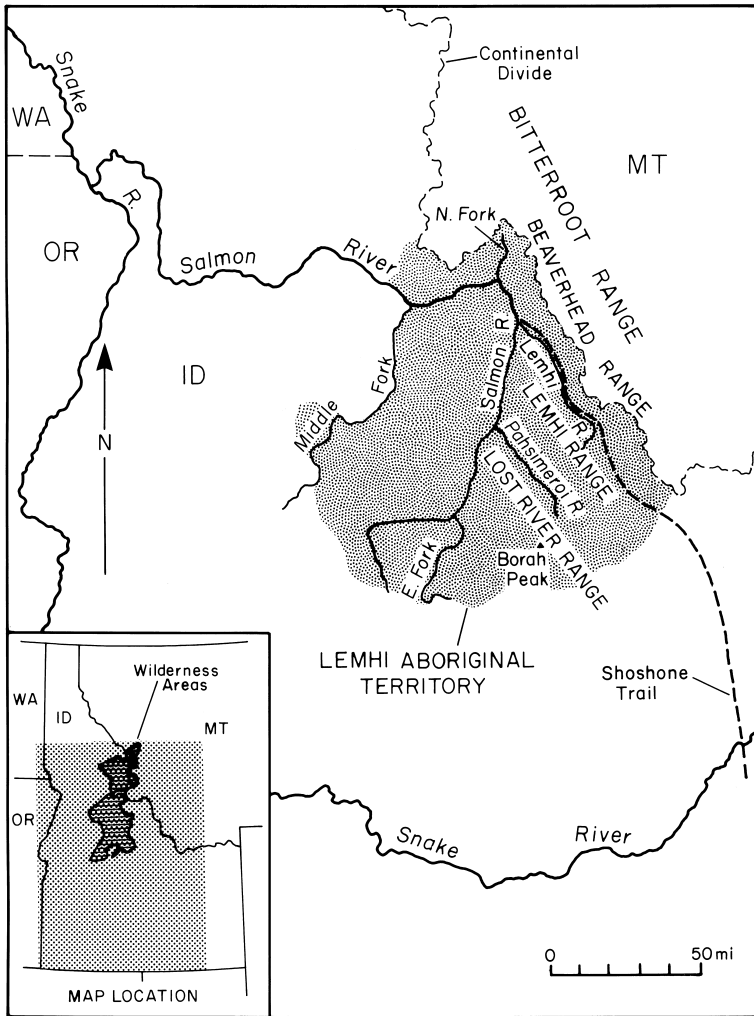
But the name River of No Return probably originated among early settlers of the area because the river was navigable to downstream, but not upstream, traffic. Indeed, even downstream navigation proved challenging. John McKay, a prospector, is credited with the first successful journey down the Salmon in 1871. Thereafter, the Northern Pacific and Midland Pacific railroads sponsored aborted survey expeditions for rail lines that were never built. Finally, in 1901 Harry "Cap"

Guleke managed to guide a prospector through, winning for himself much local acclaim in the process.¹ When the National Geographic Society later duplicated his feat, it credited him with the first successful trip down the river and modeled the boat it used on the scow that he had designed for his journey. The Society did not come up with the name River of No Return, but its article, together with the 1954 film entitled *River of No Return*, starring Marilyn Monroe and Robert Mitchum, certainly helped to popularize it.²

Prior to the arrival of non-Indians, the Lemhi Shoshones had long inhabited the upper reaches of the Salmon River. They named it after the feature most notable to them: the salmon runs that formed the base of their subsistence.³ When the Corps of Discovery reached the confluence of the Lemhi and Salmon rivers on August 21, 1805, Clark named it Lewis's River in honor of Lewis being the first non-Indian to see it. But the name never took hold because later inhabitants, like the Lemhis before them, continued to identify the river with its prolific salmon runs.⁴

Humans have inhabited the Salmon River country for more than ten thousand years, but the link between the earliest residents and the Lemhi Shoshones of the historical era is the subject of much debate.⁵ Scholars have generally agreed that the Lemhis and other Northern Shoshone Indians speak Numic, part of a family of related languages within the Uto-Aztecan group whose speakers expanded into what is now Idaho from some other place. The consensus, however, ends there, as there has been widespread disagreement over when this "Numic expansion" took place, where it started, and how and why it proceeded. David Madsen and David Rhode, editors of a volume of essays that displays the diversity of scholarly opinion on the Numic expansion, have discerned three major categories of models for the spread of Numic speakers.⁶

The first of these categories is the "traditionalist" view, which most closely resembles the model put forth by the pioneers of the concept of the Numic expansion, most notably Sydney Lamb. Drawing on Alfred Kroeber's recognition of the distribution of Numic languages, and employing lexicostatistical methodology, Lamb proposed in 1958 that the Numic peoples expanded to the north and east from the southwestern Great Basin in what is now southern California and Utah approximately one thousand years ago.⁷



Lemhi aboriginal territory in the Salmon River country, according to the determination of the Indian Claims Commission (1962).
The inset map, at left, indicates the location of the modern Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness Area (above) and the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness Area (below). Map by Sarah Moore.

Subsequent to Lamb's articulation of the theory of Numic expansion, traditionalist scholars, including Robert L. Bettinger, Martin A. Baumhoff, David B. Madsen, and Wick Miller, among others, have fine-tuned Lamb's linguistic work and complemented it with archeological evidence. Their work has supported Lamb's general hypothesis and they tend to dismiss alternative theories. "Competing hypotheses," Bettinger maintains in defense of Lamb, "which require fewer assumptions but do not engage the archeological or linguistic evidence in any detail (and frequently avoid specific reference to them altogether) are not presently viable alternatives."⁸

The second major group of scholars identified by Rhode and Madsen, which they label the "Basinist" perspective, accepts Lamb's concept of Numic expansion, but they argue that it occurred at an earlier date. Richard N. Holmer, for example, dates the arrival of the earliest ancestors of the Northern Shoshone in what is now Idaho to at least four thousand years ago. Holmer bases this conclusion on archeological evidence spanning late prehistoric to early historic times. The consistency over time of this "Shoshone assemblage," he maintains, makes it "clear that the technological tradition practiced by the historical Shoshone has roots in the Great Basin that extend back 4,000 to 5,000 years into prehistory."⁹

Donald K. Grayson concurs with Holmer that "the ancestors of modern Numic speakers entered much of the Great Basin as the middle Holocene ended, some 5,000 years ago or soon thereafter," but his rejection of Lamb's date is not based on archeology, as is Holmer's, but rather on Lamb's own forte, linguistics. Grayson argues that the shortcoming of Lamb's hypothesis lay in his methodological reliance on lexicostatistics, or glottochronology,¹⁰ which, he notes, "has been rejected by nearly all historical linguists." Followers of Lamb, Grayson concludes, have overlooked "a simple and undeniable fact. Glottochronology does not work."¹¹

The third category of scholarship on Numic expansion identified by Rhode and Madsen is the work of those "unconcerned with the point-of-origin squabbles" who focus more on the periphery of the area inhabited by Numic speakers. These "peripheralists," as they are called, "do not particularly care which of the first two models is the more valid as long as an expansion across much of the Colorado Plateaus in the last thousand years is included."¹²

Despite the variety of competing models that fit within the general framework of the paradigm first articulated by Lamb, there are also scholars who reject altogether the validity of the theory of a relatively recent Numic expansion to the north and east from the southwestern Great Basin. Deward E. Walker, for example, has argued that Lamb's linguistic hypothesis is one part of a "three-pronged anthropological research paradigm" that also includes Julian Steward's ethnographic work and Jesse Jennings's Desert Culture concept. Together, these views have come to be accepted as orthodoxy, so that scholars studying or theorizing about Numic speakers have been predisposed to emphasize their adaptation to desert environments. But for Walker it is the affinity that Northern Shoshone peoples have had with Plateau culture area groups and the Plains influence on the peoples in the eastern parts of the Plateau and Great Basin that are more striking.¹³

For Walker, then, the fact that the Lemhi Shoshones and other "northern Numic groups can be easily grouped with Plateau cultural systems" contradicts the theory that Numic speakers were relatively recent arrivals from the desert south, as proponents of the Lamb hypothesis have insisted. Nor does Walker accept that Holmer's argument for an earlier arrival of the ancestors of the Lemhi Shoshones reconciles the problem. For one thing, Walker maintains, "the linking of specific tool assemblages with particular ethnographic/linguistic groupings is suspect." Moreover, he points out that the "effort to employ the Numic-spread concept to interpret Shoshone-Bannock prehistory by use of various tool types is valid only if the Numic-spread idea is valid."¹⁴

While Walker concedes that "many archeologists still adhere" to the Lamb thesis, he also notes that alternative models have been proposed. Earl Swanson, Walker explains, was one of the first archeologists to reject Lamb's paradigm. In 1972 Swanson suggested, in direct contradiction to Lamb, that the Numic peoples spread from the northern Rocky Mountains to the south and west, rather than north and east from the southwestern Great Basin. This scenario, which posits that the Lemhis in historical times occupied the regions closest to the source of their cultural predecessors, instead of relegating them to the margins of the Great Basin culture area, is more consistent with Walker's view of the Lemhi Shoshones as part of the Plateau cultural systems.¹⁵

While archeologists have been reluctant to abandon the Lamb paradigm, linguists have been far more critical. In 1977 James A. Goss, for example, as Walker explains, criticized scholars for their blind acceptance of the Lamb hypothesis. The Lamb version of the Numic spread, he argued, became a “pet model” for prehistorians, and their commitment to it undermined other competing interpretations and the evidence that supported them. Like Swanson, Goss rejected the Lamb model and its recent arrival hypothesis, and with Swanson argued that Numic speakers appeared in the Great Basin and southern Idaho as long ago as ten thousand years.¹⁶

In sum, there is wide disagreement among prehistorians concerning the origins of the earliest ancestors of the Lemhis and the time of their arrival in the Salmon River country. There is, however, one final view that merits consideration: that of the Lemhi Shoshones themselves. The controversy over the Numic spread is more than a debate among scholars; it has serious legal repercussions as well. “In the past,” Pat Barker and Cynthia Pinto explain, “archeologists have controlled the archeological record through appeals to its scientific importance. In the late 1970s,” they continue, “the appeal to science began to lose its political effectiveness and Native American claims to control of the indigenous past began to prevail in the legislative arena.” This trend, they point out, is well illustrated by a comparison of the provisions of the 1979 Archeological Resources Protection Act and the 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.¹⁷

The issue of Numic expansion also has political overtones. The Western Shoshones, for instance, “believe that the scientific position is another way for whites to repress the rights of native people,” and therefore “the discipline is now tainted as being politically motivated.” While prehistorians debate over the timing and nature of the Numic expansion, “the Western Shoshone assert that they have always lived within the ethnographic territory that they held at the time of contact,” in accordance with their creation narratives.¹⁸

According to Robert Lowie, an anthropologist who did fieldwork among the Lemhis prior to their removal to Fort Hall in 1907, the same is true with the Lemhi Shoshones. Lemhi oral tradition holds that they originated in the Salmon River country, rather than migrating there from some other place.¹⁹