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March 2000

**Review of *In a Barren Land: American Indian Dispossession and Survival*, by Paula Mitchell Marks.**

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## BOOK REVIEWS

*In a Barren Land: American Indian Dispossession and Survival.* By Paula Mitchell Marks. New York: William Morrow, 1998. Maps, illustrations, notes, selected bibliography, index. xxiv + 451 pp. \$27.50 cloth, \$16.00 paper.

*In A Barren Land* covers a four-hundred-year history with the large brush strokes required of a text incorporating, chronologically and creditably, all the generally agreed upon major points of that story. What is in reality a large number of stories, each unfolding within a complex non-Western setting and often with byzantine logic, becomes for Marks—as the book's title succinctly indicates—a focus on what is now the usual media story of peoples dispossessed by an unstoppable force. No philosophizing, consciousness raising, or preaching under the guise of doing anthropology mars the book. Marks's somewhat abbreviated view of America, however, includes little material on Alaskan Native Americans and excludes any on the prehistory of Native Americans, on Meso-American and Canadian Indian cultures, and on Hawaiian aboriginals.

In short, *In A Barren Land* possesses many of the strengths of a good general text without overcoming the daunting obstacles facing a textbook author. These constraints can be seen, for example, in the chapter on the 1870s which must not only move incredibly fast over the fascinating military campaigns of the Plains, but detail as well the confusing Chief Joseph trek towards Canada, the Modoc confrontation in the lava beds of California, and

two Cheyenne groups fleeing an unhealthy reservation only to suffer a killing Plains winter. Oh yes, and discuss the recently enforced reservation system. Most readers interested in the West will appreciate Marks's self-discipline since forty percent of the book is devoted to the last century or so, which essentially means the history of Native peoples west of the Mississippi River.

Marks's story could have been more scholarly and innovative. She tells the reader on the first page that the book is based on no original research; her footnotes simply list where her riveting quotations are lifted from. Even where primary sources are easily available, she prefers general collections of speeches. Some of her sources are rather dated, while her references to contemporary Native America are limited to just a few authors and periodicals from a two-year period of the 1990s. Marks makes an effort to emphasize the paradigm of creative and quietly successful adaptations by Native Americans even as they were being victimized by their new neighbors. Despite the number of times she valiantly argues this approach, in the end her well-organized and fascinating material remains the limited story of peoples pushed from their American paradise into wastelands.

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