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Robbie Ethridge. *Creek Country: The Creek Indians and Their World.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003. vii + 369 pp. $70.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8078-2827-4; $23.50 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8078-5495-2.

Reviewed by Fay Yarbrough (Department of History, University of Kentucky Capturing a People in Transition)

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Robbie Ethridge uses a variety of sources including archaeological evidence, oral history, and a careful reading of documents produced by literate individuals living in Creek territory to reconstruct the lives of Creek Indians during the nineteenth century. What she captures with her interdisciplinary approach is a moment of transition: Creek Indians were attempting to reconcile their own economies, social structures, and forms of governance with the ideas and practices introduced through increased contact with outsiders, people of European and African descent, and with the American federal government.

The author begins with some historical background on the origins of Creek and other Southeastern Indians. According to Ethridge, many of these groups did not exist prior to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Instead, they formed as remnants from Mississippian chiefdoms joined together after contact between the Old and New Worlds decimated indigenous populations in North America.

Ethridge then offers a detailed description of what life must have been like for Creek Indians, both elite and ordinary. She introduces the reader to the topography of the land and provides comprehensive maps of the region; describes the people who lived in Creek country and their daily activities; and outlines the function of the economy and the operation of Creek governing bodies. Creek Indians lived in matrifocal compounds shared by members of a matriline in which women performed much of the agricultural labor, and men engaged in hunting and trading. Some households included Creek women and their white husbands. Some of the Métis children of these unions began to engage in large, plantation-style agriculture by the end of the eighteenth century, including the ownership of African-descended slaves. Other Creek households turned to ranching as their primary economic activity. Ethridge finds that the world of Creek Indians was quite diverse in terms of the composition of the population, the economic activity in which Creek Indians participated, and the varying landscapes in which they lived.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the federal government attempted to change indigenous populations. The American "civilization" program largely entailed encouraging the individual ownership of land among native groups in order to facilitate the sale of "excess" Indian lands to American settlers. This push for individual land ownership and the establishment of family farms headed by men also meant a radical change in Creek gender roles. Federal authorities and their agents insisted that Creek men, not women, perform agricultural labor and that Creek men give up the hunt. The focus on male-headed households also meant a move away from matrilineally organized households.

The writings of Benjamin Hawkins form an important part of the evidentiary base for this study. Ethridge recognizes that the heavy reliance on written records produced by white men living in Creek Country, such as Hawkins and others, can be problematic, but she approaches these sources with caution and an ear attuned to the potential biases of such documents. Hawkins obviously came to the Creek Indians with a particular perspective, especially given his mission to bring "civilization" to the population. He often displayed a patronizing attitude toward many Creek practices, but his writings also reveal a respect for Creek people and a genuine effort to treat them fairly.

Ethridge's work is invaluable for scholars of Creek Indians in particular and southeastern Indians more generally. *Creek Country* provides an in-depth description of many aspects of Creek life in the nineteenth century and a window on the changes they experienced.

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