

4 Underground Reservation

The chapter titled "UNDERGROUND RESERVATION" delineates the complex history and the transformative journey of the Osage people, from their ancestral dominion over vast tracts of the central United States to their coerced migration and the subsequent discovery of oil on their reservation land, profoundly altering their destiny.

In the 17th century, the Osage claimed extensive territories, which were later encroached upon following the Louisiana Purchase. Thomas Jefferson's interactions with the Osage in 1804 were initially diplomatic, but the tribe was soon forced to cede large portions of their land, leading to their relocation to a reservation in southeastern Kansas. The chapter vividly recounts the Osage lifestyle, characterized by buffalo hunts and the profound spiritual and communal life they led, which was later disrupted by settlers and the demand for their Kansas lands.

Driven to find a new homeland, the Osage purchased land in Oklahoma, seen as undesirable by whites, which serendipitously sat atop vast oil deposits. This newly acquired land, deemed worthless by settlers, became the cornerstone of the Osage's future wealth due to the oil underneath it—a twist of fate that led to the creation of the first "underground reservation."

Mollie, a central figure in the narrative, experiences the Osage's transition from wealth due to oil discovery, juxtaposed with the erosion of their traditional ways of life. Detailed are the cultural shifts Mollie's family undergoes – from the proud heritage of her father, Ne-kah-e-se-y (later known as Jimmy), and their integration into an increasingly encroaching white society. The Osage's struggle to retain their identity while navigating the newfound wealth and the pressures of assimilation into American society is detailed through Mollie's experiences and the broader impacts on the Osage people.

The chapter outlines historical injustices, such as forced land cessions and the imposition of allotment policies aimed at assimilating the Native Americans into white culture. It also highlights strategic maneuvering by the Osage, such as securing mineral rights during land allotments which inadvertently led to great prosperity from oil, altering their socio-economic status significantly.

In conclusion, the chapter encapsulates a pivotal moment in Osage history, marked by profound loss, resilience, and an unexpected rise to wealth through oil. It presents a microcosm of larger themes of colonization, cultural assimilation, and the transformative impact of natural resources on indigenous communities.