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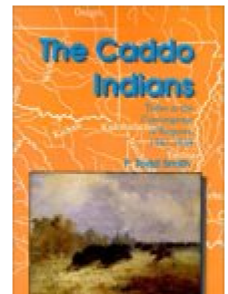
F. Todd Smith. *The Caddo Indians: Tribes at the Convergence of Empires 1542-1854.* College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1995. 229 pp. $24.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-89096-981-6.



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In *The Caddo Indians*, F. Todd Smith has done something very old, but at the same time something new and exciting. Like an old-fashioned historian, he wrote a narrative history. What's new? He wrote a narrative history of the Caddo Indians and their relations with the Europeans and Americans who settled the Red River Valley of present-day Louisiana and eastern Texas. Like Daniel Usner in *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves,* [1], Smith wonders in his introduction that historians have so long neglected such an interesting subject. The Caddo were among the first natives in North America contacted by Europeans–during the Soto expedition–and they occupied a strategic location that put them at various times between various combinations and permutations of New Spain, New France, Mexico, the Republic of Texas, the United States, and other Indian groups, a position that allowed them to "play off" the peoples around them, although Smith does not use that exact term.

To explain this neglect, Smith points to "the bias of American historians toward English colonization over the contemporaneous history of those areas once controlled by France and Spain" (p. 4). He makes it clear at the same time that he is writing Indian-centered history–that is, not a general history of Indian-white relations, but the history of the three peoples that made up the Caddo confederacies, from first contact until the establishment of their Texas reserve in 1854. That history involves two main themes. First, the Caddo confederacies were able to play off the European (French and Spanish) and Euroamerican (Texan and U.S.) powers well into the nineteenth century. Second, close contact with Europeans led to a dwindling population and to the Caddos' becoming dependent on Europeans, first for goods, then for food as well.

The Caddo confederacies have a history that should be told and that should be studied by historians who want to make sense of American history. In Chapter 1, as is common among such histories, Smith begins with an overview of Caddoan prehistory and culture. The Caddoan confederacies lived in what is today Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Oklahoma, but there is also a Caddoan language group that includes Plains tribes such as the Arikaras, Pawnees, Wichitas, and Kichais. The "Caddos" as a people included three confederacies, although membership changed over time between the fifteen or so towns, known as the Kadohadacho, Natchitoches, and Hasinais. Smith explains the basic religious tenets of the Caddos, as well as their civil government, which probably reflect Mississippian survivals. The Caddos were expert agriculturalists, which Smith argues accounted for their large population and their ability to retain independence from the Europeans for so long. Caddo contact with Soto's expedition was brief, and Smith discusses it briefly in this chapter.

The rest of the book covers the period from 1686 to 1854; it is divided into chapters (two through nine) based mainly on the changing circumstances of the Caddos, which were dictated by the shifting Euroamerican presence in Caddo country and on their borders. The Caddos were able to retain their numbers, even at the levels they did, and their independence in part because Caddo country was not a frontier of settlement until after 1800: Louisiana and Texas were both tactical colonies placed where they were to protect vital European possessions (Canada and Mexico), and neither attracted much settlement. The establishment of Natchitoches and then the Nassonite Post in the early part of the eighteenth century made Caddo country a pivot, if not of empire, of trade and diplomacy, and the Caddos made the most of it. A series of remarkable Caddo leaders such as Bernardino, Tinhiouen, Bigotes, Dehahuit, and Iesh exercised great political and diplomatic skills, and some of the Caddo leaders were among the most respected native leaders of their day, at a time when trade, diplomacy, and war could bring together such diverse allies and enemies as the Cherokees, Choctaws, Chickasaws, Delawares, Kickapoos, Alabama-Koasatis, Osages, Apaches, Comanches, and Quapaws.

Dealing with the Europeans, of course, had to be part of any such considerations. In this one part of the world, at least, France was more powerful than Spain, and the story of just how that came to be is one of the most interesting chapters in North American colonial history. Ironically, even after Louisiana became a Spanish colony after the Seven Years' War, a frontier remained between Louisiana and Texas, as Louisiana fell under the jurisdiction of the viceroyalty of Havana, while Texas continued to be administered from Mexico City.

The Caddos were able to maintain a play-off system later than any other eastern tribes because of a series of episodes that kept the various governments hesitant to challenge the balance of power in the region, and the Caddos were at the center of that balance. First there was the confusion over the Louisiana-Texas border after the Louisiana Purchase, followed by the turmoil of the War of 1812 and the Creek Red Stick revolt. Mexico won its independence from Spain shortly after that, but then the Texas revolutions broke out, followed by the creation of the short-lived Republic of Texas, which was nonetheless significant for the Caddos, because its Indian policies might have made even Andrew Jackson's policies look humane by comparison. Even after the annexation of Texas things remained unsettled, however, as the circumstances of annexation led to Texas' public lands not coming under the immediate jurisdiction of the federal government. Finally, by 1854, the Caddos became just another small, powerless tribe to be pushed here and there by the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Although Smith is not writing about a very large area, at least on a continental scale, it is indeed a region "at the convergence of empires," and working in the history of these empires is not easy. Historians have not written about the Caddos and some of the other tribes of the Southeast partly because many of the sources are not in English and thus not accessible to many U.S. historians: Smith notes in the introduction that the only published history of the Caddos has almost nothing about the Caddos before 1803 (p. 4). Although some French and Spanish archival sources and published primary sources on Texas and Louisiana have been translated, and Smith has used these to great effect, he has also used Spanish-language materials, archival and published, to write this history.

Although I like what is here, there are a few topics and sources that I think the author should have included. Although Smith makes playing off the peoples and states around the Caddos a major theme of the book, he does not make much of the idea of play-off systems; I have absorbed enough anthropology to think that he should at least make reference to other play-off systems and how and why they did or did not work–for instance, Daniel Richter's discussion in *The Ordeal of the Longhouse.* [2] In the same way, Smith writes about dependency, without calling it that directly or citing any other discussions of this topic, even though he might easily have cited Richard White's work on nations to the east and northwest of the Caddos, the Choctaws and Pawnees, especially because the Choctaws have a least cameo appearances in the book.[3]

Likewise, the notes and bibliography miss at least a couple of works that the author should have included. Although I can understand why he might not have highlighted it, Smith should at least have made reference to Ross Phares' biography of St. Denis, a crucial European figure in Caddo history, if only to explain why he doesn't make much of it.[4] I also think, especially given that some of the Caddo tribes maintained their population levels longer than other groups in the region, that he should have included information about the Caddos and neighboring groups provided by Peter Wood's excellent article on Southeastern demography in *Powhatan's Mantle.*[5]

I have a few other quibbles–for instance, I do not think that Jackson's removal policy represented a dramatic change in U.S. policy (p. 103)– but overall, *The Caddos* is an excellent work. The book has six well-done maps, which are crucial to keeping up with the different groups as they change configurations and places through the years. The book has extensive endnotes and a bibliography, a combination that I think should be standard for history books today, even with book prices as they are.

The Caddos and their territory lay between several zones of convergence in North America. They occupied the borders of ecological zones–that is, the Plains and the Mississippi Valley. Their culture was basically that of the eastern woodlands, but some of their near neighbors were of the Plains cultures. And they certainly occupied the "convergence of empires." But the Caddos and other groups also occupy frontiers between history and anthropology, between "U.S." or "American" history and other histories. They have, until very recently, occupied the academic equivalent of the "neutral ground" between Texas and Louisiana. F. Todd Smith's book goes a long way toward opening up that neutral ground for our exploration. I would hope that colleagues outside of Indian history, borderlands, and Texas and Louisiana colonial history do not fail to discover what F. Todd Smith has uncovered here.

Notes [1] *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley Before 1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 2-5.

[2] Daniel Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse: The Peoples of the Iroquois League in the Era of European Colonization* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), esp. 2-4.

[3] Richard White, *The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment, and Social Change among the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navahos* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983).

[4] Ross Phares, *Cavalier in the Wilderness: The Story of the Explorer and Trader, Louis Juchereau de Saint Denis* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952).

[5] Peter Wood, "The Changing Population of the Colonial South: An Overview by Race and Region, 1685-1790," in Wood, Gregory Waselkov, and M. Thomas Hatley, *Powhatan's Mantle: Indians in the Colonial Southeast* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 35-103.

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