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## REVIEWS

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**The Alabama-Coushatta Indians.** By Jonathan B. Hook. The Centennial Series of the Association of Former Students, Texas A&M University, no. 71. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1997. 152 pages. \$29.95 cloth.

The meaning of "being Indian," one of the pervasive issues throughout Native America today, is at the heart of Jonathan B. Hook's ethnohistorical study, *The Alabama-Coushatta Indians*. Tracing the history of the Alabama-Coushattas from contact through the present, Hook focuses on ethnogenesis, regeneration, ethnicity, and identity. Moreover, he discusses the extent to which external versus internal forces shaped cultural and social change.

Hook's ambitious endeavor covers four periods in Alabama-Coushatta history: early contact and migration to Texas (1540 to 1854); a period of assimilation and conversion dominated by the presence of the federal government and missionaries (1854 to 1930); the Indian New Deal through termination (1934 to 1960); and a final era characterized by federal recognition, regeneration, and ethnogenesis (1960 to 1994). *The Alabama-Coushatta Indians* provides a much needed first step toward understanding the history of an often overlooked people.

Moreover, the author presents, if in somewhat formulaic fashion, a unique means of understanding the process of cultural change. Through this study, Hook reveals that as the stakes of Indian-white interaction changed from basic physical survival to cultural persistence, the possibility of regeneration and ethnogenesis increased. The Alabama-Coushattas' efforts to revive or recreate their culture in new ways began in earnest after termination in 1954, as they worked toward securing federal recognition (pp. 74-94). The federal government officially reinstated the tribe in 1987. During these years, being Alabama-Coushatta evolved to include different material things, rituals, sports, and values. Concurrently, supratribalism took precedence as they accommodated Plains Indians dances, participated in powwows, and defined themselves in terms of Indianness rather than a specific tribal identity. All the while, the core concept of community, if not communalism, endured and strengthened.

Hook openly acknowledges the challenges he faced as the chronicler of the Alabama-Coushattas' history. Due to a paucity of written sources, Hook

relies on ethnographic research conducted between 1994 and 1996. He argues that this proved minimally limiting because, "It is their narrative, and they are ultimately the ones who can adequately depict the movement in their history" (p. xv). This raises three issues that deserve more attention: the limitations of ethnography, the concept of social memory, and contests over ownership of history. Hook presents this as a study based primarily on interviews with twenty-eight Alabama-Coushattas and ten other American Indians. Certainly, ethnographic research provides a wealth of insights that archival research simply cannot. Yet while he addresses some methodological and theoretical considerations in his first chapter, he does not point out the ethnographic method's limitations. To be sure, it raises questions regarding representativeness, constructions of reality, definitions of the situation, and substantiation. Hook does not discuss whether his twenty-eight informants reflect the positions held by most Alabama-Coushattas. While striving for "their narrative," one question readers are left with is, which Alabama-Coushattas are being represented, and according to whose definitions of the situation is this history constructed?

Second, it has been widely recognized that the process of ethnogenesis and regeneration involves conflict both intratribally and externally, as the author points out in his introduction (p. x). Yet Hook does not weave discussions of contrasting social memories, constructions of reality, and definitions of the situation into his research. Four studies that provide important insights into these issues, which are conspicuously absent from his bibliography, are Loretta Fowler's *Arapahoe Politics* (1986) and *Shared Symbols, Contested Meanings* (1987), Morris W. Foster's *Being Comanche* (1993), and Keith Basso's *Wisdom Sits in Places* (1996). Each of these texts deals with contrasting concepts of a people's history, the struggles that accompany cultural change—either as regeneration or ethnogenesis—and the impact of internal and external forces on tribal cultures. *The Alabama-Coushatta Indians*, while it falls short of providing the richly contextualized analyses found in the former titles, does provide a springboard for a more nuanced, thorough, and diverse presentation of "being Alabama-Coushatta" over time.

A related question raised by Hook's study involves the ownership of history, accuracy, and substantiating evidence. Obviously, the notions of representativeness and breadth figure prominently in any discussion of whose history is being presented in any given work. Yet a question lingers, as noted above, after completing Hook's study: to what extent is this the history of the Alabama-Coushattas from the perspective of one select group of the tribe? The limited use of substantiating evidence, narrow selection of informants, and absence of open disclaimers leaves this issue open to debate.

A particularly troubling assertion posited by Hook is illustrative. "There is a widespread belief," Hook notes, "that Indian identity requires a blood connection because there are essential genetically transmitted cultural memories" (p. 14). As substantiating evidence, Hook refers to a survey he conducted in which "[o]nly one of over one hundred American Indians ... did not believe in some form of genetically transmitted cultural memory" (p. 111). Such an assertion raises multiple methodological questions regarding the

informants—their ages, economic statuses, political stances, family backgrounds, heritage, and sex, to name a few. While such an assertion may have accurately reflected the respondents' beliefs, the question remains as to the wider applicability. In short, to what extent is this an accurate reflection of the Alabama-Coushattas? Attention to, or at least recognition of, these subtleties would strengthen Hook's study immensely.

The issue of substantiation arises in numerous areas. Hook often cites interviews with non-Alabama-Coushattas and secondary source material to draw parallels or to set context. However, all too often, Alabama-Coushatta sources are lacking to reaffirm the veracity of such comparisons. For example, the author discusses the ability of Cherokee cosmology to accommodate Christianity without the need for a total refutation of existing beliefs and relates this to the Alabama-Coushattas who held "similar cultural and theological traditions..." (p. 46). While noting the similarities between the two indigenous cosmologies, Hook provides only one source, in the form of an interview, that suggests a similar kind of syncretism. Obviously, the possibility for syncretism is great; indeed, it is to be expected. Yet substantiating evidence and elaboration would provide a much more compelling argument. Numerous other examples throughout the text raise similar concerns.

A final critique relates to his utilization of the concept of cultural brokerage. Although he cites Margaret Connell Szasz's masterful edited work, *Between Indian and White Worlds: The Cultural Broker* (1994), he fails to define cultural brokerage adequately in the body of his text. Rather, he cites missionaries whose "sole aim ... was to convert and civilize the Indians" (p. 42) and television as cultural brokers (p. 60). By definition, cultural brokers are intermediaries; they walk in the middle ground, facilitate communication, and bridge chasms of cultural understanding (Szasz, 296, 300). While missionaries often find themselves playing the role of broker, perhaps unwittingly at times, those described by Hook are not at all interested in being cultural brokers. Television, while communicating the values of one culture to another, does not actively mediate. It could perhaps be used by a cultural broker, but in and of itself, television is not a broker. Such misuses of cultural brokerage threaten the integrity of a useful concept by imbuing it with universal applicability.

*The Alabama-Coushatta Indians* has an interesting introspective quality that derives from the author's Cherokee heritage, his personal interaction with the tribe, and his rationale for conducting the study. "I wrote this book," Hook relates on a website subsequent to publication, "not from an academic perspective but out of personal experience. I was involved with many different activities on the reservation, from powwows to health issues to education. The book came out of that lived history" ([www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)). In fact, only a small portion, albeit the most compelling, covers the period for which Hook conducted ethnographic research or was active in the community. A sustained, more in-depth analysis of his experiences would have added greatly to the work.

This suggestion applies to *The Alabama-Coushatta Indians* generally. With an actual text of 108 pages, and a scope of four hundred years, very few top-

ics receive the attention they deserve. In this sense, Hook's later reflection, as quoted above, accurately describes his book. It serves better as a reflection or impression—a think piece of sorts—than a comprehensive and rigorously researched monographic history. Yet in spite of this observation and the author's disclaimer, Hook's study contributes to dialogues within academe regarding social memory, ownership of history, identity, and the preeminence of Indian voices; it raises important questions and provides a useful springboard for further scholarship.

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**American Indian Sovereignty and the U.S. Supreme Court: The Masking of Justice.** By David E. Wilkins. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997. 403 pages. \$40.00 cloth; \$24.95 paper.

In his seminal *American Indians, Time, and the Law* (1987), Charles F. Wilkinson argues that the U.S. Supreme Court has, over the past quarter-century, been a fairly consistent and positive force in upholding the sovereign status of Indian tribes. In *American Indian Sovereignty and the U.S. Supreme Court: The Masking of Justice*, David Wilkins disagrees—so much so that he characterizes the current conservative Court as an “Imperial Judiciary.” If this seems like a loaded description, Wilkins reaches this conclusion by way of a meticulous historical analysis of two hundred years of U.S.-Indian legal relations. In this book, the author examines fifteen of the most salient and devastating Supreme Court decisions regarding tribal and individual Indian rights, beginning with *Johnson v. McIntosh* (1823) and concluding with the more recent *County of Yakima v. Yakima Nation* (1992).

*Context* is the operative term in this multilayered analysis. Wilkins' goal is to illustrate through these fifteen examples that the Court “...has applied linguistic semantics, rhetorical strategies, and other devices to disempower tribal governments and to disenfranchise Indians” (p. 3). In short, Wilkins attempts to dispel the myth of judicial neutrality by illuminating the extent to which judicial self-interest, political motives, and so forth have been at the root of contradictions and sometimes extralegal disparities in the Court's rendering of “the law” where Indians are concerned.

Two major theoretical perspectives guide this analysis. First, Wilkins draws on the tools of critical legal theory (CLT) to determine the extent to which a distinctive and autonomous *legal consciousness* serves as a perceptual filter through which the judiciary has historically articulated Indian law. Second, Wilkins elaborates on John T. Noonan's proposition that people involved in the American legal system are often given “masks” by the judiciary that conceal their true character (*Persons and Masks of the Law*, 1976). Masks are “...legal constructs which mask the humanity of a participant in the process” (p. 8). Just as the mask of “property” was used to justify the enslavement of African Americans in the nineteenth century, Wilkins attempts to expose the