

Mankiller: A Chief and Her People

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The first female chief of a large tribe, the Cherokee Nation in Tahlequah, tells her life story, from her childhood on Mankiller Flats to her struggle to lead her people into a new century. 75,000 first printing. National ad/promo. Tour.

Wilma Mankiller was Chief of the Cherokee Nation for over ten years. She lives in Oklahoma. Michael Wallis is an award-winning historian of the Old West and author of *Route 66: The Mother Road*. Disappointing autobiography by the first woman to lead a major Indian nation. Mankiller made history in 1985 when she became principle chief of the Cherokee Nation. She holds the reins of power well, and has been reelected to her post. But structuring an autobiography is not her strong suit, although fault may lie with coauthor Wallis (*Route 66*, 1990) or with Gloria Steinem, whom the acknowledgements credit for "suggesting the format for this book." Instead of a forthright life, readers will find a choppy mix of autobiography, traditional tales, and a lengthy history of the Cherokee. Mankiller's chronicle of her people churns with energy, whether she's raking the federal government over the coals or celebrating past Cherokee leaders like Sequoyah, inventor of an Indian syllabary. Often, though, history lies crushed beneath the weight of her angry rhetoric--demonizing Columbus, ridiculing missionaries, attacking academic scholarship that doesn't fit her political agenda. Coupled to this awkward polemic is her own life story, from childhood poverty to the cultural revolution of Haight-Ashbury in the mid-60's to her ethnic awakening during the Indian occupation of Alcatraz in 1969. Her battle against devastating personal illnesses--including kidney disease and myasthenia gravis--evokes admiration for her courage but doesn't wash away an impression of self-importance: Her text prattles on about her "innate love of all people" and her "public and private aura" to which "spirituality is...the key" (an assertion for which the book provides little evidence). Mankiller also claims that a religious vision foretold her election as chief. Important as testimony from a historical figure, but shallow and predictable. For a more nuanced and powerful Native American autobiography, try Peter MacDonald's *The Last Warrior*, reviewed above. (Thirty-two pages of b&w photographs--not seen) -- Copyright © 1993, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

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?.?.?.?.?. Fortunately, Studs was able to find work in the theater and one day, in October 1952, after hearing Woody Guthrie on the radio, he ... Studs said, "If I did one thing I'm proud of, it's to make people feel that together they count."