

AMERICAN INDIAN INSTITUTE
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

SHAWNEE INDIAN HISTORY CLASS AND HISTORY OF THE ABSENTEE SHAWNEES

In the spring of 1969 the Little Axe Multi-Purpose Center of the Community Action Program sponsored two classes for the Shawnee Indians living in the vicinity of Little Axe, a few miles east of Norman. Our office was contacted and asked to provide a teacher for the history class, if possible. One of our staff members, Julia A. Jordan, conducted the class, which met on Wednesday nights for about 13 weeks, and prepared the accompanying materials.

The class was considered to be of importance for a number of reasons. The Shawnees themselves were interested in the idea of examining their own history, and it seemed a good opportunity for demonstrating the way in which the American Indian Institute and Indian Education officers of the University of Oklahoma are interested in working in the interests of Indian people. The Shawnees of the Little Axe vicinity, the so-called Big Jim band of the Absentee Shawnees, have a reputation for conservatism and uncommunicativeness to outsiders unparalleled among Oklahoma Indians. Living within a few miles of the Oklahoma City urban-industrial complex and working in local installations, they have yet retained their language and traditional religious ceremonies intact. They have also maintained a strong and viable oral tradition which, after 200 years of cultivated resistance to efforts to force them to change, they are reluctant to share with outsiders.

We hoped that through the history class we might break down some of the reluctance to discuss their history which characterizes the Shawnees, and obtain