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Review of *They Called It Prairie Light: The Story of Chilocco Indian School* By K. Tsianina Lomawaima

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They Called It Prairie Light: The Story of Chilocco Indian School. By K. Tsianina Lomawaima. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994. Preface, maps, illustrations, epilogue, methodology appendices, notes, bibliography, index. xviii + 205 pp. \$25.00.

They Called it Prairie Light is the best book I have read recently about life in the boarding school system. The narration and interviews are interwoven into an easy readable style. Lomawaima has done an exceptional job of painting a very richly textured picture of Native peoples' undaunted spirit.

The suffering and hardships that many Native Americans endured on reservations at the end of the last century and the early part of this century forced many families to make hard decisions about the welfare of their children. Caught between watching their children suffer on the reservation or sending them away to boarding schools, many parents chose the boarding schools.

Life at Chilocco was difficult for many children. Their memories of their arrival at the school present a mosaic of mixed emotions. Their memories of time spent at Chilocco give the reader a glimpse of institutional abuse and racism, the lost of human dignity and freedom. Despite all the hardships the interviewees still have fond memories of people and places at Chilocco. In reading these interviews one gets a picture of denial and uneasiness at speaking ill about their time at Chilocco. The trauma of the experience has marked those students and touched future generations.

The history of this institution is a mirror of a whole system that thought of the Native American as a child, a child that the government unsuccessfully tried to prepare to be a productive individual in a white world. The young women received training in the domestic area that forced them into a situation where a husband and family was the only measure of success. The young men received training in farming, carpentry, painting and harness making, but the school never tried to train these young people in the higher academic fields of business, art, science, and teaching.

Lomawaima has captured a true picture of Chilocco. Her research and interviews capture feelings from both sides of the institutional system. This book is a must read for anyone interested in Native American and U.S. relations.

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