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## Review of *The Cherokees and Their Chiefs: In the Wake of Empire* By Stanley W. Hoig

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*The Cherokees and Their Chiefs: In the Wake of Empire.* By Stanley W. Hoig. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1998. Maps, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. xiii + 350 pp. \$34.00 cloth, \$18.00 paper.

A popular history of the Cherokees, Hoig's book recounts, through vivid prose and detailed research from Euro-American records and scholarly sources, the diverse and troubled relationships between the Cherokee people and varied agents of colonialist expansion. Those who are largely unfamiliar with the voluminous number of academic texts about the history of British/US/Cherokee interaction will find the volume quite compelling. Those looking for more contemporary research, however, or for a strong Cherokee presence among the sources chosen will find *The Cherokees and Their Chiefs* something of a disappointment.

Hoig's greatest strength is as a dynamic storyteller. Writing with clarity and passion about the powerful personalities and events involved in Cherokee resistance to displacement, removal, and detribalization, he brings to life such figures as Attakullakulla, Oconostota, and Dragging Canoe of the 1700s, and John Ross, Stand Watie, and the various political and social rivals who battled for primacy through the nineteenth century and its traumas of Removal, the US Civil War, and allotment. Hoig is unflinching in his acknowledgment that "[s]eldom were [the Cherokees] defeated in their contests with the [US] government on the merits of their case but

usually by the unwillingness of government officials to adhere to their own ethics and written laws"; he exposes frequently the shameful actions of the US and its citizens in their interactions with the Cherokee people.

Unfortunately, as a scholarly text this book is lacking. It fails to draw on the most recent scholarship in the field, except in passing, and generally ignores cultural stories and oral histories of Cherokees themselves. The terminology employed is often that of pulp Westerns, complete with "shamans" and Indians "howling" and letting out their "war whoop" while engaging in "massacre" and "bloody assaults" on their (white) enemies. The sympathetic orientation of the stories is offset by the frequent animalistic terminology. (Yet I was more than a little amused to find that Andrew Jackson, too, "howled in fury" at one point.) Moreover, there is far too much of the "Vanishing Indian" stereotype, with references to the futility of Cherokee resistance to white intrusion, the possible "demise of their tribal being," and the apparently ever-present "precarious path that separates advancement from extinction." With little discussion of contemporary Cherokee culture and history, or the rich vitality and powerful endurance of the Cherokee people, such stereotypes are given an unfortunate emphasis in the text.

Perhaps the greatest drawback of *The Cherokees and Their Chiefs* for the scholar is one of context: do we really need another generalized history of the Cherokee chiefs and their interaction with the US government? Probably not. Focusing on only the men (with scanty mention of Nancy Ward/Nanyehi and Wilma Mankiller) who stood as political leaders provides, at best, a limited perspective, especially considering the strong traditional role of women in Cherokee politics. The leading Cherokee scholarship today provides detailed and nuanced analyses of the largely ignored or misunderstood aspects of Cherokee life: gender roles and divisions among Cherokees past and present; the diversity of responses to intermarriage, acculturation, and

assimilation, and their uses in the formation of contemporary Cherokee identities; Christianity and its relationship to traditional spiritual practices; and the endurance of traditional stories, ethics, and beliefs among today's Cherokee people.

Yet the flaws are largely forgivable. The book is more outdated in perspective than intentionally dismissive of more substantive analysis or current historiography. As far as it goes, *The Cherokees and Their Chiefs* provides a good start for anyone interested in many of the larger political and social forces dominating the lives of Cherokees in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

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