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“THE MODERN FRONTIER”: OKLAHOMA SETTLER MEMORY IN THE MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

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Abstract

In 2020, the Oklahoma City Convention and Visitors Bureau launched the "Modern Frontier" campaign to attract tourists, residents, and businesses to Oklahoma City. Surveying the history of what became the state of Oklahoma helps to contextualize this "Modern Frontier" campaign. Three commemorative moments occurred in the aftermath of these segregation laws, the Dust Bowl, and the Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act. In 1939, 1948, and 1957, respectively, white boosters (mis)used historical events and constructed historical narratives that celebrated white settlement at the expense of Indigenous peoples and African Americans. I argue that white Oklahomans used a hegemonic settler memory of nostalgia and progress to make Native people (at times) strategically visible and make Black people absent from Oklahoma history. However, the attempt to assert this hegemonic settler memory was met with Native and African American resistance. Ultimately, these three moments suggest that Oklahoma identity and community were under intellectual construction during the mid-century. The degree of a community's inclusion in the popular memory of place correlated to a group's relative access to power. Commemorations of the past became moments that shaped the memory landscape of Oklahoma, mobilizing usable histories for the purposes of celebration and tourism. But something else happened that the white boosters did not intend: these commemorations provided the context in which Black and Native Oklahomans negotiated their belonging as historical actors in the popular memory of Indian Territory and Oklahoma.

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Introduction

In 2020, the Oklahoma City Convention and Visitors Bureau launched the "Modern Frontier" campaign to attract tourists, residents, and businesses to Oklahoma City. This tourism campaign used the "Modern Fronter" tagline, because Oklahoma City "embodie[d] the Modern Frontier and defined its own future," and was a "young city steeped in Native American and Western culture, openness, and an enterprising nature."[1] In developing this campaign, the Oklahoma City Convention and Visitors Bureau conducted "extensive research with [a] local branding agency," including interviews with community stakeholders, studying "competitor peer destination brands," media analysis, and "branding exercises."[2] In the campaign's brand guide, the marketers referred to the "voice" of Oklahoma City as "nostalgic," which they defined with the terms "heritage," "slower-paced," and "respectful of the past."[3] Ironically, the marketers of Oklahoma City expressed acute awareness that nostalgia serves as the cornerstone of the "Modern Frontier" campaign, though their analysis of nostalgia seems more celebratory than critical.

While the function of the frontier in the "Modern Frontier" recalls popular images of the American West, the modifier "modern" has its own historical origins dating back to boosterism in the mid-twentieth century. At this time, white Oklahomans became obsessed with presenting Oklahoma as a modern, progressive place. White boosters contemplated the relationship between frontierism, the ideology that white settlement was destined to expand westward, and modernity,

[1] "OKC: Our Modern Frontier," Visit Oklahoma City, accessed March 25, 2023, https://www.visitokc.com/the-modern-frontier/.
[2] Lindsay Vidrine, email message to author, February 27, 2023. Vidrine is the Senior Vice President of Visit OKC.
[3] "Campaign Brand Guide & Logos," Visit Oklahoma City, accessed March 25, 2023, https://www.visitokc.com/industry-resources/brand-guide-logos/.

the idea that technological advances and social advancements have created a break with the past.[4] White boosters made their ideas frontierism and modernity operational through their commemorations of historical events. While Oklahoma was remade as the homeland for Native Nations in the years leading up the mid-century, White Oklahomans selectively incorporated Native people into the memory of Oklahoma in order to further assert Oklahoma's modernity. In contrast, boosters left out Black people.[5] In the middle of the twentieth century, Oklahomans—Black, white, and Native—negotiated who belonged and who did not—to the social and political fabric of Oklahoma. Belonging ultimately represented a group's existence and agency in narratives of the past, reflecting their proximity to socio-political power. Oklahomans performed, imagined, and contested their claims of belonging to place by remembering the white settlement of Indian Territory, Oklahoma Territory, and Oklahoma. Commemorations of the past became moments that shaped popular understandings of Oklahoma history, mobilizing usable histories for the purposes of celebration and tourism. But something else happened that the white boosters did not intend: these commemorations provided the context in which Black and Native

[4] My definitions of settler colonialism draw on the following works: Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event* (London: Cassell, 1999); Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Rita Dhamoon, "A Feminist Approach to Decolonizing Anti-racism Rethinking Transnationalism, Intersectionality, and Settler Colonialism," *Feral Feminisms*, no. 4 (Summer 2015); Adam Dahl, *Empire of the People: Settler Colonialism and the Foundations of Modern Democratic Thought* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2018). For defining and understanding modernity, I draw on Lynn Hunt, *Measuring Time, Making History* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2008); Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy, "Introduction," in *The Collective Memory Reader*, ed. Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy (London: Oxford University Press), 3-62.

[5] For the purposes of this paper, I use the term "Black" to refer to both Freedmen of the Five Tribes and non-tribal affiliated African Americans, largely because of the time period at time. In contrast, I use the term "African American" to refer to non-tribal affiliated African Americans who migrated to Oklahoma after the Civil War from the South. While I do not seek to collapse the important historical and contemporary differences between these groups, the state of Oklahoma and white Oklahomans treated Freedmen of the Five Tribes and non-tribal affiliated African Americans with the same discrimination of Jim Crow laws.

Oklahomans advocated for their belonging as historical actors in the history of Indian Territory and later Oklahoma.

Surveying the history of what became the state of Oklahoma helps to contextualize the "Modern Frontier" campaign. The land that now makes up the state of Oklahoma is the ancestral homeland of the Caddo, Osage, Quapaw, and Wichita peoples. The Pawnee, Quapaw, and Kiowa also had seasonal relationships with the area. While France claimed the land that was Oklahoma and then eventually sold it to the United States in 1803 as part of the Louisiana Purchase, the space remained a Native world for well into the nineteenth century.[6] Native nations called this land home, while the U.S. military began to establish military posts.[7] In the early years of the nineteenth century, some members of the Creek, Cherokee, and Choctaw nations voluntarily moved westward, to present-day Oklahoma and Arkansas. However, the large next wave of demographic change occurred after 1830, when Congress passed the Indian Removal Act that mandated the forced removal of the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Seminole, and Muscogee (Creek) nations to what was then called Indian Territory because white Southerners wanted to use the Southeast to expand plantation slavery. On their deadly forced migration paths, many Native people died, along with the African-descended peoples they had enslaved. Some of these

[6] For this phrasing of "Native world," I draw on the work of Michael Witgen, *An Infinity of Nations: How the Native New World Shaped Early North America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012). While Witgen focuses his study on Indigenous peoples of the Great Lakes and Northern Great Plains, his idea that lands outside of the eastern seaboard remained a Native World until well into the nineteenth century can also be extended to the Southern Great Plains. While the United States "purchased" the territory in 1803 from France, the geographical and logistical takeover was "piecemeal." See Robert Lee, "Accounting for Conquest: The Price of Louisiana Purchase of Indian Country," *Journal of American History* 103 no. 4 (March 2017): 921-942.

[7] See Brad Agnew, *Fort Gibson: Terminal on the Trail of Tears* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980); David La Vere, *Contrary Neighbors: Southern Plains and Removed Indians in Indian Territory* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000); Francis Paul Prucha, *The Sword of the Republic: The United States Army on the Frontier, 1783–1846* (1969; reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986).

people had mixed African and Indigenous ancestry, and their level of incorporation into the broader community varied by tribe and context.[8] Beyond these nations that became known patronizingly as the "Five Civilized Tribes," now modernized as the Five Tribes, the United States federal government forcibly removed many other tribes from the upper Great Plains and the upper Midwest regions to Oklahoma during the 1830s and throughout the nineteenth century.[9] Because of the Native nations that considered it an ancestral homeland and the Native nations that were forcibly removed, Indian Territory (and eventually Oklahoma) had a great diversity of Native nations with cultural, linguistic, political, and social differences.

While these removed Native nations rebuilt their societies in Indian Territory and other Native nations dispossessed by these removals had to similarly rebuild, the Homestead Act of 1862 paved the way for mass European-American migration to Indian Territory and Oklahoma Territory in the late nineteenth century. The United States government stripped lands previously promised to Native peoples and opened the lands for European-American settlement. The most famous, mass experience of white migration into Indian Territory was the Land Run (or Rush) of 1889, when white settlers took off to stake a land claim, a process which established major towns like Oklahoma City, Norman, and Guthrie. The Land Run of 1889 marked a moment of settler colonialism, a historical process in which Anglo-Americans and European immigrants attempted to completely replace Native peoples physically, socially, politically, and culturally through

[8] For works on the Five Tribes' enslavement of African-descended people and Freedmen of the Five Tribes, see Tiya Miles, *Ties that Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Alaina Roberts, *I've Been Here All the While: Black freedom on Native Land* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021); David Chang, *The Color of the Land: Race, Nation, and the Politics of Landownership in Oklahoma, 1832-1929* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).
[9] See John P. Bowes, *Land Too Good for Indians: Northern Indian Removal* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016).

dispossessing them of their land and activating violently towards them.[10] Along with white settlers, many African American settlers, escaping the post-Reconstruction South, moved into these territories. Later, the Curtis Act of 1898 brought about the dissolution of Native governments and segmented Native lands into individual allotments, which paved the way for white settlement of Indian Territory. This act, along with continued white migration, led to the establishment of Oklahoma as a state on November 16, 1907. While Native politicians had pushed for the creation of a separate State of Sequoyah and African American leaders like E.P. McCabe pushed for an all-Black state, President Theodore Roosevelt demanded that Indian Territory and Oklahoma Territory be joined as one state.[11] During the first few decades of statehood, the new legislature passed segregation laws and the state became increasingly hostile to Black people, prompting some migration out of the state.[12] Other Black people stayed and still

[10] While this is a simplification of a hotly contested and complex term, I draw on the following works to form my theoretical understanding of settler colonialism: Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event* (London: Cassell, 1999); Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Rita Dhamoon, "A Feminist Approach to Decolonizing Anti-racism Rethinking Transnationalism, Intersectionality, and Settler Colonialism," *Feral Feminisms*, no. 4 (Summer 2015); Adam Dahl, *Empire of the People: Settler Colonialism and the Foundations of Modern Democratic Thought* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2018). For defining and understanding modernity, I draw on Lynn Hunt, *Measuring Time, Making History* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2008); Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy, "Introduction," in *The Collective Memory Reader*, ed. Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy (London: Oxford University Press), 3-62.

[11] For information on the proposed State of Sequoyah, see Angie Debo, *And Still the Waters Run: The Betrayal of the Five Civilized Tribes* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1940); Amos D. Maxwell, "The Sequoyah Convention," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 28, no. 1 (Spring 1950): 161-192; Jeffrey Burton, *Indian Territory and the United States, 1866–1906: Courts, Government and the Movement for Oklahoma Statehood* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995). For information on McCabe's push for an all-Black state, see Jimmie Lewis Franklin, *Journey Toward Hope: History of Blacks in Oklahoma* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982); Eddie Jackson, *Oklalusa: The Story of the Black State Movement in Oklahoma* (Independently published, 2020).

[12] Franklin, *Journey Toward Hope*, 33. See also: Kendra Taira Field, *Growing Up with the Country: Family, Race, and Nation after the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press,

more migrants from the Deep South continued into Oklahoma, believing it the "promised land." Black Oklahomans experienced the limits of this "promised land" with the Tulsa Race Massacre, when white Tulsans descended upon the wealthy and preposterous Black Wall Street and attacked Black Tulsans, killing many and destroying homes and businesses.[13]

In the first decades of statehood, Oklahoma's economy revolved around agriculture and oil. In the 1930s, Oklahoma became the site of a major drought and over-farming crisis known as the Dust Bowl, leading white, Black, and Native people to leave the state in search of better lives.[14] In 1939, John Steinbeck published *The Grapes of Wrath*, which chronicled the impoverished white Joad family as they moved from Oklahoma to California, seeking work and opportunity because of the Dust Bowl. This novel became a hegemonic representation of Oklahoma on that national landscape.[15] Meanwhile, the 1937 Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act, Oklahoma's equivalent to the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, walked back the detribalization and allotment efforts of the Curtis Act. Thus, the late 1930s became a time of rebuilding for many Native nations.[16]

Three commemorative moments occurred in the aftermath of these segregation laws, the Dust Bowl, and the Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act. In 1939, 1948, and 1957, respectively, white boosters (mis)used historical events and constructed historical narratives that celebrated white settlement at the expense of Indigenous peoples and African Americans. First, in 1939, white

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2018); R. Bruce Shepard, *Deemed Unsuitable: Blacks from Oklahoma Move to the Canadian Prairies in Search of Equality in the Early 20th Century, Only to Find Racism in Their New Home* (Toronto: Umbrella Press, 1991).

[13] Franklin, *Journey Toward Hope,* 142.

[14] Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s* (London: Oxford University Press, 2004), 5.

[15] Jennifer J. Collins, "The Lingering Shadow: *The Grapes of Wrath* and Oklahoma Leaders in the Post-Depression Era," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 81, no.1(Spring 2003), 80.

[16] Peter M. Wright, "John Collier and the Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act of 1936," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 50 (Fall 1972): 347.

boosters organized the “Golden Anniversary " of the Land Run of 1889, when the celebration of white settlement served as a hegemonic memory exercised through embodied commemorations like Land Run reenactments. Hegemonic memories are popular understandings of the past that tend to be the historical narratives circulated in schools, museums, and media, and they often reflect the community with the most social, political, and economic power. In contrast, counter-memories represent mnemonic challenges to hegemonic memories. Native people and African Americans in Oklahoma complicated and contested memories of the Land Run of 1889, while the white press largely ignored the histories of these communities.

Ten years after this commemoration, boosters in Eastern Oklahoma commemorated the removal of the Five Tribes and their settlement in Indian Territory in a celebration called the “Indian Centennial of 1948” in Muskogee, Oklahoma. White boosters largely set the terms for how to remember removal, but Native peoples selectively participated and others critiqued the historical narratives within the commemoration. Like the Golden Anniversary of the Land Run, boosters and the white press did not include Black people as historically important actors in their memories of removal and the rebuilding of the Five Tribes after removal, even though Muskogee had a vibrant Black community, made up of both tribal associated Freedmen and African Americans who had migrated from the South after the Civil War.

Ten years later, Oklahomans celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of statehood with the Semi-Centennial of Statehood celebration in 1957, when white boosters selectively incorporated Native peoples and culture to attract tourists while the white boosters pushed Black people to the margins of their state histories. Each of these commemorations became occasions to express and practice a hegemonic settler memory, although Indigenous peoples held their own memories of statehood that sought to emphasize their own agency as both historical and commemorative

actors. Likewise, in the era of Oklahoma's civil rights movement, African Americans took part in the Semi-Centennial as commemorative actors, highlighting the Black history of Oklahoma. Taking together these three commemorative moments, I argue that white Oklahomans used a hegemonic settler memory of nostalgia and progress to make Native people (at times) strategically visible and Black people nearly invisible in Oklahoma history. However, the attempt to assert this hegemonic settler memory was met with Native and African American challenges, at times privately and at other times publicly. The degree of a community's inclusion in the popular memory of place correlated to a group's relative access to power. Ultimately, these three moments suggest that Oklahoma identity and belonging remained under intellectual construction during the mid-twentieth century, as Oklahomans grappled with their histories.

For the purposes of this project, settler memory refers to the mnemonic practices and narratives that simultaneously make visible and invisible contemporary Indigeneity in order to assert white settler domination over the land and the narratives attached to place. Mnemonic practices refers to commemorative events and actions that make history usable for a triumphalist end, like Land Run re-enactments and parades. A key part of this settler memory in Oklahoma was how white boosters selectively included Native people into modernity and at other times excluded them from modernity. Settler memory served as a hegemonic memory in Oklahoma during the mid-twentieth century, because white boosters operated at the helm of commemorations based on their own celebratory historical narratives. At the same time, however, African Americans and Native peoples expressed their own memories that challenged settler narrations of the past. Oklahoma remained a place where communities contested the

dominant memory, because alternative memories made cracks in the facade of dominant settler memory.[17]

Further, settler memory installed white identity and history on the level of the body, transforming the body into a site of white settler performance. Settler ideas of property, whiteness, and domination form the settler logics that older generations of white white settlers transmitted to younger generations. These logics functioned on the level of the body, which served a usable embodiment of racial hierarchies and power. Settler memory applied settler logic to a body that was white or other, modern or anti-modern. By instilling the settler memory on the level of the body, white boosters created a performance of white settlement, a chance to stake a claim on stolen land and renew the narrative of white settler progress. For example, white boosters created so-called 89ers out of settler bodies fifty years after the Land Run of 1889. Simultaneously, white boosters racialized the bodies of Indigenous people as sites of performances of the anti-modern, banished from contemporary existence. These embodied memories required easily identifiable markers on the body to racialize Oklahomans and delineate who was a settler or not, who was white or not. The embodiment of memories often relied on a gendered body, a body already marked with the "naturalness" of gender difference, to further assume the "naturalness" or inevitability of race or colonized status on the body.[18] These two

[17] I define settler memory in concordance with the work of Kevin Bruyneel (discussed later in introduction). My approach to collective memory and counter-memories draws on the scholarship of Jeffrey K. Olick, "Collective Memory: The Two Cultures," in *The Collective Memory Reader*, eds. Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy (London: Oxford University Press), 225-228; Eric Hobsbawn and Terence Ranger, ed., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Svetlana Boym, "Nostalgia and Its Discontents," in *The Collective Memory Reader*, eds. Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy (London: Oxford University Press), 452-457.

[18] For this idea, I borrow from Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

processes, the construction of race and gender, became inextricably linked in determining how settlers performed settler memory.

This project builds upon frameworks of settler memory put forward by other scholars. Most of the memory literature on settler colonialism looks at the eastern seaboard of what became the United States or at the national landscape more broadly. In *Firsting and Lasting*, historian Jean M. O'Brien (White Earth Ojibwe) argues that New England settlers in the nineteenth century used local histories to construct themselves as bringing modernity and civilization to Indigenous lands that they considered wild, backward, and untamed. Settlers used these local history narratives to label themselves as modern and label Native people as anti-modern, creating a justification for white settlement. Ultimately, local histories put forward a "replacement narrative" that disappeared Native people and naturalized settler control. O'Brien uses the framework of "firsting"—when local histories created white Anglo Americans as establishing the "first" history on the North American continent—and "lasting"—when local histories pointed to any counterexample of Native presence as the "last" of their kind.[19] While O'Brien offers a useful framework for understanding how settlers wrote Native people out of local history as a form of settler colonialism, the monograph remained focused on nineteenth-century New England. This project seeks to shift the geographical and temporal focus to Oklahoma in the mid-nineteenth century.

Adding the historiography on settler narratives that disappear Native people, Mark Rifkin uses the framework of "settler common sense" to explore how settlers internalized legal and political ideas of settler ownership in a way that created settler entitlements and emotionality around possession. Like O'Brien, Rifkin uses the temporal and geographic focus of nineteenth

[19] Jean O'Brien, *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2010), xi-xxvi.

century New England, but he shifts focus to canonical literary texts by Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry David Thoreau, and Herman Melville to read their texts' negotiation of settler "place, personhood, and political belonging."[20] By using these texts, Rifkin suggests that texts not popularly considered as in dialogue with Indigeneity and settler colonialism still embody settler common sense. For these canonical authors, frameworks of settler colonialism underpinned the ways Americans understood themselves and their relationship to place. While Rifkin considers how New England in the nineteenth century still contemplated itself as a "frontier," this project returns to the West, to Oklahoma, to consider how settler common sense in the twentieth century still dominated a set of notions under which white Oklahoma boosters conducted themselves and drove them to commemorate.

While other scholars largely excluded Blackness from their frameworks of settler colonialism, Kevin Bruyneel looks at the intersection of settler colonialism and anti-Blackness to understand settler memory.[21] Bruyneel looks at historical examples, from Bacon's Rebellion to the writings of James Baldwin, to investigate how Indigeneity gets subsumed into whiteness. In this way, Indigeneity is both ever present and ever forgotten. In understanding how white supremacy functions in the United States, Bruyneel insists that we consider settler identity as fundamental to whiteness. Overall, Bruyneel acknowledges colonization of Indigenous peoples and lands, and the enslavement and dehumanization of African-descended peoples, as twin projects of white supremacy. Drawing on Bruyneel's framework of settler memory, this project considers the specificities of Oklahoma settler memory, as a place with very visible Native presence and yet as a place that Euro-Oklahomans sought to remake through settler memory on

[20] Mark Rifkin, *Settler Common Sense: Queerness and Everyday Colonialism in the American Renaissance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2014), xvii.
[21] Kevin Bruyneel, *Settler Memory: The Disavowal of Indigeneity and the Politics of Race in the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021).

their own terms, and as a place where anti-Blackness and white supremacy was built into the political and social fabrics of the state.[22]

This project looks at three moments in the mid-twentieth century to investigate white settler memories and counter-memories. Chapter one traces the fiftieth anniversary of the Land Run of 1889 celebrated in 1939. In a celebration called the "Golden Anniversary," boosters recycled historical narratives based on hegemonic settler memories of the Land Run of 1889, creating a nostalgia to settler ancestors and land, even as such commemorations cast Oklahoma as "modern." The Golden Anniversary mobilized the gendered and racialized body as a commemorative device to remember and solidify white settler supremacy by decentering Native people and African Americans. White boosters and the white press tended to ignore African Americans as historical actors who took part in the Land Run of 1889 while neglecting the impact of this event on Indigenous peoples. However, Native peoples and African Americans held their own commemorations public and private remembrances that challenged white settler memories by re-telling history through a Native and African American perspective. The Golden Anniversary of 1939 showed how white Oklahomans insisted on celebratory mnemonic practices to re-assert their hegemonic settler memory.

Chapter two considers a commemoration that boosters named the "Indian Centennial of 1948," which commemorated the removal of the Five Tribes and the rebuilding of their nations after removal. Eastern Oklahoma boosters created a settler paradox in the Indian Centennial: boosters rhetorically insisted that members of the Five Tribes were settlers in their own right, and yet, the actions of commemoration racialized them as others. While white boosters did not consider the people of the Five Tribes as true settlers entitled to land but as steps in the right

[22] Franklin, *Journey Toward Hope*, 33. See also: Roberts, *I've Been Here all the While* and Shepard, *Deemed Unsuitable.*

settler direction. Meanwhile, Native nations, like the Osage, other than the Five Tribes critiqued the celebration's focus on the Five Tribes. While the celebration selectively incorporated the Five Tribes, white boosters and the Five Tribes participants did not include Black people of Muskogee—both tribal associated Freedmen of the Five Tribes and African Americans who had migrated from the South after the Civil War—from the commemoration. Throughout the Centennial, Oklahoma became both an example of—and an exception to—national settler memory, because white boosters selectively incorporated Native presence into settler notions of belonging.

Chapter three traces the fiftieth anniversary of statehood in 1957, termed the Semi-Centennial of Statehood. White boosters marked the festivities in a months-long exposition, which included festivals, parades, exhibitions, so-called pioneer celebrations, and Native performances. In this celebration, Oklahoma boosters created a paradox: the rhetoric of the Semi-Centennial of Statehood depicted Indigenous people and culture as gone, yet boosters boasted Native individuals as performers, casting them as cultural heritage of Oklahoma. Ultimately, the place of Native peoples in the Semi-Centennial of Statehood festivities came to mirror their place in settler memory in Oklahoma: at once present and yet pushed to the edges of the periphery. The rhetoric of Native peoples as not belonging in the present conflicted with the existence—and persistence—of Native peoples in Oklahoma. At the same time, African American civil rights leaders pushed for their inclusion in the Semi-Centennial festivities. While the Semi-Centennial Commission marketed Oklahoma using a hegemonic settler memory, individuals and communities—Native, Black, and white Oklahomans—staked claims of belonging by remembering the past in different ways.

These three moments at the midcentury reflected ongoing discourses about who belonged in Oklahoma modernity. Boosters refuted John Steinbeck's "Okie" and pushed forward portrayals of Oklahoma as white, wealthy, and modern, though dominated by pioneer nostalgia. Boosters struggled where to fit Native peoples into this rebranding scheme, and they left out Black people altogether. Ultimately, this mid-century conflict over who belongs within the category of "Oklahoman" illustrates the elevated stakes of such discourses. Questions of belonging continue to be relevant in Oklahoma today, as the 2020 marketing campaign of Oklahoma City as the "Modern Frontier" suggests. The state continues to market itself as inclusive by selectively highlighting Native peoples, yet the public image of Oklahoma still pushes Black Oklahomans to the margins, like the mainstream unawareness of Black freedmen who were enslaved by members of the Five Tribes and later the migration of formerly enslaved Black Southerners to Indian and Oklahoma Territories after the Civil War. While there are contemporary efforts to highlight underrepresented stories of both Native peoples and Black Oklahomans, the hegemonic memory continues to be a settler memory.

Chapter One: The Settler Gaze in the Golden Anniversary of the Land Run in 1939

In 2006, actor James Garner returned to his hometown of Norman, Oklahoma to celebrate the anniversary of the Land Run of 1889 and to serve as the grand marshal for the '89er Day Parade. The *Maverick* star known for playing cowboys in Western films was born in Norman in 1928; his paternal grandfather was a participant in the Land Run of 1889 and his mother was half Cherokee.[23] On Friday, April 21, Garner fired the gun to initiate the Land Run reenactment at Eisenhower Elementary School.[24] As a third grader in 2006 attending Eisenhower Elementary School, I was one of the children taking off running at the sound of a gun, wearing a bonnet and cowboy boots. When I approached this history of land run commemorations some fifteen years after I participated, I came with an awareness of how my settler body had been used to further the settler memory of the Land Run of 1889. By the time I participated in 2006, commemorating the Land Run of 1889 had a long history.

While the means of commemoration have changed over time, they have nevertheless persisted in one form or another since the years following the Land Run of 1889. These early commemorations consisted of rodeos, square dancing contests, parades, horse races, and the crowning of the "89er Day Queen."[25] Guthrie, the original capital of Oklahoma, officially organized its 89er Day Celebration in 1911, which included a parade and banquet for surviving participants, referred nostalgically as "89ers."[26] More extensive commemorations emerged throughout the 1930s, when the scope of Land Run commemorations grew exponentially into a

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[23] "'Maverick,' 'Rockford Files' Star James Garner, Cherokee, Dies at 86," *Indian Country Today*, July 20, 2014, https://indiancountrytoday.com/archive/maverick-rockford-files-star-james-garner-cherokee-dies-at-86.
[24] Jane Glenn Cannon, "Norman Salutes its 'Maverick," *The Oklahoman*, April 22, 2006.
[25] Tobie A. Cunningham, "Eighty-niner Day Celebration," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture,* https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry?entry=EI001.
[26] Tobie A. Cunningham, "Eighty-niner Day Celebration."

statewide and national event. In one account, published in *The Daily Oklahoman* in 1939, journalist Bert Kermerer argued that the post-World War I period saw the rise in the extravagance of the commemorations because enlisted servicemen returned to Guthrie to find the town unsatisfying to the point that they "were not even certain they were glad the war was over."[27] Guthrie veterans tried "minstrel shows, tag days, armistice celebrations, motorcycle, rabbit drives, and smokers" to recover their pre-war belongings, but they remained dissatisfied until 1929, when veterans at the American Legion decided that commemorating the Land Run of 1889 would fill such emptiness.[28] In using "minstrel shows," these white veterans explored racial mockery and anti-Black racism as a form of commemoration, illustrating race as important to the construction of their own white identities. Even reading Kermerer's origin story through a lens of skepticism, the narrative of discontented veterans constructing the large-scale commemoration of the Land Run of 1889 illustrates that the historical event sat at the apex of a romanticized myth of place, even at its founding. Veterans had used this myth to negotiate their own sense of place and belonging in twentieth century Oklahoma.

Kermerer published this history of Land Run commemorations in 1939, when white boosters commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the Land Run in a celebration called the "Golden Anniversary" in 1939. Boosters cultivated an emotional connection to place and settler heritage in order to solidify a triumphalist settler identity based on claims of modernity, using mnemonic practices to create a shared ancestral link. The commemorative devices of the Golden Anniversary relied on the gendered and racialized body to perform white settler identity. White boosters and the white press's narratives of the Land Run did not include African American

[27] Bert Kemmerer, "Guthrie Ready for Its Biggest Annual '89er Celebration," *The Daily Oklahoman*, April 16, 1939.
[28] Bert Kemmerer, "Guthrie Ready for Its Biggest Annual '89er Celebration," *The Daily Oklahoman*, April 16, 1939.

settlers who participated in the Land Run of 1889, therefore defining settlers through their proximity to whiteness. However, African American migrants from the post-Civil War South privately remembered Black settlement in Indian and Oklahoma Territories. While white boosters pushed forward a celebratory narrative of white settlement, Native peoples expressed counter-memories that complicated hegemonic settler narratives through their own commemorations like the American Indian Exposition. The Golden Anniversary in 1939 illustrated how different stakeholders in Oklahoma negotiated white settler identity through historical memory and commemorative devices, even though counter-memories remained ever-present. White Oklahomans staked a claim in modernity through their Land Run origin story, refuting the image of Dust Bowl-tattered Okies while attaching ideas of modernity to the state's "pioneers."

Narratives of the Land Run

For boosters, structures of race and family signified how the Land Run initiated progress. In *Story of Oklahoma and the Eighty-Niners: Retold on the Golden Anniversary*, a book published on the occasion of the semi-centennial, author Fred L. Wenner displayed a sense of pride in what settlers "accomplished" during their settlement of the land.[29] Wenner constructed the Land Run as an intervention that contributed to the progression of civilization, because the lands opened for settlement in 1889 were an "unpeople[d] wilderness."[30] Of course, Wenner's historical narrative neglected both the Native people who had ancestrally called the land of Oklahoma home, including the Caddo, Wichita, Pawnee, Quapaw, Osage, and Plains Apache, as well as the many other Native nations that had been forcibly removed to Indian Territory. Settler

[29] Fred L. Wenner, *Story of Oklahoma and the Eighty-Niners: Retold on the Golden Anniversary* (Guthrie, Oklahoma: Co-Operative Publishing Company, 1939).Wenner was a newspaper correspondent covering the run of 1889.
[30] Wenner, *Story of Oklahoma,* 4..

families, according to Wenner, offered the solution to this falsely identified wilderness. Of the Land Run, Wenner stated that "these men and women and children (...) came as a conquering army—not seeking the land and wealth of other people, but with an intent and determination to wrest from the wilderness a home, a competence or a fortune."[31] This construction of home installed a racialized idea of family and nuclear households onto place.[32] Wenner celebrated that men and women had found "the great of all institutions, a home," where they would build a "great American commonwealth—a heritage for their children and their children's children."[33] In this way, Wenner gendered and racialized the body, emphasizing the way such a body fit into a nuclear settler family, as the mechanism of colonization and therefore "civilization." This primacy of the family as a site of colonization would figure prominently in the mnemonic practices settlers in 1939 used to remember the Land Run.

Wenner celebrated the role of settler women in bringing about "civilization." Wenner bolstered a traditional white settler binary of gender wherein the man ran in the Land Run while the wife was "to follow in a schooner."[34] Once these women reunited with their husbands, they maintained the home and offered "moral help" that would allow men to begin the "carving of a home from a country of virgin resources."[35] Whether attached to patriarchal homes or not, Wenner celebrated widows who came on trains to Oklahoma Territory and "met the men on equal footing and asked no special favors," playing into a narrative of pioneer women as having

[31] Wenner, *Story of Oklahoma,* 6.
[32] For more on nuclear families and settler colonialism, see Mark Rifkin, *When Did Indians Become Straight? Kinship, the History of Sexuality, and Native Sovereignty* (London: Oxford University Press, 2011).
[33] Wenner, *Story of Oklahoma*, 7.
[34] Wenner, *Story of Oklahoma*, 13.
[35] Wenner, *Story of Oklahoma*, 27.

grit and self-dependence while still emphasizing them as "strictly virtuous."[36] Wenner celebrated "the valiant women of Eighty-Nine, the vanguard of the mighty throng of homemakers who were later to be a great factor in making Oklahoma one of the greatest states of the Union, undaunted and fearless…"[37] Ultimately, Wenner considered women as markers of the transition from pre-modern to modern because "things 'got settled' [as] more women began arriving in every city."[38] For Wenner, white settler women "brought civilization" vis-a-vis the Land Run, and they represented a significant step toward progress.

Paradoxically, Wenner did not just celebrate whiteness, but he insisted on a kind of racial harmony that made Oklahoma exceptional. Wenner wrote that "Oklahoma can well be called the melting pot of the Nation—her citizenship more truly American than that of any other State" because it was "[p]eopled by a cosmopolitan throng from every section of the Union and from foreign lands as well, mingling with and assimilating many tribes of Indians representing one third of the Indian population of the country."[39] Wenner presented the assimilation of Native peoples and intermarriage as a goal, and yet he constructed the population of Oklahoma as "more truly American" than other states. Wenner illustrated the cornerstone of settler memory in Oklahoma, which strategically disappeared or highlighted Indigeneity. He mentioned Native peoples only to subsume them under whiteness. Following his settler lineage, Wenner celebrated Oklahoma Territory as a newborn baby that—after fifty years—had proved its progress by assimilating Native people and incorporating them into whiteness. By turning Native people into white people, Wenner supported an image of both Oklahoma exceptionalism and Oklahoma

[36] Wenner, *Story of Oklahoma*, 35. For more on gender in the memory of the American West, and specifically Oklahoma, see Cynthia Culver Prescott, *Pioneer Mother Monuments: Constructing Cultural Memory* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2019).
[37] Wenner, *Story of Oklahoma*, 35.
[38] Wenner, *Story of Oklahoma*, 35.
[39] Wenner, *Story of Oklahoma*, 5.

modernity. Because Native people could not be modern, according to settler logics, then white settlement and influence allowed the only access path to modernity. Wenner's narrative of "racial harmony" distracted from African American participation in the Land Run and the ongoing Jim Crow policies in Oklahoma at that time.

Wenner's history of the Land Run was not the only publication to present a progressive narrative of how settlers carved homes out of the wilderness. The University of Oklahoma yearbook from 1939 centered its entire theme around the Land Run of 1889. Before each section, the student editors paused to tell a part of the settlement process, and comic book-style illustrations accompanied the text. The foreword to the yearbook declared that "cities have evolved from a wilderness," depicting the pre-Land Run landscape as an empty one and therefore disavowing Native existence.[40] In the illustration accompanying this foreword, a white-coded man bent down to nail down a wooden stake into the ground, a scene that in settler memory marked the first step in bringing about "civilization." In another section of the yearbook, the student editors portrayed white families as signs of progress, featuring an illustration of white women and children sitting around a table full of food while men built the wooden frame of a house in the background. The storytelling text recalled that "scenes all over the territory reminded one of that famous repast known as the 'First Thanksgiving,' and truly they might have been called 'Thanksgivings' because they marked the end of an era of trial, uncertainty, and struggle, for those who now had become citizens of the Oklahoma land."[41] Here, the yearbook localized the Thanksgiving myth, because it was the most pervasive story in the settler memory arsenal. The myth spoke to settler entitlement to the bounties of the land and erased Indigenous

[40] Sooner Yearbook, University of Oklahoma, 1939, Yearbook Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[41] Sooner Yearbook, University of Oklahoma, 1939, Yearbook Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

experiences of white settlement. By comparing the early months of white settlement in Indian Territory to the first Thanksgiving, the yearbook established Oklahoma settlers within a national landscape of settler memory.

High school yearbooks also bolstered narratives of progress with the tagline "From Teepees to Towers." Like the University of Oklahoma, the Oklahoma City Central High School took the Golden Anniversary as an opportunity to make the Land Run of 1889 the theme of their yearbook in 1939. In the first few pages, the yearbook staff wrote a dedication printed in the outline of a teepee. It reads:

> It is with great pride that we, the class of nineteen hundred and thirty nine, look back over the past half century of progress. We see the tepees which are now replaced by towers. We see not only the tepees but those sturdy pioneers and trail blazers who built this, our city, and gave to us the priceless heritage of Central High School. To those true Americans, we dedicate this book…[42]

This description insisted that "true Americans," the pioneers of 1889, held responsibility for progress. Like the imagery of towers replacing tepees, this narrative implied that white settlers replaced Native peoples. The school superintendent, C.K. Reiff remarked in his message to graduating seniors of 1939: "The blood of pioneers courses through the veins of Central's students. Fifty years ago they came, stalwart men and women believing in God and their own abilities, to build on this prairie a marvel city of churches, schools, and homes. We enjoy today the fruits of their sacrifices. Great was their success."[43] The students' commemoration of the Land Run of 1889 drew heavily on the juxtaposition of the tepee and the tower, the covered wagon and paved street. Without directly mentioning the dispossession of Native people, settlers

[42] Scarab Yearbook, Oklahoma City University, 1939, Yearbook Collection, Oklahoma History Center.
[43] Cardinal Yearbook, Oklahoma City Central High School, 1939, Yearbook Collection, Oklahoma History Center.

of 1939 practiced settler common sense, the ways that settler land ownership operated as a given in the settler psyche and the nostalgia which settlers attached to this narrative.[44]

Newspaper coverage during the "Golden Anniversary" similarly relied on the "Teepees to Towers" narrative. For example, one local journalist referred to Oklahoma as a "paradise" because of the

> exacting work of our ancestors who lived in dugouts and tents, feasted on hard bread and unsweetened coffee, and had to fight to retain what was rightfully theirs to build and preserve for us; the industrial spirit which brought the railroads, oil fields, flour mills, coal and zinc mines, 400 good towns, towering skylines, paved highways, fine schools, libraries, churches, a satisfied population in 1939 still bent upon carrying on.[45]

The journalist framed the move to towns, skyscrapers, and paved streets as progression, linking settler memory to narratives of progress. The *Oklahoma City Times* journalist assumed the settler identity of his readership because he exalted the "exacting work of our ancestors," therefore erasing Native readership. As proved ubiquitous in land run commemorations, settlers celebrated private land ownership as a sign of progress.

Narratives of settler progress in 1889 functioned as the justification for settlers in 1939 to re-assert their claims on the land. The aforementioned *Oklahoma City Times* journalist did not just remark on the success of the past fifty years but he argued those years should serve as inspiration for the next fifty: "The same kind of work and thought which guided our pioneer fathers in opening and building this country for us in the last 50 years will bring an equal amount of progress in the next 50 years. (...) Our goal is to keep Oklahoma going—going forward—and the troublous [sic] times across the seas must not deter us in our spirit which is a marvel to that

[44] Rifkin, *Settler Common Sense*, xvi, 40. In delineating his concept from Rifkin's, Bruyneel clarifies settler memory as settler common sense habitually practiced (see Bruyneel page 14). I further clarify settler memory from settler common sense, because the former concept emphasizes strategic history telling as a means of perpetuating the settler colonial project.
[45] "Spirit of Progress Is in the Saddle," *Oklahoma City Times*, April 18, 1939, 22.

part of the outside world that knows us."[46] The journalist framed the progress of the last half-century as a verification that settlers must continue possession of the land for progress to continue. The past served as a claim on the future, a heritage that could calm anxieties about the war brewing in Europe, which the journalist called the "troublous [sic] times across the seas." The newspapers tried to create a lineage between '89ers and '39ers.

But these white settler memories of the Land Run of 1889 left out non-tribal associated African Americans who also participated in the settlement. Secondary literature on the African American migration to Indian Territory stresses the participation of Black people in the Land Run of 1889 and in its immediate aftermath.[47] While the number of African Americans taking part in the Land Run was small compared to the number of white migrants, an estimated 2,600 African Americans migrated to the Oklahoma Territory shortly after the Run and thus these African American migrants fleeing the post-Reconstruction South founded many all-Black towns during the territorial period and some settled in already founded towns with a significant white population.[48] For instance, at least fifty African American residents settled in Edmond in the years following its founding, around 1891.[49] By neglecting to include this history of African American settlement in Indian Territory, white boosters could ignore some towns settled in 1889 that previously had African American residents, like Norman and Edmond, which had become nearly all white by the 1920s. Even further, the white boosters in 1939 did not recognize the organized push for African American migration to Indian Territory in their histories of

[46] "Spirit of Progress Is in the Saddle," *Oklahoma City Times*.
[47] For more about Black Southern migrants to Oklahoma in the Land Run of 1889 as an act of settler colonialism, see Alaina Roberts, *I've Been Here All the While: Black freedom on Native Land* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021).
[48] Chang, *The Color of the Land*, 156, 158; Field, *Growing Up with the Country*, 91–93. Norman Crockett, *The Black Towns* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1979) and Hannibal Johnson *Acres of Aspiration: The All Black Towns in Oklahoma* (Fort Worth: Eakin Press, 2003).
[49] Christopher P. Lehman, "West Edwards Days: African Americans in Territorial Edmond," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 97, no 2 (Summer 2019), 175-6.

settlement in Indian Territory. Migration enthusiasts like W.L. Eagleson and E.P. McCabe used the Oklahoma Immigration Association to encourage African Americans in the South to seek opportunities and liberty in Indian Territory.[50] Besides silences around African American settlement to Indian Territory after the Civil War, boosters ignored the all-Black towns that African-descended peoples enslaved by members of the Five Tribes had founded before the Land Run, like Marshalltown, North Fork Colored, and others. Freedmen of the Five Tribes founded these all-Black towns after emancipation. To discuss African American settlement during the Land Run of 1889 would destabilize white settler narratives that defined settler exceptionalism as a white phenomenon.

Boosters seized the Golden Anniversary as an occasion to remember the Land Run of 1889 as a founding moment for the "exceptional" state of Oklahoma, which served as a bastion of family life, gender roles, racial harmony, and progress. Boosters in 1939 used historical narratives of the Land Run to create emotional and bodily linkages between settlers across time. Commemorative documents like yearbooks and the booster publications set the narrative stage for the commemorative devices that invited racialized and gendered bodies to recreate and celebrate settler land theft. By racializing and gendering bodies, booster memories exclusively celebrated white settlers, choosing not to include African American settlers in their narratives of history and erasing the dispossession of Indigenous lands. These exclusionary memories served as the moral and commemorative playbook for participants in 1939, where settlers remembered the Land Run through their racialized and gendered bodies.

Commemorative Devices

[50] Daniel F. Littlefield, Jr. and Lonnie E. Underhill, "Black Dreams and 'Free Homes: The Oklahoma Territory, 1891-1894," *Phylon* 34, no.4 (1973): 342; Lori Bogle, "On Our Way to the Promised Land: Black Migration from Arkansas to Oklahoma, 1889-1893," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 72 (Summer 1994): 160.

From reenactments on horseback to parades with an estimated 125,000 attendees, white Oklahomans in 1939 remembered the Land Run of 1889 through their bodies, using devices like dress and reenactment. Over the course of two days, OCU students embodied the experience of 1889 settlers, replicating the sight, sound, taste, and feel of the Land Run of 1889. These mnemonic practices ultimately invited the college students of 1939 to lay claim to the legacy of the white settlement. On the morning of Friday, April 17, 1939, at the sound of a gun, young men took off on horseback from a starting line. The horse of the first participant across the line received a kiss from the woman selected as OCU's "Pioneer Co-ed," Sara Gethmann.[51] Performances of the Land Run like this one relied on the idea of settler women as prizes. Meanwhile, the tobacco-spitting contest allowed men to use actual tobacco, while the women used licorice. Men competed to see who produced the most growth of facial hair after six weeks in the "whisker raiser" competition, while women participated in the "cutest cowgirl" contest.[52] The gendered division of commemoration used the "natural" difference of gender to create continuity over the past fifty years of settler time, creating a shared heritage between the settlers of 1889 and 1939.[53]

OCU students were not the only young settlers to embody 89ers through a physical reenactment of the Land Run of 1889. The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) of Oklahoma City hosted a reenactment for 1,400 Boy Scouts and their fathers at Camp Don Shelley in Warr Acres, a short drive out of the city. At the sound of a gun, participants took off running to stake a claim from 1,000 plots. After the conclusion of the reenactment, the

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[51] "Goldbugs Stage the Run of '39," *Oklahoma City Times*, April 21, 1939, 4,19.
[52] "Goldbugs Stage the Run of '39," *Oklahoma City Times*, April 21, 1939, 4,19. "50th Anniversary of Run Celebrated by Thousands," *The Chickasha Daily Express*, April 23, 1939, 10.
[53] While I am not insisting that gender is a "natural" difference, I do suggest that settlers saw gender this way. See Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs*.

celebration continued with athletic competitions, chuck wagon dinners, stomp dances with Native peoples from Concho Indian Boarding School, and a high school stunt team dressed in pioneer clothing. While the OCU re-enactment allowed the direct participation of college aged young men and allowed women in their gendered roles, the YMCA reenactment targeted young boys as the embodied settlers, without a mention of young women at all. Thus, these Land Run reenactments coded participants in the Land Run as male, young, and white whereas all other people played a different role in commemorations. Native students from Concho Indian Boarding School served as entertainment to the Boy Scouts, a move which implied that Native peoples were secondary historical actors. The boosters pushed Native people to the margins of their commemorations, including them to illustrate Oklahoma racial harmony but forbidding them from true subjectivity.[54]

Beyond clubs, the public-school system hosted celebrations where students could embody settlers. The Municipal auditorium of Oklahoma City displayed school projects that teachers had assigned as part of the Golden Anniversary in a celebration called the "Little World's Fair" that depicted the "progress" of education in Oklahoma from 1889 to 1939.[55] In the classroom, teachers instructed students to complete art projects with themes like "The New Run of 1939" and "Staking New Claims."[56] For this latter poster project, students would create components that make a great city: water works, a library, new fairgrounds, four lane highways, and an interstate highway. This poster activity bolstered the theme of the Golden Anniversary, "From Teepees to Towers," because the lesson instilled a narrative of progress on its students. Young people would participate in such progress by envisioning an even better city. These

[54] "1400 Fathers, Sons Register for 'Run' at Y.M.C.A Golden Anniversary Camp," *Oklahoma City Times*, April 13, 1939, 3.
[55] "Anniversary Program," *The Oklahoma City Times*, April 17, 1939, 4.
[56] "Golden Anniversary: Oklahoma City Public Schools," Art Department, Bulletin No. 3, January 25, 1939, Blanche K. Young Collection, Box 2 Folder 1, Oklahoma History Center.

assignments were then displayed publicly for their families to see at the municipal auditorium. Along with school assignments, the Golden Anniversary display included "pioneer" costumes, artworks, and notebooks with memories of '89ers were on display as part of this Golden Anniversary commemoration.[57] Along with these activities, programs depicted moments in Oklahoma history, including Stand Watie, the Cherokee general who served in the Confederacy during the American Civil War, a staged production of the "marriage of Miss Indian Territory with Mr. Oklahoma," and a quilting bee, where students collaboratively made a quilt.[58] The staged marriage of "Miss Indian Territory" and "Mr. Oklahoma" figurative moved Indigenous women under the patriarchal oversight of white men. The "Little World's Fair" exemplified how students embodied '89ers, solidifying a settler identity.

When the '89ers told their stories during the Golden Anniversary, their firsthand storytelling served as a literal embodiment that sought to collapse the rhetorical distance between settler ancestors and their descendants. As part of the Golden Anniversary, boosters held luncheons and gatherings to honor the settlers from the Land Run of 1889.[59] For example, the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce hosted a luncheon for a "pioneer women's day celebration" in which 89er attendees dressed in Victorian garb.[6061] In newspaper coverage, journalists reprinted the stories of '89ers like Harriet Colcord, who arrived in Oklahoma City in 1889 with two children after her husband participated in the run. Along with publishing her story, the newspaper featured a 1939 picture of Colcord with her granddaughter, creating a visual

[57] "Booths Are Built for City Schools' Elaborate Display," *The Oklahoma City Times*, April 12, 1939, 2.
[58] "Schools Continue Programs for Golden Jubilee," *The Oklahoma City Times*, April 17, 1939, 4.
[59] "'The Run' Celebrated By 'Old Oklahoma,'" *Harlow's Weekly*, April 22, 1939, 7.
[60] "City Women of '89 to be Honored at Luncheon April 17," *Oklahoma City Times*, April 6, 1939, 4.; "Many Plan to Attend Pioneer Women's Event," *The Oklahoma City Times*, April 15, 1939, 4.; "Women of '89 Honored at Luncheon," *The Oklahoma City Times*, April 17, 1939, 1.
[61] "Women '89ers Are Honored at Luncheon," *The Oklahoma City Times*, April 17, 1939, 9.

and embodied link from 1889 to 1939.[62] Likewise, music festivities during the Golden Anniversary honored the so-called "Women of '89," who had a reserved seating section, and, in creating this physical demarcation, boosters allowed for a visual embodiment and emphasis that these "women pioneers" still dominated Oklahoma society.[63]

Beyond reenactments, parades disappeared Native people by placing them outside of modernity. As the former capital of Oklahoma Territory, Guthrie held a massive celebration marking the fifty years, including a parade.[64] Oklahoma Governor Philips led the Guthrie parade, where seventy bands played from across the state, and the three hundred floats participated in the parade.[65] The *Oklahoma City Times* described it as *a* "parade of 500 cowboys and Indians."[66] This description illustrates the extent to which Oklahoma's self-understanding in the mid-twentieth century was based on frontierism. The energy company OG&E won the parade's float competition with a float that "showed the entry of buffaloes and Indians into Oklahoma," a phrasing situated Native peoples and buffaloes as signs of pastoralism and therefore as part of the past.[67] This winning float constructed settlers as bringing modernity and civilization to Indigenous occupied lands characterized as wild, backward, and untamed.[68] In creating a float representing "the entry of buffaloes and Indians into Oklahoma," OG&E further situated Native life as a prehistory to Anglo American civilization, disavowing contemporary presence of Native

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[62] "Pioneer Women's Hardships Recalled," *The Oklahoma City Times*, April 17, 1939, 9.
[63] "Patrons to Pick Numbers Tonight for Orchestra," *The Oklahoma City Times*, April 17, 1939, 2.
[64] "Phillips Horse for 89er Parade, Guthrie Missing," *Sapulpa Herald*, April 21, 1939, 1.; "Guthrie Takes Lead in Golden Jubilee Plans," *Harlow's Weekly*, April 8, 1939, 6.
[65] "'The Run' Celebrated By 'Old Oklahoma,'" *Harlow's Weekly*, April 22, 1939, 7.
[66] "Many Pioneers Visit Guthrie for Jubilee," *Oklahoma City Times*, April 20, 1939, 2.
[67] "50th Anniversary of Run Celebrated by Thousands," *The Chickasha Daily Express*, April 23, 1939, 10.
[68] O'Brien, *Firsting and Lasting*, xii.

peoples. While reductionist imagery appeared ubiquitous in the parade, newspaper coverage did not mention Native participation in the parade, nor Native perspectives.

While the re-enactments of the Land Run often featured Native dancers as part of the commemoration, white boosters depicted Native people as close to whiteness when such a racialization served the purposes of Oklahoma's racial harmony. During the Golden Anniversary, boosters celebrated Will Rogers constantly, and, like James Garner, Rogers was of both settler and Native (Cherokee) ancestry. Having died in a plane crash only four years earlier, boosters still named Will Rogers as the most recognizable Oklahoman. The Boy Scouts dedicated a monument to '89er Anton H. Classen in a park named Will Rogers Park on Sequoyah Day, on April 14, 1939.[69] In describing the park in which this took place, the *Oklahoma City Times* described Rogers as a "typical Oklahoman in that he was part Cherokee Indian and undoubtedly the most loved of all its citizens."[70] Thus, even an occasion that was supposed to celebrate the settlers of 1889 like Anton Classen, became an occasion to celebrate Will Rogers as the ideal Oklahoma, because he was both Cherokee and Anglo-American. But Rogers' place in the memory of Oklahoma was a complicated one. Rogers' family enslaved African-descended people, a fact that none of the newspaper descriptions mentioned, let alone unpacked.[71] Some depictions, like a cartoon historical sketch of Rogers published in the *Oklahoma City Times* in 1939 did not mention his Indigeneity.[72] In Guthrie's Golden Anniversary festivities, the old opera house featured a play about Rogers' life because he had

[69] "Boy Scouts' Memorial Stone Honors City Pioneer," *The Oklahoma City Times*, April 14, 1939, 10.; "Musical Programs Feature Boomer Day Observances for Golden Anniversary," *The Oklahoma City Times*, April 15, 1939, 3.
[70] "City Opens Golden Jubilee with '89 Spirit Reigning," *The Oklahoma City Times*, April 14, 1939, 2.
[71] Amy M. Ware, *The Cherokee Kid: Will Rogers, Tribal Identity, and the Making of an American Icon* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2015), 18.
[72] "Rogers," *The Oklahoma City Times*, April 10, 1939, 13.

"played there when he was a rope-twirling stage comedian."[73] This short reference to the play staged in Guthrie did not mention his Indigeneity, but unfortunately no surviving documentation exists of how the play depicted his life, particularly in placing him as Cherokee. Ultimately, Rogers became a figure continually thrown around in public perception as a Native-descended person who Oklahoma claimed as one of its own and, simultaneously, as evidence of the racial harmony that boosters depicted in historical narratives. Boosters used Rogers as the one exception to the rule of Native backwardness or disappearance, but they only did so to emphasize his whiteness.

Oklahoma City closed its "Golden Anniversary" commemoration by ceremoniously placing a bronze plaque into a vault, metaphorically sealing the celebration.[74] In another fifty years, settlers celebrating the centennial anniversary of the Land Run of 1889 would open the vault, establishing a settler heritage from 1989 to 1939 to 1889. Thus, a time capsule marked the end of the "Golden Anniversary," an occasion that invited white participants to embody a gendered past that excluded African Americans from their definition of settler. As white participants in 1939 embodied the so-called '89er experience, they created an intergenerational fellowship resting on a shared heritage of whiteness. As much as settler boosters asserted settler claims on the land by pushing Native peoples to the margins, they sometimes highlighted Native peoples in their commemorations, like Will Rogers, to illustrate the "racial harmony" of Oklahoma exceptionalism. This guise of "racial harmony" helped them obfuscate the reality of racial discrimination in Jim Crow Oklahoma. While settler narratives shaped the Golden Anniversary in 1939, they were still met with alternative memories of the Land Run. Native

[73] "Many Pioneers Visit Guthrie for Jubilee," *Oklahoma City Times*, April 20, 1939, 2.
[74] "Hour Observed," *The Chickasha Daily Express*, April 23, 1939, 2B.

peoples and African Americans held their own memories of the late nineteenth centuries and commemorated such memories in different ways.

Counter-Memories and Counter-Commemorations

While ‘39ers were busy embodying their settler ancestors, Native peoples held their own ways of remembering that challenged hegemonic settler memories. During the Golden Anniversary, some Native peoples participated, although their exact perspectives were not published in white newspapers. Some Native peoples strategically used the Golden Anniversary to survive economically and culturally. And finally, Native peoples created their own spaces to highlight their counter-memories, particularly in the American Indian Exposition, an annual festival that highlighted Native culture and arts in Anadarko, Oklahoma. The American Indian Exposition provided a counter-narrative to settler triumphalism. Meanwhile, individual African Americans remembered migrations from pre-statehood in the Works Progress Administration's Oklahoma Slave Narrative Project and the Works Progress Administration's Indian Pioneer Oral History Project, although white fieldworkers controlled these projects and African Americans did not. Acknowledging the unequal contexts in which these projects created oral histories, these narratives illustrate that African Americans remembered the Land Run of 1889 but such memories did not coincide with the celebratory tone of the white Oklahomans. While settler perspectives dominated the Golden Anniversary, Native and African American memories existed at the settler margins. Reading the American Indian Exposition of 1939 and the WPA narratives in conversation with the Golden Anniversary, Native and African American counter-memories challenged settler attempts to disappear them.

On the same day as the OCU re-enactment of the Land Run, the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce invited Native people to gather at the Chamber of Commerce building to speak at a

luncheon called "Indian Memories."[75] The event began with a Kiowa ceremonial dance, followed by a statement from Reverend James Pickup, and one-minute speeches by Mrs. Neil Conner (Delaware) and Don Whistler (Sac and Fox). The luncheon then featured speakers from the Five Tribes, including O.H.P Brewer (Cherokee), W.A. Durant (Choctaw), John Noon (Creek), J. Bart Aldrich (Seminole), and Neal Johnson (Chickasaw). The main event of the luncheon, however, was a keynote address from United States Senator Robert L. Owen (Cherokee), read from transcription. While the recording and transcript of the speeches cannot be found, one newspaper characterized Senator Owen's speech as a "review of Oklahoma's progress, and recollections of Indian life."[76] Sallie C. McSpadden, Will Rogers' sister, attended the luncheon.[77] The event illustrated both the contestation of memory and the continued (but silenced) importance of Native people in mid-twentieth century Oklahoma politics. While this commemoration centered Native perspectives, even the name "Indian Memories," in this context, suggests the settler association of Indigeneity with the past. The inclusion of Native people and their "memories" of Indian Territory before white settlement simultaneously recognized their continued existence and yet did not challenge white claims to land. The tangential inclusion of Native perspectives suggested some awareness of continued Native importance in Oklahoma politics and society.

For Native people who participated in the "Golden Anniversary" as performers, participation was a strategic method of survival in an economically precarious time. *The Daily Oklahoman* included a story on Kiowas coming to Oklahoma City for the festivities:

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[75] "Goldbugs Stage the Run of '39," *Oklahoma City Times*, 19.; "Tribal Leaders Jubilee Guests," *Oklahoma City Times*, April 21, 1939, 1.
[76] "Goldbugs Stage the Run of '39," *Oklahoma City Times*, 19. I am looking into Owen's papers to locate a transcript of this speech.
[77] "Tribal Leaders Jubilee Guests," *Oklahoma City Times*, April 21, 1939, 1.

> If you are one of the many Oklahomans who have never seen a real Indian teepee you can do that very thing by going to the 3500 block South Robinson avenue where there are five teepees and five Kiowa Indian families. The Indians were brought here from Anadarko by the Capitol Hill Commerce club for the anniversary week celebration. The Indians will participate in the Indian day festivities Friday. Homer Buffalo, left, and Jack Sandkoda, both Kiowas, are shown at their teepees. They will remain at their present location for a week. They will give Kiowa dances and will charge a small admission.[78]

The inclusion—or exploitation—of Kiowas for entertainment purposes followed a longer tradition all over the United States of essentializing Native people as an "other" while relegating them to the past. Performing Indigeneity as a method of survival was not unique to Kiowas in Oklahoma in 1939, but this method of survival spoke to the broader economic hardships that tribes of western Oklahoma experienced.[79] Kiowas participating in fifty-year commemorations may have been seeking to similarly assert their unique culture in a period of assimilative policies that sought to strip Native nations of their culture and sovereignty. In addition to economic survival, Kiowa participation illustrated their assertion of unique culture in a period of federal anti-Indigenous policies. Kiowas did not just participate for economic survival but for the purposes of their own national sovereignty. At the same time, however, Kiowas faced violence and settler antagonism. On April 17, Kiowas called the police after someone stole a hatchet from their camp in Oklahoma City. The newspaper article described that "some eager boy stole a hatchet from their Indian village in the 3900 block South Robinson avenue."[80] While Kiowas participated in the Land Run commemorations, at least tangentially, settler memory laid the

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[78] "Real Indians, Teepees," *The Daily Oklahoman,* April 19,1939, 3.

[79] In *Monuments to Absence*, historian Andrew Denson discusses the practice of "chiefing" among the Eastern Band of Cherokee in the Qualla Boundary, where Cherokee men dressed in Plains-style headdresses and pose for photographs with settler tourists in exchange for tips.# Denson argues that the Eastern Band of Cherokees strategically engaged in the tourist industry throughout the 1920s and 1930s as a way to survive economically and resist allotment policies in North Carolina. Andrew Denson, *Monuments to Absence: Cherokee Removal and the Contest over Southern Memory* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 61.

[80] "Pale Face Steals Hatchet of Indian," *The Daily Oklahoman*, April 18, 1939, 1.

groundwork for the continued devaluing of Native peoples that came out in anti-Indigenous violence and disrespect.

Outside of the golden Anniversary, the American Indian Exposition offered Native counter-memories, and more specifically, the memories of Native Nations other than the Five Tribes. In the constitution of the American Indian Exposition, the organizers confined ownership to the Apache, Kiowa, Comanche, Wichita, Caddo, Delaware, Fort Sill Apache, Osage, Pawnee, Otoe, Arapaho and Cheyenne, as well as delineating honorary status to the Ponca, Iowa, and Sac & Fox of Oklahoma. Notably, none of the Five Tribes owned the American Indian Exposition, an intentional clause of the organization's constitution which sought to bolster the voices of non-Five Tribes nations. The representative of each of the tribes on the Board would have to be Native, thus making this organization, as dictated by its bylaws, Native-owned and run. Further, the constitution stated that the goal of Exposition was to "promote the general welfare of all Indians, revive and perpetuate Indian arts and crafts…"[81] Muriel Wright (Choctaw) traced the first American Indian Exposition to the year 1933, as part of the Caddo County Fair.[82] An earlier iteration called the "All-Indian Fair" had existed as part of the Craterville Park, which was under the direction of a white man named Frank Rush in 1924. But in the early 1930s, Native participants and organizers started to express dissatisfaction that Rush, a settler, benefited from their labor and culture and thus a group pushed for establishing a new fair solely owned and operated by Native people.[83] The first American Indian Exposition then premiered in September 1933, with the support of Anadarko businesses but authored by Native people.[84] The first

[81] E. R. Gaede Jr., "An Ethnohistory of the American Indian Exposition at Anadarko Oklahoma: 1932-2003" (PhD diss., University of Oklahoma, 2009), 523.
[82] Muriel Wright, "The American Indian Exposition in Oklahoma," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 24, no. 2 (Summer 1946): 158-165.
[83] Gaede, "An Ethnohistory of the American Indian Exposition," 126-127.
[84] Wright, "The American Indian Exposition in Oklahoma," 161.

Exposition included a parade, dancing, arts and crafts, archery contests, horse races, and agricultural exhibits.[85]

While the white Golden Anniversary relied on a settler memory expressed through the body, the American Indian Exposition mobilized a counter-memory of colonization using the body. By 1939, the year of the Golden Anniversary of the Land Run of 1889, American Indian Exposition had grown exponentially to include a pageant. In 1938 and 1939, the American Indian Exposition included pageants that illustrated a Native telling of history and the past, through historical dramas, called "The Spirit of Washita" and "The Spirit of the Red Man," respectively. In the 1939 pageant, Native organizers presented "The Spirit of the Red Man," which presented a narrative of Native history from European contact to 1939. E.W. Gallaher, Kiowa, and Margaret Pearson Speelman, a settler, wrote "The Spirit of the Red Man" for the American Indian Exposition.[86] Told in five scenes, the drama opened with a pre-contact camp where Indigenous people performed the Round Dance when a group of Francisco Vásquez de Coronado's troops interrupted the camp. This moment of contact with Spanish conquistadores was the first of several experiences with European colonizers. The next scene featured the French colonial interruption of Indigenous life. And finally, the next scene illustrated the period of American colonization, featuring Confederate soldiers, American extermination of the buffalo, and treaty-making with the U.S. government after the Civil War. Clearly, the Indigenous retelling of their history did not begin with the Land Run of 1889. Instead, Indigenous memories told a longer story of European colonization. Because Native actors played each of the roles, this transmission of memory also operated on the level of the body, like the Golden Anniversary. However, the American Indian Exposition exemplified a different set of relevant memories.

[85] Wright, "The American Indian Exposition in Oklahoma," 160.
[86] Gaede, "An Ethnohistory of the American Indian Exposition," 639.

Whereas the Golden Anniversary emphasized Native disappearance after the Land Run of 1889, Gallaher and Speelman's drama continued the narrative until the present time, 1939. The last scene of the drama was a "Period of Adaptation," which emphasized education. Native counter-memories did not call the period after the Land Run as one of assimilation but instead the pageant used the language of "adaptation." While many scholars have debated what to make of this dichotomy, Gallaher and Speelman situated the push for schools as a community decision of strategic adaptation in the wake of permanent settler infringement: "Parents, realizing that education in the white man's way would be a great advantage to their children, offer them to be taken to the Mission schools."[87] While literature and oral histories with boarding school survivors and descendants have suggested that mission and federal schools were coercive in how students came to be enrolled, Gallaher and Speelman's phrasing perhaps sought to recover agency for Native people, as the founding ethos of the American Indian Exposition suggests.[88] Whereas settler memories relied on national myths like Thanksgiving, Indigenous mnemonic practices localized the experience during this period of "adaptation," mentioning the Catholic-run Anadarko Boarding School, formerly called St. Patrick's Boarding School. St. Patrick's School, for a time, relied on land and funding from the Kiowa, Comanche, and Apache nations in order to operate and thus required active Native participation to function.[89] Because of the pageant's focus specifically on the Anadarko Boarding School and specific tribal experiences,

[87] Gaede, "An Ethnohistory of the American Indian Exposition," 639.
[88] For histories of boarding schools, see Denise Lajimodiere, *Stringing Rosaries: The History, the Unforgivable, and the Healing of Northern Plains American Indian Boarding School Survivors* (Fargo: North Dakota State University Press, 2019); David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995); Tsianina Lomawaima, *They Called it Prairie Light: The Story of Chilocco Indian School* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994); Brenda Child, *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families, 1900-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998).
[89] Forthcoming article by Bryan Rindfleisch and author for the *U.S. Catholic Historian.*

the pageant offered a much more localized memory centered on Native agency. This pageant offered a powerful counter-memory to the Land Run of 1889 narrative put forward in such works as Wenner's *Story of Oklahoma and the Eighty-Niner*, which placed Native people as allies of white settlers in order to celebrate white settlement. Instead, Gallher and Speelman presented a narrative about the violence of Coronado and Confederate soldiers, as well as the disastrous impact of the Indian Wars. The period of the Land Run, referred to as the "Period of Adaptation," focuses on how Native people remember those years: through schools, both religious and federally-run. Rather than remembering the Land Run, Native peoples remembered education, illustrating that the Land Run was just one moment of how white settlement affected their lives and therefore expanding the historical narrative to before 1889.

Whereas the Golden Anniversary's celebratory narrative of the Land Run left Native people out of its history, the pageant insisted on continued Native survival.[90] By telling Native history from 1541 to 1939, Gallaher and Speelman resisted the narrative that Native people disappeared. The pageant offered a narrative that emphasized Native subjectivities, as they pushed for survival under violent conditions created by different iterations of settler soldiers—Spanish, then French, then American. While the Golden Anniversary demanded that settlers remember the Land Run through their bodies through reenactments and dress, "The Spirit of the Redman" relied on the acting and performing body to remember history. The American Indian Exposition illustrated the extent to which the Golden Anniversary was not the only memory of the late nineteenth century but just one memory that settlers then sought to institutionalize through mandating memory through civic and educational avenues. white boosters attempted to

[90] For more on Native survival under settler colonialism, see Gerald Vizenor, *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008).

marginalize such memories through the spectacle of parades, reenactments, and commemorative history publications.

Like Indigenous people, African Americans held their own counter-memories of the Land Run of 1889. In an interview conducted in 1937 or 1938 for the Slave Narrative Project, a formerly enslaved man named Alfred Smith recalled being born into slavery in Georgia, moving to Kansas, and then moving to Indian Territory. He migrated "shortly after the run and bought 160 acres from a white man," and on this land Smith cultivated cotton and became quite successful.[91] In another interview with Smith, this time conducted for the Indian Pioneer Papers, Smith recalled that his claim was just east of Oklahoma City and the land provided extensive oil profits.[92] Unfortunately, Smith's interviewer, Harry M. Dreyer, paraphrased and summarized Smith's interview instead of presenting a verbatim transcript. Because of Dreyer's role as the intermediary, it is difficult to read Smith's tone in the interview. However, Smith's recollections suggest a positive experience of participating in the Land Run of 1889, insofar as it produced a good income. While Smith fared well from the Land Run of 1889, his recollections still constitute counter-memories to the hegemonic settler memories that neglect the existence of African American participants in the Land Run of 1889.

But not all remembrances were this positive. In an interview conducted in August 1937, a formerly enslaved man named Bird Wilson recalled growing up in Texas and eventually moving to Indian Territory in 1880. After working at Sacred Heart Mission, a Catholic boarding school for Native children, he made a deal with a white man to run on his behalf in the Land Run of

[91] Alfred Smith, Interview by unknown field worker, 1937 or 1938, in *The WPA Oklahoma Slave Narratives*, edited by T. Lindsay Baker and Julie P. Baker (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996): 386-388.
[92] Alfred Smith, Interview by Harry M. Dreyer, date unknown, Indian Pioneer Papers, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

1893.[93] Wilson remembers how he was only allowed to run because he was representing a white man, reflecting a memory of the inequity attached to the land run process. Not only was Wilson not allowed to run for himself, but when the white man did not file the corresponding claim, Wilson lost out on the land altogether. Wilson's recollection represents a counter-memory to the celebratory reenactments of white college students and boy scouts. Instead of remembering the opportunity attached to the Land Run of 1893, Wilson remembered the ways in which he was excluded from the opportunities of white settlers. Wilson's testimony illustrates the single mindedness of hegemonic white settler memories. While the American Indian Exposition illustrated a public counter-memory, Wilson illustrated a private counter-memory.

While Wilson and Smith provide different accounts of the Land Run of 1889 and 1893, other oral histories suggest Indian Territory as a land of opportunity and liberty turned out to be a failure in the years after settlement. In an interview with the Oklahoma Slave Narrative Project, Alice Alexander remembered life during slavery in Louisiana and then her family's migration to Oklahoma "in search of education."[94] Alexander "walked nearly all the way from Louisiana to Oklahoma." While she does not mention the year of the migration, Alexander recalled that her family went "to Oklahoma looking for de same thing then that darkies go North looking fer now," but she said that they were "disappointed." Making a connection between African American migration to Indian Territory and the Great Migration, Alexander expressed awareness of the Jim Crow conditions of the South and Oklahoma. Further, Alexander expressed the feeling

[93] Bird Wilson, Interview by Robert H. Boatman, August 16, 1937, Indian Pioneer Papers, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma. While the Land Run of 1893, or the Cherokee Strip Land Run occurred a few years after the main land run under consideration here, Wilson's testimony still offers a valuable counter-memory to how land runs function in the white settler imagination.

[94] Alice Alexander, Interview by Ida Belle Hunter, 1937, in *The WPA Oklahoma Slave Narratives*, edited by T. Lindsay Baker and Julie P. Baker (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996): 23-25. Ida Belle Hunter was one of three African American field workers working for the Oklahoma Slave Narrative Project at the time.

that Oklahoma was a failed promise for African Americans searching for freedom. While white boosters in 1939 recalled the Land Run as a catalyst for prosperity, African American settlers remembered years of white settlement as causing a decrease in their quality of life.

Ultimately, Indigenous people and African Americans held memories of the Land Run of 1889 and the territorial period that diverged significantly from hegemonic settler memories. While white boosters expressed reverence for '89ers for instigating a "modern" and "progressive" society, Indigenous people remembered a time of strategic accommodation and African Americans remembered the various possibilities and failures of settlement for liberation. White settlers left out Indigenous people when they did not suit a triumphalist narrative of settler exceptionalism, and white settlers left out African Americans because they did not define progress or modernity as having African American settlers. But these marginalized groups held their own counter-memories that held a more complicated history.

Conclusion

When actor James Garner shot the gun to initiate Eisenhower Elementary's Land Run reenactment in 2006, I did not have a comprehensive understanding of settler colonialism. I didn't know that Garner descended from both Cherokee and settler ancestors, and I would not know what to make of such facts. The attempt to instill settler pride in young students from 1939 remained until at least 2006 and years after. By wearing "pioneer-style" clothing and running down a schoolyard field to stake a claim, my peers and I embodied our perceived settler ancestors from whom we should have inherited land and privilege. Our bodies became archives of settler memory. But, as a settler with no familial or ancestral connection to the 89ers, why was I supposed to adopt this historical lineage as my own? Beyond this logical fallacy, what should we make of schools forcing my Native classmates to participate in a celebration of land theft?

What kinds of conversations did their families have around the dinner table about what the Land Run of 1889 represented? What do we do with James Garner, who descended from both Cherokees and Euro-Americans, and who celebrated the run?

While boosters like Wenner sought to reconcile this narrative through the construction of Oklahoma as a melting pot of multicultural harmony, the socio-political reality of Oklahoma remained much more complicated in the decades after the Golden Anniversary. Boosters neglected to include African American migrants from the South in their histories even though they settled in Indian Territory alongside the white settlers who had participated in the Land Run of 1889. While boosters continued to celebrate the Land Run of 1889 annually through embodied mnemonic practices like reenactments, the terrain of whose memory they commemorated became more and more questionable as the twentieth century continued. Boosters recycled the theme "From Teepees to Towers" from the Golden Anniversary in 1939 during the Semi-Centennial of Statehood in 1957, but moments of disruption and counter-memories erupted that undermined this triumphalist narrative. While settler boosters dominated the memory landscape, Native peoples and African Americans continually held counter-memories and strategically participated in commemorations for the purposes of cultural and political sovereignty. The next mid-century commemoration, the so-called "Indian Centennial of 1948" illustrated the messiness of memory when multiple stakeholders, both Native and white, joined forces to commemorate the past. Once again, boosters and the white press left out Black Oklahomans, both tribally associated and not, from histories of removal. These debates over belonging crystallized in the Indian Centennial of 1948, less than ten years after the Golden Anniversary of the Land Run.

Chapter Two: Native and Settler Reactions to the "Indian Centennial" of 1948

Searching finding aids at the Western History Collections, I try many terms to locate commemorative events during the twentieth century in Oklahoma. I use the terms "commemoration," "memorial," and "festival." Finally, I use the term "centennial," and a collection of one box populates the search platform. The collection is called the "Muskogee, Oklahoma, Indian Centennial Collection." Not familiar with this particular commemoration, I request to pull the box. When I start going through it, I see newspaper article after newspaper article covering an event called the "Indian Centennial of 1948." Whoever had donated the materials pasted newspaper clippings to blank sheets of paper with precarious glue. After searching secondary literature databases for information on this so-called Indian Centennial, I cannot find any information on it. I begin working my way through the hundreds of pages of newspaper clippings, trying to figure out what the "Indian Centennial" commemorated.

The so-called Indian Centennial began with a push from the Oklahoma Philatelic Society, a stamp club. The club met with Senator Elmer Thomas and Representative William Stigler (Choctaw), both of Oklahoma. Representative Stigler proposed and then passed a resolution in the House that then Senator Thomas introduced and passed in the Senate. By May 1948, the United States Post Office Department slated the stamp for issuing later that year. The Bureau of Engraving and Printing designed a stamp with the seals of the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Seminole, and Muscogee (Creek) nations placed beside the outline of the state of Oklahoma. The bottom of the stamp read, "The Five Civilized Indian Tribes of Oklahoma, 1848-1948." The commemoration of the Five Tribes did not stop with the stamp. The Oklahoma Philatelic Society

used the national stamp as a form of national advertising for the so-called "Indian Centennial of 1948," a two-day celebration held in Muskogee, Oklahoma.[95]

On October 14 and 15, the Centennial consisted of a parade, an arts and crafts exposition, and performances by Native dancers and singers.[96] A white man named C. N. A. DeBajligethy served as the chair of the Indian Centennial Committee and took the lead in organizing and advertising the event.[97] Along with DeBajligethy, business leaders of Eastern Oklahoma served on the centennial committee board, including Harry Ogeden (president), S. F. Ditmores (VP), Marie Hayes (secretary), Ross Susman (treasurer), LW Duncan, EB Maytubby (Chickasaw), Dr. NK Leathers, Tom Tarpley, Carl Krepper, Earl Boyd Pierce, and Charlie Cobb.[98] Notably, some representatives from the Five Tribes joined the white businessmen who headed the Committee. J.J. Mingo, Muscogee (Creek) Nation, served as the chairman of parade floats and sat on the board after Chief Roly Canard appointed him.[99] Besides Maytubby, no other tribally enrolled members of the Five Tribes served on the Centennial committee board. For a town located in both the Muscogee (Creek) Nation and the old Cherokee Nation, Muskogee was firmly situated

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[95] George H. Shirk, "Oklahoma's Two Commemorative Stamps," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 27, no. 1 (Spring 1949): 89-94.

[96] The so-called Indian Centennial began with a push from the Oklahoma Philatelic Society, a stamp club. The club met with Senator Elmer Thomas and Representative William Stigler (Choctaw), both of Oklahoma. Representative Stigler proposed and then passed a resolution in the House that then Senator Thomas introduced and passed in the Senate. By May 1948, the United States Post Office Department slated the stamp for issuing later that year. The Bureau of Engraving and Printing designed a stamp with the seals of the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Seminole, and Muscogee (Creek) nations placed beside the outline of the state of Oklahoma. The bottom of the stamp read, "The Five Civilized Indian Tribes of Oklahoma, 1848-1948." The commemoration of the Five Tribes did not stop with the stamp. The Oklahoma Philatelic Society used the national stamp as a form of national advertising for the so-called "Indian Centennial of 1948," a two day celebration held in Muskogee, Oklahoma.

[97] George H. Shirk, "Oklahoma's Two Commemorative Stamps," 89-94.

[98] George H. Shirk, "Oklahoma's Two Commemorative Stamps," 89-94.

[99] Newspaper clipping of Muskogee Times-Democrat, "Checotah Group Pledges Support for Centennial," May 14, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 1, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC.

in Indian Country. No African Americans, whether tribally affiliated or not, served in any capacity of the planning, even though Muskogee (combined with nearby Taft, an all-Black town) had a large African American population of about 15,000 in the early 1940s, and the town had a history of Black-owned businesses and activism.[100] In a ceremony leading up to the opening of the centennial, on October 4, the postmaster of the Muskogee post office presented a sheet of the stamps to each of the Five Tribes.[101]

Eastern Oklahoma boosters created a settler paradox in the Indian Centennial: boosters rhetorically insisted that members of the Five Tribes were settlers in their own right, and yet, the actions of commemoration racialized the Five Tribes as others and therefore not true settlers nor inheritors of the land. Throughout the Centennial, Oklahoma both challenged and illustrated national settler memory, because white boosters selectively incorporated the Five Tribes into celebratory notions of settlement and "civilization." However, white newspapers did not include African Americans—non-tribal associated African Americans and Freedmen of the Five Tribes––in their histories of removal and the rebuilding of the Five Tribes after removal nor in their coverage of the commemoration.

Rhetoric of the "Indian Centennial"

In choosing the framework of a centennial, Eastern Oklahoma boosters had to invent why 1948 marked an important century of time. Centennial Chairman C.N.A. DeBajligethy took to the press to explain the year's significance, offering slightly different explanations depending on the audience to whom he spoke. While the Centennial Board could only have command over the

[100] Muskogee, Oklahoma Negro City Directory, Including the Town of Taft, 1941-1942. Muskogee Public Library, Muskogee, Oklahoma, 9; Franklin, *Journey Toward Hope*, 23, 25, 97.In fact, Muskogee had been a central organizing space for activists seeking to challenge the segregation laws attached to statehood. See Arthur Tolson, "The Negro in Oklahoma Territory: A Study in Racial Discrimination," (PhD diss., University of Oklahoma, 1966), 127, 131, 132, 134, 144.

[101] George H. Shirk, "Oklahoma's Two Commemorative Stamps," 92.

intended meaning of the Centennial, they tried repeatedly to offer a progressive narrative of history that incorporated the Five Tribes and white settlers. The boosters' rhetoric displayed the degree to which settler logic and memory dominated the Indian Centennial. DeBajligethy made sense of historical events as benchmarks of progress for the Five Tribes, even when Native historians complicated the Centennial's founding historical narrative. According to booster rhetoric, the Five Tribes became settlers in history, and yet, boosters situated white settlers as the inheritors of this history. Boosters who peddled in representing this history to the press excluded African Americans from the history altogether.

If 1948 marked one hundred years since something historically significant happened, Chairman DeBajligethy had to explain what happened in 1848. DeBajligethy insisted on the importance of 1848 because, as he claimed, the Chickasaws withdrew from the Choctaws and established independent governance, the last group of Seminoles was removed to Indian Territory, the Seminoles gained independent governance from the Muskogee (Creek) Nation, a Choctaw student went to an East Coast a university, and the Cherokees founded the first seminary for women. DeBajligethy noted the importance of the Treaty of Guadalupe in 1848 as justification for the commemoration because members of the Five Tribes served in the Mexican American War, and the treaty initiated the process of Oklahoma securing the panhandle from Texas. Succinctly, DeBajligethy said that "from this historical information we are celebrating the century that elapsed since the establishment of all five civilized tribes in what is now known as Eastern Oklahoma."[102] But DeBajligethy was aware of skepticism to his historical narrative. Anticipating critics, DeBajligethy maintained that "no earlier date could have been selected, in view of the fact that prior to 1848, only three of the tribes had governments in the territory." At

[102] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, "Indian Centennial to Mark Several '100th Birthdays," July 29, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 1, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC. Newspaper clipping, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection.

the same time, DeBajligethy also argued that the celebration aimed to highlight "how the Five Tribes pioneered Oklahoma, and have kept pace and aided in its advancement."[103] In a statement to The Associated Press, DeBajligethy cited "the first meeting of all five tribes was held at Council Hill, which became known as the beginning of cooperation between the five tribes." This meeting, according to DeBajligethy's historical narrative, marked "beginning of a march of progress which contributed to the attainment of statehood."[104] In emphasizing governance, East Coast universities, and seminaries, DeBajligethy offered a settler logic of progress that incorporated the Five Tribes as "pioneers."

When casting the Five Tribes as "pioneers," the boosters made them means to the end of Oklahoma statehood, therefore incorporating them into settler triumphalism. In his Associated Press open letter, DeBajligethy said, "This cooperation [between the Five Tribes beginning in 1848] marked the beginning of a march of progress which contributed to the attainment of statehood."[105] In a statement to the Associated Press, DeBajligethy said that the Indian Centennial did not commemorate the Trails of Tears but rather it was "honoring them as the settlers and pioneers of Oklahoma."[106] Not only did the Five Tribes serve as a step toward statehood, according to this settler logic, but DeBajligethy furthered that "these Indian citizens have brought renown and glory to Oklahoma," listing Will Rogers and Sequoyah as examples of

[103] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, "Indian Centennial to Mark Several '100th Birthdays," July 29, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 1, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC. Newspaper clipping, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection.
[104] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, "Conoco to Provide Award for Float," April 27, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 1, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC.
[105] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, "Conoco to Provide Award for Float," April 27, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 1, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC.
[106] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, "Conoco to Provide Award for Float," April 27, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 1, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC. I use the term "Trails of Tears" to emphasize that many Native nations have their own trails of forced migration, beyond the most commonly cited "Trail of Tears" of Cherokee forced migration.

such Native heroes.[107] DeBajligethy's rhetoric underpinned a settler logic that white Oklahomans should celebrate the Five Tribes insofar as they served as interim proxies for civilization until permanent white settlement a few decades later. Though calling the Five Tribes "settlers," boosters considered the Five Tribes as the prehistory of white settlement.

According to the needs of a settler logic, narratives of Oklahoma history disappeared or highlighted Native people to illustrate Oklahoma's racial harmony. In speeches at the opening of the Indian Centennial, former governor and future senator Robert Kerr, and the BIA superintendent of the Five Tribes, William O. Roberts, "expressed the belief that the Indian and white peoples had set an example by their harmony for the world to emulate."[108] Speaking as the head of the education division of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Willard W. Beatty said that the "intermarriage and cooperation of the two peoples promised a nationwide solution of Indians' racial problem."[109] State politicians and federal agents considered relations between Native people and white Oklahomans as exceptional, because of the "harmony" and "intermarriage" in Oklahoma. Such rhetoric created a narrative in which the Five Tribes' closeness to Euro-Oklahoman culture represented their "progress" and level of civilization. In prizing "intermarriage" as a solution to the "Indian problem," white politicians erased Native people and claimed white settlers as the inheritors of their land and culture.

While the removals of many Native people groups marked the mid-nineteenth century and explained the Five Tribes' relocation to Oklahoma, boosters disavowed the idea that the

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[107] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, "Conoco to Provide Award for Float," April 27, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 1, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC.
[108] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, "Album Presented to Each Chieftain by Postmaster," October 14, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 2, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC.
[109] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, "Album Presented to Each Chieftain by Postmaster," October 14, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 2, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC.

Centennial celebrated removal policies. While DeBajligethy insisted on the theme of progress, he resisted the reading of this narrative as a celebration of the Trails of Tears, especially when he spoke to Native audiences. DeBajligethy, expressed awareness of the potential controversy regarding the Centennial's theme. DeBajligethy said to an audience of Muscogee (Creek) at a National Council meeting that the Centennial intended to "mark a century of progress of the Indians nations responsible for the settlement and early development of what is now eastern Oklahoma," however, to this audience, DeBajligethy "emphasized that the celebration was not in commemoration of the forcible removal of Indians known as the 'Trail of Tears.'"[110] At DeBajligethy's meeting with the National Council of the Muskogee (Creek) Nation, J.J. Mingo translated DeBajligethy's statements into the Creek language, so Mingo may have translated DeBajligethy's explanation of the Centennial to the audience at the Muscogee (Creek) National Council meeting in a way that changed the intention of his statements. Beyond DeBajligethy's comments, newspapers published that "[n]o one should get the mistaken idea the Centennial has the intent of having the least thing to do with that regrettable phase of history that has become infamous and now is referred to as the 'Trail of Tears.'"[111] Newspapers would not mention the Trails of Tears or removal. The *Tulsa Tribune* described the Indian Centennial as marking "the 100th year since the uniting of the Five Tribes after their settlement in territory, and the advances in education, industry and civic progress during that time," thereby using the word "settlement" instead of the word "removal."[112] This distancing subtly implied a disavowal of the disastrous

[110] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Times-Democrat*, "Creek National Council Votes Full Support for Centennial," April 30, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 1, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC.
[111] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Times-Democrat*, "Creek National Council Votes Full Support for Centennial," October 14, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 2, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC.
[112] Newspaper clipping of *Tulsa World,* "Indian Centennial," October 10, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 2, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC.

and genocidal policies of the United States government. Instead of calling it removal, boosters used the term settlement.

However, Native historians attempted to correct the Centennial's historical fabrications. DeBajligethy had the most difficulty explaining the importance of 1848 when he spoke to Oklahoma historian and Choctaw woman Muriel H. Wright.[113] In a series of letters exchanged between the two from March to May 1948, DeBajligethy proved clueless about the history of the Five Tribes, when he discussed the subject with Wright, a historian. On letterhead reading "In 1948 It's Muskogee! Indian Capital of the World!," DeBajligethy wrote to Wright in her capacity as the unofficial editor of the Oklahoma Historical Society's *Chronicles of Oklahoma* publication.[114] He inquired about displaying historical items relating to the Five Tribes at the Arts and Crafts Exposition. But before making this request, DeBajligethy described the theme of the Indian Centennial as "100 Years of Progress," situating 1848 as the year when "the main body of the Seminole Tribe was moved by force in 1848 and they are the last of the Five Civilized Tribes to be moved here…"[115] In response, Wright did not remark on the theme or the history, but she said that the Oklahoma Historical Society held interest in the commemoration but she explained that they do not loan out exhibits.[116] Responding once again, DeBajligethy backtracked, saying that he was "not interested in securing any exhibits front he Oklahoma

[113] Muriel H. Wright was an elite Choctaw who had ancestry both from Mayflower-era settlers and was the granddaughter of Choctaw chief Allen Wright. She was also heavily involved in Choctaw politics, serving as the secretary of the Choctaw Committee and then a member of the Choctaw Advisory committee and as the Choctaw representative to the Intertribal Council in the 1930s through 1940s. She published several books on Oklahoma and Native history, and served as the editor of the Oklahoma Historical Society publication, *Chronicles of the Oklahoma*, for several decades.

[114] C.N.A. DeBajligethy to Muriel Wright, 24 March 1948, Folder 10, Box 1, Minor Collections, Oklahoma History Center.

[115] C.N.A. DeBajligethy to Muriel Wright, 24 March 1948, Folder 10, Box 1, Minor Collections, Oklahoma History Center.

[116] Muriel Wright to C.N.A. DeBajligethy, 10 April 1948, Folder 10, Box 1, Minor Collections, Oklahoma History Center.

Historical Society, due to the fact that all available space for the Indian Arts and Crafts Exposition had been taken by the various Indian schools, weavers, etc."[117] Amending his prior request, DeBajligethy instead requested the endorsement of the Oklahoma Historical Society and suggested that they submit a float for the parade. He then cited the endorsement of the Five Tribes, the United States Senate, the United States Army, and the towns of then Indian Territory. He boosted the expected attendance of the Centennial and explained that he "certainly expect[s] the Oklahoma Historical Society to give its support to such a worthy cause in honor of the Five Civilized Tribes for their 100 Year March of Progress."[118] But after this letter, there is no record of Wright's response.

After what may have been a lapse of response, DeBajligethy wrote again, making another request to Wright. Because the historian previously charged with organizing the historical floats was ill, DeBajligethy asked if Wright would take up the baton and list "[t]en or so floats [that] should tell the story (these floats to be entered by various civic groups) followed by members of the Five Tribes who have achieved success such as artists, professional men, etc."[119] He then boasted that "everyone is contributing their time and we are not bringing in any professional to put this event on and will not allow any carnival to be here." He assured Wright that the Centennial would be "authentic in every respect and to be the finest ever held in Oklahoma" and "a genuine tribute to our beloved Indian Citizens." After another gap in response, DeBajilgethy sent another letter to Wright inquiring about "photographs of the five Principal Chiefs of the Five

[117] C.N.A. DeBajligethy to Muriel Wright, 13 April 1948, Folder 10, Box 1, Minor Collections, Oklahoma History Center.
[118] C.N.A. DeBajligethy to Muriel Wright, 13 April 1948, Folder 10, Box 1, Minor Collections, Oklahoma History Center.
[119] C.N.A. DeBajligethy to Muriel Wright, 27 April 1948, Folder 10, Box 1, Minor Collections, Oklahoma History Center.

Civilized Tribes of 1848."[120] He wanted to use materials from the Oklahoma Historical Society in order to bound the Indian Centennial in historical legitimacy.

After this request, Wright expressed the most corrections at what she considered DeBajligethy's misunderstanding of history. Wright responded that his request was "impossible to fill" for a number of reasons.[121] First, Wright explained that photography was not a widespread technology in 1848 and that a fire had destroyed paintings of the chiefs at the Smithsonian in the 1850s. Second, Wright noted that his understanding of five chiefs for five nations did not reflect the historical reality of 1848. At that time, the Chickasaws and Choctaws were still under the same nation, and they did not separate until 1856. The Choctaws had three chiefs for three districts. Additionally, the Muscogee (Creeks) had two chiefs. Succinctly, Wright said, "History does not fit this request which is impossible." Beyond the question of identifying the chiefs, Wright responded to DeBajligethy about his request for float theme suggestions, by stressing the importance of including float themes that were "really historical." Wright expressed regret at being too busy to plan them herself. This tension between the Centennial Committee, represented by DeBajligethy, and a Native historian affiliated with the Oklahoma Historical Society, represented by Wright, reflected the tension between the history of the Five Tribes and white (mis)understandings of the Five Tribes.

But these histories of removal and the celebration of the "progress" of the Five Tribes after removal leaves out an important group of people. While boosters did not publicize this history, African-descended people were part of the removals that the so-called Indian Centennial

[120] C.N.A. DeBajligethy to Muriel Wright, 15 May 1948, Folder 10, Box 1, Minor Collections, Oklahoma History Center.
[121] Muriel Wright to C.N.A. DeBajligethy, 18 May 1948, Folder 10, Box 1, Minor Collections, Oklahoma History Center.

aimed to commemorate.[122] The U.S. federal government forcibly removed African-descended people who the Five Tribes enslaved in the nineteenth century. Much of the "progress" of the Five Tribes economically was based on enslaved labor, and then some nations of the Five Tribes resisted the incorporation of freedmen after Civil War treaties mandated the abolition of slavery. White boosters ignored this history, choosing instead to whiten the Five Tribes when it served their purposes and to Indigenize them at other times. While boosters variably emphasized Indigeneity and whiteness, they never emphasized Blackness. The history (and presence in 1948) of African American was an intentional gap in the memory for white boosters seeking to emphasize the "civilized" nature of the Five Tribes.

This progressive narrative based on historical fallacy amounted to a settler memory, because the boosters' rhetoric mobilized the history of the Five Tribes as a step towards "civilization." Boosters neglected the history of the Freedmen of the Five Tribes, implying that they did not want to ascribe "progress" to a people that included people of African descent. So, instead of acknowledging this history, boosters buried it. Ultimately, DeBajligethy's rhetorical implementation of the Five Tribes as settlers provided the settler logic on which boosters based the idea that Oklahoma provided the answer for the national racial problem between Native people and white Oklahomans. By casting Native people as settlers, Oklahoma boosters illustrated a particular iteration of a settler memory, and yet, in their defensive posturing at questions of removal, boosters expressed the national hegemonic settler memory of disavowing federal anti-Indigenous policies. The remaking of the Five Tribes into settlers lived in rhetoric, but the commemorative devices racialized them as others.

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[122] Chang, *The Color of the Land*, 25.; Donald A. Grinde and Quintard Taylor, "Red vs. Black: Conflict and Accommodation in the Post Civil War Indian Territory," *American Indian Quarterly* 10 (Summer 1984): 212; Walt Wilson, "Freedmen in Indian Territory During Reconstruction," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 49 (Summer 1971): 230.

Commemorations during the "Indian Centennial"

While booster rhetoric made the Five Tribes settlers, commemorative devices emphasized their non-whiteness, therefore emphasizing their inability to be "true" settlers. The commemorative devices of the Centennial relied on the body to remember. First, the cosmetic and shaving permits instituted before the Centennial relied on the body to solidify bodily differences between Native peoples and white Muskogeans. Parade floats used the racialized body as a site of remembering and as a site of performance of the past. However, boosters also emphasized the racial unity of the Centennial through floats, a mural in downtown Muskogee, and a fashion exposition. Even as state and federal government officials looked to Oklahoma as a place that had solved the problem between Native people and white people, the commemorative actions included in the Centennial practiced imagined racial differences on the body. These commemorative devices created a paradox of racial unity and yet racial difference, therefore situating the non-whiteness of the Five Tribes as disqualifying their settlerness.

In order to raise funds and awareness for the Centennial, the Centennial Committee created a system of shaving and cosmetic permits that racialized the gendered body. The shaving permits specified that white men, defined using blood quantum, a pseudo-scientific idea that one's Indigeneity could be quantified by blood count, would not be allowed to shave unless they purchased a permit.[123] DeBajligethy's settler logic followed that Native men of more than "one-eighth blood" did not have to grow beards nor pay for permits because Native men could not

[123] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, "Why Beards? DeBajligethy Gives Reasons," September 5, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 1, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC. For beard permits, men of "less than one-eighth Indian blood" in Muskogee and the surrounding towns had to purchase permits in order to illustrate their permission to shave.

grow beards if they were "fullbloods."[124] white boosters rested on the racialized, caricatured, stereotypical notion that Native men could not grow beards if they were truly Native. If these men of Muskogee did not abide by the rules of the shaving permits, a pseudo-vigilante group called the "Court of the Brush" would antagonize the man without a shaving permit and they would mime killing the offender in a mock guillotine or shoot out.[125] Explaining the settler logic of the shaving permit, DeBajligethy explained that white men should "revert back a hundred years, and to appear as white men of the territorial days, leaving the progress angle to the Indians."[126] This explanation rested on a belief in the racialized differences between white and Native people, complicating DeBajligethy's insistence on the Five Tribes as settlers.

Newspapers reported on the shaving permits activity in a way that further racialized the beard, and racialized the differences between the Five Tribes and settlers. The *Muskogee Daily Phoenix* published a photograph of an employee of the Office of Indian Service for the Five Tribes, Noah Vann, to publicize the Indian Centennial. Vann sported a beard and wore a collared white shirt, suspenders, and a flat brim hat. The newspaper noted that Vann grew a beard to support the Indian Centennial, but the newspaper retorted that Vann was "one half Indian and exempt from growing whiskers."[127] The act of publishing Vann in the newspaper with the descriptor of him as "one half Indian" simultaneously disappeared and emphasized his

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[124] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, "Why Beards? DeBajligethy Gives Reasons," September 5, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 1, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC.
[125] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, "Unauthorized 'Hazers' Given Stern Warning After Attack," September 10, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 1, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC.
[126] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, "Why Beards? DeBajligethy Gives Reasons," September 5, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 1, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC.
[127] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, "Beards at Work," August 25, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 1, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC. The newspaper article does not list his tribal affiliation.

Indigeneity. The caption minimized Vann's Indigeneity by describing him as only "half" Native and yet the newspaper emphasized his Indigeneity in order to suggest the participation of Native people in boosting the Indian Centennial. The rhetorical move to emphasize or disavow an individual's Indigeneity became a primary way for white newspapers and planning committees to set the terms of belonging on settler terms, incorporating or excluding them according to white pseudo-scientific methods of belonging like blood quantum or bodily characteristics. Boosters used facial hair to essentialize the body. In doing so, boosters paradoxically affirmed the racial boundaries of Native people and settlers and yet emphasized the interracial harmony between Native and white populations so that boosters could put forward a narrative of progress.

But shaving permits were not the only way that Centennial boosters sought to raise funds and draw attention. For women, the boosters implemented cosmetic permits, wherein women of one-quarter or less blood quantum would have to purchase a permit to wear cosmetics unless they dressed in "pioneer costume"[128] These cosmetic permits took the visual form of a feather tied around the woman's forehead in a style that newspapers described as having them appear like the "Indian maidens of yesteryear."[129] Thus, the boosters encouraged women to participate in a form of "playing Indian." If women did not abide by the rules of the cosmetic permit, the Hazing Harpies, another pseudo-vigilante group, would ostracize any rulebreakers.[130] While white men grew beards as a proxy to their "pioneer" forefathers, white women either dressed up in "pioneer" clothing or played the role of the "Indian princess." When white women played

[128] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, "Women May Buy Red Feathers as 'Cosmetic Permits' Today," September 1, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 1, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC. "appear[ed] in pioneer costume from October 1 through the Centennial."

[129] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, "Feather-Wearing Girls Boost Centennial," September 8, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 1, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC.

[130] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, "Three Are Dunked by Court of Brush," n.d., Box M-7, Folder 2, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC.

Native women during the Centennial, it performatized Beatty's insistence that intermarriage posed a solution to the supposed "problem" of racial conflict between Native and white people. More specifically, these examples of racialized and gender play suggested that intermarriages should occur only between a Native woman and a white man, disavowing the existence of Native men altogether. And in the commemoration's representations of these Native women, the women did not even need to be Native but could be white women playing Native. While the Centennial Committee constructed the event as an opportunity to celebrate the Five Tribes as the first pioneers of what became Oklahoma, boosters simultaneously wrote racialized differences onto their bodies through the use of shaving and cosmetic permits. And because of these racialized differences in commemorative devices, Centennial boosters hinted at a more complicated understanding of who was a settler.

Beyond shaving and cosmetic permits, the Centennial featured floats that racialized and otherized Native bodies, therefore distancing them from the whiteness of settlers. The biggest attraction of the Indian Centennial was the parade, which boasted more than fifty floats, all falling under the aforementioned theme of "100 Years of Progress."[131] A float submitted by the St. Louis-San Francisco Railway depicted the first train to travel through Indian Territory, and the float contained "an Indian and a white woman dressed in territorial costume and another pair dressed in modern style."[132] This float once again took up women—both white and Native—as bodies upon which to illustrate progress. Yet another float depicted an event first commemorated on statehood day in 1907, showing the "marriage to Indian Territory and Mr. Oklahoma," with a

[131] C.N.A. DeBajligethy to Muriel Wright, 13 April 1948, Folder 10, Box 1, Minor Collections, Oklahoma History Center.; Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Times-Democrat*, "Army Band Leads Procession Lasting Nearly Two Hours as Floats, Bands Thrill Crowd," October 15, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 2, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC.
[132] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, "Frisco to Present Trophy to Winning Band in Centennial," September 29, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 1, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC.

Native woman in characterized Plains dress and an Anglo man in a suit and tie.[133] This staged marriage, commonly recycled in Oklahoma commemorations, celebrated the merging of the Five Tribes and white settlers, serving as the origin myth for Oklahoma statehood. The Pilot's Club sponsored this float and it won second prize in the second division of the parade, illustrating the popularity of his intermarriage narrative.[134] Even further, the Muskogee Business and Professional Women's Club hosted a float entitled "Horn of Plenty" that local newspapers described as featuring a "comely Indian Princess."[135] Native women served to remind audiences of the romanticized "Indian princess" trope that many white Oklahomans considered to be their heritage. These floats depicted Native bodies through a racialized, often caricatured lens, and the float designers used racialized bodies to emphasize that to be a settler was to be white and to associate Indigeneity with pre-modernity.

The Centennial bolstered a "coming together" narrative despite their simultaneous insistence on racialized differences. Beyond the parade, publications, and barbecues, the Indian Centennial Committee planned a mural to commemorate the two-day event. They hired Albert H. Hanson to create stencils of the seals of the Five Tribes that were twenty-three feet wide and thirty-two feet across.[136] Hanson and his assistant then used the stencils to paint the paved road of Third Street in downtown Muskogee. But, because the murals were so huge, Hanson struggled

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[133] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, "Big Centennial Parade Witnessed by 150,000," October 16, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 2, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC.
[134] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, "More 'History on Wheels' Scenes from Centennial Parade," October 17, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 2, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC.
[135] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, "Business, Professional Women's Float," October 17, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 2, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC.
[136] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, "Vocational Works of Chilocco Indian School to be Displayed," October 10, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 2, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC.

to complete the mural in time. Newspapers used this mural to depict a story of triumph to proselytize the "coming together" of Native people and white migrants. The newspapers boasted that the "community spirit did it," when the mural finally was completed.[137] The newspaper narrated how a young Choctaw woman from Holdenville, referred to as "Princess Pale Moon" had "donned overalls and pitched in with brush and paint," and over a dozen more people then joined the task of painting. This celebratory narrative served the wider white settler narrative of the "coming together" of people, which the float about the marriage of Miss Indian Territory to Mr. Oklahoma similarly invoked. These floats retold the history of pre-statehood in celebratory terms, focusing on the blending and racial harmony of the Five Tribes and white settlers.

Beyond the mural, the fashion exposition offered both included Native women and yet also used them as spectacles to create Indigeneity as Oklahoma's heritage.[138] During the centennial, Edith Mahier, a professor of art at the University of Oklahoma (OU), sponsored a fashion show at the Centennial, where Native students from the university modeled the clothes. A newspaper reported that in addition to the OU students as models, Mahier invited local Native students from the Muskogee area to participate in the fashion show. To do so, they mailed Mahier a photograph, as well as information like dress size and age. Mahier insisted that the show represented both Native people and Oklahoma, describing it as "Indian in tone, and definitely Oklahoman in effect," because the Sequoyah Indian Weavers and other Native artisans

[137] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Times-Democrat*, "Volunteers Aid in Painting Seals on Third Street," October 14, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 2, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC.

[138] Since the 1930s, the United States had seen a revival in interests surrounding "folk culture," which is already a colonial idea. In their policies addressing the economic catastrophe of the Great Depression, the Franklin Delano Roosevelt administration sought to revive patriotism and fund unemployed workers through New Deal programs like the Federal Writers Project, the Historic Sites Act, and the Indian Arts and Crafts Board. These initiatives sought to increase interest in American culture, and by rhetorical situating Native arts and culture under this catchall of American culture, the Roosevelt administration, and the bureaucracy therein, situated Native culture under the purview of a national framework.

made the textile materials for the clothing.[139] Mahier insisted the fashion exposition would "show Oklahoma women that they do not need to go out of this state for exclusive fashion designs that equal any produced in the great metropolitan centers, and that can not be duplicated anywhere." By highlighting Native-produced fabrics for local consumption, Mahier carved out a place of belonging and pride in Oklahoma, through a gendered interest in women's clothing. And yet, Mahier racialized these Native women as others.

Ultimately, these different commemorative devices used the body in different ways, but they all racialized—or solidified—differences between bodies. The shaving and cosmetic permits relied on body modifications to bring a narrative of the past into the present. The floats emphasized the body as a caricatured spectacle, especially drawing attendees' attention to Native bodies. Simultaneously, some floats depicted the intermarriage between Native peoples and white settlers, relying on the intimate relation of bodies to represent a multicultural Oklahoma. The way that newspapers reported the story of the mural emphasized the otherness—the mysticism and spectacle—of Pale Moon's body, and yet the story tried to convey a story of Oklahoman exceptionalism because of its interracial unity. And finally, the fashion exposition located the body as a site of spectacle, relying on young Native women's bodies to emphasize Oklahoma's exceptional offerings to the arts. Ultimately, commemorative devices relied on the body to affirm narratives of progress, on the one hand, and narratives of racial difference, on the other, to exclude Native people from "true" settler identity. The Centennial became an occasion to create a spectacle of the body as a settler or a Native person. Importantly, however, white boosters did not mention Black Muskogeans during the commemoration, neither as participants nor as historical actors, in newspaper reports of the Centennial. The narrative of racial harmony

[139] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, "Area Indian Girls to Model Exclusive Articles of Clothing During Style Show at Centennial," September 22, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 2, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC.

between Indigenous people and white settlers served as a red herring to distract from the legal and extralegal forms of segregation in Muskogee and throughout the state. Instead, boosters created a bilateral racial dichotomy, Native and white, without mentioning how Black Muskogeans factored into histories of removal.

Resistance and Strategic Participation

Native peoples reacted in a number of different ways to the Indian Centennial. Some members of the Five Tribes participated, like JJ Mingo and E.B. Maytubby, and their place within the Centennial can be read through the lens of strategic participation, because leaders of the Five Tribes perhaps participated in the Centennial as an act of sovereignty. Other members of the Five Tribes seemed reluctant to participate at all. Beyond the Five Tribes, members of other Native nations around the state expressed frustration at the way the Centennial presented history. Ultimately, Native peoples reacted in heterogeneous ways to the Centennial, both adopting approaches of resistance and strategic participation. While boosters selectively incorporated Native peoples, Native peoples selectively incorporated the Centennial.

Because of the precarious place of the Five Tribes during the 1940s in Oklahoma, some members of the Five Tribes participated in an effort to bolster their sovereignty as independent governments and societies. In the lead up to the Centennial, President Harry Truman visited Muskogee, an event which the boosters used to cultivate a national audience prior to the Centennial. About two weeks before the Indian Centennial, President Truman gave a speech after Governor Roy J. Turner introduced him. In photographs from the event, Native students from Bacone College sat behind the president and governor.[140] While boosters celebrated the speech for attracting national attention to further advertise the Centennial, the presence of Native

[140] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, "President Introduced by Governor Turner," September 30, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 2, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC.

students from Bacone College during the presidential speech illustrated Native presence and continued survival to national settler audiences. By standing behind President Truman, Native peoples entered into the realm of politics and participated in the Centennial in order to further their own survival as sovereign nations.

Native participants in the Centennial co-opted the celebration as an occasion to highlight the continued vitality of their own languages, another important facet of sovereignty. The lines of audience and authorship became blurred during the Centennial, as Native peoples strategically participated in the planning of the Indian Centennial. However, the Five Tribes also served as an audience for the Centennial, and Indigenous languages became one way that made this audience visible. For example, Centennial festivities in the nearby town of Wagoner offered Centennial programs in both English and Cherokee.[141] The printing press on the Wagoner Roundup Club's float printed these programs, emphasizing the written Cherokee language. White newspapers appeared conscious that "a large number of Indians, including many who speak little or no English, will be present," and therefore the boosters appeared interested in providing some materials for them.[142] While white boosters largely served as gatekeepers, Native people expressed their sovereignty through their use of language.

Beyond language, the Five Tribes participated most actively in the planning and execution of the Arts and Craft Exposition, which highlighted the vitality of cultural traditions. The Choctaw, Muscogee (Creek), Seminole, and Cherokee nations co-sponsored the Arts and Crafts Exposition and contributed goods on display after the Muscogee (Creek) Nation came up

[141] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, "Old 'Pony Express' to Bring Mail Here During Centennial," September 23, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 2, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC.
[142] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, "Indians Prepare Market and Fair for Opening Today," October 14, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 2, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC.

with the idea for the Exposition.[143] These four tribes displayed home-made goods for purchase and live demonstrations of weaving. The Sequoyah Indian Weavers and the Choctaw Basket Weavers provided audiences with a demonstration at the exposition.[144] In 1948, the practice of loom weaving was relatively new in the Cherokee Nation, as an agent of the Bureau of Indian Affairs had trained Cherokees in the 1930s to instruct on loom weaving as part of the folk culture renaissance of the New Deal. The Sequoyah Indian Weavers Association began at the Sequoyah Indian School in 1938 as a part of that Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) program.[145] At the Exposition, Juanita Smith, a Cherokee young woman from Tahlequah, was a featured weaver and she had gained a profile earlier that year at the International Textile Exhibition at New York.[146] These loom weaving demonstrations represented cultural preservation to white boosters and tourists who maintained mental images of the "vanishing Indian." This showcasing of Native cultural practices were public acts of sovereignty that interrupted disappearance narratives. While the white boosters used the weavers as a tourist attraction, the weavers used the Centennial to further cultural survival and sovereignty.

Beyond the weaving demonstrations, the Five Tribes offered their own histories of the past one hundred years. The Arts and Crafts Exposition included also a number of manuscripts, books, and artifacts for audiences to peruse and learn about Five Tribes history through curated

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[143] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, "Indians Prepare Market and Fair for Opening Today," October 14, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 2, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC.
[144] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, "Arts and Crafts Show to be Best of Kind Ever Held," October 3, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 2, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC.
[145] "Loom Weaving Class to Begin January 28,) *Cherokee Phoenix*, January 11, 2012, https://www.cherokeephoenix.org/culture/loom-weaving-class-to-begin-jan-28/article_d9bf7b0c-40a9-5df7-9741-bca2b9c9c324.html.
[146] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Times-Democrat*, "Indian Weavers Plan Centennial Demonstration," February 25, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 1, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC.

physical artifacts. Lee Harkins (Choctaw) organized the display of historical materials because he had an extensive private collection of materials relating to the Five Tribes. These historical materials reflected a narrative of broken federal treaties and emphasized the sovereignty of the Five Tribes before the detribalization era. Further, Lusshayna (Chickasaw), a Metropolitan opera singer, made a celebratory appearance at the Exposition.[147] Individual tribal members participated in the Arts and Craft Exposition, where Native people participated in ways that boosted Indigenous sovereignty.

Though to a lesser degree than the Arts and Craft Exposition, the parade offered ways for the Five Tribes to offer their own memories of the past one hundred years. While the Arts and Crafts Exposition, the parade offered limited Native authorship. The Cherokee Nation, or at least its governing body, submitted float designs and invited individual Cherokees to participate. At various points in the planning process, many educational institutions with tribal ties entered floats. For instance, Northeastern State College, a university aimed at preparing teachers located at Tahlequah, Oklahoma, the capital of the Cherokee Nation, contributed a float to the parade.[148] The float depicted the Cherokee Female Seminary building, which, paired with the Cherokee Male Seminary, were tribally-run boarding schools created in November 1846. While the Cherokee Nation ran the schools throughout the nineteenth century, the state government forcibly seized control over the schools in the era of allotment and detribalization in the early twentieth century, upon statehood in 1907, the effects of which the Cherokee Nation still being felt in 1948. Even before the state government took control, the schools existed in the fluid space

[147] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, "Arts and Crafts Show to be Best of Kind Ever Held," October 3, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 2, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC.

[148] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, "Vance McSpadden to Head Centennial Plans at Tahlequah," May 16, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 1, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC.; Ronald Caywood, "*The History of Northeastern State College*" (Thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1950), 4.

between assimilation and cultural traditions, like teaching similar classes in both the female and male seminaries, illustrating the cultural tradition and value of gender egalitarianism.[149] In the float depicting Cherokee education, the Cherokee Nation strategically highlighted one hundred years of "progress," creating an impression that these messy educational institutions—which were at times assimilationist and at other times expressions of sovereignty—persisted in the Cherokee consciousness as important sites of remembering. Further, this Cherokee Nation-authored float suggested the Cherokees emphasized education as a site of progress. Other educational institutions with floats included the Sequoyah Indian School, Sequoyah Grade School, Central and Bagley High Schools.[150] The Cherokee Nation, represented by Chief JB Milam, spent over $700 on Cherokee-sponsored floats for the parade and other Centennial-related expenses.[151] These floats illustrate the extent to which the Cherokee Nation attempted to participate in the commemoration on their own terms of progress: education.

Beyond explicit Native expression of sovereignty in floats and the Arts and Crafts Exposition, Native presence existed in less obvious ways. Historical booklets published on the occasion of the Indian Centennial offered glimpses of Native perspectives, even within broader celebrations of white settlement. Settler and published local historian Dr. Grant Foreman

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[149] Emily Legg, "Daughters of the Seminaries: Re-Landscaping History through the Composition Courses at the Cherokee National Female Seminary," *College Composition and Communication* 66, no. 1 (2014): 67–90. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43490901. Devon Mihesuah, "Out of the 'Graves of the Polluted Debauches': The Boys of the Cherokee Male Seminary *American Indian Quarterly* Vol. 15, No. 4 (Autumn, 1991): 503-521. https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/10.2307/1185367.

[150] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, "Vance McSpadden to head Centennial Plans at Tahlequah," May 216, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 1, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC.

[151] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Times-Democrat*, "Cherokees Authorize $500 Centennial Float," September 4, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 1, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC. McSpadden married Sarah "Sallie" Rogers, Will Roger's sister. The Rogers family was Cherokee.

prepared a historical booklet about the Five Tribes in preparation for the Indian Centennial.[152] Co-sponsored by the Indian Centennial Central Committee and the Da-Co-Tah Club, the booklet entitled "The Five Civilized Tribes: A Brief History and A Century of Progress" offered Indian Centennial attendees a history of the Five Tribes.[153] As the title indicated, Foreman described a story of progress for the Cherokees, Choctaws, Chickasaws, Seminoles, and Muskogee (Creeks), focusing largely on removal and then on "advancement" after relocation in Indian Territory.[154] While the booklet offered a celebratory narrative of the Five Tribes as advancing civilization in Oklahoma, aligning with DeBajligethy's comments to the press, the back cover of the booklet revealed the tension over the Centennial's Native and white authorship. The back cover of the pamphlet depicted Native students at the Haskell Institute at Lawrence, Kansas. In the center, a young woman student and a young man student walked arm in arm while wearing Haskell Institute school pride outfits. Sketches of Haskell students doing many activities surrounded the man and woman; the women baked, sewed, and typed, while the men welded and read. Under these sketches, the booklet read, "Learn To Earn at Haskell," and "Sketched by Franklin Gritts, Cherokee Artist," and "Book printed by Indian students." In other words, while Native students did not write the history publication, they illustrated their lives. The depiction of these Native students taking part in gendered labor practices at a federally run boarding school epitomizes

[152] Dr. Foreman originally came to Indian Territory, then Oklahoma, to serve on the Dawes Commission. He ended up settling in Muskogee and publishing several books on the history of tribes of Eastern Oklahoma through the University of Oklahoma Press. He also was a project manager for the Works Progress Administration's Oklahoma Branch's Federal Writers Project which conducted interviews with Anglo settlers and Native people during the 1930s and 1940s.
[153] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, "Foreman to Prepare Information Booklet for Big Centennial," March 3, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 1, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC.
[154] "The Five Civilized Tribes: A Brief History and a Century of Progress," by Grant Foreman, 1948, William G. Stigler Collection, Box 9 Folder 79, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

what the Indian Centennial celebrated: a settler-defined version of progress for Native people. However, the drawings depicted Native authorship with a keen awareness of the settler gaze.

At several moments of the Centennial, gaps in newspaper coverage invite contemplation on moments of transgression and complication of settler memory. The Centennial included events and spaces solely for Native people, illustrating an understanding of the Five Tribes as sovereign nations and cultures. JJ Mingo (Creek) announced in the newspaper that there would be activities for Native audiences only, including "stomp dancing, green corn dancing, archery contests and a rough and tumble ancient game of Indian stick ball."[155] But these events were not limited to members of the Five Tribes but also an estimated 20,000 Native people from around North America who traveled to Muskogee for the Centennial celebration. Muskogee newspapers neglected Native perspectives on the Indian Centennial, even while some Native people took part in organizing it. One of the gaps in the white newspaper reporting occurred when leaders of the Five Tribes gave speeches to attendees in Native languages.[156] While the newspaper coverage did not specify which tribal leaders chose not to speak English, white newspapers mentioned speaking native languages that white audiences could not understand. Indigenous languages created spaces beyond settler ears, even during a commemoration that settler memory dominated. The leaders of the Five Tribes could have said in their own language, outside the understanding of white ears, sentiments that offered a counter-memory to the one hundred and some years since removal to Indian Territory. Perhaps their speeches challenged the celebratory nature of the

[155] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, "Village of Indians Springs Up in Arena at Fair Grandstand," October 15, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 2, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC.
[156] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, "Album Presented to Each Chieftain by Postmaster," n.d., Box M-7, Folder 2, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC.

festival or poked fun at the obliviousness of white Oklahomans. Unfortunately, no record of these speeches could be located.

However, even in the Native-only moments of the Centennial, settler colonial definitions of Native peoples determined who was—and was not—Native. Settler logic still circumscribed Native-only spaces. As part of welcoming the thousands of Native people coming to Muskogee for the Indian Centennial, the Committee hosted a barbecue at the Muskogee Fairgrounds on Friday, October 15 where Native performers and visitors could gather. The dinner consisted of elk and buffalo meat that the United States government had shipped. However, according to the notice of the barbecue published in Muskogee newspapers, participants had to be "of at least one-quarter Indian blood" in order to register for the dinner.[157] Even in this supposedly Native-held space, the white settler logic of blood quantum set the terms of who could attend.[158] Even in Native-only spaces, settlers disappeared Native people by creating goalposts of Indigeneity mapped onto colonized communities.

In the white press, Native peoples expressed reservations about the Centennial. These examples illustrated the ways in which the harmonious narrative of Oklahoman exceptionalism was more fiction than reality. When the Indian Centennial Committee courted members of the Five Tribes for participation in the planning of the celebration, some Native people expressed reservations about it. J.J. Mingo visited the Co-Operative Club of Muskogee to garner support. At the meeting, Mingo tried to recruit boosters because, according to the newspaper's paraphrasing, Mingo expressed awareness that "many older Indians were still doubtful that the

[157] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, "Cavalcade Sellout Seen First Night," n.d., Box M-7, Folder 2, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC.
[158] It should be noted, however, that some Native nations have adopted blood quantum to create structure of tribal citizenship within the confines of the United States legal system.

white man would hold any kind of celebration honoring members of the red race."[159] Some members of the Five Tribes looked skeptically at the triumphalist narrative of celebration that the Centennial boosters had offered. They realized that this celebration was not on their own terms but on terms following settler logics and settler domination. Some members of the Five Tribes did not participate at all, perhaps out of skepticism that participating could further sovereignty.

Beyond the Five Tribes, other Native nations of Oklahoma expressed frustration at the historical narrative that the Centennial boosters insisted upon. Charles Labadie of Hominy, Oklahoma, wrote in a letter to the editor:

> I notice where the people behind the celebration you are putting on at Muskogee say that it is to honor members of the Five Civilized Tribes who were responsible for the settlement and development of eastern Oklahoma. Members of the Osage Indians, of which I am one, present this misrepresentation of the facts, as many Osage Indians were settled there by Jean P. Chouteau long before the Five Tribes in the 1830's. (. . .) The constructive development of Oklahoma is generally considered to start from that time.[160]

Like historian Muriel Wright, Labadie pointed out the factual inadequacies of the narrative the Centennial boosters presented to the local and national press. Defending the Centennial, the newspaper columnist reiterated that the Centennial was intended to celebrate the Five Tribes "settlement and development of eastern Oklahoma," and that nobody "claimed that they were the first ones here."[161] While Labadie's comments still relied on white settlement as the origin for progress, his comments complicated the boosters' use and misuse of history. Osage understandings of history complicated the white booster narrative of Oklahoma exceptionalism that marketed Oklahoma as having solved tensions between Native peoples and white

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[159] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, "Full Centennial Support Urged by Co-operative Club Speaker," August 28, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 2, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC.
[160] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, "Ah-Se-Quu-A-Dah-Ne-Di," May 17, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 1, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC.
[161] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, "Ah-Se-Quu-A-Dah-Ne-Di," May 17, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 1, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC.

Oklahomans. Labadie pointed to the differential treatments between the tribes of western Oklahoma and the Five Tribes.

White newspaper coverage of the "Indian Centennial" only mentions Black Muskogeans as participants in the commemorations once. The Muskogee Times Democrat reported on a sporting event: "Opening the program at 8pm, tomorrow will be a negro football game at the Wagoner High School Stadium. An old settlers' dance will follow at the Community Building and the Indian stomp dance coming at 10:30 pm."[162] The only event that included African Americans advertised alongside the Indian Centennial was a football game. This specific article does not even mention the schools playing other than noting that they were African American schools. Another article from the *Muskogee Daily Phoenix* advertised that the Manual Training School, an all-Black school in Muskogee, would play the Lincoln High School of Kansas City.[163] Manual Training School, the heart of the African American community in Muskogee, also featured a homecoming parade through downtown. Besides this brief schedule of events published in the newspaper, the two white newspapers of Muskogee ignored African Americans in the town. Even though this football game appeared in the press, it was not considered a direct commemorative activity associated with the "Indian Centennial." Even when boosters included them as contemporary actors, the Centennial Committee did not include African Americans in their historical narratives of removal.

Ultimately, Native peoples in Oklahoma—numbering more than forty different tribes and nations—reacted in a diverse way to the Centennial. The Five Tribes selectively participated in

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[162] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Times-Democrat*, "Wagoner Plans Night Long Activities for Those Attending Indian Centennial," October 13, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 2, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC.
[163] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, "Centennial Grid Tilts Tonight in Three Cities," October 14, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 2, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC.

order to bolster their own sovereignty in a period of detribalization and anti-Indigenous federal and state policies. By casting themselves as sovereign actors through Truman's visit, the highlighting of their own languages, and sponsoring the Arts and Crafts Exposition and parade floats, Native presence illustrated the fallacy of booster narratives that disappeared Native people after white settlement. The Five Tribes participated as an act of sovereignty, refuting their termination as political actors in Oklahoma. However, other Native peoples—both members of the Five Tribes and other nations in Oklahoma—expressed critiques of the Centennial for political reasons. While settler memory in Oklahoma selectively incorporated Native people, Native people selectively participated in booster events for their own ends.

Conclusion

The Centennial of 1948 ended on Saturday, October 15, and afterward boosters began cleaning up Muskogee. Chairman DeBajligethy told the *Muskogee Times-Democrat* that he "want[ed] to thank everyone who aided with the foresight, confidence and energy behind the centennial, and for the Oklahoma spirit that made it the greatest celebration ever held in the southwest, and the finest, cleanest even ever staged in Oklahoma."[164] DeBajligethy's emphasis on the "Oklahoma spirit" concealed the question of who belonged as a part of that spirit and for what reason they belonged. By nature of their exclusion, DeBajligethy would not seem to include African Americans or other Native nations as part of this "Oklahoma spirit." According to his white settler logic, the "Oklahoma spirit" of 1948 was the conglomeration of the Five Tribes who started Oklahoma on the path toward white notions of settlement and progress, and then the white settlers who, upon the land runs of the late nineteenth century, took up the torch and sealed the settler colonial project.

[164] Newspaper clipping of *Muskogee Times-Democrat*, "Thanks to Those Helping on Indian Centennial Given," October 19, 1948, Box M-7, Folder 2, Muskogee, Oklahoma Indian Centennial Collection, WHC.

The Centennial offered a memory of the Five Tribes as settlers in their own right and yet mnemonic practices, like the shaving and cosmetic permits, demonstrated that racial ideology still coded the way white Oklahomans saw Native peoples. This paradox made mid-century Oklahoma both conform to—and challenge—the settler memory that dominated the mainstream national memory. Oklahoma boosters elevated white settlers, like the rest of the national memory landscape, and still Oklahoma boosters sought to cast the state as "racially harmonious" for its positive relationship with Native peoples. In Oklahoma, white boosters considered the Five Tribes as similar to them, as historical actors who pushed forward progress until permanent white settlers "arrived" on the scene. Whereas national settler memory disavowed Indigenous people altogether, Oklahoma settler memory selectively incorporated Native peoples, like the Five Tribes. However, the white press of Muskogee did not include African Americans in their historical narratives of the removal. Further, the white press only mentioned African Americans as commemorating the Centennial in a brief mention of a football game occurring between two Black high schools. Illustrated by Kerr, Roberts, and Beatty's remarks on how Oklahoma had solved the "Indians' racial problem," this narrative of exceptionalism became the way that Oklahoma marketed itself outwardly. By illustrating Oklahoma as having solved the "racial problem" because of white-Indigenous relations, white boosters did not address the segregationist laws that marked African Americans' lives in Muskogee. The construction and reconstruction of Oklahoma identity during the mid-twentieth century became an even more pressing question for the statewide celebration of the Semi-Centennial of Statehood in 1957. Nearly ten years after the "Indian Centennial of 1948," boosters from around the state marketed Oklahoma to national audiences and they debated how to do so.

Chapter Three: Modernity and Belonging during the Semi-Centennial of Statehood

The Oklahoma Department of Libraries houses the state archives, and the building sits a mere half mile from the Oklahoma State Capitol. In a dingy building constructed in the 1970s, I took the elevator to the second floor, where a wire cage greets me on the landing. Within the locked cage that took up half the floor is a series of boxes for which I was searching. When I get to the reading room table, a nicely printed finding aid for the Semi-Centennial Commission Collection greets me. I look through the finding aid to verify the boxes I had requested to pull when I get to a series of scanned photographs at the end of the finding aid. After a photograph of Buster Keaton and Jerry Lewis looking absent-minded, Lucille Ball and a Native woman dressed in regalia stare back at me. The photograph stops me in my tracks. What did it mean that a surprised Lucy, at the peak of her career, posed with an unnamed Native woman at the Semi-Centennial of Statehood? What does it say about the place of Oklahoma in popular culture and how Native people fit into that picture?

When this photograph was taken in the 1950s, Oklahoma was undergoing some political and social changes. First, African American leaders amplified their organizing for desegregation and civil rights. In 1946, an African American woman named Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher sued the University of Oklahoma for refusing her admission to the College of Law based solely on Oklahoma segregation statutes. Fisher's case went to the United States Supreme Court, and in 1948, the justices ruled that the Board of Regents had to admit her, a case that marked a stepping stone toward *Brown v. Board of Education*.[165] In 1952, only five years before the Semi-

[165] Mark Tushnet, *Making Civil Rights Law: Thurgood Marshall and the Supreme Court, 1936–1961* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 129. The United States Supreme Court ruling did not immediately result in Fisher attending the University of Oklahoma's College of law. Instead, the Oklahoma Legislature created a School of Law for Langston University, a historically Black university. It took another appeal for Fisher to actually gain entrance into the

Centennial of Statehood, Oklahoma City hosted the National Association of Colored People (NAACP) National Convention.[166] The civil rights movement of Oklahoma City was in full swing, led by activists such as Jimmy Stewart, Clara Luper, and Roscoe Dunjee.[167] Meanwhile, Indigenous nations in Oklahoma and around the country experienced an assault on their sovereignty and new attempts at assimilation as the Eisenhower administration created the Urban Relocation Program and the House Concurrent Resolution 108. The Urban Relocation Program sought to relocate Native families from rural areas to urban centers in order to assimilate them into white life. The House Concurrent Resolution 108 initiated a policy that resulted in over sixty nations losing their tribal status.[168] These two contexts created the atmosphere in which Indigenous peoples and African Americans navigated Oklahoma in 1957.

The story of this photograph began when the Oklahoma legislature signed the House Joint Resolution number 511 in 1953 to authorize the creation of the Oklahoma Semi-Centennial Commission which would be responsible for organizing the celebration. By the year of the celebration 1957, boosters marked the festivities in a months-long style, and the celebration became marked by April 22nd—referencing the date in 1889 when the so-called Land Run opened parts of Indian Territory to white, immigrant, and African American settlement—and November 16th—referencing the date in 1907 when Oklahoma statehood became official. The

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University of Oklahoma's College of Law, and even then, Fisher was forced to sit in the back of the classroom and had to use separate cafeteria and restroom facilities.

[166] "Attendees of the 1952 NAACP National Convention, Calvary Baptist Church," June 1952, Oklahoma Images Collection, Metropolitan Library System, Oklahoma City, OK, https://www.metrolibrary.org/archives/image/2012/08/attendees-1952-naacp-national-convention-calvary-baptist-church.

[167] Rachel E. Watson, "An Unflinching Call for Freedom: Clara Luper's Pedagogy at the Center of the Sit-Ins," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 97, no. 2 (Fall 2019): 278-295; Aaron Preston, "Fitting In and Sitting In: Phillip Henry Porter and Memories of Integration Efforts in Enid, 1955-58," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 96, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 78-93.

[168] Donald L. Fixico, *Termination and Re-location: Federal Indian Policy, 1945–1960* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986), 98.

Semi Centennial of Statehood included a number of activities around the state, including a summer exposition at the Oklahoma City state fairgrounds and commemorative events throughout the state. While nationally, settlers attempted to erase Indigeneity from the United States in the mid-century, Oklahoma boosters encountered a paradox: the rhetoric of the Semi Centennial situated Indigenous life as gone, yet boosters simultaneously boasted Native participation, casting Native people as the cultural ancestors of Oklahoman identity. Ultimately, the place of Native peoples in the Semi-Centennial of Statehood festivities came to mirror their place in settler memory in Oklahoma: at once present and yet pushed to the periphery. The rhetoric of Native peoples as anti-modern conflicted with the persistence—and resistance—of Native peoples in Oklahoma. While the Semi-Centennial Commission marketed Oklahoma using settler rhetoric, individuals and communities—Native peoples, Black Oklahomans, and white Oklahomans—contemplated how they belonged.

Marketing Oklahoma

Boosters of the Semi-Centennial of Statehood, who were predominantly white, engaged in a marketing campaign in preparation for the commemoration.[169] In the staging of this campaign, boosters constructed a narrative of Oklahoma history and identity that considered

[169] In terms of the participation of Native people in the planning of the Semi-Centennial, the Semi-Centennial Commission documents leave behind a more complicated trail. First, of the nine members on the executive committee of the Oklahoma Semi-Centennial Commission, none of them had a documented tribal affiliation. However, according to the list of people named to the Semi-Centennial Commission in House Bill 660, the ex-officio members included several Native people including Floyd Maytubby (Chickasaw), the Governor of the Chickasaw Nation, N.B. Johnson (Cherokee), Supreme Court Justice and President of the Inter-Tribal Council of the Five Tribes, and Robert Goombi (Kiowa), the president of the American Indian Exposition. Because these were ex-officio positions, the fact that the person holding a particular office was Native seems to imply that the people putting together the committee—Governor Gary and Chairman Allard, were not necessarily concerned with Native representation in the planning but on coordinating the events of the Semi-Centennial with other organizations to attract more visibility and cooperation. Additionally, there is archival documentation that Governor Raymond Gary invited Muriel Wright (Choctaw), a local historian and active in Native life, to be a part of the Semi-Centennial Commission.

Indigeneity to be the "heritage" culture on which settlers based present-day Oklahoma; Native peoples served as cultural antecedents to present-day Oklahoma. Boosters created a dichotomy of pre-modern and modern to understand the past. They presented Native people as pre-modern, as cultural antecedents, and they represented white settlers as modern, as embodying scientific progress. Boosters like Semi-Centennial Chairman Lou Allard and Governor Raymond Gary insisted that Native peoples would serve as the most enticing attraction to (presumably) white tourists, because such attractions allowed tourists to experience Oklahoma before white settlement. At the same time, they boasted of Oklahoma's progress to national audiences, seeking to refute John Steinbeck's image of Oklahomans as "Okies," as poor and uneducated. The marketing of Oklahoma during the Semi-Centennial illustrated the paradox of Indigeneity in Oklahoma in the mid-twentieth century: boosters simultaneously included Native people in commemorations while rhetorically treating them as anachronistic relics. While boosters allowed African Americans to display Black history at the Semi-Centennial Exposition, this inclusion remained limited to one booth and one commemoration, illustrating the time of tumultuous Black-white relations.

Boosters used Native participants in the Semi-Centennial Exposition as tourist attractions in advertisements to both statewide and national audiences exemplified this settler logic. In a televised advertisement for the Semi-Centennial, a faceless narrator highlighted attractions of the exposition. The advertisement showed Native participants, including dancers, as attractions at the Exposition. The announcer explained that the Exposition included a "pageant of Indian culture," emphasizing its authenticity. The advertisement claimed that the Native dancers' "dance of courtship" was "probably the forerunner of our modern square dance." This rhetorically placed Indigeneity as the pre-modern and white settlement as the modern. The video marketing did not

convey this idea subtly; the narrator ended the advertisement by repeating the catchphrase of the Semi-Centennial: "From Arrows to Atoms."[170]

Internal documents from the Semi-Centennial Committee showed that boosters highlighted—or exploited— Native peoples during the Semi-Centennial as a marketing strategy to attract tourists. During the planning stages of the Semi-Centennial, Governor Gary argued to the rest of the Commission that "Indians and cowboys" would be the most attractive theme to out-of-state tourists.[171] Allard agreed, adding that "Indians and oil" would attract the most tourists.[172] This relationship between Native peoples and tourism in Oklahoma proved exploitative for the organizers of the Semi-Centennial. Celebratory mottos such as "From Arrows to Atoms" and "From Teepees to Towers" perpetrated the myth that Native peoples had all but disappeared from North America. However, Native people and culture appeared everywhere at the Exposition, promoting the opposite narrative, one of continued relevance and vitality. This inclusion included a rhetoric of Indigenous peoples and culture as pre-modern. Even further, Native participants in the Exposition, such as Gladys Lawrence, the featured dancer in the advertisement, engaged in the Semi-Centennial on terms that white businessmen and -women had already planned and executed. Apart from Orange W. Starr, a Cherokee physician, no other Native people served on the planning committee for the Semi-Centennial Commission.[173] And thus, Native people navigated the Semi-Centennial within an unequal power dynamic.

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[170] A Preview of Oklahoma's Semi-Centennial Celebration, digitized video, 1957, Oklahoma Department of Libraries Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society.
[171] Bill Mullins, "An Exercise in Pride: Celebrating the Oklahoma Semi-centennial," 138.
[172] Bill Mullins, "An Exercise in Pride: Celebrating the Oklahoma Semi-centennial," 138.
[173] The United States Census of 1920 lists Orange Star as "In" under "race," meaning Indian, in Indian Territory in the Cherokee Nation. However, on Orange Star's enlistment draft registration, he lists himself as "caucasian."

Further, the Native peoples in booster literature appeared as caricatures according to settler logics of Native pre-modernity. Maps and booster materials for the Semi-Centennial of Statehood promoted stereotypical Native American imagery that did not highlight their actual lived experiences. For example, a pamphlet listing the Semi-Centennial calendar of events included a cartoon of a Native toddler holding an oversized Plains-style headdress and wearing a loin cloth and moccasins.[174] In the introduction section of the calendar, the boosters referred to Oklahoma as the "home of the Red Man," and boasted Oklahoma's "many action-packed rodeos and Indian Pow-wows," carrying out Governor Raymond Gary's insistent theme of "Indians and cowboys." Such as the televised advertisement's "From Arrows to Atoms" tagline, the pamphlet used the theme "From Teepees to Towers" to explain Oklahoma history to out-of-state tourists. The calendar illustrated the tagline with a little cartoon of a tepee in front of some skyscrapers. Through text and imagery, the boosters of the Oklahoma Semi-Centennial rhetorically tied Oklahoma to a settler image of Indigeneity; however, such texts pushed Native people out of modernity. The imagery juxtaposed the modern and the pre-modern, the white settler and the Native American. To tourists, the boosters buzzed that a visit to Oklahoma would allow them to visit both the past, represented by arrows and teepees, as well as the future, represented by atoms and towers.

Even to public audiences, boosters emphasized Oklahoma's ties to Native people and culture, and they turned Native peoples into spectacles in the process. In one of his speeches, Chairman Allard went on at length about how Native peoples served as an attraction of tourists to Oklahoma. Stating that Oklahoma had a "greater Indian population than any other state," Allard insisted that the capitals of the Five Tribes attracted tourists, as well as Fort Gibson's

[174] Oklahoma Semi-Centennial Calendar, Oklahoma Statehood Semi-Centennial V-A, Historic Oklahoma Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society.

place in the American Civil War for stationing Native troops.[175] Allard furthered that Indian City, U.S.A. offered "authenticity," explaining that "Indian guides are available to conduct visitors through the settlement and explain just how their ancestors lived."[176] Allard included Indigenous people within the Oklahoma of 1957 and yet he flattened Native culture into something consumable, as a way to time travel. Allard never veiled his economic interest in Native American peoples and culture in the speech. He clarified that showcasing Native peoples was "good for us from an economic standpoint, because it brings a lot of trade dollars into the state."[177] White boosters of the Semi-Centennial argued that highlighting Native peoples and culture would help them make money and attract tourists, in a process that exploited their labor and culture. Such exploitation simultaneously reduced Native peoples into consumable tourism that out-of-state visitors—as well as white Oklahomans themselves—could experience on vacation.

In order to expand the Semi-Centennial's offerings, the Semi-Centennial Commission planned to create an epic play that would chronicle the Cherokee past, affirming to audiences that the only real Cherokees had vanished. The play would be a sequel to "Unto These Hills," an Eastern Band of Cherokee outdoor drama that served as a major tourist attraction in North Carolina. First produced in 1950, "Unto These Hills" followed Cherokee life from the eighteenth century to the present, with the majority of its narrative emphasizing resistance to the federal removal policies in the 1830s.[178] Boosters wanted to stage a sequel to "Unto These Hills" about

[175] Lou S. Allard speech, May 30, 1957, General Files, Speeches 39-1 9-3, Semi-Centennial Commission Collection, Oklahoma State Archives, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, OK.
[176] Lou S. Allard, n.d., General Files, Speeches 39-1 9-3, Semi-Centennial Commission Collection, Oklahoma State Archives, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, OK.
[177] Lou S. Allard, n.d., General Files, Speeches 39-1 9-3, Semi-Centennial Commission Collection, Oklahoma State Archives, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, OK.
[178] Denson, *Monuments to Absence*, 135.

the Cherokee Trail of Tears and the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma. As part of this endeavor, a group of boosters—including Governor Gary and his wife—visited North Carolina to experience the production and research the prospect of replicating it in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, the Cherokee Nation capital. Representatives from the Cherokee Foundation, the Tahlequah Chamber of Commerce, and the Chairman of the Semi-Centennial Commission, Lou Allard, joined the Oklahoma party visiting North Carolina. Boosters wanted to build an amphitheater south of Tahlequah next to the Murrell Home, a plantation owned by a wealthy Cherokee family, to house the drama.[179] They argued it could serve as a nearly year-round tourist attraction. In marketing this project to taxpayers, boosters claimed to the public that no other event "would have more drawing power for out-of-state visitors nor would more truly show the beginning of the great state of Oklahoma, than this proposed event."[180] One of the major selling points, according to the boosters, in placing the drama in Tahlequah was that "[t]ourists could actually see, as they do in North Carolina, the Cherokee Indian as he lived today," illustrating the settler paradox of representing Native peoples as both present and as relics.[181] Within this narrative of Indigeneity as the anti-modern, boosters "brought" Native people into the present when it served to raise tourism dollars. Plays such as "Unto These Hills" exemplified this tension: the play offered an opportunity for white Oklahomans to see Native presence, but only through the prism of the past.

Ephemeral boosters' pamphlets coded Native people and culture as anti-modern and white settlement as modern. The souvenir program for the Semi-Centennial Exposition employed

[179] Notably, none of the boosters gave any comment to the slave-owning history of the Cherokees.
[180] Press release to Cherokee Foundation and the People of Oklahoma, n.d., General Files, Cherokee Indian Epic 39-1 2-20, Semi-Centennial Commission Collection, Oklahoma State Archives, Department of Libraries Archives, Oklahoma City, OK.
[181] Letter from Tahlequah Chamber of Commerce to the Cherokee Foundation and the People of Oklahoma, n.d.,General Files, Cherokee Indian Epic 39-1 2-20, Semi-Centennial Commission Collection, Oklahoma State Archives, Department of Libraries Archives, Oklahoma City, OK.

reductive imagery on its cover. The souvenir program featured an arrow pointing up, the sharp end of the arrow surrounded by an atom diagram. Smaller than the arrow and in the foreground, the souvenir illustration featured teepees, oil towers, skyscrapers, and a Ferris wheel, to summarize Oklahoma's industries and culture. Above the skyscraper, fireworks exploded in the sky, celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the state. The first few pages of the souvenir booklet offered the tourists a message to grab their attention: "We Must Grow Tall." The text engaged the reader: "How far away from the Exposition grounds were you, when you spotted the Arrows to Atoms tower? This impressive physical image of Oklahoma's emblem of progress towers, perhaps 194 feet above the tallest man on the grounds. This statement is significant only, in that it suggests the responsibility that lies ahead for every individual. We must grow tall!"[182] For a place known for its flatness and the ability to see for miles in any direction, the boosters of the Semi-Centennial boasted Oklahoma's ability to surge skyward and engaged the visitor to equate height with progress. To conclude this introduction, the souvenir booklet quotes Frederick the Great of Prussia: "The greatest and noblest pleasure which we have in this world is to discover new truths, and the next is to shake off old prejudices." The boosters stopped short of announcing which prejudices they referred to, so the audience was left pondering whether they should "shake off old prejudices" against Okies or Native people or both.

In Governor Gary's statement published in the Semi-Centennial Exposition souvenir guide, he constructed Native people as Oklahoma's heritage, situating Indigeneity as the pre-modern in the process. In his welcome statement to tourists, Gary said, "Oklahoma, Land of the Red Man, is proud of its colorful heritage as depicted in many of this exposition's exhibits. We

[182] Oklahoma Semi-Centennial Souvenir Program, Oklahoma Statehood Semi-Centennial V-A, Historic Oklahoma Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society.

take equal pride in our modern accomplishments and bright prospects for the future."[183] In narrating Native people as Oklahoma's "colorful heritage," Governor Gary laid claim to a kind of Indigenous identity for all Oklahomans, whether or not they had the lived experience of being Native. Even more so, Gary's rhetoric approached the question of Native presence paradoxically, at once situating Native people in the past, and yet juxtaposing such heritage with the "modern accomplishments and bright prospects for the future." Among the attractions Oklahoma offered tourists, Gary commented, were "magnificent lakes, historic shrines, colorful rodeos, Indian festivals and pageants." Therefore, Gary continued publicly with his belief during the planning phase of the Semi-Centennial Commission, that "cowboys and Indians" would draw the most tourist attention to Oklahoma. Gary marketed Oklahoma as a destination that would allow tourists to see both the old—in the form of "pre-modern" Native people—and the new—in terms of atomic technology, gas drilling, and skyscrapers.

Some of the most glaringly reductive settler narratives permeated Native representations in the souvenir program. For instance, the Falstaff Brewing Company based in St. Louis paid for advertising in the program. Coded as Native, the advertisement contained a cartoon man wearing two feathers and plaited hair. With his thumb, he pointed to a chart of the Cherokee syllabary, and the text read, "If you can't spell it…ask FOR IT!!" Below the syllabary and the first cartoon of a Native man is another cartoon of the Native man where he holds the Falstaff beer. The use of the Cherokee syllabary represented Oklahoma's specific relationship with Indigeneity, because the ad relied on its white audiences to recognize the written form of the Cherokee language. And yet, the tagline, "If you can't spell it…ask for it!" reinforced stereotypes of Native illiteracy and ignorance. Further, the use of a Native cartoon man to sell beer relied on

[183] Oklahoma Semi-Centennial Souvenir Program, Oklahoma Statehood Semi-Centennial V-A, Historic Oklahoma Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society.

destructive associations of Native people and alcoholism. Because white Oklahomans were likely not the only group purchasing the souvenir program, one cannot help but wonder what Native people who participated in—or attended—the Semi-Centennial would make of such an advertisement. This kind of caricatured iconography appeared ubiquitously in the ephemera attached to the Semi-Centennial. It represented the presence of Indigeneity, and awareness of specific tribes such as the Cherokee, although through a settler lens.[184]

Beyond white boosters, Black communities in Oklahoma celebrated the Semi-Centennial and used some of the same rhetoric of modernity toward Indigeneity that white boosters employed. In April 1957, 200 students at Tulsa's Carver Junior High School produced "Carver Rama," which *The Oklahoma Eagle*[185] described the musical as a "giant spectacle" that showcased the "story of Oklahoma from teepee to tower."[186] The musical depicted Oklahoma history in three acts, deemed, "the Indian period, the pioneer period, and the modern period."[187] The principal of Carver Junior High School, A.L. Morgan said that the play was "historical and informative, as well as entertaining," thus emphasizing the history that the musical sought to capture.[188] While Carver Rama was not the only way that Black Oklahomans commemorated the Semi-Centennial, the musical depicted a similar narrative of Oklahoma history to that of their white counterparts. The newspaper coverage reported that "[l]eading characters and soloists portrayed the Indian, frontier and modern development of the state," suggesting perhaps some

[184] Oklahoma Semi-Centennial Souvenir Program, Oklahoma Statehood Semi-Centennial V-A, Historic Oklahoma Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society.
[185] *The Oklahoma Eagle* was a historically Black newspaper based in Tulsa, Oklahoma.
[186] "Carver Students to Spotlight Semi-Centennial with Musical," *The Oklahoma Eagle*, April 11, 1957, https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc1804797/?q=semi-centennial.
[187] "Carver Students to Spotlight Semi-Centennial with Musical," *The Oklahoma Eagle*, April 11, 1957, https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc1804797/?q=semi-centennial.
[188] "State Leaders Meet Here to Plan Celebration," *The Oklahoma Eagle*, April 18, 1957, https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc1804798/?q=semi-centennial.

instances of Black students portraying Native peoples.[189] The newspaper did not disclose any student's tribal affiliation—and importantly, some Black Oklahomans were kept from their tribal affiliation through nefarious and discriminatory means—and thus the idea of "playing Indian" became more complicated at the intersection of Indigeneity and Blackness. In another example, Carver's Semi-Centennial program included an "unofficially chosen Indian Princess," Peggie Ann Gamble, *The Oklahoma Eagle* photographed with an "Indian Princess" sash.[190] Beyond representational politics and "playing Indian," the Carver Junior High musical relied on the familiar "From Teepee to Tower" narrative, in which Black students at Carver reenacted a narrative that placed Native people outside of modernity. Even thinking about the chronology of Oklahoma history in "Carver Rama," that Oklahoma history "progressed" from the Native era to the pioneer era to the modern era, situated Native people as relics with no belonging in contemporary Oklahoma. Carver Junior High's use of modernity illustrated the extent to which many communities internalized settler ideas of modernity.

White boosters used this modernity narrative to recover Oklahoma's national reputation. White boosters considered the Semi-Centennial a major opportunity to change Oklahoma's place in the national imagination. In a speech given to the California State Federation of Out-of-State clubs in May 1957, Semi-Centennial Chairman Allard preemptively addressed the "Okie" question in the room. He opened the speech with a reference to John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*: "Friends, Californians and Oklahomans —or may I say, Okies… And, by the way, I think this is a good time to set the record straight on this name—a good time to remove the stigma that somehow has been attached to the name 'Okie.'" Allard proceeded to lament the Dust Bowl, but

[189] "Carver Musical Praised; Over 200 Students in Cast," *The Oklahoma Eagle*, May 2, 1957, https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc1804800/?q=semi-centennial. Newspaper coverage does not suggest whether these students were Native or not.
[190] "Carver Princess," *The Oklahoma Eagle*, May 2, 1957, https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc1804800/?q=semi-centennial.

he did not bash Steinbeck's portrayal, as had previous governors and representatives of the state. Instead, he claimed that Steinbeck called Oklahomans "wonderful people" and Allard insisted that Steinbeck served on Governor Gary's Staff of Oklahoma Boosters committee.[191] Allard addressed Steinbeck's seminal novel because the boosters considered the Semi-Centennial as a refutation of the most infamous image of Oklahoma in popular culture: poor Okies leaving their dusty farms in the 1930s and heading for broken promises in California. While Allard did not use the speech to refute this image of Oklahomans, he did refute that such a disaster continued to hold Oklahoma back. Allard offered a narrative of progress and prosperity to his audience of Californians. In his twenty-minute speech, Allard relied on a tragic narrative that made Oklahoma's mid-century progress even more of a triumph. And so, Allard insisted that the Semi-Centennial celebration, and especially the summertime Exposition, refuted the stigma attached to Oklahomans that he perceived to be ongoing. Speeches such as Allard's illustrated the hyperawareness of Oklahoma's status on a national stage.

White boosters presented Oklahoma's history in a way that flattered the state to a national audience. This narrative mobilized Native peoples as performers while constructing their cultures as the identity that white Oklahomans inherited. While Native people were present at the Exposition, therefore illustrating their place within physical modernity, white boosters made it rhetorically distant, casting Native peoples as holdovers from a distant past. While, in actuality, Native peoples actively engaged in Oklahoma politics and economics, Semi-Centennial narratives cast them into supporting roles to white settler starring roles.

Contemplating Belonging

[191] Lou S. Allard speech, May 30, 1957, General Files, Speeches 39-1 9-3, Semi-Centennial Commission Collection, Oklahoma State Archives, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, OK.

The planning and execution of the Semi-Centennial invited individual Oklahomans—white, Native, and African-descended—to consider their own belonging in the state of Oklahoma. While boosters expressed hyper-awareness at how Oklahomans thought of themselves and their state, different racialized people groups staked claims in belonging and/or problematized hegemonic settler memoirs of the past. White boosters maintained their roles as gatekeepers of the Semi-Centennial of Statehood, but cracks in gatekeeping occurred when Native peoples and African-descended people narrated themselves into the narrative of Oklahoma, either critically or triumphally. Even white Oklahomans at times questioned the multicultural, multiracial makeup of Oklahoma, and yet this discourse remained at the periphery. Native and African American discourses of belonging at times complicated the boosters' narrative of "teepees to towers," but at other times, such discourses celebrated this progressive modernity. While these discourses operated on the periphery, they illustrated a mid-century turn toward complicating master narratives of white settlement.

Early on, white boosters of the Semi-Centennial Commission voiced a concern about the lackluster enthusiasm for the commemoration. Boosters insisted that "the entire State of Oklahoma should have more than a passive attitude toward what 1957 can mean to them as a community," and they emphasized that the Semi-Centennial offered the "opportunity to develop a state patriotism among our people that visitors will go home talking about (and envying)."[192] While boosters wanted to rebound Oklahoma's image on a national stage, they seemed just as interested in the politics of belonging within the state. Boosters insisted on "state patriotism" as the antidote to Oklahoma's perceived weaknesses. The boosters referred to Oklahoma as a "community," abstracting the mechanism that determined belonging. State patriotism demanded

[192] Lou S. Allard, n.d., General Files, Speeches 39-1 9-3, Semi-Centennial Commission Collection, Oklahoma State Archives, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, OK.

solidarity, but among whom? In a speech to the Motel Association of Oklahoma, Chairman Allard declared that the goal of the Semi-Centennial was twofold: first, to attract out-of-state visitors, and second, to work on "selling Oklahoma to Oklahomans."[193] Boosters of the Semi-Centennial explicitly stated their intentions for the festivities to operate on a local level, inviting participation from a wide swath of rural Oklahomans, but they did not remark upon the status of belonging among racialized groups. While state patriotism became an enumerated goal, the question of who qualified as an Oklahoma went unanswered. Responding to the project of "selling Oklahoma to Oklahomans," different racialized groups contemplated their place in Oklahoma.

In "selling Oklahoma to Oklahomans," Semi-Centennial boosters targeted Native nations. The Muskogee Area Office of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) distributed a memorandum addressed to the principal chiefs of the Cherokee, Choctaw, and Creek Nations, as well as the Governor of the Chickasaw Nation, the Chairman of the General Council of the Seminole Nation, and the chiefs of the Ottawa, Peoria, Quapaw, Modoc, Miami, Eastern-Shawnee, Seneca-Cayuga and Wyandotte Tribes. Marie L. Hayes, who served both as the public relations officer for the Semi-Centennial Commission and as the administrative assistant for the BIA, suggested to the Native nations, "[D]on't you think this is a good idea for each of you, if you have not done so, to schedule (. . .) any events, places or tourist attractions which your tribe has planned as a part of the Oklahoma Semi-Centennial Celebration in 1957."[194] Hayes' wording employed a suggestive tone that it would, in fact, be to Native nations' benefit to participate. The letter noted

[193] Lou S. Allard Speech, December 8, 1956, General Files, Speeches 39-1 9-3, Semi-Centennial Commission Collection, Oklahoma State Archives, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, OK.

[194] Memorandum from the Bureau of Indian Affairs Muskogee Area Office to Multiple Chiefs and Governors, December 19, 1956, General Files, Indians 39-1 5-13, Semi-Centennial Commission Collection, Oklahoma State Archives, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, OK.

that the tribes should send the list of events to both the Chairman of the Semi-Centennial Commission, Lou Allard, and the Chairman of Indian Affairs, Floyd Maytubby (who was also the Governor of the Chickasaw Nation), in order to have a place on the calendar. Thus, the tourism boosters used the mechanism of the BIA to garner support for the Semi-Centennial among Native peoples. Because boosters sold a narrative of Native belonging to attract tourists, they went out of their way to highlight the Cherokee National Holiday, different pow-wows, and the American Indian Exposition in Anadarko, Oklahoma. But white boosters, excepting Maytubby (Chickasaw), dominated the planning process of the Semi-Centennial. While Native nations participated, their collaboration proved peripheral and symmetrical, mirroring their similar peripheral role in the narratives that the Semi-Centennial bolstered.

Meanwhile, African American Oklahomans courted Governor Gary and the Semi-Centennial Commission to include African American history in the Semi-Centennial Exposition. Whereas white boosters had sought out Native participation, the Black community of Oklahoma had to organize themselves and advocate for their own recognition.[195] Black leaders from around

[195] The only exception to this self-advocacy was the inclusion of African American performers at the Semi-Centennial Exposition. One week featured a series of rock n roll acts, including Al Hibbler, who had played in Duke Ellington's Band and Della Reese, an African American jazz and gospel singer. Like the African American performers associated with the Folk Festival that happened weeks later, Al Hibbler and Della Reese must have had a difficult time visiting Oklahoma for the Semi-Centennial, considering the Jim Crow reality of Oklahoma City in 1957. While newspapers referred to Hibbler and Reese's acts as "the darlings of the teen-agers," the musicians could not sit at the same lunch counters or stay in the same hotels as their white counterparts. Considering the sit-in movement, led by civil rights leader and teacher Clara Luper, did not begin until the following year, the Jim Crow status quo in Oklahoma City remained largely unchallenged in a mobilized way. In the archives, segregation in the spaces of the Semi-Centennial Exposition appears invisible. However, Oklahoma's Jim Crow segregation lasted in its most notorious form well into the 1960s. African Americans—whether from Oklahoma or visiting from out of state—appear in some photographs and videos taken at the Semi-Centennial Exposition, though I could not find any firsthand accounts of the lived experience of attending the Centennial as a Black Oklahoman.

the state gathered at a YMCA in March 1957 to discuss contributions for the Semi-Centennial.[196] Roscoe Dunjee, a civil rights leader of Oklahoma and founder of the Black newspaper *The Black Dispatch*, led the meeting; attendees agreed to stage a play "depicting the role of the Negro in Oklahoma history," and the production would travel to cities around the state to spotlight the contributions of Black Oklahomans.[197] Dr. Melvin Tolson, the head of the English department at Langston University and a well-known poet and debate coach, agreed to write and produce the play. And finally, the attendees decided to invite Dr. John Hope Franklin, Oklahoma native and then professor of history at Brooklyn College, to give a lecture on African American history in Oklahoma.[198] Along with Dunjee and Tolson, other notable figures in the state's Black community attended the meeting, including the faith leader Reverend E.W. Perry and the educator and activist Clara Luper.

This initial YMCA meeting of civil rights and community leaders culminated in a meeting at the capital with Governor Gary to discuss Tolson's play and other ways to highlight Black history in Oklahoma. *The Oklahoma Eagle* reported that Governor Gary declared he "would give full support in the proposed program," and therefore, Tolson started writing and

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[196] "Leaders Meet at OC to Plan Role in State Semi-Centennial," *The Oklahoma Eagle*, March 28, 1957, https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc1804795/?q=semi-centennial.

[197] Roscoe Dunjee (1883-1965) was the founder and editor of the Oklahoma City-based historically Black newspaper *The Black Dispatch*. He was a lauded civil rights leader and served as the president of the Oklahoma branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) for several years, and he additionally served on the board of directors for the national NAACP.

[198] Dr. John Hope Franklin grew up in Rentiesville, Oklahoma, a historically Black town outside of Tulsa. His father, B.C. Franklin, was actually in attendance at the Semi-Centennial planning meeting. B.C. Franklin was a famous lawyer based in Tulsa, and he defended victims and survivors of the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921. Notably, B.C. Franklin was an enrolled Choctaw Freedmen, illustrating the more complicated racial/citizenship dichotomy in Oklahoma. Needless to say, the Franklin family's ties to the state and to the Oklahoma Black community ran deep.

Dunjee started organizing.[199] By their last April meeting, the committee knew the name of Tolson's play: "Upper Boulders in the Sun," a line from a Robert Frost poem.[200] In the *Oklahoma Eagle*, Tolson suggested that educators have students read Frost's poem "Mending Wall" to be better prepared to see the play. On April 22, 1957, Roscoe Dunjee and Tolson met with Governor Gary and Chairman Allard to get approval on the basic outline of the play and to make sure that the play would be on the Semi-Centennial Calendar of events. *The Oklahoma Eagle* reported that Governor Gary and Allard gave approval "[t]o date." Whether or not the white boosters had intended it, Black Oklahomans were "selling Oklahoma to Oklahomans" on their own terms, navigating the gatekeeping of state officials.

But Tolson's play was not the only way that Black Oklahomans engaged in the Semi-Centennial. Later in April 1957, *The Oklahoma Eagle* reported more details on the play and how community members planned to participate in the Semi-Centennial Exposition in Oklahoma City.[201] The group decided to purchase a booth at the Semi-Centennial Exposition for June and July. Meanwhile, the committee decided to create a brochure containing historical information from the play that offered the history of Black communities in Oklahoma. Lee K. Turpin, the advertisement manager for *The Oklahoma Eagle*, volunteered to lead the brochure taskforce. These community leaders were determined that the Semi-Centennial include their experience in Oklahoma. Black Oklahomans took the boosters' push for state patriotism on their own terms. Civil rights leaders pushed for the centering of Black history in the Semi-Centennial of Statehood and staked a claim in belonging in Oklahoma.

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[199] "Leaders to Discuss Promotion for Play," *The Oklahoma Eagle*, April 4, 1957, https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc1804796/?q=semi-centennial.
[200] "Semi-Centennial Production Named from Frost's Poem," *The Oklahoma Eagle*, April 25, 1957, https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc1804799/?q=semi-centennial.
[201] "State Leaders Meet Here to Plan Celebration" *The Oklahoma Eagle*, April 18, 1957, https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc1804798/?q=semi-centennial.

But white booster gatekeepers still dominated the Exposition. Beyond Tolson's play and the booth, Black Oklahomans participated in the Semi-Centennial Exposition through the 22nd Annual National Folk Festival, which Oklahoma hosted over the course of four days at the Exposition fairgrounds. Civil rights leader Clara Luper helped to organize Black Oklahomans' participation in the National Folk Festival, in which Black Oklahomans contributed songs, dances, and stories. But the Folk Festival included many different people groups. Joining Black performers were Native, Scotch-Irish, German, French, Spanish-American, Czechoslovakian, Jewish, and Mormon performers. In the Semi-Centennial Exposition souvenir book, the boosters wrote that the Folk Festival had "beautifully carried out" the theme of the Exposition, "Arrows to Atoms," because of the "participation of Oklahoma Indians, square dancers, fiddlers, and folk singers."[202] In other words, the Folk Festival helped the Exposition to focus on the "arrows" part of the "Arrows to Atoms" tagline. The further descriptions of the Folk Festival clarified that the inclusion of "Oklahoma Indians" represented Oklahoma's folk culture, implying that Oklahoma's folk culture was Native culture and therefore distancing Oklahoma from Black culture and the efforts of Clara Luper. In addition to its emphasis on Native performances, the souvenir program also advertised that Native art, including weaving, pottery, and textiles, would be displayed in the arts and crafts portion of the Folk Festival. Thus, Native peoples, through the National Folk Festival, became tourist attractions yet again, under the framework of folk culture.

While the advertising materials from the National Folk Festival glossed over Black contributions, boosters like National Folk Festival director Sarah Gertrude Knott boasted Native peoples as tourist attractions, as had Oklahoma boosters. Knott said that "Oklahoma Indians, who have been a part of nearly every National Folk Festival program, will play a vital and

[202] Oklahoma Semi-Centennial Souvenir Program, Oklahoma Statehood Semi-Centennial V-A, Historic Oklahoma Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society.

colorful part in this 22nd annual festival."[203] Knott considered Oklahoma a natural host for the festival, because Native peoples figured so prominently in the National Folk Festival in years past. The University of Oklahoma and the Semi-Centennial Commission co-hosted the National Folk Festival, as was the custom for the festival to have local sponsors. The tentative list of Native performers for the National Folk Festival included the Sac and Fox and Iowa tribes, but the majority of the documentation generically refers to all Native nations as "Oklahoma Indians," so the specific nations that participated were lost in the violence of the archive.[204] In addition to the National Folk Festival's main stage at the Semi-Centennial, Knott suggested that towns all over Oklahoma host additional, smaller festivals or gatherings, mirroring the calls of local boosters for "state patriotism."[205] To the Semi-Centennial Commission, Knott encouraged festivities to include folk song and dance in as many aspects of the Semi-Centennial year long activities as possible.[206] This internal discourse between Knott and the Commission illustrated the paradox at the heart of the Semi-Centennial: the National Folk Festival hinted at multicultural inclusion, yet racialized groups stayed on the periphery and maintained the status of an "other," and remained subject to white gatekeepers.

However, Native peoples spoke back to this "otherization" and some even argued for their belonging into the broader socio-political body politic of the state of Oklahoma. To

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[203] National Folk Festival pamphlet, National Folk Festival 39-6 2-1, Semi-Centennial Commission Collection, Oklahoma State Archives, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, OK.

[204] "Tentative Program National Folk Festival 1957," National Folk Festival 39-6 2-1, Semi-Centennial Commission Collection, Oklahoma State Archives, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, OK.

[205] Letter from Sarah Gertrude Knott to Oklahoma Club Members, n.d., National Folk Festival 39-6 2-1, Semi-Centennial Commission Collection, Oklahoma State Archives, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, OK.

[206] Letter from Sarah Gertrude Knott to Oklahoma Friends, n.d., National Folk Festival 39-6 2-1, Semi-Centennial Commission Collection, Oklahoma State Archives, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, OK.

encourage young people to participate in the Semi-Centennial, the Commission organized an essay contest for K-12 students in the state called "Onward Oklahoma." The Commission collected what they considered to be the best hundred or so essays and bound them in a volume that they then deposited in the Semi-Centennial Commission Collection at the State Archives of Oklahoma. Out of hundreds of essays in the bound book, one student stood out for her negotiation of being Native and being Oklahoman. Entitled "My Future Is in Oklahoma," a Chickasaw student named Vivian Neil wrote an essay unpacking this her positionality:

> My great grandparents came to Indian Territory over 'The Trail of Tears.' They loved what they found and were happy in their teepees. Now that the Territory has become part of the great state of Oklahoma, with schools, churches, and homes that are second to none in the nation, why should I not aspire to being a part of the progress from 'Teepees to Towers'?[207]

Interestingly, Neil distinguished between challenging the settler narrative of progress, on the one hand, and demanding that Native peoples belong within that narrative, on the other. Later in the essay, Neil asked the reader: "Is it such a wild idea that a Chickasaw Indian girl, whose ancestors lived in teepees, should want to live and work in Oklahoma's towers?" Whereas other white Oklahomans during the Semi-Centennial claimed Indigeneity as their inheritance, Neil claimed progress as hers. While Neil's essay offered only one perspective, she demanded that white Oklahomans ought to include her in the system they built off of her ancestor's land and labor. Neil saw Oklahoma as exceptional, explaining that "no other state in the Union can make possible for me more opportunities than Oklahoma can," suggesting that Neil saw either the opportunities in Oklahoma as extraordinary or that she saw Oklahoma as providing comparatively more opportunities than other states for Native peoples. Further, Neil asserted herself in a white boosters' model of modernity when she insisted that she belonged in towers.

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[207] "My Future Is in Oklahoma," Vivian Neil, Onward Oklahoma Essays, Semi-Centennial Commission Collection, Oklahoma State Archives, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, OK.

She saw herself as belonging in those towers, and thus belonging in the state of Oklahoma. Neil appeared to be sold on Oklahoma and to display state patriotism, whether or not the Semi-Centennial Commission boosters intended such concepts for a young Native woman like her.

While Neil pondered Native belonging, white children also grappled with the relationship between settlers and Native people in their "Onward Oklahoma" essays. Robert Barr, a student in Kingfisher County, wrote about asking his father and then a Native neighbor, Roy Little Bear, about what they thought about Oklahoma's future. Barr's father said that his father—Barr's grandfather— "went buffalo hunting" with Chief Running Fox, but then Barr's father interrupted the story, saying: "You don't want to hear history. Your theme is on Oklahoma's future."[208] Barr's father claimed a proximity to Indigeneity that the boy then repeated when he asked Roy Little Bear the same question. To this question, Little Bear responded:

> Friend, I come from a people who once roamed these lands as free as the wind that blows. Then the white man came, and eventually he confined us to the area of Oklahoma. We have suffered much on this land, but we have also learned to love it. It has a beauty all its own, a beauty of freedom. You can stand on the plain and watch the fluffy clouds roll overhead; you can fish by a secluded stream or boat on a huge lake. These are rich things to my people.

While the interaction may or may not have occurred, Barr's prose provided glimpses into how a white child understood a Native perspective. Barr's depiction of Little Bear presented the trope of a long-suffering Native victim and presented Native people as closer to nature because he depicted Little Bear as having suffered at the hands of white and yet as having deep respect for the land that other Oklahomans should imitate. At the same time, however, Barr pointed to the close proximity, either physically or schematically, of white families and Native people well into the mid twentieth century. As much as Native students like Vivian Neil considered their place in

[208] Robert Barr, Onward Oklahoma Essays, Semi-Centennial Commission Collection, Oklahoma State Archives, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, OK. Barr does not note Roy Little Bear's tribal affiliation.

Oklahoma, Robert Barr also engaged with the idea of Native belonging in Oklahoma. Even further, Barr's paper suggested an acknowledgement of the harms that Oklahoma settlers caused Native peoples.

But Barr's essay was not the only venue where the effects of settler policies came to the forefront. In conjunction with the Semi-Centennial festivities, the Oklahoma City Library System created a series of history panels featuring academics and other professionals from around the state. The Director of the Community Workshop Division of Oklahoma City Libraries, Walter Gray, Jr. organized a series of talks called "Oklahoma's Heritage," planned in honor of the Semi-Centennial.[209] Of particular interest, Gray organized one of the four panels to be called, "Explorers and Indians." Forming the panel, Gray invited Muriel Wright,[210] a Choctaw woman and famous local historian, to include her expertise on Native history in Oklahoma.[211] Interestingly, newspaper coverage of the educational series did not note Wright's tribal or community affiliation. Instead, it referred to Wright as the "editor of the Chronicles of Oklahoma," the publication of the Oklahoma Historical Society and a position that placed her at the high echelons of Oklahoma local historians. Dr. Joe C. Jackson, the dean of Central State College in Edmond (eventually renamed the University of Central Oklahoma), and George Shirk, a lawyer, historian, and eventual mayor of Oklahoma City and president of the Oklahoma

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[209] Letter from Walter Gray Jr. to Muriel Wright, January 28, 1957, Semi-Centennial Commission Folder, Box 15 Folder 17, Oklahoma Historical Society.

[210] Muriel Wright had long been a famous name in circles of historians, and the year of the Semi-Centennial invited many occasions for her knowledge to be featured front and center, a situation in which Oklahomans heard about Oklahoma heritage from a woman of mixed settler and Native ancestry. She was heavily involved in the Choctaw Nation of the mid-twentieth century and her presence must have at times challenged the settler memory that disavowed Native presence. In a way, Wright's presence served as a microcosm of the complicated relationship between settler memory and Native presence.

[211] "Talks Slated on Oklahoma," *Oklahoma City Times*, February 20, 1957, https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc1996604/m1/33/zoom/?q=oklahoma%20city%20times&resolution=4&lat=3708&lon=2372#.

Historical Society, joined Wright on the panel. Neither of these men had any recognized tribal affiliation. Additionally, the panel's moderator, Elmer Fraker, was the executive director of the Oklahoma Historical Society, and he had no tribal affiliation either. So, Muriel Wright represented the only woman and the only Native person featured on the panel. Even in this panel, Wright's presence illustrated the peripheral but indeed included place of Native peoples in the Semi-Centennial.

For the most part, the "Oklahoma's Heritage" series perpetuated the same hegemonic narratives embodied by the "From Arrows to Atoms" tagline that the Semi-Centennial supported more broadly. The other topics in the series included the following: "Cowboys and Settlers" and "Architects and Builders." Like the "Explorers and Indians" panel that Wright was a part of, the other panels included largely faculty from the University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma Baptist University, and the Oklahoma Publishing Company. These were events open to the public at the central library of Oklahoma City, and a flier advertising the event series exclaims, "Three expert panels discuss fascinating facts front he uncommon beginnings of the 'Land that is Grand.'"[212] However, Wright was the only Native person that the series featured. Referring to Oklahoma as the "Land that is Grand," the library staff who planned this series considered Oklahoma an exceptional state, further bolstering what Semi-Centennial boosters argued: that Oklahomans ought to show state patriotism. Events such as the "Oklahoma's Heritage" series, in theory, would help bolster pride in such events, especially considering the accessibility of the event.

While newspaper coverage did not report the statements of the panelists in depth, the surviving pamphlet from the "Explorers and Indians" panel suggests that it subtly disrupted settler narratives and therefore hinted at Native perspectives. The complicated relationship

[212] "Oklahoma's Heritage" pamphlet, Oklahoma Statehood Semi-Centennial V-A, Historic Oklahoma Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society.

between settlers and Native people seemed ever present during even this series on Oklahoma history. On the back of the pamphlet, the library offered a series of book recommendations for the public to further their enrichment, stating that the following "reminiscences, letters and histories-these books have been selected from the collection of the Oklahoma City Libraries to give you insight and interest in your Oklahoma heritage."[213] And, interestingly, one of the titles listed on the pamphlet was Angie Debo's *And Still the Waters Run*, which the librarians described as a "readable and authentic presentation of the exploitation of Oklahoma Indians."[214] Debo's work had provoked quite the outrage in Oklahoma when it was first published in 1940. The University of Oklahoma Press refused to publish it because Debo narrated the coercive and violent dissolution of the Five Tribes at the hands of famous and powerful state officials who threatened to remove support from the university if it was published.[215] Thus, the Oklahoma City Library's recommendation of Debo's book—which in 1957 was just as controversial as when it was published—illustrated the unstated recognition of the mass exploitation and violence done to Native people in Oklahoma. This acknowledgement contradicted the harmonious and exceptional Oklahoma that boosters emphasized in other areas of the Semi-Centennial. While the Semi-Centennial of Statehood remained largely celebratory, cracks in memory gatekeeping allowed dissenting narratives and complications of belonging to survive the hegemony of settler memory.

While white boosters authored the historical narratives that the Semi-Centennial was based on and pushed Black and Native people to the margins of participation, Native and Black

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[213] "Oklahoma's Heritage" pamphlet, Oklahoma Statehood Semi-Centennial V-A, Historic Oklahoma Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society.
[214] "Oklahoma's Heritage" pamphlet, Oklahoma Statehood Semi-Centennial V-A, Historic Oklahoma Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society.
[215] Patricia Nelson Limerick, "Land, justice, and Angie Debo Telling the Truth to—And About––Your Neighbors," *Great Plains Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (2001): 261-273.

communities pushed back. Many different communities and individuals considered belonging, and either embodied the "state patriotism" that boosters demanded or they challenged such patriotism by expanding who belonged in Oklahoma. Black Oklahomans offered their own experience of Oklahoma history, while Native peoples like Vivian Neil and Muriel Wright participated in Semi-Centennial activities and expanded who counted as Oklahoman. While a group of predominantly white boosters served as gatekeepers to enter the Semi-Centennial festivities, racialized groups found ways to participate anyway on their own terms and on terms dictated by such gatekeepers. While boosters held overall reductive images of these groups, the Semi-Centennial still afforded some moments of disruption to the hegemonic settler narratives that flattered white Oklahomans, disappeared Black people, and disavowed Native people. Ultimately, multiracial participation—and resistance—created a Semi-Centennial of Statehood with moments of contestation and affirmation.

Conclusion

In the photograph of Lucille Ball and the unnamed Native woman, the two women grasped each other's backs to pose for the camera. Both women smiled and gave the impression that they were happy to participate in the Semi-Centennial. Perhaps the Semi-Centennial Commission members would argue that the photograph illustrated the Oklahoma community, to both Oklahomans and Americans from out of state. Perhaps the boosters would read the photograph as evidence of Oklahoma's Native "heritage," because the boosters continually associated Indigeneity with the past. While Ball was not an Oklahoman, she seemed sold on Oklahoma, to the boosters' glee. Compared to Ball, the Native woman remained at the margins, unnamed in a photograph some sixty years later.

Semi-Centennial boosters set an intention at the beginning of the festivities to highlight Native peoples. Partly, they did this to generate tourism from out of state. They repeatedly insisted that "Indians and cowboys" would attract the kind of attention they wanted, to make money and rehabilitate the lasting image of the Okie from Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. In booster literature, settler memory presented Native people as they did the unnamed Native woman photographed with Lucille Ball: at once in frame and yet unnamed, anonymous. While national settler memory reduced Indigeneity as to an origin story of "heritage," white boosters highlighted Native peoples to generate their own sense of Oklahoma identity. In doing so, they constructed Indigeneity as a culture that any white Oklahoman could claim or inherit. In contrast, white boosters pushed Black Oklahomans to the margins in order to evade questions that the civil rights movement pushed to the forefront. Native people embodied the origin story on which the settler memories of modernity rested. In the operations of the Semi-Centennial, however, marginalized groups found ways to resist or revise the dominant narratives that "From Teepees to Towers" suggested. But the Semi-Centennial offered more of a contestation of belonging than a resolution to questions of belonging. As the twentieth century wore on, the question of who belongs in Oklahoma remained a relevant one.

Conclusion: The Continuing Reign of Settler Memory in Oklahoma

In the 2020s, Oklahoma City marketed itself as the "Modern Frontier," drawing on the legacies of mid-century commemorations. The campaign highlighted "inclusivity," but it did not problematize the legacy of the frontier. On the tourism page, the explanation gestures toward an acknowledgement of Oklahoma as an ancestral homeland for different Indigenous nations, saying: "Every destination has a story, and Oklahoma City's story began with several tribal nations who have always inhabited this special place, long before it was 'officially' a city. We honor that heritage, and its resiliency lives on in the Oklahoma City of today." Even further the tourism industry emphasizes the link between this "heritage" and modernity, describing Oklahoma City as a "young city steeped in Native American and Western culture, openness, and an enterprising nature, OKC embraces its roots and continues to pave the way as a center of innovation and entrepreneurship where anything is possible." This new wave of boosters has sought to carve out a new Oklahoma culture, that draws on imagery of cowboys and Native peoples, but distances itself from Steinbeck's destitute Okies. Oklahoma is not the past nor the future, boosters say, but Oklahoma is the synthesis of the two. They have rebranded the frontier itself as "modern."

Three commemorative moments in the mid-twentieth century illustrate that the twenty-first-century obsession with modernity has a longer history. In 1939, white boosters celebrated the Land Run of 1889 with the "Golden Anniversary." White boosters rooted modernity in the settler past, creating emotional connection to place and establishing the Land Run as a moment from which modernity can be traced. The commemorative devices of the Golden Anniversary relied on the gendered and racialized body to perform settler identity and Indigeneity. However, Native peoples and African Americans still expressed counter-memories that complicated

hegemonic settler narratives by decentering white settlers. The Golden Anniversary in 1939 illustrated how different stakeholders in Oklahoma remembered Oklahoma history differently, according to their proximity to power. While white Oklahomans staked a claim in modernity through their Land Run origin story, Native peoples and African Americans continued to have their own memories of the late nineteenth century, even if the hegemonic settler memory provincialized them.

While the Golden Anniversary of the Land Run of 1889 centered settler memories and disavowed Native people, boosters of the so-called Indian Centennial of 1948 strategically incorporated the Five Tribes into modernity to argue for a racially harmonious Oklahoma. The Indian Centennial became a paradox for Eastern Oklahoma boosters: they rhetorically labeled the Five Tribes as settlers, and yet, the commemorative devices racialized the bodies of members of the Five Tribes as others and therefore as unable to be true settlers. Throughout the "Indian Centennial," white boosters selectively narrated the Five Tribes into settler notions of belonging. In response, nations of the Five Tribes selectively participated in the Centennial for the purposes of their own sovereignty. With one exception, white newspapers of Muskogee did not report on the participation of Black people of Muskogee in the Centennial. Further, white newspapers did not include African Americans as notable actors in the history of removal.

While the "Indian Centennial" represented a commemoration in honor of the Five Tribes, boosters reckoned with modernity once more during the Semi-Centennial of Statehood. The rhetoric of "Arrows to Atoms" illustrated that white boosters considered Native peoples and culture as lying outside of modernity. The Semi Centennial of Statehood included a number of activities around the state, including a summer exposition at the Oklahoma City state fairgrounds and commemorative events throughout the state. Like the "Indian Centennial of 1948,"

Oklahoma boosters situated Indigenous people and culture as a relic of the past, yet they simultaneously boasted Native culture and heritage to attract both in-state and out-of-state tourists. The Semi-Centennial of Statehood made Indigenous people at once present and yet at the margins of acknowledgement. However, the white booster rhetoric of Native peoples as anti-modern conflicted with the lived reality of the persistence of Native peoples in Oklahoma in the mid-twentieth century. Simultaneously, African Americans, embedded within the civil rights movement, pushed for a recognition of the Black history of Oklahoma in the Semi-Centennial and their importance as historical actors. Overall, Native peoples, African Americans, and white Oklahomans all contemplated the history of the space they occupied.

These three moments at the midcentury reflected contestation over who belongs within Oklahoma modernity, as twentieth century boosters exhibited an awareness of how different actors factored into national optics. White boosters refuted Steinbeck's "Okies," wanting to portray Oklahomans as prosperous, modern, and white. They struggled with how to fit Native peoples into this marketing scheme, and they left out African Americans altogether. Ultimately, contemporary conflict over who belongs within an Oklahoma memory continues to be a relevant question, well into the twenty-first century, as the rebranding efforts of the Oklahoma City Convention & Visitors Bureau suggest. While there are contemporary efforts to highlight underrepresented stories of both Native peoples and African Americans, the hegemonic narrative continues to be a settler memory.

Even after these three commemorations in the mid-twentieth century, Oklahoma welcomed the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries with similar commemorations. With white boosters at the helm yet again, Oklahomans celebrated the seventy-fifth anniversary of statehood in 1982 with a celebration rivaling the fiftieth anniversary in 1957. The Land Run of 1889

continued to be celebrated yearly, with a huge celebration in 1989 to celebrate one-hundred years since settlers staked a claim in land dispossessed from Native peoples. School districts in the Oklahoma City Metro continued to re-enact that Land Run of 1889 well into the 2010s and many rural districts still do. It would seem that only commemorations to removal—like the Indian Centennial of 1948—did not initiate an annual commemoration. In these commemorations, white Oklahomans served at the helm, with Native and Black people provincialized from history. The cycle of commemorations continues today, even in the Oklahoma City Convention and Visitors Bureau's "Modern Frontier" campaign.

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