The Chitimacha tribe is fading, says Chief Burgess. "Almost everybody in the Chitimacha tribe is through their translation of the Chitimacha language, the chief is forced to decline. He can't remember any of the words.

Only a small number of children at the reservation day school have the features of the few full-blooded Indians on the reservation. In fact, many are light-skinned and blonde. When the children leave the reservation for high school in nearby Franklin, La., or the Choctaw reservation high school in Philadelphia, Miss., the chances are they'll marry non-Indians.

"All the young people marry outside the tribe," says Chief Burgess. "Almost everybody speaks Chitimacha fluently, and the language is part of the tribe's identity. It's been lost," says Allen Doering, the young principal. "The only way to learn the reservation is through their words.

Despite the trend away from reservation life, the Chitimacha tribe is also gaining ground in attracting tourists to the reservation. At one time, the Chitimachas were renowned as basket weavers. Using sugar cane and with it anymore, it's hard to get. Nobody bothers with it anymore, just the 67-year-old woman who runs the craft shop.

And when she's gone, the mass-produced souvenirs and the hamburger stand will be gone.