

REVIEW

THE NEZ PERCES IN THE INDIAN TERRITORY: NIMIIPUU SURVIVAL

by J. Diane Pearson

foreword by Patricia Penn Hilden

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Review by Clifford E. Trafzer

University of California, Riverside

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"I will fight no more forever!" These famous words, attributed to Young Joseph of the Wallowa Band of Nez Perce Indians, still ring in the minds of contemporary Americans. Although Chief Joseph never said these words at the time of his conditional surrender to Colonel Nelson Miles and General Oliver Howard, most people in Oregon have heard the phrase and can identify it with the Nez Perce War of 1877. School children often learn about the flight of the Nez Perce through their fifth- or eighth-grade texts in American history. Students in Oregon, Idaho, and Washington often know more details than other students about the Nez Perce because of general interest in the famous conflict. Few people in Oregon or the United States, however, know the details pertaining to the decision of the United States Army to remove the Nez Perce fighters and their families to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and later to Indian Territory. In the past, only a few scholars have examined the forced removal of the Nez Perce and life in Indian Territory, but no historian has thoroughly examined the topic until now. For the first time in American history, J. Diane Pearson of the University of California, Berkeley, has detailed the story of the Nez Perce removal and life in Eekish Pah, the Hot Place.

Pearson entitled her work *The Nez Perces in the Indian Territory: Nimiipuu Survival*, placing particular emphasis on the survival of the people in the face of horrendous odds and continual obstacles. She also points out that the survival of the people included Nez Perce, Palouse, and Cayuse Indians, all of whom joined in the war of 1877 and experienced exile, adaptations, accommodations, population decline, and survival. The author provides insightful details about their years in Indian Territory, including information on bacterial and viral diseases that devastated the people, as well as overwhelming infant mortality. She emphasizes the poverty and malnutrition faced by the tribes and the harmful behaviors practiced by some people. She also shows how the leadership, including Joseph, Yellow Bull, Husis Kute, Yellow Bear, and others, brought the people together to face long-term and everyday difficulties. Pearson places a great deal of emphasis on the spiritual strategies of the people to survive, as some Indians gravitated toward the Presbyterian church while others worshiped through the Wáashat faith, the ancient religion of Plateau Indians. A great deal of the book, however, centers on political and economic issues, as the people worked diligently to earn a living and free themselves from the bonds of the Office of Indian Affairs.

Under the terms of their conditional surrender of 1877, at the Bear Paw Battlefield in Montana, representatives of the United States government agreed to return the people to the Nez Perce Reservation in Idaho. But General William Tecumseh Sherman punished the people by ordering them to Kansas. The Office of Indian Affairs then banished them to Indian Territory. From 1877 until 1885, the Nez Perce, Palouse, and Cayuse lived on the Quapaw and Ponca agencies. During all this time, the Indians actively fought for their return to the Northwest. Pearson thoroughly examines this time period in twelve insightful chapters that deal briefly with the war before focusing on the removal and life at Fort Leavenworth. After providing the larger picture of life at the Quapaw Agency, Pearson writes an engaging chapter on Indian leadership and measures taken by the people to return to their homeland. Although she has a chapter devoted to intertribal relations, the topic is a constant throughout the book, as she weaves a story of Native American interactions among, and between, tribes. Pearson offers one chapter on formal education and another on religion, which includes the importance of Christianity and Christian advocates for Nez Perce people. She argues that Nez Perce leaders never wavered from their interest in returning to the Pacific Northwest, and she ends the volume with a moving chapter about leaving Indian Territory.

In 1978, Nez Perce and Palouse healer Andrew George explained that during the early twentieth century, his elders would gather once a year to lament, crying for the people they left behind in Oklahoma. George admitted he knew little about why his family was in Oklahoma, and whenever he had asked his kin, they would not say due to the pain. Pearson has unlocked the pain suffered by so many Indian people by exposing a tragic time and numerous experiences witnessed by Nez Perce, Cayuse, and Palouse people. She has provided an analysis of the topic using original sources and enlightened interpretations. The book is well researched and nicely written, allowing scholars and general audiences access to a topic that has received little attention. The Nez Perce, Cayuse, and Palouse people will welcome this superior work on their history, and scholars will hail this book as a major contribution. The University of Oklahoma Press has produced a handsome volume at a competitive price that does justice to this captivating historical work.