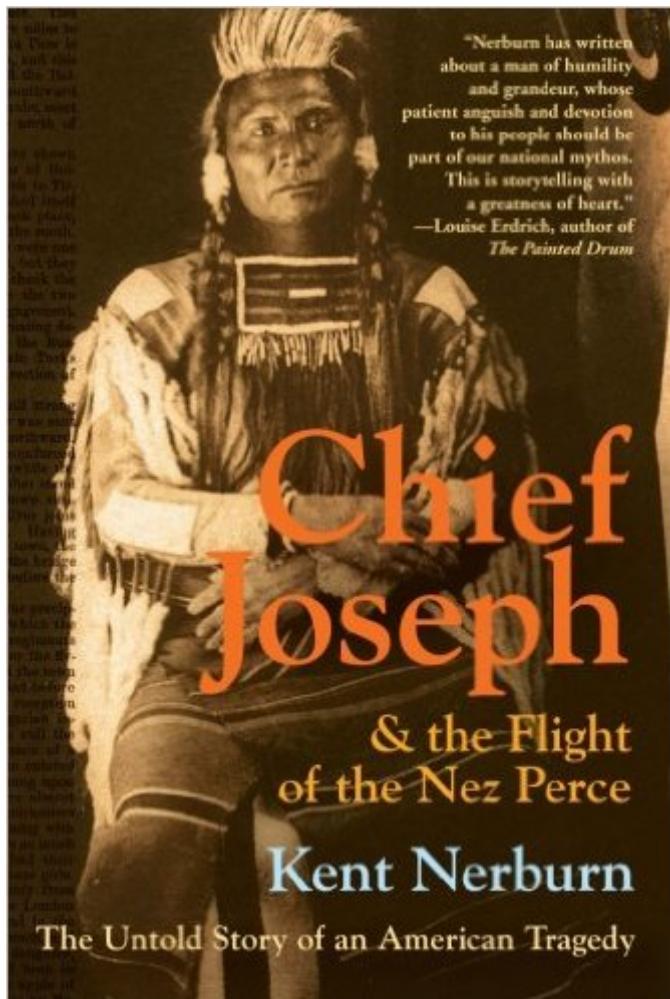


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# Chief Joseph & The Flight Of The Nez Perce: The Untold Story Of An American Tragedy



## Synopsis

Hidden in the shadow cast by the great western expeditions of Lewis and Clark lies another journey every bit as poignant, every bit as dramatic, and every bit as essential to an understanding of who we are as a nation -- the 1,800-mile journey made by Chief Joseph and eight hundred Nez Perce men, women, and children from their homelands in what is now eastern Oregon through the most difficult, mountainous country in western America to the high, wintry plains of Montana. There, only forty miles from the Canadian border and freedom, Chief Joseph, convinced that the wounded and elders could go no farther, walked across the snowy battlefield, handed his rifle to the U.S. military commander who had been pursuing them, and spoke his now-famous words, "From where the sun now stands, I will fight no more forever." The story has been told many times, but never before in its entirety or with such narrative richness. Drawing on four years of research, interviews, and 20,000 miles of travel, Nerburn takes us beyond the surrender to the captives' unlikely welcome in Bismarck, North Dakota, their tragic eight-year exile in Indian Territory, and their ultimate return to the Northwest. Nerburn reveals the true, complex character of Joseph, showing how the man was transformed into a myth by a public hungry for an image of the noble Indian and how Joseph exploited the myth in order to achieve his single goal of returning his people to their homeland. Chief Joseph & the Flight of the Nez Perce is far more than the story of a man and a people. It is a grand saga of a pivotal time in our nation's history. Its pages are alive with the presence of Lewis and Clark, General William Tecumseh Sherman, General George Armstrong Custer, and Sitting Bull. Its events brush against the California Gold Rush, the Civil War, the great western pioneer migration, and the building of the telegraph and the transcontinental railroad. Once you have read this groundbreaking work, you will never look at Chief Joseph, the American Indian, or our nation's westward journey in the same way again.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

As one who has visited the Dakotas, Wyoming and Montana on virtually an annual basis for almost 50 years, I recognize that by going to the physical source of his subject, Dr. Nerburn has captured the spirit of the Nez Perce saga. Past biographies of Joseph such as Beal, *I Will Fight No More Forever: Chief Joseph and the Nez Perce War* (1973), fail to disclose that he was hardly a Napoleonic war leader, but rather the caretaker of his tribe during their crisis. Similarly, earlier efforts to describe the Nez Perce fell short in explaining the importance of their Appaloosa horse breeding to tribal pride. As an owner of such equines, I understand how unique is that breed in terms of stamina and courage. In short, the author, through his four years of meaningful interaction with the Nez Perce of today, coupled with intensive academic research of such record as exists of their history, has presented a fair, realistic portrayal of a veritable sin committed by the then government of our country, crying out for atonement even today.

Adrian P. Schoone  
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I devoured this new book about Chief Joseph and even took notes on it...some inspiring things I wanted to remember, as well as some convicting things I must never forget. I have read other works about the Nez Perce and, in fact, I live in the Pacific Northwest and have visited many of the areas related to this part of history. But, I have never heard or read some of the things that Mr. Nerburn includes in his book. They are real and intimate and raw...and clearly tell "the rest of the story". I was sad when I finished it...like a very honest friend had to stop our very wonderful interaction. I will keep my copy and read it again and reference it often. I have read several of Mr. Nerburn's books...his voice resonates with my own. I highly recommend all of his work, but at this moment I would encourage everyone to get a fresh and vivid look at this man, Joseph, and his people by reading this book. You won't regret it.

The flight of Chief Joseph and the Nez Perce in the 1800's is told with love and great skill by Kent Nerburn in his new book. The events are historically accurate, but presented as a great story by a great story teller. It's history that reads like a novel. I felt like I was there with the soldiers in the

frozen North as they pursued the small band who desired only the freedom to live as their creator intended. I was there with the Nez Perce as their elders and children died one by one during the tragic flight. I felt their pain and suffering. I recommend this book highly to anyone not satisfied with the history as it was taught to us in our schools, and who desire the true story of this sad chapter in the story of the American West. I say thanks to Mr. Nerburn for this fascinating and absorbing labor of love. Five Stars.

I am an avid reader of history and biography. I am especially interested in Native Americans and other indigenous people. Their stories have been told by non-Native people for years, usually poorly or with a very European bias. Either the authors have no sensitivity to the native world view or they romanticize the Native people. It is rare when an author gives us a picture of a different world in a way that feels authentic. Chief Joseph and the Flight of the Nez Perce by Kent Nerburn feels authentic. I feel like I am there on the Nez Perce flight. I was familiar with this author's work from his novel, *Neither Wolf nor Dog*, which is one of my favorite books about Native people. So I expected a good read. But I didn't expect a book of such historical accuracy and narrative power. Nerburn gives us a real story of real people caught in history's web. He doesn't fictionalize but his work reads like a great work of fiction. This is something I associate with only the best authors. Too many authors forget the "story" part of "history". This book doesn't make that mistake. One of my pet peeves is when a writer stands back and tells me how to think. Nerburn just tells me the story. He takes us into events like we are there. I wish he would have spent more time on Joseph's later life. He gives us tantalizing anecdotes about Joseph meeting Buffalo Bill and Joseph's sad speech in Seattle. But he doesn't go into the kind of detail he does in other places. Where he goes into detail he is one of the best historical writers I have ever read. His recreation of the seige and surrender at the Bear Paw mountains should be required reading for every historical writer. This should be required reading for all those people buying books about the Founding Fathers. It would open their eyes.

I loved this book. In vivid detail, Kent Nerburn, in his "Chief Joseph and the Flight of the Nez Perce," fulfills his promise to show Chief Joseph's true greatness, which myth has obscured, eventually rendering the great man what the author aptly describes as a kind of "hood ornament." When the U.S. military captured the Nez Perce, other chiefs fled. Joseph stayed with and cared for his bands during their circuitous, grueling travels as prisoners of the U.S. government, while the President and military officials decided how inexpensively they could house the Nez Perce from then on. Joseph, already a myth in the eyes of the U.S. populace as the leader of the Nez Perce tribe's masterly

escape from the "best that the U.S. military had to offer," used his fame to advocate for his bands before Presidents and Congress. Although feted and celebrated, he failed to get adequate results. He was unaware that Indian genocide was being considered. This is the most horrific account of displacement I have ever encountered. A huge number of Nez Perce died on route, particularly the elderly and the very young, sickened by starvation and killed by white diseases to which they had no immunity. "Chief Joseph" took place during Reconstruction following the Civil War, a time when government resources were lacking and nerves worn. Soldiers and officers assigned to the Indian front typically lacked basic military skills and the experience necessary to handle Indians with sensitivity and tact. I recommend this book to people who like history that is presented as narrative, offering the kind of momentum and characterization that you find in novels.

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