

UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

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SAVAGES, SETTLERS, AND SLAVES:

A COMANCHE TRIBALOGRAPHY OF EDUCATION, FOOTBALL, AND RACE

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Abstract

This thesis utilizes the Sigma Alpha Epsilon (SAE) incident on March 7th, 2015, as a way to open discussion regarding race, football, and the University of Oklahoma, connecting the university's response to the situation to the experiences of Indian students, among them, Indian football players, at University of Oklahoma over the years. The thesis uses LeAnne Howe's Tribalography as a framework for telling an Indian side of the story grounded in the geographic location that the University of Oklahoma currently occupies and for exploring how this story intersects currently as well as historically with the school's football program. This "TribalOUgraphy"—the body of the thesis—narrates the intertribal story of the University of Oklahoma and of OU football from my individual ~~Namamuh~~ Comanche, perspective. The thesis describes the changes in dynamics in the state brought about by the Land Run of 1889, which "began the deposal of the federal public domain in Oklahoma" (Oklahoma Historical Society website). The nicknames Boomers and the Sooners originate from the time period. It also includes the story of the University of Oklahoma's founding shortly after that, with OU football beginning in 1895, making both the university and the football program older than the state, which wasn't formed from the two territories until 1907. The tribalography continues with an analysis of Lil' Red, the Indian mascot used by the University of Oklahoma from 1957 to the early 1970s, reappearing in 1984. The thesis also details the history of Natives playing football at OU—from Key Wolf to Sam Bradford— and contextualizes this with a general history of Natives in football, such as the innovations in sport during the time of Jim Thorpe and the Carlisle team. The thesis concludes by focusing on the advances made by the University of Oklahoma in regard to education, race, and football since the SAE incident.

Savages, Settlers, and Slaves:
A Comanche Tribalography of Education, Football, and Race at
The University of Oklahoma

Introduction

As news crews lingered on the University of Oklahoma campus for weeks after the video surfaced showing members of the fraternity Sigma Alpha Epsilon (SAE) singing a racist chant, so did peaceful protest and discussions continue in reaction. The Unheard movement¹—led primarily by black students, but also inclusive of others—was quick to respond by urging the university administration to action. Even OU football player, standout linebacker, and two-year defensive team captain Eric Striker² posted an emotional response in a Snapchat video the evening the SAE video was made public; he was confounded as to why these same members of “white fraternities” purported to be fans, shook the hands of black football players, got autographs, and took pictures with them, yet were the same ones singing—to the tune of “She’ll Be Coming Around the Mountain”:

There will never be a nigger SAE.

There will never be a nigger SAE.

You can hang them from a tree, but they’ll never sign with me.

There will never be a nigger SAE . . . (South Africa; Boomer Sooner)

The next morning the university administration acted swiftly, giving the fraternity members forty-eight hours to vacate their housing as the frat’s SAE letters were removed from their former frat house. University of Oklahoma President, David Boren, then held a news conference to denounce the fraternity’s behavior by proclaiming, “Real Sooners are not racist”³ (Boren). This statement rang loudly and ironically to me at the time, as I am sure it did to others.

For tribal peoples who underwent removals, displacement after displacement, loss of lives and essential resources, and disruptions to tribal order with interruptions in, interceptions of, and infiltrations into our ceremonial, social, and political worlds, the word “Sooner” echoes of land loss that was preceded by genocide.

While I *do not* believe that the University of Oklahoma will be changing its mascot anytime soon, nevertheless, I would like to utilize President Boren’s statement, Eric Striker’s response to the SAE incident, this incident and other events, along with a study of the Native experience at the University of Oklahoma, to continue to speak to and about some of the circumstances regarding race, football, and history on this particular campus. For some OU Indian alumni, SAE’s behavior and the initial response to the video reawakened memories of the two infamous, seemingly unrelated “tipi incidents,” which occurred on OU campus in 1994 and 1996, both in March during Native American Heritage Week.

The first incident occurred on the night of March 14, 1994, during Native American Heritage Week, when six Phi Kappa Psi fraternity members ran naked around a tipi that had been set up by Indian students on the South Oval near Bizzell Library, knocking over a pole and urinating on the tipi, inside of which five Indian students happened to have been spending the night. Along with this, a couple weeks later, a statue of former university president William B. Bizzell was spray painted with the phrase, “Navajos go home.” While I am unaware whether anyone was ever apprehended for the spray painting or not, the six Phi Kappa Psi fraternity members involved in the tipi incident plead guilty to public intoxication, disturbance of the peace, and malicious mischief and misconduct for their desecration of the tipi. However, their identities were withheld and their punishment not revealed. The student code violations against the fraternity as a chapter ended up being dismissed. The hearing for the student code violation

was dropped, and no criminal charges were filed. This caused some OU Indian students to accuse the OU administration and OU Police Department of tolerating and enabling racism.

The Indian community at the University of Oklahoma expressed outrage over what seemed to be a lack of concern for their Indian students' and faculty's safety and for failing to provide an environment conducive to learning. The then president of the American Indian Student Association, twenty-four year old Stephen Selkirk, decided to go on a hunger strike. His hunger strike lasted for fifty-eight days on the steps of Evans Hall, where the OU President's office is located. Selkirk stated that his purpose was "to call attention to what many people perceive to be the University of Oklahoma's recurring pattern of dismissing Native American concerns." Selkirk said, "If it comes to having to die out here, then this is an issue that is well worth dying for" (The Oklahoman 2015).

Five months later, in August, amidst an administration change, interim OU president J.R. Morris finally made an official apology. In November 1994, David L. Boren became the thirteenth president of the university. Meanwhile, some members of the campus community ended up filing a grievance with the Office of Civil Rights. Pressure was placed upon the University of Oklahoma by the external entity citing an anonymous staff member's complaint that there was a "racially hostile environment" and that there needed to be "some type of intervention" (Straumsheim 2015). This ultimately led the Board of Regents to adopt a revision to the Student Code in September 1995. While action from the University of Oklahoma did not come until well over a year after the tipi incident, it did, however, set a precedent for the handling of the second tipi incident which occurred just six months after the Student Code revision, that same school year.

The second tipi incident happened on the Sunday night of March 24, 1996. A tipi that had been set up for Native American Heritage week was removed from its location on campus in front of Bizzell library by three University of Oklahoma students. The tipi was taken to the Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority house lawn where the three students attempted to erect it. One of the students was a Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity member, and the other two were pledges. When questioned about the incident, the SAE fraternity member, who happened to be Asian-American, stated that their “actions were in no way racially motivated.” The three students claimed that they had not heard about the previous tipi incident and expressed remorse for their actions. Coincidentally—or perhaps not—one of the SAE pledges claimed to be of “native American descent,” saying his “great-grandfather was full-blood Cherokee” and claimed even greater personal guilt because of it. The one white SAE pledge stated, “I know I have done a terribly offensive thing, but I hope you understand that I meant no disrespect to Native Americans, and I hope you will accept my apology.” The SAE fraternity member and one pledge were suspended for two semesters, while one of the pledges was suspended for one semester because of his limited role in the vandalism. All three were expelled from SAE, but the fraternity was not found guilty of having organized the prank nor of having participated in it as a group. The then president of SAE, Jeff Nash, stated, “We welcome brothers of all races, creeds and colors into our bonds, so it is particularly unfortunate that these three men committed such a racially offensive act” (The Oklahoman 1996). That statement today reads as tragic foreshadowing when we consider the fraternity’s racist “there will never be a nigger SAE,” chant, but I must say I was grateful for the administration’s quick response to the 2015 SAE situation with the creation of the positions of Vice-President for Community at the university

level and of Director of Diversity and Inclusion in the College of Arts and Sciences as well as for the other measures meant to ameliorate the issues presented by the circumstances.

Indian students considered the disciplinary action taken in both “tipi incidents” less than sufficient, unlike that taken with the SAE incident of March 7, 2015. In fact, some OU Indian alumni are still upset about the outcomes of the 1994 and 1996 incidents. I think the confluence of these topics provides rich terrain for inquiry about our identity as an institution and the relationships formed both within it and with the outside community. The Native American experience at the University of Oklahoma is a unique one based on influence on and inclusion within the University of Oklahoma from the beginning and early on within the football program.

This has certainly been true of my experience as a Comanche tribal member. The University of Oklahoma has been a presence in my life since I was born. While my mother gave birth to me at the Indian Health Service (IHS) Hospital in Lawton, Oklahoma, and I spent my first several days at my grandfather’s home in Apache, Oklahoma, my parents eventually brought me home to our house in Norman, Pia Tūboo Kahni, “Big School House” (*Taa Nūmū Tekwapū?ha Tūboopū*, the Comanche Dictionary).⁴ We had a little red brick house on Sherry Avenue. My father, the late James Weryackwe, was working for the City of Norman Animal Control, while my mother, the late Dr. Suzanne Sockey, was attending the University of Oklahoma. After she received her doctorate, she worked in the academic environment of Norman as well as later working as an Indian educator throughout the country. Growing up, the presence of the university was undeniably prominent in this town, as it was throughout the state, as it has remained. Although academics take pride in the scholarly achievements of this institution, football is largely the reason why the University of Oklahoma is nationally renown,

and football certainly makes for a large portion of the University of Oklahoma's appeal to Indians throughout this state and beyond.

Ultimately, for me, it was my mother and her education that was the greatest influence on my decision to pursue a college degree. However, in regard to where to do that, throughout the years, the University of Oklahoma had remained in my consciousness because of sports ... in particular, football. When deciding to go back to school, I thought, "Why not? I've always supported the football team." I already had school pride. Now, as I finish up my Master's Degree, I question, "Why do Indians love OU and OU football so much?" Is it because of the role Indians played early in the football program? Is it just because of the location, Oklahoma, former Indian Territory? What about the pre-Indian territory history that our peoples experienced here before that?

The love Indians have for OU, however, is complicated by the harsh realities of subsequent histories. I can recall one nice Saturday afternoon in the fall several years ago, while walking home from a football game with my young daughter, her asking me what a Sooner was, staring up innocently with her big brown eyes at the word on my jersey. At first, I was speechless. When I answered her honestly, she then asked why so many Indians support a team that celebrates this history. I had to tell her that the situation was complicated, but I silently felt proud that she was already questioning this. Since then, I have tried my best to consciously buy only OU gear that says "Oklahoma" and eschews the term that carries the weight of Manifest Destiny.

In this thesis, using LeAnne Howe's Tribalography as a framework, I will offer a Comanche perspective grounded in the geographic location the University of Oklahoma currently occupies, inclusive of what came before us as well as our contemporary situation. This

study focuses on Indian football players at University of Oklahoma over the years, as well as other Indian student involvement with football at OU. It also analyzes the symbolism displayed on the football field, past and present, both that represents Indians and “Sooners” alike, and looks at other issues involving race and Indians at the University of Oklahoma. Hopefully, this story will impact the narrative of this space for future generations who will follow our paths to this place, helping them to recognize the University of Oklahoma’s Indian character and the Indian influences on this institution and to see this place as originally an Indian space, land traditionally utilized as tribal buffalo hunting grounds and as a place to gather other vital resources both from the land and through trade.

Why Tribalography?

Scholars of various disciplines have theorized about the social implications of space and place, about the relationship of ideas of place and the identity of a people, and about how a people makes space into a place by imbuing the geographic features and other characteristics of the land on with meaning. Theorists such as Heidegger, Foucault, Lefebvre, and Deleuze have theorized about the conceptualizing of space and the production of place through these processes. In the early 1970s, Henri Lefebvre referred to the conceptual *production of space* as “bound up with social reality” and works from a “relational concept of space and time” where *space* is “simultaneity, the synchronic order of social reality” and *time* “denotes the diachronic order and thus the historic process of social production.” Central to Lefebvre theory of space, is that “human beings in their corporeality and sensuousness...sensitivity and imagination...thinking and their ideologies; human beings who enter into relationships with each other through their activity and practice” (Schmid 28, 29). In *Race, Place, and the Law: 1836-1948*, David Delaney uses the terms geographies of experience; geographies of power; geographies of race and racism;

the geopolitics of race; and geopolitical practices. Delaney argues that these help form the landscape not just physically, but also by shaping a people's narratives and therefore the landscape's peoples and their perceptions of that landscape and its inhabitants, including themselves. In regard to scholarship demonstrating familiarity with Native considerations of place, non-Native researcher Keith Basso's book *Wisdom Sit in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache* is one many Native scholars would point to as an attempt to articulate what has been communicated within our cultures as Native perspectives of space and place, his major contribution being his articulation for academia of the Native practice for attaching meaning to place through story.

In regard to Native authored theory about space and place, conversely, the one that has garnered the most attention in recent years is Choctaw author LeAnne Howe's tribalogy. She defines term tribalogy in "Blind Bread and the Business of Theory Making, by Embarrassed Grief":

Native stories by Native authors, no matter what form they take—novel, poem, drama, memoir, film, or history—seem to pull all the elements together of the storyteller's tribe, meaning the people, the land, multiple characters and all their manifestations and revelations, and connect these in past, present, and future milieu. (Present and future milieu means a world that includes non-Indians.) The Native propensity for bringing things together, for making consensus, and for symbiotically connecting one thing to another becomes a theory about the way American Indians tell stories. Oral or written, I have called this genre 'tribalogy.' (330)

Howe points to the power of story in Native traditions. In Native stories, like all stories, the setting, tone, language, and framing of a narrative can have a huge effect on the audience's perception of an event. However, perhaps the greater impact these have is on the audience members' perceptions of themselves. In Thomas King's *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*, he proclaims, "The truth about stories is that that's all we are" (2). King also states that "stories can control our lives . . . stories are wondrous things . . . they are dangerous" (9) and that "stories [are] medicine, that a story told one way could cure, that the same story told another way could injure" (92). When discussing Howe's concept in "Expanding Tribal Identities and Sovereignty through LeAnne Howe's 'Tribalography,'" Channette Romero puts Howe's ideas in conversation with King's ideas, suggesting that "in order to create authorizing stories that 'cure,' tribalography asserts that narratives of the past must not only recount past oppression but also provide useful models for contemporary resistance...that stories that fail to recover these models of resistance, especially cross-cultural and cross-national alliances, 'could injure' by passing on only stories of fear and loss" (32). We must be careful then, in writing our own tribalographies as Indian people, to make sure we are undoing the layers of the dominant narrative that often obscure our own in the mainstream American consciousness. Romero suggests that tribalography's purpose is to

expand our understandings of what counts for tribal and intellectual sovereignty, carefully balancing discussions of specific tribal traditions with an understanding of individuals' and tribes' past and present political alliances. A more expanded notion of tribal sovereignty, one that includes the history of a tribe's interactions with others, offers readers and critics an important model for expanding contemporary Native politics and identities. (Romero 22)

These are both considerations I take into account in constructing my tribalogy below.

Likewise, in troubling the dominant cultural narrative of the university and the term “Sooners,” I also take into account the words of Jodi A. Byrd in *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism*. Byrd states, in interrogating the “apocalyptic” and “cannabilistic” tropes in contemporary popular culture, “The challenge to American Indian and indigenous scholars is to find ways to unmap the logics of conquest that underpin sovereign power conceptualized as the taking of space” (228- 9). Byrd, moreover, reminds us in her work on tribalogy that

Settlers and arrivants themselves have also told stories in order to create these lands in their image, and their politics continually return to the scene of the narrative in order to recast themselves as part of the story. And not just in a supporting role, but rather as the central first-person narrator in the story of America that depends upon vanishing the Indian as part of its denouement. (Byrd, “Tribal 2.0” 55)

Uncovering the “vanished” Indian in the dominant culture’s perception of the OU story both empowers Native students by allowing them to see themselves represented in the university’s past, present, and future, and improves non-Native/Native relations at the university by revealing Native people as partners in this educational enterprise who have been here from the start. Connecting this narrative to that of African Americans at OU shows our fellow community members from other diverse groups that we can relate to obstacles they face and be good allies for them based on our own historical and contemporary experience of the institution.

TribalOUgraphy—The University of Oklahoma Football Field

I intend to center my tribalogy on the University of Oklahoma football field, which I find to be an appropriate and useful site from which to study settler colonialism, its ongoing nature, and race relations in Norman and at OU. The University of Oklahoma football field is a space that, regardless of settler-colonial occupation, Indians have simultaneously still occupied. Here, football will be used as a lens of which to look at and speak about the inclusion of Native Americans at the University of Oklahoma. The utilization of football and the field is also appropriate due to the importance that it holds for both the Native and non-Native community.

Football is a useful lens for examining the inclusion of Native Americans in the early years, as it is indicative of their level of acceptance within mainstream society and public education at the time. Moreover, it serves as a great metaphor for colonization; it is, in fact, analogous to it as gaining yards and scoring touchdowns are a taking of territory from and a domination of an opponent. Centering this tribalogy on Owen Field will also allow me to talk about the pre-contact landscape and its history before the football field's and Norman's existence, move to discussion of early Norman as a train station and then a town, then to the creation of the university and the football team that plays on this "home" field, all while attempting to analyze race relations and my own experience of and relationship to the land, town, university, and football team. I want to point to examples of the University of Oklahoma's "Native character"—revealing Indigenous OU, as opposed to attempts to indigenize OU—including not only just the land on which the university and field reside, but also the Native influence on the legislation leading to the university's inception; and a bit about some of our many Native students, including Native football players. I will also discuss Native football players in general to give context to the discussion specific to OU.

In doing so, I want to stake a claim for asserting tribalogy as an aspect of what I would call the “extra-disciplinarity” of Native studies it is grounded in Native epistemologies and ontologies rather than in Western perspectives. Extra-disciplinary work is the unique contribution Native Studies can make beyond its being merely interdisciplinary, yet still bound to traditional institutional departmental authority over subject matter. Extra-disciplinary tribalographies rupture the mainstream narrative of place in the space of the university by asserting tribal presence before, during, and in the future of the university. This thesis utilizes Media Studies, History, Native Education, Environmental Science, and Political Science, is told, using Comanche language when appropriate, within a Comanche narrative that contextualizes the stories of those who came to these lands within our own story and the story of the land itself, and asserts our sovereignty over our own narrative, just as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Article 31.1 suggest we have the right to.

Joseph Bauerkemper urges Native scholars to utilize tribalogy as a “critical framework” and a “methodological approach,” both because of its ability to better present Native perspectives and to simultaneously reveal the structures that underlie “settler colonial contexts” (Bauerkemper 6). He describes tribalographies as a “scholarly point of departure” from other disciplines, as Native Studies includes Native viewpoints and ‘ways’ (praxis) that do not always translate well to the structures of mainstream educational discourse. Bauerkemper suggests that tribalogy as a concept can “help illuminate a wide range of hi(stories) and experiences” and demonstrate how “Native narratives and knowledges fundamentally enable readers and writers to imagine otherwise.” He goes on to suggest that a praxis grounded in tribalogy inverts the typical “settler orientations toward relations that account for Indigenous claims”: “Tribalogy imagines and remembers otherwise” (7). In “Talking Tribalogy,” Carter Meland states that

“by giving primacy to Native voices in articulating the original relations in America, Howe effectively inverts the assumptions of colonialist Eurocentrism” (30). Meland expounds that this “Eurocentrism assumes that all discourse between whites and Indians was (largely or mostly) unidirectional” and that it “imagines Native peoples as being affected, changed, or injured by Europeans and European American colonists and settlers, spending precious little wonder on the ways in which Indians created America” (30).

It is precisely the Indian aspect of the OU story that shows Indians as active agents in this place that I wish to make known to a wider audience through this work. In recovering the Native stories of the University of Oklahoma, I will show the institution’s Native character as a means of further asserting a place for tribal members on this campus through highlighting Native historic presence as well as the ways in which Natives have been included here at OU in regard to football and campus culture.

Numunarrative—A Comanche Story of a Relationship with the Land

Na Numunuu. I am Comanche. My father was Comanche, as his father was before him, and his father before him, and so on. A few generations back, there was a woman named “Margaret Guadalupe” who was introduced as a wife into my paternal family tree; she then too became Numunuu, as this was the way Comanche society was structured at that time. My mother was born to a Choctaw father and a half Pawnee and German mother. My mother was enrolled Pawnee, although I always thought of her as more Choctaw. Perhaps it was her dominant Choctaw genetics, or as they say, that she had “more Choctaw blood.” Regardless, she always encouraged me to follow my Comanche ways. Perhaps it was because I have “more Comanche blood.” Although I do my best to recognize and honor all of my ancestry and heritage, I am still culturally and legally Comanche, an enrolled Comanche Nation tribal member. Privileging

Comanche perspective, this thesis provides a culturally-specific history of a Comanche relationship to this place—the land upon which the University of Oklahoma’s football field lies—and its other inhabitants, both human and otherwise. To be transparent about my own positionality and limitations as a Comanche, I am not only genetically tied to my peoples, but I am also socially, politically, spiritually, and culturally connected to them as well as this land.

At one point, my ancestors maintained and utilized these eastern Great Plains grasslands on which the University of Oklahoma football field lies as established tribal hunting grounds, trailing herds of *Namũ kutsuu* (bison). When I speak of ancestors, I also refer to the many of generations of people from whom I descend that have migrated through, lived on, and crossed over this land since time immemorial, some of whom were from other bands or tribes. Some of those ancestors were *Penatuka* (Wasp/Honey eaters Band of Comanches) by birth, as I am. Others became *Penatuka* through interband marriages or through intertribal marriages and/or the taking of captives from an infinite number of other tribes. No matter through which path, I come from numerous peoples, and those peoples I would come from, like my perhaps Mexican great-grandmother mentioned above, eventually became known collectively as Comanches.

Namũnũũ (The People) are a segment of Eastern Shoshones who broke away from those still located in and around present day Wyoming.⁵ We migrated south from that point and later become known to outsiders as “Comanches.” As a tribal nation, Comanches are several confederated bands of peoples of Uto-Aztecan linguistic stock. It is speculated that *Namũnũũ* made our migration downward (presumably “back” downward, as Uto-Aztecs) onto the southern plains region sometime in the early 1600s.

Comanches were likely the first Plains tribe to acquire the Spanish horse and, therefore, the first Plains tribes who adapted to an equestrian lifestyle. As T.R. Fehrenbach phrases it,

“Comanches were the true prototype of the horse Indian in North America” (93). Thomas Kavaughn asserts that “of all the ‘True Plains’ peoples, the Comanche have the longest recorded history on the Plains. When Comanches were first noted in Taos, the Cheyenne and Lakota were still farmers. They were not misplaced Basin people who took a wrong turn at South Pass at the close of the sixteenth century, but were a fully adapted Plains people when they first made contact with Spaniards” (60). While we have been referred to as the “Lords of the Plains” in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, needless to say, Comanches neither had a concept of territory that coincided with Western European concepts of land ownership anymore than we had a system of monarchy that included Lords. Atabitsi (other tribes) utilized the land as well, some of those being sedentary peoples with whom Nūmūnū traded and to whom we were economically tied, such as the Wichitas and affiliated tribes and other groups such as Caddos who lived in the region.

The land on which the University of Oklahoma football field lies is on what was once the eastern borders of Comanchería. Simultaneously, it is on the eastern edge of the Central Great Plains prairie and grassland eco-region, the habitat best suited for herds of Nūmū kutsū (bison). This placed my nation of people within a natural, seasonal cycle as they trailed herds of bison moving across the prairie according to a natural process of migration for the most suitable grasslands. Comanche influence on these grasslands could have included controlled burns as a form of prairie restoration, the modus operandi that places our practices almost within the realm of the pastoral; we weren’t simply aimless hunters chasing bison following random grazing patterns. Kutsū was the main food source as well as the main resource Comanches used in providing for such necessities as the shelter of a kahni (“tipi,” most properly a “buffalo hide tipi”), tools, containers, weapons, clothing, and even spiritual items. These bison of the Great

Plains prairies once subsisted on the land of which the University of Oklahoma football field lies. The turf that is now there covers land that once was once windswept buffalo grass. In fact, the first football field at the University of Oklahoma, Boyd Field—in approximately the area where Fred Jones Museum—had to have dirt hauled in by wagon to fill the buffalo wallows (Clark 28).

The eco-region just to the east of the University of Oklahoma football field (Norman) is also where the terrain noticeably transitions from the grasslands of the Central Great Plains to the woodlands and forest vegetation of the Cross Timbers, the westernmost extension of the oak and hickory forests for which the eastern half of the US is known. Because of this, Comanches shared this area with other people groups whose lifestyles and cultures were adapted to living upon this particular type of landscape, the cusp of these regions. Comanche culture was part of an intertribal system of that defined Comanche reciprocal relationships with other nations with whom our domain overlapped. Historically, if any permanent Indigenous establishments were here in what is now present day Norman or in the vicinity, they would likely have been occupied by the more sedentary Wichitas (Wichitas, Wacos, Taovayas, Tawakoni, Kichais or another one of the tribes that operated within a confederacy that came to be known as Wichita), whose heritage “may be traced back at least 800 years to the Washita River culture of central and western Oklahoma,” according to the Wichita Tribe official website. These tribes were encompassed within or on the borders of the greater Comanche body politic and economy in the way that other nations are incorporated when sharing land within the boundaries of a western empire. Wichita villages, for Comanches, were areas of trade; Numunuu would have utilized this place as a location for acquiring resources. Whether hunting kutsuu or to nah narumu atabitsi (trade with other tribes), the University of Oklahoma and Norman is where the “Git’n Store” was for pre-Indian Territory (IT) and early IT Comanches. As noted by Captain Randolph B. Marcy

in 1852 while passing through IT, “In the early days, traders, trappers, and other travelers in the country employed the Cross Timbers as a datum line for location, and measured distances of places from this well known landmark, as in populated parts of the world reference is made to the meridian of Greenwich” (Hoagland). The economic and cultural significance of the Cross Timbers region to Comanches makes Norman, and the ecosystem of which it is a part, both to the North and the South, a key part of Comancheria.

The region that Nūmūnū came to control was known as Comanchería between 1750 to 1840. This area encompassed a little more than the western half of what is now the state of Oklahoma, including western Kansas, southeastern Colorado, the eastern half of New Mexico, and a majority of the western half of Texas down into Mexico. Comanches became the regulators of trade in this region, controlling the trade of goods coming from Spain up through Mexico and goods from France making their way through New Orleans. In this process, Comanches established a significant geopolitical order in the center of the continent, out of which formed a “major hub of commerce and diplomacy” (Hämäläinen 101). In the 1760s, the Comanche’s economic and political expansion meant “nearly exclusive access to some seven million bison,” (Hämäläinen 101). Understanding that this area was a shared hunting ground under the province of the Comanche Empire unpacks the “local knowledge” that the pre-contact Norman area comprised hunting grounds belonging to no one and shows it to be misconstrued. Comanches dictated who had access to hunt in these rich lands full of buffalo and other wild game. As mediators of commerce, Nūmūnū would make agreements to open up areas of Comanchería hunting grounds to atabitsi (other tribes) and other peoples or would conversely restrict that access. Coincidentally, this fed the dynamic that transformed us into “the Lords of the Plains.” Unfortunately, this management model would eventually lead to increasing participation in the

invasive global economy based in unprecedented, unparalleled, and unsustainable methods of exploitation of the land and all on it.

In 1833, the US Congress authorized the formation of the US dragoons, the first cavalry force in the Regular Army; however, their first mission was, in effect, a diplomatic one meant to engage specifically with Comanches, Wichitas, and Kiowas in IT. The regiment was assigned to Fort Gibson in 1834, from where the First Dragoon Expedition departed with intentions to establish formal relations and initiate a friendship through presenting a generous outpouring of gifts. Simultaneously, the expedition also fulfilled the objective of parading a military display of US power as “they expected the Indians to be awed...and thus more likely to behave themselves in the future” (Niderost). Ultimately, however, another mission of the journey was to negotiate for the return of two white captives, a 9-year-old boy and a Ranger. Around thirty Delaware, Osage, Cherokee, and Seneca scouts guided the expedition. On July 14, 1834, “the first official contact between the American government and the Southern Plains tribes” occurred when the regiment encountered Comanches (Comanche Nation Museum and Cultural Center Facebook). George Catlin, famous painter of the American West, accompanied the expedition and captured this historically significant introduction through his painting *Comanche Meeting the Dragoons* (1834), with which the University of Oklahoma Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art happened to be gifted in 2014. The painting depicts a warrior by the name of His-Oo-Sán-Chees, Little Spaniard, displaying his highly skilled horsemanship. This and other paintings of this expedition would become some of the most iconic images of the American West, providing a view into Indian Country for various audiences and shaping the way Americans saw Comanches, other Plains tribes, and generally, the West.

Comanches eventually welcomed the dragoons back to their encampment east of the Wichita Mountains, a village of considerable size, 600 to 800 tipis, stretching fifteen miles along Cache Creek (Niderost). By this time, the regiment had become stricken with illness, ultimately costing them a third of the men by the mission's end. Unable to present the magnificent display of military strength they had intended and desperately wanting to head back to Fort Gibson, they pushed onward with the final objective of their mission to negotiate for the captives. Later, Comanches directing them to a Wichita village, the Dragoon commanders were informed that the Ranger was dead, having been taken south of the Red River, at the time, the international US/Mexican border. While in the Wichita village, the unit ran into a black man, a runaway slave who had been living with the Wichitas, who decided to help them locate the boy, also in the same camp. The boy, along with the runaway slave, returned with the regiment to Fort Gibson; consequently, the black man was ordered to return to his white master. As the historic expedition returned to Fort Gibson, they crossed the Canadian River approximately eight miles northwest of where the University of Oklahoma football field is located.

Signing the Treaty of Fort Holmes in 1835, Comanches agreed to open up areas of Comanchería to Osage, Delaware, Shawnee, Kickapoo, Cherokees, Chickasaws, Choctaws, and Creeks. The area soon became overhunted, and by 1841, *Nūmā Kutsu* were quickly dwindling. This problem was exacerbated by Comanches increasing numbers of horses that competed with the few remaining buffalo for the grasslands. Our way of life and the ways of life of those *atabitsi* with whom we had shared the prairie was irreparably changed (Hämäläinen 294-95). This impacted not only who our neighbors were in this space, but also the land itself as the ecosystem has been divested of resource after resource.

In the years to come, as the Five Civilized Tribes walked their numerous “Trails of Tears” to IT, so did their black slaves, bringing a different form of slavery to Comanchería, though intertribal slavery through a system of warfare and captivity had been a significant part of tribal economies for untold centuries. As the Five Tribes came from the southeast and their economies even prior to removal had been tied to cotton farming, their own traditional practices of intertribal slavery, similar to those of *Namunuu*, had been transformed by the institution of American chattel slavery in order to support the labor required to participate in the mainstream economy. While conditions varied, Native slavery “hardly resembled the institution established in the Deep South, but was more akin to indentured servitude of early America” (Franklin).⁶ Writing from his observations during a visit to Indian Territory in 1842 about the interactions between tribal members and their slaves, Major General Ethan Allen Hitchcock writes:

I must say a good deal about the half-breeds, the true civilizers after all. It is mostly those who are in power and wealth among the Cherokees and also among the Choctaws and Chickasaws. There are not many among the Creeks and the relative condition of the tribe is distinctly marked by that fact. The full-blood Indian rarely works himself and but few of them make their slaves work. A slave among the wild Indians is almost as free as his owner, who scarcely exercises the authority of a master, beyond requiring something like a tax paid in corn or other product of labor. Proceeding from this condition, more service is required from the slave until among the half-breeds and whites who have married natives, they become slaves indeed in all manner of work (Foreman 187).

Racialization and changed practices of slavery were brought to Comancheria along with the Five Tribes’ diaspora. African Americans and Afro-Native people, though not always of their own

choice, became new neighbors with whom we share much in common, despite our historical and cultural differences, through US encroachment on Comanche land.

When Penatukas (Wasp/Honey eaters Band of Comanche) were fractioned into three separate units, one of these was the first forced to the reservation in 1853. At this time, the Penatukas were able to supplement their family's government rations by being able to hunt buffalo, but that soon changed after the populations of buffalo began to decline. Raids on Mexicans and Anglos settlements for cattle were an attempt to maintain a tradition of obtaining meat when buffalo herds had been decimated. Some Comanches were able to exploit the fact that several cattle trails cut across reservation land when they "enforced their legal ownership of the reservation by levying an informal toll" (Foster 80). Around the same time period, "Comanches benefited as well from strays, and as late as the 1890s they were known to raid neighboring Chickasaw herds" (Foster 80).

In 1849, the gold rush to California brought the first steps towards American westward expansion to the Pacific coast and therefore brought another large migration of Americans through Comanchería. The Santa Fe Trail, which went through the northwestern corner of Comanchería, had been used for a majority of westward movement; these seekers of gold began traveling the Canadian River, which went through the heart of northern Comanchería. This was a route with substantially more resources (water, wood, and grasses for livestock) to exploit along the way. The Gold Rush traffic had its ecological toll on the regions, as the waters were polluted and vegetation consumed and wasted, which only added to the devastating biological consequences for Comanches affected by smallpox and cholera carried by American travelers.

The US Civil War (1861-1865) temporary relieved pressure placed on Comanchería's borders by slowing American encroachment west; however, it created a situation that pulled

many tribes from IT into this American conflict. American Southern culture and economy had only increased its foothold in Indian Country during the thirty plus years since Removal. When the Civil War began, IT's population was made up of "approximately one hundred thousand inhabitants, 14 percent were African American slaves" (Huston). Firm entrenchment in the slave economy is part of what led to the allegiance of many of the Five Civilized Tribes with the Confederate States. A likely more significant factor was the promise on the part of the Confederacy to "undo" Removal, allowing these tribes to return to their homelands if victory was achieved, along with giving them full representation in the Confederate Congress, more representation than the US has ever offered tribal nations at the federal level to this day. The decision by tribal leaders to support the Confederacy led to further intratribal conflicts after years of having suffered from political fractionalization over removals. The new divisions were not just more splits down ideological and political lines, but included a racial component. This was further complicated by the heavy recruitment of their citizens by the Confederate Army, as tribal members were paid the same rates as white soldiers. The Confederacy's offering these symbols of equality makes these tribes' fighting another "white man's war" more understandable.

The Union, considering the territory a buffer between the North and the South, had a less significant presence in IT. Most military forts were abandoned by the Union Army early on. For the most part, Comanches took advantage of the situation under the pretense of neutrality, as they were welcomed into Confederate Fort Cobb as well as Union Fort Wise (Hämäläinen 313). The Confederate Army later occupied the abandoned US forts in the territory and began to recruit the support of Plains tribes in western IT. One instance where Comanches were adversely affected by the conflicts occurred when Albert Pike, the Confederate's Commissioner of Indian Affairs, made a treaty with a Penatuka camp near what is now Verden, OK, located forty-five

miles southwest of our present-day football field. Union soldiers later attacked the Penatukas, who decided to move back south of the Red River. However, regardless of the Confederacy's failure to provide for Comanches, the Five Civilized Tribes fared significantly better with them. Many of the Five Tribes, along with other tribes who had been relocated, actually had their own, largely tribally specific, Confederate troops. Despite the South's influence on these tribes and its success in garnering support throughout IT in general, the western front of the war was seen secondary to that in the East where there were substantial defeats, leading the Union to prevail in the Civil War. However, an exemplar of the influence and involvement of tribes and tribal members on both sides of the war is seen in the presence of Seneca attorney, Ely Parker. Parker drew up the terms of surrender and presented them with Ulysses S. Grant to Robert E. Lee on April 9, 1865 at Appomattax, Virginia. Purportedly shocked by the attendance of Parker, Lee commented, "I am glad to see one real American here." Parker replied, "We are all Americans" (National Park Service).

The aftermath of Civil War reshaped the cartographic landscape as tribes were punished for their participation with the Confederacy by the US. Using this as justification to divest the tribes of more land and resources—no longer distracted with the war—the US focused energy on rebuilding and returning to the incorporation of territory, including moving westward, further into Comanchería. More tribes were relocated to IT as the boundaries of tribal nations shifted to accommodate them. A shift in the social, political, and now racial landscape also took place. The Five Civilized Tribes were forced to free their slaves, some of whom chose to remain close to their Native communities, creating towns that were predominately black. Many became tribal members of the tribes whom freed them, known as "Freedmen."

Due to federal policies that sanctioned and promoted Settler Colonial encroachment, disease, war, decimation and near extinction of the bison, both the land base of Comanchería and the Comanche population began to dwindle, “leaving . . . only five thousand in 1865” (Hämäläinen 313). In 1867, Comanches, along with Kiowas and Apaches, reluctantly agreed to enter reservations by signing the Treaty of Medicine Lodge, ceding 90 million acres of land in exchange for 3 million acres on a “permanent” reservation in Indian Territory, the Kiowa, Comanche, and Apache Reservation (KCA). Existence on reservations for some Comanche bands began as early as the 1850s, but this was the first treaty with the United States with the collective entity that would become known as the Comanche Nation. After that point, going off of the reservation to raid or to hunt or participate in ceremonies without permission was punishable in the Court of Federal Offenses. With the military presence of Fort Sill, Numunuu were neither able to maintain our relationship with buffalo, nor able to participate in other activities that made up Comanche life at this time in the manner we once knew. This was a separation from who we were as a people physically, psychologically, and spiritually.

After the Treaty of Medicine Lodge in 1867, the federal government failed in their obligation to distribute rations, while overlooking non-Native liquor traffickers, gunrunners, and other outlaws entering Comanche lands in IT, committing crimes, and stealing livestock without punishment in violation of the treaty. Camps were set up just outside of the reservation solely for the purpose of entering at night and exploiting the opportunity for “raiding,” inverting the pre-reservation dynamic utilized to justify sending Comanches to reservation in the first place. This lack of rations and continual subjection to attacks was exacerbated by a campaign to eradicate Numu kutsuu (bison) in the Buffalo Wars, or the “Red River War,” possibly the most cataclysmic, attack on what it meant to be Comanche.

In 1871, with an additional passage added to the Indian Appropriations Act, the US ceased the recognition of all treaties between tribes, which were no longer viewed as independent nations. The Texas State Historical Association's *Handbook of Texas Online* says, "The army declined to enforce provisions of the Medicine Lodge treaty prohibiting white entry onto tribal lands, between 1872 to 1874 organized, professional buffalo hunters based in Dodge City, Kansas, wiped the herds out on the Cheyenne-Arapaho reservation." Arrangements had been made for the utilization of the Cheyenne-Arapaho buffalo hunting ranges by Comanches and Kiowas, but once the *kutsuu* were killed off by poachers determined to exterminate the American bison, already starving, these tribes were desperate. A group of seven hundred Comanches, Kiowas, and Cheyenne-Arapaho warriors gathered and headed out to the Texas Panhandle—specifically, Adobe Walls—to seek revenge for the strategic slaughter. Seventy warriors were wounded or killed compared to the three whites who died, but the warriors besieged Adobe Walls. Mackenzie then led a early morning attack, only killing two or three warriors, but burning down a camp and confiscating over a thousand horses, ultimately killing them all. This marked the end of the Red River War, Buffalo War, but also the effective end of the southern herd and the height of the Comanche empire. Comanches had to get authorization from the US military to leave the reservation. Prior to the effective elimination of a viable herd to hunt, this was mostly utilized to participate in traditional buffalo hunting. Going off of the reservation to raid or to hunt or participate in ceremonies without permission was punishable in the Court of Federal Offenses.

All the military campaigns and economic disruption paled in comparison to the devastation *Numunuu* suffered from the 1816 epidemic smallpox outbreak and a later one in early 1840, Comanches losing around two-thirds of the population, "as many as sixteen thousand

people” (Hämäläinen 111). Compounding this deaths in direct attacks by US military and Rangers had a dreadful impact on my Comanche peoples’ population. Despite the failed first attempt to confine Numunuu to the Clear Fork reservation in Texas, the federal government sequestering of my ancestors to the Kiowa Comanche Apache (KCA) reservation in I.T., the northeast corner of Comanchería, which would later become the southwestern portion of the state of Oklahoma as a result of the Medicine Lodge Treaty, worked and has been reasonably effective to this day. Fort Sill Army Post was established near Comanche camps as a means to maintain military control over the region. Today it remains the only active military fort established during the “Indian Wars.” The Comanche Nation headquarters and tribal communities surround present day Fort Sill in Lawton, OK. While certainly, like other American citizens—we finally gained citizenship in 1924 under the American Indian Citizenship Act—we are not confined and can “go off the reservation,” many tribal members choose to live in the historical KCA. Others are limited to doing so by lack of economic choice. A good percentage of us who do leave do so precisely through the act of returning to this part of Comanchería to pursue a higher education in Pia Tūboo Kahni, here at the University of Oklahoma.

“I Say Educate! Educate! Or We Perish!”

-- Choctaw principal chief Issac Garvin (1878–80) (Miles)

When the Southeastern tribes were removed to Indian Territory, “they had established constitutions, legislative bodies, and courts, and missionaries had established churches and schools” (Kidwell 30). The first schools in IT were created within the Choctaw Nation in southeastern IT. Already having adopted Christianity, the Choctaw Nation’s first schools in Mississippi had been mission schools; education was a priority for them and was almost religiously ingrained. As the first of the Five Civilized Tribes to be removed to Indian Territory,

Choctaws brought with them from Mississippi Christian missionaries who created the Wheelock Academy in 1832. In 1842, the Choctaw General Council established a number of schools: Spencer Academy; Fort Coffee Academy; New Hope Seminary; Koonaha (Kunaha or Sunsha) Female Seminary; Ianubbee (Ayanubbe) Female Seminary; Chuwahla (Chuwalla) Female Seminary; Wheelock Female Seminary; Armstrong Academy; and Norwalk Academy. These were schools initially administered by the missionaries, “but by the 1890s those that remained open were operated by educated Choctaws” (Miles). In 1844, seeing education as “essential to their continuing success in negotiations with the United States government,” the Chickasaws founded the Chickasaw Manual Labor Academy for boys; the Wapanucka Institute for girls (1852); the Bloomfield Academy for girls (1852); the Collins Institute (1854); and the Burney Institute for girls (1859) (Cobb). Cherokees had schools that were producing citizens who were literate in both Cherokee and English using Sequoyah’s syllabary and printing presses they had acquired back East for printing Cherokee language texts. Walter Adair Duncan of the Cherokee Orphan Asylum Press wrote in 1881, “The Cherokee Nation in Indian Territory operated over one hundred day schools, a Cherokee male and Cherokee female seminary, and an orphanage.” It was because of this, Duncan expressed, that “no people in the world are better situated than the Cherokees” (Smithers 28). Missionaries to the Seminoles opened the Oak Ridge manual labor school (1848); Sasakwa Female Academy (1880); Mekasukey Academy (1891); and Emahaka (1894) (Koenig).

Shortly after removal, many Creeks continued to have an overall negative view of these forms of education, but, eventually, missionaries to the Creek Nation created day schools at the Koweta Mission (1843); Tullahassee Manual Labor School (Wealaka) (1851); and Asbury Manual Labor School around the same time. After the Civil War, Creek tribal leaders began to

see the importance of education and created “Youth-in-the-States,” a program that sent selected Creek students to college in the east, sending their first eighteen in 1876. During the time of the program, it “supported an estimated two hundred to four hundred students, including women and freedmen” (Starr). Later the “Pittsburg Mission,” a school for Creek Freedman was opened in Muskogee in 1883 (Flickinger 18).

A year later, the Chilocco Indian Agricultural School was created in 1884. For tribes in western IT, Comanches, Apaches, Kiowas, Caddos, Wichitas, and Delawares, the Fort Sill Indian School—originally begun as a Quaker school 1871, becoming nonreligious in 1891—delivered vocational and agricultural training to the men and homemaking instruction for the females. Also beginning in 1871 was Riverside Indian School, the “nation’s oldest federally operated American Indian boarding school... one of four such schools remaining” (Konieg). American Indians who would eventually become students at the University of Oklahoma typically had been educated at one of these or one of the numerous other schools among the various tribes in Indian Territory.

Norman, The 1889 Landrun, and The University of Oklahoma

Seventy-five miles northeast of Fort Sill and Lawton is the town of Norman. Between 1870 and 1873, a team of surveyors led by Abner E. Norman came through these “unassigned lands” in IT and set up a camp. His team burned the words “Norman’s Camp” into a nearby tree (O’Dell). In 1884, US Congress passed an act to grant “right of way” through IT to the Southern Kansas Railway Company, a branch of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railways. Railroad tracks were laid between 1886 and 1887. Later, a boxcar from the railroad was placed where the original Norman camp was located, continuing the designation of “Norman Switch.” Norman Switch became a popular a railroad station and, in turn, became the town of Norman, later the

home of the University of Oklahoma, most significantly, or at least most significantly for our purposes here, the home of the University of Oklahoma football field.

Following removal of the Five Tribes to IT, the area on which our field lies was Creek and Seminole land by treaty, as the two nations then had joint administration. In 1856, the Seminoles became self-governed and this portion of land, between the North and South Canadian Rivers, was assigned to the tribe. After the Civil War, the Seminoles were punished for their participation and were forced to cede their land to the US. The Seminoles had to purchase land within Creek Nation territory. Indians had been divested of the land through systematic, extra-legal acquisition; in 1879, the promotion of non-Native settlement of this land went nation-wide. This was coincidentally spearheaded by mixed-blood Cherokee Elias C. Boudinot, who published an article in the *Chicago Times* with the first usage of the term “Unassigned Lands” (Blackburn). Soon after, a Kansas legislator named David L. Payne began to organize the Boomer Movement, encouraging settler encroachment in the form of squatting into the region on the “Unassigned Lands” between 1879-1888 (Blackburn). These people would become known as “Boomers.”

On March 2, 1889, with only two days left in his presidency, Grover Cleveland signed into law a new passage added to the Indian Appropriations Act that opened up the “Unassigned Lands” within Indian Territory. On April 22, 1889, some 160 acres of “free” government land, including this portion of land on which the football field lies, was offered to whomever could claim it, first come, first serve. In theory, the Land Run was open to all US citizens as a means to claim land in Oklahoma for their own, but as Stan Hoig states, “the Run of 1889...” was known to be “predominantly a white Caucasian event” (Hoig *x*). Hoig goes on to state “April 22, 1889,

was one of those days which divided history. It would be difficult to find another single day's event which more strikingly reflected the end of the Old West in Oklahoma" (Hoig *xi*).

The Boomers who came into the "Oklahoma lands ahead of time in order to grab a choice location" were called "Sooners" (Hoig 101). Originally referred to as "moonshiners," they "hid and waited for other settlers to arrive at the legal time" then "came out of hiding and planted the flagged stakes that marked the corners of claims" (McReynolds, Marriott, Faulconer 157, 161). Mary Ann Blochowiak writes, "The early legal settlers of Oklahoma Territory held a very low opinion of sooners. That began to change by 1908 when the University of Oklahoma adopted the name for its football team. By the 1920s the term no longer carried a negative connotation, and Oklahomans adopted the nickname as a badge of pride and progressivism" ("Sooner").

By the time that Sooners came through the area in the Unassigned Lands in former IT, Comanches had been separated from the land of Norman for years. Buffalo had been separated from this land for years. And because of what we know about buffalo and buffalo grass—that the relationship is reciprocal, and that the grass growth is stimulated by the presence of buffalo (Kimmerer 164)—the entire ecosystem had likely largely changed.

The University of Oklahoma was officially established in 1890; however, classes were not held until two years later in 1892. At the inception of the university, it was located in what the "Unassigned Lands" had then become: Oklahoma Territory. Paired with Indian Territory (and known collectively as the "Twin Territories"), the new non-Indian Territory was practically surrounded by tribal nations. Indian Territory had already become a disciplined space in the Foucaultian sense through "platting," the American incorporation of land organized on the township-range-section system, a measurement system dictated in the Land Ordinance of 1785.

Oklahoma Territory, now demarcated as outside of IT, was now becoming a space designated for white American settlement by law through the imposed control of imaginary lines.

“Kill the Indian, Save the Man”

Around this same time period, government policy addressing the so-called “Indian Problem” shifting from one of warfare to assimilation into American society. The Americanization of Indians transpired through education. Indian Boarding schools effected this agenda as they removed Indian children and young adults away from their homes and families in order to isolate them from their culture. In Europe and the US, “boarding schools” had previously educated the children of the elite, while commoners were not typically institutionally educated. In regard to Indian assimilation, however, in many cases the boarding school experience was the forced attendance of vocational schools, as opposed to earlier, voluntary attendance of some Indians at church mission schools and other schools that had been located in tribal communities. This story of forced schooling begins in 1879 with a congressional act that made way for Richard Henry Pratt to establish the Carlisle Indian Industrial School.

Pratt had his own association with Comanches and IT. In 1867, as a second lieutenant in the Tenth Cavalry, one of the four troops of black soldiers called Buffalo Soldiers, Pratt was stationed at Fort Arbuckle, where he was placed in command of the Indian scouts of the regiment. He was later stationed at Fort Sill and Camp Supply, participating in the Washita Massacre of Black Kettle’s Cheyenne camp and taking part in the Red River War in 1874. The next year, he escorted seventy-two leaders of Comanches, Apaches, Kiowas, Cheyennes, and Arapahos, all prisoners of war from Fort Sill, on a round-about journey by wagon, railroad, and steamer through Kansas, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Georgia to Fort

Marion, in St. Augustine, Florida. It was here that Pratt first conceptualized educating Indians in a military-esque fashion (Anderson).

Perceiving his endeavors at Fort Marion to be successful, Pratt later requested to admit seventeen Indians into the all-black Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in Virginia. President Hayes praised Pratt's success at both undertakings, and in 1879, Pratt was allowed to establish the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in several vacant army barracks in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Pratt served as superintendent for twenty-five years at the school, which was said to have

combined academic studies, eventually extending through the first two years of high school, with vocational training in various fields and the 'outing' system, which placed students in white homes and schools or jobs for a year to further their assimilation. The institution grew steadily over the years, and throughout his superintendency Pratt had charge of some 5,000 Indian pupils from over seventy tribes. (Anderson)

He even taught four of Comanche Chief Quanah Parker's children.

"Kill the Indian, save the man" was Pratt's philosophy. While his form of education called for inclusion on the level of immersion into white culture, the federal government was steadfast in regard to segregation or exclusion in regard to education. Due to his divergence of his opinion from federal policy, Pratt was subsequently dismissed as superintendent in 1904. Later officials' positions softened somewhat in regard to the kind of complete cultural genocide Pratt endorsed, while the work of assimilation continued. In 1905, Francis Leupp, commissioner of Indian Affairs, wrote: "I like the Indian for what is Indian in him...Let us not make the mistake, in the process of absorbing them, of washing out whatever is distinctly Indian. Our

aboriginal brother brings, as his contributions to the common store of character, a great deal which is admirable, and which only needs to be developed along the right line. Our proper work is improvement, not transformation” (Hertzberg 17-18). Carlisle Institute kept “improving” Indian children and young adults until it was closed in 1918 by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. However, during those years, in addition to being educated in the white man’s ways, Indians at Carlisle helped to further greatly the sport of American football, which would become a key part of the University of Oklahoma.

Indians and Football

Namunuu, like other Indians, participated in recreational sports traditionally, so when it came to Euro-American sports being introduced during the assimilation era, many Indians participated with much enthusiasm, especially in sports such as football that included a great deal of physicality, as many Native sports are quite intense. For example, as Philip J. Deloria points out, “Colonial Commentators noted the presence of ‘Indian football,’ which involved kicking and pitching a stuffed deerskin through enormous goals.” He further explains that “for plains people, horse racing, speed and endurance running, and many other games in which men and women competed were also ways of training for the exigencies of a demanding physical life” (115).

At Carlisle, Pratt believed that education and training should have a balance of academics and physical activities. The organizing of a football team as one of these physical activities—after finally being persuaded by the Indian students—would eventually become the key component to his project. David Wallace Adams stated, “[Pratt’s] idea was if Indians could display their equality on a football field... they would in fact display their ability to totally assimilate into the culture. And so Pratt saw this as a way of advertising his model of Indian

education” (Parson). Participating in football was more than aligned with Pratt’s pedagogical objectives. Promoting the Carlisle football team within Ivy League college football at the time provided the best stage for exhibiting and proving the comparative fitness of Native men. Through this means, Pratt demonstrated that his Native student-athletes were just as competent as white men, both intellectually and athletically. As Hayes Peter Mauro acknowledges in *The Art of Americanization at the Carlisle Indian School*, “Pratt clearly aimed to prove the notion that racial supremacy à la the eugenics movement was invalid” (127).

Football itself was part of the defining of a new American masculinity. Deloria states, “Pratt embraced football, in part, because it gave him a rhetoric that explained how Indian youths might become manly—in the ways that Harvard and Yale spectators understood the terms” (124). Deloria would go on to equate this manliness with “becoming white,” explaining that Pratt told the players that they “could beat white men...not because they were Indian, but because they were becoming more like white people.” Pratt would suggest that playing through adversity and overlooking unsportsmanlike conduct by referees and other players made his Indian players “bigger” men (Deloria 124).

Indians started to see American football as possibly—even if temporarily—providing a sense of equality. While included on football teams and in other sports, Indian players were sometimes heralded as heroes; at the same time, they still experienced forms of “othering” through non-Natives attitudes and language directed toward and/or about them and their people. The “Chief” nickname given to many Indian players is a prime example of the type of subtle racism to which Natives were subjected. On one hand, Indian players were praised for their athleticism and thereby received entry into different social classes. On the other, there were also situations such as that Deloria points to depicted here on the University of Oklahoma’s campus

in John Joseph Mathews' semi-autobiographical novel *Sundown*. Mathews' book deals with "issues of acceptance and rejection through the lens of Indian players and college football, with intense fraternity recruitment of Indian players thought to have a future . . . if Indian identity led to catcalls and racist nicknames, it also called forth real—if often condescending—forms of affection" (Deloria 120). It was normal for Native players—for the love of the sport and their teams—to tolerate racist remarks, heckling, and language meant to evoke stereotypic imagery.

Nonetheless, it was likely the same racial dynamic that pushed Pratt to continually engage with the nation's most academically elite schools, which many times had the best teams. As David Wallace Adams says, "At this time athletic competition symbolically represented racial conflict" (qtd. in Mauro 127). During these early years of football, Native players on the University of Oklahoma football field and fields throughout the country drew large crowds to games. While it would be nice to think that these spectators came primarily to enjoy the athleticism, physical endurance, and competition of two teams, there have been many scholars who point to the sensationalism placed upon matches between Indians and non-Natives, likening them to scenes out of the "wild west." Andrew Parsons states that Adams believed that at the time the majority of white crowds viewed the games as great spectacle and would "begin to see football in a sense, as a sort of replaying of frontier conflict," an extension of the exoticness and romanticism of wild west shows and circuses (Parsons). In old football flyers, newspaper and magazine articles, and commentary of the time about football games, there are plenty of examples of questionable language and imagery. In 1896, a *Boston Globe* article reporting about the Carlisle verses Harvard game, stated:

'All the manifold interests of present and the past, the near and the far, were collected on the instant on soldiers field. Over 500 years of education were

represented by the young palefaces in crimson, while centuries of fire and sun worship, medicine men, incantations, ghost dances and mound building were flashed before the inner vision by the appearances of the young men from Carlisle.’ (Parsons)

Even the headlines of Carlisle’s own newspaper broadcasted “Indians Scalp Harvard” after a 1907 victory (qtd. in Deloria 128).

American football became the mark of the new era, a performance of a new and distinctly American masculinity. Like Native sports, football was also seen as a means of gaining respect for Native men, who performed this new American masculinity as a demonstration of what a modern, educated Indian man might be. As Deloria writes, “This new kind of competition could sometimes be seen as part of a refigured warrior tradition, but it also provided an entrée into American society—a chance to beat whites at their own games, an opportunity to get an education, and, even at its most serious, an occasion for fun and sociality” (116). Deloria goes on to write that “ironically this extracurricular activity contributed as much to the integrating of Indians and American culture as the rudimentary book learning and obsolete manual-labor training on which the school prided itself” (125).

Between 1911 and 1914, the Carlisle Indians football team achieved huge success on the field, particularly in 1912, when Carlisle ended up beating Ivy League powerhouses such as Harvard, Yale, and Penn State, and even stood triumphant with a win over Dwight D. Eisenhower and Army for what many consider to have been the equivalent national championship. Just twenty-two years after the Massacre at Wounded Knee, nowhere was the language and imagery more pertinent than the Carlisle verses Army game. For instance, the *New York Times* announced: “Indians to Battle with Soldiers” (Jenkins 3).

The Carlisle Indians were in the national spotlight, as a team and as individuals, with two players who would also later become Olympic medalists, Louis Tewanima (Hopi) with a silver medal and Jim Thorpe (Sac and Fox) with two gold medals. As Deloria points out, the school “had become a hotbed of athletic talent, with recruitment ploys and players sometimes raided by non-Indian schools” (116). Their coach, Glenn “Pop” Warner would later be inducted into the Hall of Fame of football. Later, Warner would become the coach of Stanford and is said to have had influence on that team’s later being called the Stanford Indians because of his history with and love for the Carlisle team (Banks). Carlisle’s team largely defined the way the game of football has been played ever since. The success of the Carlisle team solidified the idea that Indians were synonymous with football in the American mind, an idea that had been developing for some years before, and Indian success at OU had been a part of that.

Indians and OU Football

Just slightly before Jim Thorpe and the Carlisle Indians hit the field during their glory years, Indians were scoring big here in football at the University of Oklahoma. While some of those players were not necessarily recognized as “Indian,” many players were mixed bloods. Ed Barrow (Chickasaw) was one of the few students asked to be on OU’s first football team (Keith *Oklahoma Kickoff*⁹, 17). Not only was there an ongoing Indian presence on OU’s football team from the beginning, our team played highly successful opponents from Indian schools such as Chilocco and Haskell. The first *phenotypic* Indian football player to play for the University of Oklahoma was Grover Cleveland “Key” Wolf (Chickasaw). In a *Sooner Spectator 2012 Spring Football Issue* article titled “Proud Heritage,” Jay Upchurch writes, “More than half-century before Prentice Gautt became the first African-American to play football at the University of Oklahoma...Key Wolf broke the school’s original color barrier” (Upchurch 21). Wolf was born

in Chickasaw Nation, Indian Territory, and graduated from Harley Institute. In 1905, ten years after the university first organized a team, Wolf, who had never played before then, was recruited by Benjamin “Bennie” Gilbert Owen, OU’s legendary coach of twenty-two years, for whom OU’s football field is named. Owen was known to pull together teams that included Indian players, whom he believed possessed an “inherent desire to honorably represent their school and their people” (Upchurch 21). Wolf would get the nickname “Big Chief” and “became an important cog in the Owen wheel of success” (Clark 46), helping beat Texas for the first time in 1905. Key Wolf became the team captain in 1908, the same year the football team was first called the “Sooners,” after also having been called “Boomers” as well as “Rough Riders” previously). That same year, they would also win the Southwest Championship.

Over the past hundred years, the University of Oklahoma football team has had likely over a hundred Indian football players, several of them Comanche, including Steve Kopepasah, 1979; Cliff Takawana, 2000; and Jarred Kopepasah, 2008. Some of the most recognizable Indian players throughout OU’s history are Bob Sumter (Choctaw), 1925-27; “Indian Jack” Jacobs (Creek), 1939-1941; Tommy Tallchief (Osage), 1945; Ed “Wahoo” McDaniel (Choctaw/Chickasaw), 1957-59; Sammy “Jack” Claphan (Cherokee), 1976-78; and the 2008 Heisman Trophy winner, Sam Bradford (Cherokee), 2007-09 (Upchurch 27). In 2010, Bradford was the number one overall National Football League draft pick, going to the St. Louis Rams. He almost led them to a NFC Western Division title and was also chosen as the NFL’s Offensive Rookie of the Year (Hoover 43). Since then, Bradford has played seven seasons in the NFL for the St. Louis Rams, Philadelphia Eagles, Minnesota Vikings, and, the team he is currently with, the Arizona Cardinals. Kendal Thompson (Kiowa) was on the team 2013 OU football team, but

graduated and ended playing for another college before going to the NFL as an undrafted free agent.

Praising Indian football players here at the University of Oklahoma throughout the years, President Boren said, “From Key Wolf over 100 years ago to Sam Bradford, Native Americans have long played key roles in the OU football program. Personal courage and steadiness under pressure, which are important attributes to native culture, have helped the Sooners establish the greatest tradition in college football. OU is extremely proud of our Native American heritage” (Upchurch “Proud Heritage” 21). Tushkahoma Brown “Mutt” Miller (Creek/Seminole), 1933-34, was idolized so much by Native and non-Native fans alike that fellow-hometown Wewoka retired teacher and writer Chelsea Cook expressed, “There are a lot of men out there who grew up in Wewoka who will tell you that Mutt Miller is still their hero” (Upchurch, “Mutt Miller” 41); likewise, it was thought by fans, both “red and white,” that “‘Indian’ Jack could do anything he wished on the gridiron” (Clark 90).

The University of Oklahoma football team even had a Native coach by the name Tom Stidham (Creek). The “dark-skinned Stidham” was born in Checotah, Oklahoma, and “played football at Haskell Indian Institute” before he eventually leading the OU football team from 1937 through 1940 (Clark 88). The “Big Chief of Sooner Football,” not only was Stidham close friends with “Pop” Warner, he was also a devotee to the Warner coaching system, and had several successful seasons (“Sports Review” Keith 14; “Tom Stidham Moves Up” Keith 83). Ultimately “the Big Indian” had his best season in 1938 when he took his OU football team to the Orange Bowl. While the team did not win that year, Stidham began to establish a name for himself. He would later go on to be a head coach at Marquette (before they were the Warriors), then an Assistant Coach at the Cleveland Browns, and a line coach for the Buffalo Bills,

Baltimore Colts, and Green Bay Packers (“Tom Stidham, 59, Coached Football at Marquette U.”).

OU’s Little Red: The First Indian Mascot Issue

The Carlisle team, Jim Thorpe, and teams like the all-Indian Hominy Professional American Football team (founded by Osage tribal members, Otto and Ira Hamilton) were helping Indians continue a new “tradition” of using football as a means of achieving success and maybe even imagining that some how they were “avenging” the losses our people had to endure after years of tragedies, doing so through sport. At the same time, as mentioned earlier, the idea that Indians were synonymous with football in the American mind was ever present and eventually led several colleges to name their teams “Indians” or other related terms. Consequently the America obsession with “playing Indian” further developed on the stage of football fields across the nation as the sport grew more popular.

At OU, the phenomenon of the Indian mascot Little Red, the first Indian mascot to be retired, had a development grounded in place. The University of Oklahoma began to accentuate the local Indian culture and personality that, since time immemorial, had always been here. Most likely since the University of Oklahoma’s inception, Indians have been a part of the student body (Harp 6). In a *Sooner Spectator 2014 Spring Football Issue* article titled “Pride or Prejudice?” Susan Grossman writes, “The Indian Club of OU began in 1908 but had no real involvement in the university’s athletics” (49). In the *Native Matters: Journal of Native American Studies, Volume 2, Fall 2012*, S. Matthew DeSpain states that, “‘Oklushe Degataga’ or ‘Okla-she-de-gota-ga’” was adopted in 1914, the name ostensibly meaning “‘Tribes Standing Together’” as the club’s goal was for “Indians to be recognized in positive and constructive ways” (7). Football would become a way.

In 1926, the OU Indian students became inspired by a visit to a homecoming football game at the Haskell Institute; thereafter, they “began to turn their attention to the football team—an increasingly prominent element of Oklahoma culture—as a vehicle for recasting and presenting Indian identities in visible and positive terms” (DeSpain 8). OU Indian students decided to utilize the exhibitions of Indian dances and other displays of powwow culture that they enjoyed during the Haskell homecoming game and parade.⁷ The OU Indian club was reorganized and renamed the Sequoyah Club in 1936, and by this time would be regularly included in the University of Oklahoma’s homecoming events, as they put up a tipi, sponsored a powwow, selected an ‘Indian Club Princess,’ and created floats for the homecoming parade (DeSpain 9). This eventually led to the dance exhibitions and honorable recognitions that came to be expected before the game or during halftime on OU’s football field.

While Indian students saw these events as a form of representation and as expressions of their Native identity, a majority of the university campus came to see these practices as university “traditions” and seemed to believe, if even half-heartedly, that Indian medicine, along with Indian physicality on the field, also contributed to the team’s success. According to DeSpain, “*Sooner Magazine* reported that new pledges to the Indian Club had been to the tepee ‘beating tom-toms all night to brighten the Sooner football team’s prospects for victory the next day’” (9). Of course, this was nothing new, as Indians were and still often are cast as mystical and magical beings, possessing spiritual medicine that brings good fortune and/or bad luck for the opposition.

Of course, this language, along with the “Big Chief” moniker mentioned in the previous section, can be seen as racist and stereotyping. *Sooner Magazine* would commonly refer to the Indian Club events of homecoming in this manner, for example, “The Indian club erected a

wigwam on the green in front of the library and ‘made medicine’ on a tom-tom continuously from Thursday night until Saturday morning” (“What a Homecoming It Was” 80). Another example is particularly detailed:

The Indian club will be staging its annual ceremonies. Dressed in the feathers and buckskin of their forefathers, members of the club will sit cross-legged before an open fire place, pass the peace pipe and stomp a few tribal steps to the throb of a tom-tom...aboriginal Indian territory will stand in bold relief upon the campus...neon signs on varsity corner, strangely at odds with spear-heads, tom-toms and a painted Medicine Man. The Medicine Man, however will not desert his post until the Homecoming dawn cracks...All night long, he will keep the throb pulsing metronomically across the campus. (“Hie You Back—It’s Homecoming” 34).

While this language is not something that we would use today, there was at least Native representation and inclusion occurring on campus and in OU football. Moreover, the type of racist language and stereotypical imagery we see here was commonplace in American culture in regard to representations of Indians at the time, with items such as Red Man chewing tobacco and Indian motorcycles.

Here at OU, the use of Indian imagery as a part of the university aesthetic was not just limited to being used by Indian football players, students, and organizations; there are examples of non-Natives on campus “playing Indian.” In 1911, Edgar D. Meacham, who “dabbled in Indian culture and lore,” joined the “secret” student honor society of Pe-et, and later integrated “secret Indian rituals” into the initiations they conducted in front of the elm tree in front of Evans Hall (DeSpain 3). During these initiations, they would perform their “Indian rites, rituals, and

ceremonies,” while wearing “a business suit coupled with a feathered war bonnet.” Members had such titles as “Chief,” “Sachem,” “Medicine Man,” and “Wampum man” and also had clan names such as “Buffalo,” “Antelope,” and “Beaver” (DeSpain 5). Meacham would later coach football and teach mathematics here at OU, while furthering the “incorporation of Indian imagery within the academic and athletic spheres” (DeSpain 4).

“Playing Indian” found a way on to the field for the first time when Pe-et was joined by the University of Missouri’s “Mystic Seven” to smoke the “Missouri-Oklahoma peace pipe” during halftime, in what was billed in the January 1940 *Sooner Magazine* as a “New Tradition, Maybe” (Brinkley 5). Purportedly, they smoked from a “century-old Pawnee ceremonial pipe,” announcing this for the enjoyment of the spectators, significant supposedly due to the fact “that the Pawnees fought battles at various times in most of the territory now occupied by members of the Big Six Athletic Conference.” Unfortunately, this would become an annual halftime performance at the OU/Mizzou games continuing as a “tradition until the mid-1990s” (DeSpain 10-11).

Looking to authenticate their ceremony, they invited OU Indian football player, artist, powwow dancer, and all-around showman Dick “Chief” West to participate in the halftime show; West was soon performing for the OU football fans by dancing Indian and received much attention (DeSpain 11). After noticing West’s dancing, the director of OU’s marching band approached a Kiowa student by the name of Jack Redbird and asked if he would be interested in dressing up in his Indian regalia and dancing with the band. He agreed to fancy dance as he led the band onto the field. To some, Redbird came to be viewed as the first “Little Red,” but it would still be several years before an official Little Red danced on to Owen Field.

Through the 1930s and 40s, the Great Depression and World War II, Native student population fluctuated, as it did during World War I, but the Sequoyah Club continued their involvement in homecoming parades and halftime performances. In 1941-42, the club chose to honor Joseph Brandt, University of Oklahoma president, as the Sequoyah Club's honorary president as he joined the Indian students during their presentation on the football field (DeSpain 14). However, with the beginning of the Bud Wilkinson coaching era, there was a noticeable absence of Indian presence on OU's football field. The Sequoyah Club continued their events surrounding homecoming, but the events began to be scheduled before games and, eventually, even moved to Friday nights.

In 1953, George Church of the University of Oklahoma's public relations office approached a Seminole tribal member named Michael Dymond, asking him to accept the position of a newly created official mascot. Dymond was to perform "as an official representative" who was directly managed by the University of Oklahoma. In his duties, aside from dancing, Dymond "appeared on television, was interviewed and photographed for magazine and newspaper articles, and represented OU at various public gatherings" (DeSpain 15). As Little Red, wearing a headdress, moccasins, leggings, and a loincloth featuring an interlocking OU, Dymond would take to the field as the school mascot. Throughout the years, Little Red was grounded in the Plains stereotype non-Natives saw in John Ford movies and other westerns, various tribal members became known as Little Red, including Jim Gabbard (Wichita), 1955-56; Phil Waller (Kiowa), 1957-60; Danny Timmons (Cherokee), 1961-62; Kirke Kickingbird (Kiowa), 1963-69; and Randy Palmer (Kiowa/Choctaw), 1970 (DeSpain 15-17). Kickingbird would become the most recognized Little Red, also the most outspoken on the issue, serving the longest stint as the mascot from his undergraduate through law school at OU.

However, Palmer as well as Kickingbird and other Little Reds would become the centers of attention in 1970 during Palmer's brief time as Little Red.

By 1969-70, with social consciousness rising on university campuses, Little Red became a point of contention with the OU Native community. Some members of the Sequoyah Club, including one who became well-known Indian activist, Clyde Warrior (Ponca), were moving to solidify activism's place within the club's official agenda as well as on campus. In response to the criticism, the Sequoyah Club decided to directly address the issue by holding a community discussion about Little Red at the first meeting of the semester.

The University of Oklahoma's Indian community became polarized on the issue. Supporters of Little Red, who were referred to largely as being "traditionalist," expressed that they saw him as a visual representation of cultural pride and as an ambassador, capable of building a bridge between cultures. Opponents to Little Red came to view him as a mockery of Indian culture, calling him "the White man's clown" in an *Oklahoma Daily* issue (Medley 5). During the Sequoyah Club meeting, the students began organizing a National Indian Youth Council (NIYC) chapter on campus. The NIYC was a national council of young Indian college students and graduates who were substantially influenced by the Civil Rights Movement, which was gaining much of the nation's attention regarding issues of race and rights among African Americans. Through this external entity, some of OU's Indian students attached their cause to the larger Civil Rights Movement, stating in an *Oklahoma Daily* article, that Little Red portrayed a "distorted picture of the pseudo-Indian mascot [that] represents the ludicrous, contemptible attitude that the vast Anglo-Saxon community has toward the contemporary Indian." The article would go on to proclaim Little Red as "a symbol of the physical oppression and culture degradation" (DeSpain 20). However, student Ron Benally (Navajo/Chickasaw) disagreed and

believed that the local community should decide. To gauge the situation, he stated that he would be willing to dance at the next OU football game. This made him the target of attacks by students opposed to the mascot, such as Anthony L. Genia (Choctaw), who referred to Benally as a ““Indian sell-out”” and questioned how he could ““state that he is demonstrating pride in his Indian heritage when his own people wear pajamas and head scarves,”” an intertribal insult regarding Benally’s people’s tribal practices, which definitely were not in line with Plains stereotype of Little Red (DeSpain 20).

On November 26, 1969, thirty-two OU Indian students opposed to Little Red dug in their heels on the issue and demonstrated with a sit-in at then president J. Herbert Holloman’s office, handing him a petition asking “that the position of Little Red be abolished at OU” (Pipps and Ruggles 1), thereby blocking Benally or anyone else from performing as Little Red. The University of Oklahoma Human Relations Committee reviewed the petition and, after several months, recommended that the mascot be temporarily suspended. April 17, 1970, Holloman utilized a presidential decree to revoke Little Red as the official mascot of the University of Oklahoma, claiming “the Little Red image was ‘degrading to Indians’ and that the real issue in question revolved around ‘human dignity’” and that ““no institution...established in our society should countenance hurt or injury to an individual or a group of individuals in the official name of the university.”” However, Holloman said, ““if Indians are chosen as cheerleaders and if they wish to participate in such activities, they may of course do so in ways acceptable to them and their community”” (DeSpain 21). He explained that he was “removing only the official recognition of Little Red as the OU mascot” (Pipps and Ruggles 1).

Many of the individuals who performed as Little Red also chose to speak up, appealing to the committee, saying that the petitions of a few did not represent the whole and that many tribal

nations supported Little Red. They vowed to fight the removal. Some supporters of Little Red looked at the activists as irrational, but Kirke Kickingbird figured that if Little Red were to be banished from the field, that it should “serve as a rallying point from which to move forward and address more important issues in Indian Country” (DeSpain 22).

The controversy engrossed the state as non-Native politicians and even the governor at the time, Dewey F. Bartlett, weighed in on the issue, predicting “the banished mascot of the University of Oklahoma, ‘Little Red,’ may make a comeback” (Kettle and Masters 19), that he will “be seen on campus again” (DeSpain 22). Charles Grounds, Seminole attorney who spoke on behalf of the Five Civilized Tribes, told the university’s Human Relations Committee “that a majority of Indians felt that striking Little Red was a strike against Oklahoma’s Indian Heritage” (Medley 5). Even George “Woogie” Watchetaker (Comanche), traditional medicine man, artist, and champion powwow dancer, expressed his regret over OU getting rid of Little Red, believing that the mascot was a source of pride among Oklahoma Indians that Little Red and served as a visual reminder of our culture. NIYC responded by broadcasting a call for a sponsored debate.

Meanwhile, Randy Palmer, a powwow dancer from Anadarko who was the local high school’s Warrior mascot, came to OU’s campus in the fall of 1970 and, with the support of the Five Civilized Tribes, declared his wish be Little Red. Palmer sought to bypass the restrictions imposed by the Human Relations Committee through the loophole of “participating as a cheerleader.” Upon hearing this information, the Indian student activists and NIYC created another petition, blocking Little Red’s return. Palmer even began to receive physical threats, but this only added fuel to Palmer’s fire as “his Kiowa temper started flaring,” sensing a deeper obligation to himself and others (Medley 1).

Palmer received endorsement from the Oklahoma Indian Affairs Commission and various tribal chairmen and leaders throughout the state. On September 19, 1970, he ended up going out on to the field as the unofficial Little Red. He danced and was cheered, supposedly without a problem, but was later charged with contempt of court for violating the university student code. The next weekend, a former Little Red performer, Phil Waller, showed up at the game as the mascot, and was warned that he was also in violation of the student code. He was later subpoenaed. Palmer and lawyers filed a countersuit. However, the debate continued and administration rewrote their revocation to specifically “prohibit any OU student from appearing on Owen Field ‘in the guise or manner of the abolished office of Little Red’” (Allen and Dylan 2). Palmer took his case all the way to the State of Oklahoma Supreme Court, which overturned the University of Oklahoma president’s ruling.

On September 29, 1970, a *Oklahoman Daily* article reported that David Poolaw, the OU chapter president of NIYC, had announced that the organization had “succeeded in attaining an American Indian Student Office to coordinate Indian student activities, American Indian Cultural Lounge, an American Indian library, Indian tutors to help slow the high attrition rate of Indian students, an NIYC office, and Native American studies courses offered by Indians at OU” (Kettle and Masters 24). Satisfied with having achieved their objective, Poolaw claimed that Little Red had “never been the major thrust of [their] activities” and “acknowledged that Little Red had gotten away from the NIYC purpose of drawing attention to the problems of the American Indian,” finally “conceding that the argument over Little Red possibly had alienated some Indians around the state” (Pipps and Ruggles 2).

Nevertheless, the University of Oklahoma sought to permanently banish Little Red and has not changed its position since that time, despite the fact the issue has continued as a point of

contention and debate. In 1973, Bill Lamabull (Cheyenne), with the support of his tribe and the encouragement of the Ruf-Neks, a portion of the cheer squad discussed later in this thesis, took to the field as Little Red and was “chased across the stadium by angry Indian student leaders” (Medley 5). There would be other attempts to revive Little Red, such as in 1984 when Phil Waller made an unauthorized appearance at the OU/Texas game in Dallas. Waller was known to have “worked just about all his life to get Little Red reinstated. It was just a handful of students here at OU that thought (the mascot) was degrading to Indians,” mentioned Leon Cross, former OU football player (Harper). The masses thought it was great. However, Indian students have been quick to respond in protest against Little Red whenever he has emerged. In 1980, the Sooner Schooner became the official mascot, filling the void left by the absence of Little Red.

In the Absence of Little Red

In the absence of Little Red, nearly half a century after the mascot was officially banished from the sidelines of the OU football field, Indian students and alumni have continued to discuss the issue and its effect on the Native community. While it is not an ongoing public debate, an occasional mentioning of the mascot’s history is heard. The protest to remove the mascot and OU’s handling of the matter became a phenomenon that was ultimately attributable to a national movement that sought to remove Indian mascots from colleges and high schools throughout the country. Shortly after Little Red’s removal—the first of its kind—Stanford and Dartmouth Universities, both “Indians,” dropped their names, in 1972 and ‘74 (Tramel). Since then, many other colleges and high schools have followed suit.

In 2007, the University of Illinois retired its Indian mascot, Chief Illiniwek. Unlike Little Red, Chief Illiniwek was neither known to be Indian, nor have regalia, nor actually dance powwow, but instead wore inauthentic garb and danced mockingly. However, according to a

February 2018 *New York Times* article, the Chief Illiniwek mascot “still makes appearances around campus” and was said to have been the reason “anti-chief protestors blocked a homecoming parade last October” (Smith). In January 2018, a conflict occurred at the university’s basketball arena when a university media and film professor opposed to the mascot was arrested after trying to “find and film the latest unofficial Chief Illiniwek” (Smith). Complicating matters even further, a former Chief Illiniwek created a campus movement to reinstate the mascot in its official role, called Honor the Chief Society (Smith). As Suzan Shown Harjo points out, the University of Illinois has allowed for such incidents to occur by neither dropping the name “Fighting Illini” nor picking a replacement mascot (qtd. in Smith). This, unlike the University of Oklahoma’s handling of the Little Red issue, has yet to be resolved.

While other universities and schools have followed OU’s lead, Indian mascots still persist in Oklahoma and much of America. Teams such as Major League Baseball’s Cleveland Indians (with mascot Chief Wahoo) and NFL’s Washington Redskins demonstrate how the same stereotypical imagery deemed racist, derogatory, or insensitive toward Indians in some instances has been tolerated, rationalized, or considered admirable in other situations. The Cleveland and Washington teams mythos claim stories attributing “Indian-ness” to their origins; however, the public has criticized both teams throughout the years, one for having a smiling, red-faced caricature and the other for utilizing a name based on bounties placed historically on the skins of Indian men, women, and children. The Cleveland Indians stated they will phase out Chief Wahoo starting in 2019, claiming this for the second time in recent years. As for the Washington team, the NFL commissioner Roger Goodell has placed little pressure on the football organization to change its name. On the other hand, the US Patent and Trademark Office has twice “cancelled the federal trademark registrations... finding that the term disparages native

people,” and despite the fact that “team and league have appealed the decision... members of Congress have introduced a bill to remove the team name” (“Racist Stereotypes and Cultural Appropriation in American College Sports: Changing the Mascot at Dartmouth, Stanford, Oklahoma, and Syracuse”). The University of Oklahoma, unlike these teams, chose to discontinue Little Red, calling the mascot “degrading to Indians.” But what has been the effect of the change? Have conditions improved for Native students and faculty since the removal of Little Red? What about the relationship of the University of Oklahoma with the Native community? How has this improved? And my question, ultimately, is this: When Little Red “danced off into the sunset,” how was the historical narrative of the land that we tell through the pageantry of OU football impacted, particularly in regard to Indians?

“Now Entering the Heart of the Sooner Nation”

The tree leaves turn from green to crimson on a beautiful autumn afternoon in Norman, Oklahoma. Walking through the University of Oklahoma’s campus, fans make their way through a sea of crimson and cream, the crowd decked out in OU’s official school colors. On their trek to the field, fans pass statues of beloved, former coaches and amble through Heisman Park, where statues of some of OU’s Heisman Trophy winners stand, a small display to signify the great legacy the OU football teams have built throughout the years.

As fans march toward the field, a lone voice bellows the call “Boomer!” Instant is the response from hundreds of fellow fans who scream “Sooner!” This practice is one of OU’s most prominent expressions for fans conjuring up school spirit. Especially in football season, it rings throughout campus. Along the journey to the field, fans pass the nearly continuous line of tailgate parties accompanying them along the various pathways to the stadium until they reach the point of stepping into the lines for stadium staff to take their tickets at the entrances. On a

typical Oklahoma game day, a good number of sports fans wear cowboy hats and cowboy boots, a practice that enhances the atmosphere here in Norman, as many tailgate parties are oriented around “Sooner” and Land Run themes, decorated to resemble covered wagons or “schooners,” with some even bringing actual wagons onto campus. Game day transforms the landscape.

Once in the stadium, fans, full of anticipation, crowd to their seats, perhaps stopping by a food vendor or a sporting apparel vendor for OU merchandise, likely emblazoned with the nickname “Sooners” or an image of the schooner. Fans hurry to their seats in time to hear the boom of canons and see the crimson colored rockets shoot though the air, all as a video highlighting some of the OU football players begins to play on a huge monitor above. As the video ends, the view switches to a camera zooming in on the OU players leaving their locker room and passing through a tunnel extending to the inner southeast corner of the stadium. Nearing their exit onto the field, they pass words, not typically visible to spectators, displayed on an interior wall, reading, “Now Entering the Heart of the Sooner Nation” (Image). As the players stampede out onto the field, running down the sidelines on the home (east) side of the field are cheerleaders who carry individual red flags that together spell out “O-K-L-A-H-O-M-A” in white letters, simultaneously on the visitor (west) side of the field, cheerleaders carry individual white flags that spell out “S-O-O-N-E-R-S” in red letters. More cheerleaders take to the field and begin to lead a chant, instructing half of the stadium to yell “Boomer!” and the other half to yell “Sooner!”

The Sooner Stage

The University of Oklahoma’s Owen Field is the stage where the scene is set, and the theatrics of a reenacted land grab take place regularly on Saturdays during the fall football season here in Norman. This performative rhetoric continues to enact conquest and colonization

as football did in the early twentieth century, similar to the ways in which “wild west” shows re-enacted history, as mentioned earlier in this thesis. After every touchdown for the home team, shotguns fire off blanks and smoke fills the air. The guns invoke the start of pageantry performing the historical Oklahoma Land Run itself, signaling the “Sooner Schooner” to dash out on to the field, driven by the “RUF/NEKS and Lil Sis” who act as stand-ins for the entire “Sooner Nation.”

But what is celebrated by this action—a touchdown—makes it clear that football as a game also works this way metaphorically. Here, the scoring of a touchdown is celebrated by a representation of the Land Run—the ultimate signifier for the taking of land in Oklahoma—an event football is similar to in that the team advances the ball up the field, acquiring more of the field or land, yard by yard. On the stage of the field, the actors and these symbols promote a narrative that specifically employs this particular event of settler colonial history. The field signifies the land, Comanchería/Wichita land, then Seminole land in Indian Territory, being “claimed” by the football team, then the RUF/NEKS and Lil Sis with the Sooner Schooner, metaphorically, as well as historically taken by Boomers and Sooners again and again after every touchdown. The crowd, already cheering for the team’s having scored in the game, are then led into cheering for the Land Run through the association of the symbols displayed on the field.

At Owen Field, like any other space, behaviors are dictated by its being made into place through both physical and narrative structuring. The noticeably defined and ordered space of the football field, which is visibly disciplined by the architecture of the stadium, the straight and measured white lines on the green grass, and goal posts, creates a place where only certain behaviors are appropriate at certain times. Consider, for instance, the rules and regulations of the game or appropriate behavior for fans, standing in line, the ritual of standing until the first OU

touchdown, and so on. This demonstrates how the disciplining space into place disciplines people as well. This behavioral modification also includes reactions to the representations of the Land Run, where mascots and cheerleaders lead the crowd's actions and induce audience members to chant with little conscious thought.

While the metaphor most attributed to football is war, here, in Oklahoma, at Owen Field, the war metaphor is paired with a celebration of this taking of the frontier, the culmination in many ways of the years of warfare that preceded the Oklahoma Land Run of 1889 in US history. So not only do we see the football team stand-in for an army, marching down the field, acquiring land by the yard, but after the team scores a touchdown, there is also the commemoration of the Land Run itself with the driving of the Sooner Schooner onto the field. However, when it comes to representations of land claims in this space and of this place, nothing trumps the symbol of a giant US Flag covering nearly the entire University of Oklahoma football field at the September 17, 2016, game with Ohio State that was nationally televised (The Pride of Oklahoma; thedelaos). The overwhelming visual effect of the massive flag, accompanied by the orchestrated performance of the hundreds of humans it took to unfold it, strengthened by the sense of group belonging experienced by the crowd fans dressed in school colors in a football stadium and intensified by the participation of the national audience, led record numbers of people in symbolically celebrating the US victory over Indian nations in colonization, particularly in the creation of the State of Oklahoma from lands reserved for us by treaty after already being dispossessed of much, if not all, of our various tribal homelands.

As a matter of fact, it was celebratory patriotism such as this that gave the University of Oklahoma football team their first name, the "Rough Riders," as a salute to then US President Teddy Roosevelt and his 1st Volunteer Cavalry Rough Riders, who were acclaimed in news

reports that “spurred a nationalistic frenzy” after Roosevelt and his cavalry charged into San Juan Hill, Cuba in 1898, leading the US’s victory in the Spanish-American War (Clark 32). Ironically, Roosevelt ended up having a significant association with Indian and Oklahoma Territories’ becoming one state, as Bob Blackburn, Executive Director of the Oklahoma Historical Society, states, Roosevelt “was probably more involved in the history of Oklahoma than any other president, before or since.” Roosevelt’s work in this regard was primarily politically driven in his role as a Republican as the party did not want more “Democratic senators, especially out of the Old South,” which would have occurred if the “Twin Territories” had been able to come into the Union as two separate states (Boots Kennedy).

Before becoming the “Sooners” in 1908 as mentioned earlier, in 1905, with the coming of OU’s legendary coach Bennie Owens, the football team would begin to employ some of the local history in its symbolism, the team being given the name “Boomers” (Clark 52). This likely had to do with Owen’s own fascination and, more importantly, his participation in what has been called the “greatest horse race in history,” as he personally took part in the Land Run of the Cherokee Strip in 1893, even though “at the age of 17, he was too young to stake a legal claim” (Clark 42). The two terms were already tied together, however, before the “Sooner” designation.

In 1905, as enthusiasm began to build around the football team, a history and physiology student by the name of Arthur M. Alden had adapted the words “Boomer Sooner” to the tune of the Yale University fight song “Boola, Boola”. The next year, the additional “Sooner Born” portion of the song would be modified from the tune of “I’m a Tarheel Born,” a University of North Carolina’s fight song (Keith 124; Clark 46; Harp 16). The combination of the two songs that became OU’s own fight song only begins to demonstrate the dualistic nature of the institution. Furthermore, the first verse of the song—

Boomer Sooner, Boomer Sooner

Boomer Sooner, Boomer Sooner

Boomer Sooner, Boomer Sooner

Boomer Sooner, OK U!

—is representative of the settler. The second verse of the song—

Oklahoma, Oklahoma

Oklahoma, Oklahoma

Oklahoma, Oklahoma

Oklahoma, OK U!

—is representative of the Indian. The third and final verse—

I'm a Sooner born and Sooner bred

And when I die, I'll be Sooner dead

Rah Oklahoma, Rah Oklahoma

Rah Oklahoma, OK U!

—is representative of both, settler and Indian.

Another song played by the university band, The Pride of Oklahoma, is the “most popular and recognizable state song in history,” Rodgers and Hammerstein’s title song to their musical *Oklahoma!* The well-known musical debuted on Broadway in 1943, earned the pair a Pulitzer Prize, and was even recently revealed as Queen Elizabeth II’s favorite piece of music (Fight Songs; “Queen’s 10 Favorite Pieces of Music Revealed”). Interestingly, the musical was based on a play called *Green Grow the Lilacs*, written by Cherokee author Lynn Riggs, set in Claremore, Oklahoma, well within the boundaries of Cherokee Nation. Yet, according to American music scholar Ryan Raul Bañagale, the musical *Oklahoma!* unlike Rigg’s play, makes

no references to Indian Territory, tribal nations, or African Americans “even though one in four cowboys were black.” Bañagale suggests the musical’s antagonist, Jud Fry, then becomes the “embodiment of all things dangerous and dark.” Ultimately Jud’s death, as he falls on his own knife during a fight with protagonist, Curly, symbolizes “Manifest Destiny and a new world order two-stepping its way into the twentieth century.” Bañagale argues the musical can “offer an important window into American culture,” but “it’s on modern audiences to read between the lines when they watch classic musicals – to think about what’s not appearing on stage, and why that might be the case.” I believe this has relevance to my position regarding the absence or removal of a narrative on any stage, here specifically the Sooner Stage, and how important it is “to reclaim the narratives of the past, while maintaining dialogue with the realities of our present moment” (Bañagale).

During the time that the “Boomer Sooner” fight song was created, the University of Oklahoma athletic association established that they would also “handle student yelling at games more systematically” by adding a yell master and a megaphone section at Boyd Field (Keith 125; Clark 46). The official Yell,

Hi rickety whoop-te-do

Boomer Sooner, Okla-U!,

Hi rickety whoop-te-do

Boomer Sooner, Okla-U!

was created in 1895 during the university’s first oratorical contest by members of Sigma Nu (Fight Songs). The OU Chant,

O-K-L-A-H-O-M-A

Our chant rolls on and on!

Thousands strong
Join heart and song
In alma mater's praise
Of campus beautiful by day and night
Of colors proudly gleaming Red and White
'Neath a western sky
OU's chant will never die.
Live on University!

was written in 1936 by Jessie Lone Clarkson Gilkey. During the chant, all fans, students, athletes, and alumni are “encouraged to stand and raise one finger in the air” (Fight Songs). This reifies the disciplining of space through the disciplining of students and fans in such activities as participating in the OU Chant and Yell along with the other practices and rituals that have become “tradition”.

Today crowd participation is directed by the University of Oklahoma Spirit Squad, comprised of OU's Cheerleaders (both co-ed and all-girl squads), OU Pom, the RUF/NEKS and Lil Sis, the costumed horse mascots Boomer and Sooner, and the “historic Sooner Schooner,” who together “support the athletic teams...by generating crowd enthusiasm and actively engaging” with the fans (Sooner Spirit). Cheerleaders and Pom regularly lead the crowd in an organized yelling of “Boomer! Sooner!” while holding up signs that correspond with the words. The individual flags they carry that spell out “O-K-L-A-H-O-M-A” and “S-O-O-N-E-R-S” are in the school colors, crimson and cream, a variation of the colors red and white, the words in fact used to refer to the spring scrimmage, the Red and White Game.

Ironically, the colors “red and white” have the same dualistic nature as did the pairing of intelligence and physical fitness, primitive and modern, and Indian and Settler. They also mirror the dualism of the “Twin Territories,” which at the time of the school’s establishment were still separate, but soon to be legally and performatively joined in the staged marriage ceremony of “Miss Indian Territory” and “Mr. Oklahoma Territory” in 1907 in Guthrie.⁸ These colors also represent a dualism in the state’s population that is projected in the narrative portrayed in history books and contemporaneously to potential tourists. White, or cream, could be viewed as representative of the settler, or “white” people, the Boomers and Sooners of Oklahoma Territory. As red, or crimson, could be viewed as representative of the Indian, or “red” people, the various tribes of Indian Territory.

The flags themselves, like all flags, are used to designate ownership, as raising flags acts performatively as a symbol to become a physical manifestation of claiming land. The fundamental function of a flag is intrinsically tied to the claiming of territory. In the 2017 football season, OU quarterback Baker Mayfield clearly demonstrated this after beating Ohio State in Columbus; he grabbed a flag from one of the cheerleaders and ran a victory lap around the field, gazing triumphantly at the fans in the stadium. Mayfield then planted the red OU flag into the center of the Ohio State “O” insignia at the 50 yard line in the middle of the field, staking his ground and claiming the Ohio State football field for OU. While breaking the pole doing this slightly detracted from the effectiveness of his theatrics, OU fans largely enjoyed Mayfield’s performance. Kelli Stacy in a *Crimson Quarterly* article calls it “a moment of elation” (13).

Along with the rest of the Spirit Squad, the RUF/NEKS and Lil Sis help conduct and participate in the chants, and carry flags along with their Schooner duties. As the Sooner

Schooner is driven by a member of the RUF/NEKS, with Lil Sis riding shotgun, one member of the RUF/NEKS leans backwards, hanging upside down, out of the back of the Schooner while waving an OU flag, as another member of the RUF/NEKS holds his legs to prevent him from falling off the back of the Schooner. Boomer and Sooner, the mascots, also sometimes carry flags and signs while making their way around the stadium and posing for pictures with the crowd. The Spirit Squad as a whole also often act as ambassadors of the university at various alumni, civil, and charitable events (Sooner Spirit).

The Sooner Schooner, the most iconic symbol on the Sooner Stage, is a conestoga or covered wagon. The Schooner was first introduced in the fall of 1964, but did not become the official OU mascot until 1980, after the previous official mascot, Little Red, was banished (Sooner Schooner). The official *Sooner Sports* website describes the Schooner as “reminiscent of the mode of travel used by pioneers who settled Oklahoma Territory around the time of the 1889 Land Run.” The Schooner is drawn by two white Welsh ponies, also called Boomer and Sooner, who are transported more than a hundred miles to Norman from their home at Bartlett Ranch in Sapulpa for each game (“Sooner Schooner”). The spectacle of the Schooner riding out to the field, onto the Sooner Stage, might not appear controversial to many fans, but a portion of Native fans who are conscious of the symbols can recognize as what is celebrated through the imagery: the loss of land through colonization and expansion. However, for many Natives, to fully accept this is to realize that their favorite team, which they have supported most of their lives, continues to commemorate this invasion.

The university’s first mascot, however, was Mex the Dog, who was rescued by Mott Keys, a US Army field hospital medic who was stationed near the Mexican border at Laredo, Texas, during the unrest surrounding the Mexican revolution in 1914. Keys eventually made his

way to OU, bringing with him Mex. As the mascot, one of Mex's main duties was to "keep stray dogs from roaming the field during a game," as back then the "football field was more accessible to non-ticketholders," including canines. Mex's status as a lucky charm was evident from the panic that ensued when he went missing temporarily during a 1924 loss against Drake University (Sooner Schooner). Mex the Dog served as the mascot from 1915 until 1928, when he died of old age; he was so beloved by students and faculty that the university shut down for his procession and funeral, as his small casket was paraded down Boyd Street and through campus and was buried "somewhere under the existing stadium" (Sooner Schooner).

Conclusion: No Longer Seeing Red

At the beginning of this thesis, I described how the land that the field lies on was once a part of buffalo hunting grounds within Comanchería, territory occupied seasonally when needed by Comanches prior to American settlement. Through the process of researching and writing this thesis, I hope I have made a contribution in drawing "a map" of Comanchería and establishing a narrative that includes Nʉmʉnʉʉ (Comanches) and atabitsi (other ally tribes) within the narrative of this field, campus, Norman, and surrounding land, within the "boundaries" of Nʉmʉ sokobi. As Roberto Cintli Rodríguez writes, "Unlike Western maps, Indigenous maps contain not simply geography, but story, history, and narrative" (50). Through using LeAnne Howe's Tribalography, I was able to, through maps, documents, and stories of this land, assert that the University of Oklahoma football field and the land that surrounds it was once Comanche land, unlike what is portrayed in many of the university endorsed narratives of this land as a "barren prairie," unlike as explained by president Boren when he states "that there was nothing here over a hundred years ago" ("The History of the University of Oklahoma: 1890-2015"). The Sooner

narrative is part of the story of this place, but it is not all encompassing. We all have different stories on this land that is now the home of the University of Oklahoma, including football field.

While the name Sooners has been carried by the team since 1908, throughout that time, a Native presence also persisted on the field, through Indian football players and Indian students parading on to the field for homecoming and other special events . . . that is, up until the point the university prohibited the visual representation of an official university endorsed Indian mascot, Little Red. The void left by the absence of Little Red has also largely been the absence of *visible* Native presence on the field. In past years, I took a position against such Indian mascots as “Redskins,” presenting on a panel to remove the name “Redskins” from Oklahoma City Capitol Hill High School. Today, I take into consideration that there are many Bureau of Indian Affairs schools and public schools with high Native student populations where Indians are supportive of and even outright *love* their Indian mascots. Whether or not Indian mascots are ever appropriate is another debate for a later discussion, nonetheless, the loss of Little Red removed a narrative that at one time was parallel to the settler narrative. Whether Little Red portrayed this narrative appropriately or not, at the least, his performance acted as some sort of visualization of the Native narrative in OU football pageantry. Since then, the Native narrative has been removed visually from the usual OU Saturday football celebratory display, and the only thing we are left with is the settler narrative.

Since then, Indian students have continued to come to the University of Oklahoma, and a Native American Studies program was eventually established, one of the demands made by students during the protest against Little Red. The campus includes Indian imagery and highlights its Indian character throughout the entire campus with Allen Houser and Kelly Haney statues, Indian art in nearly every building, floral landscaping designs reminiscent of Native

geometric designs and bead patterns, as well as an architectural style unique to this campus's brick and mortar buildings called "Cherokee gothic." The Indian character has never left campus, It has remained, despite things like the tipi incidents.

Like these incidents, the SAE incident was hurtful and offensive, not only to the African-American community, but to others who could identify and sympathize. To many of the university community, the video was shocking. But some of us were less shocked, somehow knowing these types of incident still occur in our day and age behind closed doors. However, while there is much for to be said regarding the history between the University of Oklahoma and the African-American community, I can only speak from my point of view as a Comanche man. I cannot speak for the OU African-American community. I have come to see a distinct difference in the racism against African-Americans to that of Native Americans. Much more work on that subject remains to be done by scholars, possibly others more well suited for that task.

As disgraceful as the SAE incident was, it also presented a pivotal moment for change, not just for the African-American community at OU, but also for other groups that have faced discrimination on campus. In that regard, I am grateful that then College of Arts and Sciences' Dean Kelly Damphousse took the time to sit down and discuss our concerns as Indian students with a group of which I was part. I was also later thankful for the administration's response to "The University of Oklahoma Native and Indigenous Student Manifesto" that we presented on May 7, 2015 to Dean Damphousse, which included requests for the creation of a Native Nations Center, the elevation of Native American Studies from a program to a department, and the hiring of a tribal liaison. All of these ideas have become realities in the intervening years. The university also spoke out against "Cowboy and Indian" themed parties trending within the Greek

system at the time. Among the concerns that were not addressed fully was the continued use of the term “Sooner”:

CAS should encourage the university to discontinue the use of the moniker ‘Sooners.’ While the Native student body enjoys a sense of pride of attending OU with aspirations of attaining higher education degrees, it is offensive to hear comments about racism, and then hear the use of the word “*Sooner*” as a way to combat racism. “Real Sooners” participated in an illegal event that further displaced Native American people from our land bases. This diminishment of our land bases resulted in social and economic devastation. The recurring use of “*Boomer Sooner*” only promotes and contributes to the idea that this callous behavior toward Native American people was justified, supporting the outdated notion of Manifest Destiny. The mascot was renamed in the past, as changing mainstream cultural norms demonstrated that *Little Red* was clearly offensive. The time has come once again to consider changing the mascot to clarify that the University does not endorse the historical negative treatment of America’s Native people. (2015, 4-5)

After further consideration on the subject of the mascot and nickname “Sooners,” I can say that I do not quite have the same perspective as I did when I first approached the issue. I believe any position or stance that we have in life at a particular moment will eventually shift due to our experiences. This is the case for me in regard to this issue. While entering into my research for this thesis, I was already aware of the fact that Sooners, along with Boomers and the settlers of this land around the parcel on which the University of Oklahoma football field lies, were poor people, struggling to survive in a difficult time, who took advantage of an opportunity

that was sanctioned by the federal government. It is as fruitless to be upset with Sooners and white settlers as it would be to be upset by the impositions that were placed on Comanches by other tribes who were forced to relocate from their own homelands onto Comanchería. The systematic taking of the land was conducted through extra-legal measures perpetrated at the federal level, making the creation of reservations, the dividing of those into Indian allotments, the sale of “surplus” lands, and land runs possible.

This is history of course, the past, but this past that has brought us to where we are now and definitely influences our positions in this community, our economic advantage or disadvantage, and our placements within the local societal structure with its accompanying laws and regulations. Despite past injustices that lead to current inequities, however, my position now is not so much opposition to the nickname “Sooners,” but rather promotion of appropriate representation for Native Americans that more adequately reflects past and current realities on this land.

While the Native presence has remained on the campus itself, promoted is the idea of the University of Oklahoma providing a “Sooner experience” to their students, while becoming a part of the “Sooner Nation” and “Sooner tradition.” While, I am not asking that the term “Sooner” be removed, I do propose that the University of Oklahoma bring back a Native presence to the field through collaborative efforts with the OU stadium directors, Native American Studies Department, American Indian Student Association, Sigma Nu Alpha Gamma, Gamma Delta Pi, and most importantly, tribal nation members, leaders and representatives, bringing tribal nations to participation on the field in an honorary manner, possibly even collaborating on a Native designed commemorative football uniform. Owen Field has been virtually a space absent of Indian visualization up until the 2017 season when Native students

carried tribal flags onto the field by while portion of a Kiowa Flag song was performed. This was an appropriate representation of the Native narrative and of Native presence portrayed to the national audience through the vehicle of football and sports. It is this model, similar to the initial presentations done by the OU Sequoyah Indian Club that started back in the late 1920s during homecoming, that we should be following in the future.

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NOTES

1 Unheard was a movement at OU arose out of concerns that African American students were being silenced in regard to racial grievances and that the number of black faculty members as well as other black personnel who work with students was insufficient. Unheard, which was supported in a number of its actions such as the candlelight vigil and walk by a large and diverse student presence, issued a manifesto, inspiring the “The University of Oklahoma Native and Indigenous Student Manifesto” that I discuss in detail later in the Introduction.

2 Two years later, in January of 2017, Striker was hired as a graduate assistant in Student Life at OU; “he hopes to foster communication among students on social justice issues” (Stoia and Davis 2017, 1).

3 Sooners, the name of the University of Oklahoma’s football team, is also the word for Settler-Colonials who came in before the Oklahoma Land Run.

4 The word *tubookuni* came to mean “college.”

5 Several other Shoshone groups are also in present day southeastern California, across central and eastern Nevada, northwest Utah, and southern Idaho.

6 A more comprehensive discussion of this subject than the parameters of this current one allows would take into account an intertwined history, similarities, and differences in these two bodies of practice. Among things key to that discussion would be analysis of the extent to which North America participated in global slave trade and how that practice was conducted. This discussion would also need to include an understanding of tribal practices in Africa regarding slavery and an understanding of tribal practices here. Contextualizing the various forms of slavery in both hemispheres within a time line of global imperialism and settler colonialism, including the information that the first TransAtlantic instances of slave trade were west hemisphere to east,

Indigenous Americans having been kidnapped from their people and taken back to Europe as captives and that the first African slaves were brought to the North American continent in 1619, would give a much larger understanding of the ways in which colonial and settler colonial practices have impacted African American and American Indigenous peoples in similar and differing ways. Study is necessary of the early colonial and settler colonial eras that examines the shared condition of slavery of blacks and Natives who worked and lived together and often intermarried. Beyond a doubt, there is much, much more that needs to be said about the construct of race within the economy of empire and the impact the genocidal methodologies of imperialism that affect both groups today through intergenerational, post-traumatic stress disorder; moreover, there is no way to have that conversation without a much franker discussion of the role of violence in both. Both groups are also impacted by lasting social and economic impacts and increased risk factors for being both victims of violence and oppressive practices in a material world created and enabled by the systemic racism produced by racializing bodies in order to enslave, remove, and eradicate for territorial growth and development. Indigenous slavery was not generally a permanent state of being. The time period in which a person was “othered,” not particularly racialized, was usually transitory, along with the violent and demeaning treatment one might receive. Captives either escaped, died, or became part of the people who had captured them and gained all of the rights that accorded.

7 OU has had one of the longest running annual university powwows in the nation since the first one, which was held in 1914 (“OU American Indian Student Association”).

8 This moment reenacted in Guthrie yearly and at the Capitol in Oklahoma City in 2007 for the state’s Centennial Celebration.