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Review of Mixed-Bloods and Tribal Dissolution: Charles Curtis and the Quest for Irulian Identity.

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Mixed-Bloods and Tribal Dissolution: Charles Curtis and the Quest for Indian Identity. By William E. Unrau. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989. Illustrations, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. xii + 242 pp. \$27.50.

Charles Curtis, a one-eighth Kansa mixed-blood, was elected vice president of the United States in 1928, the highest station attained by a person of Indian ancestry. Earlier, while serving as a Kansas congressman at the turn of the century, Curtis was instrumental in many government actions that are now generally considered to be some of the worst abuses of Indians and their homelands under a forced assimilation policy. William Unrau demonstrates in this important work that it was no coincidence that a mixed-blood played such a pivotal role in the destruction of tribes. The government had a long-standing record of giving mixed-bloods special consideration in negotiations. This not only helped win desired treaty arrangements, but it was also intended to convince full-bloods of the value of acculturation.

In the case of the Kansa tribe, an ancestor of Curtis named White Plume was one of several pliable mixed-bloods selected by government officials in the 1820s to act as a chief in ne-

gotiations leading to the cession of lands along the Kansas River. The mixed-bloods were given choice personal estates, partly to win their cooperation and partly to encourage them to act as role models in the reform of full-bloods. The government made little effort to make the latter a reality, and the situation deteriorated rapidly for the full-bloods. But many mixed-bloods prospered and came to live an increasingly separate and non-Indian existence.

Charles Curtis, for example, attended high school in Topeka, Kansas, near the estate he had inherited an interest in, rather than join other Kansa Indians in their move to Indian Territory after the dissolution of their Kansas reservation. Thereafter, Curtis was heavily influenced by his white grandfather, imbibing the same ideology of reducing the wilderness to a garden through farming and the building of towns and railroads that motivated countless frontier developers. He never doubted that full-bloods would have to join this march of "progress" and that mixed-bloods had to lead the way. Then upon becoming a politician, Curtis worked to promote actions such as the allotment of reservations and the opening of Indian Territory to corporate leasing. Everyone deferred to his judgment since he was billed as "Indian." Ironically, however, he "displayed no great interest in the difficult circumstances of the full-bloods" (135).

Only in recent years have scholars devoted much attention to the role of mixed-bloods in Indian history. This book represents a significant extension of that literature. While the portrayal of government policy is a damning one, Unrau's treatment is balanced and scholarly. Perhaps most important, he provides an essential reminder that Indian identity and perspective can never be defined singularly. The government and a variety of Indian peoples have struggled historically to shape them.

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