Typical Indian Home in the Coushatta Indian Reservation near Elton, La. This house, as Shamblin (and otherwise unfit for sanitary reasons), and comfort is typical of way of life and poverty which the Coushattas know today. Homes are crowded, because Indians as a rule have large families. They know no luxuries, such as bathrooms, television, radios, etc., which comprises the standard life of American families today. (Photos by Elvin Reed)

MARTIN ABBEY, Chief of the Coushatta Indians of Elton, is bedridden and a sick man. He insisted upon being put into his wheelchair to pose for this photo, being the chief of a proud race. He is a living apostle, whose word is more real and visible than that of the Coushatta Indians living on a self-styled reservation some five or six miles of Elton, in Allen Parish. For the Coushattas, who migrated to South Louisiana in 1795 from Alabama, the word "poverty" is nothing new. They have a hard-to-mouth existence for the past three hundred years. They have lost hope left in the eyes of the Coushatta elders. The Coushatta Poverty Program was approved by Congress under President Lyndon B. Johnson. The Coushatta number approximately 150 adults and 250 children, living in the wooded area north of Elton. They live as a tribe on land which was homesteaded and on land which they "displaced" and acquired title. They have struggled to maintain their livelihood in what is left to them, from a survival standpoint, as an alien economy, as alien culture, and under a friendly but alien government. The Coushattas have never been recognized by the United States government. They are a peace-loving people, who welcome visitors and tourists. Because their reservation is not legally a US reservation, they receive no assistance from any quarter.

The Coushattas have preserved their individual language, their culture and customs. Because of poverty during the last few years, members of the tribe have been forced to work in the woods for wages and take their families where work could be had. They have made the best of a bad situation, until some form of help is at hand. Everybody, like the Indians, may have to earn a living. Many are contemplating moving their lot to Oklahoma where the majority of the Coushattas migrated years ago. The majority, however, have no means, no money, no help, no transportation to do more than even dwel upon such an undertaking, and the sad thought behind the Coushatta's plight is the belief among the old and young alike that "no one cares."

There is a great feeling among the Coushatta Indians that they too, are a part of the great American heritage, a feeling that they should be recognized and included in this vast program that is in the foresight of the Johnson administration. At present their homes, their only means of shelter, are very rundown and unfurnished, so primitive that even an outbuilding is an unknown luxury. Considering their physical welfare, there is a great need for medical attention. Their death rate is higher than that of the United States at large. This band of Indians live closely banded together in the backland and waste of Allen Parish. In winter, many roads on their reservation are impassable. They have no means of buying cattle, or farm implements with which to earn a livelihood. The Coushatta Indians, today, are on the brink of extinction. They need understanding consideration.

A petition from the Coushatta tribe was presented sometime ago by their friend and advisor, Paul Tate, Manou attorney, to Senator Shriver, director of the Peace Corps and now director of the Anti-Poverty program, asking that a survey of the Indian plight near Elton be made and that possible solutions to their people's plight be possible. Word from Washington to the Coushattas is that an investigation will be made. However, help from Washington is still far away. The word of Davis Scky, one of the Coushatta elders, "my highest thinking is not to lose hope. If I lose myself, I lose everything."

The Indians feel that if they could secure assistance in the development of their real estate property, and the maintaining of a school for their children, they could develop a tourist industry for their products and perhaps some commercial market for their basket weaving skills. They are willing to work hard and long with their hands if needed, for the establishment of their colony of some commercial manufacturing establishment.

Lingerer poverty in the shadow of surplised influence is the painful paradox of American life today. In this great age of the expansion of Western civilization to underprivileged people in every country of the globe, and the realization that a people are entitled to the preservation of their rights and their culture, a human right, the Coushattas pray that their own brothers in these United States will lend a helping hand with their great need for medical attention, for food, for shelter, and education.

As we look forward to a great country and a future for our loved ones, let us not let the Coushatta Indians fall back in the shadows of civilization...let us not allow a great part of our "foundation" to crumble to the ground because of lack of maintenance and rendering aid to the main stone.

The same Coushatta Indian language means "white road-braze." The coming winter months will be hard for the Coushatta Indian children, who are in dire need of clothing and shoes. Any reader wishing to give of their kindliness in helping out the Indians with old clothing or food are asked to contact Elvin Reed, in Manou, La. or Davis Scky, Box 844, Elton, La. who will arrange for pick-up and delivery. Indian children and American Indian child does not even know about...but they could use something better.
THE HOME (left) is the dwelling in which Chief Abbey raised his family during the 16 years he has been Chief of the Coushattas. Small room on the left of the home which is typical of a Coushatta home.

DAVIS SICKY is seen preparing family dinner over an old wood burning type stove, which is only means of providing food for Indian families, and for furnishing heat for the Indian homes. Indian elders are used to this hard way of life, but would like to see their children get a better start and a rightful place in the American way of living. Davis, a Choctaw Indian, married into the Coushatta tribe. She speaks the Choctaw language, in addition to Coushatta and French.

DAVIS SICKY and wife Daisy sit on front porch of their homes. Davis, a leader in the fight for Indian rights and assistance, is contemplating moving his family to Oklahoma unless help for his people comes soon. Sicky collects old clothes for his brother Indians.

Sicky, who was a baby when his mother died, was found half-starved and almost dead in a corn field where he had been left to his fate. He considers his close call with death as an omen that he lived because he had a purpose in life to help his people.

INDIAN MADENS, Bernetta Sicky (left) and Lucille Langley pose in their Sunday best before leaving for church services. Indians are a deeply religious people. Bernetta translated several Coushatta Indian words for this writer, among them: "Non Na" which means boy; "Ta Ya" which means girl; "Es To Ba" meaning church; "Hila-Si-Tana" meaning school; "Ea Sa" meaning home; and in typical teenage terms, "Sta-Ma-TaYoup" meaning "I Love You."