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SACRED PEOPLE, A WORLD OF CHANGE: THE ENDURING SPIRIT OF THE  
CREEK AND CHEROKEE ON THE FRONTIER

by

MARJORY GRAYSON-LOWMAN GREENBAUM

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Georgia State University

SACRED PEOPLE, A WORLD OF CHANGE: THE ENDURING SPIRIT OF THE CREEK  
AND CHEROKEE ON THE FRONTIER

by

MARJORY GRAYSON-LOWMAN GREENBAUM

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Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies  
College of Arts and Sciences  
Georgia State University  
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May 2005



**Sacred People, A World of Change: The Enduring Spirit of the Creek and Cherokee on the Frontier**

This is an essay to outline the process through which I came to produce a historical radio documentary as my thesis project for my Master of Arts in History at Georgia State University. As a producer in public radio and a student in a Masters program in History, I wanted to create a project for my thesis that would allow me to combine my professional skills as a public radio producer with my academic interests and pursuits in history. Since my passion is both documentary work and history, it was easy to envision a historical radio documentary as my thesis project. How I came to choose the history of the Creek and Cherokee people on the frontier of Georgia as my subject is personal as well as professional. I have spent the past six years, specifically, exploring the Indian world by befriending mixed bloods and full blooded Indians in the area, attending sweat lodges and Sundances, and interviewing various people of Indian descent. The interviews were aired on Atlanta public radio in the form of short segments for Native American History Month and later for a series of vignettes I produced that highlighted advocates for human rights called Voices for Freedom . Also, in a graduate course on Folklore I took with Dr. Burrison and that was part of my Masters program, my final project was a study of Native American sweat lodges as practiced by local attendees in the metro Atlanta area.

My interest in American Indian issues really began 15 years ago when I was a volunteer leader with Amnesty International and our human rights work focused on the rights of indigenous peoples in North America. There I became keenly aware of their unique culture and the need for people to recognize their viability and rights as a nation within a nation. All of these activities were what prepared me along my path toward deciding to undertake the thesis subject I chose. My project focuses on the Creek and Cherokee populations on the frontier of Georgia starting around 1763 and ending with their final Removal by 1838. I give some preliminary history to 1763 by covering the Missippian Period from which the Creek and Cherokee emerge and then the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. The last part of the documentary features a series of segments on current day Creek and Cherokee descendants who explain how history has impacted their lives, what sort of issues and things they advocate for in their communities, what challenges they have to overcome, and if there is an opportunity for healing and reconciliation from the history they have endured.

Upon deciding on a subject to focus my thesis project on in the final semester of my coursework, I approached the Public History Professor, Dr. Cliff Kuhn, who took a Masters level Public History course with and who has experience in producing documentary work. I met with him to discuss my interest in making my thesis project a non-traditional project. My intention was to make my thesis a public history project, specifically. I explained what I had to offer in technical and creative skills that I have developed over the past 13 years

working in public broadcasting in both television and radio. I also discussed all of that which I would do to contribute to the project including writing and conducting my own interviews, engineering/recording interviews with scholars and native peoples using broadcast equipment in the field and in the radio studio, writing narration, choosing voice talent, selecting primary history material and recording voiceovers of that material, coaching and recording a narrator, inputting all of these audio elements digitally into an editor, and digitally editing the whole documentary, including the final mix. I can say that I, exclusively, completed all of the tasks listed above.

Once I had attained the support of Dr. Kuhn, he spoke with a few of his colleagues about my project to determine if the department would support such a thesis idea. Then, the request went through an approval process with the History Department's Executive Committee. Once they agreed, I then approached the department's Director of Graduate Studies, Dr. Brattain and she gave her approval as well. As agreed to, I also have here completed an essay to outline the process through which I was able to complete my thesis.

First of all, I have kept copious notes of all of my work from its inception. I have a drawer full of files to back up any work that I have done. Also, I have kept a computer folder of files on both disk and my home computer. I completed a prospectus and it was approved a few months after I had completed most of the historical research that would be the foundation for my project. I accompanied that paper with a bibliography of about twenty sources of

secondary and primary research that I had used and any reading I intended to pursue from that point forward. I have kept notes from all of my readings in both paper form and on computer disk. I have used far more resources than originally outlined in my bibliography accompanying my Prospectus. The primary resources I have used varied from treaties and other legal documents, and correspondences and speeches of legislators, Creek and Cherokee leaders, governors, and presidents. Also used were writings from the journals of ethnologist James Mooney and from William Bartram.

From the academic resources that I used, I compiled a series of interviews based on some individual materials and their authors. Then, I contacted these historians, curators, anthropologists, and archaeologists and determined who would best work to do recorded interviews for the documentary. I was not as critical of their voice and experience with interviews as I would have been had this been strictly a project for broadcast. Because it is an academic project as well, I mostly selected the persons who were available and who could provide me with the information I was seeking to successfully tell the story. Most of who I chose had prior experience with broadcast interviews. Some of the pitfalls of seeking academics for interviews are their busy schedules, their tendency to be out of town travelling for academic pursuits and otherwise, and the possibility of their being out of the country on hiatus, etc. I found that it is essential to contact any potential interviewees a few months before you intend to do the interview and to meet with them by telephone, etc and establish a rapport as well as

prepare them for what you have in mind for your project and how they fit into it. Also, it may take time for them to warm up to the idea of doing an interview that they might not feel qualified to do, even if you know that they are, based on their scholarship. If they cannot or do not wish to be interviewed, it is important to use the opportunity of speaking with them to seek referrals to other academics who they think may better suit your needs. I found that sometimes it took some cajoling to get them to go forth with scheduling a radio interview. It proved to be helpful on most occasions to send them the interview questions ahead of time, about two weeks, to give them time to review it and give feedback. Any number of scenarios resulted from sending the questions ahead to them by way of e-mail. Either they read the questions and gave detailed feedback, they did not read the questions at all and spontaneously responded which could make for a better or worse interview, depending on the individual. In the case of one historian, the individual came in with full, lengthy written answers from which they read into the microphone. Early into that interview, I paused and asked the interviewee to please respond as though it was an interview rather than responding in such a way as to sound like narration, even though they were in fact reading the answers. After that small request, the responses came out more naturally.

With regard to interviews, it is important to allow for cancellations which will be inevitable. Also, if you are travelling to conduct an interview, make sure all your equipment is in top working condition and rehearse on that equipment before heading out to your location to avoid embarrassment or any technical

difficulties. Arriving calm and centered and professional is necessary to evoke confidence in the interviewee as well. Often times you only get one chance to interview an individual and, if you make a mistake, the interview may be lost forever. I interviewed some native peoples outdoors at festivals and found that my sound levels were very different than what I recorded in the studio via an ISDN phone line from my studio to the studio where my guest sat in another city. And those levels were different than what I recorded when my guest was in the studio with me. Unfortunately, such circumstances require some final audio mixing where you have to tweak the various interview levels to achieve some equilibrium of overall sound which is not the ideal technical situation but one I found myself in.

Some challenges I ran up against when securing Creek or Cherokee individuals to talk with me was a matter of relationship development and trust. Native people often require a great deal of persistence, patience and the earning of trust before they will consider an interview with you. Some people can take years before they will agree to talk with someone who is non-Native. Sometimes the establishment of legitimacy came easily for me and sometimes it was very difficult. An example was my efforts to go to the Cherokee reservation in Western North Carolina. I began by speaking to individual Cherokee people I had met over a few years and then asked to formally do interviews. At one point an e-mail I had sent to someone I was pursuing for an interview was forwarded to the tribal council and I was told I should be going through their

organization and their protocol, of which I knew nothing. Needless to say, I had to begin the whole process of seeking interviews over again and was told who I should/could speak with. Then, after travelling hours to the location to conduct the interviews, a couple of the interviewees were never told of my planned arrival and did not expect me. One person was somewhat hostile and offended at my assumption that she was available to speak with me. After that experience, I felt a bit intimidated and afraid of further offending anyone, so I failed to pursue an elder I had intended to speak with. I had even previously met and spoke with this elder in an effort to build trust for this particular visit to his reservation. I regretted my resistance to pursue the interview that day and lost the opportunity as a result. I spoke with a few people who I was directed to speak with and let well enough alone. Were I to endeavor on future projects where I feature the Cherokees, I now know the protocol and would follow up with the people who I was directed to speak to and would likely not have the snags I came upon in my first attempt. Nevertheless, between speaking with Creeks and Cherokees at festivals, on reservations, or from my studio and speaking to them by telephone at their work or their homes, I was able to conduct as many interviews as was necessary to complete this project and am satisfied with the people I spoke with. . It is important to note that I have acquired a signed waiver form from each of my interviewees, giving me the right to use their voice for this project with the university and for radio broadcast. Although this is no longer a legal issue, it is essential to provide

yourself with the safety net of a signed waiver form were any contestations over the use of the interview to arise.

The evolution of the theme of my project continued to nearly the end of the work on the project. When I began my interviews, I only had a general theme of the thesis envisioned. I wanted to explore life on the frontier in the Southeast, and Georgia specifically, and how the collision of the European cultures and the Indian cultures played out. I wanted to know how the Indians were impacted by population changes on the frontier, what they lost, if they gained anything and how their fate of removal came to be. How I would use the historians and other academics was not so complicated but I was not sure how I would use my interviews with Creek and Cherokee descendents. I had to do some soul searching to figure out what questions I thought would be fitting. I was not sure how well they might know their history and did not want to make them uncomfortable with questions they could not answer. Finally, I decided to ask a few questions about how history had impacted them from removal to the laws that made their spiritual practices illegal. Then, I turned the interview over to current day issues to get a sense of what they as individuals advocated for, what traditions they handed down, and how they felt about their spiritual self. The interviews seemed to be a part of a healing process that is essential to that community today in light of a history of loss and injustice. Giving people a voice who historically had no voice and educating a wider public to the concerns of native peoples was the real purpose of my project and I feel that these interviews

were an integral part of that pursuit. Fortunately, I was able to take a few excerpts from the interviews with Creek and Cherokee people and intersperse them with the academics in the history portion of my documentary which makes up two-thirds of the overall project. Because current day issues are so relevant in light of history, I created a final section for that where it was strictly the native voice that was represented throughout.

As mentioned earlier, where I started with the project and where I ended up in terms of content and theme were two different places. I never assumed that what I had projected to be my thesis was what would be the end result. Had I done that, I would have come upon a great deal of obstacles and been fighting against the natural flow of the process. One thing I feel I did well was to let the project work itself out organically and let it have a life of its own while gently guiding it along. I feel that a documentary is about revealing the truth as best as you can let the story unfold without too much intervention. Of course, I am human and, therefore, biased. However, I did my best to let the scholars and the native people teach me rather than my trying to force everyone to fit into a mold of a thesis as I saw it. I knew the project would unfold over time and reveal whether or not my thesis would hold or would need to be altered. For example, I set out in this documentary to show that the reason that the frontier world could not accommodate both the Native and the European cultures was because of a spiritual clash. It turns out that the only really spiritual people on the frontier were the Southeast Indians. Most of the settlers were rather Godless people who

were there for land and a new start and would just as soon not be bothered by anyone. Ironically, missions and missionaries had quite a presence in certain locations but converted very few Indians to their cause, although they were responsible for the education (or re-education) of many young Indian people. I found that those of European descent were little effected by these religious groups and hardly participated in religion or made churchgoing a part of their lives. I went in thinking this was a European, pious Protestant population in direct conflict with an ancient sacred group of indigenous people. In the documentary, I reveal what I found to be the basic conflicts at hand and I tried to touch on some commonalities and forms of peaceful coexistence between the two dominant populations. Were I to have pushed my original agenda, I would have ignored the truth. I learned that letting go of ego and preconceived notions is essential to creating a documentary with integrity.

Once all the interviews were completed, of which I conducted about fifteen, I began transcribing them word for word on a computer. I then went through all the material and labeled it under certain subject headings to better organize the information. I then began to piece it together to make a story and to determine where I might be weak in telling the story from interview material. Wherever I was weak, I knew I could use narration from my research to fill in the blanks or use narration where the interviewees' answer was too detailed or did not really answer the question in the way that would make sense to the listener. This is the point where I became aware that I would not really be able to do

justice to the subject of missions and missionaries and mostly left out that part of the history from the overall project. I did not have the material covered properly in interviews and found the information beyond my ability to do the proper research to do it justice. I was not confident in my knowledge of this part of the frontier experience and had to mostly let it go. I feel it is an obvious missing piece of the story but I simply did not have the time to include it, ultimately. Nevertheless, from the transcribed interviews I was able to outline the story and determine the form it would take. I settled on telling the history chronologically and wrote a loose outline which included the interview passages I would use and in what order I would use them. Since all interviews were on tape, the transcriptions included time cues throughout. My outline, in turn, included the in and out cues of each passage I intended to use, so that I could easily locate them on the original interview tapes. To edit the interviews, I had to load the audio, complete interview by interview into an editor. I would copy and paste the audio, just as in any computer program, and place the pieces I wanted to use in one audio track in the editor that would be the non-music track of the documentary. I later did the same for the musical passages used and placed them on a separate audio track.

After the first rough edit came a review with my advisor, Dr. Clifford Kuhn. He advised me on what did and did not make sense, where I needed to tighten up the story and how I might make the documentary come alive with added elements.

The next step in the process of the project was to select the placement of music, select the type of music that was appropriate, and to edit it in. Also, while working on an outline that was changing as I worked through each editing session, I was able to begin to write in my narration. This writing and rewriting of narration while editing and reediting the interviews was a three-month long process. Ultimately, the editing of the project took about one hundred hours, if not more. The transcribing of the interviews took approximately two to three hours for every hour of interview recorded and I recorded about twelve hours of interviews.

One thing I found that was essential was that once I began editing, I had set my goal to finish a month before the initial due date for project review. When dealing with electronic equipment, it is good to keep in mind that technical errors or breakdowns can occur and you have to give yourself adequate time to remedy any problems that are sure to arise. I dealt with computer and editor problems and was saved by having allowed myself enough time to make up for the lost time I experienced.

In conclusion, I would say this thesis project was far more rewarding for me to complete than a traditional thesis paper would have been. I enjoyed all the varied dimensions of the project from research to editing to the most important aspect of such a project, a human connection that I made with my subject that I could not have experienced with a paper. I was able to meet and talk with historians and with the very people whom I sought to study and represent, the

Creek and Cherokee people of the Southeast. The average historian never meets the descendents of those whom his or her research is centered around and I think that is a loss and creates a disconnect. Most historians I spoke with whose studies were focused on the American Indians had little to no contact with those people today and I found that to be a sad commentary on the field. I feel that accomplishing this project was a wonderful opportunity to learn how to produce a documentary and to propel me forward to do more work that may be of some service to humanity while providing me a creative outlet.