UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

TO PROVE WHO YOU ARE: FREEDMEN IDENTITIES IN OKLAHOMA

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

KRISTY FELDHOUSEN-GILES
Norman, Oklahoma
2008

TO PROVE WHO YOU ARE: FREEDMEN IDENTITIES IN OKLAHOMA

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

BY

_____
Dr. Morris Foster, Chair

_____
Dr. R. Warren Metcalf

_____
Dr. Circe Sturm

_____
Dr. Sean O'Neill

_____
Dr. Lesley Rankin-Hill

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the members of my committee for their review and guidance on this dissertation, including Dr. Daniel Littlefield, and especially committee chair Morris Foster for his guidance throughout my graduate career.

My gratitude goes to the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research and the American Philosophical Society, Phillips Fund, who provided funding for stages of this research project.

Those people who contributed to my research are greatly appreciated. Without their help, this research would not have been possible, and so I would like to take the time to individually thank those who took the time to help me. From the Descendants of Freedmen Association, my gratitude goes to Marilyn Vann, Rhonda Grayson, Ron Graham, Gail Jackson, and Rose Mamaghanyzadeh. I would also like to thank Elnora Anderson, Pauletta Herbert, Garry and Kim Raymond, Cecil and Lynetta Jones, Glenda Marshall, Wilma Nash, Georgia Clark, Rev. O.J. Jackson, Ivory Grayson, Saundra Foster, Vandell Downing, Vicki Robertson, Albert Carolina, L.C. Frederick, Vera Barnes, Melba Holt, Naquesha Johnson, and David Cornsilk.

Special thanks go to the North Tulsa Historical Society, who took interest and great care in my work, and contributed greatly to this study. I would especially like to thank Robert Littlejohn, Fred Johnson, Curtis Lawson, Lorenzo Vann, Al Dunn, Lucy Allen, Hattie Cullors, and Vashti Butler.

I have eternal appreciation for all the people who welcomed me, spent their time talking with me, and driving me around the countryside to show me historical sites and to introduce me to others. Here, Damon and Kathy Foreman, Levester

McKesson, Josephine Wallace Brown, Clarence “Melvin” Delt, Robert Littlejohn, and Leroy “Red” Foreman deserve special thanks. I would also like to thank the many others who shared their knowledge with me, including Rev. Melvin Williams, Benjamin “Skinner” Benton, Roscoe Foreman, Jr., Ghian Foreman, Javin Foreman, Raymond Foreman, Lola Mae “Billie” Foreman, Rose Youngblood, Gertie Barber, Arnett Hill, Prince and Raymond Taylor, and Marvin Brant.

I would also like to thank Denay Burris, Henry Burris, Lula Shoate, Henrietta McKesson, Harold Gist, Brenda and Louis Lewis, Victoria Crutchfield, Donna and Jeff Simpson, Glenn Scott, Calvin Eubanks, Oscar Eubanks, Jimi and Margo Frazier, Verdie Triplett, Curtis and Helen Lee, Ester Lee Clayton, Harvey Shoate, Marvail Lewis, Willie and Angela Phillips, Hudy Lee, Mitchell Minner, Barbara Robbalaa, Lula Steele, and Dennis Peterson.

All of these people, and many others not named here, welcomed me into their communities and their homes, and gave freely of their time. This project was the result of their efforts as well as my own.

Finally, I would like to thank my family, Tom and Cindy Feldhousen, Adam and Elizabeth Feldhousen, my husband Eric Giles, as well as John and Marcella Giles for their continued support.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: To Prove Who You Are 1
Foundations…….2
Post Bellum Government and Activism……15
The Dawes Commission and Race in the New State of Oklahoma……...20
Cultural Diversity, Racial Designations, and Identity Transformations…26
At the Brink of the Twentieth Century…….....32

Chapter 2: Foreman, Oklahoma.....43
From Cherokee Nation to Oklahoma: Foreman and the Statehood Era…56
Oklahoma Statehood and the Early Twentieth Century……62
Community Decline and Land Loss……..83

Chapter 3: Fort Coffee, Oklahoma.....102
The Civil War and Emancipation…….110
The Struggle for Citizenship……....113
Towards Oklahoma Statehood…….116
Oklahoma Statehood and the Early Twentieth Century in Fort Coffee...123
Race and Identity in the Twentieth Century……...….126
Integration and Critical Change……...139
From Integration into the Twenty-First Century…….144
Connecting to History……..154
Searching for the Evidence……..164

Chapter 4: Freedmen Activism.....170
African American Histories…….173
Lost Histories, New Connections……182
Activism in the Era of Increasing Tribal Sovereignty…….184
Renewed Activism……...194

Chapter 5: Conclusion.....227
Blood in Quantums and Drops…….232
The Persistence of Multiracialness……...235
Assumptions About the Indigenous…….238
In Search of the Past……244
Proving Who They Are……252

Bibliography……...255

Notes……..263

List of Illustrations

Dawes Commission map of Foreman……..58

Allotment map, Foreman area…….....59

Allotment map, Fort Coffee area……..…….121

Chapter 1

To Prove Who You Are

"Now, I never thought I'd live to see the day, because it took me quite a few years to realize what they were talking about. Now the elders of my family used to always say, 'One of these days you'll have to prove who you are.' And with all this litigation with these various nations, these various tribes, I see exactly what they were talkin' about."[1]

Robert Littlejohn

Today's political contests over the tribal citizenship of those people labeled "Freedmen" over one-hundred years ago have created a critical situation concerning identity, one leaving Freedmen in a situation where they must prove just who they are. But who are Freedmen? Amidst competing histories, and conflicting constructions of indigeneity, race, and culture, it seems nearly impossible to prove an identity that ostensibly challenges all such categories. Oklahoma's history books discuss the history of Native Americans prior to statehood, mentioning African Americans as their slaves and no more. Museums, literature, and historic portrayals such as those of the Trail of Tears are specifically non-Black. All of these representations of Oklahoma history over the course of the twentieth century have left African Native Americans and Freedmen people out of the picture, creating a new history of which they were not a part. Consequently, after over a century of exclusion, Freedmen and African Native Americans have to struggle to prove they belong in these histories.

Resisting common understandings of race, indigeneity and history, people of African Native American and Freedmen ancestry have their own understandings of their identities, ones that are rooted in diverse histories across centuries of

relationships and experience. The following is a brief history of Freedmen and African Native Americans, and a foundation for the larger study of those Freedmen identities that people continue to struggle every day to prove.

Foundations

Freedmen origins lie in the first encounters between Africans, Native Americans, and Europeans in the American Southeast. Native Americans and Africans forged lasting relationships in the pre-colonial period, yet the beginnings of these relationships remain shrouded in mystery. Historian Gary Zellar, in his historical account of African Creeks, cites an oral history telling of an African shipwreck along the southeastern coast of the American mainland years prior to European arrival in the area, the marooned Africans intermarrying and living the remainder of their lives among the native people (Zellar 2007: 3). Some African Native American people today believe that the Southeast was first peopled by Africans themselves, supported in their beliefs by the work of Ivan Van Sertima.[2] This work is largely disregarded by most scholars, and historians place the first known meeting of Africans and Native Americans at 1540, with Hernando de Soto's expedition into the Americas. It was from at least this point that African-Native American relationships began to evolve over the following centuries in freedom and in bondage, in culture and in politics.

Throughout the colonial period and extending into the post-removal era, race relations and the practice of slavery differed greatly not only from tribe to tribe, but

there existed also a great diversity of these attitudes and practices within each tribe. People of African descent began relationships with individuals and communities of the Five Tribes in a number of ways. They entered as free people who intermarried or were adopted into tribal communities, as runaway slaves from the American colonies and states, and as enslaved people who were bound to particular individuals or communities. Their beginnings in these communities are crucial to the development of Black Indian, Maroon, Native Black, and Freedmen histories. These diverse foundations were built upon through a multiplicity of unique histories that shaped these relationships and communities in specific ways. The varied experiences of Africans, slaves, and mixed-race people in each of these tribal communities provided a base for unique histories and identities that would be constructed throughout the following centuries.

As slavery developed in the American colonies and the colonists pressed further into the American interior, the people of what would become the Cherokee, Muscogee Creek, Choctaw, and Chickasaw Nations became familiarized with its practice. They also came into contact with the institution of slavery through their contacts with enslaved people themselves. Many Native Americans were forced into slavery alongside enslaved African people, and enslaved Africans escaped to Native American towns and intermarried. This continued despite colonists', and later Americans', attempts to separate Native Americans from people of African descent in order to prevent their collusion in attacking them (Nash 1974:286-288; Willis 1963).

The practice of slavery was not new to the Southeastern tribes; however, the race-based plantation-style slavery practiced by American colonists differed greatly

from the tribes' own traditional slavery systems. Traditionally, enslaved people were captives who were taken in war, and at times a slave may have been a person belonging to a clan who had murdered someone from another clan. A person from the offending clan, or the murderer, was obligated to go to the family of the deceased. The family could choose whether to kill the person as punishment, to keep him/her as a slave, or to adopt him/her as a family member. Enslaved people however were not treated as property, and it is likely that children of the enslaved had no degraded status (McLoughlin 1974: 371; Zellar 2007: 4-5). As colonization developed in the Southeast and the American demand for slaves increased, war intensified among tribes as they attempted to capture people and sell them to Europeans as slaves (Kehoe 1992: 190). It followed that as slavery developed and Africans began being used as slaves, Indians began by incorporating Africans in the same way that they had traditionally used slaves.

Relationships between Seminoles and people of African descent developed differently than in the other southeastern tribes. Seminole communities established important associations with Africans who had escaped from plantations further north, fleeing to the relative freedom of Spanish Florida. Seeking protection from slave-catchers intent on returning them to their former masters, these Africans and African Americans allied with Seminole communities, and established independent communities nearby. These people were joined by free Blacks, and later by enslaved people who were given to Seminole chiefs by American and European leaders (Mulroy 2007:7-12).

Historian Kevin Mulroy maintains that the people of African descent in Seminole communities were maroon peoples, akin to other communities in the Americas where formerly enslaved people established independent and culturally distinct communities in the bush outside of colonial communities.[3] A separate Seminole maroon language blended from African, Muskogean, and European languages, distinct African-Seminole cultural patterns, and separate communities distinguished the maroons from Seminoles, although they were close neighbors and allies. When slavery developed among the Seminole, it was embedded within traditional Seminole forms of chiefly tribute, and did not approximate southern American plantation-style slavery. Instead, people who were considered Seminole slaves lived in separate communities and paid tribute to their masters. Although racial ideologies and American slavery practices began to influence Seminole masters in the 1800s, the fundamentally Seminole system of slavery remained little changed until emancipation (Mulroy 2007).

Slavery in the Muscogee Creek, Cherokee, Choctaw, and Chickasaw nations also had origins in traditional practices of captivity. In the Creek Nation, early slaves tended communal fields in Creek towns, and similar practices characterized slavery in the towns of other tribes. However, southern American slavery eventually had great influence on these nations. An influx of Scottish and Irish traders in the colonial period who married Native women of chiefly lineage led to the development of an aristocracy of mixed-blood White-Creeks who took on the Southern practices of slaveholding. By the late 1700s, some individual Native families, mainly but not limited to mixed White-Native American families, owned several enslaved people of

African descent. Slaveholding was in part a response to a shift from hunting to agriculture brought on by farming programs directed towards these tribes. As agricultural practices developed from traditional small-scale farming to large-scale plantations, many individuals realized the need for the labor and knowledge of enslaved Black people who knew how to farm. For the most part, those Native and Native-White families that were more heavily influenced by Euro-American practices, such as slavery and Christianity, separated themselves politically and residentially from others in their tribes who opposed adoption of these aspects of culture.[4]

American pressure on the tribes to give up their sovereignty and lands led to the Indian Removal Act of 1830, which paved the way for the tribes' forced moves to Indian Territory west of the Mississippi River. Over the following decade, the tribes moved to their new homes in Indian Territory, bringing the people they enslaved and other possessions with them. At the time of removal, the vast majority of tribal citizens did not own slaves, and although the numbers of slaveowners and enslaved people within the tribes would grow while in Indian Territory, tribal slaveowners always represented a minority of their national populations.

The practices and experiences of slavery differed greatly by tribe, as well as by region, community, and family. In the Muscogee Creek, Cherokee, Choctaw, and Chickasaw tribes, elite individuals farmed great expanses of land with the labor of fifty or more slaves. In most cases like these, enslaved people worked the lands of their masters, at the same time tending their own patches of farmland and being relatively self-sufficient. On Creek plantations, men would chop cotton, raise corn

and other vegetables, cut rails and work on construction of cabins and other buildings (Baker 1996: 30-31). Mary Grayson, a former slave of Mose Perryman recounted,

> "We slaves didn't have a hard time at all before the War. I have had people who were slaves of white folks back in the old states tell me that they had to work awfully hard and their masters were cruel to them sometimes, but all the Negroes I knew who belonged to Creeks always had plenty of clothes and lots to eat and we all lived in good log cabins we built. We worked the farm and tended to the horses and cattle and hogs, and some of the older women worked around the owner's house, but each Negro family looked after a part of the fields and worked the crops like they belonged to us" (Baker 1996:172-173).

Enslaved people throughout Indian Territory did similar work, farming mainly cotton and corn on their masters' land under their own direction while also tending their own gardens near their living quarters (Baker 1996). However, throughout each tribal nation, the sizes of farms, and the number of slaves in each area varied considerably; some enslaved people labored on plantations with one-hundred other slaves, while others worked small farms with five family members. Additionally, the practice of slavery itself in each tribe was diverse, running the continuum from American-style plantation slavery to traditional tribal practices of war captivity, thus creating a diverse set of experiences for enslaved people in each nation, and also within each nation.

The cultural lives of slaves varied widely as well, not only from tribe to tribe, but within tribes. Some enslaved people of elite White-Indian families most likely practiced tribal versions of Christianity and spoke mainly English, as did the families to which they belonged. Many enslaved people were familiar with their tribes' cultures, learned native medicines, and watched tribal social and cultural activities.

However, in many cases, these activities were separate from slave life, and masters were strict with the comings and goings of their slaves. As former Cherokee slave Morris Sheppard described,

> Us Cherokee slaves seen lots of green corn shootings and de like of dat, but we never had no games of our own. We was too tired when we come in to play any games. We had to have a pass to go any place to have singing or praying, and den they was always a bunch of patrollers around to watch everything we done. Dey would come up in a bunch of about nine men on horses and look at all our passes, and if a negro didn't have no pass dey wore him out good and made him go home. Dey didn't let us have much enjoyment (Baker 1996: 377).

At the same time, others allowed enslaved people relative freedom. Many of the enslaved people in Indian Territory were immersed in traditional cultural systems, including language, foodways, and spirituality. The Works Progress Administration's interview with Lucinda Davis, former slave of Tuskaya-Hiniha, demonstrates how many Creek slaves were immersed in Creek culture and language. Ms. Davis spoke Creek, as her master could not speak English. She helped prepare Creek foods like green corn, ash cakes, boiled greens, deer and turkey meat, and sofki. She related her knowledge of Creek stomp dances, ceremonies like Green Corn, funeral practices, as well as some of the folklore relating to death:

> Every time dey have a funeral dey always a lot of de people say, 'Didn't you hear de stikini squalling in de night?' 'I hear dat stikini all de night!' De 'stikini' is de screech owl, and he suppose to tell when anybody going to die right soon. I hear lots of Creek people say dey hear de screech owl close to de house, and sho' nuff somebody in de family die soon (Baker 1996: 111).

Enslaved peoples' experiences in the Indian Territory thus ranged from being raised in traditional tribal cultures to American-style plantation slavery, and from strict supervision to relative freedom.

Throughout the Indian Territory, race was of varying consequence in the lives of enslaved people and people of African ancestry. As in all other aspects of life, racial ideology and experience differed depending on tribe, region, family, and circumstance. Race was traditionally of no consequence to people of the Five Tribes, as clan membership was the only determinant of who was and who was not a Seminole, Creek, Cherokee, Choctaw, or Chickasaw. However, much of the population in the latter four tribes began to adopt American race consciousness as slavery continued to develop and as Whites became increasingly present and influential in the nations. Treatment of people of African descent in the tribes also varied by community and tribe; while each tribe had some form of Black codes, laws were rarely enforced in many areas.[5]

In the Creek Nation, despite anti-Black laws determining citizenship, Creek towns continued to determine citizenship in traditional Creek methods. In this way, a child followed the clan designation of his or her mother if she was Creek. It was in this way that many people in the wealthy, slave-owning elite section of Creek society came to possess African ancestry themselves. African ancestry was of varying consequence in elite circles. For some, it was a source of shame, and for others it seemed to be an inconsequential part of their identity, as it did not hinder their political ascension. Yet, it could be a point of contention used by political opponents (Saunt 2005). It was obviously not contradictory or problematic in the Creek Nation

for a person to be both multiracial and a slave-owner. For instance, Pleasant Porter, a multiracial Creek with African ancestry, was quite a harsh slave-owner according to former slave Tony Carolina. "If no one moved quick enough for him when he wanted something while he was in bed, he always had a long switch nearby him which he used to whip them with. My mother said he used to whip her even if she did do all that he asked her to do."[6]

African Creeks were integral to town life in the Creek Nation, as many "traditional" Creeks and Blacks continued the interracial relationships that had always characterized everyday life, despite a growing national focus on race. Silas Jefferson, known in Creek as *Hotulko Micco*, was half Creek and half African and served as Chief of the Wind Clan, and was Town King of Taskigi. Frank Speck referred to the growing number of Black Creeks in the town of Taskigi at the turn of the century, stating,

> "Nowadays it is very hard to say how many Creeks class themselves as Taskigi; but there are probably not many more than 150, and of these it is highly improbable that any are of pure Indian blood. The admixture of white and negro blood has proceeded so far since the close of the eighteenth century that the number of unquestionably pure Indians in the Creek Nation is very small indeed. The younger generations are much more visibly of mixed race than their elders. Yet despite this, and the general decay of their material and ceremonial culture, the language is rigidly but unconsciously preserved by the natives almost without exception. It is true that many of those whose features are characteristically negroid are proficient only in the Creek tongue and genuinely exhibit in sentiment all the peculiarities of Indians" (Speck 1974:107).

Like other anthropologists of his day, Speck seemed to associate the decline of culture with increased intermarriage with Whites and Blacks. Also acting as a salvage ethnologist, he focused on material culture and ceremonial life as it existed prior to its "decay," rather than exploring the cultural changes taking place. However, Speck's comment illustrates the integral nature of Black-Creek relationships at the turn of the century. Throughout the antebellum era in the Creek Nation, the Creek government continually developed new Black Codes that for example, forced free Blacks to choose Creek owners, prohibited Black-Creek intermarriage, and denied citizenship to Creeks born to Creek mothers of more than half African blood (Littlefield 1979; Zellar 2007:40), but as evidenced by accounts of town life, these laws had little effect on the majority of Black-Creek relationships. Blacks and Creeks continued to intermarry, and most Blacks – whether they were considered slaves, free Blacks, or Black Creeks – continued to live with the same rights they had always possessed in many Creek towns.

Similar patterns dominated the Cherokee, Choctaw, and Chickasaw nations in that there was a great deal of diversity in racial ideologies and the enforcement of strictures based on race. In these nations, however, there was much less intermarriage than in the Creek Nation, and a greater degree of White intermarriage paired with a growing influence of White Southern society led to more solid racial hierarchies (Krauthamer 2000; Littlefield 1980; May 1996:45; Miles 2005). In the Choctaw Nation, it can be seen from antebellum Choctaw laws and personal communications that many slave owners' attitudes toward slaves and people of African descent were consistent with those of slave owners in the states. Sampson Pitchlynn's feelings

clearly mirror those of White southerners at the time, as illustrated in an 1860 letter to his uncle, Chief Peter Pitchlynn, who was temporarily residing in Washington D.C.:

> "I see that the House of Representatives of the United States of America is not organized owing to several puerperal causes – most prominent of them seem to be Niggerism.
>
> "If the "Buck Nigger" can not be well vomited out from the halls of Congress, let every politician who owes his election in some way or other to his good name acknowledge his power and suffer him to be a Speaker of the House, so long no other decent white folk can not reach the chair (on account of the Nigger who is so much in the way of every body)."[7]

Similar attitudes were common throughout the elite sections of Chickasaw and Cherokee society as well. Despite this strong anti-Black sentiment however, slavery and intermarriage at times constituted a gray area in understanding race, status, slavery, and women, as Tiya Miles recounted in the history of Cherokee man Shoe Boots and his slave/wife Doll. In this case, the lines dividing slave from Cherokee, and slave from family member, were not always so clear, and people occupied a seemingly ambiguous status between kin and slave (Miles 2005). In countless other instances in the Cherokee, Choctaw, and Chickasaw nations, as in the United States, Indian and Intermarried White masters fathered children by their Black slaves. In most cases, these offspring would be considered slaves. However, it is important to note that in each nation, there were exceptions to this rule, as well as cases of intermarriage between free Blacks and Indian people.[8] Consequently, there was a diversity of Black – Indian relationships; the attitudes of slaveholders and other elites concerning race and African Americans in particular were no doubt very different from Indians who had little to do with slave ownership or national political life.

The lives of the enslaved would change drastically in the 1860s in both Indian Territory and the United States. When the Civil War came to the Indian Territory, each of the Five Tribes were divided in their loyalties and joined military combat on both Union and Confederate sides. The Choctaw and Chickasaw nations' governments joined forces with the Confederacy, while the Cherokee Nation government attempted to remain neutral for as long as possible, eventually joining in with the Confederacy. Both the Creek and Seminole nation governments became divided over the Civil War, with national leaders choosing to support alternate sides. Enslaved people of each nation also joined the fray on opposing sides, although the vast majority fought with Union forces (Abel 1915). After the war, the United States government sought to re-negotiate its treaties with the Five Tribes. This culminated in the treaties of 1866, which ceded lands, established railroad rights-of-way, and freed slaves if they had not already been freed, in addition to pledging tribal loyalty to the United States. In each of these treaty negotiations, both Loyal and Confederate parties of the tribes met to establish peace and to work out the new treaty terms. The Seminole, Creek, and Cherokee treaties of 1866 provided for the adoption and extension of citizenship rights to freed slaves, despite dissent from the Confederate factions (Mulroy 2007: 196-198; Perdue 1979:141-145; Zellar 2007: 88-90). However, limitations were imposed on this citizenship. The Creek Treaty of 1866 stipulated that in order to be considered citizens, Creek Freedmen who were residing outside of the nation must return within one year of the treaty date. Likewise, the Cherokee, who had officially freed their slaves in 1863, signed a treaty that limited the time for Freedmen to return to the nation to six months from the treaty date (Miles

2004: 757). Return to their homes proved impossible for many Freedmen who had been held in captivity in Texas during the war, or who had left the nations to avoid the war. Many were not informed about the deadline itself, as the war's destruction had shut down lines of communication and travel throughout Indian Territory. Many more Freedmen were impoverished after emancipation and did not have the means to move their families hundreds of miles back to the nations.[9] Consequently, Freedmen were prevented from returning to the nations by a number of important factors. The deadline would unfortunately have implications for many Freedmen later when the Dawes Commission determined the final citizenship for the Creek and Cherokee nations.

The Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations, owing to the great hostility toward their slaves and former slaves, were given different terms in their dealings with the United States. After the close of the war, in August 1865, the tribes signed a treaty at Fort Smith, Arkansas in which the United States demanded the abolition of slavery and the cession of land. Six months after the end of the Civil War, in October 1865, Choctaw and Chickasaw slaves were finally emancipated. Before this time, they continued to labor as slaves. In the Choctaw Nation, the government enacted legislation requiring former slaves to remain with their former master or select a new employer, signing a written contract. Those without contracts would be considered vagrant and arrested, their labor being sold to the highest bidder. The Chickasaw Nation passed similar codes (Krauthamer 2000: 222-225). In 1866, a treaty was made jointly with the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations that ceded the Leased District to the United States. A payment of $300,000 would be given the nations for this land provided they adopt

their freedmen as citizens. If the nations did not adopt their freedmen within two years, the United States would use the funds to remove the Freedmen from the nations (Littlefield 1980: 39-40).

Post-bellum Government and Activism

Both the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations were hesitant to adopt the Freedmen, and while the nations sought a resolution between one another and with the United States, the Freedmen were subject to continued threats and violence, theft of their land improvements, and murder among other hardships, and had no means of obtaining justice without citizenship. The two-year deadline for adoption passed and no action was taken by the nations, and in the absence of citizenship, Freedmen mobilized in order to secure their rights. Choctaw Freedmen held mass meetings in the three districts of the Choctaw Nation, many being threatened and arrested for holding or attending these meetings (Krauthamer 2000: 240-249). At these gatherings, Freedmen discussed their lack of citizenship and wrote memorials to Congress concerning their non-existent rights and continued threats and violence against them.

The Choctaw Nation was finally pressured to adopt their freedmen in 1883, but the Chickasaw Nation never adopted their freedmen as citizens. Even after adoption by the Choctaw Nation however, Choctaw Freedmen continued to be treated unequally. Freedmen continued to organize committees to address their protests to the Office of Indian Affairs. The town of Grant in the southeastern corner of the

Choctaw Nation became an area of activism, a community of Freedmen who had been slaves on the large Choctaw and Chickasaw plantations along the Red River.[10] In 1897, Reverend Wiley Homer, as chairman of the Choctaw and Chickasaw Freedmen Committee made this fervent plea:

> We are the committee in convention as colored people of the Choctaw freedmen, do hereby make application to you for help and guidance in regards to the Dawes Commissions and Choctaw agreement, they have left the colored people out entirely in regards to schools and money. All we can see is the promise of that 40 acres of land. Now the poor colored people of this nation has no one to represent them, they are poor of this world's goods, they have no money, and the Choctaws and the Chickasaws knows all this when they made this agreement, the Choctaws knew that they had adopted the freedmen as citizens of this nation. We are under their laws we obey and rule by those laws. We wrote here by the direction of the laws of this nation, then we are drawn up and whipt [sic] and shot until we are dead by those laws.
>
> Therefore we humbly ask you to put this matter before the Indian Office at Washington before it approved. We are only as beasts to be led to the slotter [sic] or as a lamb before a sharer [sic].[11]

Freedmen throughout the nation organized in this manner, demonstrating awareness of the agreements between the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations and the United States, as well as the rights they had been guaranteed.

For the Chickasaw Freedmen, threats, intimidation, and theft of property lasted for almost forty years. The Chickasaw Nation repeatedly asked the United States to remove the Chickasaw Freedmen from the nation, yet the United States took no action. Black migration from the states was rapidly increasing the Black population of the Chickasaw Nation, and the growing numbers of Freedmen led the

Chickasaws to fear that if they adopted them, they would constitute a majority in the government (Littlefield 1980: 144-146).

In the Cherokee Nation, Freedmen had voting rights, government representation, and access to schools and national payments. Freedmen citizens were an important part of the Cherokee Nation's political picture as Cherokee politicians courted the Freedmen vote at Freedmen picnics throughout the Cherokee Nation (Littlefield 2006). However, many Freedmen faced difficulty and discrimination in exercising some of their guaranteed rights. Because the nation was divided in sentiment concerning their adoption, Freedmen had to constantly appeal to the United States for their intervention in securing equal rights (Littlefield 1978). Like the Choctaw and Chickasaw Freedmen, Cherokee Freedmen could be targets of racial violence and also subject to classification as intruders in the Cherokee Nation because of their contentious citizenship. As intruders, Freedmen's improvements on lands were subject to confiscation, and Freedmen families could be expelled from the lands they had worked for years, having to leave the farms, homes, and crops they had labored over in their efforts to survive after finally being freed. Their constant struggles led to activism and the organization of Freedmen networks across the Cherokee Nation. Freedmen in each of the Cherokee districts met to discuss their problems and to write letters, sign petitions, and promote their causes.[12]

Integration of freedmen into the Creek and Seminole Nation governments was much more successful. In the Creek Nation, new towns were created for the purpose of Freedmen representation in the Creek government.[13] Freedmen from these areas were elected to the House of Kings and the House of Warriors to represent their

people in the Creek Nation government. In the Seminole Nation, two new bands were created for the purposes of representing Seminole Freedmen in the national government. In each of these tribes, Freedmen had all rights of citizenship, including voting rights, access to schools, and rights to national payments (Mulroy 2007: 200-223; Zellar 2007: 90-114). Freedmen in these nations had meaningful influence in culture and politics following emancipation.

While African Native Americans and Freedmen throughout Indian Territory experienced hardships due to racism, race hierarchies in the territory were quite different from those in the United States. Relatively few Indians had been slaveholders, and Indian Territory was mainly a land of Indians and Blacks, with few Whites in the years following emancipation. Rigid racial structures and hypodescent rules were not in place as they were in the southern states. For the most part, status was determined by traditional matrilineal kinship patterns, although as more Whites infiltrated Indian Territory and statehood loomed in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the status of Black Indians declined. Most historical studies of Freedmen, Blacks, and race in general in Indian Territory tend to emphasize the absence of rigid racial hierarchies. However, this is a distinction that is fraught with contradiction. The presence of Black deputies and Black tribal council members, the positive relationships between Blacks and Indians, intermarriage and the prominence of some Black Indian families, attest to the fact that race was not a determinant of status in the tribes. Blacks in Indian Territory were able to achieve power, wealth, and status impossible in most areas of the United States. However, this must be considered alongside the reality of segregation laws and racial violence in the tribes. At the same

time that Blacks in Indian Territory were vital parts of Indian societies, governments, and ceremonial life, they suffered discrimination, violence, and segregation due to racism.

Freedmen and people of African descent in each of the nations had unique situations in the post-bellum era, ranging from high-status positions in tribal government, to a constant struggle for rights, and then to non-existent citizenship. Each of these histories shaped Freedmen of each tribe in unique ways, forming specific identities that would serve as roots for these people in years to come. Regardless of these histories and the status of Black people at this time however, a growing racial consciousness and increasingly rigid racial system was a threat to everyone of African descent in the Indian Territory.

The relatively new and tenuous racial system that abhorred Blacks would be virtually set in stone at the end of the century with the work of the Dawes Commission and then Oklahoma statehood. Despite the great diversity of Freedmen and Black Indian experience and status in the Five Tribes during the nineteenth century, the processes of Dawes enrollment and Oklahoma statehood at the turn of the twentieth century would have a homogenizing effect on these diverse peoples. Through racial classification and legal categorization, Freedmen and Black Indians of all backgrounds would soon face similar circumstances in everyday experience, ones that would have lasting effects in the twentieth century.

The Dawes Commission and Race in the New State of Oklahoma

In the 1890s, the Five Tribes were feeling intense pressure from the federal government to divide up their tribal domains in an allotment system, and to relinquish their sovereignty to become part of the new state of Oklahoma. The Dawes Severalty Act of 1887 was the foundation for tribal allotment, and was the product of the federal government's vision of "civilizing" Indians through dissolving the traditional system of communal landholding, which was seen as a barrier to assimilation. The communal land system would be replaced by the division of the tribal reservation into individual parcels, which would be allotted to each tribal citizen. Each individual would thus be entered into the American system of capitalism and would be inclined to improve or farm his or her land by adopting American agricultural practices. This process was seen as a solution to the "Indian Problem" at the turn of the century (Prucha 1986: 224-241).

The Dawes Act did not apply to the Five Civilized Tribes, but the federal government soon sought to apply similar allotment policies to Indian Territory. In addition to the promise of "civilizing" these nations, allotment would be the major step in the federal government's opening of this land to non-Indian settlement, and in the creation of the state of Oklahoma. Each of the tribes fought the processes leading up to statehood and most citizens were staunchly against allotment, knowing that it would lead to mass alienation of land and the surrender of sovereignty.[14]

In order to deal with the special case of Indian Territory, the Dawes Commission was established by Congress in 1893 to negotiate with the tribes.

Despite its efforts, the tribes refused to ratify any agreements concerning allotment or statehood, continuing to look to their treaties that ensured their land tenure. In response, the federal government passed the Curtis Act in 1898, which effectively dissolved the tribal courts and gave the Dawes Commission the power to create rolls of the tribal citizens for the purposes of allotment (Carter 1999: 1-38). This act was a final blow to tribal sovereignty and to the treaty agreements that the federal government had made with the tribes not even a century earlier, promising them governance of their lands in Indian Territory. The tribes now had no choice in allotment and statehood, and in typical paternalistic fashion, Congress was now the final authority on who was, and who was not, a tribal citizen.

The creation of what were to be known as the Dawes Rolls invoked cultural, racial, biological, and legal frameworks in determining "Indianness." Made up of Americans appointed by the federal government, the Dawes Commission worked to produce the most accurate tribal rolls possible, using prior tribal rolls and attempting to adhere to tribal citizenship laws. The tribes also created their own commissions to the Dawes Commission, in an effort to have some control over the enrollment process. Indians were not defined solely by possession of Indian "blood," a notorious identifier of the Dawes era, but also by tribal laws concerning residency in the tribal nations, length of time resident in the nations, and the records of individuals on past tribal rolls. Accordingly, the Dawes Commission interviewed each applicant as to their tribal ancestry, how long they had been living in the nation, and looked for support for their claims on previous tribal rolls. Those with questionable status were asked to appear before the Dawes Commission, where more specific questions about

their ancestry and residency were asked, and where other witnesses – acquaintances, family, and neighbors – were called to testify to the authenticity of their citizenship.[15] Despite the great lengths to which the Dawes Commission went in creating accurate citizenship rolls, it is alleged that many citizens were not enrolled, and many non-citizens managed to be placed on the final rolls (Carter 1999: 222-223).

Enrollment as a tribal citizen involved placement on the "Dawes Roll" which was divided into various types of citizenship depending on tribal agreements with the Dawes Commission. Each nation had an "Indian Roll" and a "Freedmen Roll," and the Cherokee, Choctaw, and Chickasaw also negotiated for the creation of an "Intermarried White Roll" to enroll those non-Indian Whites who had married Indian citizens.[16] Each enrolled citizen was listed on a Dawes census card accounting the personal details of enrollment, including his or her family members, along with their ages and blood quantums. The blood quantum system was used by the federal government in its dealings with Native Americans throughout the country, and had its roots in the determination of how "civilized" native peoples were. Consequently, those with greater Indian ancestry were designated socially and scientifically as more savage, while those of mixed White and Indian ancestry were deemed as more civilized. The Dawes Commission would later use these quantifications of Indian ancestry to determine the degree of restrictions that would be placed on a citizen's land allotment. However, all citizen allotments began as restricted, including both individual homesteads and designated "surplus" land. Lands could only be sold or leased with special permission of the Secretary of the Interior (Carter 1999: 156).

The problems for Freedmen during the Dawes enrollment process were manifold.[17] Freedmen citizenship in the Cherokee and Creek nations was limited according to the 1866 Treaties' post-war return requirements. As a result, many Freedmen were denied citizenship and were considered intruders if they returned to reside in their homelands. However, in most cases, this had no real consequence until Dawes enrollment. Although they may have been regarded as intruders in the nations, it was the responsibility of the federal government to remove all intruders from the Indian Territory, and removal was a job that was seldom if ever done (Debo 1940: 29). The Dawes enrollment process penalized Freedmen who did not meet the deadlines by allotting the land on which they were residing at the turn of the century to a citizen who had been enrolled. Many of these people lost everything they had, only 40 years after they had been freed as slaves.[18]

Another obstacle in Freedmen enrollment was the practice of enrolling citizens according to the "one drop rule," despite evidence of Indian ancestry. The Dawes Commission clerks were ordered to follow this rule in determining whether citizens should be placed on the Freedmen Roll or Indian Roll (Zellar 2007: 213). Accordingly, countless multiracial Black-Indian people were automatically enrolled as Freedmen although they were Indians. In other cases, citizens were enrolled based on the mother's status in accordance with tribal practice. This meant that children of mixed Freedman and Indian unions were to follow the status of the mother, regardless of any Indian ancestry the individual might possess. While there were unions between Indian women and Freedmen men, the majority of Black-Indian unions were between Freedmen women and Indian men, many of them being relations between

Indian masters and their slave women. The children of these unions between Indian men and Freedwomen were enrolled as Freedmen, as were many children of Indian women and Freedmen men.[19] Additionally, in abiding by tribal customs in determining citizenship, the Dawes Commission also took into account the tribal laws prohibiting marriage between Indians and Blacks. Consequently, many of the children of these interracial unions were seen as illegitimate and were not listed as citizens (Carter 1999: 71).

At the same time, the offspring of interracial unions between Indians and Whites, no matter the race of the mother, were considered Indian and enrolled as such. This systematic racism favored Whites over Blacks on the Indian Rolls, and led to the mass disenrollment of African Indians as Indians. This system implicitly stated that people of African descent could not be Indians, and served to reinforce this idea over the next century. Although it was well known that many Freedmen were ancestrally Indian, their Blackness overruled any other ancestry in this racial system.

Additionally, although the Cherokee, Chickasaw, and Choctaw nations enrolled the non-citizen spouses of Indian citizens, non-citizen spouses of Freedmen were not granted citizenship in the tribes at all. All of these problems for Freedmen enrollment only added to the general inaccuracies and inconsistencies that everyone encountered with Dawes enrollment.[20]

Implicit in the way citizens were enrolled by the Dawes Commission was how tribal land would be divided and then restricted, and this was determined by blood quantum as described above. The clamor for land by oil men and land speculators led to the removal of restrictions on various classes of citizens prior to 1907. An act of

1904 removed restrictions from surplus allotment lands of Intermarried Whites and Freedmen, and authorized the Secretary of the Interior to remove restrictions from the surplus lands of adult Indians at his discretion (Debo 1940:89). In 1908, restrictions were removed from all allotments of Intermarried Whites, Freedmen, and mixed bloods of one-half or less Indian blood. Restrictions remained on the homesteads of mixed blood Indians with between one-half and three-fourths Indian blood quantum, while all allotment land of full-bloods was fully restricted (Debo 1940: 179).

The lifting of restrictions on Freedmen lands, and on other citizens' lands, led to the mass alienation of Indian land as settlers streamed into Indian Territory and secured lands through any means possible, including theft and trickery.[21] For Freedmen, this problem of land alienation was most likely the most significant issue related to Dawes enrollment. Enrollment as Freedmen did not affect their citizenship in the nations. Rather, it legally separated them from their Indian relatives and counterparts through race, creating officially segregated native populations just prior to Oklahoma statehood and the imposition of Jim Crow segregation laws. However, the absence of this recorded blood quantum would bring back the problems of racial categorization and segregation in the late twentieth century.

The work of the Dawes Commission and the creation of new citizenship rolls for each of the tribes in effect divided the populace by Jim Crow standards, creating Black and non-Black citizens. This pattern of racial categorization and determination of rights based on that categorization was increasingly set in stone as incoming Whites gained control of Indian Territory and prepared for Oklahoma statehood.

People of African descent in both Oklahoma and Indian Territories saw their rights slipping away before their very eyes as statehood loomed.

Cultural Diversity, Racial Designations, and Identity Transformations

The tensions surrounding the Indian Territory and the diversity of people flooding into the Indian Territory seeking new homes and new lands led to competing interests in constructing the future of the state. As Whites pushed for Oklahoma statehood and the opening of Indian Territory lands, the Five Tribes formed a movement for an Indian controlled state called the State of Sequoyah. At the same time, African Americans were pushing for an all-Black state.

All-Black towns in Oklahoma and Indian Territories were established by people who obtained townsite land in the Oklahoma land-runs or through purchasing tribal allotments. These sites were then promoted as havens on the frontier. This movement was the first part of a vision to bring enough African Americans into the territory to establish Oklahoma as a Black state. Despite great efforts by both African Americans and citizens of the Five Tribes, the Black state movement and the State of Sequoyah failed. However, the competing interests of Indians, Whites, and Blacks at this time led to greater and enduring divides between Indians and people of African descent, including Black Indians and Freedmen according to scholars Grinde and Taylor. Threats to Indians in terms of sovereignty and land loss became powerful producers of racial resentment (Grinde 1984). For many, Freedmen and Blacks in general represented the pathways to allotment and statehood. Additionally, they

represented further land loss when Freedmen restrictions on allotments were lifted in 1904. Many Freedmen sold their allotments or were cheated out of them, and the land used for White or Black settlement and townsite development. As the Black and Indian movements for statehood failed, White Americans seized tribal allotments and took their place as the new power holders in the statehood era.

On November 16, 1907, the new state of Oklahoma became the forty-sixth state in the United States. As Tiya Miles notes in her dissertation, the induction ceremony was laden with symbols, including the symbolic dramatization of a White cowboy representing Mr. Oklahoma Territory marrying a Cherokee woman dressed in beaded buckskin, representing Miss Indian Territory. The ceremony embodied a manufactured image of the merging of the Oklahoma and Indian Territories into the new state of Oklahoma. However, as Miles concludes, the display of consensual marriage masked the real terms of statehood that dissolved tribal sovereignty and divested Native Americans of their former lands (Miles 2000: 3-6). Conspicuously absent from this ceremony were Freedmen and African Americans (May 1996: 223). Despite their significant presence in both Indian Territory and Oklahoma Territory histories, they were not included in the statehood ceremonies. It was the beginning of the end of Black civil rights in Oklahoma, as Jim Crow laws were passed in the first meeting of the Oklahoma legislature. Freedmen soon saw what rights they had enjoyed as Indian Territory citizens disappear. No longer could they freely ride the train, attend school, church, or live in the place of their choosing. At the same time, their Indian friends and family were legally regarded as White, and although they

experienced unspeakable racism and prejudice, Indians were not legally segregated from White society.

The categorization of Freedmen and Black Indians into a "Negro" category presented special problems that began when settlers began flooding Indian Territory prior to statehood. African Americans who were not affiliated with the Five Tribes, referred to as "State Negroes" and now as "State Blacks," were ethnically and culturally different from Black Indians and Freedmen of the tribes, who were referred to as "Indian Blacks" or "Native Blacks," or simply "Natives." Even those Native Blacks who did not possess the cultural attributes of Indians saw themselves as different from State Blacks, and worked to keep themselves socially separate from the newcomers. This disassociation was felt least among the Chickasaw, Choctaw, and Cherokee Freedmen, most likely due to their proximities to state borders (Krauthamer 2000: 219-220). Choctaw Freedmen in the Scullyville area began the twentieth century with separate cemeteries for Freedmen and State Blacks. However, the new State families were accepted by Freedmen quickly, and intermarriage was common early on.[22]

Resentment and efforts to avoid relations with State Blacks were especially strong among the Muscogee Creek and Seminole. Creek Blacks referred to State Blacks as *watchina,* meaning "White man," but with the connotation of "White man's Negro" (Grinde 1984: 218; Zellar 2007: 190). Families barred intermarriage with *watchina* and treated them with disdain, believing that their acceptance of poor treatment from Whites brought down racism upon all of them. They were very aware that their status declined as more and more State Blacks entered the territory.

> "State people come into this country before statehood, pulling they hats off and kneeling and scurrying down to the White folks. They ruined the country and made a lot of natives leave for the North. Natives won't go to the back door if they has to see a White man. They won't go at all rather than that. If the Southern Negro didn't Uncle Tom so much they never would have drawed the line between the races" (Sameth 1940: 54).

Sigmund Sameth's ethnographic study of Creek Freedmen communities in 1940 revealed that tensions between Native and State Blacks remained strong thirty-three years after statehood. For the most part, State Blacks were not part of the social life of Freedmen communities in the Creek Nation and intermarriage was still looked down upon.

At the same time, State Blacks, who had usually been raised within the rigid racial systems of the South and for whom Blackness figured centrally in identity, wondered at how other Blacks could deny them as brethren, believing that Blackness tied them together. As one State Black in the Creek Nation put it in 1940, "I has nothing against the Freedmen but they're too proud. They Jim Crows their own blood" (Sameth 1940:56). Some Creek Freedmen today recall this antagonism. A Creek Freedman descendant who grew up near Tullahassee in the 1940s and 1950s recalls,

> "Bush Cemetery was a cemetery for, for Freedmen only. And apparently uh, at one point, there was a lawsuit to bury a non-Freedman in that cemetery. And I don't' know if they won or lost but there was…I can't remember the people's name. But whoever these people were, they had lived in the area a long time and thought that they had a right to be buried in the cemetery. They went to court and I don't know what the court outcome was. But it was an effort to keep other Black folks out of the cemetery. And I thought that was kind of peculiar

> because normally we think that you White people are the prejudiced ones. Apparently back during the Freedmen days, you thought that anybody that was not a Freedman was an outsider."[23]

The processes of Black segregation in everyday life and the education of their children side by side in Black schools, however, were leading to increased intermarriage and social relationships. The Jim Crow system and enforced separation from their White and Indian neighbors led most Freedmen to intermarry and develop extensive social networks with those they had identified as State Blacks. Consequently, the everyday experiences of Freedmen as Black people in the state of Oklahoma led to common bonds between Native and State Blacks, despite their differing cultures, histories, and ethnicities.

Previously self-identified by historical continuity and culture, Native Blacks were now identified and separated by their Blackness in Oklahoma society. It became the basis for their new status, and for their categorization with other people of African descent, despite the vast differences between them. A White Oklahoman testimony from 1940 represents the general attitude about Black Indians and Freedmen: "All niggers are the same. You can't trust one of them behind your back. The Creek niggers are niggers just like the rest of them" (Sameth 1940:49).

At the same time, the distance between Indians and Black-Indians and Freedmen was ever growing. Even in the Creek Nation, where these relationships were historically relatively close, important changes were taking place. Anthropologist Sigmund Sameth described the new practice of segregated seating for Blacks in the Creek Christian churches, which was done "out of respect for the White

folks"(Sameth 1940:49), and the newly offensive attempted social interaction between Indians and Freedmen: "A café proprietor said, 'An Indian JD had a fight in here last Saturday with a nigger who tried to sit next to him at the table. They were both drunk. The nigger tried to pass for an Indian" (49).

Claudio Saunt also attests to the growing divide between Blacks and Creeks in his historical account of the Grayson family. Although the beginnings of the separation of Blacks from the national Creek picture came long before the Dawes Commission and Oklahoma statehood, Saunt discusses the power of statehood and Jim Crow in separating people once connected by bonds of kinship and culture. In this case, the White Grayson family denied its ancestry and relationships to the Black Graysons to the point where the Black Graysons were virtually written out of Grayson family history and became rather a "lasting cloud over [the Grayson] family's name"(Saunt 2005: vii).

This was the story of many Creek families, as well as of Seminole, Cherokee, Chickasaw, and Choctaw families in the new state of Oklahoma. However, for many more families, and for the Grayson family according to some, everyday family life was not severely impacted by the increasingly rigid racial systems. Especially in the historic Creek Nation, interracial White, Indian, and Black relationships continued throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, despite miscegenation laws. Throughout the Creek Nation, Black-Indian-White relationships continued in the traditional Creek ways, evidenced by the enduring familial relationships throughout the twentieth century. Despite the fact that marriage between Blacks and Indians and Blacks and Whites was now illegal, marriages continued, presenting problems only in the legal

transfer of allotments or other facets of heirship. Mixed race Creek people in many areas continued to keep kin relationships throughout segregation, visiting their relatives regularly, attending family gatherings and funerals, and upholding kin obligations. According to oral histories of Black Creek people today, these relationships remained alive in many branches of Creek families.

This pattern was present in the other tribes in the early 20th century, but the racial divide was more pronounced in the Cherokee, Choctaw, and Chickasaw nations. Most mixed White-Indian families went on to establish further social and kin relationships with other Whites, and Jim Crow was working to build lasting divides between Blacks and Indian people.

At the Brink of the Twentieth Century

This is where historical accounts of the twentieth century leave us, at the beginning of the twentieth century. The outlook for Freedmen is bleak, with a future of Jim Crow segregation and disconnection from their non-Black social and kin networks. Historians have so far focused on the transformations of Freedmen and Indian cultural and racial identities throughout the nineteenth century in Indian Territory, stopping short of exploring the critical ways in which Freedmen identities were shaped by those seemingly dooming racial structures imposed on them at Oklahoma statehood. In the early twentieth century, Freedmen and Black Indian people in Oklahoma were at a turning point, not only in history, but in cultural and identity transformations. What happened to Freedmen and historic Freedmen

communities after Oklahoma statehood? How did historical racial systems, spanning from tribal slavery to the present, work on Freedmen identities? How are Freedmen today connected to where historians left them at the beginning of the twentieth century, and, did facets of Freedmen identity withstand or carry through the powerful racial systems of the twentieth century? The task of this study is to uncover the multitude of processes embedded within history and racial systems that contributed to dynamic Freedmen identities, and to understand the ways in which Freedmen of today are connected to that place where they were left in the literature, and in popular understanding today, at the dawn of the twentieth century.

Freedmen communities in Oklahoma consist of an incredibly diverse group of peoples, varying by tribal background as well as by history and present status. Historic Freedmen communities are still very much alive in each of the Five Tribes, but most visible today are the activist Freedmen communities in Oklahoma. These are consciously constructed communities of people with shared interests in restoring Freedmen citizenship in the Five Tribes. I began my ethnographic research by attending the meetings of one of these activist groups, the Descendants of Freedmen of the Five Civilized Tribes Association, based in Oklahoma City. At the time, I was also beginning work on a University of Oklahoma research project concerning cancer in Oklahoma's African American populations. Beginning my research just as this group was formally established, I was able to see this activist network grow and attract members and supporters throughout the state and nation within a few years. From its formal inception in 2002, I actively attended meetings and functions of this group, and made brief presentations at many meetings to recruit participants for both

the cancer project as well as my own. Consequently, I conducted interviews with a diverse group of people, many of them being people who attended a Descendants of Freedmen meeting only once, as well as many who attended meetings regularly. I conducted interviews and oral histories with meeting attendees until 2005.

Finding this activist community quite different from the still surviving historic communities in Oklahoma, I set out to conduct participant observation ethnographic fieldwork in a historic Freedmen community. Even so, the diversity among these communities struck me so that I felt I needed to explore the varied histories, cultures, and experiences of several historic Freedmen communities. Consequently, I chose to deeply study two communities that lie in stark contrast to one another, yet which are separated only by several miles. Fort Coffee, Oklahoma, is a historic Choctaw Freedmen community located in LeFlore County, and is home to a vibrant and still active group of residents that have taken steps to revitalize their small town. Across the Arkansas River from Fort Coffee lies Foreman, Oklahoma, a historic Cherokee Freedmen community which is no longer viable. Between July 2004 and October 2005, I lived in Fort Smith, Arkansas, only several miles from both communities, to conduct ethnographic fieldwork. During this time, I participated in community events and church services, and collected oral histories from many residents. In each case, community members who were knowledgeable about their community history came forward to introduce me to others in their communities, and many actively sought me out in hopes that I could contribute to their own family histories. While conducting this fieldwork, I also spent many hours poring over historical documents concerning

Freedmen families in the towns during the Dawes era, in an attempt to connect the families at the turn of the twentieth century with the families of the towns today.

At the same time, I continued my participation in the Descendants of Freedmen Association based in Oklahoma City, and also began participating in another activist group based in Tulsa, the North Tulsa Historical Society. I conducted lengthy interviews and oral histories with many people of this organization early on, and continued my work through participating in meetings and events. Additionally, I conducted interviews, oral histories, and other research in historic Freedmen communities throughout Oklahoma, and with each tribal affiliation excepting the Seminole. In all cases, my interviews consisted of gathering life histories and family histories, with particular attention to how these families and individuals perceived a larger community history. At the same time, I asked people to reflect on their own understandings of being a Freedman descendant in the context of their relationships to the tribes with which they were historically connected, as well as the understandings held by their parents and grandparents, and within the community in general over time. Interviews were recorded through digital audio recorder, and interviewees were given a copy of their recording. Much more gathering of data took place through casual conversations throughout my fieldwork.

My concentrated studies with two activist groups and two historic Freedmen communities were a result of a need to understand the diversity of Freedmen identities in Oklahoma. For instance, why were Freedmen seemingly suddenly forming activist networks in 2002, and what was the foundation or root for this activist Freedmen/Black-Indian identity? How did this movement relate to historic

Freedmen communities throughout Oklahoma? And then, why are some historic Freedmen communities like Foreman, Oklahoma all but dead while Fort Coffee, another Freedmen town only miles away, is alive and well? The diversity of Freedmen experiences and histories in Oklahoma has led to a diversity of Freedmen identities today, and the only way to approach this under-studied subject is through a study of several of these communities.

Freedmen identities are shaped by many factors, the most important of which may be race, history, and historical consciousness – a historical consciousness which includes a unique understanding of indigeneity. This sense transcends common linkages of Indianness and indigeneity which can sometimes evoke race and ancestry, and instead understands indigeneity as a historical and cultural connection to place. Present identities and activism are a result of dynamic histories, layered and multi-faceted, that created diverse understandings of just who Freedmen are and where they fit in their local communities, tribal communities, and state histories. Through the ways that Freedmen people situate themselves in these contexts over time, we may begin to understand the construction of Freedmen identities from slavery to the present, and that these identities rely heavily on generations of specific experience.

To analyze the various processes at work on Freedmen identities, both historical and racial, I find theoretical work concerning race and ethnicity, and historical consciousness most useful. Race has been a most prominent shaper of Freedmen experience and identity from the beginnings of racial distinction among the Five Tribes, and since the onset of slavery in the tribes. The field of anthropology has long been concerned with the problems of race, and despite the fact that the biological

usefulness of racial categories has been refuted by anthropologists, the consequences of their imposition on peoples cannot be underestimated. At the turn of the twentieth century, W.E.B. Dubois discussed Blackness in terms of a veil that all African Americans experience – the feeling that the Black person in America is at once like other Americans in "heart and mind" but at the same time forced into difference. This veil embodies a "double consciousness" that forces the Black person to constantly look at himself through the eyes of others, measuring himself by Whiteness. At the same time, Blacks possess a national American identity within a nation that reviles them. Consequently, a constant dichotomy presents itself. As DuBois illustrated, "One ever feels his two-ness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (DuBois 2003:9).

Frantz Fanon echoed these perceptions in *Black Skins, White Masks* (Fanon 1967), speaking of the experiences of Blacks in the colonial and post-colonial world and the racial relationship that colonialism engenders. Like DuBois, Fanon noted the ways in which Blacks are made to hate Blackness, and at the same time to wish to emulate the colonizer. The colonial relationship creates Blackness in opposition to Whiteness, and rewards that which is White. As such, the Black person will hate himself and his own people, and strive to become White in language, culture, and thought. DuBois's veil proves to be impenetrable however, as Fanon demonstrates the continuing colonial racial system despite individual aspiring towards the white ideal. In Fanon's view, colonial otherness is written onto the colonized, and he is

made to understand himself through the eyes of the colonizer. This colonial logic is, in Fanon's estimation, inescapable.

The experiences of the colonial racial system, Dubois's veil and "double consciousness" are the common experiences of African Americans in the United States. It is through these common experiences that African Americans of various historic and ethnic backgrounds have come to identify with other African Americans, and to nationalistically comprise a somewhat monolithic "Black" or African American group that may be identified by historic racial categorization. In the philosophies of DuBois and Fanon, Blackness is the primary experience in terms of a colonial and post-colonial environment. It is from this common experience across an African diaspora that nationalist identities spring forth. Paul Gilroy explored this relationship further, discussing the dual nature of race and diaspora, at once creating many different African-mixed cultures, and at the same time uniting them all through parallel experiences of slavery, racism, and suffering. Despite differing histories that have contributed to current ethnic differences, there exists a diaspora of common experience created by the encounter with Blackness (Gilroy 1993).

Sociologist Robert Blauner discussed the power of racial categorization and racism itself in the formation of racial and ethnic groups, but like many, focuses on civil rights political movements as the shaper of African American ethnicity. As Blauner contended, it is through the

> "continuing struggle to surmount and change a racist social system…that black Americans have created a political history. This political history is the core of the emerging ethnic culture, and the clue to the contemporary revitalization movement which celebrates blackness." (Blauner 1970:355).

Blauner went on to discuss three ways in which American racism has been the key factor in the flowering of Black culture. First, racism blocked the participation of African Americans in the dominant culture so that unfilled needs for symbols, meaning, and value had to be met elsewhere. Second, African Americans realized that the institution of racism was inherent in American society and cultural values, thus preventing them from fully embracing American culture. Finally, racism called forth social and political responses on a collective level aimed at transforming the American system towards equal rights. This shared political history comprises the bedrock of African American culture, according to Blauner.

Blauner made a shrewd observation about the effects of racism on group formation: "Racism excludes a category of people from participation in society in a way different from class hegemony and exploitation."(Blauner 1970:358). In this analysis, racism itself is a force that shapes a social group, in this case, a racial/ethnic group. "Blackness" has become a social, cultural, ethnic, and racial identity resulting from the consequences of racial categorization and racism itself.

This monolithic Blackness had important consequences for African American identity and politics. Theorist Stuart Hall affirmed that this new identity served a purpose in that it attempted to replace the White-created monolithic negative stereotype of African Americans with a positive one, and it was a way of referencing the common experience of racism and marginalization in the African diaspora. As Hall related,

> "…[the term 'black'] came to provide the organizing category of a new politics of resistance, amongst groups and communities with, in fact, very different histories,

> traditions and ethnic identities. In this moment, politically speaking, 'The Black experience', as a singular and unifying framework based on the building up of identity across ethnic and cultural difference between the different communities, became 'hegemonic' over other ethnic/racial identities – though the latter did not, of course, disappear"(1988:27).

Theorist Cornel West elaborated on these insights by attributing this monolithic Black identity as a result of the lack of Black power to represent Blacks to themselves and to others as complex human beings, and the consequent inability to contest the bombardment of degrading stereotypes forwarded by White supremacist ideologies (1990:29). Hall and West expressed the need for a deconstruction of the hegemonic and monolithic Black identity. West proposed the destruction of the binary opposition contained in Whiteness-Blackness, and encouraged Black cultural workers to create new responses that articulate the diversity of global Black practices.

While a monolithic Black identity certainly masks the diversity of the African diaspora, it has been a powerful shaper of identity. Beginning with racial categorization that justified slavery and racism, to the use of race to assert nationalistic identities in the twentieth century, race has played a major part in Black experience, including the experiences of Freedmen in Oklahoma.

Racial histories are at once important shapers of Freedmen experience, and also part of a second structure of identity: history. Freedmen histories and their connections to these histories are critically important in the construction and continuity of Freedmen identities. Historical consciousness is a framework for understanding these connections and the ways in which they pervade and inform cultural groups' and communities' identities. Here, I take lessons from the work of

Richard Price, who illustrated the significance of history and historical consciousness to collective Saramakan identity in *First Time* (Price 1983). Other scholars who explore the critical relationships between identity and history are Gerald Sider, who demonstrated the importance of Lumbee histories in constructing and claiming identities that are persistently challenged (Sider 1993), and Joanne Rappaport, who explored the uses of history in indigenous identity construction and in activist movements (Rappaport 1990). These authors, and other scholars who explore the relationships between history and identity, including Karen Blu and James Clifford, also point to the ways in which people draw upon history to direct their futures (Blu 1980; Clifford 1988).

It is my aim to demonstrate the ways in which community histories, and racial histories specifically, have shaped Freedmen identities from slavery to the present, but to also illustrate that the diversity of these histories have important implications for Freedmen identities. By approaching Freedmen identity through community history, especially through multiple community histories, we may begin to understand the ways in which multivocal histories have shaped diverse Freedmen identities, so that Freedmen communities differ importantly from one another. In the midst of these differences in Freedmen community histories and identities across Oklahoma however, important threads of common experience continue to connect Freedmen communities and individuals across seemingly disparate contexts. As people and communities with similar experiences within specific historic racial structures, Freedmen identities work within complex negotiations in ideologies concerning history, race, indigeneity, and multiracialness. These racial ideas and histories, in

addition to shaping Freedmen communities and tying them together through common experience, have worked to create a situation in which Freedmen, as well as others, are left searching for the foundations of their own identities.

Chapter 2

Foreman, Oklahoma

I had seen several brief mentions of the Cherokee Freedmen town of Foreman in various articles about Freedmen history, and had seen its general area on a small map of historical Black towns in Oklahoma. Yet, I could not find it on my own road map. Finally, while driving back to Norman from Fort Coffee, a nearby Choctaw Freedmen town, I glanced at the map and the name "Foreman" suddenly stood out. I decided to find it on my next trip out to Fort Coffee.

I started down Redland Road just west of Muldrow looking for signs of the historic Cherokee Freedmen town. The road stretched south for miles through expanses of ranch land, with few individual houses alongside the road. I finally reached what I believed was the end of the road without seeing any signs of the town of Foreman, and I was ready to give up with the assumption that this town, like many other historic Freedmen towns in Oklahoma, was long gone. I turned right down a dirt road, which I believed might lead me closer to the Arkansas River; however, I ended up on someone's farmland. As I turned my vehicle around, a truck turned in to meet me. An elderly, toothless White man in an earflap hat stuck his head out the truck window and asked, "What you lookin' for?"

"Foreman. The town of Foreman," I replied.

"Old nigger town?" He quickly corrected himself: "Old Negro town?"

I said, "Yeah, well it's a Cherokee Freedmen town."

He told me there wasn't much left of it, but that if I would follow him in my car, he would take me to "the Negro boy's" house, as he was there that day. He also

told me that I needed to be careful driving around the area, as he incoherently explained that there were many crazy people in the area on crack cocaine.

Feeling half lucky and half regretful that I happened upon this man, or that he happened upon me, I followed him back north on Redland road. After turning down a short dirt road, we came to a set of railroad tracks. We got out and the man explained that this was the place where the train dropped off the Foreman mail. He said the "Negro boy" lived across the tracks and he'd take me over there.

Back again on Redland Road, we soon turned off and pulled over on a side dirt road. He told me to park my car there, get into his truck, and he'd take me up the hill. Unsure about why and where we were about to go, and contemplating my safety with this odd man, I quickly decided to do as he said. My fears were somewhat laid to rest when I got into the truck and he sputtered, "Now you don't bother me, and I won't bother you!" We drove a short way up a dirt drive and up to a construction site. I was expecting to meet a teenaged African American boy, as the man had described him as a boy. Instead, I met Damon Foreman, a 53-year-old African American man who was working there with several White men on tractors. We were interested to speak to one another about Freedmen history in the area although it was cold and had started to rain. We arranged to speak later by phone and I got back into the truck with the elderly man. On the way back down the hill, he pointed to where he used to attend "Negro picnics" when he was 17 or 18 years old. He was 84 years old at that time, in March 2004. Later I would realize just how lucky it was that he had found me in his field that day; Damon became my key informant and provided great knowledge throughout my fieldwork there.

• • •

The town of Foreman was a historic Cherokee Freedmen town, founded after slavery by a man named Zack Foreman. Zack Foreman went on to become one of the wealthiest men in all of the Cherokee Nation, and the town of Foreman became a large and vibrant community of Cherokee Freedmen and later, State Blacks as well. My first visit to the town in 2004 however demonstrated to me that the town no longer resembled the center of life it once was. Between 2004 and November 2005, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Foreman and with former Foreman residents, and completed archival research to try to connect the Foreman of the historical record with the Foreman of today. In the process, unique and often overlooked histories were uncovered that had shaped Freedmen experiences and identities from the era of slavery and tribal removal to the present-day.

The town of Foreman lies just north of the Arkansas River in Sequoyah County, close to the towns of Redland, Gans, and Muldrow. After Cherokee removal to Indian Territory, this river bottom became an area of large farms with enslaved people who worked them. The Gunter family was one of these prominent, slave owning families. This family's history leads us back to Alabama, where a Scottish or Welsh trader named John Gunter settled in a Cherokee village near the present site of Guntersville, Alabama.[24] He married a Cherokee woman named Catherine, or Katy. They and their children became leading figures in the Cherokee Nation prior to removal, and operated a river ferry at a point named Gunter's Landing (Foreman 1947: 2). They became successful traders and prominent politicians in the Cherokee Nation. Several of John and Katy's sons served on the Cherokee constitutional convention and as delegates for the Cherokee Nation in the east. The Gunters served

on Chief John Ross's executive council, but came to favor removal of the Cherokee Nation to the west to cope with encroaching Whites (Foreman 1947; Linker 1976; Mitchell 1976).

According to the Federal Cherokee Census of 1835, only 7.4% of Cherokee families collectively owned 1,592 slaves (McLoughlin 1977:690). The Gunter family comprised a significant portion of the Cherokee Nation's slaveholding population prior to removal, with several of John Gunter's sons recorded as owning 30 slaves in 1835 (Foreman 1947: 11). As in many slaveholding families, John Gunter's slaves were divided amongst his children according to his will at his death (Foreman 1947: 11-16). At least two of John Gunter's sons fought under Jackson in the Creek war, one of them being Samuel Gunter, who died in Alabama (Foreman 1947: 30). Samuel had married a Cherokee woman named A-Yo-Ku and they had one son, George Washington (G.W.) Gunter. George Washington moved on to Indian Territory in 1839 with his wife Eliza and their three children. This branch of the Gunter family settled in Redland Bottoms, about fifteen miles west of Fort Smith on the Arkansas River in Skin Bayou District, later named Sequoyah District of the Cherokee Nation (Wilson 1976: 266).

George Washington Gunter established the first cotton gin in the Cherokee Nation at this location.

> Our friend and fellow-countryman Mr. George W. Gunter, has just wrected a new and substantial cotton gin, at his place fifteen miles from Fort Smith on the Arkansas River. This is the first cotton gin that has been established in the Nation… The gin is capable of picking from four to five thousand pounds of cotton daily.[25]

Gunter undoubtedly enjoyed great economic success from this investment. However, certain people who were most likely instrumental to the building and running of the cotton gin were left out of the notoriety it afforded. These were Gunter's slaves. According to the 1860 census of Indian Territory, George W. Gunter enslaved nineteen peopple ranging from 11 to 70 years old. Among them was the Foreman family. Jerry Foreman and his wife Rhoda, and their children Jerry and Zack were just a few of Gunter's slaves.[26]

Historical records are lacking concerning Gunter's relationship with his slaves, but we can assume there was a rather close or friendly relationship between the Foremans and the Gunters by looking at the historical record following the Civil War. Enslaved people of the Cherokee Nation were freed by act of Cherokee National Council in 1863, although this act had little effect on most slaves because most were held by Confederates who did not recognize the act's legitimacy, and many had removed outside of the Cherokee Nation where the act could not be enforced (Perdue 1979: 138). Zack Foreman and his family were most likely freed by this act in 1863, as there is no evidence that they had moved outside of the Cherokee Nation, and Zack joined the army in the same year. Zack Foreman would have been 15 when freed.[27] He served with Union forces in the Civil War, volunteering for the 83rd United States Colored Infantry. He enlisted as a Private on September 3, 1863 and served in Company G. He was mustered in 1865 and returned to his home near Redland soon after.[28] His brother Jerry stayed in the Choctaw Nation during the Civil War, perhaps to escape the ravages of the war that were more intense in northern Indian Territory than in the south. When he returned, according to Dawes

Commission testimony, he stayed at George W. Gunter's brother John's place, implying that Jerry had friendly relations with the Gunter family in the area.[29]

Zack Foreman would go on to build the town of Foreman, and to become one of the wealthiest men in the Cherokee Nation. Perhaps owing in part to his early first-hand education with the enterprising Gunter family who made the pioneering investment in the cotton gin, Zack became a successful businessman. A 1938 WPA interview with J.J. Cape, a White man who came to Redland in 1881, describes some of Zack Foreman's life.

> Zack Foreman was a Cherokee freedman who had no education, being able neither to read nor to write. He was a friend to Indians and whites as well as to colored people. He was very wealthy. The story of how he got his start is interesting. His father died when he was small. He went to work when a very small boy to support his widowed mother.[30]

The statement that Zack went to work to support his family when a very small boy is strange considering that Zack was listed as a slave of George Gunter with the rest of his family. It is possible rather, that Zack took paying work and was hired out to other people in the Cherokee Nation needing labor in order to earn extra money for his family. This allowance for enslaved people to earn their own money independently of their owner was quite common (Perdue 1979: 107-108).

Cape tells us more about Zack Foreman's early years:

> He worked on farms or ranches, at anything he could get to do, receiving in return for his labor about fifty cents or a dollar a day. Some cow buyers came in there one day and bought a herd of cattle where Zack was working. One of the cows got her leg broken and could not make the trip to no Man's Land with the rest of the herd, and they left her with Zack. He cared for her and

> she finally recovered. Later she had a heifer calf. He worked hard and bought heifer calves with the money he earned. Before he was fully grown he owned quite a herd of cattle, and he finally became the wealthiest cattleman in the Cherokee Nation.[31]

Cape goes on to recount how Zack Foreman loaned them money when he heard that Cape's mother was ill and his father could not pay for medical treatment. According to Cape, he married a non-citizen Black school teacher named Mattie, and together they had five children – Roscoe Wallace, Sheridan, Zack Jr., Rhoda, and Dewey.[32] Zack opened a store and built a cotton gin. The settlement came to be known as Foreman, named after Zack, and a post office was established in 1898 (Foreman 1928).

Foreman became the new hometown of many Cherokee Freedmen in the area, many of whom had belonged to Gunter and other wealthy Cherokees as slaves. As in many small towns in the Cherokee Nation, Freedmen in Foreman were self-sufficient and raised most of their food. People made a living through farming or providing labor on large farms in the area. In Foreman however, Zack's farms and cattle-ranching business provided a stable economy for the town and provided many jobs for ranch-hands and other workers.

The African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church had established a presence in the Cherokee Nation in 1877, and had attracted a number of Cherokee Freedmen in the Fort Gibson area by the late 1870s. An AME church was established in Foreman in 1882. The building remained unfinished for a time, but when Prentiss H. Hill was appointed pastor in November 1891, the building was completed, a parsonage built, an organ was bought, a choir was established, fifty scholars attended the Sabbath

school, and a congregation of 150 to 200 attended Sunday services within two months of his arrival (Littlefield 1978:59). The pastor of the church would later serve as an organizer of a Back-to-Africa movement for Freedmen and Blacks in Sequoyah District prior to statehood. In 1892, the pastor and a man named Priestly led a number of people to what they declared was the promised land in Liberia. Priestly, however, was apparently a fraud and divested them of their money, leaving the group stranded in New York City where there was no ship to carry them to Africa (Littlefield 1978: 69).

Masonic lodges became an important part of Freedmen life in Indian Territory, and at some time prior to statehood or in the early twentieth century, Foreman established an assumedly Prince Hall Masonic Lodge.[33] This was constructed next to the town's AME Church. Older residents of Foreman recall that their parents used the lodge and that both men's and women's meetings were held there, the women's group being called the Seven Sisters of the Tabernacle.[34] In addition to the Masonic order, men also had the United Brothers of Friendship, an African American fraternal organization (Campbell 1976). This organization, based in Louisville, Kentucky, also had a women's group called Sisters of the Mysterious Ten, and consequently it is possible that the older informant recalled the name incorrectly, and that instead of Seven Sisters of the Tabernacle, the group was actually the Sisters of the Mysterious Ten (Gibson 1971). The presence of these non-Masonic organizations in Foreman signals cultural sharing and influence from the State Black presence in the town. Unfortunately, interviews with Prince Hall Lodge state officers and searches in state Prince Hall Masonic records turned up no

information on the Foreman lodge. However, residents recall that it was most likely used during the 1930s and possibly during the early 1940s, but was out of use by the 1950s.

Another feature of Freedmen life in the Cherokee Nation prior to statehood was the large picnics held annually on August 4 to celebrate emancipation. The date August 4 was celebrated for unknown reasons, as it was not the date on which enslaved people of the Cherokee Nation were freed. The Cherokee Nation's proximity to the Creek Nation may have figured into the celebrated holiday, as people formerly enslaved by the Creek Nation officially received equal citizenship rights on this date (Zellar 2007: 77-78). Throughout the Cherokee Nation, these celebrations were pivotal in Cherokee political life as local and national tribal politicians and businessmen often came to make speeches, a sign of the political roles that Freedmen communities played in Cherokee politics (Littlefield 2006). In Foreman, these picnics were large and would go on for several days, attracting community members and Whites, Blacks, and Indians from across the nation. In his 1938 interview, J.J. Cape described Zack's central role in the Freedmen picnics at Foreman.

> Each year on the fourth of August they held an Emancipation Proclamation Picnic at Foreman. There was always barbecue and games and dancing. Also stands to sell red lemonade. Zack and his wife were always crowned king and queen of the festival. They rode a pair of black horses and passed in review before the crowd after the crowning. Everybody loved Zack and Mrs. Foreman.

These gatherings were vital to Foreman's community life, and Zack's annual honor at these picnics demonstrates his incredible importance not only to Foreman's economic well-being, but to its social and political life as well.

Zack Foreman's wealth and prominence only seems to have grown toward the end of the nineteenth century. In the 1890s, he accomplished a feat that few others of any race could have done.

> In the nineties the Kansas City Southern put a road through Redland from Kansas City to Port Arthur, Texas. They missed Foreman by three miles. Zack dressed up, got on the train and went to Kansas City to see the Kansas City Southern officials about letting him have a railroad. They agreed to lay the steel if he would make the road bed. He came home and gave the negroes work. Those who owed him, paid their debts by working on his road. They graded it with teams and scrapers and laid the ties and the railroad company put the rails down for him. Then when he wanted to ship cattle or cotton he called the agent at Redland and a car or any numbers of cars were dispatched to Foreman. He was the only negro in the United States at that time who privately owned a railroad.[35]

This narrative points to Zack Foreman's extraordinary character, as well as to the status that people of African descent could achieve in parts of Indian Territory. Although racism and prejudice did exist against Blacks and Freedmen in the Cherokee Nation, Zack Foreman was obviously a force to be reckoned with. Economically successful tribal citizens of African descent could be found in the Creek Nation – people such as Cow Tom, James Coody Johnson, and Sugar George. Creeks with African descent were able to be elected as Chief.[36] However, there were almost no such cases in the Cherokee Nation, and Zack Foreman was likely most notable of the few. Despite the meanings attached to race in the Cherokee Nation,

Zack Foreman stood out as one of the wealthiest and most powerful citizens in the region.

Zack's prominence and wealth is supported by the fact that he is one of only a few people who appear consistently in district records of sale of stray property, where Zack and others bought livestock. Records show that he grew cotton and corn and kept livestock, but spent more time toward the end of his life as a cattle rancher.[37] Like his former owner, he built a successful cotton gin in addition to the store and post office.[38] Records also point to close business relationships between Zack and the family of his former owner. In the early 1890s, Zack Foreman was involved in several court cases with George Gunter, and testimony in these cases demonstrates that they worked together frequently on property, with Zack supplying workers and controlling rents for some of Gunter's farms.[39]

Zack's wealth also made him the center of social attention in that residents expected him to financially support community events. As printed in a section of the *Muldrow Press* called "Among the Colored Folks" on June 17, 1904, the writer tells of an upcoming rally at the colored church on Sunday. He or she writes: "Zack Foreman has promised to come to our rally. As Zack is the wealthiest colored man in the nation, we shall expect a liberal contribution from him." Along with his fame and fortune came responsibility for the welfare of other Blacks in the Cherokee Nation – a responsibility that he may or may not have enjoyed, but apparently kept up as evidenced by his continued reputation as a generous benefactor.

Despite Zack's prominence throughout the district and his social and business relationships with people of all races in the area, his race was still an issue and presented special problems. J.J. Cape explained the situation:

> "One day father took his cotton to Redland, and about the time he got to Foreman, it began raining. Zack invited him to stay at his home. Father said they had a table set for him alone. And he was taken to a room to sleep where no colored people ever slept. This was reserved for white people."[40]

This story reminds us of the pervasiveness of racial systems and their significance over economic and social status. Even though Zack was most likely wealthier than the White people who may have stayed at his home, he still had to make special accommodations to separate them from his Blackness, or at least pretend to. Zack's African ancestry and great wealth must have constantly presented a contradiction to many, especially to outsiders unfamiliar with Indian Territory. In the pre-statehood era, as racial boundaries were growing ever sharper, Zack's wealth and status allowed him to employ Whites and Indians as laborers, thus subverting the conventional power relationship. Oral histories also maintain that several of Zack's children were half-White. His oldest son, Ed, and his youngest, Dewey, are said to have White mothers, one of them possibly being a White woman employed by Zack. Clearly, Zack's race and status were at once contradictory and inconsequential, presenting Zack with special problems and opportunities throughout this period of great change in Indian Territory and the Cherokee Nation. It is also clear however, that Zack strongly identified as a Cherokee Freedman although his relationships and status seemed to separate him from the crowd. Despite his great economic success and

power, Zack had to struggle throughout his lifetime for basic Cherokee rights, including the right to vote, rights to Cherokee payments, and his children's access to education in the Cherokee Nation. These rights, despite his status as possibly the wealthiest cattleman in the Cherokee Nation, were denied him and his family because of his status as a Freedman.

In response, Zack became an activist for Cherokee Freedmen and a representative of Freedmen in Sequoyah District. As such, he worked to secure suffrage and education for Cherokee Freedmen, as well as rights to payments distributed to citizens of the Cherokee Nation. In 1883, the Cherokee Nation passed an act stating that only Cherokees by blood could share in per capita payments (Littlefield 1978: 132). Zack, along with Jack Campbell and Richard and Harrison Foreman of Foreman, created a petition along with other delegates from across the Cherokee Nation opposing the act.

> Four Mile Branch, November 14, 1883
> To the Hon. National Council
> Tahlequah, CN
>
> We the undersigned delegates from the several districts of the Cherokee Nation, representing the colored citizens of the Cherokee nation assembled in convention at the above named place and date and unanimously adopted the following petition to present to your honorable body.
>
> According to Art. 3d sec. 20 page 16 of the constitution of the Cherokee Nation, all acknowledged treaties shall be the supreme law of the land." The 9th art. Of the treaty of July 19, 1866, between the United States and the Cherokees guarantees that all Freedmen etc. (sec. 9 art.) The act passed by the National Council on May 19, 1883, debarring all but Cherokees by blood to participate in the money per capita is according to (sec. 20" Art. 3d page 16) a violation of the same; it also limits the privileges set forth in the 9" art. Of the treaty of 1866; therefore, we do most earnestly implore your honor to repeal the act passed on May 19, 1883 giving to each citizen debarred of said funds his dues portion.

Delegates
Tahlequah District: Berry Mayes, Joseph Brown, Richard Humphreys, Jack Pack
Illinois District: Wm. Thompson, Jake Crapo, Stephen Smith
Sequoyah District: Jack Campbell, Zack Foreman, Richard Foreman, Harrison Foreman
Canadian District: Coffey Sheppard, Wm. Brown[41]

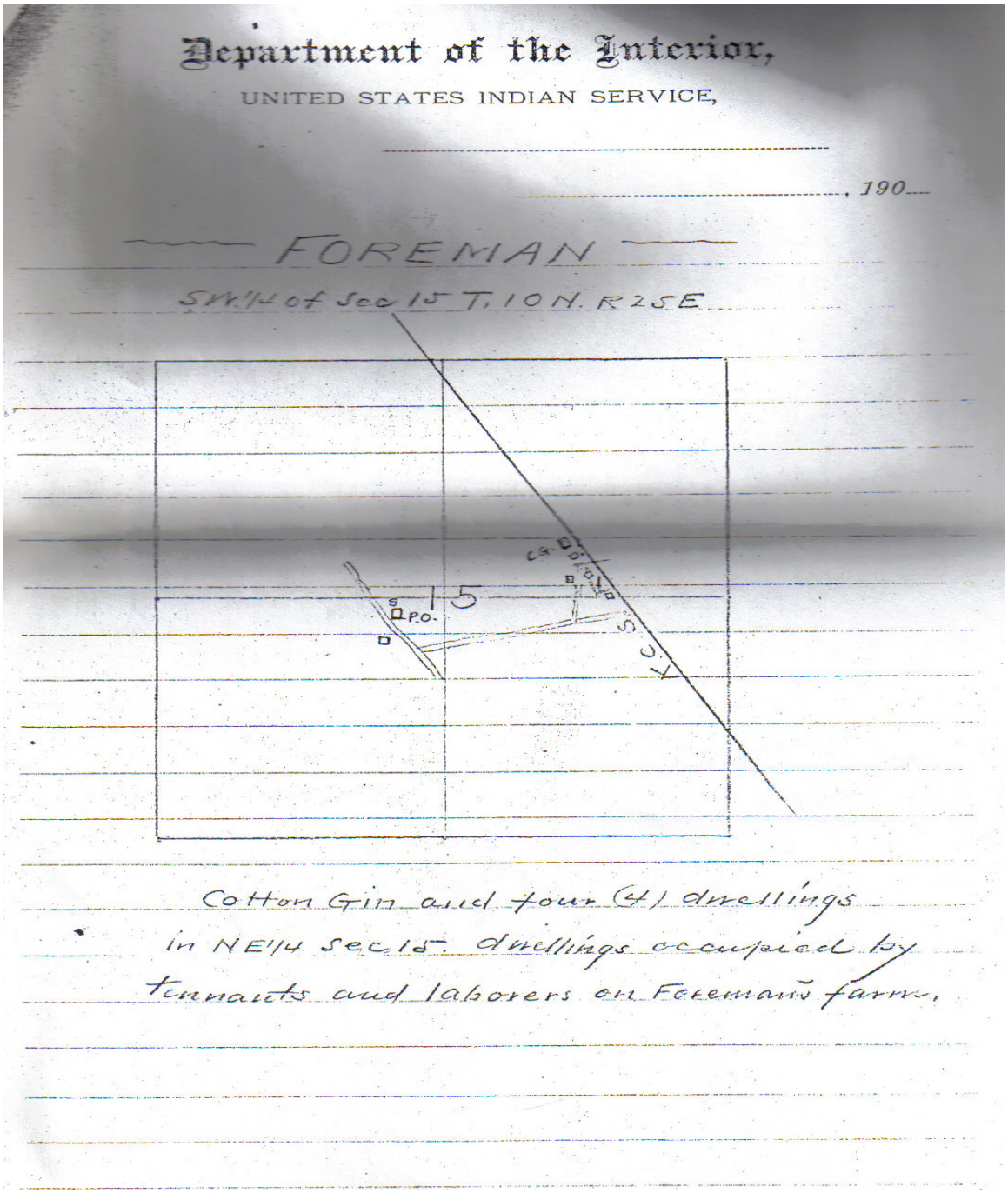
This letter demonstrates that the Foreman family, not only Zack, was involved in activism for their people. In addition, the language of the petition makes it clear that the Foremans and other Freedmen delegates were quite knowledgeable about the affairs of the Cherokee Nation government and its laws, as well as their own rights under the Treaty of 1866. When joined with activist networks of Cherokee Freedmen across the Cherokee Nation, Freedmen representatives in Foreman maintained a constant resistance to threats to Freedmen citizenship. These remarkable activist networks demonstrate that although Foreman was a small town in the southern Cherokee Nation, it was far from isolated. Zack Foreman and the residents of his hometown were actively connected to other Freedmen across the nation, and the Foreman family's notoriety, power, and economic and social networks that extended all the way to Vinita in the northern Cherokee Nation no doubt provided great strength to the Freedmen movement.

From Cherokee Nation to Oklahoma: Foreman and the Statehood Era

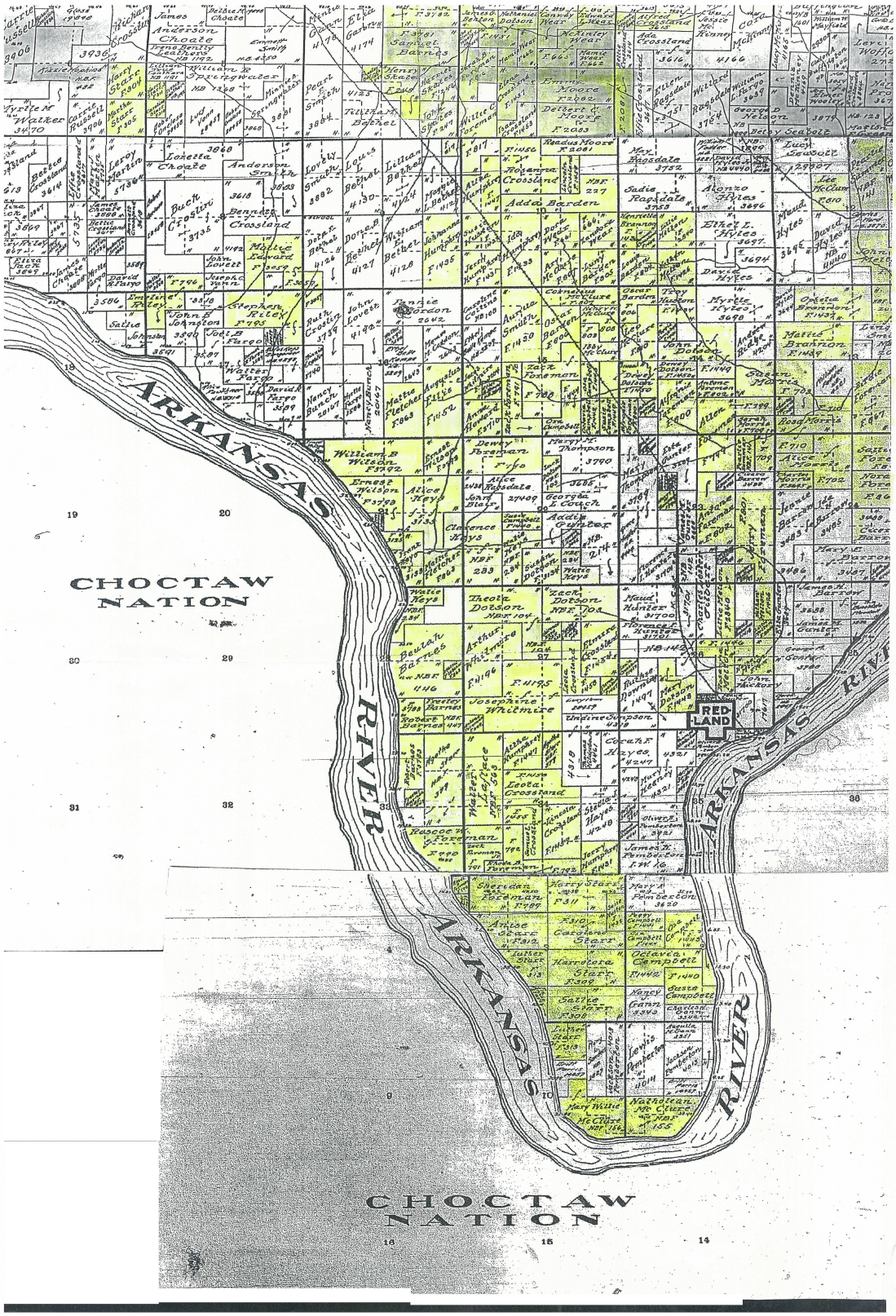
In 1902, the Dawes Commission came to the area to plat townships in preparation for allotment. In the Dawes worker's survey of Foreman, he recorded the population as twenty-six, consisting of two White families, four Black families, and

one Freedman family. He opined that Foreman should not be accorded status as a townsite because of its proximity to the towns of Gans and Redland, and because all of the improvements in the town, including a post office, general store, and cotton gin, were owned by one person (see diagram).[42] This was, of course, Zack Foreman. Accordingly, Foreman was never platted as a town for allotment, and the entire area was allotted to Cherokee Freedmen. As such, it is difficult to believe that the town consisted of only twenty-six people in 1902, as there were over one-hundred Freedmen that were allotted land in the area and many more non-Freedmen Blacks who resided there (see map).[43] However, it is possible that the Dawes worker counted only people living in the town center.

During territorial days, land in the Cherokee Nation was not held by any individual but was rather held in common by all Cherokee citizens. People could own improvements on the land, but not the land itself. Prior to statehood, Zack was able to use massive amounts of land in the area for his cattle ranching and other ventures. The entire area was called Foreman Prairie and Zack controlled most of it. However, like many other wealthy and influential citizens of Indian Territory, Zack stood to lose a great deal in the process of allotment. In the Cherokee Nation, each citizen received approximately 180 acres of land, depending on its value. Zack most likely lost control of thousands of acres of land, as they were allotted to other Cherokee citizens in the area. Luckily, Zack was able to use his children's and family's allotments for his ranching needs, and most likely the allotments of others as well. As his children got older, they joined various parts of the family's business.[44]



Dawes Commission map of Foreman, 1902. Cherokee Nation Dawes Commission Records, Oklahoma Historical Society. Copied by Daniel Littlefield, Jr.



Allotment map of Foreman area, Freedmen allotments highlighted in yellow. Township plats of the Cherokee Nation, Oklahoma Historical Society.

In the years leading up to Oklahoma statehood, the Cherokee Nation, as well as the other Indian nations of Indian Territory, experienced a large influx of non-citizen Whites and Blacks. The town of Foreman attracted so-called State Blacks most likely because it was seen as an already established, predominantly African American community. Given its proximity to the border of Indian Territory and to the city of Fort Smith, Foreman likely attracted State Blacks relatively early in the post-bellum era. Unlike in the Creek Nation, there is little evidence of Freedmen hostility towards or social separation from State Blacks in Foreman. Instead, intermarriage between these two groups was common, and these two different ethnic groups joined together, forming bonds that would lead to population growth and stability in the Foreman community.[45]

The processes of allotment however, doubtless put pressure on Foreman. When allotment was finished, virtually the entire Foreman area was owned by people enrolled as Cherokee Freedmen. However, many lost their land early in the century to non-payment of taxes. It was this process that divested most people of their original allotments and of their lands purchased throughout the twentieth century. Under the Dawes Act, Freedmen allotments were restricted and untaxable. However, in 1904, through pressure from land-hungry people flooding in from outside Oklahoma, restrictions were removed from Freedmen surplus allotments (Debo 1940: 89). In 1908, all restrictions were lifted from Freedmen lands, including their homesteads.[46] Suddenly taxed, many people lost their lands through inability to pay or through not understanding that their land was now taxable. Those people who could not or did not pay their taxes found that their land was listed in the local and

county newspapers, up for bid by anyone who could pay the taxes on it. When someone noted this type of land for sale, they could simply travel to the county courthouse in Sallisaw and pay the taxes on it, and the land was passed to them. While this was entirely legal, most Freedmen descendants in the area refer to this type of land transfer degradingly, virtually likening it to theft. Whites and Freedmen, people from the community as well as outsiders, obtained vast amounts of land through this method, and were usually able to get this land for virtually nothing.

Another method of land loss was through default on loans or mortgage, or as payment for services rendered. Mr. Benjamin "Skinner" Benton, who, in his mid-eighties, was the oldest living resident of Foreman during my fieldwork, told of one well-known doctor's accumulation of land.

> S: Well like mother say there used to be a doctor here. A White doctor, he owned a lot of property around here you've probably heard of him, talk about Dr. Fox? …Well he owned a lot of property and he was a big farmer over there but he was a doctor… My mother said he, that he uh in comin' up and doctorin' all the people, a lot of people, he got a lot of people's property, like they land and stuff, just like if he, if he come doctor on my child and I didn't have no money, well…
> K: Oh he'd get the payment from 'em…
> S: Yeah, say he made a lot of land like that. And a lot of 'em would borrow money from him. And never paid.

Consequently, many Freedmen in Foreman who had just received their own piece of land lost this property early in the century. The new system of allotment finally guaranteed Freedmen ownership of their property, but the subsequent removal of restrictions brought further threats to individuals, families, and the Foreman

community itself. Those who lost their land likely experienced economic hardship, and many moved away from Foreman.[47]

Oklahoma Statehood and the Early Twentieth Century

Foreman community life continued in much the same way as it had prior to statehood in 1907. Now however, Foreman was a part of Oklahoma rather than the Cherokee Nation. Jim Crow segregation was now officially written into Oklahoma state law, affecting people of African descent in terms of education, intermarriage, and transportation. Later segregation laws mandated separate railway cars for people of African descent, and it was soon common practice for restaurants and stores to have segregated areas for Blacks, or to deny any service at all. The importance of Black towns was critical at this point. Towns like Foreman provided somewhat of a safe haven for both Freedmen and State Blacks during the Jim Crow era. They were places where people of African descent could have control over their own affairs and have successful businesses. They provided relative safety from the discrimination and racial violence experienced in non-Black towns throughout the Oklahoma countryside. Segregation in some forms had existed for Foreman residents under the Cherokee Nation, although it was not enforced equally in all institutions and in all locations. For people in Foreman, many parts of segregation were not a feature of everyday life due to their situation in the country and in a Black town. Area schools were segregated by race, but with no public transportation and no businesses besides small general stores, Foreman residents only encountered strict segregation on trips to

other towns like Muldrow and Fort Smith, which were usually made once a month or less. Whites, Blacks, and Indians in this rural area shared relative poverty and worked together in the fields to make a living. Children played together regardless of race. Social relationships between Whites, Blacks, and Indians were ordered by the predominant racial hierarchy, and generally friendly interactions were still tainted with the differentials in respect that were dictated by that hierarchy. However, most Foreman residents continued to have the same familiar relationships with their non-Black neighbors with whom they had been connected prior to statehood.

The Foremans were regarded as important people in the area throughout the beginning of the twentieth century and were central to the town's social and economic life. The Foreman family was extensive and Zack was said to have had family all over northeastern Oklahoma. Though the family connections are unknown, oral history maintains that the Foremans of Foreman were related to the Foremans of Vian, namely Aaron Foreman, a prominent Freedman in that area who helped to establish the county's first and only Black high school (Branscum 1976). It is said that Zack Foreman was well-connected to his family around the Cherokee Nation, and that they were also part of his large ranching operation as well as other businesses in which Zack was involved.

Zack's sons were regarded as "rich boys" because of their father's wealth. However they, like their father, had to tread the seemingly incompatible lines between Blackness and wealth throughout their lives. As mentioned earlier, despite his status, Zack Foreman was still subject to the degradation imposed by the racial system within Indian Territory and then Oklahoma. His son Ed, who was half White and half

Black, had perhaps an even more delicate line to walk. Oral histories tell that he often tried to "pass" for White, and many times succeeded. He separated himself in many ways from other Blacks in the community, but was shown in no uncertain terms that he was not welcome in White society when during one of his regular visits to the Silver Moon, a bar in downtown Fort Smith, it was discovered that he was part Black. Community members recall that he was beaten severely, and that this type of occurrence was not out of the ordinary for Ed.

Despite the family's prominence throughout the Cherokee Nation, the Foremans would virtually disappear from the area over the course of the twentieth century, as did many of the families that once populated Foreman. Zack passed away on August 5, 1916 at approximately 68 years of age. He left behind almost $20,000 in property, including 150 acres of land, 250 head of cattle, 52 horses and mules, 35 hogs, and a cotton gin. It can be imagined that much of his wealth was in the hands of his children and family at the time of his death, but this property left at his death was left to his sons and daughter, and several other people from Foreman.[48]

Zack's son Roscoe had learned to read, acquired a set of law books, and subsequently acted as an attorney and served as the administrator of his estate at his death. His son Zack Jr. went on to play professional baseball for the Kansas City Monarchs in the Negro Leagues in 1920.[49] However, he was murdered in 1921 about one and a half miles west of Redland during a dispute over a poker game.[50] Oral history today blames his murder partly on Zack Jr.'s status as a "rich boy" that other people did not care for. Ed Foreman stayed in the town most likely until his death, and Sheridan stayed in the town into the 1960s, when he and his family moved to

Iowa. Dewey was said to have moved to Texas. The futures of Zack Foreman's other children are unknown, but they did not remain in the Foreman area.

Life continued on without Zack Foreman in the twentieth century, and Foreman remained a vibrant community for generations. It was a small country town, but was home to a large community. As in most country towns in Oklahoma, most roads were dirt and heavy spring and fall rains would make them impassible. Motor vehicles were hard to come by and most people traveled by horse and wagon or buggy, or on foot. Water was pulled from individual wells, and wood was chopped to use in wood stoves for heat. At night people worked by the light of coal oil or kerosene lamps, taking a walk outside to the outhouse before they crawled into their tick-mattress beds for the night. This was life not only in the 1800s or the 1920s, but up into the mid-1950s and 1960s. Like many small Oklahoma towns in the country, especially Black towns, people lived without electricity until 1954 or 1955. Phones and indoor plumbing came even later, many homes never installing them as families moved out of the area before these services were brought to the country.

Farming and cattle ranching continued to be major occupations in Foreman, the cattle ranching most likely continuing as an influence from Zack Foreman. Mr. Skinner Benton remembered stories of cattle ranching in Foreman during his father's time and when he, himself was a child in the 1930s.

> "Zack Foreman had property and people from here to Vian. He raised cattle you know… And he had all, cattle everywhere there. Plum down into the creek. And they, them cows'd be so thick up there and hollerin' at night, you couldn't sleep. And if you, you've ever been in the house the cows'd come right up to the house and just lay down and just 'Maw, maw, maw, maw' all night long! And I seen my dad, and Johnny, I seen them

> get ready to sell cattle… And there, there he'd put the cows out on that road and boy I've seen cows like, one down yonder, that road down yonder I've seen 'em where you could walk on their backs, there were so many cattle in the road.… And they'd push 'em all out to Muldrow to a big pen out there. And dad and them used to be carrying feed out there to stay out there; sometime you wouldn't see 'em for 2 or 3 nights. Takin' care of them cattle. Puttin' 'em on the train. Yeah, somethin' to see. Back then. Now people, people wouldn't look at 'em now; put 'em in a truck in a half hour and have 'em gone. Things are different."

Cattle ranching remained a part of the Foreman economy at least into the 1930s.

Farming and farm work eventually overtook cattle ranching as an occupation, and throughout the twentieth century, adults and children picked cotton, spinach, peas, and other vegetables for several large farm owners. Many families in Foreman were sharecroppers for these farm owners. In Raymond Foreman's and Skinner Benton's day in the 1930s, one of these landowners was Dr. Fox. In their children's time, in the 1950s and 1960s, it was B.C. McKnabb. Farm workers would drive through Foreman in trucks, picking up workers and bringing them to the fields in the flatbeds. At the end of the day, they would ride home in the same way. This was done from spring to fall each year, many times both children and adults toiling in the summer's blazing heat.

Most families were large at that time, some with more than ten children. Children were expected to help the family by working early in life. Typical daily work for children included hunting, fishing, chopping wood, drawing well water, and taking care of livestock, among other things. In some cases, children stayed home from school in order to help their familes. In this close-knit community, most adults

took part in raising the children of others through monitoring children's activities and informing their parents, or scolding or punishing them as their own parents would. Despite the possible punishments, children knew that their elders were watching out for them. Josephine Wallace Brown, now a resident of nearby Roland, recalls growing up in Foreman with fondness.

> Oh yeah we were busy, but it was fun, it wasn't hurting people. It was just – anybody got hurt it would be us but. We would do back then. Be jumpin' in the pond could get snakebit but we didn't. We had a ball growin' up. But Redland [Foreman] was so different 'cause kids were, and the parents were all about the welfare of the children. Everybody's child. And every child was, was treated with respect down there. And every parent, well I had some people that we called Aunt and Uncle though they weren't any blood relation to me. But you had to show that respect. People that had that on the front of their names. I mean if you were to keep your lips, you would.

Children made their own fun through rolling tires with sticks or through creating their own toys when they weren't engaged in daily work activities.

Throughout most of the twentieth century, people in Foreman kept their own gardens and usually several hogs and chickens, only going to the store for such things as flour, sugar, coffee, and other such items they could not produce on their own. This diet would be supplemented by small game that was hunted in the area, including squirrels, rabbits, deer, catfish, and possum. It was a diet of food that was produced from their own labor, or from their neighbors within the community. Some of these foods are not remembered well today by residents. Rose Youngblood and Josephine Wallace Brown recall with disgust some of the meals that were common in their community, and the work that went into producing them:

R: And I'd have to help clean them chitlins,
J: Ooh that's why I don't eat 'em now. I don't eat chitlins.
R: I don't either; I could never eat 'em.
J: I couldn't either.
R: I tried once and that thing, every time I chew it it'd get bigger and bigger in my mouth. I couldn't swallow it.
J: That's why I can't eat 'em. I can't handle it.
R: I can't, I can't. The other thing I can't handle is possums.
J: I don't want no mo' greasy possum.
R: Aw had to eat them possums.
J: And the hog maw.
R: Oh no!
K: What is that?
J: That's the stomach isn't it?
R: That's the stomach, s' a big ol' thang.
J: S' kinda like ripple, like ripple Christmas candy,

Each fall, before it got cold, people in the community would come together for hog killings at various people's houses. People brought their own hogs, and they usually killed about four or five at a time. Those who helped were able to take home some of the meat, and generally everyone left with enough to feed their families through the winter. Meat was smoked in a smokehouse and virtually every part of the hog was used for things like cooking grease, hogs head cheese, cracklin', bacon and ham. Rose Youngblood, born in 1926, and Josephine Brown, born in 1952, discuss their vivid recollections of hog killing:

R: Yeah we'd get up at 4, 4, 5 o'clock in the mornin'!
…
J: They'd render the fat into cracklins and…
R: Oh girl don't name that.
J: Had a black washpot out there and had them cracklins just swimmin' in all that grease. And we'd skim 'em off and put 'em in a pan and get 'em out and put another

> batch of fat in there. And then you'd have lard to cook with.
> R: And I couldn't hardly stand that lard from them hogs. It always had a scent to me.

Hog killings were just one of the ways in which the community ensured that all of its members were taken care of. Being a small and close-knit town, it was known when families or individuals did not have enough to get by. Offerings of food from individuals in the community as well as community food gatherings like a hog killing were ways in which the less fortunate could be supported. However, most people in the area, White, Black, and Indian, were in the same economic situation: poor but not hungry.

> We learned to be content, whatever the circumstances. We learned to be content in those circumstances. Because we thought everybody was like us. You know everybody we knew were poor. So that's just the way of the world.[51]

When people remember their lives in Foreman, poverty is never part of the description. Most people had enough to get by, and should they fall short from time to time, the community ensured their survival.

Foreman was a center of social activity throughout the early to mid-twentieth century. Only a few residents owned cars, and most got around by horse and buggy or by walking. The heavy rains in spring and fall would often make the dirt roads impassable, and consequently most residents in Foreman did not travel regularly to larger neighboring towns like Muldrow or to the city of Fort Smith. The community was consequently the center of residents' social and economic activities. Its importance for these types of interaction was doubled by the environment of racial

segregation and racism in general. Foreman, as a Black town, provided some amount of safety from the racism of surrounding White/Indian towns, and was a location for Black-owned businesses which Foreman residents could manage and patronize without fear of discrimination or racist acts. Men and women, adults and children, had innumerable platforms for social interaction within their own community.

Women in Foreman came together often for quilting, usually at women's homes and later at the AME church in town. Josephine Wallace Brown recalled,

> And the women would get together and my aunt had a, a quilting rack on her ceiling. And the ladies would get together and I think Miss Moore had one, but they would get together at each other's house and they'd make each family a quilt from time to time you know. They'd take turns. And they'd drop the rack down and you'd have three or four women sittin' around quilting…Yeah they would quilt. And every patch of clothes that we couldn't wear anymore because too many holes or, they were cut up and made into bedding.

This was one of many social gatherings that held the Foreman community together. On many days throughout the year, Foreman residents could be found watching community baseball games outside. Baseball teams were formed for girls, boys, and men, and while community games were common, so were games with teams from other towns in Sequoyah County. Many times, these were teams from other Black or Freedmen towns, but games were also played against White teams and against Indian teams from further north, in the hills north of the Arkansas River bottoms. Foreman boys went as far as Stilwell to play baseball with other teams. Foreman girls had teams as well. Foreman produced some excellent ball players, as Zack Foreman Jr.

went on to play in the Negro Leagues. Rose Youngblood, an 80-year-old woman from Foreman, and Josephine Wallace Brown recall the community ballgame events:

> J: I was tellin' her when we passed the gate we used to have ball games down there.
> R: I mean y'all had some.
> J: Didn't we though?
> R: Whoo! Good, plum 'til night, every week.
> J: And you couldn't even, couldn't even hardly see! But that's the only thing drove, stop the game. Darkness.
> R: And y'all could play some ball.

Baseball was a great part of life in many Freedmen towns, and this community institution worked to connect Foreman residents to other people and other towns in their vicinity.

Churches in Foreman also served this dual function. While being spiritual and social centers for community residents, they also connected Foreman to other towns throughout the county and state. Foreman churches often served as meeting sites outside of Sunday services; they were places where dinners and singings were held, and where quilting gatherings took place. The town of Foreman had three churches prior to the 1970s – a Baptist church, a Holiness church, and an African Methodist Episcopal church. The Holiness and Baptist churches were most likely established early in the century, if not prior to statehood, and the African Methodist Episcopal Church had been established in 1882, as described above.

In the 1930s and 1940s and prior to this time, church revivals in Foreman would attract hundreds of people across the state who would stay for days. Skinner Benton recalls Mrs. Williams, the church mother. She served as caretaker for the church and its congregation, and often traveled across the state and to Kansas City on

church business. Accordingly, while Foreman seems as if it must have been isolated out in the countryside, evidence to the contrary continues to present itself. Mr. Benton described with excitement the Holiness church revivals, where Blacks would come from across the state as well as from Arkansas and further for days at a time. Sitting on Mr. Benton's porch looking out at the main road in the setting sun, I could almost see the entire road filled with people as he described.

Throughout the twentieth century and up until the early 1970s, church services were rotated cyclically throughout the months and years. People from Foreman attended church in relatively distant places in the county like Sallisaw and Vian about twice yearly at each location, and the congregations of these churches would also attend services in Foreman several times a year. These would usually be followed by dinner on the grounds for everyone involved. Somewhat like the 4th Sunday church rotations seen in the Seminole and Creek Baptist churches, the Black churches had similar cycles of visiting other Black churches in the area on certain Sundays. Historically, it was a critical way in which Foreman could interact and have fellowship with Black communities throughout the area.

The educational system within Foreman and that serving Blacks across the county had a similar function. Prior to statehood, children in Foreman attended subscription schools. There were several over the years in the Foreman area, and children's parents had to pay a fee each year to help fund the operation of the school (Campbell 1976). Foreman residents who are today in their eighties remember several schools serving different areas of the Black community. There were enough children to necessitate several schools, and Raymond Foreman, an 83-year-old man

during my fieldwork, recalls that there were 65 to 70 children in his school. However, most people over 50 remember only one school serving Foreman. From the 1930s until the 1950s, children attended school in the center of Foreman in a two-room schoolhouse. This later burned, and some rumors point to the school burning being possibly racially motivated. A small one-room schoolhouse was built across the road that still stands now, although in serious disrepair.

Children attending school here in the two-room schoolhouse – later the one-room schoolhouse – could go only to the eighth grade. If they decided to continue their schooling, children had to attend the only Black high school in Sequoyah County, which was located in Vian – over thirty miles away. In addition to spending hours on an unheated bus each day going to and from school, children in Foreman would have to walk as much as six miles from their house to what was then the highway so the bus could pick them up. At the same time, while walking to the bus stop, the White school bus would pass them by. The great walking distance led many parents to send their children to live with relatives in Muldrow or places closer to the highway during the week. For others, these incredible obstacles to education kept them from getting through high school. Despite the hardships encountered in the struggle for education however, the one Black high school in Vian connected Black youths and families from all across the county. Students who attended school here grew up with close friendships and acquaintances with other Black students from the entire area. Consequently, people who after people finished school here, they were part of a vast Black social that spanned the county. Being a relatively small school, students in one grade were often acquainted or at least familiar with students in the

other grades. If a person attended school over four years apart from another student, they were still likely to be able to connect to each other through their brothers and sisters. It is a network that still exists among the now elderly African Americans who attended the Black high school in Vian.

Townspeople also interacted with other communities through doctoring and midwifery. Several women in Foreman served as midwives not only to women in their own community, but to women in neighboring White and Indian communities. People who grew up in Redland, a White town neighboring Foreman, recall that they were born with the help of well-known midwives from Foreman, and that these midwives would be paid for their services with food or other resources. Raymond Foreman recalls that his grandmother knew herbal medicines well and would often be called away to service in Cherokee communities in the northern hills of Sequoyah County.

> She would go clear in them mountains and stay three and fo' months. And never come down. Go on over and get in that buggy. And when she leave we wouldn't know whether she was comin' back. She'd be back.
> K: Huh. What did she go out to the mountains for? Nobody knew?…
> R: Them Indian people up there, the women have babies and they give her money and she'd go up there and he'p 'em. She stayed with them. Yes uh.

Most older Freedmen in Foreman had knowledge of medicinal herbs and roots and used them regularly within their own families. This knowledge was passed down from parents and grandparents to children. While most men learned all of these medicines and where to find them, the knowledge was especially important for women, and they used these in the care of their families most often. Today, everyone

I spoke with from Foreman recalls the remedies that people used to use, although the younger people would not know where to find these things. Although non-Freedmen Cherokee people may have used these same herbs and medicines, these were thought of as country medicinal practices, and not Indian or Cherokee practices.

Community picnics continued to be an important part of Foreman cultural life in the beginning of the twentieth century. While the large Freedmen picnics held to commemorate emancipation on August 4 were falling out of practice in the historic Cherokee Nation, they were going strong in Foreman into the 1930s.[52] However, they were no longer held on August 4, but rather around July 4 as were other American Independence Day celebrations. The date and reasoning behind this change are unknown, but it most likely began taking place between Oklahoma statehood and the 1930s, as none of the elderly Foreman residents could recall having picnics on August 4. The shift may have been a result of statehood's influences as well as Foreman's proximity to the Arkansas border, and the heavy influx of non-native Blacks following statehood. According to oral histories, the picnics continued to be just as large as they had been in Zack Foreman's day. Benjamin "Skinner" Benton had vivid memories of attending the Foreman picnic as a child:

> S: And I remember when we stayed over across at Muldrow, this was what they called the Foreman prairie here. And there ooh there was a lotta Black people, a lot of 'em just a crazy actin' and mean as they could be.
> K: Really?
> S: Yeah you know, and they had a big playground down this road, and they'd come out around here, around a big creek here, and all different trees and everything. And our people, Black people over where we lived there, they'd hook up the wagon, and bring the children over in the evening, at sundown and come over here to that picnic. And I remember 'em, it was 5 or 6 of us as

children in that wagon. It was uh, uh, they'd put a quilt or two down on the floor and we'd just get back there and they'd get up there in that seat and ride. And when we get down here there was so many people and they was what you call I can't think of it, use that booze, a lot of em and ooh they was, it seemed more like they was crazy you know? But they dance, play music, aw but they, ride horses! They'd just run them horses through there. And children couldn't even get out of the wagon.
K: Really?
S: Uh–uh. You'd stay up in that wagon and your mother and daddy would go up in, in there where they could buy you stuff. And they'd go up and buy you stuff and bring it out to the wagon and then give it to the children up in that wagon. And they'd be wagons go all out there.
K: This is during a picnic or?
S: This is generally during a picnic yeah. A great big crowd, a great big place. People just everywhere. And horses and people, if you'd see 'em you'd think they were, a lot of 'em 'd be crazy, and they'd be fulla that junk you know and they'd just run horses and ride 'em and shoot yaw! Yeah.
K: So how often did they have those?
S: Well, once a year anyway. The 4th of July was one of the main days.
K: Really.
S: Yup, they'd have 'em 3 or 4 days. Yeah.
…

K: Huh. And everyone would dance?
S: Oh yeah! Yeah, they'd dance, holler and hoot. Yes. Sing. Oh they had some, if they had it they could do it, they had a lot of people who could dance! Yes.
K: So when did they stop having those picnics, do you remember?
S: Well, it depends. Somedays they'd go all night with them picnic, and people would go home, like that. Leave. Some of 'em stay all night.

These picnics attracted people all over the area regardless of race, and one was likely to find Whites and Indians among the crowd. Mr. Benton remembers that more and more Whites came every year, while there weren't many Indian people in attendance.

Each of these aspects of community life, from hog killings and quilting gatherings to church services and extravagant picnics, helped to form and solidify the community of Foreman in terms of identity. Its historical roots as a Cherokee Freedmen town and as a legacy of Zack Foreman were also instrumental in community and individual identities. These features of life in Foreman were common to many small towns in Oklahoma, especially to historic Freedmen towns throughout the former Indian Territory. Despite their many similarities however, Foreman was unique as its own community and had its own identity stemming from its unique history and cultural context.

Another central feature of Foreman community identity lay in the racial environment in which it was founded, as well as the shifting racial system in which it was embedded throughout the twentieth century. Foreman was founded as a community of Freedmen in the Cherokee Nation, as a place where newly emancipated Cherokee slaves could find refuge and opportunity. It was a base of activism for the rights of Freedmen in the Cherokee Nation, and at the same time a symbol of the success that Cherokee Freedmen could attain in the post-bellum era in the Cherokee Nation. As race consciousness grew in the Cherokee Nation and later in the state of Oklahoma, Foreman became perhaps even more important to its residents as a safe haven from racism and discrimination that hindered social life and business opportunities for Black people. During segregation, Foreman's identity as a Black town was further solidified within a state and society that defined its residents as Black, regardless of their diverse histories and cultures, and accordingly subject to treatment as second-class. The strict racial hierarchy that came with statehood,

segregation, and the influx of outsiders into Indian Territory and Oklahoma brought about great changes. Despite ethnic and historic differences, Foreman residents related to one another through their common experiences as Black people under an oppressive racial system. What had been Freedmen identities eventually gave way to a common Black identity that was shaped by the racial environment, non-Freedmen Black influence, and everyday experiences as Black people in terms of segregation, discrimination, and simple experience as the racial other. Racial violence also contributed to the melding of Freedmen and Black identities. Despite the relative protection from racism that life in Foreman provided, life in the early to mid-twentieth century involved several instances of violence that shook the community. Mr. Skinner Benton recalls a frightening experience from his childhood in Foreman in the late 1920s or early 1930s.

When Mr. Benton was young, there was a new Black family moving into a house nearby. No one knew the family or where they had come from. One day, the man of the family and some others came up over the hill in town in a wagon with a team of horses. They were going too fast and would soon be out of control. At the bottom of the hill was a White lady named Miss Ashley walking down the road. The wagon came over the hill and as it was speeding down the incline, the man in the wagon jumped out to try to brake the wagon. Because wagons lacked brakes, someone had to jump out and catch the wagon by swinging a chain around the axle or wheel. The man was trying to do this and was running after the wagon with several other men yelling, “Catch it! Catch it!” Miss Ashley thought they were running after her and yelling, “Catch her! Catch her!” She became frightened and ran all the way

home, telling the people there what had happened, and that this man was chasing her and trying to catch her. Later, the Black townspeople heard that the White people planned to kill that man. Skinner's mother heard about it and mentioned to his father that maybe he should tell that man that people were planning to kill him. Skinner heard his father say no, that if he did so the man may get angry with him. Later, the man came by the house and his father said to him, "Some of these white people are planning on trying to kill you. I just wanted you to know so you would be warned, if you wanted to leave or something." The man responded, "I ain't scared of nothin'." After that, the other Black townspeople heard that Skinner's father had told the man of the plot to kill him, and that created trouble for Skinner's father. They were angry that his father said anything to the man, perhaps fearing retribution on the larger Black community. Skinner's family learned that there were now men out to kill Skinner's father for the offense. For a time, about seven or eight people would come to the house at night with guns with the intent to kill him. There was a small wooden box outside the wall of the house and each night, Skinner's father would hide in it for the entire evening in case the men came for him. There was a small hole in the wall and Skinner's mother would pass cooked sweet potatoes to his father through it so he could eat. It was an extremely terrifying time for Skinner and his brothers and sisters, and one that Skinner recalls vividly even though his memory is lately failing. Fortunately his father was not killed. They continued to see the newcomer walk the road to Muldrow and back every day for work and thought nothing of it. Eventually they stopped seeing him, and his family had moved out of the house. They assumed they had moved on, since no one around town really knew that family at all. Later, a

White family moved into the vacant house. One day one of the children went out to cut some wood for fire. There was a big tree in the back yard that was uprooted, and there was a small pit underneath where the roots had been. As they went over to the tree to cut the wood, the boy saw something in the pit. It was the body of a Black man and it had been tied with chains and dragged by a mule. They called the police and they asked several people to come identify the body; sure enough it was that man who the White people had planned on murdering.

In this case, the murderers were arrested, but they were two Black men who had been forced by local Whites to do the job. In the following decades, the 1930s and 1940s, there were at least three more instances of horrifying violence against the Blacks of Foreman. Josephine Brown, now in her fifties, was always told that her grandmother was raped and murdered. Rose Youngblood, one of the older women of the community, remembers when they found her:

> R: I hear my sister tell about that a lot. She the one who found her.
> J: My mother did?
> R: Yeah.
> J: She didn't tell us. What's the story. I don't remember it correctly.
> R: Well she said, she was s'posed to have been goin' up to Ms. [ ]'s.
> J: Mm-hmm.
> R: And somebody said they seen somethin' layin' out there and they said Luke would only go so far. And Bill went back to the house. And finally they went all out there. And there she was, dead. Somebody done murdered, killed her.
> J: Mm. She been gone how long from home?
> R: I guess you know quite a while that day.
> J: Mm.
> K: And they found her in the morning?

> R: I guess it was afternoon. My sister say she went too over there and she was dead. It must have been somebody out there in the woods…
> J: Kidnapped her.
> R: Yeah when she left that house.
> K: And they said nothing was ever done about that?
> R: Mm-mm. No. Only that no arrests had been made. Like they did when they killed Miss Hester. Nobody was arrested when they did that.
> …
> J: Wan't no law out here for us.
> R: No wasn't no law to do nothin'.

Like Josephine's grandmother, a woman named Miss Hester had been raped and murdered in her house while she was quilting, years prior to Josephine's grandmother's death. These terrible acts must have had devastating effects for the community of Foreman at the time.

Although Whites in the area today seem eager to talk about historic inter-racial friendships, there are several who also recall the violence inflicted against Blacks while in their youth. Gertie Barber, a White resident of the neighboring community of Redland, remembers as a child when two young Black girls were attacked while picking berries. She has written up this account as a part of her own informal history of the area.

> "I think his family is a little bit leery of white people. Back in the 20's one of the siblings got her throat cut by a white man named Irvy Tuner. This Turner guy and another fellow were riding down the old section line road just east of the Davis place and came upon these two black girls. The girls were on Bear Branch hunting for turkey nest. Irvy's friend dared him to get off his horse and cut the "dam [sic] nigger's throat." Irvy got off his horse and chased her down and cut her throat from ear to ear and threw her on a brush pile and left her for dead. The other girl out ran them and went home and told her mother and dad what had happened. They

> went and found Mary, hauled her to the doctor in a wagon and the doctor saved her life. The woman still has this scar on her neck."

The woman who was attacked is now in her eighties and lives out of state, and has lived with the physical scar of this ordeal for her entire life. The emotional scars left on her family are especially severe. Her brothers and sisters – one of whom still resides in Foreman, and several others who have passed away in the past decade – were known for going to great lengths to avoid interaction with Whites, and would often act strangely even in pleasant attempts at conversation by Whites.

Race was consequently an important part of life for Foreman residents throughout the early to mid-twentieth century. Foreman's identity as a Black town was strengthened as segregation dictated that Blacks could not participate in the social and economic life of the surrounding area. At the same time, people's individual experiences as Black in this area tied them together with a common identity. The Jim Crow system determined their separateness from the rest of the society. Defined as Negroes, they had their own schools, own towns, their own social and spiritual institutions, and were subject to racism, discrimination, and violence due to their skin color. Individual experiences as Black people in this system as well as the community's functions as a social and economic center in such a racial context were powerful shapers of identity for Foreman residents. Social and political networks that were created and maintained through Black churches and schools also reinforced Black identity. This identity as Black became primary as experienced in everyday life. Individual family histories and ancestries, while important, became secondary as shapers of identity. When this racial system began to break down, so did many of

functions that Foreman, as a Black town, had, and this had critical impacts on the community and identity.

Community Decline and Land Loss

"Oh, oh they left heah. It's pitiful how they left, how our people left here…"
- Skinner Benton, 2004

It is a dark and wet day when Damon and Kathy Foreman and I venture out to the abandoned AME church building. We crawl through the barbed wire fence separating their property from the neighboring cow pasture and start out, Damon carrying his rifle in case of an encounter with a snake. We choose our path carefully in order to avoid the cows and to bypass the massive expanses of mud and water in our way – it has been a rainy autumn and land can stay flooded for weeks here due to the clay soil. We stop first at what was a cattle dip, a narrow open tunnel across about ten feet of land lined with concrete. Zack Foreman and others used this to apply insect repellent to their cattle, hundreds at a time. Now it is cracked and uneven, but holding the rainwater as it must have held the repellent at one time. We move on, Damon showing us the roads he used to walk down to get to church and to friends' houses. It is hard to believe that there were once roads where we are walking, now just part of a seemingly unending cow pasture. We come upon the old home site of Zack Foreman. There is no building left, but we can see the remnants of a concrete walkway lined with bunches of flowers. There is little that is recognizable in the rubble of the once large house that stood here. We go on toward the AME church and find what we believe to be the remnants of the Masonic lodge, now a pile of plywood

and metal roofing on the edge of the pasture. We step through the mud and ruins of an outhouse to the church. We find the church with the doors gone, and walk in to find the pews, altar, and pulpit virtually unmoved from their places where they must have been at the church's last service. However, as we walk further inside, the stench of cow and wild animal feces is overpowering. The hymnals and bibles once used by the congregation are now reduced to thousands of pages strewn across the floor. Covering our mouths and noses, we explore the chapel and find paper fans, Sunday school lessons, and some bibles and hymnals that are still in one piece. Somehow, it seems from the position of the pews and the chalkboard listing the Ten Commandments, that the church had been abandoned last week in a rush – everyone leaving their church materials there. Instead, it had been abandoned decades before, no one bothering to take the hymnals or bibles, no one returning to move the pews or to board up the windows. Amazingly, Damon and Kathy find his late aunt's Bible in the mess, still in one piece. We are soon overcome by the foul smells and must leave, and do so with some sadness at what has become of a church that was once full of life.

• • •

By the time of racial integration in the late 1950s and 1960s, people had been moving out of Foreman for decades. Many Cherokee Freedmen had lost their land through the consequences of the Acts of 1904 and 1908, or had mortgaged and lost their property early in the century, some people moving out of Foreman completely. However, the real impacts on population began with the local and national economic downturn in the 1920s and 1930s. In Oklahoma, farms were hit hard and cotton

prices dropped drastically, a major blow for the state's main cash crop. Small towns like Foreman suffered as people could no longer make a living through farming, or through working others' farms as laborers. Black towns like Foreman likely were among the hardest hit, as farm laborer was one of the few jobs that Blacks could normally get and keep. The large farms in the Arkansas river bottom attracted workers not only from the historic Freedmen towns in the area, but also from seasonal Black laborers who would help fuel the local Black economies. Some very elderly residents of Sequoyah county recall seeing rows of temporary homes on small stilts lining the roads surrounding the large farms in the area early in the twentieth century. It is a sight that has not been seen since then.

Some Foreman residents, like residents of other small country towns in Oklahoma, sought opportunities elsewhere. Some moved to cities like Fort Smith, Tulsa, and Oklahoma City. Others moved out of Oklahoma altogether, to places like Wichita, Kansas City, or even further to California. The community lived on, however, its diminished population took a toll. A community which once had at least three schools to serve all of its children was reduced to one two-room schoolhouse, and later a one-room schoolhouse. It was also during this period, the 1920s to the 1940s, when Foreman's fraternal organizations likely went out of practice. The large annual picnics eventually died out as well. Mr. Skinner Benton described his memories of the picnics.

> K: And do you know how old you were when you were at the last big picnic like that?
> S: I was, I really wasn't, aw let's see. It's been a long time though. The last time I've been one that I've been to a picnic. But the picnic went down just like

> everything else. It got where it wasn't nothin' much, it wasn't like it used to be. It got where someone would come up and have a picnic, but they just, 'cause I remember at one of them small picnics after then, but they used to have big ones, when all the people was here, and it was, it was a lot of Black people, it was Indian and mixed breed people. And it was a lot of 'em in here then, and some of em was crazy. You know of them, they get out there and a lot of 'em just go to fightin' each other! (laugh) They would! No kiddin' and and they'd make 'em stop, they'd stop, and some would go home maybe and get a gun and come back, and you're liable to hear that thing shootin'! People be laying down under the tables and runnin' and everything! Oh it was animal peoples down in there some of 'em.

Mr. Benton was a child when he attended the big picnics, and so the last of these was most likely held in the late 1930s.

Picnics became smaller and attracted fewer people, and were most likely family reunion types of events. Skinner recalled attending what he referred to as a picnic in the past five years in Foreman, however, this was more like a family reunion. In Foreman, eventually these gatherings were not held at all anymore as families moved out of the town.

Churches also suffered from the population decline. While Foreman had several churches, many times there were not enough attendees to have services at all three places. However, many residents remained loyal to their own churches and there was no desire to consolidate the separate congregations into one. Instead, townspeople alternated churches in various weeks. Damon Foreman speaks of attending services at Foreman's Baptist church in the 1950s and 1960s:

> Now it wasn't each and every Sunday that we had church up there and that created problems because they would try to communicate with, with uh Reverend

> Thompson on Saturday to make sure he was coming because he wasn't, his attendance wasn't great. Okay, he was not consistent with it. And especially in the wintertime, 'cause the winters were so much colder then, you'd have to make sure you have wood. So we'd have often times come there, there was Blackjack trees around the church. Big ones too and there was always limbs and stuff like that so we would gather enough wood to start the stove and get the place warm, so we could have church in the morning. Mr. Taylor would pick us up okay, it would be Mr. Taylor, his wife, Raymond, and they drove a pickup, the one you saw my mom take a picture. That one, and we all sat in the back. And ate dust. And uh they'd have mom, and the rest of us. So we'd have eight or nine people just right there. …And then, you'd go to church there and Reverend Thompson wasn't comin', then the communication would be, let's go over to the Baptist church, the church that we went over to there. Remember the church there? We'd go to church there. And we'd give them a good crowd. Often times you'd have people come down from Vian and every month or so there'd be a gathering of church folks. Um and what else. And also in Sallisaw. We would have turns going there as well.

People of Foreman continued their participation in the church visitation cycle with other Black churches throughout the county up until the 1960s and 1970s. Residents continued using the churches as meeting places for community events into this period as well. Unfortunately, the Holiness church burned in the late 1960s, and the Baptist church had the same fate. Members of the former Holiness church in Foreman reunited to establish a new church in Muldrow since community members were moving out of Foreman. This survived until rather recently, but is now abandoned. The Gaines Chapel African Methodist Episcopal church was reconstructed in 1961 in Foreman. Services had been held in a small white wooden church, and a new church

was built directly next to the building out of red brick. Unfortunately, this church would be completely abandoned in the late 1970s or early 1980s.

Perhaps the final blow to Foreman's declining population came with racial integration. Oral histories recall the integration of area schools in 1955, and Foreman children began attending school in the neighboring White town of Gans, which not long before had sported a greeting sign saying, "Nigger don't let the sun go down on you here." By one disputed account, the event was commemorated with the burning of a cross on the school grounds. Skinner Benton's oldest daughter was one of the first students to integrate into Gans school. He was protective of his daughter and family during what must have been an incredible transition:

> And it was 'long in the time when you know you had a lot of people that I would say particularly in the south, they had all that trouble and people fighting about things you know, well, the first one come out here and come to our house and take our daughter and say we're going to have to send her to Muldrow or Gans or something. And this, and he was an awful nice man now, but he was je- set down and was being nice, he was nice. And he told us and we told him 'cause we knew him, we told him that we don't mind our child, we don't think she's too good to go there, but we're going to tell you. Say we're not goin', we're not going to go pushing doors open in the school. But we're not going up there to fight to go to school up there. But when the doors are open, then we will let our children come to the school.

While finally providing Black students with decent education, the transition was difficult for many. Damon Foreman was forced to leave his school in Foreman to attend Gans school after he had finished 4th grade. Foreman school was being closed down and due to the processes of integration, Damon was made to go into 6th grade.

Consequently, Damon had to skip two critical grades in his schooling. He believes he continues to suffer from missing critical levels in his education.

Josephine Brown was the only Black student in her class at Gans and she suffered at the hands of a racist and abusive teacher.

> J: It was rough 'cause you know, and it was rough for me growin' up in Gans school cause I was the only Black in the class. And Jim Crow is not dead. I mean you could sense the prejudice once you know. It was, it was bad. I-I had a rough time at Gans school.
> K: Did you feel it from like other students?
> J: Oh yeah.
> K: And teachers? And…
> J: Yes. I had one teacher that, I won't call his name but it was ridiculous the way I was treated in his class. And the way it ended, some of the kids went home and told their parents, and my daddy went to school. And Daddy didn't go to school. But my daddy went to school. And it ended. They left. Oh yeah. I'm glad that one time, he went and straightened it out.

Integration proved to be a difficult road for some individuals in terms of racial discrimination in school settings. It was also a blow to the community of Foreman itself. The town's school was closed for good, and with its demise also went the community's control over their children's education. Foreman school teachers were no longer needed, and educational resources were now fully in control of neighboring White towns. It was a critical community institution that was now no more.

Another severe impact of shutting down the Black schools lay in Foreman's connection to other Black towns and neighborhoods across the county. Previously, Foreman youths endured incredibly long bus rides to Vian that often prevented Foreman residents from receiving high school educations. Now those students could attend a high school within a few miles of their town. However, they were no longer

able to interact daily with other African American youths in the county through school. Consequently, the benefits of equal rights to education also brought losses to Foreman residents in their community institutions, as well as to their social and political networks with other Blacks across the county. Rural areas throughout eastern Oklahoma, regardless of race, were also undergoing similar processes as school consolidation led to school closings in many small communities.

Racial integration was eventually instituted in local businesses and transportation, including stores and restaurants. Foreman residents no longer had to enter through the back doors, use separate water fountains and restrooms, or suffer with no services at all. However, now that Blacks were allowed to use the services formerly reserved only for Whites, Black-owned businesses in Foreman suffered greatly. The general stores and other establishments in Foreman became unnecessary with integration and with better transportation. While integration was necessary in finally providing Blacks with basic civil rights, it stripped communities of institutions like schools and economic centers that were sites of Black power and self-determination. White institutions that had better services benefited from integration, as Black children were sent to White schools while the Black schools closed. More White teachers were hired while the Black teachers were suddenly out of work. White shops and restaurants benefited from the added business while those in Foreman failed. By the mid to late 1960s, the small businesses in the town were gone.

The processes of integration dealt a devastating blow to community life in Foreman, cutting the community's roots from under it. Children were now educated

in different towns and did not have contact with other Blacks across the county every day of their childhoods. As Foreman residents began to patronize the businesses of larger towns, the Foreman economy died. With it died much of the complex social and economic networks within and between Black communities in eastern Oklahoma. This change had lasting effects for Foreman. Integration, as well as greater individual access to transportation in the form of automobile ownership and the construction of Interstate 40, both of which happened during the period of integration, may have been the final blows to the Foreman community.

Little remains of the once bustling town of Foreman. As one drives down Redland Road just west of the small town of Muldrow, one can see houses scattered across the slightly hilly terrain, but it is mostly overgrown with trees and the tall, at times strangling, grasses of eastern Oklahoma. When Foreman was still a living community, there was none of this dense overgrowth – the land was sprayed with herbicide to keep away such weeds, and for miles there were only farms and ranches. There is no sign of what used to be the town center, which historically was near the fork in Redland Road where the railroad track crosses – the track that Zack Foreman persuaded the Kansas City Southern to lay. Today the fork in the road is still there, as well as the railroad track which still sees several trains each day. Nearby is a newer church building that is now used by a small White Baptist congregation. Staying to the left at the fork will lead one to the old town of Redland, which is in almost the same state as Foreman. Small houses are generally separated by 1/3 mile or more of ranch prairie or overgrown land. Much of it is now owned by the Stephenson Oil Company, which is known locally for putting an oil well on a piece of land and letting

the vegetation grow up. The neighboring town of Redland has also undergone severe decline, but many of the families of its historic residents still live in the houses scattered around the area. In Foreman, only about ten older people, four households, still live in the historic town's area. The number continues to decline as Foreman's older residents sadly pass away.

• • •

March 2005

Riding with the Foremans down Redland Road today, I had never noticed the old wooden house just hidden amongst the trees and overgrowth, now crumbling before our eyes. Damon stops the car on the road and points it out to me. It is Aunt Eller Green's old house, a central figure in the community about whom I had heard so much. She was a midwife to Black and White children throughout the area, a mother of dueling sons, the woman who would ladle out refreshing water to passing children. The irises she had planted along the road continue to bloom, although each year the wild grasses and woods threaten to strangle them for good. Crumbling houses and churches, splashes of flowers planted in what used to be yards, this is all that remains of Foreman's former glory. The few people who continue to live here, most over 70 years of age, keep in touch with those who have moved to Muldrow, Roland, Sallisaw, and Fort Smith, seeing them regularly at church, social events, and everyday activities. However, the community is gone. What was once Foreman is now stretched over the United States through family networks, and has merged into the larger Fort Smith community. The town of Foreman is now mostly a memory, and

one that will most likely fade as the older people pass on and their descendants grow up in places distant from Foreman, Oklahoma.

• • •

Most of the former Foreman residents and their descendants who are still in the area have moved to Fort Smith, or reside in other small towns nearby like Muldrow or Roland. There is however, a general African American community spanning eastern Sequoyah County and northern LeFlore County, including Fort Smith, Arkansas. The small town feel remains however, as amazingly, almost everyone knows each other and everyone seems to know what is going on in everyone else's lives, even though they may not have spoken to them in years. Foreman was not the only historic Freedmen or Black Cherokee community in the area. Other towns like Shady Grove and Moffett still have many residents, descendants of the original Black Cherokees and Cherokee Freedmen that settled the area. These communities keep active social ties to one another through continued church visitations, similar to the church rotations in which Foreman churches participated throughout the twentieth century. This still goes on today in area Black churches, although the entire congregation of a church rarely takes a Sunday to visit another. Instead, many people from various churches will attend churches in neighboring areas on special occasions for that specific church, such as church anniversaries and pastors' wedding anniversaries. This practice would most likely be done today in Foreman if any of its churches were still in use today. Today, this practice is a continuation of fellowship and networks among Black churches and people in the

area. People also stay connected through friendships, family relationships, and casual meetings at local restaurants and stores.

Although integration took place over forty years ago, racial structures in eastern Oklahoma remain solid. Racism is simply still a part of everyday life for most non-White people in this area. Additionally, despite the racially mixed histories of the area, most people are continually categorized as White, Black, or Indian. People continue to identify others, even lifetime friends, first on the basis of their race, and many times make preliminary judgments about their personality or other aspects of identity based on this.

Discrimination and racism are not merely features of the past. The "N" word is commonly used by Whites and Cherokee people as they speak amongst themselves, and racist attitudes continue to be passed from generation to generation among non-Blacks in the area. In this everyday situation described by Josephine Wallace Brown, the common way in which Whites attempt to compliment Blacks is described.

> J: When I was working, I was the outreach worker for this county, there was someone who had a problem with me. Bein', you know asking questions to see about getting them help, and referring them. One man, he's in his seventies, he came in the office one day. He said, 'Well you helped me a lot.' He told me, 'You sure are a credit to your race.' And I said, 'Well what race is that?' And he said, 'Well you know I mean the colored race.' I said, 'Well I don't know. 'Cause my great-grandfather was White, now where am I?' So he said, 'Well you're a, you're a nice lady.' I said, 'Thank you.' You know. (laughs)
> K: And how long ago was that?
> J: Uh 19-
> K: Kinda recently?
> J: Ooh yeah. This was 90- 93.

Other situations are more blatantly hateful:

> J: But what angered me one day, my daughter came home she was upset. One of her teachers in Muldrow had told her that, they ask her where Black people come from and she told 'em uh they were a curse from God.
> K: Are you serious?
> J: I was so upset I couldn't see straight. I had to do all I could not to just go up there and slap her. But yeah. And she graduated in 1990.

This took place in an eleventh grade class in a local high school. Its relative recentness demonstrates that these racial attitudes did not disappear with segregation in the 1950s and 1960s. From blatant hate to the more common genuine friendliness on top of long held racial stereotypes and ideologies, race continues to influence identities and interactions in everyday situations.

African American people in this area are seriously affected by the present and past racial structure. Today, it affects them in the types of jobs they work, the churches they attend, the types of interactions they have, and the people who they interact with, among other things. The past racial structure has had immense effects on identity, especially for those who experienced segregation. The racial past continues to structure the racial present in many ways. One of these ways is through the emotional residue of racism and racial violence felt throughout segregation. While acts of racial violence no doubt had devastating effects for the community of Foreman at the time, they also continue to affect generations of Foreman families. Josephine Wallace Brown reflects upon her grandmother's murder with Rose Youngblood:

> J: My grandmother was about in her 70s though wasn't she?
> R: I think, I imagine.

> J: She was in her 70s, late 70s. Pitiful. To die like that. She probably was tryin' to make it home. You know. Ughhh. Yeah I remember my Aunt Ella, 'cause Aunt Ella's the baby. And she said uh my mama never did no good after that happened. She died a couple years later.

Josephine was told that her mother died from being 'worried to death' over her grandmother's murder. The same was said about Miss Hester's daughter, the other murder victim of the same era. This trauma is carried through the generations, and is evident when talking to Josephine about her mother's and grandmother's deaths.

Race and the constantly changing overarching racial structures of the Cherokee Nation and of Oklahoma have had deep effects on the experiences and identities of Foreman residents from slavery up to the present. Their race virtually determined their lives as enslaved people prior to the Civil War, and after emancipation, their race and their consequent status as Freedmen put qualifications on their rights as Cherokee citizens. The influx of non-Cherokee, State Blacks also had important effects for Cherokee Freedmen and Black Cherokees in the Foreman area. Although they had different histories and cultures, they shared skin color and relative status as Black people. Ethnic differences and diverse ancestries were pushed aside as the possession of Black ancestry became the most important factor in day to day life. Racial segregation based on this ancestry, ignoring all other ancestries and cultural differences, was an extremely powerful shaper of experience and identity. Despite Foreman's situation in the country and away from businesses that required strict segregation, Foreman residents lived lives that were shaped daily by their status as Black people. Although they may have had very different cultural backgrounds and identities, their common experiences as Black people in their current context

unified them and shaped their identity accordingly. An African American identity that subsumed ancestral, cultural, and ethnic differences arose throughout Oklahoma and became the main identity of Foreman residents. Ancestries became secondary, as did claims to indigeneity held by Cherokee Freedmen and Black Cherokees. These aspects of individual identity had little relevance to everyday life under Jim Crow segregation, and within a community maintained by its features as a Black town.

Within this strict racial system that helped to create monolithic racial categories and solidify similar identities however, Freedmen and Black Indians in Foreman defied and resisted Oklahoma's constricting racial structures through their understandings of multiracialness within and outside their communities. The community's history itself is one of multiracialness and diverse backgrounds. As a town borne out of a multiracial Indian Territory, it was not out of the ordinary in Foreman to have Indian and White ancestry; rather it was the rule. Among older residents especially, there was and is a general understanding of kinship among all Whites, Indians, and Blacks in the area. They know that the Whites and Indians are multiracial, just as Blacks are. It is this kind of relationship that has spanned throughout the Indian Territory era, through statehood and segregation. It is one where Blacks, Whites, and Indians are connected in many ways, yet kinship connections with Blacks are not officially acknowledged. As Raymond Foreman noted of the Whites local to Foreman,

> R: We ain't got no White people.
> K: Well they do in Redland. You mean what? How do you mean?
> R: Sayin' if you test them they wouldn't test White. Mixed up.

"Mixed up" is exactly the way in which Freedmen refer to their own ancestry, acknowledging the degree of their multiracialness, and unity with surrounding White and Indian communities, despite monolithic racial categorization.

Keeping in mind this sub-context of taken for granted multiracialness, most Foreman residents throughout the twentieth century identified themselves primarily as "Negro" or Black, and referred to others as Whites or Indians. This Black identity was instrumental in the cohesiveness of the community, as well as to the larger network of African Americans in the area, and in the state of Oklahoma. This identity was also powerful in uniting Blacks in the struggles for civil rights, and for standing together during the heavy local opposition to racial integration in the 1950s and 1960s. The processes of integration took their toll on the community of Foreman, as did the economic shifts that took place throughout the twentieth century. The eventual disintegration of the Foreman community can be seen in many ways as a result of disintegrating community identity. The town of Foreman had great importance as a Black town for its residents under segregation. As segregation ended and the beginnings of racial equality were felt, the community no longer held the same importance. Residents were able to move elsewhere and they did so.

Although racial segregation is over, the remnants of this strict racial system remain. Everyday life is still very much shaped by race, and descendants of Freedmen and Black Indians continue to identify themselves primarily as African Americans or as Black. Over the past twenty to thirty years however, there has been a re-emergence of individualized, multi-racial, and indigenous identities. These have arisen as a result of increased interest in genealogy and family history, which

coincided with the celebratory reception of Alex Haley's *Roots* in 1976, and also coincided with the re-emergence of tribal governments within the Five Civilized Tribes. Accordingly, there are many descendants of Freedmen and Black Indian people from the Foreman area who have spent years researching their family histories, often with the intent of enrolling as a citizen in their respective tribes. Today, the multiracialness described above in Foreman during segregation is now not always taken for granted, but rather seen as another facet of identity that now deserves recognition.

Along with this re-emergence of multi-racial and multi-ethnic identities is a claim to Black indigeneity that was a major part of identity throughout the twentieth century. This aspect of identity is particularly strong, and has been handed down through the generations since Oklahoma statehood. In speaking to most any person of Freedman or Black Indian descent in rural historic Freedmen towns about history, they will invariably tell you, "This whole area used to be all owned by Blacks and Indians." They then almost always add, "Whites weren't even allowed here. They had to have special permission just to come in here." Skinner Benton of Foreman related,

> Oh they, it used to be a lot of Black peoples in there. Lot of Black people in there. Used to be in the bottoms and they'd farm and they, and then I have had older Black people that tell me I seen a little of it, but I didn't know nothin' about it, but the older ones say down in that bottom down there, where Roland is, all the way down to Muldrow, that Black people owned all of that in there. And what it was, them Black peoples owned it all…

The fact that almost every person of Freedmen and Black-Indian ancestry knows this about the history of eastern Oklahoma speaks to the significance of this narrative to their own understanding of their roots. This history, although not printed in historical literature or portrayed in tribal and Oklahoma histories, has been kept very much alive among Freedmen in Sequoyah County. Its retelling is a way of situating themselves within histories that have been constructed to purposefully leave them out. At the same time, the narrative is an act of resistance against those who have subjugated them over the past century. It recalls a time when Whites, who have dominated society and deprived them of basic rights, had no place and it was Blacks who did have a place. This narrative is a claim to indigeneity that resists a public narrative dismissing indigeneity based on the lack of documented Indian blood. This type of indigeneity is not necessarily a claim to Indianness, but rather a claim to having a native history with the tribes, and to having significant roles in Indian Territory before it became Oklahoma.

This narrative is an extremely important aspect of Freedmen and Black-Indian identity that lives on for past Foreman residents, as well as for descendants of Black Cherokees and Freedmen throughout the area. Racial systems in the Cherokee Nation and the state of Oklahoma have had immeasurable effects on Foreman residents' experiences and identities, and the present absence of these systems in institutional form has led to more impacts on identity. Re-discovery of Freedmen and Indian roots have followed de-segregation, as has a re-assertion of claims to multiracialness and to indigeneity to Indian Territory and the tribes. These latter two claims are especially important in a post-segregation era that warrants a now public

assertion of these aspects of identity. Today, Foreman is no more a town. However, those who are connected to the town have a unique sense of identity that was shaped by changing racial systems and understandings of their own places within it. Though the town of Foreman died long ago, its residents continue on their own journeys in identity, shaped at once by Foreman's history as a Cherokee Freedmen and Black town, and by today's shifting racial understandings.

Chapter 3

Fort Coffee, Oklahoma

I am on my way to Fort Coffee, a small Black town that has recently joined the Black Mayors' Association, an organization that works towards town improvement. The town is hosting this month's meeting of the association, and I am scheduled to make a brief presentation concerning the status of a health study. Additionally, I plan on speaking about my own research project concerning Freedmen of the Five Civilized Tribes.

It is a long drive from Norman to Fort Coffee, located on the eastern border of Oklahoma only several miles from Arkansas. As a Black town situated in the historic Choctaw Nation, I wonder if Fort Coffee has Choctaw Freedmen roots. I carefully find my way northward from Highway 9 towards the Arkansas River, and notice a small sign welcoming me to the town of Fort Coffee. Small homes, spaced quite far from one another, line the wide road that stretches over hills and gullies, although a few are obviously abandoned. Another mile north, and I am greeted by wooden signs pointing the way to local churches and the community center. As I drive toward the center of town, the roads narrow and the houses are a bit closer together, each one neat with a well-kept yard. However, most are still situated several acres away from one another, separated by expanses of land and woods. Despite their distance, there is evident life in each homeplace. Another sign points the way to the Fort Coffee community center, our meeting place for that day, and I soon find myself in a dirt parking lot in front of a small red building.

Inside, I am greeted by mayors from various Black towns with whom I am acquainted, as well as with Fort Coffee townspeople who I have never met. In speaking with Fort Coffee's mayor and other residents, I am informed that their town was recently incorporated in 1997. Thinking such a recent incorporation date strange for a Black town in Oklahoma, I ask Fort Coffee's mayor and vice-mayor if their town has any Freedmen history. Affirming my primary hunch, mayor Denay Burris relates her own Freedmen and Choctaw ancestry, and introduces me to her sister, who has been researching their family history for several years in order to enroll in the Choctaw Nation. The vice-mayor relates that just about everyone in Fort Coffee is a Choctaw Freedman, or is married to one. Following the meeting and my brief introduction of my research, an older gentleman approaches to tell me that his town of Fort Coffee does indeed have a rich history relating to the Choctaw Nation and Choctaw Freedmen. The history is so extensive, says former mayor Levester McKesson, that he plans to write a book on the subject. He offers to tell me all that I wish to know, and gives me his contact information. With high hopes, I leave Fort Coffee and promise to return soon.

While the seemingly large population of Freedmen families and the great interest in community history in Fort Coffee has given me reason for excitement, it has also presented me with some confusion. How is it possible that in a region so detached from other Black towns and Freedmen communities, and seemingly the rest of Oklahoma in general, a Freedmen town has survived the past century? Why is this community, which has existed at least since the Indian Territory era, suddenly establishing a town council and joining the Black Mayors' Association? Why is this

Freedmen community seemingly vibrant and full of life while so many others are in such decline?

• • •

Fort Coffee lies just north of the old Choctaw Nation capital of Scullyville, and its original inhabitants were Black Choctaws and former slaves of the wealthy elite Choctaws as well as Choctaw politicians and leaders. The old fort at Fort Coffee served as a landing point for many Indians on the Trails of Tears from the 1830s on, including those wealthy and elite Choctaw mixed-bloods.[53] One of these people was Sarah Harlan, a woman who was White and 1/16 Choctaw. She came to Indian Territory in 1850 with her family and the people they enslaved from their homes in Sumter County, Alabama, traveling by boat but paying extra to escape deck passage to which other Choctaws were subjected. On the boats, Sarah and her family met other "pale-faced Indians" whom they likened to themselves. Hardship followed Sarah and her family on their journey. As they drew closer to their destination, illness beset the family.

> "My oldest sister's baby was very sick with congestion of the brain. There was a French doctor on the boat who took care of it, and he finally told me it would not recover. So just as we pushed off from Van Buren, the babe drew its last breath." [54]

The suffering continued after their landing at Fort Coffee, as Sarah became sick with cholera and several more of her nieces soon died from the illness. Sarah and her husband, and her sisters and brothers with their own families chose large expanses of land close to Scullyville, and there built their homes. Sarah spent many days emotionally distraught over her new isolation in the frontier of Indian Territory:

> Not many days would I spend without tears. I would brace up every morning and think; "Well, I'll not cry this day."…
>
> "Well," I said, "I must adapt myself to the ways of these people. I have come here, and in Rome I must do as Rome does." So, not long after this, there came a lot of Indian women to invite me to a quilting. Quilting was the order of the day, then, and they always had a big pow-wow. The men furnished the meat and barbecued it and game as well. Well, I went to the first one, and saw barbecued beeves, hogs, and venison, and thought it was enough to satisfy an army. I was always treated royally. The Indians kept coming until I verily believe there must have been six or seven hundred people at this quilting.[55]

Sarah eventually began to feel at home with her new neighbors and in her new surroundings.

Many other Choctaws and enslaved people made the harrowing journey to Indian Territory from their homes in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama like Sarah. A great number of slave owners and enslaved people would also find their new homes in the Scullyville area. Scullyville, just a few miles south of Fort Coffee, was established in 1832 as Choctaws were being removed to from their homes in the southeast. The United States government established an agency at this site, it being good land and full of natural springs that furnished water. The town of Scullyville grew up around the agency, and the distribution of Choctaw annuities here led to the development of an economic center for the entire Choctaw Nation, eventually becoming a trade center between Indian Territory and eastern markets of the United States. Scullyville soon became a significant political center of the Choctaw Nation as well; many wealthy and elite families of the nation settled in and near the town. The McClains, Folsoms, Wards, McCurtains, and other chiefly Choctaw families

made the town their home. Scullyville became the capital of the Moshulatubbee District, later called the Scullyville district, until 1850 (Morrison 1938: 234-238).

Fort Coffee had been abandoned by the United States military only four years after it was established, but its buildings were used by the Methodist Church and the Choctaw Nation in establishing the Fort Coffee Academy for Boys (Morrison 1938:235). Only several miles south of this academy was the New Hope Academy for Girls. These Choctaw boarding schools served the Scullyville area, and they were funded jointly by the Choctaw Nation and the Methodist Church (Parman 1998). Consequently, Scullyville was a place of political, economic, and educational opportunities for many of the people who had it made it their new home.

These opportunities however did not exist for the slaves of these Choctaw people. Although enslaved people were able to attend religious services in Christian churches established by missionaries, they were cut off from the Choctaw political, economic, and educational institutions. Most enslaved people worked the lands of their masters, tending and harvesting fields of cotton and corn in addition to their own smaller gardens. Some were allowed to learn reading and writing, and most recorded slave experiences attest to the probability that treatment of slaves in the Choctaw nation was generally better than that of the neighboring United States. However, enslaved people experienced great hardship in captivity, as well as in leaving friends and family for their new homes in Indian Territory (Krauthamer 2000: 212-217). Although Choctaw Indian experiences at these times were difficult, those of their slaves were undeniably more difficult, as can be seen again through the experiences of Sarah Harlan and the people enslaved by her family.

• • •

Sarah Harlan's father eventually traveled to Scullyville from Alabama and took several enslaved people, described as young men and women, back with him as they had been mortgaged to him by another Choctaw. He asked his son-in-law to accompany him as he was afraid he may have some "trouble" from the slaves. As Sarah put it, they might have been troublesome because they loved their Indian masters. Here we find what is likely to be a slave owner's biased understanding of enslaved peoples' feelings. At the same time however, there was most likely some apprehension among the people in leaving Choctaw masters for non-Choctaw ones, as in many cases, Choctaw masters were known to be less harsh. More importantly, the enslaved people spoken of here no doubt had great fear of being separated from their families and friends, as well as from their Indian Territory home.

Sarah's husband soon died from consumption and her mother in Alabama passed away. Her father then sold most of his belongings and Sarah went to help him move his slaves out to Indian Territory, most likely in the 1850s. As Sarah describes it, "The negroes were very much opposed to moving; did not want to go West; thought they would go to their death." This time, Sarah traveled by carriage with the enslaved people. They persuaded her to travel with them by assuring her that she could stay in the carriage the entire time, only getting out once they had already erected her tent. One little slave boy was killed on this trip by falling out of the wagon and then being run over by its wheels.

"I got out of the hack and gathered the little fellow in my arms, and he said, 'Oh Miss Sarah I am going to die.'" He passed away later that night. Sarah remembers, "the negroes sang no more for many days. Before that, they would walk along and sing songs; they walked all the way but we never traveled over fifteen miles a day."[56]

Difficult times like these in Indian Territory provide a backdrop for understanding the experiences of slave owners and enslaved people alike. Although Sarah describes an arduous journey, the experiences of slaves at this time were unimaginably more trying. In sickness, heavy labor, and the suffering endured in the long journeys from Alabama to Indian Territory, enslaved people bore the brunt of the harsh conditions. While slave owners like Sarah traveled by carriage and slept in people's homes, the enslaved had to walk and sleep in tents pitched in the snow.

In 1850, Scullyville had ceased to be the capital of the Choctaw Nation, however, its significance as a political and economic center did not decrease. It was home to several chiefs of the Choctaw Nation, as well as a stop for the Butterfield stage line, which was an important connection to Texas and the United States. Sarah's life was impacted by the stage line, as she traveled throughout the Choctaw Nation and Texas for many years, spending much time away from her home and the people she enslaved. Sarah later hired out many of her slaves for five dollars a month, and this may have given them some degree of freedom, yet their profits likely went directly to Sarah. As the Choctaw Nation transitioned into the 1860s, tensions mounted as abolitionist movements made their way into Indian Territory. Sarah's father was killed during this time, and many blamed his death on a slave uprising

although Sarah seemed to be one of the few that did not believe this. After his death, his slaves were taken to Memphis, Tennessee and sold on the block.[57]

The hardships of enslaved people's lives can be seen in these difficult antebellum times in the Choctaw Nation. Despite the evidence of a relatively less harsh slave experience in the Choctaw Nation, enslaved people were at the mercy of their masters, and subject to separation from friends and relatives to be sold on the block in situations such as this. These instances likely became more prevalent as the abolitionist presence grew, and fear of slave uprisings mounted.

There was at least one other instance of a suspected slave uprising in relation to abolitionism in the Fort Coffee area, and this involved the father of Squire Hall, later a lawman and Fort Coffee resident. Squire was born into slavery in 1863 on the plantation of the Hall family. His mother, Eliza Hall served as a housewoman for the Hall family until an uprising on their plantation in 1860 or 1861. In this uprising, three of the four Hall brothers were murdered. Squire's father Jake Hall assisted the single surviving male member of the family in avenging the death of the three brothers by killing the overseer, an alleged abolitionist who instigated the uprising.[58]

Blacks were not only slaves of wealthy Choctaw families in the Scullyville area. Some also served as "servants" for Christian missions and schools in the area. A missionary account of a Black servant at New Hope Academy for girls gives us an understanding of the ways in which Choctaw Freedmen and Freedwomen were integral in Choctaw life and culture prior to the Civil War:

> "Our kitchen and laundry were presided over by "aunt Hetty," subject to the occasional inspection of the matron. Aunt Hetty was decidedly a character. She was a tall, raw-boned, ugly, but intelligent mulatto woman,

> about forty years of age. Having been raised by the Indians as a slave, she spoke their language fluently, and was not only well acquainted with their peculiarities, tricks, and turns, but she also partook of them largely herself. Always having a pleasant look and a smile for every one she met, she could cover as much deceit under an open countenance as any studied adept in chicanery…. In truth, she was the most important personage at the mission, and did more to govern the school than either teacher or matron. Having the confidence of the young ladies it was easy for her to imagine that she had ours also, and she was the happiest soul on the premises. Withal, her whimsical good-humor made her the admiration of many, and the study of all" (Graham 1864: 412-413).

Hetty's fluency in Choctaw language and culture made her a most important intermediary at the school. While many enslaved people in the area spoke Choctaw, it was also likely that many spoke only English. Contrary to Hetty's life experiences, the slaves of Sarah Harlan most likely never heard their masters speaking Choctaw. However, daily interactions with others in the Scullyville area most likely gave enslaved people in this area knowledge of language, foodways, culture, and medicines despite cultural patterns of their masters.

The Civil War and Emancipation

The Civil War changed life for everyone in the Choctaw Nation, and perhaps especially for Choctaw slaves. The war ravaged Indian Territory, and cut resources for even the wealthiest citizens. In a now drastically changed world, Sarah Harlan soon was obliged to free her slaves.

> "My husband called the negroes around him and told them that they were free, that they were no more his.

> The negroes were surprised, said nothing but stood and looked at him in awe. At last, the old negro Soloman said: 'Marster, what must we do?' My husband said: 'You have got to think and do for yourselves now.' Poor darkeys, they knew not what to do. He told them to go back to their cabins and counsel with one another and decide what they would do, saying, 'I will make you a proposition right now, but you go and study the matter over and weigh it well.' He offered them half the crop for another year and furnish everything. In a few days, they made their appearance at the porch and said they would stay. He told them he would leave his nephew there to boss them. But they said, 'No Marster, he don't know how to boss. If Mist'es will stay with us we will stay.'… One old negro came to me and sat on the steps at my feet and said: 'You know that young man don't know nothing, you stay with us.' Then he bowed his head and wept."

Sarah stayed with them until they could raise and harvest their crop. Sarah's version of the events surrounding emancipation implies a sort of simple-mindedness in her former slaves. However, her recollections of the time are indicators of the very real fears that newly emancipated enslaved people had at an incredible time of transition. While her references to their ignorance and emotion at having to fend for themselves are borne out of ideologies of inferiority and simplicity, the events she describes point to the clear reservations about the future that formerly enslaved people had in a rapidly changing world.

The fears that came with freedom after emancipation in a time when the Choctaw Nation was recovering from the Civil War must also have been paralyzing. Although obviously skilled in making a living, Blacks were now expected to economically compete with Choctaws who had established large farms decades

before. Most newly emancipated people had no improvements or foundations of their own. Luckily, Sarah's former slaves were able to make a start with half of their crop. They were able to survive, and their descendants today live in Fort Coffee.

Like Sarah's former slaves, many Choctaw Freedmen in the Scullyville area took jobs as servants and farm workers after emancipation, in some cases working for their former masters. Their rights in the nation in which they had spent their lives toiling however, were not guaranteed. In the post-Civil War treaty made between the United States and the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations, the tribes were required to free the people they enslaved but not to extend them citizenship. The treaty allowed two years for the Choctaw and Chickasaw nations jointly to choose whether or not to adopt the Freedmen, and if they chose to do so, a payment of $300,000 would be furnished to the nations for their support. If the Choctaw and Chickasaw nations chose not to adopt their freedmen within two years, the United States would use the money to remove the Freedmen from the nations (Littlefield 1980: 39-40).

As the Choctaw Nation was considering the Freedmen citizenship question, life was already strong in the Freedmen community of Fort Coffee, historically known as Oak Lodge.[59] It is likely that freed slaves and Black Indians, among other people of the Choctaw Nation, created a small settlement north of Scullyville near Fort Coffee. When enslaved people were freed in 1865, it is probable that the population grew, and it truly became a Choctaw Freedmen community.[60] It appears that the Methodists were the first to have a presence in Oak Lodge, establishing a mission and then the Fort Coffee School for Boys and the New Hope Academy for Girls with the Choctaw Nation. Oral history relates that there was once a Methodist

church for Freedmen in Fort Coffee, most likely established by the Methodist missionaries in the area. This, however, must have been destroyed not long after statehood.[61] Mount Triumph Missionary Baptist Church was said to have been established around 1865. However, the actual church building was not constructed until 1901. Prior to this, church meetings were held in community members' homes.[62]

The Struggle for Citizenship

In the 1860s and 1870s, the Choctaw Freedmen still had no rights of citizenship in the Choctaw Nation. They suffered discrimination, racial violence, and were not secure in any of their possessions or improvements because they lacked any rights in the Choctaw Nation and in the United States. The large population of Choctaw Freedmen in the Scullyville/Oak Lodge area became active in the struggle for their rights and held mass meetings, the outcomes of which were petitions to the United States Congress. They met at least twice in 1869, creating resolutions that stated their wishes to be citizens of the Choctaw Nation, their home. These Freedmen meetings across the Choctaw Nation and in the Scullyville area were disrupted by Choctaw people, who tore down announcement posters and in one case, arrested one of the leaders on his way to a meeting. However, their efforts resulted in a memorial to Congress outlining their hardships in the Choctaw Nation that resulted from discrimination and their lack of citizenship.[63] The racial climate in the Choctaw Nation was hostile in places, and Freedmen lived in fear of loss of their lives and

improvements. Missionary Cyrus Kingsbury described the racial climate in a letter to Reverend S.B. Treat with the American Board in 1865: "I fear there are many who will no more hesitate to take the life of a Negroe, than of a dog. It is sickening to contemplate the prospect that is (I hope but for a little season) before us".[64]

The Freedmen of the Scullyville area were among the most active in the Choctaw Nation in attempting to secure rights of citizenship. This activism has been seen alternately as a device through which to obtain U.S. support and attention, and this no doubt factored into their efforts (Krauthamer 2000: 250-253). However, Freedmen in this area understandably had serious concerns for their futures. Despite their relative freedoms, Freedmen were for the most part impoverished and their survival depended on what improvements they had made to the land – houses, gardens, small farms, and corn mills among others. Without citizenship, these critical parts of economic survival were constantly at stake. Additionally, as non-citizens, Freedmen had little recourse when someone contested their rights to their improvements and to settle on the land on which they resided, or in cases of discrimination or crime.

In 1883, the Choctaw Nation at last provided for the adoption of Choctaw Freedmen who wished to become citizens. Records demonstrate that Choctaw Freedmen in Fort Coffee were generally left in the dark as to the extent of their rights, and there was a general state of confusion as to what would become of them and their fruits of their labor. In 1885, when the Choctaw Nation was providing for Freedmen citizenship, it required Freedmen to register. This set at least several people in the

community to worry, so much so that they wrote directly to the United States government about it:

> JJ Moore, Pastor of the Fort Coffee Church, to the Sec. Of Interior, April 6, 1885
> Oke Large [sic], IT
> Sir, will you please let me know if there have been any action in Congress in rgards [sic] to of the colerd [sic] people regerston [sic] and by us doing they become sitteson [sic] of the T and if not they are to take one hundred dollars and leave the IT and go out to Okhomer [sic] lands and it is also stated that all cases as lrceny [sic] sault [sic] and attempt murdering [sic] are brought before the US Cort [sic] now if that is the case we will stay in the T. and if it is not the truth we will leave for we do not want to live under Indian laws. We live under that law before the rebeluen [sic] and we find no pertection [sic] in the Indian laws for the collard [sic]. [65]

Most likely the same person, but perhaps another man in Fort Coffee later wrote:

> JM Morris, Oke Large [sic], IT to President of US, May 22, 1885,
> We have been told by the Indian that we have to register on the first day of June 1885. They say we have to register they will move us out and there is a great many of us colored people is ignorant of the matter and we wish you to please let us know? The Indian says that if we don't register in sixty days that can't longer hold our farms and that will confiscate our places. They say the government have nothing to do with regisrd [sic] of adopting the colored of the Choctaw Nations freedman?[66]

Again, Freedmen of Oak Lodge had serious concerns about their futures in their homeland. The Choctaw Nation was requiring Freedmen to register as citizens, and just what this all entailed proved confusing to many or most. At registration, the Choctaw Nation offered $100 to those Freedmen who wished to move outside the nation. There were only approximately 69 Freedmen in the entire Choctaw Nation who opted to take the money and forego citizenship. Several individuals in the Oak

Lodge/Fort Coffee community chose to give up their citizenship. However, records show that many of these people did not actually leave the Choctaw Nation. Instead they stayed at their homes in Oak Lodge. Later, when they attempted to enroll as Freedmen in the Choctaw Nation with the Dawes Commission, they were rejected from citizenship because they had legally given up their citizenship in 1885.[67]

Finally with citizenship, Choctaw Freedmen in Oak Lodge seemed to have some amount of security. There was a diversity of people and occupations in the area at this time. Oak Lodge's proximity to Scullyville and Fort Smith ensured that its residents were close to economic and political activity, as well as to travelers, missions, education centers, and the like.

Towards Oklahoma Statehood

Squire Hall's father Jake Hall died just before the close of the Civil War, leaving his wife to care for their three small children. Squire was the youngest at less than two years old. She took them to Fort Smith and worked as a cook in the old St. Charles Hotel until 1873, and thereafter returned to her former owner's plantation.[68] He gave her a horse and farm implements and allowed her and the children to live there, cultivating the land, free of rent. Squire did not attend school regularly, and attributed this to his having too much fun trying to catch his master's wild horses. There was a school in Oak Lodge that students did attend however. A school for Freedmen children had been established by missionaries in territorial days.[69] However, by the end of the century, the teachers were local Freedmen from Fort

Coffee. Fort Coffee school records from the year 1896 show a class of twenty-one students ranging from age seven to sixteen, taught by a local Freedman. Students were taught spelling, reading, arithmetic, penmanship, history, and geography.[70] The relatively small number of students may be due to the possibility that this was only one of several schools serving the area, or perhaps because many children could not attend school due to farm or other work. Others may have been like Squire Hall, having too much fun in other exploits. Squire went on to serve as deputy sheriff in Scullyville County for four years. When he was appointed for another term, he declined stating that he wanted others to have a share of the honors.[71]

Squire Hall was part of a growing population in Oak Lodge; statehood was looming and outsiders attempted to gain entry into Indian Territory. With its proximity to the Arkansas border and Fort Smith, this area became overrun with people from all over the United States, as evidenced by the 1900 census. By this time, Freedmen and Choctaws were a minority in their own country. Census data indicates that in Oak Lodge, there were eighty-six White families in contrast to twenty-four Indian families, seven Black families, and fifteen Freedmen families. In Mountain, located in the same area, the census lists one Indian family, forty-three Black families, twenty-one Freedmen families, and one hundred three White families.[72] There were three recorded instances of interracial Black-Choctaw unions, however there were likely many more than indicated, as well as many more White-Choctaw unions than indicated. What is clear from the census is that in 1900, Oak Lodge was an incredibly diverse place. Freedmen were likely to have Whites, other Blacks, and Choctaws for neighbors.

Within this great racial diversity, another Black Choctaw Freedmen story was emerging – one that would exemplify the confusion between identities and race in the Dawes era. In 1896, Anna Craig of Oak Lodge applied to the Dawes Commission for citizenship in the Choctaw Nation. At this time, under objection by the Choctaw Nation, the Dawes Commission opened enrollment in the Choctaw Nation due to the poor quality of its past censuses (Carter 1999: 70). Rather than applying for citizenship as a Freedman, which she would later be enrolled as, Anna applied as a Choctaw Indian. According to her application, she was a granddaughter of Choctaw Indian Charles Beams, a full blood. Her mother Adeline Beams, the daughter of this Charles Beams, did not apply as a half-blood Choctaw, but rather served to corroborate her daughter's claim. Other residents including Eliza Ward, who would later be enrolled as a Choctaw Indian, also stated that Anna and her family were recognized as Choctaw Indians. Just why Anna applied for citizenship at that time is unknown; she may have felt that her citizenship, or her status as an Indian, would have been contested. Her application to the Dawes Commission was rejected, the commission stating that the evidence fails to show that Anna was indeed a Choctaw Indian by blood. [73]

Two years later, the Dawes Commission arrived on the ground in Indian Territory to divide the diversity of the Choctaw Nation into citizenship categories based on race. Here, citizens were separated into categories of Choctaw Indian, Intermarried White, and Freedmen. The Dawes Commission recorded the great diversity of Choctaw ancestries within the non-Black population, using blood quantum to record racial Indianness spanning from full-blood to 1/64 or less.

Freedmen were enrolled with care to determine whether they had been slaves of Choctaw citizens, and whether they had already opted to forego citizenship in 1885. The diversity of Freedmen ancestries went unrecorded by the Dawes Commission for the most part. A few families in the area were recorded as being sons and daughters of Choctaw chiefs and other elite Choctaw men, yet they were enrolled as Freedmen because of their Black ancestry, and because in most cases, the mother was recorded as being "Negro."[74]

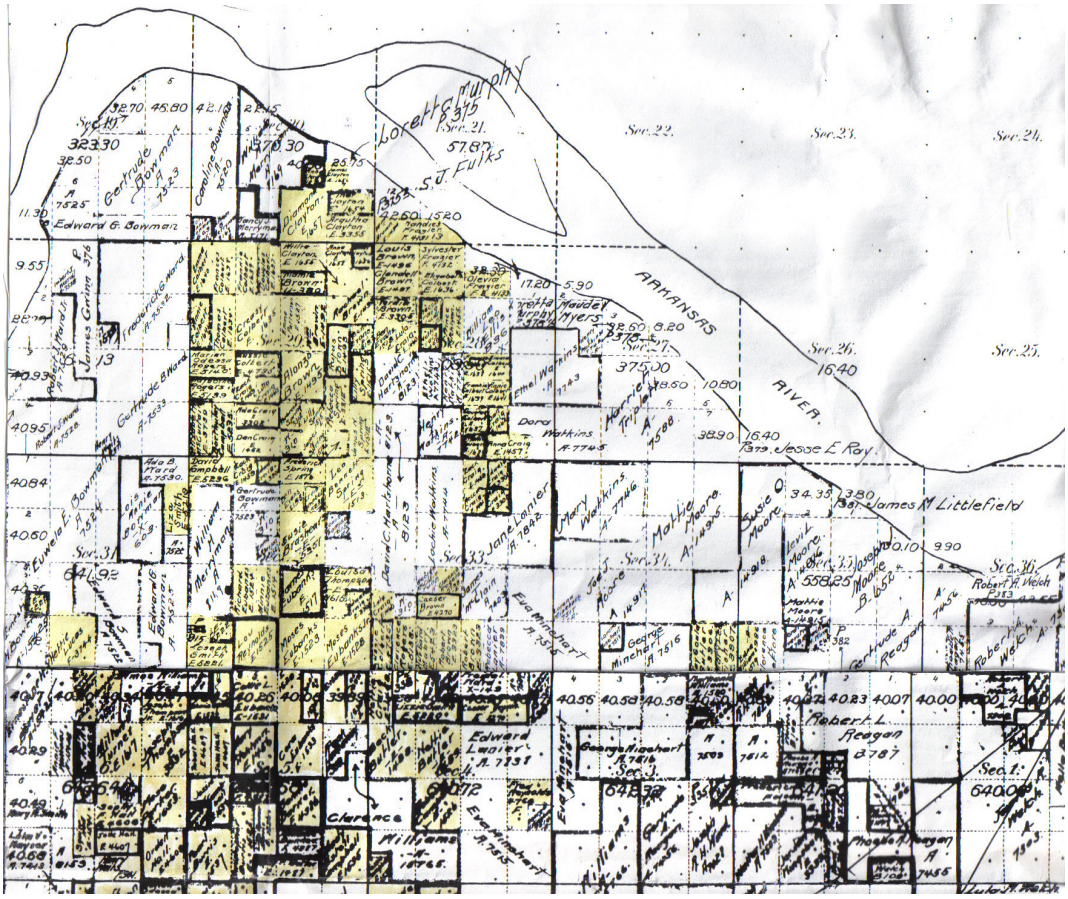
A few years later in 1899, Anna's husband William Craig, said to be a White man, enrolled his wife and children as Freedmen with the Dawes Commission. At this time, Anna was 22 or 23 years old according to William, although her true age was 32 or 33.[75] She had already had five children with William and would soon give birth to twins. According to her husband who enrolled her, and her mother's half-brother who testified in her behalf, Anna was the daughter of Adeline Pitchlynn, a former slave of Thompson McKinney. Anna's father was Nelson "Nels" Pitchlynn, listed as a slave of Peter Pitchlynn. Family history, as well as Anna's own testimony, tells that Anna was Choctaw, and family photographs show a Anna as a distinguished looking woman of mixed race. Despite her previous claims to Choctaw Indian identity, she and her children were enrolled as Freedmen and were allotted land in the Fort Coffee bottoms, where the great Spiro Mound once stood.[76] Many other mixed race and Freedmen families of Fort Coffee underwent the same processes at enrollment. Despite identities and ancestries that may have opposed this category, almost every family of Fort Coffee was enrolled as Freedmen, and was given a Freedman's share of the tribal domain.

In contrast to allotments in Foreman across the river in the Cherokee Nation, Freedmen allotments in the Choctaw Nation consisted of only 40 acres. Freedmen allotments clustered around the Oak Lodge area. They were smaller than allotments of surrounding Choctaw and Intermarried White allotments, but in many cases the amount of land had minimal importance to everyday life. Levester McKesson, current mayor of Fort Coffee and local historian describes,

> But land didn't mean that much to those people back in those days, the Freedmens that is. Because they didn't have the equipment to farm with. And there was no market. There was no market for the the produce, whatever they raised. And what they usually raised, basically farm raised what they could use themselves. You know they raised the corn, um tobacco, sorghum, cane that is, um and that type, even rice. I understand they grew that here. But they, they used the land to grow what they really needed. So a lot of the land that they were given just grew up. It was no need for it.

The land itself had value however, especially to those who sought to deprive Freedmen of their lands through graft and other corrupt means. The moves toward statehood allowed Freedmen to own the land on which their homes sat, yet as for all Freedmen allotments, restrictions were removed from surplus lands in 1904, and from homesteads in 1908. Also as in Foreman, the removal of restrictions and consequent sale and theft of land led to many Freedmen losing these lands, forcing some to move out of the area, but leaving many more impoverished and now without a major source of stability.[77]

The removal of restrictions also led to the application of taxes to Freedmen lands. Many Fort Coffee residents who were already impoverished were unable to



Choctaw Freedmen and Chickasaw Freedmen allotments in Fort Coffee area. Township Plats of the Choctaw Nation, LeFlore County Courthouse, Poteau, Oklahoma.

pay these new taxes, and many consequently were forced to mortgage their land for this reason, or for any number of reasons. Mortgage of land was common in Fort Coffee, and it was a common way in which land was lost. In Fort Coffee, stories of land loss to mortgage are well remembered by the descendants of those who lost it. In many cases, the mortgages were held by residents of Fort Coffee who were more economically prosperous than others.[78]

The Craig family was one of these prosperous families, and they were considered well-off compared to most people in the area. William and Anna opened a store in Fort Coffee and later bought a house in Fort Smith on 10th Street, often called Black Millionaire's Row. As relatively wealthy people in town, and as storeowners, William and Anna were one of several families that gave credit and loans to other families of Fort Coffee. When mortgage payments were not made, they foreclosed and the family lost their land. The actual circumstances surrounding the transfer of land is unknown; with the statehood era context of graft and theft, there may have been some suspicion surrounding loss of land even when mortgaged. Although these mortgage practices were seemingly legal, the Craigs and other families who capitalized on the losses of community members were seen as somewhat cruel by others in the community. The families who lost their land were hit hard and harbored bad feelings towards the community members who foreclosed on them.[79] These processes of land loss that began after allotment only worsened after statehood, as pressures on the community increased.

Oklahoma Statehood and the Early Twentieth Century in Fort Coffee

Despite ongoing land loss, Fort Coffee was a large community by all accounts. Prior to statehood, its proximity to Scullyville had been a major factor in its popularity as a residence. When Scullyville declined as a town and economic center in the statehood era, the town of Spiro just south of the former capitol grew in importance, and became more significant than most other towns in what would become LeFlore County, Oklahoma. Fort Coffee was a country town, but it was situated between Fort Smith, Arkansas, and Spiro, Oklahoma, making it far from isolated. Although there were many businesses and services in Spiro and Fort Smith, the lack of services for people of African descent and the day's trip to get to these locations by horse and wagon made it necessary for Choctaw Freedmen and other White and Indian residents to establish general stores and small restaurants in Fort Coffee. The town also had a post office. Most day to day needs were met by the businesses and facilities within Fort Coffee, and longer trips to Spiro or Fort Smith were necessary only monthly or bi-monthly.

People in Fort Coffee kept their own gardens and usually several hogs, chickens, horses and some cattle. As in Foreman, garden produce and livestock would be supplemented by small game that was hunted in the area, including squirrels, rabbits, deer, catfish, and possum. Most families were self-sufficient and raised almost everything they needed, killing hogs in the fall to last them throughout winter, and raising enough vegetables to feed the family all year. Sorghum was

processed into molasses at mills owned by certain townspeople, and corn was ground into meal by community members who owned corn mills.

Most residents were either sharecroppers or worked for large-scale farmers picking cotton, beans, spinach, and other vegetables in the summer. In Fort Coffee, the Geren Farms employed most area workers. This lifestyle continued into the 1960s and 1970s. Henrietta McKesson, a 92 year-old woman who has lived in Fort Coffee for her entire life, recalls the hard day-to-day work required of people. Her father owned the corn mill in town and she was required to manage it from time to time. Ms. McKesson relates part of a conversation she had with her son, when he asked about her life in earlier times:

> H: And once my son in California come, he ask more questions than a nerve. And he said 'Mother, how little a bit did you work for in a day?' I said, 'well like on those Geren farms down there, maybe some of work for 50 cents a day. Sun up to sundown.' And I said, 'well I'll go you one better. There's cotton to pick and I said it was 40 cents a hundred. If you went out there and didn't pick a hundred pound a cotton that day, you didn't make 40 cents. I said is that cheap enough?' I, I grew up on 20 acres and we worked. And I can say I've never seen a hungry day. Because they worked. They made me garden and had the chickens and the pig and the cow an'. And uh, and the corn, some of the toll what he'd get while he was grindin' the corn for people. And my daddy, when I started doin' he said, now don't take too much toll. Don't take, don't take too much. He didn't wanna lose his reputation and he didn't want to take too much so they didn't come back. And uh, so that helped us to feed the chicken and the pig and the horse and the cow and whatever. And what grew out in the field. And they had pear trees, they probably had 2 pear trees that he had bought.

Mrs. McKesson, as one of the oldest residents of Fort Coffee, remembers that many people throughout the early to mid-twentieth century were generally poor. Homes were small and some of them were actually shacks. However, most had enough to survive through hard work. Those who did not have enough were cared for by the community. Community institutions including hog killings, church functions, and general day-to-day interactions with neighbors ensured that everyone had enough.

Another part of self-sufficiency in Fort Coffee involved the use of medicinal herbs and roots, and many women became midwives for their community. Older residents recall the plants used for various ailments or situations, as they were used regularly up until the mid-twentieth century. Henry Burris of Fort Coffee recalls that his father, a Black Choctaw who could speak the Choctaw language, knew every wild food and medicine that was to be found:

> But this, my dad could take you in the woods, like I say, and spend a year. Take you in the woods before the vegetables have gotten ready for garden, for harvest, he'd take you in the woods and every type of wild green, every type of wild green, he'd know. As far as hunting, ooh.

People of Fort Coffee had knowledge of these medicines from generations past in Indian Territory, and most of these remedies were used throughout the twentieth century.

Race and Identity in the Twentieth Century

While State Blacks had a presence prior to statehood, more State Black families moved into the area at statehood and through the early part of the century.[80] Freedmen were distinguished from other Blacks in Fort Coffee through their tribal land allotments. In the early part of the century, many Freedmen were buried in the Scullyville slave cemetery, known today as Roselawn Cemetery, and only Freedmen people could be buried in this area. However, cultural and historical differences did not separate Freedmen and outsiders for long, and virtually all of the families intermarried.[81]

Although Fort Coffee was a very diverse community, the imposition of strict Jim Crow laws and the accompanying racial structure eventually led to an important identity shift. Freedmen and Black Choctaws in Fort Coffee were now relegated to the status of Negro, both in social and legal spheres of everyday life. They were joined by State Blacks in this category. Although Fort Coffee/Oak Lodge residents had previously been identified by their status as indigenous peoples of Indian Territory, they were now identified and separated by their Blackness. Within this racial system, original Fort Coffee residents and State Blacks were not only relegated to the same racial and ethnic categories and defined as such by Whites, but this system produced contexts where these two different ethnic groups began to see their common experiences as stronger than their cultural and ethnic differences. The social and legal definition of Blackness within the Jim Crow system shaped the experiences of Freedmen and State Blacks in the same ways. As their status became defined by

their skin color, and as their experiences in everyday life became defined by Blackness, people began to define themselves primarily through their racial identities and experiences as Black people.

At the same time, the increasingly strict system of segregation worked to make Fort Coffee a predominantly African American town. The eldest residents of Fort Coffee recall that the community was a diverse place in the earlier part of the twentieth century, with people of Black, White, and Indian ancestry. However, people of all younger generations recall that Fort Coffee was always primarily home to Blacks, with few others residing in the town. The difference in these accounts points to a shift possibly in the 1930s or 1940s, most likely as a result of increasing imposed separation and segregation between Blacks and others.

In Fort Coffee, the aforementioned economic hierarchy had a racial dimension as well, one that grew ever more significant in the new state of Oklahoma's rigid racial structure. The Craig family and others in this socioeconomic category were part of another important group in Fort Coffee: the light-skinned elite. Oral histories convey the early presence of a socioeconomic hierarchy based on skin color in Fort Coffee. At least since the time of the Dawes era, those of highest status in the community were those that had light skin and were mixed White, Indian and Black. People today describe animosity felt by darker-skinned people toward lighter-skinned people and their abilities to go between White and Black communities. Henry Burris recalls a story his mother used to tell him about his aunts:

> H: My aunt, on my dad's side, there's an old story my mother used to tell. That complexion thing, it used to go a long way. It still a thing now. It's a mentality thing where black folks won't do with a White, it's a status

> thing. My mother used to tell about they were traveling to Muskogee once on a train. She and her sister in law were sittin' on this train and my sis-, I mean my aunt Reka was about your complexion.[82] And she comes back in the back, say the conductor come back there in the back and say, Miss, said you need to move. Said, 'This train here is for coloreds, and the Whites sit up there.' And my aunt get ready to get up, and my mother grab her by the dress. She said, 'If you go up there and sit with those folks don't you come back here. Don't you, don't you…'
> K: Yeah.
> H: You know. Don't you ever.

Freedmen families and individuals of mixed race and light skin tone in times past are often referred to as White by Fort Coffee residents. Light-skinned families are said to have been wealthy, and these specific Freedmen families are said to have used their light skin color and according status to swindle other families in Fort Coffee through mortgage of property.

The Craig family continued to hold this status as part of the White or light-skinned elite in Fort Coffee for several generations, and had opportunities that were not available to many other community members. Anna's and William's daughter Mecca married Adel Tony, a man who was part Crow Indian and part African American, a horse trader from the Muskogee area. Mecca and Adel Tony had two children, who later went to live with their grandmother Anna in Fort Smith to avoid an illness passing through Fort Coffee at the time. Mecca was later married to Quidman Gardner, and together they ran one of the family stores in Fort Coffee. Mecca was one of the few children of Anna and William who lived out her life in Fort Coffee, the others moving to other areas in the country to attend school and become professionals.

Mecca's brother Daniel left Fort Coffee for Chicago, where he studied medicine. His drive to become a doctor is illustrated in a heartfelt letter he sent to his family, most likely in the 1920s.

> July 25 -19[ ]
>
> I have not heard directly from you in some time so I am writing to find how you and things are - meanwhile I plan to explain my cause and intention: Dad, I have decided and am standing put on going to school this year. My mind is on the section of medicine and I am going to shell it vehemently until I am awarded the degree of Doctor of medicine.
>
> Dad, when I look back and see that you have reared (9) nine children - have seen them become grown - witnessed the marriage of (7) seven - seen some as mothers and fathers but have not yet witnessed (1) one receive a degree of any kind - my heart aches to know that none have gone so far the lack of persistence.
>
> Now aside from that for me to know that I have gone farther than any one of us and have not finished I feel that I would be less credit to the family than any one. So I have picthed [sic] a skinnich [sic] line around some medical school and mean to bombard her until that degree surrenders. Dad, if I didn't have the ability I wouldn't mind giving up - but I don't know that book I can't master. So I am making every day add to my preparation. The sweet thing about it I have seen enough to know that the medical game can't be beaten.
>
> So- Dad, in my undertaking I'll ask you if you are willing to lend me your influence. Anything you can or will do for me, will be more than appreciated.
> I trust that you won't think this a "prognostic prelude to the sermon on the mt. but is a staunch determination.
>
> Love to all -
> Your own son,
> D.C. Craig[83]

Daniel's letter is an illustration of the challenges encountered by even relatively wealthy people of Fort Coffee. Rooted in this small Freedmen town, people were able to leave to attend prestigious schools and travel to large cities, and receive

training in fields that were generally off limits to African Americans at the time. At the same time, the challenges of being the first in a family to achieve an educational degree was a source of determination and pride. Daniel did eventually make it through medical school, and he became a doctor and raised a family in the Chicago area, far from his Fort Coffee home. Mecca's children also strayed far from the area. Her daughter, Ora Toney, attended school at the Hampton Institute in Virginia and later married in Pennsylvania. She had several children and raised them in West Virginia and Pennsylvania. Ora always identified as both Black and Indian, and attended pow-wows and collected bits of Choctaw and Crow history. Her daughter, Brenda, would visit her grandmother Mecca in Fort Coffee only once during her childhood.[84]

The story of the Craig family is one that illustrates the diversity of life experiences in Fort Coffee, as well as the ability for the upper classes to achieve wealth and professional success. While members of the Craig family were able to become professionals outside of Oklahoma and Fort Coffee, many other Fort Coffee residents were living out life on their small farms, and trying to get by. This racial socioeconomic hierarchy was indeed powerful in some cases, and shaped the life chances for some community members. In other cases, however, light-skinned people were not a part of the upper echelons, and their economic status was not shaped by their skin color. Consequently, skin color was not a determinant of economic status, but merely was seen as a characteristic that most elites in Fort Coffee possessed.

Despite community divisions in terms of economic status and skin color, the Fort Coffee community came together and defined itself through important social

institutions that were carried from Indian Territory through the twentieth century. As in Foreman, the community of Fort Coffee held large community picnics every summer. Oral histories tell that these picnics began as a celebration of emancipation, and older residents explain that the picnics were historically held on August 4, which they believed to be their emancipation day. People enslaved in the Choctaw Nation were actually emancipated in October, and the celebrations on August 4 may have been due in actuality to the community's proximity to the Cherokee Nation and Foreman, where a large picnic was held annually on that date. Families came together from great distances for these occasions. Clearings in the woods served as the picnic sites, and platforms were constructed there and lanterns hung in the trees. The men cooked barbecue and women baked pies and other dishes to be served, and bands played guitar until late in the night. The music and dancing lasted several days, and throughout the twentieth century, people in Fort Coffee usually held several of these picnics each summer. Each was an occasion for community interaction and for visiting family to reconnect with friends and family.

Baseball games were also significant community events in Fort Coffee throughout much of the year. On game nights, adults and children from across the community would fill the trails that cut through the woods of Fort Coffee as they made their way to the ball fields. Fort Coffee had teams for men and children, and in addition to playing intra-community games, the teams played against other area towns. Baseball games connected Fort Coffee residents to other people and other towns in their vicinity while bringing the community itself together. Fort Coffee men

were well known for their baseball abilities; the late Levi Steele was a well-known baseball player who enjoyed fame outside Fort Coffee and Oklahoma.[85]

In addition to traditions like picnics and baseball games that brought the community together, Fort Coffee churches were important centers of community activity throughout the twentieth century. In the early part of the century and perhaps prior to statehood, Fort Coffee had an active Masonic lodge. However, this must have gone out of use very early in the century, as only Fort Coffee's oldest residents can remember the abandoned building that housed it, and recall that their parents may have used it. While this institution did not survive long in the twentieth century, Fort Coffee's churches did. Mount Triumph Baptist church continued to serve the community, as did a Holiness church and the Macedonia Church of God not far away. Women who are in their late eighties and early nineties today became members of the church usually in their late childhood, between eight and eighteen years of age. Joining the church was an individual decision that each child or teenager made, and was a step taken with great responsibility. Most elderly people remember being baptized in a pond in Fort Coffee, and recall having "good church" back then with inspirational preaching and much singing.

Fort Coffee churches provided an extensive network to other African American people and communities throughout LeFlore county and the larger Fort Smith – Sequoyah County area. In Mount Triumph Baptist Church, deacons and members of the congregation attended meetings concerning church affairs in their district, as well as statewide meetings. District meetings have been held for as long as living memory can recall in Fort Coffee. These district meetings in Fort Coffee

brought in people from across the district and state who would stay in town for several days. Without automobiles and hotels nearby, visitors stayed in families' homes around Fort Coffee. This practice became a foundation of closer relationships between people of Fort Coffee and Blacks from around the state. It was critical to establishing and maintaining social and spiritual networks with other African Americans throughout the district and state.

Additionally, residents attending the Mount Triumph Baptist Church also participated in rotational visits to other Black churches in the area, and other churches participated in visits to their church in Fort Coffee occasionally. This network of churches in northeastern LeFlore county included congregations in Spiro and Pocola among others. Individuals also visited various churches in the area, including Foreman's and Shady Grove's churches. Singing groups formed within the church traveled to different churches throughout the area, and if they were skilled enough, they went on to travel the state and the American South to singing competitions and other visits. All of these church functions were instrumental in making Fort Coffee an active part of a great network of African American people in the area and the state of Oklahoma.

The school system served a similar function in uniting African Americans in Leflore county. Throughout most of the twentieth century, children in Fort Coffee attended school in a two-room schoolhouse in the center of town. Students could attend school here until the eighth grade, though many children did not get this far because of the necessity of farm work and supporting their families. Lola Mae "Billie" Foreman, an 80-year-old woman who grew up in Fort Coffee and who later

married a Foreman and moved across the river, recalls that even attending school in town was difficult. As the daughter of a sharecropper, the occupation of most Blacks in the area, Lola Mae had to work in the fields during the beginning of each school year because it was harvesting time. Accordingly, she and her siblings could only attend school on rainy days. Her father, a Freedman born in Fort Coffee, had only a third grade education. During her time at the school in the 1930s, Lola Mae recalls that there were many children at the school, perhaps 90 or 100. Each day, the children ate lunch at the school, usually a meal of beans cooked with bacon, cornbread, and applesauce.

Up until about the 1930s, an eighth grade education was the most a Black child was able to attain. High school was not an option as there was no Black high school in the county. Lola Mae Foreman recalls that her parents sent her older sister to live with people in Tulsa so that she could go to high school, and some other families presumably did the same. Eventually, Douglas High School in Spiro, just south of Fort Coffee was opened for Black students. However, like the Douglas High School in Vian, Sequoyah County, this Douglas High School was the only Black school in LeFlore county. Consequently, Black students had to travel from all across the county to attend school every day, and LeFlore County spans a great distance. Black students could possibly have had to travel as far as 80 miles in order to get from their community to high school in Spiro. Douglas High School served mainly the Black populations in Fort Coffee, Spiro, Braden, Poteau, Murry Spur and Lewisville, and so Fort Coffee students who attended school were likely to know most other Black families across the county. Fort Coffee residents lived relatively

close to their high school, however, attending school remained difficult for all in addition to farm work and the costs to attend school. Lola Mae Foreman recalls that when she began attending Douglas High School in the 1930s, there were about 43 other students in her class. By the time she graduated, there were only 20 to 22 students. About half of the original students had dropped out. The barriers to education evidently proved too difficult to surmount for many.

As in Foreman, Fort Coffee was a community which had critical bonds in its institutions. Despite its proximity to major towns and cities, the system of segregation ensured that the mostly African American population of Fort Coffee was connected through common experience and important community institutions. Community businesses, baseball games, church services, picnics, and other social gatherings constantly created and maintained social bonds between community members and ensured the survival of the community itself. At the same time, these institutions functioned to connect African Americans in Fort Coffee with other Blacks throughout the county, as well as in Fort Smith and across the river in Sequoyah County. In fact, these institutions linked Foreman and Fort Coffee in important ways throughout most of the twentieth century and even prior to statehood.

Throughout ongoing population loss throughout the twentieth century, these institutions held the Fort Coffee community together. The powerful forces of race also served to mold and strengthen the community, creating a distinctive barrier between non-Black and Black communities and institutions. Despite the fact that Fort Coffee became known primarily as a Black community, there has been a small but continuous White population in the town throughout the twentieth century. However,

this community segregated themselves from the rest of the non-White community. One of the main White families here has roots extending back to Indian Territory as well. Harold Gist, now in his eighties and living in Sallisaw, tells that his family, descendants of Sequoyah, creator of the Cherokee syllabary, moved into the Choctaw Nation from Arkansas prior to statehood. Although they were technically intruders in the Choctaw Nation, an influential Choctaw family in the area convinced school officials to allow Harold's mother to attend school there.[86] Through land sales following statehood, more White people moved to Fort Coffee and resided in the general vicinity of the Gists. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, these residents attended a separate school and church from Fort Coffee's Black residents.

Older Choctaw Freedmen residents of Fort Coffee recall that there was never any trouble between Fort Coffee's Black and White residents. Friendly relations were the rule, although they were carried out within the racial system that dominated the twentieth century. Victoria Crutchfield of Fort Coffee recalls that when she was growing up in the 1930s, Black and White children and adults got along well:

> K: So when you were growing up did the White kids play with everyone else and just...
> V: Yes. Yes. No, we didn't have any racial problems.
> K: Did you ever notice with the adults...
> V: No, they didn't have any problems either. It's just like now.

Black and White residents of Fort Coffee encountered one another at local stores, and worked together in the fields of large landowners, and established friendly relationships through their common work. However, the friendships were tempered

by the racial system in which they were embedded. Harold Gist relates his experiences as a child:

> K: Now when you were playing, now did the White kids play with the Black kids at all when you were little?
> H: When I was small yes. And usually when that would take place, would be in the field when we was workin'. And, or, at a funeral or somethin'. You know, yes, we all played together then. But you know, we didn't make, you know, a habit of it I mean it's... it's not that we had anything against each other, it was just not customary to do that. But there's a girl right now, she works in Fort Smith. Name of [ ]. ...She could tell you lots about this White boy, 'cause she helped raise me in them p'tata fields and cotton fields, and you know what we'd do, we'd throw cotton bolls at one another. And we'd throw dirt clo-, clods of dirt at one another. Or we'd put dirt in our sacks so we'd have a bigger weight, and get caught you know. And she'd say, you know, I tol' yo' momma I was gonna whip your hind end! You better, you better quit doin' that!' Called me White Boy.

Despite these friendly interactions however, there was a strict line dividing Black life from White life in Fort Coffee. Relationships did not pass the acquaintance level, intermarriage was unheard of, and Whites were absent from Fort Coffee social, educational, and political institutions.

Although general good relationships characterized the interactions between White and Black citizens of Fort Coffee, racial violence was not unheard of. While most elderly residents recall no incidents of outright violence, family histories tell of grandparents here and there being killed in various situations with Whites. In one case, a man was killed by local Whites when walking into a bar, supposedly because they thought he was planning to shoot one of them. As in most every case regarding the murder of a Black person, this excuse was enough to keep the murderers from any

punishment. For Fort Coffee community members, this type of injustice was just another part of everyday life.

Consequently, race was an important part of life for Fort Coffee residents throughout the early to mid-twentieth century because it shaped daily life and experience for community members, as well as for Fort Coffee's all-Black community institutions. Fort Coffee had strength in the racial solidarity that held the community together. While it had roots in racial and ethnic diversity, Fort Coffee took on a role as a predominantly Black community which was made stronger as segregation dictated that Blacks could not participate in the social and economic life of the surrounding area. At the same time, people's shared experiences as Black in this area tied them together with a common identity. Additionally, segregation dictated that they had their own schools, own towns, their own social and spiritual institutions. The social and political networks that were created and maintained through these institutions also reinforced Black identity.

Moreover, each aspect of community life including picnics, baseball games, and everyday community interactions, helped to form and reinforce Fort Coffee's identity as a community. While the community had begun as a diverse community with a large Freedmen population, its transformation into a mostly Black town of Freedmen, Black Choctaws, and State Blacks helped to solidify Fort Coffee as an important community in times of segregation. The second half of the twentieth century would bring about great changes for the town, ones that as in Foreman, would prove destructive to community institutions that tied residents together. However,

Fort Coffee would pull through this difficult time, and this distinguishes it from other towns that suffered similar fates as Foreman.

Integration and Critical Change

As in Foreman, while integration finally provided Blacks in Fort Coffee with basic equal rights, it also struck the community's roots, cutting critical community networks and ties. Integration stripped Fort Coffee of important institutions of Black power and self-determination. Everywhere in Oklahoma, White institutions that had better services benefited from integration. Black children were sent to White schools while the Black schools closed. More White teachers were hired while the Black teachers were suddenly out of work. Integration of Spiro schools began in 1957 with the junior and senior classes, and the schools were finally fully integrated in 1966. Black students began attending the formerly White high school in Spiro. This was not accomplished without great sacrifice of Black students' self-esteem in the early years. While most people say they did not have many problems in integrating, there were many fights between Whites and Blacks, and Black students found themselves educationally behind Whites as a result of their inferior schools. Marvail Lewis, who began attending Spiro High School in the 1950s recalls,

> M:…and 1957 that's when they integrated. And that was the most traumatic year I've ever had.
> …The reason being is that I think I was a little, bein' a, you know, a grade, matter of fact I almost flunked out of school. You know. And reason being is that everything was just different and we were behind. You know as far as studying. But in my mind, it appeared that nobody cared. You know you'd catch a bus to go to

> that school, and all we'd go to the back door of the school, this is 1957.
> K: You went to the back door of the school they had you integrate into?
> M: Yeah, that's where the bus would let us out was at that back door. And when twelve o'clock came all the Black, you know I think we probably separated ourselves. You know all the Blacks just went to one corner.

Jeff Simpson, who was in one of the first classes to integrate into the Spiro schools, recalls that he had no problems with the other students and the teachers were generally fair. However, the superintendent of the schools went out of his way to make the Black students feel unwelcome.

> "…and uh the first day when we went to Spiro High I remember him comin' up, a little short guy. And he says, 'I'm lookin' for basketball players.' That's what he said. He said ball. And then he came in and I never will forget this, he came into the Government class. Mr. Butler was the teacher. Mr. Butler was a fair teacher. And he says, you know he says, 'The people downtown, they don't like, and I have a problem 'cause they don't like that I let you go to school here.' And I think it was James Thomas that said, 'Well Mr. [ ], you go back and tell 'em the truth: if it was your choice, we still wouldn't be here.' Now I remember that conversation. And I think Mr. Butler said, he always had somethin' to say, 'You cooked his cabbage' or somethin' to that effect. But as far as the rest of the teachers and what happened, they, they were fair with me. I can't, I didn't have a problem. They gave me the benefit of the doubt.

While it was a difficult experience for many, several people who attended school during integration recall it being an exciting time. It was a new setting where children were able to meet people who had previously been in another social world, people of different backgrounds who were not of their own familiar sphere. Children were awed by the changes that were taking place in their everyday lives.

While children in Fort Coffee now had the opportunity to enjoy equal resources in education, albeit with the limitations of some unequal treatment within the schools, a major Black institution was shut down. The high school that once united African American students from across the county and created lifetime social networks was no longer a functioning force in the community. Fort Coffee students continued to attend school in Spiro, but other Black communities in the county were now able to attend formerly White high schools local to them. Consequently, social networks amongst the African American communities in the county were significantly reduced.

Integration also dealt a fatal blow to Fort Coffee's economy. As community members were finally able to patronize formerly White-only shops and restaurants, community stores, juke joints and cafes closed down as their business went to larger White-owned businesses. White shops and restaurants benefited from the added business while those in the Black towns failed. By the 1970s, the small businesses in Fort Coffee were gone.

There were social components to these economic impacts as well, and these would have great consequences for the community. Marvail Lewis describes the effects of integration on the community:

> M: And before integration came in, seemed to me that everybody was really a family. A *family* family. But then when integration came, people began to separate. You know they used to have Black stores here. Black merchants in this little community. And seemed to me right after integration came, all of that left.
> K: Really.
> M: Yeah. You could go to either corner and find a store.
> K: Right down here?

M: Yeah, right down the road there.
K: Wow. And they stayed there until what the 1960s?
M: Yeah. Probably 1960. The Shoates had a store there, the Gardners had a store there. And uh Gists. That store. And the Shoateses had a store. Yeah. And they always had some kind of little place for entertainment for your kids on Sunday. They call 'em, I call 'em a little joint, go up and buy a pop and dance on Sunday. And they had that you know. So it was, so I think that integration was good but it separated Blacks, Black people.
K: Well I don't really understand. Why did the stores go out of business when integration came? Just because there wasn't a need for Black stores anymore?
M: Probably. You know the opportunity. If you felt like your money wasn't good enough for somebody to take, what would you spend it on? Spend 'em with your own people. Right? And then when integration came, everything opened up and you could go to Kresses and eat a hamburger on a spinning barstool, why wouldn't you, you know?

Here, Mr. Lewis relates the decline of businesses in Fort Coffee to a decline in community cohesiveness. This relationship is important in understanding the effects of integration on Fort Coffee. As schools, businesses, and other institutions left Fort Coffee during integration, community members became less dependent on one another in many ways, and were able to form relationships with people and institutions outside of the community.

Integration was preceded by other great changes in Fort Coffee, among them the installation of modern services in many homes, including running water, telephone, and electricity. As in Foreman, people in Fort Coffee lived without these conveniences until the mid 1950s and 1960s. For some older people who were wary of such modern devices, their installation was even later.[87] These conveniences were able to connect many people in Fort Coffee who had been relatively isolated in the

country to the rest of the area in new ways. Telephones and televisions connected people not only throughout Fort Coffee, but also provided a new tie to local and national communities that had not existed before.

World War II, a shift in the national economy toward mass production, the failure of farms, and more efficient transportation through individual vehicle ownership were incredibly important changes between the 1940s and 1960s, and contributed to the already steady drain of people from Fort Coffee stemming from the lifting of restrictions on allotments, the Great Depression, and the fall of cotton earlier in the century. As integration provided new jobs for Blacks both locally and nationwide, many people moved to Fort Smith, and many others moved to far distant places like Wichita, Michigan, and California for jobs in industries like car manufacturing and US Steel. Modern services like the telephone allowed families to keep in touch over long distances, while individual car ownership allowed for visits during the summer and on holidays. These new abilities to keep in touch undoubtedly comforted people in their decisions to move away from Fort Coffee. Consequently, the majority of families that left during this period were able to keep close connections with their family and friends in the town.

The processes of integration, along with shifts in transportation and the economy left Fort Coffee's institutions and population greatly diminished. Baseball games and picnics no longer attracted the numbers of people they once did. The Holiness church lost members and was later abandoned. These same processes proved ultimately fatal for the town of Foreman in the 1970s. Although Fort Coffee

was also greatly weakened over this time period, the community today remains a relatively strong one in many ways.

From Integration into the Twenty-First Century

The reasons behind the very different futures of Foreman and Fort Coffee are many, not the least of which is the original size of the towns. Fort Coffee has been described by the eldest residents of each town as always having been much larger than Foreman. As a sort of historic suburb to the Choctaw Nation capital of Scullyville, Fort Coffee doubtless enjoyed a much larger population than did Foreman, whose closest major town in the Cherokee Nation was ten miles away in Sallisaw. Fort Coffee is also much closer to Fort Smith, Arkansas which has always been an important hub of activity to both Indian Territory and the state of Oklahoma. A larger original population may have been key in Fort Coffee's survival throughout the twentieth century. However, there are other significant processes that helped to ensure Fort Coffee's endurance as a community.

The common experiences of African Americans in Fort Coffee that had bound them together in identity and community during segregation did not fade away with the onset of racial integration. While Blacks were now allowed participation in the formerly White economy and educational systems, racism continued albeit in a different form. Although Fort Coffee children were now able to attend the formerly White Spiro High School, their treatment there was far from equal. Discrimination in the school continued into the 1970s and 1980s, and in 1970 or 1971, the Black

students on the football team staged a boycott of the games because they were treated unequally. Although they were the stars of the football team, they were never given any leadership roles on the team, and Blacks were never allowed to be class officers. Melvin Delt, a freshman football player at Spiro High after integration, described why he never returned to the team.

> "Some of 'em went back and some of 'em didn't. And it actually really affected the students and the school 'cause…the school team was real good in football and at the time it was in the football season, or the beginnin' of the football season. And, and-and the year before that we had gone to the state playoffs. And then we all boycotted for about, I guess seven games. And the Spiro school lost every game until we got back on. But I decided not to go back.
> You might not wanna put that on the record but the reason why I didn't go was because we had had a meeting that mornin', the next day, and the ones that wanted, the coach told us the ones that think that y'all have done 'em wrong, y'all apologize to the team for you leavin'. Set here, come down and set here, and I didn't go. I didn't think I had done anything to be apologizin' for."[88]

This inequality was carried in the 1980s as Denay Burris, who attended Spiro High School at that time relates. Interracial relationships were unacceptable and she was told that two boys were called into the principal's office to be told that they were to stop dating the White girls they were currently seeing. Additionally, Black students were still not portrayed in school representations:

> D: There was a, there was a calendar that was made at the school and it had all the athletes on the calendar. There was not one Black athlete on the calendar. So, and we're talkin' about basketball, football, track, and baseball. Not one! I mean it was going to be a big thing 'cause um the, the best boys that played basketball were Black and football were Black. Maybe not baseball,

okay, 'cause there wasn't anybody that played baseball.
And in track were Black okay.
K: Mm-hmm.
D: Was *not one* Black athlete.

Racial discrimination continues to plague children of African ancestry in Spiro schools today, according to parents in Fort Coffee.

Racism continued to define Fort Coffee residents' everyday experiences long after integration. While a façade of racial equality prevailed, the day to day lives of Fort Coffee residents continued to be defined as Black as opposed to White or Indian. Although Jim Crow laws were no longer legally enforced, the same social attitudes towards Blacks continued for the most part. Common experience as African American people in this post-Jim Crow era bound Fort Coffee residents together as it had during segregation. Consequently the community's significance and importance to its members as a Black community in a predominantly White environment did not completely fade away.

The continued division between African Americans in Fort Coffee and non-Blacks in the local area is visible in many facets of life, including marriage. Marriage between Whites and Blacks was practiced prior to statehood and again became legal after integration, but is still rare and many times looked down upon. At least two inter-racial couples call Fort Coffee home today, and both have encountered disapproval from Whites in the area as well as from people of their own community. Angela Phillips, a White-Choctaw woman in her late thirties who grew up in a nearby all-White town, recalled that she never saw African Americans when she was growing up, despite the town's proximity to Black communities like Fort Coffee. The town neighboring her own also had a sign warning, "N-, don't let the sun go down on

you here." Now married to Willie Phillips of Fort Coffee, an African American, they have found that racial attitudes have not changed much since their youth. Angela has had to deal with several instances of this problem at her workplace, a convenience store within a Choctaw Nation casino and gas station complex.

> A: For instance where I work at now, Choctaw Nation. When uh, I went to work over there, I had my CDIB card, and uh wasn't long after I went to work over there that I uh, that we had a little uh incident about uh my husband comin' to see me for lunch.
> W: Oh yeah.
> A: Because the people wasn't, the- there had been some complaints about…
> W: Well one instance, this one particular incident where my wife was workin' cash register, and this White guy came up to buy some cigarettes. Well he didn't have no money but a quarter so she had some coupons for the cigarettes that he was buyin'. She gave him the coupon and he said 'Oh golly I love you, how 'bout a kiss?' She says, 'I don't think my husband would like that.' And I was standin', and I said, "No, I wouldn't like that." And he looked, and he went out of the store. Came back wantin' to complain about it.
> A: He wrote…
> W: That she was flirtin' with a Black man.

Racial structures have been relatively unchanged in many ways, and these divisions continue to permeate many aspects of everyday life for Fort Coffee residents.

At the same time, the town of Fort Coffee as a predominantly Black community is relegated to the shadows of perceived danger and invisibility in the public mind. The neighboring town of Spiro distributes a local newspaper, the Spiro Graphic, in which Fort Coffee is regularly portrayed negatively. Drug busts and other criminal behavior are often reported as having taken place in Fort Coffee when many times, the offense was committed near the border of Fort Coffee by non-Black

people.[89] Consequently, there is a good deal of pressure on community members to keep Fort Coffee out of the local newspapers through maintaining good behavior. The report of a crime in Fort Coffee, or committed by a person from Fort Coffee, brings to mind a Black community, subconsciously associated with crime and violence. When I first moved to Fort Smith and spoke with White strangers about the research I would be conducting in Fort Coffee, I often received the response, "Be careful!" One man responded that he often went out there to drink heavily. Locally, Fort Coffee is known as a haven of drugs and meth labs, yet it is not the community members who are involved in this, but outsiders who use Fort Coffee for such purposes because police coverage in the town is minimal.[90]

Although integration took place over forty years ago, it is evident that racial structures in eastern Oklahoma remain solid. Racism is simply still a part of everyday life for most non-White people in this area. The continuing racial structure of this area insists on keeping race relevant to identity and community in Fort Coffee. Despite a perpetual pride in multiracial ancestries, which will be described further below, an enduring Black experience continues to be critical to Black identity and community in Fort Coffee, reinforcing Fort Coffee's important role to its citizens as a predominantly Black community in a racially structured environment.

Another reason behind Fort Coffee's perseverance as a community may lie in the continued practice of the traditions that tie people together. Many of Fort Coffee's institutions remained intact through the 1970s and 1980s, although much diminished from what they once were. Fort Coffee's community picnics continued on, although they may have attracted fewer people than they had in the past.

However, they remained large gatherings of family and friends that lasted several days and nights. These picnics continued well into the 1970s. Curtis Wayne Lee, born in Fort Coffee in 1950, remembers attending them as a child and teenager.

> "As best I can describe, I-I I'll describe it like this. People from all our town would be home, they'd come home. And then maybe one of their children, all the children would be there. Ever- it was just a lot of fun just all gettin' together like one big ol' family. Jus' like a big family of people. Your second cousins would be there. … It, it, and it was a lot of fun. It was a lotta lotta fun. I remember goin' there."

Lights were still hung in the trees and people would gather to buy dinners of fish, hot dogs, barbecue, and pies. The continued tradition of community picnics was instrumental in keeping the community intact. Not only did it continue to provide a setting where individuals in Fort Coffee interacted with one another, it also was a time and place for the return of sons, daughters, sisters, brothers, cousins, aunts and uncles, who had moved out of Fort Coffee. Summer picnics were important times when families and the community would reunite and reaffirm community bonds.

Large picnics are no longer held today, but their practice continues in the form of family reunions. These are held throughout Fort Coffee during the summer as family members and relatives who now live in places like Wichita, Kansas City, and California return for a long weekend or a vacation. Gatherings usually happen around the 4th of July and Memorial Day, but can be seen throughout the summer. These gatherings are much smaller than the traditional picnics, last only one day, and are usually held in someone's yard. However, the spirit of the old picnics lives on as many people in the community attend and spend the day eating and talking with old

friends and distant relatives. Despite their diminished character, these functions serve to reaffirm community networks and bonds.

Mount Triumph Missionary Baptist Church and Macedonia Church of God also kept their congregations throughout the period following integration, although the Holiness church was abandoned during this era. The church congregations diminished somewhat, but as in Foreman, services were held in each church on alternating Sundays at different times in order to provide a full congregation, or in the case of an absent preacher. Mount Triumph has been a site of social and spiritual gatherings throughout the twentieth century. In the 1950s and 1960s, the church held "Tuesday Night Tea," where children of all ages from Fort Coffee could come in for Kool-Aid and snacks, regardless of their church affiliation. This provided a "hang-out" within the town for small children as well as teenagers. Throughout the week, group meetings would be held for women's fellowship, men's fellowship, Bible study, and choir practice among others. These meetings throughout the week continue today, and the church remains an active Fort Coffee institution, as can be seen by a visit to Sunday services today.

• • •

On any given Sunday, a few cars will arrive at the Mount Triumph Missionary Baptist church at 9am. It is a small red brick church with a grass parking lot and a cemetery behind it, containing graves dating back to 1900 and most likely before that. Sunday school begins at 9 each week, and usually has several children and adults in attendance. A few minutes before 11am, the grass lot around the church quickly fills with cars and the church fills with fifty to one hundred people dressed in fine suits

and dresses. The church mothers, the older women who are longtime members of the church, take their seats at the front of the church, usually within several pews set sideways toward the pulpit rather than directly opposite as the rest of the pews are placed. The service begins with an upbeat song, led by the choir and accompanied by a drum, electric guitar and bass at the front corner of the church. Everyone rises and begins to clap their hands, singing a song like "Jesus is on the Main Line". At times, one of the church mothers will begin singing another song following this, and she is quickly joined by the choir and the rest of the congregation. These songs are followed by a welcome by the deacons and church announcements. More upbeat songs follow, and then a call for the church offering. At this time, the entire congregation rises and pew by pew, people walk to the front of the church to deposit several dollar bills or more into the offering baskets. Following this, the pastor begins his sermon, centering on a theme taken from the Bible – starting out slowly and quietly, and by its end, the message being delivered in shouts and song, answered by the congregation in "Amen" and "Go on!" After the sermon, the pastor calls any individual who is in need of special prayer and help to come to the front of the church. Those who feel they need it, usually one or two individuals, approach the front and are seated in one of two chairs facing the congregation. They are surrounded by the deacons and the pastor invites the congregation to pray for the individuals. Many people in the congregation rise and go to the front, surrounding the individuals in the chairs, and at times hold hands and pray while the pastor prays aloud. It is during this time that one or two individuals may become "filled with the Holy Spirit" and begin convulsing while praying. After five to ten minutes of prayer,

all return to their seats and a closing prayer and song. The congregation is soon filing out of the church, speaking briefly to others along the way. Within fifteen minutes, the grass lot is mostly empty again and everyone has returned home or to a Sunday dinner in Fort Smith at a restaurant like the Golden Corral.

• • •

Mount Triumph and Macedonia churches serve ever important functions in Fort Coffee as spiritual and social community centers, and they also continue to provide important networks to other African American communities throughout the area and state. Unlike other institutions that were broken down by integration, the historic functions of community churches remain intact. District meetings with other churches throughout the area and state continue to establish and maintain networks between Fort Coffee and African American communities, and ongoing visitations to other local African American churches reinforce important relationships between individuals in Fort Coffee and African Americans throughout the area. These important networks live on because historically African American churches throughout Oklahoma have remained predominantly African American. Active relationships through these churches are yet another way that community identity is reinforced, at the same time renewing an racial identification with African Americans throughout the area.

Another key to Fort Coffee's endurance as a community is a relatively recent return of Fort Coffee residents from distant places throughout the country. The population of Fort Coffee has decreased greatly in the past century due to the same processes at work on Foreman. As farming cotton and then farming in general

became less viable and factory jobs opened up in the northern U.S., many people moved away to places like California, Kansas City, Wichita, Flint, Michigan, and Detroit. However, unlike Foreman, Fort Coffee has seen a return of many people who left. Many people return to the town when they retire or to take care of a sick parent, often times bringing with them their own family. A great deal of those who live permanently in Wichita or California have other kin relations in the same area, and keep deep social and familial ties to Fort Coffee through phone calls and annual summer trips back to Fort Coffee. In some cases, town expenses are covered with donations from these people in faraway places. Consequently, the roots of the Fort Coffee community are alive and well despite continual population loss. Most of the people who continue to live there today are related to one another closely or distantly, as there has been little change in the make-up of the population besides out-migration.

A continual and pervasive racial structure surrounding Fort Coffee, as well as ongoing community traditions work to bind people together in a common racial and community identity. At the same time, the town remains much changed from what it once was. Its population has decreased and there are few young people living within the town. Baseball games are no longer played within the community. There are no businesses within Fort Coffee, and much of the familial feel that people remember of the community is gone. However, the community itself remains extremely important to its residents, and to those who grew up there, thus the constant draw of people who grew up there to return. Not only is it a personal root of childhood, but it is a continuous shaper of identity, a place embedded in a specific history unique to the people of Fort Coffee. This is a living history which is passed on over and over

throughout the community, building and reinforcing an identity that is extremely important to identity and community survival and renewal in Fort Coffee.

Connecting to History

Former mayor and local historian Levester McKesson and I are driving around the Fort Coffee area in my car on one of several rides around the area's significant historic places. We have stopped at state historic markers that salute missionaries in Indian Territory, the New Hope Academy, Fort Coffee School for Boys, and the town of Scullyville. Each of these tells a story of Choctaw history in the area, of chiefly Choctaw families, and of agencies and schools that served the Choctaw Nation. State historic markers are found throughout Fort Coffee, alongside the country roads and the highways that crisscross the area. To community members, these markers are proof of their historic ties to the Choctaw Nation and Indian Territory – a point of reference for local people to connect with their history, as well as evidence to show outsiders like me who wish to know more about their history.

Perhaps the most significant physical piece of history is held in and around the Scullyville Cemetery. I had heard about it from other community members before Mr. McKesson actually took me there one rainy day. I couldn't have found it on my own, located as it was some distance from the center of town. Not visible from the main road, the cemetery lies behind an old house once used as a school, down a narrow dirt path marked by a stone marker that tells the history of Scullyville.

Mr. McKesson directs me to drive down the narrow dirt path, and we soon come to a locked chain fence beneath an iron archway reading "Choctaw Nation Skullyville Cemetery." We get out of the car and find our way into the cemetery. It is a large, well-kept burial ground with beautiful historic grave markers atop a rich layer of green grass. Inside, a newer marker is beautifully engraved with the history of the Scullyville Cemetery and its significance in Choctaw Nation history. I am impressed by the cemetery's beauty, and its obvious maintenance in a location so remote. It is a peaceful place, situated away from the roads and surrounded by large trees that had stood witness to the burials of the Choctaw chiefs resting here.

Mr. McKesson sets about reading the names on the graves and telling me whether or not he knew the person, or perhaps was acquainted with some relation of theirs. He tells me something about each person he knew who is buried here, usually bearing the last name of a well-known Choctaw family. As we go through the grave markers, at times struggling to read the worn names, I become more interested in the slave cemetery I've heard about. Other community members have told me that slaves were buried on the other side of the fence, as Blacks were not allowed burial in the same cemetery as the Choctaw people. Attempting to find this fence built to separate the Blacks, I wander towards the edges of the cemetery, asking if I can see the other cemetery from here. Mr. McKesson assures me that he will show me the slave cemetery shortly.

After we are finished with our tour of the graveyard, we return to my car and head back to the road. Just a short distance down the road, a sharp left takes us down a different dirt road, this one a bit longer than the last. I am still looking for the

cemetery when Mr. McKesson tells me to stop, that we are already here. We get out of the car and my eyes search the ground for signs of a cemetery, as I see none. What lies ahead is an overgrown field of brownish grass. As I look into the tall grass, I begin to see the tops of grave markers here and there, and then a larger grave closer to me covered by a large slab of concrete. I finally understand that this is indeed a cemetery, but far from what I had imagined.

It is wet and humid, and I tell Mr. McKesson that he doesn't need to make the trek through the field to show me the graves, but he gladly does so anyway. He tells me that historically, only Choctaw Freedmen could be buried in this cemetery. State Blacks had to be buried elsewhere. However, over the years, this restriction was lifted and anyone could be buried here, although it was still mainly relegated to the family members of others who had been buried there. Mr. McKesson and I wade through the long grass to each grave marker, and he tells me a story of each name he recognizes, bringing the spirits back to life as he relates stories of old girlfriends, and old friends and their antics in high school or in past gatherings. This overgrown cemetery is full of memories, and is still used and visited by the Fort Coffee community. However, it stands in stark contrast to the well-cared for Scullyville cemetery holding the remains of the elite Choctaw families. While the Choctaw Nation maintains the Scullyville cemetery, the neighboring graveyard of those Choctaw slaves and their descendants must rely on the labor of community members who in many cases, lack the time and equipment to maintain such a site. Despite this dichotomy, the Fort Coffee community takes great pride in both cemeteries that help define their historical roots.

The Fort Coffee area is filled with history, visible in historic markers and sites throughout. However, the obvious pride that Fort Coffee townspeople take in the area's history and its documentation in historic markers is strangely juxtaposed with the fact that none of these historic markers speak about Black Choctaws, or Choctaw Freedmen, or anyone who is publicly connected to the Fort Coffee community today. Just how this lack of recognition has affected people in Fort Coffee is critical to understanding community identity.

• • •

Most Fort Coffee children in the twentieth century grew up knowing little about their ancestry or their family history. Usually, people were not interested in such subjects as children, and most times when they would ask about these things, they were told that it was none of their business. In most cases, it was considered inappropriate for a child to ask questions concerning the subject of ancestry and family history. By the time people became interested in these matters as adults, the elders of their family had passed away. An incredible amount of Freedmen history has been lost in this way. This loss, in addition to the absence of written histories of the community, leaves most Fort Coffee descendants today with countless unanswered questions and struggling to know just who they are.

There are some residents of Fort Coffee today who asked the questions growing up and received answers from their parents and grandparents, or who paid attention to what the older people were saying when they were children. These people are a minority, but they help to bind today's generations with the histories of their communities. Community members look to them to understand more about

where they come from, and when they pass away, so does another wealth of community and Freedmen history.

Within this dearth of family and local histories however, lie important connections to historical roots that resist both the lack of history and the historic racial structure in this area. As among Freedmen descendants and Black Indians in Sequoyah County across the river, many Fort Coffee residents have a strong claim of indigeneity to the area. Although written histories exclude them, Freedmen descendants of Fort Coffee know that their roots extend back further than most other communities in the surrounding area. They also take pride in the fact that this was their home while Whites were not legally allowed into the territory. Pride in this deep root is carried by most every resident of Fort Coffee, who although they may not know the details of their community's history, they do know that their foundation lies in Indian Territory and the Choctaw Nation.

At the same time, family and local narratives of multiracialness are prevalent throughout Fort Coffee. While Blackness within a strict racial system has shaped identity strongly throughout the twentieth century and most everyone identifies primarily as Black or African American, descendants of Freedmen in Fort Coffee defy and resist Oklahoma's constricting racial structures through their understandings of multiracialness in their community. People in Fort Coffee realize that despite their categorization as Black, and their experiences as such during segregation, that their diverse Indian Territory roots are not so distant. Most families with histories extending back to Indian Territory claim mixed Black, White, and Indian ancestries and are proud of these backgrounds, despite the ways in which these diverse

ancestries were ignored over the past century by society surrounding them. These claims to multiracialness work to connect Fort Coffee residents to non-Black families and communities around them, whether or not those families and communities wish to acknowledge this relationship.

As Henrietta McKesson, one of the oldest residents of the town said, "Yeah. We all kin! (laughs loudly) Well whether we agree or not, we all kin."[91]

This is a feeling that is vocalized often by older Freedmen and Black Indians in Fort Coffee. Another older woman of Fort Coffee is a descendant of the Choctaw Darneal family. Her mother was the daughter of a Black woman and a well-known Choctaw man named Darneal who was married to a White woman. It was recognized throughout the area that she was Darneal's daughter, and the Darneal family reportedly acknowledged her as kin, giving her special treatment in day to day interactions. Although this kin relationship was generally acknowledged, it was kept quiet and unofficial. There are no documents readily available that connect her with the Darneal family, but local oral history and knowledge confirm it. Today, both sides of the family acknowledge the kin relationship, yet until 2006, the White side of the family was enrolled in the Choctaw Nation, while the Black side was not for lack of documentation of blood connections. Fortunately, with the help of expert genealogists, this family was able to find documentation of this relationship and enroll as citizens in the Choctaw Nation.

This kind of relationship has spanned throughout the Indian Territory era, through statehood and segregation. It is one where Blacks, Whites, and Indians are connected in many ways, yet kinship connections with Blacks are not officially

acknowledged. In many cases, it has cost African Americans tribal citizenship. Today, families in this situation are at a loss. Most are not familiar with archival and other types of materials needed for this type of investigation.

These publicly unrecognized ties to Choctaw families are part of a larger connection to their area's history. Community-specific understandings of history and their place within it embody a historical consciousness that is critical to Fort Coffee's identity and sense of indigeneity. These pieces of history are passed on daily, lived daily, and constantly shape residents' understandings of their community and themselves.

One of these pieces of history is the understanding of the places of certain families in Fort Coffee's beginnings. Within the community, descendants of Freedmen families are referred to as the "original" families of Fort Coffee, people who had been there long before any Whites or other African Americans came and settled in the area. Descendants of these original families take great pride in their families' histories, as well as in their indigeneity to the area. Family names like Burris, Eubanks, Brown, Clayton, Craig, McCurtain, and others all invoke a kind of respect as the first families of Fort Coffee. Virtually every Freedmen descendant in Fort Coffee knows his or her connection to one or several of these families, and the intermarriages and historic relationships between these families have become almost legend in their constant repetition by local historians of Fort Coffee. While not everyone in Fort Coffee is familiar with the specifics of the town's history, most all people know the oldest families of Fort Coffee.

Additionally, the Fort Coffee community is embedded in the physical representation of Choctaw Nation and Indian Territory history. Historic sites extending back prior to statehood fill the community and surround it on all sides. The actual fort of Fort Coffee, Scullyville, the Choctaw agency, Spiro Mounds, New Hope Academy, Fort Coffee School for Boys, and Scullyville Cemetery are found either within the community or close by. Growing up with these sites in their backyards, community history has become a part of Fort Coffee's historical consciousness. For most, it has become a taken for granted aspect of everyday life, and yet a constant source of pride in historical roots and indigeneity. Specific points in town are remembered for their roles in history and the Choctaw Nation, and still are seen and used daily. A case in point is the site of the old Scullyville Agency and the natural spring just below it in Fort Coffee. It is mentioned in many historical accounts, including Sarah Harlan's autobiographical account. Its importance lives on today as people continue to use the old spring, driving up to the site with plastic jugs to catch the still flowing water. Levester McKesson relates the historical importance of the area:

> "But right up on this hill here, this hill, this very hill, right there, that's the old Ainsworth hill where that, and this is the spring, right there, here. This spring has been around here since 1800. Right there. But this is where they used to congregate and bring all of the, the Indians, the Choctaw Indians from the old fort down there, all the way to this right there. Right up on that hill there. And that's where they disbursed em, pretty much. Right here. This is sort of notorious, well not really but this, because this is where all of the gatherings used to take place."

Mr. McKesson spoke from knowledge that was passed down from previous generations and from other community members, supplemented by his own research. This historical point, like many others, serve as a sort of root for Fort Coffee community members, surrounding them and daily reminding them of their community's history and their own roots within it.

Another significant piece of history in the Fort Coffee community is Spiro Mounds, or as community members call it, Fort Coffee Mounds. These two mounds along the Arkansas River were once one large mound, part of the prehistoric Mississippian culture complex spread across the greater southeast. Since their removal from the southeast, Choctaw Freedmen were farming this area, and the Dawes Commission later allotted the land on which the mound sat to the Brown and Craig families prior to statehood.[92] While Fort Coffee residents have no known ancestral connections to the prehistoric people who built Spiro Mound, they relate to its historic presence in their community. People speak with obvious pride about the mound, and community narratives about it are central to the community's claims to identity today. Most community members speak of the mound as if it is theirs, and indeed lay claim to it through naming it "Fort Coffee Mound." Although now controlled by the state of Oklahoma as a historic site and museum, it is one of the roots of the community leading back to their arrival in the 1830s.

Each of these sites is part of the historic landscape within which Fort Coffee was created, and which continues to remind the community of its indigenous roots. These pieces of the historical and present landscape join with residents' understandings of who they are in relationship to it. Additionally, Freedmen and

Black Choctaw families of Fort Coffee live day to day the understandings of who they are that were passed down from their parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, and other community members. Today, Fort Coffee families continually relate themselves today to their forebears in the past, reliving the relationships that their ancestors had with other families and with historical figures. Certain families today have ancestral relationships to Judge Isaac Parker, known as the "Hanging Judge" of Fort Smith who was well-known throughout Indian Territory. These ancestral relationships are continually passed on throughout related families as well as through the community itself. It is well-known which families of Fort Coffee are related to these historical figures as well as to each other. In another case, one family's relation was actually hung by Judge Parker, and this caused rifts between these families who had opposing relationships to Judge Parker, the memories of which shape relationships in Fort Coffee today. In many cases, people of the town do not share these relationships, most likely with the feeling passed down from their own parents that these topics are not for open discussion. However, unwillingness to discuss such relationships does not change the meanings attached to these and their effects on family and community identities.

Aside from ancestral kin relationships, social and economic relationships from the territorial era continue to influence relationships today, and affect how Fort Coffee community members see themselves. Consequently, some relationships are somewhat strained between families who lost their land to mortgage early in the century, and those to whom it was mortgaged. Many people today attribute various characteristics of people's ancestors to their descendants living today, both racial and

social. In this way, individual, family, and community relationships and identities are continually shaped by historical consciousness. This is a continuous thread of history and identity through which people of Fort Coffee relate themselves to their community and the world around them. It is a significant part of Fort Coffee's survival as a community. However, a bit of this history is lost as each generation passes away.

Searching for the Evidence

Today, Anna Craig's great-granddaughter Brenda is 70 years old. Although she grew up in Virginia and later lived in many places across the United States, she now lives in Fort Coffee, on the same corner where her grandmother Mecca lived. She and her husband built this house after their retirement, when Brenda decided that she wanted to live on the land that had been passed down to her by her family. Today, Brenda's concerns are with understanding her true ancestry. She has always been told of her Choctaw and Crow and White ancestry, and that her family was descended from Peter Pitchlynn. Her family, however, had been listed as Choctaw Freedmen, and today this bars her from tribal citizenship. She has inherited bagfuls of documents spanning back to her great-grandmother Anna Craig, concerning land rights and property sales. A copy of a drawing of Peter Pitchlynn's face was kept among the family documents for many years, and Brenda searches for more answers about her family's true history and ancestry. However, without knowledge of genealogy and with poor existing records, the many details of her family's ancestry

and Choctaw citizenship will most likely remain hidden behind the mysteries of race and records in the Choctaw Nation.

• • •

Even with a strong community history and Fort Coffee people's embeddedness within it, individual Freedmen descendants in Fort Coffee continue to search for understandings about their families' roots and to understand their roles in history in light of their removal from state and tribal histories. With the continued passing of older generations who are keepers of community history, and without any formal understandings of their histories through school or local history books, many Fort Coffee residents look for written documentation of their historic relationship to the area and to the Choctaw Nation. Most Fort Coffee residents are unfamiliar with Dawes records, yet have done some type of significant genealogical research on their families. Everywhere in Freedmen communities, people feel an urgency and are engaged in a constant struggle to rediscover and maintain their histories as people who have been left out of the historical narrative in which they are so important, especially as family and community histories continue to pass away with each generation.

This loss becomes even more significant in today's context of their disenfranchisement as Choctaw citizens. Noticeably, most people in Fort Coffee with these important historical relationships are not enrolled citizens of the Choctaw Nation, while many other non-Black people in the area are citizens. Although Freedmen people in Fort Coffee recall their parents and grandparents voting in

Choctaw elections, and remember that officials of the Choctaw Nation came to Fort Coffee in order to influence people's votes, Freedmen are no longer citizens of the nation. In 1984, the Choctaw Nation's constitution was written to include only people who could prove ancestry from a person on the Choctaw Indian Roll of the Dawes Roll who had a Choctaw blood quantum. Unfortunately, this cut Freedmen from Choctaw citizenship for lack of blood quantum. Throughout the past twenty years, as the Choctaw Nation has erected casinos and other commercial enterprises aimed at economic development, and have increasingly been able to serve its citizens through health care and educational funding, the distinctions between citizens and non-citizens have become ever more evident to people in Fort Coffee. Consistently, Blacks are unable to access these services while Whites and Indians are, despite their common histories in the Choctaw Nation. The racial aspects of this distribution of services seem to repeat and reinforce the racial structure that had segregated Blacks from Whites and Indians throughout the twentieth century, and this seemingly old system is met with confusion and defiance by some people in Fort Coffee. The struggle for the rights of citizenship, including access to tribal services, is important to many people, but is by no means central to a growing need to find individual histories.

Fort Coffee community members' ties to their history, as well as an interest in their own family genealogy, has led many people to research their ancestry in order to enroll in the Choctaw Nation. As people grow up embedded in these important histories, and yet find no record of them outside of their elders' knowledge that continues to pass away, there is a desperately felt need to record what is known, and

to research and find evidence of their roots. It is this search for a better understanding of their histories that is important to today's generations, and is central to defining identities in a context where historical knowledge fades fast.

The urgency to record Fort Coffee's history and the histories of its families, and the desire to secure tribal rights as Freedmen has been met with activism in Fort Coffee. Following in the footsteps of their forebears who organized on behalf of Choctaw Freedmen for citizenship after emancipation, people in Fort Coffee are again becoming active in a push for Choctaw Freedmen citizenship. Fort Coffee resident Verdie Triplett, along with Levester McKesson and several other community members, established the Choctaw-Chickasaw Freedmen Association in late 2006. This organization is dedicated to preserving Fort Coffee's unique history and, taking its cue from Freedmen activism throughout the state of Oklahoma, especially the ongoing case of the Cherokee Freedmen, the organization also seeks to secure rights of citizenship for all Choctaw and Chickasaw Freedmen. The association is concerned with the rights of all Freedmen however, as it was this group who first brought Congress's attention to the Cherokee Nation's expulsion of the Cherokee Freedmen through a petition to Congresswoman Diane Watson. While the association began slowly in terms of members, the group has grown and now has the aid of Angela Walton-Raji, a nationally known genealogist and activist for Black Indians and Freedmen of the Five Tribes.

Fort Coffee has an extensive and unique history that has shaped and continues to shape the Freedmen lives within it. As a community in Indian Territory, Oak Lodge/Fort Coffee was a diverse place. Home to emancipated slaves, Choctaws of all

intermixed races, and Whites, this diversity was key to the community's beginnings and to its identity that was carried through the twentieth century. As the twentieth century began however and Fort Coffee became a part of the new state of Oklahoma, race became an ever important organizer of everyday life. While Freedmen of Fort Coffee had had many separate institutions prior to statehood in the Choctaw Nation, the new Jim Crow system adopted at statehood led to a strict separation between people of African descent and others. This, combined with the influx of non-Indian Territory African Americans, was a major contributor to Fort Coffee's strengthened identity as a predominantly Black town throughout the twentieth century. The hardships and everyday experiences of Freedmen and other African Americans within this system of segregation solidified Fort Coffee as a community, but at the same time strengthened a sort of monolithic Black identity. The continual forces of population loss throughout the twentieth century led to a decline in many of Fort Coffee's institutions and in the community itself. For Foreman, these processes led to the community's virtual abandonment. In Fort Coffee however, persistent community institutions, a return of generations who had left, and a continuing racial structure worked to maintain community identities. More importantly, a deep personal root in family and community histories has carried through the generations, invoking a pride in indigeneity and an identity based in historical consciousness has not only allowed for Fort Coffee's survival as a community, but has contributed to its revitalization through preservation and activism. Today in Fort Coffee, the Choctaw-Chickasaw Association is a rather new aspect of this revitalization. In the past ten years, Fort Coffee has established programs for its seniors, a Head Start program, joined with

county community action groups, created a community center, purchased land within the town's historic boundaries, established parks, and constructed a new town hall. These have all been major steps for Fort Coffee, and ones that demonstrate that although they have suffered population loss, the people of the town are dedicated to keeping it alive and improving life for its residents. Recently, the mayor of Fort Coffee joined the Oklahoma Association of Black Mayors, which was possibly another step forward for the town, furthering their representation on a state and national scale. In light of this recent and ongoing revitalization, Fort Coffee proves that Freedmen communities in Oklahoma not only have a meaningful and important history, but that they may also be instrumental in shaping the future through the perseverance of local Freedmen histories and identities.

Chapter 4

Freedmen Activism

It is almost 2pm on a Saturday at the Midwest City Community Center in June 2004, and people are still filtering in for the Descendants of Freedmen of the Five Civilized Tribes Association meeting. Rows of folding chairs have been set up facing a table at the front of the room, at which sit several officers of the association. Most meeting attendees sit and wait in silence, unfamiliar with the others in the room, as they wait for the meeting to begin. At a few minutes after two o'clock, Marilyn Vann welcomes everyone to the meeting, and outlines the association's goals of educating people about Freedmen history and genealogy, and of restoring Freedmen rights within the Five Tribes. A sign-up sheet attached to a clipboard is handed throughout the rows of people, where attendees write their names and contact information.

The meeting begins as the officers speak about the progress of their court cases in the Cherokee and Creek nations for Freedmen citizenship. There is a Treasurer's Report, and a report from the Conference Chair on the progress of coordinating the annual summer conference. Marilyn then speaks to the crowd again, this time with a straightforward but persuasive tone that urges everyone to join the action now, to do their part by researching their own genealogy within the Dawes Rolls, joining the association to take part in their activism, and by contributing funds to the cause. She relates the fact that current legal actions are costly, and support is critical. Audience members ask questions about how the association can help them, and how the current court cases might benefit them. They are met with reassurances

that the work they are doing will benefit all Freedmen people. It is now time to "pass the hat," and most everyone rifles through their purses or pockets to make a small donation to the day's collection. Afterwards, the invited speaker is asked to present. Today, the guest is Ms. Sylvia Davis, a leading figure in Freedmen activism who fought for equal rights to services for Seminole Freedmen. She provides an update about their ongoing struggles in the Seminole Nation and the federal government, and follows this with an inspirational speech urging the officers and attendees to keep up their fight for citizenship. She asks Rhonda Grayson, an association officer, to join her at the front. Taking her hand, Ms. Davis begins marching in place, asking Rhonda to march alongside her and urging everyone to unite, and to keep marching on with their heads up. After some final words from the officers, the meeting ends and audience members approach the front of the room to speak with the officers about the many questions they have about their histories, ancestries, genealogy, association membership, and the ongoing struggles for tribal citizenship.

• • •

Meetings of the Descendants of Freedmen Association do not represent the first instances of Freedmen activism within the tribes or in the state of Oklahoma. As described in previous chapters, Choctaw Freedmen mobilized for citizenship in the Choctaw Nation prior to 1883, and Cherokee Freedmen became active in struggling for equal rights in their nation prior to statehood. This activism continued into the Dawes era and beyond. In the Cherokee Nation, Freedman Moses Whitmire and many other Cherokee Freedmen successfully contested their exclusion from an Indian Court of Claims payment for lands seized in the Cherokee Strip.[93] In the Creek

Nation, a Creek Freedmen's Association was established, and in the 1940s, the association filed a lawsuit against the Creek Nation in the Indian Court of Claims for failure to provide for equalization of allotments. In the 1950s and 1960s, a Cherokee Freedmen's Association based in Kansas City became active in securing lands and rights that were denied them and their ancestors when they were rejected from the Dawes Commission Rolls. Later on, in 1976, Seminole Freedmen became active in a struggle to secure a share of a $16 million award from the Indian Claims Commission for Florida lands taken in 1823 (Mulroy 2004: 474). In each of these cases, Freedmen were unsuccessful in securing their rights.[94] Nonetheless, Freedmen activism was an important feature of the twentieth century in Oklahoma, demonstrating that identities and connections to the tribes remained strong throughout the century.

Freedmen activism today has taken a different turn, one that has brought Freedmen activist networks from local and tribal to intertribal and nationwide. In the past, Freedmen mobilized to secure specific rights in their respective tribes, and historically these issues differed depending on tribe. Freedmen activist networks rarely spanned beyond tribal lines, the exception being the Choctaw and Chickasaw as a result of the 1866 Treaty requiring joint action by the tribes concerning their Freedmen's citizenship. Today however, while local Freedmen activism continues within the tribes, there is a new activist movement that extends past tribal and even state boundaries. In recent years, Freedmen from all Five Tribes have come together in the struggle for equal tribal rights and citizenship. As in the cases of Foreman and Fort Coffee, this movement has been shaped in significant ways by historical

experiences within Indian Territory and Oklahoma, and especially the specific histories of Freedmen in Oklahoma's urban areas.

Freedmen descendants born and raised in the urban centers of Oklahoma comprise a great deal of the Freedmen population today. As in the historic Freedmen communities, Freedmen descendants in urban centers have roots extending back to lives in the old Chickasaw, Choctaw, Seminole, Muscogee Creek, and Cherokee nations, in towns like Foreman and Fort Coffee. However, twentieth century experiences in Oklahoma City and Tulsa, and in Oklahoma at large, shaped Freedmen identities in ways that differed from those of Freedmen in these small historic towns. These processes over the course of the twentieth century were instrumental in the formation of today's modern activism.

African American Histories

As urban centers, Oklahoma City and Tulsa attracted a heavy influx of non-tribal citizens in the pre-statehood era, including many African Americans from across the southern United States. The relative freedom the territories offered and the immense number of African Americans drawn to this area led the newcomers to seek to influence Oklahoma statehood in their own favor, and to make it a Black state. In so doing, African Americans were competing with more powerful White interests and also with citizens of the Five Tribes, who formed a movement for an Indian controlled state called the State of Sequoyah (Carter 1999: 218). The efforts of African Americans in regard to Black statehood would greatly influence the futures of

all Blacks in the new state, not only in population growth, but in African American institutions, social and cultural networks, and the unique diversity of Oklahoma itself.

The establishment of all-Black towns in Oklahoma and Indian Territories was key to the Black statehood movement. These small towns embodied Booker T. Washington's ideals of Black self sufficiency and progress under segregation, and accordingly were home to Black-owned businesses, farms, homes, banks, newspapers, and other symbols of African American freedom and progress (Crockett 1979). In Indian Territory, many Black towns like Boley and Taft were established near already existing Freedmen and Black-Indian communities, on allotments sold when restrictions were lifted (Gray 1988; Odell 2007). Once towns were established, Black town promoters actively recruited African Americans to the area from across the South, promoting these towns as havens on the frontier in a vision to bring enough African Americans into the territory to establish Oklahoma as a Black state. Edward P. McCabe, fresh from service as Kansas's first African American state auditor, sought out this vision when he learned of the upcoming 1889 land run in Oklahoma Territory. Not long after this first land run, McCabe founded Langston City on October 22, 1890, calling it "The Only Distinctively Negro City in America." McCabe began promoting Langston to African Americans throughout the South in an effort to bring more Blacks into Oklahoma (Crockett 1979: 20-40; Tolson 1974: 73-88).

Thousands of African Americans throughout the South were enticed to escape the poverty and prejudice of their homes and set out for the Oklahoma frontier. One man described witnessing the departure of hundreds from their Tennessee homes.

> "My parents, Ben and Emily Randle, were both slaves. I went down to the river at Memphis, Tennessee, and saw the crowd of about six-hundred negroes leave to find free homes in Oklahoma. It took about three trips of the ferry-boat to take them all across the river. Many of their relatives did not want to see them leave and there was much praying, shouting, and shedding of tears."[95]

By the end of 1890, Oklahoma Territory's African American population had grown to more than 3,000. Throughout the decade of the 1890s, the Black population grew steadily so that by 1900, over 55,000 Blacks resided in Oklahoma and Indian Territories (Franklin 1982: 11).

McCabe made no secret of his plan to use Langston as the nucleus of an all-Black state with himself as governor. (Crockett 1977:23). At the same time however, White settlers were working to secure their own power in statehood. Despite McCabe's appointment as Assistant Territorial Auditor and the large influx of African Americans into the territories, it was evident by the late 1890s that the Black state movement had failed. Blacks never accounted for more than 10 percent of the population at any time during the 1890s (Crockett 1979: 26). Despite the Five Tribes' unification towards their own political goals, the State of Sequoyah movement failed also.

At the same time, in Indian Territory, the work of the Dawes Commission and the creation of new citizenship rolls for each of the tribes in effect divided the populace by Jim Crow standards, creating Black and non-Black citizens. This pattern of racial categorization and determination of rights based on that categorization was increasingly set in stone as incoming Whites gained control of Indian Territory and

prepared for Oklahoma statehood. Blacks in both Oklahoma and Indian Territories saw their rights slipping away before their very eyes as statehood loomed.

Frank Speck, observing race relations in Indian Territory and Oklahoma Territory just prior to statehood, described the great changes resulting from an increasingly strict racial structure accompanied by racial violence. He describes one instance in which as he waited at a train station at Chandler, an African American man asked him if the town of Stroud was open to Negroes. The man found out quickly after he stepped off the train there that indeed it was not. "A large crowd of white men filled the station platform and Sam was immediately lost to view in a surrounding mass of inquirers, who were enforcing upon him in various ways the fact that it would not be 'healthy' to stay over night there." Speck later learned that the only African American family in the town, who had braved the opposition for some time, was forced to leave when their home was blown up with dynamite: "'No lives lost, but the house demolished and Negroes ousted,' was the gist of the newspaper accounts" (Speck 1907: 431). Instances like these were common throughout Oklahoma at the time, as incoming Whites attempted to impose strict racial segregation onto a diverse territory. Given the increasingly hostile racial environment, Speck predicted, "The Negroes, who naturally in this case cannot foresee much to their advantage in the present changes, may be expected to retire further and further into racial conservatism, and seclude themselves in increasing numbers in surroundings that are more to their taste, away from districts that are not socially congenial to them." (Speck 1907: 432). Speck was unfortunately correct about the impending racial future in the area.

The racial environment only became more hostile for African Americans. Racial antagonism and violence in the territories grew into the 1900s. When statehood came, it meant the end of civil rights for people of African descent, as Oklahoma's new legislature immediately passed Jim Crow laws. To White settlers in Oklahoma, statehood meant new democratic freedom. For African Americans, it meant a future of segregation, political invisibility, and ensured inequality. Freedmen and Native Blacks in the new state of Oklahoma were confronted with segregation and racial violence. For many, it was a new and terrible situation, one in which they found they no longer had the rights they once had. Race irrevocably changed and pervaded life in Oklahoma throughout the twentieth century for Whites, Blacks, and Indians, and structured everyday interactions as well as life possibilities.

In its early years, Oklahoma saw many lynchings of Blacks and the presence of the Ku Klux Klan. Two African American homes were dynamited in Okemah in the beginning of 1907, and later that year, the first lynching of an African American in the new state of Oklahoma took place twenty miles east in Henryetta. The violence continued through dynamite and murder while racial hatred filled local White newspapers (Crockett 1979:94).

Racism was not the only pressure on people of African ancestry in the early twentieth century however. During the 1920s and 1930s, farming cotton was no longer a viable way of making a living for most people in Oklahoma, including Freedmen and the farmers for whom Freedmen worked. The Great Depression signaled a move from small rural towns in Oklahoma to urban centers, and many Freedmen moved from their traditional communities to cities like Oklahoma City,

Tulsa, Muskogee, and Ardmore to find work. Freedmen of all Five Tribes made Oklahoma City their home, coming from small historic Freedmen towns like Springer in the Chickasaw Nation, Atoka in the Choctaw Nation, and Weisner Chapel in the Creek Nation. As people of African descent, they were forced to live in specifically Black sections of the city when they arrived, and soon became integral in African American institutions in the city with other non-Freedmen Blacks.

Freedmen who moved to Oklahoma City encountered few, if any, others from their hometowns, and it was therefore vital to bond with others in their new community. This city was full of vibrant activity for African Americans, and included many Black churches and fraternal orders. There were several first-class movie theatres for African Americans, and Oklahoma City was the site of an influential Black newspaper, the *Black Dispatch*. Ballrooms and clubs attracted great African American musicians and bands from across the nation, as well as talented dramatic artists. These foundations of social and cultural life in the city worked toward strengthening racial solidarity despite cultural and ethnic diversity, and were critical networks of Black experience in this urban area (Franklin 1982: 153-184). Freedmen joined these networks with other people of African descent, and were fundamental parts of these African American institutions from their beginnings.

Tulsa was also home to a large and vibrant African American community throughout the twentieth century, yet it had a dramatically different history. As a city original to the Creek Nation, had a Freedmen and Native Black population from the beginning. Tulsa was a site of Native Black Creek businesses and allotments prior to statehood, and after 1907, the Greenwood District in north Tulsa became a

neighborhood of great African American business and social activity, being called "Black Wall Street." One Tulsa resident recalled the vibrant life of north Tulsa she experienced as a child:

> "How I remember those good old Greenwood days. Greenwood was something else! We had clothing stores, shoe stores, hotels, and all kinds of businesses on Greenwood then. Oh, black Tulsa always had an abundance of hotels….We had ladies dress shops, hat shops, and shoe shops….Blacks had some nice houses, too" (Gates 1997).[96]

Businesses, churches, homes, and most of Greenwood itself however was razed to the ground in the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921, where White Tulsans killed up to 300 Blacks indiscriminately in response to accusations of a Black man attacking a White woman. Thirty-five city blocks were looted and burned, including over one-thousand homes, twenty-three churches, and countless prosperous businesses (Gates 1997: 267-268).

Increasing experiences of racism such as the Tulsa Race Riot in the early twentieth century worked to tie people of African descent together in Tulsa. Native Blacks and State Blacks alike had the same experiences of racism in a White-dominated city, yet the very different histories and cultures of these groups continued to distinguish many of them throughout the century. As in the rest of the Creek Nation, many Black Creeks in the Tulsa area continued to keep up their roles in Creek kinship and social networks. As a part of the historic Creek Nation, these networks stayed alive within the city and the surrounding area, despite the overarching racial system that prohibited such interaction.[97] Some of these instances will be discussed further below. At the same time however, everyday experiences as Black in Tulsa

worked to tie African Americans of all histories and cultures together throughout the twentieth century.

Freedmen from small towns throughout Oklahoma continued to pull up their roots and move to the state's urban centers during World War II, and into the 1950s and 1960s. As Freedmen and State Blacks joined life in Oklahoma's urban areas throughout the twentieth century, it was difficult for them to not be part of one another's everyday lives. In the cities, both Freedmen and State Blacks were required to live in a specifically Black section of town. Without access to the rest of the city because of the limitations imposed on them, Freedmen and State Blacks shared community institutions like churches, shops, and everything that comprised daily life, the economy, and cultural life of the Black neighborhoods. As in the case of Fort Coffee, many people who moved kept up their family and social networks, staying in contact with family and returning home now and then for visits. However, in many more cases, their children and grandchildren would grow up detached from their parents' and grandparents' former communities. Especially in urban centers in Oklahoma, racial segregation became an important force for Freedmen and Freedmen descendants. Now surrounded by an incredible diversity of African American people and living everyday life as Black in one of these urban areas, original community identities and Freedmen backgrounds faded in significance as race became primary. Children who were born in these areas usually grew up primarily identifying and being identified as Black, as did their neighbors and friends in these cities. Freedmen histories became a part of ancestry, a distant root compared to the ones lived daily in places like Fort Coffee. This powerful history of segregation and categorization as

Black despite great diversities of ancestry and history had immeasurably significant effects on Freedmen identity throughout the twentieth century. Community identities took a backseat to the lived experience as Black in a segregated world.

The segregation that strictly ordered daily life and barred African Americans from equal opportunities in Oklahoma began to break down with the first activist strides of Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher in 1946, as she took on college-level educational segregation in the courts. The repercussions of Brown v. Board of Education in 1954 were the final blows to segregation in the schools, although it took many years to institute across the state. Segregation was still very much entrenched in everyday life however, as most businesses did not institute racial integration. The late 1950s and the 1960s brought about great changes through the Civil Rights Movement and local activism under the leadership of Clara Luper and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). While many of the pillars of segregation were toppled, discrimination remained throughout Oklahoma, especially in housing and employment. The 1970s brought with it Black Pride movements which further reinforced Black or African American identities, those which had been the basis for activism for civil rights in the 1960s. In Oklahoma, there was a clamor for inclusion of African American history in school curriculums and state representations. Reapportionment led to African Americans finally being elected to the House of Representatives and the Oklahoma Legislature, from which they had been absent for over half a century (Franklin 1982:186-200).

Lost Histories, New Connections

Throughout the twentieth century, the majority of Freedmen descendants in these urban areas became disconnected from their family histories and rural roots. Family histories were lost as their grandparents passed away, and as children were told little to nothing about their lives in Indian Territory. Many Freedmen parents hid their historic connections to tribes. In by far most cases, Freedmen who grew up in urban centers away from the historic Freedmen communities of their roots learned very little about their families' pasts from their parents and grandparents. For them, as in the historic Freedmen communities today, to ask such things about your family as children was considered rude and impudent. Other children didn't think to ask such questions when they were growing up. Many Freedmen descendants recall that their parents or grandparents spoke a tribal language, and some recall that their parents participated in tribal ceremonies or celebrations. Most heard from family members while growing up that they were tied to a certain tribe in a particular way, and they usually were told that their family lived in Oklahoma before it became a state.[98] Beyond this, however, the oral histories in many cases did not penetrate.

At the same time, Freedmen descendants were faced with an Oklahoma and Indian Territory history that did not include them. In segregation and integration, most school lessons taught that African Americans were descendants of slaves in the American South. Oklahoma history was written as beginning with White pioneers, Sooners, and land runs, while Native Americans and Freedmen were removed from the historical narrative. Eventually, the Five Tribes regained somewhat of a place in

Oklahoma history, and most Freedmen recall specific history lessons about the Five Tribes in school as children. However, their own Freedmen and Black Indian histories never figured into these lessons. The lack of their own histories, both in public and family forums, led to a growing disconnect between Freedmen and their histories throughout the twentieth century.

This disconnect was coupled with an increasing pan-African American identity throughout the twentieth century. Black or African American identities were strengthened as this racial identifier became primary in everyday experience. More so for Freedmen in urban areas than for Freedmen in rural Freedmen communities, children grew up as African Americans with other non-Native African Americans. Like them, their lives were shaped by their common experiences as Black people in their communities and in Oklahoma. Any other ancestries, including White, Freedmen, and Indian, became secondary to the racial category that became their primary life experience. Freedmen and Indian histories were not relevant to the monolithic racial category to which they were relegated, and African American identification became an important part of Freedmen life in the cities.

Likewise, civil rights movements from the 1950s to the 1970s strengthened these bonds between Freedmen and non-Freedmen African Americans. The cities of Oklahoma City and Tulsa were often sites of activist meetings and events, including protests and sit-ins. Not only did African Americans of diverse backgrounds and histories join together in activist networks and actions, but they joined together with pride in their identity as Black people. This continued in national Black Pride movements throughout and following the Civil Rights era. These movements

depended specifically on Black identities, and other ancestries and histories again were pushed in many ways to the side as Blackness became critical on even more levels of identity. Continuing experiences of racism and relegation to a Black racial category in Oklahoma and national society continued to tie people together in urban areas following the Civil Rights era.

Consequently, all of these processes of the twentieth centuries had profound influence on Freedmen identities, especially in urban areas in the twentieth century. Physical and sociocultural distance from their ancestors' communities combined with an increasing dearth of public and family histories led to a growing disconnect between Freedmen descendants and their unique histories. At the same time, critical processes like segregation, civil rights movements, and Black pride shaped Freedmen identities throughout the twentieth century and led to stronger identification as Black and African American. Unity in civil rights and successful efforts to end segregation highlighted race and oneness, while downplaying diversity and multiracialness. When segregation was at last over, the racial structure was still very much in place, being instrumental both in structuring everyday life and African American sociopolitical identification.

Activism in the Era of Increasing Tribal Sovereignty

Throughout the twentieth century, the Five Tribes were also fighting against racism and threats to their existence. The processes surrounding Oklahoma statehood had stripped tribes of their sovereignty and led to immense land loss for tribes and

individual Indian people. After 1907, the Five Tribes' government officials were appointed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and US paternalism towards the tribes ensued.

Indians too found themselves embedded within a strict racial system. Although a racial structure had been a part of tribal society prior to statehood, Oklahoma's more rigid system was an important influence on Indian identities and relationships in the twentieth century. At statehood, Indians were defined legally as Whites while their Freedmen and Black-Indian tribal cohorts were defined as Negroes and separated out of "White" society. Although Indians were part of the White category, there was a great distance between everyday experience for people of each of these racial groups. Legally assigning Indians a status of White enabled incoming Whites to obtain tribal allotments through marriage, and was also conducive to American society's answer to the "Indian Problem" through racial intermixture with Whites and supposedly consequent assimilation. Additionally, as Oklahoma's racial system favored Whiteness, it looked down upon dark-skinned individuals, including Indians of full or near-full Indian ancestry. In line with the American understandings that equated high Indian blood quantums with savagery, Oklahoman attitudes promoted racism and prejudice against Native Americans despite their legal status as Whites (Wickett 2000).

Oklahoma's racial structure also imposed new limitations on Indian relationships with people of African descent. As described in Chapter One, the changes in Black-Indian relationships in the Five Tribes over the course of the 1800s are well documented, and several scholars have illustrated the advanced disconnect

between Black Creek and non-Black Creek former friends and relatives in the twentieth century. Throughout the beginning of the twentieth century, many Indian tribal citizens found themselves physically and socially divided from their Black counterparts, and newly defined by their race rather than their community backgrounds. A case illustrative of the personal and family crises brought on by the imposition of these new racial definitions is that of the Ispocogees. In this Tulsa County District Court case, Muscogee Creek man Sam Ispocogee charged that his wife was not legally his spouse because she was of African ancestry, and consequently their marriage was invalid. His wife maintained that she was indeed Creek rather than Negro, and that she and her family had always been recognized as such. She attempted to secure funds to refute this charge with the passionate claim that the charge made by her former husband,

> "affects both her social and political status in the state and in society; that she denies the allegations made in said answer and will to the utmost of her ability defend against said charge for the sake of herself and of her children; that to permit such charge to be sustained in the courts will change her social and political status and the social and political status of her children."[99]

Accordingly, Oklahoma's new race-based legal system instituted new barriers in interracial relationships. For Mrs. Ispocogee, race was now something that could be held against her, and could redefine her own and her children's status and life chances. Although marriage between Freedmen or Black Indians and Indians was illegal, the law was rarely enforceable. It did however, have consequences for property rights and the transfer of allotments, especially in cases of heirship for children of Black-Indian marriages. A case in point is that of the estate of Muscogee

Creek man Billie Atkins. He had married Bertie Miller, a Black woman, in 1920 and had three children with her before her death. After his own death in 1929, his half-brother attempted to take Billie's allotment as his own, preventing its transfer to its rightful heirs, Billie's and Bertie's children. Billie's half-brother charged that these children could not legally be heirs, as his marriage to Bertie was illegal according to state law.[100] Although Billie's children were able to keep their father's allotment this time, this type of occurrence was no doubt common and multiracial people were constantly threatened with loss of property and other things critical to their livelihood through the enforcement of Jim Crow laws. Consequently, the tribes themselves underwent significant changes in social and familial networks as a result of enforceable racial legislation.

Tribal communities were also under many of the same pressures that Freedmen communities suffered in the twentieth century. Many people lost their lands through graft and theft in the statehood era, and the despicable acts that divested countless Indian people of their lands are well documented (Carter 1999: 155-179; Debo 1940). Many tribal citizens became landless and impoverished in the statehood era, and were forced to leave their homes when incoming Whites took over their lands. The Great Depression also led to farm failure and the fall of cotton, which diminished many small towns in Oklahoma, including Indian communities. Many sought opportunities in Oklahoma's urban centers, and in other cities nationwide. Federal policy also led many Indian people to move from their homes. The establishment of Indian boarding schools took many children from their rural communities, many of whom went on to live in places besides their home

communities. In the 1950s and 1960s, the federal government's policy of Relocation encouraged Native people to leave their communities for urban centers like Oklahoma City and Tulsa, as well as Los Angeles and San Francisco. Many left their homes with the help of this program, which funded their move and placed men and women in low-paying jobs, and found them new housing in low-income neighborhoods. Each of these processes throughout the twentieth century influenced tribal identities in many ways, and increased identification with other Indians across tribal lines. Common experiences as Native American people in Oklahoma's racial system, as well as the establishment of social networks in boarding schools and urban centers, led to the formation and strengthening of pan-Indian identities (Fixico 1986; Lomawaima 1994; Nagel 1996).

Despite population loss throughout the twentieth century, and the virtual dissolution of the Five Tribes' governments at statehood, the tribes struggled throughout the century for their rights and for control over their own affairs. However, United States government paternalism remained strong as tribal leaders were selected by government officials rather than being elected by tribal citizens. The Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act was adopted by several tribes, who were consequently able to re-organize their government into tribal councils following the 1936 act. Indian Claims Commission settlements for lands ceded without payment, and unpaid royalties for tribal oil and coal reserves helped sustain tribal programs and individual citizens in the twentieth century. It was not until after 1970 however, that self-determination was truly put into practice with the Principal Chiefs Act of 1970, which allowed tribes to elect their own leaders, and the Indian Self-Determination Act of

1975, which allowed tribes greater control over their own affairs, including services and political structure. Finally able to have democratic control over their nation, the tribes set about drafting constitutions and reorganizing their tribal governments (Brightman 2004; Innes 2004; Kidwell 2004; King 2004).

In drafting or reforming tribal constitutions, however, several tribes created new requirements for citizenship, including proof of descent from a person on the Dawes Indian rolls. The Muscogee Creek constitution of 1979, the Chickasaw constitution of 1983, and the Choctaw constitution of 1984 limited citizenship to people of Creek, Chickasaw or Choctaw blood respectively with an ancestor on the Dawes Rolls. The Cherokee constitution of 1976 limited citizenship to those who could prove descent from ancestors on the Dawes Rolls, without specifying a requirement of Indian blood quantum.[101] The Seminole Nation did not attempt constitutional changes to limit citizenship through possession of Indian blood in this era, however, the nation had attempted to eliminate Freedmen in prior political organization. As the Seminole Nation attempted to organize under the Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act of 1936, one faction attempted to exclude the Freedmen bands from the tribal government, and again when the Seminole Nation began drafting a new constitution in 1964. These attempts were unsuccessful as the Bureau of Indian Affairs enforced their inclusion in Seminole government, and their 1969 constitution included the Freedmen bands in citizenship and tribal representation (Mulroy 2004: 474-475).

For Freedmen of other tribes, constitutional changes toward blood quantum on the Dawes Rolls meant a sudden end to citizenship. Most Freedmen, both in urban

areas and throughout Oklahoma, were unaware of these changes and the ways in which they affected their citizenship. Freedmen who had stayed connected to their tribes throughout Oklahoma recall voting in elections or receiving tribal payments or services up until the 1970s, and in the case of the Cherokee Freedmen, until the early 1980s.[102] Another important factor in this era was the ability of tribes to now contract with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) for control over health and other services, and the removal of the ¼ blood quantum requirement to receive various services. As all tribal citizens were now able to receive health and some other services, citizenship became important in an economic sense to many people. With constitutional changes toward blood quantum requirements however, most Freedmen found themselves cut off both from tribal services and from representing themselves through the vote. In the case of Cherokee Freedmen, they found themselves cut out of the tribal populace even without these constitutional changes.

The Cherokee Freedmen were blocked at the Cherokee Nation polls in 1983 although they had voted in tribal elections between 1971 and 1979 and had been regarded as Cherokee citizens throughout the century.[103] Freedmen who went to vote in the election as usual this time had their voting cards confiscated and were told they were not allowed to vote. The Freedmen vote was blocked in a controversy surrounding the contest for the position of Principal Chief, in which Ross Swimmer ran against Perry Wheeler, who held the favor of most Freedmen voters. Swimmer won by a small and contested margin, and under his administration, the Cherokee Nation government maintained that Freedmen were not allowed to vote under new laws requiring the possession of Indian blood. Reverend Roger H. Nero and sixteen

other Cherokee Freedmen who were denied the vote filed a lawsuit (*Nero v. Cherokee Nation*) in which they sought $750 million in compensatory and punitive damages and asked for the election in question to be declared null and void. Wheeler and his running-mate also filed lawsuits in federal and tribal courts, contesting the outcome of the election due to the barring of the Freedmen votes. However, both lawsuits were dismissed. Nero's case was dismissed in 1989 by both the Oklahoma district court and the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals on the basis of the Cherokee Nation's sovereign immunity and their own judgment that this was an intra-tribal affair (Sturm 2002:178-185).

Freedmen in the Muscogee Creek and Choctaw nations also found themselves removed from tribal citizenship. As these former citizens attempted to file for tribal services and vote, they were told that they were Freedmen and were not tribal citizens. Most Freedmen received this news with surprise, as they or their parents had always been tribal citizens and recalled receiving tribal money and voting in tribal elections. Many Creek Freedmen today recall the 1979 election concerning the new Creek constitution, and that there were several representatives of the Creek Nation coming through the Black towns within the Creek Nation registering people to vote and attempting to influence their votes. Choctaw Freedmen in historic Freedmen towns have similar recollections of the 1970s and 1980s. However, when those same Freedmen returned to tribal offices to enroll children or obtain services, they were told that they in fact were not Creek or Choctaw, but that they were Freedmen, and not citizens of the tribe.[104] For Cherokee and Muscogee Creek Freedmen, although tribal constitutions did not limit citizenship to those with Cherokee or Creek blood

quantums from the Dawes Rolls, official enrollment practice denied citizenship to Freedmen who did not have CDIB cards. During this time in the 1970s and 1980s, Freedmen were told that they needed to have a CDIB card for enrollment in the nations. When Freedmen applied for these cards at the BIA offices, they were denied due to the absence of blood quantums on Dawes enrollment cards. When tribes eventually contracted with the federal government for control over enrollment and CDIB card affairs, they continued this practice formally introduced by the BIA.[105]

For approximately twenty years, individual Freedmen and their families continued to apply for citizenship and services and attempted to vote in each of the Five Tribes and were unsuccessful. In 1997, the first case since that of Reverend Nero sought to reinstate Freedmen citizenship. Bernice Riggs, a Cherokee Freedwoman in her seventies, filed a lawsuit for citizenship in the Cherokee Judicial Appeals Tribunal with the help of David Cornsilk, a Cherokee-Keetoowah activist and editor of a local Cherokee newspaper. A former employee of the Cherokee Nation citizenship and registration office, Cornsilk had seen proof that at least one-third of those people enrolled as Cherokee Freedmen by the Dawes Commission had documentation of Cherokee blood. Riggs sought citizenship in the Cherokee Nation based on her proof of Cherokee blood although her ancestors were enrolled as Freedmen. The Cherokee Nation Judicial Appeals Tribunal denied her claim to citizenship in 2001, stating in their decision that although Riggs had proof of Cherokee blood, the Cherokee Nation had the authority to determine who was and who was not a citizen. In their opinion, Riggs was not a citizen.[106]

The court cases for Freedmen citizenship ceased after Riggs's denial. Individual Freedmen descendants across Oklahoma continued to apply for citizenship in their tribes only to be denied in official letters stating that they had no proof of Indian blood as their ancestors were listed on the Freedmen Roll, a response which confused these people whose parents and grandparents had been citizens. Lacking legal representation and understanding of the ways in which tribes had changed their citizenship laws, individual Freedmen people continued to search for this "proof" on their own, or eventually gave up in the increasingly difficult genealogical journey.

In 2001, the Muscogee Creek Nation Citizenship Board amended their citizenship code to limit citizenship to only those who could prove descent from someone on the Dawes Creek Indian Rolls. Prior to this change, the citizenship code stated that proof of Creek blood could be determined by the Dawes Roll as well as any of several Creek Nation rolls that predated the Dawes Rolls. The ability to use other Creek rolls for citizenship was critical to people whose ancestors were listed as Freedmen because the earlier rolls did not divide Creeks on the basis of their skin color. Most every Creek person who belonged to an original Creek tribal town was listed as a Creek Indian, in contrast to the Dawes Roll which listed most Black Creeks as Freedmen with no blood quantum. Although the Creek Nation had not been using the other rolls in determining citizenship and official practice was to deny people who did not have an ancestor on the Dawes Creek Indian Roll, the 2001 citizenship code specifically targeted Freedmen by making their citizenship now legally impossible. Freedmen and Creek people in general were unaware of this change, as it was not voted upon in an election.[107]

By this time at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century, Freedmen families had been shaped in many ways by identity processes that turned them away from their tribal roots towards a larger Black or African American identity that they held in common with other African Americans in the state of Oklahoma. This result of living within Oklahoma's racial structure, coupled with a failure in many cases to pass down family histories and the dispossession of Freedmen from Oklahoma and Indian Territory histories, led to a disconnection between most Freedmen descendants in Oklahoma urban areas and their respective tribes, and with their unique Freedmen histories. For many, their Freedmen and Black Indian identities lay in stories their parents or grandparents told about their ancestry, or in family talk about historic allotments. After tribal re-organization and the tribes' new abilities to elect leaders and provide for its own citizens, urban descendants who recalled that their parents voted in tribal elections or received tribal payments went to enroll themselves and their children as tribal citizens. When turned away and told they were Freedmen and had no Indian blood, many gave up after being confronted with a lack of documentation and history. Some however, were motivated to discover more about just who Freedmen were, and set out to search for their histories and relationships to the tribes for themselves.

Renewed Activism

In contrast to other urban areas, connections to tribal histories and multiracial Creek relatives remained strong for many in the historic Black Creek areas of Tulsa

and Okmulgee. Perhaps more so for these people who had knowledge of their history and kept their connections to Creek kin, being turned away from Creek citizenship was a source of great confusion. As their disenfranchisement became evident, many were drawn to explore what had happened between their parents' times and the present that would explain their expulsion from their nation.

One of these people was Ronald Graham, a man whose ancestors had been enrolled as Creek Freedmen despite their Creek Indian ancestry. Graham, a native of Okmulgee, came from a traditional Black Creek family who spoke the Creek language and were recognized Creek citizens. His father was a stomp dance leader at Arbeka grounds. Ron knew that he was Creek not only because of his ancestry to Creek Indian people, but because of the culture in which he was raised. His father, who passed away in 1979, was an original enrollee on the Dawes Roll. When Ron went to the Creek Nation in the 1980s to enroll himself as a citizen, he was directed to the Bureau of Indian Affairs to obtain a Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood (CDIB) card. The Bureau of Indian Affairs informed Graham that his father had been enrolled as a Freedman, and therefore he did not have a blood quantum needed for issuance of a CDIB.[108]

Graham was confused and surprised at his rejection and had never heard the term "Freedmen" before, and certainly not in reference to his family. He then set out on a quest to find his genealogy and this proof of Indian blood that was now so important to his being Creek, at least in the eyes of the Creek Nation. Over the following years, Graham became an expert genealogist of Creek and Creek Freedmen ancestry. He found his ancestors listed on earlier Creek rolls as Creek Indians, yet no

blood quantum was listed. At one point, Graham felt that perhaps his African American appearance was the cause of the BIA's rejection of his citizenship and so he returned to the BIA with his aunt, who was phenotypically Indian. He returned again with his cousin who was an enrolled citizen, with whom he shared grandparents. Again he was rejected, and was told to find more supporting documents. Finally, Graham found evidence of his grandparents' and great-grandparents' blood quantums on several records. This time Graham applied to the Creek Nation for citizenship, as it was now 1994 and the Creek Nation had contracted with the BIA for citizenship and issuance of CDIBs. He listed the documentation of Creek blood he had discovered, and again he was rejected. In his search for his records however, Graham had uncovered many of the hidden aspects of Freedmen enrollment in the Creek Nation, finding proof of Creek Indian ancestry for countless Freedmen families that had had their blood quantums erased by the Dawes Commission. He had become active in the Okmulgee-Tulsa area in educating people about Creek Freedmen history, and in helping others in situations similar to his own.

Through keeping up with local news about Freedmen issues, he found a kin relation of his who was also going through a similar struggle. Fred Johnson, a Tulsa resident then in his seventies, had been searching for proof of his own ancestry for years. Knowing for certain that he was of both Black and Creek ancestry, he refused to believe the tribe's claims that he was a Freedman. His story was featured in the *Tulsa World*, and through this article he became visible to his second cousin, Ron Graham, who contacted him soon after.[109] Both became active in the North Tulsa

Historical Society, a small organization which was established to educate people about the Black history in Oklahoma that had been neglected.

Established in 1995, this group took an activist approach to history. Former president Ms. Eddie Faye Gates served on the Tulsa Race Riot commission, and attempted to secure reparations for survivors. Curtis Lawson, who later served as president, was an attorney and Oklahoma's first African American representative in the Oklahoma legislature. Member Robert Littlejohn was an expert in Creek and Black Creek history, growing up embedded in Black Creek social and kin networks that had survived the pressures of racial categorization in the twentieth century. This group is small and informal, but is significant in its goals and the way it educates others in Tulsa.

Early on, the North Tulsa Historical Society sought to uncover the truth about the Tulsa Race Riot, an event which was actively covered up in Oklahoma and Tulsa history until the 1990s (Fisher 2003). Then president of the North Tulsa Historical Society Eddie Faye Gates was instrumental in calling the Oklahoma Legislature's attention to this historic and horrific event, and in the establishment of the Tulsa Race Riot Commission, which sought out facts surrounding the massacre. She also helped lead the campaign for reparations for survivors of the race riot. Under later leadership, the North Tulsa Historical Society moved on to explore other areas where Black histories had been hidden, one of them being in the peopling of the Americas. Educated in Ivan Van Sertima's theories about Africans traveling to the New World prior to European arrival and other evidence of cultural and linguistic similarities,

several organization members actively maintain that Native Americans are the descendants of these early Africans in North and South America.

During my fieldwork from 2003 to 2006, the North Tulsa Historical Society met one Saturday each month in the Rudisill Library in north Tulsa, and here, members educated one another on African American history, especially Tulsan history. In recent years, the North Tulsa Historical Society was focused on making the true Black history of Oklahoma known through Robert Littlejohn's presentations on the Native Black history of Tulsa and the Creek Nation.

• • •

It is a cool December afternoon in 2005 when I meet Robert Littlejohn, Fred Johnson, Ron Graham, and two others in the parking lot of the Rudisill Library in North Tulsa. The six of us crowd into the back of Mr. Littlejohn's van for a day's lesson in Creek racial history. Our first stop is a house in Broken Arrow, where we pick up an elderly uncle of one of our group, our first physical example of this racial mixing lesson. After introductions, Mr. Littlejohn makes a point to ask me what I believe his racial background to be. I hesitate. His skin color is about as light as my own, but his facial features suggest that he might have Native American ancestry. However, he is the uncle of an obviously African American woman. I respond with, "I'm not sure," and Mr. Littlejohn laughs, telling me that this is exactly the point; they are all mixed up - Black, White, and Creek.

We continue on our ride to several historic Creek cemeteries in the area, where relatives of those on our trip are buried. The people in our group are all Black Creek people of varying racial appearances, save for me and one other African

American member of the North Tulsa Historical Society. The grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other more distant relations of the group now passed on are remembered publicly as Creek people, buried in a widely recognized historic Creek cemetery. However, many of these relations, like their descendants, had evident Black ancestry. Today, Mr. Littlejohn is re-assessing the cemetery in his efforts to have it recognized as a Black or Black Creek cemetery.

Mr. Johnson and the others in our group relate stories of their now passed loved ones in the cemetery, as they wipe away the dirt that has gathered on the tombstones. One of our group finds a patch of mullen, a wild plant traditionally used in teas, and begins picking the plants from their roots, and putting them in plastic bags. I volunteer to help, and bend down to pull the best looking plants from the cold ground. She tells me how good mullen tea is in curing what ails you, and the conversation soon turns to her community. She speaks proudly of her place in her traditional Creek town and church in Wetumka.

As the day goes on, we ride to other historic places in the area, and eventually drop off our elderly group member at another relative's house in the country. It is a small house with a few abandoned cars in the front, and his niece, a woman of strong Native American appearance, comes out to the van and asks if we would like to come in and eat. After telling her that we couldn't impose, Mr. Littlejohn asks about how her children are doing. She immediately produces a photograph of her daughter, which is passed through our group. The photo serves as one more piece of evidence in the case Mr. Littlejohn is trying to make, as it depicts a young girl of African American appearance.

It is getting dark as we all ride back down the country road, and Mr. Littlejohn is confident that he has illustrated his points. There is no separation between Creek, Black, and White. Rather, they are all the same people. This is how it has always been, and it is the way it is today. After a hearty dinner at Golden Corral, we return to the Rudisill Library parking lot to say our goodbyes and go our separate ways.

• • •

This outing represents just one of the many efforts of the North Tulsa Historical Society to correct mainstream understandings of Creek and African American history. At organization meetings and invited presentations, Littlejohn presents case after case of the ways in which Tulsa and Creek Nation history has been re-written as Creek and White, and as specifically non-Black. Using examples such as the Perryman family, credited as being the founding family of Tulsa, Littlejohn demonstrates that many of these significant historical figures who are now labeled as Creek were actually Black Creek, the Black ancestry going unrecognized even today. Another example is Martha Owen, on whose allotment lies the now well-known Owen Park in Tulsa. Wife of a White man who is also recognized as a founding father of Tulsa, Martha is consistently labeled as a Creek Indian although she also had African ancestry. Akin to a "whitewashing" of history, group members maintain that Tulsa and Oklahoma history has been Indianized to the point where Blackness no longer figures in. All of these significant people of the Creek Nation were of mixed ancestry, yet this mixedness has been forgotten by many, and intentionally covered up in other cases. The North Tulsa Historical Society seeks to re-assert these important

histories and make their roles in them clear, at the same time exposing the racist system that wrote them out of the historical narrative.

The efforts of the North Tulsa Historical Society represent an attempt to correct portrayals of Oklahoma and Indian Territory histories that have excluded the significant roles of Black Indian and Freedmen people. In formal bus tours setting out from the Rudisill Library in Tulsa, Robert Littlejohn narrates a story much different from those in told in the typical bus tours of the All-Black towns. In this tour, people are shown the first Black communities of Oklahoma, those of Black Indian people in the Creek Nation and the city of Tulsa. In this type of activism, the members of the North Tulsa Historical Society are re-asserting their ties to the tribes and to Indian Territory history. They are not creating a Black history out of an Indian history, but rather are claiming their indigeneity in the context of a true Black-Indian history that has been actively covered up by racism in the historical narrative.

Although it attracts African American people of Cherokee and Choctaw backgrounds, as well as from non-tribal backgrounds, the North Tulsa Historical Society's unique activism is built upon specifically Tulsan foundations, and within a unique multiracial Creek Nation history. This rich history in Indian Territory was followed by an exceptional Black history in Tulsa, where African Americans were in control of a vibrant economic, social, and cultural life in the Greenwood District of Tulsa, home of what was called Black Wall Street. The Tulsa Race Riot destroyed much of this progressive area, and although this was also left out of Oklahoma's historical narrative for most of the twentieth century, African Americans in Tulsa remembered it well. Additionally, a great pride in the memory of Greenwood that has

been passed through the generations. This base of unique and exceptionally prosperous Black history in both the Creek Nation and in Tulsa has become a significant part of historical consciousness for generations of Tulsa families, and families from the surrounding areas. This understanding of their ancestors in past generations has shaped their understandings of who they are today, and their own roles in society. Denial of their identities in state and other historical narratives has provided a context for their constant re-assertion of these identities through specific types of activism that encourage new understandings of history, which in actuality require old understandings of Creek multiracialness and Black prosperity. The activist promotion of these understandings is a regionally and culturally specific form of Freedmen-Black Indian activism, which has been shaped by a unique historical consciousness.

In July 2002, a small group of Freedmen descendants came together at the Ellison Library in Oklahoma City to establish a different sort of activist organization. The Descendants of Freedmen of the Five Civilized Tribes Association aimed to secure Freedmen rights within the Five Tribes. Among its founding officers were Ronald Graham and Marilyn Vann, a middle-aged woman of African American, Cherokee, European, and Chickasaw ancestry who had attempted to enroll in the Cherokee Nation in the previous year and was denied. Knowing that her father was Cherokee and was enrolled as a citizen in the nation, Vann applied for her own citizenship as well as for that of her daughter, Rose. Much to her surprise, her application for citizenship was rejected because her ancestors were listed on the Freedmen rolls. Vann had never heard the term "Freedmen" before, and certainly did

not know that she was one. Her father, who was in his sixties when Marilyn was a child, was an original enrollee on the Dawes Roll. He was Cherokee by blood and had informed her of their ancestry early on, although nothing concerning Freedmen was ever mentioned.

After her rejection from Cherokee citizenship, Vann began researching her genealogy as well as educating herself about Freedmen. She found that her father had indeed been listed as a Cherokee Freedman. However, in looking further into her ancestry, she found that her father's father was a Cherokee citizen "by blood," and her father's mother was an African American woman. Through continued research, Vann traced her ancestry back to the mid-1700s and found that she was a descendant of several prominent Cherokees including Joseph Vann, former assistant chief of the Cherokee Nation. This Cherokee side of her family was consistently multiracial throughout the centuries, with ancestors who were Cherokee, White, and Black.

Marilyn grew up in Ponca City, Oklahoma, and although she was multiracial and identified both as African American and Native American, she lived life as a Black woman in Oklahoma. Her connections to Cherokee and Chickasaw culture lay in her summer trips to the northern Cherokee Nation, where she and her family would visit their extended family and attend large annual church meetings in June. These were held in one of the old churches in the historic Cherokee Nation, and Marilyn recalls there being long church services, plenty of food, and many people. She attended these church meetings until she was in her early teens, until her elderly father was unable to travel to these gatherings any longer. When Marilyn attended these gatherings as a child, she did not understand the reason for celebration at this

time every year, but as she became older, she realized that it was in this month that enslaved people were emancipated in the Cherokee Nation.

Throughout her life, Marilyn was taught little about the Cherokee Nation, but she enjoyed reading about it in the newspaper at times because of her ancestry within it. When she attempted to enroll in the nation, she believed that with her father being an original enrollee, she would encounter no problems in securing her citizenship. However, her application for enrollment was rejected. She was told that her father was on the Cherokee Freedmen Roll, had no listed blood quantum, and that she was not entitled to membership as a result of this lack of blood quantum.

Marilyn was shocked at her rejection of citizenship, for she had always known herself to be Cherokee. Knowing little at that time about enrollment requirements, she did not realize that the Cherokee Nation had different rolls for citizens. As Marilyn reflected on this experience in 2003, she stated, "No, I didn't know they had a Jim Crow roll." For Marilyn, her rejection was the beginning of her own quest to uncover and investigate the circumstances of Freedmen exclusion from the Cherokee Nation, and later the exclusion of Freedmen from citizenship or other rights in the other tribes (Feldhousen 2005).[110]

Within a year, Marilyn had found other Freedmen descendants who had also been active in trying to secure their citizenship. Together, they envisioned an organization that would join Freedmen across the state in order to regain citizenship in the four tribes who had disenfranchised their Freedmen. While the North Tulsa Historical Society bases their activism on a regional identity, the Descendants of Freedmen Association has engendered a kind of pan-Freedmen identity and activism

that spans regional and even state lines. This group has attracted members and attendees from across eastern Oklahoma, however many of its members are Freedmen descendants who grew up in Oklahoma City and other areas distant from their ancestors' historic Freedmen communities. Most grew up knowing little about their Freedmen or Black Indian backgrounds, but despite this lack of knowledge of their roots, they were able to connect with others of similar backgrounds, interested in finding what had been lost over the previous generations.

Marilyn Vann joined with Ron Graham of Okmulgee, Eleanor "Gypsy" Wyatt of Kansas City, Gail Jackson of Oklahoma City, and Angela Molette of Enid to form the Descendants of Freedmen of the Five Civilized Tribes Association. At their first formal meeting in the Ralph Ellison Library in Oklahoma City, these people, along with Vann's daughter, Rose Mamaghanyzadeh, came together with only a few others in attendance. Their offices were officially determined, and their mission statement declared. They determined that voting members would have to prove their descent to a person on the Freedmen Dawes Rolls through genealogy, much like the tribal enrollment process, while supporter members could join without providing genealogical documents.

The founding officers, those mentioned above, were people who, like Vann and Graham, were educated about the ways in which they had been disenfranchised from their tribes, and with hope sparked by the recent Seminole Freedmen cases. In December 1994, Seminole Freedwoman Sylvia Davis's twelve-year-old son, a Seminole Freedman, was denied the tribal clothing allowance based on his lack of provable Seminole blood in the form of a CDIB card (Associated Press 1995). Three

hundred Seminole Freedmen reacted by marching on the Seminole registration office and applying for CDIB cards, and all were denied. The following year, Sylvia Davis, chief of the Dosar Barkus band, filed a lawsuit against the United States (*Davis v. United States*) with the help of attorney Jon Velie and his law firm for rights to programs funded by the Seminole Judgment Fund, a $16 million payment plus interest from land ceded in the 1823 Treaty of Camp Moultrie. The Freedmen's case for access to the programs was dismissed on the grounds that the Seminole Nation was an indispensable party and was not named in the lawsuit. Through appeals, the Seminole Freedmen later won their rights to several tribal assistance programs, though not all of them (Bentley 2003).

In 2000, a faction of the Seminole Nation tribal council attempted to pass a constitutional amendment limiting tribal citizenship to those of one-fourth Seminole blood or more. Freedmen charged that they were not allowed to vote in the election. The amendment would have disenfranchised the two Freedmen bands which had been part of the Seminole Nation government since its establishment. It had not been approved by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) pursuant to their existing constitution, which required BIA approval of all constitutional amendments. Consequently, this amendment, as well as the election results electing Chambers as Seminole Chief and ousting Chief Kelly Haney, was invalidated. The pro-Haney faction and the pro-Chambers faction staged a protest war at the tribal headquarters, one locking the other out of the tribal buildings.[111] The pro-Chambers faction sued the BIA in *Seminole v. Norton* over the right to amend its constitution and hold an election without approval from the Secretary of the Interior. The Seminole Freedmen,

again with the help of attorney Jon Velie, unsuccessfully attempted to intervene as a necessary party.

Motivated by the actions being taken in the Seminole Freedmen cases, the Descendants of Freedmen Association gathered Freedmen descendants to a similar cause, with goals to win their rights back within their own tribes. Meetings were planned on the third Saturday of each month and were advertised in local newspapers and radio stations geared toward African American audiences. Meetings attracted twenty to forty people, with mostly new faces at each meeting. These gatherings were soon scheduled in other cities around eastern Oklahoma in alternating months in order to attract Freedmen descendants from across the state.

Early meetings were brought to order with a prayer, usually led by association officer Ron Graham. This would be followed by the mission statement:

> 1. To educate members, supporters and the general public regarding the history, culture and political rights of those particular to the Dawes Freedmen Enrollment. The Association is organized to plan, implement and administer, operate, and evaluate programs to carry out the objectives and purposes of the Association to assist in and promote, restore and preserve the rights of those descendants of the 5 Civilized Tribes (Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek and Seminole Nations) particular to the Dawes Freedmen Enrollment. To promote, collect, and preserve Oklahoma Freedmen Genealogy, History and Artifacts and study the unique cultural diversity of Freedmen Descendants for the general benefit and good of the individual and collective Tribes and Representative Communities, in the State and Nation, and to improve the quality of life, to reinvigorate and promote cultural awareness and events relating to our heritage.
>
> 2. To assist members in gaining knowledge of genealogy techniques and family contacts for the purpose of tying to our ancestors particular to the 5 Civilized Tribes.
>
> 3. To acquire political standing to regain status as tribal citizens through the Tribal or Federal Courts through revision of Bureau of

> Indian Affairs policies or regulations, or through congressional legislation.

A sign-up sheet would be passed around so that the association could gather people's contact information, and in early meetings, a petition was also passed through the audience which asked Congress to terminate the tribal status of any tribe that refused to accept its Freedmen as citizens. Meeting attendees listened with great interest as association officers discussed Freedmen and Black Indian histories in the Five Tribes, and their recent disenfranchisement. A guest speaker would usually make up the main portion of the meeting, and at times this would be a person from the local community who had some Freedmen ancestry and some knowledge of the community's history. Towards the end of the meeting, the vice president, Eleanor Wyatt would usually speak about the Freedmen cause. A spirited speaker in the style of Baptist preachers, and invoking religious and political imagery into the subject, Wyatt encouraged everyone to find their roots, join the association, and confront the tribes on their alleged racism. At the close of the meeting, individuals would approach the officers' table to ask questions about their own genealogy, and a few to ask further about membership.

Over the course of the year following its inception, the Descendants of Freedmen Association organized a conference, and Wyatt and Molette left the organization to form their own based in Kansas City. The original group led by Marilyn Vann continued to carry out its meetings in Oklahoma City and throughout eastern Oklahoma with the same structure and similar information provided at each, at times holding separate genealogy workshops for interested Freedmen descendants. They have also continued the tradition of the annual conference, which enjoyed more

success in later years under the direction of officer Rhonda Grayson, but has been unable to draw large numbers of Freedmen descendants despite the presence of well-known scholars on Black Indian history. Over the almost six years of their activism, the Descendants of Freedmen Association has attracted many members and supporters from across Oklahoma, as well as many across the nation. California's Freedmen population has been especially receptive to the group's efforts and has several leaders of its own who have remained in contact with the association since its early days. Freedmen descendants have been strongly attracted to association meetings for information on their own heritage, seeking ways to find their genealogy and about their histories within the tribes.

Most Freedmen descendants who attend a meeting of the Descendants of Freedmen Association for the first time come looking for answers about their ancestry, and many have tried to enroll in their tribes in the past after learning about health and educational benefits provided by the tribes. Attracted by newspaper or radio advertisements, or by word of mouth, people who recall family histories of kinship or cultural ties to the Five Tribes come to find information about their histories and their roots that have been missing from other sources of knowledge. They come to find help in their long-time efforts toward genealogy, documentation of this historical or kin relationship to the tribes that they had heard about, but of which they could never find proof in history books or museums. Their feelings of uncertainty are often met with a spirited genealogical presentation conducted by Ron Graham.

• • •

The lights dim as Ron Graham turns on the overhead projector. He begins by introducing himself and speaking about his experience in genealogy, alluding to the many well-hidden clues about Black Creek ancestry he has uncovered in his work. In an effort to prove to the audience that people of African ancestry were indeed important parts of tribal histories, he displays a historic photo of Silas Jefferson, also known as *Hotulko Micco*, a half-Creek and half-Black man who served as chief of his tribal town and represented it in the Creek national government in Indian Territory. Graham has the audience's full attention as he turns to Silas Jefferson's Dawes enrollment card. The overhead shows Jefferson listed on the Creek Indian Roll with ½ blood quantum. After explaining the card, Mr. Graham turns to a different overhead film, copied from a page in Campbell's *Abstracts of Creek Census Cards*. "Okay now, I'm going to give you all a quiz," says Graham. The slide shows four individuals of different last names, and with different blood quantums, one being listed as a Freedman. Graham asks, "Now, which of these people are related?" Individuals in the audience shout out guesses, but none are correct. Graham affirms that all of them are brothers and sisters, despite the fact that their blood quantums and names differ, and that one is listed as a Freedman. He relates that he knows the descendants of the individual listed as a Freedman, and has helped them prove their blood quantum to enroll in the Creek Nation. It is just one of many examples of Black Creeks being enrolled as Freedmen on the Dawes Rolls, says Graham.

Mr. Graham brings out another example to show just how much digging it can take to uncover such proof. He displays the census card of Cooper Davis, grandfather of Fred Johnson, enrolled on the Creek Freedmen Roll. Graham relates the extensive

searches he completed in archives in Oklahoma and at the National Archives center in Fort Worth, Texas. Finally, he says, he came across a box in the National Archives holding "Old Creek Census Cards." Searching through the hundreds of documents here, he at last came upon a card for Cooper Davis, which he has now placed on the overhead projector. Contrary to what the Dawes card listed, Davis was here listed as a Creek Indian with ¾ blood quantum. The card was marked by with a large dash across its face, and a notation reading, "Re-enrolled as Freedman," and a corresponding Dawes census card number. Graham says, "You see, with the stroke of a pen, they made him a Freedman." An audience member repeats loudly, "With the stroke of a pen!" Captivated and shocked, the audience sees that their histories may indeed be well hidden behind racial constructions. For many, at last they find that someone else has experienced the same frustrations and difficulties in finding proof, and confirmation that racism does figure into the consistent problems.

• • •

Those Freedmen descendants who come to the meeting often leave with renewed zeal in finding their genealogies. Most do not become active members of the association, but many will return if a meeting is again held in their area, and will stay informed of the association's activities. In addition to finding more about their own ancestries, many Freedmen descendants continue to affiliate themselves with the association because they identify with the histories that are re-told in this context. After learning about their own histories and the ways in which they have been hidden as a result of race, Freedmen descendants stay involved to some degree with the

association in order to give strength to their own story, to assert that Black-Indian histories do exist and that these histories need to be told. Rhonda Grayson, who began attending Freedmen Association meetings and eventually became an officer and conference organizer, told why she feels strongly about the organization:

> And so I think it is a good cause. It needs to be known. We do need to be recognized for who we are because we are, I mean we're just as much Native as we are Black and like I tell people, often times I probably have more white blood running through my veins than I do African blood. I mean just to be true, more Native blood than I have African blood because I've traced it back. So but I think it needs to and I think it's a good cause. It's something that needs to be done and we do need to be recognized. I mean it's not a lot that you're going to get in terms of monetary but you just still need to be recognized as who you are. It doesn't need to be like it's a dirty secret you know and it's shut up in the closet, because we are who we are.

For the majority of Freedmen descendants who have become detached from their histories, this organization is appealing and important. Emphasizing rights based on these historical connections, the Descendants of Freedmen Association promotes finding documentation of these connections for future enrollment in the tribes. In addition to at long last learning about their roots, there is the hope of finally finding physical proof of them and gaining recognition as tribal citizens. As family histories were lost over the generations, and as Oklahoma and tribal histories were re-written to exclude them, Freedmen across Oklahoma at the beginning of the twenty-first century had a sense of loss concerning their ancestral backgrounds. Others remained confused about their denied applications for tribal citizenship. The Descendants of Freedmen Association drew them with the promise of rectifying these problems, and

of providing an understanding of where they came from. At the same time, this re-discovery promised a place in the history books for their own people.

The Descendants of Freedmen Association attracted Freedmen descendants across Oklahoma and around the nation, regardless of tribal background or region of origin. In contrast to the North Tulsa Historical Society, the Descendants of Freedmen did not have a specific community base of historical consciousness. In fact, the Descendants of Freedmen promoted a previously unknown pan-Freedmen identity, one that was shaped by the experiences of Freedmen descendants who had grown increasingly detached from their Freedmen and Black-Indian communities over the course of the twentieth century.

This new Freedmen movement was created in large part out of the history of pan-African American identity that had been strengthened over the course of the twentieth century in Oklahoma City and similar areas. Due to segregation with other people of African descent and the general struggles for civil rights as Black people, most Freedmen descendants in the twentieth century stopped seeing themselves as connected to other Freedmen in favor of seeing themselves as connected to all African Americans. In other words, over the course of the twentieth century, lines were drawn around racial, rather than ethnic identities. This was true especially in urban areas like Oklahoma City, where African Americans of diverse backgrounds came together to form African American institutions, as well as social, kin, and cultural networks under segregation, and worked together in common goals for civil rights and Black pride. Ancestral and ethnic differences cast aside, Freedmen backgrounds became less important over time, especially in urban areas.

The Descendants of Freedmen Association attracted people of these backgrounds, who had lost touch with Freedmen roots. Most Freedmen descendants who were drawn to the organization had little in common with one another. They hailed from different parts of Oklahoma City and from towns and cities across the state. Most had never met one another and would have no reason to meet. However, their common experiences both as Freedmen descendants who were searching for their roots lost in a racially structured twentieth century, and as people who had been denied as tribal citizens, were able to tie them together in a common cause, and begin the formation of a new Freedmen identity that spanned tribal and regional boundaries.

Meetings of the Descendants of Freedmen Association present sometimes new understandings of race, ethnicity, and identity to many attendees. Most first-time meeting attendees are people from urban centers and have always identified primarily as Black or African American, with Freedmen or Indian factoring in only as a part of their ancestries. However, presentations at association meetings impart new political understandings of what being a Freedman means. Lessons about Freedmen history within the tribes give attendees understandings of their roots and re-establish their connections to their multiethnic histories. Presentations and workshops on Freedmen genealogy reveal that meeting attendees do have Indian ancestry that has been hidden somewhere in documents one-hundred years old. Information regarding disenfranchisement of Freedmen from the tribes declares that Freedmen are victims of ongoing racism, discriminated against by tribal governments, and must now be part of the struggle against leaders in the Five Tribes who are standing in the way of their rights and citizenship. Significantly, meeting attendees find that they are tied to every

other Freedmen descendant in the room through shared ancestries, histories, and common experiences of struggles in trying to find their roots and enroll in the tribes. Many also find they share bloodlines. A standard event at almost every meeting is for several Freedmen descendants to find that they are distantly related to others in the room. As former strangers now call each other "cousin," common bonds that are more than a century old are re-created.

For most meeting attendees, all of these are new meanings concerning their ancestries, identities, and political understandings about who they are. They learn that they have something in common with everyone else in the room, and with all other Freedmen descendants in Oklahoma. Their ethnic and racial histories as Black people in Oklahoma connect them and inform their understandings of how they, as Freedmen, have been specifically affected by race. Their Freedmen and Indian histories and ethnicities that were, for many, pushed to the outer rims of a more general African American identity throughout much of the twentieth century, are now at the forefront of a new political movement.

While the Descendants of Freedmen Association was able to connect Freedmen on a pan-tribal level, it had a main goal of reclaiming Freedmen rights in the tribes through legal action. Because each tribe had its own laws and requirements for citizenship, and each is a sovereign entity, this action had to be taken on a tribe-by-tribe basis. Although claimants had to struggle for rights under their own tribal affiliation, this was done with the support and struggle of Freedmen descendants of all tribes and communities.

The legal battle began in May 2003, when the Cherokee Nation held a national election resulting in the re-election of Chad Smith as Principal Chief and passage of a constitutional amendment removing the requirement for BIA approval of future constitutional amendments. Marilyn Vann and several other Cherokee Freedmen attempted to vote in this election and were denied voting cards, absentee ballots, and were given challenged ballots if they attempted to vote in person. With the help of Velie & Velie law firm, the same law firm that had represented the Seminole Freedmen in their struggles for citizenship and equality, Vann filed a complaint with the BIA concerning the validity of the Cherokee election in which they were not allowed to vote. The complaint resulted in BIA officials questioning the election proceedings as they did when the Seminole Nation held their election without the Freedmen vote. Chief Smith and the Cherokee Nation government accused the BIA of paternalism and held that Freedmen had not been allowed to vote in past elections that went uncontested and unquestioned by the BIA. Seemingly in opposition to the BIA's decision in the Seminole conflict, in this situation they recognized Smith as Principal Chief but withheld approval of the constitutional amendment (Jackson 2003).

On August 11, 2003, the 137th anniversary of the Treaty of 1866, Marilyn Vann and several other Cherokee Freedmen descendants filed a federal lawsuit against the Secretary of the Interior through Velie & Velie. The lawsuit (*Vann et. Al. v. Norton*, now *Vann et. Al. v. Kempthorne*) contested the results of the Cherokee Nation election, citing the Treaty of 1866 which guaranteed equal rights of citizenship to all Freedmen and their descendants, the 1979 Cherokee Nation constitution which

guaranteed citizenship to all people with ancestors on the Dawes Rolls, and *Seminole v. Norton* 2001 and 2002, the decisions of which had upheld Freedmen citizenship in the Seminole Nation.

One and a half years later, in January 2005, the Cherokee Nation filed a motion to intervene in Vann's lawsuit. Vann and supporters of the Cherokee Freedmen became alarmed as they realized that the Cherokee Nation desired to intervene in the case so that they could file a motion for dismissal. A February 17 meeting of the Cherokee Nation Rules Committee was scheduled to vote on the resolution to intervene, and Marilyn Vann and about twenty Freedmen attended the meeting. Vann had submitted a request to speak about the resolution as soon as the meeting agenda had been posted. However, her request was denied. The meeting was crowded with Freedmen descendants and supporters, some affiliated with the Descendants of Freedmen Association, the North Tulsa Historical Society, and others with no such affiliation, who had driven many miles to present a united front. Extra chairs were brought into the small room to accommodate the multitude of people, but as the meeting began it was standing room only. Everyone patiently waited as the committee considered the other business before them that night, and finally the motion to intervene was discussed. The vote was taken and the resolution was approved, though not unanimously. At the end of the meeting, a committee member asked if Marilyn Vann would be allowed to speak for five minutes given the distance traveled and time many Freedmen had sacrificed to attend the meeting. This speaking time was granted, and Marilyn Vann stood up and addressed the committee, telling

them that Freedmen wanted to work with the Cherokee Nation rather than against them. The Freedmen left that night with some disappointment.[112]

The Cherokee Nation moved forward with a motion to intervene in the lawsuit, as well as for dismissal of the lawsuit based on sovereign immunity. However, this was met with a denial. In December 2006, a federal judge denied the Cherokee Nation's sovereign immunity and its motion to dismiss, stating that the Cherokee Nation was subject to the United States' thirteenth amendment, which addressed the denial of civil rights based on badges and incidents of slavery.[113] Accordingly, as Vann's lawsuit contended that Freedmen rights were being denied as a result of their history as slaves, the judge declared that the Cherokee Nation is not immune to the lawsuit and was indeed a necessary party. Consequently, the lawsuit was not dismissed.

Freedmen of many different tribes affiliated with the association continued to make their presence felt at Cherokee Nation council meetings and other local venues where Freedmen rights were being considered. However, the association was not the foundation for all activist activity. In fall of 2004, another Cherokee Freedwoman, Lucy Allen, filed a lawsuit in the Cherokee Nation tribal court with the help of Cherokee-Keetoowah citizen and activist David Cornsilk. She was affiliated with the North Tulsa Historical Society, but was also connected with the Descendants of Freedmen Association. Although Ms. Allen has documentation of Cherokee blood in her ancestry, she filed a lawsuit for citizenship in the Cherokee Nation based on the provisions in the Treaty of 1866 and the 1979 Cherokee constitution. Cornsilk, a long-time activist for civil rights of oppressed peoples in the Cherokee Nation, had

been longing to help Freedmen gain back their rights of citizenship in the Cherokee Nation. Her hearing took place in Tahlequah in an almost empty courtroom, with fewer than three Freedmen or Freedmen supporters in attendance. Here, Cornsilk argued that Freedmen were Cherokee citizens under the Cherokee constitution, and that Allen and other Cherokee Freedmen should be allowed to enroll in the nation. The citizenship code that had been passed subsequent to the Cherokee constitution that required documentation proving an ancestor on the Cherokee "by blood" Dawes Roll was unconstitutional, he argued. His argument targeted the conflict between the citizenship requirements in the Cherokee constitution and the Cherokee citizenship code.[114]

For months, Cherokee Freedmen hoped for the best in Lucy Allen's case, and in March 2006, their rights in the nation were finally returned with the Judicial Appeals Tribunal's positive decision, stating that Cherokee Freedmen were citizens according to their constitution and that the following legislation requiring blood for citizenship was contrary to the constitution. However, key to the ruling was the statement that

> "…if the Cherokee people wish to limit tribal citizenship, and such limitation would terminate the pre-existing citizenship of even one Cherokee citizen, then it must be done in the open. It cannot be accomplished through silence" (*Lucy Allen v. Cherokee Nation Tribal Council*).

Officials opposing Freedmen citizenship saw in this the seed for divesting Freedmen of their citizenship permanently through a constitutional amendment. Immediately, these officials began campaigning for a special election to remove Freedmen from the tribe while maintaining that the Cherokee court had "reversed itself."[115] A petition

was created for the purpose of a special election on citizenship. It was successfully submitted, and the election was scheduled for March 3, 2007.

Cherokee Freedwoman Vicki D. Baker contested the legality of the special election and appealed to the Cherokee Nation Supreme Court. In their arguments, Cornsilk and Cherokee Freedmen cited reasons of fraud, insufficiency of signatures, the misleading wording of the petition, and the unconstitutionality of the petition.[116] However, the court ruled that the petition was valid, and the special election remained on schedule.

In March 2007, Cherokee voters voted for an amendment limiting citizenship to those who could prove ancestry from a person on the Cherokee Indian rolls, Shawnee rolls, and Delaware rolls.[117] The vote was appealed by Cherokee Freedmen who were disenfranchised by this action, and is now, in December 2008, under consideration by the Cherokee Supreme Court. The case has received a great deal of media attention through the work of the Descendants of Freedmen Association, as well as other activist groups like the Choctaw-Chickasaw Freedmen's Association of Fort Coffee, who brought Freedmen rights to the attention of Congress. Consequently, with an eye toward Freedmen rights, Congress passed the Native American Housing and Self-Determination Act (NAHASDA) with special conditions for the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma. This federal funding cannot be utilized unless Freedmen are recognized as Cherokee citizens.[118] As of December 2008, Cherokee Freedmen are still awaiting the Cherokee Supreme Court's decision, as well as the final outcome of Marilyn Vann's federal lawsuit.

While efforts towards Cherokee Freedmen citizenship were being made, there were also important strides being made toward rectifying the problems of African Creek citizenship. Also supported by the Descendants of Freedmen Association, two men affiliated with the North Tulsa Historical Society, Ron Graham and Fred Johnson, filed lawsuits in the Creek Nation courts for their citizenship in the Muscogee Creek Nation. The lawsuit was supported by the Descendants of Freedmen Association, and after the two men struggled through representing themselves against the Creek Nation for several years, the Association enabled them to hire Damario Solomon Simmons and his law firm for representation. Simmons himself is a descendant of Cow Tom, a well-known African Creek man who was a leader and wealthy ranch-owner of the old Creek Nation.

Graham and Johnson both had documented proof of their Muscogee Creek blood, and had been applying for citizenship in the Muscogee Creek Nation since the 1980s and 1990s. Both had been repeatedly rejected because their ancestors were listed as Freedmen on the Dawes Rolls. However, both had proof that their ancestors had been listed as Creek on previous tribal rolls. Despite their proof of Creek ancestry, they had been denied citizenship because their ancestors were categorized as Freedmen. They made their appeal in 2005 in the Creek Nation courts, and they argued that they had always been culturally Creek; their families spoke Creek, participated in Creek ceremonial life, and practiced other cultural traditions. Graham's and Johnson's attorneys also argued that the Creek Nation citizenship board had illegally disenfranchised countless Creek Freedmen by limiting citizenship to people whose ancestors were on the Dawes Indian (Creek by Blood) Rolls. In fact,

the 1979 Creek constitution states only that citizens must be Creek by blood and that they must have an ancestor on the Dawes Roll. Many Freedmen descendants meet these criteria, yet the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Creek Nation citizenship office had continually denied all applications from people whose ancestors were listed on the Freedmen Rolls for over 20 years. In 2001, the Creek Nation citizenship board changed its citizenship criteria in 2001 to explicitly limit Creek citizenship to those who could prove descent from the Dawes Creek Indian Rolls. The plaintiffs argued that this change targeted Freedmen applicants and made their citizenship impossible, and that this new citizenship code was contrary to the Creek constitution. In March 2006, the Creek Nation District Court ruled in favor of Graham and Johnson, ruling that the Creek Nation Citizenship Board had acted illegally when it denied them citizenship according to the existing citizenship code that was in place prior to 2001 (*Ron Graham v. Muscogee (Creek) Nation Citizenship Board, Fred Johnson v. Muscogee (Creek) Nation Citizenship Board*). However, this decision was appealed immediately by the Muscogee Creek Nation, and Graham and Johnson lost in the court's latest decision.

Today, the Descendants of Freedmen Association and the North Tulsa Historical Society remain as active as ever. Following the Cherokee vote expelling the Freedmen, Marilyn Vann established a separate group in preparation for efforts toward federal recognition of Cherokee Freedmen as a sovereign Indian tribe. Called the Freedmen Band of Cherokee Indians, this group meets following Freedmen Association meetings, or on their own in various places throughout the Cherokee Nation. Although Cherokee Freedmen citizenship has been re-instated pending a

tribal court decision, the Freedmen Band of Cherokee Indians will seek federal recognition should they not be accepted as Cherokee citizens. This group has the support of the Descendants of Freedmen Association, and although it specifically focuses on the rights of Cherokee Freedmen, Freedmen of other tribes hope that this group can pave the way for their own efforts for tribal citizenship and barring that, tribal recognition.

Although in many ways, the pan-Freedmen movement has broken up into tribally specific goals and groups, there remains a pan-Freedmen goal and identity, a common current running through continuing Descendants of Freedmen meetings, as well as through activism in general. For those Freedmen from tribes who have yet to assert their rights through legal action, there is identification with these Freedmen who are making strides in the Cherokee and Muscogee Creek nations, and hope that they will also one day be able to contest their own disenfranchisement. The uniting force of today's activism can be seen in Fort Coffee's support of the Cherokee Freedmen. The recently formed Choctaw-Chickasaw Freedmen Association of Fort Coffee was impelled to create a petition to Congress concerning the exclusion of the Cherokee Freedmen from the Cherokee Nation. Catching the attention of the Black Caucus and Representative Diane Watson of California, this appeal led to the creation of H.R. 2824, a bill which seeks to terminate all federal funding to the Cherokee Nation if they refuse to accept Freedmen citizenship.[119] The Cherokee Nation has reacted strongly to this threat, appealing to Congress through their own representatives in Washington, D.C., and through the creation and distribution of press kits.[120] These documents contain Cherokee National opinions on the Freedmen

issue and sovereignty, but also emphasize the dependence of citizens many Cherokee programs that would not be possible without US government funding.[121] The Cherokee Nation courts have yet to make a final decision concerning Freedmen citizenship.

Although many see current Freedmen activism as an attempt to secure tribal services and benefits, Freedmen have been mobilizing for tribal rights since territorial days. The current wave of activism however is dramatically different from prior movements however. From the 1860s to the 1990s, Freedmen activism has been largely local and divided by tribal affiliation. Today's activism is marked by a pan-Freedmen identification that spans tribal and state lines. Like identities in Foreman and Fort Coffee, Freedmen identities that are the foundation of today's activist movements have been shaped by specific histories. They are histories that, like those of Foreman and Fort Coffee, grew out of close relationships with the tribes in slavery, culture, and kinship, as well as specific Freedmen and Black Indian community histories. However, these histories diverged from those rural Freedmen community histories when Freedmen moved from these communities to Oklahoma's urban areas in the early to mid-twentieth century. A history of segregation with other African Americans and Freedmen of various backgrounds compounded with a strong racial structure that shaped everyday life as Black. In addition to the omission of Freedmen from state and tribal historical narratives, the loss of family histories left many Freedmen descendants in urban centers without an understanding of their roots. The dissolution of tribal governments and their virtual relegation to the pages of history throughout the twentieth century compounded people's distance from their tribes.

When the tribes re-organized in the 1970s and 1980s, many Freedmen descendants in urban areas were confused as to the details of their connections. This varied in several instances, as recounted in Tulsa, many Black Creek people continued to live within their traditional Creek family and social networks throughout the twentieth century.

For all Freedmen descendants however, the administration of tribal health care and later, services like housing and educational funding that expanded in the 1980s and 1990s brought attention to their new lack of citizenship. As many Freedmen applied for citizenship in the tribes based on their known histories and/or ancestries within them, they were met with rejection and confusion shared by other Freedmen descendants across Oklahoma they had not yet met.

Today's pan-Freedmen movement was shaped by these specific histories, but this movement also came at a critical time, when Freedmen descendants could be connected not only through their common experiences of searching for their Freedmen and Black Indian roots, but also through media and the internet. Although many Freedmen descendants in Oklahoma do not have access to the internet, this medium has been incredibly instrumental in bringing attention to Freedmen issues, both statewide and nationwide. Consequently, Freedmen descendants as far away as California and Chicago could keep up with the progress of Freedmen struggles in Oklahoma, and the Descendants of Freedmen Association could attract members and supporters from across the nation. This increased ability to connect to Freedmen and Freedmen issues and political movements led to the furthering of a common

Freedmen identification, where Freedmen descendants and Black Indians across the state and country could connect to one another regardless of place or background.

This new movement is one is built out of a certain unique history experienced by Freedmen in Oklahoma, and its brand of activism attracts others from similar backgrounds of detachment from Freedmen roots. At the same time however, it also attracts the support of those with strong community backgrounds and identities, including Creek Freedmen in the Tulsa area and Choctaw Freedmen residents of Fort Coffee. The current activist movement and its foundations seem to differ greatly from the local community foundations of rural Freedmen communities like Foreman and Fort Coffee. Despite these differences however, the identities and histories of each of these disparate Freedmen communities are connected to one another in important ways, not only through today's activism, but in identity-shaping processes spanning from slavery and freedom in the Five Tribes to today's struggle for citizenship.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Having just moved to Fort Smith, I am eager to see what the public library, which is home to a large genealogy and history section, offers on the histories of Foreman and Fort Coffee, the communities I have begun to study. Thus far, I have found only a few published accounts of Freedmen history, the most complete of which are Daniel Littlefield's books and articles. Beyond this, I have relied on WPA interviews and other primary documents housed in collections at the University of Oklahoma and the Oklahoma Historical Society. Still, there was little information on the specific communities of Foreman and Fort Coffee. Fort Smith, a mid-sized historic city on the border of the former Indian Territory only several miles from my study communities, seems to promise more in the way of local histories.

Looking through the library catalog and walking throughout the shelves of books at the library, I am excited to find titles on histories of the Foreman family, and on Fort Coffee. However, each time I open the book in question, I am confronted with histories and genealogies of the Foreman family that leave out the African American Foremans. Fort Coffee histories tell only of the historic military fort, and have no information about the Freedmen community that had surrounded it nearly since its establishment. The same is true at smaller local libraries in communities neighboring these towns, including Muldrow and Spiro. The glaring absence of these community histories is made more obvious by the plethora of histories on White and Indian communities that neighbor Foreman and Fort Coffee.

The absence of Freedmen histories is also evident in historical representations throughout the state. School history books, historical museums, and other portrayals of state history rarely contain any mention of the people of African descent who were part of life in the Five Tribes. Similarly, most tribal museums developed and managed by the Five Tribes depict Indian histories free of Blacks, both slave and free. Despite their significant roles in tribal events throughout history, they are not represented in paintings, depictions of life in the Southeast, or in representations of the Trails of Tears, tribal wars, nor in the re-establishment of the nations in Indian Territory or in the Civil War. Freedmen themselves did not learn about their ancestors' histories in school, nor in museums or libraries, and most did not learn these histories from their parents and grandparents. Many were too young to care about such things when their knowledgeable ancestors were living, and most were considered rude and impudent for asking such things of an elder. Given this absence of their own history in everyday experience, how is it that history is actually critical in Freedmen communities and identities?

Despite the absence of recorded histories, history is a major shaper of communities and identitities, and is key to current Freedmen identities and activist movements. Foreman, Fort Coffee, and the activist communities of the North Tulsa Historical Society and the Descendants of Freedmen Association are communities that have been built by specific histories. From roots in Indian Territory and in the cultures and contexts of their various tribes, Freedmen communities have come through unique and significant histories that had critical impacts for current identities and conditions. The Freedmen situation today is characterized by great diversity, and

the portraits of the communities that make up this study are only a small representation of this diversity. The unique cultural and historical backgrounds of these communities have shaped Freedmen identities and contexts in different ways, and thus, there exists a spectrum of Freedmen identities and communities today. Accordingly, each Freedmen community has certain understandings of their own identities, and specific ways of presenting those identities, depending on cultural and historical foundations, as well as current contexts.

The ways in which Freedmen communities use this history as a base for current identities and actions is part of an important historical consciousness that varies by community. This historical consciousness shapes the ways in which people connect to their communities, their histories, and their own identities. In Richard Price's *First Time*, Saramakan people's relationships to their past, contained in specific historical narratives, constantly inform identity (Price 1983). Much like the Saramakas, who re-tell specific events that were pivotal in history and identity, Freedmen communities reflect on certain events in their histories that inform them about who they are. In Fort Coffee, understandings of the community's and specific families' places within local and tribal histories are an important part of individual and community identity. Historical consciousness not only shapes understandings about identity however, it also shapes the ways in which communities do things, and the actions communities take to achieve their goals. In the North Tulsa Historical Society, relationships to specific histories and cultures in the Creek Nation shapes the goals and methods of its activist founders. At the same time, the relationships between activists in the Oklahoma City area and their very different histories

characterize the ways in which the Descendants of Freedmen Association achieves its goals. Varying histories and their relationships to these histories add yet another layer to the diversity of Freedmen communities today.

Notwithstanding the important differences in these communities however, they are tied together by important common threads of identity. One of these threads is the shared experience of race. Race is a critically important part of Freedmen identities and histories, and has played a number of roles in shaping current Freedmen contexts. As enslaved people in Indian Territory, or as free Blacks, race was significant in everyday life for many people as American racial ideologies began informing understandings of Indian identity. At the turn of the century, race became paramount as most Black citizens of the tribes were enrolled as Freedmen, and then segregated by the state of Oklahoma. Throughout the twentieth century, everyday life was shaped by experiences as Black in a segregated or post-segregation society. Race was the basis for a primary identity, and an identification with others with the same everyday experiences. The enforced racial structure caused a shift in many Freedmen identities, and sociocultural divisions between Freedmen and non-Freedmen African Americans faded as bonds of common experience drew these people of different backgrounds together. Community identities were strengthened in many ways by this racial system, as Black towns and African American communities developed their own schools, shops, banks, churches, and other institutions. At the same time, extensive networks connected African Americans across great distances as segregation forced them into limited schools, and as churches connected with one another through visitation practices. As in Robert Blauner's analysis, the experiences

of Freedmen as African Americans within Oklahoma's racial structure over the twentieth century were forces that created a new monolithic African American identity out of a diverse group of Freedmen and non-Freedmen.

Further changes for Freedmen communities were a result of racial integration or de-segregation, as many African American community institutions were weakened or broken down by a changing racial structure. However, struggles for equal rights at this time were partially dependent on a monolithic Black identity that had been forged in the decades prior, this identity serving as a point of unification, pride, and resistance.

Over time, race has shaped Freedmen histories in incredibly important ways, and it continues to shape their current situations on local, tribal, and more far-reaching levels. Race had similar impacts on Freedmen people throughout the state of Oklahoma in the twentieth century, however, each community's unique history refracted these racial structures differently, contributing to the array of identities and contexts seen throughout Oklahoma today. Yet despite differences on the community level, Freedmen descendants throughout Oklahoma draw upon a common base of racial experience as Black in Oklahoma and are able to connect to one another within this foundation.

While this seemingly monolithic Black identity has had formative effects for Freedmen people and has helped to create common bonds between Freedmen, as well as between Freedmen and other African Americans, it also presents special problems for Freedmen in terms of conflicts between this monolithic understanding of race, ideas about Indian blood, their own histories of multiracialness, and understandings of

indigeneity. As Freedmen descendants growing up in Oklahoma, race as Negro or African American was paramount in determining social, cultural, and political identities, as described above. However, family and local histories of Native American ancestry, multiracialness, and indigneous roots in Oklahoma would seem to conflict with all that the monolithic racial category of Negro or African American would invoke. Common understandings of race that involve assumptions about appearance, culture, and history, have had immeasurable impacts on Freedmen's struggles with identity. These taken-for-granted associations between race and other phenomena not only color outsiders' understandings of who Freedmen are, but also present identity dilemmas for Freedmen people themselves. James Clifford's account of the Mashpee Wampanoag's struggle for recognition illustrates the conflict of actual identity with common-sense ideas of Indianness that corresponded with essences of Native American traditional culture, race, and political systems (Clifford 1988). Likewise, the Freedmen find themselves attempting to prove themselves within a set of ideologies concerning race and culture held by society in general. Efforts to define Freedmen identities are made ever more difficult by the marginalizing effects of two racial systems: blood quantum and the one-drop rule.

Blood in Quantums and Drops

Indian blood quantum is a racial construct that attempts to quantify Indian identity in fractions of Indian blood. In the colonial era, ideas about Indian blood were constructed in connection to culture, and it was seen as a carrier of an essence of

savagery, while intermixtures of White blood were believed to have civilizing effects. As Melissa Meyer described,

> "In the language of colonial racial politics and evolving scientific racism, fused notions of blood and peoplehood were also ordered hierarchically into superior and inferior stocks. "White blood" might uplift darker "blood," but not as quickly as "tainted blood" polluted. And the stain of degeneracy attached to all those of mixed descent for those of the dominant order" (Meyer 1999: 239).

Despite the tendencies of blood quantum to racialize Indians and to stand in the way of real cultural and kinship connections, tribes and Indian people have increasingly adopted blood quantum as a marker of Indian identity. The colonial roots of this quantifier continue to subjectify Native people however, in every use of this racial ideology. As Pauline Strong and Barrik Van Winkle relate in their discussion of reckonings of Indian blood,

> "…the vanquished are required to naturalize and legitimize themselves in terms of 'blood quantum' – an imposition of the victor's essentialized reckoning of identity that becomes an integral, often taken-for-granted aspect of Native subjectivity" (Strong 1996:552).

The result is a Foucaultian context where the colonized is continually re-subjectified by colonial paradigms that become unquestioned understandings of self (Biolsi 1995).

Freedmen people must contend with these colonial paradigms of Indianness, as well as another racial structure that has worked to marginalize them. The one-drop rule became a tool of colonizers in delineating and separating people of African ancestry into a slave class and removing them from everyday White society. Unlike

in the blood quantum system applied to Native American people, the one-drop rule disregards cultural assimilation and assumes that one "drop" of Black blood, no matter the education or cultural patterns, makes a person Black and consequently unfit as a member of White society. As Strong and Van Winkle write, "Vis-a-vis 'white blood,' the power of a drop of 'Negro blood' is to contaminate" (Strong 1996: 551). Beyond visually marking a status, the one-drop rule became a taken-for-granted marker of identity, both for those with African ancestry and for those that were on the outside of this racial grouping.

When applied to Freedmen, Black Indians, and Black citizens of the tribes in Indian Territory, the one-drop rule deprived people of legal status as Indians by assuming Black and Indian to be mutually exclusive racial categories. At statehood, the effects of the rule were further developed in depriving Freedmen of civil rights and in creating common bonds between Freedmen and other peoples of African descent. However, this rule also continued to define Freedmen by their Blackness, and worked to deny multiracialness. This has had important effects on Freedmen, as the racial systems unique to Native Americans and African Americans conflict in a way that shuts out shared ancestry.

Accordingly, Freedmen find themselves at a crossroads of ideologies concerning blood and race. While lifelong experiences as Black within a structured racial system have pulled them in one direction in terms of identity, understandings of their families' histories and multiracial, multiethnic ancestries have presented opposing ideas about identity. In addition to these ideological understandings, there are also legal parameters of identity that further problematize Freedmen identities.

While Indian blood quantum is a colonial construct that carries assumptions about culture and identity, it is legally required for the recognition of Indianness in most tribes today. Here, the Five Tribes present a special case in that they counter the colonial blood quantum system through refusal to impose blood quantum restrictions on their citizens. Any descendant with an ancestor on the Dawes Indian Roll is eligible for citizenship, no matter his or her Indian blood quantum. In this way, citizenship is a matter of descent rather than of degree of Indian blood. At the same time however, reliance on the Dawes Rolls for proof of Indian blood presents a racial conundrum for Freedmen. While not putting a quantifier on blood degree, the possession of Indian blood itself is embedded in colonial notions of mutual racial exclusivity put into practice by the Dawes Commission. As Freedmen attempt to prove their Indianness through struggling to find proof of blood, they are racialized by the one-drop rule and excluded from Indianness. Consequently, Freedmen are caught between two racial systems that racialize and marginalize them in different ways. Conflicting understandings about race and ethnicity, Blackness and Indianness, have presented Freedmen with an "either/or" paradigm in terms of identity that they must negotiate in history, society, and in their own understandings of who they are.

The Persistence of Multiracialness

Freedmen histories and identities of multiracialness have withstood these pressures of restrictive racial structures and ideologies, but not without conflict. Virtually all Freedmen, despite their histories and ancestries as Freedmen, Black,

Indian, and White, grew up as Black people in Oklahoma, as did their parents and perhaps their grandparents as well. Throughout their lives, they identified themselves as Black or Negro, not because this was the best descriptor of their ancestry, but because this was their community identifier. Not only was this an ancestry, it was an absolute determinant of status, an identifier in society. It determined where they would live, what kind of jobs they would get, what kind of education they could receive, and who they could call friends and family. This Black identity was imposed upon Freedmen, but it came to be embraced as a primary identity as well.

Although their primary identity is Black or African American, many Freedmen insist on their multiracialness and continue to define themselves as Black, White, and Indian at the same time that they, as well as others, identify them as Black. Beyond the primary African American identity, most Freedmen ascribe great importance to multiracial roots, such that these roots inform understandings of identity. Monolithic social understandings of race have been consistently contradicted by family histories of multiracial Indian and White ancestries passed through the generations. To one degree or another, each person with these histories must negotiate their own understanding of these seemingly conflicting identities.

In addition to being a part of individual and family identities, multiracialness is also rooted in local understandings of history and historical consciousness. For many, the insistence on multiracialness in the face of monolithic racial understandings is related to the strong feeling that Freedmen in various communities are all intimately connected to Whites and Indians in the area through kin relationships. Despite racial barriers that have persisted in these communities, Freedmen continue to

assert that Whites, Indians, and Blacks are one and the same people. The only difference between them may be the shade of their skin. This history of multiracial relationships is part of a feeling of unity with other Indians and Whites who also have histories extending back to the Indian Territory era.

These multiracial ancestries and identities go largely unrecognized by most outsiders, given common associations between race and appearance, and race and culture. Consequently, Freedmen find that their identities are difficult to prove in a system that defines diverse peoples as monoracial and monocultural, and imposes racial designations based on ideas of blood. Reverend Melvin Williams, proprietor of a small barbeque restaurant and native of Shady Grove, a Cherokee Freedmen and Black Cherokee settlement, relates his version of the unique problems of Black-Indian multiracialness:

> "And instead of them being Black and Indian, you either were Indian, or colored! You know they wouldn't let 'em be Black Indians. That a lot of Whites are White and Indian, but a Black man had to be always Black, always Black and always colored. There wan't no in between like it is for the White man. You got people up there with 15/64s, you know, that isn't even enough to talk about, and they got a card! But if you got Black blood in you, they say well you Black. You mean that Black blood and Indian blood can't mix as well as White blood and Indian blood mix? Come on, somethin's wrong somewhere."

Reverend Williams elucidates the problems of multiracialness in a world dictated by the one-drop rule, and the unwillingness of others to acknowledge this racial diversity. Consequently, Freedmen feel the effects of these conflicting racial structures not only in their attempts to enroll as citizens in their various tribes, but in

everyday interactions with people who tend to associate Blackness with monolithic ancestries, cultures, and histories.

Assumptions About the Indigenous

Although we have come to understand that race is a social construct rather than a biological one, we cannot dismiss the importance of biology in the construction of race. People build ideas of nature, culture, and essence onto certain perceived biological differences. These assumptions are especially relevant for Native American identities which are caught up in ideas about blood, race, and culture. African American identities carry similar assumptions that conflict with those ideas concerning Native American identities, thus posing one of the main problematics in this situation for both outsiders and Freedmen.

Scholar Peter Wade urges us to dissect and analyze the connections between nature, essence, culture and race (Wade 2002). Wade explores the construction of race and proposes that the idea of race is 'naturalized' so that race is seen as a part of nature, as well as of a person's nature. At the same time, racial essences carry ideas about culture, while notions of culture carry assumptions about race. In this way, race and racism involve the naturalization of culture and the culturalization of nature.

Wade's understandings of the common sense associations between race, culture, and nature can be extended to study the ways in which race carries implications about specific histories. Along with assumptions about culture, the Native American racial category invokes assumptions about generalized and specific

histories, for example of population loss due to war and disease, broken treaties, the trials and tribulations of removal, and the loss of sovereignty and seemingly endless destructive government policies. For the Five Tribes, these histories specifically surround broken treaties, the Trail of Tears, successful re-establishment of tribal nations in Indian Territory, and the ravages of allotment, racism, and the dissolution of tribal sovereignty at Oklahoma statehood. In much simplified form, histories assigned to the African American racial group involve origins in Africa, slavery and bondage, and struggles to overcome racism and prejudice since emancipation. Freedmen and Black Indian histories in Oklahoma defy the common historical essentialisms assigned to these racial categories. They share histories with both African Americans and Native Americans of the Five Tribes, yet their race as Black people determines that their history lies assumedly within a monolithic racial essence.

Similar conflicts can be found in the ways that culture and indigeneity are conflated with race. Peter Wade has illustrated the ways in which race is coded as culture, making culture seem as something naturally included in someone's race. The works of Eva Garroutte and Circe Sturm explore the ways in which culture can be seen as a taken-for-granted aspect of racial identity, and illustrate the actual correlations between race, blood quantum, and assumptions about culture in Native America (Garroutte 2003; Sturm 2002). In the Cherokee Nation, Circe Sturm discusses the "cultural production of bloodedness" in relation to an example of a green-eyed, full-blood Cherokee medicine man:

> "Because this man is seen in the eyes of the community as a critical culture bearer, he is assumed to have a high degree of Cherokee blood, and because he is assumed to

> be a full-blood, he must be a culture bearer. His presumed fullness of culture denotes a fullness of blood, which is itself a metaphor for culture"(Sturm 2002: 141).

Thus, historically and today, greater degrees of blood quantum are associated with greater retention and practice of tribal cultural patterns, or "traditional" Native American culture. At the same time, a drop of Black blood seemingly bestows an entirely different set of cultural assumptions on an individual or group. As a result of this racial system, Black blood is seen to bring an individual into a monolithic African American culture and ethnic group. These perceived connections between race and culture are pervasive and influence our understandings of peoples, and have consequences for people in terms of identity. Because culture is an inherent and underlying assumption within race, this hinders an actual understanding of Freedmen's unique cultures in many ways.

Another complicating factor in this problematic lies in understandings of indigeneity. Wade's analysis of the connections between culture, nature and race can be expanded to include notions of indigeneity that have historically been associated and confused with race. Indigeneity is a term laden with meanings that are just beginning to be explored and questioned, and has been alternately defined in terms of the first peoples of a land, as well as in terms of political and ancestral claims to lands and status made from a position of relative disempowerment in a postcolonial world.[122] For purposes of understanding Freedmen identities however, and in line with Wade's explorations of everyday assumptions, I refer to indigeneity in terms of the common, taken-for-granted assumptions associated with the concept. This implies a rootedness in an area or territory transcending colonial intrusions and

settlement. Traditionally in North America, "indigenous" has been a term reserved for Native Americans as the first people on this continent, or within a specific area prior to colonization by Europeans or Americans. Oklahoma however presents a special case. Here, too, indigeneity is seen as a quality solely possessed by Native American people in Oklahoma, although most tribes were actually relocated there from other parts of the country. While their relative date and method of arrival in the Indian Territory may qualify their indigeneity to that specific region in some interpretations, their status as tribes with histories preceding Oklahoma statehood is a strong, and publicly accepted, symbol of indigeneity to the area. It is a recognizable root of nativity that is felt and acknowledged as peoples who were present prior to Euro-American colonization and settlement of the area.

However, the many people of African descent who were also citizens of the tribes are not seen as native people to the area. A rootedness within the tribes and Indian Territory is an important part of Freedmen identities, yet this sense of indigeneity would seem to conflict with the racial structure that has so shaped Freedmen lives over the course of the twentieth century. This is in many ways because indigeneity in the United States, in common thought and understanding, has been constructed racially, and as specifically non-Black. Common sense understandings of indigeneity see this as a quality associated with non-Black people of Native American racial appearance and ancestry. Freedmen, as Black people, are seen as inherently non-indigenous because of the specific histories assigned to various racial categories. Accordingly, despite diverse and multiracial national populations

prior to statehood, the tribes have been reconstructed in the common mind as fundamentally Indian, and thus inherently non-Black.

Freedmen understandings of their indigeneity however, have carried through the generations over the past century, and this persistence attests to the strong meanings they hold for Freedmen people. Ties of identity to indigeneity vary by community and generation – some communities like the Descendants of Freedmen Association have molded political understandings of indigeneity, while other localized communities have their own specific ties to indigenous pasts in Indian Territory. Older generations have kept these ideas of indigeneity strong, while many of younger generations have become disconnected. Nevertheless, these understandings of indigeneity are integral parts of most Freedmen identities today.

Freedmen throughout Oklahoma have passed knowledge over generations about the fact that eastern Oklahoma once belonged only to Blacks and Indians. This important story represents a claim of indigeneity to the area in the midst of official histories that ignore them. The re-telling of indigenous narratives is a form of resistance against these official historical narratives, and is a vital way of passing histories and identities on to subsequent generations. Reverend Melvin Williams, discussed what his father told him many times:

> "And he would tell me about that and he would tell me there wasn't any Whites here as we know in Sequoyah County. That from Greenwood Junction to Muskogee, wasn't anything but Indians and Blacks. Yeah he would always say that."[123]

The significance of this narrative can be seen throughout eastern Oklahoma. As recounted in previous chapters, the narrative is found in historic Freedmen towns like

Foreman and Fort Coffee, as well as in activist groups like the North Tulsa Historical Association. Cecil Jones, Chickasaw Freedman descendant and mayor of the historic Chickasaw Freedmen town of Tatums claims,

> "You'd be surprised this whole land belonged to blacks here all the way back to I-35, back up almost to Elmore City, across to 29 all the way back across here."[124]

This understanding of native history is held by most Native Blacks or Freedmen in Oklahoma, but few others. This narrative is significant on several levels. The ownership of land was historically and continues to be a source of pride for Freedmen across the state. It set them apart from other Blacks who had come to Oklahoma as well as from Whites who came searching for land. Freedmen of the Five Tribes distinguished themselves through their land ownership. Additionally, this narrative serves as a claim of indigeneity and of nativity to Indian Territory in the face of a century of White domination and anti-Black racism. It is a claim to being here first, and a reference to a time when Blacks had rights that Whites did not. Recollections of this time have been passed on through the generations, perhaps serving as a source of internal pride throughout the hardships imposed by racism and segregation throughout the twentieth century.

These claims to indigeneity are key forms of resistance to past and current racial structures, and are ways of summoning the power of their Indian Territory ancestors in a post-segregation world. However, these narratives are also key to Freedmen's struggles to define their identities within a racial system that correlates indigeneity with race. This taken-for-granted association between race, history and indigeneity further clouds understandings of Freedmen identities already complicated

by understandings of blood and multiracialness in Native America and African America. Consequently, it becomes even more difficult to assert identities that defy such racial structures. Freedmen come into conflict with the persistent rigidity of these associations in everyday interactions with non-Freedmen who are loathe to dismiss their own understandings of race. This conflict defines the problematic of Freedmen identity both in everyday life and in securing citizenship from their respective tribes.

These unique experiences with the conflicts between race, blood, multiracialness, and indigeneity connect people of Freedmen ancestry across Oklahoma and the nation itself, as family histories and identities clash with taken-for-granted understandings of race, history, and culture. The common experience of people with Freedmen ancestries are a foundation for social and activist connections. While individual experiences vary, Freedmen are tied together by their struggles within and resistance to these ideological structures that attempt to dictate that their identities and histories should correlate somehow with their perceived race.

In Search of the Past

Despite the persistence and significance of this narrative of Freedmen indigeneity in Oklahoma, the details of specific family and local histories are still unknown to most individual Freedmen descendants. Beyond the prideful stories of Blacks being some of Indian Territory's first citizens, there lies for most a deep void of knowledge about the circumstances and lives of their ancestors. Generations of elders have passed away over the course of the twentieth century, and with each

passing there dies a irreplaceable store of knowledge about the past. Compounded by local and cultural ideas of what are appropriate subjects for discussion with youths, individuals in Freedmen communities have lost a great deal of knowledge about their pasts.

Perhaps most influential in the loss of Freedmen histories is the aforementioned confusion of race and indigeneity, as well as racism in general over the course of the twentieth century. Freedmen and Black Indian histories were left out of history books, museums, and other representation of Oklahoma and tribal histories not only because Freedmen, as Black people, were seen as non-indigenous, but also because Black histories were not seen as valuable or worthy of record. These significant histories were purged from Oklahoman and tribal historical narratives. Historical events, and historic tribal and state populations were cleansed of Black presence and influence. In histories of Oklahoma's tribes, past leaders and tribal events became known as solely Indian and non-Black. Although Freedmen may have known their indigenous histories in Oklahoma, they found no documentation of such relationships in written or portrayed histories. Their presence had been virtually erased.

This exclusion has had incredible implications for Native Black and Freedmen understandings of themselves in historic and present contexts. Over the course of the twentieth century and up to today, Freedmen are implicitly told in everyday portrayals of history that their own communities and their histories are insignificant and unimportant. The erection of monuments and historical markers concerning White

and Native American histories next to Freedmen historic places that go unrecognized speaks to the continued invisibility of Freedmen and Black histories.

At the same time, people throughout Oklahoma and within the Five Tribes learn the same histories that Freedmen have been confronted with – histories that are devoid of their presence. Consequently, if Oklahoma and tribal citizens are not familiar with these Freedmen and Black histories, they rarely understand just who Freedmen are and where they fit into Oklahoma and tribal histories. For Freedmen people themselves who have grown increasingly distant from their own ancestors' communities and their histories, a keen sense of loss is felt as the hole in these representations of history grows more apparent. Family histories and community histories told of roots in Indian Territory, of connections and close relationships with one or more of the Five Tribes, yet there is no documentation in historical sources. There is nowhere to turn to find out more about these histories, or to find the details of these histories. For those Freedmen and Black Indians who grew up with solid narratives and roots tying them to their histories, it has been a struggle to assert and maintain their identities within a place that does not recognize their existence. For those Freedmen and Black Indians who grew up detached from such roots, the absence of their ancestors in historical representations has left them with a sense of loss in knowing who they are. Consequently, Freedmen are left having to prove their identities not only to others, but also to themselves.

• • •

In 1940, a son was born to Zack Foreman's son Roscoe Wallace. Roscoe's son was born in Foreman, to a wife who was over thirty years his junior. Their son, Roscoe Jr., never knew his grandfather who had passed on in 1916, and unfortunately, his father, Roscoe, would also pass away when his son was only one year old. Now a widow, Roscoe Jr.'s mother took a job in Oklahoma City, leaving her son in the care of Foreman's Holiness church mother for an extended period of time. Later, she took her children and left the town of Foreman for other work opportunities in New York City.

Roscoe Jr. would not learn much about his father's side of the family as he grew up, given their distance from the town of Foreman and the early death of his father. However, on childhood trips to Foreman, his uncle Sheridan would touch his face and cry when he saw him, exclaiming how much he looked like his father. He knew the names of his uncles and grandparents, and his family had kept an old black and white photograph, a portrait of a man said to be his grandfather Zack, although he thought it may be an uncle or other relative. However, the details of his father's family history were unknown to him and his siblings due to the absence of these family members, and their distance from the Foreman community.

Roscoe Jr. became an attorney like his father and moved to Chicago. Trying to bridge the distance between himself and his Oklahoma roots, Roscoe traveled back to his birthplace in the 1980s, driving through town and trying to identify what was left of the town. As he drove down Redland Road through the center of what was once Foreman, he stopped to talk to anyone he saw. Those residents of Foreman who were left knew Roscoe as soon as they saw him; he looked just like his father who

they remembered so well. After learning what he could, he returned to his Chicago home, hoping to someday return with his sons.

In 2005, while researching Foreman genealogy on the internet, I came across an emailed response on an ancestry website from a Roscoe Foreman. Immediately recognizing the name from my research on the Foreman family, I emailed a message to the given address, introducing myself and my research, and asking if he was Zack Foreman's grandson. To my surprise, I received a response from Roscoe Foreman, affirming that he was indeed the grandson of Zack Foreman, and that he was trying to find information on him. We scheduled a time to speak on the phone, and I later mailed him all of my research on his family and his grandfather. Soon, Mr. Foreman scheduled another trip to Oklahoma, this time with his sons.

In October 2005, just at the end of my fieldwork in Oklahoma, I had the pleasure of meeting Roscoe Foreman and his two sons, Javin and Ghian, both in their twenties. Fortunately, Damon Foreman, my main informant, and his wife Kathy, excited to meet Roscoe and his sons, had driven back to Foreman from Colorado to meet Damon's distant cousins and to bring them around the community. Damon and Roscoe greeted each other as long lost relatives in the parking lot of a small diner in Roland, Oklahoma. After we all got to know each other over breakfast, we set out for a tour of Foreman. In this small but significant reunion of sorts, Damon related his knowledge of the community from his own childhood, helping to fill the void left by the circumstances of Roscoe's own childhood. Roscoe and his sons were excited to talk about the community and their roots with Foreman's older residents like Skinner Benton.

Roscoe had brought his old family photograph with him, and a visit to Robert Johnson, another older Foreman resident now living in Fort Smith, confirmed that the man in the picture was indeed his grandfather, Zack Foreman. All of us were overjoyed to know that the man pictured was the one we had studied for so long, all the while never knowing the physical countenance of this man of legend. The day was too short for the Foreman family as these relatives got to know one another, sharing information and exchanging stories, each filled with fascination in what the other had to share. The sons listened with great interest, Ghian excited to pass these things on to his own children at home.

Words could not express the feelings surrounding the rediscovery of family and community roots that day, nor the new bonds formed between distant cousins meeting for the first time in this common search. It was a hidden history that was a source of immense pride when rediscovered by these members of younger generations. Roscoe and his sons soon traveled back to their homes in Chicago, and Damon and his wife returned to Colorado with promises to return at some point in the future, and with renewed zeal to pass what they had learned to future generations. While the community of Foreman will most likely continue further into decline, its history will live on as those who are connected to it rediscover their roots within it.

Damon Foreman and Roscoe Foreman and his sons had come together from very different backgrounds, although they shared roots in the Foreman community and family. Damon had grown up in Foreman when it was still full of families playing baseball games and attending church socials. He left the community when he was sixteen, seeking job opportunities in Kansas. After raising his children, he came

back in his fifties with an understanding of how important his now virtually abandoned community was. He sought to create a historical site in Foreman, to enroll in the Cherokee Nation, and to explore his roots in the Foreman family. Roscoe had grown up almost completely detached from the place of his birth, and although he knew the name of his grandfather, he had no idea of his stature and meaning in creating the Foreman community. Roscoe returned to the place of his birth seeking information about where he and his family came from, and with a desire to pass this on to his own children.

Despite differing backgrounds, both of these men had come together in the search for their roots as Cherokee Freedmen and as Foremans. Damon and Roscoe, like many other Freedmen across the nation, were struck by the significance of their family and community histories. Realizing their importance, they set out to rediscover their roots and to record what they could for future generations. Roscoe's and Damon's searches are ones that united not only them, but this search connects countless Freedmen across Oklahoma and the nation. While it is central to today's activist movements, it is also a key to Freedmen identity today.

In spite of the diversity of Freedmen individuals and communities, all descendants of Freedmen are brought together by their seemingly unending quest to find the details of their histories. A result of the ways their ancestors were written out of tribal, state, and national histories, Freedmen descendants and Native Black people are consumed with research on Freedmen, collecting family histories and genealogies, looking up allotment histories, and research on the Five Tribes themselves. There is an ever present sense of urgency in the re-discovery and preservation of these

histories and important aspects of identity among people of middle age and above. While certain community histories and narratives of indigeneity have remained strong, Freedmen individuals feel increasingly lost in terms of their own histories as a result of their absence in local written histories and the continual passing of older community members who hold so much of community and family histories.

Histories have also been lost in part because of the twentieth century trend of the monolithic Black racial category and life experience within this category. While family histories of multiracialness and multiethnic heritage survived, they were less important throughout most of the twentieth century. Although multiracialness was recognized as a fundamental part of Blackness, it was recognized that these other ancestries and histories were in many ways irrelevant to everyday life in segregation. Additionally, the details of the African American past, including family ancestries and histories, seemed lost within the vast undocumented period of slavery. However, many Freedmen came to begin seeking out the details of their histories in the 1980s, after Alex Haley's *Roots* was published (Haley 1976). This story was a symbol that these seemingly lost histories actually could be found. For Freedmen of younger generations, multiracialness and roots within the Five Tribes were rediscovered, and the search began for more knowledge.

This renewed interest in genealogy and the search for Freedmen histories coincided with the re-establishment of the Five Tribes in Oklahoma in the late 1970s and 1980s. The resurfacing of tribal sovereignty and the media attention it created doubtless attracted the attention of many Freedmen people who had since lost many of the details of their historic relationships with the tribes, but knew of their existence.

Others had parents who took for granted their citizenship, not knowing that there were different rolls for Freedmen and Indians. Following the revision of tribal constitutions, finding proof of blood quantum became an issue for Freedmen, and the search for this has led to an intensified genealogical quest.

Freedmen across Oklahoma and the United States have been and continue to be confronted by these problems in the search for their histories, genealogies, and proof of blood needed for tribal citizenship. These shared experiences are built upon by activist organizations like the Descendants of Freedmen Association, as people come together to find answers to these long-sought questions about their histories. Additionally, as small historic communities like Foreman fade, Freedmen identity is reshaped by connections to other Freedmen who share the same story. Consequently, people who have lost many of their connections to community and history find new identification with others like them across the state and nation.

Proving Who They Are

Histories, as well as the absence of histories, have been critical to Freedmen over the course of the twentieth century, and in defining identities today. However, as Gerald Sider and Richard Price contend, histories are also vital to a people's futures. As Sider states, we must pay attention to the

> "multiple, shifting chasms that open and close between, on the one side, where people say they come from – not only their origins but their sense of the past they have come through – and how they use where they think they have come from to figure out where they want to go and

> how to organize themselves to get there..." (Sider 1993: 23).

For Freedmen, specific histories are used in important ways to inform and assert identities. Within these webs of meaning that come with intersecting ideologies of race, blood, history, and culture, Freedmen people find themselves struggling to find the truth of their ancestors lives, for an understanding of their historic experiences that seem to perhaps defy the racial categories that have structured their own lives.

Along with this search for understanding comes a struggle against the circumstances that a racial history has created, one that has divided them by blood, and created a set of ideologies that denies multiracialness and indigeneity. It is a racial history that has worked in many ways to deprive them of their historical roots through construction of unique racial systems that are dependent on ideas about blood, and which contain often hidden assumptions about culture and history. Within such a set of racial ideas and histories, it is little wonder that most Freedmen have struggled to define their own identities that often conflict with these common-sense ideas. Today's efforts toward tribal citizenship represents only one of the many fronts on which this fight against these racial ideologies is taking place. In many ways, the current struggle with the tribes is a physical and legal representation of the ways in which race and its underlying assumptions has divided people and clouded Freedmen histories and identities.

These historic and racial paradigms have converged to create an environment where Freedmen must prove who they are in legal and everyday encounters. Consequently, Freedmen of diverse communities throughout Oklahoma and the nation have become acutely aware of the power of their histories in asserting

identities that defy these common understandings. Although Freedmen communities, cultures, and histories differ greatly, Freedmen everywhere are confronted with these important problems in defining identities within these complex and conflicting racial paradigms. Freedmen find that their histories are central in both rediscovering identity in a world structured by these ideas, and in proving identities to others with the same understandings of race, culture, history, blood, and indigeneity. In essence, Freedmen seek out and value these histories to prove who they are in the midst of such assumptions, not only to outsiders, but to themselves as well.

Bibliography

Abel, Annie Heloise
1915 The American Indian as Slaveholder and Secessionist. Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark Compant.

Baker, T. Lindsay and Julie P. Baker, ed.
1996 The WPA Oklahoma Slave Narratives. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

Bentley, Mac
2003 Seminole Freedmen recognized - Slaves' descendants are tribal citizens but lacked full benefits and voting rights. *In* Daily Oklahoman. Oklahoma City.

Biolsi, Thomas
1995 The Birth of the Reservation: Making the Modern Individual Among the Lakota. American Ethnologist 22(1):28-53.

Blauner, Robert
1970 Soul Music and Blues: their meaning and relevance in northern United States black ghettos. *In* Afro-American Anthropology: Contemporary Perspectives. N.E.a.J.F.S. Whitten, ed. New York: Free Press.

Blu, Karen
1980 The Lumbee Problem: The Making of an American Indian People. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Branscum, Mrs. H.W.
1976 Vian. *In* The History of Sequoyah County 1828-1975. S.C.H. Society, ed. Pp. 158-162. Sallisaw, OK: Sequoyah County Historical Society.

Brightman, Robert A. and Pamela Wallace
2004 Chickasaw. *In* Handbook of North American Indians. W. Sturtevant, ed. Pp. 478-495, Vol. 14. Washington, D.C.: Handbook of North American Indians.

Campbell, Ora J.
1976 Foreman. *In* The History of Sequoyah County 1828-1975. S.C.H. Society, ed. Sallisaw: Sequoyah County Historical Society.

Carter, Kent
1999 The Dawes Commission. Orem, UT: Ancestry.com Incorporated.

Clifford, James
1988 Identity in Mashpee. *In* The Predicament of Culture. J. Clifford, ed. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Crockett, Norman L.
1979 The Black Towns. Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas.

Debo, Angie
1940 And Still the Waters Run: The Betrayal of the Five Civilized Tribes. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

DuBois, W.E.B.
2003 The Souls of Black Folk. New York: Barnes & Noble Classics.

Fanon, Frantz
1967 Black Skin White Masks. C.L. Markmann, transl. New York: Grove Press.

Feldhousen, Kristy, Elnora Anderson and Marilyn Vann
2005 Women in Color: Contemporary Black-Indian Lives in Oklahoma. *In* Race, Roots, and Relations: Native and African Americans. A.T. Straus, ed. Pp. 285-308: Albatross Press.

Fisher, Alyssa
2003 A Sight Which Can Never Be Forgotten: The Tulsa Race Riot. Archaeology.

Fixico, Donald
1986 Termination and Relocation: Federal Indian Policy, 1945-1960. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

Foreman, Carolyn Thomas
1947 John Gunter and his Family. *In* Oklahoma Historical Society. Oklahoma City.

Foreman, Grant
1928 Early Post Offices of Oklahoma. Chronicles of Oklahoma 6(3):271-298.

Franklin, Jimmie Lewis
1982 Journey Toward Hope: A History of Blacks in Oklahoma. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

Garroutte, Eva Marie
2003 Real Indians: Identity and the Survival of Native America. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Gates, Eddie Faye
1997 They Came Searching: How Blacks Sought the Promised Land in Tulsa. Austin, TX: Eakin Press.

Gibson, William H.
1971 History of the United Brothers of Friendship and Sisters of the Mysterious Ten: in two parts. Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press.

Gilroy, Paul
1993 The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Graham, William
1864 Frontier Sketches. Ladies Repository 24:411-415.

Gray, Linda
1988 Taft: Town on the Black Frontier. Chronicles of Oklahoma 66(4):430-447.

Grinde, Donald A., and Quintard Taylor
1984 Red vs Black: Conflict and Accommodation in the Post Civil War Indian Territory, 1865-1907. American Indian Quarterly 8(3):211-229.

Haley, Alex
1976 Roots. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Innes, Pam
2004 Creek in the West. *In* Handbook of North American Indians. W. Sturtevant, ed. Pp. 393-403, Vol. 14. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Insitution.

Jackson, Ron
2003 Cherokee Freedmen file joint lawsuit. *In* Daily Oklahoman. Pp. 1. Oklahoma City.

Kehoe, Alice B.
1992 North American Indians: A Comprehensive Account. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Kidwell, Clara Sue
2004 Choctaw in the West. *In* Handbook of North American Indians. W. Sturtevant, ed. Pp. 520-530, Vol. 14. Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Insitution.

King, Duane H.
2004 Cherokee in the West: History Since 1776. *In* Handbook of North American Indians. W. Sturtevant, ed. Pp. 354-372, Vol. 14. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution.

Krauthamer, Barbara
2000 Blacks on the Borders: African-Americans' Transition from Slavery to Freedom in Texas and the Indian Territory, 1836-1907. Dissertation, Princeton University.

Linker, Etta Gunter
1976 Gunter, James. *In* The History of Sequoyah County 1828-1975. S.C.H. Society, ed. Pp. 267. Lincoln, AR: ARC Press of Cane Hill.

Littlefield, Daniel F. Jr.
1978 The Cherokee Freedmen : From Emancipation to American citizenship. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press.

—

1979 Africans and Creeks: From the Colonial Period to the Civil War. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.

—

1980 The Chickasaw Freedmen: A People Without A Country. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

—

2006 Juneteenth and August Fourth Celebrations: Political Rally Days in Indian Territory. *In* Unpublished paper.

Lomawaima, Tsianina

1994 They Called it Prairie Light: The Story of Chilocco Indian School. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

May, Katja

1996 African Americans and Native Americans in the Creek and Cherokee Nations, 1830s to 1920s: Collision and Collusion. New York: Garland Publishing.

McLoughlin, W.G.

1977 The Cherokees in Transition: A Statistical Analysis of the Federal Cherokee Census of 1835. Journal of American History 64(3):678-703.

McLoughlin, William G.

1974 Red Indians, Black Slavery, and White Racism: America's Slaveholding Indians. American Quarterly 24:366-85.

Meyer, Melissa L.

1999 American Indian Blood Quantum Requirements: Blood is Thicker than Family. *In* Over the Edge: Remapping the American West. B. Allmedinger, ed. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Miles, Tiya

2000 "Bone of My Bone": Stories of a Black-Cherokee Family, 1790-1866. Dissertation, University of Minnesota.

—

2005 Ties That Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Miles, Tiya and Celia Naylor-Ojurongbe
2004 African-Americans in Indian Societies. *In* Handbook of North American Indians, Southeast Volume. W.C. Sturtevant, ed. Pp. 753-759, Vol. 14. Washington: Smithsonian Institution.

Mitchell, Okla Gunter
1976 Gunter, George Edward. *In* The History of Sequoyah County 1828-1975. S.C.H. Society, ed. Pp. 265-266. Lincoln, AR: ARC Press of Cane Hill.

Morrison, W.B.
1938 The Saga of Skullyville. Chronicles of Oklahoma 16(2):234-240.

Mulroy, Kevin
2004 Seminole Maroons. *In* Handbook of North American Indians, Southeast Volume. R.D. Fogelson, ed, Vol. 14. Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution.

—
2007 The Seminole Freedmen: A History. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

Nagel, Joane
1996 American Indian Ethnic Renewal: Red Power and the Resurgence of Identity and Culture. New York: Oxford University Press.

Nash, Gary B.
1974 Red, White, and Black: The Peoples of Early America. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Odell, Larry
2007 Boley, Vol. 2008: Oklahoma Historical Society.

Parman, Donald L.
1998 "Wholly Occupied with my Special Work": Reverend William Graham's Stay at Fort Coffee and New Hope, 1845-1847. Chronicles of Oklahoma 76(3):262-281.

Perdue, Theda
1979 Slavery and the Evolution of Cherokee Society: 1540-1866. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press.

Press, Associated
1995 Black Seminoles Urged to Fight for Share of Funds. *In* Daily Oklahoman. Pp. 16. Oklahoma City.

Price, Richard
1983 First Time: The Historical Vision of an Afro-American People. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Prucha, Francis Paul
1986 The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Rappaport, Joanne
1990 The Politics of Memory: Native Historical Interpretation in the Colombian Andes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sameth, Sigmund
1940 Creek Negroes: A Study of Race Relations. Dissertation, University of Oklahoma.

Saunt, Claudio
2005 Black, White, and Indian: Race and the Unmaking of an American Family. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sider, Gerald M.
1993 Lumbee Indian Histories: Race, Ethnicity, and Indian Identity in the Southern United States. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Speck, Frank
1907 Negro and White Exclusion Towns in Indian Territory and Oklahoma. Southern Workman 36:23-27.

—
1974 The Creek Indians of Taskigi Town. Memoirs of the American Anthropological Association II(2):103-164.

Strong, Pauline Turner and Barrik Van Winkle
1996 "Indian Blood": Reflections on the Reckoning and Refiguring of Native North American Identity. Cultural Anthropology 11(4):547-576.

Sturm, Circe
2002 Blood Politics: Race, Culture, and Identity in the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Tolson, Arthur L.
1974 The Black Oklahomans, A History: 1541-1972. New Orleans: Edwards Printing Company.

Wade, Peter
2002 Race, Nature and Culture: An Anthropological Perspective. London: Pluto Press.

Wickett, Murray
2000 Contested Territory: Whites, Native Americans, and African Americans in Oklahoma, 1865-1907. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.

Willis, William
1963 Divide and Rule: Red, White, and Black in the Southeast. Journal of Negro History 48(3):157-176.

Wilson, F.
1976 Gunter, G.W. and Eliza. *In* The History of Sequoyah County 1828-1975. S.C.H. Society, ed. Pp. 266-267. Lincoln, AR: ARC Press of Cane Hill.

Zellar, Gary
2007 African Creeks: Estelvste and the Creek Nation. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

Appendix

[1] Robert Littlejohn of the North Tulsa Historical Society, Presentation on the Origins of Native Americans, Meeting of the Descendants of Freedmen of the Five Civilized Tribes Association, 2005
[2] Ethnographic fieldwork 2004-2005; Ivan Van Sertima, *They Came Before Columbus* (Random House, 1976). For more discussion of possible contacts between Africans and Native Americans prior to 1500, see Jack D. Forbes, *Africans and Native Americans: The Language of Race and the Evolution of Red-Black Peoples* (University of Illinois Press, 1993) pp. 6-25.
[3] Mulroy uses the term maroon, as both William Sturtevant and Richard Price agreed that the people of African descent associated with Seminole communities in the Bahamas and Mexico fit this designation. Sturtevant later applied this term to Black Seminole communities of Indian Territory and Oklahoma. Both terms *Seminole* and *Maroon* originate from the Spanish word *cimarron*, meaning *fugitive* (Mulroy 2004: 475). Maroon societies are found throughout the New World's historic areas of slavery. See for example the work of Richard Price (1983); Rosalyn Howard, *Black Seminoles in the Bahamas* (University Press of Florida, 2002); and *Creativity and Resistance: Maroon Cultures in the Americas*, an online exhibit by the Smithsonian Institution's Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage http://www.folklife.si.edu/resources/maroon/start.htm, 1999
[4] For detailed and extensive histories on slavery in each of these nations, see the works of Daniel Littlefield Jr. noted in this bibliography, (1977, 1979, 1980). For history of slavery and African Creeks in the Muscogee Creek Nation, also see Gary Zellar (2007) in this bibliography; for the Cherokee see Perdue (1979) in this bibliography; and for the Choctaw, see Krauthamer (2000) in this bibliography.
[5] Interviews with former slaves and historical studies demonstrate that despite the presence of Black codes that prohibited slaves' possession of firearms, teaching slaves to read, sexual relationships between Blacks and Indians, etc., these things were common in everyday life in Indian Territory, and there was little enforcement of such laws. See for instance Miles's historical account of a prominent Cherokee man who married and had children with his slave, Doll (2005). Also see Baker (1996) in this bibliography.
[6] Tony Carolina interview, Indian Pioneer Papers, Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma.
[7] Peter Pitchlynn Papers, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma.
[8] Ethnographic fieldwork 2003-2005; Records of the Dawes Commission, Freedmen census cards and application packets, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma; Baker (1996) in this bibliography.
[9] Records of the Dawes Commission to the Five Civilized Tribes, Freedmen Doubtful and Rejected.
[10] A study of Choctaw and Chickasaw Freedmen census cards and testimony for the Dawes Commission shows that most Freedmen residents of the Grant area had been slaves of several large slaveholders with plantations along the Red River bottoms. Records of the Dawes Commission, Choctaw and Chickasaw Freedmen census cards and application packets, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma.
[11] US Senate Document, 55th Congress, 1st Session, Senate Doc. 149, no. 3563. Thanks to Jesse Schreier for supplying this document from his own research.
[12] Records of the Cherokee Nation: Freedmen, Oklahoma Historical Society.
[13] These were not towns in the traditional sense, that is, a cluster of residences near a town square or ceremonial grounds. These new towns, Arkansas Colored, Canadian Colored, and North Fork Colored towns, rather were large regions encompassing many different communities. In this way, depending on what region of the Creek Nation a Freedman lived, he or she would be represented through one of these Freedmen towns.
[14] Although the tribes had legal title over their lands and were sovereign nations, the federal government sought statehood for Indian Territory at any cost. Because of the strong tribal opposition to the federal government's plans, the Office of Indian Affairs created the Dawes Commission in 1893, appointing commissioners to negotiate the extinguishment of tribal title to the lands of Indian Territory either by cession or by allotment in severalty. The tribes were eventually induced to negotiate with the Dawes Commission concerning allotment and the creation of the tribal rolls because they saw that the federal government's proposals had turned to demands, and because they wanted to retain some degree

of control over the making of the tribal rolls. For many years, the tribes had not been able to stop the streams of outsiders intruding upon their lands. Now they feared that many more would be clamoring to be included on the tribal rolls and that consequently, reservation land would be distributed to thousands who were not tribal citizens (Carter 1999: 1-38).

[15] Records of the Dawes Commission to the Five Civilized Tribes, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma.

[16] The Choctaw Nation also had a "Mississippi Choctaw Roll" upon which were listed those Mississippi Choctaws who elected to move to the Choctaw Nation Indian Territory and secure an allotment there. The Cherokee Nation also had separate rolls for Shawnees and Delawares who were considered adopted citizens.

[17] There existed some opposition to Freedmen enrollment among some tribal members in each of the tribes, however, each tribe's agreement with the Dawes Commission provided for Freedmen enrollment (Carter 1999: 70). The Chickasaw Nation, which had never accepted its Freedmen as tribal citizens, asserted that the federal government had never removed the Freedmen from their nation as was its treaty obligation. During the period between removal and the Dawes era, the Black population in the Chickasaw Nation had increased. Tribal officials had maintained that the Chickasaw citizens had never owned more than about one thousand slaves, but the 1890 federal census showed 3,676 Blacks living in the nation. The tribal government explained this growth as the result of freed former slaves from the states entering the nation and forming networks with Chickasaw Freedmen. The great number of Blacks living in the Chickasaw Nation led many to refer to the nation as an "African stronghold." In actuality, Chickasaw slave holders had acquired more slaves prior to the Civil War, so that the Chickasaw Freedmen population following the Civil War was estimated at 2,000 (Littlefield 1980: 30) Responding to opposition from tribal officials, the Chickasaw Freedmen organized to fight for their rights (Carter 1999:70-71).

[18] See for example the case of Tom Bell, who was rejected from the Cherokee Freedmen roll because he did not meet the deadline for return to the Cherokee Nation. Records of the Dawes Commission, Cherokee Freedmen Doubtful and Rejected.

[19] There were some cases of people with Indian mothers and Freedmen fathers being enrolled on the Indian Rolls, however, the vast majority were enrolled on the Freedmen Rolls. While there were Black Indians with Indian mothers who were enrolled on the Indian rolls, many were induced to enroll as Freedmen. Charles Cohee, president of the Chickasaw Freedmen Association and member of a committee serving the Dawes Commission in determining Chickasaw Freedmen citizenship, was present in the Dawes Commission tents as they received applications and interviewed applicants, and stated that applicants of mixed Black and Indian blood were compelled to enroll as Freedmen (Carter 1999: 99).

[20] There were countless instances of brothers and sisters who shared a parent or parents being enrolled on separate rolls: some being enrolled as Freedmen and some being enrolled as Indians. Silas Jefferson, who was half-Creek and half-Black and served in the Creek government, was enrolled as a Creek Indian. Several of his children, however, were enrolled as Freedmen with no Indian blood quantum. Ronald Graham of the Descendants of Freedmen of the Five Civilized Tribes brought attention to this fact through genealogy and continuous presentation of this documentation at meetings of the organization. Other tribal families, including those national tribal chiefs, show the same pattern. Descendants of Samuel Perryman, former chief of the Creek Nation, had several grandchildren who were alternately enrolled as Indians or as Freedmen. The same is true of Choctaw chief Jackson McCurtain, who fathered at least one son who was enrolled as a Freedman. See Dawes Census Cards of Creek Freedman Martha White and Choctaw Freedman David McCurtain.

[21] Historian Angie Debo brought to light the connections between members of the Dawes Commission and land speculation companies, describing the corruption that led to the mass alienation of tribal lands after allotment (Debo 1940).

[22] Ethnographic fieldwork Fort Coffee, Oklahoma 2003-2005; Records of the Dawes Commission, Choctaw Freedmen Census Cards.

[23] Oral history interview with Ivory Grayson, Oklahoma City, 2003.

[24] Family histories state that John Edward Gunter, Sr. was a Welshman (Linker 1976: 267; Mitchell 1976: 265). However, Carolyn Thomas Foreman's biography of the Gunter family states that he was a "Scots trader" (Foreman 1947: 2).

[25] *Cherokee Advocate*, October 19, 1844, quoted in Foreman 1947: 37.
[26] Cherokee Freedmen enrollment cards of the Dawes Commission: Rhoda Foreman, Jerry Foreman, Zack Foreman.
[27] Zack Foreman's age has been calculated from his age recorded on Dawes enrollment documents. His Dawes census card lists his age as 53 in 1901. This would have made him 15 years old in 1863.
[28] National Park Service Online Civil War Soldiers and Sailors System, accessed 10/13/2004. Zack Foreman is listed incorrectly as "Jachary" Foreman; Application Packet for Jerry Foreman, F308, Records of the Commissioner to the Five Civilized Tribes.
[29] Records of the Commissioner to the Five Civilized Tribes, Cherokee Freedmen, Jerry Foreman, F308.
[30] Interview with J.J. Cape, Indian Pioneer Papers, Western History Library, University of Oklahoma.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Records of the Commissioner to the Five Civilized Tribes, Cherokee Freedmen, Zack Foreman, F300.
[33] Most historic Black towns of Indian Territory, including Freedmen towns, had established Prince Hall Masonic lodges prior to statehood.
[34] Interview with Rose Youngblood, Foreman resident.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Gary Zellar discusses in-depth the social, political, and economic heights to which some African Creeks rose prior to statehood. Among the most notable are Island Smith, Warrior Rentie, Cow Tom, Paro Bruner, and Silas Jefferson. Creek chiefs of African descent included Legus Perryman and Pleasant Porter. Zellar, *African Creeks*.
[37] Testimony in *Peggie Holt v. George Gunter and Zack Foreman*, Records of the Cherokee Nation (CHN) Roll 47, Oklahoma Historical Society; Records of Stray Property Sold, Sequoyah District, Records of the Cherokee Nation (CHN), Oklahoma Historical Society.
[38] Interviews with former and current Foreman residents, 2004-2005.
[39] *Delila Hicks v. George Gunter & Zack Foreman, Peggie Holt v. George Gunter & Zack Foreman*. Records of the Cherokee Nation (CHN), Roll 47, Oklahoma Historical Society.
[40] Interview with J.J. Cape, Indian Pioneer Papers, Western History Library, University of Oklahoma.
[41] Freedmen Records, Cherokee Nation Records Roll 81, Oklahoma Historical Society.
[42] Information as to Small Towns, Foreman, Cherokee Nation. Records of the Dawes Commission, Cherokee. Oklahoma Historical Society. Document generously provided by Dr. Daniel Littlefield, Jr.
[43] Plat maps of the Cherokee Nation. Oklahoma Historical Society.
[44] Oral histories state that several of Zack's sons became involved in the cattle ranching business, and that Roscoe Foreman ran the post office for some time.
[45] Dawes enrollment records of Cherokee Freedmen residing in Foreman show that many Freedmen were married to non-citizen Blacks. Present-day oral histories and genealogies of Freedmen who grew up in Foreman also attest to the frequent intermarriage between Freedmen and State Blacks.
[46] Sections 1 and 9 of Act of Congress approved May 27, 1908.
[47] The oldest residents of Foreman have never heard of the surnames of many of the Cherokee Freedmen allottees in the Foreman area, suggesting that their land was alienated early-on and they left the community.
[48] Probate records, Zack Foreman, Sallisaw County Courthouse.
[49] Zack Jr.'s involvement in Negro Leagues baseball was brought up briefly in conversation with one Foreman resident, and has been confirmed by Negro League Baseball historian Larry Lester of NoirTech Research, Inc.
[50] Oral histories with Foreman residents, 2003-2005; *Foye v. State*, 1928 OK CR 347, 272 p.491, 41 Okl. Cr. 280, Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals, Oklahoma State Courts Network, www.oscn.net, retrieved 11/16/08.
[51] Interview with Josephine Wallace Brown, 2005.
[52] In his 2006 unpublished paper, Daniel Littlefield observed that emancipation day celebrations had declined greatly by the end of the nineteenth century, and that they became increasingly violent. Aims to make profits had also begun to factor into the celebrations, as attendees were charged for admission, food, and other forms of entertainment. A 1938 interview with Elizabeth Ross claims that by that time, only the elderly Freedmen recalled the large picnics. Elizabeth Ross interview, Indian Pioneer Papers,

Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma. However, these accounts do not study July 4 picnics held by Freedmen, and it is possible that these celebrations also shifted to July 4 in other Freedmen communities.

[53] Fort Coffee had been established on June 16, 1834 and was named in honor of General John Coffee of Tennessee. The fort was established on Swallow Rock, a limestone bluff upriver from Fort Smith, and its main purpose at that time was to deter whiskey smugglers from reaching Indian Territory by boat.

[54] Sarah Harlan interview, Indian Pioneer Papers, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Indian Pioneer Papers, Squire Hall interview, Western History Collections

[59] The present town of Fort Coffee is located at Township 9 North, Range 26 East. Censuses of 1890 and 1900 refer to this area as Oak Lodge, as do historic documents of the Choctaw Nation and Oklahoma. This was supposedly the community name, distinguishing it from the actual fort nearby, which was called Fort Coffee. However, none of my informants recall the community ever being called Oak Lodge.

[60] This assumption is based on oral histories from Fort Coffee residents as well as inference from the historical record. Several people in Fort Coffee say their Black-Indian ancestors lived there prior to the Civil War. Additionally, free people of African descent commonly clustered around forts in Indian Territory, at times for protection and other times for proximity to resources. Scullyville was also an important economic and political center, and was home to federal government agents and missionaries, making it an attractive site for free Blacks of the Choctaw Nation.

[61] According to oral history of Mr. Levester McKesson, mayor of Fort Coffee and local historian. No resident of Fort Coffee recalls the Methodist church, thus it must have been destroyed early in the twentieth century.

[62] "History of Mount Triumph Missionary Baptist Church," pamphlet for presentation at church anniversary, 2006.

[63] "Memorial of A Committee on Behalf of the Colored People of the Choctaw and Chickasaw Tribes of Indians." Senate Document, 41st Congress, Second Session. Misc. Doc. No. 106.

[64] Letter from Cyrus Kingsbury to S.B. Treat, 1865. Cyrus Kingsbury Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma.

[65] Record Group 48, Box 48, National Archives Fort Worth, Texas. Special thanks to Jesse Schreier for supplying these documents.

[66] Ibid.

[67] 1885 Roll of Choctaw Freedmen who Elected to Leave the Nation; Records of the Dawes Commission, Choctaw Freedmen Doubtful and Rejected.

[68] Walker Folsom took over the Hall plantation after the uprising that killed several of the Hall family men. Eliza Hall returned to the plantation that was now owned by Walker Folsom. Indian Pioneer Papers, Squire Hall interview, Western History Collections University of Oklahoma.

[69] Letter to E.A. Hayt, Commissioner of Indian Affairs from Rev. R.S. Cutting, American Baptist Home Mission Society, August 30, 1878. Newberry Library collections, Chicago. Special thanks to Dr. Clara Sue Kidwell for supplying this document.

[70] Records of the Choctaw Nation, Scullyville District, Oklahoma Historical Society.

[71] Indian Pioneer Papers, Squire Hall interview, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma.

[72] This data is a result of the combination of information from the 1900 census and the Dawes Rolls, which were compiled during the same time. This information shows that many of the families listed as White on the census were actually Choctaw, usually listed on the Dawes Roll as ¼ or less blood quantum. Many of those who were listed as Black and not found on the Dawes Rolls may have been Choctaw or Choctaw Freedmen who were not enrolled. Consequently, these numbers should not be taken as accurate, but as approximate figures of the racial makeup and diversity of the area. Census takers at the time often listed people of Black-Choctaw ancestry as Black, did not record every family in the area, and general misinformation makes the census unreliable at times.

[73] 1896 Choctaw Nation Application for Citizenship of Annie Craig, National Archives, Fort Worth, Texas.
[74] Records of the Dawes Commission, Choctaw Freedmen enrollment cards and application packets, Fort Smith Public Library.
[75] 1896 Census, Choctaw Nation.
[76] Records of the Dawes Commission, Choctaw Freedman Anna Craig F679; Township plats of the Choctaw Nation, LeFlore County Courthouse; Oral history of Brenda Lewis of Fort Coffee.
[77] Sections 1 and 9 of Act of Congress approved May 27, 1908; Debo 1980: 89.
[78] This information comes from several Fort Coffee residents, as well as a study of several cases of allotment loss due to non-payment of mortgage in Fort Coffee.
[79] Legal documents concernting the transfer of land in sale or mortgage carry no evidence of the social circumstances surrounding them. However, community members today recall various townspeople who lost their land to the wealthier families of Fort Coffee, and this is seen negatively by virtually all people who are not descendants of these so-called rich families.
[80] Oral histories of Fort Coffee residents tell of grandparents who moved to the area from elsewhere after statehood.
[81] Most Fort Coffee families can trace ancestry to at least one non-Freedman ancestor, and all of the families in Fort Coffee are historically connected to one another through marriage. A common saying in Fort Coffee is, "Everyone here on Fort Coffee is related." Oral histories state that Roselawn Cemetery was reserved exclusively for Freedmen.
[82] The author and researcher is a White woman of light complexion.
[83] Letter courtesy of Brenda Lewis of Fort Coffee. The date of the letter is unknown, but was most probably written in the early 1920s, as Daniel Craig was born in 1895 and most likely attended medical school while in his twenties.
[84] Interview with Brenda Lewis of Fort Coffee.
[85] Interviews with Curtis Lee and Melvin Delt of Fort Coffee.
[86] Interview with Harold Gist of Fort Coffee.
[87] Harvey Shoate of Fort Coffee related that many times older people in the community had some fears about the installation of electric lights and other conveniences and refused to have them in their homes until they saw over time that they were safe.
[88] Permission was given by Melvin Delt to reproduce this quote in this dissertation. His caveat, "You might not wanna put this on the record…" demonstrates the hesitancy with which many people in Fort Coffee speak about their responses to racism over the years.
[89] This seeming continual portrayal of Fort Coffee was discussed at length by Denay Burris, then mayor of Fort Coffee, who has addressed this in several editorials in local newspapers.
[90] Lack of police coverage and the consequent use of the town for illegal activity was a major problem identified by then mayor, Denay Burris.
[91] Interview with Henrietta McKesson, 2005.
[92] The major part of the mound was on Rachel Brown's allotment, a 64-year-old woman who was said to be Indian, having straight black hair that was so long she could sit on it. She was enrolled as a Choctaw Freedman by the Dawes Commission. She lived until 1921 and it was said that as long as she was alive, no one disturbed the mound. Oral and written histories attribute this to the story that Rachel told about what she had seen one night when she looked out her window at the mound. She saw that it was covered with flickering sheets of blue fire. Out of the mound came a team of cats, harnessed to a wagon which they pulled around and around the base of the mound. Nobody doubted her and people generally stayed away from it.[92] However, the land and the mound passed out of the family's hands after Rachel's death and it was eventually destroyed by pothunters and the Pocola Mining Company, which used explosives to find the artifacts inside. The mound became two smaller mounds which went relatively undisturbed for some time between the 1940s and the 1980s, when the Oklahoma Historical Society took over the site and established a museum. Up until this time, Freedmen families continued to live near the mounds. Freedmen who grew up in this area of Fort Coffee recall playing as children and finding arrowheads and human skeletal remains, and many artifacts would be turned up when tilling fields all over Fort Coffee. As children, they would sell arrowheads and beads for 25 cents to White people driving through town.
[93] *Moses Whitmire v. Cherokee Nation and United States.*

[94] *P.A. Lewis, Xenophon Jones, and Eddie Warrior, on the relation of the Creek Freedmen Association vs. United States of America* (Docket 25, 1949) was dismissed as an intra-tribal affair over which the United States had no jurisdiction, as Creek Freedmen were a specific group of tribal citizens with a complaint against the tribal government. *Cherokee Freedmen, and Cherokee Freedmen's Association v. United States of America* (Docket 123, 1960) was dismissed in 1964 (Sturm 2002:177). The BIA excluded Seminole Freedmen from the $16 million payment in 1976 because they were regarded as non-citizens of the Seminole Nation prior to their formal adoption in 1866 (Mulroy 2004:474).
[95] Wilson Randle interview, Grant Foreman Collection, Indian Pioneer History, Oklahoma Historical Society, v.113, 206-207.
[96] Interview with Alice Andrews, pp. 39-41.
[97] Interview with DeEtta Perryman Gray in Gates 1997, pp.91-93. Testimony in *Ronald Graham v. Muscogee Creek Nation Citizenship Board*, and *Fred Johnson v. Muscogee Creek Citizenship Board*, 2005. Fieldwork and oral histories conducted in Tulsa and surrounding areas, 2003-2005.
[98] Interviews with Freedmen descendants in Oklahoma, 2002-2005.
[99] Application for Additional Funds to Defend and Temporary Allowance for Support. *Sammie Ispcogee vs. Sam Ispocogee*. District Court, Tulsa County, Oklahoma, No. D-10830. Special thanks to Robert Littlejohn for supplying this document.
[100] In re Atkins' Estate, Atkins et. Al. v. Rust et. Al., No. 20749. Supreme Court of Oklahoma July 7, 1931. Pacific Reporter, v. 3, 2d Series, p. 682-687. Special thanks to Robert Littlejohn for supplying this document.
[101] http://www.chickasaw.net/about_us/index_124.htm accessed 10/10/08; http://www.choctawnation.com/files/Constitution.pdf accessed 10/10/08; *Ronald Graham v. Creek Nation Citizenship Board*, *Fred Johnson v. Creek Nation Citizenship Board*, 2005; Sturm 2002: 178-179.
[102] Interviews conducted with Freedmen across Oklahoma, 2003-2006. See also Sturm 2002: 178-185.
[103] In the Cherokee Nation, Cherokee Freedmen used Cherokee courts, sat on juries, and served as elected officials until the Cherokee Nation government was dismantled in the early twentieth century. Throughout the century, Freedmen shared in some tribal payments and had voted in tribal elections since re-organization in the 1970s (Littlefield 1978:249; Sturm 2002: 171-178).
[104] Interviews with Freedmen descendants in Oklahoma, 2002-2005.
[105] Testimony from *Ronald Graham v. Creek Nation Citizenship Board*, and *Fred Johnson v. Creek Nation Citizenship Board*, 2005.
[106] *Bernice Riggs v. Cherokee Nation Citizenship Board*
[107] *Ronald Graham v. Creek Nation Citizenship Board, Fred Johnson v. Creek Nation Citizenship Board*, 2005.
[108] *Ronald Graham v. Creek Nation Citizenship Board*, August 2006
[109] "Focus: 'Black Indians' Find Roots Well Hidden." Randy Krehbiel, *Tulsa World*, 2/4/2002
[110] Interview with Marilyn Vann, Fall 2002
[111] "Seminoles Struggle Over Choice of Chief," by Dawn Marks, *Daily Oklahoman*, December 27, 2002.
[112] Field notes, Feb. 17, 2005.
[113] *Marilyn Vann et. Al. v. Dirk Kempthorne*, Memorandum Order and Opinion, 12/19/2006
[114] Field notes, 2004
[115] "Citizen Views Fall on Both Sides of Freedmen Issue." Chad Smith, Cherokee Nation News Release, 03/13/2006
[116] "Leeds Dissent Points to Initiative Petition Irregularities." Will Chavez, Cherokee Phoenix, January 2007.
[117] "Cherokee Nation Special Election Results," Cherokee Nation News Release, www.cherokee.org, accessed 3/3/07.
[118] NAHASDA Clears Congress with Freedmen Provision. *Indianz.com*, September 26, 2008.
[119] Library of Congress website, http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d110:h.r.02824:, accessed 08/10/08.
[120] www.cherokee.org, accessed 2/11/08
[121] "If Cherokee Funding is Cut, Who Will Feel the Pain?" Cherokee Nation Publication, 2007.

[122] See "Kalahari Revisionism, Vienna, and the 'Indigenous Peoples' Debate" by Alan Bernard, and "Discussion: The Concept of Indigeneity" in *Social Anthropology*, v. 14 v. 1, pp.1-32; "Indigeneity? First Peoples and Last Occupancy" by Jeremy Waldron, in *New Zealand Journal of Public and International Law*, 2003, 1:55; "Recognizing Indigenism: Canadian Unity and the International Movement of Indigenous Peoples" by Ronald Niezen, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, v.42 n.1.pp. 119-148.
[123] Interview with Reverend Melvin Williams of Roland, Oklahoma, 2005.
[124] Interview with Cecil Jones of Tatums, Oklahoma, 2004.