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Review of Perdue & Green's "The Cherokee Removal: A Brief History with Documents"

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The Cherokee Removal: A Brief History with Documents. Edited by Theda Perdue and Michael D. Green. (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1995. xiii + 185 pp. Illustrations, maps, tables, index. \$35.00, cloth; \$6.50, paper.)

In this volume, Theda Perdue and Michael Green introduce readers and students of history to the main issues of the story of Cherokee Indian removal through an examination of related primary sources. The book serves as both a history of Cherokee Indian removal as well as an anthology of representative historical documents of this tragic episode in the American past.

After summarizing the history of the Cherokee people through the 1830s in their introduction, Perdue and Green present a range of documents that cover Cherokee civilization, Georgia and United States Policy, the Cherokee Debate over removal, and the Trail of Tears. The editors set each chapter and each source in historical context, introduce the significance of the primary source, and raise questions that help the reader glean the most meaning from the texts. These sources represent a variety of viewpoints and offer a fairly balanced account. For example, Perdue and Green have chosen documents that not only

demonstrate the perspective of whites who favored and opposed removal, but also offer viewpoints of the Cherokees themselves (such as the Ross and Ridge factions). Here and elsewhere, the editors seek to present history in both its complex and ambiguous state, while never failing to keep readers attuned to the main issues. The editors have chosen materials that not only represent various viewpoints, but also exemplify different kinds of primary sources, raising the issue of what value such sources have for historians, how reliable they are for illuminating the past, and how the researcher undertakes the task of interpreting the past based upon such different materials. Thus, the editors include census data, government documents, treaties, personal memoirs, newspaper editorials, and even an oral account recorded nearly one hundred years later. Some of these sources seem to be obscure, while others, such as excerpts from the Treaty of New Echota and Chief Justice Marshall's majority opinion in *Worcester v. Georgia*, present well-known documents related to removal.

Although collections of documents can be limited in their usefulness because of their disparate and disunified natures, such limitations do not apply to this volume. Perdue and Green have not produced a smorgasbord of unrelated primary sources; they have judiciously chosen a variety of materials, have offered them in a clear historical context, and have made the volume a useful learning tool. Whether one is teaching a United States survey, or courses in Native American or western history, this book will introduce students to the crucial issues of Cherokee Indian removal. It will connect these issues to the broader themes in early nineteenth-century American history, and it will expose readers to the historian's task—the pleasures and obstacles scholars experience as they read and seek to understand the past in its “rawest” form.

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