

The Desperate People

Farley Mowat

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THEY COULD SURVIVE ANYTHING IN THE ARCTIC WILDERNESS--EXCEPT THE WHITE MAN. They were rich, the caribou were abundant. Their dogs were many and strong. The children in the tents were happy, and there was never any fear of going hungry. Then came the ruthless white man's civilization. And with it came slaughter of the herds, starvation of the flesh, and torture of the spirit.

The Desperate People Details

Date : Published June 1st 1984 by Seal (first published January 1st 1957)

ISBN : 9780770423230

Author : Farley Mowat

Format : Mass Market Paperback 240 pages

Genre : History, Nonfiction, Cultural, Canada

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Lock says

Very well written, and in a fairly traditional style. Grim as all hell: another story of civilized white people thoroughly destroying the ability of native folks to live traditionally, or even survive.

Roy says

It was hard in a way to think that people in Gov positions could be so ignorant just 50 or so years ago in Canada and today those people are trying to create a government in Afg ... when those people are not or never will be civilized in the same manner that we are , if indeed we are at all . Farley has a way with words there is no doubt about that .

Jen says

I read this book in a single day. Admittedly, it made that particular day rather depressing. Mowat's language is descriptive, almost lyrical in sections, as he depicts the geographic desolation of the inland Arctic and the people who lived there until a series of events & decisions conspired to nearly wipe them out in the 1950s.

East Bay J says

The Desperate People is not exactly what you would call a feel good experience. Mowat's sequel to *People Of The Deer* is, unlike that volume, bereft of the lighthearted, bantering moments that served to balance the ugly truths. Rather than let the information lie to be interpreted as the reader will, one can't help but get the message that white settlement of Canada destroyed a people and their way of life.

Of this, there can be no doubt. History proves the point and provides the details. Mowat serves up those details in a well researched, well written account of the slow decline. Like a creeping, inexorable slide across the ice and over a precipice, the Inuit ended up nowhere and with nothing.

Haunting, chilling, frustrating and sad, *The Desperate People* is a study in decay. This is not a lighthearted read but is an excellent book nonetheless.

Sally Hunt says

What a long struggle to complete this book. I did not find it the most exciting book on the shelf, although I persevered and have come away with a better understanding of the treatment by the whites to the Eskimos and, essentially, all of our native peoples in Canada. It is a shame that these things occurred during the expansion of Northern Canada. It was also a nice refresher of the geography of that region. One little tidbit I

did pick up on was names like Nanuk and Ootek - I have known many husky-type dogs bearing these names and I wonder if the dog owners even know where the names they chose for their canine companions originated.

Teresa says

I heard that there is controversy whether Farley Mowat was making up his story. I have a degree in Native Studies and one of my hobbies is researching First Nations history and culture, so I think that Mowat was very truthful with revealing the devastation of how Inuit peoples were abused and mistreated by our Canadian government. This is an important book to read for anyone who wants to learn more about Canadian history.

Shelly Curtain says

Very depressing as the title suggests but what an informative book on the delicate balance of survival and the need ultimately for assistance. It's easy to cast a group aside as welfare bums but take the initiative to look beyond the rags to see how they got there.

Owen says

"The Desperate People" is a very different book from its sister volume, "People of the Deer." Although it tells a continuing story, it was written many years later and, unlike the previous volume, Farley Mowat himself does not play a direct role in the narrative. Although one feels that he is never more than a heartbeat away from the action, he does not intrude upon it. It is the People's story; he is just the teller. As for the story he tells, it is not a pretty one.

In the book, he evokes a scene in a coastal town of the Arctic, in which a supply ship is making a stopover. Excitement runs through the townspeople as the ship's crew and passengers are brought to shore. It is a very bright moment in an otherwise dull, monotonous routine. One of the passengers detaches himself from the crowds leaving the vessel and makes his way through the town to an encampment on its edge. Tents are struck there and as he approaches, it happens that one of the occupants is outside and sees him approaching. It is an Eskimo dressed in rags and wearing an unmistakable air of dejection. Suddenly the visitor recognizes the man and hails him, but is not answered.

The visitor is Mowat and the Eskimo is Ohoto, a member of the Ihalmiut, one of the People. The two have not set eyes on each other for more than ten years. From that last meeting, looking backwards, Farley Mowat reconstructs the life of this little-known inland tribe as they prepare, unknowingly, to meet their doom. The story has grandeur as well as the appalling odour of decay. It has the sensitivity to show us that the fragility of the Ihalmiut may well turn out to be our own. It is also a finely written work, which had me yearning for some of the places described within and it may affect you that way too. At any rate, this second and perhaps final book about the People is so plainly filled with human understanding that one has to be very indifferent indeed, to take nothing from it.

Meagan says

An unbelievable account of how the white people destroyed a culture, and an entire bloodline of true Canadians. I am horrified, embarrassed, and disappointed of the color of my skin today.

This book is primarily an account of what the judiciary system, the RCMP, the missionaries, the white gamesman did/did not do in regards to basic humanity.

I have always wanted to work in the north as a Registered Nurse, to work with the people in regards to their health and well-being. At this point, this very moment in closing the cover - I am too embarrassed to set my foot into the tundra floor.

An excellent account as to what we did wrong, and hopefully give each of us an appreciation / insight in what we can do better for basic decency in regards to humanity.

Jrohde says

A really sobering tale of the die-out of an eskimo tribe and the callousness of the Canadian bureaucracy in the face of Mowat and other observers trying to bring it to attention of govt. this occurred in late 40s and 50s - a sad tale of incredible privation and misunderstanding.
