

THESE HILLS, THIS TRAIL: CHEROKEE OUTDOOR HISTORICAL DRAMA AND THE  
POWER OF CHANGE/CHANGE OF POWER

by

CHARLES ADRON FARRIS III

(Under the Direction of Marla Carlson and Jace Weaver)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation compares the historical development of the Cherokee Historical Association's (CHA) *Unto These Hills* (1950) in Cherokee, North Carolina, and the Cherokee Heritage Center's (CHC) *The Trail of Tears* (1968) in Tahlequah, Oklahoma. *Unto These Hills* and *The Trail of Tears* were originally commissioned to commemorate the survivability of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI) and the Cherokee Nation (CN) in light of nineteenth-century Euramerican acts of deracination and transculturation. Kermit Hunter, a white southern American playwright, wrote both dramas to attract tourists to the locations of two of America's greatest events. Hunter's scripts are littered, however, with misleading historical narratives that tend to indulge Euramerican jingoistic sympathies rather than commemorate the Cherokees' survivability.

It wasn't until 2006/1995 that the CHA in North Carolina and the CHC in Oklahoma proactively shelved Hunter's dramas, replacing them with historically "accurate" and culturally sensitive versions. Since the initial shelving of Hunter's scripts, *Unto These Hills* and *The Trail of Tears* have undergone substantial changes, almost on a yearly basis. Artists have worked to correct the romanticized notions of Cherokee-Euramerican history in the dramas, replacing

problematic information with more accurate and culturally specific material. Such modification has been and continues to be a tricky endeavor: the process of improvement has triggered mixed reviews from touristic audiences and from within Cherokee communities themselves.

While outdoor drama is intimately linked with Euramerican touristic expectations, of which themes of faith and patriotism are most prominent, and while many outdoor dramas continue to perpetuate an out-of-date “American Imaginary,” *Unto These Hills* and *The Trail of Tears* are among the few outdoor dramas to vigorously contest, reconsider, and refigure Native American identities on the outdoor stage, as well as champion Native American sovereignty and cultural autonomy. While the CHA’s and the CHC’s outdoor dramas are dilemmatic and bound by impervious market-driven conventions, this dissertation demonstrates how the frequent revision of *Unto These Hills* and *The Trail of Tears* is better understood as an exploration of the intersections between Cherokee epistemologies and theatrical praxis.

INDEX WORDS: *Unto These Hills; The Trail of Tears; Kermit Hunter; Cherokee Historical Association; Cherokee Heritage Center; Outdoor Historical Drama; Mountainside Theatre; Theatre Tsa-la-gi; Cherokee Theatre and Performance; Native American; American Indian; Indigenous Theatre and Performance*

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the University of Georgia in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2016

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## DEDICATION

For Grey

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*We are all children of somebody's work. We may delude ourselves that we have no masters, that no personality has influenced us, proudly affirming that our originality is nourished by the anonymous and democratic teaching in the schools of our industrial civilization. Or else we can acknowledge in a few people the origin of the path that has led us to ourselves and which others call a "professional biography."*

- Eugenio Barba, *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*

Over the course of my academic adventures there have been several people that have greatly impacted my "professional biography" as a scholar and as an artist. Indeed, this dissertation is the product of not only my own experiences with the theatre, but also the experiences of those knowledgeable people that I have had the pleasure to meet, or with whom I have had the opportunity to work with and study under. Above all, my thanks go to Dr. Marla Carlson and Dr. Jace Weaver, who saw this project complete its performative arc. A number of other people have played important roles in the development of my "professional biography," including my readers: Dr. David Saltz and Dr. Freda Scott-Giles.

I also wish to thank Dr. Fran Teague, who encouraged me to travel the Trail of Tears in order to deepen my research, and who made such field research possible. In addition, I must thank the institutions who have generously supported my research through travel grants and research funding. They include: The Willson Center for Humanities & Arts, the American Society for Theatre Research (ASTR), the Graduate School and the Institute of Native American Studies at the University of Georgia.

I also wish to thank my family, my friends, and my new-found colleagues at The University of Georgia. To mention only a few: Buddy and Judy Farris, Dr. Arnab Banerji, Dr. Alicia Corts, Roy Brooks-Delphin, Angela Hall, Dr. Chris Eaket, Seth Wilson, Geoffrey Douglas, Aaron Kelly, Jieun Lee, Dr. George Pate and Libby Ricardo, Jennie Czuba, Shannon O'Neil, Kristyl Tift, and Josh Marsh. Thank you all for humoring, encouraging, and helping me along the way. Without your support, completing this project would not have been possible.

Last but not least, I give special thanks to those who have given their voices to this dissertation and to the institutions who have opened their doors to me so that I could conduct research. They include: Tom Mooney, Tonia Weavel, Linda Squirrel, James Bradley, Hanay Geiogamah, The Cherokee Heritage Center, The Cherokee Historical Association, and the Institute of Outdoor Theatre.

Thank you all.



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

*No history is complete without knowing the history of the history.*  
- Paul Chaat Smith (Comanche Nation)<sup>1</sup>

In May of 2015, *ThisLandPress.org* published an article by Rilla Askew entitled “Trail.” In the article, Askew reflects upon the time she spent in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, while employed with the Cherokee Heritage Center as a dancer in *The Trail of Tears* in the 1970s. Despite her gratifying experience while working on the drama, Askew admits that she never took pleasure in the play, believing it was misleading, inaccurate, and insulting. *The Trail of Tears*, according to Askew, was a “white man’s version of Indian history told simplistically, if sympathetically, with spectacular effects.” None of this really bothered the writer while she was working on the show—she “didn’t think it an insult to make an entertainment of that brutal American act of ethnic cleansing.” What did trouble her was the play’s mistreatment of women and the Hollywood-style portrayal of the Cherokees. There was “only one significant female character” in the drama—“a sappy love interest named Sarah who spends most of the play acting like as big a ninny as any white female character in an old Western.” She also disliked that the majority of the dance numbers in the play, such as the Green Corn Dance, portrayed the Cherokees as “all stooping over and whooping like bad imitations of Hiawatha and Pocahontas.” Despite these

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Chaat Smith, *Everything You Know about Indians is Wrong* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 53.

annoyances, Askew enjoyed working on the production, but what she enjoyed most was learning new things about dance, meeting new people, and establishing lasting friendships.

With regard to the drama, Askew never felt comfortable with “how the tragedy was told” or the messages audiences left with after the show. Indeed, the notion that the Cherokees were thrilled to become citizens of the great state of Oklahoma, that “the red man [was] like a crimson thread running through the texture of this new state...like red flowers growing on the green bosom of Oklahoma” was preposterous to Askew. Moreover, the warring nature of the Cherokees, as exemplified by the many instances of war and murder; the silencing of women so that the men may speak; the loss of lands and loved ones; and the explicit deference to white saviors woven into the fabric of the drama sickened Askew. The more she began to recognize the drama’s perpetuation of erroneous history, the more she came to deride the production and her involvement with it: “Night after night, in bustle and gingham skirt,” Askew recalls, “I kicked and strutted that two-step ragtime ‘1907’ with a silent, inarticulate rebellion in my chest, an inchoate sense of wrongness.... Surely the Cherokee people did not see it this way.”<sup>2</sup>

The earliest versions of Cherokee outdoor historical drama assemble at the site of conflict Askew articulates here—between the Cherokees and the Euramericans. This dissertation compares the historical development of the Cherokee Historical Association’s (CHA) and the Cherokee Heritage Center’s (CHC) outdoor theatrical programs in light of contemporaneous issues surrounding the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians’ (EBCI) and the Cherokee Nation’s (CN) cultural survival. The CHA’s *Unto These Hills* (1950) in Cherokee, North Carolina, and the CHC’s *The Trail of Tears* (1969) in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, were commissioned to commemorate

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<sup>2</sup> Rilla Askew, “Trail,” *ThisLandPress.com*, May 6, 2015, <http://thislandpress.com/05/06/>

2015/trail/ (last accessed Jun 3, 2015).

the survivability of the EBCI and the CN in light of nineteenth-century Euramerican acts of deracination and transculturation. Whereas the CHA and the CHC originally wanted dramas that championed the Cherokees' historical and cultural memory, Kermit Hunter, a white southern American playwright who bore the responsibility of seeing the organizations' dramas come to light, had a different plan. Disregarding the organizations' wishes, Hunter tailored the dramas to attract Euramerican tourists. To do this, he championed theatricality, sacrificed authenticity, and embellished historical narratives with romantic and patriotic flavor. He also employed archaic language and reductive stereotypes to indulge Euramerican curiosities and jingoistic sympathies. Furthermore, the playwright buried the Cherokees' sorrow under the pretext that the Cherokees suffered for the greater good of "America." In this way, the CHA's and the CHC's original productions rendered and commemorated not the Cherokees' achievements, but the Euramericans'.

Over several decades, *Unto These Hills* (1950-2006) and *The Trail of Tears* (1969-97) entertained touristic audiences from across the world, instilling in them false narratives about Cherokee-Euramerican history. It wasn't until 2006/1997, respectively, that the CHA and the CHC shelved Hunter's dramas, replacing them with historically accurate and culturally sensitive versions.<sup>3</sup> Both Native and non-Native artists were employed to correct the romanticized portrayal of the Cherokees' history as well as replacing problematic information with more accurate and culturally specific material. In North Carolina, Kiowa playwright Hanay Geiogamah was tasked with bringing the CHA's drama into the twenty-first century. In Oklahoma, the CHC employed

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<sup>3</sup> The CHC technically began altering Hunter's drama as early as 1984. For reasons that will be explained later, I focus on the year 1997 as being the pivotal moment when the organization decided to drastically overhaul the drama.

Joe Sears, a member of the Cherokee Nation who began his career by working on the original *Trail of Tears*. In the wake of these two playwrights, both organizations employed new writers to restory the dramas, on an almost-yearly basis. Following Geiogamah, Pat Allee and Ben Hurst, two Hollywood screen writers, were asked to revise *Unto These Hills* for the 2007 season.<sup>4</sup> For the 2008-16 season, Linda Squirrel rewrote the drama. In Oklahoma, Lacye Gardner and Richard Fields followed Sears. The modification of the dramas was a tricky endeavor, however, as the process of improvement triggered mixed reviews from touristic audiences and from within the Cherokee communities themselves.

One major factor that has made the process of revision challenging is that outdoor historical drama is indissolubly linked to tourism. Many audiences are not interested in having their horizon of expectations challenged, and they expect to see productions that match their former experiences and understanding of American Indian-Euramerican history.<sup>5</sup> Linda Squirrel, the current author of *Unto These Hills*, informed me that in the drama's formative years, the majority of audiences hailed from within the region and consisted of those who worked in rural mines and mills.<sup>6</sup> The drama, Squirrel noted, "was one of the only sources of entertainment for many people." Audiences of this period took great pleasure in viewing various forms of media romanticizing American Indians in addition to moral values and patriotic duty. Therefore, in

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<sup>4</sup> Allee and Hurst are best known for their writing of "Sonic the Hedgehog" cartoons.

<sup>5</sup> For more on audience horizons of expectations see Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 48-52, as well as Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 18-39.

<sup>6</sup> Linda Squirrel in discussion with author, Aug 8, 2014.

order to attract families from neighboring communities, it was compulsory that the dramas incorporated “Indians” and that these “Indians” harmonized with Euramerican expectations. As the drama began drawing larger crowds, tourism patterns promptly changed. Audiences became primarily comprised of Euramericans—those with the means to travel and those with the curiosity to explore the mythical wilds of historic America.

The average Euramerican understanding of Natives in the mid-twentieth century was ill-informed and tended to rely on romanticized and racialized notions of the Other. American Indians were not contemporary peoples, many thought, but rather living relics of a prehistoric past. As literary scholar Paul Chaat Smith articulates, Euramericans were fascinated with “Indians...but not the ones still here.”<sup>7</sup> Stereotypical stock characters in books and films, such as “Hollywood Injuns,” “Noble Savages,” “Indian Princesses,” and “Ecological Indians” (to name but a few) established a fallacious imaginary in the minds of Euramericans regarding their nation’s founding, and these fictitious characters, as opposed to the actual peoples, were what Euramericans craved. Hunter capitalized on these stereotypes and on what Dennis McPherson and J. Douglas Rabb consider “outside-view predicates,” drawing upon Euramericans’ predilections and expectations regarding American Indians in order to make his dramas attractive.<sup>8</sup>

Outside-view predicates are figures of speech and thought that subjugate people into believing that they can only perform the role given to them by the dominant society. They are outsider perspectives that stymie self-understanding, ideological propositions that, in a manner

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<sup>7</sup> Smith, *Everything You Know*, 16.

<sup>8</sup> Dennis H. McPherson and J. Douglas Rabb, *Indian from the Inside: Native American Philosophy and Cultural Renewal* (North Carolina: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2011), 23.

similar to Louis Althusser's notion of hailing and interpolation, work to envelop a person into a hegemonic ideological perspective.<sup>9</sup> There are two directions in which outside-view predicates operate: from outside the individual or from within. As McPherson and Rabb contend, outside-view predicates are perilous to American Indians when they are allowed to shape and define an individual's lived experience: "To apply an outside-view predicate to yourself is much more than seeing yourself as others see you," the scholars state.<sup>10</sup> "It is permitting others to tell you who you are, fitting in with the plans and projects of others, making it easy for them to manipulate you for their own ends, for their own purposes." Allowing outside-view predicates to govern one's life is "in a very real and frightening sense, to lose yourself, to become alienated, to become a stranger, an alien to yourself."<sup>11</sup>

While penning *Unto These Hills* and *The Trail of Tears*, Hunter knew that "the average tourist [did not] give a damn about history, but [that they would] stop to see a rat-fight, and to see Indians."<sup>12</sup> The playwright, therefore, wrote for the "hundreds of thousands [of people] on the highways who [were] white, and who [knew] the romance of Indians."<sup>13</sup> Hunter gave his audiences what they wanted to see, what they had been accustomed to seeing: artificial representations of American Indians akin to those on the silver screen. Hunter's methods were no

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<sup>9</sup> Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy* (London: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 127-186.

<sup>10</sup> Dennis H. McPherson and J. Douglas Rabb, "Indigeneity in Canada: Spirituality, the Sacred and Survival," *International Journal of Canadian Studies* 23 (2001): 75.

<sup>11</sup> McPherson and Rabb, *Indian on the Inside*, 22.

<sup>12</sup> Kermit Hunter to Troy and Charles, no date, circa 1994.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*



doubt impactful, and his dramas were extremely profitable. Combined, over three million people attended Hunter's *Unto These Hills* and *The Trail of Tears*. While the dramas were successful in their own standards, they were ultimately damaging, swaying audiences (both Native and non-Native) into reading and seeing history from within a colonial perspective.

*Unto These Hills* and *The Trail of Tears* reached their peak toward the late 1980s. By the mid-1990s, however, both productions were losing audiences. This decline in attendance is not specific to the organizations' revision of the outdoor dramas but is representative of a number of issues affecting the dramas, including changing weather patterns; the rise of home entertainment, such as television and the internet; and changing tourist patterns. I propose, however, that one of the primary reasons audiences stopped attending the dramas is because the organizations continued to revamp their dramas so that they adhered to the Cherokees' understanding of their culture and history. At the time they were authored, *Unto These Hills* and *The Trail of Tears* were bound by the mandates of the Euramerican audience. They also mirrored the limitations of this demographic majority. When the CHA and the CHC began to alter the dramas' structures to align with the Cherokees' cultural perspectives, Euramerican expectations were upturned. Whereas Hunter's drama followed an inherently Euramerican dramatic structure, steeped in Aristotelian thought—his plays have a beginning, a middle, and an end and follow a linear logic consisting of an inciting event, a rising action, a climax, and a denouement—the CHA's and the CHC's revisions incorporated the Cherokees' understanding of performance, which has its roots in the oral storytelling tradition. The Cherokees' storytelling tradition is circular, and this mode of theatrical narration confused many audience members who were accustomed to seeing a simple plot structure unfold on stage. Though the organizations believed that altering the dramas in such a manner would be beneficial, the changes were too drastic and too quick. Even when

playwrights tried to craft better versions, they did not succeed in a market shaped by Euramerican expectations because Cherokee ways of knowing, ways of being, and ways of doing diametrically oppose those which the market exploits.

The market dictates that outdoor drama must be dramatic, theatrical, and spectacular, which means that the CHA and the CHC would have to alter the Cherokees' traditional stories, dances, and historical narratives for them to be marketable. In essence, they would have to pervert their traditions to engage Euramerican audiences and their curiosities. If viewed from a Western perspective, these dramas exemplify a problem that simply needs to be corrected. From a Cherokee perspective, however, these dramas are dilemmatic. Problems have easy solutions and can be fixed. Dilemmas, on the other hand, are not easily fixed or corrected, requiring "undesirable choices to be made between highly priced values that cannot be simultaneously or fully solved."<sup>14</sup> The market demands that outdoor drama must accommodate and privilege a tourist's expectations in order to be attractive, even though the tourist's expectations may be ill-informed. In this regard, the CHA's and the CHC's dramas cannot ever share the Cherokees' historical, cultural, or traditional perspectives in the way they, the EBCI, or the CN wish.

Because of this, each organization decided to develop new theatrical projects that would allow the Cherokees' cultural and historical perspectives to permeate the stage. In Oklahoma, the CHC developed two new projects, *Under the Cherokee Moon* and *Legends at Dusk*, neither of which was staged in the amphitheatre. In North Carolina, the CHA contracted playwrights to develop new works that would run in repertoire with *Unto These Hills*, such as Larissa Fasthorse's *Cherokee Family Reunion*. Each of these dramas successfully addressed the

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<sup>14</sup> Larry Cuban, *How Can I Fix It?: Finding Solutions and Managing Dilemmas: And Educator's Road Map* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2001), 10.

challenges the organizations faced when it came to cultural and historical representations on the outdoor stage, but these projects no longer resembled American outdoor historical drama.

While outdoor drama is intimately linked with Euramerican touristic expectations, and while many outdoor dramas continue to perpetuate an out-of-date American Imaginary, the latter iterations of *Unto These Hills* and *The Trail of Tears*, as well as *Under the Cherokee Moon*, *Legends at Dusk*, and *Cherokee Family Reunion*, are among the few dramas to vigorously contest, reconsider, and refigure American Indian identities on the outdoor stage. They are also among the few in the United States to champion Native American sovereignty and cultural autonomy. I understand the frequent revision of *Unto These Hills* and *The Trail of Tears* to be best understood as a methodic exploration of the intersections between Cherokee epistemologies, ontologies, historiography, and theatrical praxis. Therefore, this dissertation focuses primarily on Cherokee dramatic methodologies and investigates the CHA's and the CHC's period of dramatic creativity.

The questions guiding this dissertation are as follows: Why did these dramas change when they did? How did they incorporate the EBCI's and the CN's historical and cultural perspectives? Were they successful or unsuccessful? Why? Why is it that *Unto These Hills* has remained in performance while *The Trail of Tears* closed? I contend that the production of *Unto These Hills* in North Carolina has continued to do well for a variety of reasons: Located within the Qualla Boundary, Cherokee, North Carolina, is sovereign territory that is federally recognized in trust.<sup>15</sup> Whereas the reservation system was abolished in Oklahoma, Cherokee,

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<sup>15</sup> Although the Qualla Boundary is often identified as a reservation, it is not a part of the federal government's reservation system. According to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, a reservation is "an area of land reserved for a tribe or tribes under treaty...with the United States...as permanent

North Carolina, is renowned for being “Indian Land,” which creates mass appeal for non-native tourists keen on observing the “Indian.” Also, Cherokee, North Carolina, neighbors the Smoky Mountain National Park, as well as Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, three locations that thrive on tourism. The tourist industry is alive and well in this region, whereas it is less perceptible in Oklahoma. In addition to answering these overarching questions, this dissertation investigates the inaccuracy of American Indian representations in the United States. While scholars have written on American Indian representation in film, theatre, and popular media, little attention has been given to specific Nations and their unique historical and cultural narrative arcs. Consequently, I focus specifically on Cherokee drama and investigate how theatre has become a powerful tool through which the Cherokees—today—are able to explore and correct unstable cultural and historical representations inherent in this popular art form.

### **On Epistemology**

It is important to recognize the cultural variances among epistemological frameworks when writing on American Indian history and culture. Too often, Euramerican scholars have written about the “Indian” in terms familiar to their academy, prodding indigenous individuals with questions that suit their formulaic curiosities. Rather than asking “How does it mean to

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tribal homelands.” The Qualla Boundary is not a reservation because the EBCI and individual tribal members hold title to the land. For more information, see: United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, *FAQs*, [www.bia.gov/FAQs/](http://www.bia.gov/FAQs/) (last accessed Jul 11, 2016); John Finger, *The Eastern Band of Cherokees, 1819-1900* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984), 41-59; and John Finger, *Cherokee Americans: The Eastern Band of Cherokees in the Twentieth Century* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 1-17.

Cherokees?” or “What does it do?,” scholars have tended to seek answers for “what it is,” and “how it differs from them.” If the answers do not fit the appropriate mold, then the Other becomes lesser-than. This is partly due to Euramerican notions of linear logic, which is monocular. In Euramerican thought, you live to meet an end and all aspects of culture are metaphors of such activity through time and space. Traditionally, however, many American Indians viewed the world around them in terms of circularity; they followed a circular logic, which is polyocular. In what follows, I outline several key points concerning American Indian epistemologies. I provide this brief overview so that my readers will be able to recognize and understand the epistemologies I explore in the chapters that follow.

Vine Deloria, Jr. (Standing Rock Sioux) states that for many American Indians it is not about finding “the abstract structure of physical reality but rather...the proper road along which...individuals [are] supposed to walk.”<sup>16</sup> Building upon this point, Lee Hester (Choctaw Nation) and Jim Cheney clarify how American Indians approach and arrive at knowledge and understanding differently from Euramericans. According to these scholars, the major difference revolves around the concept of “belief”:

[In] Western science (and philosophy) *belief* enters the picture (“Western science prematurely derives its scientific ‘laws’ and assumes that the products of its own mind are inherent in the structure of the universe”) and the map is taken as a *true* account of the territory; the map is mistaken for the territory. For the Native American, both the map and the territory are real, but the map is not (is not

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<sup>16</sup> Vine Deloria, Jr., in conversation with Derrick Jensen, in *How Shall I Live My Life? On Liberating the Earth from Civilization* (San Francisco: PM Press, 2008), 266.

understood as a true picture of) the territory. The Western understanding of “true belief” is absent in Native American epistemology.<sup>17</sup>

The “map” and the “territory” here metaphorically refer to “worldviews” and the actual “world.”<sup>18</sup> Euramericans believe that there is some kind of direct “correspondence between the map and the territory,” that the map and the territory are exact replicas of each other—“a one-to-one correspondence.” American Indians, however, understand the map “not...[as]...a high fidelity picture of the territory” but “an action guiding set of ideas.” This set of ideas is a “portrait of epistemological relationships within the world” or, as Deloria suggests, “principles of epistemological method.”<sup>19</sup>

Euramerican thought conceives of all knowledge as the product of scientific measure. American Indians, however, do not negotiate knowledge or truth in such measured ways. Instead, they reflect upon what Deloria considers systems of “recognition” (knowing-how) as opposed to systems of “belief” (knowing-that).<sup>20</sup> James Maffie contends that in American Indian epistemological frameworks, “knowledge has a practical, not theoretical focus; it concerns

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<sup>17</sup> Lee Hester and Jim Cheney, “Truth and Native American Epistemology,” *Social Epistemology* 15.4 (2001): 321.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 329.

<sup>19</sup> Hester and Cheney, “Truth and Native American Epistemology,” 320-23; Vine Deloria, Jr., *Spirit & Reason: The Vine Deloria, Jr., Reader*, eds. Barbara Deloria, Kristen Foehner, and Sam Scinta (Golden: Fulcrum Publishing, 1999), 44-6.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 362.

concrete experiences and narratives of actual lives in the world.”<sup>21</sup> Knowledge, therefore, “is narrative of a life lived in the world,” not a species of belief.<sup>22</sup> With this logic, American Indians make sense of the world around them in terms of fulfilling a journey, as opposed to establishing order: “When you do not claim to have a correct map of the world,” states Hester, “then you do not claim to have the ‘Truth.’ You are willing to accept that other people have maps that are as good (or as bad) as your own. When your map primarily traces your own path through life, then you are always eager to share stories and broaden your map.”<sup>23</sup>

There are three primary principles governing American Indian epistemology: responsibility, respect, and experience. Responsibility or, as Louise Profeit-LeBlanc (Northern Tutchone Nation) suggests, “responsible truths,” are “ethically informed” actions that ensure one is living in accordance within a living universe/world.<sup>24</sup> Respect pivots around the notion that all “data or experiences that do not seem to fit into the patterns that have so far emerged in one’s observations of nature” are anomalies that are equally valid.<sup>25</sup> Respect also involves two attitudes: “acceptance of self-discipline by humans and their communities to act responsibly toward other forms of life” and the desire to “establish communications and covenants with other

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<sup>21</sup> James Maffie, “Ethnoepistemology,” *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/> (last accessed Feb 7, 2014).

<sup>22</sup> Hester and Cheney, “Truth and Native American Epistemology,” 331.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Louise Profeit-LeBlanc, quoted in Hester and Cheney, “Truth and Native American Epistemology,” 319-20.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 321.

forms of life on a mutually agreeable basis.”<sup>26</sup> Experience incorporates a multitude of aspects that revolve around an individual’s interaction with the universe/world. The universe is alive and “human beings are the ‘younger brother’ of the other life-forms” who taught humans how to live in accordance with the world. One’s experience, which is carried over from one generation to the next through story must be treated with proper care, as such experiences continue to inform and instruct. All of these principles intertwine in what Cheney describes as ceremonial worlds, which are “worlds (comprehensive maps, stories) within which we live...worlds that have the power to orient us in life.... [And] define for us the nature of the sacred...the natural, and the human, and the relationships between them.”<sup>27</sup>

As Jaye Darby admirably surmises in her article on Cherokee playwright Lynn Riggs’s *Out of Dust*, the biggest difference between Cherokee and Euramerican understandings of the land is that the Cherokees have a long-running relationship with the earth, whereas Euramericans slavishly exploit it.<sup>28</sup> Euramericans exploit the land as a thing to be conquered, to be controlled. Traditionally, the Cherokees considered the land as their relative, a being deserving of respect. As Geary Hobson (Cherokee-Quapaw/Chickasaw) succinctly states, “Heritage is people; people

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 326.

<sup>27</sup> Jim Cheney, “The Moral Epistemology of First Nations Stories,” *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education* 7.2 (2002): 93.

<sup>28</sup> Jaye T. Darby, “‘Civilization’ and its Transgressions on the Old Shawnee Trial: Lynn Riggs’s *Out of Dust*,” in *Enacting Nature: Ecocritical Perspectives on Indigenous Performance* (New York: P.I.E. Peter Lang S.A., 2014), 63-5.



are the earth; earth is heritage.”<sup>29</sup> In this sense, the Cherokees are a part of the land, and the land is a part of them. The Cherokees’ creation stories, social postulates, laws, and customs stem from this worldview, and it is because of these views that Euramericans were unable to live peacefully among the original inhabitants of this land, as well as why touristic audiences failed to fully grasp and appreciate the CHA’s and the CHC’s revisions to their outdoor dramas.

*Unto These Hills* and *The Trail of Tears* carry forward a portion of a larger historical narrative which shape our understanding of Cherokee outdoor historical drama and historical memory. Throughout this dissertation, I am concerned with the practice of historical writing. I am particularly interested in the way we remember, how and what we choose to remember, and the ways in which we honor or commemorate such acts of remembrance. If one is to tell the history of the CHA’s and the CHC’s theatrical programs, one must take into consideration all of the theatrical projects produced between 1950 and today. Moreover, one must read the history surrounding these productions as a journey toward cultural specificity. The CHA and the CHC were instituted to promote and preserve Cherokee history and culture; over their years of operation, the organizations have worked to clarify Cherokee-Euramerican history. Though they got a lot wrong, they got a lot right. With this in mind, I argue that it is impossible to succinctly summarize the organizations’ development of the dramas by looking at one script, one playwright, or a single season’s performance records. It is also impossible to fully understand the significance of the CHA, the CHC, and their dramas without taking into consideration how they mean to the Cherokees and what they do for their communities. Therefore, I explore how *Unto*

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<sup>29</sup> Gary Hobson, “Introduction: Remembering the Earth,” in *The Remembered Earth: An Anthology of Contemporary Native American Literature* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1981), 11.

*These Hills, The Trail of Tears*, and the other productions function as primary historical documents. How do these plays help us to remember, to honor, and to commemorate? What are their objectives? How have these performances changed since 1950 and 1969 to better serve historical memory? Whose?

Being an art form that arose out of the Great Depression, outdoor historical drama has scarcely changed since its origination in the 1930s. In fact, a great majority of outdoor dramas in performance today continue to perpetuate nineteenth century mentalities. It wasn't until the end of the twentieth century that the writing of outdoor historical drama evolved beyond a Euramerican ethnocentric point of view. This change was initiated in large part by the EBCI and the CN when they intervened and encouraged the CHA and the CHC to alter their presentation of the Cherokees' historical and cultural memory on the outdoor stage. The reason it took so long for the EBCI and the CN to become involved is partly due to the fact that many American Indians had been forced to assimilate into mainstream Euramerican society. For instance, when *The Trail of Tears* opened in 1969, the Cherokee Nation was and had been forced to live under the federal government's rule for over forty years. During this time, the CN was not allowed to fully practice their own form of tribal governance. In fact, the Cherokee Nation was denied its sovereignty until the early 1970s. Once their sovereignty was restored, the Cherokees began to redefine themselves as an autonomous Nation and to renew their heritage.<sup>30</sup> As the Nation grew more powerful, and as Cherokee citizens started to learn more about their history and culture, they started to challenge the inaccurate portrayals of Cherokee history and culture on the outdoor stage.

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<sup>30</sup> Tonia Hogner-Weavel, in conversation with the author, Aug 4, 2015.

The CHA and the CHC were developed within a Euramerican business model. At the time, neither the EBCI nor the CN was a key player in the development of either organization or outdoor drama. Their absence, therefore, allowed both organizations to define and represent Cherokee history and culture in a manner they saw fit. I explore how and why the CHA and the CHC were first established, how and why they implemented outdoor historical dramas, and how and why both organizations and their dramas changed. Although Cherokee outdoor historical drama did not evolve in the same manner that Native American Studies and Native American theatre and performance did, I see it following a similar pattern, albeit at a much slower pace.

### **Historical Developments of Native American Studies**

Several scholars, such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Porou), Pekka Hämäläinen, Devon A. Mihesuah (Choctaw), Donald Fixico (Shawnee/Sac & Fox/Muscogee Creek/Seminole), and Paul Chaat Smith, argue that while the practice of recording history has changed over the decades and the discipline as a whole has undergone substantial theoretical revision—“Gone is the trivialization of Native Americans as myopic, prepolitical actors, mere speed bumps in Anglo-America's westward expansion, and gone is the reduction of hundreds of indigenous communities to a hazy backdrop of frontier hostility”—the discipline continues to disappoint as there is a paucity of tribally specific voices fleshing out the historical record.<sup>31</sup>

Though many disciplines have broadened their scope and have become somewhat self-reflexive

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<sup>31</sup> Pekka Hämäläinen, “The Futures of Native American History in the United States,” in *Perspectives on History – The Newsmagazine of the American Historical Association* (Dec 2012), <http://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/december-2012/the-future-of-the-discipline/the-futures-of-native-american-history-in-the-united-states> (last accessed Apr 10, 2016).

and responsive to the marginalized—often transferring the marginal to the center—theatre history (and history in general) continuously fails to accommodate contemporary indigenous concerns, let alone decolonize the colonized.

As Māori and indigenous education scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith argues, “history is about power” and is of very little importance for indigenous peoples “because a thousand accounts of the ‘truth’ will not alter the ‘fact’ that indigenous peoples are still marginal and do not possess the power to transform history into justice.”<sup>32</sup> Pekka Hämäläinen argues a similar point:

Some Native thinkers demand that Native peoples should write their own histories and decide how, and if, their histories should be disseminated to wider audiences. They want to reclaim their histories from the snares of scholarly and media misrepresentation and they insist that academic research should empower indigenous communities. Some see an unbridgeable divide between oral traditions and archive-based documentation and assert the primacy of the former, arguing that Native stories extend deeper in time and get closer to the essence of indigenous experiences.<sup>33</sup>

Likewise, as Devon Mihesuah articulates in her opening remarks of the *American Indian Quarterly*'s 1996 special issue on “Writing about American Indians,” newly developed and

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<sup>32</sup> Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 2012), 35.

<sup>33</sup> Hämäläinen, “Futures of Native American History,” *ibid.*

theorized approaches to American Indian history are perfunctory.<sup>34</sup> Devon claims that as studies on American Indians evolve, they remain inadequate due to their exploitation of inappropriate voices, which more often than not are held in esteem even though they lack authority; the omission of Indigenous voices entirely; the creation or invention of histories that side with individuals in positions of power; the lack of engagement with Indigenous communities; and the preoccupation with non-Indigenous systems of theorization.

History written on or about Indigenous peoples in the Americas shows progress toward inclusivity, yet it remains laden with contentious methodological practices that fail to uphold, support and recognize Indigenous peoples and communities as being intellectually vibrant hubs of cultural/historical information. Donald Fixico (Shawnee/Sac & Fox/Muscogee Creek/Seminole) identifies three fundamental problems Indigenous peoples face as they strive to amend the discipline: First, the wealth of information stored in libraries pertaining to Indigenous peoples—or the “Western canon on Indian History”—keeps scholars from engaging correct research materials.<sup>35</sup> Second, most of the scholarship from the Western canon coalesces a

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<sup>34</sup> Devon A. Mihesuah notes in her editorial comments that her understanding of the issues comes from several Indigenous scholars who provided criticism to the special issue but choose to remain nameless because they “were fearful of how their comments might be received by non-Indians” studying Native American or Indigenous histories. Devon A. Mihesuah, “Voices, Interpretations, and the ‘New Indian History’: Comments on the ‘American Indian Quarterly’s’ Special Issue on Writing about American Indians,” *American Indian Quarterly* 91 (1996): 91-2.

<sup>35</sup> Donald Fixico, “Methodologies in Reconstructing Native American History,” in *Rethinking American Indian History*, ed. Donald Fixico (The University of New Mexico Press, 1997), 117-130.

multiplicity of Indigenous histories together into a singular study. Third, this scholarship often takes a comparative framework centered on dualisms (“Us/Them, Indian/non-Indian, Linear/Cyclical, and Oral/Literate”).<sup>36</sup> Fixico questions how one should go about making sense of the Western canon and how to situate more than five hundred tribally-specific voices along with their distinct “political and epistemological challenges to the Western tradition of history-telling” within it, while also imagining histories that “transcend” traditional scholarly practices.<sup>37</sup> While epistemological differences lead to different approaches to not only life, but to how life is recorded, and while historiographic methods have begun to reach across scholarly divides, inappropriate contextualization continues to define and redefine historical subjects and peoples in terms synonymous with a colonial subjectivity. Paul Chaat Smith suggests that “what really matters aren’t the numbers or particular outcomes, but whether we can build new understandings of what it means to be human in the twenty-first century.”<sup>38</sup> Smith states that “it isn’t about us talking and you listening,” but “about an engagement that moves our collective understanding forward.” In order to do this, we must embrace various ways of knowing, being, and doing and acknowledge “the awesome complexity” of history and the “potentiality for new avenues of investigation.”<sup>39</sup> It isn’t about “the good guys being bad guys, and bad guys being good,” states Smith, “but about finding new ways of seeing and thinking about the history that is all around us.” I strive to incorporate Smith’s advice throughout my dissertation.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Smith, 86.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 75.

The disquiet surrounding American Indian history emanates from an irksome past. Beginning in the late 1800s anthropologists such as Franz Boas and James Mooney began studying Indigenous cultures within the vein of salvage anthropology/ethnography, a form of historical study that described indigenous peoples as belonging to ancient times and as an extinct or vanishing race.<sup>40</sup> In furtherance of United States assimilationist ideals, Boas and Mooney set out to document tribal histories before American Indians were thoroughly assimilated into (or killed off by) the dominant society. The historical materials produced during this period objectify indigenous peoples through the colonial lens and Enlightenment perceptions. The “vanishing Indian” topos, so deeply ingrained in the Euramerican imagination by the likes of photographer Edward Curtis and others, penetrated non-native psyches, engendering the romantic image of The Indian. While scholars such as Boas and Mooney set out to write the history of the “vanishing Indian,” Native cultures continued to survive, resisting colonial invasion, a fact that many scholars overlooked.

Scholars began to recognize in the early 1900s that American Indians had not perished. They also realized that American Indians had not completely abandoned their traditional lifeways. While still believing that the “Indian” would eventually assimilate into American society—thus still vanishing, but at a slower rate—academic perceptions and views quickly shifted and new scholarship surfaced describing the “Indian” as victims of colonial assault. Scholars of this period studied the “Indian” and *his* history through frameworks representative of

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<sup>40</sup> The terms salvage anthropology or salvage ethnography did not come about until the 1960s. For more on this point, see James J. Hester, “Pioneer Methods in Salvage Anthropology,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 41.3 (1968): 132-46; Jacob W. Gruber, “Ethnographic Salvage and the Shaping of Anthropology,” *American Anthropologist* 72.6 (1970): 1289–99.

their national guilt. Such approaches continued well into the mid-1900s, focusing on the United States' exploitation of Native peoples during the country's foundational years. However, these studies continued to focus on the "Indian" as a figure of the past—a static being—not on American Indians as contemporary persons affecting the modern world. It wouldn't be until the 1960s that scholars challenged the mistreatment of the "Indian" in scholarship as well as in popular culture. With the onset of civil rights issues and social justice reform, American Indians were finally able to alter the way people understood and wrote about *their* lives, albeit with limited authority.

Dee Brown and Vine Deloria, Jr. were two of the pioneering scholars that shifted the frame during the 1960s.<sup>41</sup> With the works of Deloria, such as *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* and *God is Red: A Native View of Religion*, the capacity, function, and process of forming or understanding ideas about American Indians changed. Non-native scholars started to view American Indians as permanent residents, as distinct nations within the United States, and as people who actively resisted colonial domination. Out of this wave of scholarship grew new approaches to Indigenous Studies that paved the way for the New Indian History movement in the 1970s. New Indian History moved American Indians from the margins to the center, marking the first time, as Nicolas Rosenthal notes, "historians began taking American Indians seriously."<sup>42</sup> As New Indian History took hold, new areas of research opened up, including ethno-history, law and policy, and (post)colonial studies. Feminist critiques didn't infiltrate this

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<sup>41</sup> Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1970).

<sup>42</sup> Nicolas G. Rosenthal, "Beyond the New Indian History: Recent Trends in the Historiography on the Native Peoples of North America," *History Compass* 4.5 (2006): 962.



newly developed paradigm until the 1980s. Despite these improvements, however, Indigenous voices remained separate from those occupying positions of privilege and power. By the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, American Indians tirelessly challenged the study of Indigenous histories and cultures by Western scholars, demanding that their voices be heard and included. Many Indigenous scholars started to develop a counterdiscipline to New Indian History focusing on tribally specific issues, the most important being Native American intellectualism, a concept that submits that Indigenous peoples have intellectual systems that are more apposite than the Euramericans'. The use of the term intellectualism received much criticism, however, and remains a point of contention in Native American Studies today. Scholars felt that the discipline needed an *inward* → *outward* focus on Indigenous communities from within. Rather than try to stay afloat in elite Western academic circles that did not represent Indigenous peoples' concerns and approached the discipline from an *outward* → *inward* perspective, scholars began establishing an intellectual tradition that suited their needs. The controversy surrounding Native American intellectualism isn't necessarily concerned with its focus, but rather its absorption of Western theoretical ideologies concerning the civilized mind. As David Martinez states, the term "*intellectual* is a foreign word imposed upon individuals who never described their roles as writers and speakers in such elitist terms," which signals "a colonized mind more than it evokes an Indigenous perspective."<sup>43</sup>

According to Elizabeth Cook-Lynn (Dakota/Crow Creek Sioux), however, by 1997 Native American Studies had failed to develop into an acceptable academic discipline because of the continued influence of (post)colonial theories and the efforts to discredit American Indian

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<sup>43</sup> David Martinez, "Neither Chief nor Medicine Man: The Historical Role of the 'Intellectual' in the American Indian Community," *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 26.1 (2014): 30.

scholars.<sup>44</sup> Cook-Lynn stresses that in order for Native American Studies to “seek autonomy from other opportunistic epistemologies” (among other things) it must “reject assimilation in favor of tribal nationhood,” reject “mainstream American conservatism in favor of a new history that acknowledges a horrific period of greed and empire building in America during which genocide and deicide was legalized,” and focus on the principles of “indigenusness and sovereignty rather than cultural contact (or colonialism), pluralism, diversity, and immigration.”<sup>45</sup> Helen Hoy argues a similar point, stating that Euramerican scholars’ application of “irrelevant aesthetic standards” as opposed to Native intellectualism continues to be a means of “domesticating difference, assimilating Native narratives into the mainstream.”<sup>46</sup> Equally, Margaret Kovach (Nêhiyaw/Saulteaux) stresses that when emergent methodologies such as Native intellectualism challenge “existing paradigms,” there is an automatic reaction by the “dominant majority” who find it necessary to “continue rather than interrupt a pre-existing, ongoing conversation.”<sup>47</sup> Kovach states, “The resistance to epistemological disruptions within academia is so great that it can stymie that which it seeks to create—new knowledge. Within an Indigenous research context, the result has been an attempt to weld Indigenous methods to existing bodies of Western knowledge, resulting in confused efforts and methodological

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<sup>44</sup> Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, “Who Stole Native American Studies?” *Wicazo Sa Review* 12.1 (1997): 18.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>46</sup> Helen Hoy, *How Should I Read These? Native Women Writers in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 9.

<sup>47</sup> Margaret Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 36.

floundering.”<sup>48</sup> Scholars have since started to tackle these issues, and new methodologies stemming from epistemologies rooted in traditional cultures are in development. Likewise, Native American Studies has since infiltrated and influenced a multitude of disciplines. And new auxiliary subdisciplines are developing, making Native American Studies a practical and valuable field of study.

My dissertation strives to bring Native American Studies and Indigenous intellectualism to the forefront of the scholarship on outdoor historical drama. One area in which Native American Studies has profoundly made an impact is in Native American Theatre and Performance Studies. While Jace Weaver (Cherokee Nation) rightly points out that “Native peoples have been creators of drama and dance in ritual and ceremony from the beginning of time,” Native Performance Studies has only recently come into its own as a critical discourse.<sup>49</sup> Significant Native artists contributed to the early developments of American theatre, drama and film, such as Cherokee playwright Lynn Riggs, whose *Green Grow the Lilacs* inspired the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical *Oklahoma!*; Will Rogers (Cherokee Nation); Te Ata Fisher (Chickasaw Nation); Zitkala-Ša (Dakota Yankton Sioux, also known as Gertrude Simmons Bonnin); and others. Their contributions were often overlooked, however, especially when compared with other famous figures and their contributions of the time. This is not to say that their works were by any means inferior, but rather to note how historians from the Western tradition neglected to concern themselves with such projects. By the 1960s and 1970s,

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Jace Weaver, “Introduction” in *American Indian Performing Arts: Critical Directions*, eds. Hanay Geiogamah and Jaye T. Darby (Los Angeles: UCLA American Indian Studies Center, 2010), xi.

Indigenous performance started to challenge the Euramerican theatrical tradition. Hanay Geiogamah's (Kiowa/Delaware) American Indian Theatre Ensemble and American Indian Dance Theatre as well as Muriel, Gloria, and Lisa Mayo Miguel's (Kuna/Rappahannock) Spiderwoman Theatre actualized some of the most significant Indigenous theatre and performance of the time, squarely positioning American Indian theatre and performance as a traditional, as opposed to a borrowed, art form. New Native playwrights, such as Tomson Highway (Cree), William S. Yellow Robe, Jr. (Assiniboine), and Diane Glancy (Cherokee Nation)—to name only a few—took the lead. These and other Native playwrights altered Euramerican attitudes to a certain degree, but Western scholars continued to engage with American Indian theatre and drama as hybridized and heavily influenced by Western theatrical traditions. Playhouses across the United States also played a role in confining American Indian theatre to the margins, as they considered such production a niche segment of the larger theatrical market. Moreover, audiences were accustomed to seeing plays about “Indians,” not contemporary American Indians. Though great works were available, playhouses produced, and unfortunately continue to produce, theatrical productions about American Indians that Euramerican audiences want to see, not those that challenge preconceived notions about “Indians.” Despite these impediments, American Indian theatre started to positively affect indigenous communities across the nation early on, and today American Indian theatre has spread across the Euramerican theatrical playing field with works not only challenging preconceived notions of performance, but radically altering the way the medium functions within Euramerican society. United States and Canadian playwrights such as Marie Clements (Métis), Larisa Fasthorse (Sicangu Lakota), Yvette Nolan (Algonquin), and Monique Mojica (Kuna and Rappahannock)—to name a few—are building bridges between Indigenous communities and

larger political arenas, increasing awareness of Indigenous peoples and their contemporary concerns. Since the 1960s, the uprising of American Indian theatre and performance has infiltrated wider non-native audiences who, as Christy Stanlake notes, discover that Native plays are uniquely different from mainstream drama.<sup>50</sup> One of the major problems, however, is that there is a lot of great American Indian theatre, but very little scholarship related to these works and their impact. While new works are constantly being developed, the majority of them are left suspended in a rather elusive space. This is true for outdoor historical drama as well.

Stanlake's 2010 monograph *Native American Drama: A Critical Perspective* provides one of the most comprehensive studies of Native American dramaturgical practices to date and is perhaps one of the best examples of how to make sense of Indigenous performance from within an Indigenous cultural framework. Pulling from the works of Native American scholars, such as Gerald Vizenor (Anishinaabe/Chippewa), Robert Allen Warrior (Osage), Jace Weaver, and LeAnne Howe (Choctaw), Stanlake threads together four Native discourses—storying, platiality, tribalography, and survivance—that intersect with performative elements such as space, speech, action, and movement. When woven together, these discourses comprise Native American dramaturgical structures. According to Stanlake, storying is the “the action of telling Native American stories, and it is also a discourse that encompasses concepts about language from Native American intellectual traditions.”<sup>51</sup> Platiality, as Robert Allen Warrior argues, concerns Native philosophies of place and identity, of “localized relationships created between individual

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<sup>50</sup> Christy Stanlake, *Native American Drama: A Critical Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 15.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

people and specific places.”<sup>52</sup> Tribalography, Leanne Howe’s literary theory, is “the ability for stories to create a rhetorical space in which people can thread their own stories and histories into the stories and histories of others.”<sup>53</sup> And Gerald Vizenor defines survivance as “the combination of Native resistance (to stereotypical representations and reductive studies) and survival (continuance of traditions splintering into the ever-changing, multi-dimensional lived experiences of contemporary Native peoples).”<sup>54</sup> With Stanlake’s critical study, audiences unaccustomed to Native epistemologies and their dramaturgic application on American Indian theatrical stages can better understand how Native theatre differs from Euramerican theatre. I employ two of these terms, storying and tribalography, throughout my dissertation to show how the CHA and the CHC, once they decided to revise their outdoor dramas, turned to forms of dramatic production rooted in American Indian epistemic practices.

Other works by Native and non-Native scholars have also illuminated the field of Native American theatre, highlighting its traditional underpinnings along with its historical developments. For instance, Hanay Geiogamah’s and Jaye Darby’s *American Indian Performing Arts: Critical Directions* and *American Indian Theater in Performance: A Reader*, the first two texts to present the views encompassing contemporary Native theatre, have profoundly influenced the understanding of American Indian theatre as well as its ceremonial importance.

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<sup>52</sup> Robert Allen Warrior, *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 87; Stanlake, *Native American Drama*, 106.

<sup>53</sup> Leanne Howe, “Tribalography: The Power of Native Stories,” *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 14.1 (1999): 117; Stanlake, *Native American Drama*, 30.

<sup>54</sup> Gerald Vizenor and A. Robert Lee, *Postindian Conversations* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 93; Stanlake, *Native American Drama*, 168.

From these works and new approaches to scholarship in other disciplines, Indigenous voices and tribal concerns are starting to shape our understanding of scholarship, thus making the inaccessible tangible as well as establishing Indigenous intellectualism as powerful and influential.

For the reasons laid out in this historiographic survey, this dissertation engages with Indigenous methodologies as they continue to develop within and expand the academy. While my project comes out of and reports back to the Euramerican system, and while I am not an authoritative figure with the ability to speak for any Indigenous community, I seek to make my research and scholarship relevant not only to my academic community but to Indigenous communities as well—to become a “simpatico and knowledgeable critical” ally, at least.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, while privileging Indigenous voices, I also explore the liminal space between cultural epistemologies (Cherokee and Euramerican).

## **Methodology**

Very few Native nations have culturally specific methods with which to conduct research and scholarship in the field of theatre and performance. The Cherokee Nation and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians are among those who have yet to establish their own research methodologies. As Jill Carter (Anishinaabe) states, “to the best of my knowledge, in the realm of theatre scholarship and performance studies, even a single model out of many possible Indigenist critical frameworks has yet to be published.”<sup>56</sup> Carter questions how “without any such models...the work of...theatre scholars [can] be supported,” as well as how “these works [can]

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<sup>55</sup> Jace Weaver, Craig S. Womack, and Robert Warrior, *American Indian Literary Nationalism* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006): 11.

<sup>56</sup> Jill Carter, in conversation with the author, Nov 6, 2015.

possibly support the work of the Indigenous artists with whom they claim alliance.” Recognizing the absence of culturally specific critical frameworks, I have utilized a new research perspective while working on this dissertation to begin to answer the problem Carter raises: Donald Fixico’s cultural bridge of understanding based on the Medicine Way or “the Native way of seeing,” which is well-suited for non-Native scholars working on American Indian-Euramerican relations.”<sup>57</sup>

Fixico’s cultural bridge of understanding is the processual study of American Indian-Euramerican relations. To cross the bridge, a scholar or researcher must navigate through three distinct “dimensions”: The First Dimension, or “the way in which western-trained historians write ‘about’ American Indian history while not properly understanding the cultural reality of Native people from inside Native communities”; the Second Dimension, or “the ‘shared-experience’ stage of scholarship in writing American Indian history as western-trained historians are putting Indians at center stage as makers of history with white Americans”; and the Third Dimension, or “the Native reality of the physical and metaphysical combined, in which spirits and visions are a major part of the indigenous paradigm and Native worldview, with details varying by tribe.”<sup>58</sup> According to Fixico, “Real Indian history focuses on how Indian people were involved in experiences from their own perspective and also on understanding the views of non-natives who participated.”<sup>59</sup> Fixico states, “In order to understand Indian history, it is necessary to attempt to ‘see’ things from the Native perspective of a tribal community’s

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<sup>57</sup> Donald Fixico, *Call for Change: The Medicine Way of American Indian History, Ethos, and Reality* (Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 2013), xviii.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii-xviii.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.



inside.”<sup>60</sup> To see things from the Native perspective, Fixico suggests that one must cross the bridge through the First, Second, and Third dimensions of Native history.<sup>61</sup> I strive to follow Fixico’s suggestions, and I have tried to structure my work in a manner that will help my readers to understand the Cherokees’ culture and history in a similar manner. Doing so will help my readers to see *Unto These Hills* and *The Trail of Tears* in a manner that is aligned with the Cherokees’ perspective.

Honoring Fixico’s recommendations, I have attempted to locate my research within a framework that privileges Cherokee ways of knowing, ways of being, and ways of doing. As I conducted research on the subject of Cherokee outdoor drama, I explored many archival records at the Cherokee Heritage Center in Tahlequah, Oklahoma; the Cherokee Historical Association and Museum in Cherokee, North Carolina; and the Institute of Outdoor Theater, housed at East Carolina University in Greenville, North Carolina. Each of these archives houses a wealth of information pertaining to the dramas, including photographs, rehearsal recordings, original and revised play texts, brochures and publicity materials, records of ticket sales, as well as audience questionnaires and surveys on the dramas. Locating information in these archives, however, was just the starting point for my research. After my initial research was complete, I began to interview individuals who participated in *Unto These Hills* and *The Trail of Tears*, as well as individuals familiar with the outdoor theatre genre. From these interviews, I was able to gather a body of knowledge that filled in some of the holes found in the archival records. I followed my archival research with an investigation of the social and cultural landscapes against which these dramas were staged. I examined economic and geographic records, as well as material on local

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., xvii.

history. Utilizing box office records, production reviews, interviews, and audience responses, I proceeded by comparing the texts of *Unto These Hills* and *The Trail of Tears* with their subsequent revisions and replacements. I then juxtaposed my findings with the supplemental scripts of *Under the Cherokee Moon*, *Legends at Dusk* and *Cherokee Family Reunion*.

Unfortunately, *The Trail of Tears*, *Under the Cherokee Moon*, and *Legends at Dusk* were no longer being staged in Oklahoma at the time of my research, nor was Larisa Fasthorse's *Cherokee Family Reunion* being staged in North Carolina. Therefore, I have had to rely on archival research and textual analysis for this portion of my dissertation. I did attend performances of *Unto These Hills* over the 2013 and 2014 summers. While in Cherokee, North Carolina, I was able to witness many additional layers of performance that have profoundly influenced the outdoor drama there, such as "chiefing," a performative process whereby Cherokee dancers perform "ideal" Native traditional dances for Smoky Mountain tourists, as well as the Oconaluftee Indian Village, a "realistic" replica of a historic Cherokee village outfitted with historical reenactments. The Cherokee Heritage Center also has similar performative spaces at their site in Oklahoma. While these additional performance spaces have worked to both positively and negatively impact the outdoor drama, I will not discuss the history surrounding this operations in detail.

### **Dissertation Outline**

Chapter Two introduces the Cherokees' history and cultural traditions. Throughout this chapter, I explore the historical narratives utilized to create *Unto These Hills* and *The Trail of Tears*. Kermit Hunter took extreme liberty when fashioning his outdoor dramas, often conflating time periods and historically significant moments to streamline and drive his dramatic plots. Focusing on the way(s) Cherokees want their history preserved and represented, I concentrate on

reconstructing, as far as I am able, the historical narrative from a Cherokee perspective. This chapter is broken up into significant time periods during which the Cherokees were forced to contend with a changing world. Beginning with European arrival and ending with contemporary Cherokee worldviews, I trace the Cherokees' existence alongside external oppressive forces. I contend that the Cherokees have persisted amongst their oppressors for a variety of reasons that are tied to their worldviews and traditions. Throughout this historical survey, I pit the Cherokees' ways of knowing, ways of being, and ways of doing against those of Europeans/Euramericans. In doing so, I show how the Cherokees, despite colonial intrusions, have remained unbroken.

Chapter Three examines *Unto These Hills* and *The Trail of Tears* as “American” forms of theatrical production. The Cherokee Historical Association and the Cherokee Heritage Center developed dramas to commemorate the Cherokees' history and culture. Due to the nature of outdoor historical drama, however, the plays were not emblematic of the Cherokees' history and culture but rather the United States'. In this chapter, I explore the origins of outdoor historical drama as well as the origins of the CHA's and the CHC's dramas within a colonizing context. I argue that despite good intentions, Kermit Hunter manipulated Cherokee history to create an “American” myth that did little to support the communities for which these dramas were written.

In Chapter Four, I explore the Cherokee Historical Association's and the Cherokee Heritage Center's changes to their organizations and their theatrical operations. Toward the end of the twentieth century, both organizations decided to revise their dramas so that they spoke to contemporary audiences. This chapter is designed to serve as a timeline that highlights pivotal moments in the dramas' performative histories. Juxtaposing the original scripts with their subsequent revisions, I show how the organizations strived to transform the dramas into culturally and historically specific products. Though the CHA and the CHC listened to the

Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians and the Cherokee Nation regarding their concerns about the dramas, the organizations' revisions failed to satisfy both the Cherokees and the tourist communities. In response, the CHA and the CHC decided to develop new theatrical projects to replace or accompany the outdoor historical drama. Chapter Five examines the three additional dramas the organizations used to offset some of the Cherokees' and tourists' concerns. In this chapter, I argue that the organizations' move to produce new dramatic projects was the single most effective strategy the CHA and the CHC implemented in order to revise their dramatic operations.

### **On Terminology and its Usage**

The "naming issue" in Indigenous studies has been debated ad nauseum, providing little direction for those concerned with maintaining political correctness. Native and non-native scholars, such as AIM activist Russel Means (Oglala Lakota Sioux) and Jim Charles, have argued that finding a solution to the problem is unworkable. Instead, Means and Charles suggest that it is imperative to move beyond immobilizing discussions of collective names and to focus on larger, apposite issues because such discussions will always be either reasonably or perversely insulting. The consensus is to use distinct cultural affiliations when it is germane.

Throughout my dissertation, I use Cherokee Nation (CN), Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI), and the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians (UKB) to refer to the three federally recognized Cherokee bands in the United States. I also use the plural form of Cherokees as a unifying hypernym when discussing matters of tradition that were once (and perhaps still are) customary to each of these three self-governing entities. When I describe matters that apply to the Cherokees but are emblematic of a multitude of Indigenous ethnic groups, the use of specific terminology becomes a bit trickier. In this case, I utilize Native,

Native American, Indigenous, and Aboriginal interchangeably when referencing all First Nations peoples; however, I prefer to use the term American Indian whenever possible. The *Chicago Manual of Style* suggests that the latter term is more appropriate in certain historical contexts.<sup>62</sup> In addition to being more suitable, the term American Indian is politically charged and active. According to Means, who also prefers using the term because of its origins, American Indian “is the only ethnic group in the United States with the American before [the] ethnicity.”<sup>63</sup> Means elaborates: “We were enslaved as American Indians, were colonized as American Indians, and we will gain our freedom as American Indians—and then we can call ourselves anything we damn please.” Likewise, N. Scott Momaday suggests that the term “American Indian...reaffirms...American Indians’ belief that non-Indians do not know anything about them,” which is a “great source of laughter” for Momaday and other “American Indians across the country.”<sup>64</sup> Considering these political connotations, I utilize the term in a confrontational manner.

I also follow the standard convention of listing tribal affiliations directly following an Indigenous scholar’s name, enclosed in parenthesis, the first time they are introduced; for example, “Diane Glancy (Cherokee Nation).” Furthermore, I try to incorporate the Cherokee written language throughout my dissertation. I am not a native speaker and therefore must rely

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<sup>62</sup> *Chicago Manual of Style*, 16<sup>th</sup> Edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 402.

<sup>63</sup> Russell Means, “*I am an American Indian, Not a Native American!*” (Treaty Productions, 1996). [http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/roadshow/fts/bismarck\\_200504A16.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/roadshow/fts/bismarck_200504A16.html) (last accessed Oct 5, 2015).

<sup>64</sup> Jim Charles, *Confronting the Text, Confronting the World: Reading, Learning, Teaching N. Scott Momaday*, ed. P. L. Thomas (New York: P.I.E. Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2007), 20.

on dictionary spellings. Trying to locate the appropriate spelling of a word or phrase is not always possible; therefore, I have limited my orthographic writing of Cherokee words and expressions to a few sources: James Mooney's early ethnography and Durbin Feeling's *Cherokee-English Dictionary*. I will introduce words or concepts in English first, followed by the Cherokee equivalent. For instance, "books/di-go-we-li." When introducing principal people or sacred beings, I will utilize their Cherokee name first, followed by the English translation set off in parentheses, such as "Dâyuni'sī (Beaver's Grandchild, Little Water Beetle)."

Lastly, I utilize the term Euramerican in reference to Anglo-Europeans in the United States. As a hypernym, this term is representative of American colonists and national citizens following the American Revolution.

## CHAPTER 2

### THIS STORY, THEIR STORY: CHEROKEE ORIGINS AND CULTURAL FOUNDATIONS

*The Cherokee legacy is that we are a people who face adversity, survive, adapt, prosper and excel. And to fulfill this legacy, we must ask the questions...*

*Where will we be as people five, ten, fifty or one hundred years from now? Do we brag about our full blood ancestor or do we brag about our Indian grandchildren? Do we live in the past or do we focus on the future? Is being Cherokee a novelty or a way of life? Is being Cherokee a heritage or a future?*

*Our ancestors who walked the grounds of this capitol building resoundingly cry, 'Don't forget the legacy we passed on. Don't let it lapse. Pass it on, stronger and stronger to your children. Let the Cherokee language laugh, speak and sing again. Let our history be known and discussed. Live by our wisdom. Don't let us die as a people. If you do, then all our sacrifice will be for nothing and you will lose those things that fulfill your life.'*

*- Chad Smith, Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation,  
State of the Nation Address, Sept. 1, 2001*

In “The Political Context of a New Indian History,” Robert Berkhofer outlines “the great desideratum in writing” for American Indian history.<sup>1</sup> Demanding a more critically engaged relationship with American Indians in both anthropological and historical scholarship, Berkhofer urges scholars of American Indian history to move beyond the recording of “White-Indian relations” and focus on developing American Indian stories and histories with American Indians

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Berkhofer, “The Political Context of a New Indian History,” *Pacific Historical Review* 40.3 (1971): 357-82.

at the center of such work. Berkhofer's general thought has become a type of mantra for American Indian scholarship. Aside from a few notable exceptions, however, a majority of scholars continue to explore Indigenous histories through dichotomous relations, and American Indians continue to be unrecognized as politically active agents in their own historical narratives. As Berkhofer notes,

Even when the historian thought he was portraying the Indian "side" in his writing, he adopted implicitly either the white view of his sources or, equally invidious, the assumption that the outcome of his story was determined more by the white side than by the Indian side.... [The] historian treated Indians as passive objects responding to white stimuli rather than as individuals coping creatively in a variety of ways with the different situations in which they found themselves.<sup>2</sup>

Berkhofer's assessment of sources here, as well as his consideration of American Indians as effective actors in the construction of American Indian and North American history, shape the primary concerns of this chapter.

In what follows, I outline pivotal moments in early Cherokee history and focus on the key players that shaped this historical narrative. Positioning the Cherokees at the center of this account, I strive—to the best of my ability—to relate these events from a point of view that is sympathetic with the Cherokees' perspectives. It is not my intention to reflect upon the United States as despotic, nor to render early government officials as malevolent, but rather to capture the essence of the Cherokees' ability to shoulder more than five hundred years of oppression, dehumanization, deracination, and transculturation and remain, despite the federal government's

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 364.



wishes, Cherokees. In order to do so, a “red thread” must be woven throughout this historical narrative.

While I endeavor to honor Indigenous sources in this chapter, there are times when I rely on Euramerican scholarship. The reason is that many scholars, both Native and non-native, utilize certain Euramerican records as primary sources of knowledge, such as James Mooney’s *Myth of the Cherokees*. In addition, the presentation of Cherokee history here is composed in a traditionally linear manner. Considering that the outdoor dramas I investigate herein treat historical narratives anachronistically, the presentation of historical information in this way will be useful for my readers as the dissertation unfolds. Furthermore, there are many instances in early Cherokee history that have inspired debate. I will point to such deliberations; however, I refrain from engaging in such discourse. The aim of this chapter is to provide a reasoned telling of historical events from as close to a Cherokee perspective as possible so that my readers can comprehend the complexity of early Cherokee relations with foreign political bodies and better understand Cherokee cultural developments.

In addition to Berkhofer’s recommendations, I utilize two contemporary Indigenous critical discourses to bring this history into appropriate play: *storying* and *tribalography*. I argue that utilizing these two independent but closely related discourses allows one to approach the historical record from a culturally centered perspective. Framing Cherokee history within these discourses allows me to focus on Cherokee historical and cultural developments as one continuous story. It also helps to reposition Euramerican stimuli as being subordinate to the Cherokees’ strength of mind and character.

Storying, according to Christy Stanlake, is “the action of telling Native American stories” and “a discourse that encompasses concepts about language from Native American intellectual

traditions.”<sup>3</sup> In this chapter, I utilize storying as a way to foreground the Cherokees’ cosmogonic reality and as a way to bring Cherokee history to life. With story being intrinsic to Native cultures, and with oral histories being transmitted via the storytelling practice, approaching Cherokee history by way of the storytelling tradition emphasizes the Native voice *as* the historical record. As Stanlake notes, “Native American concepts of storytelling provide one way to approach...the forgotten and omitted stories of Native Americans who shaped our present world.”<sup>4</sup> In this sense, history is an epic performance itself, and each retelling anticipates revising and reshaping our shared understanding of the world.

Stanlake synthesizes the discourse of storying as follows:

The broad use of the term storying occurs because it is an intertribal term that contains a nexus of concepts about the power of words, usually spoken. The interrelated concepts of the power of language derive from numerous Native origin stories that link the winds with human breath, and the acts of speech and thought with that of creation. The causal relationship between speech and creation connects to the idea of “language as landscape,” in which humans engage in a reciprocal relationship with place through speech.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Christy Stanlake, *Native American Drama: A Critical Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 118.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

Storying, understood in this manner, is a powerful tool with which to ensure cultural survival; it is, in its most basic form, a means of “writing the past, living the present and preserving the future.”<sup>6</sup> Storying *is* political action.

Tribalography is “a rhetorical space” that “explains how America was created from” Native “narratives that were histories and stories with the power to transform” and “create material effects.”<sup>7</sup> Howe stresses that Native stories are performative acts of creation; when spoken, a story dynamically amalgamates the past with the present, producing a foreseeable future. Strictly speaking, tribalography encompasses birth, lived experiences, death, and beyond with the intention of writing tribal histories for future generations. Coupled with this tribally specific notion, as Channette Romero reminds us, is the incorporation of “Natives’ present and historical experiences with other people.”<sup>8</sup> Therefore, tribalography extends beyond tribal specificity and has the capacity to accommodate disparate settler, national, and global narratives into a single, shared tribalography. In short, through the process of storying and tribalography, Euramericans and their history were spoken into being in large part by American Indians; their legacy is inherently an indigenous one.

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<sup>6</sup> Shannon Smith, “Native Storytellers Connect the Past and the Future,” *NativeDaughters.com*, <http://cojmc.unl.edu/natedaughters/storytellers/native-storytellers-connect-the-past-and-the-future> (last accessed Jan 5, 2016).

<sup>7</sup> Howe, “Tribalography,” 118.

<sup>8</sup> Channette Romero, “Expanding Tribal Identities and Sovereignty through LeAnne Howe’s ‘Tribalography,’” *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 26.2 (2014), 13.

## Origins and Foundations

To align these theoretical constructs to Cherokee ways of knowing, ways of being, and ways of doing, I first explore the sacred properties of the Cherokee language. The Cherokees refer to themselves as the Ani'-Yûñ'wiyă—the “principal people” or “the real people.”<sup>9</sup> The popular designation for the tribe, Cherokee, did not come about until the sixteenth century when Spanish explorers first happened upon Indigenous shores. In their records, the Spanish refer to the Cherokees as “Chalaque,” a word that James Mooney proposes was derived from the “Mobilierian jargon” or the “pidgin” used among American Indians when dealing in trade.<sup>10</sup>

Traditionally, three dialects were spoken: the Eastern or Lower dialect, the Middle dialect, and the Western dialect. Only the Middle and Western dialects remain in usage today. The Middle dialect, also referred to as the Kituwah dialect, is spoken by the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians living in North Carolina on the Qualla boundary. The Western dialect, also referred to as the Overhill dialect, is spoken by the Cherokee Nation in present day Oklahoma. These two dialects share similarities, yet there are many distinguishing aspects that separate the two vernaculars. A member of the Cherokee Nation often has a difficult time understanding a native speaker from the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians due to phonetic variances. For instance, the word for “hello” in the Western dialect is “osiyo,” while in the East it is “shiyo.”

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<sup>9</sup> James Mooney, *Myths of the Cherokee* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1995), 15.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-6.

Closely akin to the Iroquoian languages, the Cherokee language has been connected to the region now known as the Southeastern United States for hundreds of years.<sup>11</sup> There is debate, however, regarding the Cherokees' association to this particular landscape. A few scholars argue that the Cherokees migrated to the mountainous region shortly before the arrival of Europeans; other scholars argue that the Cherokees inhabited the land for a much longer period of time. Burial mounds peppered throughout the Southeast reflect an indigenous presence dating back to C.E. 1000. A few archeologists contend that the mounds are not distinctive of Cherokee culture, but are rather the remnants of earlier ancient Indigenous societies. Some scholars, such as Roy Dickens, argue that a Cherokee presence is visible, and that there are direct links between the Cherokees and the mounds.<sup>12</sup>

In a recent study, Benjamin Steere maintains that new data shows the Cherokees (once they established themselves as Cherokees) utilizing the mounds as sites for the building and

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<sup>11</sup> The Iroquoian language family is representative of the American Indian tribes inhabiting the eastern portion of the Great Lakes region. Included in this family are the Central Iroquoian, Lake Iroquoian, and Southern Iroquoian languages—to only the latter of which the Cherokee language belongs.

<sup>12</sup> Roy S. Dickens, Jr., “The Origins and Development of Cherokee Culture,” in *The Cherokee Indian Nation: A Trouble History*, ed. Duane H. King (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1979), 3-32; see also Christopher B. Rodning and Amber M. VanDerwarker, “Reconstructing Ancient Cherokee Lifeways in Southwestern North Carolina,” *Southeastern Archaeology* 21.1 (2002): 1-9; Ted L. Gragson and Paul V Bond, “A Local Analysis of Early-Eighteenth-Century Cherokee Settlement,” *Social Science History* 31.3 (2007): 453-68.

rebuilding of their townhouses.<sup>13</sup> The most important site is the Kituwah mound, which, according to oral tradition, is the Cherokees' place of origin. It is at this site that the Cherokees first declared themselves the Ani'-Yûñ'wiyă. As Steere suggests, the mound sites around which the Cherokees constructed their townhouses "created a link between the built environment and sacred aspects of the natural landscape."<sup>14</sup> This link is further emphasized in the Cherokee language itself. Linguistics researchers contend that, because the Cherokees' language had been removed from the Northern Iroquoian language family for over 3500 years, they must have been established in the area for an equally long period of time prior to foreign invasion.<sup>15</sup>

Today, there are fewer than 300 fluent speakers in the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, and only about 1 percent of the 300,000 members of the Cherokee Nation are fluent.<sup>16</sup> Though the language has been threatened with extinction, Cherokee leaders, such as Tom Belt (CN), John Standingdeer, Jr. (EBCI), and cultural scholars, such as Barbara Duncan, have made groundbreaking discoveries toward the preservation of the language, making it accessible for

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<sup>13</sup> Benjamin A. Steere, "Revisiting Platform Mounds and Townhouses in the Cherokee Heartland: A Collaborative Approach," *Southeastern Archaeology* 34.3 (2015): 197.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>15</sup> Floyd G. Lounsbury, "Iroquois-Cherokee Linguistic Relations," in "Symposium on Cherokee and Iroquois Culture," *Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin* 180 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1961), 11.

<sup>16</sup> Dale Neal, "Cracking the Code to Speak Cherokee," *Citizen-Times*, Jan 5, 2016, <http://www.citizen-times.com/story/news/local/2016/01/03/cracking-code-speak-cherokee/77744120/> (last accessed Apr 14, 2016).

those who wish to learn the language. For instance, in Cherokee, North Carolina, Standingdeer and Duncan have developed an on-line language program based on archival records that makes the Cherokee language not only accessible but easily learnable. Compared to other Cherokee language programs, which have not been successful regarding language retention, their program is helping to save the language from extinction.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the loss, the Cherokee language is arguably the most important trait characterizing Cherokee culture. Through the language, Cherokees learned to describe the world in which they lived; they learned to define their relationship to the land and to other beings. Because of this, Cherokee language instructor Tom Belt (CN) states that the Cherokee language is a sacred thing:

We were told that the Old People said that the language was given to us by the creators—it is a gift. If it has been given in such a manner, then it becomes a sacred thing. It is the way in which we reach into each other’s hearts. To lose that, they said, to stop speaking that language is to stop that kind of understanding of the world and also the robbing of the coming generations of a gift that was

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<sup>17</sup> For more information, visit *YourGrandmothersCherokee.com*. The Cherokee Nation also has programs devoted to language retention and learning, such as the Cherokee Language Technology Program, which develops digital programs/platforms that allow the syllabary to be utilized on smartphones, laptops, desktops, tablets and social networks, as well as the tsalagi tsunadeloquasdi (The Cherokee Immersion School). For more information on these programs, visit Cherokee.org.

intended for them. And we are told that that is theft. And that is not the way that human beings are supposed to do. And that is not how you treat gifts.<sup>18</sup>

Language, seen here as a gift, directly relates to the Cherokees' worldviews. As Belt notes, the Cherokee language is polysyllabic and verb-based, and its structure echoes the Cherokees' conception or apprehension of the world:

The very structure in which we view the world is incorporated into how we speak. For example, we do not begin by speaking about ourselves first.... Things...are noted first, and then we bring it back to where we are at. In other words, we do not say "I see a bear," we say "bear I see." It indicates a worldview that is different from Western European, and it is very complex.<sup>19</sup>

Decentering the human, as Belt suggests, is central to Cherokee belief. Language, therefore, is preoccupied with balancing the Cherokees' universe; built into its structure is the balancing act that creates harmony in the world.

According to Cherokee artist and mask maker Davy Arch (EBCI), the notion of balance "is an attitude more than a physical balance":

It is a physical balance [when] preserving...materials and...resources. For instance...the rule of thumb...is not to gather the first but to wait until [you] find the fourth or seventh. That numerology connects directly to the recipes and

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<sup>18</sup> Tom Belt, interviewed by Tonya Carroll, "Tom Belt: Cherokee Language Teacher," *Blue Ridge National Heritage Area*, in cooperation with Qualla Arts and Crafts, Cherokee, N.C., Vimeo video, 5:25, May 16, 2012, <https://vimeo.com/42273897> (last accessed Apr 14, 2016).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.



medicine and the attitude that involves all aspects of existing. Direction has a lot of symbolism, so if I am gathering some things I like to go north, if I'm gathering other material, then I'll go south or east or west. And so developing the connection...that, in my mind, creates the balance that I'm doing things in the right way, to preserve for the future what I'm doing today. At the same time, I'm connecting what I'm doing directly to the past and what has made us the culture and the people that we are.<sup>20</sup>

Arch's description of physical and mental balance here illuminates an additional important aspect of Cherokee culture. Cherokees have practiced balancing their ways of living in the world for generations. Moreover, the fact that Arch connects his contemporary practice to that of his ancestors exemplifies tribalography; through his process of storying, Arch constructs a reality that helps author himself and his tribe by making "unending connections to past, present, and future."<sup>21</sup>

As illustrated, language and physical and mental processes are crucial to establishing balance. While the Cherokees strive to maintain balance within themselves, they also strive to maintain balance in the world, which also rests in a precarious state of equilibrium. The earth, according to sacred tradition, is an island floating in a great sea that is held afloat by four cords—one in the east, the north, the west, and the south—that are attached to a sky arch made

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<sup>20</sup> Davy Arch, interviewed by Tonya Carroll, "Davy Arch: Cherokee Artist and Mask Maker," *Blue Ridge National Heritage Area*, in cooperation with Qualla Arts and Crafts, Cherokee, N.C., Vimeo video, 5:09, May 16, 2012, <https://vimeo.com/42271515> (last accessed Apr 4, 2016).

<sup>21</sup> Howe, "Tribalography," 29.

of stone.<sup>22</sup> Balancing this island, also referred to as the Middle World, are the Upper and Under Worlds. Galûñ'lăĩ, or the Upper World, is sometimes referred to as “the seventh height,” as it is exactly seven handbreadths above the horizon.<sup>23</sup> Great spirits and beings reside in the Upper World. Oral histories tell us that the spirits that live in Galûñ'lăĩ resemble the plants, animals, and humans that occupy the earth today; however, they are much larger and more powerful. The Under World, which is described as being similar to the Middle World aside from the “seasons [being] different,” is a precarious land.<sup>24</sup> It is often noted that the Under World is full of chaos and that when the spirits from the Under World make their way to the Middle World, the spirits in the Upper World are often called upon to return the Middle World to its proper balance.<sup>25</sup>

There are four cardinal directions balancing the Middle World: the East, which is represented by the color red and symbolic of strength and war; the North, which is represented by the color blue and symbolic of defeat, illness, and cold; the West, which is represented by the color black and symbolic of death; and the South, which is represented by the color white and symbolic of peace and the source of sacred power.<sup>26</sup> Three additional directions, however, are Up, which is represented by the color yellow and symbolic of the Upper World; Down, which is represented by the color brown and symbolic of the Under World; and “In-the-Middle,” or

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<sup>22</sup> Mooney, *Myths*, 239.

<sup>23</sup> Lee Irwin, “Cherokee Healing: Myth, Dreams, and Medicine,” *American Indian Quarterly* 16.2 (1992): 240.

<sup>24</sup> Mooney, *Myths*, 240.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Irwin, “Cherokee Healing,” 242.

“where you are,” which is represented by the color green and symbolic of the Middle World. Each of these directions correspond to Cherokee sacred formulas, which Irwin states are “a complex of relationships involving a constant appeal to powers whose successive interactions reveal a dynamic pattern requiring the constant attention and solicitations of the shaman to maintain equilibrium and harmony.”<sup>27</sup>

There are several stories that mention a special priestly Cherokee clan called the Ani'-Kuta'nĩ or Ani'-Kwāta'nĩ who held “hereditary supervision of all religious ceremonies among the Cherokees.”<sup>28</sup> There is little information regarding the origin of this priestly class; however, there are accounts of their demise. Irwin synthesizes from various sources that the Ani'-Kuta'nĩ were the original mound builders and that they ruled Cherokee townships. The priests abused their powers, however, and were murdered for their “corruption and sexual impropriety.”<sup>29</sup> Irwin suggests that prior to the end of the priestly class, the traditional Cherokee religious worldview would have looked different, and it is likely that the “revolt resulted in new forms of shamanic practice.”<sup>30</sup> Whichever way the “true” story goes, it is understood that Cherokee healers were in charge of maintaining balance for the community. While town healers were in charge of keeping

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Mooney, *Myths*, 392.

<sup>29</sup> Raymond D. Fogelson, “Who Were the Ani'-Kuta'nĩ? An Excursion into Cherokee Historical Thought,” *Ethnohistory* 31.4 (1984): 255.

<sup>30</sup> Lee Irwin, *Coming Down from Above: Prophecy, Resistance, and Renewal in Native American Religions* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 39.

harmony within the community, it was the responsibility of the individual to keep a sense of balance within themselves, hence the three additional directions.

Balancing the notion of the Upper and Under Worlds with “where you are” (the Middle World) was a common practice demonstrated through the art of storytelling. Christopher Teuton (Cherokee Nation), in *Cherokee Stories of the Turtle Liars’ Club*, states that storytelling, or *gagoga*, which literally translates into “h/she is lying” is an epistemic methodology through which to ensure that “the living nature of stories” survives generation after generation.<sup>31</sup> Storytellers, or the *sgadug*—“a community that comes together to help each other in times of need”—is responsible for the dissemination of the “stories, teachings, and crafts” with “others in hope that the knowledge will continue.”<sup>32</sup> Through story and storytelling, the Cherokees’ pass on ancient wisdom and knowledge to future generations. In doing so, the stories and the action of telling them teach how to balance oneself in the world, to live accordingly. Cherokee stories impart sacred knowledge about how men and women should complement and balance one another; they teach of the proper relationship between humans and the land, the animals, the plants, and the spirits whom occupy the same land. While the notion of balance, or *duyuk’ta*, is a common feature of Cherokee story and storytelling; it is also a common practice among many indigenous peoples across the globe. In addition to teaching balance, stories and storytelling

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<sup>31</sup> Christopher B. Teuton, *Cherokee Stories of the Turtle Island Liars’ Club: Dakasi elohi anigagoga junilawisdii (turtle, earth, the liars, meeting place)* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 2.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

bridge the present with the past; they make connections with the lived experience and the “otherworldly.” For instance, as Kimberly Blaeser (Anishinaabe) notes:

Native stories are seldom about separate parallel existences, but instead are about intricately linked relationships, about intersections. Spatial, temporal, and spiritual realities of Native people reflect a fluidity that disallows complete segregation between experiences and of life and death, physical and spiritual, past and present, human and nonhuman. Thus, they are reflected in cycles that involve return, reconnection, and relationships.<sup>33</sup>

Because Native stories link the lived experience with the spiritual, many non-natives consider them to be myths because they do not adhere to the laws of reality. Joseph Bruchac (Abenaki) argues that “rather than being ‘mere myths,’ with ‘myth’ being used in the pejorative sense of ‘untruth’...ancient traditional tales [are] a distillation of the deep knowledge held by the many American Indian nations about the workings of the world around them.”<sup>34</sup> Likewise, Debbie Reese (Nambe Pueblo) states that “through story, people pass their religious beliefs, customs, history, lifestyle, language, values, and the places they hold sacred from one generation to the next” and that “their telling are more than simple entertainment”—they matter “to the well-being

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<sup>33</sup> Kimberly M. Blaeser, "Like 'Reeds through the Ribs of a Basket': Native Women Weaving Stories," in *Other Sisterhoods: Literary Theory and U.S. Women of Colour*, ed. Sandra Kumamoto Stanley (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 265-276.

<sup>34</sup> Joseph Bruchac, *Roots of Survival* (Golden: Fulcrum, 1996), ix.

of the communities from which they originate.”<sup>35</sup> Echoing Blaeser, Bruchac, and Reese, Cherokee storyteller Kathi Littlejohn (EBCI) stresses that “Cherokee stories are of vital importance to the culture and heritage of the Cherokee. . . .Telling the stories, that’s how people passed on lessons in how to live your life, how to get along with others, how to be the best person that you could possibly be.”<sup>36</sup>

Two of the best Cherokee stories exemplifying this notion are creation stories. The first story confers how the spirits of the Upper World helped to make the Middle World. In the beginning, the world was covered with water. Above the water was Gālûñ’lătĭ. Space was getting crowded in Gālûñ’lătĭ, and the occupants needed to find a solution to their problem. They sent out Dâyuni’sĭ (Beaver’s Grandchild, Little Water Beetle) to search for more room below. Dâyuni’sĭ searched all across the water but could not find a solid piece of earth on which his fellow companions could reside. Dâyuni’sĭ wondered if something lay hidden below the surface, so he dived down into the dark abyss. Dâyuni’sĭ swam as deep as he could, but as he swam deeper, he started to lose consciousness. Right before passing out, his tiny leg scratched the bottom, breaking free a small piece of muddy earth. Upon floating back to the surface, the mud began to spread, creating an island. Pleased with Dâyuni’sĭ’s accomplishments, the spirits in Gālûñ’lătĭ quickly came to see the new land; however, once they arrived, they all got stuck in the

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<sup>35</sup> Debbie Reese, “Proceed with Caution: Using Native American Folktales in the Classroom,” *Language Arts* 84.3 (2007): 245.

<sup>36</sup> Kathi Littlejohn, interviewed by Tonya Carroll, “*Kathi Littlejohn: Cherokee Storyteller*,” *Blue Ridge National Heritage Area*, in cooperation with Qualla Arts and Crafts, Cherokee, N.C., Vimeo video, 6:28, May 16, 2012, <https://vimeo.com/42282972> (last accessed Jul 15, 2016).

mud, as the terrain was still saturated. A council was held and the leaders decided to send Suli (the Great Buzzard) to dry the muddy earth with his giant wings. The land took a while to dehydrate, and Suli started to get tired. His wings started to droop and drag along the surface of the earth. Where Suli's wings touched the ground, a valley formed; where his wings swooshed upward, mountain peaks. This is how the land was created, the land the Cherokees came to call home.<sup>37</sup>

Upon creating the earth, the spirits that came down from Gālûñ'lăĩ noticed that they were starting to lose their powers. The animal and plant spirits started to shrink, resembling the animals and plants that we see today. Humans were created soon after the plants and animals. Kana'tĩ (the Lucky Hunter) and Selu (Corn), two sacred Cherokee figures with mystical powers, are known to have helped the Cherokees survive. Kana'tĩ is responsible for providing Cherokees with meat, while Selu provided corn. Anisga'ya Tsunsi' (the Little Men), Kana'tĩ's and Selu's sons, who also have mystical powers, discovered their mother's and father's secret abilities to easily provide nourishment for the family. Displeased, Kana'tĩ and Selu gave the boys instructions on how to hunt and grow crops for themselves, as they would no longer provide the boys with food. Kana'tĩ gave the boys sacred songs to draw deer and other wildlife out of the woods, while Selu instructed the boys on how to plant crops. The boys did not exactly follow their parents' directions, however, and that is why it is so taxing to hunt and grow corn today.

Both of these stories tell how the world came to be and reason why the world operates as it does today. Included in these stories are instructions, both explicit and implicit, on how to comport oneself, to balance oneself in a chaotic world. In the first story, it is taught that everyone

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<sup>37</sup> Mooney, *Myths*, 240.

has a place in creating the world, no matter how big or small one might be. Moreover, it shows how working in cooperation with one another creates material effects. In the second story, which is more directly associated with humans, we learn that one's actions directly affect one's relationship with not only fellow humans, but with the natural world. Had Anisga'ya Tsunsi' not questioned how their parents acquired their comestibles, and had they followed their parent's strict instructions, living in the world would have been much easier. As it was, survival became difficult.

The version of the stories I have paraphrased here come directly from James Mooney's transcription of the stories told by A'yũn'inĩ (Swimmer), Ităgũ'năhĩ (John Ax), and Suyeta (The Chosen One) in the late 1800s, which have since been transformed into contemporary tellings and woven into new narrative structures.<sup>38</sup> When these stories are told today, they are often communicated to establish a sense of ethics. As is the case with oral cultures, stories are handed down, often changing form to meet contemporary demands, and new threads are woven into traditional structures to make them relevant today. Teuton notes that stories are "fluid" and "loose," changing with each storyteller: "By the time you have read them [or heard them]," states Teuton, "they have already changed; they are living things."<sup>39</sup> Because they are living things, Wilma Mankiller, the first female Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation (1985-1995), states that they are the way Cherokees maintain balance in a rapidly changing world. Mankiller states:

In the old days, the Cherokee people believed that the world existed in a precarious balance and that only right or correct actions kept it from tumbling.

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<sup>38</sup> Mooney, *Myths*, 238-9.

<sup>39</sup> Teuton, *Turtle Liars Club*, 4.



Wrong actions were thought to disturb the balance. From hundreds of years, since the Cherokees signed the first peace and friendship treaty with Britain, and later a land cession treaty with South Carolina, our world has been spun out of control, and we have been searching for that balance. In our current state, we are so very distant from that time when our world had balance. But even though we do not...fully understand why, we have returned to searching our own history and teachings for answers to today's problems. Perhaps, like Selu shaking the kernels from her body so that the people can live, we are shaking hundreds of years of acculturation and dehumanization from our minds—also so that our people may live.<sup>40</sup>

In this way, as stories evolve, they continue to help maintain balance in the world and instruct generations upon generations on how to be good citizens in the world.

Language and stories are only a few aspects of traditional Cherokee culture that exemplify the notion of balance. Another area in which the Cherokees sought equilibrium was in their traditional form of governance. When the Cherokees first encountered Europeans, their traditions were deemed heathenish; European polities regarded the Cherokees as living in a “state of complete ‘savage’ lawlessness,” a misconception that legal historian Rennard Strickland (Osage/Cherokee) criticizes in his study of Cherokee laws and customs.<sup>41</sup> Strickland argues that

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<sup>40</sup> Wilma P. Mankiller, “Introduction,” in *Selu: Seeking the Corn-Mother's Wisdom*, by Marilou Awiakta (Golden: Fulcrum Publishing, 1993), ix.

<sup>41</sup> Rennard Strickland, *Fire and the Spirits: Cherokee Law from Clan to Court* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1975), xi.

Cherokees exercised many laws prior to the arrival of Europeans and that the Cherokees never abandoned or ceased practicing their traditional customs once Euramerican governmental jurisdictions took hold following the American Revolution. Prior to European-Euramerican stimuli, Cherokees organized around several “social postulates.” Honoring the sacred fire and clanship systems, balancing social harmony through class and rank, upholding “duties of blood and oaths,” and practicing communal proprietorship, Stickland explains, were the Cherokees’ governing priorities.<sup>42</sup>

Cherokee towns were autonomous polities comprised of a peace chief (designated by the color white) and a war chief (designated by the color red) that supervised community matters.<sup>43</sup> White and red governments were never in operation at same time: The white government—“supreme in all respects except for making war”—was a “theocracy” composed of community elders, which “constituted a tribal gerontocracy.” The red government, which was in operation during periods of conflict or war, was “controlled by the younger warriors.”<sup>44</sup> Each court was comprised of various selected officials who were responsible in arbitrating activities within tribal affairs; these courts were comprised of individuals from each of the seven Cherokee clans: The Anigilohi (Long Hair), Anisahoni (Blue), Aniwaya (Wolf), Anigotegewi (Wild Potato), Aniawi (Deer), Anitsisqua (Bird), and Aniwodi (Paint).<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 21-23.

<sup>43</sup> Robert J. Conley, *The Cherokee Nation: A History* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 27.

<sup>44</sup> Strickland, *Fires and the Spirits*, 24.

<sup>45</sup> Mooney, *Myths*, 212.

Traditionally, Cherokees followed a matrilineal heritage line, and it is through this line that clanships were assigned. Marriage within the same clan was forbidden. Strickland quotes a Cherokee Chief who states that it is easier to keep track of kinship relations in this way because “every mother knows who her children are, but fathers have not such knowledge.”<sup>46</sup> Clans were kept in order to preserve kinship ties, and keeping clan affiliations separate insured Cherokee bloodlines remained pure.

In terms of governance, Cherokee law was extremely democratic. Individuals, regardless of their abilities, were seen and treated as equals, and each person was responsible for the well-being of the community. Women and men had equal voices when it came to political matters as well, and both were represented at councils. In fact, as exemplified in the Cherokees’ gender-neutral language, you would not say that a “man” or “woman” speaks at council, but that a Cherokee speaks. Though women and men had differing societal responsibilities, these responsibilities complemented each other. Echoing Selu and Kana’ti, women worked the land for farming, while the men hunted. There are instances, however, where gendered duties were transgressed and men tended the fields and women hunted.

The only unbalanced custom was that land and familial possessions remained with the female side of the family; men did not own land, only women did. This is not to suggest that the Cherokees explicitly practiced notions of possessorship. Natural resources were seen as gifts from the creator; they were free, common goods.<sup>47</sup> Land, while belonging to the female head, was to be shared, meaning that the crops nurtured on one’s land were distributed amongst the

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<sup>46</sup> Strickland, *Fires and the Spirits*, 30.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

community. As Strickland notes, property was “not to be accumulated;” capital—whether in money or property—was not a “desired social goal.”<sup>48</sup> Overall, the notion of land ownership was a foreign concept; territories (outside of traditional homelands), borders, and possessions were not ideal. Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo) stresses that “the notion that nature is somehow over there while humanity is over here or that a great hierarchical ladder of being exists on which ground and trees occupy a very low rung...is antithetical to tribal thought.”<sup>49</sup> Like language and story, the land is alive; it is a gift from the creators and it is to be treated as such. Jace Weaver echoes this sentiment when he states that “Natives traditionally [did not] relate to the land as landscape,” but as a relative.<sup>50</sup> As such, the Cherokees maintained a sense of reciprocity “between self and place.”<sup>51</sup> It wasn’t until the arrival of Europeans that the notion of the earth being something an individual could claim, possess, molest, or neglect ever crossed a Cherokee’s mind.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>49</sup> Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 59.

<sup>50</sup> Weaver articulates that the term “landscape” shares “a common origin with the injunction of Genesis 1:28” and suggests that humans “have dominion over [its] creation.” Jace Weaver, *Other Words: American Indian Literature, Law, and Culture* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 302.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 35.

## Storying the Foreign

When Hernando de Soto and Juan Pardo first crossed through Cherokee territory on their search for gold, the indigenous populations they encountered failed to understand the explorers' colonizing edicts. The Doctrine of Discovery, instituted by Pope Alexander VI on May 4, 1493 (the year Columbus returned from his voyage), is a precept that gave Christian explorers the right to claim any lands for Christian monarchs. David W. Wilkins and K. Tsianina Lomawaima contend that the Doctrine of Discovery gave European nations "absolute legal title to, and ownership of, American soil."<sup>52</sup> Upon its introduction, however, Indigenous communities failed to comprehend the foreign religious injunction.

Scholars speculate that de Soto was the first foreigner the Cherokees encountered, as documents show that de Soto crossed through Cherokee territory on his quest for national riches. Many scholars note, however, that early Spanish records are relatively cursory and un-descriptive. In fact, de Soto's and Juan Pardo's vague travelogs have impelled researchers, such as anthropologist Charles Hudson, to retrace the explorers' steps in an attempt to verify their records—to see *if* and *where* de Soto and Pardo made contact with the region's Indigenous populations.<sup>53</sup> Although de Soto recorded very little of his encounters with the Cherokees, there

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<sup>52</sup> David W. Wilkins and K. Tsianina Lomawaima, *Uneven Ground: American Indian Sovereignty and Federal Law* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 252.

<sup>53</sup> Hudson compiles early historiographical records with contemporary archeological research, sketching a picture of early sixteenth-century North America, which he then uses to describe the Southeast region's late prehistoric civilizations. Charles Hudson, *Knights of Spain, Warriors of*

are several things Hudson derives from de Soto's records that help researchers better understand the interactions Cherokees had with the Spanish during these formative years. Among the things Hudson investigates, the Spanish identification of the Cherokees and the Cherokees' reaction to the foreigners is most relevant to this study.

According to Hudson, the Spaniards "had not yet questioned the assumption that European people were the measure of men everywhere," and "they had little reason to inquire into the specific ways in which Indian cultures differed from their own."<sup>54</sup> This is probably why so little information was documented regarding the Cherokees in their records. Hudson notes that de Soto treated many Indigenous people poorly, enslaving them at times, even against Queen Isabella's wishes; however, Hudson points out that the mistreatment of Indigenous peoples was not out of racial superiority or a need for domination. Rather, enslavement stemmed from religious belief. Because de Soto and his team were Christian Catholics—exploring not in the name of Spain, but of Christ—they upheld their religious belief as supreme and punished those whose lifeways challenged their own. Hudson queries:

But what about people such as the Indians, who had never heard of Christianity?

Did their being outside Christianity entitle Spaniards to enslave them? Isabella did not think so, and in 1500 she prohibited enslaving Indians, although exceptions

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*the Sun: Hernando de Soto and the South's Ancient Chiefdoms* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1997).

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

were made when Indians attacked Spaniards or when they engaged in abominable acts, such as cannibalism, or prohibited sexual practices, such as sodomy.<sup>55</sup>

As Jace Weaver (Cherokee Nation) articulates, “Europeans’ first reaction to inhabitants of the Americas was...not alterity but sameness.” The only difference between the Europeans and Indigenous Americans was that the latter were thought of as “pagans.”<sup>56</sup> Ralph H. Vigil notes that the Requerimiento of 1513 asked “the Indians to understand that the Pope was the political and spiritual head of the world, and demanded that the Indians acknowledge the sovereignty of the Spanish Crown by reason of the papal donation in 1493.”<sup>57</sup> If the Indigenous peoples refused the Pope’s dictates, then they would be stripped of their property and forced into slavery. Therefore, notions of heathenism, savagism, and barbarism derive from pitting Indigenous cultural practices against those of Catholicism. The interactions between the Indigenous and the Spanish were tailored around religious postulates, and it was through these relations that researchers apprehend the Spaniards’ understanding of Native cultures in the Americas and vice versa. The search for wealth and riches and the proselytization of “Indians” was the only business the Spanish had in the “New World.” There were no plans to establish a permanent

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>56</sup> Jace Weaver, “From I-Hermeneutics to We-Hermeneutics: Native Americans and the Post-Colonial,” in *Native American Religious Identity: Unforgotten Gods*, ed. Jace Weaver (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998), 9-10.

<sup>57</sup> Ralph H Vigil, “The Expedition of Hernando de Soto and the Spanish Struggle for Justice,” in *The Hernando de Soto Expedition: History, Historiography, and ‘Discovery’ in the Southeast* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 329-354.

national residency in the Americas, no plan for cultural genocide, only the reaping of precious resources and the ubiquity of the Catholic faith.

From de Soto's records, we know that the expedition's first encounter with the Cherokees was less fortunate than his encounters with other indigenous groups. Hudson tells us that the first Cherokee village de Soto approached was deserted, aside from a few elderly. Evidently, after hearing about Spanish mistreatment of neighboring tribes, the Cherokees fled their village for safer terrain, leaving behind those who were unable to quickly escape. De Soto's second encounter with the Cherokees, however, was more propitious. In his report, the Cherokees were welcoming, offering de Soto and his men food and lodging. Hudson posits that the treatment de Soto and his men received at each location confirms that the Cherokees were originally comprised of self-governing tribal alignments, rather than one large chiefdom.<sup>58</sup> Had the Cherokees been under a larger form of governance, it is likely de Soto and his men would have received the same treatment at the second village that they did at the first. Coupled with Strickland's understanding of early Cherokee governance, Hudson's proposition supports other historical and oral records; each tribal grouping dealt with outsiders, as well as other important matters concerning the safety and welfare of the community, locally rather than on a national scale.

While de Soto's records reveal little information concerning early Cherokee lifeways, Juan Pardo's records offer a bit more information regarding Cherokee-Spanish affairs. Hudson recounts two of Juan Pardo's expeditions through the interior southeastern region of North America. The first began in December of 1566 and finished in March 1567; the second began in

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<sup>58</sup> Hudson, *Knights of Spain*, 193-194.



September 1567 and concluded in early March the following year. Retracing Pardo's routes, Hudson investigates the numerous Indigenous populations the explorer met while carving a road to the Spanish silver mines in Zacatecas, Mexico. Pardo's objectives, aside from establishing a trade route, were to explore the interior of the southern portion of North America as well as convert Indigenous populations to Christianity.<sup>59</sup> Hudson infers from the records of Pardo's notary, Juan de la Bandera, that Pardo's expeditions were built around evangelizing Indigenous peoples and making them subservient to the Spanish crown and the Pope, much like de Soto's earlier expeditions.<sup>60</sup> Essentially, Pardo was to locate chiefdoms where he could colonize inhabitants and establish fortifications in the name of Spain. As Hudson asserts, such dealings were thwarted due to the Cherokees being tribally centered. Thus, the Cherokees' failure to comprehend the Spanish concept of discovery and conquest parallels the Europeans' inability to understand that not all lands are ruled by a leader, such as the King or the Pope.

While the Spanish tried their best at "conquering" this portion of the Americas, they only succeeded in shrinking Indigenous populations so that they would become more manageable for the future colonial rulers. They did this not with coercive weapons but with biological toxins, such as bacteria and viruses. The first wave of European encroachment brought with it the heaviest assault the Cherokees would face when dealing with foreigners. Ann Ramenofsky and Patricia Galloway contend that specific diseases were rarely documented; if they were, they were generally non-specific: "Because humans and animals were a part of the Soto *entrada*, the

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<sup>59</sup> Charles Hudson, *The Juan Pardo Expeditions: Explorations of the Carolinas and Tennessee, 1566-1568* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1990), 23-50.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

expedition was potentially well-stocked with infectious parasites that could have spread to native southeasterners.”<sup>61</sup> Epidemiological factors suggest that some, but not all, of the following diseases were introduced into the southeast between 1538 and 1541: smallpox, whooping cough, influenza, measles, mumps, rubella, pneumonia, scarlet fever, and typhoid fever, as well as a host of sexually transmitted diseases.<sup>62</sup> Theda Perdue and Michael D. Green calculate that disease decimated a healthy 30,000 to 35,000-strong Cherokee Nation down to 11,210 by 1715, and down to 7,000 by the 1760s.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, diseases were the greatest culprit in the decline of the Cherokees during the formative years of Cherokee-European interaction.

Extant documents tell us that very little interaction between the Cherokees and the Spanish took place during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. There is evidence suggesting that Cherokees began incorporating foreign commodities into their traditional lifestyles, however, soon after the Spanish arrived. Among the many things the Spanish brought with them to the new world were exotic wildlife, including horses, dogs, and pigs. In addition, they brought various foodstuffs foreign to the Indigenous diet, such as wheat, barley, and sugarcane. Indigenous polities quickly adopted these foreign effects and began rearing and cultivating them as their own. While some might read the adoption of foreign goods as an intrusion on traditional

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<sup>61</sup> Ann F. Ramenofsky and Patricia Galloway, “Disease and the Soto Entrada,” in *The Hernando de Soto Expedition: History, Historiography, and ‘Discovery’ in the Southeast* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 259.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Theda Perdue and Michael D. Green, *The Cherokee Nation and the Trail of Tears* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007), 11.

lifeways, the Cherokees utilized only what they found to be beneficial and in agreement with their philosophical disposition. In other words, the adoption of foreign goods should not be regarded as an act of assimilation to European customs but rather a self-directed process of cultural growth.

For instance, Weaver recounts a relatively humorous story about Cherokee textiles and how the Cherokees incorporated European and Asian garments as their own. In 1730, Attakullakulla (Little Carpenter) and six other Cherokee men traveled with Sir Alexander Cuming to London, England, to sign the Treaty of Whitehall, which established amicable trade relationships between the Cherokees and England. Weaver narrates:

There is a persistent legend among the Cherokees today that the most enduring legacy of the 1730 delegation was not the treaty they executed (and subsequently renewed in 1733 and 1744) but something more material. The Cherokee men arrived naked “except an Apron about their Middles” (a breechcloth). They also practiced facial and scalp tattooing. Sir Robert Walpole, King George’s prime minister, thought them far too fierce-looking to present to His Majesty.

Fortunately, a delegation from India had been at court sometime in the recent past and had left their turbans. The Cherokees’ brows were crowned with the abandoned headdresses, which they asked to keep. Henceforth the turban became traditional Cherokee male headgear.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Jace Weaver, *The Red Atlantic: American Indigenes and the Making of the Modern World, 1000-1927* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 156.

As Weaver illustrates, “Indigenous travelers were cosmopolitan agents of international change,” and while the Cherokees made use of foreign goods, they more often than not found ways to utilize them toward their advantage.<sup>65</sup>

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as the Cherokees established relationships with the French, British, and Euramericans, the exchange of cultural resources increased rapidly and European contrivances and textiles were integrated into Cherokee homes. Tools, such as the cotton loom, were utilized to produce materials with which the Cherokees fashioned their manners of dress. Scholars often regard the British and Euramerican periods of “civilization”—the epochs during which the Cherokees precipitously incorporated foreign practices—as being burdensome or hindering Cherokee self-sufficiency. While civilization policies were no doubt barbarous, they intrinsically helped to arbitrate tribal sovereignty despite colonial machinations. I do not mean to suggest that the Cherokees were saved by the “white man’s tools” or to perpetuate a “noble savage” stereotype but rather to celebrate the Cherokees’ adroit intellectual ability to adopt and simultaneously stymie calculated Euramerican acts of ethnic cleansing. Cherokees did not blindly welcome European customs into their daily lives.

In fact, the process of establishing relationships with foreign political bodies was a tumultuous task. As the French and the British started to infiltrate native lands, the Cherokees quickly began to choose sides. Like the Spanish, the French had little to do with the Cherokees—they too were only after riches and the spread of Christianity. The British, however, quickly encouraged the Cherokees to side with them against other European forces. In 1721, the British began negotiating treaties with the Cherokees, and between 1721 and 1777, the Cherokees

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

entered into nine agreements with the British. With these treaties, the Cherokeees ceded half of their lands to the Crown; however, these treaties implied that the Cherokeees held sovereignty over their lands and that they were in an amicable relationship with the Crown. This period of treaty negotiations is rather murky, however, as the Cherokeees understood the alliance as being bound by those who made it rather than symbolic of, or representative of, the entire Cherokee people. Therefore, the Cherokeees did not collectively enter into any agreements with the British, nor did they always take their side.

For instance, during the mid-eighteenth century, Cherokee-British relations were rather chaotic. During the French and Indian War, the Cherokeees sided with the British. In return for their allegiance, the British promised the Cherokeees goods in exchange for their service. After the war, the British were unable to uphold their promises. Dejected, the Cherokeees returned home, and along the way, took possession of a team of horses. The Cherokeees believed that the horses were theirs by right of services rendered. The Virginia colonists who were in possession of the horses at the time, however, believed the Cherokeees stole the horses, and, in retaliation, murdered a group of Cherokee men. According to Cherokee blood laws, and in keeping with their notion of balance, they murdered an equal number of Virginian colonists in reprisal. As a result, Cherokee-British relations were turned upside down, resulting in the Anglo-Cherokee War. It wasn't until July 20, 1761 that the Cherokeees signed a peace treaty with the British, reestablishing their allegiance. In 1763, at the end of the French and Indian war, the British produced the Proclamation of 1763, which stipulated that no colonist could enter into Native territory past the Appalachian Mountains. The Proclamation was of little benefit to the Cherokeees, however, as colonists (against the Crown's mandate) frequently usurped Cherokee lands as their own.

As the Cherokees negotiated with the British, they began to form a national identity. In 1721, the first governor of South Carolina, Sir Francis Nicholson, created the title “Emperor of the Cherokee Nation.” This was the first attempt to nationalize the Cherokees. Also, this was the first treaty pertaining to land cessions.<sup>66</sup> As is to be expected, declaring one Cherokee leader emperor of all Cherokees wasn’t effective, and many states assigned their own “official leaders” as it was impossible to expect one treaty to speak for all.<sup>67</sup> Establishing an Emperor was not the Cherokees’ choice. The British, being a patriarchal society, simply did not want to negotiate with women. In the Cherokees’ gendered division of labor, women did most of the farming and trading and this disgruntled the British.

By the time of the American Revolution, the Cherokees were fully committed to the British, which did not bode well with the Euramericans after winning their independence. Inheriting all declarations of property from the British, the Euramericans swiftly began negotiating new treaties with Indigenous peoples. This transitional period was the biggest, and perhaps most important, change for the Cherokees. Now, two nations occupied the same land. At first, Cherokee-Euramerican negotiations were relatively solicitous; however, by the early nineteenth century they became shameful, powered by intolerance and xenophobia. With political coercion, fundamentalist religious ideology, and racially encumbered solipsism, Euramericans began to systematically quash the Cherokees’ livelihood.

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<sup>66</sup> Alexander Hewatt, *An Historical Account of the Rise and Progress of the Colonies of South Carolina and Georgia* (London: Donaldson, 1779), 258.

<sup>67</sup> Duane H. King, “Introduction,” in *The Cherokee Indian Nation: A Troubled History*, ed. Duane H. King (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1979), xii.

Shortly after George Washington took office, Indigenous nations became “the problem.” According to Washington, Native nations stood in the way of the great “American Nation” and were a force that had to be defeated. Near the beginning of his term as President, Washington declared that a just Indian policy was one of his highest priorities, explaining that “the Government of the United States are determined that their Administration of Indian Affairs shall be directed entirely by the great principles of Justice and humanity.”<sup>68</sup> Washington and his Secretary of War, Henry Knox, argued with Congress as to whether or not Natives had lost all rights to their land after they sided with the British during the American revolutionary war. Congress believed they had; however, Washington and Knox understood that not all Indigenous peoples sided with the British, and to account for all Indigenous tribes as being traitorous was a political fallacy.<sup>69</sup> By no means did this sympathetic assessment keep the federal government from manipulating Native-Euramerican relations in the future, though. And it certainly does not suggest that Washington was an advocate of Indigenous rights. In fact, Washington’s deliberations on the “Indian problem” paved the slippery boulevard the federal government consistently returned to when needing a new route (treaty) to bypass Native nations. David Smith notes that Washington regularly equated the Indians to animals—“Indians and wolves are both beasts of prey, tho’ they differ in shape”—and to have had little respect for the Natives,

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<sup>68</sup> “George Washington to the Commissioners for Negotiating a Treaty with the Southern Indians,” Aug 29, 1789, in *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources 1745-1799*, v. 30, ed. John C. Fitzpatrick, <http://etext.virginia.edu/washington/> (last accessed Mar 13, 2014).

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

regardless of his negotiations with them.<sup>70</sup> While Washington knew that the extermination of Indigenous peoples was not the answer (unless they abused the government), he would mastermind a program that would at least rid them of their lands through forced assimilation.<sup>71</sup>

Henry Knox was the primary architect of the Euramerican civilization policy. Knox and Washington initiated the policy so as to encourage Native nations to adapt to European civility, to become their equals, and to become citizens. In 1796, James McHenry and Washington would try to persuade the Cherokees to “reach higher civilization” and strive to become “economical.”<sup>72</sup> As noted in a letter to Washington from McHenry, however, the process of assimilation did not succeed, as Cherokees refused to part ways with their traditions. McHenry writes:

It is to be lamented, that the experiments, heretofore made, with a view to civilize the Indians, have issued so unsuccessfully. Notwithstanding the pains that have been taken on this subject, the Indian differs but little at this day from what he was when first known to the Europeans. Neither the time which has since elapsed;

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<sup>70</sup> David Livingstone Smith, *Less than Human: Why We Demean, Enslave, and Exterminate Others* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2011), 83.

<sup>71</sup> Washington is said to be nicknamed Conotocarious, or "Town Destroyer," by the Iroquois Indians after he razed forty of their settlements. For more information, see Barbara Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1972).

<sup>72</sup> From the War office of James McHenry to George Washington, Aug 24, 1796. *Founders Early Access*, University of Virginia Press, <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/default.xqy?keys=FOEA-print-01-01-02-0878> (last accessed Jul 15, 2016).



nor our intercourse with them; nor our establishments among them, seem to have rendered them more civilized or less savage. We still find them characterized by the same habits and manners; the same pursuits and pleasures, varied only by certain incidental vices derived from the outcasts of Society.<sup>73</sup>

It is evident from McHenry's letter that the Cherokees utilized Euramerican "establishments," but did so without sacrificing their fundamental principles. The Cherokees exploited Euramericans, they learned from them, they adopted their business models and ways of living. Adopting these "things," however, did not make them Euramerican. What is misleading about McHenry's correspondence with Washington is that he makes it seem like all Cherokees refused to integrate with colonial society, which was not true. Many Cherokees did refuse to entertain the colonizer's way of life, choosing their traditions instead; however, many others adopted Washington's civilization program.<sup>74</sup>

With the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, Thomas Jefferson brought forth new complications regarding American Indian affairs. Jefferson wanted to expand the United States' frontier, yet the "Indians" stood in his way. Jefferson, unlike Washington, cared little for the humanity, salvation, or acculturation of American Indians, though he believed in 1785 that "the proofs of genius given by the Indians of N. America, place them on a level with Whites in the same uncultivated

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> For more on Cherokee reactions to the civilization policy see: Bernard W. Sheehan, *Seeds of Extinction: Jeffersonian Philanthropy and the American Indian* (New York: WW Norton and Company, Inc., 1973); William G. McLoughlin, *Cherokees and Missionaries, 1789-1839* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995).

state.”<sup>75</sup> His tone would change by the early 1800s, as evidenced in his letters to William Henry Harrison in 1808 and John Adams in 1812, wherein he wrote that he intended to remove all Native populations west of the Mississippi river by forcing them into trade debt:

To promote this disposition to exchange lands, which they have to spare and we want, for necessaries, which we have to spare and they want, we shall push our trading houses, and be glad to see the good and influential individuals among them run in debt, because we observe that when these debts get beyond what the individuals can pay, they become willing to lop them off by a cession of lands.... [T]hey will consequently retire from the completion, and we shall thus get clear of this pest without giving offence or umbrage to the Indians.<sup>76</sup>

If they did not succumb to debt and remove, then they would be forced off the land. “If ever we are constrained to lift the hatchet against any tribe,” writes Jefferson, “we will never lay it down

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<sup>75</sup> Thomas Jefferson to Marquis de Chastellux, Jun 7, 1785, *Founders Online*, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-08-02-0145> (last accessed Jul 15, 2016).

<sup>76</sup> This unofficial and private letter is rather scandalous as Jefferson asks Harrison to consider his letter to be “as private and friendly, and not to controul [sic] any particular instructions which [he] may receive through an official channel,” and to observe “how sacredly [the information of the letter] must be kept within [his] own breast,” as it would be “improper to be understood by the Indians.” President Jefferson to William Henry Harrison, Feb 27, 1803, *Indiana Historical Bureau*, <http://www.in.gov/history/2573.htm> (last accessed Jul 15, 2016).

till that tribe is exterminated or driven beyond the Mississippi... in war, they will kill some of us; we shall destroy them all.<sup>77</sup>

Jefferson's inability to cooperate with Indigenous populations fostered a growing hatred in the Cherokees. As settlers began adopting stronger racialized views of Native peoples, seeing themselves as superior and entitled to the lands granted to them by right of conquest, the Cherokees began to fight back. In the latter part of the eighteenth century and the early part of the nineteenth, the Cherokees experienced substantial transformation. Land treaties with the federal and state governments, barbaric settler intrusions, and additional complications made many Cherokees nervous about their future. A few Cherokees removed west voluntarily as early as 1773, and many more migrated away from their traditional homelands west of the Mississippi river in 1808 as a result. More Cherokees followed after the Cherokee Treaties of 1817 and 1819, which stipulated that any Cherokee who ceded his homelands and relocated to a tract of land that the government "found...suiting the emigrants, and not claimed by other Indians" would be awarded "the exchange of that for a just portion of the country they leave, and to a part of which...they have a right."<sup>78</sup> The treaty also stipulated that those who wished to remain in their homelands could do so by relinquishing their national status as Cherokees and becoming citizens

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<sup>77</sup> Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, Jun 11, 1812, *Founders Online*, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-05-02-0100> (last accessed Jul 15, 2016).

<sup>78</sup> "Cherokee Treaty of 1817," in *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties* (vol. II), compiled and edited by Charles J. Kappler (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1904), published online by the *Oklahoma State University Library Electronic Publishing Center*, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/Vol2/treaties/che0140.htm> (last accessed Apr 14, 2016).

of the United States.<sup>79</sup> Article 8 of the 1817 treaty stated that those who elected to become citizens would be given by the United States, “a reservation of six hundred and forty acres of land in a square to include their improvements...in which they will have a life estate with a reversion in fee simple to their children reserving to the widow her dower.”<sup>80</sup> The treaty of 1819 secured this proposition, “generating a certified list of Cherokee U.S. citizens.”<sup>81</sup> Those Cherokees who relinquished their sovereignty and became citizens of the United States were known as the Quallatown Indians and, after removal, would become recognized as the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. The Cherokees who fled the Euramerican encroachment wished to uphold their national status as Cherokees and to escape Euramerican manipulation. They are referred to as the Western Cherokees or the “Old Settlers”. The Western Cherokees relocated to what is now known as Arkansas. In 1828, they moved again to Indian Territory due to settler invasion. Today, they are federally recognized as the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians (UKB).

When Andrew Jackson took the presidency in 1829, American settlers, particularly in Georgia, began to encroach further onto Cherokee lands. Prior to his presidency, Jackson wrote President James Monroe in 1817 describing his view on tribal affairs, wherein he stated “[The

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> “Cherokee Treaty of 1819,” in *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties* (vol. II), compiled and edited by Charles J. Kappler (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1904), Published online by the *Oklahoma State University Library Electronic Publishing Center*, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/Vol2/treaties/che0177.htm> (last accessed Apr 14, 2016).

Cherokees] were not sovereign and to pretend that they were by negotiating treaties with them was ‘absurd.’” They were within the boundaries of the United States, and the government should treat them as subjects, not as sovereigns: “Negotiating treaties with the tribes might have made sense in the old days when they were strong, and the United States was weak, but circumstances have entirely changed...and the army of government [is] sufficiently strong to carry [a new policy] into execution.”<sup>82</sup> Out of all the presidents, Andrew Jackson was dead set on turning southeastern American Indians into detritus. At the fifth annual meeting of the House of Representatives and the Senate on December 3, 1833, Jackson declared:

My original convictions upon [American Indians] have been confirmed by the course of events for several years, and experience is every day adding to their strength. That those tribes cannot exist surrounded by our settlements and in continual contact with our citizens is certain. They have neither the intelligence, the industry, the moral habits, nor the desire of improvement which are essential to any favorable change in their condition. Established in the midst of another and a superior race, and without appreciating the causes of their inferiority or seeking to control them, they must necessarily yield to the force of circumstances and ere long disappear.<sup>83</sup>

Jackson disliked American Indians so much so that he refused to uphold federal orders. Jackson believed that “only detribalized ‘civilized’ individual Indians could remain in the East, where

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<sup>82</sup> Perdue and Green, *The Cherokee Nation*, 50.

<sup>83</sup> Andrew Jackson, “5<sup>th</sup> Annual Message to Congress,” Dec 3, 1833, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29475> (last accessed Jul 15, 2016).

they would be subject to the laws of the states in which they lived, even if those laws denied them basic civil liberties.... There could be no sovereign tribes, no tribal governments, and no commonly held tribal lands in the East.”<sup>84</sup> While federal government machinations were in development from the 1780s to the late 1820s, Jackson would be the one to oust all Native nations west, freeing the Cherokees’ lands for Georgian settlement.

What is perhaps most unnerving about this turbulent time period is the fact that the Cherokee Nation incorporated what the federal government insisted they must in order to become equal to Euramerican civilized society. In 1821, Sequoyah (George Guess) completed the Cherokee syllabary, a writing system used to read and write in the Cherokee language. While the Cherokees were forced to learn English and learn the grammar, they went further and were able to take the knowledge they learned and turn it around to suit their own needs. While formulating their own written language helped to preserve Cherokee culture and knowledge, it most importantly became a political tool. The script became official in 1825, right at the time Georgia was pressuring the Cherokees to either remove west of the Mississippi River or to end their tribal government and surrender control of their lands to the United States and Georgia. The syllabary would prove to be the one cultural element that distinguished the Cherokees from other Native nations, as no other tribe—in the eyes of the Euramericans—matched the progress demonstrated by the Cherokees at the time.

With the birth of the Cherokee written language, twenty-four delegates from the eight districts of the Cherokee Nation met in New Echota, the Cherokee Capitol in northern Georgia, in 1827 to draft the first Cherokee National Constitution, penned in English and in the syllabary.

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<sup>84</sup> Perdue and Green, *The Cherokee Nation*, 61.

Not only did having their own written language distinguish the Nation as civilized, the fact that they had a constitution (modeled after the United States') proved equally advantageous. According to Strickland, the Cherokee Constitution "seemed the ultimate in civilization."<sup>85</sup> The Cherokee Constitution signalled that the United States could no longer regard the Cherokees as being backward. The Cherokees thought their constitution would force Euramericans to recognize their political identity as an independent, sovereign nation beyond the jurisdiction of the United States federal and state governments. Unfortunately, in the minds of Euramericans the constitution did no such thing.

Moreover, in response to civilization, the first American Indian newspaper, *The Cherokee Phoenix*, was created. In 1828, the General Council of the Cherokee Nation, along with Samuel Worcester, a Euramerican missionary, bought the type for the newspaper. The Council elected Elias Boudinot as the newspaper's first editor, and the first newspaper rolled off the press in 1828. On one side of the column, the news was written completely in the syllabary, on the other, in English. The newspaper would become the first official voice of the Cherokee Nation, establishing their culture as "civilized" and equal to their Euramerican neighbors. It would also become the driving force behind the growing factionalism within the Cherokee Nation as the newspaper became a platform through which political differences would be aired.

Margaret Bender questions whether or not the Cherokee syllabary was indeed triumphant or if it was, as many Cherokees believed, a setback:

At its inception, the Syllabary was received in a variety of ways by a variety of parties—native speakers, missionaries, and Cherokee and white political leaders.

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<sup>85</sup> Strickland, *Fire and the Spirits*, 65.

Was it a blessing or a curse? Was it an agent of isolation or a tool for assimilation? Would it facilitate the conversion of the Cherokees to Christianity through the written word or interfere with the efforts of missionaries to teach English and provide a written Cherokee Bible? Would it assist the Cherokees in their quest for progress and development or prevent their access to the best that the civilized world had to offer?<sup>86</sup>

As Bender suggests, the development of the syllabary did little for the Cherokees other than establish a unique written language. Euramericans saw the syllabary, the Cherokee Constitution, and the *Cherokee Phoenix* as mere child's play. The Cherokees, on the other hand, believed that as a culture, they were equal to their persecutors, and that their adoption of Euramerican traditions was a sure sign that they were capable of self-governance. This was a fact that the Cherokees believed Euramericans had to recognize and understand. Unfortunately, Cherokee-Euramerican relations did not transpire in such a manner. As Strickland notes, "the Cherokees sincerely believed, as Jefferson suggested, that they might save their nation with the adoption of a new system of laws patterned after those of the white man."<sup>87</sup> After Washington's and Jefferson's encouragement to become "civilized" ultimately "failed," the Cherokees became dismayed—to not have their hard work recognized was damaging to the well-being of the Nation. Out of this demoralization, however, was born the new Cherokee Nation. The new Nation is different from how the Cherokees were considered a nation by the British in the late

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<sup>86</sup> Margaret Bender, *Signs of Cherokee Culture: Sequoyah's Syllabary in Eastern Cherokee Life* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 23.

<sup>87</sup> Strickland, *Fire and the Spirits*, 52.



1700s. Then, the British defined the Cherokees' formal governance for them, as they required a unified body to negotiate with. Upon drafting the Cherokee National constitution, however, the Cherokees—for the first time—self-defined themselves as a political entity.

The inability to contend with the Euramerican government, though, created a rift within the Cherokee Nation. Principal Chief John Ross insisted that if the Cherokees continued to make peaceful negotiations with the federal government, then they would be able to stay in their homelands and their “white neighbors” would soon see them as civilized. Ross’s political stance remained unyielding over the years leading up to removal, but not everyone had as much faith in Ross or in the newly formed Euramerican government. Major Ridge, his son John Ridge, Elias Boudinot, and Stand Waite, all of whom belonged to the same prominent political family, are among the few who opposed Ross.<sup>88</sup> John Ridge and Boudinot were educated and acculturated Cherokee business men who assisted in the early formation of the Cherokee Nation’s governance. Boudinot was also editor in chief of the Cherokees’ newspaper. Though Ross, the Ridges, Boudinot, and Waite all believed that appropriating Euramerican customs and political strategies would prove serendipitous to the Nation, political pressures escalated and as the United States and the state of Georgia grew more malicious, the latter group of men would come to see that the only hope for the Cherokees was to evade white intrusions, to uproot from their traditional homelands, and move west into Indian Territory.

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<sup>88</sup> For a familial lineage of the Ridge family see: Thurman Wilkins, *Cherokee Tragedy: The Ridge Family and the Decimation of a People* (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1986); Emmet Starr, *History of the Cherokee Indians and Their Legends and Folk Lore* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co. Inc., 2003).

Between 1822 and 1832, just as quickly as the Cherokee Nation banded together, it disintegrated. Several court cases during this time period forced Cherokees into subservient positions when dealing with Euramerican federal and state governments. The primary reason was because the United States Supreme Court continually employed the Doctrine of Discovery as a means of establishing their superiority over American Indians, putting the Cherokee Nation in check despite their advances. As the Doctrine stipulated, title to recently discovered lands lay with the government whose subjects found the new territory. Because the United States inherited Europe's laws after the Revolution, Euramericans argued that they occupied the same position as the British. Wilkins and Lomawaima explain how the doctrine was manipulated in the United States Supreme Court and highlight the doctrine's pejorative stance toward American Indian tribes across North America:

The discovery doctrine...perpetuate[d] a second-class national status for tribal nations and relegate[d] individual Indians to a second-class citizenship status...it strip[ped] tribes and individuals of their complete property rights.... In its most brazen and negative sense, discovery [was] equated with conquest, with the complete subjugation of Indigenous nations.

All court hearings between the United States and the Cherokee Nation began with a refined concept of this doctrine, which stripped the Cherokees of their autonomy. No matter what they did, they were, by God's law, subjugated peoples.

There are many instances in which the federal government did side with the Cherokee Nation; however, state governments, such as Georgia, refused to uphold national deliberations when it came to the Cherokees. Settlers had, from the very beginning, been seizing Cherokee lands, driving families out of their homesteads, and occupying their farms as their own—illegal

conduct to be sure, but not significant enough for the Georgia Guard to intervene. While settlers had always been encroaching, the problem became an even bigger issue once gold was discovered in the Georgia Mountains. After this discovery, not only were more Euramericans usurping Cherokee lands, but the state of Georgia was looking to do so as well.

At the time, missionaries and Euramerican sympathizers worked alongside the Cherokees in support of their national cause. In doing so, they were often accosted by the Georgia Guard, as the state of Georgia refused to negotiate with the Cherokees or anyone who believed the Cherokees had the rights to their homelands. The Georgia General Assembly of 1828-9 nullified the Cherokee Constitution, giving Georgia sovereignty over all the lands within its boundaries. The Assembly dictated that Georgians could do whatever they wanted with the Cherokees and use whatever force was necessary to make sure they were subdued.<sup>89</sup> In 1829, Georgia's legislature passed the Loyalty Act, which ordered all Euramericans living among the Cherokees to register and pledge their allegiance to the state. This took a heavy toll on missionaries who had become great friends with the Cherokees. In 1831, eleven missionaries were arrested for violating Georgia law. Among those captured were Samuel A. Worcester and Elizur Butler, the only two white sympathizers who refused to pledge their allegiance to the State of Georgia.

Samuel Worcester was a minister affiliated with the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission. In 1827, the board ordered Worcester to the Cherokee National Capital of New Echota, Georgia, to supervise and help the Cherokees to become civilized Christians. Upon his arrival, Worcester began working with Elias Boudinot to translate the Bible and other materials into the Cherokee language. Worcester became a close friend of the Cherokee leaders

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<sup>89</sup> Perdue and Green, *The Cherokee Nation*, 58.

and often advised them in their political and legal rights. Upon Worcester's arrest, he adamantly began to fight for the Cherokee Nation and debate with the federal government the Cherokees' sovereign rights.

In the 1832 Supreme Court case *Worcester v. Georgia*, Chief Justice John Marshall ruled that states, especially Georgia, had no legal power over the Cherokees or any Native nation. Georgia was ordered to release Worcester from jail. Georgia officials, however, ignored the federal government's ruling. Of crucial importance to this hearing is Marshall's definition of the Cherokee Nation, which he considered a "domestic, dependent nation."<sup>90</sup> Equally important is the declaration made in the *Cherokee Nation vs. The State of Georgia*, wherein Justice Marshall asserts:

They [The Cherokee Nation] look to our government for protection; rely upon its kindness and its power; appeal to it for relief to their wants; and address the president as their great father. They and their country are considered by foreign nations, as well as by ourselves, as being so completely under the sovereignty of the United States, that any attempt to acquire their lands, or to form a political connection with them, would be considered by all as an invasion of our territory, and an act of hostility.<sup>91</sup>

Vine Deloria, Jr. and Clifford M. Lytle contend that while this ruling served as the basis for United States-Native affairs, "the Cherokees had no rights whatsoever that were not subject to

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<sup>90</sup> Samuel A. Worcester v. The State of Georgia, 31 United States (6 Pet.) 515 (1832).

<sup>91</sup> The Cherokee Nation v. The State of Georgia, 30 United States (6 Pet.) 1, 16 (1831).

intervention and expropriation by the United States.”<sup>92</sup> Deloria and Lytle surmise that the Justices were not altogether clear on how to deal with the Cherokee Nation, as they variously claimed Indigenous tribes as domestic dependent nations, sovereign nations, non-sovereign nations, and tribes that had the potential to become sovereign.<sup>93</sup> Regardless, these rulings are the “federal underpinnings upon which federal responsibility for Indians is based...tribes are under the protection of the federal government” yet lack “sufficient sovereignty to claim political independence,” but they have the right to do so when dealing with state governments, which is to be backed by the federal government.<sup>94</sup> Wilkins and Lomawaima articulate that this ruling echoes the Doctrine of Discovery by defining Indigenous nations as “children or wards, incompetent to manage their own territorial affairs,” children who are in need of the “federal ‘guardian’” because of their “alleged technical and cultural shortcomings.”<sup>95</sup>

John Ross relentlessly fought for the Cherokee Nation’s sovereignty and on numerous occasions traveled to Washington to fight for the Cherokees’ right to stay in their homelands. Ross pleaded with the federal government to recognize the many achievements the Cherokee Nation had accomplished in such a short time. Ross firmly believed that the Cherokees could be neighbors and brothers to the settlers, but only if they were treated as equals and as a sovereign nation. Given these rulings, the Ridges, Boudinot, and Watie knew that there was nothing the

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<sup>92</sup> Vine Deloria, Jr. and Clifford M. Lytle, *American Indians, American Justice* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), 31.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Wilkins and Lomawaima, *Uneven Ground*, 24.

Cherokees could do to stay in their homelands; it was either die trying or become incorporated. Neither option proved beneficial. And so, while Ross was in Washington lobbying Congress for help, the Ridge faction met in the home of Elias Boudinot at New Echota in 1835 and signed a removal treaty. Boudinot justified the signing of the treaty behind the Cherokee Nation's back by stating, "If one hundred persons are ignorant of their true situation and are so completely blinded as not to see the destruction that awaits them, we can see strong reasons to justify the action of a minority of fifty persons to do what the majority would do if they understood their condition—to save a nation from political thralldom and moral degradation."<sup>96</sup> This agreement would become known as the Treaty of New Echota, and those seventy-five Cherokees who signed the agreement, the Treaty Party or the Ridge faction. When the Ridge faction signed the Treaty of New Echota, they also signed their death warrants, since the Cherokee Nation passed a law in 1822 calling for the death of anyone agreeing to give up tribal land.<sup>97</sup> The treaty stated that all lands in the East would be exchanged for land in the West, with a five-million-dollar stipend with which to relocate and establish the Cherokee Nation in Indian Territory. Although Ross and

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<sup>96</sup> Elias Boudinot, "Letters and Other Papers Relating to Cherokee Affairs: Being a Reply to Sunday Publications Authorized by John Ross," in *Cherokee Editor: The Writings of Elias Boudinot*, ed. Theda Perdue (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983), 162.

<sup>97</sup> In 1808, the Cherokees passed a law that anyone who sold Cherokee lands for personal profit would be condemned to death. This law came into effect after Doublehead, a Cherokee warrior, conspired with United States Indian Affairs Commissioner Return J. Meigs, Jr. and sold tribal lands. Oddly enough, Major Ridge executed Doublehead for his trespasses against the Cherokee Nation.

his deputy George Lowery garnered over fifteen thousand signatures from those Cherokees wishing to remain in their homelands in protest of the corrupt treaty, the United States ratified the treaty. While the Ridges' and the rest of the Treaty Party moved West immediately, John Ross remained in Cherokee territory until President Martin Van Buren, in 1838, instructed the United States Army to enter what remained of the Cherokee Nation, to forcibly gather the people, and march them to Indian Territory along what has become known as the Trail of Tears. Around sixteen thousand Cherokees were forcibly relocated from their ancestral lands in the southeast to Indian Territory. While the death toll is debatable, it is estimated that only twelve thousand survived the journey.<sup>98</sup>

Once in Indian Territory, the Cherokee Nation, bruised and divided, rejoined those who made the trip west just prior to removal. Political tensions were at their apex once the Cherokee Nation settled into their new homelands: The Ross and Ridge factions continued to clash over government rulings, generating some of the most dramatic events in Cherokee history. The signing of the treaty led to bitter factionalism once the Cherokees joined in Indian Territory and ultimately to the deaths of three Treaty Party leaders. The majority of the tribe, who continued to support Ross, bore bitter animosity toward the members of the Treaty Party, particularly

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<sup>98</sup> This figure does not include all Native nations that were removed from their homelands. Therefore, the total number of fatalities (in sum) was likely higher. Some scholars, such as Russell Thornton, project up to 8,000 people died along the trail. For Thornton, population loss isn't specific to mere death, but to total population loss, including lost parturitions. Russell Thornton, "Cherokee Population Losses during the Trail of Tears: A New Perspective and a New Estimate," *Ethnohistory* 31.4 (1984): 289-300.

Boudinot and the Ridges. They were perceived as traitors who had sold out to the Euramericans. Boudinot and the Ridges were assassinated in 1839, unleashing a series of bitter family and factional feuds. In addition, there was a conflict between the new immigrants and the Old Settlers who had a primitive form of government that, unlike the Cherokee Nation's constitution, was still shared through the oral tradition. They did not want to give up their self-government and had no wish to cede power to the Cherokee Nation. But Ross envisioned a Cherokee Nation that was completely unified. The Old Settlers quickly consolidated with the Ridge party, who also opposed Ross's idea of a unified government. The growing factionalism continued to tear the Nation apart.

The situation became so bad that President James Polk, in 1846, submitted a special message to Congress recommending the division of the Cherokees between the opposing factions. Polk stated,

These measures are the only means of arresting the horrid and inhuman massacres which have marked the history of the Cherokees for the last few years, and especially for the last few months. I am satisfied that there is no probability that the different bands or parties into which it is divided can ever again live together in peace and harmony; and that the well being of the whole requires that they should be separated and live under separate governments as distinct people.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> James Polk, "President Polk," in *The Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, ed. James D Richardson, v.4 (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1902), 429.



John Ross and his delegation bitterly opposed the legislation presented by the Polk Administration, however, and they were able to defeat the measure. In its place, commissioners were appointed to hear and investigate the contentions of the two factions, and their findings were incorporated in a new treaty which was ratified and signed later in 1846. This treaty settled all matters in controversy between the Cherokee tribes and the government and between the Cherokee Nation, the Old Settlers, and the Ridge faction. Thus, the Cherokee Nation, once again, became whole.

Though the Cherokee Nation unified, they continued to be mistreated by the United States, and between 1861 and 1865 they found themselves embroiled in another battle: The Civil War. With eight percent of Cherokees being slave holders, a small faction believed the Confederacy was correct in its efforts; others believed that the Union was justified in its pursuits. With the influence of John Ross, however, the majority of the Cherokee Nation believed that the war was not their fight, and so they pledged neutrality. Referred to as the “Brothers’ War,” the Civil War disrupted the peace the Cherokees had fought so hard to regain.<sup>100</sup> The Cherokee Nation continued to suffer at the hands of the Euramericans for years to come. In 1901, Congress passed an act that officially split Indian Territory into two twin territories: Oklahoma Territory and Indian Territory. Despite their efforts, the Cherokees were losing control; and they did, in 1907, when the territories formalized into the state of Oklahoma. Rose Stremlau succinctly describes the Cherokees’ reactions: “The inherent brutality of this union was painful for many

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<sup>100</sup> “Brother’s War” little refers to brother fighting against one another in the war. In the context of the Cherokee Nation, Cherokees fought against themselves.

Cherokees, and they could not bear witness.”<sup>101</sup> Once again, the Cherokees’ world was knocked out of balance, and it stayed this way for years to come.

The history of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians’ is more complicated than that of the Cherokee Nation. Mooney asserts that the Eastern Band formed because a number of Cherokees fled to the mountains at the time the federal government was rounding up the Cherokees for removal in 1838.<sup>102</sup> According to Mooney, these “1,000 or more” Cherokees comprised the “purest-blooded and most conservative of the Nation.” The historical narrative surrounding the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, however, is steeped in myth. Mooney records that the Cherokees were able to stay in their homelands because of the heroic efforts of one Cherokee man: Tsali. John Finger, however, contends that Tsali’s story is hagiographic, as Tsali and his family (still members of the Cherokee Nation) were supposed to head West with the rest of the tribe.<sup>103</sup> The myth surrounding Tsali revolves around him having sacrificed his life so that the Cherokees who hid out in the mountains could remain in their homelands. Mooney suggests that when the federal troops began rounding the Cherokees up to take them to the stockades, Tsali’s wife was murdered by one of the soldiers along the way. In retaliation, Tsali killed the soldier and then fled into the mountains. Eventually, the federal troops located Tsali and made a

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<sup>101</sup> Rose Strelau, *Sustaining the Cherokee Family: Kinship and the Allotment of an Indigenous Nation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 179.

<sup>102</sup> Mooney, *Myths*, 157.

<sup>103</sup> John R. Finger, *Eastern Band of Cherokees: 1819-1900* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984), 22.

deal with him that if he surrendered for his crimes, the rest of the Cherokees hiding in the mountains would not be forced to relocate, to which Tsali agreed.

Finger notes that Tsali's only "crime" was that "he avoided removal"; there is no evidence that suggests that Tsali surrendered his life voluntarily, nor that he was a key player in the murder of the federal troops.<sup>104</sup> In fact, Finger finds the records to suggest that Tsali was captured by two family friends, Wachacha and Euchella, and was executed by them several days after those found responsible for the murders were killed.<sup>105</sup> Mooney, on the other hand, suggests that General Winfield Scott, who in 1838 was in charge of removing the Cherokees to Indian Territory, devised a plan to capture Tsali. Scott solicited the help of William H. Thomas, a friend of the Cherokee Nation and the adopted son of Yonaguska (Drowning Bear), Peace Chief of the Eastern Band of Cherokees.<sup>106</sup> Scott informed Thomas that if he was able to influence U'tsala, a Cherokee leader who also escaped into the mountains, to agree upon the capture of Tsali, the remaining Cherokees hiding there would be able to stay on their homelands. Upon hearing Thomas's news, U'tsala is reported to have said: "If only they might stay [all renegade Cherokees], even though a few must be sacrificed," with which he consented to the capture and subsequent execution of Tsali.<sup>107</sup> According to Mooney, it was Thomas who coaxed Tsali into turning himself in, which Tsali apparently did willingly.<sup>108</sup> At the hands of his brethren, Tsali

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>106</sup> Mooney, *Myths*, 160-162.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

submitted himself to execution by firing squad. His final words were reported to be an impassioned speech about sacrificing his life so that his people might live.

John Finger objects, however, claiming that, while these figures do play a prominent role in the Cherokees' history, their alleged significance is disproportionate with that documented in the historical records.<sup>109</sup> Whereas Mooney asserts that the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians was able to reside in their homelands because of Tsali's sacrifice, Finger observes that it is actually because approximately four hundred Cherokees relinquished their national citizenship for United States citizenship in 1817 and 1819. Because they gave up their citizenship, they were exempt from removal, holding "an anomalous status" in the eyes of the United States federal government.<sup>110</sup> It was not Tsali's lynching that permitted the Cherokees to stay in their homelands, suggests Finger, but rather William Thomas's assiduous negotiations with the federal and state governments.<sup>111</sup> Still, Thomas's role in this story is murky, echoing the hagiographic telling's of Tsali and his sacrifice by Mooney. Finger notes that Thomas's role in this historical narrative is often incorrectly cited. For instance, whereas Mooney suggests that Thomas was able to get Tsali to turn himself in out of respect for all the Cherokees in hiding, Finger contends that Thomas played a different role in the event altogether. Believing that the Cherokees that escaped the roundup "might jeopardize the rights of the Quallatown Band to remain" in their lands, Finger asserts that Thomas fully cooperated with the army and assisted them in their roundup

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<sup>109</sup> Finger, *Eastern Band of Cherokees*, 20.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-1.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

procedures so as to ensure that the Quallatown Band remained unmolested.<sup>112</sup> Thomas's work after removal and after the federal government permitted the Cherokees to stay, however, is what Finger believes substantiates Thomas's claim to fame. At the time of removal, American Indians were not allowed to own property in North Carolina. Therefore, with the Cherokees' money, Thomas held their lands in trust, ensuring that the federal government could not take them away as they were legally owned by a white man. Finger notes "Thomas argued forcefully that his clients should be allowed to remain in North Carolina...because they were already supposed citizens, and the others because they were qualified to become citizens under Article 12 [of legislation passed in 1835]."<sup>113</sup> Thomas argued for the Eastern Band of Cherokees up until his death in 1893. By 1870, the Eastern Band obtained a corporate charter from the state of North Carolina, and a few years later re-organized their government and adopted their own constitution, separate from the Cherokee Nation.

### **Conclusion**

From the early sixteenth century to the turn of the twentieth, Cherokees withstood squalls of treaty negotiations, confronted the United States' violation of Cherokee sovereignty, and fought for equality in light of a supposedly prudent justice system. From localized tribal governance to nationalization, from matrilineal kinship systems to forced patriarchal practices, and from traditional spiritual praxes to the absorption of foreign religious activities and beliefs, the Cherokees persevered in an ambiguous world.

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

While the function and structure of the Cherokees' language, stories, and governance changed over the years, the fact that they remain speaks of their significance. Embedded in the structural makeup of such traditions are Cherokee worldviews that continue to influence Cherokee culture today. Collectively, these traditions reflect Cherokee epistemologies; they substantiate the Cherokees' legacy and impugn Euramerican convictions that the Cherokees were in a "state of complete 'savage' lawlessness," a misconception that legal historian Rennard Strickland condemns in his study of Cherokee laws and customs.<sup>114</sup> Once foreigners started policing Cherokee territory, Cherokee social postulates slowly shapeshifted, mimicking Euramerican traditions. This is not to say, however, that the Cherokees threw their traditional practices away in favor of those of "civilized society."

Tom Belt tells an old Cherokee prophecy that warns of "ultimate hardship and [the] virtual extinction of the Cherokee people."<sup>115</sup> Belt suggests that, while the prophecy is open to interpretation, Cherokees do not view the prophecy as the end of the world, but the end of the Cherokee culture. For Belt, the prophecy simply states that if you can no longer see yourself or the people around you as Cherokees, then the culture has been lost. The prophecy states, however, that there will be a period of regrowth and regeneration, when everything will return back to the way it should be. "The Cherokee view of life and death," states Belt, "is that our physical life on this planet is the first of seven stages of existence. Dying is the process by which

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<sup>114</sup> Strickland, *Fire and the Spirits*, xi.

<sup>115</sup> Marysa Burchett and Ben Haines, "End of the World Prophecies Duped," *The Western Carolina Journalist*, Dec. 12, 2012, <http://www.thewesterncarolinajournalist.com/2012/12/17/end-of-the-world-prophecies-duped> (last accessed Jan 7, 2016).

we transition to the next stage.” Belt suggests that the prophecy is concerned less with the afterlife than with cultural loss: “If we are not living the way that we are supposed to, if we are not who we say we are, then we are something else,” he explains. “If you’re not what you’re supposed to be then people wouldn’t see you. They would see you as something else, but as a Cherokee you wouldn’t exist, even if you were still alive.”

Across nine hundred miles, the Cherokees maintained their position in the world; despite the odds, they continued to hold the world—their world—in balance. The Cherokees’ survival through frontier contact, white ascendancy, tribal dislocation, the struggle for self-government, the American Civil War and Reconstruction, the reestablishment of the Cherokee Nation, its termination, and the establishment of Oklahoma as a state provides an extensive rationalization of the Cherokees’ continued self-sufficiency. It is important to understand the Cherokees’ position in the world in order to make sense of this dramatic history.

### CHAPTER 3

#### THE RUDIMENTS OF *UNTO THESE HILLS* and *THE TRAIL OF TEARS*

*European America holds a mirror and a mask up to the Native American. The tricky mirror is that Other presence that reflects the Euramerican consciousness back at itself, but the side of the mirror turned toward the Native is transparent, letting the Native see not his or her own reflection but the face of the Euramerican beyond the mirror. For the dominant culture, the Euramerican controlling this surveillance, the reflection provides merely a self-recognition that results in a kind of being-for-itself and...an utter absence of certainty of self. The Native, in turn, finds no reflection directed back from the center, no recognition of "being" from that direction.*

*The mask is one realized over centuries through Euramerica's construction of the "Indian" Other. In order to be recognized, and to thus have a voice that is heard by those in control of power, the Native must step into that mask and BE the Indian constructed by white America. Paradoxically, of course, like the mirror the mask merely shows the Euramerican to himself, since the masked Indian arises out of the European consciousness, leaving the Native behind the mask unseen, unrecognized for him/herself.*

– Lewis Owens<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter, I explore the development of the Cherokee Historical Association (CHA) in Cherokee, North Carolina, and the Cherokee National Historical Society (CNHS) in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, and their creation and implementation of outdoor historical dramas. *Unto These Hills* in North Carolina and *The Trail of Tears* in Oklahoma were conceived to

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis Owens, *I Hear the Train: Reflections, Inventions, and Refractions* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 217.



commemorate and preserve the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians' and the Cherokee Nation's cultural and historical legacy. As the dramas were developed, however, focus on the Cherokees' historical memory faded to the background. Initially, the plays catered to Euramerican, rather than Cherokee, audiences. Along with their historical inaccuracies, perpetuation of reductionistic stereotypes, and romanticization of American Indian spirituality, the dramas established a formidable tourism industry. Though the CHA and the CNHS and their projects were born out of good will, they ultimately created a contrived and artificial "folk culture" and ingrained a fallacious image of Cherokee history and culture in the minds of millions of tourists, which created tenacious obstacles for each organization to overcome.

### **And so it Begins**

Between the Stock Market crash in 1929 and the inception of WWII ten years later—the decade popularly known as the Great Depression—the United States entered into its longest period of economic despair. Unemployment skyrocketed, giving rise to poverty; families were ripped apart as mortgages crippled households and fertile farmlands buckled under the strain of human activity. As people shuffled across the United States seeking employment, the American theatre responded in vibrant ways. Though several theatres were forced to close during this demoralizing period, many remained open; and many more were erected across the country in an attempt to provide entertainment to those suffering from the economic collapse. With the Federal Theatre Project (FTP), founded in 1935 under the aegis of the Works Progress Administration (WPA)—the largest offshoot of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal program—the

federal government strived to provide relief to theatre workers across the country.<sup>2</sup> During this time, the American outdoor historical drama was born.

Outdoor historical drama in the United States, a genre originated by Paul Elliot Green, first began in 1937. *The Lost Colony* was first produced by the Roanoke Island Historical Association (RIHA) in Manteo, North Carolina, with the generous support of the WPA.<sup>3</sup> Having been developed by The Carolina Playmakers, a theatre company founded by Frederick Koch at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC), the genre is unique to the South. Following Koch's notion of "folk drama," Green developed his plays based on the people he saw around him, the people with whom he became acquainted, the "folk" whom he observed.<sup>4</sup> "The folk," Green suggests, "are the people whose manners, ethics, religious and philosophical ideals

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<sup>2</sup> For more on The Federal Theatre Project see: Hallie Flanagan, *Arena* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1940); Jane DeHart Mathews, *Federal Theatre, 1935-1939: Plays, Relief, and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015); and Elizabeth A. Osborne, *Staging the People: Community and Identity in the Federal Theatre Project* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> For more information on the FTP's and the WPA's influence on outdoor historical drama see: Angela Sweigart- Gallagher, "The Promise of Democracy Imagining National Community in Paul Green's *The Lost Colony*," *Theatre Symposium* 17 (2009): 97-112.

<sup>4</sup> Koch is best known for his production of "folk drama," which are plays based on "the legends, superstitions, customs, environmental differences, and the vernacular of the common people." Fredrick H Koch, "The Carolina Playmakers," in *An Ideal Theater: Founding Visions for a New American Art*, ed. Todd London (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2013), 13-4.

are more nearly derived from and controlled by the ways of the outside physical world...than by the ways and institutions of men in a specialized society.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, Green found “folk” culture to possess the fundamental qualities of drama.

While focusing on “the folk”—the African American folk in particular—provided Green with a rewarding career in New York, Green felt that his plays on the Broadway circuit were somewhat underappreciated.<sup>6</sup> Green returned to his home state to work on a new type of theatrical project, one that, while still focusing on “the folk,” would resonate with a greater majority of people than with those “who develop their values and ambitions from rubbing shoulders in a crowded city.”<sup>7</sup> This move, Green believed, would allow focus to be placed on the people who held onto the values and morals established along with the United States at the time of the American Revolution. Telling their stories, Green held, would renew all that had been lost in the nation. Those who held onto such tradition were the “denizens” of “the deep woods of Eastern Carolina”—the “race and color and caste” of the “Real South.”<sup>8</sup>

According to Green, the nation’s morals were best preserved in various cultural traditions such as song, dance, music, speech and prayer. Incorporating such traditions into his plays, Green believed he could reawaken the country to what it had lost. Green considered outdoor

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Green, “Drama and the Weather,” in *A Paul Green Reader*, ed. Laurence Avery (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 254.

<sup>6</sup> Green’s *In Abraham’s Bosom* received the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1927.

<sup>7</sup> Green, “Drama and the Weather,” 254.

<sup>8</sup> John H. Roper, *Paul Green: Playwright of the Real South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 80.

historical drama a powerful tool with which to inculcate a national identity in US American culture, and theatre critics and audiences alike praised Green's theatrical ingenuity, championing his resolve to write for "the people," "the folk" of America. As a "poet/priest," to borrow Margaret Bauer's characterization of Green, his primary objective for outdoor historical drama was to interpose various "American" traditions with dramatic tellings of United States history, creating a theatrically splendid representation of "America" and her triumphs. Green believed that bringing these elements together would unify an audience with the theme of the play and eventually engender in such audiences (if not in the country) a national identity: "I think that is what these audiences come to the play for[,] to form some...relationship with their past and their...country's traditions."<sup>9</sup>

When *The Lost Colony*, which details Sir Walter Raleigh's ill-fated colonial establishment on Roanoke Island, first opened its doors, it welcomed an overwhelming crowd of 2,500 spectators; by summer's end, roughly 50,000 people had witnessed the production.<sup>10</sup> The developers decided to make the drama an annual attraction. The success of the play boosted the local economy tremendously, and with the community's enhancement came the birth of outdoor historical drama tourism. In 1938, *The Lost Colony* played to 100,000 tourists.<sup>11</sup> Though the FTP

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<sup>9</sup> William Howard Rough, "(What) The American Public Needs: A 'Theater of the People': An Interview with Paul Green," with notes by NCLR Editor, *North Carolina Literary Review* 18 (2009): 15.

<sup>10</sup> Harry McKown, "July 1937: The Lost Colony," *This Month in North Carolina History*, 1, <http://www.lib.unc.edu/ncc/ref/nchistory/jul2006/index.html> (last accessed Dec 12, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

came to a close shortly after the rise of the RIHA and *The Lost Colony*, the organization and the drama managed to remain in operation due to increased interest in national historical drama. With such fervor and passion for the “American” people, Green’s understanding of outdoor historical drama took hold and quickly became a propagandistic faucet that—once opened—poured across the United States, inundating the American public with the spirit and aspirations that, Green believed, were common to the whole nation.

### ***Unto These Hills***

In response to the success of *The Lost Colony*, communities across the nation wanted dramas of their own to improve their local economies and historical significance. As the economy began to rebound, the second most popular outdoor historical drama was erected in North Carolina: *Unto These Hills*. One of the earliest commentaries on the development of the Cherokee Historical Association (CHA) and *Unto These Hills* comes from George Myers Stephens, a key player in the development of the Western North Carolina Associated Communities (WNCAC).<sup>12</sup> The WNCAC was responsible for developing tourism in western North Carolina to improve the region’s quality of life.<sup>13</sup> One of the organization’s biggest

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<sup>12</sup> George Myers Stephens, “The Beginnings of the Historical Drama ‘Unto These Hills,’” *The North Carolina Historical Review* 28.2 (1951): 212-218.

<sup>13</sup> For more on the WNCAC, see Matthew D. Thompson, “Staging ‘the Drama’: The Continuing Importance of Cultural Tourism in the Gaming Era” (PhD diss., University of North Carolina, 2009), 38-35; as well as George L. Simpson, Harriet L. Herring, and Maurice B. Morrill, *Western North Carolina Associated Communities* (Cherokee: The Cherokee Historical Association, 1956).

accomplishments was in Cherokee, North Carolina. In 1948, the WNCAC established The Cherokee Historical Association (CHA), a non-profit corporation devoted to the preservation of Cherokee culture and history. Stephens reflects on how the Cherokee “refugees who clung tightly as lichens to the cliffs of the Great Smokies” were lucky enough to have found sanctuary in a remote location following Indian Removal, as “history [would bestow] upon them one of its peculiar rewards.”<sup>14</sup> As Stephens explains, with the opening of the Smoky Mountain National Park in 1940 and later the Blue Ridge Parkway, the Cherokees’ land (once again) became prime real estate.<sup>15</sup> The WNCAC believed that developing the tourism industry on the Qualla Boundary would help improve the community’s deficient economy. Thousands of tourists flocked to the Smokies for vacation each year, and they were spending a considerable amount of money while there. These tourists typically stayed in Eastern Tennessee—in either Gatlinburg or Pigeon Forge—and the WNCAC believed it would be beneficial if they could bring some of the tourists’ dollars across the state line.<sup>16</sup> Very few people in North Carolina and in Tennessee knew that the Cherokees still resided in the mountains. Once the community was “rediscovered,” the town and the “Indians” quickly became a cultural attraction—a site and a people to be seen.<sup>17</sup> With

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<sup>14</sup> Stephens, “The Beginnings of the Historical Drama,” 213.

<sup>15</sup> The Smoky Mountains were recognized throughout the late 1920s and 1930s, but the park was not officially dedicated until 1940. National Park Service, “Creating a National Park,” *NPS.gov*, <http://www.nps.gov/grsm/learn/historyculture/stories.htm> (last accessed Feb 12, 2016).

<sup>16</sup> John Finger, “Termination and the Eastern Band of Cherokees,” in *The American Indian: Past and Present*, ed. Roger L. Nichols (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 329.

<sup>17</sup> Stephens, “The Beginnings of the Historical Drama,” 216.

growing Euramerican curiosity, the WNCAC exploited the Cherokees, their community, and their cultural heritage as a money-making opportunity. With this strategy in mind, the WNCAC created the Cherokee Historical Association in Cherokee, North Carolina, to manage the community's tourism operations.

The CHA's program pivoted around two primary objectives: On one hand, the organization wanted to develop, promote, and educate the general public about the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. On the other hand, they wanted to help the Cherokees develop their own economy so that they became a self-sustaining entity in North Carolina. One way the WNCAC and the CHA believed they could do this was by developing a theatrical program that served both causes. According to historian John Finger, however, the organization was "clearly...white-dominated" and geared toward tourism.<sup>18</sup> Only a few tribal representatives served on the CHA's board, and not one on the WNCAC's. In fact, both organizations were often referred to as "boys clubs," akin to popular Country Club systems at the time. Comprised of the state's governor and citizens from outlying western counties, the WNCAC and the CHA were primarily concerned with creating a money-making business. Matthew Thompson, who agrees with Finger, further criticizes the WNCAC and the CHA, describing the organizations as colonial projects designed to bring the Cherokees out of the backwoods of Appalachia and into modern—civilized—society.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Finger, "Termination and the Eastern Band," 336.

<sup>19</sup> Thompson, "Staging 'the Drama'," 47-8; Simpson, Herring, and Morrill, *Western North Carolina*, 33.

Initially, the plan was to create a small, community-focused pageant in Cherokee, North Carolina, to be performed on the Cherokee ball fields. Wallace Umberger notes that Ross Caldwell, a white trader, initiated the idea of the Cherokee pageant in 1941.<sup>20</sup> Caldwell approached Joe Jennings—then the head of the Indian Agency in Cherokee—to inquire what would need to be done to see the project materialize.<sup>21</sup> According to Umberger, Jennings found the project interesting but noted that it would be a big investment and require an enormous financial backing.<sup>22</sup> Without adequate resources, the project was tabled for a few years. Shortly after WWII the project regained interest, and Harry Buchanan, the CHA’s chairman; Percy Ferebee, the organization’s vice-chairman; and the CHA’s Treasurer, Joseph Jennings, took Caldwell’s original idea of a pageant drama and came up with a workable plan.<sup>23</sup> Whereas Caldwell wanted to develop a simple program that would benefit the Cherokees, the WNCAC and the CHA had something bigger in mind.

According to Stephens, the WNCAC and the CHA wanted a production that would essentially promote the great state of North Carolina as being a leading developer of outdoor historical dramas. Stephens, along with Harry Buchanan, a fellow founding member of the WNCAC who had a “career of practical theatre experience,” believed a large-scale drama would

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<sup>20</sup> Wallace Randolph Umberger, Jr., “A History of *Unto These Hills*, 1949-1986” (PhD diss., Tulane University, 1970), 13.

<sup>21</sup> Joe Jennings would eventually become the Treasurer of the Cherokee Historical Association.

<sup>22</sup> Umberger, “A History of *Unto These Hills*,” 13.

<sup>23</sup> For an illuminating historical sketch of this developmental period and for more on Ross Caldwell see: Thompson, “Staging the ‘Drama’,” 52.



be a lucrative investment.<sup>24</sup> Unsure of how to proceed with the project, the CHA contacted Samuel Selden, the director of Paul Green's *The Lost Colony*, for assistance. Selden was also chairman of the Department of Dramatic Arts and the director of the Carolina Playmakers at the University of Chapel Hill. Selden's credentials convinced the WNCAC and the CHA that he could help them develop a program matching *The Lost Colony*, which was the number one tourist attraction along the North Carolina seaboard. Selden, along with Paul Green, had "first-hand knowledge" and understood "the problems involved in...outdoor drama."<sup>25</sup> The WNCAC and the CHA therefore turned the development of the drama over to Selden and those he knew at UNC and *The Lost Colony*.

It is arguable that reaching out to UNC and those involved with *The Lost Colony* was either the greatest move or the biggest mistake the WNCAC and the CHA made. During the CHA's initial consultation with Selden, the director persuaded the organization to reconceive the small pageant as a larger production, matching (if not surpassing) in size and scale *The Lost Colony*. Selden convinced Buchanan that a grand theatrical production would benefit the organization's goal of increasing tourism in the area more than a small pageant drama would, and this decision, they thought, would ultimately help the Cherokees grow and prosper. The

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<sup>24</sup> Stephens, "The Beginnings of the Historical Drama," 214; Buchanan is described as a man who placed "service above self and to whom the word impossible [did] not exist." He is cited as the one who fashioned Caldwell's dream of the Cherokee drama into a reality—and with his "concern for civic and political affairs," the development of Western North Carolina. *Unto These Hills* Souvenir Play Bill, 1966, 17.

<sup>25</sup> Umberger, "A History of *Unto These Hills*," 11.

problem, however, was that the project required more specialization and professionalism than originally imagined. For instance, Selden convinced the CHA that the site for the drama needed to be developed from the ground up. Originally, the planning committee had three locations in mind for their pageant, each being relatively cost effective when it came to establishing a theatrical venue: the old Cherokee Ball Grounds, a place along the ravine above the Cherokee Fairgrounds, and the site of an old nursery on a mountain.<sup>26</sup> Selden did not like these locations, believing that they were inadequate and incapable of supporting a production commensurate to *The Lost Colony*. As is told, the committee then took Selden on a walk through the woods, where they discovered the perfect location for an outdoor drama. Selden writes, “We went along for a while, and then I said, ‘Here is the perfect site.’ It was a hillside—a nice slope, and back of where the stage would be, another hill. ‘That will make a great backdrop, and if the wind blows, it will blow around you; it won’t blow the words away from the audience.’”<sup>27</sup> As soon as the location was secured, the amphitheatre was aptly named the Mountainside Theatre.

The construction of the theatre wasn’t the only thing needed to make the project successful. Selden encouraged the CHA to also employ professionals to help bring the drama to life, as a project of this caliber would need quality artists to make it a success. Trying to emulate *The Lost Colony* as best they could, the CHA contacted Paul Green to see if he would be interested in authoring their script. According to Selden, “Green...could not be interested in the

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<sup>26</sup> Simpson, Herring, and Morrill, *Western North Carolina*, 26.

<sup>27</sup> Umberger, “A History of *Unto These Hills*,” 12-3; Simpson, Herring, and Morrill, *Western North Carolina*, 26. Thompson suggests that this is merely an origin story created by the CHA to promote their program and that it most likely did not happen in this way.

idea for he was...busy on several new projects, nor did he show much enthusiasm for the historical materials suggested to him as the basis for a historical Indian drama.”<sup>28</sup> Selden offered up Kermit Hunter, a graduate student in the playwriting program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Hunter worked with Green as a student and was learning the trade directly from the master. Selden believed Hunter would “be interested undertaking the project, working from historical materials concerning the white man and the Indian.”<sup>29</sup> After a brief period of negotiation, Selden informed the CHA that Hunter desired to work on the project, and he reported that “the script [would] be prepared in collaboration” with the Carolina Playmakers and personnel from *The Lost Colony*, with “Hunter...bear[ing] the principal burden in the writing.”<sup>30</sup> Selden also suggested that Carolina Playmakers’ Harry Davis be selected to direct the play, and that other Playmakers be employed in the role of technical director, costume designer, and lighting designer.<sup>31</sup> Very few members of the EBCI were offered an opportunity to work on the show, though Selden did propose that actors from the Cherokee community be given first consideration before those from “neighboring towns” or professional actors.<sup>32</sup> Very few Cherokee actors, however, graced the Mountainside Theatre during its early years.

In fact, when Umberger attended *Unto These Hills* in 1969, only 42.2% of the cast and 70.6% of the operating staff were tribal members. While the latter figure seems reasonable,

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<sup>28</sup> Simpson, Herring, and Morrill, *Western North Carolina*, 25.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>30</sup> Samuel Selden to Ross Caldwell, Dec 23, 1947.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*; Simpson, Herring, and Morrill, *Western North Carolina*, 26-7.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

Umberger notes that the majority of Cherokees worked in the information booth, in the parking lot, and in the concession stand, and that only two tribal members were a part of the production staff. Moreover, while the cast appears inclusive of Cherokee actors, only ten Cherokee actors appeared in the “24 title roles,” and only two had speaking parts.<sup>33</sup>

From the beginning, it was understood that tribal members would be trained to take over the theatrical program. Umberger states that Percy Ferebee suggested this focus as early as 1946, when he first proposed that a “special committee,” including the EBCI’s Principal Chief and Ross Caldwell, be made to represent the Cherokee tribe.<sup>34</sup> The CHA’s inclusion of the Cherokee community, however, fell by the wayside once the organization contracted the artists from UNC and *The Lost Colony*. The CHA’s decision to hire professionals to run the theatrical program, rather than tribal members, rests on several factors—the most obvious reason (according to the CHC) was that the Cherokees lacked specialization in the art form. The problem wasn’t that Cherokees lacked the ability to do the job professionally, though. I propose it was that the art form had already been defined and established, and certain rules had become conventionalized.

What was originally deemed a small community pageant quickly became a professional enterprise, and with the cost of professionalism, the CHA had to generate the funding to match the established industry. In sum, the CHA’s theatrical operation cost over \$100,000 dollars to complete. At the time of construction, the organization had only managed to secure \$19,750 dollars in “cash donations from each of the eleven counties.”<sup>35</sup> The organization did not acquire

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>35</sup> Simpson, Herring, and Morrill, *Western North Carolina*, 28.

the necessary funding to open the drama, so they had to push the opening of the play from 1949 to the summer of 1950. With this extra time, the CHA managed to secure an additional \$29,286 dollars, \$5,000 of which came from the EBCI. In total, the CHA collected \$84,036 dollars but were still short of their goal. In a last effort to acquire the remaining \$35,000 needed to bring the drama to life, Buchanan went to the state's legislature to seek help. His proposal to the Appropriations Committee of the House passed unanimously, and he secured from them the remaining money needed to "assure the success of the drama."<sup>36</sup>

Although Buchanan championed the Cherokees' cause, he often surrendered to the professionals. Buchanan's service to the Cherokee community clashed with Hunter's understanding of the drama and its importance: whereas Buchanan was set on making sure the drama benefited the Cherokee community in every way, Hunter's correspondence reveals a different agenda:

You [Buchanan] saw UNTO THESE HILLS as a means of bringing people into Western N.C. and helping the Cherokee, but I have seen it from the start as a means of re-stating some of the fundamental truths of human existence: that there is a God, that He moves in the lives of men, and that the Christian ideals on which this nation is founded need to be given a new birth and a new emphasis in our time.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Harry E. Buchanan, "A Community Effort," in *Unto These Hills* Souvenir Play Bill (1966): 19.

<sup>37</sup> Kermit Hunter to Harry Buchanan, no date.

Whereas Buchanan wanted an educational drama, as it was the organization's mission to provide educational services, Hunter saw the production differently. The drama had to be entertaining, and it had to speak to a contemporary, Christian audience. To make this happen, Hunter found ways to write about Cherokee-Euramerican history in a way that would perpetuate this goal. The most obvious method he used was to diminish the Cherokees' traditional point of view by replacing it with a Christian perspective.

*Unto These Hills* is comprised of two acts: Act One originally contained nine individual scenes and Act Two, five. The time of the drama shifts from the mid-sixteenth century to the early part of the nineteenth, moving between the Smoky Mountains, Washington, D.C., Georgia, and Alabama. The play opens with the voice of the Narrator who introduces the audience to the Cherokees' idyllic environment and their "Great Spirit" that lives "where the velvet sunlight poured through the cool ravines of the Oconaluftee River."<sup>38</sup> After a brisk "primitive" dance, Hernando de Soto and his men enter, signaling the arrival of Europeans. Just as quickly as de Soto enters, we are transported two hundred and fifty years into the future. It is now the middle of October in 1818, the year, according to Hunter, the Cherokees developed their national identity. We are in the company of Junaluska and Tecumseh. Tecumseh (Shawnee) was a tribal confederacy leader in the early 1800s. He and his brother advocated a united tribal confederacy, a return to ancestral lifestyles, and the rejection of colonial America. Junaluska was a chief who would later fight alongside Andrew Jackson in the battle of Horseshoe Bend and ultimately save Jackson's life. Other characters in this scene include Nunnahitsunega (White Path), Koowisguwi (John Ross), Sequoyah (George Gist/Guess), Yonaguska (Drowning Bear), and a white

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<sup>38</sup> Kermit Hunter, *Unto These Hills* (Asheville: The University of North Carolina Press, 1950), 5.

missionary. Tecumseh has come to the Cherokees to persuade them to join the confederacy and to fight against the colonial Americans. Over the course of their meeting, the Cherokees discuss the advantages and disadvantages of war. By the end of the meeting, the Cherokees decide to refrain from joining the confederacy, choosing instead to remain loyal to their “white brothers” (21). To further perpetuate the Cherokees’ allegiance to the Euramericans, Hunter provides a snippet of the Battle of Horseshoe Bend, wherein Junaluska saves Jackson’s life. As this battle scene comes to a close, we move to a domestic pastoral scene where Wilani and Mrs. Perkins await the return of their husbands from war. As they wait, they discuss the proper role of women in Cherokee-Euramerican society. Wilani is the wife of Tsali, who becomes the main character later in the play. Mrs. Perkins is a fictitious character who is included in the drama to symbolize the many good Euramerican women who helped the Cherokees. When the men finally return, the community celebrates their victory with a dance. The Eagle Dance, which was traditionally performed after military victories, sweeps across the stage in balletic fashion. Following the dance, we quickly learn that gold has been discovered in the mountains, which brings prospectors out of the woodwork. Soon after, the state of Georgia tries to displace the Cherokees in attempt to usurp their lands as their own.

The year is now 1835, and the Cherokee leaders have gathered again to discuss the character of the Euramericans. John Ross encourages the Cherokees to hold onto their homelands, while Junaluska declares he will fight in Washington, D.C., for the Cherokees’ right to live freely. Junaluska believes that since he saved Jackson’s life during the Battle of Horseshoe Bend, the President will help the Cherokees maintain control of their lands. As we see in the following scene, however, this is not the case. Reverend John F. Schermerhorn has gathered a group of Cherokee men together to sign the 1835 Treaty of New Echota, which

legalized the removal of the Cherokees from their homelands. Because the ratification of the treaty was illegal, Junaluska and John Ross travel to Washington to plead with Andrew Jackson to nullify the treaty. Jackson, however, refrains from helping the Cherokees reclaim the title to their lands. Returning to the Smoky Mountains, we see the Cherokees' world slowly crumble. Wilani and Mrs. Perkins return at the end of the act to prepare the wedding of Nundayeli, the daughter of Tsali and Wilani, and Suyeta, the son of Drowning Bear. Before Nundayeli and Suyeta are married, however, Major Davis of the United States Army arrives to escort the Cherokees to the stockades in Chattanooga, Tennessee, where they are to await their removal to Indian Territory.<sup>39</sup>

At the top of Act Two, we are transported to the stockades in which the Cherokees are now imprisoned. A Lieutenant is seen paying out the negotiated monies promised to the Cherokees for their removal. Two constables, however, are collecting the money and issuing warrants, as the Cherokees have supposedly failed to pay proper rent for the three years they occupied Euramerican lands. Major Davis intervenes, banishing the crooked constables from the scene. Davis soon discovers that a few Cherokees have evaded the stockades and are hiding out in the mountains. Following orders, Davis declares that anyone who is caught evading the removal is to be shot on sight. It is at this point that Hunter turns his dramatic narrative to focus on the character of Tsali and those Cherokees who hid out in the mountains of North Carolina.

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<sup>39</sup> Hunter refers to Indian Territory as Oklahoma throughout the drama despite the fact that Oklahoma was not a recognized state at this time. Hunter does this so as not to confuse his audiences.



During this scene, a group of refugees enter, led by a drunken soldier. Among them are Tsali and Wilani. Exhausted from carrying her belongings, Wilani stumbles and drops the pack she is carrying on the ground. The drunken soldier accosts Wilani, pushing her to the ground. In a fit of rage, the soldier brings the butt of his rifle down over Wilani's head and kills her. Tsali, in retaliation, picks up a rock and bashes it over the soldier's head. Realizing what he has done, Tsali flees into the surrounding mountains. Because Tsali has killed an American soldier he must, in turn, be put to death. Davis orders Drowning Bear and William Thomas to follow after Tsali to convince him and his sons to surrender. In the following scene, we find Tsali hiding in a cave. Drowning Bear and Thomas persuade Tsali to turn himself in, declaring that the rest of the Cherokees will be allowed to reside in their homelands for his sacrifice. Returning to Major Davis with Tsali in tow, the soldiers prepare for Tsali's execution. As last words, Tsali asks his people to sing "Amazing Grace," and to remember him as having sacrificed himself so that his people might live.

The final two scenes of Act Two serve to reconcile the plot's loose ends. We are once again in Washington, D.C. Drowning Bear, Thomas, and Daniel Webster have gathered to entreat President William Henry Harrison to provide the Cherokees in the east with a reservation and American citizenship, to which Harrison—after some deliberation—agrees.<sup>40</sup> In the final

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<sup>40</sup> Hunter locates this scene in the spring of 1841. After removal, Thomas acquired tracts of land, which he purchased for the Cherokees. The Cherokees in the East did not have the right to own and control lands until 1866, however; and it wasn't until 1876 that their lands were formally recognized. Moreover, the Cherokees in North Carolina had already secured their citizenship

scene, we see the birth of a new generation of Cherokees. Nundayeli and Suyeta are expecting the arrival of their son, which signifies the living spirit of Tsali. In the final moments of the play, Major Davis arrives to inform the Cherokees that they now have title to their own lands. As the Narrator concludes, this was always the “dream of the Cherokee,” the dream “of America” (99).

Hunter’s drama is little more than a fanciful fabrication of historical events. Not only does Hunter blend unrelated historical narratives together, he brings historical figures back from the dead and transplants them into future events to provide a sense of dramatic continuity. Moreover, the playwright moves events from their proper place to construct a story that is (supposedly) specific to the Cherokee of North Carolina. The majority of events included in the drama did not take place in North Carolina, but in Georgia; nor are the events indicative of the EBCI’s history, but rather the Cherokee Nation’s. While Hunter defended his mythologizing of history, claiming that he was more concerned with the “spirit of history” than actual events, he fell short of capturing the essence of this time period. The portrayal of events in this manner not only suggests that the Cherokees were without history, it also justifies Euramerican intrusions. Only when Euramericans intervene are the Cherokees considered a political entity. Skewing history in this way also allowed Hunter to utilize stereotypical American Indian identity constructions in order to reach Euramerican audiences. When coupled with western literary tropes, the portrayal of stereotypes and inaccurate historical narratives provides the opportunity to write a romantic understanding of the American spirit.

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through treaty negotiations in 1817/1819. Hunter’s presentation here is therefore inaccurate. To include Drowning Bear in the scene is anachronistic as well, as the leader died in 1839.

Take, for example, the opening scene of *Unto These Hills*. The year is 1540; the setting, a pastoral Cherokee village nestled alongside the Oconaluftee River. Hunter sets the opening of his scene in this year as this is when the Cherokees enter the written record. While it is not likely that de Soto visited what is now known as Cherokee, North Carolina, the explorer's records indicate that he visited nearby locations. A "majestic, spirited, triumphant" musical prelude fills the amphitheatre "expressing the vast, boundless freedom of the open world" (5). The music subsides as the transcendent, Godlike narrator describes how, "in the beginning...plains and valleys of green grass—forests of rich oak, and poplar, and pine" filled the landscape and the mountains pushed "their smooth ancient peaks against the sky." As the narrator continues his romantic homily, unfolding how the Cherokees basked in various freedoms and in peace, several Cherokees enter the stage, including a chief dressed in a feathered cape and headdress and several dancers dressed in loincloths and moccasins. The dancers genuflect before their chief, "their faces against the ground." They rise, in a ritualized manner, "lifting their arms and gazing upward" to the "Great Spirit—that divine force which stirred the hearts of all men, and which led them to express, in primitive ecstasy, their deep kinship with the eternal God." The narrator then, as though reading from ancient Cherokee scripture, recites a ceremonial prayer: "The black bear and the gray foxes know the earth is wide / My brother the fox spoke and said, / 'Now is the time of sun in the green corn; / Behold and see the wideness of the earth! / Stand by cool water and say to the white clouds: / You are my strength; the power is yours, O heavens!'" The music returns, accompanying "a spirited Indian dance." The dancers leap across the stage in "sweeping and vivid" movement. As the routine reaches its climax, the rest of the Cherokee community enters the playing space, applauding the spectacle they have just seen. "The mood is gay" and festive. Suddenly, the chief lifts his arms to the sky. In response, the community lift their arms

toward the chief. The ceremony is complete. Cherokees then flood the stage from every direction, carrying props indicative of Cherokee or “Indian” paraphernalia: food stuff, baskets, and handiwork for the women; spears, bows and arrows, and blowguns for the men. The scene “is of substance and bounty.” This is how the Cherokees lived before the arrival of Europeans: “In the beginning was the land. The Red Man possessed it lovingly. He possessed it with gentleness and humility, with peace.”

This opening sequence introduces the audience to several supposed Cherokee traditions: The Cherokees lived in harmony with the land; lived in boundless freedom and in peace; constantly worshiped the Great Spirit; performed elaborate dances; and vowed fealty to their chief. Included in Hunter’s narration are cultural objects, such as corn; ceremonial traditions, such as the Green Corn ceremony; and prayer. Each of these aspects is glossed or manipulated in the play in such a way that it only resembles Euramericans’ imagination of ancient Cherokee culture. To borrow from Aimé Césaire, the Cherokees’ traditions, along with their beliefs, and customs have become signs or signals of the American Indian, stylistically transformed through a process of “thingification.”<sup>41</sup> Hunter leaves his audience with a spectacular visual impression of traditional Cherokee culture, rather than a truthful representation of their ancient customs and traditions.

Hunter’s process of “thingification” is most visible in his stage directions and in the narration of the ceremony. If Hunter is portraying the festivities surrounding the Green Corn ceremony here, he degrades the actual ceremony by turning it into a bizarre attraction. The Green Corn ceremony, according to Theda Perdue, is a community ceremony centered on renewal, not

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<sup>41</sup> Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 20-25.

a fanciful dance to entertain a chief, let alone an audience. “It was emblematic of community harmony,” Perdue explains:

When everything was in order, the warriors and “beloved women” retired to the square ground where they fasted for two nights and one day.... During the fast, the women brewed and served warriors sacred medicine that acted as an emetic, purging their bodies of spiritual as well as physical pollution. At the end of the fast, the women brought samples of the new crop to the square ground and washed common utensils. On a freshly swept hearth, the community’s spiritual leader kindled a new fire and placed in the fire corn given to him by a beloved woman. All those seeking forgiveness could now come forward without fear of retaliation or reprisal. The medicine men called all the women to the fire, spoke to them about their obligations, and gave them new fire to take to their homes. When the women returned to the square ground, everyone joined together in dancing and singing.... Finally, they painted themselves in a white clay symbolizing peace and prosperity and ritually bathed in the river.<sup>42</sup>

In addition to celebrating new crops and their harvest, the ceremony “became the occasion for the forgiveness of debts, grudges, adultery, and all crimes except murder.”<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, the focus on the chief, as if he were a monarch, is an exercise in creative license. Hunter’s attention to the chief relies upon archaic notions of American Indian governance, leading people to believe

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<sup>42</sup> Theda Perdue, *Cherokee Women: Gender and Culture Change, 1700-1835* (Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 25-6.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

that the chief had the ultimate power and was the only connection to the divine, much like the Catholic Pope today. Cherokee governance was balanced with two principal chiefs, a war chief and a peace chief.<sup>44</sup> The war chief would preside over council during times of conflict and the peace chief during periods of amity. The Green Corn ceremony took place when the Cherokee community was not at war. From Perdue's description, it is also understood that chiefs had minor responsibilities when it came to ceremonial practices. Therefore, channeling praise through the chief up to the Great Spirit is inappropriate, as a "spiritual leader" would manage the community's welfare, not a chief.

As Christian Moe, Scott Parker, and George McCalmon note in their monograph on outdoor historical drama, playwrights "begin with a fabric of facts or legendary happenings currently accepted as factual" and it is the playwright's job to "embody...an idea or theme" and "arouse in the audience a feeling that it is reliving the past (or...experiencing that history of the immediate present)."<sup>45</sup> Hunter believed that drama should allow the present to speak too.<sup>46</sup> Hunter's understanding of the past and present, however, differ greatly from the Cherokees' understanding. In fact, Hunter's understanding of the past and its effect on Cherokees today has little to do with the actual Cherokees, focusing instead on the development of the United States as a morally unified nation.

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<sup>44</sup> Rennard Strickland, *Fire and the Spirits*, 24.

<sup>45</sup> Christian Moe, Scott Parker, and George McCalmon, *Creating Historical Drama: A Guide for Communities, Theatre Groups, and Playwrights* (Carbondale: South Illinois University Press, 2005), 3.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

From the beginning, Kermit Hunter manipulated the CHA to see the future of the drama his way. In response to Hunter's initial draft, the Cherokee community criticized the drama's lack of historical accuracy. Hunter defended his writing by stating that "a strictly accurate drama probably would not be much of a drama at all," claiming that, according to his informants, "the Indians up there probably never did dress up, never did use drums, never had any musical instruments to speak of, had only very dull music and still more neutral dances, and left most of the fighting for their rights to their white friends."<sup>47</sup> Hunter argued that if what he was told was true, that the "actual Indian material [was] not very exciting," which is why he "felt impelled to do some adopting [sic]."<sup>48</sup>

Contrary to Hunter's dramatic license, Jason Edward Black states that it is imperative that Native understandings be incorporated into Euramerican history and that Native voices should never be tokenized as being merely present, but as having significantly shaped and influenced Euramerican society. According to Black, the Native voice "moves beyond sheer incidence" toward agency with the ability to exact change—to make a difference.<sup>49</sup> Black suggests that

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<sup>47</sup> Samuel Seldon to Harry Buchanan, Aug 2, 1949.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Jason Edward Black, "Memories of the Alabama Creek War, 1813–1814: U.S. Governmental and Native Identities at the Horseshoe Bend National Military Parks," *American Indian Quarterly* 33.2 (2009): 207; see also Linda M. Clemmons, "We Will Talk of Nothing Else—Dakota Interpretations of the Treaty of 1837," *Great Plains Quarterly* 25 (2005): 174; Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs Identity?" in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and

recognizing this fact “begins a process of decolonization, whether American Indians in the nineteenth century were successful in their resistance by Western standards or not.”

Embellishing historical narratives for the sake of entertainment, therefore, is not an acceptable excuse. Nowhere in the drama is Hunter’s adaptive practice more visible than in the Cherokees’ council meeting with Tecumseh.

In this scene, Hunter has the Narrator introduce the “Shooting Star of the Shawnee” as a tyrant “shouting in words of flame” his detestation of Euramericans (13). As the council commences, Tecumseh shares with the gathered men his plan to quash the Americans. Driving a tomahawk into a tree stump, Tecumseh declares that no white men shall cross Indian borders, else they wish to die (14). Despite Tecumseh’s call for confederation, the Cherokee leaders decide to remain loyal to their “white brothers.” Sequoyah, who Hunter depicts as a Christian sage amongst the Cherokees—“a Christian, like all of us”—tells Tecumseh that the Cherokees do not have the weapons to fight the Americans; that fighting will not protect the “Red Man’s” lands; and that the Cherokees have long since abandoned their heathenish ways and have learned to live in “warm houses...plant big fields of corn and potatoes” and “go to church and worship a Christian God” (17-8). Bewildered, Tecumseh declares that Sequoyah is trying to trick his people and is scared of the white man. Sequoyah, however, reassures the council that he is not fearful of the Euramericans, but of red men like Tecumseh. According to Sequoyah, the Cherokees are no longer “Red Men” but are “Americans,” and because they are like their “white brothers” they must, like “good men...labor for peace” (20).

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Paul du Guy (London: Sage Press, 1996), 2; Sonya Atalay, “No Sense of the Struggle: Creating a Context for Survivance at the NMAI,” *American Indian Quarterly* 30.3-4 (2006): 601.



Aside from the council meeting itself, this scene is fiction. The Cherokees did not hold council with Tecumseh. As Thurman Wilkins observes, the key figures at the council would have been Muscogees, with a select few Cherokees in attendance.<sup>50</sup> In fact, Major Ridge led a small delegation of Cherokee men to hear Tecumseh speak at the Muscogees' meeting in Tukabatchee (one of the Muscogees' mother towns). Sequoyah would not have been at this council meeting, and it is unlikely that John Ross and the others present in the scene would have been in attendance either (or even aware of one another's existence). Moreover, the way Hunter portrays Tecumseh as a warmonger and Sequoyah as a peaceful Christian is unfitting based on historical records.

As Wilkins notes, Tecumseh did not deliver a violent speech to the council but rather a wise and peaceful warning for all Natives to band together and to resist Euramerican advances:

The great burden of his talk was of his conversations with the Great Spirit—as well as the revelations his brother Tenskwatawa the Prophet had received—about how the Indians should manage their affairs. The principal message Tecumseh preached was veiled behind his talk of peace. In essence it was a call to reaction, a plea to return to the Indians' ancient ways. Only then, and only after the Indian Tribes have been welded into an effective confederacy, would they be able to resist the whites with any hope of success.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Thurman Wilkins, *Cherokee Tragedy: The Ridge Family and the Decimation of a People* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), 54.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

Wilkins adds that historical narratives tend to position or represent Tecumseh as war hungry instead of cautious and peaceful, and that it was actually Tecumseh's brother, Tenskwatawa, who "led the Shawnees into battle."<sup>52</sup> In addition, it was Major Ridge who informed Tecumseh that the Cherokees would not take part in his confederacy, not Sequoyah. Ridge informed Tecumseh that if he brought his brother's messages to the Cherokees, then he would personally kill him himself.<sup>53</sup> An advocate of Euramerican civilization, Ridge did not want anything interfering with the Cherokees' negotiations with Euramericans. If the Cherokees sided with Tecumseh, all of their hard work would have been rendered ineffective, which would certainly have enticed the Euramerican government to remove the Cherokees from their homelands. As Michelene Pesantubbee states, the Cherokees were already "becoming factionalized into assimilationists and conservatives, Christians and traditionalists, mixed-bloods and full-bloods."<sup>54</sup> Tecumseh's message for Natives to rid themselves of all American influences and to return to their sacred ways would only have torn the Cherokees further apart, thus quickening their removal.

Despite Ridge's wishes, however, Tecumseh's messages did reach the Cherokees. Following Ridge's warning and the councils' dismissal of the prophet's messages, Tecumseh declared that when he returned to the North, he would stomp his foot on the ground and create an earthquake that would knock down the homes of those who did not believe in his message.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>54</sup> Michelene E. Pesantubbee, "When the Earth Shakes: The Cherokee Prophecies of 1811-12," *American Indian Quarterly* 17.3 (1993): 305.

<sup>55</sup> Wilkins, *Cherokee Tragedy*, 55.

Coincidentally, an earthquake struck Cherokee territory in 1811, leading many Cherokees to question whether Tecumseh's prophecy was in fact true.<sup>56</sup> Pesantubbee notes that the Cherokees were already in an active period of revitalization at this time and that they had prophecies of their own that precede Tecumseh's visit. Coupled with the earthquake, which many believed was a result of Tecumseh's anger, many Cherokees began to regard Euramericans with skepticism and shun their religion, their ways of living, and return to their traditional ways. Major Ridge even doubted his faith in the Euramericans. Others, however, were unmoved.

Hunter portrays Sequoyah, like Tecumseh, in a misleading light in this scene. Whereas Ridge was a Christian and an advocate of Euramerican allegiances, Sequoyah was neither.<sup>57</sup> Depicting all of the Cherokee men as Christians was Hunter's method to distinguish the civilized Cherokees from the heathenish "Indians." Sequoyah, however, was not appreciative of Euramerican religion. Moreover, while noted as a politically significant figure primarily for his invention of the syllabary, the majority of Sequoyah's life was spent in seclusion.<sup>58</sup> In fact, Sequoyah completed the syllabary outside of North Carolina, only returning to teach the written

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<sup>56</sup> Pesantubbee, "When the Earth Shakes," 311.

<sup>57</sup> Mooney, *Myths*, 109; William G. McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renascence in the New Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 350-65; John B. Davis, "The Life and Work of Sequoyah," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 8.2 (1930): 149-80; Grant Forman, *Sequoyah* (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1938); Traveller Bird, *Tell Them They Lie: The Sequoyah Myth* (Los Angeles: Westernlore Publishers, 1971); Susan Kalter, "'America's Histories' Revisited: The Case of Tell Them They Lie," *American Indian Quarterly* 25.3 (2001): 329-51.

<sup>58</sup> Forman, *Sequoyah*, 20-1.

language once it was complete.<sup>59</sup> In addition, whereas Hunter contrives Sequoyah as a proponent for Euramerican civilization, Sequoyah actually resisted Euramerican ways of living, the syllabary being a tool with which the Cherokees could finally demonstrate their autonomy.

Hunter writes Sequoyah's character this way to set up the notion that the Cherokees, unlike the majority of Natives in the United States, were fulfilling the Euramericans' civilization program—a sentiment that is fully realized by the end of the drama when the Narrator declares that “at last Sequoyah's dream was coming true. His people were the friends of their white neighbors” (93). Indeed, as the play progresses, we see the Cherokees slowly evolve into civilized people who finally recognize that the American dream is in fact the Cherokees' dream. For instance, in the play's denouement, Drowning Bear, having just informed Harrison that the “only answer” to ensure the safety of the Cherokees “is to make the Cherokee—all Indians—American citizens,” declares: “The day of the Red Man is passing. Sequoyah knew it thirty years ago. Junaluska told us that before he went to the West. Now Drowning Bear can see it too. All we ask is to stay in North Carolina, those who are left” (91). In these concluding remarks, Hunter brings the vanishing Indian narrative into full focus, which works to reassure Euramerican audiences that despite the Cherokees' troubles, they are a better people now because they are American.

As is evident, Hunter selected events from Cherokee history that were primarily indicative of Euramerican discovery, invasion, and expansion. Though these events are somewhat pertinent to Cherokee history, Hunter repositions these events to align them more closely with Euramerican understandings of *their* national historical memory. For instance, in

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

placing the Battle of Horseshoe Bend directly after the council scene, Hunter aligns his narrative with Euramerican expectations and sympathies. The Battle of Horseshoe Bend (1812), which took place in Mississippi Territory (present day Alabama), was a battle between the United States and the Red Sticks, a traditionalist faction of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation. The Red Sticks, like many American Indians, opposed the United States' westward expansion. Hunter includes this battle in his drama for several reasons, mainly to highlight that the Cherokees who participated in the battle (roughly 500-600 Cherokee warriors) were betrayed by Andrew Jackson, who was serving as General in the Tennessee Militia at the time. In the drama, Junaluska saves Jackson's life.<sup>60</sup> In thanks, Jackson tells Junaluska that because of his heroic action the Cherokees would always be considered friends. Jackson's appreciation here serves to foreshadow his betrayal (Indian Removal) later in the play. Aside from this setup, however, the battle scene is staged for no other reason than spectacular effect.

I argue that the inclusion of this battle also works to instill an ideology in the minds of Euramerican audiences—that the Cherokees thoroughly believed in the United States' civilization of American Indians. While the Cherokees did participate in the battle, they did so for different reasons. The Cherokees held land disputes with the Creek for several years. While siding with the United States was a political move, designed to keep the Nation in good standing with their white neighbors, it was also a maneuver to decimate their enemies. Like the Muscogees, the Cherokees did not want Euramericans invading their territory. Yet Hunter depicts the Cherokees as siding with the United States and their efforts for westward expansion.

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<sup>60</sup> This is a story that has been passed down. There are no records that suggest Junaluska actually saved Jackson's life, especially in this manner.

Hunter does not provide sufficient reason for the Cherokees' involvement in the battle, nor does he complicate the reasons why the Muscogees obstructed the United States' Manifest Destiny. Instead, Hunter depicts the Cherokees as servile and the Muscogees as murderous, bloodthirsty savages. We see in this scene a character construction similar to the scene prior: Sequoyah equals in spirit Junaluska, and Tecumseh equals the heathenish Muscogees. To suggest otherwise, to represent the Cherokees and the Muscogees as having ulterior motives, complicates the "spirit of America" Hunter spins for his audiences.

Distorting history on stage is not the only way Hunter caters to the Euramerican audience. Hunter weaves outside-view predicates into his characters so that they comply with Euramerican expectations. For instance, in a letter to Samuel Seldon, Hunter describes a few of the changes he had to make to certain characters in order for the play to be accessible:

I am adding a little comedy in spots, rather than try to create one continuous comedy character—which I feel may be better than to imitate *The Lost Colony*. I hope to make Drowning Bear into the Big, clumsy, good-hearted soul who is trying desperately in his crude way to do *a noble thing*, etc. I may have to change [Sam] Houston to Davy Crockett to satisfy the historical side, but that will not affect the play.<sup>61</sup>

Hunter's description of Drowning Bear here relies on archaic and stereotypical considerations of American Indians. Drowning Bear, who is a real historical figure, is inaccurately portrayed in *Unto These Hills*; his character is not based on his actual personage, but rather a romantic conception of him. While Hunter feels the need to alter Sam Houston and Davy Crockett to

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<sup>61</sup> Kermit Hunter to Samuel Seldon, no date, emphasis added.

“satisfy the historical side,” he feels free to distort Drowning Bear’s character as no one knows who he is.<sup>62</sup> Though Houston and Crockett were involved in the Creek War, only Houston was involved in the Battle of Horseshoe Bend with Jackson.<sup>63</sup> Crockett was under the direction of General John Coffee and dispatched to raze a different Creek town. As Thompson articulates, Houston and Crockett are only mentioned in the drama because they are names with which tourists will identify and sympathize.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, as Thompson also points out, the Cherokee men present in the battle would not have been involved in the war, as Major Ridge was in charge of the Cherokee battalion.<sup>65</sup> The inclusion of Euramerican men in the scene, therefore, adheres to Hunter’s understanding of historical accuracy, while his manipulation of Cherokee characters is solely for dramatic effect.

Hunter contends that it is harder to write historically significant “American” heroes than American Indian characters because “everyone knows who the American heroes are.”<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Crockett preferred the name “David.” The use of “Davy” was a posthumous moniker used to celebrate his mythic stature and was perpetuated by the popular song “The Ballad of Davy Crockett” written by Thomas W. Blackburn and composed by George Bruns for none other than Walt Disney in 1954.

<sup>63</sup> For more on Houston’s involvement in the Battle of Horseshoe Bend and with the Cherokees in general see: Col. James F. Corn, “Sam Houston: The Raven,” *Journal of Cherokee Studies* 6.1 (1981): 34-49.

<sup>64</sup> Thompson, “Staging ‘the Drama’,” 131-3.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Kermit Hunter to George Stevens, Jul 23, 1949

Interestingly enough, *Unto These Hills* was criticized by Euramerican audiences for its mistreatment of “American” heroes, in particular the portrayal of Andrew Jackson. According to the governor of Tennessee, the portrayal of Jackson needed to be altered in the play because it made the president look as though he was a travesty in American history.<sup>67</sup> Hunter replied to the governor and to other critics stating that he was writing a creative drama, not a history lesson, and that “the character of Andrew Jackson happened to be viewed from the standpoint of the Indians” rather than the “romanticized, doctored-up patriotic version given to American schoolboys.”<sup>68</sup> In Hunter’s estimation, Jackson had to be rendered a buffoon because the Cherokees detested the man. This perspective, however, is poorly manifested on stage; the only aspect of buffoonery is portrayed in the Battle of Horseshoe Bend as Jackson hobbles around the stage with a missing boot.<sup>69</sup> In effect, the misplaced boot serves as a distraction, and it is only because of this distraction that the Creeks are able to blindside the leader.

When it comes to his Cherokee characters, Hunter does not ever appear to defend his choices. This is most likely because Hunter viewed American heroes as distinct, individual figures and American Indians as being one in the same. After all, as Hunter states, “It is important to remember that there is a vast Cherokee history in Oklahoma and Texas, as well as early Virginia, and the name Cherokee has been batted around for years in connection with

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Kermit Hunter, quoted in “Some Aspects of Outdoor Historical Drama, With Special Reference to ‘Unto These Hills,’” *The East Tennessee Historical Society Publication*, 1954: 6.

<sup>69</sup> Jackson removes his boot at the top of the scene in order to extricate a nail stuck in the sole of his shoe.



*everything Indian.*”<sup>70</sup> It seems that because Euramericans recognize the Cherokees as being synonymous with all American Indians—all 500+ indigenous tribes—that they know “everything Indian” and it is, therefore, okay to fabricate their characterizations. In fact, when choosing a title for the outdoor drama, Hunter insisted that *Sunrise Drums* “had more punch, more Indian character (perhaps not Cherokee), and more tourist attraction.”<sup>71</sup>

For Hunter, American history revolved around the motives of powerful men. Though Cherokee men were responsible for the shaping of the Nation, Hunter located them in the shadow of Euramerican leaders, as if the Cherokees were unable to make decisions for themselves. To showcase the Cherokees as being politically motivated would have made the drama distressing for audiences, as audiences would have seen how Euramericans robbed the Cherokees of their voice. The focus on Euramerican agency, rather than the Cherokees’, is also exemplified in Hunter’s characterization of Cherokee women. When Cherokee women are shown on stage, they are always rendered emblematic of Euramerican cultural and societal standards, and their presence does not help move the plot forward. Rather, they function as a type of garnish to the drama, transmitting value laden codes that are indicative of male hegemony and male expectation.

For instance, following the Battle of Horseshoe Bend, we are introduced to one of the pastoral scenes in which women are primarily located. As the lights come up, we see Wilani who is perched upon a boulder with her baby, Talara, in her arms. Wilani is weaving a hunting basket as a gift to her husband, which she plans to give to him when he returns from the war. With

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<sup>70</sup> Kermit Hunter to George Stevens, Jul 23, 1949, emphasis added.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

Wilani is Mrs. Perkins, a pioneer woman, who serves as a type of mentor to Wilani. Through their dialogue, we learn that Wilani is fearful that her husband will not survive the war. Mrs. Perkins, in a playful manner, consoles Wilani, assuring her of his safe return. This scene conjures up notions of familial life and front loads “traditional” values, hopes, and aspirations that emanate most profoundly during periods of conflict. Wilani tells Mrs. Perkins that Tsali wants many sons. Mrs. Perkins, referring to her own husband, tells Wilani that all men do, and that it is their fault that they do not have any sons yet because they are always preoccupied with war or farming: “Like I tell ’im [George Perkins]—if he wouldn’t spend so much time in that cornfield” (29). Just as this conversation comes to a close, Tsali, who has survived the war, appears through a clearing in the woods. Relieved, Wilani gives him the gift she has made him. Tsali informs the two women that Drowning Bear’s son “will not come back,” and Mrs. Perkins leaves the scene to console Drowning Bear, while the lights fade out on Wilani and Tsali in embrace.

Until this scene, female characters have not been given significant space in the drama, and these archetypal female characters carry little substance when compared to their male counterparts. Wilani and Mrs. Perkins are housewives, patiently adhering to the societal mandates prescribed by the white male patriarchy of the time. While such depictions are indicative of Euramerican customs, Hunter fails to render Cherokee women appropriately. Trivializing the significance of Wilani’s role, Hunter renders her in a weak position rather than portraying her as a complex and significant individual who balances her husband’s power. Given Wilani’s submissiveness, it seems as though she has tossed her traditions aside in favor of Euramerican ways of living.

When the audience sees Wilani worrying about the safety of her husband while simultaneously crafting him a basket and caring for his child, they know she is performing

according to the societal roles set forth by men regarding a woman's responsibility to their husbands. While Hunter refrains from rendering his female characters as objects of desire in this scene, aside from when Mrs. Perkins refers to Wilani's child as "beautiful...a real *princess*" [emphasis added], the playwright does manage to code the female characters in terms of Euramerican patriarchal expectation. As Theda Perdue points out, such behavior was customary to the time period: "women belonged to men" in "civilized" society.<sup>72</sup> As written, Wilani appears to have adopted these "civilized" traits from her friend and mentor, Mrs. Perkins. Mrs. Perkins is described as a pioneering woman, a character type that one would think challenges the notion of possession, ownership, purity, piety, and domesticity. Yet she fulfills this role by remaining a sexualized object for her husband. As Mrs. Perkins states, she would give her husband all the sons he wants if he'd just come out of the cornfields (29). Mrs. Perkins and Wilani, in this sense, only gain agency through copulation and child bearing. While such "expected" female behavior is indicative of Euramerican culture at this time (1814), depicting a Cherokee woman in such light renders her as helpless, which simply was not the case for most Cherokee women.

Prior to colonization, Cherokee gender roles were patterned in ways that balanced one another; for example, women tended to the crops while men hunted. With Washington's civilization program, however, men took over the crops and women became domesticated housewives. Even though some Cherokees adapted white customs into their daily manner of living, they did not abandon their culture altogether. Cherokee women had been farming their

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<sup>72</sup> Perdue, *Cherokee Women*, 112.

entire lives and they were not about to disregard such responsibility.<sup>73</sup> Perdue asserts that, while the Cherokees incorporated many of the ideologies set forth by the civilization program, the Cherokees “struggled to reconcile these two value systems and to create a code of laws in which individual and community, private and public, men and women balance each other.”<sup>74</sup> Therefore, Hunter’s portrayal of Wilani as being a submissive, pure, dutiful wife who has appropriated the ways of Euramericans, while justifiable, is doubtful and slightly reductive.

Hunter misses the opportunity here to craft strong female characters that accurately figure into Cherokee history. He also misses the opportunity to problematize this period and show how vicious the American government was toward the Cherokee. For instance, Hunter could have introduced a strong female figure such as Nancy Ward, the War Woman of Chota, who fought against the Creeks in the 1750s and who also stood up for Cherokee rights against the corruption of government officials, or he could have at least depicted the struggle Cherokee women faced when forced to give up working their farmlands and move indoors to perform domestic chores. Perdue goes to great lengths outlining the vital importance of Cherokee women in traditional culture and relates how these women continued to hold onto their traditional values despite Euramerican “civilization” programs. For instance, Cherokee women attended council meetings, where they weighed their concerns about land treaties or voiced their opinions about Cherokee governance.<sup>75</sup> Perdue states:

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<sup>73</sup> Melvin Henderson, “Indian Agriculture in the Southern Colonies,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 44 (1967): 283.

<sup>74</sup> Perdue, *Cherokee Women*, 135.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

When the Cherokee council referred to “Mother Earth” in 1801, they gendered their homeland. Such reference was not common, but the crops that took root in the earth had a clear cosmological association with women through Selu, whose blood soaked the ground and germinated corn. Men had no such mythical connection to the land: when Kana’ti discovered his wife’s death, he became a wanderer who never returned to his homeland. Like Kana’ti, men went abroad in search of game while women stayed home, hoed their corn, and became Selu’s heirs. Women made particular plots theirs by farming them. Since the women of a matrilineage normally worked together, the land belonged to the matrilineage that used it, and through their maternal kin succeeding generations of women inherited their right to farm it. Consequently, women had a profound interest in the Nation’s land and genuine concern about any proposed cession or change in land tenure.<sup>76</sup>

With this connection to the land in mind, Hunter’s placement of men in the corn fields displaces Cherokee women, thereby awarding the men with the possession and ownership of land, a Euramerican practice that was a part of their civilization process.

Hunter also has the female characters in the play echo Sequoyah’s stance on loyalties and the Cherokees’ newfound Christian faith. In the final scene of Act One, wherein Wilani’s daughter is preparing to marry Drowning Bear’s son, Hunter has Wilani stress how happy she is that her daughter will have a Christian marriage. Speaking in third person (as all the Cherokees in the play do) she states: “Yes—and now Tsali is a Christian, and Wilani, and Drowning Bear—

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 136.

all of us. The old ceremonies are gone forever—now we are like everyone else—it is good! Our children will be married in a Christian church!” (59). As Hunter utilized Sequoyah to demonstrate the Cherokees’ progression toward civilization earlier in the play, by the end of the act, the Cherokees have officially integrated into Euramerican society after having given up their pagan ways, including their traditional wedding ceremony. Hunter concludes the act in this way so as to heighten the dramatic effect of Major Davis’ entrance, which sets the removal process in motion. Because the audience has seen the Cherokees transform into a people like themselves—God fearing and civilized—the inevitable removal of the Cherokees weighs on the audiences’ hearts a little more heavily than it would had the Cherokees held onto their traditions and resisted Euramerican advances.

Though not the best storyteller, Hunter was an entrepreneur who treated the writing of outdoor historical drama as a business; he understood his audiences, and knew exactly how to entertain them. Had he chosen to represent Cherokee history appropriately, audiences would not have welcomed the drama, as it would have discredited their lived experience as Americans in the twentieth century. As Gregory D. Smithers notes, “Hunter’s representation of Cherokee gender roles and domestic tranquility would have resonated with Cold War era audiences bombarded with...ideals...about ‘separate spheres.’”<sup>77</sup> Moreover, as Thompson asserts, Hunter’s portrayal of the Battle of Horseshoe Bend speaks to the audience...as...Cherokee and the Smoky Mountains appeal primarily to...the demographic most likely to have provided

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<sup>77</sup> Gregory D. Smithers, “A Cherokee Epic: Kermit Hunter’s *Unto These Hills* and the Mythologizing of Cherokee History,” *Native South* 8 (2015): 14.

military service.”<sup>78</sup> Hunter knew who would attend his productions and he made sure that his words spoke directly to those individuals in attendance.

Within the first five years of performance, the drama was revised to address many issues Hunter neglected to correct, such as historical accuracy or the treatment of the Cherokees. These alterations, however, were not enough. Although Hunter managed to sway the CHA into doing things his way in the beginning, the CHA and the Cherokee community would begin to denounce Hunter and his drama, leaving him to seek employment elsewhere. Less than twenty years later, Hunter would again become a conduit through which to tell the Cherokees’ story—this time, however, in Oklahoma.

### ***The Trail of Tears***

By the time an interest in outdoor historical drama reached Oklahoma, the genre had already developed into a purely touristic endeavor. Principal Chief W.W. Keeler initiated the idea of an outdoor drama project in Tahlequah after he, along with an envoy of Oklahomans, witnessed Hunter’s *Unto these Hills* in Cherokee, North Carolina, in 1957.<sup>79</sup> For Keeler and the other Oklahomans in attendance, the Cherokees’ struggle did not end on the trail. Party-political tensions escalated between the two Cherokee factions and the United States, and the culmination of remorse, betrayal, and finger pointing reached a bloody apex shortly after the Cherokee Nation arrived in Indian Territory. As in Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee, political alignments and allegiances shifted furiously as the Cherokee Nation fought to keep their new lands free from outside influences. This was the story that needed to be told: the struggle to

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<sup>78</sup> Thompson, “Staging ‘the Drama’,” 130.

<sup>79</sup> *Trail of Tears* Souvenir Playbill (1975), 40.

overcome adversity within a nation, the strength to embrace change, the ability to move forward and to reawaken a culture whose fate, for so long, had been manipulated by the hands of Euramerican men.

When Keeler returned to Tahlequah, he contacted Hunter to see if he would be interested in continuing the Cherokees' story. Hunter was more than enthusiastic. The first attempt toward conceiving an annual outdoor historical drama in Oklahoma, however, fell by the wayside in 1958. Why the project lost steam isn't exactly clear. It appears budgeting constraints and an inability to keep focused on the project kept the drama from materializing. A few years later, while at a conference at the University of North Carolina, Hunter overheard that plans for the project were again in development. In 1963, Hunter wrote to Keeler that the project was fated to dissolve again if the project leaders did not take action and produce a script: "I would feel better about the chances of this whole thing," Hunter wrote, "if a play were being written because this will be the number one product to be merchandised.... And anything to be done in 1964 should be in process now."<sup>80</sup> For various reasons—a lack of funding being the most obvious—the writing of a script did not commence in 1963.

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<sup>80</sup> Kermit Hunter to W.W. Keeler, May 15, 1963. Oddly enough, Hunter claims that he never "peddled his wares," but waited for "communities to contact him to write a drama." In an interview Raymond Carol Hayes, Hunter states: "I write them on order, not try to sell them. I simply wait around until some community decides they would like to memorialize their history to try to improve their tourist industry, so they come to me. I write the thing as partners with them, so nobody is out on a limb. We work together." Kermit Hunter, in conversation with



What did transpire in 1963 was the organization of the Cherokee National Historical Society, Inc., a non-profit educational institution founded by Keeler and Martin A.

Hagerstrand.<sup>81</sup> Having lived in the community for a few years, Hagerstrand developed an interest in Cherokee history and culture. Prior to the establishment of the CNHS, Hagerstrand, whose primary occupation was in urban development, instituted the Northeastern State College's Tourism Management program. With his interest in Cherokee culture and his expertise in the tourism industry, Hagerstrand was a shoo-in to direct the CNHS and its operations. Hagerstrand and Keeler, who "had great foresight" and a penchant to "help his people," were the businessmen responsible for bringing the Cherokee community back to life.<sup>82</sup>

Hagerstrand and Keeler initiated and outlined four phases of development to take place over several years: the building of a historical Cherokee village; an outdoor drama; a museum;

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Raymond Carol Hayes, "A Study of Hero-building and Mythmaking in Three of Kermit Hunter's Outdoor Historical Epic-dramas" (PhD diss., Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 1982), 51.

<sup>81</sup> The organization that oversees the village, the drama, the museum, and the archives is called the Cherokee National Historical Society. The phrase Cherokee Heritage Center was applied, starting in 1983, to the collection of sites run by the Cherokee National Historical Society.

Oftentimes, however, Cherokee National Historical Society and Cherokee Heritage Center are used interchangeably. Information obtained from "Frequently Asked Questions," Cherokee Heritage Center Website, Tahlequah, OK (last accessed Apr 5, 2016).

<sup>82</sup> Marion Hagerstrand, quoted in "Precious Memories," by Rene Fite, *Tahlequah Daily Press*, Dec 31, 2009, [http://www.tahlequahdailypress.com/archives/precious-memories/article\\_fc527ecb-aec4-584e-be31-8a05d58ca4ad.html](http://www.tahlequahdailypress.com/archives/precious-memories/article_fc527ecb-aec4-584e-be31-8a05d58ca4ad.html) (last accessed Mar 1, 2016).

and a National archive. The CNHS's facilities were to be established in Park Hill at the site of the 1851 Cherokee National Female Seminary, which is located about a mile outside Tahlequah, Oklahoma. While Keeler is often credited with having secured the site for the Society, Robert Conley suggests that Principal Chief Jesse Bartley Milam was actually responsible for purchasing the site.<sup>83</sup> It seems as though plans for a heritage center were already in motion prior to when Keeler took office. Though Milam laid the ground work for the society, it was Keeler who saw the society materialize. In 1967, the Tsa-La-Gi Ancient Village opened, followed by the outdoor amphitheatre two years later.<sup>84</sup>

According to Kent Brown, the CNHS was "a training ground for the Cherokees."<sup>85</sup> The drama, in particular, was conceived as a "means of introducing to Cherokee people...an understanding of their own history in hope of developing a better self-image."<sup>86</sup> Hagerstrand hoped that the CNHS and the drama would "educate as well as entertain, [and] lead to a deeper communication between diverse peoples who have such totally inaccurate concepts about

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<sup>83</sup> According to Conley, many of Keeler's successes belong to Milam. Robert Conley, *The Cherokee Nation: A History* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 207.

<sup>84</sup> In addition to completing the four phases of the society's plans, the CNHS constructed the Ho-  
Chee-Nee Trail of Tears Memorial Prayer Chapel, which was funded by Cherokee poet and artist  
Jimalee Burton in 1978. A year later, Adam's Corner, a rural village which consists of several  
buildings that replicate 1890s Cherokee life, opened. "Frequently Asked Questions."

<sup>85</sup> Kent R. Brown, "Re-creating History: The Trail of Tears," *Players Magazine* 51.2 (1976): 65.

<sup>86</sup> Hagerstrand, in conversation with Brown, *ibid.*

Indians,” including the Cherokees themselves.<sup>87</sup> Although the CNHS was “established for the purpose of preserving the story of the Cherokee in the West,” it was not directly associated with the Cherokee Nation.<sup>88</sup> The Nation, as well as other sponsors, did provide the organization with funding; however, Keeler, who was the head of Phillips Petroleum Company (PPC) at the time, financially supported the organization on his own.<sup>89</sup>

While Hagerstrand’s and Keeler’s plans were successful, their methods were not always fondly received, nor were the two men viewed as trustworthy. The unaffiliated organization was a source of community distress. It appears that the community’s apprehensions of the two men and the organization arose from Hagerstrand’s and Keeler’s lack of historical preservation techniques. Several individuals from the Cherokee Nation protested the Society and its development, claiming that the CNHS’s projects were “destroying the history at Park Hill.”<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> M.A. Hagerstrand to Director of the Outdoor Drama Institute, Jul 7, 1964.

<sup>89</sup> Marjorie Lowe states that Keeler used his own money to not only develop the CNHS but to also “establish the Cherokee Foundation, a non-profit organization to obtain and administer funds and properties to improve the welfare, culture, health and morale of the Cherokee people.” In addition, Keeler developed scholarship awards and educational loans, encouraged the development of schools for “Cherokee children in elementary and high schools,” and sustained programs to help “Cherokees in self-supporting trades.” Marjorie Lowe, “‘Let’s Make It Happen’: W. W. Keeler and Cherokee Renewal,” *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 74.2 (1996): 118-9.

<sup>90</sup> Emily Kinkade to W.W. Keeler, no date.

Because the organization was building its facilities on top of the ruins of the Cherokee National Female Seminary, many people believed the Society was disrespecting the Cherokee Nation's historical memory, as the school was—and still is—considered one of the Nation's stellar achievements. The Seminary was the first school of higher education for women west of the Mississippi River, and though the school burned down on Easter Sunday in 1887 and was no more than a pile of charred bricks covered in vegetation, the site was regarded as semi-sacred ground.<sup>91</sup>

The lack of preservation at the Seminary site was not the only reason Cherokees came to distrust the CNHS. One individual went so far as to attack Keeler and Hagerstrand, insulting their character and their dedication to the Cherokee Nation: "Hagerstrand has no interest in preservation! I don't know what kind of man Keeler is?" wrote Mildred Ballenger, who, in a separate letter, also indicated that the Principal Chief was a dictator.<sup>92</sup> J. M. Green also expressed displeasure with Hagerstrand. In a letter addressed to a local politician in 1965, Green asked for Hagerstrand to "step aside" when it came to domestic affairs.<sup>93</sup> Perhaps most damaging, however, was a handbill passed around Tahlequah and the surrounding area paid for by the

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<sup>91</sup> The second iteration of the school has since been incorporated into the Northeastern State University. For more information, see: Devon A. Mihesuah, *Cultivating the Rosebuds: The Education of Women at the Cherokee Female Seminary, 1851-1909* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

<sup>92</sup> Mildred Parker Ballenger to Mr. Keeler, regarding the Park Hill project, no date.

<sup>93</sup> J. M. Green to W. W. Keeler, Dec 9, 1965.

National Indian Youth Council (NIYC) that directed attention to monetary issues surrounding the Society's project.

The protest flyer, addressed to any “[g]uest to our homelands” who may or may not know the state of the Cherokee Nation in light of the million-dollar project being conceived, informs the reader of several important issues that would affect the Cherokee Nation if the project continued.<sup>94</sup> Of particular interest is the declarative parenthetical following the flyer's fourth bullet point: “Come visit us in January when we are back on Welfare!” While it isn't clear if the NIYC was privy to the problems the Cherokees faced in North Carolina with their outdoor drama, they at least understood that they would be exploited should the Society succeed in turning their community into a hub for cultural tourism. Many American Indians at this time had already been forced to wear and market their culture to make a living; the NIYC recognized that the Society, while systematically destroying the last remaining relics of their National history, were also trying to turn their community into a tourist attraction with “the only ‘benefit’” being a “handful of degrading jobs at minimal wages from April to October.”<sup>95</sup>

Criticism was directed not only toward the Society and its projects. Several Cherokees questioned Keeler's distribution of tribal funds as well. For instance, Marjorie Lowe mentions “a group of young, discontented Indians” who were a part of the American Indian Movement (AIM) in 1967:

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<sup>94</sup> National Indian Youth Council, “Dear Guests,” Flyer (Tahlequah: Cherokee Heritage Center Archives), no date.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

Young Indians carrying guns confronted [Keeler] about his administration of tribal funds during the dedication and opening of the Tsa-La-Gi Restaurant and Motel on June, 24, 1967.... Keeler willingly opened the books for the dissidents' inspection and gave them the opportunity to voice their displeasure over the public address system. When they could discover no wrongdoing and decided they had no case, they retreated peacefully.<sup>96</sup>

Although many Cherokees considered Keeler the best principal chief the Nation ever had (second only to John Ross), as he “supplied the direction, inspiration, and financial support necessary for the very survival of Cherokee sovereignty,” many found him deceitful.<sup>97</sup> While Keeler did not mismanage tribal monies, he did abuse those from the PPC. As Conley notes, “during Keeler’s last four years as an elected chief, he and PPC had been indicted, tried, and found guilty of having made illegal campaign contributions to Richard Nixon.”<sup>98</sup> While this event did not transpire until the end of Keeler’s elected term of office, it is possible that his allegiance to the United States federal government fueled the community’s distrust of him. In fact, because Keeler was first appointed principal chief by the federal government, it is likely

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<sup>96</sup> Lowe, ‘Let’s Make It Happen’,” 20.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>98</sup> Keeler contributed \$100,000 to Nixon’s campaign, to which he plead guilty to in 1973. Interestingly enough, it was Nixon who, during his presidency, overturned the federal government’s Termination policy (1945-61), reestablishing tribal governances. Conley, *Cherokee Nation*, 220.

that the community was annoyed with him, as he was not who they wanted representing their Nation.

In 1906, the Cherokees were denied the right to elect government officials once the Act to Provide for the Final Disposition of the Affairs of the Five Civilized Tribes was ratified by Congress. The act granted the Department of Interior authority to take “over the Indian schools and school funds, and all government buildings” and declared “that the tribal government would continue ‘in full force and effect for all purposes authorized by [U.S.] law.’”<sup>99</sup> With this act, the federal government dissolved the Nation’s sovereignty, which meant that the Cherokees lost the right to elect their own chief, to organize—politically—as they wished. Following the termination of Cherokee governance, the federal government appointed nine principal chiefs to represent the Nation when they needed to negotiate or override settlements between the United States and the Cherokee Nation. The majority of the chiefs appointed during this time period served for no longer than a day. Keeler, who was first appointed in 1949, was the last chief elected by the federal government. In 1970, when Congress replaced its 1953 termination policy, which abolished “the special relationship of the federal government with American Indian tribes,” thereby reinstating treaty rights and restoring self-determination, the Cherokee Nation reelected Keeler, who served until 1975.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Conley, *Cherokee Nation*, 200. The last principal chief elected by the Cherokee Nation was William Charles Rogers in 1903. Rogers served as principal chief until Oklahoma entered statehood in 1907.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

Yet many Cherokees continue to fondly reflect on Keeler and Hagerstrand. As Jo Layne Kehle (Cherokee Nation) observes, Keeler was a good example of Cherokee leadership; he was a straightforward man concerned for the welfare of his people and he trusted a Cherokee's opinion over a Euramerican's.<sup>101</sup> And Hagerstrand was one of the few non-natives to further the Cherokees' cause through economic development. "He was a good man," stressed Tonia Weavel in our interview, and did what he thought was best to help the Cherokee community.<sup>102</sup>

While community voices neglected to stifle the CNHS, they did manage to raise awareness that Cherokee citizens needed to be involved in the organization—to ensure that the CNHS represented the Nation appropriately. According to Hagerstrand and Keeler, one-half of the CNHS's board was to be comprised of Cherokee community members. Moreover, Hagerstrand and Keeler made it clear in their correspondence with Hunter that Cherokee individuals should become key players in the development of Theatre Tsa-La-Gi and in the production of *The Trail of Tears*. Hagerstrand wrote to Hunter in 1968, reminding him that the whole project was for the benefit of the Cherokees:

Insofar as I am concerned, we need to make this a quality effort in every way, first using persons of Cherokee descent who are fully qualified both professionally and personally; second, using persons of Indian descent from other tribes, perhaps; and third, others. But the criterion must be quality and ability to do the job. As time goes on, we should be attempting to train local Cherokees as replacements,

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<sup>101</sup> Jo Layne Kehle, "The Leadership of Ross O. Swimmer 1975-1985: A Case Study of a Modern Cherokee Principal Chief" (PhD diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 2008), 102-6.

<sup>102</sup> Tonia Hogner-Weavel, in discussion with the author, Aug 4, 2015.



but not at the sacrifice of quality performance. I know of nothing that can kill a program more quickly and effectively than a mediocre performance—except of course a bad script, and that we will not have.<sup>103</sup>

Including Cherokees and other American Indians in the Society's projects looked great on paper; however, when it came to actually staffing the theatre, the Society disregarded their stance on partiality. A drama that was hailed "the most spectacular and interesting drama of its kind ever performed" could not rely on neophytes to make it popular.<sup>104</sup> As was the case in Cherokee, North Carolina, opportunities were handed over to those whom Hunter thought best to bring the production to national attention. Unfortunately, very few of these individuals were of American Indian descent, which is odd considering several Cherokees submitted resumes to the Society for consideration, including Arthur S. Junaluska, the founder and Executive and Artistic Director of the American Indian Society of Creative Arts, Inc. in New York City.

Junaluska, who first applied to direct the *Trail of Tears*, submitted his resume as early as 1964 and between 1964 and 1966 actively submitted letters seeking employment with the organization. Along with his resume, Junaluska had his friends and colleagues submitted letters of reference and other information to show that he was capable of fulfilling the job requirements.<sup>105</sup> Keeler and Hagerstrand did look at the applicant's documents; however, they

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<sup>103</sup> M.A. Hagerstrand to Kermit Hunter, Nov 25, 1968.

<sup>104</sup> Nate Way to M.A. Hagerstrand, Jan 3, 1969.

<sup>105</sup> Arthur S. Junaluska to W.W. Keeler, Nov 7, 1965; W.W. Keeler to Arthur S. Junaluska, Dec 16, 1965; Ruth Thomson to W. W. Keeler, on behalf of Arthur S. Junaluska, Jun 1, 1966.

ultimately passed him over as he was reportedly unruly.<sup>106</sup> The Society, following Hunter's lead, hired a director with whom the playwright had worked with previously in Gatlinburg, Tennessee—Nate Way.<sup>107</sup>

While the staffing of the drama did not adhere to the organization's wishes, Hunter did manage to create a solid production team and supply the Society with a relatively successful script, which put the Cherokee Nation and the CNHS on the tourism map. The earliest drafts of Hunter's drama, however, underwent substantial revision before a final product ever graced the Tsa-La-Gi stage. Even after the drama's premier, the script was revised an additional nine times within a ten-year period (1969-79). Hunter's use of historical and cultural materials led many Cherokees to object to the playwright's methods. In fact, Hagerstrand compiled a four-page report detailing his and several reviewers' concerns pertaining to the historical and cultural inaccuracy of Hunter's script as early as 1966. Hagerstrand wrote: "There is some concern with some of the settings, insofar as the 'time frame' is concerned.... Unless there is some important reason for departure from historical accuracy, it would appear relatively easy to bring the events into proper periods."<sup>108</sup> Hagerstrand also noted that several Cherokees were sensitive to the representation of the principal characters and their families in the drama and wondered if Hunter needed to seek permission to represent such historical figures onstage considering the "bitterness

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<sup>106</sup> M.A. Hagerstrand to Mr. Peek, regarding Arthur S. Junaluska, Apr 20, 1966.

<sup>107</sup> Hunter selected Way because he enjoyed working with him on his production of *Chucky Jack*, which Way directed.

<sup>108</sup> M.A. Hagerstrand to Kermit Hunter, Sep 20, 1966, 1.

that existed between the Ross and Watie families” persists “through their descendants” today.<sup>109</sup> The use of the Bushyhead family was also of concern, “primarily because they believed it necessary to secure some concurrence from family survivors in order to prevent possible future lawsuits.”<sup>110</sup> Though Hunter represented Rev. Jesse Bushyhead with comparative accuracy, his representation of Dennis deviates from the actual historical figure. Not only was the real Dennis Bushyhead away from the community during this this time period, either at school or searching for gold in California, he never married a woman by the name of Sarah.<sup>111</sup> Moreover, Dennis became a chief in 1879; therefore, his murder on the steps of his home in 1869, as Hunter depicts, is implausible.

Many historians also felt that short shrift was given to Sequoyah, who only appears in the drama to provide a statement of unity and a message of hope, while others wanted more focus on Cherokee accomplishments in light of the United States’ intervention in tribal affairs. For instance, one reviewer suggested that much could be added about the many “Oklahoma Counties with Indian Tribal Names” that were “accepted by the Constitutional Convention, such as Choctaw, Creek, Osage, Seminole, and Cherokee.”<sup>112</sup> This comment is particularly interesting as it points toward the struggle many American Indians endured once Indian Territory was

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>111</sup> For more information on the Bushyhead family, see: John Bartlett Meserve, “Chief Dennis Wolfe Bushyhead,” *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 14.3 (1936): 349-59; David R. Edmunds, *American Indian Leaders: Studies in Diversity* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980).

<sup>112</sup> M.A. Hagerstrand to Kermit Hunter, Sep 20, 1966, 2.

abolished and the state of Oklahoma was formed. Although it is perhaps not as historically engrossing as the story in which Indian Territory's 5 Tribes advocated the establishment of the State of Sequoyah in 1905, it does suggest that the American Indians had a staying power within the region, even though the United States found ways to usurp their homelands.<sup>113</sup>

In response to these suggestions, Hunter wrote third and fourth drafts of the script in 1968 and 1969. In his note to Hagerstrand and Keeler, which was included in the third draft of the play, Hunter comments on the never-ending job of the playwright:

As most of you probably realize by now, plays are not written, they are re-written.

Although the returning of this draft to the Society, with the historical corrections you have suggested, fulfills our contract of the script, there is no such thing as a finished and complete play.

...

There will be many more changes and re-writes. We have just begun to make a play. You will note that the characters this time are more deeply etched, perhaps more definitely defined. This will improve more as we go along. The director, the designer, the composer, and many others will want certain alterations for the purpose of good staging. The audience will suggest things to us by their reactions. The script will be constantly re-done.

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<sup>113</sup> Conley, *Cherokee Nation*, 201. In 1905, delegates of the 5 Tribes proposed the State of Sequoyah be established from Indian Territory. With the threat of Oklahoma statehood, the American Indians proposed to create a state of their own so as to retain control of their lands.

You must feel free to keep making suggestions. They will all be used, or we will give you good and logical reasons why they cannot or should not be used. In almost every case, I have adopted your suggestions in this draft, but you may uncover others. I did not set a scene for the building of the Capitol, or the founding of Tahlequah, nor the assassination of a prominent figure onstage, because the fact is that audiences tend to laugh at such things, and the death of Dennis may have to be altered. I changed the Bushyhead family to a fictional one, a much surer and more dramatic method. But otherwise it is the play you said you wanted, historically speaking. Now we must inject more drama. The audience must laugh, and they must cry—and they will, before we finish.<sup>114</sup>

Although it appears that Hunter was fulfilling the Society's requests, historical records suggest otherwise. The final version of Hunter's script, which appeared on stage in 1969, wasn't anywhere near what the Cherokee Nation wanted to see on stage. Hunter did manage to incorporate a few of the organization's recommendations into his script; however, he primarily wrote what he thought was attractive—what he thought the Euramerican tourist would find entertaining.

Hunter's drama followed a simple narrative plot structure. Barbra McMahan writes that Hunter believed the play needed to be compressed "by focusing the action...on large decisions or occurrences, and covering the historical time in between such moments with narration."<sup>115</sup> In

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<sup>114</sup> Kermit Hunter's Note, attached to the third manuscript of *The Trail of Tears* drama.

<sup>115</sup> Barbara M. McMahan, "An Historical Analysis of the Theatre at Tsa-La-Gi (Cherokee)" (PhD diss., North Texas University, 1974), 3.

essence, the plot structure was truncated to focus solely on the most dramatic elements of Cherokee history. From this point of view, *The Trail of Tears* primarily characterizes a bifurcated Cherokee Nation within a foreign landscape, focusing on the turbulent process of unification between the two strong-willed Cherokee factions. Hunter arranges the dispute and tension between the Ross and Watie factions front and center, as doing so highlighted the Nation's inability to band together and move forward, united, into the future.

The play opens in prologue with a dance. The Cherokees have gathered in Tahlequah to celebrate Indian Territory's union with Oklahoma Territory and their adoption into the United States of America as a unified state. In this opening scene, we are introduced to two important, though fictional, characters, Dennis Bushyhead III and his grandmother, Sarah Bushyhead. Dennis III serves as a narrator throughout the show, relating his grandmother's story, while a younger Sarah serves as one of the drama's principal characters.

Following behind Stand Watie, Elias Boudinot, Major Ridge, and a small group of Cherokees in 1836, the last of the Cherokee Nation reached Indian Territory with John Ross in 1839. The main plot in *The Trail of Tears* begins with the anticipation of the second wave of Cherokees to arrive, which simultaneously sets the tone of the drama in shades of national unrest. In the first two scenes, we see the Ridge faction disparage John Ross and his followers. Having already established their own form of governance, Watie and Elias Boudinot proclaim that Ross will have to submit to their conventional laws if the Cherokees wish to live peacefully

among their brethren in the west.<sup>116</sup> As the play progresses, the feud between the Ross faction and the Ridge faction escalates. Members of the Ridge faction, including Major and John Ridge, and Elias Boudinot, are assassinated by members of the Ross faction, which incites a series of revenge murders. Over a brief period, the Cherokees reconcile their differences—with the aid of the United States federal government—and reorganize. Stand Watie, who is a member of the Ridge faction, assumes the role of the antagonist in the play and stands in opposition to the Cherokee Nation, which serves as the drama's protagonist. Watie is incensed by Ross and his leadership and vindictively manages to unite the Cherokee Nation with the Southern Confederacy—an unfavorable position for Ross, who wished to remain neutral.

Amid this historical sketch is fictional spectacle, revolving around a love affair. As in *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Trail of Tears* centers on forbidden love. Sarah, who traveled to Indian Territory with her uncles, is awaiting the arrival of her fiancé, Dennis Bushyhead, who is traveling the trail with the rest of the Cherokee Nation. Sarah arrived in Indian Territory shortly after the Treaty of New Echota was ratified, while Dennis stayed behind to fight for the Cherokees' rights to stay in their homelands with John Ross. Before Dennis's arrival, however, we learn that the animosity between Sarah's family and Dennis's threatens to keep the lovers apart. Once the Cherokee Nation arrives in Indian Territory, the two factions commence fighting, leaving Sarah's and Dennis's love in a state of suspense. It isn't until the two factions seek the counsel of the United States President James K. Polk that a new treaty is formed, reestablishing

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<sup>116</sup> At the time, The Old Settlers had their own form of governance based upon their traditions, which was passed down orally. Hunter does not mention the Old Settlers in his drama, however, choosing to stay focused on the two factions.

the Cherokee Nation as a unified people under the guidance of Principal Chief John Ross. With the Nation reunited, Sarah and Dennis are finally able to marry. A series of events leading up to the Civil War, however, soon tear the couple apart.

Sarah and Dennis represent the two Cherokee factions, and their love for each other seems destined to bring the Cherokee Nation together. The unification of the nation does not happen in this manner though. Toward the end of the Civil War sequence, a group of men attack and kill Dennis on the front steps of his home. Angry with her uncle, Sarah challenges Watie to recognize how his involvement with the Confederacy has destroyed the Cherokees. In remorse, Watie declares that the Nation will change. The production concludes as we return to 1906, wherein Sarah—in epilogue—relates how the adoption of Indian Territory into the United States was the Cherokees' re-birth.

While the historical events represented in *The Trail of Tears* are, for the most part, correct, the spectacle surrounding the historical sketch is broadly imaginary. In response to community concerns, Hunter stated that his primary obstacle while writing the drama was the “absence of historical accounts of the evolution of the Cherokee Nation,” claiming that while the Cherokees did keep records of “their medical formulas, incantations and love songs in the language that Sequoyah had invented,” they were largely kept secret:

These were kept from family to family and were usually hidden away in glass jars or tobacco tins to protect them from raiding bands during the Civil War. But then they were often forgotten.... They are still hidden away in the hills of Oklahoma.



But these were isolated fragments. No official, considered history of the Cherokee people, compiled by their own leaders, existed.<sup>117</sup>

Here again, with a lack of substantial material, Hunter felt that he had to do some adapting, as “oral history techniques were unusable...because the recollections of Indian leaders go back only thirty to forty years.... And even the Cherokee themselves do not know what the dances or costumes were like 100 years ago.”<sup>118</sup>

Concerned with embellishing the drama’s spectacle, Hunter elected to include fanciful dances in *The Trail of Tears* matching those in *Unto These Hills*, such as the Green Corn ceremony or the Eagle dance. The dance numbers in *The Trail of Tears* include a Two-Step, the Green Corn ceremony, a Hoedown, a Victory dance, a Phoenix dance, and a Ribbon Dance. I include in this group the Death dance; however, this is not a large group dance, but rather an individual dance woven throughout the play that is symbolic of the Cherokees’ beliefs concerning the afterlife. Aside from the Green Corn ceremony, the Victory dance, and the Death dance, each of which are fabrications of the Cherokees’ traditional dances, the remaining dances are fanciful. The Two-Step and the Hoedown are representative of Euramerican dance traditions and are anachronistic to the time period, while the Phoenix dance is purely conjectural, taking its shape from the title of the Cherokees’ newspaper, the *Cherokee Phoenix*. Of the five dances presented in *The Trail of Tears*, only four are representative of the Cherokees’ traditional culture. Because Hunter did not know what the traditional dances were like, he blended romanticized American Indian dance elements with modern ballet. Moreover, he encouraged Hollywood-

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<sup>117</sup> Kermit Hunter, in conversation with Kent Brown, “Re-creating History,” 59.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 59-60.

inspired, Plains Indian regalia to dress his dancers, as general audiences were accustomed to seeing “Indians” dressed in this fashion as opposed to the Cherokees’ actual traditional manner of dress.

Unlike the other dances, which are bound by a specific duration of time and tersely presented on stage, the Death dance is broken into several vignettes sprinkled throughout the drama. The dance consists of a single performer who embodies the Ka'lanu ahkyeli'ski (The Ravenmocker), the Cherokees’ agent of death. The Ravenmocker appears at various dramatic moments during the play, usually when a character is about to die or has just passed away. The Ravenmocker receives the most stage time at the height of the Civil War battle scene, in which he is seen dancing in and out of the pantomimed chaos. While it is possible to overlook a few of Hunter’s mythic dance adaptations, the Death dance and the Ravenmocker deserve critical attention. As a symbolic representation in the play, Hunter’s utilization of the Ravenmocker deviates from the Cherokees’ conception of the malicious figure. Moreover, the Ravenmocker is utilized to substantiate the Cherokees’ process of “civilization.”

We first see the Ravenmocker during the Trail of Tears scene. Dennis III, who serves as the drama’s narrator, describes how the Cherokees’ “ancient gods” went silent after they had learned “about a new Christian God, who taught the people to forgive their enemies, to forget that they had been corrupted, bribed, and deceived” (5). As the Trail of Tears march is pantomimed across the stage, the narrator tells how “superintendents, transportation contractors, and officers of the United States Army” were now the Cherokees’ guides, rather than their traditional “Gods” (5). Without doubt, Hunter paints the Trail of Tears in grim color; however, it is unclear if the playwright is insinuating that the Cherokee leaders lost control of the Nation because they adopted the Euramericans’ God as their own, or if the leaders lost control because

many Cherokees continued to hold onto their sacred traditions. By the end of the play, it seems as though the Cherokees are better off for having adopted Euramerican customs and for finding their faith in Christianity. Complicating this notion, however, is the inclusion of the Ravenmocker.

According to oral tradition, the Ravenmocker is a malevolent shape shifter who can assume the form of a human, a raven, other animals, or a ball of fire.<sup>119</sup> When a person is on their death bed, the Ravenmocker emerges from the shadows of the night to hasten the dying process. Once a person has died, the Ravenmocker feasts on the deceased's corpse. After devouring the victim's heart, the Ravenmocker acquires the victim's life force and wisdom. The Ravenmocker is often perceived as a withered old man or woman, for when they feed they add to their age the age of their victims; however, most of the time they are unrecognizable, only revealing themselves in the midnight hours in secret forms only powerful Medicine Men can recognize.

The Ravenmocker is a supreme "witch," or an evil sorcerer, whom all malevolent and benevolent beings fear. Raymond D. Fogelson states that witches are "counterfeit or pseudohuman being[s] since humanity is but one among many guises that [witches] assume in

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<sup>119</sup> For more information on the Ravenmocker and the Cherokees' beliefs concerning death, see Mooney, *Myths*, 401-403; Michelle D. Hamilton, "Adverse Reactions: Practicing Bioarcheology among the Cherokee," in *Under the Rattlesnake: Cherokee Health and Resiliency*, ed. Lisa J. Lefler (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2009), 29-60; and Tracey Burley-Jones, "The Death System in Tsalagi Culture," *Totem: The University of Western Ontario Journal of Anthropology* 10.1 (2002): 20-26.

their incessant metamorphosis and in their parasitic relationship to the Cherokee community.”<sup>120</sup> Male and female witches represent, as Alan Kilpatrick (Cherokee Nation) suggests, “the ultimate expression of human depravity and antisocial deviance” in the Cherokee community.<sup>121</sup> In *The Trail of Tears*, Hunter lifts the Ravenmocker out of this traditional context to add a sense of mystical color to his drama. Personified as a youthful male, the Ravenmocker, through dance, characterizes the Cherokees’ suffering. Painted in white—a color Hunter suggests is symbolic “of the terrible unknown”—with a deerskin head piece and a cloak of feathers, the Ravenmocker does somewhat represent the traditional figure, though he is a romantic representation at best.<sup>122</sup> Whereas the Ravenmocker is known to stealthily attack his or her victims, “frightening and tormenting the sick” until they die—thus literally killing them—the Ravenmocker in the drama assumes the role and characteristics of the Grim Reaper, the Euramerican psychopomp.<sup>123</sup>

When the Ravenmocker first appears, he is seen lurking in the shadows upon a cliff, observing the Cherokees’ procession along the Trail of Tears. As the Ravenmocker watches the people below, he detects those who are close to dying from the “blinding hot dust of summer...the raw freezing winter” (5). One of Ravenmocker’s victims is John Ross’s wife, who is only referred to as “a lovely, gentle Indian mother” in the script (5). Ravenmocker merely

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<sup>120</sup> Raymond D. Fogelson, "Analysis of Cherokee Sorcery and Witchcraft," in *Four Centuries of Southern Indians*, ed. Charles M. Hudson (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1975), 128.

<sup>121</sup> Allan Kilpatrick, *The Night Has a Naked Soul: Witchcraft and Sorcery Among the Western Cherokee* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 10.

<sup>122</sup> White is typically symbolic of peace and happiness.

<sup>123</sup> Mooney, *Myths*, 401.

watches the Cherokees from above, however. We do not see him devour the hearts of his victims. As the scene progresses, Ross steps away from the funeral scene to discuss political matters with Jesse Bushyhead, who is a minister and Cherokee Statesman, and Bushyhead's son, Dennis. As the men ponder what destiny lies ahead, the audience learns that Major Ridge, Elias Boudinot, and Stand Watie still stand in the way of the Cherokee Nation's progress. While Ross and Jesse strategize peaceful relations, Dennis protests, citing the "three ring-leaders" as "traitors" who "sold their birthright, took the money [from the illegal treaty negotiation with the U.S. federal government], and ran away" (7). Dennis, unlike his father, somewhat represents the Cherokees' traditional religion. In response to his father's plea that the Cherokees must put their faith in the Christian God, as "whatever brought [the Cherokees] here" must be "God's plan," Dennis catechizes his father, probing him to explain how the death of Ross' wife and the suffering of the Cherokee people could possibly be the will of God (7). "You keep preaching God's purpose, but God doesn't care about the Cherokees!" lectures Dennis. "The Ravenmocker hovers over the Cherokee, the spirit of death, and he is tearing the heart out of the Cherokee people! God turned his back on us and left us in the hands of a demon!" he explains further. Nevertheless, Jesse—firm in his Christian faith—ignores his son's irreverence, claiming that the Cherokees were destined to "do one great thing, so great that even God will be pleased" (7). As Dennis flees from his father in anger, the pious minister recites a prayer in the Cherokee language, which is translated by the narrator: "O, Ancient One! Make the fire rise at our feet as we pass on toward the nightland! When the night swims through our souls, let the flame rise before us! O Ancient One! Peace, peace for the Cherokees!" (7).

It appears as though Hunter is trying to dramatize the Cherokees' religious conflict in this scene; yet when compared with other scenes in which Ravenmocker makes an appearance, it

seems Hunter is actually pitting Christianity against the Cherokees' "barbarous" ways to substantiate the Cherokees' process of acculturation as being God's bidding. For instance, aside from the last scene in the play, Ravenmocker only appears when the Cherokees are reduced to acts of "savagery." At the end of scene three, after both Cherokee factions have come together, the community performs the traditional Green Corn ceremony.<sup>124</sup> As the stage directions suggest, "The green corn, danced by the men, is nourished by the earth, danced by the women. It is a dance with its roots deep in the primitive mystery from which it grew. As the dance reaches its peak, the lights dim and we see the Ravenmocker, mocking from above" (13). Following the dance, Dennis III narrates that despite the Green Corn ceremony, the two factions failed to come together and their "meeting adjourned in anger" (13). In other words, the community was not healed or cleansed after performing the dance.

Directly following this scene, Sarah is seen teaching Dennis and a group of school children how to read from the Bible. Sarah recites Ecclesiastes 3:1: "For everything there is a season, and a time for everything under heaven; a time to be born and a time to die.... All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full: to the place where the streams flow, there they flow again" (14). Read in context with the previous scenes, this passage reiterates Dennis's father's sentiments—that it is God's will and that, in the end, the Cherokees will be reborn if they continue to visualize their Christian future. Having this scene directly follow the Green Corn ceremony reduces the Cherokees' traditional practices to mere child's play, as only faith in the Bible can heal the Cherokees and reunite the Nation.

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<sup>124</sup> Here again, Hunter presents this ceremony only for its spectacular ethnic color.

This notion is strengthened when Sequoyah informs Ross that he will be leaving the community, as it is his time to “search back of the sunset,” to move “westward” and prepare himself for death (14-15). Upon his departing words, Sequoyah informs Ross that it is his dying wish for the Cherokees to “build schools...for boys and girls...for men and women” and to “teach [the Cherokees] to go forward, to live.... Before it is too late,” as the “Cherokees have a strange passion for dying!” (15). In a vain attempt to keep Sequoyah from leaving, Ross implores Sequoyah to stay and to see his dreams come true. Unmoved, Sequoyah tells Ross to “get a man like Stephen Foreman” to teach the Cherokees the proper way. Foreman, a Cherokee Presbyterian minister and politician, was employed by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) before and after the Trail of Tears to translate the Bible into the Cherokee language along with Samuel Worcester. As Sequoyah departs, we hear Ecclesiastes 3:1 again—this time, however, the group of school children recite the passage on their own, indicating that Sequoyah’s educational dreams come true.

It isn’t until the second act that Ravenmocker returns. The Nation has since factionalized, once again, in the wake of Civil War. At the end of the Cherokees’ council meeting, during which the Cherokees decide to join forces with the Southern Confederacy, Ravenmocker dances in and out of the developing scene as wartime chaos ensues. In pantomime and tableaux, Cherokee families fill the stage fleeing from death and destruction, while the soldiers portray the effects of war. The climax of the war dramatization concludes as a Cherokee Union soldier kills his Confederate brother. Played on top of the battle is a recorded narration of Ecclesiastes 3:1, which accompanies Ravenmocker’s gleeful dance. After everyone is slain, Ravenmocker vanishes, only to reappear in the following scene for Dennis’ demise. Here again, Ravenmocker is only present because the Cherokee Nation has been reduced to savagery.

Ravenmocker reappears at the end of the drama, though his demeanor has changed; he is no longer the bloodthirsty purveyor of death but a lenient guide—an angel—for those ready to travel to the other side. As the aged Sarah concludes the Cherokee Nation’s history, she clasps hands with the Ravenmocker, who slowly escorts her offstage. As they exit, Sarah recounts how the Cherokee Nation “did not die in 1907”—the year Oklahoma entered statehood—“but [was] re-born,” echoing Jesse Bushyhead’s and Sequoyah’s message that the Cherokees’ were fated to do one great thing in the eyes of the Christian God: to become educated Christians, to become Oklahomans—Americans (42).

Barbara McMahan notes that Kermit Hunter “set out to write a play which would perpetuate the history and conditions of the Cherokees in Oklahoma and also increase tourism in Cherokee Country.”<sup>125</sup> According to McMahan, Hunter wanted to produce a script “[that could] express the spirit, meaning, and heart of the Cherokee people insofar as possible while at the same time entertaining people.”<sup>126</sup> Increasing tourism and entertaining people, however, were the playwright’s primary concerns. Hunter had to accommodate his audiences, which were, as the playwright suggested to McMahan, “a homogenous representation of ‘grass roots’ America where concern for God, Country, and Community, and Family is predominant.”<sup>127</sup> According to Hunter, “no matter what you write about...you are writing about America. The background

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<sup>125</sup> McMahan, “An Historical Analysis,” 3.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*



theme is America.”<sup>128</sup> Because the focus of the drama is about America and for Americans, the Cherokees’ history had to be made condescendingly simple and their culture made exotic.

For Hunter, this was the only plausible way to tell the story. The playwright explains that he has Ross and Sarah make “repeated statements about their hope that the Cherokee would eventually come together and perform a task that would heal their wounds and place themselves before the world as a united people, to do that one great thing that would please God.”<sup>129</sup> This desire, Hunter elaborates, came to him when he realized that the adoption of the state of Oklahoma into the United State of America in 1907 would, by necessity, “weld all [the] Indian nations...into some kind of society”:

And it was, finally, the power of the tribal chieftains, and the leaders of the various Indian nations, who got together and agreed to join the United States and give up their individual tribal identities, that made statehood a possibility....

There were a number of meetings among the leaders of the Civilized Tribes....

This is why the play states the hope that even though the Cherokee were uprooted in their homeland, they can still come together and become a great nation. But they must relinquish their identity to become something else. They must lose their identity in order to find it. Lose identity as Cherokees and find it again in statehood as American citizens.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Brown, “Re-creating History,” 63.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

Suggesting that the Cherokees' lost their identity in order to become American citizens is a primary tactic Hunter utilized to cater to Euramerican audiences—grassroots audiences who, with their love of country, would not want to see a drama that cast the establishment of the United States in a negative light. Therefore, Hunter framed the drama within an origin story of sorts to support his claim that the United States was born because the Cherokees gave themselves up for the greater “American” good. The juxtaposition of the Ravenmocker with Christianity here exemplifies Hunter’s process of accommodation, as the Cherokees’ traditional beliefs are trumped by Euramerican convictions: only one’s faith in God can keep the Ravenmocker from stealing the heart of the Cherokee Nation. Such a sentiment resonated with Euramerican audiences, and the repetition of Ecclesiastes 3:1 afforded them with the ability to detain their grief, as the constant reminder of God’s words absolved their guilt. In essence, the Cherokees’ tragic story was God’s will, and because it was His bidding, the Cherokees were better off. Despite the turbulent convergence of the white and red “rivers,” the Cherokees and Euramericans came together, and in the great wild “ocean” of North America, formed a civilized, Euramerican society. Aside from the imaginative portrayal of Cherokee culture and the colonizing narrative surrounding the Cherokees’ politically focused entry into the United States, Hunter also represented his characters in a manner with which grassroots audiences could identify. Nowhere in the drama is this more visible than in the play’s portrayal and representation of Cherokee women.

One would expect after hearing Dennis III introduce his grandmother at the top of the play that the drama would highlight the powerful role of Cherokee women in Indian Territory, especially when Dennis III shouts, “God, bless the Cherokee women!” (2). Though Hunter does pay attention to female figures in *The Trail of Tears*, more so than in *Unto These Hills*, their

placement in the drama is conventional and hackneyed. As Raymond Carroll Hayes notes, Hunter admitted to him that female roles were “difficult for [him] to create” as “the most important movements in American history seem to have been motivated...by the male animal.”<sup>131</sup> Because men were responsible for shaping American history, it was necessary to “dream up roles for women,” which is why his dramas contain “romantic interludes . . . , dances, quilting parties, sewing bees, and weddings,” as this was the only way “to vitalize the play with female warmth and color and variety.”

While Sarah is the leading female character in the play and the carrier of the drama’s primary aphorism, she is stereotypically two dimensional. For instance, as the prologue transitions to the first scene, the elderly Sarah transforms into the “the young girl of 1839” (2). While Dennis III narrates, Sarah “skips out to ‘step-off’ the outline of her dream house” in “imaginary dimensions.” Visualizing where the parlor will go, Sarah relates to Hannah (Watie’s wife) what her home will look like once she and Dennis finally settle in Indian Territory. Hannah is apprehensive of Sarah’s daydreaming and informs her that Watie will not approve of her and Dennis being together. This news does not stifle Sarah’s envisaging though, as she is convinced that their “marriage might bring both families closer together” (3). Upon the entrance of Sequoyah, who is followed by Watie and Boudinot, Sarah snaps back to reality and runs to the men with questions about Dennis’s arrival: “Is there any word from the east?... Then they’ll be here soon? When? How long before they arrive?... And Dennis? Is he coming? Have you heard from him?” Sequoyah, Watie, and Boudinot have adjourned from a council meeting in which they discussed how they will receive the Cherokee Nation once they arrive. Though cognizant of

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<sup>131</sup> Hayes, “A Study of Hero-building,”55.

her uncles' bitterness toward Ross, Sarah does not question whether the men will greet the newcomers with hospitality.<sup>132</sup> Because Sarah chooses to remain willfully ignorant of the Cherokees' factionalism, Elias Boudinot, who is also Sarah's uncle, pulls her aside and instructs her to "remember who [she is]—who [her] family is" once "these people from the East arrive." When Dennis and the rest of the Cherokee Nation do reach Indian Territory, Watie and Boudinot attempt to keep the lovers apart; however, Sarah's strong will and determination is unwavering—she is committed to marrying Dennis.

Though Sarah is a prominent character throughout the drama, her role is vapid and serves only to promote domesticity. Sarah longs for the union of the Cherokee Nation, though she does so only because it means she will be able to marry and have children with Dennis. It is through this act alone that Sarah believes she has the power to effect change in the Nation. The portrayal of Cherokee women in this light is suggestive of normative gender roles and gendered expectations: while women dream of change, only men can make it happen.

Toward the end of Act One, Sarah and Dennis are given time alone on stage (15-9). Having just finished her bible lesson with a group of school children, Sarah and Dennis begin to cavort about the church lawn. Sarah, who has stolen Dennis's moccasins, provokes Dennis to chase after her. Over, around, and under picnic tables, the lovers frolic until Dennis finally catches Sarah in his arms and kisses her. After a short playful exchange, their conversation turns serious. Sarah has become disquieted, fearful that her family will try to keep them from marriage. She turns to Dennis for help.

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<sup>132</sup> When it comes to political matters, no woman questions the men's motives or offers their advice.

In an attempt to console Sarah, Dennis tells her that they will move to Washington, where he will practice law. Moving away from the chaos in Indian Territory is the only thing Dennis can think of doing if he and Sarah are to safely be together. Sarah explains that if she marries Dennis, then her uncle would likely kill him irrespective of if, when, and where they relocate. Before Dennis can respond, however, Jesse rushes in and informs the couple that Major and John Ridge were assassinated along with Elias Boudinot. Dennis, whose only concern is for Sarah's safety, asserts that they will leave for Washington at once. Sarah, however, has a change of heart; she informs Dennis that she cannot leave her community, that she must stay to "teach [the] people—to build a Society" (18). Incredulous, Dennis tells Sarah that the "the Cherokees are savages! Murderers!" Their following exchange is exacting:

DENNIS: White men will take over the Territory and drive us farther west!

Where do we go next, California? (Sarah turns away from him.) While Cherokee fight among themselves, white men take the land and get rich.

SARAH: We can't solve our problems by running away!

DENNIS: Is there any special virtue living in a wilderness?

SARAH: It is our duty as Cherokee to stay here and rebuild our nation! Do you know why white men always win? Because white children are taught work and responsibility!

DENNIS: What's the use? The Indian is disappearing anyway. What do they call it? The twilight of the Cherokee.

SARAH: Don't talk like that! Your father said there is something great that the Cherokee will do. We must labor to bring about that day. Dennis, the white man and the red man are like two rivers coming together. Each

changes the other, but off in the distance at last they become one stream, flowing toward the same ocean. Neither one wins out! They simply mingle together. It is like our marriage will be, Dennis, like our loving each other.

Following Sarah's last words, Dennis embraces her. John Ross, who has entered unnoticed, pleads with Dennis to stay, informing him that the Cherokees will build a capitol and that he will one day be able to practice law in their own courts. Turning their attention back to the matter at hand, they swiftly exit for safety.

We do not see Sarah again until the second act. Following the first scene of act two, in which Watie decides to join forces with the Confederacy, we are transported to the dressing room of the Female Seminary. Sarah, along with her daughter, Talara, and a handful of Cherokee female students, are preparing for the May dance celebration. Sarah has aged considerably, and we learn that she has since married Dennis and has had children. Though Sarah continues to advocate for her Cherokee community, her demeanor has slightly changed; she is no longer a naïve young woman in love, but a mother who, compelled by her Christian faith, bears new responsibilities.

The scene opens with Sarah helping a young Cherokee woman get into her dress for the celebration. Amy, who is described as a young girl "working with an exceptionally large bosom" is trying to squeeze into a "corset which is obviously too small" (27). Throughout the scene, Amy's body is utilized as a source for humor. Following Sarah's instruction, Amy struggles to wrap the petticoats around her waist. After Amy manages to properly dress—with Sarah's reluctant assistance—the final result is less than picturesque. Amy is embarrassed, as she looks dowdy. Sarah suggests that she pin a rose on her dress "for a touch of color." Amy, however,

reminds Sarah of her large bosom by pulling her shoulders back, to which Sarah then suggests pinning it in her hair. As Amy schleps off stage, Sarah “watches [her] with a sigh” (29).

The scene progresses as Sarah and her daughter argue about the proper role of a woman in society. Talara is set upon kissing a boy at the dance, which does not please Sarah. After a short period of bickering, Sarah leaves the dressing room to allow Talara to finished getting dressed. As she exits, Jimmy Looney, the boy Talara plans to kiss, enters. Jimmy catches sight of Talara, who is bent over adjusting her stockings. Discomfited by Sarah’s indecent posture, Jimmy turns to run. Sensing his presence, however, Talara rushes to the door to cut him off before he can escape. Talara provocatively blocks the door frame with her arms, ensnaring Jimmy. She reproves: “Well, a lady might as well dress in the public square in Tahlequah! This is not a dressing room...it’s a railway station!” Jimmy is awkwardly aroused by Talara’s recalcitrance and nervously responds: “If an engineer saw you, his train would jump the track.” Amused, Talara implores Jimmy to be more descriptive, to which Jimmy can only mutter a pithy statement about her beauty. In response, Talara grabs Jimmy, “doubles him back and kisses him,” then rushes out the door, leaving a stunned Jimmy in a state of concupiscent stupor. Jimmy rebounds, and with a click of his heels, darts out of the room in pursuit of Talara.

In terms of female representation, this latter scene is perhaps the most problematic. Not only does the scene provide little information, it does not support the overarching narrative of the drama. Rather, it is a scene of fanciful feminine color that is, without any perceptible reason, gratuitously unchaste. Though Hunter managed to provide space for female characters in *The Trail of Tears*, he did so by making them sexualized objects. In relation to the Society’s wishes that more emphasis be placed on the history and development of the Female Seminary, Hunter’s dramaturgical perspective is telling of the patriarchy subsuming outdoor historical drama. Given

the time period, it appears Hunter is pulling from the silver screen to shape his female characters as well. I do not mean to suggest that rendering female characters on stage in this manner is in poor taste. Rather, I argue that in only having female characters assume such roles and responsibilities—to include female figures only for “romantic interludes . . . , dances, quilting parties, sewing bees, and weddings” or “for feminine color”—causes injury to Cherokee and non-Native women. As Carolyn Johnston notes, in traditional Cherokee society “women had autonomy and sexual freedom...[they] possessed a cosmology that contains female supernatural figures, and had significant political and economic power.”<sup>133</sup> There was more to the everyday life of a Cherokee woman than being a dutiful housewife.

While a handful of Cherokee women did adopt Euramerican gender roles, they were among a minority swayed by the United States government and the missionaries who made a “concerted effort to transform Cherokee gender roles and attitudes toward sexuality and the body” and to “inculcate Euro American values of true womanhood.”<sup>134</sup> Johnston notes that even among the Cherokee men, such as Elias Boudinot, that there was increasing pressure for Cherokee women to adopt Euramerican customs of “piety, person, parts, patience, prudence, providence, privilege, parentage, and portion.”<sup>135</sup> In fact, Elias Boudinot wrote many articles for the *Cherokee Phoenix* in which he wrote about how a woman should comport herself. In one article he wrote that a woman’s person must be “beautiful because the gentleness of her nature

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<sup>133</sup> Carolyn Johnston, *Cherokee Women in Crisis: Trail of Tears, Civil War, and Allotment, 1838-1907* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2003), 3.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.



and the kindness of her heart throw a household halo around her person adorning her as a honeysuckle adorns an ordinary tree and impressing her mental image on our mind.”<sup>136</sup> In another, Boudinot wrote that, in order to be a housewife—“a sacred name...and [a] responsible office”—a woman “must be the unspotted sanctuary to which wearied men flee from the crimes of the world, and feel that no sin dare enter there.... [the] guardian angel of his footsteps on earth, and guide them to Heaven.”<sup>137</sup> Though there was increasing pressure to live accordingly, many Cherokee women did not give up their duty and responsibility to the land, to their crops, to Selu. While Hunter does not totally misrepresent the political and social climate during this time period, he perpetuates a colonial mentality in his narrative that resembles a 1950s point of view more than it does a point of view from the late 1800s. In this light, Hunter’s portrayal of Cherokee women in the drama is not fully formed, relying on stereotypical female character constructions. Though these characters are underdeveloped, Hunter does include in their speech important bits of exposition, though this information only works to serve the overarching narrative of the Cherokees’ process of Euramerican civilization.

## **Conclusion**

Whereas the CHA and the CNHS wanted an outdoor historical drama to commemorate, educate, and preserve the Cherokees’ heritage and culture, Hunter wanted to focus primarily on entertainment, as this was the number one thing that would increase ticket sales. Pulling from various forms of popular entertainment, Hunter constructed his dramas in a manner that he believed his audiences would find captivating. In doing so, he perpetuated stereotypes and

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 43; Elias Boudinot, “Who is a Beautiful Wife?” *Cherokee Phoenix*, Apr 1, 1829, 4.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 44; Elias Boudinot, “Angel of the House,” *Cherokee Phoenix*, May 27, 1829, 4.

created false histories that many people interpreted to be true. As the dramas continued to be performed each summer, they generated mass appeal. By the 2000s, over six million people had seen either *Unto These Hills* or *The Trail of Tears*, if not both. Though this brought much needed income to the Cherokee communities, it also brought forth a world of problems, as tourist operations of this sort usually do.

In this chapter, I have shown how these early dramatic representations of Cherokee history and culture serve Euramerican audiences and how, in doing so, they displace—intentionally or not—the very people they objectify. Whereas the CHA and the CNHS were instituted to establish programs for tourism and cultural revitalization within each community, these programs really only served touristic curiosity and endorsed a false understanding of Cherokee values. In effect, *Unto These Hills* and *The Trail of Tears* silenced the Cherokees' voice on stage; they created counterfeit representations of Cherokee cultural and historical memory by way of outside-view predicates with which Cherokees can only falsely identify. In this sense, these dramas are merely propagandistic, spreading the beliefs, morals, and ideologies of a Euramerican social elite. While tourists flocked to see these dramatic portrayals year after year, community members became perturbed with their insensitive depictions. Shortly after their inception, the CHA and the CNHS quickly began the laborious process of making their plays benefit the Cherokees' perspective. The original dramas, however, were products of a rather impervious genre and market, a dilemma both organizations would constantly struggle to overcome.

## CHAPTER 4

### TAKING CONTROL: COMMUNITY PRESSURES AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE LEADERSHIP OF THE CHC AND THE CHA

“Change is the only constant thing.”  
- Joe Sears, in a letter to David Weiss (2003)

After *Unto These Hills* and *The Trail of Tears* opened, the CHA and the CHC started revising the dramas. Both organizations did this for several reasons: On the one hand, the dramas were never perfect and the historical material presented in the dramas was in constant need of revision. On the other hand, the dramas needed to be regularly revised in order for them to stay attractive to tourists. *The Trail of Tears* changed the most over the years it was in production, and was the first to be replaced with a new drama in 1983. *Unto These Hills* did not radically change until 2006. Despite their revision, both dramas had become to seem clichéd and trite by the end of the century. Moreover, the Cherokee communities in Oklahoma and in North Carolina started to become more vocal about the representations of their culture on the outdoor stage. In response to both tourist expectations and community concerns, the CHC and the CHA decided it was time to give their dramas a much needed facelift. One of the ways they managed to do this was by bringing in contemporary playwrights. Many playwrights found it pertinent to incorporate the Cherokees’ traditional cosmogonic reality into the drama, as up until the mid-1990s, the culture was represented stereotypically. In response, playwrights began to dig deeper into the Cherokees’ storytelling practices and pull characters from the Cherokees’ origin and creation stories.

In this chapter, I explore the several revised scripts that graced either the Mountainside Theatre or Theatre Tsa-la-gi in an effort to bring the Cherokees' traditional culture into a contemporary perspective. I begin with an exploration of the changes made to the dramas in Oklahoma, as they were the first to incorporate and focus on historical and cultural accuracy. I then explore the changes made to *Unto These Hills* in North Carolina. While it was the CHC's and the CHA's goal to revise their dramas so that they aligned more closely with what each Cherokee community wished to see on stage, their revisions were not always successful. One of the biggest issues each organization ran into was that, when it came down to placing authentic cultural information on stage, many community members were unsure what elements or aspects of the Cherokees' culture were appropriate or stageworthy. Moreover, many Cherokees, especially the more acculturated or "cosmopolitan," did not believe certain traditional aspects should be shown on stage, as it ran the risk of reflecting poorly on the Cherokees and the community. Despite these issues, the CHC's and the CHA's experimentation with their outdoor dramas during this time period reveal some of the most fascinating aspects of outdoor historical drama and its position within the United States' historical memory. The productions that I discuss below exemplify just how impervious the outdoor historical market became since its inception in the early 1930s. When I first started conducting research for this topic, I was convinced that the changes that the CHC and the CHA made to their production would drastically alter the market. Unfortunately, the tourism industry and the outdoor historical genre are still bound by convention today.

## **Oklahoma**

Between 1969 and 1983, the CHC asked Hunter to revise *The Trail of Tears* on a yearly basis. Whereas the organization wished to make the drama align with the Cherokee Nation's

historical and cultural memory, Hunter resisted, as he understood that doing so would alienate tourists, the audience base for which he was writing. Several directors took it upon themselves to revise Hunter's script, causing many problems.

For instance, shortly after learning that his script was going to be replaced, Hunter petitioned the organization to buy the rights to *The Trail of Tears*. In a 1984 letter, attorney Elton Johnson informed Hunter that his request to purchase the script was denied, stating "the Contract...entered into by you and the Society on December 23, 1965...is quite clear that the Society is under no obligation to transfer ownership of the play or play-script to anyone."<sup>1</sup> According to the contract, "recovery of the rights" would only be possible if the script did not enter into production prior to 1970. As the drama premiered in 1969, that "provision of the contract [was] moot." Hunter argued that the contract was "unclearly written and agreed upon" and insisted that the script was to be constantly developed over several years, which necessitated his constant employment.<sup>2</sup> Since the CHC had decided to revise the drama on their own, Hunter believed this violated the contract. The agreement was clear, Hunter thought, and understood by all parties involved: "If and when the Society should decide to produce a different play," Hunter states, "the right, title, and interest would revert to the playwright for the payment of \$500."<sup>3</sup>

Hunter petitioned the organization to buy the rights to his script because his name was being used to promote a production that he did not write himself. Hunter states:

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<sup>1</sup> Elton L. Johnson, Jr. to Kermit Hunter, Feb 24, 1984.

<sup>2</sup> Kermit Hunter to Elton L. Johnson, Jr., Feb 28, 1984.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

One underlying reason for this concern is the continued appearance of my name as author. I do not care to have my name associated with the production I saw last summer, or with any that might be done under the current situation, because it has taken me 36 years and over 40 productions to build a different kind of name.<sup>4</sup>

According to Wallace Umberger, Hunter did allow directors to “make minor changes [to his dramas] without consulting” him.<sup>5</sup> These changes, however, were small in comparison to what the CHC was doing. Up until 1984, the organization was making drastic changes to the script without the playwright’s permission. Hunter informed Umberger that the director was responsible for consulting with him “about script weaknesses” before any drastic changes were to be made.<sup>6</sup> Hunter didn’t like for the director to alter the script, as “it [was the director’s] job first to try the script...and see if it works.”<sup>7</sup> If the script didn’t work, then Hunter felt the director should have the playwright fix it and not take the task upon himself.<sup>8</sup> According to Umberger, what made Hunter angry was “when the director made changes throughout the playing season without telling” him, as Hunter only knew how to revise the script that he had written.<sup>9</sup> If a

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Wallace Umberger, “A History of Unto These Hills, 1941 to 1968” (PhD diss., Tulane University, 1970), 56.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 57-8.

director made changes during the production season, they were rarely documented, leaving Hunter with little to no idea about what had been altered or changed.<sup>10</sup>

While Hunter's arguments here are valid, there are several remarks made in letters between 1969 and 1996 that suggest that Hunter stopped re-writing the script altogether, which is why the organization decided to revise the drama on their own. According to the playwright, the CHC lacked the ability to recognize his script's perfection. Hunter mentions in a letter to Scott Parker, the director of the Institute of Outdoor Drama, in 1996 that he was fired ("a few years back") and that the Society "got that fellow from the museum at Cherokee as manager, and hired a playwright from Tulsa to follow what the museum man said."<sup>11</sup> Hunter goes on to state that the Society urged him "to introduce several Indians who are known to no one but a Cherokee historian, to rout out...the Indian element of the play." Hunter claims he did, "adding some 15 minutes to the play and twisting the emphasis," but there is no evidence of this. The playwright finally submits that he should have resigned back then, "but [he] kept thinking [the play] might be pulled into shape somehow," and he kept "forgetting that [he was] about as welcome [in Tahlequah] as the HIV virus."

From the very early stages of *Unto These Hills* and *The Trail of Tears*, it seems Hunter consistently felt that he was being disrespected; if you did not submit to him, it seems, he would immediately become vindictive, which was a quality the Society recognized from the very beginning. Ultimately, the CHC decided to shelve Hunter's script and write a new show that would, they thought, be more culturally and historically accurate. And so, in 1984, the CHC

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Kermit Hunter to Scott Parker, Jun 6, 1996.

decided to commission James Vance to write a new drama. For the fourteenth (1984) and fifteenth seasons (1985), Vance rewrote Hunter's drama to focus on the Cherokees' understanding of Indian Removal. Vance's script is the first to align itself with the Cherokees' understanding of their history and their cultural traditions. Not only does his drama include additional historical events, it revolves around figures that stem from the Cherokees' cosmogonic reality.

According to *The Oklahoman* in 1983, Vance viewed *The Trail of Tears* "from a different perspective than...Hunter."<sup>12</sup> Vance states in the news article that "John Ross...is largely the focal point" of the play and that, whereas "Hunter saw people as historical figures, [he] sees historical figures as people." Vance proceeds to explain that the drama would continue to present a spectacle, but that it would "show [the] people, and why they acted the way they did," which according to the playwright "is the heart of the drama."<sup>13</sup> In the 1984 version of Vance's script, he introduces the Mythkeeper, who serves as the drama's narrator. In the opening prologue, the Mythkeeper calls forward the seven Cherokee Clan Spirits and introduces them to the audience. Then he begins to tell the story of how the Creator promised the Cherokees that, "so long as [their] hearts remained pure, [they] would endure forever, in happiness, at the center of the

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<sup>12</sup> "Indian Tale Expanded for Sooners," *The Oklahoman*, Jun 13, 1983,

<http://newsok.com/indian-tale-expanded-for-sooners/article/2028385> (last accessed May 15, 2015).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.



earth.”<sup>14</sup> The Mythkeeper holds a belt up for everyone to see, explaining that the Cherokees’ ancestors wove the Creator’s message into the belt so that they would always be able to remember where they belong. After a dance fills the stage in celebration, accompanying the lighting of the sacred fire, the Mythkeeper continues his story, informing the audience that the Cherokees have recently lost touch with their traditional ways because of the ever encroaching white man. The scene shifts to a ball field where Stand Watie and William Ross (John Ross’ fictionalized son) are seen playing stickball. The two men deride each other about how to properly play the sport. William teases Watie, who is considerably older than he is, that he is unfit to play with the younger boys. Watie informs William that he will gladly challenge him to a game, but that it will have to wait, as they are being called to council.<sup>15</sup>

This early scene sets up the notion that the two Cherokee men respected each other prior to Euramerican advances, that the men (as well as the Cherokee Nation) were once unified. As the play develops, the two men become mortal enemies. Through their growing hatred for one another, Vance symbolizes the growing factionalism in the Cherokee Nation—the Ross Party and the Treaty party. By the end of the play, Watie, after having already destroyed several Cherokee homes in the name of the Confederacy, has decided that he will murder William in retaliation for his cousins’ murders which took place shortly after the Cherokee Nation arrived in Indian Territory. As Watie makes his way to the Ross’s homestead, where William is residing,

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<sup>14</sup> James Vance, “The Trail of Tears” (unpublished manuscript, 1984), 1. Subsequent citations made parenthetically in text.

<sup>15</sup> John Ross did have a son named William. The character in Vance’s script, however, is only loosely based on this figure.

he burns everything in sight. Upon arriving at the Ross's home, Watie has a short confrontation with William wherein he tells William the reason he must die. William pleads with Watie to spare his mother's life, to which Watie agrees. Watie then instructs two of his soldiers to torch the home.<sup>16</sup> Right before Watie goes in to attack William, however, the two soldiers bring out a bundled blanket from the burning house. Inside it is the belt the Mythkeeper describes in the opening prologue, the belt that was given to the Cherokees by Unetlanvhi (the Great Spirit) as a sign of their belonging "at the center of the earth" (1). When Watie sees the belt, he is taken aback. William tells Watie that the belt is all that remains "of their past...of a time when men thought their hearts could be pure" (48). William then advises Watie to throw it into the burning house, as "there is no place for it in the world Stand Watie will make" (48). Surprised and chagrined by the coldness of William's words, Watie is suddenly reminded of community. With a change of heart, Watie thrusts the belt into William's arms and tells him to flee along with his mother. As the characters disperse, the Mythkeeper reenters, delivering a message of hope: "The war ended. And from the blaze of battle, our people emerged ... like the Phoenix—out of the ashes, to begin life anew" (49). The play concludes in a Washington hotel room in 1866, where John Ross and Dennis Cooley, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, discuss and agree upon a new treaty that stipulates that the Cherokee Nation will remain undivided and will endure into the future.

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<sup>16</sup> In 1863, Watie and his Confederate troops did burn down the Ross's homestead, also known as Rose Cottage. Watie did not directly approach the household with the intention to murder William though, nor did he spare William's life after seeing the belt.

According to the CHC's publicity materials, Hunter's drama returned and remained in performance until 1994, resurfacing in 1996 after a one-year hiatus.<sup>17</sup> This timeline, however, is not entirely accurate. Two additional versions of the drama appeared on the stage between 1987 and 1989. Duane King, a scholar of Cherokee history, is reported to have written a version of *The Trail of Tears* that appeared on the Tsa-la-gi stage shortly after Vance's drama. King's script is unavailable, but Tonia Weavel stated in our interview that the production, while historically and culturally accurate, was very dry and serious.<sup>18</sup> Following King, Lane Glenn and Charles Seat, two performers in the original outdoor drama, wrote a new drama as well. Their drama follows the same events that Hunter's does, but draws from King's to portray historical and cultural material in a more authentic manner. For instance, in the opening scene of the 1989 production, we are introduced to the Mayor of Tahlequah and his aide, Elmer, both of whom, along with a group of Cherokee citizens, are awaiting news about Oklahoma's pending statehood. The scene is rather humorous, as the two men fumble with a telegraph machine through which the news is being delivered. The machine breaks down, postponing the arrival of the news. While Elmer tries to get the telegraph machine operating again, the Mayor commences to tell the Cherokees' history. Glenn and Seat pay special attention to the historical record in their drama. In this opening scene alone, they portray the Cherokees as waiting nervously rather than enthusiastically to hear if Indian Territory and Oklahoma Territory have been adopted into the United States as a unified nation. As the scene develops, a few Cherokees air their fears

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<sup>17</sup> Tom Mooney, "50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Exhibit: Celebrating 50 Years of the Cherokee National Historical Society" (Tahlequah: Cherokee Heritage Center, 2013), 23.

<sup>18</sup> Tonia Hogner-Weavel, in conversation with the author, Aug 4, 2015.

about losing their identity and their lands if Indian Territory is incorporated into the United States. Others state that they do not want to be a part of the United States, as they would lose their autonomy and right to self-governance. By the end of the play, Elmer manages to fix the telegraph machine. When the telegram finally comes through, the Cherokees are rendered despondent; they are grave and non-celebratory. After a brief pause, the Mayor informs the crowd that they will do the best they can with the news they have received in order to make sure the Cherokee Nation survives into the future.

Another interesting aspect of Glenn's and Seat's drama is that they blend religious practices throughout the drama. Unlike Hunter, who champions Christianity, Glen and Seat pay specific attention to the complexity of spirituality during this time period. For instance, during council scenes, which are comprised of both Cherokee men and women, the council leaders have the community healer conduct a traditional Cherokee prayer. After the healer has finished, they then ask a Christian missionary to share another prayer from the Christian perspective. When the missionary asks everyone to bow their heads in prayer, however, it is clearly noted which Cherokee men follow suit and which do not. For instance, in scene six, Elias Boudinot is asked to pray over the council meeting. Glenn and Seat note that, while Boudinot prays, only a few men are to bow their heads. In fact, the playwrights have Sequoyah look a different direction than those in the gathering because the historical figure resisted Christianity. Only after the prayer has been spoken does Sequoyah turn his attention back to the council. Upon doing so, he thanks the men for their words, declaring he remembered "a time when council meetings were

not as complicated as they are today and [when] men could speak freely without the cautions of ministers.”<sup>19</sup>

Hunter’s drama returned to the stage in 1990. There are few copies of Hunter’s yearly revisions following this time period, and those that I have been able to track down suggest that very little of his drama changed. There is mention in a 1990s news article that the production that year was slightly different from the original script. According to columnist Chuck Davis, Hunter’s drama “[began] in 1907, just before Oklahoma became the nation’s 46th state.”<sup>20</sup> The play’s beginning and ending are not much different from Hunter’s other versions, which are bookended with the “statehood” theme; however, Hunter made a change in narration between 1986 and 1994. Davis states that the 1990 production opens with a Cherokee woman named Anawake in “downtown Tahlequah, at the Court House...telling the story of the Cherokee people.”<sup>21</sup> It isn’t clear if the community is celebrating Oklahoma’s incorporation into the United States, as in Hunter’s 1996 revision, or if the theme of statehood has been removed. Anawake returns in the end to close the show in a manner similar to the end of Hunter’s 1996 script, where the voice of an aged Sarah recounts the unification of the Cherokee Nation under the State of Oklahoma, which leads me to believe the 1990 version championed the statehood theme and that only the narrator and the narration of the event were altered.

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<sup>19</sup> Lane Glen and Charles Seat, “Trail of Tears” (unpublished manuscript, 1989), 7.

<sup>20</sup> Chuck Davis, “Trail of Tears Drama Comes to Life,” *NewsOK.com*, Aug 10, 1990, <http://newsok.com/trail-of-tears-drama-comes-to-life/article/2326977> (last accessed Dec 21, 2014).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

Hunter's script received major criticism in the early 1990s. In 1992, Chad Smith wrote to Principal Chief Wilma Mankiller that the drama was in need of drastic revision. In a rather scathing memorandum, Smith states that Cherokee scholar Rennard Strickland complained "of the perversion of the history by the play applauding Oklahoma statehood at the expense of the Cherokees"; Bob Conley, of the script's depiction of "the Cherokees [as] suicidal"; and others of the play's triteness and fraudulence.<sup>22</sup> Smith also criticized the script's reference to the Cherokees as noble savages as well as the self-destructive tone of the play and of the Cherokees. He also felt that the glorification of Oklahoma statehood, the offensive and tacky mistreatment of cultural dances, and the drama's focus on war and violence for no other reason than for mere color and spectacle were deplorable.<sup>23</sup> "Those authorities who allow the perversion of Cherokee history and culture to continue," Smith admonishes, should make "certain minor changes" for the current season's production and "solicit a new script by contest" the following year. Among the things Smith suggests be replaced or removed from the script are the use of fictional characters to serve as symbols of Cherokee beliefs, like the Ravenmocker, and the inappropriate ritualization of Cherokee expressions that the Cherokees do not consider ritualistic or ceremonious. The most pressing issue needing addressing, however, was the notion that the Cherokees ever acted in an obsequious manner or showed servile deference to the United States' federal and state governments. As Smith articulates, the drama was loaded with disrespectful and racist stereotypes.

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<sup>22</sup> Chad Smith to Wilma Mankiller, "Re: Trail of Tears Drama," May 27, 1992.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

Toward the mid-1990s, the drama, as well as the CHC, underwent drastic changes. New ideas were beginning to reveal themselves as American Indians across the United States started to rejuvenate their cultural pride. In 1994, Kermit Hunter's production of the *Trail of Tears* played to 15,840 people, a significant drop of 4,500 persons in one year, compared to previous attendance records. It was an enormous loss of revenue for the CHC. According to year-end reports, there had been a steady decline in attendance since 1982, when about 29,000 people were attending the show each summer. With audience decline, the CHC decided to take a one-year hiatus to "refocus" and strategize new ways to get audiences back in the theatre.<sup>24</sup> Hunter's production returned in 1996 with a revision of the 1975 script, but ticket sales failed to pick back up, finally convincing people that Hunter's drama was simply old-fashioned.

Hunter was clued in that the Cherokee community reviled his work by 1996. At one moment, Hunter appears belligerent toward such criticism; at another, he exudes a willingness to satisfy the community (for the sake of his posterity). Indeed, Hunter oscillates between being resentful and suppliant regarding the future of, and his association with, *The Trail of Tears*. Toward the end of the season, Hunter apparently heard rumors that he would no longer be associated with the outdoor drama. In a letter to the Center, Hunter begged the organization to allow him to write a completely new script for the 1997 season; however, Hunter had crossed several lines with the CHC and the organization simply stopped cooperating with the playwright. In 1996, Hunter wrote to Scott Davis that Mac Harris asked him to revise several scenes in his

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<sup>24</sup> "Cherokee Drama to Open Monday," *NewsOK.com*, Jun 30, 1996,

<http://m.newsok.com/cherokee-drama-to-open-monday/article/2541175> (last accessed Jan 15, 2015).

script and to provide new dialogue and stage directions. Hunter mentioned that he replied to the CHC with some new ideas but ignored the committee's desire for new material. Someone apparently informed Hunter that the CHC decided to push forward with an entirely different play, which, according to Hunter, was "utilizing Indians almost entirely."<sup>25</sup> The committee "seems to have felt that since they owned the copyright...it was theirs to experiment with as they pleased," Hunter writes, explaining that "they seem to have wanted to do their own play, with my blessing."<sup>26</sup> Embittered, Hunter sent a scornful letter to Mac Harris attacking the organization:

If indeed you have dramatists there who can re-write, add lines, take out lines, add stage directions, and generally do my work, then by all means turn it over to them. If you trust their judgment over mine, then you need to go with the ones you trust. As I looked over the rewriting and considered it in the light of the whole play, I realized that they had little or no concept of the whole vehicle, only little bits and sequences. I would never have the gall to rewrite someone else's work. Suggest, yes, but never rewrite. That's the place where we part company. You hire me, so you use my work. If you can't use it, hire someone else. I would think that by now you would have had enough of these annual versions, and the directors and managers to write them. As long as you do that, you will never be satisfied. There is no way to please everyone. You take a script and go with it. The great fallacy is

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<sup>25</sup> Kermit Hunter to Scott Parker, no date, circa 1996.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.



that you will never get anywhere playing to the Cherokee Nation, or eastern Oklahoma. The audience is 90% from elsewhere.<sup>27</sup>

Whereas Hunter raises several good points, his understanding of his role in the outdoor drama was far from reality. Davis replied to Hunter with concern, stating that he “seemingly [had] disregarded all the suggestions and [had] rewritten and altered the play in a way [the CHC] had not requested or even spoken about.”<sup>28</sup> Recognizing his error, Hunter apologized in a follow-up letter, insisting that his previous words were misinterpreted. Included with his response was a detailed synopsis of Act One, as the Society saw it being produced.<sup>29</sup>

Hunter’s 1996 rewrite and his ideas for the future were less than satisfactory, to say the least. Nat Eek, the director that season, wrote to Parker that Hunter’s script was “serviceable, but old-fashioned, predictable, lacking in character development...and certainly out of sync with...current Native American concepts.”<sup>30</sup> Eek told Parker that neither he nor Harris were “interested in working with Hunter again,” stating that Hunter was “irascible, old-fashioned, non-flexible, and...incapable of seeing a 1997 viewpoint.”<sup>31</sup> Eek suggests that Hunter was “dedicated to the old-format,” which to Eek was “obvious, dull and no longer capable of readily holding an audience.” Shortly after Eek’s letter, Parker informed Hunter that they would be

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<sup>27</sup> Kermit Hunter to Mac Harris, no date, circa 1996.

<sup>28</sup> Mac Harris to Kermit Hunter, Nov 10, 1996.

<sup>29</sup> Kermit Hunter to Mac Harris, Jan 14, 1996.

<sup>30</sup> Nat Eek to Scott Parker, Jun 11, 1996.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

letting him go the following year, prompting Hunter to make one last compromise.<sup>32</sup> By the time Hunter's new ideas reached the Center, however, he and his vision were already afterthoughts.

In numerous letters to Parker shortly following Eek's letter, Hunter writes some of the most racist and pejorative statements regarding the Cherokee Nation and the CHC. In one letter, Hunter describes the organization and their drama as "time wasted" and that "they don't know"—"a bunch of amateur minds who believe...that anyone can write a play, or a poem, or a symphony, or can build a rocket ship, or at least a Cherokee can."<sup>33</sup> In another letter, Hunter reproves the CHC leaders as being backward, not matching the direction in Keeler's or Buchanan's era. Hunter pressed that Harris was insufficient in his position because he took on the task of pleasing everyone, which "works with intelligent, mature, experienced people at times, but never with Indians" who, according to Hunter, "believe (from childhood) that no white man can do anything as well as an Indian," not even "write a play, act a role, [or] conduct an

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<sup>32</sup> It seems that Parker cared for Hunter a great deal, often siding with him on issues concerning the drama in Tahlequah. In his letter to Hunter, he writes: "All of this may be too little, too late anyway. They may have already made up their minds that they need a new script and a new playwright, I just don't know. I wish to hell they had taken my advice of two years ago: hold off producing the show one more year and raise enough money to DO IT RIGHT, beginning again the summer of 1997. Instead, they decided to get up again this summer, but without all the needed resources. So, I fear it will be half-blown again." Scott Parker to Kermit Hunter, no date, circa 1996.

<sup>33</sup> Kermit Hunter to Scott Parker, no date, circa 1996.

intelligent conversation.”<sup>34</sup> It is obvious that Hunter was angry and embarrassed that he had been dismissed, but it is also evident that the playwright was incapable of self-reflection. The drama’s failure, it seems, was never his fault but everyone else’s, especially those who lacked his vision—a vision, Hunter suggests, he shared with “devoted and talented young men who understood theatre, to whom the theatre was a shrine” back in 1950.<sup>35</sup> It was not his play that warranted criticism, Hunter believed, but rather those “heavy-handed brainless would-be directors who have been taught in the self-conscious drama departments everywhere [sic], each generation proliferating an ongoing stream of incompetents.”

As the CHC said goodbye to Hunter, they welcomed one of the Cherokee Nation’s very own stars, Joe Sears. Sears’s *Nation: Trail of Tears*, which opened in 1997, marks the first time a Cherokee had been given the opportunity to write a new version of the drama. Though Sears’ script is unavailable, numerous news articles state that the playwright/director drastically overhauled Hunter’s drama and omitted all dance sequences and superfluous activity so as to keep the drama focused on Cherokee history, culture, and tradition. “It was the choice of the Cherokee to exclude all Hollywood dancing, as the Native Americans call it,” states Sears.<sup>36</sup> Audiences, however, did not respond favorably to Sears’s rewrite. Many tourists came to the production for the spectacle, which Sears omitted. Sears mentioned to William Kearns in 2010

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Kermit Hunter to Scott Parker, no date, circa 1997.

<sup>36</sup> “Auditions Scheduled for Cherokee Heritage Center’s Trail of Tears Drama,” Feb 9, 2001, *Cherokee Nation News Release, Cherokee.org*, <http://www.cherokee.org/News/Stories/21208.aspx> (last accessed Dec 21, 2014).

that when the CHC commissioned him to write the new drama “they expected [him] to put some comedy into it,” but he did not feel that the subject matter warranted comedy. “No way was I going to try to get a laugh out of 4,000 Indians dying,” Sears said.<sup>37</sup>

With Sears’ 1997 drama, sales did bounce back, nearly matching those of the mid-80s. Even though the playwright removed the spectacle from the drama, audiences flocked to see the production. This increase in ticket sales is likely because Sears was a name that people recognized, being a Broadway star and TV personality. Sears is well-known for his performance in and writing of the four *Greater Tuna* comedies. However, because previous production seasons failed to generate substantial revenue, the CHC failed to make a profit with which to offset their overall losses. Even though sales were high that year, the organization failed to recover. Sear’s drama, therefore, only lasted one year, and from 1998 to 2000, Theatre Tsa-La-Gi stayed dark. The amphitheatre was in need of major repair, and the three-year hiatus allowed the CHC to regroup and to strengthen their tourism program. It also gave Sears the time needed to revise and craft something that would surely impress not only the CHC but their audience base.

In 2001, Sears retooled and remounted his drama, which remained in performance until 2003.<sup>38</sup> Not only were dance numbers reintroduced, Sears brought back all the pageantry that he

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<sup>37</sup> William Kearns, “Actor-playwright Joe Sears proud of his Cherokee heritage,” Nov 19, 2010, *Lubbock Avalanche-Journal*, *Lubbockonline.com*, <http://lubbockonline.com/entertainment/2010-11-19/actor-playwright-joe-sears-proud-his-choerokee-heritage#.VwrJo6QrLIU> (last accessed Apr 10, 2016).

had removed from the 1997 drama, and he included live, on-stage singing. Sears commented on the production changes, stating:

The tourists demand that the entertainment be heightened.... We have to remain aware of everyone's needs, especially the audience, who is smarter than audiences 25 years ago. The new generations of Oklahomans have computers and easier access to their Cherokee Heritage; they know the true story of their ancestry. It would insult them as an audience to ignore the feelings of the Nation, even though they themselves are not members.<sup>39</sup>

According to *NewsOK.com*, the new drama incorporated contemporary Cherokee figures, such as Will Rogers. The “opening of the play begins at the Ziegfeld Follies, when a technical problem occurs,” the article states, “giving Will Rogers the opportunity to tell about his ancestors and the story of *The Trail Where They Cried*.”<sup>40</sup> Rogers serves as the drama’s narrator throughout the

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<sup>38</sup> There is contradictory evidence that suggests that a different production was in performance in 2003, one by playwright John Leitch entitled *Sequoyah: The Trail of Tears*. News articles of this year consistently connect the outdoor drama to Sears, but they also mention significant changes made to the 2003 script that reflect the title of Leitch’s production. “The Tsa La Gi Amphitheatre Comes to Life with the Production of the ‘Trail of Tears’ Drama,” *Cherokee Nation News Release*, *Cherokee.org*, Jun 19, 2003, <http://www.cherokee.org/News/Stories/22054.aspx> (last accessed Dec 21, 2014).

<sup>39</sup> “Auditions Scheduled,” *ibid*.

<sup>40</sup> Jay C. Grelen, “Playwright uses Broadway to Enliven Cherokee Drama,” Apr 27, 2001, *The Oklahoman*, *NewsOK.com*, <http://newsok.com/article/2739046> (last accessed Apr 10, 2016).

theatrical event, bridging the past and the “Cherokee Golden Age” with the modern world.<sup>41</sup>

Audiences responded to the production favorably and enjoyed the incorporation of Rogers as narrator.

Despite Sears’s strong run at the Theatre Tsa-La-Gi, he resigned in November of 2003 shortly after the season closed. In an e-mail to David Weiss, Sears discusses his separation from the organization:

The report from “Trail” is not good for me. The Chief wants a new play reflecting his vision and that has less Trail history and more modern emphasis. I am dedicated to the historical. The Heritage Center is under pressure to appease the higher ups since they have the money. The Heritage Center has lost favor by indulging the ideas of entertainment values and exploring areas and ideas they knew were controversial to begin with. The Heritage Center continues to appoint unprofessional, unworthy and unqualified people to run their theatre. No quality decisions made. The Heritage Center will continue to write their play by committee. They are seeking a new playwright. Their dilemma is finding one to work for free like me.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> The years between the removal and the 1860s are referred to as the Cherokee’s “Golden Age,” a period of prosperity, tribal factionalism, and War. Margaret Dornaus, “Celebrating Cherokee Heritage on Trail of Tears,” May 12, 2002, *American Profile* (New York City: PGOA Media), <http://americanprofile.com/articles/trail-of-tears-chokeee-heritage-talequah-oklahoma/> (last accessed Dec 27, 2015).

<sup>42</sup> Joe Sears to David Weiss, Nov 9, 2003.

The numerous reasons surrounding Sears' resignation here are somewhat opaque, but a 2010 editorial featuring Sears makes certain aspects a little clearer. William Kerns writes that Sears left because "the play's steering committee" was unresolved on what to present on the outdoor stage.<sup>43</sup> "That's why they've never really had a successful playwright," writes Kerns, quoting Sears: "They cannot seem to get on the same page." Additionally, it appears that the production team lacked professionalism between 2001 and 2003. In several letters between Sears, David Weiss, and Scott Parker, it is evident that the production was plagued with inexperienced workers.

For instance, in several letters between David Weiss and Anne Shirey, who was the producing director of the drama in 2004, Weiss emphatically states that he didn't want to continue working with the organization as their lighting designer anymore because he found the staffing to be comprised of amateurs.<sup>44</sup> This is further substantiated in Weiss's e-mails to Scott Parker, wherein he states that the show "still has too much amateurism in it," and "suffers from lack of rehearsal time," which "is most notable in the crowd scenes." Also, it appears that the production lost its sense of community. Sears wrote to Weiss that he had heard there was a lot "racial tension backstage."<sup>45</sup> The racial tension ultimately displeased Sears, as the cast was "95% Native American."<sup>46</sup> Sears wrote that to have them abuse the non-native actors was uncharacteristic and embarrassing, and Sears suggested that Weiss contact the chief

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<sup>43</sup> Kerns, "Actor-playwright Joe Sears," *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> David Weiss to Anne Shirey, Mar 24, 2004.

<sup>45</sup> Joe Sears to David Weiss, Aug 29 2001.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

to put an end to the racial tension once and for all.<sup>47</sup> It seems the CHC was starting to lose its focus, which is why Sears, along with Weiss, decided to leave in 2003.

Following Sears's production, the CHC continued to explore how best to present Cherokee history on stage while also finding ways to make it relevant to the Cherokee Nation. The earlier dramas, with their focus on history and historical accuracy, made it seem as though the Cherokee Nation was a product of the past. The dramas suggested that the Cherokee Nation had not changed—that they were still a warring Nation, divided by the colonizer. This was not the story the CHC wanted audiences to leave with. Rather, they wanted their audience to know that, despite their tragic history, the Cherokees persevered. So, in 2004, they contacted playwright Layce Gardner, a native of Tahlequah, and commissioned her to write a new drama that would exemplify this point. Although Gardner's *Trail of Tears: Rebuilding a Nation* ran for only one year, playing to roughly 8,000 people, it was one of the best to bring the Cherokee Nation into a contemporary perspective. Whereas the other dramas revolved around prominent historical figures, Gardner's script focuses on a single Cherokee family that has been forced to travel the Trail of Tears. The story "chronicles the evolution of modern-day Cherokee culture using a...[book] of Cherokee folklore as a unifying element as the show progresses from one generation to another."<sup>48</sup> Gardner's play reminded people of the Cherokees' past and demonstrated how the past continues to affect the Cherokees today.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Janet Williams, "Open-air Entertainment, Crowds Love State's Theatrical Productions Staged under Stars," Jul 4, 2004, *The Oklahoman*, *OKNews.com*, <http://newsok.com/article/2857512> (last accessed Apr 10, 2016).



*Trail of Tears: Rebuilding a Nation* weaves together three plots to create a cohesive story that transcends space and time, bringing together the then and there with the here and now. The three plots include the Grandfather/Grandson narrative, the story of Johnny Blackhawk and William Drum, and a historical narrative resembling Hunter's outdoor drama.<sup>49</sup> The Grandfather/Grandson plot works to teach the audience, through story, why history needs to be remembered and shared. In this narrative, the Grandson claims he already knows the history of the Cherokee people, having read about it in textbooks. The Grandson believes that the past doesn't apply to him because it doesn't affect his lived experience. The Grandson doesn't even consider himself to be Cherokee. As the boy states, "no one pays attention to that stuff anymore" (4). Dumbfounded, the Grandfather commences to teach the young boy why the past is important and what it means to be Cherokee today. "Being Cherokee isn't a feeling," states the Grandfather, "it is a way of life, a way of being in this world" (5). He tells the boy that "you cannot learn everything in a book.... The whole of history is not easily translated into the written word" (5); rather, it is felt and passed on through story. The Grandfather begins telling the story of their ancestors, Johnny Blackhawk and William Drum, two men who met on the hunting field when they were young boys prior to Removal. As the Grandfather narrates, their story comes to life. Johnny and William enter the stage looking for game, only to discover each other. As their scene develops, we learn that Johnny's family was pushed off the land by White prospectors, leaving him to fend for himself. William's family has managed to stay in their home and on their lands undisturbed. William decides to bring Johnny home with him, and Johnny is adopted into the Drum household. As the play progresses, we see the two boys grow older in the shadow of

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<sup>49</sup> Layce Gardner, "Trail of Tears: Rebuilding a Nation," (unpublished manuscript, 2004).

the burgeoning United States. Johnny develops a love interest in William's younger sister, Rose, and plans to marry her, but before this can happen, the family is uprooted and forced to travel along the Trail of Tears with the rest of the Cherokee Nation. As they travel, Johnny and William are pulled apart as they develop their political allegiances, echoing the Cherokee Nation's bifurcation. Once they arrive in Indian Territory, the two boys have become mortal enemies. William will no longer allow Johnny to marry his sister. Unlike William, who has come to side with the Euramericans and the United States, Johnny has grown to advocate for tradition and peace. It is within these two men that Gardner locates the Nation's factionalism. In doing so, Gardner's script is the first to stray from focusing on historically significant figures like Ross and Watie.

Accompanying the brothers' narrative are snippets of historical speeches reflecting portions of Cherokee-Euramerican history that directly affect Johnny's and William's relationship. Gardner utilizes these historical vignettes to show how the historical reality affected all Cherokees leading up to and beyond Indian Removal. Focusing on a fictional narrative allowed Gardner to explore several issues that the other dramas ignored, such as education and its effects on the Cherokee Nation.

In fact, one of the best scenes in the script describes the difficulties the Nation faced when it came to educating Cherokee children. The Orphanage scene, which runs concurrently with the development of the *Cherokee Phoenix* newspaper, compares and contrasts the Cherokees' idea of education with Christian missionaries' understanding. While two editors of the *Cherokee Phoenix* typeset the week's news, they narrate certain National accomplishments, which are spliced between the Orphanage scenes. One of the achievements they discuss is the establishment of the Cherokee education system. In the Orphanage scene, we observe the way

the orphans were taught by Christian missionaries and are exposed to how Euramericans forced Cherokee children into believing Western logic through corporal punishment. In this scene, Percy Crane, a white missionary, teaches the children how to remember the cardinal directions:

*PERCY CRANE is teaching geography. He asks a student what is above Indian Territory. CRANE asks THOMAS:*

CRANE: “What is North of us?”

*THOMAS doesn't know.*

CRANE: “I’ll make it easier for you, Thomas. North is always up. Now, what is up?”

*In his confusion, THOMAS glances up – directly above him.*

CRANE: Not above you, idiot! Give me your hand.

*ROSE happens to be passing by and sees what is going on in the classroom. Grimacing THOMAS holds out the back of his hand, and CRANE whacks it with the ruler. Humiliated, THOMAS sits back down at his desk.*

CRANE: Do you even know the directions?

*THOMAS nods.*

CRANE: Name the directions. If you’re able.

THOMAS (in Cherokee): North, South . . .

*CRANE whacks his hand again.*

CRANE: in English!

THOMAS: North, South, Up, Down . . .

*Another whack with the ruler.*

CRANE: Incorrect. How many directions are there, Thomas?

THOMAS: Seven, sir.

*CRANE whacks him again.*

CRANE: Four! There are four directions! Do I have to beat it into your thick skull? (36).

Confused and embarrassed, Thomas cowers under Crane. Crane proceeds to beat him with the ruler. The rest of the children become frightened. Rose, William's sister who is now a young woman and an educator herself, rushes in and takes the ruler from Crane's hand, forcing him to sit down. She is disgusted by Crane's methods. Gently, Rose asks Thomas to repeat how many directions there are, to which Thomas, again, says seven. Rose concurs, smiling. She then turns to Crane and asks him to name the seven directions. Crane isn't able to list them, so she hits him with the ruler. Shocked and embarrassed by Rose's actions, Crane flees the school room. After Crane leaves, Rose proceeds to teach the children the seven Cherokee directions. As Rose teaches the children the Cherokees' understanding of the cardinal directions, her lesson turns into a plea for the Cherokee leaders to establish a form of education for their children so that they will no longer suffer at the hands of Euramericans.

This scene represents the horrors of Euramerican boarding schools and highlights the forceful indoctrination of Euramerican knowledge systems. It also contrasts the Cherokees' understanding of education with Euramericans' and shows why the Cherokees developed their own educational system. The Cherokees did not develop their educational system because it was a "civilized" thing to do, but because it was necessary to educate Cherokee youth to recognize their sovereignty as autonomous peoples. We are

reminded of this when the Grandfather tells his Grandson that there was a time when it was impossible to learn about oneself, about one's culture, because it wasn't allowed (6). From the Grandfather's story, the Grandchild develops a new respect for his people's history, as he learns "that there are as many truths as there are people" (68).

Despite Gardner's successful production, the CHC couldn't afford to stage the drama the following season. In addition to royalties, the production was too large and costly. The organization ended up spending more money on producing the show than they recouped in ticket sales.<sup>50</sup> Aside from budget constraints, Gardner also had a difficult time working with the organization, much like Sears who came before her. In a letter to Scott Parker, Eric W. Stall, Layce Gardner's attorney, writes that he is "assisting Ms. Gardner in disassociating herself with the Cherokee Heritage Center," and requests that the Institute of Outdoor Drama remove Gardner's name from their website, which was promoting the CHC's 2005 production.<sup>51</sup> Precisely why Gardner wished to disassociate herself legally with the CHC remains unclear. The fact that Sears and Gardner had difficulty working with the CHC, however, suggests that some of the problems may be attributed to the organization.

The fifth play using the title *Trail of Tears* opened in 2005, authored by the CHC's Executive Director, Richard Fields. The new drama "depicts several Cherokee myths and legends such as 'Rabbit Eats with Bear' and 'How Possum's Tale Got Bare,'" which, the

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<sup>50</sup> Tonia Hogner-Weavel, in conversation with the author, Aug 4, 2015.

<sup>51</sup> Eric Stall to Scott Parker, "Re: Website: Historical Dramas for 2005/Trail of Tears—Rebuilding a Nation by Layce Gardner," Jun 16, 2005.

playwright notes, are “told along with the story of the Trail of Tears...and how the Civil War affected the Cherokee Nation.”<sup>52</sup> Fields’ correspondence indicates that the Phoenix dance returned, echoing Hunter’s and Vance’s earlier works.<sup>53</sup> Fields’ script is not available, but from descriptions in news sources, it seems as though the CHC was trying their hardest to provide culturally specific information along with entertaining aspects. Despite these efforts, however, the drama failed to draw a crowd. Shortly after the close of the 2006 season, Richard Fields stated in a year-end article that “the days of outdoor amphitheaters drawing crowds to make money are apparently gone.”<sup>54</sup> He notes that his production “wasn’t able to make enough money despite audiences topping 400 people on some nights.”<sup>55</sup> As a sign-off, Fields informs the community that the drama would not be coming back the following year. In 2006, Theatre Tsa-La-Gi went dark for good.

### **North Carolina**

As *The Trail of Tears* came to a close in Oklahoma, changes to *Unto These Hills* were just starting to take place in North Carolina. As Thompson notes, prior to 2006, the CHA was still comprised of Euramerican men who controlled and operated the “institutions which produced representations of [Cherokee] history and culture for tourists.”<sup>56</sup> With the development

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<sup>52</sup> Richard Fields to Scott Parker, “Trail of Tears Drama,” Jun 17, 2005.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> “No Trail of Tears drama in 2006,” *The Cherokee Phoenix*, Sep 09, 2005, <http://www.cherokeephoenix.org/Article/index/1118> (last accessed Dec 23, 2014).

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Thompson, “Staging ‘the Drama’,” iii.

of Harrah's Cherokee Casino and Hotel in the early 2000s, however, the EBCI began to challenge the CHA's leadership in cultural tourism and their position within the Cherokee community. Not only had Cherokee, North Carolina, become the "largest tourist destination in the state of North Carolina," Thompson states, Harrah's Casino and Hotel "was the largest single employer west of Asheville."<sup>57</sup> Indeed, the community was growing more powerful, and along with their economic improvement came the revival and renewal of cultural pride. Both Thompson and James Bradley refer to this period of change as the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians' renaissance.<sup>58</sup>

As the community started to flourish, the EBCI decided it was time to intervene and reconfigure the CHA and its operations, which had become old-fashioned.<sup>59</sup> The CHA adamantly resisted change, and the association's inability to renovate their image and services rendered the business untenable.<sup>60</sup> In 2006, after a series of failed business strategies, the CHA filed bankruptcy, and the EBCI took control of the organization, marking the first time the CHA was run and operated by tribal leadership.<sup>61</sup> Upon taking control, the EBCI decided to renovate the drama. Many people believed the play simply needed a face lift, while others believed the CHA needed to completely divorce itself from the organization's old practices, including Hunter's script. In *Ceremony, Spirituality, and Ritual in Native American Performance: A Creative*

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 70; James Bradley, in discussion with the author, Aug 8, 2014.

<sup>59</sup> Thompson, "Staging 'the Drama'," 99.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> For more on the CHA's downward spiral, see Thompson, "Staging 'the Drama'," 85-101.

*Notebook*, Hanay Geiogamah (Kiowa/Delaware) states that when the CHA contacted him to re-write the drama, they were unsure which direction they should take the new production, but that they had a “strong feeling that change, even radical change, was in order.”<sup>62</sup> The old drama, Geiogamah explains, was “so outdated, so strident, and so laborious a theatrical experience” that the production’s message and theme became “clichéd”—it no longer “reflect[ed] what [the EBCI] instinctively felt it should represent about themselves to tourist audiences.”<sup>63</sup> One of the major problems Geiogamah identified with Hunter’s production was its perpetuation of Euramerican prerogatives. Believing the production should come from a Cherokee point of view, Geiogamah worked with tribal historians, local storytellers, and artists to “identify and clarify story elements” that were indicative of the Cherokees’ cultural perspective.<sup>64</sup> As Geiogamah states, “the old drama compelled [him] to look for something that would reflect the inner soul of the tribe.” With this in mind, Geiogamah decided to write “a ceremonial performance...rather than a traditional play in the spirit of western literature.”<sup>65</sup>

Geiogamah, who is the founder and co-director of Project HOOP and director of the American Indian Dance Theatre, is best known for his incorporation of ceremony and ritual in his dramas. Ceremonial performance pivots around three interrelated concepts: ceremony,

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<sup>62</sup> Hanay Geiogamah, *Ceremony, Spirituality, and Ritual in Native American Performance: A Creative Notebook* (Los Angeles: UCLA American Indian Studies Center, 2011), 15.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-6.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*



spirituality, and ritual.<sup>66</sup> When these elements are woven together they “transform and formalize...into a meaningful, accessible experience...[providing] intellectual and emotional enlightenment, hope, healing, and uplift.” In Geiogamah’s estimation, this is exactly what *Unto These Hills* needed. Whereas Hunter construed his theatrical production around a single cathartic movement (“We’re all Americans!”), Geiogamah’s implementation of ceremonial aspects kept the Cherokees’ historical and cultural memory alive and resisted encapsulating their historical trauma within a false narrative of reconciliation.

According to Geiogamah, *a Retelling* was designed as a vehicle to renew Cherokee song, dance, and storytelling, and was conceived to correct some of the stories of Cherokee history through a process of ceremonial cleansing.<sup>67</sup> To do this, Geiogamah incorporated more traditional dance into the structure of the performance, which made the plot and action of the drama culturally sound. He also introduced creation figures, such as Messenger Birds, the Seven Cherokee Clan Spirits, Kanati and Selu, and the Booger Spirits.<sup>68</sup> Though Geiogamah’s revision follows Hunter’s chronology of events, *a Retelling* adheres to an episodic rather than linear structure, which aligns more closely to the Cherokees’ storytelling practices. The first act provides an interpretive sketch of Cherokee history, beginning with the arrival of Europeans and moving through specific periods of Euramerican contact. In contrast to Hunter’s drama,

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 9

<sup>67</sup> Hanay Geiogamah, in conversation with the author, Mar 17, 2016.

<sup>68</sup> Geiogamah does not utilize diacritical marks when writing Cherokee names in his script. Kana’ti, as seen in previous chapters, is the same creation figure seen here, only his name has been spelled differently.

however, the second act focuses on the restoration of the bifurcated Cherokee Nation.

Geiogamah devises the second act around a healing ceremony through which the audience learns to reconcile the historical material presented in the first act. While Geiogamah utilizes the same historical events presented in the original drama, he refrains from dramatizing or reenacting the events as they allegedly happened. Instead, he strips the events down to focus on their essence, which treats historical memory and historical events in a more objective manner. For instance, the Battle of Horseshoe Bend is not decorated with sensational “story” like in Hunter’s drama but is focused on Jackson’s betrayal.

Echoing Cherokee storytelling practices, Geiogamah’s prologue situates the drama within the Cherokees’ spiritual landscape, their cosmogonic reality. Unlike Hunter, who chose to render the Cherokees’ spirituality in antiquated terms, Geiogamah renders the Cherokees’ spirituality as a thriving aspect of Cherokee culture, which is supported by generations of ancestral spirits. As audience members find their seats, they are introduced to this notion via the preshow music that fills the amphitheatre. The music, however, isn’t entirely recognizable, being a recording of ambient noises such as wind blowing through the trees or birds chirping. As the start of the drama draws near, the bird calls become more frequent, until finally a cacophony of birdsong fills the amphitheatre. As the house lights dim, the sound of flapping wings blends “into what sounds like an orchestrated musical piece.”<sup>69</sup> As the stage lights rise, they reveal a group of Messenger Birds on stage. The Messenger Birds are portrayed by dancers in elaborate feathered costumes. One of the messenger birds makes his way to center stage, beckoning the others to

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<sup>69</sup> Hanay Geiogamah, “Unto These Hills...a Retelling (Second Draft)” (unpublished manuscript, 2016). Subsequent citations made parenthetically in the text.

draw near. The Messenger Bird then shares with the congress a message “from the Creator.” They are to find the seven Clan Spirits and bring them to council. Upon hearing this message, the birds take flight, exiting in all directions. One by one, the seven Clan spirits are located and informed that the Creator has summoned them to gather around the sacred fire. After the last Clan Spirit has been summoned, the spirits make their way to the center of the stage. Once there, they conduct a small ceremony. Accompanying this ceremony are images “of the Smoky Mountains, of the rivers, the animals, all of the elements of life that are central and important to the Cherokees,” which are projected onto a screen at the back of the stage (2). After the ceremony is complete, the lights fade to black. In the darkness, a ball of fire descends from the heavens; once it reaches the ground, it becomes the council’s sacred fire. The Clan Spirits surround the fire along with the Messenger Birds, and a smudging ceremony takes place around the fire, purifying the council. Once this is complete, the Messenger Birds inform the Clan Spirits that the Cherokees have stopped sharing their stories, have stopped teaching their youth how to live according to the traditional ways, which displeases the Creator. The Messenger Birds then implore the Clan Spirits to reawaken the Cherokees’ stories, so that the people can remember. After some deliberation, the Clan Spirits call upon Kanati and Selu to help them “find the words” (5).

Traditionally, birds occupy a significant space in the Cherokees’ cosmogonic reality. Buzzards, eagles, wrens, robins, chickadees, and tufted titmice are among the most famous birds in the Cherokees’ creation stories.<sup>70</sup> Because birds can fly, they are thought to be emissaries of the Upper World, delivering messages from the Creator to those who reside on the earth. While

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<sup>70</sup> For more information on the significance of birds, see Mooney, *Myths*, 280-94.

Buzzard is known to have shaped the Cherokees' homelands with his giant wings, the importance of birds as messengers primarily stems from the story of U'tlûñ'tă (The Spear-Finger), a "terrible ogress" who used to terrorize the Cherokee villages.<sup>71</sup> With her long stone finger, U'tlûñ'tă would cut out the livers of children, men, and women. The Cherokees desperately tried to kill the monster, but her skin was impenetrable, being made of stone. One day, a group of warriors decided to dig a pit in which to trap U'tlûñ'tă. Unaware of their plan, U'tlûñ'tă fell into the pit, which pleased the warriors. As the warriors stood at the lip of the pit, looking down upon U'tlûñ'tă, they fired arrow upon arrow upon her, but nothing seemed to penetrate the monster's skin. Off in the distance, they heard Utsû'gĩ (the Tufted Titmouse) cry out that they should aim for the monster's heart. Taking the bird's advice, they aimed their arrows at the monster's chest, but still, their arrows failed to penetrate the monster's skin. The warriors cut Utsû'gĩ's tongue out, believing the bird had lied. Returning to the pit, the warriors continued to strategize ways to kill the monster, but they had no luck. Finally, after numerous failed attempts, Tsĩ'kĩlilĩ' (the Chickadee) flew in to help the warriors dispose of the monster once and for all. Tsĩ'kĩlilĩ', knowing the true location of U'tlûñ'tă's heart, landed upon the monster's stone finger. The warriors took this as a sign and focused their arrows upon U'tlûñ'tă's right hand. Finally, one of their arrows ripped through the stone finger and cut into U'tlûñ'tă's heart, killing her instantly. From then on, Tsĩ'kĩlilĩ' became known as "the truth teller."<sup>72</sup> In other stories, birds serve to warn the Cherokees when they are in danger; for instance, Tom Starr, a Cherokee outlaw of the Cherokee Nation in Indian Territory, was about to walk into an ambush

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 316-9.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 319.

when he heard Tsǐ'kǐlilǐ' call out ahead of him. Believing the bird's call to be a warning, Starr rerouted his path, narrowly escaping the ambush.<sup>73</sup>

Whereas birds are widely documented in the Cherokees' traditional stories, there is no evidence that suggests the Cherokees were guided by Clan Spirits in a similar manner. The seven Clans Spirits in the drama, therefore, are Geiogamah's personification of the Cherokees' traditional social organization. Geiogamah informed me that when he toured the Museum of the Cherokee Indians in North Carolina, he was drawn to the ornate mask carvings of the seven clans hanging in the foyer. He also observed locals introducing themselves by their clan affiliations. Believing this to be an important part of the Cherokees' cultural identity, he decided to incorporate the clans and the masks into the play. Clan masks, however, are a relatively new concept. Though the Cherokees are known to have carved masks for various ceremonial occasions, there is no evidence that suggests the Cherokees' ever carved masks to represent their clanship system in the past. Despite their novelty, the carving of clan masks has impelled Cherokee families to rediscover their clanship affiliations. This is a trying process though, as many families can no longer remember their familial history and records detailing clan affiliations are scarce. The paucity of records detailing familial lineage is partly due to the Cherokees adoption of Euramerican practices—the clanship system was practically abolished in 1810 when the Cherokees decided to forego their blood law practices.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, as the

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 286.

<sup>74</sup> On this point, see Mooney, *Myths*, 86-7, 107; Rennard Strickland, *Fire and the Spirits*, 54-61; and Michelle Daniel, "From Blood Feud to Jury System: The Metamorphosis of Cherokee Law from 1750 to 1840," *American Indian Quarterly* 11.2 (1987): 97-125.

Cherokees transitioned into a patriarchal society, clanships were no longer passed down through the female side of the family.

Incorporating the Clan Spirits into the drama was a way to maximize the Cherokees' artistic practices and also to balance the Booger Spirits, which are also masked beings in the drama. Boogers, states Driskill, are masked figures that participate in the Booger Dance, "a Cherokee ceremony that caricaturizes invading forces that threaten to disrupt...Cherokee nationhood."<sup>75</sup> The Boogers are characterizations of either the ghosts, evil spirits, animals, or foreigners that are thought to harm Cherokees, and the Booger Dance is an event designed to "[weaken] the harmful powers of alien tribes and races, who, as living beings or ghosts, may be responsible for [the Cherokees'] sickness or misfortune."<sup>76</sup> Though Boogers can resemble a wide variety of malevolent beings, they commonly represent the Cherokees' adversaries, among which Euramericans are most often depicted.<sup>77</sup> As such, the Boogers assume stereotypical physical features and mannerisms of debauched Euramericans and, through dance, derisively mock Euramericans and their inequities.

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<sup>75</sup> Qwo-Li Driskill, "Ha'nts: The Booger Dance Rhetorics of Lynn Rigg's *The Cherokee Night*," in *American Indian Performing Arts: Critical Directions* (Los Angeles: UCLA American Indian Studies center, 2010), 181.

<sup>76</sup> Frank G. Speck and Leonard Broom, *Cherokee Dance and Drama*, in collaboration with Will West Long (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 37.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

According to Speck and Broom, when the Boogers assume Euramerican characteristics, their features and mannerisms are primarily obscene.<sup>78</sup> Fogelson and Walker suggest that this is because Europeans “and their sequence of demands is taken to be a condensation of the acculturational process as seen from the Cherokee perspective.”<sup>79</sup> Each Booger is a characterization of an archetypal foreigner and has a personal name with which to help identify the type.<sup>80</sup> For instance, if a Booger were to assume the role of an overweight predatory Euramerican male suffering from syphilis, the Booger’s mask would most likely be a deformed gourd with a “down-pointing gourd neck nose that resembles a phallus,” and the Booger might introduce himself as “Sooty Anus,” “Making Pudenda Swell,” or some other equally objectionable moniker.<sup>81</sup> Following this pattern, when the Boogers enter into a private arena to dance, they exaggerate their movements in a sexualized manner, such as thrusting their pelvises in the air, miming masturbation, or quivering on the ground in paroxysmal excitement.<sup>82</sup> Accompanying this spectacle, the Boogers seek out the women in attendance and playfully chase

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>79</sup> Raymond D. Fogelson and Amelia B. Walker, “Self and Other in Cherokee Booger Masks,” *Journal of Cherokee Studies* 5.2 (1980): 90.

<sup>80</sup> White, Euramerican men are not the only foreigners the Boogers parody. African Americans, French, Spanish, Chinese, and other “alien Indians” are also subjects who the Boogers lampoon. Ibid., 89.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Fogelson and Walker note that the Boogers sporting gourd masks often “discharge water” from the tip of the gourd, simulating ejaculation. Ibid.

them around the room in an attempt to sully their spirits. In effect, the Boogers and the Booger Dance serve to warn and remind the Cherokee community to hold strong to their beliefs, their identities, and to resist foreign suasion.

Scholars debate whether or not the Boogers and the Booger Dance are reflective of the Cherokees' traditional ceremonial practices. Speck and Broom understand the Booger Dance to be little more than a record of the Cherokees' anxieties—"their reactions against the symbol of the invader, and their insecurity in their dealings with the white man"—not as a symbolic representation of the Cherokees' religiosity.<sup>83</sup> Fogelson and Walker also delimit the Booger Dance to "a symbolic enactment of historical mistreatment" that is indicative of the "basic tensions between culturally defined old...and young men."<sup>84</sup> Powers, however, argues that these scholars reduce the Booger Dance to a "manifestation of psychology or sociology," when in fact the dance should be regarded as a ceremony dedicated to keeping the Cherokees' cosmology in balance.<sup>85</sup> Relying upon Speck's and Broom's informant, Will West Long (EBCI), as well as Mircea Eliade's philosophy of religion, Powers notes that Speck and Broom overlook the fact that the Cherokees' dances (and songs) were given to them after they slayed Nun'yunu'wi (Stone Coat), and that the Cherokees' songs and dances are "spiritualistic aids in [the Cherokees'] struggle for life against an adverse animal kingdom, the agency of disease, and a menacing world

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<sup>83</sup> Speck and Broom, *Cherokee Dance and Drama*, 3.

<sup>84</sup> Fogelson and Walker, "Self and Other in Cherokee Booger Masks," 88-9.

<sup>85</sup> William Douglas Powers, "Returning to the Sacred: An Eliadean Interpretation of Speck's Account of the Cherokee Booger Dance," *The Journal of Religion and Theatre* 1.1 (2002): 70-3; see also).



of mankind.”<sup>86</sup> Whereas Speck, Broom, Fogelson, and Walker tend to view the Booger Dance as a late addition to the Cherokees’ dance repertoire and as having no religious ties—“those ritualistic aspects merely contribut[ing] to the dance’s aesthetic and dramatic elements”—Powers advises that all Cherokee song and dance are “spiritual aids” and that, because of this, they are inherently ceremonial regardless of when they enter the Cherokees’ dance repertoire.<sup>87</sup>

In addition, a majority of scholars tend to locate the dance and its importance specifically in the colonial era, suggesting that the dance was merely a performance designed to respond to early Euramerican incursions. In confining the dance to this epoch, scholars indirectly suggest that the dance is a defunct part of the Cherokees’ contemporary cultural and spiritual identity. The Boogers and the Booger Dance, however, were not lost; the dance is still performed today, though it has transformed to address the current issues afflicting the Cherokees’ society. Scholars tend to overlook this aspect, as it resists encapsulating Cherokee religious practices into a

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 70; Speck and Broom, *Cherokee Dance and Drama*, 5. Nun’yunu’wi is a monster that terrorized Cherokee villages. Seven menstruating women are said to have killed Nun’yunu’wi, as no other man could injure the monster due to his stone skin. For more information on Nun’yunu’wi see, Mooney, *Myths*, 319; Carolyn Ross Johnston, *Cherokee Women in Crisis: Trail of Tears, Civil War, and Allotment, 1838-1907* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2003), 29.

<sup>87</sup> Powers, “Returning to the Sacred,” 70.

codified formula. As Margaret Drewal argues, “ritual practitioners...transform ritual...through play and improvisation” to ensure such ceremony is relevant to contemporary society.<sup>88</sup>

After witnessing a Booger Dance in the North Carolina Mountains, Geiogamah decided the sacred figures and their dance needed to be included in his revision.<sup>89</sup> Geiogamah stated in our interview that no other American Indian culture has sacred figures or a dance that warns against the assimilation tactics of Euramericans as do the Cherokees.<sup>90</sup> Because of their uniqueness, their effectiveness, and their inherent dramatic qualities, the Boogers and the Booger Dance were a perfect vehicle through which to tell the Cherokees’ story.

In the drama, the Boogers function as “a type of Greek chorus” and “provide, via repetition, a ritual structuring device.”<sup>91</sup> Though Geiogamah doesn’t shy away from having the Boogers parody Euramerican culture, he has them parody a variety of other cultures as well, including the Cherokees’. In this way, they adhere to their traditional function, shapeshifting into

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<sup>88</sup> Margaret Drewal, *Yoruba Ritual: Performers, Play, Agency* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), xiii.

<sup>89</sup> Geiogamah informed me that the dance he witnessed was performed in the mountains, far from the city center, and that, although the Boogers and the dance were not an explicitly “private part of Cherokee culture,” the dance was not open to tourists.

<sup>90</sup> Hanay Geiogamah, in conversation with the author, Mar 17, 2016. Many scholars, such as Fogelson and Walker, have attempted to connect the Boogers and the Booger Dance to other American Indian tribes, but these comparisons are rather tenuous and only serve to delegitimize American Indians’ national and cultural autonomy.

<sup>91</sup> Geiogamah, *Ceremony, Spirituality, and Ritual*, 17.

various characters in order to point out opprobrious cultural or societal qualities. Upon speaking the Boogers into being, Kanati and Selu recount the Cherokees' first confrontation with Europeans. Slowly, the Boogers creep into the light and begin to perform the start of their ceremonial dance while Kanati narrates: "Back in clearer seeing times, we invented for ourselves, with the help of the Creator, our own special way of talking about and debating [the] concerns and fears we had" (9). As the scene develops, the Boogers enter into a Cherokee village. They have come to warn the villagers that "many men were coming into [their] world, from another world far across the big ocean waters" (10). As Kanati and Selu narrate, the Boogers begin to pantomime the arrival of Europeans and physically assume the role of Spanish conquistadors. A group of them also assume the role of frightened Cherokee villagers. One of the Boogers steps out of the Spanish armada, assuming the role of De Soto, while Selu assumes the role of De Soto's guide, the Queen of Colfaltechequi.<sup>92</sup> Kanati becomes the village's chief.

As in Hunter's drama, the scene builds around De Soto's quest for gold. The guide (Selu) informs the chief (Kanati) that if the Spaniards return empty handed, then they will wage war upon the Cherokees. The chief responds that they will fight the Spaniards, as the Cherokees are great warriors (12). At the mention of war, the Boogers transform into warriors and assume a defensive stance. The guide pleads with the chief to reconsider and to "find the way of peace" as it "is the only way" to survive the interlopers' persecution (12), and the lights go to black as the sound of thunder claps throughout the amphitheatre. The Spaniards and the Cherokee villagers transform back into the Boogers and scatter across the stage, while the chief and the guide return

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<sup>92</sup> De Soto's guide was a male in Hunter's drama, which is not historically accurate.

Geiogamah's production is the first to portray De Soto's guide as female.

to their proper roles as Kanati and Selu. Continuing the story, Kanati explains how everyone who came to the Cherokees' lands was seeking gold, while Selu recounts how "for over two hundred years [the Cherokees] watched them come" and "tried, with all their strength and hope to avoid fighting with these invaders, to keep peace, to live in friendship and mutual respect" (12). As Kanati and Selu relate how the Europeans and Euramericans swiftly usurped the Cherokees' lands, and how the colonizers begged the Cherokees for their loyalty, the Boogers enter the stage again. This time, they act as white traders who mingle with the Cherokees—"bargaining, buying, exchanging—miming, mocking—offering food, and clothing" (13). The Cherokee villagers, as though coerced by the Euramerican Boogers, begin to appropriate the whites' customs and manners of dress: "Some form a group to listen to a Christian preacher. Some try to read books. Some count money. Others pull wagons, carry white men's tools" (13). The Boogers then begin to dance amongst the Cherokees, transforming into malevolent beings, taking the Cherokees' books from them and stealing their money.<sup>93</sup> The following dialogue summarizes the Cherokees' process of acculturation:

FIRST BOOGER: My, these Indians are starting to look just like us!

SECOND BOOGER: It's getting hard to tell them apart from us!

THIRD BOOGER: They speak like us!

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<sup>93</sup> Thompson provides a fascinating description of how these characters functioned in the drama. He notes that the actors portraying the Boogers tried to outperform their fellow actors by overly exaggerating their movements or by incorporating new actions into the drama which the other performers had not yet seen. Such actions include running about the stage and grabbing their groins or performing pelvic thrusts in the air. Thompson, "Staging 'the Drama'," 274-86.

FOURTH BOOGER: They walk like us!

FIFTH BOOGER: They dance like us!

SIXTH BOOGER: It's getting hard to tell them apart from us!

SEVENTH BOOGER: Yes. I have forgotten what a Cherokee used to look like.

*The Boogers howl, then dance a short, mocking jig (14).*

At this point, the drama takes on a serious political tone. The Boogers, through their actions, begin to censure the Cherokees for having given up their traditions for the Euramerican lifestyle. Because the Cherokees have neglected to heed their warnings, the Boogers turn antagonistic and mock and deride their choices. As the first act develops, the Boogers serve to remind the Cherokees that their misery is a result of their inaction—a result of their inability to rise up and stifle Euramerican advances. This point of view is further exemplified throughout Kanati's and Selu's storytelling.

One of the more interesting aspects of Geiogamah's drama is his inclusion and utilization of two of the Cherokee's most well-known creation figures: Kanati and Selu. In addition to serving as the drama's primary storytellers, Kanati and Selu assume various nominal roles throughout the play.<sup>94</sup> Having Kanati and Selu story the Cherokees' historical memory situates the drama within the Cherokees' spiritual cosmology; coupled with the Messenger Birds and the Clan and Booger Spirits, Selu and Kanati help to also focus the drama from a Cherokee perspective as opposed to a Euramerican one. Though Kanati and Selu primarily function as

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<sup>94</sup> Originally, Sequoyah was written to narrate the drama, but his character was dropped. I note that including Sequoyah in the drama would have maintained false historical narratives. Hanay Geiogamah, "Unto These Hills...a Revision (First Draft)."

narrators in the drama, woven into their characterizations are contemporary Cherokee thoughts, concerns, and historical reflections—philosophical elements that create conflict between the two storytellers, giving them a narrative arc of their own. In this sense, Kanati and Selu (as well as the other creation figures) resist becoming archetypes confined to a specific traditionalistic narrative. Rather, their characterizations are contemporized, as though they have been living amongst the Cherokees all these years, which reinforces the Cherokees' cultural perspective that spiritual beings and humans occupy the same earthly terrain.

In addition to storying the Cherokees' encounter with Euramericans—their process of acculturation, their loss of lands, and their ultimate forced removal—Kanati and Selu embody contemporary attitudes that affect the Cherokee community in North Carolina today. As Kanati struggles to story the Cherokees' history, he tends to relate only the positive aspects of historical events. Kanati longs to story the Cherokees' history in a way that renders the principal people as having banded together with others to stifle the invaders (15-6). Kanati knows, however, that this is not how the story goes. Selu constantly reminds Kanati (and the audience) of the Cherokees' choices—the “sorrowful ones” and those causing disrepute—insinuating that the Cherokees had the ability to stop Euramerican advances, if only they had chosen differently (6). Whereas Kanati chooses to focus on the Cherokees' peaceful disposition, Selu will not allow him to render their history in such a pacifistic manner, as “memory without action” is of little good (23).

Selu wishes to expose the complexity of the Cherokees' interactions with foreigners. She reminds Kanati that the Cherokees were once great warriors, and that to dismiss this aspect of their culture would be a disservice to the historical memory of the Cherokee people (16). On this point, Selu states: “There is no shame in confessing [that the Cherokees were warriors]. It has been our survival as a people—warring with other tribes, the white man...(laughing) even

fighting among ourselves!” (16). Upon Selu’s words, Kanati becomes disquiet—“afraid to go on” with the story. Sensing his discontent, Selu calmly advises Kanati that he “cannot remember only that which gives [him] no pain,” and that he “must remember the entire story” if his words are to be effective. Regaining his composure, Kanati commences to tell of Tecumseh’s visit to the Cherokees “before the great rift—before [the Cherokees] were, as a tribe, split in two.” In a similar manner to the scene presented in Hunter’s original drama, Tecumseh asks the Cherokees to join his confederacy. The Cherokees, however, elect to remain loyal to their Euramerican brothers.<sup>95</sup> As the scene comes to a close, Selu spitefully reflects on the council meeting, exclaiming that the Cherokees “were fighters...and had been for many years,” insinuating that the Cherokees should have taken up arms with Tecumseh (19). Kanati dismisses Selu’s outburst and begins to relate how the Cherokees continued to align with the whites, which brings the audience to the Battle of Horseshoe Bend. As in Hunter’s drama, a Cherokee saves the life of Andrew Jackson; however, in Geiogamah’s rendition the scene is played with less pomp and

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<sup>95</sup> While the dialogue in this scene echoes Hunter’s historical sketch verbatim, it is interesting to note that Geiogamah removes any reference to historical figures, such as Sequoyah, Drowning Bear, or Junaluska from this scene. Instead, Geiogamah refers to the characters in attendance as War Chiefs (I and II). In this way, Geiogamah is able to focus on the essence of the Cherokees’ encounter with Tecumseh. The Cherokees had the opportunity to fight the intruder, but chose to remain peaceful.

circumstance, focusing primarily on Jackson’s dismissal of the Cherokees’ participation in the battle.<sup>96</sup>

Following this scene, Kanati becomes emotional and begins to verbalize and physicalize his anger in response to the story he has just shared. Selu, who encourages Kanati’s animosity, tells him that it is good to be angry, that “it is good that the past...disturbs [him],” as “it has been the survival of [their] people—remembering what the white man did to [them]” (23). In a strategically derisive manner, Geiogamah follows the battle of Horseshoe Bend with a small romantic interlude akin to Hunter’s portrayal of Wilani awaiting Tsali’s return from war. Geiogamah’s scene, however, is exaggerated and is deliberately parodic. In this scene, Kanati and Selu assume the roles of nondescript Cherokee lovers:

YOUNG CHEROKEE MAN: I’ve come back! (word for ‘My Lady Love’ in Cherokee Language)

*No response.*

YOUNG CHEROKEE MAN: Where are you?

YOUNG CHEROKEE WOMAN: Who’s calling my name? Hello!

YOUNG CHEROKEE MAN: It’s (insert a man’s name here)—the man who is going to marry you! Where are you? I’m back.

*The young woman runs on from SL.*

YOUNG CHEROKEE WOMAN: You’re alive, you’re safe. Did you win?

YOUNG CHEROKEE MAN: Yes, yes we won! We always win!

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<sup>96</sup> Here again, Geiogamah refrains from naming Cherokee characters; nor does he suggest that Junaluska was the one to save Jackson’s life.



*They embrace. Suddenly, they break from their characters. Selu steps back, turns to [the audience]—somber (24).*

Following this short riff on Hunter’s drama, Selu and Kanati continue to relate how the Cherokees believed their participation in the war positioned them in a favorable light amongst the Euramericans. Selu sarcastically states that “life would all be good!,” to which Kanati rejoins that the Cherokees, nevertheless, “gave thanks for [their] good fortune in spit [sic] of it all,” which signals the start of the Eagle Dance (25).

After the dance, Kanati returns to the stage to share how the “years passed by” and how, as the years passed, so too did “the hopes of the Cherokee” against “the rising tide of white settlers” who “shoved their way into the wilderness—grabbing land, building towns, taking what they wanted” (27). In resentment, Kanati suddenly finds himself surrounded by the Booger Spirits. The Boogers begin to dance around Kanati in a hectic and frightening manner, mocking him—accusing him—for the Cherokees’ misfortunes. Terrified, Kanati cowers on the ground as the Boogers continue to torment him. The Boogers recall specific events from the historical past, events in which the Cherokees—had they heeded the Boogers’ initial warnings and chosen differently—could have saved themselves from such misery:

FIRST BOOGER: I have told you the danger of the white man. We should have  
joined Tecumseh!

SECOND BOOGER: Tell us your plan for war with the white man!

THIRD BOOGER: We will join together in one great nation, all nations in all the  
directions!

FOURTH BOOGER: Have you tried to make peace with the white man?

FIRST BOOGER: The white man will never stop taking until he takes everything!

SECOND BOOGER: My land is all I have. Cherokees cannot live without their  
land. We must fight!

*Suddenly Kanati rises, challenging the Boogers.*

KANATI: Do you have guns and cannons?

THIRD BOOGER: We have bows and arrows, tomahawks, knives, and fire!

FOURTH BOOGER: Against the guns of the white man?

KANATI: Years ago we lived in caves and grass huts...

*The Boogers take over the rest of Kanati's words—repeating them, continuing to  
mock and pull at him throughout.*

BOOGERS: Now we build warm houses! Many times we starved through the  
long winters! Now we plant big fields of corn and potatoes! Our fathers  
prayed to the spirits of these mountains! Now the Cherokees worship the  
Christian god! Yes!

KANATI: (yelling) We swore that we would live in peace with the white man!

...

KANTAI: We have chosen the way of peace! We will live with the white men as  
brothers! (28-9).

Upon Kanati's last words, the Boogers slowly begin to "form a line to create a silhouetted replication of men and women moving along" the Trail of Tears (29). In this manner, Geiogamah strives to dramatize the complexities of the Cherokees' historical memory, the psychological and emotional trauma the community underwent, and their deep and violent political and cultural transformation. Selu, who observes Kanati's struggle with the Boogers, remains in the distance, as "she knows that Kanati is alone in this part of remembering" both the good and the bad (27). It

is at this point that the ceremonial healing process, which the drama serves, begins—for Kanati, for the Cherokee community, for the audience.

The second act, which is comprised primarily of ceremony, song, and dance, begins with sorrowful music against which Selu—in monologue—reflects upon the Cherokees' journey along the Trail of Tears. Selu describes the Trail and the atrocities that took place on it through the eyes of the children that were forced to travel with their parents and grandparents:

It was the longest winter.... Women, babies, one by one, they coughed, eventually lost their breath. Their skin turned to ice.... There was a little girl...who watched from the back of a wagon—watched her mother and father who were left behind. She stared at their lifeless bodies along the frozen trail for as long as she could, until the trail turned down a mountain (32).

The scene concludes with a grim impression of death and destruction, which sets up the healing and cleansing ceremony in the next act.

Kanati, along with the Seven Clan Spirits, enters center stage. In the Cherokee language, Kanati states that the Cherokees “take care of [their] dead,” and that they must pray for those who have perished along the Trail (33). The Seven Clan Spirits then transform into “priests and celebrants” and perform the funeral rites for those who have begun their journey to the west. Selu, who is accompanied by an orphaned child, joins Kanati and the Seven Clan Spirits in the ceremony. Selu sprinkles cornmeal and dried flower petals about the earth, symbolically demarcating the graves of those who died on the Trail. At the conclusion of the ceremony, corn stalks sprout from the ground and flowers bloom while the “tribal choir sings an honoring song” (33).

Though the dead have been properly honored and laid to rest, the Nation and the Eastern Band are still dejected. Geiogamah stages the bifurcated tribe by placing the Cherokee Nation, along with Selu, stage right, and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, along with Kanati, stage left. Both bodies of people are huddled around their respective sacred fires. The fires threaten to die, which prompts Selu to call for more firewood. Across the divide, Selu pleads for Kanati to feed his peoples' fire, which he does. As he places wood into the fire, he observes that the Cherokees have stopped singing their songs, have stopped dancing, and have stopped telling their stories (34). Upon his final words, the Booger Spirits enter, echoing Kanati's observations. Selu and Kanati join the Boogers center stage to hear their message. The Boogers inform Selu and Kanati that the Cherokees must start to create new stories, new songs, and new dances, as relying solely on the story about the Trail of Tears will only oppress the Cherokees' spirit further (35). "We must sing new songs again! And we can, we can! And enter new circles to dance! Shake the shells, and sound the drums!" the Boogers exclaim, which incites the start of the Hoop Dance.

The Hoop Dance, which is often performed by a solo dancer with several hoops, is comprised of four to six dancers in Geiogamah's choreography. The dance begins with the individual dancers stomping and creating eagle shapes out of their hoops, symbolizing the return of strength and power to the Cherokee Nation and to the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. When this opening number is complete, the dancers then move together to form a solid line across the stage. Once in place, the dancers drop their eagle pattern and unfurl their hoops to symbolically create a bridge across the stage with unites the Cherokees in the west with those in the east. After the bridge structure is complete, the lights dim, leaving the hoops, which are painted with florescent paint, to glow in the dark. In the glow of darkness, the Cherokees in the

west and the Cherokees in the east start to cross the bridge and reunite with their kinfolk. After their reunification, torchbearers from the Cherokee Nation and the Eastern Band of Cherokees come together to light one sacred fire, signifying that the Cherokees in the east and in the west have rejoined into a homogenous polity. With a new sense of spirit, the Cherokees begin another dance. The Seven Clan Spirits return to their sacred council fire, while the Boogers, Selu, Kanati, and the rest of the Cherokees parade about the stage in celebration.

The final scene, which is a sequence of various dances, depicts how the Cherokees developed new songs and dances to carry them forward into the future. The dances in this closing sequence include a hoedown/square dance; traditional folk dances, performed by Cherokee children; and the American Indian Dance Theatre's New Dance, which is an exciting march that the entire cast participates in as they parade across the stage and through the audience for the finale.

Collectively, the Messenger Birds, the Clan Spirits, the Booger Spirits, and Kanati and Selu worked to reposition the outdoor drama from within the Cherokees' traditional cosmogonic reality. As Geiogamah stated in our interview, many tourists had never understood the Cherokees' historical memory from such a vantage point, nor had many of the tribal members who grew up watching or participating in the drama reflected on their history in such a way. The entire experience was shocking. For the Cherokees, it was the first time they had ever seen the stories they grew up with presented on stage in such a manner. For the tourists, it was the first time the drama presented Euramerican colonial activity in a negative light. The drama was no longer a cathartic dramatic experience. Instead, it was a call to remember, to take action. This is not to suggest that the production was geared to sway the Cherokee community to take up arms and fight against the dominant society, but rather a challenge for the Cherokees (as well as

tourists) to reflect upon the historical record and to reformulate their understanding of their shared history in order to pave a more fruitful road forward, together.

Geiogamah's drama received standing ovations night after night, though the community wasn't exactly prepared to have their culture on full display. Many found the production a welcome change, but many tourists and community members alike found the production less than satisfactory, preferring the old drama instead. While the CHA hoped that refining the outmoded drama would, first and foremost, dispel audience misconceptions about the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians—which it did—it unsuspectingly created a rift within the community. Now that the EBCI was in charge of the production and had the opportunity to present the drama in a manner they saw fit, it became a question of what aspects of Cherokee culture should be openly shared on the outdoor stage.

The biggest issue with the drama appears to revolve around the use of the Booger Spirits. Geiogamah, Thompson, and Bradley state that the Boogers are not a particularly private part of the Cherokees' culture, but that many people found their inclusion in the drama to tarnish the community's image. Many individuals in the community also found the Boogers sacrilegious; for example, conservative Christians consider the Boogers to be satanic.<sup>97</sup> Thompson further relates many additional concerns surrounding the use of the Boogers in the drama: One viewer, who longed to see the old drama return, said the Boogers were not what Cherokee history and culture were about, and that it was a shame so much emphasis was placed on these figures in the

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<sup>97</sup> Geiogamah, *Ceremony*, 19. While I was conducting research in Cherokee, North Carolina, Booger Masks were hanging for sale in almost every storefront window.

play.<sup>98</sup> Another commented that the message of the production missed the point: “Cherokee desperately needs fun family attractions for visitors.... Let’s send them away with lasting memories, something more than how goofy the boogers were at *Unto These Hills*. It’s sad that the only thing people remember when they leave Cherokee are goofy looking boogers.”<sup>99</sup> That so many community members responded in a negative manner can perhaps be attributed to the fact that very few tribal members understood the Boogers’ significance within a traditional context. As Geiogamah states, he didn’t realize that “the Boogers are somewhat misunderstood by some in contemporary Cherokee life.”<sup>100</sup>

Despite these negative reflections, James Bradley informed me that he believed the Boogers brought an attractive quality to the performance, frontloading Cherokee culture and tradition.<sup>101</sup> I find the use of the Boogers to be a compelling aspect of the production as well, although I can also see how they might appear abrasive and shocking—something a traditional audience might not be ready to witness without prior understanding of their significance, especially audiences who were accustomed to seeing the original drama. Many members of the community remained sympathetic to Hunter’s original production, as they grew up with it; many community members also believed that every word of Hunter’s drama was representative of their culture and their history. If anything, this speaks to Hunter’s drama as being a colonizing project,

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<sup>98</sup> Thompson, “Staging ‘the Drama’,” 295.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Geiogamah, *Ceremony*, 19.

<sup>101</sup> James Bradley, in conversation with the author, Aug 8, 2014.

strategically swaying not only tourists, but also Cherokees, into believing the Cherokees' history and their process of acculturation as being for the greater good.

In addition to the critique on Geiogamah's use of cultural material to shape the drama, several community members, as well as cast members, found the use of non-Cherokee dances questionable as well. Geiogamah introduced a variety of dances into the drama, including several from the American Indian Dance Theatre, such as the Hoop Dance and the New Dance. Thompson notes in his dissertation that many people were displeased that the director included dance numbers that were not traditional, but rather indicative of American Indian Powwow dances.<sup>102</sup> While I understand that these dances would incite aversion within the community, in the context of the script, Geiogamah does not suggest that these dances are of Cherokee origin. As the Boogers demand, the Cherokees need to create new dances, new songs, and new stories (33). Read in line with Geiogamah's desire to create new ceremonies through which to heal the Cherokee communities, I see these dances as being a response to the Boogers' plea. Despite not being Cherokee, the dances are suggestive of what new dances and new songs might look like today.

Even though Geiogamah's drama received criticism, his production managed to increase ticket sales, and attendance did pick up. Yet, as Geiogamah informed me, the drama was in need of revision if it was going to be produced the following summer. The "dissident, and powerful voices within the tribe" swayed the CHA to provide a drama that, while maintaining historical and cultural accuracy, matched the old one.<sup>103</sup> Geiogamah was asked to revise the drama for the

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<sup>102</sup> Thompson, "Staging 'the Drama'," 250.

<sup>103</sup> Geiogamah, *Ceremony*, 19.



following summer, but he found the staff difficult to work with and decided to leave the project altogether, as did James Bradley.<sup>104</sup> According to Geiogamah, certain staff members became dictatorial, telling him exactly how the drama should be revised, which did not rest well with the playwright. The drama, which was the second draft, was to be developed over several years. Geiogamah understood that the drama would be developed further and in seven to ten years would be replaced with a new drama authored by a Cherokee writer. This plan, however, never materialized.

In 2007, Pat Allee's and Ben Hurst's production replaced Geiogamah's and like Geiogamah's, it was only performed for one season. Linda Squirrel informed me that the production was excellent, and that it aligned more closely with what the Cherokee community and the tourists wanted to see on stage.<sup>105</sup> The problem with the script, however, was that it provided too much information and moved too fast. According to Squirrel, audiences missed the simple story being told because there was too much extraneous material introduced on stage. Similar to Gardner's *Trail of Tears* in Oklahoma, Allee's and Hurst's drama was narrated through the storytelling tradition and, like Geiogamah's, incorporated the Messenger Birds, the Clan Spirits, and several of the dances Geiogamah devised the year prior. Unlike Gardner's and Geiogamah's scripts, however, Allee and Hurst introduced the storytelling aspect only in the beginning and end of their drama as a type of framing device surrounding its main content. There

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<sup>104</sup> Hanay Geiogamah, in conversation with the author, Mar 17, 2016; James Bradley, in conversation with the author, Aug 8, 2014.

<sup>105</sup> Linda Squirrel, in conversation with the author, Aug 8, 2014.

is very little narration woven throughout the play, and what does occur is done so through voice over.

The drama follows Hunter's original plot structure, but it includes more historical information and more character development. Indeed, the script is loaded with new characters, and each historical moment is maximized to include new information. For instance, the Battle of Horseshoe Bend is broken up into two scenes. The first scene concludes the first act, while the second scene begins the second. At the top of the first scene, the battle is already in full swing.<sup>106</sup> As Cherokee and United States troops fill the stage, the scene focuses on Junaluska, Sequoyah, and additional Cherokee warriors who are waiting for their military orders. Focus is placed on the Cherokee warriors in this scene, rather than the Euramerican military heroes as in Hunter's drama. As Junaluska and the others wait, we learn that they are eager to engage in battle with the Redsticks. All of a sudden, a few of the Creek warriors enter from the cliff above the men. Pleased that they finally get to see battle, the Cherokee men engage in a small skirmish with the Creeks, the outcome of which concludes in the Cherokees' favor. As the scene develops, the Cherokees discover that the Creeks have concocted a plan to escape via canoes should the result turn poorly in their favor. At this point, the Cherokee men decide to steal the canoes, ensuring that the Creeks cannot escape. It isn't until this plan is fully developed that Jackson and Houston enter the scene. When they learn of the Cherokees' plans, they are thrilled. The scene, however, concludes with Junaluska saving Jackson's life in the traditional manner. As the second act picks up, we discover that Jackson has made Houston a lieutenant and has pledged his allegiance to

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<sup>106</sup> Pat Allee and Ben Hurst, "Unto These Hills" (unpublished manuscript, 2007). Subsequent citations made parenthetically in the text.

Junaluska. Houston, pleased, informs Junaluska that he has “made a powerful friend today in saving Jackson’s life,” to which Junaluska says he hopes Houston is right (44). Though these scenes follow the same structure as Hunter’s, they are embellished to focus on the Cherokees and their involvement in the battle. In this way, the playwrights strive to present the scene from the Cherokees’ historical perspective.

Though Allee’s and Hurst’s script revises Hunter’s in a manner that aligns more closely with the Cherokees’ historical and cultural perspective, the drama falls back into the trap of presenting information in a way that caters to the Euramerican tourists. For instance, during the Trail of Tears scene, the stage is awash with Nashville citizens who rush about the stage with blankets, clothing, food, and other items which they give to the Cherokees as they pass by. The stage directions state that the “Nashville citizens are openly affected, some breaking down and weeping” (61). A young Cherokee girl, Kamama, notices the people crying. Turning to her grandmother, she points to them, and asks why they are crying. The Grandmother tells her that she must never forget that “there are always good people, no matter what color they are” (61). Following this sequence, and as the Cherokees continue to march, a Christian prayer is heard, accompanied by the Christian hymn, “Poor Wayfaring Stranger” (61). Following the prayer, the lights dim to focus on a group of Cherokees surrounded by the Clan Spirits, who have gathered to construct a makeshift grave for Kamama, who has died while walking the trail (61). Given the emotional power of the scene, it appears as though the playwrights bring the group of Nashville citizen into focus in order to mollify the audience’s heartache. Seeing good Euramericans help the Cherokees as they walk makes the audience feel less guilty—they identify with the Nashville citizens. Though the writers make sure the Cherokees’ spirituality remains visible, they cater to Euramerican audiences so that they are able to experience a catharsis of sorts. While there is

nothing wrong with the presentation of the events in this manner—again, many Cherokees were Christian—it does not portray the Cherokees’ forced removal in a comprehensive manner. Many Euramericans turned their back on the Cherokees as they traveled the trail and refused to allow the Cherokees to cross through their lands, forcing them to find alternate routes through which to travel to Indian Territory.

Another aspect of Hunter’s drama that returns in Allee’s and Hurst’s revision is the death of Tsali. The execution, however, is altered so that focus is placed on Tsali as an individual Cherokee—a warrior—rather than a martyr for the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. Whereas Hunter portrays Tsali’s execution as though he sacrificed himself for the greater good of his people, Allee and Hurst render the scene in a different manner:

TSALI: We did not ask for this. We don’t deserve this!

YONAGUSKA: We have no choice, Tsali.

TSALI: I have my faults. I know that. I have my edges, some of them very sharp.

I have not always followed the way of the warrior, but I follow it now. If I die,  
the others will stay?

YONAGUSKA: Yes.

TSALI: So it must be. (to Yonaguska) Would you take a message to my  
remaining son, Washington?

YONAGUSKA: Speak. I will tell him. You have my word.

TSALI: Tell him...tell him never to leave the land of his fathers.

*A LIGHT COMES UP across stage, illuminating Washington, as Yonaguska  
turns and crosses halfway to the boy.*

TSALI/YONAGUSKA: (in unison) Tell him to follow the way of the warrior.

YONAGUSKA: Tell him to be proud. He is Cherokee.

*The boy slumps in sorrow. Yonaguska turns back to Tsali.*

YONAGUSKA: I am Cherokee also, Tsali. And I have given my word for the good of our people.

*Tsali nods in understanding.*

TSALI: Let it be remembered that I died as a Cherokee warrior.

In Allee's and Hurst's rendition of the scene, Tsali does not turn himself in willingly. He does not offer himself up as martyr, nor does he make a speech upon his death that he gave his life for the Cherokee people to live freely in their homelands. Instead, he asks for his son to be proud of who he is: A Cherokee.

Though Allee's and Hurst's production incorporated all that the Cherokee community and the tourists asked for, the production was dense and difficult to follow. Many reviews of the production criticized the writers for returning to the hackneyed theatrical conventions found in Hunter's script. One reviewer chided: "This year [Hunter's] plotlines are back. And so are the trite storytelling, static staging, and grade-school history lessons. At least the gorgeous dances [from Geiogamah's production] have been retained."<sup>107</sup> The CHA decided to scrap Allee's and Hurst's production at the end of the season and commission another work to be written the following year. The organization failed to find a new writer in time, however, so Linda Squirrel decided to try her hand at revising the drama for the 2008 season.

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<sup>107</sup> Doug Mason, "Hollywood Writers' Revamp the Revamped 'Unto These Hills,'" Jun 15, 2007, *Knoxvillnews.com*, <http://www.knoxnews.com/entertainment/hollywood-writers-revamp-the-revamped-unto-these-hills-ep-413056680-360251271.html> (last accessed Apr 10, 2016).

Squirrel's 2008 revision remains in performance today. Her revision isn't exactly new, insofar as she did not write new material for the show but instead sampled and revised portions from each of the productions that came before.<sup>108</sup> In this way, Squirrel's script is a pastiche, exhibiting the best moments from each of the plays. Squirrel stated that constructing the drama in this way allowed the CHA to insert and pull new scenes on a yearly basis, which helped to keep the drama fresh. Doing so, Squirrel believed, made it easier to strategically balance the historical with the cultural, giving just enough space and time to establish both without overloading the audience with too much information. "It keeps them curious and wanting to know more," Squirrel said.<sup>109</sup> The script samples portions of Hunter's original drama, but his words are assigned to different characters. For instance, the Narrator's dialogue in Hunter's drama is given to Selu and Kanati, who return in Squirrel's drama to narrate the Cherokees' history. Though Squirrel diligently blends Hunter's plot with accurate historical and cultural material, the plot itself does not allow the Cherokees' historical and cultural perspective to shine through. Instead, it continues to perpetuate a Euramerican understanding of Cherokee-Euramerican history.

Currently, there are not any plans to revise the outdoor historical drama any further. When I ask if any new scripts were in commission, Squirrel said that the CHA wasn't interested in replacing the drama. Instead, they were looking to explore new performative avenues and find new ways to get the Cherokees' story out into the world.

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<sup>108</sup> Linda Squirrel, in conversation with the author, Aug 8, 2014.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

## **Conclusion**

The CHC and the CHA responded to community concerns and tourist expectations throughout the 1990s and early 2000s in various ways. During this time period, the organizations experimented with their dramas in hopes of increasing ticket sales. This was a tricky endeavor, but an adventure both organizations needed to explore in order to continue to produce theatrical productions on their outdoor stages. The CHC first started responding to community concerns in the early 1980s. Their early revisions of the drama, however, were not overwhelmingly fruitful. Only when the CHC shelved Hunter's archaic and reductive drama did the theatrical experience start to present the Cherokee Nation's historical memory in a constructive manner. This move, however, alienated touristic audiences, which ultimately hurt the CHC. In North Carolina, the CHA's experimentation proved more successful. The result of bringing a cultural point of view into the drama, however, created a rift within the community. Now that the EBCI was in control of the tourism program, no one could agree on how best to present the Cherokees' culture and history on stage in a manner that would satisfy everyone—tourists and community members alike. Though both locations altered the plots of the dramas to better suit Cherokee storytelling practices, though they strived to incorporate more specific cultural figures into the dramas to add or create a sense of ceremony, though both locations altered their productions to present a more historically and culturally authentic dramatic experience, they consistently ran into problems that kept the productions from succeeding. In my estimation, the CHC and the CHA did everything in their power to alter the dramas. As it turns out, if the dramas failed to speak to Euramerican audiences, then the dramas ultimately failed. Recognizing this as an impasse, the CHC closed the doors to its theatre in 2006. The CHA, however, decided to provide the tourists with what they

wanted. As long as people were showing up to see the show, no matter how trite it may be, the organization and the community continued to make money—to survive.

Both organizations eventually came to realize, however, that the outdoor historical drama and its market was a dying business. In response to this trend, both the CHC and the CHA decided to look into other opportunities to maximize their programs. In the following chapter, I explore the various ways the organizations responded to declining market trends and how each organization tried to combat dwindling ticket sales.



## CHAPTER 5

### A CLEAR ROAD FORWARD?

*We are a revitalized tribe. After every major upheaval, we have been able to gather together as a people and rebuild a community and a government. Individually and collectively, Cherokee people possess an extraordinary ability to face down adversity and continue moving forward. We are able to do that because our culture, though certainly diminished, has sustained us since time immemorial. The Cherokee culture is a well-kept secret.*

- Wilma Mankiller<sup>1</sup>

On top of poor production values, the constant revision of *The Trail of Tears* and *Unto These Hills*—coupled with new original works—confused repeat audiences who were accustomed to seeing a consistent product. Either the productions were changing too much or not enough. All of these changes left audiences unconvinced that the Cherokee Heritage Center’s and the Cherokee Historical Association’s modifications to their theatrical programs were efficacious, and so many stopped attending.<sup>2</sup> In an attempt to amend negative audience responses and to continue to promote historically and culturally accurate material, the CHC in Oklahoma and the CHA in North Carolina decided to develop alternative theatrical programs. Only three productions materialized out of this development strategy: Laurette Willis’ *Under the Cherokee*

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<sup>1</sup> Wilma Mankiller, quoted in *Way Down Yonder in the Indian Nation: Writings from America's Heartland* by Michael Wallis (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), 222.

<sup>2</sup> These are not the only reasons for audience loss. Changing tourist patterns, weather, television, and various changes in American culture and society also impacted ticket sales.

*Moon*, which was performed at Theatre Tsa-La-Gi in Park Hill between 2007 and 2011; Tonia Weavel's *Legends at Dusk*, which also showed in Oklahoma, but for only one summer in 2011; and Larissa Fasthorse's *Cherokee Family Reunion*, which premiered at North Carolina's Mountainside Theatre in 2012 for one season.

In this chapter, I examine how these three plays contend with issues of historical accuracy, cultural epistemologies, and the representation of violence on the outdoor stage. Each of these plays explores and addresses the issues of historical accuracy and cultural representation in its own unique way; however, one play tends to focus on or represent a specific issue better than the others. For instance, in *Under the Cherokee Moon*, Laurette Willis strives to adhere to and accurately represent not only the historical record but the historical memory of the Cherokee Nation. Willis, who is a Euramerican playwright and actor, crafted *Under the Cherokee Moon* in collaboration with the CHC and the Cherokee Nation to make sure the production did not perpetuate false stereotypes or showcase biased historical narratives. In a similar manner, Tonia Weavel (Cherokee Nation) shaped *Legends at Dusk* by focusing on Cherokee epistemologies. Utilizing story as her *modus operandi*, Weavel emphasizes that the Cherokees have always been intimately involved with the performing arts and that it is through such tradition that the Cherokee culture remains strong today. Unlike these two dramas, which focus more on the appropriate methods of Cherokee cultural and historical preservation, Larissa Fasthorse's *Cherokee Family Reunion* works to transmute Cherokee-Euramerican history and culture by revealing the pretense of the outdoor dramatic genre itself. One of the ways Fasthorse manages to do this is by mocking the reenactment of war on stage.

From a dramaturgical perspective, each of these plays is an exercise in tribalography. Utilizing story, the dramas weave the historical into the contemporary, bringing Natives and non-

Natives together to reimagine not only Cherokee history and culture but our shared understanding of the world. These productions are the first to fully explore Cherokee ways of knowing, ways of doing, and ways of being in a constructive manner. The dramas that came before these three attempted to explore such processes with limited success. One of the reasons for their shortcomings is that they tried to locate Cherokee ways of knowing, being, and doing within a Euramerican theatrical context, which only managed to restrict Cherokee perspectives from being wholly developed.

These dramas were theatrical experiments for the CHC and the CHA. Whereas the CHC developed *Under the Cherokee Moon* and *Legends at Dusk* as replacements for *The Trail of Tears*, the CHA planned to commission a new production every year following the 2012 season to accompany *Unto These Hills*. According to John Tissue, the CHA wanted to bring in new dramas because most visitors had seen *Unto These Hills* several times.<sup>3</sup> It was never the CHA's strategy, however, to replace *Unto These Hills*. Rather, it was a way for the organization to provide more opportunities for tourists to see performances at the Mountainside Theatre—to utilize the amphitheatre more efficiently. Aside from the main production season (May-August), the theatre stayed vacant for nine months. In addition to providing audiences with a new take on

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<sup>3</sup> John Tissue, quoted in "CHA Expanding Offerings at Mountainside Theatre," by Scott Mackie, Apr 12, 2012, *The Cherokee One Feather*, <http://theonefeather.com/files/2012/01/April-12.pdf> (last accessed Feb 23, 2015), 5. The CHA apparently commissioned Rob Lauer to write a musical entitled *Chief Little Will* for the 2013 season. The script was written, but it did not premier in the 2013 season. In fact, it doesn't appear that Lauer's script ever materialized into an actual production.

historical outdoor drama, the CHA hoped that having two theatrical attractions would help counterbalance the cost of keeping the venue in good working condition. In Oklahoma, the CHC decided to move away from the amphitheatre, as restoring the venue to its proper condition year after year was a financial nightmare.

### ***Under the Cherokee Moon***

Tonia Weavel, who is currently the Cherokee Heritage Center's Education Director, made it clear in our interview that the closing of Tsa-La-Gi in 2005 was an especially hard decision for the CHC to make.<sup>4</sup> The organization's identity had been linked with the outdoor production for over three decades—to say goodbye to the drama was like losing a child. In spite of the amphitheatre's closure, the CHC's Executive Director, Carey Tilley, continued to believe that a theatrical performance of some sort would benefit their patrons.<sup>5</sup> The CHC knew that trying to revive the amphitheatre and its production was a huge undertaking and that, economically speaking, it was impractical.<sup>6</sup> Even without a drama the CHC barely had the resources to keep their organization self-financed. Despite their struggle, the center believed that a drama of some sort would perpetuate their organization's mission, which Weavel identified as “to preserve, promote, and teach Cherokee history and culture.”<sup>7</sup> With this mission in mind, the

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<sup>4</sup> Tonia Hogner-Weavel, in discussion with the author, Aug 4, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Carey Tilley, quoted in “Cherokee Heritage Center begins ‘Under the Cherokee Moon’ drama,” by Tesina Jackson, Jun 8, 2009, *Cherokee Phoenix*, <http://www.cherokeephoenix.org/Article/index/2942> (last accessed Jul 24, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> Tonia Hogner-Weavel, in discussion with the author, Aug 4, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

CHC started to strategize new ways to preserve their organization's theatrical legacy. In order for a new production to happen, the CHC needed a scaled-down theatrical venue, a space that did not require a large budget to maintain. The organization's Ancient Village, a replica of a pre-1700s Cherokee settlement, and Adam's Corner, a replica of a late-1800s rural Cherokee village, were the perfect locations for such an event.

In the Ancient Village, tourists experienced what traditional Cherokee culture and ways of living were like just prior to the arrival of Euramericans.<sup>8</sup> Adam's Corner, a similar outdoor exhibit, allowed visitors to walk among historical buildings indicative of Indian Territory just prior to Oklahoma's statehood.<sup>9</sup> With an ancient council house, ball field, and ceremonial ground in the Ancient Village and a school house, a frontier homestead, a general store, and a church in Adam's Corner, the CHC had the perfect backdrops against which to stage a new drama. With two non-traditional, site-specific theatrical spaces secured, now all the CHC needed was a new script.

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<sup>8</sup> The Ancient Village, which opened two years before Theatre Tsa-la-gi in 1969, closed in 2012. The exhibit was relocated, reconstructed, and renamed Diligwa in 2013. According to Alfie Vick, who helped develop and construct the new 1710 replica village, Diligwa is a more accurate recreation of an early Cherokee township. Alfie Vick, quoted in "Diligwa Portrays Authentic Cherokee Experience of 1710" on *Indian Country Today Media Network.com*, Jun 9, 2013, <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2013/06/09/diligwa-portrays-authentic-choerokee-experience-1710-149760> (last accessed Oct 8, 2015).

<sup>9</sup> Adam's Corner is still in operation today. Cherokee Heritage Center Website, CHC FAQ, <http://www.cherokeeheritage.org/chc-faq/> (last accessed, Jul 24, 2015.)

In 2006, the CHC contracted actor-director Laurette Willis (now the director of PraiseMoves Fitness Ministry) to write a new drama. The organization first learned of Willis' playwriting abilities from *The 1840 Cherokee Trial of Archilla Smith*, a historical drama commissioned by the Arts Council of Tahlequah in 1996.<sup>10</sup> Wilma Mankiller praised *Archilla Smith* for “document[ing] an important part of Cherokee history and bring[ing] to life important Cherokee leaders.”<sup>11</sup> In this play, Willis pulled from actual courtroom transcripts, as well as collaborated with the Cherokee Nation Prosecutor, Chad Smith, to create “an accurate representation of 1840 Cherokee law and courtroom procedures.”<sup>12</sup> Not only was this drama constructed off of historical documents, it was performed in the actual courtroom in which the original trial took place. The CHC was impressed with Willis' playwriting abilities, as well as her stagecraft; they also found her attention to historical accuracy and her sensitivity to Cherokee culture extraordinary. As a result, *Under the Cherokee Moon* opened in the summer of 2007 and remained in performance until 2010.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Laurette Willis, Professional Website, <http://laurettewillis.weebly.com/recommendations.html> (last accessed Aug 24, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> Wilma Mankiller, quoted in “Praise Quote,” *ibid*. It should be noted that *Under the Cherokee Moon* was advertised as dinner theatre, not an outdoor drama.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>13</sup> The production returned in 2011 for “a four-week limited engagement each Saturday in September,” but this was more of a special event as opposed to part of the organization's summer tourism program. Tourism Industry Partners, “Cherokee Heritage Center presents ‘Under The Cherokee Moon in Indian Territory,’” Aug 9, 2011, *Travelok.com*,

Over its four-year run, Willis altered *Under the Cherokee Moon* periodically to incorporate new historical voices and events. While conducting research for her script, Willis was constantly learning new information, and she wanted to bring her knowledge to the stage. Because of this, there are three different versions of *Under the Cherokee Moon*. In the 2007-9 productions, the first act was titled “Amazing Graces.” In this act, we are introduced to what Indian Territory was like in the late 1800s by two prominent historical female figures, Carrie Bushyhead and Sarah Worcester.<sup>14</sup> Carrie Bushyhead, the daughter of Rev. Jesse and Eliza Bushyhead, was a Trail of Tears survivor. She was also one of the first graduates of the Cherokee Female Seminary School in Park Hill, Oklahoma. Sarah Worcester, the daughter of Rev. Samuel and Ann Worcester, was a graduate of the Mount Holyoke Female Seminary in South Hadley, Massachusetts. Mount Holyoke’s curriculum served as a model for both the Cherokee male and female seminaries. Because Sarah was familiar with the curriculum, she was one of the first instructors at the Female Seminary in Park Hill.<sup>15</sup> Set in Adam’s Corner, “Amazing Graces” was staged on the front porch of the general store. Performing the roles of Bushyhead and Worcester, Willis took the audience back to the day the Cherokee National Female Seminary was being built, relating what life was like for both Cherokees and non-native women in Indian Territory prior to Oklahoma statehood. In the second act, “Around Cherokee

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[http://www.travelok.com/media\\_room/release /cherokee-heritage-center-presents-under-the-cherokee-moon-in-indian-territory](http://www.travelok.com/media_room/release /cherokee-heritage-center-presents-under-the-cherokee-moon-in-indian-territory) (last accessed Oct 16, 2015).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Sarah D. Stow, *Mount Holyoke Seminary, South Hadley, Mass. During its First Half Century, 1837-1887* (South Hadley: Mount Holyoke Seminary, 1887), 331-2.

Council Fires,” the audience gathered in the Ancient Village’s council house. Here, the audience was transported to 1776 to hear Cherokee leaders discuss the tribe’s relationship with the British and the American colonists. By the end of the council meeting, the audience voted on whether the Cherokees would fight against the British, against the American colonists, or remain neutral. In 2010, the production was slightly altered. Willis introduced a new first act, “Journey to Chota,” which centered on Henry Timberlake’s visit to the Cherokees in 1761-2. Timberlake was an emissary to the Cherokees, and he documented early Cherokee cultural formations in a series of memoirs. Willis again presented “Amazing Graces” for the 2011 production, but introduced a new second act, “Adventures in Indian Territory.”<sup>16</sup> In each of her iterations, prominent figures such as Attakullakulla, Dragging Canoe, Oconostota, War Woman/Beloved Woman Nancy Ward, Captain Nathaniel Gist, Ostenaco, Sageni, Lt. Henry Timberlake, Walisi, Ned Christie, Will Rogers, Zeke Proctor, Captain John C. West, Belle Starr, Carrie Bushyhead, and Sarah Worcester, took the stage to share the Cherokees’ ever-changing world. While I will reference portions of each play, I will primarily utilize the 2010 script to explain how the CHC altered their

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<sup>16</sup> Heidi Nees writes about this production in her dissertation and provides a wonderful description of the drama and its significance: Heidi L. Nees, “‘Indian’ Summers: Querying Representations of Native American Culture in Outdoor Historical Drama” (PhD diss., Bowling Green State University, 2012).



programming to better suit Cherokee culture and history, as this version portrays specific historical events and Cherokee figures in the most cohesive manner.<sup>17</sup>

The 2010 version of *Under the Cherokee Moon* is broken into two unrelated acts, with the first act, “Journey to Chota,” comprised of four distinct scenes: The English Party, the Woman’s Party, the Warrior’s Party, and the Articles of Peace. The first act is set in Chota, the Cherokee Capitol in 1761-2—the year in which Henry Timberlake ventured into Cherokee territory to discuss the British Articles of Peace.<sup>18</sup> The English Party, the Woman’s Party, and the Warrior’s Party scenes are performed concurrently in different stations within the Ancient Village. Prior to the start of the performance, the audience is broken up into three different groups. In rotation, each group travels to each of the three different stations. After each group has witnessed the three scenes, the divided audience comes back together to watch the fourth and final scene of Act One. Each scene presents a different perspective on the Articles of Peace. In the English Party scene, Timberlake holds council with Nathaniel Gist, a white trader and soon-

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<sup>17</sup> Laurette Willis, “Under the Cherokee Moon: Journey to Chota” (unpublished manuscript, 2007); “Under the Cherokee Moon: Around Cherokee Council Fires” (unpublished manuscript, 2010).

<sup>18</sup> More commonly referred to as the Treaty of Long-Island-on-the-Holston, the British Articles of Peace was a treaty between the Cherokees and the Virginian colonists on Jul 20, 1761. The treaty ended the Cherokee’s war with the Colony of Virginia.

to-be-father of Sequoyah.<sup>19</sup> In addition to learning about the Cherokees' relationship with the British and the American colonists, we learn specifics about council etiquette, traditional Cherokee customs, and a few expressions in the Cherokee language, such as "Osiyo" (Hello) and "Wado" (Thank you).<sup>20</sup> In the Woman's Party scene, we are introduced to the Beloved Woman/War Woman, Nancy Ward—a significant historical figure about whom I talk later. Ward has gathered a group of Cherokee women to discuss traditional Cherokee customs, such as marriage, kinship, and peace relations. In addition, we learn a few traditional Cherokee stories, such as the one about Jay-nee (Wren) and Ta-la-du (Cricket), two animal figures that are said to alert the Cherokees about the birth of a newborn child. In the Warrior's scene, we acquire information about the French and Indian war and how a few Cherokee warriors, such as Dragging Canoe, who is the son of Attakullakulla, are suspicious of Timberlake, the colonists, and the British government. We also learn in this scene that the Warriors are ready to fight if any more of their lands are illegally traded with the British, the French, or the colonists. After the audience has seen each of these presentations, they regroup to listen to Ostenaco accept the

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<sup>19</sup> There is debate on whether Gist was Sequoyah's biological father. For more information, see: Samuel C. Williams, "The Father of Sequoyah: Nathaniel Gist," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 15.1 (1937): 3-10.

<sup>20</sup> These expressions are anachronistic, resembling the Cherokee Nation's contemporary language. Willis utilizes the contemporary language here so that Cherokee community members can understand the language better. For instance, in the east the appropriate word for "Thank You" would have been "S'gi."

British Articles of Peace and bury the “bloody tomahawk...deep in the ground.”<sup>21</sup> In the second act, “Around Cherokee Council Fires,” which takes place fourteen years later, the audience listens to Attakullakulla, Oconostota, Dragging Canoe, Gist, Ward, and others debate the Cherokees’ involvement in the American Revolution. Attakullakulla and Oconostota side with the British, but they prefer not to participate in the war. Dragging Canoe believes the Cherokees should join with other tribal affiliations to decimate both the British and the American colonists in order to protect Cherokee lands. Ward, being a Beloved Woman, advocates for peace, siding with both the British and the American colonists, as it is “God’s” calling to protect everyone.<sup>22</sup> By the end of the show, the council votes on whether to remain neutral or to become involved in the war. The vote, however, is not unanimous, and the leaders adjourn with the understanding that they will not become embroiled in the war between the British and the American colonists.

Nees cites *Under the Cherokee Moon* as an excellent production that transformed audiences because Willis had them directly participate in the production, which is a performance methodology unlike those traditionally explored in outdoor historical drama.<sup>23</sup> Audience members assumed various character roles prior to the start of the play and were prompted to ask questions throughout the performance to help develop the plot along with the actual characters. For example, in the second act of the 2010 production, the audience was treated as though they

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<sup>21</sup> Willis, “Journey to Chota,” 16.

<sup>22</sup> Willis, “Around Council Fires,” 13.

<sup>23</sup> On this point, see Nees, “‘Indian’ Summers,” 79-83, as well as “New Paths to Representation; or, How *Under the Cherokee Moon* Broke the Outdoor Historical Drama Mold,” *Theatre History Studies* 34 (2015): 79-102.

were members of the Cherokees' council. Prior to the start of the show, select audience members were given a question to ask the leaders gathered around the council fire. Once their questions were asked, the performers directly acknowledged and responded to the audience member as though his or her voice was of utmost importance. Because not everyone in the audience could ask a question, the actors would also directly address individuals in the audience as if they had shared an opinion with the council before the action of the scene took place. For instance, while *Ostenaco* or *Dragging Canoe* share their stance on war with the council, they attribute specific characteristics to individual people in the audience, at times referring to a selected individual as being a significant Cherokee leader or as kinsman with excellent ideas. In other versions of *Under the Cherokee Moon*, Willis had her audiences assume they were members of various outlaw gangs, such as the Wild Bunch, and had them assume individual character roles, such as Cattle Annie and Little Britches—two notorious female bandits in Indian Territory. By including the audience in the production, Willis felt that the audience became more invested in the story. Willis stated in a 2011 TV interview that this form of drama was “important, especially in this age, where everything seems so technical” because it allowed people “to realize—one-on-one—what people went through, what brought us to the place we are today.”<sup>24</sup> Willis believed that the performer’s relationship with the audience allowed the audience to bring this history to life, “so that [the audience felt] as if [they] were there” in “Indian Territory, over a hundred years ago—on the spot.” Heidi Nees notes that during the performance she witnessed in 2011, the performers

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<sup>24</sup> Laurette Willis in “Under the Cherokee Moon Returns for 5<sup>th</sup> Year,” Fox23 video, 4:20, from a news spot televised by Fox23 in Sep of 2011, <http://www.fox23.com/videos/news/under-the-choerokee-moon/vCM4yS/> (last accessed Oct 9, 2015).

pulled people out of the crowd to perform various tasks on stage, such as balancing books on one's head or to learn how to twirl a rope like Will Rogers.<sup>25</sup> Because the audience was directly involved in the production, they walked away learning something more than they would have if they had been allowed to remain passive spectators. As Nees states, "the play does not become about a white audience experiencing an Aristotelian sense of catharsis," but rather, by "relying on history and culture not just through words and demonstrations, but also through audience participation, that knowledge becomes embodied in the audience."<sup>26</sup>

Fashioning her script under the strict supervision and guidance of Cherokee historians and CHC board members, Willis ensured that her production was culturally sensitive and historically accurate before presenting her work before a live audience.<sup>27</sup> Willis annotated her primary and secondary sources throughout her script, footnoting portions of dialogue taken directly from historical materials, such as court documents, personal journals, and news articles. To distinguish historical texts from dramatic embellishments, Willis offset historical records in blue ink, which helped actors determine when the playwright chose to remain faithful to or stray from the historical record. Even when Willis deviated from the record, she justified her choices with an abundance of historical information to justify her dramatic license. Doing so not only exemplifies her ethically engaged research abilities but also suggests that the historical record *is* dramatic, that there isn't a need to mythologize or fabricate Cherokee-Euramerican history.

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<sup>25</sup> Nees, "'Indian' Summers," 222.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

Working in close collaboration with the Cherokee community and the historical archive, Willis was able to devise a dramatic narrative that blends bits of mythology with historical and cultural precision. While exposing different accounts of the “truth” in this manner drew audiences into the entertaining aspects of Willis’s drama, it also instructed audiences on how to reassess historical narratives, a dramatic concept that Nees considers “edutainment.”<sup>28</sup> For instance, in the second act of the 2011 production, Belle Starr and Zeke Proctor debate the reputation of the legendary Hangin’ Judge, Isaac Parker. Belle Starr, kin to the Hatfields of the famous Hatfield-McCoy feud, is a notorious female outlaw who married a Cherokee man. Zeke Proctor (Cherokee), an oft-cited drunken menace in saloon lore, was a United States Deputy Marshal under Isaac Parker. In this scene, Proctor has just returned from Arkansas, having been in service at Judge Parker’s court. Proctor conveys to Starr his version of the infamous Judge. Not trusting a word Proctor says, however, Starr, who is played by Willis, corrects Proctor’s sensational story:

STARR: Well Zeke, I heard you just came back from Arkansas. I love  
Arkansas. Always had a soft place in my heart for it.

PROCTOR: Fort Smith in particular. Judge Isaac Parker’s court. Ugh,  
Hangin’ Issac Parker’s court that is.

STARR: Now that’s where salacious rumors get started.

PROCTOR: You’re not trying to tell me you’ve never stood before  
Hangin’ Judge Parker’s court before, are you?

STARR: Not “Hangin’ Judge,” just plain ole “Judge.” See there’s more of  
those rumors.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

PROCTOR: Rumors? Belle, he sentenced 160 people to their death—by hanging. Including four women.

STARR: [Grabbing throat, croaks] And I weren't one of them, and I don't intend to be neither. 'Sides, there's actually 79 men what's got hanged, and that's out of over 13,000 trials in 21 years. Now I ain't good at ciphering numbers and all, but I reckon them's pretty good odds. Don't you?

PROCTOR: Not if you happen to be one of the 79.<sup>29</sup>

This scene demonstrates Willis's ability to blend myth with historical accuracy, which simultaneously entertains and informs audiences about Cherokee-Euramerican history. Legend has it that the Judge was hell bent on hanging people for their offenses and that he took pleasure in condemning people to death. One myth alleges that Parker would chant "Hang by the neck until you are dead, dead, and dead!" at the end of every death sentence.<sup>30</sup> Court records indicate, however, that this was not the case. Parker was known as a pejorative castigator, often delivering wild speeches while issuing death sentences, but the judge more often than not recited the law when conveying the court's rulings.

As we see in this scene, Willis weaves various elements together in order to show how the Cherokees interacted with Indian Territory's settler population. Many Cherokees, such as

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<sup>29</sup> This portion of "Under the Cherokee Moon" was performed during the September news spot with Fox23, cited in note 22.

<sup>30</sup> Michael Brodhead, *Isaac C. Parker: Federal Justice on the Frontier: A Bibliography* (Oklahoma: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1986), 80-82.

Proctor, held prominent positions within the larger society. Willis' blending of Cherokee-Euramerican historical figures paints a more accurate picture of the actual cultural landscape. Whereas characters in Hunter's drama are often men (both Cherokees and non-natives) who hold positions of power, Willis interprets the people in Indian Territory differently, giving voice to the women who heavily influenced the Cherokees' life. Also, these females are awarded the power to alter a story's "truth," as is exemplified in Starr's admonishing of Proctor's "salacious rumors." Willis weaves the Cherokees' story into the Euramerican settlers' to expose the complexity of Cherokee-Euramerican relations. In doing so, she tells a new version of history, a story that upholds the Cherokees' cultural identity while also weaving it into other types of identity formation.

Willis utilized numerous records to complicate her characters and their narratives. She developed her plot around historical conflicts, differences of opinions, and disparate cultural traditions, rather than maintaining a narrow triumphalist narrative. In Willis's production, we see a variety of perspectives concerning events and people, and the Cherokees are written with complexity. Willis does not champion a specific narrative, but rather provides a multiplicity of opinions and perspectives, allowing her audiences to make their own conclusions based on historical records about the historical events.

One of this dissertation's overarching arguments is that the Cherokees are forced to straddle two worlds, each with its own way of being, doing, and knowing. During this time period, Euramericans also straddled a multiplicity of worlds. Willis explores this notion in *Under the Cherokee Moon*, providing contrasting opinions to show how complicated political matters were for everyone. In "Around Cherokee Council Fires," Willis has Nathaniel Gist enlighten the council (and the audience) about the various worlds he straddles. With bibulous candor, Gist



describes how he is “in the peculiar position of being closely associated with three different worlds”: 1) his occupation—his “uniform”—belongs to England; 2) his body (or being) to “the cool earth of...native Virginia”; and 3) his loyalties and heart to the Cherokees, including his wife and son.<sup>31</sup> As Gist formulates a mental image of the world(s) he inhabits, he begins to question home, peace, and war. He asks Attakullakulla and Oconostota, with whom he keeps council, if “the place where a man’s heart is at peace is his true home” and if “the place of war—or fighting for what is right—is where a man’s heart belongs.” Oconostota tells Gist that “there is neither peace nor a clear strategy for war when loyalty faces three different directions.” Bothered by this admission, Gist then addresses the audience in soliloquy. While sipping from his whiskey flask, he tries to develop a name for a person “who faces three different directions...at the same time.” Gist offers the name of the “three-cornered hat...Americans [wore]” during the eighteenth century—a tricorne/tricorn, or a cocked hat—as being the appropriate moniker to describe such a person. Gist then asks the council for permission to speak freely—as “one of those tri-cornered hats”—and beseeches the council to consider that the Americans want nothing more “but the freedom every man wants.” Assuming this nickname, Gist reveals his allegiance to the Virginians and the American colonists. In fact, Gist advises the Cherokees to follow in the footsteps of the colonists, as turning against them would be unwise. The Cherokees’ “quarrel cannot be solved with word” or “with rifles,” he states. No one, not the Cherokees, the English, or the Virginians, “can stop the tide,” he warns.

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<sup>31</sup> Wut-teh, the sister of Chief Old Tassel, is Nathaniel Gist’s wife. Her character is not present in the script, but the actors delegate one of the female audience members to assume her role. George, or Sequoyah, is Gist’s son. Willis, “Around Cherokee Council Fires,” 2-4.

In a similar manner, Willis has Attakullakulla and Oconostota, the Cherokee Warriors, and Nancy Ward describe their loyalties to further illustrate the complexity of not only the historical record but the culturally disparate relations within and outside the Cherokee community. For instance, despite the council's ruling, the warriors wish—and plan—to fight against the British and the American colonists in order to protect their lands. The warriors turn against the council to do what they feel is right. Ward, on the other hand, advocates that the Cherokees side with the colonists, as they have intermarried with them and have adopted many Euramericans into their tribe. “To fight against them,” to shed blood within the family is a sin, states Ward, “Peace is the only solution!”<sup>32</sup> The chiefs, however, believe that the tribe should remain neutral, as “the battle between the British and the American colonists is not the Cherokees' fight.” In each of these instances, the Cherokees are split between two (or three) worlds. Not only are they split between the Cherokee and Euramerican worlds (with two ways of knowing, being, and doing), their own world—their community—is divided.

Willis also incorporates remarkable female characters in *Under the Cherokee Moon* to strengthen and complicate her obligation to historical and cultural accuracy. As I have noted elsewhere, the majority of women in outdoor dramas are depicted as voiceless “props.” Willis did not want to author a historical drama that perpetuated such dubious ideology. Of the several female characters in *Under the Cherokee Moon*, not one is a derivation or an archetype. For instance, Willis gives Beloved Woman Nancy Ward, Segeni (Ostenaco's Daughter), and Walisi (a little girl) substantial space in *Under the Cherokee Moon*. These female characters are of central importance and considerably influence the narrative of Willis's production. These female

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 4-5.

figures are introduced for many reasons, the most important being to show that women were revered in Cherokee society and that a few held positions of power equal to men while at council and in the community. Willis focuses on the powerful roles many Cherokee women performed in political situations, such as the War Woman of Chota, Nancy Ward. War Women, or Beloved Women, held council with Cherokee chiefs, and their opinions and arguments heavily influenced a council's decision. Granted, the powerful role of women in Cherokee society started to change once Euramericans implemented their civilization policy. Yet, as Theda Perdue notes, even though the Cherokees began to emulate Euramerican patriarchal society, "the long-held Cherokee tradition of granting political powers to designated women... guaranteed that women could continue to participate openly in public affairs."<sup>33</sup> With the eventual adoption of Euramerican legal practices in the early nineteenth century, Cherokee women were eventually denied their place in council, and their political worth was redefined. Despite this setback, Cherokee women managed to air their political voices in one way or another—they were heard even if they were not physically present.

Many American Indian and feminist scholars, playwrights, and novelists have written about Nancy Ward (also known as Nanye'hi). Scholars such as Theda Perdue and Michelene Pesantubbee argue that while Ward's historical significance is, to some extent, fictional, she is no doubt one of the most important female figures to arise out of the Revolutionary Period (1764-1789). Nancy Ward is often regarded as one of the few Cherokee women who fought alongside Cherokee warriors. As Theda Perdue explains, women were often present on the

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<sup>33</sup> Theda Perdue, "Ward, Nancy," *American National Biography Online* (2000), <http://www.anb.org/20/20-01077.html> (last accessed Oct 16, 2015).

battlefield and could be seen performing “tasks customary for Cherokee women, such as cooking, carrying water, and gathering firewood.”<sup>34</sup> In contrast to these “traditional” duties, it is reported that Ward actually took up arms and fought alongside her fellow male warriors. For instance, Ward fought by the side of her husband, Kingfisher, against the Creeks in the Battle of Taliwa in 1755. One story relates that Ward hid behind a fallen log beside her husband as he fired against the enemy. Ward helped her husband to prepare his bullets by chewing on them; the misshapen bullets were thought to have caused more damage by shattering into smaller pieces whenever they hit their target. Another story tells that during the same battle, Ward took her husband’s rifle after he was shot down and continued his fight. With gun in hand, she rallied the Cherokee warriors to fight harder, renewing her fellow warriors’ spirit and leading them to victory. Because of her courageous demeanor, the Cherokees honored Ward with the title of Beloved Woman/War Woman. With this title, Ward became a powerful voice in Cherokee councils, advocating peaceful relations between Euramericans and Cherokees in the years leading up to and following the Revolutionary War. In fact, Ward’s importance is often fixed to this time period.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> For more information on Nancy Ward’s involvement in the Revolutionary War see Sarah Wilkerson Freeman, “Nan-ye-hi (Nancy Ward): Diplomatic Mother,” in *Tennessee Women: Their Lives and Times*, vol. 1, eds. Sarah Wilkerson Freeman and Beverly Greene Bond (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009), and Ben Harris McClary, “Nancy Ward: The Last Beloved Woman of the Cherokees,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 21.4 (1962): 352-364.

As the Revolution drew near, Ward was known to exercise her plea for peace by informing colonists and settlers that the Cherokees planned to attack them. Because of her actions, many historians regard Ward as being an American patriot who “felt that white ways were superior to her own.”<sup>36</sup> Michelene Pesantubbee argues that despite her forewarnings, “Ward’s actions were informed by her kinship ties and friendships with American colonists...not because she felt American society was superior or because her brief marriage to a white man led her to hold all Americans dear to her heart, but because she continued to carry out her functions as a beloved woman at the same time she sought new ways for the Cherokees to thrive in a changing world.”<sup>37</sup> Theda Perdue also notes that “because the Cherokees had no central government with coercive power, individuals could make such decisions freely and not suffer retribution.”<sup>38</sup> Therefore, Ward was neither a “traitor” to her people nor an American sympathizer. She acted upon her duties as the Cherokees’ Beloved Woman/War woman.

Willis pays particular attention to Ward in *Under the Cherokee Moon*, portraying her as a warrior, a peacekeeper, and a mother figure of the Cherokees. In the first act, Willis depicts Ward as a well-reasoned and respectable woman, an educator, and a political pundit. Throughout the Women’s Party scene, Ward pleads with the Cherokee women to teach their children that they “cannot trade land for peace,” because “those hungry for land will always want more,” and they will destroy anything that stands in their way get it. “When we have no more land to trade

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<sup>36</sup> Michelene E. Pesantubbee, “Nancy Ward: American Patriot or Cherokee Nationalist?”

*American Indian Quarterly* 38.2 (2014): 177.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Perdue, “Ward, Nancy,” *ibid.*

for peace, there will be no more peace, and they will force us to leave,” she entreats. In this early scene, we see Ward holding onto her warrior days. She does not advocate fighting, but she insists that land cannot buy peace. By act two, however, Ward has somewhat changed her tone. At the council meeting, Ward continues to plead for peace, yet she now believes the Cherokees must align themselves with the American colonists. Establishing peaceful relations with the colonists is the only way for the Cherokees to survive. In a heated debate, Dragging Canoe, a representative of the Cherokee warriors, reprimands Ward, asking where her “fighting spirit” went. Ward responds by sharing with the council how she became known as War Woman. She informs them, however, that she “was not thinking of valor, or honors” but with “only destruction” back then and that with age, she has learned new things and taken new responsibilities. As Beloved Woman, it is her duty to advocate for peace, not war or the killing of mankind. Willis writes Ward’s personal strife into her character, complicating not only this scene but the actual historical backdrop. Once Dragging Canoe leaves the council to prepare for war against the Euramericans, Ward, with a heavy heart, explains her duty and responsibility, stating that she will “uphold [her] honored role as Ga-tsi-ge-yu-i (Beloved Woman), an advocate for peace,” but that she will also “warn any who may be in harm’s way...to protect themselves—whether they be English, Cherokee, Colonists...or Virginians” even though she must, as War Woman, prepare no-wod’ (medicine for battle) for the Cherokee warriors.<sup>39</sup> As Beloved Woman/War Woman, Ward has to perform certain tasks, even if they go against what she believes. Therefore, while Ward promoted peaceful relations with the colonists—all human life being her responsibility—her loyalties never left Cherokee territory.

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<sup>39</sup> Willis, “Around Council Fires,” 12.

After the council has made their decision at the end of the piece to remain neutral, Willis has Ward step out of the dramatic action to directly address the audience. Willis and the audience are no longer a part of the council; they are no longer in 1776, but are in present time. In her address to the audience, Ward describes the events that took place shortly following the council's motion to remain neutral. Blood was spilled, and many lives were lost on all sides of the war. She informs the audience that the Cherokees and Euramericans have since come a long way, and she encourages the audience to continue to fight for peace, as killing for one's beliefs is unnecessary and against God's will. "All for peace' is our call to you tonight," Ward supplicates, "I hope you will join us."<sup>40</sup> After these final words, Ward invites the audience to join the cast in song. As the audience and actors exit the council house, rejoining the land of the living with a renewed sense of communitas, they sing a Cherokee rendition of "Amazing Grace," a song that does not belong to the Cherokees, but one that, as Ward states, reminds the Cherokees of their call for peace.<sup>41</sup>

Audiences responded to Willis's production with enthusiasm.<sup>42</sup> One woman wrote that that the production left her speechless.<sup>43</sup> Others stated that they left the production with tears of

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> For more on audience response, see: Nees, "New Paths to Representation," 99.

<sup>43</sup> Betty Smith, "'Cherokee Moon' Rises," Jun 2, 2008, *TahlequahDailyPress.com*, [http://www.tahlequahdailypress.com/archives/cherokee-moon-rises/article\\_cd4b7e6b-9a89-54dd-8ffd-b6b044a44636.html](http://www.tahlequahdailypress.com/archives/cherokee-moon-rises/article_cd4b7e6b-9a89-54dd-8ffd-b6b044a44636.html) (last accessed Feb 1, 2015.)

joy and with renewed appreciation of Cherokee history and culture.<sup>44</sup> Many historians also applauded Willis' drama, citing it as being historically accurate and culturally sensitive.<sup>45</sup> From every direction or angle, the show was deemed a success. No one appears to have criticized the fact that Willis's production perpetuated ideologies in a similar fashion to Hunter's earlier dramas, such as colorblind casting. No one appears to have complained that Willis was playing leading female Cherokee roles, either. This is most likely due to Willis's fame in the performing arts around Oklahoma. Nevertheless, the CHC continued to experience financial hardship, and despite the show's dramatic achievements, its ticket sales were dismal. Weavel informed me that Willis's royalties and performance fees were greater than what the box office grossed.<sup>46</sup> "It was impossible to pay around \$25,000 to \$35,000 a year when the organization only recouped \$15,000 each season," Weavel explained.<sup>47</sup> And so, being a financial burden, the CHC decided to discontinue *Under the Cherokee Moon* shortly after its 2010 run.

The fact that the show failed to attract large audiences was no doubt discouraging, but it did not sway the CHC to abandon their relationship with theatrical performance altogether. The

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<sup>44</sup> Travina Coleman, "Go Under 'Cherokee Moon,'" *MuskogeePhoenix.com*, Jul 3, 2008, [http://www.muskogee phoenix.com/news/lifestyles/go-under-cherokee-moon/article\\_0778708b-3fe9-5c96-9961-8c4b542df5f4.html](http://www.muskogee phoenix.com/news/lifestyles/go-under-cherokee-moon/article_0778708b-3fe9-5c96-9961-8c4b542df5f4.html) (last accessed Feb 1, 2015).

<sup>45</sup> Cherokee Nation News Release, "Cherokee Heritage Center Presents 'Under the Cherokee Moon,'" *Cherokee.org*, May 17, 2007, <http://www.cherokee.org/News/Stories/23364.aspx> (last accessed Feb 1, 2015).

<sup>46</sup> Tonia Hogner-Weavel, in discussion with the author, Aug 4, 2015.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*



CHC continued to see drama as a practical vehicle through which “to preserve, promote and teach Cherokee history and culture.”<sup>48</sup> As Weavel stressed in our interview, the CHC simply needed to find a way to lower the cost of production even further so that production expenditures matched what was earned. If the CHC figured out a way to cut down on expenses, then they could continue their theatrical programming. The organization had already saved money by turning their two villages into theatrical venues. The only thing left to do was to produce a script that belonged to the organization, one that was written and performed by the CHC staff. In 2011, Tonia Weavel and Mickel Yantz co-wrote and produced the center’s very own *Legends at Dusk*. With royalties and actor fees out of the way, the CHC finally had the solution to their theatrical problem, or so they thought.

### ***Legends at Dusk***

In *Legends at Dusk*, actors perform traditional Cherokee stories of “a time when people and animals lived together and spoke the same language.”<sup>49</sup> As we learn in the opening of *Legends at Dusk*, the Cherokees were able to communicate with the animals and the plants in the old days. Back then, the animals and the plants “were larger and more perfect than the weak imitations that you see today.”<sup>50</sup> Like people, the animals and plants once organized their own communal activities—they held council, and they appointed chiefs. The humans, the plants, and

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Will Chavez, ‘Legends at Dusk’ Production Shares Cherokee Legends,’ Jun 16, 2011, *CherokeePhoenix.org*, <http://www.cherokeephoenix.org/Article/Index/4966> (last accessed Oct 8, 2015).

<sup>50</sup> Tonia Hogner-Weavel, “Legends at Dusk” (unpublished manuscript, 2011), 3.

the animals mingled on a daily basis, holding conversations with each other as though they were one. The Tsunatanaya, or the Old Ones, being of the lowest order in the natural world, needed the help of the animals and the plants to survive.<sup>51</sup> Many stories relate how the animals willingly sacrificed themselves for the betterment of humankind, as people were generally helpless back then. Eventually, however, the Old Ones started to exploit the animals' charity. Angered by their insolence, the animals turned against the humans, creating diseases for which the Old Ones had no medicament. Seeing the pitiful state of the "two-legged," the plants created medicines to cure their ailments, thus counteracting the animals' diseases. Though they learned from the plants how to heal themselves, the humans' careless disregard made them lose their ability to communicate with the plants and the animals. Shortly thereafter, "for reasons yet unexplained," the perfect animals and plants "left the [middle] world and ascended to the world above."<sup>52</sup> Because the Old Ones lost the right to speak their language, they had to create stories so that future generations could learn to survive decorously with the natural world.

As Kimberly Blaeser (Anishinaabe) states, "Native stories are seldom about separate parallel existences, but instead are about intricately linked relationships, about intersections" that are "reflect[ed] in cycles that involve return, reconnection, and relationships." Given the "spatial, temporal, and spiritual realities of Native people[s]," stories "reflect a fluidity that disallows complete segregation between experiences and of life and death, physical and spiritual, past and

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

present, human and nonhuman.”<sup>53</sup> The seven stories woven together in *Legends*, including “How the World was Made,” “Me-li and the Mud Dauber,” “Rabbit and Possum After a Wife,” “Rabbit Goes Fishing,” “The Origin of Bears,” and “Little Water Spider and the Cherokee Fire,” create a theatrical production that, as Blaeser describes, teaches audiences about traditional Cherokee culture and history. It is important to note that Weavel utilizes seven stories to round out her production as seven is a sacred number in the traditional Cherokee belief system, representing not only the seven Cherokee clans and the seven cardinal directions, but the height of purity and sacredness.<sup>54</sup> Through these seven stories, the audience learns how, where, and why the Cherokees came into this world and how they learned to live with and within it. The stories shared in *Legends* are moral lessons in mutual respectability—they teach, despite cultural disparity, how to live in harmony not only with other people but with the flora and fauna and the spirits that occupy the same earthly terrain.

Cherokee stories frequently reflect a time when humans and the natural world were in a state of imbalance, and through the stories the animals instruct humans on how to reestablish equilibrium. Cherokee stories also teach various cultural traditions, such as how traditional

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<sup>53</sup> Kimberly M. Blaeser, "Like 'Reeds through the Ribs of a Basket': Native Women Weaving Stories," *American Indian Quarterly* 21.4 (1997): 557.

<sup>54</sup> Weavel, “Legends at Dusk,” 3. Subsequent citations made parenthetically in text.

For more information on the Cherokees’ traditional belief systems, see: Cherokee Nation Cultural Resource Center, “The Traditional Belief System,” on the Cherokee Nation Website (Cherokee.org), <http://www.cherokee.org/AboutTheNation/Culture/General/TheTraditionalBeliefSystem.aspx> (last accessed May 24, 2015).

pottery was made, or they tell how and why certain animals came to look the way they do. In “Me-li and the Mud Dauber,” the mud dauber teaches a young Cherokee girl how to make pottery (5-8). The version of the story told in *Legends at Dusk* describes how a beautiful young girl ignored the world around her so she could focus on her daily chores. Because of her beauty, everyone wanted Me-li’s attention, but Me-li wanted nothing to do with the others. She would intentionally snub anyone who approached her, concentrating solely on her work. One of Me-Li’s chores was to retrieve water every day from the creek (6). Before pottery, Me-li had to use a woven basket to transport water. As one would expect, by the time Me-li arrived home, most of the water would seep through the sides of the basket, forcing her to make several trips to the creek to collect enough water for her family to drink. Every day, mud dauber watched her walk down to the river to fetch water and willfully ignore those who tried to talk to her. One day, mud dauber decided that he would endeavor to get the young girl’s attention with the hope of teaching her a lesson. His first attempt was unsuccessful, however, as were his second, third, fourth, and fifth (6-7). One day, mud dauber decided that he would fly down the young girl’s dress, believing such a maneuver would unquestionably get Me-li’s attention. It worked. For the first time, Me-li’s focus was broken. Angered by the mud dauber’s boldness, Me-li thought she would teach the mud dauber a lesson by throwing his house into the water, so she did (7). Mud dauber, however, was not affected by her intrepid move. When Me-li returned to the creek the following day, she noticed that the mud house remained intact in spite of her having thrown it into the water. The house did not dissolve; on the whole, its structure remained undamaged. Confused, the young girl set the house on the bank to dry. Me-li thought that the sun would surely make the house brittle and full of cracks. But it didn’t. With the heat of the sun, the house hardened into an even stronger structure. Perplexed by this, she decided to throw it into the fire. Surely the flames

would incinerate the home, she thought. To her surprise, however, the clay house again held its structure, and the fire only made it stronger than before. Me-li took what she had learned and started to shape other forms with the mud, and each time, the clay hardened into a solid structure (7). Me-li began to make bowls and other forms of pottery until she finally crafted a water vessel, which she could use to transport water from the creek. With this new knowledge, Me-li started paying attention to the world around her, as there are lessons to be found so long as you pay close enough attention.

There are many lessons to be learned in this story, such as learning to balance work and pleasure, as well as learning to respect and learn from the natural world. In other stories, such as “How Rabbit Lost His Tail” and “Rabbit Goes Duck Hunting,” we learn similar lessons, in addition to many others. In these stories, Ji-stu (Rabbit), one of the Cherokee’s most famous trickster figures, learns that it is better to be oneself than to pretend to be someone else. There are several Rabbit stories, all of which blend into one another, but the majority of them revolve around Rabbit’s boastful self-importance. As we learn in *Legends at Dusk*, Rabbit was always jealous of Otter. In “Rabbit Goes Fishing,” we learn that Rabbit believed he could do anything that Otter could do—but better (8). In this story, Rabbit boastfully tells Otter that he can catch fish and ducks, just like Otter. Incredulous, Otter presses Rabbit to prove his abilities. Accepting his challenge, Rabbit fashions a noose out of tree bark and swims out into the middle of a lake to where a flock of ducks are bathing. Rabbit dives down under one of the ducks and slips the noose around the duck’s feet. The duck, startled, quickly takes flight, and out from the water trails Rabbit, holding onto the rope for dear life. Rabbit eventually tires and releases his hold on the rope, and as he falls from the sky, he lands in a hollowed tree trunk (9). There, Rabbit sat for what seemed like an eternity. After many days of sitting and waiting to be rescued, Rabbit started

to get hungry. As rabbits often do when they are distressed, Ji-Stu began to chew on his fur until there wasn't any left. Emaciated and furless, Rabbit started to believe he was going to die in that hollowed log. Several more days passed before anyone discovered Rabbit, and once they did discover him, it became known that when Rabbit is seen with patches of missing fur, that the trickster has been up to no good.

Whereas in "Me-Li and the Mud Dauber" we learn about balance and respect, we learn in Rabbit's stories that the natural world can be deceiving. More importantly, however, we learn how certain animals came to be in this world and how they came to look and act the way they do. Like the Cherokees, the animals and the plants have their origin story. While Rabbit stories are most often consigned to lessons in how one should act, they also teach certain skills in tracking and hunting. For instance, with "Rabbit Goes Fishing," a hunter would learn that if a rabbit is seen in a miserable condition that it isn't fit for consumption.

Separately, each of these stories contains its own lessons; however, when woven together, the stories work to create a larger story with larger lessons. As poet Leslie Silko (Laguna Pueblo) tells us, the stories' connections need not be made explicitly clear, and "one must simply learn and trust" that "the structure will emerge as it is made" by the storyteller.<sup>55</sup> Marilou Awiakta (Cherokee) describes this structure as a doublewoven basket, with each reed

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<sup>55</sup> Leslie Silko, "Language and Literature from a Pueblo Indian Perspective" in *English Literature: Opening Up the Canon*, eds. Leslie A. Fiedler and Houston A. Baker (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 54.

crisscrossing “over ... under ... over ... under.”<sup>56</sup> Stories are a web of individual “reeds” woven together, and they never, like the doublewoven basket, “run straight on.” There are several stories/lessons in *Legends at Dusk*, but the most important pertains to the permanence of the Cherokees’ culture. The goal of this production is to educate (by way of entertainment) audiences about Cherokee traditions. Granted, many audiences will not buy into the stories, believing them to be mere myths with simple moral lessons, much like the nursery rhymes Euramericans are taught as children. Because of this, Aman Sium (Tigrinyan/Eritrean) and Eric Ritskes caution that if this is the only outcome that the stories themselves become a “kind of multicultural ‘show and tell.’”<sup>57</sup> While it is possible that *Legends at Dusk* borders on this less-than-serious type of presentation, I argue that the stories do work on the listener—in one way or another. One does not have to believe in the story or its message in order for the story to have an effect. If anything, hearing these stories helps the listener to understand that the Cherokees have maintained their cultural traditions—their self-directing freedom and moral independence—by way of storytelling.

As Sium and Ritskes state, stories “in Indigenous epistemologies are disruptive, sustaining, knowledge producing, and theory-in-action.” They are “decolonization theory in its most natural form.”<sup>58</sup> Stories, especially those that brush up against Eurocentric normativity, are

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<sup>56</sup> Marilou Awiakta, *Selu: Seeking the Corn-Mother’s Wisdom* (Golden: Fulcrum Publishing, 1993), 34.

<sup>57</sup> Aman Sium and Eric Ritskes, “Speaking Truth to Power: Indigenous Storytelling as an Act of Living Resistance,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, and Society* 2.1 (2013): 5.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

threatening, even though they appear harmless. “They’re threatening,” the scholars state, “because they position the teller outside the realm of ‘objective’ commentary, and inside one of subjective action.”<sup>59</sup> Because stories are “agentic,” “individual,” and are “communal sharings that bind communities together spiritually and relationally,” they always possess the ability to “exercise agency and renewal.”<sup>60</sup> The simple act of telling the story, the act of speaking things into being, *is* a performative exercise of agency and renewal. As Muriel Miguel states, “Just the fact that you are on stage telling...stories is political. Just the fact that you’re there.”<sup>61</sup> Therefore, regardless of its presentation style, *Legends at Dusk* seeks to decolonize audience understandings of Cherokee history and culture.

When we look at the structure of storytelling more closely, it is clear that the sequencing of events itself is politically charged as well. As Vine Deloria Jr. states, Native literatures are “hardly chronological,” resembling more a “sequence relate[d] to the integrity of the circle, not the directional determination of the line.”<sup>62</sup> Likewise, Lee Francis (Laguna Pueblo) states that

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>61</sup> Muriel Miguel, quoted in “Weaving a Legacy: An Interview with Muriel Miguel of the Spiderwoman Theatre,” by Ann Haugo, in *The Color of Theatre: Race, Culture, and Contemporary Performance*, eds. Roberta Uno with Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns (New York: Continuum, 2002), 227.

<sup>62</sup> Vine Deloria, Jr., in the foreword to *New and Old Voices of Wah'kon-tah: Contemporary Native American Poetry*, eds. Robert K. Dodge and Joseph B. McCullough (New York: International Publishers, 1985), ix.



American Indian stories are “not about a linear narrative, but about what happens in the middle” (it’s not about “beginning, middle, end but the middle, middle, middle).”<sup>63</sup> Blaeser also describes the nonlinearity of American Indian literatures as having “its own kind of choreography,” which “proceeds with a purpose other than closure,” and which “encourages a specific kind of audience involvement.”<sup>64</sup>

Like *Under the Cherokee Moon*, Weavel’s production centers on audience participation. However, due to its unique structural arrangement, which resembles a storytelling session more than a drama, *Legends* demands a greater degree of audience participation than Willis’ production. There are two levels of audience participation in *Legends*. The first level is that of active listening. The second level is that of active doing. As Silko, Awiakta, and Blaeser note, an audience must be willing to allow the story to take shape—they must listen to understand. In traditional theatre, the sequence of cause and effect, the axiomatic inciting incident, rise of action, climax, falling action, and denouement allows an audience member to loosen his or her attention—he or she knows that a story will eventually come to a close, ending with a particular message. This is not the case with American Indian storytelling. A story told orally demands a certain kind of attention, a certain kind of participation, a certain kind of respect. Not only must you actively listen, but you must actively participate. In *Legends at Dusk*, the audience is thrust

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<sup>63</sup> Lee Francis, quoted in Kimberly Blaeser, and taken from comments made by Francis during the panel discussion “Bridges to Community: From Homeplace to Cyberspace,” at the Wordcraft Circle Conference, University of Memphis, Oct of 1995; Blaeser, “Like ‘Reeds through the Ribs of a Basket’,” 557.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

into the production in a manner that forces them to directly engage with the story. Whereas *Under the Cherokee Moon* has audience members participate by performing various actions, such as rope twirling, or asking plot-driven questions, Weavel's production has audiences adopt and perform principal characters in the drama. As a storyteller begins her story, she asks for a member of the audience to come forward and to assume they are a principal character in the story. For example, in "Me-li and the Mud Dauber," two audience members are selected from the audience and asked to perform the role of Me-li and the Mud Dauber. One girl pantomimes the actions the storyteller relates to her about Me-li, while a young boy flies around the girl; the boy, acting like the mud dauber, tries to distract Me-li (7). In this manner, the audience not only listens to the stories come to life, they literally embody them, they perform them into being.

According to Weavel, Robert Lewis originated this style of storytelling while working at the CHC.<sup>65</sup> One afternoon, Lewis was giving a group of students a tour of the CHC's Ancient Village; Lewis's tour, however, was stalled by another group. The students in Lewis' group started to get antsy and upset while waiting. In an attempt to ameliorate the situation, Lewis started to tell a few stories. The first story wasn't successful, as the group's focus was elsewhere. The second story he told, however, worked to refocus the group. During his second story, Lewis pulled people out of the group to act out the story's characters, and the students immediately started paying attention. After the tour, the group's chaperones informed the center that Lewis

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<sup>65</sup> Tonia Hogner-Weavel, in discussion with the author, Aug 4, 2015. To hear Robert Lewis describe his storytelling technique see "Robert Lewis Storyteller: The Cherokee Way," YouTube video, 8:27, posted by "Cherokee Nation Television a Communications Group," Apr 29, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YCBn2AfhtwY>, last accessed Oct 15, 2015.

did an excellent job working with the students. From this experience, Lewis started to alter his storytelling techniques to include audience participation, and the CHC and Weavel felt that this was exactly the type of storytelling that needed to be in *Legends at Dusk*.

While *Legends*, at first glance, resembles a storytelling session more than a theatrical performance, I qualify the production as theatre because it is framed as such. Whereas storytelling sessions can take place anywhere and at any time, this production is rooted in a particular setting and bound by the laws of a theatrical event. Moreover, if this were just a storytelling session, the road leading to the finale would be different each night. Though the stories that are told are fluid in their delivery, they are structured in this particular production around a skeletal plot structure, thus adhering to a semblance of traditional theatrical convention. Yet the play should not be considered outdoor historical drama, nor should *Under the Cherokee Moon*. While *Under the Cherokee Moon* and *Legends at Dusk* replaced *The Trail of Tears*, they did so for a variety of reasons, mainly because they were relatively inexpensive to produce. Heidi Nees argues that *Under the Cherokee Moon* and *Legends at Dusk* are paradigms for passé outdoor dramas to emulate, as they “propose new directions for historical outdoor drama.”<sup>66</sup> While I agree with Nees, I find the problem with outdoor historical drama to be more complex and exacting than she lets on. I argue that both dramas emphatically depart from the established genre’s market-driven conventions. *Under the Cherokee Moon* and *Legends at Dusk* freed themselves from the confines of the genre, and they should be regarded not as *evolutions of* but *insurrections to* outdoor historical drama and its established market.

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<sup>66</sup> Nees, “‘Indian’ Summers,” 210.

What is perhaps the most interesting thing about these two productions freeing themselves from the conventions of outdoor drama is that they have become, as some scholars argue, family focused and centered. Both *Under the Cherokee Moon* and *Legends at Dusk* refrain from depicting violence on stage, which is one of outdoor historical drama's trademarks. I asked Weavel if this was a conscious decision the CHC made in order to avoid the perpetuation of violence on stage. In reflection, Weavel said that violence wasn't really on the CHC's radar, at least not for *Legends at Dusk*. "For *Legends*, it was just a matter of getting something together as quickly as possible so that [the CHC] would have something to produce that summer," Weavel said, admitting that the organization was "not that smart about it."<sup>67</sup> Weavel, however, mentioned shortly thereafter that she wished the organization had thought about the notion of violence, as it would have been a nice thing to claim. In regard to *Under the Cherokee Moon*, Weavel mentioned that the notion of violence was likely at the forefront of Willis's mind while writing her play, as her production centered on the Cherokees' understanding of and desire for peace. Willis's production includes several Cherokee warriors, such as Dragging Canoe, who are war heroes, and the major theme of the production is deciding whether or not the Cherokees should go to war, but Willis chose to only allow the Warriors and other characters to *talk* about the prospect of war. Willis did not stage violence, as it would have detracted from her overall message.

It is possible that Willis and Weavel refrained from presenting violence on stage subconsciously, considering that the plays were to be performed in the villages and not in the traditional amphitheatre. With a smaller theatrical venue, there is less of a need to embellish the

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<sup>67</sup> Tonia Hogner-Weavel, in discussion with the author, Aug 4, 2015.

drama with the spectacle of violence because the intimate space allows the actor-audience relationship to take precedence. Because the dramas were to be performed away from the amphitheatre, they were freed from the conventional parameters of outdoor drama and allowed to explore new modes of theatrical production. Had *Under the Cherokee Moon* and *Legends at Dusk* been staged in the amphitheatre, they would not have been as successful, as the sheer size of the amphitheatre would have swallowed Willis's and Weavel's subtle storylines.

Turning attention to Larisa Fasthorse's *Cherokee Family Reunion*, which supplemented the Cherokee Historical Association's *Unto These Hills* in 2012, we see a different approach to not only the portrayal of violence on the outdoor stage, but an entirely different attitude regarding outdoor historical drama and its production. Whereas *Under the Cherokee Moon* and *Legends at Dusk* were freed from the amphitheatre and the genre's restrictive conventions, Fasthorse's *Cherokee Family Reunion* had to challenge the genre and its issues on its own turf.

### ***Cherokee Family Reunion***

Believing a new drama would maximize the use of the Mountainside Theatre and draw new, larger crowds, the CHA added *Cherokee Family Reunion* to its theatrical program in 2012. The original plan was to produce a new drama each year that would run in repertory with *Unto These Hills*. John Tissue, the CHA's executive director, said the organization wanted to provide something new for their audiences. "We know most of our regional folks have seen *Unto These Hills* a million times, but this will be a reason to draw them back into the theater to see some new stuff," stated Tissue.<sup>68</sup> Commissioned by the CHA, and written by Sicangu Lakota playwright Larissa Fasthorse, *Cherokee Family Reunion* introduces Henry Timberlake's historically

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<sup>68</sup> McKie, "CHA Expanding Offerings at Mountainside Theatre," *ibid.*

significant memoirs to the general public. As Tissue describes, the historical aspect of the drama is interwoven with the troubles of a modern day Cherokee family “in a way that appeals to modern families, while giving them some authentic Cherokee culture to take home.”<sup>69</sup> From the very beginning, Fasthorse and the CHA saw the production as a companion piece to *Unto These Hills*, “in both topic and production,” which would utilize the same playing space as the original outdoor drama; the cast from *Unto These Hills* would also appear in the new play.<sup>70</sup>

Set in modern day Cherokee, North Carolina, *Cherokee Family Reunion* follows the Bearmeat and the White families as they band together to plan the biggest Cherokee family reunion of the year.<sup>71</sup> John Bearmeat, a Cherokee widower, has recently fallen in love with Euramerican Emma White—the pair met on an on-line dating site. After six months of courtship, the couple decides to get married. When the two disparate families come together to celebrate the union of John and Emma, they quickly learn they harbor deep-seated prejudices. The Bearmeats do not understand Euramerican ways, and the Whites do not understand the Cherokees’ ways. On top of the unification of the families—as if learning to live with each other wasn’t enough—they have been thrust into organizing John’s family reunion. Organizing the event is a huge responsibility for a non-Cherokee, especially as there are only two weeks left to bring the reunion together. In order to streamline the event, Emma suggests developing a mini-drama

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<sup>69</sup> John Tissue, quoted in McKie, *ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Larissa Fasthorse, “Cherokee Family Reunion – A Comedy with Heart for the Whole Family (a play proposal),” Aug 21, 2011, 2.

<sup>71</sup> Larissa Fasthorse, *Cherokee Family Reunion* (Woodstock: Dramatic Publishing Company, 2013).

about Cherokee culture and history based on the memoirs of Lieutenant Henry Timberlake. In addition to introducing the British Articles of Peace to the Cherokees, Timberlake accompanied three Cherokees to England in 1762 to meet with the King. Having spent a considerable period of time in Cherokee territory, Timberlake documented several Cherokee traditions and customs. Believing his memoirs to be accurate, Emma develops several scenes with the help of her new family to perform at the reunion. Fasthorse notes in her script proposal that Timberlake's memoirs are not "easy for a young people of today to interpret."<sup>72</sup> His descriptions are at times flattering yet are more often insulting—a hard reality that comes to light once the family starts to dramatize Timberlake's memoirs.<sup>73</sup> As rehearsals begin, culture shock and xenophobia soon follow. Suddenly, everyone has a different opinion about what material should be performed for the reunion and how: The White family believes the Cherokee Eagle Dance would best be expressed through ballet; the Bearmeat boys modernize a traditional war song into a rap and transform the battle scene into a Wrestle Mania match. Ultimately, a cultural wedge is driven between the two families. By the time the reunion rolls around, however, everyone has learned what it really means to be a Cherokee family in the twenty-first century.

Unlike *Under the Cherokee Moon* and *Legends at Dusk*, *Cherokee Family Reunion* has all the trappings of an outdoor drama: live music, historical narratives, spectacle, dance, and stage combat. The drama, however, is drastically different from what one would expect of an outdoor drama. Each of these defining elements is subverted in a way that either modernizes or archaizes outdoor drama's theatrical conventions. In fact, Fasthorse turns the notion of outdoor

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<sup>72</sup> Fasthorse, "A Comedy with Heart," 1.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

historical drama on its head by interlacing contemporary politics with theatrical tradition. In this way, *Cherokee Family Reunion* not only mocks the genre but exposes its hypocrisy.

Blending seriousness with humor, Fasthorse stretches racial and cultural misunderstandings to their breaking point. Take, for instance, the opening reception scene. Shortly after the Bearmeats' wedding ceremony is complete, Fasthorse pits the Bearmeat family against the Whites. As the children decide on what music to dance to for the reception, both families begin to reveal their lack of cultural knowledge. We quickly learn that each family has its own understanding of what dancing means and what it looks like. John proposes the Cherokee Friendship Dance as a way to share Cherokee tradition with the new family members. Emma's daughter, Hillary, however, has a better idea. "It's not a wedding without the 'Chicken Dance,'" she exclaims. John's children are puzzled with Hillary's recommendation.<sup>74</sup> Meli, John's daughter, asks Hillary if she is thinking of the "traditional Quail Dance." Confused by this, Hillary dismisses Meli's query, grabs her brother, Justin, and drags him out onto the dance floor to prepare. As the melody picks up, the music seduces the rest of the White family to join the fun. In a matter of seconds, the entire White family circles the dance floor, flapping their arms and clapping their hands. The Bearmeats, appalled by what they are seeing, believe the Whites are mutilating one of their traditional dances.

Fasthorse provides the audience with this humorous scenario early in the show to encourage audiences to laugh at their own ignorance. As the play develops, cultural differences take on a more serious tone. Even though what follows becomes weightier, Fasthorse always introduces cultural differences with a heavy dose of humor to keep her audiences engaged, to

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<sup>74</sup> Fasthorse, *Cherokee Family Reunion*, 21.



challenge audiences' expectations, to extricate fallacious stereotypes, and to underscore several issues affecting the Cherokees (and many other Native tribes) today. Using humor in this manner ensures audiences will walk away from the show entertained yet aware of contemporary Cherokee-Euramerican relations and cultural concerns.

While there are several instances in the drama that exemplify Fasthorse's desire to rip cultural stereotypes apart at the seams, the most interesting revolves around the notion of violence. Fasthorse strategically subverts the notion of violence and the reenactment of war on stage by turning violence against itself. Fighting violence with violence, Fasthorse challenges audiences to see historical battles and their reenactment in a different light. Rather than render war and violence as entertainment on stage, Fasthorse shifts her audience's focus to the inhumanity plaguing America today. Fasthorse challenges the display of violence in order to disrupt not only outdoor drama's propensity to reenact war, but an audience's predilection for violence. Exploiting violence in this way allows Fasthorse to transmute the characteristics of violence and to minimize its appeal, thus challenging audiences to reassess their understanding of war by bringing critical attention to the effects of war today. In this production, the images of war perpetuated in *Unto These Hills* (and other outdoor dramas) are disrupted and upturned to expose the reality of war and its effect on cultural memory, which serves to decolonize and heal historical trauma. With this in mind, Fasthorse's *Cherokee Family Reunion* falls in line with Qwo-Li Driskill's understanding that "Native theatre takes place in...a 'decolonial imaginary,'"

which is a space “for Native people to engage in the delicate work of suturing the wounds of history.”<sup>75</sup>

There are two instances in the drama where violence occurs. The first emerges while the family rehearse the fight sequence at the end of act one. Prior to this scene, John’s youngest sons, John Ustdi and Levi, have caught Lizzie (John’s daughter) and Christopher (Emma’s son) in a tête-à-tête. The two boys are sickened by the fact that their step-brother and sister “like” each other. Lizzie and Christopher flee the scene once they see their secret has been revealed, leaving John Ustdi and Levi to concoct a plan to keep the illicit lovers apart. The two boys decide to let their elder brother, Twodi, handle the problem. The next morning, as the family assembles to rehearse the fight scene for their mini-play, Levi and John Ustdi keep a close eye on Christopher and Lizzie and make sure the two are kept separated. Once Twodi arrives, the two boys run to him to share their news, but before they can divulge the secret love affair, Emma urges everyone to take their places. As Emma narrates the scene, fights break out all across the stage. John Ustdi and Levi fight like they are WWE wrestlers while the others lifelessly attack one another. As the scene develops, John Ustdi and Levi become more aggressive and start to collide with the others. Confused, the actors break from their choreographed routine and begin to improvise the battle. The White family finds the Bearmeats’ mistreatment of the blocking repugnant, and they begin to quarrel. Confusion grows, and before we know it, the entire family is on the “warpath.” As tension reaches its apex, Levi blurts out that Christopher was seen kissing his step-sister.

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<sup>75</sup> Qwo-Li Driskill, “Theatre as Suture: Grassroots Performance, Decolonization and Healing,” in *Aboriginal Oral Traditions: Theory, Practice, Ethics*, eds. Renee Hulan and Renate Eigenbrod (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing Co., Ltd, 2008), 155.

Shocked and disgusted by this news, Twodi charges Christopher with a tomahawk in hand. Christopher tries to defend himself while the rest of the family continues to fight. Everyone stops their bickering when they see Christopher get knocked to the ground. Twodi towers over Christopher with his tomahawk held high, threatening to kill him. Right before Twodi is able to bring the hatchet down over Christopher's head, Lizzie dashes in and throws herself on top of Christopher, saving his life. Fasthorse disrupts the tension here with a bit of survivance humor. While the family freezes in their huddled mass, John Ustdi and Levi step out from the horde to survey the scene. Upon recognizing the tableau, they point to Lizzie with excitement: "It's Princess Pocahontas!" After a briefly shared laugh, the scene becomes serious again:

TWODI. Stay away from my sister! All of you!

LIZZIE. Twodi, wait—

TWODI. Not one word! We're moving to Granny Bearmeat's.

MORGAN. None of us would seriously date a Cherokee girl anyway.

TWODI. Good 'cause I won't let my sisters date white guys.

MELI. Won't let us?

HILLARY. Morgan, you don't mean that.

MORGAN (overlapping TWODI). Come on. Look at them! Sitting around this reservation, getting all their benefits. No one's given me one thing in my whole life. I'm not a racist or anything, but this has been going on for generations. Maybe it's in the DNA. You want that blood in your family tree?

TWODI (overlapping MORGAN). They are the invaders. Still coming here taking everything they see. Stealing our land, our culture, our

women. Besides, it's just biology. We keep mixing our blood with theirs, generation after generation, and we'll be gone. Cherokees wiped off the face of the earth.

(Stunned silence.)

MORGAN. Then we understand each other.

Upon Morgan's last words, the family separates. The Bearmeats head to their Granny's house and the Whites to their new home.

In this scene, the Bearmeat-White family are trying to stage a historical battle from the French and Indian War that was recorded in Timberlake's journals. This battle scene is slightly reminiscent of Horseshoe Bend in *Unto These Hills*. Whereas staging battle scenes is a part of an outdoor drama's attraction—"tourists will stop to see a rat-fight," as Hunter states—Fasthorse focuses on the violent result of racism so as to redirect her audience's attention to the here and now, not the far removed then and there. Bearing in mind that *Unto These Hills*, *The Trail of Tears*, and other outdoor dramas across the nation stimulate and endorse the impression that we, as a unified country, have come a long way and that, in spite of everything, are now "better"—the outcome of war making this certain—Fasthorse's production is a welcome reality check. According to Harry Elam, a "reality check" is "a moment that traumatically ruptures the balance between the real and the representation," a moment "that...generates demands that the relationships between the real and the representational be renegotiated," a moment "that disrupt[s]...spectators, potentially excit[ing] in them social action" and "new meaning."<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Harry J. Elam, Jr., "Reality✓," in *Critical Theory and Performance*, eds. Janelle Reinelt and Joseph Roach (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 173.

Fasthorse's twisting of outdoor dramatic conventions here allows the audience to focus on the results of war in different ways. Reenacting war isn't about monumentalizing the victor, as it is in Hunter's play, but about revealing its legacy, its collateral damage. When viewed this way, we see Fasthorse exposing the harsh realities of covert racism, domestic violence, and blood quantification, all of which have been shaped by acts of war.

For instance, when Twodi claims that white men have been stealing their women for centuries and that he will not allow a White to date his sister—as “mixing our blood with theirs” would “wipe the Cherokees off the face of the earth”—he is perpetuating racist sentiments born out of hostility. As I have mentioned elsewhere, Cherokee women held positions of power and were highly respected in the Cherokees' social sphere prior to Euramerican acculturation. A Cherokee woman could choose who she wanted to marry. As the Cherokees began adopting elements of Euramerican culture and modeling their form of governance off the United States', Cherokee women were forced to become submissive to men. Fasthorse challenges this notion by having Meli respond to Twodi with incredulity. “Won't let us?” she asks in an attempt to reclaim her agency. Closely connected to this is the notion of blood quantum, a law enacted in the United States to define membership in American Indian tribes or nations, which has its roots in the Civil War. While blood laws were primarily set in place by the federal government, Fasthorse redirects focus to how American Indians utilize the notion of blood quantum to establish a sense of pedigree—the more “Indian blood” you have in you the more “authenticity” you can claim. Therefore, rather than successfully stage a battle scene, Fasthorse shifts and refocuses the legacy of war to address the detritus left behind by such violent acts. Disrupting historical memory in this way allows Fasthorse to address the issues that are in need of reconciliation today.

It is important to note that Fasthorse devises the play's fight sequence in a cartoonish manner in order to draw attention away from the harsh realities of violence. The language Fasthorse chooses to utilize in this scene is rather abusive. Therefore, the physicality of the fight sequence needs to be executed through humor. If the fighting matched the language, then the audience could potentially become emotionally invested in the scene, which would likely lead the audience to formulate inappropriate judgments based on cultural positionality. The fights are stylishly choreographed, exaggerated, and un-naturalized, so much so that they are absurd reflections of violence. In fact, Fasthorse spoils the audience's understanding of violence so that they do not become invested in its portrayal. Instead, audiences recognize that the "ninja-esque" or "WWE" style of fighting is ludicrous, which in turn allows them to absorb the message Fasthorse is trying to communicate. If the violence were rendered in a realistic manner, the scene would become too real. Staging violence in this manner allows the audience to relax just enough that they are able to pick up on Fasthorse's satirical portrayal and to understand how violence has shaped Cherokee-Euramerican relations today.

The second instance of violence occurs in the play's final scene. By the end of the play, the Bearmeat-White family has managed to reconcile their differences and cobble together a mini-play in time for their family reunion. With a renewed sense of family, the Bearmeats decide to showcase the positive attributes of Cherokee-Euramerican relations. In the 1700s, Cherokees not only negotiated with foreigners but welcomed outsiders into their communities. As the Bearmeats welcome distant family members to the reunion, they introduce themselves as a new family much like the one "Henry Timberlake probably ran into...over 200 years ago."<sup>77</sup> Echoing

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<sup>77</sup> Fasthorse, *Cherokee Family Reunion*, 72.

Timberlake's relationship with the Cherokees, the Bearmeats and Whites perceive their new familial status to be continuing their ancestors' practice of reciprocity.

Fasthorse refrains from depicting cultural conflict on stage. Rather than portray the Cherokees, the British, Euramericans and other American Indians as enemies, Fasthorse strives to represent a peaceful scenario. Though images of war and combat are present, they are not exhibited as reenactments of war. Instead, they are stylishly choreographed, focusing on wartime procedures and customs as opposed to bloodshed:

TIMBERLAKE. The Cherokees are remarkably well-featured; both men  
and women.

TWODI (to MORGAN). Siyo!

(MORGAN and TWODI greet each other. The other boys play a  
choreographed stick ball game during the following.)

TIMBERLAKE. Our entertainment from these people was as good as any  
in the whole country. I was especially pleased with their ballgames, in  
which they show great skill.

TWODI. I am Ostanaco.

(The other boys gather weapons.)

TIMBERLAKE. Merit is the sole means of acquiring power, honor, and  
riches. There is no law or compulsion to follow a chief to war.

Therefore, he strives to inspire them by the war-song, as the ancient  
bards did once in Britain.

(TWODI takes a club, and the other boys follow him to war in a  
choreographed display.)

TIMBERLAKE (cont'd). The story of the Amazons is not a fable as our limited minds imagined. Very unlike our women, many of the Indian women are famous in war and powerful in the council.

(The men part and MELI and HILLARY move through a choreographed fight sequence, fluid and fierce. MORGAN and TWODI come together C.)

TIMBERLAKE (cont'd). Warriors or war-women who can no longer go to war, have the title of Beloved and are forever respected by all.

(LIZZIE comes forward wearing a cape.)

TIMBERLAKE (cont'd). After the peace pipe was smoked and the ceremony concluded, Ostanaco made a speech:

TWODI. The bloody war club, long lifted against our brothers the English, must now be buried deep, deep in the ground, never to be raised again. I ask that this white warrior who has joined our people may be cared for and respected by us all.

(TWODI presents MORGAN with a woven belt that MORGAN wraps around his waist.)

TIMBERLAKE. The behavior of the Cherokees to me obliged me never to refuse anything to them. I gave them literally all in my power to serve them. Do I regret my many decisions in their favor?

...



TIMBERLAKE (cont'd). Not one.<sup>78</sup>

Interlaced throughout this final scene, we see instances of war accompanied with favorable prose. Through Timberlake's dialogue, the audience learns to see the Cherokees' wartime practices in a different light. Rather than perpetuate stereotypical images of "warring savages," Fasthorse focuses on the Cherokees' sense of martial decorum. The inclusion of the stickball game, the men's war dance, the women's war dance, and the "burying of the hatchet" together work to frame the Cherokees' military practices within a judicial context.

For instance, the stickball game, also referred to as The Little Brother of War, is a game traditionally played to settle disputes.<sup>79</sup> When a community was at odds, they would hold a stickball game to settle civil unrest rather than encourage war. As Timberlake states in the script, when the Cherokees did find themselves in situations where war was the only solution, it was up to the leaders to persuade men and women to join in the fight, as there was "no law or compulsion to follow a chief to war."<sup>80</sup> War was not a favorable solution, as it upset the balance of the world. Because fighting made the world unstable, there were special rites that had to be performed before and immediately following combat. Rather than focus on and perpetuate acts

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<sup>78</sup> Fasthorse, *Cherokee Family Reunion*, 73-74.

<sup>79</sup> Information from the Cherokee Nation website, [http://www.cherokee.org/AboutTheNation/Culture/General/Stickball\(anejodi\).aspx](http://www.cherokee.org/AboutTheNation/Culture/General/Stickball(anejodi).aspx) (last accessed Jan 15, 2015); for the story behind the stickball game, see: Jerry Wolfe, "Jerry Wolfe: Cherokee Artist & Ball Player," DigitalHeritage.org, <http://digitalheritage.org/2012/02/cherokee-storytelling> (last accessed Feb 14, 2015).

<sup>80</sup> Fasthorse, *Cherokee Family Reunion*, 73.

of violence, Fasthorse concentrates on the Cherokees' sense of responsibility in conflict situations instead. Through her methodical exploration of military practices, Fasthorse positions the Cherokees as diplomatic and skilled in handling affairs without arousing hostility, a poignant argument that resists the perpetuation of the "savage Indian" outside-view predicate.

As in *Under the Cherokee Moon*, Fasthorse concludes *Cherokee Family Reunion* with an image of peace. Whereas *Under the Cherokee Moon* demonstrates that fighting evil with its own tools can never offset the collateral damage of war (even for the victor), *Cherokee Family Reunion* strives to communicate something different. The final impression of the Cherokees as advocates of peace not only repositions the Cherokees in a positive light, it also ties the historical to the present day. As the Bearmeat-White family comes together ("one family at last"), the play concludes with an overwhelming sense of hope.<sup>81</sup> Fasthorse teases positive bits of history out of the historical record and stories them anew to promote the idea that we—American Indians and Euramericans—share a legacy, and that despite our cultural differences, we too can come together and reconcile our difference, just like the Bearmeat-White family.

## **Conclusion**

*Under the Cherokee Moon*, *Legends at Dusk*, and *Cherokee Family Reunion* are the pinnacle of the CHC's and CHA's promotion of historically accurate and culturally sensitive theatre. With these productions, the Cherokee Heritage Center and the Cherokee Historical Association were finally able to produce dramas that challenged outdoor drama's market-driven conventions. Each play, whether implicitly or explicitly, addresses the many problems facing outdoor historical drama in its own way. Moreover, these plays break the genre's mold and, in

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 74.

doing so, decolonize the art form. These dramas are strikingly different from those the CHC and the CHA developed to replace *The Trail of Tears* and *Unto These Hills*. While playwrights tried to sensitively articulate Cherokee history and culture in these productions, they were not financially successful because the dramatic conventions of outdoor drama did not allow Cherokee ways of knowing, ways of being, and ways of doing to penetrate the rigid Euramerican dramatic structure.

Take, for instance, the portrayal of violence on the outdoor stage. Violence has always been an item for consumption in outdoor historical drama, and in the 1950s, depicting acts of war on stage was a part of the tourist draw. The real issue here is not so much that violence is enacted on stage, but rather what the staging of violence is trying to communicate to audiences. At first glance, the portrayal of war scenes in outdoor drama is a political maneuver. As I discuss in Chapter Three, outdoor dramas are designed to mythologize triumphalist narratives, and all scenes of war or dispute strive to position the victor in the limelight. The images and acts of war in *The Trail of Tears* and *Unto These Hills*, while representative of Cherokee history, are staged/framed in a derisive manner that tends to overshadow the Cherokees' plight in favor of Euramerican progress. I suggest that we look at violence on the outdoor stage in terms of its harmful portrayal of stereotypical assumptions regarding American Indians as war mongers, an outside-view predicate which Hunter utilized to strengthen the Cherokees allegiance with the United States.

Ever since Euramericans landed on Indigenous shores, they made the Other an abstract manifestation of their lived Truth. In art, literature, and law, American Indians were subjected to criticism in order to substantiate Euramerican ideals. Barbara Singer locates the nadir of this political maneuvering in Hollywood: "As the popularity of western movies waned in the mid-

1940s, lower-budget films produced extremely negative images of wild, bloodthirsty ‘Indians.’ These films appropriated,” Singer states, “bizarre ‘Indian’ costumes coupled with story lines that positioned American Indians as outcasts in America.”<sup>82</sup> Likewise, Robert Warrior notes that American Indians have largely been depicted in films as primarily “noble, stoic, bloodthirsty, and defiant” military agents.<sup>83</sup> This pejorative rendering of the Other in “the movies, loom[s] so large for Indians,” states Paul Chaat Smith, “because [Euramericans] have defined our self-image as well as told the entire planet how we live, look, scream, and kill.”<sup>84</sup> In such films, American Indians are more often than not depicted as tomahawk-wielding marauders, hell-bent on impeding Euramerica’s Manifest Destiny.<sup>85</sup> When and if American Indians are given screen time, they are seen jumping out from behind a rock or a tree to ambush an “innocent” victim—there is no time for deliberation, no time for peaceful reconciliation. There is no time to establish the American Indian’s presence as anything other than an evil marauding plunderer. While this characterization

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<sup>82</sup> Barbara Singer, *Wiping the War Paint off the Lens: Native American Film and Video* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 20; also see Michael T. Marsden and Jack Nachbar, "The Indian in the Movies," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, ed. William C. Sturtevant, vol. 4, *History of Indian-White Relations* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1988), 611.

<sup>83</sup> Robert Warrior, in the forward to Barbara Singer’s *Wiping the War Paint off the Lens: Native American Film and Video* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), viii.

<sup>84</sup> Paul Chaat Smith, *Everything You Know about Indians is Wrong* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 37.

<sup>85</sup> Singer, *Wiping the War Paint off the Lens*, 20.

is less visible in outdoor drama, the trappings of such wild sentimentality do permeate the stage, especially in *The Trail of Tears* and *Unto These Hills*.

In *The Trail of Tears*, the trappings of “the savage Indian” are present in several scenes. Given Hunter’s justification for writing the drama in the manner he did, as discussed in Chapter Three, such characterization needed to be present in order to vindicate Euramerica’s involvement in the story and to substantiate the Cherokees’ “civilization process.” Take, for instance, the various assassinations in the drama. These scenes are constructed in a manner similar to those seen on the silver screen: prominent men who sided with Euramericans are quickly killed by warring Cherokees hiding in the shadows. While these assassinations did take place, we do not receive the full story in the drama. We are left with the impression of “renegade Indians.” There is no scene that suggests a council meeting was held wherein the Cherokees democratically deliberated a course of action. In fact, there is only a brief mention of Cherokee blood laws. We only see the killing, and it is quick.

Violent scenes such as these, or battle reenactments, are easily rendered on the outdoor stage. They are also, whether we like to admit it or not, entertaining to watch. The drama of war, with its brute physicality and dramatic effects—gunfire, cannon smoke, clanking of swords—as well as its focus on life and death, victory and conquest makes for splendid theatre—it is inherently *spectacular*. Staging war for no other reason than dramatic effect, however, is dangerous. When we look closer at the reenactment of war on stage, it becomes clear that its presentation sides with the victorious, even if we are told otherwise. For instance, in *Unto These Hills*, the Battle of Horseshoe Bend relates how the Cherokees helped the United States conquer the Creeks. Andrew Jackson gave his word that he would remember the Cherokees for helping him win the war. Yet we learn by the end of the play that Andrew Jackson utilized the Cherokees

as pawns, seeing as how he relocated the tribe west of the Mississippi two decades after the war. Despite this turn of events, the Cherokees are never rendered victorious—Euramerican governances always reign supreme.

Smithers suggests that Hunter strove to depict Jackson as a “singularly unlikable character” in the Battle of Horseshoe Bend to align Hunter’s understanding of the “*spirit of history*” with the Cherokees’ percipience.<sup>86</sup> While Jackson is rendered a type of buffoon in the play, there is more to this battle scene that overrides Hunter’s sympathetic portrayal of American Indians. As Smithers articulates, images of the Battle of Horseshoe Bend were utilized to market the production across the United States, and on the cover of the 1950 program, the climax of the battle scene is artistically rendered. In the image, Jackson is seen having been knocked to the ground while Junaluska, with a knife held high in his right hand, towers over a Creek captive. The Creek man is on one knee, signifying his defeat. Behind the three characters sits a faceless audience, and behind the audience is a sketch of the idyllic Smoky Mountains. If one were to read the image out of context with the drama, the sketch suggests that a white man (Jackson) is being entertained by Native on Native violence: the audience watches Jackson watching the slaying of a Native man by another Native man. Jackson’s face is alight with a smile, a smirk that exudes satisfaction. Read in this way, the image suggests that *Unto These Hills* is a drama portraying the heathenish brutality of American Indians, which perpetuates a warring Hollywood Western Indian trope.

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<sup>86</sup> Smithers, “A Cherokee Epic: Kermit Hunter’s *Unto These Hills* and the Mythologizing of Cherokee History,” *Native South* 8 (2015): 9-10; Hunter, “History or Drama?,” 4.

In context with the drama, however, this climactic scene proposes a different story. The killing of the Creek captive solidifies the notion that the Cherokees supported the Euramericans in their pursuit of conquest. Rendering American Indian-Euramerican relations in this way suggests that the Cherokees were more advanced, more civilized than other American Indians. The measure of civility here is further substantiated by juxtaposing the Cherokees with the Creeks. As the Narrator sets the scene, we learn that despite the white man's intrusions, the Cherokees believe in the "Americans' cause":

Suddenly the white man called on the Cherokee for help—help against these other Indians who threatened the American nation. Would the Cherokee take up arms against their own race? Would they help the white man preserve the very land he had taken from them? A strange thing to ask! And yet—down from the high peaks and sunny foothills of the Great Smokies, from the broad valleys of Georgia and Tennessee, from cabins and pine-board huts, farms and villages, the Cherokee came—three thousand strong.<sup>87</sup>

Depicted as turning "against their race," the Cherokees are rendered as smart, practical, and determined military aficionados who cunningly outsmart the Creeks in favor of Euramerica. It isn't until halfway through the scene that we actually see the presence of Creek warriors on stage. As the stage directions relate, Drowning Bear and Tsali bring in a couple of captives who are "hideously painted... surly and unmanageable."<sup>88</sup> In contrast to the Cherokees, the Creeks are

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<sup>87</sup> Hunter, *Unto These Hills*, 21.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

regarded as incompetent “critters” with the supposed inability to “understand American.”<sup>89</sup> To not be able to understand “American” (English) suggests that the Creeks are unable to comprehend and support the American cause, which in turn means that they cannot ever be like the Cherokees—subservient to the white man. Hunter’s qualification of the heathenish and the civilized here mimics the “negative images of wild, bloodthirsty ‘Indians’” that Singer articulates above, which is further echoed in the final moments of the scene when one of the prisoners escapes and “steals along the foot of the mound toward Jackson” to kill him. Several production stills depict this scene as being staged similar to a Hollywood western, with the attacking Creek jumping down from a platform onto an unsuspecting Jackson below. Despite the plot, the staging of this scene mirrors fantastical impressions of American Indian war mongers perpetuated by the likes of the silver screen.

*Under the Cherokee Moon, Legends at Dusk, and Cherokee Family Reunion* resist positioning the Cherokee Nation and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians in roles synonymous with such stereotypes, focusing instead on cultural features that substantiate the Cherokees’ sovereignty, such as peacekeeping, military deliberation, familial and community longevity, reciprocity, and balance (to name but a few). Read in line with Hunter’s dramas, these three plays disrupt and decolonize pernicious twentieth century sentiments concerning American Indians that are still too often preserved in popular entertainment today, including outdoor historical drama.

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.



## CHAPTER SIX

### DEFINITIVE MEMORIES: A CONCLUSION?

*“GRANDMOTHER: We’re carriers of our stories and histories.  
We’re nothing without them.*

*GIRL: We carry ourselves. Who are you besides your stories?*

*GRANDMOTHER: I don’t know—no one ever asked.”*

- Diane Glancy, *The Woman Who Was a Red Deer  
Dressed for the Deer Dance*

In this dissertation I have traced the historical development of the Cherokee Historical Association and the Cherokee Heritage Center along with their outdoor historical dramas. From the organizations’ and the dramas’ inaugurations to their transformations, I have shown how these institutions have developed in response to tourist and Cherokee community concerns. I offer this critical study neither to explain away the intellectual and aesthetic problems of the CHA’s or the CHC’s dramas, nor to explain away the Cherokee Nation’s or the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians’ historical and cultural memory. Rather, I have tried to contribute to the often overlooked field of outdoor historical drama and to suggest how the Cherokees have influenced the portrayal of history, culture, and memory on the outdoor stage and how, in doing so, they have challenged the very conventions of this dramatic form of leisure entertainment. While a majority of outdoor historical dramas have scarcely changed since their opening, *Unto These Hills* and *The Trail of Tears* are among the few dramas that tried to rectify misleading historical and cultural information on the outdoor stage; they are among the few (if not the only two) that—through a process of experimentation—tried to break the mold of the convention-bound

genre so that Cherokees and Euramericans alike can see and approach this shared history in new ways.

I began this dissertation with an exploration of the Cherokees' historical and cultural memory to show how the EBCI and the CN survived Euramerican injuries by adhering to a sense of traditionalism throughout their process of cultural exchange with foreigners. I presented this information in a way that highlights the Cherokees' cosmogonic reality via the storytelling tradition, with the recording and retelling of history being a part of the storying process. Organizing the dissertation in this manner set up a framework through which to discuss and juxtapose the Cherokees' understanding of history with Euramerican considerations, the latter of which heavily influenced the construction of the CHA's and the CHC's outdoor dramas.

*Unto These Hills* and *The Trail of Tears* were instituted as a means to preserve and promote the Cherokees' historical and cultural memory. Once the dramas opened their doors to touristic audiences, however, the notion of preservation diminished. Because outdoor historical drama is a tourist operation, historical and cultural preservation are not primary concerns. By necessity, outdoor dramas have to be entertaining if they are to draw crowds. Sacrificing cultural and historical accuracy are among the many ways to ensure their attractiveness. In addition, outdoor dramas tend to rely on outside-view predicates that align with Euramerican patriarchal expectations, such as "savage" or "noble Indians." As the majority of outdoor dramas in the United States position Euramerican founding fathers in opposition with American Indians (with Euramericans always holding positions of superiority), it was customary to render the enemy—"the savage Indians"—in a negative light. Considering that *Unto These Hills* and *The Trail of Tears* take the Cherokees and their struggles with the United States federal and state governments as their subject matter, the dramas had to represent the Cherokees as a people that

developed beyond the “savage Indian” stereotype to that of the “noble savage.” In doing so, the dramas’ representation of the Cherokees continued to align with Euramerican expectations.

When I started working on this dissertation, I could not understand how the EBCI or the CN could have allowed the presentation of their culture to be manipulated and misconstrued in such a fallacious and pejorative manner. It wasn’t until my interview with Tonia Weavel that I began to fully comprehend the complexity of not only these dramas, but also the Cherokees’ historical and cultural memory. At the time the original dramas were constructed, neither the EBCI nor the CN had a strong sense of their legacy, at least not like they do today. It wasn’t until after the federal government reinstated sovereign rights to American Indians in the late 1970s that the CN began the process of rediscovering its past and reimagining its future. While I was aware of the historical events and the laws and policies surrounding this time period, I did not fully grasp the effect it had on the Cherokees’ historical and cultural memory. For the greater portion of the twentieth century, the Cherokees (as well as a majority of American Indian nations) were denied access to, among other things, their history. Aside from what was passed down through families, the only education the Cherokees received came from the Euramerican perspective. Though there was an uprising of American Indian cultural awareness in the late 1960s, it was slightly misguided and tended to focus on themes emblematic of Pan-Indianism rather than cultural specificity. When *Unto These Hills* and *The Trail of Tears* were written, Pan-Indianism was being transfused across the country. Euramericans came to regard all Native nations as being one and the same, and many American Indian communities, for different

reasons, did too.<sup>1</sup> Weavel shared a memory with me about how Pan-Indianism was disseminated across the Cherokee community during the 1970s to exemplify the condition of the Cherokee Nation in terms of its cultural awareness when the CHC's outdoor drama opened in 1969. As Weavel recalled, the notion that all American Indians in Oklahoma wore fringed buckskin garments and headdresses was pervasive. This was partly because KTUL/Channel 8 in Tulsa, Oklahoma, ended their nightly television programming with a sign-off featuring Dick West (Cheyenne) dressed in a Plains Indian headdress and in a fringed white leather outfit, performing the Lord's Prayer in sign language. Weavel remembered her cousin, as well as many other Cherokees, performing the same routine for the talent portion of the Mrs. Cherokee pageant contest: "For a while there, that was what everyone did...that's where we were at back then," she said.<sup>2</sup> Connecting this back to the outdoor drama, Weavel informed me that while many Cherokees understood the drama to be wrong—or not exactly correct—they took the drama

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<sup>1</sup> There is a difference between American Indian conceptions of Pan-Indianism and Euramerican conceptions. For more information on this topic see: Robert K. Thomas, "Pan-Indianism," *Midcontinent American Studies Journal* 6.2 (1965): 75-83; JoAllyn Archambault, "Pan Indian Organizations," in *Encyclopedia of North American Indians*, ed. Frederick E. Hoxie (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1996); Stephen E. Cornell, *The Return of the Native: American Indian Political Resurgence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); as well as Hazel Hertzberg, *The Search for an American Indian Identity: Modern Pan-Indian Movements* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1971).

<sup>2</sup> Tonia Hogner-Weavel, in conversation with the author, Aug 4, 2015.

“with a grain of salt”—they knew it wasn’t right, but they couldn’t exactly articulate why.<sup>3</sup> Many Cherokees, however, understood the drama as being factually representative of the Cherokee’s history and culture, but this was because the outdoor drama was the only source of information many people knew.

Weavel informed me that it wasn’t until she enrolled in a Cherokee Law class, taught by Chad Smith (Cherokee Nation), that she realized just how complex the Cherokees’ history and culture really were. Taking the class was revelatory for Weavel. Only then was she able to really grasp the Cherokees’ resiliency before, during, and after the Trail of Tears. Toward the late 1970s, the Cherokee Nation started to take control of their history and to generate a new sense of identity, a new sense of cultural pride. The more the Cherokees learned, the more they came to dislike the outdoor drama and its inaccurate portrayal of Cherokee-Euramerican history.

As the CN and the EBCI began to renew their historical and cultural memory, so too did the CHC and the CHA. Both organizations decided it was time to revise their outdoor dramas so that they were historically and culturally accurate. By the time they managed to get the story “right,” however, it was already too late. In Oklahoma, the CHC abandoned their outdoor theatrical operation and decided to focus their attention and energy on other projects. While *Unto These Hills* remains in performance in North Carolina, the CHA discovered during their period of exploration that the drama rests in an untenable position.

The issues affecting the outdoor dramas led both organizations to explore new theatrical opportunities. In Oklahoma, the CHC decided to develop small-scale theatrical programs that were free from outdoor drama’s reductive conventions. Moving away from the theatre, the organization believed that they would still be able to share the Cherokees’ history and culture in

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

a more cost-effective manner. Though this change brought forward new and exciting works, the cost of production continued to outweigh revenue. In North Carolina, the CHA decided to show additional theatrical productions in repertoire with *Unto These Hills*, believing the more the organization had to offer, the more tickets they could sell. These efforts, however, were disadvantageous.

Throughout this dissertation I have tried to explain and reposition the historical, cultural, and genre-defining significance of *The Trail of Tears* and *Unto These Hills*, along with their reinterpretations, reincarnations, and replacements, as a complex story in need of critical attention. By compiling the history of these theatrical productions, I have illuminated how the EBCI and the CN have influenced the CHA and the CHC to challenge a predominantly Euramerican theatrical market. Many people (scholars and theatre-goers alike) disfavor the early dramas, as they engendered an illusory light reflective of nineteenth-century Euramerican sentimentalities. Though I reflect upon the foundational years of the CHA, the CHC, and the outdoor dramas in a similarly critical manner, I have come to view the organizations and their early dramas in terms of fulfilling a journey. The CHA and the CHC began their journeys with good intentions. More often than not, those who embark on journeys of this nature don't start off on the right foot. As journeys progress, however, lessons are learned and mistakes are corrected. The CHA and the CHC endeavored to create sites that preserved the Cherokees' cultural heritage. Over the years they worked to promote and preserve their heritage, they learned how to do so respectfully. The organizations' journeys are ongoing, and the future will impress upon them new challenges which they will have to overcome. As long as the organizations continue to promote and preserve, as long as they continue to listen to community concerns and grow along with the EBCI and the CN, they will remain important to not only the tourism industry, but to the

Cherokee communities whom they serve. The CHA's and the CHC's constant struggle to revise and represent cultural material suitable for the outdoor stage should be read as a journey toward historical and cultural accuracy. Many scholars and theatre critics tend to overlook the fact that the CHA and the CHC had—for several years—tried to make the dramas align with the Cherokees' perspective, choosing instead to focus on Hunter's scripts. Allowing this to be the only narrative regarding the CHA's and the CHC's outdoor dramas negates the good these organizations accomplished. I have attempted to clarify how the CHA's and the CHC's experimentation with their outdoor dramas accomplishes this feat. While the original productions were problematic, when viewed as a whole, these organizations and their productions provide a compelling glimpse into the Cherokees' cultural survival—then and now—and their power to incite change.

The Cherokees have an expression or concept—a practice even—called *elohi gadui* which translates into English as “the world (*elohi*) working together in community (*gadui*).” Traditionally, *gadui* stems from the notion of men and women, both elderly and young, working together to either cultivate or harvest crops.<sup>4</sup> Qwo-li Driskill notes that the concept has since been applied to a variety of activities or groups of people who come together to labor for the greater good and to “sustain survival” of Cherokee communities, including hospital workers and

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<sup>4</sup> Wilma Dunaway, “Rethinking Cherokee Acculturation: Agrarian Capitalism and Women's Resistance to the Cult of Domesticity, 1800-1838,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 21.1 (1997): 156-7.

educators.<sup>5</sup> Steven Woods (Cherokee Nation) adds to this grouping of people storytellers. According to Woods, “The criterion for accuracy within the Cherokee culture is not go-tlv-hi-d-o-di, or correctness, but a-ga-se-s-do-di, care. This sense of care is at the heart of ga-du-gi, for there can be no coming together without it.... [A]ny interpretation of the complex Cherokee storytelling tradition” should be regarded as a community belonging to and in service to the larger community itself.<sup>6</sup> With this concept in mind, I would add to this list the CHA’s and the CHC’s operations. While I have not seen or heard anyone reference these organizations as a ga-du-gi, their work and their service to the community seems to fit the concept well.

Since I began working on this dissertation, I’ve had the pleasure of interviewing and talking with many different people who have either worked on or witnessed *Unto These Hills* or *The Trail of Tears*. In many of the interviews I conducted, the interviewees shared with me stories about their involvement in the production, the majority of which detailed backstage events, such as sexual escapades or practical jokes. For instance, Tom Mooney shared with me a story about how certain actors would go on stage and try to make their fellow cast members break character by making them laugh, or how several of the female dancers would overload their lips with bright red lipstick in an attempt to leave a mark on the cheeks of the men they had to kiss on stage. Tonia Weavel told me a story about a new homeowner who found a bag of old newspaper clippings and letters, the majority of which were written over a certain 1970s

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<sup>5</sup> Qwo-li Driskill, *Asegi Stories: Cherokee Queer and Two-Spirit Memory* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2016), 16.

<sup>6</sup> Steven Woods, “Cherokee Story-telling Traditions: Forming Identity, Building Community,” Cherokee Heritage Center, no date, PDF, 2-8.



summer, stashed in his attic. Among the materials were love letters between two of the cast members in the show who were having an affair. Weavel marveled at how small bits of history kept popping up every once in a while, even though *The Trail of Tears* had been closed for over seven years.

While I was conducting archival research at the Cherokee Heritage Center in 2015, I had many conversations with Tom Mooney, who was then the CHC's archivist. As I shuffled through stacks of letters, reports, and play manuscripts, Tom kept bringing out boxes for me to rifle through, occasionally bringing out a relic or two from the show, such as a printing head used to make commemorative stamps or a brochure logo template. Eventually, I got lost in my research, but Tom continued to pull folders and boxes from the archives. Every once in a while I would look up to see if he retrieved anything significant. I got the sense that he had stopped looking for materials for my project and was on a quest to track down some information on his own. Toward the end of the day, Tom pulled out a box full of photographs, production stills from the year in which he was a performer in *The Trail of Tears*.

Tom called me over. Opening the box, he picked up a handful and started flipping through them, handing me each one to look at after him. The pictures on top were from when the amphitheatre was first being constructed. Tom pointed out the state-of-the-art air-conditioning system. Following these pictures were images of Kermit Hunter, Paul Green, Marty Hagerstrand, and W.W. Keeler. Why Green's photograph was included was puzzling to us both.

I was particularly drawn to the image of Hunter, who was seated behind a desk, on the telephone. I had seen this image in several newspaper clippings and printed in marketing materials. Tom informed me that back in those days it was fashionable to take photos of people

in action—on the phone, writing a letter, or in conversation—as it showed a sense of power. I chuckled at the irony.

Under these photos, were production stills: “Here’s one of the Phoenix dance—the dance which comes at the end of the show,” Tom said. I nodded and took the picture from him. It was a picture of a small child, costumed in war paint and with feathers tied up and down his arms, riding high on the shoulders of another dancer. In another photo, Tom asked if I recognized anyone in the group of men standing at the back of the stage. I looked at the image closely—I had no idea what or who I was looking at or who or what I should be looking for. After about thirty seconds, Tom said: “Didn’t think so.” The dejected way he said it, you could almost hear the years, the decades pass. “That’s me in the middle, in the back,” Tom said. “I don’t look the same, do I?” I smiled. “Wow.” In my mind, I started to panic, thinking I should have picked up on his asking as cue from the beginning. “Anyway…” Tom said, pressing on to the next photo. It was visible from his facial expressions and the sound of his voice that memories were starting to flood his mind.

The next set of photographs were of actor headshots. With each photograph he passed over to me, Tom commentated: “Oh, what was her name? I can’t remember…she played Sarah. He played John Ross. Oh man, I’m sure he’d have some stories to tell. I have no idea who that is, must have been in the background.” There were several photographs we passed when Tom didn’t say anything; he just looked at them in quiet reflection before passing them over to me. About half way through the stack, Tom paused on a photo. “He’s dead.” After a moment of reflection, he placed the stack of pictures in his hands back into the box and turned toward his office. “Anyway, look through those, you might find something that interests you,” he said as he walked away.

I stood there, looking down at the man's picture, biting my tongue, somewhat shocked and nervous that I had caused Tom to remember some wonderfully painful memories, as if my research manifested into some type of memento mori for him, reminding him that all good things come to an end. The photographs, no doubt, had an impact on him. In a way, they moved me too—or perhaps Tom's reaction to them did. I was reminded of just how long the drama had been in performance, how many lives devoted their summers to that one single production. The photographs, the scripts, the letters, the printing head, the logo templates, the souvenir play bills—they all of a sudden became special, or perhaps more real.

As I finished thumbing through the photographs, Tom started to lock the archives up as he was leaving an hour early to get home to his family. I packed up my belongings and set my research materials to the side, as I would be back the next day to finish my work. I walked out with Tom to his car, as I was going to take photos of the old amphitheatre before heading off to my hotel. I asked if there were any plans to try to restore the amphitheatre. Tom said there weren't any and that they were actually planning to tear it down, as they had let the theatre fall too far into disrepair. When we got outside, Tom shared with me a story about a group of people or performers who would sneak into the amphitheatre to perform various skits and plays, drag shows and such, after it had been decided to no longer hold an outdoor production. Tom informed me that they got caught and were instructed to never enter the premise again, as the facilities were too dangerous. He told me that after that incident they came in and boarded the entrances up, making it almost impossible to get into the theatre.

I said goodbye to Tom for the day, and went to my car to get my camera gear. The theatre is about fifty yards behind the CHC and the parking lot. I decided to drive around and park by the entrance. It is difficult to recognize the entrance to the amphitheatre now, as trees and

brambles have grown up around the front of the box office, concealing the path to get inside. I was shocked, as the construction photographs I had just seen showed the theatre in pristine condition, with flowing grasses cascading down berms encircling the perimeter of the theatre where a thicket of trees now blocks the view.

After crawling over a series of saw horses with signs reading “Stay Out, Theatre is Closed,” I made my way into the rain shelter. I was surprised to see that the shelter, though dusty and cluttered with dead leaves, was still in good condition. In the middle of the shelter stood a giant wooden statue of Sequoyah, with a little child at his feet either learning to read or reading the Cherokee syllabary. I wondered why they left this wonderful carving to weather with the rest of the amphitheatre.

A series of guardrails that came up to my neck were screwed into place to block access to the amphitheatre proper. I was forced to look over the railings and to take pictures of what lay below. I took a couple of shots of the enormous concrete steps where audiences used to sit, and a couple of the stage. On the stage I noticed a big white cylindrical structure. I zoomed in with my lens and discovered it was one of the units from the original air-conditioning system, which prompted me to turn my attention to the roof line, where I spotted a few more of the fans hanging precariously from the decaying rafters, awaiting their turn to be called down to take their final bow center stage.

At first, I didn't recognize the stage. It was completely overgrown with vegetation. In fact, it took about five minutes to chart the trail from the top of the faux mountain, where the Ravenmocker would have first appeared, down to the center playing area. I decided to scale the barricades to get a closer look at the theatre ruins. From where I was standing, I got a sense of what audiences would have seen down below, but I wanted to know what the actors would have

seen night after night, looking up into the audience. Once I made it to the stage, I started taking pictures of all the plants I saw, the trees growing up from the stage, the rusted objects strewn across the back of the stage, the dressing rooms and the bathrooms. I then remembered a story about a group of copperhead snakes that made a nest on stage one summer, and how they forced the production team to shift scenes around to the opposite side of the stage so as to keep the actors safe. Thinking I was going to have an encounter with those same snakes (as if they were still there after all those years), I decided to leave.

Before leaving, though, I sat down in the middle of amphitheatre, on the concrete steps, and soaked in the theatre's remains. Recalling the photographs Tom brought out, I started to mentally direct my own production of *The Trail of Tears*. Then I started to daydream about all the people who stood upon that stage, the number of footsteps that kicked up the dirt each night, the people who, like Tom, made so many memories, night after night, on this one small parcel of earth.

Once I got back to my car, I discovered that I had left my keys in the ignition. While I waited for a locksmith to arrive, I sat on the edge of the sidewalk and reviewed the photographs I had just taken, deleting those that were out of focus. My attention shifted from my camera to a squirrel that was building a nest in the rotten timber frame surrounding what used to be the Tsa-La-Gi box office. This place was sacred and, in its own unique way, consecrated ground, I thought. To think that it would soon be gone.

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