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Review of The Quapaws

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The Quapaws. By W. David Baird. Indians of North America, edited by Frank W. Porter III. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1989. Maps, illustrations, photographs, bibliography, glossary, index. 111 pp. \$17.95.

How to shake the hand of the unsmiling stranger in town and at the same time lose your shirt and all you own—such is the amazing and also tragic history of the American Indian. Although W. David Baird does not deviate much from the familiar and almost expected Jacksonian shakedown, he does offer succinct and at times moving accounts of how one formerly important tribe on the Mississippi-Arkansas trace was successively reduced in importance by its encounters with the French, the Spanish, and the Americans.

When the explorer Robert Cavelier de La Salle arrived at the river villages of the Downstream People in March 1682, the Quapaws numbered close to 20,000 and were a formidable barrier on the central waterways of the South. A century and a half later, after being repeatedly scattered into Texas and across Caddo territory in what is now southern Oklahoma, Chief Heckaton led the 176 remaining Quapaws into the northeast corner of Oklahoma, an area set

aside for remnant bands of displaced people. The time was September 1834.

The history of the Quapaw people might have ended at that date, but it did not. By the end of the Civil War, which caused another period of exile and loss of land and crops, the tribe, led now by Ki-he-cah-te-da, numbered 265. The decades ahead, as Baird points out, were ones of slow but at times exciting recovery. When lead and zinc were discovered beneath some of the allotted land, the tribe for a time prospered.

But readers must examine the final years for themselves. The relatively short history is without battles but not without thought-provoking insight and astounding glimpses into the ways that human problems are sometimes resolved. Because of the adoption into the tribe, for instance, of a Stockbridge Indian man of eastern New York, the Quapaws gained a capable and shrewd spokesman who soon made certain that treaty obligations by the federal government were being honored. Land allotments were expanded and increased. When mineral wealth was later discovered, legal entitlements to the land were firmly intact.

By 1914, nearly five million dollars worth of lead and zinc concentrates had been mined. In 1961 the tribal census was 1200 persons. Much, it was clear, had been lost, but also, in some ways, much had been gained. Such is the history of any vital group of people, and such is the history of the Downstream People, the Quapaws of northeastern Oklahoma.

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