

Southeastern Indians Since the Removal Era

by Walter L. Williams

The authors of these essays are an interdisciplinary team of anthropologists and historians who have combined the research methods of both fields to present a comprehensive study of their subject. Published in 1979, the book takes an ethnohistorical approach and touches on the history, anthropology, and sociology of the South as well as on Native American studies. While much has been written on the archaeology, ethnography, and early history of southern Indians before 1840, most scholarly attention has shifted to Oklahoma and western Indians after that date. In studies of the New South or of Indian adaptation after the passage of the frontier, southeastern native peoples are rarely mentioned. This collection fills that void by providing an overview history of the culture and ethnic relations of the various Indian groups that managed to escape the 1830s removal and retain their ethnic identity to the present.

INTRODUCTION by Walter L. Williams:

The origins of this book lay in my early childhood, when I heard stories about my Cherokee great-great grandmother, whose English name was Polly Strickland. I remember seeing photographs of her, a small very dark-skinned woman who wore a kerchief covering her hair and smoked a corn cob pipe. My mother remembered her from her own childhood. Polly Strickland died in 1938 at age 97. She was obviously not white, and knowledge of my mixed-race family history had a large impact on my developing self-identity as someone who did not quite fit in with the established white supremacy rhetoric of my Southern upbringing.

My interests were heightened by numerous family trips to visit the Eastern Cherokee Indian Reservation, on the Qualla Boundary in the mountains of North Carolina. Then, as a student at Georgia State University, I was fortunate to enroll in a class on Cherokee history taught by Professor Henry Malone, author of the book *Cherokees of the Old South*. I was lucky because, in the 1960s, this was likely the only such class taught anywhere in the world. My appetite was whetted, and that was followed by an anthropology class on North American Indians. I was a history major, and I began to perceive a rich history of Indigenous peoples. My interest was heightened by my job as a fieldworker on three archeological excavations sponsored by the Georgia Historical Commission, at the Fort King George Gualé Indian site, at the Etowah Mississippian site, and at New Echota, capital of the Cherokee Nation. At the same time, I noticed in my history classes how little was being said about Indigenous Americans (except as an impediment to American frontier expansion). I ended up taking so many anthropology classes that I graduated with a double major in history and anthropology.

Influenced especially by the Cherokee anthropologist Sharlotte Neely, from late 1972 to early 1974 I lived as part of the traditionalist Snowbird Community on the Eastern Cherokee Reservation. What I learned from my Cherokee neighbors was on a par with any degree of learning I received as a student at either Georgia State University or in graduate school at the University of North Carolina. In fact, I would say that my time

with the Cherokees was one of the most important turning points of my life. Their viewpoints and approach to life has affected all my subsequent attitudes.

My formative influence while a student at Georgia State University was due to my involvement as a protester in a number of civil rights demonstrations. I met Martin Luther King, Coretta Scott King, Julian Bond, Maynard Jackson, Jesse Jackson and other icons of the civil rights movement. When I went to graduate school my intent was to write my Master's thesis on Black history, and my Ph.D. dissertation on Cherokee history. But, encouraged by my professors to write my dissertation on Black history, I had to postpone my writings on Indigenous American history.

I did not have to wait long to begin work on what ultimately became this book. In 1974, just as I completed my Ph.D. at the University of North Carolina, I was hired as an assistant professor of history at the University of Cincinnati. The position was advertised to replace a deceased popular professor who had taught a year-long course on the American Civil War and Reconstruction. I was a former student of Professor Bell Wiley, a leading Civil War historian, so I knew the subject well. When I was brought in for my interviews, I gave a lecture on Indians in the Civil War. This topic was so different from the other candidates, and I had such a unique approach that the faculty chose me over 252 other historians who applied for this job. I accepted the position on condition that I could also develop another course in American Indian history. At the time, practically the only university courses on Indigenous Americans were taught in anthropology departments, so my class was among the first to be taught in the historical discipline.

I decided that, after living in Florida near the Seminole Reservation, I wanted to expand my focus from the Cherokees to indigenous peoples of the South. The academics who knew these peoples best were anthropologists, so I wrote to the leading specialists on particular tribes, like Professor Charles Hudson on the Catawba, and Professor Adolph Dial on the Lumbee. Once I had these "big name" professors on board, they helped me attract other researchers I did not know. When I had collected enough specialists to make a book, I sent each a detailed instruction how to structure their chapter, one time period after another in chronological order, just like historians structure their diachronic analysis of any other subject.

Once they started sending me their draft chapters, I presented a speech at the 1976 annual meeting of the American Society for Ethnohistory, and organized a session of most of the authors at the 1977 annual meeting of the Southern Historical Association. After helping the authors refine their chapter, I wrote a Preface arguing for the need to combine the perspectives of both historians and anthropologists, and an introductory chapter on the history of Southern Indians before the U.S. government Indian removal policy of President Andrew Jackson. At the end of the book, I wrote a concluding chapter drawing from the insights of each of the authors, as well as a bibliographic essay publicizing the major sources for future research on Southern Indians.

In 1978 I presented all of this to the University of Georgia Press, which accepted the manuscript for publication a year later. Lumbee scholar Professor Adolph Dial wrote a Foreward to the book, concluding: "Professor Walter L. Williams has made a great contribution to southeastern Indian history by bringing together a collection of essays written by authors who have expertise in a people who were almost forgotten but now seek a place under a new rising sun. Readers will find *Southeastern Indians Since the Removal Era* most informative and enjoyable."

This book became an exemplar of what became known as "The New Indian History," which approached the history of Indigenous peoples as other historical subjects are presented; not as people who "lost their culture" but as human beings who have to deal with multiple pressures affecting their actions and reactions to their lived experiences.