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## A Review and Comments on Indian Histories

Karl E. Cilmont

**Nee Hemish: A History of Jemez Pueblo.** By Joe Sando. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1983. 258 pp. \$19.95 Cloth.

**Noon Neemepoo.** By Allen P. Slickpo, Sr. and Deward E. Walker, Jr. Lawi-ID: Nez Perce Tribe, 1973.

**Our Home Forever: A Hupa Tribal History.** By Bryan Nelson, Jr. and Others. Hoopa, CA: Hupa Tribe, 1978. 224 pp. Cloth.

**Walker River Paiutes: A Tribal History.** By Edward C. Johnson. Walker River, NV: Walker River Paiute Tribe, 1978. 201 pp. \$9.50 Cloth.

**The Southern Utes: A Tribal History.** By James Jefferson, Robert W. Delaney and Gregory C. Thompson. Ignacio, CO: Southern Ute Tribe, 1972. 106 pp. Cloth.

**Ogaxpa.** By Joy Reed. Quapaw, OK: Quapaw Tribe, 1977. 119 pp. Paper.

In the annals of North American history, there is a dearth of records for tribal histories. Since the multitude of original peoples on this continent left no written records, unlike the European settlers with diaries and letters, there is scant historical evidence to show who came when and from where. Hence, the only extant evidence is that which has been uncovered in various archaeological sites and petroglyphic inscriptions at scattered locations.

Recent social and legal changes in the last half century have spurred more tribes to produce a written record, possibly as a gesture for recognition among most tribes, however, this need for "recognition" is deemed an Anglo societal concept.

Nevertheless, what has evolved has been a mild plethora of personal accounts, tribal histories, and an awareness that Native Americans have as yet a history that has been untold by various media. What has been published has been largely from two genres of tribal developments (assuming for the moment an exclusion of general and regional archaeological accounts of sundry site excavations), which have attempted to shed some light either on a particular tribe's evolution, or on a particular tribe's place in its evolution toward twentieth-century life in an Anglo world.

From these genres, two distinct patterns of recording tribal histories seem to have emerged. One is written from a tribe's viewpoint (*Noon Neemepoo*, Nez Perce; *Ogaxpa*, Quapaw; *Our Home Forever*, Hupa), and the other consists of a chronological account showing the tribe's growth in a particular geographic location. It must be emphasized that Indian ways do not necessarily have to be carbon copies of other ethnic groups. As the Indian sees life, so it is—whether it is a description of chants as an influence on tribal culture or how the tribal council battled an inept Bureau of Indian Affairs and hostile white neighbors.

Considering the histories which express a tribal viewpoint, there is, for example, in *Our Home Forever*, an extensive discussion of the Hupa Valley conflicts in California and gradual efforts to gain deserved recognition. This, as well as others, is mostly a first-person account, since the elders are always those who know what transpired (at least from the tribal viewpoint) and have the wisdom to teach the tribal heritage to younger individuals. Of course, intermingled with these histories are accounts of past wrongdoings and a mixture of folklore. A primary purpose of a tribal history can be to set the record from the other side, as, for instance, in the case of the Nez Perce. What most history texts, including various military journals, reveal is that the Nez Perce were a raiding tribe that infringed on the rights of settlers who wished to inhabit the western plains. What is now revealed in *Noon Neemepoo* is the history of a people who managed a vast terrain and were threatened by hostile invaders who neither recognized that they were on another's property nor even stopped to consider that the Nez Perce were the rightful owners of wide stretches of territory.

*Ogaxpa*, the tribal name of the Quapaw people of Oklahoma, stands for people who "went down the river" (Mississippi) to

settle among other neighboring tribes of the Peorias and Wyandottes. There they settled, and in this short edition, we learn not so much of their history as the stories and folkways of the tribe. Told in the style of one who wishes to relate standards and beliefs, the tribe's mores are revealed as being rich in heritage. If one were to sit with Quapaws, it would be very worthwhile to read this edition first, for these writings reveal attitudes not only toward themselves but also toward other Native Americans and outsiders. From a discussion of peyote (beneficial as an aid during certain ceremonials) to sports (bootball and foot races), the Quapaw emerge as having a distinct culture. Although this work is somewhat brief (119 pages), the photographs and diagrams assist in text description of Quapaw life. It is unfortunate that the narrator lacks sufficient background to fill the reader in on the history of the people as the country was being settled, but it may be the Quapaw way to summarize an origin and concentrate on the present. If that be the case, the work and the result should be of high importance to the Quapaw tribe and younger tribal members who are interested in learning about Quapaw ways.

When Colorado and Utah were adjunct territories to New Spain, the major Indian tribal organization was the Ute Tribe. Taking the name of Utah, most settled in present-day Colorado. In *The Southern Utes: A Tribal History*, there is little space given to the movement of the Utes before they saw the first European, so one must therefore conclude from this work that the Southern Utes spent most of their history under the domination of first the Spanish and later the Americans. While the Spanish did extend some colonization (and conversion) attempts throughout their hold on the southwest, what is pictured here is a Spanish attempt to completely destroy Ute life-styles. Southern Utes did conduct occasional raiding and were regarded in some areas as warlike and fearsome. The authors, however, neglect to mention the role which the Utes played in the Navajo wars (1865-1866), and the destruction caused by the Utes, which resulted in part of Canyon de Chelly being aptly named Canon del Muerto, "Canyon of the Dead Man," being where Utes deliberately starved or pushed Navajos to their deaths from atop steep canyon walls. In the American period, the Utes were assigned smaller reservation areas in southern Colorado and separated from other Ute people, most notably the Uintah of Utah. The work concludes with a short description of Ute customs and beliefs.

*Our Home Forever* is an account of a long bloody series of battles between Hupa (sometimes referred to as Hoopa) Indians of northwestern California and encroaching farmers, miners, loggers, and the military over land ownership and misunderstandings between the Native Americans who had settled and farmed the valleys, and white settlers who relegated to Indian rights and peace the value of dust and dirt. Due to sheer weight of numbers, it was a losing war, as history has amply demonstrated; but from the viewpoint of the Indians, this tale has appeared among most tribes. The history of the Hoopa, considered one of America's largest tribes, shows that the fate of the larger tribes was also shared by smaller groups. The title of this short story reflects not only Hupa philosophy but also the philosophy of every tribe that considers this land and all of its treasures as a universal home. The Hupa's story is important, not so much as an account of one tribe, although one tribe is just as important as another, but in as much as the difficulties of the Hupa have been the difficulties faced by every tribe. This short work of 224 pages is well documented, not only with references to Hupa history but also containing a good survey of Indians of California.

Perhaps one of the most heroic figures in American history is that of chief Joseph of the Nez Perce tribe. In *Noon Neemepoo*, the tribal name of the Nez Perce Indians ("We, the People"), the focus is not necessarily on Joseph but on the efforts of the Nez Perce to establish their own tribal settlement amid the frustration caused by onrushing settlers who desired and took what was not legally theirs to settle. From the Nez Perce viewpoint, the Davis Act of the mid-1920s was probably the second tragedy to affect tribal history, as that law not only deprived the Nez Perce of land ownership held since their time began but also forced upon them a foreign way of life based on private and restricted zoning of where one can live. The Nez Perce lost both of the wars of 1877 and the resistance to the provision set by the Congress (and the Bureau of Indian Affairs) under the Davis Act. This work, the first of two studies, basically dwells on the history of the tribe and gives very little information on the cultural bases upon which the people live. However, along with relevant photographs and a good bibliography, there is enough here to well acquaint anyone seeking detailed data about the Nez Perce.

Perhaps, just perhaps, the most influential movement among western tribes, albeit for a short time, was the Ghost Dance.

Emanating principally from the Walker River Paiutes (and associated with Wovoka), the eponymous history of the tribe is greater than this attempt to seek peace through an inner strength. From the Walker River in Nevada, the Paiutes depended on some fishing and limited farming to sustain life. As with all Indian peoples, they became subjected to land deprivations and a loss of much of their culture as cattlemen and miners swept through their lands, either on the way to various gold adventures or seeking new homesteads with greater horizons. In addition, a major factor in the outright theft of tribal property was the growth of western railroads. When the federal government did act, it was usually in a step against the wishes of the native peoples, as with the establishment of agencies under the supervision of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. In this study, the lives of the tribe, as told by themselves, reflect a great feeling of loss as to what their aspirations could have reached. With several Curtis photographs, both the simple life and various individuals are shown. Yet, it was through Wovoka, an early proponent of the Ghost Dance, that the people believe they lost their last great opportunity to achieve what they could call their own. It wasn't extinguished at Wounded Knee; it just became more subdued. That to the Paiutes their culture is strong and identifiable is clearly shown in this short study.

Occupying a major portion in the northern center of New Mexico are the Pueblo people, among whom are the Jemez who can trace their earliest villages to before the Spanish explorations. In *Nee Hemis*, the origins and early struggles for an identity are detailed and, by following Jemez history, there is also an accompanying account of the various governments which have ruled New Mexico, from Spanish to contemporary times. The Jemez are well known for their ceramic crafts. However, it is their strong cultural ties which make them so typical of most people. Having survived many attempts at extermination and relocation, all of which failed, the Jemez people occupy a strategic place in the history of the southwestern tribes. They believe their culture will bring goodness not only to their heirs but also to all who come in contact with it. The compilers of this history have amply demonstrated, with an abundance of excellent photographs and first-rate bibliography, that Indian history can be told well and with a great deal of accurate data.

Two distinct patterns emerge from tribal histories. There is one when someone steeped in tribal lore recounts images and begin-

nings, but concentrates on various current practices—education, council composition, the status of the sexes, and the role of various spiritual beings. Although basic tribal attitudes differ sharply from Anglos—the former are polytheistic, the latter monotheistic—what is interesting are the attitudes of different tribes to the same creature (e.g., coyote or owl). Moreover, what most Anglos cannot comprehend (and these same say this is the basic reason why Indians cannot unite as one ethnic society) is the Indian name for the tribe. There is an overwhelming majority of tribal names that, when translated, mean “The People.” If each tribe considers itself as the chosen one, then unity for collective leadership will falter. Tribal histories do not discuss this aspect however; nor do they mention relations with neighboring tribes.

The second pattern of Indian history comes from research conducted through university or other historical forums. Not only are there extensive chapters outlining archaeological beginnings and relationships with other tribes, but more data is also given concerning influences from surges of population expansion, government changes, and impact consequences (Manifest Destiny, post-Civil War, and civil rights movements).

Both approaches in their own ways describe a tribe's place, yet what is needed is a skillful blend of input from knowledgeable and communicative tribal elders and erudite scholars to produce a work where one can fully understand not only contemporary views but also historical perspectives. Only a few studies on the American westward movement have touched the subject even in a superficial manner.

Unlike other ethnic groups, Indians exist as no one group. No other ethnic society in North America is structured into as many independent groups (tribes) as are Indians. For all Indians, regardless of affiliation, to declare that no one Indian is different from another is an impossible task. Similarly, among other minorities, Cubans set themselves apart from Mexicans, and Nisei claim no kinship with Chinese or Koreans. Indians will reluctantly cooperate within the broad framework termed “Indian,” but not on many major issues. They usually revert to long-standing tribal customs that may include animosities stretching back for more than a century.

Where tribal histories have been lacking, the works discussed here will serve at best as a starting point for further research. Most include bibliographies and current identities. However,

when working with tribal elders, one should be well acquainted with their tribe's customs and basic history. As the archives of observers of events in Indian history become available, it is hoped that in the future there will be a comprehensive picture of every tribe compiled by either a knowledgeable tribal member or by a scholar who has the patience and skill needed to record what has transpired. Until that time comes, what we have is adequate but a long way from excellence.