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## Review of *The Ojibwa of Western Canada, 1780-1870* By Laura Peers

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*The Ojibwa of Western Canada, 1780-1870.* By Laura Peers. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1994. Maps, photographs, notes, references cited, index. xviii + 288 pp. \$32.95 cloth. \$15.95 paper.

This innovative work is an ethnohistorical study of the Ojibwa migration from the Great Lakes region to the Plains. Building on earlier studies by Harold Hickerson (*The Chippewa and Their Neighbors*) and Charles Bishop (*The Northern Ojibwa and the Fur Trade*), particularly in the use of the Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Peers reconstructs processes of historical change over a ninety year period. She is not content, however, simply to document the historical record, but instead takes on a much broader challenge, and herein lies the major value of her study.

The Ojibwa of western Canada are known by various names, such as Saulteaux, Bungi, Anishenabeg, Outchibouec, or Chippewa. Despite this problem of synonymy, which makes tracing the identity of various aboriginal groups in the historical records a difficult task, Peers nonetheless manages to present a coherent account of Ojibwa migration, adaptation, and change. We learn about the particular problems they encountered moving out onto the Plains, such as changing from fur trapping to bison hunting as their economic base, and of new relationships with other Indian groups, particularly the Cree (mainly friendly) and Sioux (mostly hostile).

The main point Peers makes in her study is that the Ojibwa migration to the West did not involve a wholesale or fundamental transformation in Ojibwa culture, behavior, and values. There were changes, but the core of Ojibwa culture remained intact. This position is in stark contrast to the "culture area concept" which suggests that an adaptation to the Plains would likely involve a similarity in cultural change among the various peoples who migrated into the area. Peers argues this was not the case with the Western Ojibwa, whose core cultural characteristics remained much the same on the Plains as during their Great Lakes days. "Their

adaptations to the different physical and human environments in the West," she contends, "including their increased association with plains peoples, use of bison, and, for some bands, adoption of horses, did not immediately bring more profound cultural changes or changes in identity." Indeed, Peers sees the concept of identity or, more particularly, ethnicity as a useful point of departure, indicating that "If the adoption of new cultural traits by the western Ojibwa was the result of new external (environmental and human) forces they encountered, the maintenance of an Ojibwa heritage rested on the internal, more intimate forces determining identity."

This emphasis on identity and ethnicity makes for a far more mature approach to ethnohistorical material than the mere rendition of historical facts and figures. Peers places the study of historical changes more squarely in the realm of cultural studies and the examination of issues and problems as a whole, thereby broadening the relevance of such work immeasurably.

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