

Download and Read Free Online Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi, 1818–1918 By Clara Sue Kidwell

Editorial Review

From Library Journal

This is a highly focused, richly detailed, scholarly account of the interactions of Choctaws, Christian missionaries, and government in the gradual removal of these Native Americans from their homeland. The dates in the title reflect the span of time from the arrival of the first missionaries to the year the Mississippi Choctaws' identity as a tribe was formally recognized by the government. Concerned with good citizenship as well as religious education and conversion, the missionaries' schools were welcomed by the Choctaws, who sought new, practical skills for their rapidly changing world. One of Kidwell's major theses is that the missionaries ultimately failed to reach the majority of full-blood Choctaws because they relied so heavily on the mediation of mixed-bloods. This is a story of complex forces and personal anguish set against the backdrop of government policies inexorably bent on relocation. Recommended for collections strong in history and Native American studies. —Charles E. Perry, East Central Univ., Ada, Okla.

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From the Back Cover

The present-day Choctaw communities in central Mississippi are a tribute to the ability of the Indian people both to adapt to new situations and to find refuge against the outside world through their uniqueness. Clara Sue Kidwell, whose great-great-grandparents migrated from Mississippi to Indian Territory along the Trail of Tears in 1830, here tells the story of those Choctaws who chose not to move but to stay behind in Mississippi. As Kidwell shows, their story is closely interwoven with that of the missionaries who established the first missions in the area in 1818. While the U.S. government sought to "civilize" Indians through the agency of Christianity, many Choctaw tribal leaders in turn demanded education from Christian missionaries. The missionaries allied themselves with these leaders, mostly mixed-bloods; in so doing, they alienated themselves from the full-blood elements of the tribe and thus failed to achieve widespread Christian conversion and education. Their failure contributed to the growing arguments in Congress and by Mississippi citizens that the Choctaws should be moved to the West and their territory opened to white settlement. The missionaries did establish literacy among the Choctaws, however, with ironic consequences. Although the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek in 1830 compelled the Choctaws to move west, its fourteenth article provided that those who wanted to remain in Mississippi could claim land as individuals and stay in the state as private citizens. The claims were largely denied, and those who remained were often driven from their lands by white buyers, yet the Choctaws maintained their communities by clustering around the few men who did get title to lands, by maintaining traditional customs, and by continuing to speak the Choctaw language. Now Christian missionaries offered the Indian communities a vehicle for survival rather than assimilation.

About the Author

Clara Sue Kidwell received her Ph.D. from the University of Oklahoma and is Assistant Director for Cultural Resources with the National Museum of the American Indian, Washington, D.C.

Users Review

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