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Review of *A Nation in Transition: Douglas Henry Johnston and the Chickasaws, 1898-1939* by Michael W. Lovegrove

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A Nation in Transition: Douglas Henry Johnston and the Chickasaws, 1898–1939. By Michael W. Lovegrove. Ada, OK: Chickasaw Press, 2009. xiv + 226 pp. Photographs, maps, appendices, notes, bibliography, index. \$24.95.

What happens when a Native American nation is gradually and purposefully dismantled in order to make way for a new state government? How do tribal leaders meet the challenges of an impending dissolution of their own government and simultaneously fight against the erosion of their tribal sovereignty? These compelling questions inform *A Nation in Transition: Douglas Henry Johnston and the Chickasaws, 1898–1939*, a new history of the Chickasaw Nation of Oklahoma and its leadership under Governor Douglas Henry Johnston (1898–1902; 1904–1939), whose tenure, according to author Michael W. Lovegrove, was longer than that of any other American Indian executive. Pointing to the “paucity of records” about Johnston and the Chickasaw Nation, Lovegrove nonetheless charts a fascinating history of the complex political negotiations, legal maneuvering, and difficult choices that characterized Johnston’s administration in the face of the transition of Indian Territory to Oklahoma statehood in 1907.

We learn that Johnston and the tribe faced several major issues both before and after statehood and that many of them were not resolved until well into the twentieth century. These included who was eligible to be on the final membership rolls of the Chickasaw Nation (and subsequently receive allotted tribal lands); how the land rights of mixed bloods versus full bloods would be handled; how the Chickasaw leadership could defend their tribal rolls against people who might fraudulently claim tribal membership in order to receive land allotments; how the citizenship claims of Chickasaw freedmen (former African slaves) and intermarried whites would be settled; whether the Chickasaws should work with the closely related Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma to pursue common interests; how the Chickasaw Nation could fund and maintain its schools in the face of a federal takeover of the tribe’s education system; how the Chickasaws could press the federal government to compensate them fairly for leased lands as well as tribal lands rich with timber, coal, asphalt, and other valuable resources. *A Nation in Transition* shows how, under Douglas Johnston’s leadership, the Chickasaw Nation of Oklahoma was able to resolve many of these complex issues, adapt to radical changes, and proudly survive as a people even as former political boundaries shifted.

Although Lovegrove leaves some gaps in the historical narrative (filling them in would enhance

comprehension), and although his earlier chapters (prestatehood) flow more smoothly than later ones, he succeeds in presenting a dynamic picture of the struggles of diverse Native and non-Native stakeholders who came to define an important chapter in the modern transformation of the Great Plains and its people.

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