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Navajo Police Special Investigator Ella Clah is on the run. Justine, Ella's cousin and fellow officer, disappeared after the two women argued publicly over Justine's new boyfriend. Human bones are discovered at the spot where the younger woman had told her family she and Ella were to meet late one night. Suddenly Ella Clah, cop, is Ella Clah, murder suspect.

Stunned by Justine's death, Ella has no time to mourn. Her former allies in the Navajo Police Department and the FBI are hot on her trail, using techniques she taught them to hunt her down. Ella has to find the real killers--and fast--before the Dineh act on a growing belief that Ella's mother, brother, and young daughter have become evil.

Red Mesa Details

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Author : Aimée Thurlo , David Thurlo

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From Reader Review Red Mesa for online ebook

Bernadette says

Red Mesa is #6 in a series of mysteries featuring Ella Clah, a special investigator in the Navajo Tribal Police. In this volume, Ella stands accused of murdering and dismembering her own second cousin, officer Justine Goodluck. With indefatigable effort, assistance from loyal brothers and sisters in arms, and clues from an unknown informant, she uncovers the truth.

I do not know enough about Navajo culture and politics to say whether they are portrayed accurately in this book. In chapter 3, when information about Ella's "dark legacy" is introduced, and at other points in the book where this "part myth, part history, and part legend" is discussed, one may wonder if Navajos as a group are being depicted as unintelligent gossipers, for we are told that "many in the tribe will never accept" Ella and her family simply because of their descent from an incestuous relationship between a man and woman of the same clan (pg. 25-26). But otherwise, various "traditionalist" characters are portrayed as caring, knowledgeable, and unique persons. For example, Rose is the dedicated and expert grandmother who raises Ella's daughter. While she often argues with Ella about the proper way to parent Dawn, Ella often accepts her guidance and the baby is happier and healthier because of it. Brother Clifford, who supplies healing ceremonies and medicines within the community, assists Ella to the extent that he can in her detective work and in evading her manhunt. These two characters are not simplistically portrayed in a "Native-affirmative" light, however. Rose is at times stubborn, refusing to allow much-needed assistance (pgs. 50-52). Ella and Rose both acknowledge that Clifford is not spending enough time with his wife and son, thus causing significant strain in his marriage (pg. 106). For those who are interested in contemporary American Indian life, there are glimpses of longstanding conflict between Hopis and Navajos (pg. 37), the complexities of police jurisdiction on reservations (pg. 66-68), the difficulty of "walking the line" between tradition and modernity (pg. 148), social problems such as alcoholism, fetal alcohol syndrome, and gambling addiction (pg. 157-161 and 201-205), the importance of learning language toward molding Native identities (pg. 222-225), and other timely issues. Personally, I wish these topics were more fully developed and integral to the narrative, but perhaps this is too much to expect of an action-oriented page-turner like this one.

Many reviewers compare Aimee and David Thurlo to Tony Hillerman, whose detective novels also feature Navajo protagonists. Though I have only read one book from each, I prefer the Thurlos' work because of the complex relationships Ella shares with family and community members. I am not a heavy reader of mysteries, but for me it is refreshing to find a single, working mother at the center of a book. I look forward to more.

Jewett says

I really like this series but I regret that Ella is always the scapegoat - sometimes she should just be the heroine.

Catherine Woodman says

I love Ella Clah and this whole series, altho' it wouldn't be bad for her to get a love interest that lasted at

some point--she is a great Native American and the mysteries are very good

Deb says

Pretty much a Hillerman knockoff. A marginally interesting story, but Waaaaay too many tense rides on dirt roads in the dark to get away from a pursuer and quick pull offs to hide. The main character is a stressed out female tribal cop and mother of a toddler who seems to do nothing but fall asleep. Worst of all, a pair of twins show up in the penultimate chapter as the obvious suspects whom we had no inkling as they have never been mentioned.

Stefanie says

I really enjoyed this adventure of Ella's. She ends up being put under suspicion of killing her assistant and fellow cop Justine. Of course her family legacy is also dogging her steps, especially with a giant portion of the community under the belief that she has gone to the dark side. Before I thought that having a daughter would greatly affect her character, but it really hasn't changed her behavior all that much. This book also contained more details on her brother and his family which I found interesting. It's about time that we learn more about Clifford and the obstacles in his life as a medicine man of the tribe, father, and husband. I also really liked how despite having the deck stacked against her; Ella still had friends who stood beside her and believed in her innocence. Looking forward to reading the next book.

Sandy says

One of the best in the series, I think. I'd recommend the Ella Clah books to anyone that likes the Tony Hillerman books.

It's definitely better to read the books in this series in order. I started with one of the later books and went back to start with the first.

Thea says

I was really into this book and could not wait for the end.

Jackie R says

This has to be one of the worst books I've read in a very long time. Incredibly boring, predictable, and the main character a total nothing, I would not waste my time on any other books by the Thurlos. I only finished it because it was this month's mystery book club book.

Doris says

In this continuation of the Ella Clah series, the department itself, but especially Ella, is under attack by some devious personage who has committed loathsome deeds in the cover of darkness. Now Ella is fighting not only for justice but for her own freedom, and for once very little mention is made of skinwalkers.

The tight knit groups of family and friends make this a compelling read, and the background and history of The People and especially of Ella's family ties it all together, in a weave that makes this a powerful book.

P. Upshaw says

Good mystery

Always enjoy Ella Clah stories. They show the many issues related to struggles between her life as a police officer and the traditional life of the culture of the people she strives to protect. Conflicts are everywhere she turns.

Gypsy Lady says

Regarding radio talk shows

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He sure gets people talking about his radio show, and I guess that makes his advertisers happy. Freedom of speech can be an impressive moneymaker even in misguided hands.

Mary says

Another good read in Aimee Thurlo's Ella Clah mystery series. I like the setting of these books--the southwest, the main character Ella and the recurring characters who add depth to the books, and the mysteries. I find the cultural info about the Navajos to be interesting as well as intriguing. I would recommend this series but it should be read starting with the first book.

Chris Noel says

A series with Navajo policewoman, Ella Clah. Ella's cousin, Justine, goes missing and is assumed dead. Bones and a finger are found. Ella investigates and it begins to look like she is the murderer. She is in trouble with some of the tribe who believe she has turned to evil. She has to untangle who framed her & why, and at the same time protect her mother and daughter.

Nancy Wilson says

Justine is dead--or is she? Ella killed her--or did she??? So many tangles and intrigue--and more to come!

Bj Hoover says

This is a really gripping novel in the Ella Clah series. Accused of murdering her second cousin and partner in the Special Investigator Unit of the Navajo police, Ella struggles to solve the Red Mesa mystery. With further developments in her life and her mother's, Ella strives to walk in beauty.
