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Creek Indian History: A Historical Narrative of the Genealogy, Traditions, and Downfall of the Ispocoga or Creek Indian Tribe of Indians. By George Stiggins. Birmingham: Birmingham Public Library Press, 1999. 176 pages. \$24.95 cloth.

Some critics, most prominently Arnold Krupat, have charged tribal nationalists with a fundamental naivete; that is, a belief in pristine cultures and literatures, which exist in a vacuum, most authenticated to the degree of their isolation. This represents a major misreading of our work which has never claimed that tribal or literary sovereignty depends on cultural purity. A case in point is the Muskogee confederacy, and no work illustrates this better than Muskogee author George Stiggins's *Creek Indian History*, which demonstrates the amazing ethnic, political, and cultural diversity that is a central feature of Muskogee history.

Stiggins's own background is instructive. He was from a Natchez community that settled in Muskogee country in 1729. Stiggins himself was next in line for traditional Natchez chieftainship, an office he declined most likely due to the more acculturated turn his life took. Like many Creek towns, his community was bilingual. They spoke their original language, Natchez, as well as Muskogee, the language necessary to accommodate their newly acquired citizenship. This was not unusual within the confederacy, this bi- or even tri-lingualism, and in the midst of all these widely varied origins, Muskogeeans nonetheless had an impressive capacity to imagine themselves as Muskogees through a highly evolved governmental, town, clan, and red-and-white division of their people that created a unified national front.

Stiggins, for example, records this phenomenon in relation to the Alabamans, a tribal group related to the Choctaw and long-time members of the Muskogee confederacy: "In all national concerns and public assemblies the Alabama head men have the standing and voice that the chiefs of the other tribes have. While in the assemblies they use the Creek tongue; in their local concerns they use their own tongue or language" (p. 30). Much could be said here about the historical basis for a nationalism that takes into account diversity, an example that has deep implications for today's literary debates focusing on hybridity rather than national transformation of myriad cultures that evolve into strong forms of nation building.

Stiggins even tells us an Indian joke to underscore the Muskogee commitment to the positive aspects of cultural change and cross-cultural exchange. He says members of Towassee, one of the Creek towns, "say very jocosely they consider at this [contemporary] time were they to meet one of their ancestors armed in ancient manner and dressed in buckskin of his own manufacture that it would inspire them with dread to behold his savage appearance" (p. 28). He also reports that William Weatherford convinced runaway African-American slaves to join the famous Red Sticks in their 1813–1814 revolt (pp. 104–105), one of many instances in which blacks became Creek through a complex system of cultural assimilation. Their participation, according to Stiggins, actually played into Creek philosophy because the Red Stick prophets were predicting that "[t]heir freedom would

come about when the Negroes and the Indians would conquer and destroy the white people" (p. 120).

This history challenges the widely held assumption that assimilation only works in one direction, that Indians are always on the receiving end of it, that red will always be overpowered by white (or other colors). Obviously, a trope not unlike a metaphorical version of mixing paint has failed to serve us very well in literary studies. Its failure, however, has only encouraged its most ardent defenders. The idea—which might not work with paint but could apply here—that you could mix red with other colors, shake it around, and discover when you open the can that it is still brilliantly, beautifully red, instead of some hybridized blur, seems not to register. This would require a shift in thought which involves transformation rather than mere hybridization. Maybe in another five hundred years or so we will be ready for such radical notions. George Stiggins understood it in 1831. Certainly much of contemporary theory will encourage those who would rather look at the blur than the red, but some of us are interested in investing our energies elsewhere.

George Stiggins's *Creek Indian History* is the first book-length work we know of in the Muskogee national literary canon. He barely misses the distinction of also writing the first Indian-authored tribal history. Tuscarora writer David Cusick's 1827 work, *Sketches of the Ancient History of the Six Nations*, wins that honor, a book that precedes Stiggins's account by less than a decade, since Stiggins had begun his manuscript in 1831 and finished it sometime prior to Indian Removal in 1836 (though it was published much later in 1989, which might also disqualify it from this particular first book award). Further it is interesting to note the commitment of these early Indian writers to author tribally specific works about their own communities. In this regard we might note William Apess's account of Christian Pequots in his *The Experiences of Five Christian Indians of the Pequot Tribe* (1833), George Copway's *Traditional History and Characteristic Sketches of the Ojibway Nation* (1848), Peter Jones's *History of the Ojibway Indians* (1861), and William Whipple Warren's *History of the Ojibways* (1885).

Stiggins's book made a major dent in southeastern history. The well-known Bureau of American Ethnology ethnographer John Swanton used Stiggins as a primary source for his *Early History of the Creek Indians* and quoted extensively from Stiggins's work. This means, of course, that Stiggins also impacted, to varying degrees, virtually every book written this century on southeastern tribes, given the heavy reliance on Swanton. When Frank Owsley edited the 1969 reprint of Halbert and Ball's 1895 publication of *The Creek War of 1813 and 1814*, Owsley relied on Stiggins to validate the Halbert and Ball account and found much consistency between the two works, which he believed strengthened the claims of both (p. 10). Books as recent as Patricia Riles Wickman's 1999 work, *The Tree That Bends: Discourse, Power, and the Survival of the Maskoki People*, refer extensively to Stiggins throughout. In other words, the Stiggins work is both a Creek literary treasure and a book that has had a major impact in the outside world as well, further evidence that national literatures are not doomed to isolationism.

Stiggins's work demonstrates a literary pattern that would become a central feature of Creek narration to come in its emphasis on the origins of Creek

towns, the history of Creek national government, the role of Creek clans, and the meaning of the Green Corn Ceremony. These become essential characteristics of several Creek works that follow Stiggins's early authorship. The continuity of these narrative patterns can be traced through books as diverse as the Chekilli migration story in Albert Gatschet's *A Migration Legend of the Creek Indians* (1884), Louis Oliver's *Chasers of the Sun: Creek Indian Thoughts* (1990), and Jean and Joyotpaul Chaudhuri's *A Sacred Path: The Way of the Muskogee Creeks* (2001). There is such a thing as a Muskogee Creek written narrative style. (I can hear the objections, so let me say not just *one* but *many*. Here I am referring specifically to those works that follow this pattern of accounting for town, governmental, and Green Corn origins.) The purity of it—arguing whether or not such a style or these works themselves contain traces or even major European influences—is not the issue. The transformational power of Creeks engaging in the act of narration, telling their own history, imagining and creating a community by authoring its story, is what is at stake.

In terms of evaluating Stiggins in relation to other Creek authors, an interesting comparison is G. W. Grayson's autobiography, *A Creek Warrior for the Confederacy*, authored during World War I in Grayson's later years. The book focuses largely on his Civil War experience (also published many years after Grayson wrote it). Grayson's literary ancestor Stiggins was a member of the very faction that would later become allied with the American South during Grayson's time in the Civil War and opposed to the traditionalist faction led by Opothle Yahola. Grayson himself fought in a Creek confederate unit. Stiggins, similarly, fought against the Red Sticks, siding with the Americans against these Creek traditionalists.

Stiggins's narrative, however, differs in one fundamental aspect from Grayson's. While Stiggins gives a very detailed account of the Red Stick War, he does not tell us about what part he played himself. Stiggins's story is an eye-witness account that for some reason proceeds as if it is not, resorting mostly to a third-person narration of the principals in the war. Grayson, however, does not obscure in any way his own involvement. We can see him in the scenes he is narrating.

A strong feature the two books share is a strong anti-sentimental or anti-romantic strain. Grayson reports on the grubby meanness of the small-scale conflicts he was engaged in in Oklahoma and Arkansas, and he is the first to admit they were anything but heroic. Stiggins's work, similarly, does not go out of its way to create noble heroes where they do not exist. For instance, in a Creek battle with Chickasaws in 1793, Stiggins tells us that,

The Chickasaws in the neighborhood hearing the report of the guns, mounted their horses and made for the fort; but by mistake they made their way into the Creek forces, and five of them were instantly killed. The rest made their way safely into the fort. Thereafter the Creeks . . . quit their attack of the fort with precipitation and fled for their lives. Their flight was so intense and their panic so great that all entreaty was unavailing. Leslie and many of their mounted chiefs gained their front and used commands and expostulations to stop and rally them

to a fight. But all was to no purpose. The Creek warriors kept on running though they outnumbered their pursuers by fifty to one. (p. 76)

Not exactly “it’s a good day to die” stuff. More disturbingly, Stiggins reports even uglier aspects of Creek warfare: “Their petty wars are wars of extermination. They are not man against man, but tribe against tribe. It is a praiseworthy action for a man or a party to kill the women and children of the enemy, more so than to kill a man who is frequently in the forest. To kill a woman shows that he was not afraid to go into enemy country, but achieved the manly deed in the enemy’s very house door and escaped” (p. 75). Stiggins seems to back up these assertions with statistical data. In regard to the Red Stick attack on Fort Mims, Stiggins reports,

On the day before the fort was attacked, there was a general muster of the men in the fort, when there appeared to be 76 year troops and 52 effective militia and 11 unfit for duty, making 139 men in all. Of the aforesaid men 17 made their escape. One hundred and twenty-two were killed; besides them 201 women and children were killed. The whole posse of the fort—men, women, and children—at the time of the assault numbered 340. Of that number 11 were taken out alive as prisoners of war. This leaves the number massacred 303. A total of 28 escaped or were taken prisoners. (pp. 112–113)

Whatever one might argue about the veracity of Stiggins’s statements (and certainly Stiggins is biased in his many negative views of the Red Stick faction), it can be pointed out that romanticizing warrior cultures has its limits. Stiggins, obviously, is not the only Indian author to point out Indian-perpetrated atrocities.

A recent challenge to Creek scholars and to scholars writing about Creeks has been sounded in the Chaudhuri’s book *A Sacred Path*, which argues that the historical record has relied too extensively on the accounts of the Creek concessionists, such as the McGillivrays and McIntoshes, to the exclusion of the resistance leaders like Menawa, Opothle Yahola, and Chitto Harjo. Stiggins would certainly fit the Chaudhuri critique, given his many prejudices against the Creek traditionals and his statements, such as “So the age of prophecy in the Creek Nation displaced the light of reason and knowledge for a time” (p. 87). He tends to look at the Creek prophets as out-and-out frauds in some cases, though there are those he respects as well.

Stiggins’s culture bashing is not nearly as out of control as an Indian writer appearing in print the next decade, George Copway, particularly in his *Traditional History and Characteristic Sketches of the Ojibway Nation*, in which Copway’s “I once was Indian but now am found” resounds as a continual refrain, his traditional Indian past being frequently attributed to his days of darkness, ignorance, and superstition. Stiggins has some of these biases, but not to such an extreme. He writes during difficult times, dark days when those expressing opinions that did not concur with the Red Stick leadership were sometimes denounced as witches and executed. This created extreme pressures to conform. Stiggins puts a very human face on this challenging period

and captures the emotional turmoil of it. For that, even as a man with his set of prejudices, he deserves attention, concessionist or not.

It is interesting to note that as pressures of contact and Indian removal loomed ever larger, these suppressive environments worsened. A classic example, less extreme than executing alleged witches who held dissenting opinions, is the Boudinot-Ross dispute over freedom of the Cherokee press in the early 1830s. John Ross maintained the position that in the face of Indian removal one does not allow dissenting voices. A leader provides a unified front to fight the aggressive militarism of the federal government. Elias Boudinot resigned as editor of the *Cherokee Phoenix* over this very issue, disputing Ross with a democratic argument that insisted a newspaper present all sides of an issue, even if it meant giving voice to those in favor of removal. These were difficult times and both men were in impossible situations.

To return to Creek concerns, the Chaudhuri's point about a skewed reliance on only one faction of the tribe is well-taken, and I wish the editors' introductions to George Stiggins's history would have explained these complexities. An updated introduction that placed Stiggins in his rightful place as part of a Creek literary tradition is much in order. William Stokes Wyman's introduction, written in 1902, is a little dated to say the very least, and Virginia Pounds Brown's brief sketch tells little more than what years the manuscript fell into whose hands. At this point I guess people are tired of hearing me say this, but would it be too much to ask that even one of the people introducing the book be a Muskogee person? In addition to some of the earlier mentioned complexities of Creek life, a revelation that might emerge, for example, in a modern introduction, is an answer to the question, How did George Stiggins, who we know died in Macon County, Alabama, in 1845, manage to escape Indian Removal and keep his prosperous farm where he lived until his death?

Now, there's a story.

Craig Womack

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Feathering Custer. By W. S. Penn. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001. 256 pages. \$29.95 cloth.

In the title essay of W. S. Penn's entertaining collection of articles appraising current trends in literary and cultural studies, the author explains how George Armstrong Custer lost touch with his plebeian origins and gradually reinvented himself according to dubious, heroic tales of his exploits that began to circulate among the American public when Custer was only twenty-three years old. Insecure about his legitimate place within American history, and uncertain of his worthiness in the eyes of more powerful, superior men, Custer eagerly conformed to popular mythology. Accepting a view of himself as a peerless military legend and an American hero, he willingly "forgot" that he was once a poor, not especially intelligent boy from the "wrong" political