

Book Review by: Walter L. Williams. *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (Winter, 1978), pp. 333-335. Published by: Oxford University Press.

*The Southeastern Indians*. By Charles Hudson (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1976).

Numerous scholars in the fields of archaeology, ethnography, and history have separately investigated the past of native peoples of the southeastern United States, but not until Charles Hudson's study has there been a up-to-date and comprehensive synthesis of all these perspectives. An anthropologist at the University of Georgia, Hudson has spent several years investigating the ethnohistory and belief systems of southeastern Indians after the publication of his first book, *The Catawba Nation* (1970).

The major problem concerning studies of native peoples of the Southeast is that they were among the earliest North Americans to feel the pressures of European colonization and to have their societies disrupted and changed before historical descriptions could be written down. Although much of the world view of aboriginal times has survived among several modern-day southeastern Indians, the length and intensity of their contacts with Europeans have lessened the continuity of oral history that many western Indians have retained. Therefore, the social historian must rely on glimpses of evidence from other sources to reconstruct the past ways of life of these peoples. It is on these grounds that Hudson is at his best.

After introductory remarks on the physical setting of the southeastern environment and its varieties of peoples, Hudson presents (in less than 100 pages) the best summary of southeastern prehistory that this reviewer has read. Not only does he incorporate the latest findings of archaeologists, but he also places them in the context of social history. In his pages the lifestyles of the people themselves emerge, rather than mere descriptions of spear points or pottery types that usually dominate writings on prehistory.

In a well-written synthesis, Hudson stresses the basic continuity of cultural development in the prehistoric Southeast. Striving to overcome the ahistorical static nature of many anthropological analyses, Hudson traces the development of the Paleo, Archaic, Woodland, and Mississippian eras in the same way that historians deal with the Medieval, Renaissance, and Colonial periods of European culture. The influence of agriculture and Mesoamerican diffusion is not ignored for the Mississippian era (A.D. 700-1600s), but Hudson stresses the continued importance of forest management through hunting, fishing, and wild plant gathering.

The major body of the book, chapters 3 through 7, is an ethnographic analysis of Indian cultures during the 18th century, before their institutions were fundamentally changed by European influences. Though he is forced to rely mainly on recordings by European travelers in the Indian country, Hudson brings the trained eye of the ethnographer to evaluate those sources in a way most historians could not. This is particularly true in his use of myths and traditions to penetrate the Indians' world view.

Professor Hudson gives most emphasis to belief systems as a means of explaining other aspects of southeastern culture. After explaining ideology, he organizes his analysis around categories of social organization (kinship and political organization), subsistence (food production, trade, and economics), ceremony and recreation (art, music, and games). This format provides a clear model for social historians in all fields.

Hudson found an obsessive concern about purity and pollution in southeastern belief systems. By mixing things from opposed categories, the Indians believed, chaos would result. Therefore, ceremonies emphasized the separation of different things in order to prevent pollution. This view provided order in an uncertain world. Part of this order involved a concept of natural balance, in which people suffered if nature were abused. Mankind was a part of nature in a world where little was due to chance. If something went wrong it was because nature's rules were broken and atonement must be made. This emphasis was reflected in all aspects of life, from marriage rules to artistic styles.

Hudson is at his best describing these internal structures of southeastern culture, but at times he tends to present them as static and ahistorical. He also devotes less attention to external relations with Europeans during the colonial period. Happily, readers can turn to another recently published book, Gary B. Nash, *Red, White, and Black: the People of Early America* (1974) as a supplement. As an historian of colonial America, Nash has a better understanding of Anglo-American society and can provide more comprehensive coverage of Indian-white relations. Hudson seems to feel that an historical chapter necessitates a particularistic names-and-dates approach. Nevertheless, his conclusions about the colonial era are well founded. The major reasons for southeastern Indians becoming a conquered people, he suggests, involved their susceptibility to Old World diseases, their localized political organization, and their economic dependency on European trade goods.

Hudson's book is weakest on the 19th century, to which he devotes less than 30 pages. Unlike his material on the previous century, Hudson is mainly content to rely on secondary sources for the 1800s. Even though he does not make original contributions on this period, Hudson does provide an accurate summary of the problems relating to removal and continued loss of self-rule.

Another 30 pages wrap up the 20th century, but here Hudson again becomes more analytical. Not only does he emphasize cultural continuities among southeastern Indians now in Oklahoma, but he also provides an excellent survey of the varied native groups that escaped removal and remained in the Southeast. He distinguishes genetic, cultural, and social factors to define "Indianness" in recent times. Based on these factors, Indians in the Southeast today are divided into three categories: (1) those who have retained parts of their aboriginal culture (Cherokees, Seminoles, Choctaws, and Alabama-Coushattas); (2) those who have largely lost a distinct native culture but who have historically filled a social role as Indians (Lumbees, Catawbias, Houmas, Creeks, and various other small groups); and (3) racially mixed mestizo groups that have only a partial claim as Indians, although some have established an Indian identity during recent years.

In addition to these groups, Hudson notes the large number of both white and black southerners with some Indian ancestry, and the consequent native influences on southern folkways (especially in agriculture, cooking, herbal medicines, and folklore).

Charles Hudson has written a large book on a large topic, and he should not be faulted for emphasizing some things over others. As a synthesis of the entire history of southeastern Indians, this book is an excellently written and important volume. It is well produced with a complete bibliography and illustrations that add much to the text. Anyone interested in southeastern Native Americans, or in techniques of ethnohistory and social history, should not be without it.

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