

**The Indians' New World: Catawbas and Their Neighbors from European Contact through the Era of Removal**



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Writers on such disputes, as Anita Parlow freely admits in the introduction to her book (p. 1), are seldom if ever “objective.” Thus, this book joins the long list of publications and broadcasts favoring the Navajo position over the Hopi one. Interview after interview burn indelible visions into the mind of the reader of the mental and physical suffering that the Navajos who live on the “wrong” side of the fence have experienced. The Hopis on the other hand are divided into the “traditional” ones who support their Navajo brothers and sisters and the “secular” ones who, motivated by the opportunity to make a quick buck, are being manipulated by the “true villains” (i.e., Barry Goldwater, government officials, and Mormon lawyers). Top Navajo tribal officials also join the list of “bad guys” whenever they appear to be wavering in their support for those Navajos facing the court ordered eviction from their sacred homeland. However, to the author’s credit, she does at times (although in a very haphazard way) include a few brief passages that indicate that there are at least a few Hopis who are seeking to reclaim their lost lands for other than secular reasons. And she does include a few extremely short statements revealing the bitterness certain Hopis feel about their earlier forced “relocation” from the disputed lands not by the government but by Navajo raiders and herders.

Unfortunately, Parlow fails to realize that the real root of the current conflict lies in such naive assumptions as the one made by government officials in 1882 who felt that the Hopis and Navajos, despite their vastly different lifestyles, differential reproductive rates, and long competitive history, could coexist peacefully in a joint use area. And the problem has now been further compounded by the recent federal decision to grant independent tribal status to Paiutes living in portions of the disputed area which will possibly lead to further Lawsuits and confrontations as they try to obtain their own independent land base. As I stated in an article published in *Human Organization* in 1971, about the rising political and economic power of the Navajo Nation:

... I would argue that the key variable in explaining the enormous difference in power that now exists between the Navajo tribe and other Indian “nations” both rich in land and other resources ... or poor ... is population size. ... Politicians and movie stars (and writers such as Parlow) flock to defend the former group while members of the latter groups because of their political insignificance have rapidly become the truly forgotten men (and women) of America. ... The pie is finite but the struggle for control of the knife is neverending. Population is often the decisive weapon.

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Merrell, James H. *The Indians' New World: Catawbas and Their Neighbors From European Contact Through the Era of Removal*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989. xv + 381 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, index. \$32.50 cloth.

The subjects of this much-needed study are the native peoples of the Carolina piedmont who became known as Catawbas in the eighteenth century. A polyglot union forged from largely independent villages about the Catawba

River and refugees from other peoples, some of them culturally diverse, the Catawba "nation" was a significant force in the history of the Carolinas until the Revolution, and still retain a portion of their traditional territory. The keynote of their dogged and embattled history, and that of James Merrell's book, is survival.

Eschewing "the tragically plummeting trajectory so commonly charted" in tribal histories, Merrell deals with "the ebb and flow of challenge and response, crisis and calm, disintegration and reformation." While Catawba history exemplifies destructive forces that ruined many native societies, it is not a simple tale of terminal decline. Rather, the nation often stabilized, adjusted to new realities, and occasionally prospered for periods that effected generations. Merrell's conclusions are based upon a thorough, rigorous and imaginative analysis of documentary and archaeological sources, and presented in a consummately crafted pieces of writing that must rank as one of the best Indian histories to appear in recent years.

The author's identification of the new challenges posed by the colonies of South and North Carolina and Virginia will not surprise those versed in the Native American experience, but his emphasis is rather upon Indian responses. Virulent diseases, such as those of 1718, 1738 and 1759, decimated Indian communities, disrupting social systems based on the duties of kin and, by the destruction of the elderly, damaging the collective memory of the people. Warfare also contributed to the reduction of the piedmont Indians. They had relatively little direct conflict with the colonists, but traffic with the whites arguably intensified inter-tribal warfare. Nevertheless, Merrell argues that the weakening of Indian communities through disease and war resulted in a series of migrations and mergers in which various groups combined to restore their influence and stability. Indeed, from the ruins of the Yamasee war of 1715, epidemics and the raids of Indians such as the Iroquois, there emerged the union later called the Catawba nation.

Another example of the Catawba's ability to withstand adverse circumstances occurred in the 1750s, when the proceeds from the deerskin trade were dwindling, harvest failing, and smallpox and warfare were reducing Indian numbers. The Catawbas presented themselves as a buffer to the British colonies, and their diplomatic visits to Charleston secured substantial and regular issues of presents that sustained their ailing economy and compensated for the decline of trade. In addition, the new relationship enabled the Catawbas to use the colonists as intermediaries in inter-tribal disputes, and it was British influence that led to a peace between the Catawbas and the Iroquois in 1751.

But while Merrell highlights the resilience and ingenuity that assisted the Catawbas to survive when other natives faltered, the overall outline of their history is not unfamiliar. The growing dependence of the Indians upon European trade goods and the retreat of their territory before the advance of the colonial planters are carefully documented. From defending ill-defined boundaries, the nation was brought to a surveyed reservation in 1764 and ultimately to the brink of dispossession and dissolution in the 1840s. The Catawbas, no less than many other aboriginal peoples, were compelled to replace their bankrupt economies with livelihoods dependent upon manual labor and crafts. Despite his relative optimism, Merrill's purpose is not to gainsay the difficult and often tragic circumstances that attended Catawba history, but rather to demonstrate through a finely-grained analysis the complexities and swings in fortune that are often overlooked.

The publisher's claim that the book "signals a new direction for the study of Native Americans" is unfair to the more sensitive work done by other historians, but James Merrell adds greatly to the growing volume of literature that penetrates the generalizations and treats Indians not simply as victims and pawns in the imperial process but as important shapers of both their own and frontier history. His book will be welcomed by all those interested in the Native American and colonial experience.

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Newkumet, Vynola Beaver and Howard L. Meredith. *Hasinai: A Traditional History of the Caddo Confederacy*. Foreword by Arrell Morgan Gibson. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1988. xvi+ 144 pages. Illustrations, glossary, notes, bibliography, index. \$16.95 cloth.

*Hasinai: A Traditional History of the Caddo Confederacy* recounts the historical, mythological and cultural background of the Caddos. The authors relate the varied aspects of Caddo society through interpretation of its ceremonial dances. The result is a colorful, yet confusing, documentation of oral Caddo history.

*Hasinai* briefly describes twelve aspects of Caddo life. Each chapter, covering subjects from hunting to contemporary affairs, offers the reader a broad and readable description of Hasinai life. The authors impress upon the reader the maintenance of Hasinai traditions in twentieth century life. Overall, the book provides a good picture of Hasinai society.

The reader is forewarned, however, of the deficiencies of the book at the beginning. Meredith prefaced the text with a most appropriate opening: "Although it is impossible to do justice to the Hasinai experience within the narrow confines of one volume, it has become increasingly important to attempt syntheses of our perspectives" (p. xiii). Indeed, the narrowness of the volume may account for some of the text's weaknesses, but the authors' acknowledgement of the impossibility of their task accounts for most of them. The reader can easily see the opportunities for analysis and interpretation bypassed by authors determined to synthesize the Caddo experience.

Each chapter opens with a detailed description of a ceremonial dance. Only twice is the dance explained in relation to the content of the chapters. The Drum Dance and its accompanying songs tell the mythological stories of creation, social organization and cultural identity. The Turkey Dance relates the history of the Hasinai. Unfortunately, the cohesiveness of these first and last chapters, respectively, is not continued throughout. The remaining chapters are a patchwork of dance descriptions and cultural explanations. Why the chapter about architecture is titled "Duck Dance" or how "Alligator Dance" applies to clothing are just two examples of this inconsistency.

Beyond the incohesiveness of dance descriptions and chapter contents is a general lack of analysis. The text winds through descriptions of hunting, agriculture, architecture, clothing, family relations, tribal relations, foreign relations, health, language, and contemporary affairs. Yet, little attention is placed on historical interpretation of these subjects. Meredith also noted in the