

The chapter is rife with lists of the environmental, legal, and health abuses heaped on the Pueblo people in the name of energy progress. Perhaps the following quote serves as a summary sample of Matthiessen's perspective:

Now it was 1979, and here in the sacred Tukunavi, the spring light of late April came darkly through the haze of ash, the unseen mist of lead, mercury, dioxides, sulphuric acid, and other sickening pollutants that all dwellers in one of the most dramatic regions of the earth are doomed to breathe. Most of the human inhabitants are Indians, who watch in silence as their bare, clean world is turned into a wasteland. Five of the six plants now in operation are fired by coal from nearby strip mines, which contribute their own poisons to the air and water, but coal is not the only menace. In 1948, Kerr-McGee, attracted by cheap defenseless labor as well as the lack of health, safety, and pollution regulations, became the first company to mine uranium on Indian lands. Not far south of Shiprock are dead mines into which, for sixteen years, the overseers of Kerr-McGee sent Navajo miners when the air was still choked with uranium dust from the blasting; as late as 1966 (three years before Kerr-McGee abandoned its operation), there was no ventilation system in the mines. Perhaps because they had no concept of "radiation," the Indians were given no protective masks, nor were ever warned of their great danger: since no drinking water was provided, they often drank from the puddles of "hot" water on the mine floor. Within years of the mine-closing, twenty-five Navajo—about one miner in five, including young men in their thirties—had died of anaplastic cancer of the lungs, with a like number of dead and many others dying of dust poisoning, or pulmonary fibrosis, and no end to these ravages in sight. Two brothers named Billy and Lee John who worked together for seven years were dead of cancer within five months of each other; a woman named Betty Yazzie lost one husband, then another, to the same disease. Yet Kerr-McGee and the Atomic Energy Commission, which was buying the milled uranium produced, dodged all responsibility for the deaths; they left behind a poisoned and poverty stricken community, a radioactive mill, and seventy-one acres of spent uranium ore that is estimated to retain up to eighty-five percent of the original radiation. These tailings, exposed to wind and rain, were dumped about twenty yards from the banks of the San Juan River, the crucial source of water for the region. Such tailings piles, together with unfilled exploratory holes that did not pan out but are spreading surface radiation nonetheless, are unmarked death traps for Indians and others all over the Southwest. (296–97)

Given the ways in which Kerr-McGee, Anaconda, and other mining corporations abused not only the cheap Native American labor but also