

# UCLA

## American Indian Culture and Research Journal

### Title

Tell Them We Are Going Home: The Odyssey of the Northern Cheyennes. By John H. Monnett.

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5105v03w>

### Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 25(4)

### ISSN

0161-6463

### Author

Campbell, Gregory R.

### Publication Date

2001-09-01

### DOI

10.17953

### Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

**Tell Them We Are Going Home: The Odyssey of the Northern Cheyennes.** By John H. Monnett. Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001. 288 pages. \$27.95 cloth.

In the annals of nineteenth-century Native American–Euro-American relations in the West there are a number of historical events that significantly altered the course of government policy toward Native Americans. One such incident is the desperate escape of the Northern Cheyennes from Indian Territory after their forced removal south. Their struggle to return home after being escorted to Indian Territory under military escort drew national media attention and the sympathy of eastern liberals. The Northern Cheyenne's plight sparked congressional investigations. Ultimately the policy of removal was revoked, but not before it exacted a terrible cost. *Tell Them We Are Going Home: The Odyssey of the Northern Cheyennes* by John H. Monnett is a chronicle of the Northern Cheyenne's forced removal and escape back to their Northern Plains homeland.

Monnett opens the work with a cursory discussion of Colonel Ranald Mackenzie's winter attack of the Northern Cheyenne's camp along the Powder River. While the Northern Cheyenne's defeat of the tribe would eventually lead to their surrender in 1877 and culminate in the decision by military officials to remove them forcibly to Indian Territory, the social forces that led to that moment extends back at least three decades. Since 1850 the Northern Cheyennes had their lifeways directly threatened by the erosion of their lands and resources because of American nation-building. Emigrant settlers poured in in ever-increasing numbers across their territory. That situation was exasperated after the United States military decided to construct a series of forts along the frequented routes of travel in an effort to protect commerce and the westbound emigrants. Faced with the deterioration of their lands and resources, in combination with the growing hegemony of the military in their territory, the Northern Cheyenne and their allies fought a war of resistance.

Within months of their military subjugation, the decision is made to remove the Northern Cheyennes to Darlington Agency, Indian Territory. Governmental efforts for their removal began as early as 1874, withholding their annuity disbursements. The removal policy pursued by military in council with Northern Cheyenne leaders was consistent with the Bureau of Indian Affairs' policy of concentrating large numbers of Native Americans in a designated locale. It was believed that such a policy would be economically expedient and provide greater military control.

For the Northern Cheyenne leaders present, removal was not a viable option. After some deliberation, the Northern Cheyenne delegation chose Standing Elk to speak on their behalf. In direct opposition to the majority opinion held by the Northern Cheyenne headmen, Standing Elk announced that the Northern Cheyennes desired to go south. On May 17, 1877, the Indian Office received a dispatch from General Sheridan stating that the Northern Cheyennes desired to remove south. Despite the protests raised by C. H. Morgan, a representative of the Sioux Commission to President Hayes,

on May 28, 1877, 937 Northern Cheyennes, under the direction of Lieutenant Lawton, embarked for the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency, Indian Territory.

Monnett turns next to the stress and hardships faced by the Northern Cheyennes in Indian Territory. The Northern Cheyennes arrived at Darlington Agency on August 5, 1877, seventy days after their departure from Fort Robinson. At the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency, the Northern Cheyennes were confronted with infectious diseases, insufficient rations, severe social control by Indian Agent John D. Miles, cultural alienation, and political factionalism. Gradually a portion of the Northern Cheyennes led by Little Wolf and Morning Star moved some twelve miles northwest of the agency and in most respects acted like a separate tribe. Approximately 640 other Northern Cheyennes under Standing Elk and Living Bear continued to camp near the agency, associating themselves with the Southern Cheyennes.

Over the next three chapters, the author details their departure and the conflicts that arose in an attempt to recapture the Northern Cheyennes. Despite attempts by Agent Miles to force them to adjust to life in the South, on September 9, 1878, 257 Northern Cheyennes under Little Wolf, Morning Star, Old Crow, and Wild Hog, broke out of the military control that Agent Miles had ordered and fled northward. Initially 250 military troops were dispatched to intercept them. By the end of the campaign, over 1,000 United States military regulars would be involved in pursuing the Northern Cheyennes.

During their march north, the Northern Cheyenne met US troops in major battles at Turkey Springs and Punished Woman's Fork. In each instance they were able not only to halt the attack, but also to inflict harsh defeats on the United States military. These battles however were not without cost. The Northern Cheyenne lost lives and property.

As the Northern Cheyennes proceeded toward their homeland, warriors went out from the main band raiding Kansas settlements for property. Some warriors also killed a number of settlers. In discussing the depredations, Monnett outlines several reasons for their raids across Kansas. Although hypotheses proposed by several other authors range from kin revenge to psychological stress and anger, Monnett rightly concludes that after losing most of their stock at the Battle of Punished Woman's Fork, horses and food became immediate needs if they were to continue homeward.

The Kansas raids focused national media attention of the Northern Cheyennes' plight. The bands traveled together, avoiding United States military troops until crossing the North Platte River. At that point, 149 Northern Cheyennes led by Morning Star attempted to reach Red Cloud Agency, but the band was captured and taken to Fort Robinson, Nebraska. The incidence leading to the Northern Cheyenne outbreak from the fort and their slaughter is graphically portrayed in chapters six and seven.

On January 3, 1879, despite repeated pleas from Morning Star not to be sent back to Indian Territory, the Indian Office ordered the military to return the band south. Learning their fate, the Northern Cheyennes refused to go south. In response to their objections, Captain Wessells locked them in the barracks under military guard and withdrew all firewood, food, and water to starve them into compliance. The result of Wessell's actions was a desperate

escape attempt by Morning Star's people that led to sixty-four Northern Cheyenne deaths, seven missing, and seventy-eight people recaptured.

Of the seventy-eight survivors, twenty were escorted to Kansas to stand trial for murders committed during their flight north from Indian Territory. The remaining survivors were permitted to transfer to the Pine Ridge Agency. After the trial, the twenty Northern Cheyennes were taken back to the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency in Indian Territory. There they joined Little Chief's people, who were forcibly removed to Indian Territory in the fall of 1878.

Little Wolf and 114 of his followers, as Monnett discusses, wintered on Lost Chokecherry Creek, eventually surrendering to Lieutenant W. P. Clark north of the Black Hills. Lieutenant Clark escorted his band to Fort Keogh, where they lived next to Two Moon's band. At the fort, Little Wolf's people settled into the routine of living under the watchful eye of the army. The Fort Keogh Northern Cheyennes drew high praise by the post military officials for their loyalty of military service as scouts and their willingness to adopt the virtues of "civilized" pursuits.

In the epilogue, Monnett weaves together a number of historical vignettes describing several major events and individuals involved in the Northern Cheyenne struggle to remain north. This includes the 1884 creation of the Tongue River Reservation by presidential executive order. It was a reservation paid for with suffering, blood, and sheer determination to return home. It also meant the reconsolidation of their population. Within two years, Two Moon, Morning Star, and Little Wolf led their bands onto to the newly created reserve. Little Chief and his people would join them in 1891 from Pine Ridge Agency. As the Northern Cheyennes faced the realities of reservation life, many of the major leaders who participated in the great return died. The memory of their forced removal and their sacrifice to return home is not a faded memory, however. Like the Sand Creek Massacre, contemporary Northern Cheyennes still remember the struggle of their relatives. It is etched into their ethnic consciousness.

With respect to the Anglo-Americans who pursued and fought with the Northern Cheyennes, Captain Henry Wessells, Second Lieutenant John Baxter, and Lieutenant William P. Clark all faded into the annals of history. Even those settlers killed by Northern Cheyenne warriors as they moved through Kansas are relegated to a historical marker.

The author concludes by returning to a theme briefly touched on in the book's introduction:

Modern Americans must cease to isolate the Indian Wars as over simplified examples of atrocities, violence, and institutionalized injustice. We must no longer consider simply "Indian History" or simply "military history." Sorting out atrocities or injustices by group, for the purpose of using them as a measure against opposing groups, leads to separate ownership of what is, in reality, the shared history of Indian and non-Indian peoples. . . .

The story of the odyssey of the Northern Cheyenne is too complex and disturbing in its inconsistencies to isolate as simply cultural-historical property of either Cheyennes, the Kansas settlers, or the federal government. In total, the odyssey of the Northern Cheyennes created seem-

ingly inexplicable and unnecessary suffering for a variety of Americans—Indians, whites, African Americans, and persons of mixed ancestry. (p. 204)

It is in these final pages that the author's motivations for writing the work become clear. Monnett's plea for a common historical unity is well intended, but ignores the contextual realities of the event. The forced removal of the Northern Cheyennes and their embattled journey home occurred as part of the national expansionism of the United States. Native Americans, including the Northern Cheyennes, were viewed as a racially inferior people who were an impediment to that process. If there is a unifying trajectory that binds us all, it is this historical reality, not apologies or hollow pleas to comprehend each other's perspectives on a singular historical event.

As a history, *Tell Them We Are Going Home* is thoroughly documented and meticulously researched, especially in describing the Northern Cheyenne's flight north. The book is a valuable addition, not because it contributes any new insights, but because it draws together a mass of literature. It is the book's synthetic nature that makes it a contribution.

*Gregory R. Campbell*  
University of Montana

**The Voice of Dawn: An Autohistory of the Abenaki Nation.** By Frederick Matthew Wiseman. Hanover: University of New England Press, 2001. 220 pages. \$45.00 cloth; \$19.95 paper.

This unique book combines scholarly research and the rich personal history of the Alnobak or Abenaki people. The author, Frederick Wiseman, draws upon his own memoirs, filled with oral traditions and the personal knowledge that comes with being one of the people, along with photographic archives and his academic training in archaeology to uncover Abenaki history. His book also draws upon the well-respected secondary sources on the Abenaki of Colin Calloway, William Haviland, and the late Gordon Day.

At times Wiseman walks a tight rope between scholars and himself, and between competing factions in the contemporary Abenaki communities. He recognizes his occasional precarious positions but he also seems to welcome the challenge of creating a history that repatriates the past to his people. Repatriation is, in fact, a major theme of his book. As he states in the first chapter, repatriation means more than returning sacred archaeological materials to the people. Repatriation also means repossessing one's paleoenvironmental and ethnohistorical information and ideas. In sum, repatriation calls for taking back the past, making it more accessible to the people themselves and refiguring it—not in terms of white or Iroquoian hegemony, but in terms of the Abenaki perspective that for so long has been neglected.

*The Voice of the Dawn* spans the earliest recorded archaeological data about the Abenaki to the present-day factionalism within the tribe. Wiseman always