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Review of *Sustaining the Cherokee Family: Kinship and the Allotment of an Indigenous Nation* by Rose Stremlau

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*Sustaining the Cherokee Family: Kinship and the Allotment of an Indigenous Nation.* By Rose Strem-lau. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011. xiii + 320 pp. Map, photographs, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. \$24.95 paper.

Cherokee families, Rose Strem-lau states in her elegantly written book, were and remain “egalitarian, flexible, inclusive, and decentralized.” These characteristics, she argues, have provided stability through difficult times, as Cherokee families faced colonization, displacement and removal, the Civil War, and ultimately the allotment policy of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries (although it is important to note that she also carries her analysis beyond the allotment era, into the mid-to-late twentieth century). Using U.S. and Cherokee census data, Dawes Commission records, Guion Miller Commission applications, probate records, articles from the national *Cherokee Advocate*, and oral histories in the Doris Duke Collection, the Indian Pioneer Papers, and in

the collections of the Oklahoma Historical Society, Stremlau examines a sample of about 200 people in and around the community of Chewey (located in what was once called the Goingsnake District and is known now as Adair County, Oklahoma). To this rich documentary record she employs ethnohistorical methods and uses intimacy as an analytical concept, skillfully and compassionately humanizing the bureaucracy of allotment by writing “about each person as unique and fully human.”

A major strength of *Sustaining the Cherokee Family* lies in Stremlau’s deep description of individual lives and the ways this approach sheds light on the complicated and multifaceted histories of the allotment era in Indian Territory. Building upon the work of earlier scholars—especially Angie Debo—the author moves beyond a narrative of noble-but-futile resistance before an overwhelming federal bureaucratic system, demonstrating instead how Cherokee people used “creative adaptation, selective collaboration, and informed resistance” prior to, during, and after the development and implementation of the policy. Chapters 4 and 5 (“Enrolling” and “Dividing”) demonstrate the immense analytical payoff of this approach. Here Stremlau describes the creation of the Dawes roll, the massive list used by the federal government to carry out the actual process of allotment in Indian Territory, through a series of human stories that in the end make a powerful assertion representing common sense, but often overlooked in contemporary discussions: “The Dawes roll was not a Cherokee creation, and it reflects a non-Indian definition of tribal membership from a moment in American history when Anglo-Americans understood indigenous people to be less than fully human.” This point is especially significant because the Dawes roll is still recognized as the primary documentary record for validating claims to tribal citizenship. Stremlau’s book is an exceptional example of the best new work being done in Indigenous studies today.

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