

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Northwestern Tribes in Exile: Modoc, Nez Perce, and Palouse Removal to the Indian Territory. Edited by Clifford E. Trafzer.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5165047f>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 11(2)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Wells, Merle

Publication Date

1987-03-01

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/>

Northwestern Tribes in Exile: Modoc, Nez Perce, and Palouse Removal to the Indian Territory. Edited by Clifford E. Trafzer. Sacramento: Sierra Oaks Publishing Company, 1987. 137 pp. \$11.95 Paper.

Unimpressed by a long series of failures in trying to relocate eastern Indians in Oklahoma and to have them emerge as happy ranchers and plains farmers, United States government agents decided to apply that same policy to northwestern bands. A few Modocs from southern Oregon and northern California managed to get by in a southern plains environment far different from anything they had been used to. But other displaced northwestern bands finally had to be sent back to lands nearer their original homes when their unsatisfactory plight in Oklahoma became a national outrage. After a century and more of additional experience in experimenting with policies that failed, administrators of Indian agencies have shown that most of what was intended to be helpful and humanitarian could not accomplish those objectives. So large numbers of peoples were confined to reservations under conditions that ruined traditional cultural patterns without supplying appropriate alternatives. Other programs designed not to be beneficent or charitable did not work either. Many Indians had a pretty clear idea of what was wrong, but their views usually were ignored.

Western miners and ranchers who tolerated Indians at all—and most did not—generally insisted that they be exiled to distant reservations. Two Modoc bands experienced that kind of pressure in 1864. They already had encountered serious trouble with miners and ranchers, but had gained a few white friends. Violent opposition had been more typical, and when Joaquin Miller had landed in a Yreka jail for having tried to help them, his sympathetic attorney could think of no suitable defense other than a plea of insanity, which at least proved successful. Unable to settle with their Klamath friends on an Oregon reservation, Captain Jack's Modocs finally had to retreat to some lava beds where they held out with spectacular skill during an 1873 campaign that concluded with their exile to Oklahoma. More individualistic than most northwestern Indians, they survived a distasteful situation there. Four years later, several bands of Nez Perce exiles had an unsolicited opportunity to join them.

Idaho settlers firmly resisted all attempts to allow four independent Nez Perce bands, including Oregon's Wallowa and

Washington's Palouse groups, to return to an Idaho reservation after they had been forced in 1877 to travel through Idaho and Montana all summer in search of a little peace and quiet. Military pressure to force them to abandon their traditional homelands in order to join some other Nez Perce peoples in Idaho led to a series of battles that punctuated a 1,700 mile army campaign. After a severe defeat at Whitebird in June, army authorities failed to capture their Nez Perce adversaries during a number of widely separated engagements. Hostilities finally ended in October in north central Montana. During a battle at Bear Paws, 98 Nez Perce warriors accompanied a larger number of women and children to exile in Canada, where they were protected from hostile ranchers and settlers who resisted their return to Idaho. They were a lot better off than those who remained and agreed to go back to Idaho. Colonel Nelson A. Miles made a deal with Joseph—whose Wallowa band had consented with great reluctance to settle in Idaho—to suspend any further armed conflict in return for Nez Perce consent to occupy their Idaho reservation. Joseph accepted that arrangement, since that was what he had been trying to do all summer, and a majority of women and children (352 in all) along with a minority of men (79, including many in no condition to travel to Canada) came with him. But they were shipped off to Oklahoma instead. Miles tried to get his agreement honored, but army authorities could not overcome Idaho resistance to letting Joseph's people come back.

A vast historical literature has emerged to explain Modoc and Nez Perce tribulations that led to their removal to Oklahoma. Much less has been published concerning their life there. So Clifford Trafzer published two articles dealing with Palouse participation in that episode. These are reprinted in his North-western *Tribes in Exile*. A number of specialists in Indian history have contributed accounts of Modoc (Robert K. Sutton and Lucile Martin) and Nez Perce (Steve Evans, Carol Bull, Dorothy Garceau, and Carole Seeman) phases that provide similar coverage. Richard D. Scheuerman joined in preparation of Palouse military history. All of these articles are sympathetic to Modoc and Nez Perce cultural orientation and preferences. Although contextual information presented in this compilation generally can be found somewhere in earlier publications, this volume is valuable for presenting a useful summary of northwestern antecedents to Indian removal to Oklahoma. Modoc and Nez Perce experience in Oklahoma has received much less attention, and

adding that material to an earlier account of Palouse misfortunes there provides convenient access to information relating to that somewhat neglected subject. Repetition of material concerning Palouse and other independent Nez Perce bands that wound up in Oklahoma is unavoidable when their adventures are dealt with in separate chapters. A fully integrated presentation would require consolidation of accounts prepared by different authors.

Each chapter is organized as part of a consistent interpretation of an important feature of northwestern Indian history. Presented in a national context, this volume offers more than an ordinarily useful account. Nez Perce people who preferred to retain their traditional culture had a more difficult time getting release from their Oklahoma captivity than did those who were willing to acculturate with Idaho's reservation bands. Reasons for their resettlement at Colville instead of in Idaho are covered adequately. Most Nez Perce histories have paid less attention to later developments covered in this volume. In its conclusion, it summarizes subsequent developments that merit additional investigation needed to clarify later Nez Perce history. A transition is provided to explain an important subsequent era that needs further attention by specialists, including those who have made this welcome contribution to Indian history.

Merle Wells

Idaho State Historical Society

Shared Symbols, Contested Meanings: Gros Ventre Culture and History, 1778–1984. By Loretta Fowler. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987. 301 pp. \$35.00 Cloth, \$14.95 Paper.

Even though the Indians have lived on reservations for over a century, researchers have only recently begun to analyze this important period in Native American history. Not only are these investigations identifying cultural continuities and changes over the past one hundred years, but they are discovering that many of the forces that affected the tribes before the reservation era continue to influence their lives today. In addition, more scholars are recognizing that the Indians were not passive victims of white policies but attempted to deal with these foreign actions within the contexts of a dynamic culture. In her book, *Shared*