



THE ISOLATED EASTERN CHEROKEE

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Some observers of the American Indian scene suggest that there are changes in the collective comportment of the American Indians. These changes include an increasing awareness of "rights" and of real or perceived treaty violations; a recognition of shared goals and mutually held feelings; and the communication of these sentiments to the larger society in various ways. The fact that Indians have become vocal has led to the contention that there is a collective movement¹ among native Americans.

The characteristics of this movement are, however, difficult to categorize. To apply to it the familiar labels of "nativistic movements" or "revitalization movements" appears to be imprecise. For example, there is no resemblance between current Indian behavior and the Black Muslim cult. The militancy which is a trait of the Black Muslims is absent, and so is the aim of uniting all Indians under one banner.² The familiar irrational thought and behavior associated with the Melanesian "Cargo cults" past and present is not apparent. Neither does this contemporary Indian resurgence resemble the messianic movements such as the Prophet dance, Ghost dance or the Indian Shaker church which figured so prominently in the Indian past.

We seem to know what this phenomenon is not, but we are not sure what it is. I am inclined to agree that Nancy Lurie's term "Indian Renaissance"³ is appropriate and is descriptive of the events which are occurring. The specific goals, however, seem to be somewhat ill-defined, and are possibly related to a particular problem or particular tribe. Although there is a great emphasis on permitting an "Indian way" of life to continue in, or in juxtaposition to the larger culture, the movement -- if movement it is -- is not explicitly opposed to acculturation. Indeed, there is an explicit desire to maintain separate tribal identities. On the other hand, there does not seem to be a drive for acculturation either, although there is a demand for a larger "slice of the pie" in regard to education and higher standards of living.

In addition to these problems there is another. How pervasive is this movement? Are all or most of the "tribes" participating in it with equal fervor? I submit that they are not. For example, I know of no evidence demonstrating that the Eastern Keresan Pueblos are a part of it. The rea-

sons for their lack of participation are a function of, among other things, a deliberate effort to maintain cultural identity and to disassociate themselves from the white world. It is not with them, however, that this paper is concerned, but with the Eastern Band of the Cherokee. There is equally little evidence attesting to Cherokee participation. A review of the content of Indian Voices reveals no mention of Eastern Cherokee acting collectively, or of representatives from the band attending the various regional and national meetings aimed to organize and promote Indian goals. In order to understand this it is necessary to examine the contemporary Cherokee and the environment in which they live.

CHEROKEE COUNTRY

The Eastern Band of Cherokee occupy a 56,572 acre reservation in western North Carolina about equidistant between Asheville, North Carolina, and Knoxville, Tennessee. The area is mountainous. A main highway climbs the mountains forming the eastern boundary of the reservation and winds its serpentine way down through the business section. Much of the reservation land borders on Great Smoky Mountain National Park. Although there are good bottom lands, over 46,000 acres are in timber. The remaining acreage is agricultural, pasture or waste. Qualla Boundary is the main reservation. Separate from it and about fifty miles away is the Snow Bird section consisting of 2,249 acres. Still farther west in Cherokee County about 5,000 acres are held in fragmented tracts. Qualla Boundary has five communities within it: Soco, Paint Town, Cherokee, Big Cove and Birdtown. Each of these has distinctive ecological, demographic and cultural characteristics.

Elevation on the reservation varies from 1900 feet to 4700 feet. The mean temperature for a year is 54.9° F. February is the coldest month, with an average temperature of 29.7° F., and July, with an average of 80.5° F., is the warmest. In general the climate is relatively mild, except at the highest elevation, and there is abundant moisture. Numerous mountain streams flow into the rushing Ocunuluftee River which courses through the reservation on its way into the Tennessee River system.

THE PEOPLE⁴

The 1960 census of the band revealed 4,494 members. There was a roll taken in 1924 listing a population of 2,540. From these figures it is evident that the population has nearly doubled in thirty-six years. The genetic composition of the band is mixed, but accurate data exist for the 1924 enumeration. John Gulich in 1960 made an estimate based on the composition of school enrollment for 1956-1957.⁵ However, in the case of children with 1/2 or less Indian blood, there is the possibility that the child's inheritance may differ markedly from that of either or both of his parents. "One-half Indian blood" might result, for instance, from one white and one

Indian parent, or two "1/2 blood" parents, or one 1/4 and one 3/4 "blood" parent. Table I compares the Indian inheritance of the 1924 roll with the figures obtained from the schools in 1956-1957.

Table I
Comparison of Indian Inheritance by Percent

1924 ^a			1957 ^b		
Blood Degree	No.	%	Blood Degree	No.	%
4/4	525	20.67	4/4	197	22.89
3/4	326	12.83	3/4-4/4	223	25.90
1/2	183	7.21	1/2-3/4	172	19.97
1/4	180	7.09	1/4-1/2	140	16.26
1/16	613	24.13	Less than 1/4	129	14.98
Less than 1/16	713	28.07			
Total	2540	100.00	Total	861	100.00

a. Tribal file data, 1960.

b. Based on school enrollment data only.

ECONOMY⁶

The economy of the Cherokee can be described as mixed. The major sources of earned money are the tourist industry, three factories, miscellaneous wage labor, and, to a limited extent, timbering. Full time farming is practiced by so few that it can hardly be considered a significant source of cash. The major crop is tobacco, but allotments are very small.

The tourist trade is probably the most important single contributor to Cherokee income. In addition to the profits accruing to business owners, many people are employed as waitresses, sales personnel and motel maids. The craft work also owes much of its existence to the visitors.

To operate a business of any type in the reservation, a trader's license, for which there is no charge, is necessary. White entrepreneurs not married to an Indian must hold a lease. Between 1950 and 1963 there was a trend away from white lessees. In spite of this phenomenon, most Indian owned or operated businesses are not controlled by "full bloods." In May 1963, 134 licenses were granted in the following categories: Indian owned and operated businesses, 63; Indian owned but leased to white operators, 11; non-Indian owned, 60. There were thirty-three motels, thirty-nine craft shops, eleven restaurants, nine groceries with picnic supplies and nine combination craft shop, restaurant and grocery businesses under one roof.

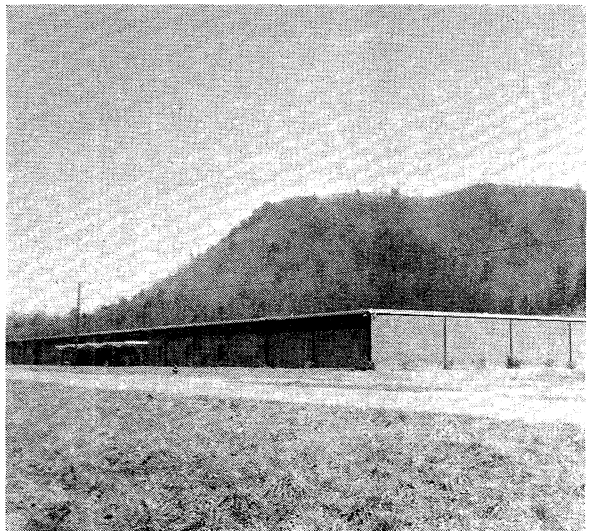
Gross income figures posted for three of these Indian owned and operated establishments are: \$428,213; \$175,072; and \$151,538. We have been describing large businesses. There are other very small ones such as a one vehicle taxi service. Figures for such endeavors are not recorded,

EASTERN BAND CHEROKEE.
RIGHT: A conservative basketmaker at work.



LEFT: A typical conservative Cherokee home, a "pole" cabin, a type now becoming rare on the reservation.

RIGHT: The Harns Manufacturing Company plant, the first of two sizeable industrial establishments built on the reservation.



Snapshots by the author.

but the net is probably less than \$1,000 per year. All businesses except taxi services pay a 3% tax on this gross to the tribal treasury. These levies make possible assistance to needy individuals. Of even greater importance, they have enabled the tribe to solicit industry through sharing a portion of the investment.

By itself tourism is not enough to support the people. Together with the Indian Bureau, the tribal council has induced three industries to locate on the reservation. Saddlecraft, the oldest, manufactures moccasins plus a few other items, and has a yearly payroll of about \$200,000. Harns Manufacturing Company, which makes quilted products and padded infant accessories, is housed in a modern plant erected with tribal funds. The company holds a twenty-five year lease with an option for renewal. Its yearly payroll is over \$500,000. The Vassar Corporation, a manufacturer of women's hair accessories, has constructed a 45,000 square foot building on the reservation. Financing for it came from both the tribal treasury and Jackson County Industries. Inasmuch as the tribe assumed the major financial burden, about 70 per cent of the employees are Indians.

It must not be assumed on the basis of the foregoing review of the economy that all Cherokee are economically secure. Many of them still just eke out an existence, aided in many cases by welfare funds coming from the county in which they live. Other assistance derives from the federal Indian Welfare Department. In 1963 federal Indian Welfare expenditures totaled \$55,303.

CHEROKEE CULTURAL AND SOCIAL GROUPS

Just as there is genetic diversity among the Cherokee, so is there social and cultural diversity. It is, however, somewhat doubtful that all the Cherokee see the subtle differences. Although everyone knows his degree of Indian inheritance, the most frequent distinction made among the people is "full blood" and "white" Indian. A "full blood" is one who looks like an Indian; a "white Indian" is one who usually has less than 1/4 Indian inheritance and who looks white. The term "full blood" tends to imply people who are traditionally oriented. This is not entirely accurate, although there is a tendency for more of the "full bloods" to be conservative, and for those of mixed ancestry (particularly under one-half) to be more "progressive." But the differences among the Cherokee are not such that they are subject to simple dichotomizing. It is not a matter of "conservatives" and "progressives." Nor can the people be placed into categories ranging from like-Indian to like-white in order to explain the disparateness. At Cherokee there are two categories of people based upon acculturation.⁷ There are the Conservatives, people far from aboriginal Cherokee, but who retain to one degree or other a core of interrelated covert and overt traits which set them apart from others. They continue to speak Cherokee; they cling to "Indian" doctors and native medicine, although not always exclusively.

Their belief system includes witches, omens and contagious and sympathetic magic. Probably the most telling indicator of a Cherokee is his value system. The conservative guides his behavior by the "Harmony Ethic."⁸ Acting in accord with it, he attempts to maintain harmonious relationships with others by not offending them and by responding to their demands upon him. Conservatives abhor "stinginess" and esteem generosity. Through various devices they avoid overt aggression or situations which might produce it.

Modern Indians comprise the second category. These are people who, while not necessarily like one another, are very different from the Conservatives. They may or may not speak or understand Cherokee, but if they do they seldom use it. There is almost no resort to "Indian doctors," although some may practice self-medication with herbs. Their most outstanding characteristic, however, is their lack of adherence to the "Harmony Ethic." Indeed, their behavior is largely predicated on the "Protestant Ethic." To be sure, there are degrees to which it is followed, but these folk are the business owners or managers, the few farmers remaining and the skilled or semi-skilled laborers. However, many of them qualify for public assistance or federal Indian Welfare Aid as a consequence of lack of education, illness or other misfortune. Ideally, they still cherish the idea of independence and individualism. Within this category of the Modern Indian a continuum with regard to standard of living, education and adherence to the "Protestant Ethic" is visible. The differences among those in this category suggest that a class system is emerging. Those who are economically successful and whose style of life reflects it, comprise the Cherokee middle class. Those whom circumstances have kept impoverished or nearly so compose a lower class. Genetically, "Modern Indians" range in their degrees of Indian inheritance from 4/4 to 1/32 or 1/64 Indian.

The formation of these cultural and social groups is a consequence of complex historical events beginning with contacts with early settlers and continuing through to the present. It is not within the scope of this paper to chronicle them, but they are important in that they resulted in the maintenance of the Cherokee as the single largest group of Indians in the east. This fact also has a bearing on the place of the Cherokee in an Indian renaissance.

THE CHEROKEE AND THE RENASCENCE

When Nancy Lurie called the idea of an Indian renaissance to my attention in regard to the eastern Cherokee, I responded by saying that I thought most of her generalizations held for them.⁹ I did qualify my response by stating that my agreement was largely contingent upon the socio-cultural orientation of the particular segment of the heterogeneous Cherokee population one was discussing. Upon further reflection, however, I have concluded that they are not a part of the general movement if by that we mean

that they are either individually or collectively participating in inter-Indian gatherings with the purpose of bettering the lot of Indians. Two subsequent visits to the reservation have reinforced my conclusions.

Let us examine the behavior and attitudes of the disparate aggregates of Cherokee for the evidence to support our contentions. The Conservatives provide the first data.

CONSERVATIVES

For the most part Conservatives live apart from the business center of Cherokee. Their homes are usually found in mountain coves some distance from the main highway. Some live as far away as fifteen miles. It is true that many of them come to town to watch the local scene during the tourist season or to go to the agency or to the hospital. Their social life is, nevertheless, largely confined to other Conservatives, or to the lower class. I do not mean to suggest that Cherokee is not still a folk society. It is, and most of its residents know or recognize each other. Nonetheless, Conservatives are a group apart. They tend to be socially as well as physically isolated. Many of them have been no farther away from the reservation than Asheville. Those who can read see only the Asheville or Knoxville newspapers, which carry little or no news of other Indian groups.

Conservatives have only vague knowledge of other Indian tribes. They are familiar with the Catawba, for at one time some Catawba lived in Cherokee. Some have heard of the Choctaw and Seminoles. Their children who have attended Indian schools in Oklahoma have mentioned others to them, but they have had no experience with them. Many of the Cherokee have relatives in Oklahoma -- a consequence of the Removal -- but few Conservative adults have ever been west. When questions are put to them in regard to other tribes, they indicate that they know that there are others in the country but they disclaim anything in common with them. When a Conservative refers to himself as an Indian, he means two things: (1) he is an Indian and the "white" Indians are not, and (2) he is a Cherokee.

Conservatives know that periodically some of the tribal council members and the chief go to Washington. They are not just sure why, except possibly to get something for the Indians. They tend to be quite suspicious of any chief the band might have. He is either working for himself or the "white" Indians. They occasionally demonstrate a subtle hostility toward whites. The summer outdoor drama, "Unto These Hills," is an ever present, if not entirely accurate -- reminder of the harsh treatment accorded the Cherokee in the period leading up to the Removal.

Some of the more sophisticated of them suspect that the Indians are not being employed by the manufacturing plants. They do not realize that in many cases their educational levels are too low. They know too that their lot is not as good as others, but they credit this to "stinginess" or land theft on the part of the wealthier people.

Despite their occasional discontent -- this also includes real or fancied maltreatment at the hands of government personnel -- the Conservatives have no real conception of uniting to correct the situation as it obtains locally. Due to their isolation from all other Indians, they have no knowledge of a movement to make explicit generalized Indian goals.

MODERN INDIANS

An analysis of Modern Indians shows for somewhat different reasons an equal lack of participation in a larger world than Cherokee.

Lower Class: The lower socio-economic class of the Modern Indians exhibits much of the same sort of physical isolation that the Conservatives do. Few have traveled outside of western North Carolina or eastern Tennessee. Some of the younger adults have attended Indian schools in the west, but so long ago that they do not identify with people or places other than Cherokee. Their educational achievements are also limited, and consequently they read very little. The "white" Indians among them, although they recognize their Indian inheritance, do not really identify themselves as Indians. Still, few of them have ever considered living elsewhere. They are very much like so many of their white mountain relatives. The mountains are home; "the water does not taste right" in other places; they have rights to their land regardless of what the "full bloods" say.

When asked about Indians elsewhere, they reply that they "don't know nothing much about them." Neither do they know about the various meetings held in other parts of the country by numbers of different tribes. They do think that Indians -- and here they regard themselves as Indians and Cherokees -- have been mistreated and that something should be done. They do not get excited about it or the prospects of rectifying any conditions. Very few know anything about the much publicized Seneca case or other recent treaty violations. It is difficult to predict with certainty what they would do if they did know. I suspect that they would be sympathetic but would not become so incensed as to lend active support unless they were individually canvassed. They live their lives out as marginal farmers, employees of the industries or of the Indian Bureau.

Although degree of Indian inheritance has little to do with culture or class, those Modern Indians in the lower socio-economic bracket who are phenotypically Indian do demonstrate a difference based on their genetic composition. They do identify with Indians racially, although they do not identify with them culturally. The fact, however, that they regard themselves as Indians does not necessarily make them any more aware of national events affecting Indians. What knowledge, if any, the people of this category have is acquired from contact with the Indian agency. When they do have some information, they are perhaps more in sympathy with the plight of the beleaguered groups than the poorer white Indians. But at present, they exhibit little tendency to become involved in a national move-

ment. Like the Conservatives and the phenotypic white Indians of the lower socio-economic class, their general lack of sophistication mitigates against it.

The Middle Class Cherokees: The Middle class is numerically the smallest of the socio-cultural categories. In general the people in it are nearly white, with several notable exceptions. As I indicated, they are usually the business people, although some are school teachers, nurses or employees in responsible positions at the Indian Bureau. Their educational attainment is much higher than that of others in the tribe, but apart from the teachers, only a few have attended or completed college. Many of them graduated from federal institutions such as Haskell, Carlisle or schools in Oklahoma. They are better read and better informed than any of the others. They agree that Indians are becoming politically active. The business people in particular feel that termination of federal control would be the best thing for Cherokee, and probably for all Indians. They have heard of most of the events affecting the better known tribes and agree that the treaties have always been violated and probably always will be. When asked whether they are conversant with the various meetings held with the aim of making Indian goals public, only a few answer in the affirmative. With one exception, most of these people -- particularly the entrepreneurs -- are not interested in participating. In general the latter are motivated by self interest. This is not meant to be a derogatory evaluation. They are in business: their concern is that which affects their businesses. To this extent they make themselves heard at the tribal council, through the Cherokee Chamber of Commerce, or perhaps the Lions Club. Their attention is focused on the tourists and the facilities and attractions which will increase the numbers of annual visitors.

The Indian agency employees and the teachers are more aware of events affecting other tribes, and more interested, too, in the outcome. This is especially true of those who are decidedly Indian in physical appearance. Their identification is, however, Cherokee first and Indian second. None of these people has attended any national or regional meeting.

There is, however, one nearly full blood family which is much more alert to the national scene. Among the men, one brother was an Episcopalian minister to the Seneca, another is a superintendent of a reservation in the west, a third has traveled extensively. One sister has a responsible position in the Cherokee agency and another is working for a national Indian organization. This family, while a respected one in the community, has not influenced the attitude of others in regard to an all-Indian movement, although it is vitally interested in the outcome. With this exception the Cherokee Middle class is quite uninvolved, either emotionally or physically, in any national collective action.

I feel, then, that the eastern Cherokee are not identified with a renaissance as I have defined it. What are the reasons for the absence of their participation?

First, and perhaps most importantly, the location of the reservation isolates the Cherokee from other Indians. Unlike the Indians of the southwest or others who are in close proximity to each other, the Cherokee are seldom in contact with other tribes. As far as I know, there have been only two occasions when any of them attended the Gallup pow wow (a woman who is a professional sculptress and her brother went to exhibit wood carving). The Cherokee have no native dances left, and so have no impelling need to go. In fact, only a few realize that there are these summer affairs. Their knowledge of other Indians, as I have said, is quite hazy. They emphatically disavow any relationship with the Pembroke and Lumbee Indians¹⁰ who have on occasion claimed Cherokee status. These are the only other Indians in North Carolina. Their ancestry seems to be mixed -- white, Negro and Indian -- and the Cherokee want no affiliation with them.

A second reason which may explain the Cherokee situation can be found in the fact that since their reservation was established, there have been no major problems associated with it.¹¹ They have not been threatened with the loss of any of their land. To date there have been no mineral resources discovered which might generate such a problem. Their land is not coveted by local whites. In fact the latter recognize full well that the presence of the reservation and the national park bring money to the entire area.

The third reason, I think, is a consequence of the burgeoning Cherokee economy, which has affected in one way or another most of the members. In fact, I think that the reservation is in a financially healthier state than many of the surrounding white communities. A comparison of the federal Indian welfare expenditures for the fiscal years 1960 through 1963 reflects this, at least in part. In 1960-61 the total expenditure was \$114,405. Monies spent in 1961-62 totaled \$101,684, and in 1962-63 the figure was \$55,303. I have no comparative data for public assistance issued to the Indians by the counties, but suspect that these funds have either remained constant or have decreased.

It is true that there are some folks who are discontented for personal or business reasons. In general, however, it seems plausible to suggest that the Cherokee have no compelling need at present to join forces with other Indians in the pursuit of mutual goals. Indeed their isolation has made them unaware of the plight or needs of Indians in other parts of the country.

Footnotes:

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¹ The phenomenon of collective movements or social movements has received considerable attention in sociological literature. It is postulated that necessary pre-conditions for it are a deep dissatisfaction with current conditions, damaged self conceptions and frustrations. See, for example, Arnold W. Green, Sociology (New York, 1960), 622-623.

² There is some scattered evidence to the contrary. For example, the following is excerpted from a letter appearing in Indian Voices (April, 1964): ". . . no longer does each one picture himself as Sioux, Navajo, Cherokee or Mohawk. First and foremost he is Indian!!"

³ Nancy Lurie, "An American Indian Renaissance?" This is quoted in full in Nancy Lurie's article in this issue.

⁴ These data come from Harriet J. Kupferer, "The Principal People: A Study of the Social and Cultural Groups of the Eastern Band of Cherokee." Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation (University of North Carolina, 1961).

⁵ John Gulick, Cherokees at the Crossroads (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1960).

⁶ The material in this section derives from a revision of Kupferer, "The Principal People," to be published by Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology.

⁷ Harriet J. Kupferer, "The Principal People." See also her "Health Practices and Educational Aspirations as Indicators of Acculturation and Social Class among the Eastern Cherokee," Social Forces, 41 (December, 1962); "Material Change in a Conservative Pueblo," El Palacio, 69 (Winter, 1962); and "Cherokee Change: A Departure from Lineal Models of Acculturation," Anthropologica, 5 (December, 1962).

⁸ The term "Harmony Ethic" was suggested by Robert K. Thomas who asserts that it is central to the Cherokee way of life. For a more complete description of this ideology see John Gulick, Cherokees at the Crossroads and Harriet J. Kupferer, "The Principal People."

⁹ Some of the characteristics of the movement as identified by Nancy Lurie are: (1) gathering momentum to disseminate widely Indian opinion; increased participation in inter-tribal conferences; reactivating or encouraging the perpetuation of tribal languages; and increased articulateness of Indians in general.

¹⁰ For a description of these ill defined groups see Brewton Berry's Almost White (New York, 1963).

¹¹ Six years after the 1838 Removal, the Cherokee purchased their land through an agent. This land comprises the bulk of the reservation, although additional tracts have been purchased by federal funds.