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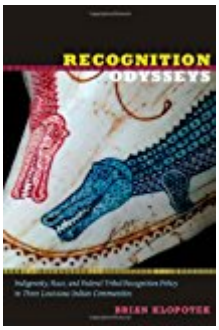

Brian Klopotek. *Recognition Odysseys: Indigeneity, Race, and Federal Tribal Recognition Policy in Three Louisiana Indian Communities.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2011. 416 pp. $24.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8223-4984-6.

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A recent trend in Native studies is tribal-level examinations on indigenous nation-building and the expanding definitions of sovereignty, as well as examinations regarding citizenship that are inevitably generated from such endeavors. Brian Klopotek, in *Recognition Odyssey: Indigeneity, Race, and Federal Tribal Recognition Policy in Three Louisiana Indian Communities*, brings a much-needed perspective to these conversations through his detailed analysis of the variability in the recognition process and how success or failure is predicated more on the intersections of larger historical social structures with specific circumstances than on objective qualifications. Using a multidisciplinary approach combining history, anthropology, and sociology, Klopotek has written an immensely impressive and supremely complex history of three distinct Indian communities in late twentieth-century Louisiana seeking state and federal recognition: the Tunica-Biloxi, the Jena Choctaws, and the Clifton-Choctaws.

The research that undergirds this book is stunning. Klopotek not only did much historical research on the processes with which these three communities have been engaged for years, he also conducted much ethnographic fieldwork, spent numerous hours speaking with community leaders and others, and deeply researched the complex state and federal recognition processes through the modern era. The result is a richly detailed and nuanced look at how the federal recognition process unfolded in these three communities, the consequences of both their successes and failures in achieving recognition, and how the journey transformed each of these communities.

Like others, Klopotek sees federal recognition as linked to issues of sovereignty, nation, economics, and citizenship. However, Klopotek expands this conception by articulating it with issues of Indian identity and authenticity, which he understands to be related to issues of race and white supremacy. These latter issues emerge, undoubtedly, from the fact that Klopotek chose as his subject southern Indian groups, all of whom have had long histories of close associations with black communities and who, in the Jim Crow South, had

two ethnic choices—black or white—for decades. Still, all three communities have sustained their Indian identities into the twenty-first century. Klopotek, therefore, sees the recognition process as a "battle of competing racial projects" between whites and Indians, and he sought out race theory as a way to deconstruct this battle (p. 5). To this end, Klopotek proposes to combine race theory derived from ethnic studies with sovereignty and identity frameworks formulated in Native studies. The result is a theoretically sophisticated and sweeping new formulation of the recognition process.

After setting the theoretical agenda, Klopotek takes the reader into the three case studies. He details with great care the Tunica-Biloxi and Jena Choctaw (four and three chapters, respectively), but he spills considerably less ink on the Clifton Choctaw (only one chapter). This unevenness is regrettable, but it does not detract from Klopotek's larger arguments. Clearly the three communities share some structures of life in the American South: they are in Louisiana, two are Choctaws, they have a history of social and economic struggles, and they have negotiated a complex racial past of black, white, and Indian in the Jim Crow South. In addition, all of Louisiana's Indians face particular hurdles in the recognition process. The tribes are typically small, and the Office of Federal Acknowledgments (OFA, part of the Bureau of Indian Affairs [BIA]), chronically underfunded, was reluctant to expend funds on these small groups. Therefore, the OFA usually opted to let the states handle their own Indian affairs. Second, federal and state arbiters were skeptical of the "purity" of Louisiana Indians. Louisiana Indians, like many southern tribes that had escaped removal, have been living and intermarrying with both whites and blacks for decades. In the heightened racial thinking throughout the twentieth-century South, just "one drop" of African American blood consigned an individual to the black racial category. The Louisiana Indians, then, the thinking goes, are too mixed and too assimilated to be "real" Indians.

While acknowledging such commonalities, Klopotek is interested in the intersections of these commonalities with the differences between and historical contingencies of the three communities and how these intersections informed and shaped the recognition process for each. Through reconstructing their dense histories, Klopotek also reconstructs the complex nexus of politics, local histories, colonial entanglements, economics, authenticity, identity, and race that is the recognition process. It should come as no surprise that the recognition process is an inherently political one, and Klopotek thoroughly dissects the political machinations undergirding the process for the three groups.

Klopotek examines politics at every level—local, state, and federal—and identifies specific players and influential voices that helped to shape each tribe's efforts. From the "activists chiefs" of the Tunica Biloxis, to the contentious rise of a young, aggressive leadership among the Jena Choctaws, to an unexpected coalescing of the diffuse leadership of the Clifton Choctaws, Klopotek details much about the transformation of local tribal politics as the leadership tackled the long play of federal recognition. Klopotek goes on to detail the sometimes ill-fitting articulation between local politics and state and federal politics. The Clifton Choctaw case study is an especially apt one in this regard. With state recognition, the Clifton Choctaws found themselves in a Louisiana political hurricane spawned by the flurry of recognition applications at the time and an intense antigaming backlash (most of the applicants hoped to found casinos on tribal grounds). The storm also affected intratribal relations as already established tribes attempted to block state recognition of others so that the limited benefits from the state would not be diluted. Given the Clifton Choctaws close association with African Americans, the arguments quickly devolved to racial

ones--were the Clifton Choctaws "real" Indians, or African Americans? Those against their recognition used the old one-drop rule--being mixed with African Americans, the Clifton Choctaws must be black, not Indian. Klopotek examines this question acutely, concluding in no uncertain terms that "this collective erasure of indigeneity in people with African ancestry should take its place among the massive acts of genocide in United States history" (pp. 213-214). In point of fact, many Clifton Choctaws throughout the twentieth century asserted their Indianess over blackness and, like other Louisiana Indians, have adopted antiblack racist ideologies. Klopotek cogently observes that such racism is not in the Indians' best interest because it only serves to reinscribe a doctrine of white supremacy. In the case of the Clifton Choctaws, such racial questions quickly became linked to questions of authenticity. This, in turn, prompted the Clifton Choctaws to invest in revitalization programs, but their loss of "traditional" arts and crafts combined with their lack of recognition, has made it especially difficult for them to claim a legitimate right to participate in broader, pan-Indian cultural movements and hence to establish their Indianess to outsiders through such programs.

The Tunica Biloxis and Jena Choctaws also had to deal with racial questions in their pursuit of state and federal recognition. In their first enunciations for recognition, all three tribes had hoped to claim racial separation from blacks and some acknowledgment of a third racial category--that of Indian, which in the racial hierarchy of the day stood closer to whiteness than to blackness. The Tunica Biloxis and Clifton Choctaws were tribes that had historically close associations with blacks and whites, and this fact, as seen, proved an obstacle to federal recognition. In fact, in the early twentieth century the OFA and BIA repeatedly discouraged the Tunica-Biloxis from petitioning for recognition, pointing to an oft-cited early anthropological report detailing much genetic (or "blood") mixing and assimilation of the tribe. The Jena Choctaws, on the other hand, are a small group of interrelated families who are unusual in that they have historical continuity in place, they claim a high "blood quantum," they have retained the Choctaw language, and many practice traditional Choctaw ways. Living in the Jim Crow South, the Jena Choctaws early on began self-segregating from blacks and adopting racist ideologies in order, as Klopotek argues, to be on the other side of the color line. By the mid-1930s they had received federal funding for an Indian school, which, although keeping them separate from whites, allowed a general perception of the Jena Choctaws as Indians rather than as African Americans. Klopotek's insightful analysis here reveals the awful paradox that the Jena Choctaw's educational efforts were rooted in the ideology of white supremacy--"the ideological foundation of their own oppression" (p. 144). However that may be, by claiming Indianness, the Jena Choctaws believed that a petition for federal recognition would be successful. Klopotek also uses the case of the Jena Choctaws to uncover some of the contradictory interpretations and inconsistencies on the part of the OFA in regard to recognition. Unlike the cases of the Tunica-Biloxis and Clifton Choctaws, the OFA did not dispute that the Jena Choctaws were Indians. Yet the OFA, for spurious reasons such as the ambiguities between state and federal jurisdictions and the fact that the Jena Choctaws were not part of the federally recognized Mississippi Band of Choctaws, denied their first petitions.

In each case, the quest for recognition took decades and the objectives changed over those decades. In time, and with the civil rights and other social movements of the mid- to late twentieth century, the objectives of each tribe shifted. For the Tunica Biloxis, a second generation of "activist chiefs" led renewed efforts for federal recognition. Now, though, instead of seeking racial separation, they sought economic development, political and legal independence from state jurisdiction, and self-determination. They also were quite

explicit about their desires to bring gaming into their community. The motivations for recognition among the Jena Choctaws also changed after World War II. By this time, the Jena Choctaws were becoming acculturated to white Louisiana society, although they tenaciously guarded their Indian identity. The younger generation of Jena Choctaws saw the possibilities for economic rejuvenation and political sovereignty in recognition. Their voices transformed Jena Choctaw leadership from leadership by a few families to a more council-led government that, in turn, led the recognition efforts. They achieved federal recognition in 1995. The Clifton Choctaws incorporated in 1977 at the suggestion of the state Indian office and in order to apply for federal economic assistance grants. The next year, they were granted state recognition. However, as mentioned, their application for state recognition set off a political and public relations firestorm, and, to date, they still have not received federal recognition.

In all three cases, the recognition process as well as the success or failure in achieving it brought mixed results. The Clifton Choctaws' failure has been a particularly tough one. They had tremendous difficulty tracing their Indian genealogies, a requirement in the application, which only gave fuel to their detractors. In addition, the Clifton Choctaws have not historically been a "tribe" according to the OFA's definition, despite the fact that they have had distinct community boundaries and claimed indigeneity for decades. The race question, along with the accusations that they are not "real" Indians and are only seeking recognition for federal funds, continue to taint their efforts.

The success of the Jena Choctaws has been uneven. For the Jena Choctaws federal recognition brought intangible benefits such as a sense of identity, justice, and empowerment. However, the tangible benefits such as health care, housing, education, and so on have been slow in coming, leading to frustrations and disappointments. In fact, the tribe's continued efforts to establish a casino resulted in much political wrangling with and ill will from antigaming proponents, much of which took a racist slant. All of this left the Jena Choctaws embattled and on the defensive. (The Jena Choctaw finally opened a small casino in 2013, after publication of Klopotek's book.)

The Tunica Biloxis, perhaps the most successful of the three groups, have also had mixed results. Since achieving federal recognition, the Tunica Biloxis have parlayed recognition into several benefits for their members, including a casino and repatriation of the so-called Tunica Treasure, a collection of valuable historical artifacts from Tunica archaeological sites. These benefits, however, have come with unexpected issues such as reconsidering citizenship requirements and the tribal rolls, inadequate business training for the casino and other entrepreneurial endeavors, shifts in tribal leadership, and difficulties with locals who question the legitimacy of Indian gaming. In other words, achieving federal recognition for the Tunica Biloxis brought many of the expected benefits, but also some unexpected costs.

As this brief summary shows, ***Recognition Odyssey*** tackles one of the most complicated issues facing contemporary Native people today--sovereignty and recognition. Klopotek, in no uncertain terms, lays bare the inconsistencies in federal recognition that have resulted from obtuse, nineteenth-century definitions, incomplete understandings of the complexities of Indian histories, odd colonial legacies, a tangled morass of legalese, the inherently treacherous landscapes of local, state, and federal politics, the still powerful vestiges of white supremacy, and the social and cultural particulars of particular people at particular points in time. ***Recognition Odyssey***, in short, transforms our understanding of indigenous nation building and sovereignly because Klopotek's analysis shows that federal recognition is neither easy nor straightforward and that linking Indian

tribal sovereignty and identity to state and federal recognition, therefore, is risky business at best.