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English 210-003

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The Caddo Tribes of Louisiana

The Caddo people are a group of Native American tribes that once inhabited the Piney Woods region of the United States. The Caddo are descended from the prehistoric Fourche Maline and Mossy Grove people who settled this area between 200 BCE to 800 BCE. By 800 BCE these people formed the Caddoan Mississippians, and by 1000 BCE this society’s ideas and religions evolved into what is defined as Caddoan. The Caddo people settled all along the Red River, dividing themselves into three confederations, the Hasinai, Kadohadacho, and Natchitoches, and branched out into many affiliated tribes. They covered parts of Oklahoma (Kadohadacho), east Texas (Hasinai), southern Arkansas (Kadohadacho), and northwestern Louisiana (Natchitoches).

In Louisiana they covered territory from the Ouachita River west to the Sabine River and south to the Cane River. The Caddo people of Louisiana include the Adai, Doustioni, Natchitoches, Ouachita, and Yatasi tribes. The Adai spoke their own language, which is now extinct. Their name is Caddo for ‘brushwood’. Not much is known about the Doustioni. They formerly lived on the Red River, but mysteriously abandoned their village and wandered for five years. They joined the Natchitoches confederation and resettled near the present day city of Natchitoches. The Natchitoches tribe settled around the Cane River. In 1700 they were joined by remnants of the Kadohadocho, who had suffered severe losses from wars with the Chickasaw. The Ouachita tribe settled near the Ouachita River and the Black River. They are known for their practice of burying horses. The Ouachita Mountains, the Ouachita River, and the Ouachita Lake are all named after the tribe. The Yatassi were settled south of modern day Shreveport. Their name is Kadohadacho for ‘those other people’. The Yatassi fought the Kadohadacho with the Chickasaw.

The Caddo have their own unique culture among other Native Americans. The word ‘Caddo’ comes from ‘Kadohadacho’, which means ‘true chiefs’. The Caddo have their own language, Caddoan. The Caddo chiefs are called caddi. The Caddo men were warriors and hunters, and the women farmed and cooked. The men wore breechcloths and cut their hair into a Mohawk style or a scalplock style. The women wore wraparound skirts and poncho tops made of deerskin. The Louisiana Caddoans lived in tall beehive shaped grass houses. They farmed beans, corn, pumpkins, and harvested berries and sunflower seeds. They hunted buffalo, deer, bear, and turkey.

According to Caddo legend, the tribe originated from an underground cave near the Red River known as Chahkanina, which means ‘place of crying’. They were led by a man named Moon, who instructed the people to not look back. A Caddo man carried with him a drum, pipe, and fire, and his wife carried corn and pumpkin seeds. When the people and animals emerged from the cave, the wolf looked back, and the entrance was sealed. They followed the Red River west, and a Caddo woman named Zacado taught the people how to hunt, fish, build homes, and make clothing.

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