

Sandra Faiman-Silva, *Choctaws at the Crossroads: The Political Economy of Class and Culture in the Oklahoma Timber Region*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997) pp. 273. \$45.00  
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**In the early 1980s** Sandra Faiman-Silva, then a doctoral student in anthropology, lived near Talihina, Oklahoma. She took advantage of her location, receiving a grant from the National Science Foundation to investigate the lives of Choctaw Indians living in the timber region of southeastern Oklahoma (mostly in Pushmataha and McCurtain Counties). This book is the product of her efforts. She used detailed survey instruments and on-site visits as part of her investigation. Also, she conducted an extensive review of existing literature, supplemented with considerable archival research at libraries and in county court houses. She also drew upon several theoretical models to structure her findings. The result is a comprehensive discussion of the Choctaws in the timber region and a solid estimation of the condition of the Choctaw tribe today.

Faiman-Silva uses roughly the first half of the book to discuss various theoretical models and to describe the social, economic, and political history of the Choctaws. The author especially endorses those theoretical models that emphasize world-systems and neo-Marxist explanations. She admires the original Choctaw system, which was "rooted in kinship idioms, reciprocity, and gender complementarity" (p.19). Through a dialectical change process, the Choctaws were reduced from a sovereign nation to a dependent domestic nation to a tribe to a marginalized ethnic enclave. Most recently, according to Faiman-Silva, the Weyerhaeuser timber corporation and Tyson Foods—both multinational

corporations—have devised policies of exploitation that has kept the Choctaws and others in southeastern Oklahoma in a pre-proletariat condition. Many Choctaws are currently exploited by multinational corporations and the harsh realities of a new global economy.

Faiman-Silva's discussion of the history of the Choctaws draws upon solid sources. She describes the pre-contact conditions in Mississippi, the early European confrontations, the use of the factory system to make the Choctaws dependent, demands for land cessions, and the removal from their southeastern homelands. She then covers the antebellum golden era and the horrors of the Civil War in Indian Territory. Finally, she explains the process of forced allotment and subsequent alienation of Choctaw lands in the early twentieth century. These first chapters of the book dealing with history suffer from some small errors and vagueness. For example, she over simplifies the full-blood, mixed-blood arguments about removal. She also incorrectly indicates that the Reconstruction Treaties with the federal government in 1866 created the first federal courts in Indian Territory (p. 62) and mistakenly implies that railroad land grant legislation applied to the Choctaw Nation (p.77).

Another flaw of the book is the repetition found throughout. In the early chapters, the theoretical considerations seem unnecessarily redundant, which makes for tedious reading at times. Likewise, the second half of the book suffers from repetition of recent and contemporary patterns among the Choctaws. In all, a reduction of about one fourth of the verbiage in the book would have improved the outcome.

The most useful information in the book comes in the later chapters. Here Faiman-Silva reports her findings of the extensive surveys she conducted, which included fifty households over an eighteen-month period from 1980 to 1982. The data of the surveys included the number of residents in the home, details of the condition of the dwelling, income of the residents, and a variety of economic conditions of each home. The family surveys revealed several clear patterns, Both nuclear and extended families crowded into inadequate houses, some resorting to living in unimproved shacks that surround the old Indian churches in the area. Also, the incomes were seldom adequate to meet basic needs, reflecting

chronic underemployment and unemployment.

The last few chapters describe the economic practices of the Weyerhaeuser Corporation and Tyson Foods, current conditions of the tribal government, and recent attempts by the tribe to provide economic benefits to the Choctaws. Weyerhaeuser has followed strategies of downsizing the workforce, outsourcing a considerable amount of the cutting and planting of the forests, and making strong demands on the remaining unionized workforce. Consequently, few full time job opportunities above minimum wage have been available for the Choctaws of the timber region.

Throughout the 1980s and even more so in the 1990s, the Choctaw tribal government has followed a policy of economic development to deal with many of the problems of tribal members. Bingo palaces, truck plazas, partnerships with various industries, community health centers, and other new institutions and practices have led to greater self-sufficiency for the Choctaws. Still, however, the new jobs created by the tribe remain unskilled service employment, and many of the economic enterprises—such as gambling operations—remain precarious due to politics and competition. The welfare and selfhelp services now provided by the tribe have become necessary due to the severe governmental cut backs in services, a product of President Ronald Reagan's New Federalism.

All in all, Faiman-Silva's book is an insightful and helpful discussion of the conditions of the Choctaws who live in the timber region and of the tribe as a whole. It is an important addition of knowledge that updates the story of the lives of the Choctaws who live in the most culturally "Choctaw" portion of Oklahoma. Historians and anthropologists dealing with the tribe must include the book with the other standard studies. Public administrators and social service workers will find the work especially helpful in dealing not only with Choctaws but also with other tribal groups.

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