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Review of *Indian Fall: The Last Great Days of the Plains Cree and the Blackfoot Confederacy* By D'Arcy Jenish

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Indian Fall: The Last Great Days of the Plains Cree and the Blackfoot Confederacy. By D'Arcy Jenish. Toronto: Penguin Books Canada Ltd., 1999. Maps, bibliography, photographs, index. 241 pp. \$32.00.

In *Indian Fall*, D'Arcy Jenish recounts the history of "grave injustice" and the ultimate devastation of the Plains Cree and the Blackfoot Confederacy through the dramatic telling of the intertwining life stories of the nations' leaders—Piapot, Big Bear, Crowfoot, and Poundmaker. Jenish is an author with a mission. He challenges the mainstream historical portrayal of these leaders as "felons" and "traitors" by relating their stories from an empathetic "Aboriginal perspective," concluding that they were major players in Canadian history and that their heroic efforts are worthy of our respect and admiration.

The book is divided into four parts. The first, "Buffalo Days," provides biographical, cultural, and historical contexts for the four leaders. The second section, "Freedom's End," chronicles the events that occurred from 1866 to 1884. In this relatively short period, the Plains Cree and Blackfoot encountered catastrophic changes in their lives in the face of the oncoming of Euro-Canadian settlement, alienation from their land base, and their incorporation into the nation-state of Canada. The focus is on the events leading up to the Northwest Rebellion of 1885. In the third section, "A New World Rises," Jenish revisits the four Plains leaders and traces the final demise of their communities as well as their own personal "falls" in the aftermath of 1885. A brief "Epilogue" closes with a tribute to these leaders, who "fought to preserve what they could of their communities and their cultures, their freedom and their independence, their pride and their dignity, their way of living, thinking and being."

Jenish has set out to breathe life into the telling of history through a style his publisher describes as fusing the "immediacy of journalism" and the "intimacy of fiction." This is a history written for a general audience. Highly readable, Jenish's writing captures his readers' imaginations through the extensive use of anecdotes often narrated in the first person. It will be a frustrating volume for professional historians and researchers who may wish to follow up on Jenish's sources since no specific document location references are provided for the large number of citations.

In terms of prairie historiography, Jenish overstates his claim that historians have focused on "portraying the transformation of the Prairies as a triumphant accomplishment" of fur traders, railway builders, mounties and homesteaders (Canadian national heroes) at the expense of the experiences and perspectives of Natives inhabitants. For the past three decades, several historians have directed their research and writing towards providing a more balanced history of the interrelationships between Aboriginal populations and

Euro-Canadians. This is evident in Jenish's bibliography which not only includes the autobiographies of Aboriginal leaders such as Edward Ahenakew, Joseph Dion, Fine Day, and Abel Watetch, but also the historical biographies on the four leaders produced by Hugh Dempsey, Donald Barnett, and J. R. Miller.

Today, the legacy left behind by Big Bear, Poundmaker, Crowfoot, and Piapot continues to inspire a new generation of Aboriginal leaders who once again are deeply immersed in the renegotiation of the relationship between their communities and the government of Canada. Jenish's book will introduce general readers to this legacy with the objective of offering these "remarkable leaders" not only as heroes to their people, but as heroes to be embraced by non-Aboriginal readers as their own. The author, a senior writer with *Maclean's* in Toronto, received "The Canadian Authors Association Lela Common Award for Canadian History" for *Indian Fall*. His work challenges professional historians to publish more of their research in an engaging, informative, easily readable and entertaining manner.

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