



SOME LIMITATION OF THE RE-  
NASCENCE CONCEPT IN ACCUL-  
TURATION: THE NEZ PERCE CASE

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Various anthropologists -- Fred Voget in 1956 and Nancy Lurie in 1964, for instance -- have suggested that a contemporary American Indian renaissance is now in progress. They think that it is most evident in political life, and that it is manifest in the development of stronger tribal governments and in the appearance of pan-Indian political organization. These writers suggest that it is based upon renewed desires among American Indians for economic self-development and for an increased ethnic distinctiveness. Although such developments are present in contemporary Nez Perce culture, an examination of the Nez Perce acculturational continuum has convinced me that a somewhat different approach is required, namely, an inquiry into the nature and applicability of the renaissance concept to past as well as contemporary Nez Perce culture change. Perhaps the most important factor encouraging this approach is that rebirths or revitalizations of various aspects of Nez Perce culture are by no means limited to the present. In fact, they have occurred at very different times in different aspects of the culture since the Nez Percés first came in contact with Euro-Americans.

A second factor which has forced me to concentrate more on the validity and applicability of the renaissance concept is its frequently ambiguous application to American Indian culture change. I have often encountered the tacit assumption that a rebirth in one aspect of a culture extends into others or even to the culture as a whole. Conflicting uses of the term also are widespread, and such uses make the term "renaissance" even less practical for analytical purposes. These considerations and the need for an operational set of criteria lead me to characterize as "renascent" all changes which serve to increase the cultural distinctiveness of the Nez Percés. Similarly, changes which reduce this distinctiveness I would characterize as a cultural decline. Consequently, a related requirement of such an analysis of culture change is a demonstration of a former decline in the particular aspect of a culture characterized as "renascent." So I shall deal only with those aspects of the culture in which the processes and causes of decline are reasonably well understood -- for example, the demographic, the religious, the economic and the political organization. An examination of the long-term changes in these four areas indicates among other things

that while certain areas have experienced renaissances after periods of decline, others have shown only persistent decline. These and similar conclusions to be drawn indicate that some caution is required in applying the concept "renaissance" to contemporary American Indian culture change.

#### DEMOGRAPHY

The present Nez Perce population resurgence accords well with their political renaissance, but most probably does not relate to it in a causal or resultant sense. It is, however, a reversal of a long downward trend which began perhaps as early as the late 18th century when the Nez Percés experienced their first smallpox epidemic.<sup>1</sup> From this point until about 1900, the Nez Perce population was in constant decline. It dropped from an estimated aboriginal figure of between 5,000 and 8,000 to a 1900 figure of about 1,500. In 1905 the agent wrote that,

With weak constitutions, a great susceptibility to tuberculosis, and a life of idleness yielding the usual fruits, the tribe is decreasing, and unless a change should occur in their manner of living, it will be only a few generations before the tribe is extinct (Annual Report, 1905, 217).

Apparently the ravages of measles, tuberculosis, smallpox, infantile mortality and other factors contributing to the reduction had reached their maximum impact by this time, for after 1900 there was a leveling out of the decline at the 1,500 figure. The population remained at this level until about 1935 when an upward trend appeared, continuing into the present so that the 1964 population is approximately 2,200. Numerous factors have been responsible for this resurgence, but perhaps most important are the improvements in medical care and sanitation. Improvements in infant care and the post-1900 establishment of a government tuberculosis sanatorium on the reservation with permanent medical personnel would seem to have been particularly important in reversing the downward trend.

The Nez Percés (local pronunciation as in fez and nurses) are located in north-central Idaho and presently number about 2,200. They are part of the Macro-Sahaptian linguistic grouping, including such tribes as the Umatilla, Cayuse, Walula-Palus, Tenino, Klikitat, Yakima, Wanapam and Kittitas. They are bounded on the south by Shoshonean speaking groups and on the north and east by Salish speaking groups.

During the 19th century important changes also had taken place in the structure, distribution and racial composition of the population. Some of these changes were rather closely related to changes in the political, religious and economic spheres and therefore deserve a brief elaboration. Aboriginally the Nez Perce population was distributed over a relatively large territory in villages probably averaging between 50 and 100 individ-

uals.<sup>2</sup> Such village groupings were territorially based and part of large band groupings which were organized around given watershed zones. The villages situated along a given tributary usually considered themselves as part of a band grouping. This distributional pattern was changed drastically in the course of acculturation. Few villages were displaced as a result of the first treaty of 1855, but the treaty of 1863 involved substantial population dislocation which was an important contributing factor to the war of 1877.<sup>3</sup> After the 1863 treaty, prompted by the gold strikes within the boundaries established by the 1855 treaty, there was a rapid concentration of the Nez Perce population. The missionary stations and later the government agencies served as foci of the concentration. The permanent villages which developed around these agencies were larger than any of the aboriginal villages and were characterized by serious internal disputes. Because of the relatively simple social structure of aboriginal Nez Perce culture, there were no native leaders with sufficient authority to manage these new groupings. Missionary and government agents attempted to remedy this problem by placing the tribe in the charge of a single head chief and a number of sub-chiefs. These innovations accomplished little other than providing a rubber stamp indigenous authority to certify in the name of the Nez Percés the various treaties and agreements put forward by the government. Further, they resulted in serious factionalism in the tribe, with a substantial minority opposing the head chief system sponsored by the government and the mission. This was a non-Christian minority faction which was deprived of its lands with the approval of the government- and missionary-supported head chief and sub-chiefs; it is the same faction which was to resist the government militarily in the war of 1877.

At present the on-reservation population seems to favor the males slightly and may be related to changes in marriage patterns which have altered the racial composition of the population.<sup>4</sup> Although there was some early intermarriage between Caucasians and Nez Percés, it does not seem to have become important until after 1900 when the reservation was opened to homesteaders. Since that opening, however, the rate of intermarriage and consequent reduction of Nez Perce heredity has shown a relatively constant increase, accelerating somewhat during and after World War II. Outmarriage has increased to the point that the population under twenty is now predominantly non-Nez Perce. A search of genealogies has revealed the not surprising greater tendency for Nez Perce females to marry out of the society, often moving off the reservation and in effect abandoning most tribal ties. This pattern of outmarriage goes far toward explaining the present predominance of males on the reservation. The growing off-reservation section of the population plays an important part in contemporary tribal politics, and in so doing reflects a long-standing pattern: those Nez Percés who are on the tribal rolls but who live off the reservation constitute an opposition to the reservation political establishment. After the war of 1877,

those individuals in the dissident faction who were not willing to become Christians were forced to reside on other reservations, particularly on the Colville reservation in Washington. Descendants of such dissidents, plus the so-called half-breeds who traditionally also have been excluded from the reservation establishment, constitute a large part of the present minority faction which opposes continuation of the tribe as a corporate entity.

It would seem, therefore, that there has been a demonstrable, quantitative decrease and resurgence of the Nez Perce population. The recent increase clearly contributes to an increased distinctiveness and may be regarded as renascent. The other changes, however, do not fit so well under decline or renaissance. For example, is one to regard a concentration in larger villages as contributing to a renaissance or to a decline? On the other hand, the growing tendencies to marry non-Nez Percés and non-Indians and to move off the reservation clearly cannot be regarded as contributing to a renaissance. For example, in 1900, more than ninety per cent of the population resided on the reservation, whereas in 1964, approximately one-third resided off the reservation.<sup>5</sup>

#### RELIGION

Aboriginal Nez Perce religion was organized around a system of tutelary spirits which individuals obtained in the vision quest wherein a young man fasted and sought a guardian spirit. Possession of such tutelary spirits was widespread in the culture, and their assistance was essential for any other than a mediocre performance of most adult role requirements. The principal religious specialists were shamans, some of whom were grouped into an influential shamanist society. Important religious ceremonies were an annual mid-winter tutelary spirit dance, a first fruits ceremony held in the spring and a number of less important ceremonies held at various times during the year.<sup>6</sup>

Nez Perce religion was one of the first aspects of the culture affected by the western expansion of greater Euro-American culture. Between 1820 and 1836, according to Leslie Spier,<sup>7</sup> there developed in the Plateau region a religion blending Christian and native elements which Spier called the "Christianized Prophet Dance." The Nez Percés apparently shared in and were greatly affected by this movement.<sup>8</sup> The development of new religious offices, dogma and ritual occasioned by this movement were to serve an important bridging function in the Nez Perce adaptation to Euro-American culture. For example, this movement seems to have been responsible for the 1832 Nez Perce-Flathead delegation to St. Louis in search of missionaries, and the eager reception given to the first missionaries who appeared in Nez Perce territory in 1836.

The first missionaries in the area failed to distinguish between the aboriginal and more recent syncretistic or "blended" religious systems, classifying both as heathen. In time many Nez Percés were to concur in

in this judgment and agree to banning most of the old culture. Branded as heathen were most of the cultural patterns that obviously conflicted with Euro-American norms, such as polygamy as well as most overtly Indian behavior. For example, they not only banned most aboriginal ceremonialism, religious as well as non-religious, but hair styles, clothing styles and many former economic and subsistence patterns. For a time the missionaries even controlled the agency, and this period (1870-1879) was a particularly formative one in the course of Nez Perce acculturation. During this time a native preacher elite was trained and the churches with all their offices, ceremonial and missionary support became new foci of social organization. In the case of the dominant Presbyterians, the churches with their native preachers and elders tended to substitute for the older village, band and headman complex. A smaller Catholic community was developed, but always was relatively unimportant, having little influence in tribal political affairs which remained a Presbyterian stronghold. Nevertheless, despite the absence of a native priest elite, the Catholic sector developed relatively self-sufficient, theocratic communities quite similar to those developed among the Presbyterian Nez Percés. This essentially religious transformation of the residential and leadership patterns was complete by 1895, with very few pagans remaining on the reservation, some of the last having been exiled to other reservations. This was the period of highest church membership and most intense participation in Nez Perce acculturational history.

After this time attendance statistics show a steady decline until the late 1930's, when they level out with no indication as yet of any resurgence.<sup>9</sup> Where Nez Perce rates of church participation in 1900 were much higher than those of the surrounding Euro-American community, they now seem to approximate or perhaps even fall below the participation of the surrounding Euro-Americans. Because many churches were constructed at the height of Nez Perce Christianity, the present congregations in these churches are relatively small and comprise little more than caretaker forces. Only during important religious holidays will the rate of participation approach that of the earlier period. The most obvious results of this decline in church attendance have been a development of a large body of unchurched individuals on the reservation and the closing of two smaller churches in the more remote eastern edge of the reservation where, because of population redistribution, few Nez Percés live any longer. Although various programs of proselytization have been undertaken since World War II by such groups as the Church of Latter Day Saints, the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Pilgrim Holiness Church and other fundamentalist groups, few inroads have been made into the largely secularized Nez Percés. Despite this general lack of success, the Assembly of God Church has had an indirect effect since two independent, Indian-oriented Pentecostal sects have developed since 1950. These, however, remain small-scale operations and in no way have reversed the over-all decline in church participation.

To what extent, then, do decline and renaissance apply to the religious changes seen in the course of Nez Perce acculturation? This question cannot be answered by referring solely to the contemporary situation, since it is clear that during the latter half of the nineteenth century Christianity served as a means of reasserting the ethnic distinctiveness of the Nez Percés. Although this process involved great changes in the older religion, settlement patterns and leadership, it is clear that the development of Nez Perce Christianity afforded the Nez Percés a vehicle for reconstituting a radically changed culture. The more recent period has been one of decline, but the churches have remained exclusively Indian despite attempts on the part of Euro-American church leaders to force an integration of Indian and non-Indian churches in the area. When confronted with the very emotional Nez Perce resistance to church integration, one can hardly avoid the conclusion that these churches early became a means of preserving a distinct identity.<sup>10</sup>

#### ECONOMY

Aboriginally the Nez Perce economy was based in a hunter-gatherer approach to the available resources: roots, game and fish. A small economic surplus seems to have been realized in this relatively rich environment. A half-dozen or more distinct roots were exploited at different times of the year and were dried and stored for use in the permanent winter villages along the rivers. Although salmon was the most important fish taken, others such as sturgeon, steelhead and even eels, were also important. Fish were dried and stored in substantial quantities as part of the winter stores. The Nez Perce area also enjoyed rather abundant game resources, principally deer and elk.

The first main interruption of this pattern came with the adoption of the horse shortly after 1700. The Nez Percés' rapid acquisition of horses and cultural patterns associated with the horse resulted in an increasing exploitation of the buffalo to the east in Montana, and this practice had reached substantial proportions by the time of white contact. Additional economic effects of the development of the horse complex can be seen in a more intensive exploitation of more inaccessible game, fish and root digging areas. Vast herds of horses soon were developed and served to augment economic differences both within and between the various bands. Not only did incipient economic class distinctions appear, but certain favorably situated bands were able to become extremely prosperous participants in the Plains horse complex. A few less favorably situated bands remained less prosperous and more isolated, continuing many of the older economic patterns of the days before horses were introduced.

The horse complex was one of the principal obstacles in the way of missionaries and government agents who were attempting to implement policies of population concentration and permanent settlement of the Nez

Perces within the context of an agriculturally based economy. Most Nez Perces preferred to retain their freedom of movement and resisted strongly the attempts to immobilize them by reducing their vast herds. Ultimately several methods were used to reduce the herds; according to some older informants, the most successful was official non-recognition of the persistent rustling by non-Indians of Indian horses and cattle. By 1900 the huge herds no longer existed, and the Nez Perces were reduced to dependency on horticulture and income from allotments rented to the non-Indian farmers who had homesteaded approximately 500,000 "surplus" acres of the 756,900 acres remaining in Nez Perce hands after the treaty of 1863.<sup>11</sup>

Despite several reports to the contrary by agency personnel, few Nez Perces ever lived on their allotments, remaining instead in their valley homes and renting their holdings to non-Indian farmers in the area. Even had many Nez Perces wished to become farmers it was soon impossible because the original allotments had become split into tiny fractions due to repeated inheritance. A more serious matter, however, has been the continuing sale of the original allotments. Although there have been several periods when the agency discouraged the sale of allotments to the surrounding farmers, the gradual reduction of Nez Perce owned lands seems to have been rather continuous. By 1940, a large number of the original allotments had been sold, and in 1964 the total land remaining in individual Nez Perce hands was 57,062 acres.<sup>12</sup> This gradual loss of the only remaining source of cash income has influenced Nez Perce economic patterns in several important ways. First, more and more Nez Perces have been forced to seek employment in the surrounding economy. The many lumber mills in the area have provided some with permanent employment, but few Nez Perces are willing to remain permanently at such jobs, preferring instead the temporary farm work available during the planting and harvest seasons. Many individuals also have lost their homes as a result of inheritance sales and either have moved away or congregated in the principal village on the western edge of the reservation, close to the agency and the Lewiston-Clarkston urban area nine miles to the west. Here many have become, in one way or another, economically dependent, relying partially or totally on subsistence provided by welfare from the tribe, the BIA, the county, the state or some combination of these agencies.

Gradual impoverishment and loss of economic independence have been topics of long-standing debate among many Nez Perces. From the time of the first Euro-American encroachments they have watched their various resources disappear, but collective action against this trend did not appear until the 1920's, when a five-year plan of economic self-development was adopted. Despite its lack of success in creating Nez Perce farmers, it did serve to develop a concern among the Nez Perces for taking the initiative from the agency in solving tribal problems. This early attempt recently has been supplemented by extensive economic developmental planning on the

part of the present leaders, most of whom came to power after 1948. The adoption of a strong constitution in that year and subsequent successful appeals before the Indian Claims Commission resulted in the tribe's receiving several million dollars. There has been much talk of using these funds for economic self-development, and some few projects actually have been initiated, but the funds are rapidly being used up in economically non-productive enterprises such as repeated per capita payments and sanitation projects. There is little in these efforts capable of reversing the trend of declining economic independence. Despite occasional optimistic predictions, few knowledgeable individuals in the area hold out much hope for a reassertion of Nez Perce economic independence.

To what extent, then, do "decline" and "renaissance" apply to economic changes in the course of Nez Perce acculturation? It would seem that the few efforts of present leaders to reassert Nez Perce economic independence are too limited and too late. If the Nez Percés still retained the bulk of their aboriginal territory as do some tribes, or even if they had substantial mineral or timber resources which could be developed, the picture might be different. Even tribal leaders in private are pessimistic about contemporary plans for economic development and encourage those who have jobs in the surrounding economy to retain them.

#### POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

As I have implied, aboriginal Nez Perce political organization was relatively simple with weakly developed leadership. It was a political system grounded in the village and village council, and in the band and band council; each was led by a headman who held his position because of the force of his personality and his demonstrated administrative skills. Rarely were the leaders able to coerce their followers; instead, the latter had to be persuaded to cooperate. There was little in the nature of supra-band, permanent political machinery. Cooperation between different bands was limited to traditional alliances for defense and aggression, or for exploitation of the buffalo to the east. Leadership of such multi-band undertakings was elective, and lasted only as long as was required by the particular undertaking. Despite some claims to the contrary, there was no single head chief of all the Nez Percés at the time of contact, and this proved particularly trying for the early missionaries and government agents whose customary mode of operation required power centralization. A uniform reaction of the missionaries and government agents was that the Nez Percés had no government, that they existed in a state of anarchy. As a result these outsiders undertook what they considered the task of formulating an effective indigenous government.

In 1842 they appointed a head chief with twelve sub-chiefs, each of whom had five police assistants. This system functioned in conjunction with the older village and band headman system.<sup>13</sup> Needless to say, a great

deal of conflict ensued, because few of the egalitarian Nez Percés were willing to accept the idea of permanent tribal leadership supported by external authorities. These external authorities disregarded the Nez Perce reluctance to accept the new system, and quickly came to regard their appointees as the only legitimate Nez Perce authorities. They rewarded them economically and provided them with means of enforcing their orders, all of which acted to reduce the importance of the older headmen. In addition to these new secular leaders, the Presbyterians trained a number of native preachers who were to become influential in the reorganized society. The preachers emerged as the de facto leaders of the society in their positions as heads of the new church-village complexes which had replaced the older village and band groupings. With the expiration of the treaties in 1880, the government-appointed chiefs were no longer a force in tribal affairs,<sup>14</sup> and the only remaining competitors for the preacher elite were the agency policemen, who received small salaries and continued to exert some authority. This competition, however, does not seem to have been serious, and the preachers remained in control of the field, working closely with the agency personnel whose interests normally coincided with those of the few missionaries who remained as advisors.

The importance of these preachers as leaders in the reorganized society was particularly clear at the time of allotment, when they were formed into a committee to assist in the division of the lands. Of the nine members chosen, there were three Presbyterian preachers, four Presbyterian elders, one ex-Presbyterian elder who out of a disagreement had established his own schismatic Methodist church, and one Presbyterian layman. Of the two alternates, one was a Presbyterian elder, the other, a Catholic. The Presbyterian domination of this first executive committee was more than an expression of their numerical superiority. It was an expression of a strong tradition. Presbyterians had control of the agency practically from its inception, since even the early government-supported chiefs had been predominantly Presbyterian.

Between the completion of allotment in 1895 and 1923, this committee remained relatively inactive, but its importance as a prototype became evident in the latter year. By this time a number of Nez Percés were interested in formulating a permanent representative body; this was achieved in conjunction with the development of the first five-year plan. This plan for economic self-development called for the formation of a Home and Farm Association consisting of all Nez Percés within the tribal boundaries. The importance of the earlier committee is seen in the governing board of this association which consisted of nine men, most of whom were Presbyterians. Riley has referred to the tribal adoption of a code of laws in 1880 as the first Nez Perce constitution, but this seems unwarranted. Instead, adoption of a first formal constitution took place in 1927 following the 1923 re-emergence of the nine man committee. This constitution was accepted by

the BIA in October of 1927 which thus legitimized the first permanent executive committee. Activities of this committee centered around land leases, loan applications, land claims, timber sales, grazing permits and other affairs such as marriage laws and sanitation.<sup>15</sup>

Important limitations on this executive committee, however, were its lack of control over tribal funds and the requirement that the BIA approve all its actions. Such limitations convinced most Nez Perces that they were still very much under the control of the BIA, and that more independence was necessary if the tribe were to act successfully in its own behalf. The opportunity presented to the Nez Perces in 1934 to achieve this end through adoption of the Wheeler-Howard Act, however, was rejected. Reasons for this rejection were complex: fear of losing government services, fear of becoming subject to taxation, a cultural resistance to leadership by a powerful few, and, particularly, a fear on the part of the Christian Nez Perces that the aboriginal religion again would become legal and constitute a threat to their theocracy.

Further attempts were made in 1940 and 1945 to formulate constitutions permitting a stronger executive committee, but these too were rejected by the general council. After World War II the BIA began withdrawing certain services in accord with its developing "termination policy," and that faction favoring a strong tribal government began to receive more support within the tribe. It became increasingly evident to those Nez Perces who formerly had opposed a strong executive committee that the absence of effective tribal government would no longer deter the BIA in its determination to terminate federal supervision as soon as possible. The withdrawal of government services beginning shortly after World War II forced the ineffectual tribal executive committee based on the 1927 constitution to assume more and more duties. The constitutional crisis created as the executive committee exceeded its constitutional authority, coupled with the renewed political interests of the returning veterans and war workers, produced sufficient positive sentiment to ratify, in 1948, a constitution permitting a strong executive committee. In addition, many Nez Perces had come to realize that in order to implement claims effectively before the new Indian Claims Commission which was created in 1946, they would have to have a much more effective governing body than had ever existed before. Opponents of strong tribal government, however, continued to fulminate against the new system. Since 1949, this dissident faction has made several unsuccessful attempts to reduce the power of the strong executive committee, and such efforts continue into the present.

Despite this opposition, the strengthened executive committee has been successful in implementing claims against the government. These have resulted in large financial awards to the tribe. Receipt of these awards has strengthened the executive committee in the eyes of many Nez Perces, but the use of the money for community centers, horse-breeding

programs and several other tribal enterprises has resulted in even more vehement opposition. In the last half-dozen years the principal issue separating the two factions has become whether the funds will be used collectively or disbursed individually. The opposition faction contains the majority of the off-reservation Nez Percés under the leadership of a small on-reservation nucleus. Whether resident on other reservations or in metropolitan areas, members of this faction stand to gain little from a use of these funds for development of the reservation population. On the other hand, members of the faction supporting the present executive committee and its programs of tribal development tend to be drawn from the reservation population. This present political division, therefore, would seem to be expressive of an even more basic division in the society. This is the division between those whose future is not bound up with the insulated, protective reservation system, and the present majority of Nez Percés who for various reasons cling to the reservation system.

One often encounters the opposition faction's charges that the people support the executive committee only because of the economic power its members wield over the lives of the reservation Nez Percés. Further, members of the opposition state that the members of this committee really could not succeed in a non-reservation environment and are engaged in long-term planning as a means to insure the continuation of their well-paid jobs on the reservation. It seems obvious enough that were tribal assets divided equally among individuals, the principal raison d'être of the executive committee would disappear.

Such accusations by the opposition make more understandable the great efforts exerted by the members of the executive committee to restrict voting privileges to those individuals resident on or adjacent to the reservation. They may even shed light on the strong resistance to lowering the blood quantum to include as tribal members those individuals with less than one quarter Nez Perce heredity. Were these restrictions removed, the opposition faction would be greatly strengthened. Reservation Indians believe that practically all of the off-reservation individuals (those living beyond the 1855 treaty boundaries) favor individualization of all tribal assets, and that they therefore strongly oppose the executive committee and the reservation faction. Further, that section of the population with less Nez Perce heredity tends to be comprised of individuals who have moved away, married non-Indians or taken little interest in tribal affairs, being interested only in receiving their "share" of the claims settlements and sale of tribal property.

In view of these developments, then, to what extent do "decline" and "renaissance" apply to political changes within Nez Perce culture in the course of acculturation? As in the cases of population, economy and religion, the answer is not a simple one. There are "declines" and "renascences" throughout the period since contact with the dominant culture was first

made. The pattern begins with the government appointed chiefs. It seems clear enough that the institution of the head chief and sub-chiefs resulted in a net loss of Nez Perce cultural distinctiveness. It is not clear, however, whether one should consider that the replacement of this chief system with the executive committee system promoted or reduced Nez Perce cultural distinctiveness. In fact, no clear judgment can be made, but the gradual strengthening of the executive committee in the recent past fits neatly under the renascent heading. Through strengthening this committee the Nez Percés have been able to reassert a degree of political distinctiveness probably not realized since 1855 when they first came under government control. Despite this political renaissance, however, it is clear that not all Nez Percés support such a development, some preferring instead to do away with most tribal enterprises and to distribute all tribal assets.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Three principal conclusions concerning cultural renaissance may be drawn from the foregoing analysis of Nez Perce acculturation. First, "renaissance" as the term is used in this paper has not been a uniform characteristic of all aspects of Nez Perce culture at any single time. Instead, certain aspects of the culture, such as religion in the late nineteenth century, clearly were undergoing a renaissance, while others were in decline. More recently, while church participation has been declining, with a consequent loss of religious distinctiveness, there has been a concomitant resurgence of political distinctiveness. In fact, with the possible exception of population, the only apparent renaissance in the culture at the present time is to be found in the political organization. Only here are there developments which clearly are promoting Nez Perce ethnic distinctiveness, since the differentiating effect of the population increase is being offset by increasing tendencies to move off the reservation and to intermarry with non-Nez Percés and non-Indians. Despite present attempts to develop tribal economic enterprises, the efforts seem too limited and too late to reverse the overriding trend toward economic assimilation. This does not, of course, mean that such a resurgence could not take place, but there is nothing on the national, state or local levels that would cause one to think it even remotely possible.

A second principal conclusion drawn from this analysis is that although "decline" prevails over "renaissance," there is no further consistent relationship between the two in the course of Nez Perce acculturation. While certain aspects of Nez Perce culture have undergone renaissances after periods of decline, there are others which have been in a steady decline since the time of contact. The distinctiveness of the economy has been persistently reduced, and despite a few feeble efforts at the present time to reverse this trend, there is an increasing participation in the surrounding Euro-American economy. Language, although I have not discussed it in this

essay, has also shown a steady decline. At the present time there remains only one known mono-lingual Nez Perce. The majority of the population under twenty-five years of age uses English constantly. Despite a recent attempt on the part of a few Nez Perces to revive the language, few Nez Perces show real interest, since there is a general feeling that the language is a handicap. In fact, there have been recent attempts to establish a school for adult education in English.

Contrasting with these persistently declining aspects, of course, are the religion and political organization. Although the aboriginal religion was almost completely abandoned, Christianity in the latter half of the nineteenth century served as a means of reestablishing a distinct ethnic identity, but it, too, has been in decline since 1900. On the other hand, despite the earlier decline of the aboriginal and transitional political institutions, a recently reorganized political system has served as a means of reasserting an ethnic distinctiveness. It would seem to be of some significance that in both of the latter cases as well as in the case of the population resurgence, the renaissance was due largely to the actions of Euro-Americans. In the case of religion, the "renaissance" could not have occurred had not particularly effective missionaries been present, and changes in BIA policy obviously have been important factors contributing to the Nez Perce political renaissance. It does not seem likely that the Nez Perces would have developed their strong political system had there not been the threat of termination and the economic opportunities presented by the Indian Claims Commission.

A final conclusion drawn from this analysis is that the demonstrable Nez Perce renaissances have involved substantial factional disputes, and have by no means been uniformly supported by all members of the culture. This is evident in the religious renaissance of the late nineteenth century, when a substantial non-Christian segment was essentially exiled, with the reservation remaining under the control of the Christian faction. The members of this exiled faction were associated with paganism and uniformly rejected the Christianity so fully accepted by their opponents. Similar strong disagreement has accompanied the more recent political renaissance, and persists into the present: a predominantly off-reservation faction opposes a predominantly on-reservation faction. The principal issues are the amount of power exercised by the executive committee and the disposition of the recent claims settlement monies. Perhaps it is inevitable that intense sentiments develop for and against all radical changes which result in a marked shift in direction of an established acculturational trend. The complexities involved in the study of culture change among North American Indians in terms of the concept of "renaissance" are apparent in the case of the Nez Perces and further demonstrated in the other articles in this collection.

## Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup> Clifford Drury, Spalding and Smith on the Nez Perce Mission (Glendale, 1958), 136-37.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>3</sup> Deward Walker, "Schismatic Factionalism and the Development of Nez Perce Pentecostalism," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (Oregon, 1964).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 112-16.

<sup>5</sup> Deward Walker, A Survey of Nez Perce Religion (New York: Board of National Missions, United Presbyterian Church, 1964), 36-38.

<sup>6</sup> The interested reader may find a more detailed treatment of aboriginal Nez Perce religion and religious acculturation in my unpublished dissertation (see footnote 3).

<sup>7</sup> Leslie Spier, The Prophet Dance of the Northwest and Its Derivatives: The Source of the Ghost Dance (Menasha, Wisconsin, 1935).

<sup>8</sup> Deward Walker, "Schismatic Factionalism," 42-50.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 98, 119.

<sup>10</sup> Deward Walker, "Recommendations Regarding Certain Problems Concerning Nez Perce Presbyterianism. (Unpublished paper, 1964, available on request.)

<sup>11</sup> Deward Walker, A Survey, 25.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>13</sup> Francis Haines, The Nez Percés (Norman, Oklahoma, 1955), 87-89.

<sup>14</sup> Kate C. McBeth, The Nez Percés Since Lewis and Clark (New York, 1908), 115.

<sup>15</sup> Robert James Riley, "The Nez Perce Struggle for Self-Government: A History of Nez Perce Governing Bodies, 1842-1960," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (Idaho, 1961), 58, 45-46, 66.