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Review of *The Peace Chiefs of the Cheyennes* By Stan Hoig

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The Peace Chiefs of the Cheyennes. By Stan Hoig. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980. Illustrations. xiv + 206 pp. \$14.95.

Stan Hoig here retraces a critical half-century of Cheyenne history from the tribe's first treaty with the United States in 1825 to the settlement of the traditionally nomadic northern and southern Cheyenne upon separate reservations in present day Montana and Oklahoma. The uniqueness of this book lies in its emphasis upon the roles played by some seventeen chiefs in serving the interests of their tribe through *peaceful* means. As did George Bent before him, Hoig points out that among the Cheyenne the recognized chiefs were *not* the young war leaders, but were mature men who assumed the more difficult role of seeking to foster peace with other tribes and with the whites. Many of these men had been active warriors in earlier days, but when they became chiefs they assumed responsibilities for

preventing, ameliorating, or ending conflicts between the Cheyenne and the whites. Trying to mediate between their own young warriors, eager to gain reputations for themselves on the battlefield, and dealing with the more numerous, technologically superior whites who coveted their lands proved an almost impossible task for the peace chiefs. Repeatedly they negotiated with representatives of the United States in treaty councils in the West. Repeatedly they traveled to Washington to confer directly with high government officials or even the president himself. Yet Cheyenne territory continued to shrink as the frontier of white settlement expanded. Even more tragically, a number of these peace-seeking chiefs were killed by white soldiers who attacked their peaceful camps. Early in 1864 Lean Bear was shot down while riding out to meet the soldiers, wearing his peace medal on his chest and carrying the paper that President Lincoln had given him in the national capital the previous year. Before that year ended, five more Cheyenne peace chiefs were killed in Chivington's murderous attack upon the Cheyenne camp at Sand Creek. And Black Kettle, whom the author properly considered the most important of all the peacemakers among the Cheyenne, was killed during Custer's winter attack on the Cheyenne on the Washita in 1868.

The author, a professor of journalism in Oklahoma, has the journalistic talent for sifting from the abundant literature on the nineteenth-century Cheyenne Indians those actions and statements that best epitomize the character of the various chiefs. He is handicapped by the fact that relatively little is known about some of the most important of the earlier chiefs. Of necessity, the biographical sketches of those persons must be more fragmentary than those of the chiefs who came into prominence during the stormy decades of the 1860s and 1870s, which are well covered by both government records and the writings of field observers. Thus only two pages in this volume are devoted to High-Backed Wolf, signer of the first Cheyenne treaty in 1825, and the subject

of an 1832 portrait by George Catlin. On the other hand, Black Kettle, who might well be the subject of a book, is treated in a condensed biographical sketch requiring eighteen pages.

Even so, the author cannot resist the temptation to include one chapter on three prominent war leaders during the eventful 1860s. He retells in some detail the oft-told, highly dramatic story of the death of Roman Nose, riding his war pony and wearing his famed one-horned feather bonnet against the soldiers on Beecher's Island in 1868.

Readers familiar with other histories of the Cheyenne will find few facts or incidents here that do not appear in one or more of the half dozen books devoted to the Cheyenne. Nevertheless, Hoig's consistent emphasis upon the important roles played by the peace chiefs must be recognized as a significant contribution to a better understanding of Cheyenne history.

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