

# Miscellaneous Tape #501

Side 2

1. OVERTON James / President of Chickasaw TRIBE - OKla.  
"The Unfinished Journey" The 5 civilized TRIBES of Oklahoma  
SPEECH
2. MR. WARREN / Representing W. Kester (President of Cherokee TRIBE)  
SPEECH
3. JERRY Wilkenson / Cherokee  
Exec. Director N.I.Y.C.  
Interview

FEB. 1970

HILTON HOTEL, ALAB, N.M.

INDIAN EDUCATIONAL WORKSHOP  
SPONSORED BY THE B.F.A.

The 1st two are tapes of speeches made  
the interview was of comments about the  
conference + current ISSUES.

Good

Trene Silent man  
Anna Boyd

Tape #501 (side 2)  
MISCELLANEOUS  
Indian Education Workshop  
February 26, 1970  
By Irene Silentman & Anna Boyd

OVERTON JAMES-Pres. Chickasaw  
tribe "The Unfinished  
Journey" of Five Civilized  
Tribes of Oklahoma  
MR. WARREN-Representing Mr. W. W.  
Keeler, pres. of Cherokee  
tribe  
JERRY WILKINSON-Cherokee, Exec.  
Director of NIYC

INTRODUCTION AND TALK BY OSAGE WOMAN ABOUT TRIBAL CUSTOMS WAS INAUDIBLE

OVERTON JAMES:

Information about the Indians of Oklahoma... I wanted to briefly give you a little preview of the man which will make a speech. I would be happy to share with you some of the history and culture of the Five Civilized Tribes in Oklahoma. These Five Civilized Tribes are the Chickasaws, Choctaws, Cherokees, Creeks, and Seminoles are so called and referred to as the Five Civilized Tribes because they have made great advances and progress as far as civilized life and customs when they were first encountered by the Europeans. First I want to point out that, at this time, that all Indians of Oklahoma and all the other states today, are civilized from the point of view of the Anglo American culture. Yet the term Five Civilized Tribes emerged as early as 1876 and long before the removal to Oklahoma of the Chickasaws and the Choctaws and the Cherokees and the Creeks and the Seminoles had already gone far into the fields of agriculture and Christianity and tribal organization and government. Oklahoma was not always the homeland of these five powerful nations... When first encountered by Europeans, the Five Civilized Tribes were living in Virginia, North Carolina, South

Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee and Mississippi and Florida. They had lived there for centuries since the early 1700's when England, France and Spain began to get and gain some control of not only the Indian trade, but also of Indian lands and it would have been pitiful if these three rival European countries would meet head on in their power struggle to control North America and also in order to win the various Indian tribes over to their particular side, they saturated the Indian natives with all kinds of goods and filled their heads of red people with all kinds of promises and pacts to protect.... lines up along side of the Europeans and the English soon won the Chickasaws over and they were finally attacked with the English through the American Revolution and the Chickasaw warriors fought alongside of the English troops in many battles. The Chickasaws were for a long time have been noted for their bravery and courage and moreover as fierce warriors. They are never known to have lost a battle. Some historians give the unconquered Chickasaw tribe credit for the United States now being an English speaking rather than a French speaking nation. Not too happy with the Chickasaws siding the the English, the French made way to exterminate the Chickasaw tribe... five times from 1736 to 1753 the French along with their Choctaw allies had made demands of the Chickasaws and each time they failed to be conquered and perhaps it is because of the unconquerable Chickasaws that persuaded the French government during World War I selected a Chickasaw, Sargent Otis as a leader as

the typical American aborigine. World wide colonial rivalry between England and France erupted into the French and Indian War and when the smoke had cleared, peace was established in 1763, the whole North American continent had changed. England now had control of the eastern half of the United States from the Mississippi River to the Atlantic. And then in 1775 open war broke out between the British and the American colony. September of 1783 brought peace and with it came a decree of independence for the colonies. Shortly after the turn of the century, the Chickasaws and other southern tribes were no longer American... no longer were they made by the United States to act as buffers between European rivals and Indian trade was no longer important in America. But what was important at this time was to get the Five Civilized Tribes completely out of the way and make room for the adventurerers and land speculators, squatters and what have you... who were pushing toward the Tennessee. And with the election of Andrew Jackson as President of the United States in 1828, removal of the Five Civilized Tribes was made. In 1830, after a very bitter debate in Congress, the Indian Removal Bill was passed giving the President power to see that Indians west of the Mississippi were removed to the far away country of the United States, which at that time was Indian territory... now in Oklahoma. Most of the removal treaties between the United States and the Five Civilized Tribes contained the properties that an Indian territory would never be included as a state or

part of a state, where no white men will trouble you and no spirit will tempt you, and your land will be yours as long as the grass grows and rivers flow. Although the Indian Removal Bill was not authorized then for its removal force nevertheless was used in time. When none of the Indians wanted to leave their own homeland and to take that difficult journey of indescribable suffering and hardship for a long time... one of the blackest marks in American History is referred to as the Trail of Tears. The Choctaws were the first to be removed; several of the Choctaw party had to march through the snow six inches deep and their travel was very slow, sickness was a constant traveling companion of the marchers. Cholera devastated the travelers, deaths due to hunger and exposure were staggering. One fourth of the Choctaw tribe or approximately 3,500 died on the removal trail. Major Armstrong, who was the federal agent in charge of the move, the Choctaw removal wrote, "No man, except one that was present can form any idea of the difficulties that we encountered, with regard to the cholera and its effects. Death was hovering over us, the [ ] was filled with the graves of the victims and the roads were lined with the sick... fortunately there are a people that marched through the land, but I do not know how we got along." The Creeks were next; torn from their homes, forced to abandon their [ ] and most of their personal belongings, the Creek through the push for governmental program of removal suffered more than any other tribe on their Trail of Tears. Bound with shackles and chains one party

of 300 warriors was placed on a river boat which had already been condemned and unsafe, the ruddy boat sank and unable to swim in shackles all drowned. By the Spring of 1837, 15,000 Creeks had arrived at Fort Gibson, thousands died in the bitter cold on the way to Oklahoma. The severe winter, lack of food, and general suffering killed virtually all infants... small children and older people. Conservative estimates indicate that 40% of the total population of the Creek tribe died, about 6,000 of them during the removal and adjustment in Indian territory. It was now the Chickasaw's turn... living in northern Mississippi, the Chickasaw chief that removal was inevitable and through shrewd and cunning, they held out just long enough to bring out the government commissioners, by far the best removal treaty of all tribes. With a short distance to travel and wise management of removal by tribal leaders, the Chickasaw relocation was most peaceful and orderly. The suffering and hardship of all the tribes and Chickasaws were able to collect most of their personal possessions, their slaves, their livestock, were transferred west. The Chickasaws had almost about 900 members or 15% of their tribe. Next came the Cherokees; the Cherokee removal was the most publicized of any in Indian history. Living in Georgia, the Cherokees were progressive and most were prosperous farmers who ignored the appeal to leave their lands and move west. The fourth removal of the remaining 15,000 which did not remove voluntarily was entrusted to General Winfield Scott and 7,000 federal troops. On May 10, 1838

they issued a proclamation to the Cherokee people warning that the immigration must begin at once and in haste and that before

was passed, every Cherokee man, woman and child were to be moved west as demanded by the President of the United States.

A Georgia volunteer, afterwards a colonel in the Confederate service said, "I fought through the Civil War and have seen men shot to pieces and slaughtered by the thousand, but the Cherokee removal was the cruelest work I have ever known." About four thousand Indians died over the course of capture and detention in temporary stockades and during the removal itself. So the last of the Five Civilized Tribes to be forced into Indian territory was the Seminoles. Seminole chief, Osceola, headed the faction who refused to be bound by the removal treaty and promised that his warriors would fight until the last drop of Seminole blood had moistened the dust of his hunting grounds. Chief Osceola carried on a vigorous war against the United States and the Florida settlers and he was finally taken prisoner in violation of the truce agreement and the unconquerable war chief died in chains in 1839, but his followers continued the war and the United States eventually gave up in their struggle to remove them West. By 1842, only 3,000 Seminoles had been removed to Indian territory for each Seminole that was removed to Indian territory it cost the federal government \$6,500. Looking at these statistics in another way, for every two Seminoles removed to the west, the army paid for the life of one soldier. At last

removal of the last of the Five Civilized Tribes was an accomplished fact but their sorrow in their hearts, weakened by hardship and suffering, decimated by disease, the Indians now had little hope they would be free from cruelty and harassment and would be allowed to live in peace and to restore their broken health and homes, their institutions and government. At first all of Oklahoma was given to the Five Civilized Tribes with the exception of the pan handle. As a result of the Five Civilized Tribes joining the Confederacy during the Civil War, the federal government claimed that they had forfeited their claim to western Oklahoma and took these lands and gave them to the other Indian tribes. For almost three quarters of a century the Five Civilized Tribes lived in Indian territory as sovereign nations with their own legislative, judicial, and executive branches of government and all with their own respective capitol buildings. Four of these capitols are still standing... The Chickasaws at \_\_\_\_\_, the Choctaws at Tuska-homa, the Cherokees at Tahlequah, the Creeks at \_\_\_\_\_ and the Seminole capital at \_\_\_\_\_ has never been restored. The passing of the General Allotment Act of 1887 was a major factor in bringing up the land holdings of the Five Civilized Tribes and bringing \_\_\_\_\_ this act provides for Indian land to pass from title ownership to individual owner. Each member of general allotment and surplus land sold... While many owners retained and benefited from their allotments, others sold out for a fraction of the land's worth with the advent of statehood, many Indians took their claim



in to the leader and others became well adjusted citizens in the dominant society. However still today in Oklahoma we have thousands of Indians who have made very little progress in adjusting and are still paying duty for their Indian way of life. The Five Civilized Tribes have added immeasurably to the culture and spiritual lives and to the wealth and stability of Oklahoma. The Five Civilized Tribes are now merged into the great democracy that the world has ever known. We only hope and pray that this great democracy in these fifty states all united into one nation shall forever remain free and democratic and now then.....

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This is Keeler, principal chief of the Cherokee nation.....

THIS PORTION OF TAPE IS INAUDIBLE DUE TO THE ACOUSTICS IN HILTON HOTEL CONFERENCE THEREFORE IT IS NOT TRANSCRIBED.

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JERRY WILKINSON-Executive Director of National Indian Youth Council

Q. Do you know that guy's name that just made that speech?

A. No, I didn't catch his name.

Q. But he works for Keeler, doesn't he?

A. Yeah, I think so. What were you going to ask that question about that?

Q. About what?

A. You ought to ask him some specific questions because what he said was so broad.

Q. He was talking about towards the end of the speech, he was

talking about an industry that they provided... What did he say, steel well? And there are 51 employees or something, do you know about that project?

- A. And that is all... most of these projects that they have in these tribes in Oklahoma there is racism within the tribe, in other words they want the doctor or the more traditional Indians are generally looked down upon than most parties really and they don't have any real kind of power or participation in their tribe and so I would imagine that the question is like who is employed up there... like what kind of Indians are employed? And also there is a general assumption made that Oklahoma Indians are just like white Oklahomans, it is kind of like assimilation and there really isn't much difference between cultural or otherwise and this stuff isn't borne out in facts that there aren't many people that have cause they are treated, had their identity threatened because of that kind of a situation and so I suspect that it isn't all that good a picture I imagine... I don't know who is participating in these sort of projects.... and one of the things that, about this economic development should be done, not only through tribal government but through private organizations of Indians on various reservations in big groups, mostly groups of Indians should participate.
- Q. It seems like Phillip's Petroleum was really doing alot as far as technological advances for the Cherokee, training them and so on... is this what you're....
- A. They are probably behind... they are probably afraid that some ill founded notion that unless Indians are made good capitalists they will turn communists and all of this that is all tied up with kind of this right wing stuff going around America, America first and so forth and love it or leave it attitude I think that alot of things.....
- Q. Okie from Muskogee?
- A. Okie from Muskogee, yeah... and it is all tied up in there, if you look for a motive it's mixed up with being ideological. I think that some of it is the same kind of attitude as people sending old clothes to our house during holidays often looked on these dogoody things as the same kind of attitude that is behind... you develop but you develop along our lines and so forth and you develop like us and you become like us... and that is the way to solve your problems.
- Q. Well they were really... the speaker was talking about Indian leadership, don't you think that there are some Cherokees that

are really benefiting from it?

- A. Yeah, no doubt that there are people benefiting from it, but I am just saying that probably that is not the primary ones that benefit from it and it is a problem of, I don't know... it is a question of integrity... I imagine this is true in any other places especially.
- Q. Keeler is the principal chief of the Cherokees, is he appointed or elected?
- A. He was appointed about 20 years ago, by President Truman, there has never been an election. And he engages in all kinds of tribal enterprises there, cultural grounds for Indians are dressed up and live in huts and so forth... tourist kinds of things... come by and take their pictures, and there is a tribal restaurant that doesn't have any Indian waitresses, the only Indians that work there work back in the kitchen. And there is general attitude of making Indians into tourist attractions for all of Oklahoma and this seems to be the only justification that Oklahomans can find for Indians being around. One of the problems that I talked about earlier is this fear of people that are different, with different traditions and so forth and who would like to remain different and alot of them drop out of school and it is because they have themselves seen this system and it doesn't relate to who they are... and this attitude is behind alot of this stuff behind trying to relate Indians, Okies and so forth and hang on to some of their traditions, that amuse them the general population. I think that you can't confer power on people, you can set up companies for Indians and hope they get some Indians to take it over or something, but the real power is when people begin setting up these things for themselves and demanding things. Power comes up from the bottom and that is where you make real lasting progress.
- Q. Can you generalize on what you think this whole convention or conference, or have you been....?
- A. Well it will probably have some good results... people will get to know each other, is one of the things... I think, but why don't they take that \$75,000 that it takes to put on this thing and give it straight to the demonstration program that would benefit some particular group and use it as a model... that would be more effective way of doing things. And it seems like mostly there are non-Indians here anyway, I suspect in this kind of thing... they are the people that make the money off Indians. You look at poverty experts sitting around making \$75 a day consulting somebody and I think this

money would be a better spent but I am kind of tired of conferences anyway one on this and one on that.... every administration comes in and spends all its money doing surveys and we already know what the problems are.

- Q. What about these people that came from Alaska and Washington and Minnesota, Nebraska and North Dakota and South Dakota... there were quite a few in there... they were all In.
- A. Yeah, that may be, I don't know... I guess you need experts that is one of the things you know... there are all these conferences and generally if you would cut out about half of them and start spending the money on the people...
- Q. Well back to Keeler again since he was appointed by Truman... then is he going to be there for life or another person will be appointed?
- A. Yeah, probably... there's a bill for an election but that is a different kind of situation because and probably the rolls have been so expanded he probably wouldn't have any trouble getting elected.
- Q. What do you mean?
- A. I mean, supposedly that traditional Indians claim that there are only about twenty to thirty thousand Cherokee, whereas Keeler and the tribal council claim that there are about eighty or ninety thousand and so who is going to vote for who, I don't think an election will make much difference.
- Q. No....
- A. Yeah.
- Q. Do they have elections?
- A. No, there haven't ever been elections so I don't know what there will be or how long there, because I'm sure that the people will survive as people but I'm not sure they'll survive as Indians.
- Q. Is he chief... like you are from Carolina?
- A. Yeah, North Carolina.
- Q. North Carolina... so does he have power over you guys?
- A. No, no... it is totally different.

Q. How is it different over there?

A. Well...

Q. Those are the ones that remained behind?

A. Yeah, right... Cherokees have always lived in Smoky Mountains of North Carolina in small, isolated reservation, maybe four thousand or five thousand people and they have, they elect a chief and an elected tribal council, but it has nothing to do with Oklahoma.

Q. How many are over there, Cherokees?

A. In North Carolina?

Q. Yeah.

A. I think 4,800 on the reservation.

END OF TAPED SESSION