



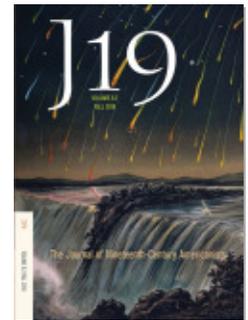
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J19: The Journal of Nineteenth-Century Americanists, Volume 6, Number  
2, Fall 2018, pp. 335-364 (Article)



Published by University of Pennsylvania Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jnc.2018.0025>

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## Pressing for Sequoyah: Print Culture and the Indian Territory Statehood Movement

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In 1905 leaders of the Five Tribes (Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Mvskoke-Creek, and Seminole) and a number of prominent white businessmen launched a statehood campaign to admit Indian Territory into the United States as the state of Sequoyah.<sup>1</sup> According to the *Cherokee Advocate*, the official newspaper of the Cherokee Nation, the newspaper editor J. S. Holden penned a poem that circulated at the September statehood convention.<sup>2</sup> The ode lyrically celebrated the state's namesake Sequoyah, who famously developed the Cherokee syllabary with his daughter in the early nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> He is described in Holden's poem as one who "stood alone" and whose "genius shone / Throughout a hemisphere."<sup>4</sup> By naming the proposed state after him, Holden assures, "Yes, grand and great, the future state / Should bear Sequoyah's name." While the poem likely circulated as a way to swell support for "Sequoyah" as the proposed state's name, it also registered a key tenet of the Sequoyah statehood movement: the interconnectedness of textuality, politics, and literary expression. That a poem was disseminated at statehood discussions—and then reprinted in the *Advocate* for territorial readers to consume—signals the tenor of the campaign as one tethered to a thriving territorial print culture.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, it gestures toward the value placed on aesthetics and text to enact a large-scale collaborative movement.

This essay reflects on a period in Indian Territory and Native print culture that illuminates not only that era but also our own contemporary moment, by pointing out the many ways that Native communities and nations, of what is now commonly called eastern Oklahoma, continue

to assert their political and cultural force in the region. The statehood campaign's rhetorical fight was launched through the pages of a thriving dynamic territorial print culture. One might say that *print runs* had as deep an impact on the geopolitical changes at the turn of the century as the more famous *land runs* that continue to dominate official cultural memory of Indian Territory.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, print fostered a rich Native literary tradition that would endure long after Oklahoma statehood.

To see the Native space that tribal leaders, editors, and writers constructed requires that we as readers understand the Territory as connected to but also distinct from the United States proper. Indian Territory was home to numerous Indigenous nations with political and economic authority in the region throughout the nineteenth century, and most tribal leaders, editors, and writers understood themselves as negotiating this multivalent position.<sup>7</sup> Daniel Littlefield Jr. and James Parins have argued that despite stereotypical assumptions that Native people were isolated from global and US current events, Indian Territory writers were well aware of larger US literary trends.<sup>8</sup> I would add that these writers and editors were equally attuned to the *internal* workings of the space and were as committed to addressing readers there as they were to a broader US audience, if not more so in most cases. To embrace the mappings of Native space produced in their work, we must think about how they used writing to create a sense of community within the space of the Territory, not simply as a way to "speak back" to US empire. Writing was, after all, not merely a defensive tool negotiated in US-Indigenous relations. It was also a tool Native people used to speak to one another, both in the present and to future generations.<sup>9</sup>

### Twin Territories

The State of Sequoyah movement was, in many ways, the culmination of a series of dramatic changes regarding land use, governance, and settlement in the nineteenth century. Fifteen years earlier Indian Territory comprised the entire region south of Kansas and north of Texas, but the region was split in two following the 1889 Land Run and the 1890 Organic Act (see fig. 1). The western half became Oklahoma Territory and the eastern half Indian Territory. In just a year what would become Oklahoma Territory flooded with non-Native settlers who rushed to the newly available lands and burgeoning towns in the region with hopes for new economic opportunity. Between 1890 and 1907 the population of Oklahoma Territory increased from 60,417 to 722,441, mostly comprising non-Native settlers who had little interest in upholding tribal ways.<sup>10</sup>

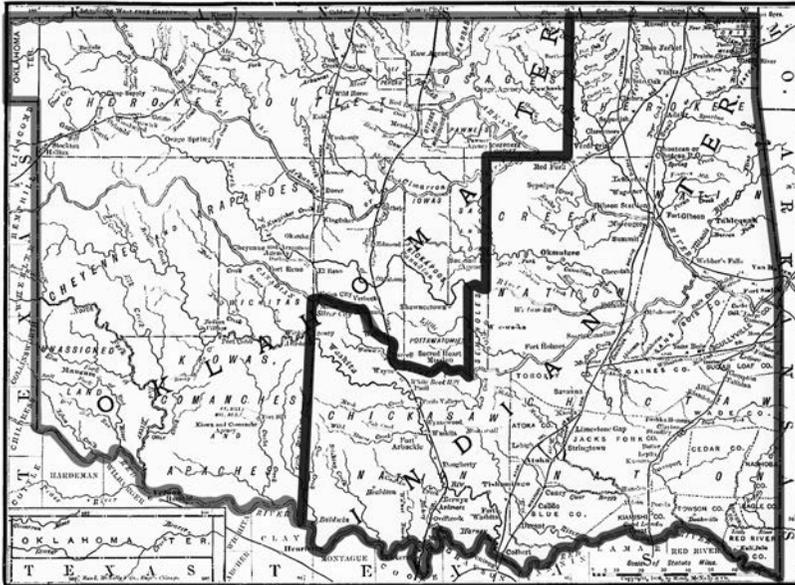


Figure 1. Rand, McNally, & Co. *Oklahoma Territory and Indian Territory*, ca. 1:2,000,000, “Oklahoma Digital Maps Collection,” 1890, Edmond Low Library, Oklahoma State University. Accessed April 4, 2018. <https://library.okstate.edu/search-and-find/collections/digital-collections/oklahoma-digital-maps-collection/>. Reproduced by permission from the Oklahoma Digital Maps Collection.

Many of these settlers were white, but there were sizeable populations of nonwhite settlers as well, including African Americans migrating from the South attempting to escape the racial caste system that supplanted slavery after the Civil War.<sup>11</sup>

When Oklahoma Territory was created in 1899, the US government appointed a territorial governor, legislative system, and judicial system, emulating the process of increased infrastructural governance outlined by the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 as the clearest path to statehood. Land openings in Oklahoma meant increased settler influence and decreased Native control in that territory, but Indian Territory was still politically and economically dominated by the Five Tribes. The Five “Civilized” Tribes secured considerable economic and political power in the region after the US government forcibly removed them to Indian Territory earlier in the century.<sup>12</sup>

Unlike most other territories (including Oklahoma) organized under a territorial governance structure operated by the United States, the Five Tribes held civic and political control over the peoples and lands of their

respective nations. Their strength and savvy in maintaining geopolitical control was perhaps best evidenced by the Five Tribes' ability to curb allotment proceedings outlined in the original Dawes Severalty Act of 1887 (requiring tribes to divide up communal landholdings into individual plots), but their position grew more precarious in the 1890s due to non-Native statehood movements and the pending end of tribal governance over the region (which, under the Curtis Act, was slated to begin in 1906). It was not until the Curtis Act in 1898 that all five tribes were compulsorily required to participate in drafting official tribal rolls and to allocate individual lots to tribal members. Because they owned their land in fee with a patent, the Department of the Interior had to assign the Dawes Commission to negotiate with each nation separately. A stark distinction between the two territories began to emerge in this period. Known as the "Twin Territories" or "Mr. Oklahoma and Miss Indian Territory," the two were popularly understood as competing symbols of the "West." This was invoked by the racialized and gendered logic of the Mr./Miss dialectic of the pioneering cowboy and the young Indian maiden. As the political power of the non-Native population increased in Oklahoma, however, interest grew in the territories' future. Would they "wed," or would they continue to function as two autonomous geopolitical bodies?

Congressional interest in the possibility of statehood heightened in the early 1900s, and it became more and more evident that statehood of some sort was inevitable. Plans to form the Sequoyah statehood movement were initiated by Pleasant Porter, the principal chief of the Creek Nation, in 1902, the same year the Mvskoke-Creek Nation signed an allotment agreement with the US government.<sup>13</sup> In September 1903 representatives from the Five Tribes met again and decided to collaborate on a statehood effort, demonstrating what the Mvskoke-Creek scholar Tol Foster has termed a "relational regionalism" that recognized the Five Tribes had greater political mobility if they worked collectively to challenge single statehood.<sup>14</sup>

While the Sequoyah leaders argued about whether or not the Five Tribes would have full control over the proposed state, those leaders invested in the movement believed that a separate state would allow the nations to maintain more power and control than they would in joint statehood with Oklahoma Territory. There were also striking political and cultural divisions between the two territories. In "Reasons for Not Wishing to Unite with Oklahoma," published on August 9, 1905, in the *Muskogee Phoenix*, the Cherokee lawyer Robert L. Owens outlined dif-

ferences between the two, including the prohibition of alcohol, segregated schools, and lower taxes in Indian Territory, and expressed fear that Oklahoma would be granted all public buildings.<sup>15</sup> In addition to these concerns about public infrastructure and governance, as well as anxiety about racial integration that signaled very real anti-Blackness and racial tensions, Indian Territory was predominantly Democratic and Oklahoma Territory was majority Republican.<sup>16</sup> This political divide was as contentious a division as that between Native and non-Native territorial control; if Indian Territory was to become a state, it would likely enter the United States as a Democratic one. However, because the population of Oklahoma Territory was larger, joint statehood would result in a state with more Republican leanings. This political party rift was not simply a divisive issue between Oklahoma and Indian Territory inhabitants. It also meant that there were external interests in which party prevailed in the region. With a Republican majority in Congress and a Republican president facing a re-election campaign, there were federal investments in a single statehood proposal that ensured Republicans' dominance in the territories. The State of Sequoyah movement fought to maintain a sense of Native geopolitical self-determination in the Territory, rather than give the United States free rein to arbitrate the Territory's future.<sup>17</sup>

### **States of Sequoyah**

The State of Sequoyah movement was the last large-scale Native effort to curtail the transformation of the territories into a white-dominated, US-controlled space.<sup>18</sup> While there was talk of constructing an Indian state in one form or another for over one hundred years, there had never been an Indian statehood movement that was more invested in a geographic argument (all the land and peoples encompassed within the boundaries of Indian Territory) than a demographic one (a state comprising exclusively Native people).<sup>19</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century, Indigenous communities maintained considerable autonomy over land use, commerce, and governance in Indian Territory. At the start of the twentieth century, however, the discovery of oil and other natural resources in the region, along with complaints from non-Native colonizers about their lack of representation under Native rule, exacerbated US interest in seizing complete control of the region away from Native people.

In response, the Sequoyah movement tactically resisted even greater erosion of Indigenous self-determination in the face of land allotment

and settler statehood to ensure a tribal voice in the geopolitical and cultural futurity of the space. As a movement, it demonstrated the confluence of spatial mappings, print, and governmentality as useful tactics for resisting US imperial oversight and co-optation. Native leaders used their adeptness with US political and legal rhetoric to manipulate the geopolitical production of statehood as best they could to serve the interests of Native peoples. Native editors and writers used print to demonstrate this sense of control and mastery. With the end of formal treating practices between the United States and Native people in the 1870s, the printed page became an alternative, at times anti-assimilative, tactic in the continued effort to challenge imperial control.<sup>20</sup> This demonstrated a dexterity with predominantly white technologies of print and conceptions of space and power—the state, the newspaper, the magazine—in confluence with tactics that registered as more long-standing Native understandings and practices of rhetoric, storytelling, discourse, space, and time. Spatial and governmental practices manifested through the production and circulation of print in a moment of sweeping change for Indian Territory—the years between the Curtis Act (1898) and the State of Sequoyah movement (1905)—were not simply archived in the newspapers, magazines, and other ephemera of the era, but their content, composition, and circulation worked in concert with on the ground grassroots campaigning.

The decision to call this space “Sequoyah” intentionally invoked the iconic figurehead of Cherokee literacy and registered a particular framing of Native identity. Sequoyah and his daughter are credited with creating the Cherokee syllabary in the 1820s, an innovation that, within a few short years, transformed the Cherokee into a literate, print-reading, and print-circulating nation. Sequoyah influenced an adapting sense of Cherokee peoplehood and resistance to colonialism. Both during his lifetime and after his death, Sequoyah functioned as the symbolic representative of the larger Cherokee Nation for many of its people. He symbolized Cherokee nationalism, adaptability via literacy, and an ability to harness a vital tool of US settler colonialist projects in the interest of Native resistance.<sup>21</sup> The name is a strategic political choice that aligns the proposed state with a particular notion of cultural advancement and textual production. It suggests a knowing sense of control over print media and the discourses it circulated—and a masculine representation of the Territory. Sequoyah projects an image of Indian Territory that challenges the feminization promoted by the Mr. Oklahoma/Miss Indian Territory trope and asserts a sense of patriarchal control, but in

so doing it obfuscates the important role of women in territorial print culture and politics, much like the erasure of Sequoyah's daughter in most narratives of the syllabary's production.

Sequoyah was symbolic for both Cherokee and non-Cherokee Native people alike; poets wrote sonnets in honor of him, many of them echoing the poetic tradition of praising mythological or heroic figures. The use of classical allusion and traditional meter and rhyme—typical of much nineteenth-century poetry—asserted the poet's skill and Sequoyah's importance in Western civilization by demonstrating an awareness of common English-language poetic tropes and revealing the authors' versatility with language and content. Additionally, a number of Sequoyah poems share a celestial invocation of his timelessness. He transcends nations, time, and space, much like heavenly bodies or constellations. In fact, associations between classical form and aesthetics and Sequoyah were a common enough trope that J. S. Holden's statehood poem abided by these conventions, even though Holden himself was not Native. Sequoyah becomes symbolic of Native survivance, the ability to endure long after the era of US imperialism—through print and its conventions, which are understood as culturally fungible and translatable.<sup>22</sup>

This is clear in an early poem written by the Mvskoke-Creek poet, fiction writer, and *Indian Journal* editor Alexander Posey. Posey was perhaps the most well-known Native person in the territories during this period (and also the elected secretary of the Sequoyah convention). According to Daniel F. Littlefield, some of Posey's earliest success came from "Ode to Sequoyah" after it was first published in Ora V. Eddleman Reed's monthly periodical *Twin Territories: The Indian Magazine* in April 1899 and recirculated through a number of territorial and US publications.<sup>23</sup> Posey's ode was initially accompanied by a brief introductory paragraph that simultaneously frames the author as both exceptional and typical—it alleges that most Indians are "anything but poetical," offering a sense of the odds, "about one in ten thousand."<sup>24</sup> However, the poem asserts that the poet's education and intelligence are quite common, noting "there are thousands of educated Indians in the Territory—many of them graduate from famous institutions of learning, but they do not deal in poetry."<sup>25</sup> In doing so it argues for the poem as a unique, erudite literary piece, but without claiming that its allusions or adeptness with language would be lost on a well-educated Native territorial audience.

The blurb ends by saying that one cannot read this poem without acknowledging the sophistication of life in Indian Territory. This

introductory remark was most likely written by Ora V. Eddleman or one of the other editors of *Twin Territories* and not Posey, but it reflects sentiments similar to those made by Posey elsewhere. In a statement he made to the *Philadelphia Press* in 1900 he argued that “if they could be translated into English without losing their characteristic flavor and beauty, many of the Indian songs and poems would rank among the greatest poetic productions of all time . . . The Indian talks in poetry; poetry is his vernacular, not necessarily the stilted poetry of books, but the free and untrammelled poetry of nature.”<sup>26</sup> Posey simultaneously critiques the poetic limits of the English language and refutes the notion of the Native poet as anomaly; instead he argues that Native understandings of poetry are as good as, if not better than, those of whites.

Posey’s poem lauds Sequoyah and performatively demonstrates a mastery of Western conventions and forms. It begins:

The names of Waitie and Boudinot—  
 The valiant warrior and gifted sage—  
 And other Cherokees, may be forgot,  
 But thy name shall descend to every age;  
 The mysteries enshrouding Cadmus’ name  
 Cannot obscure thy claim to fame.

Here, Posey praises Sequoyah by not only comparing him to Cherokee leaders like Stand Watie and Elias Boudinot but also to Cadmus, the prince responsible for the Greek alphabet. Sequoyah’s greater claim to posterity is explicitly linked to the endurance of written language and storytelling, through this comparison but in other ways as well. The third stanza reads:

The people’s language cannot perish—nay!  
 When from the face of this great continent  
 Inevitable doom hath swept away  
 The last memorial—the last fragment  
 Of tribes, some scholar learned shall pore  
 Upon thy letters, seeking ancient lore.

In this formulation, written language and the oral stories told about Sequoyah’s creation assure his trace, as well as that of the Cherokee people. Posey suggests that memorials—and we could interpret these as material markers or as written memorials (a genre of writing used

by the Cherokee to lobby the US government)—may fade and “the last fragment of tribes” may be “swept away,” yet “the people’s language cannot perish.” Even in the face of colonialism, settlement, and allotment, the people will endure, if not physically, then lyrically through the language that forecasts its own futurity.

The poem’s ending, however, is slightly more ambiguous as Posey closes by alluding to Sequoyah’s biographical disappearance and uncertain fate. He writes:

By cloud-capped summits in the boundless west,  
Or mighty river rolling to the sea,  
Where’er thy footsteps led thee on that quest,  
Unknown, rest thee, illustrious Cherokee!<sup>27</sup>

Concluding as it does by questioning Sequoyah’s whereabouts, this stanza seems to tilt the poem toward elegy—and mourning—and, with it, toward the well-known settler trope of the vanishing Indian (here Sequoyah himself), whose final resting place is unknown. At the most basic level, these lines are simply asking whether Sequoyah, wherever he died, is at peace. But this poem is not an elegy and it ends with an exclamation mark. It is emphatically titled and framed as an ode, a celebration of survival rather than an act of grieving, and Posey is almost certainly asking a broader question that depends not on Sequoyah’s disappearance so much as on his people’s endurance; Posey may not be asking if Sequoyah is literally at rest but rather hoping Sequoyah can rest easily with Native responses to the moment of cultural and political upheaval in which he is writing. In this way, the poem reaches both backward and forward from the ground it stands on in 1899. Sequoyah ascends at the poem’s end as a founding father watching over the present crisis, a figure pressed into the service of a nationalism so deep and long-standing that it might rival those of European modernity, whose constituent nation-states were, in this period, hard at work inventing similarly primordial pasts for themselves.

Posey’s ode was the most well-known, but it was certainly not the only poem dedicated to Sequoyah. Like other Sequoyah poems, many of which circulated in territorial periodicals, Posey’s ode emphasizes Sequoyah’s achievements as timeless and eternal, but this is seemingly in tension with the material form of the publication—an ephemeral magazine. The magazine’s performance of Native power complicates its additional function as a site of everyday circulation for communal dialogue

and discourse. As a marker of Native power and culture, the periodical (like Sequoyah) speaks not only to its contemporary readers but also to its future readers. While the actual text of the poem may not continue to circulate among the same number of individuals today as it did in the nineteenth or early twentieth century, it contributes to an argument about Native space and culture that endures via the land and the people. Moreover, it challenges the dominant US narrative of the era, which depicted Native nations as unable to wield control over space and people.

#### **“All I Know Is What I Read in the Papers”**

While the Cherokee humorist Will Rogers’s signature phrase “All I know is what I read in the papers” became the hallmark of his syndicated editorial column in the 1920s and 1930s, he, like others living in Indian Territory in the early 1900s, did in fact learn a great deal from what circulated in the press.<sup>28</sup> Carl F. Kaestle and Janice Radway argue that print was a key technology of power in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and this was certainly the case in the territories.<sup>29</sup> The rapid and widespread circulation of print dailies, weeklies, and monthlies placed them on the front lines of political discussions. The newspaper and magazine in this era served multiple audiences and promulgated a wide array of political agendas. Newspapers had become a litmus test for public opinion. They had been used as evidence in Washington DC to justify greater involvement of the Dawes Commission in Indian affairs—and the US government more broadly—often standing in place of the appeals and arguments of Native leaders.

Circulation of periodicals and print ephemera originated in Native nations in Indian Territory in the 1830s, mostly disseminating information about tribal affairs and as school or church newsletters and pamphlets. Therefore, print had deep Indigenous roots in the space.<sup>30</sup> In 1835, shortly after his arrival in Indian Territory, one of the first things Reverend Samuel A. Worcester established was a printing press at Union Mission. The first publication on the press was a book printed by Reverend John Fleming in the Creek language, *Istutsi in Naktsoke*, or *The Child’s Book*.<sup>31</sup> Not all early publications were published by Native authors and editors, as evidenced by the examples of Worcester and Fleming, but most of them *were* published in Indigenous nations on behalf of a nation or were intended for Native readership and had to attain a nation’s approval for circulation and publication. Authors published both in English and in Native languages, and a number of newspapers, including the *Cherokee Advocate* and the *Choctaw Intelligencer*, printed

dual-language issues that included pages in Cherokee or Choctaw and English. However, most of the papers, at least those that survive in the archive, were printed predominately in English.<sup>32</sup>

Again, because tribes—not a US territorial government—governed the Territory, tribal approval was required to engage in civic and commercial enterprises within the parameters of each nation. Indian Territory nations were sovereign, and while not all printed materials were entirely controlled by Native people (a near impossibility), in these early years they were produced, circulated, and consumed in Native space. I want to place emphasis on this point. While there can be (and has been) much debate about the provenance of print, its affiliations, intentions, and the identity of authors and editors, all of these discussions happened in Native spaces and produced a print culture tied to such spaces. The stakes were great for all participants, often in ways that were deeply politicized along racial and national lines; nonetheless to dismiss the significance of print's Indigenous geopolitical ontologies threatens to reproduce the same logic used to erode Native sovereignty and fuel a single statehood movement—that Native nations were unable to manage and control their lands or the people inhabiting them.

While earlier publications were printed for a Native audience (many of them in Native languages) and served as mouthpieces for particular tribes, tribal organizations, or tribal factions, as white settlement increased in the 1880s and 1890s the political bent of the papers became far more diverse.<sup>33</sup> In her study of nineteenth-century newspapers, Grace Ernestine Ray writes:

The newspapers, controlled by their tribal governments or by churches or schools, were in a measure independent of their subscribers and advertisers. Under this plan of operation the editors shaped their editorial policies to conform to the best interests of the tribes which they were sponsoring. This freedom of the press is a distinctive characteristic of the early newspapers in the Indian Territory. Perhaps no other state can offer a parallel in the history of the development of its press.<sup>34</sup>

But by the last decades of the nineteenth century, Indian Territory was awash in newspapers, and as the US government became more actively involved in territorial and tribal affairs, papers did not function under the same tribal controls as they had throughout much of the nineteenth century. However, understanding of a paper's provenance continued to

be important because the context in which the paper was produced reflected how it shaped perceptions about what was actually going on in the Territory for readers outside the region. For example, if a paper was assumed to be Native-run, even if that assumption was inaccurate, it was often presumed to speak for an entire nation or tribe. The notion that Native people could disagree or speak individually challenged prevailing colonial assumptions about Native identity.

Perhaps most famously, Elias C. Boudinot—the same Cherokee citizen whose 1879 article in the *Chicago Sun Times* had roused interest in opening Indian Territory land to the railroads—established the *Indian Progress* under the auspices that it was an official organ of Native opinion in the Territory, “owned, edited, and printed by Indians.”<sup>35</sup> Boudinot’s previous stint as editor of the *Cherokee Advocate*, the long-standing official newspaper of the Cherokee Nation, aided in further confusion about backing and support for the *Progress*. It was commonly believed by those familiar with Boudinot in the Territory that the publication was “calculated to convince Congress that the tribes themselves were advocating territorial government” and a way for Boudinot to lobby for his own profit, advocating non-Native settlement which would lead to financial gains for the railroads, with whom he had business ties.<sup>36</sup> Boudinot was able to deploy a sense of the collective as a front for personal interests or gain. While the piece was not an official statement of the Cherokee Nation, outside the Territory it was perceived as such; one Indian spoke for all Indians, especially if what he or she was saying worked to benefit white business interests.

In addition to Native editors like Boudinot, many non-Natives established newspapers and magazines to advocate for the opening of Native land and increased settlement, as well as to launch critiques against tribal rule (under which non-Native settlers technically had no voice in tribal government and had no control over the tribally run school systems but paid taxes on business ventures).<sup>37</sup> Perhaps most famous and dramatic was the founder of the Boomer movement, David L. Payne.<sup>38</sup> Payne and his Oklahoma Colony felt that Indian Territory should be available for homesteading, and they staged occupations throughout the 1880s.<sup>39</sup> Payne printed his own newspaper, the *Oklahoma War-Chief* (also called the *Oklahoma Chief*), to disseminate his arguments about colonization. Payne’s need to circulate his politics in print was so strong that he even printed the weekly while on the lam from federal marshals or while establishing new colonies/encampments. The weekly was rarely published from the same location twice; an account of one particular

issue of the paper reveals a sense of the urgency Payne felt in his desire to publish:

[It] was printed on brown wrapping paper, and was smeared with grease. Whether it had been printed on some paper in which the bacon and other camp supplies had been wrapped, or whether it was stained with grease after being printed, is a matter for speculation. But the result was a newspaper that was scarcely legible. The two inside pages were blank, indicating either that there were other shop difficulties besides shortage of paper or that the camp was forced to move before the entire edition had been printed.<sup>40</sup>

While the reason for Payne's sloppy printing is uncertain, the drive to publish was strong enough that he and his fellow Boomers were willing to do so by any means, which says much about the impulse to print and also the symbolic power Payne associated with newspaper circulation.

While some of Payne's and others' publications called for increased white settlement and the end of Native control over the territories, it is important to note that all of the region's print culture was in some way still deeply rooted in tribal practices and a long history of Native production and circulation. That is to say, there was an actual and symbolic power of Native sovereignty exerted on the fields of print. The *Vinita Chieftain*, when operated by the white editor D. M. Marrs, would consistently emphasize the number of its Cherokee readers and its commitment to Cherokee issues, through editorials, letters to the editor, coverage of Cherokee tribal affairs, and the publication of Cherokee writers.<sup>41</sup> One could argue that any reader or writer juggles multiple geopolitical scales of subjectivity, but those of an Indian Territory audience were unique to that space. Even if readers, writers, or editors were not Native, they were living, writing, and publishing in Indian Territory—a space that was tribally run until the early 1900s. This is key to understanding the political moment of 1905 and the stakes of statehood. One of the reasons Indian Territory had maintained its status as an unorganized US territory for so long and was not subsumed as a proper state of the union was the strong governance structures of Native nations. Moreover, a thriving print culture, the development of “modern” institutions, schools, and other signifiers of social advancement signaled a region in tune with Progressive era tenets. This was the conundrum Indian Territory posed. To acknowledge that the Territory was, in fact, composed of a diverse

collection of Indigenous nations and thriving economic and cultural communities begged the question: was it really unorganized?

Corresponding to other publications of the day, but emphasizing their Native genealogy in the region, newspapers functioned like political tracts in many ways, and editorial opinions and articles served an evidentiary function in congressional debates about the status of Indian Territory, sometimes carrying more weight than the petitions and claims of tribal leaders and delegates.<sup>42</sup> The powerful sway newspapers held over readers was expressed in a letter sent to Principal Chief Mayes in 1895 by the Cherokee delegation in Washington DC. The delegation explained the Dawes Commission's report on their assessment of self-government in the Territory. They outlined for Mays the citational use of the non-Native press in both territories as evidence of the failure of Native nations to govern adequately: "We saw that even the press had been largely subsidized in favor of the dissolution of our government and the invasion of our rights . . . Nevertheless, these papers have their influence. They are circulated at Washington as well as throughout the country at large."<sup>43</sup> The delegation's concerns touch on the press's influence both inside and outside the Territory in determining what was happening on the ground and demonstrate a belief in the voice of the press as an authoritative or democratic representative for its local readers. The delegation's frustrations show how this sense of authority could be (and was) utilized to argue for opinions that were not always held by a wider public. While some publications continued to assert arguments beneficial to the tribes, many others represented white settler interests, the interests of particular communities (such as political parties and ethnic or racial groups), or the interests of individuals or businesses—many under the pretense of nonpartisan, unbiased news sources. Parsing out the political bents of territorial newspapers, therefore, becomes an incredibly difficult, if not at times impossible, task.

Opinions about the current state of affairs and the future for Native nations varied dramatically among Native individuals and communities, freedmen (a term used to denote former slaves of the Five Tribes and their ancestors, adopted African American members of Native communities or African Americans with communal ties to Native communities, or Afro-Native people), and non-Indigenous settlers.<sup>44</sup> While print was initially dominated by official publications of the tribal governments, by the 1870s it had become a sophisticated and diverse medium that represented a staggering array of opinions and beliefs about the current status and future fate of the shape and structure of the space and its

inhabitants. Indian Territory had experienced dramatic geopolitical and cultural changes through the opening of land to railroads, the land runs, and allotment. Change occurred at such a rapid clip that tactics for addressing these changes or advocating for others were deeply contested. How best to combat US imperial interventions was a deeply difficult and divisive question whose answer would inevitably have a major impact on the shape of Native autonomy for the foreseeable future. The Crazy Snake movement, a Creek anti-allotment nationalist group led by Chitto Harjo, showed that some Native groups and individuals were resistant to any form of compromise with the United States. Others saw allotment and the erosion of Native governance as inevitable.<sup>45</sup> Still others believed Native autonomy and sovereignty could be preserved by working within the standing political structures of the United States.<sup>46</sup>

Even though Indian Territory print culture responded to the claims of settler newspapers, it was not simply mimicking or reacting to print culture in the Territory. More specifically, not only did Native print culture have *material* priority in this region (going back to the 1830s) but its ontological horizon differed from settler print culture. Benedict Anderson argues for the “newspaper-as-fiction,” claiming that the newspaper depends on fictive, imagined connections, both in its content and in its readership. For Anderson, the newspaper is like “a book sold on a colossal scale, but of ephemeral popularity,” held together less by a consistent narrative carried across the various articles and advertisements in each publication than by their temporal link, indicated by the date at the top of the issue.<sup>47</sup> In other words, what connects the different articles, images, and advertisements in the same issue of a newspaper is less a shared sense of content, ideology, or argument than the fact that they are reported on the same day and are imagined to work in tandem within a shared temporal reality. The narratives crafted in Indian Territory newspapers by Native editors and authors, however, served a slightly different function.

Unlike the fictive connections of an Andersonian model, the content of these periodicals often *hinged* on a sense of cohesion and consistency yoked not just by time but by a sense of uncertainty, and sometimes optimism, about the geopolitical future of the territories. These publications called on the multiple scales of subjectivity that Indian Territory editors, authors, and readers experienced. They were, after all, inhabiting multiple subjectivities: members of specific Native nations fighting to maintain tribal autonomy and political strength; members of townships or other local communities; members of a territory that understood

itself as a network of various Native nations who still maintained civic and judicial agency. While one can argue that any reader or writer juggles multiple geopolitical scales of subjectivity, those of an Indian Territory public were particularly nuanced as both contra-empire but (often) also intratribal and multiracial.

Demonstrating a sense of cohesion across a publication crafted an argument about Native nations and readers in Indian Territory: (1) Readers were cosmopolitan and felt a sense of connection between events in the Territory and events elsewhere around the world; (2) Newspaper production and the content of these papers often demonstrated a sense of modernity and progress that challenged primitivist assumptions about Native peoples; (3) Readers could make connections between US involvement in the territories and US involvement in other locales around the world; (4) Readers could pull together fictional pieces, editorials, and news accounts of current events to shape a particular political understanding of the space. As such, they perform what Phillip Round identifies as “print constitutionalism” and what Lisa Brooks calls “text-maps.”<sup>48</sup> For Round, printing tribal constitutions and other political documents “served not only to balance traditional consensus building and liberal ‘public opinion’ in the Indian Territory but also to preserve the ‘landedness’ of Native identity, in spite of the various nations’ removals far from their traditional homelands.”<sup>49</sup>

The space and content of these newspapers and magazines not only created a sense of cohesion among readers but also served the performative function of demonstrating Native cosmopolitanism and civility to Native readers, non-Native readers, and the US government. As Trish Loughran has shown through her study of US revolutionary-era print, sometimes the *assumption* that a particular text or set of texts is widely read is as influential as the actual, material consumption by readers.<sup>50</sup> These periodicals performed a particular model of acculturation and “progress”—a version of modernity that ostensibly drove the Dawes Commission’s policies in the Territory—and in doing so, many of these territorial magazines and newspapers generated a sense of autonomy and stability and argued implicitly against excessive external intervention. This is not to say they were free from debate or conflict—some of the most famous newspaper stories of the day involved gun slinging *between* editors—but these debates fostered a discourse and dialogue that was deeply inclusive and showed strong connections between print and peoples in Indian Territory.<sup>51</sup> So, these periodicals cultivated a sense of cohesiveness across time, geography, and subjectivity that stood in

contrast to the individualizing, singular quality of allotment or the organizing structure of a typical Andersonian newspaper—that of time.

Moreover, they elicited calls to action, particular mappings of place and history, a sense of connection among contemporaneous readers, the confluence of older tribal stories and practices with current events, and new media technologies. Within the ongoing structure of settler colonialism, which had been devised to persist in perpetuity, they also speak to us now, over one hundred years later, and challenge the widely disseminated myth that Native people simply conceded their power and rights to the United States when it seemed inevitable that the space they inhabited would no longer “officially” be their own. These periodicals included not only stories of current events but also tribal stories (often rooted in oral tradition), as well as histories of both Indian Territory and the Five Tribes’ ancestral homelands in the South. Additionally, they explicitly evidenced involvement in market capitalism and a sense of technological progress. As such, they “mapped” a complex set of power relations among the United States, individual Native nations, and Indian Territory as a whole. Native print culture thus created a cohesion that breathed, flexibly serving a performative function for US readers and a utilitarian one for territorial readers.

Finally, many of these papers worked under the assumption that some of their readers were, in fact, not territorial inhabitants but rather US readers outside the two territories. In addition to performing a sense of modernity, progress, and cohesion (but not always consensus) within the territories, periodical editors and writers also understood that there was great interest in their publications as venues where a reader could “eavesdrop” on territorial affairs. Some editors and writers capitalized on this readership by addressing these readers directly or through effusive descriptions of modern advancements in the Territory. While many papers did reprint material from other sources, a common practice of the day, they also reprinted (often favorable) coverage of Indian Territory in US papers with a broader readership, such as the *Kansas City Star* or the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*.

#### “Specialty of Local and Territorial News”

That said, the Creek-run *Indian Journal*, one of the most widely read newspapers in Indian Territory in the early 1900s, was self-professedly more territorially centric than other newspapers; it rarely covered news outside Oklahoma and Indian Territories.<sup>52</sup> In May 1876 the *Indian Journal* was established in Muskogee and was initially subsidized by

the Creek national government “to fight the railroads and their lobbyists at Washington, and elsewhere, in efforts to break down and nullify rights of the people guaranteed them by law.”<sup>53</sup> Muskogee was chosen as the paper’s initial locale, due to its “strategic point located on the first railroad in the Indian Territory.”<sup>54</sup> The paper was started as a venue to express Indian opinions and counter the US federal government’s argument that Native self-governance was not working in the Territory.<sup>55</sup> While the paper was established within the Creek Nation, it drew a far broader readership. Despite the publication’s staunch assertion of its limited (intended) audience, there are certain connections among news stories, advertisements and essays, poetry, and fictional pieces in the newspaper that recurred consistently through many Indian Territory newspapers.

The July 25, 1902 issue offers a model of how this functioned. It was published early in the Mvskoke-Creek poet and writer Alex Posey’s time as editor—the same Posey who penned “Sequoyah” in *Twin Territories* a few years earlier—and in the same year that Pleasant Porter began his campaign for an Indian Territory state and the Creek Nation negotiated an allotment agreement with the US government. On the cover page, one sees a large advertisement for a mercantile company’s hardware inventory, invoking the increased building and production that accompanied settlement and allotment. Directly below the advertisement is a special letter to the *Journal* from the Creek Council titled “Following Preamble and Resolutions Appealing to the President for the Protection of the Creeks Against Lawless Land Grabbers Submitted to Council by Chief Porter Yesterday.”<sup>56</sup> The advertisement for the hardware store is oddly juxtaposed with a formal resolution to President Roosevelt, making tensions about land in the Territory palpable on the front page. At the same time, the coupling of advertising and governance creates a space that is both commercial and communal. The end of the Creek Council’s piece indicates that Chief Porter will submit the resolution to Roosevelt, but by printing it beforehand in a newspaper with strong Creek readership, more traditional forms of tribal discussion and politics combine with the medium of the printed circular. There is a tension, however, between Porter’s message about preserving Creek property rights and the advertisement that hovers above.

The second page of the paper, like the first, offers an odd melding of advertisements that allude to tribal politics and includes the Mvskoke-Creek writer Charles Gibson’s running column *Rifle Shots*. An advertisement for Grayson’s Grocery slides across the top of the page while Gibson’s

piece sits below it. *Rifle Shots* is sandwiched between advertisements for dentists, lawyers, and other professionals on the left and advertisements for banks and the St. Louis stockyard on the right. The text of the Grayson's Grocery ad could be read as an allusion to the twin territories metaphor of Oklahoma and Indian Territory, as well as that of joint statehood: "The young man loves the young lady. That's his business. The young lady loves the young man. That's her business. Pretty soon they'll be married and wanting all kinds of Fancy and Staple Groceries. **That's my business** [emphasis in the original]."<sup>57</sup> W. C. Grayson was a friend of Posey's and a well-known Creek actively involved in the allotment process; he had been on the Creek committee that approved allotment. However, Grayson was also considered "anti-progress," according to Daniel Littlefield Jr., and supported Chief Porter's decision not to sign thousands of Creek allotment deeds in Muskogee until the United States consented to a supplemental agreement that would help prevent the sale of "excess" lands to non-Creeks.<sup>58</sup> The allusion to the heteronormative marriage trope of Mr. Oklahoma and Miss Indian Territory offers a humorous endorsement of single statehood that alludes to the profit of "my business," meaning Grayson's. The first person places him directly into the pages of the paper, connecting his own economic prosperity to the economic advantages ferried in by statehood.

Below Grayson's advertisement sits the first of Gibson's two *Rifle Shots* pieces for July 25. "More About the Spokogees" uses the case of the Spokogees to share preremoval Creek land-use history. Gibson says that while the Spokogees could be viewed as "pullbacks," a problematic but popular term used at the time to denote Native people committed to older ways and traditions, they understand that General McIntosh's treating with the US government did not benefit the Creeks. And "so it was that Gen. McIntosh and one other was killed for having signed a treaty with the US government ceding Alabama contrary [*sic*] to the law and will of the Creek people." Gibson ends the piece with the assertion that "what we have written is no guess work but a plain statement of facts."<sup>59</sup> While Gibson's piece self-identifies as a history lesson on pre-Removal Creek politics, its allusion to the contemporary moment is no guesswork either—the case of the Spokogees echoes many of the same concerns facing negotiations in 1902 between the US federal government and the Creek Nation.

As well as debate about Porter's decision to push for the supplemental agreement regarding allotment and land leasing, the year 1902 saw Chitto Harjo and the Snakes regroup to fight Creek compliance with the

Dawes Commission.<sup>60</sup> The Snakes were often tagged with the derogatory term “pullback” that Gibson used for the Spokogeas. Gibson’s word choice suggests a potential connection among the Spokogeas of the past and the 1902 “traditionals,” Snakes, and Snake sympathizers. One can read between the lines in Gibson’s piece and see a commentary on current debate in the Creek nation about Porter’s decision and the Snakes’ organizing efforts; fighting against the erosion of Creek landholdings had a long tribal history and was an imperative of Creek law. Gibson uses long-standing forms of Creek metaphor and allusion to stage a fairly radical commentary by framing it as a story of history and tradition that posits itself as “folksy” rather than political. Whether or not intentionally placed side by side in the layout of the newspaper, Grayson’s advertisement and Gibson’s essay present two competing notions of territorial identity and Creekness. Coupled together, they make the temporality of the Creek newspaper distinct from the one Anderson proposes. They display a sense of multiple scales of readership, and together they present an understanding of progress narratives actively engaged in the capitalist project of modernity and state-making, while also reflecting on a long history and deep past. Together, they not only reflect varied Creek opinions but coexist in disagreement together on the same territorial landscape of the newspaper page.

The third, fourth, and fifth pages of the newspaper cover a vast array of local and territorial news and announcements that create a sense of intimacy for readers, referring to individuals in ways that make them seem familiar. “Bower,” for example, “is still doing business at the same old stand.”<sup>61</sup> Posey also includes news from other newspapers, notably the *Holdenville Times*’ praise of “Charlie” Gibson and Alex Posey.<sup>62</sup> In addition, these pages are peppered with advertisements from banks, railroads, and land sales—again echoing the current moment in Eufaula and the Creek nation. The fifth page of Posey’s paper is taken up by a full-page advertisement for the *Journal* (see fig. 2). It is an advertisement for advertisers, full of white space and varied font sizes and styles. It draws the reader’s eye first to the newspaper’s title, as well as its subscription numbers. The eye is then drawn to the ad’s assertion of its intended or assumed audience through its “Specialty of Local and Territorial News.” If allotment produced a dizzying sense of atomization and excess, then a paper like the *Indian Journal* countered that with a sense of cohesion and communalism. Not only does this ad assert its dedication to the Territory; it also emphasizes “the people, a reading public, a community.” Instead of individual listings, the *Journal* surrounds

its advertisement with one thin border, encompassing all of the print on the page. Indeed, it looks less like an advertisement than a title page—an ornate calling card for the people of Indian Territory writ large.

The last two pages of the newspaper continue to offer local and territorial news, as well as a short narrative piece, “The Cruise of the Good Vrouw,” excerpted “From a Diary by One of the Crew.”<sup>63</sup> Two characters, Doc and J.N., take their boat on the Oktahutche, a beloved spot for Posey; based on the style of the prose, it is likely that Posey penned the anonymous piece himself. Under Posey’s editorship, the *Journal’s* advertisements, essays, and news pieces offer readers both then and now a sense of the political and cultural moment of 1902. The paper not only “Make[s] a Specialty of Local and Territorial News”; its *emphasis* on community and cohesion functions as a political response to allotment debates, grounded as those debates were in questions about the strength and futurity of the Creek Nation. The nation, like the paper, is communally affiliated, even if contentious, and balances a deep sense of Creek identity and nationalism with an awareness of larger territorial discussions and modern forms of capital, technology, and print. Much like Posey’s earlier “Ode to Sequoyah” and the State of Sequoyah movement, the paper both performs and coheres a typographical and geospatial sense of tribal and territorial identity.

### Sequoyah’s Afterlife

The Sequoyah movement did not succeed in creating an Indian Territory state in the end. The memorial, constitution, and voting results were submitted to President Theodore Roosevelt and Congress in December 1905 and January 1906 with little response. In the same congressional session that established the Enabling Act (also known as the Hamilton Bill), allowing for Oklahoma statehood, Congress also passed the Five Tribes Act, which ended the official tribal enrollment proceedings of the Dawes Commission and instituted greater US oversight of tribal affairs including forcible seizure of territorial schools.<sup>64</sup> The 1906 Enabling Act was also accompanied by a congressional compromise that New Mexico and Arizona be entered as one state, if both territories’ populations consented. While history has demonstrated this was not the case for Arizona and New Mexico, it was for Oklahoma and Indian Territory, and by June 1906 Oklahoma statehood was all but guaranteed. Within the two years following the movement, tribal governments lost authority over the Territory and the state of Oklahoma was formed. Despite the highly sophisticated, organized effort, the State of Sequoyah

# **THE INDIAN JOURNAL**

## **5000 Readers**

**IT IS THE MEDIUM FOR ADVERTISERS**  
**IT REACHES THE PEOPLE**

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We Make a Specialty of  
Local and Territory  
News

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We are prepared to do all kinds of Job Work, on  
Short Notice. Prices reasonable. Country  
Work Solicited.

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**INDIAN JOURNAL**

**\$1.00 PER YEAR**

Figure 2. "Advertisement," *Indian Journal*, July 25, 1902.

campaign fell out of popular and official lore, whether because Native nations and people had to quickly refocus on combating the newly formed structures of governance or because the trauma of such a loss led to almost immediate silence about the movement.

Nonetheless, print culture geared toward Native readers and Native interests in Indian Territory challenged (and continues to challenge) the notion that print was the exclusive tool of US imperialism in the nineteenth century, just as the map of Sequoyah challenged the idea that only the US Congress could produce a functioning and recognizable state. Moreover, because of the rapidity with which change occurred during this era, newspapers became a prominent medium for literary expression: one could reach a wider audience cheaper and more quickly than through book-length writings. Attention to periodical literature and Indian Territory print culture highlights an archive of nineteenth-century Native American literature that not only bears witness to Native writers and editors' vocal protests launched against allotment and Oklahoma statehood but also highlights a rich body of literary production previously understudied.

Noenoe Silva's important assertions about the political utility of Kanaka Maoli writings in Hawaiian-language newspapers and her refutation of the "myth of passivity through documentation" proves salient for the primarily English-language periodicals I have discussed in this essay.<sup>65</sup> Like Kanaka Maoli writers, Native writers in Indian Territory knew that "when the stories can be validated . . . people begin to recover from the wounds caused by that disjuncture in their consciousness."<sup>66</sup> Attention to what circulated in Indian Territory newspapers reveals how Native writers expressed themselves, especially to a Native public. In their work many writers were actively invested in the politics of the present but also left a record of their struggle for future generations, making clear they did not passively accept statehood.

While the Sequoyah movement fell short of creating an official state, it nevertheless left a discursive trace that could not be completely ignored or erased. Not only did the Sequoyah map and constitution influence those of the state of Oklahoma; the use of print circulation and production established a strong communication network between the Native nations of the space, and this print culture produced a rich literary community for Native writers both in and around 1907—and beyond.<sup>67</sup> This approach to power and storytelling perhaps makes more evident why a literary writer and newspaper editor like Alex Posey was

selected as secretary for the State of Sequoyah convention. Print, too, continues to play a significant role in the circulation of statewide discussions and information-sharing. According to the “Printing and Publishing” essay in the online *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture* produced by the Oklahoma Historical Society, in 2001 Oklahoma was the state with the second most printing and publishing operations in the United States.<sup>68</sup> The State of Sequoyah movement and turn-of-the-century Indian Territory print culture fracture the dominant notion that allotment cast a large shadow over the entire era, leaving Native communities with little recourse. While allotment policy left an unquestionably devastating legacy, it was met with multifaceted resistance that was often worked out materially and typographically on the printed page.

Furthermore, I would argue that this rich legacy of print culture has direct correlations to the breadth of literary output from twentieth- and twenty-first-century Native authors from the region.<sup>69</sup> In an elegy that echoes “Ode to Sequoyah,” the Mvskoke-Creek poet Louis Littlecoon Oliver praises Alex Posey. In lines six through fifteen of his 1990 poem “Salute to Alexander Posey” Oliver writes:

All of nature bends to you  
 I too bend my knees  
 I feel we were of one genre.  
 You preferred Chennube Harjo  
 To be a name of your choice  
 Your old ones were of that clan.  
 It may seem ridiculous  
 For an Indian of political stance  
 To give praise to a Daffodil,  
 But deep down you were a poet [.]<sup>70</sup>

As Sequoyah inspired Posey, Posey inspires Oliver. In kind, Oliver eulogizes Posey in much the same fashion, honoring the depth and influence of his work. The utterances of his “salute,” like the writing of Sequoyah’s syllabary, challenge colonial space and time. And like the figure of Sequoyah (or Posey), friction with an autonomous state identity continues to circulate. Native nations still exert significant political and cultural influence in the region. While Sequoyah never achieved fruition, the state of Oklahoma also never fully subsumed Indian Territory or its legacy.

## Notes

Many thanks to the Oklahoma Historical Society, the University of Oklahoma's Western History Collection, the Oklahoma State University Special Collections, and Dan Littlefield and the Sequoyah Research Center for sharing their holdings, guidance, and insights into Indian Territory print culture. I would also like to thank the 2011–2012 Illinois Program for Research in the Humanities (IPRH) reading group, the Global Indigenities reading group at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Trish Loughran, Jodi Byrd, and all the others willing to read previous drafts of this material with such generosity.

1. Throughout most of the essay I shorten "Mvskoke-Creek" to "Creek" unless I reference specific individuals' tribal affiliation because that was the self-identified name used by the tribe at the time. I do so in order to stay consistent with the terms Mvskoke-Creeks used to describe themselves and their nation in this era.

2. According to Daniel F. Littlefield Jr. and Carol Petty, J. S. Holden (1843–1920) was "a native of Ireland, grew up in Detroit, where he learned the printing trade. He established and edited a number of papers in Michigan before going to Muldrow, Cherokee Nation in 1890." There he established the *Muldrow Register* and later went on to edit the *Fort Gibson Post*, in which he sometimes published his own poetry. He was also a good friend of the Creek author and newspaper editor Alex Posey. Alexander Posey, *The Fus Fixico Letters*, ed. Daniel F. Littlefield Jr. and Carol A. Petty Hunter (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 180.

3. Many of the details of Sequoyah's life are shrouded in speculation, including the role his daughter played in developing the syllabary. However, most sources agree that it was by teaching her that he perfected the system, which in my mind is a significant component of the syllabary's invention. The fact that she went with him to present the written language at a council meeting in 1821 reinforces her crucial role in formulating the syllabary and aiding its adoption. For further discussion of Sequoyah's daughter and the syllabary, see Ellen Cushman, *The Cherokee Syllabary: Writing the People's Perseverance* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011), 35.

4. "WILL BE SEQUOYAH: Brief Sketch of the Noted Cherokee Sage After Whom the New State Will Be Named—The American Cadmus," *Cherokee Advocate*, September 9, 1905.

5. While the *Advocate* describes Holden's poem favorably, Holden had a contentious history with the paper. According to Cullen Joe Holland, Holden received severe criticism from a previous editor of the *Advocate*, H. M. Adair, for his vocal advocacy of white citizenship in Indian Territory. The *Advocate's* favorable response to his poem in 1905, therefore, might say more about the paper's endorsement of the Sequoyah movement than its esteem for Holden. Cullen Joe Holland, "The Cherokee Indian Newspapers, 1828–1906: The Tribal Voice of a People in Transition" (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1956), 499–501.

6. Land runs, also called land rushes, described the opening of land previously owned by a Native nation for non-Native settlement. Runs typically had a start line and start time from which prospective settlers would run (or rush) to stake a land claim. Much of Oklahoma Territory was colonized by non-Native settlers in this way.

7. I find Jodi Byrd's discussion of the denaturalizing of colonial borders and maps a particularly helpful reminder of the need to spatially orient away from an imperial vantage point. Jodi Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), xxx.

8. Daniel F. Littlefield Jr. and James Parins, "Short Fiction Writers of the Indian Territory," *American Studies* 23, no.1 (Spring 1982): 24.

9. For further discussion of Indigenous print culture and literacy in North America, see Lisa Brooks, *The Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Matt Cohen, *The Networked Wilderness: Communicating in Early New England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Maureen Konkle, *Writing Indian Nations: Native Intellectuals and the Politics of Historiography, 1827–1863* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Jean M. O'Brien, *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); Birgit Brander Rasmussen, *Queequeg's Coffin: Indigenous Literacies and Early American Literature* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012); Phillip H. Round, *Removable Type: Histories of the Book in Indian Country, 1663–1880* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Leslie Marmon Silko, *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit* (1996; New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013); Craig S. Womack, *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Robert Warrior, *The People and the Word: Reading Native Nonfiction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

10. Kenny L. Brown, "Oklahoma Territory," in *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, Oklahoma Historical Society, www.okhistory.org.

11. For further discussion of African American migration to Indian Territory, see Jimmie Lewis Franklin, *Journey toward Hope: A History of Blacks in Oklahoma* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982); Arthur L. Tolson. *The Black Oklahomans: A History, 1541–1972* (New Orleans, LA: Edwards Printing, 1966).

12. While the Five Tribes have connections to the land, the specific geographic areas they inhabited in Indian Territory were not the same ancestral lands they had lived in prior to Removal. Nonetheless, as Tol Foster reminds us in his discussion of the Mvskoke-Creek Nation, "When the fires were transposed upon the new territory, even if fed along the way by different fuels, the Indian Territory *became* home." While the Five Tribes came to understand the Territory as home, it is important to note that other Native communities were displaced by the U.S. federal government's forced removal of the Five Tribes from their ancestral homelands. This invariably provoked tensions and hostility among Native peoples in the region, but it also promoted allegiances and collaboration across tribal affiliations. Tol Foster, "Of One Blood: An Argument for Relations and Regionality in Native American Literary Studies," in *Reasoning Together: The Native Critics Collective*, ed. Craig S. Womack, Daniel Heath Justice, and Christopher B. Teuton (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 265–302; 271.

13. According to Jeffrey Burton, representatives of the Five Tribes met in Eufaula in November 1902 in response to the proposed Moon Bill: "In March 1902, the House Committee on the Territories recommended the passage of John Moon's bill to create the Territory of Jefferson out of the Indian Territory." This bill, however, never passed the House of Representatives. Jeffrey Burton, *Indian Territory and the United States, 1866–1906: Courts, Government, and the Movement for Oklahoma Statehood* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 247.

14. Tol Foster describes his notion of "relational regionalism" as the following: "Relational regionalism accepts the constructedness and contingency of the notion of a region in both time and space . . . In the tribal context this means that we need to start acknowledging dissent within the community in a muscular fashion, as well as pointing out unsavory elements of our home community's practice openly. The regional identity arises out of the interaction of these frames and can be identified, but does not do so uniformly, because of differences of power." Tol Foster, "Of One Blood," 273.

15. C. M. Allen, "Appendix D: REASONS FOR NOT WISHING TO UNITE WITH OKLAHOMA AS PRESENTED BY ROBERT L. OWEN IN MUSKOGEE PHOENIX, AUGUST 9, 1905," in *The "Sequoyah" Movement* (Oklahoma City: Harlow Publishing), 79.

16. Like their Dixiecrat counterparts, Indian Territory Democrats advocated segregation. Anti-Black racism was palpable in turn-of-the-century Indian Territory. While Native critiques of US colonialism were ever present, these rarely acknowledged the ways that colonialism established a systematic structure of racialization and racism that affected individuals of African descent as well. While their post-Civil War treaties with the United States required the Five Tribes to outlaw slavery, abolition did not fully eradicate all racialized discrimination. And one of the damaging results of allotment was that it did more to reinforce racialized logics of difference than it did to strengthen Red-Black alliances or more communal practices of relationality. Most African Americans who moved to the Territory in the 1880s and 1890s without prior tribal connections were perceived by Native communities as settlers, just like their white counterparts, and sometimes viewed as worse than whites precisely *because* of pervasive anti-Blackness in mainstream US culture. This is not to say that there were no strong alliances on the ground or between Afro-Native peoples and African Americans. There are numerous examples of Black-Red alliances and significant numbers of Afro-Native peoples and freedmen with social standing in the Territory, as well as community-building and support between freedmen and Afro-Native people and migrant African Americans. However, the general tenor of Indian Territory culture and politics that circulated in the press was often segregationist. In his study of the Mvskoke-Creek Nation, David Chang argues that the years of allotment, from the 1890s until Oklahoma statehood, hardened definitions of race and nation: "U.S. policy was more consistent in insisting on a racial political order: it used allotment to impose its racial categorizations far more systematically and rigidly than Creeks had ever done. Allotment required enrollment—a listing of every citizen of each nation classified by race." David Chang, *Color of the Land: Race, Nation, and the Politics of Landownership in Oklahoma, 1832–1929* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 93.

17. For a discussion of how party politics shaped Oklahoma Territory and fueled divisions between the twin territories, see James R. Scales and Danney Goble, *Oklahoma Politics: A History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982), 3–19.

18. The statehood movement was initially driven by leaders from the Five Tribes. The call for the convention was drafted in a meeting with representatives from all five: General Pleasant Porter from the Mvskoke-Creek Nation, Chief W. C. Rogers from the Cherokee Nation, Governor Green McCurtain from the Choctaw Nation, Governor John Brown from the Seminole Nation, and William H. Murray, who stood in as representative for Governor Douglas Johnson from the Chickasaw Nation. There was some dissent within the Chickasaw nation about whether separate statehood would be the best choice for Chickasaws. In an attempt to curtail conflict, Johnson sent a delegate instead of attending himself. The Sequoyah constitution premised itself on compromised inclusivity. It gave all men over the age of twenty-one who were either citizens of the United States or agreed to become citizens voting rights, Article VI, section 3 included language that would allow women suffrage at the first meeting of the General Assembly (at this time women's suffrage was adopted in only four other states: Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, and Idaho). While the citizenship requirement for voting was problematic for many in the Territory, as it conceded citizenship to the United States in order to maintain geographic and political autonomy at a more localized level and went hand in hand with the creation of official tribal rolls and allotment, it also extended citizenship to an unusually large population. Voting rights were added in an amendment to the Dawes Act on March 3, 1901: "*Be it enacted . . .* That section six of chapter one hundred and nineteen of the United States Statutes at Large numbered twenty-four, page three hundred and ninety, is hereby amended as follows, to wit: After the words 'civilized life,' in line thirteen of said section six, insert the words 'and every Indian in Indian Territory.'" Moreover, voting rights do not inherently prevent the silencing of some groups over others—there were clear racial tensions surrounding race in the Five Tribes and the larger Indian Territory at the time. Segregation and prejudice against Blacks, including both African Americans and Afro-Natives, prevailed in many places. However, the language of equality in and of itself was fairly unprecedented and demonstrated an attempt to curtail accusations that statehood would simply be a stand-in for further tribal control of the Territory. Francis Paul Prucha, ed., *Documents of United States Indian Policy*, 3rd ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 198.

19. In *Empires, Nations, and Families* the historian Anne Hyde outlines mid-nineteenth-century efforts to establish an Indian state, the first of which was proposed by the geographer Jedidiah Morse. In his 1820s report on the status of Indigenous peoples he insisted that an Indian state was the only way to contain and civilize Indigenous peoples in ways deemed appropriate by the US government. Anne Hyde, *Empires, Nations, and Families: A New History of the North American West, 1800–1860* (New York: Harper Collins, 2011), 282–84. Statehood movements in Indian Territory, however, did not gain momentum until after the Civil War in 1866 when the United States demanded that the Five Tribes negotiate treaties as a consequence for factional Confederate leanings. The political status of Indian Territory had been tenuous since the 1866 treaties and had led to increased US involvement in the political workings of the tribes. The first statehood movement post-1866 was driven by the United States through an experimental general assembly of Indian nations organized by Congress. The assembly was to meet annually and did so until 1874, "in an effort to adopt an organic document that would preserve the tribal rights and cultural traditions of the tribes while enabling the territory as a whole to move toward statehood." While the congressional goal of these assemblies was to heighten surveillance of Native nations, it also put numerous tribes in conversation with one another, leading to intratribal alliances that in many cases created greater solidarity than division. Vine Deloria Jr. and Clifford M. Lytle, *The Nations Within: The Past and Future of American Indian Sovereignty* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984), 24.

20. For a discussion of the formal end of treaty negotiations between the United States and Native people, see Kevin Bruyneel, *The Third Space of Sovereignty: The Postcolonial Politics of U.S.-Indigenous Relations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 65–95.

21. Cushman, *The Cherokee Syllabary*, 149.

22. For a sample of these Sequoyah poems, see *Changing Is Not Vanishing: A Collection of Early American Indian Poetry to 1930*, ed. Robert Dale Parker (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 133; 140; 210.

23. Daniel F. Littlefield Jr., *Alex Posey: Creek Poet, Journalist, and Humorist* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 114.

24. Introduction to "Ode to Sequoyah," *Twin Territories*, April 1899.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Quoted in Littlefield Jr., *Alex Posey*, 117.

27. There is a third stanza of the poem that I have not included here, detailing Sequoyah's perseverance in developing the syllabary. Alexander Posey, "Ode to Sequoyah," *Twin Territories*, April 1899. This is not the only Sequoyah poem that Posey wrote. Matthew Sivils includes another

in his collection of Posey's poetry. Also, the version of "Ode to Sequoyah" reprinted by Sivils and Robert Dale Parker does not include an exclamation mark after "nay" in the second stanza. Posey's wife Minnie may have made this change when she edited a collection of his poetry in 1910. Alexander Posey, *Song of the Oktahutche: Collected Poems*, ed. and introduction by Matthew Wynn Sivils (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 76; 167; Parker, *Changing Is Not Vanishing*, 168.

28. In her discussion of the impact of territorial newspapers on Will Rogers, Ware emphasizes their broad significance for Indian Territory inhabitants. She writes:

Also central to Cherokees' successful juggling of the modern and the traditional was the abundance of newspapers published throughout the Territory . . . While the better-known *Cherokee Phoenix* and *Cherokee Advocate* represented the official voice of the nation during their print runs, the vast majority of newspapers available to local Cherokee citizens were those printed by individual tribal members. It is not only the mere existence of such a plethora of newspapers that is important in understanding the Cherokee Nation at the turn of the twentieth century as a multivocal place; it is the content as well. These papers offered more than local news: they contained editorials and charged political arguments among neighbors, families, and business associates. Many of these letters were written in a particular dialect that became a distinct literary movement in the Territory. That Rogers, in his journalism, would employ this dialect style is an important indicator of these tribal newspapers' influence on his own writing. One of the period's most tangible testaments to tribal perseverance, nationalism and syncretism was hotly debated in newspapers across the Indian Territory: the State of Sequoyah.

Amy Ware, *The Cherokee Kid: Will Rogers, Tribal Identity, and the Making of an American Icon* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2015), 44–45.

29. Carl F. Kaestle and Janice A. Radway, "A Framework for the History of Publishing and Reading in the United States, 1880–1940," in *Print in Motion: The Expansion of Publishing and Reading in the United States, 1880–1940*, vol. 4, *A History of the Book in America* (Chapel Hill: American Antiquarian Society by the University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 7–21.

30. For a discussion of Indian Territory print culture, see L. Edward Carter, *The Story of Oklahoma Newspapers, 1844 to 1984* (Muskogee: Western Heritage Books, 1984); Carolyn Thomas Foreman, *Oklahoma Imprints, 1835–1907: A History of Printing in Oklahoma before Statehood* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1936); Grace Ernestine Ray, *Early Oklahoma Newspapers: History and Description of Publications from Earliest Beginnings to 1889* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1928); Linda D. Wilson, "Printing and Publishing Industry," in *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, <http://www.okhistory.org>.

31. Foreman, *Oklahoma Imprints*, xiii.

32. The choice to do so may have been for a number of reasons, and not necessarily the same for all editors. Because Indian Territory was home to a number of nations that did not all speak the same language, English became the lingua franca to speak across Native communities. Some Native readers could only read in English, and at least for some of the Cherokee papers getting Sequoyan typeface was not always easy or cost effective. Additionally, the use of English made the papers accessible to non-Native settlers in the region, which invariably helped increase sales and financial stability. Finally, the use of English ensured the widest possible audience of both Native and non-Native readership and circulation across tribes and beyond the territories.

33. Ray, *Early Oklahoma Newspapers*, 9–10.

34. Ray offers a detailed account of the earliest newspapers in the Territory (those established between 1844 and 1871)—six in total: *The Cherokee Messenger*, *Cherokee Advocate*, *Choctaw Telegraph*, *Cherokee Rosebud*, *Choctaw Intelligencer*, and the *Halaquah Times*. She also describes the publication history, content, and political bent, as well as material aspects of the publications, such as size and layout. Ray, *Early Oklahoma Newspapers*, 10.

35. Angie Debo, *The Road to Disappearance: A History of the Creek Indians* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1941), 211.

36. *Ibid.*

37. Angie Debo, *And Still the Water Runs: The Betrayal of the Five Civilized Tribes* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1940), 18–30.

38. "Boomer" was the term for illegal white settlers who squatted on Native-owned land in Indian Territory. Later, the term was also used to denote those who participated in the land runs that helped establish Oklahoma Territory.

39. For further reading on David Payne, see Stan Hoig, *David L. Payne, the Oklahoma Boomer* (Oklahoma City: Western Heritage Books, 1980); Carl Coke Rister, *Land Hunger*:

*David L. Payne and the Oklahoma Boomers* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1942). However, these sources tend to favor Payne and view him as a heroic outlaw figure rather than a self-consciously lawbreaking colonizer.

40. Ray, *Early Oklahoma Newspapers*, 81.

41. As one example, a February 2, 1900, letter to the editor thanked the *Chieftain* for being “the only newspaper that has taken a brave stand and raised a voice in behalf of the poor Indian people.” Whether truth, advertising, or both, the *Chieftain* published multiple pieces like this, both in editorials written for the paper and in letters to the editor ostensibly written by readers. “COMMENDATORY WORDS: The Chieftain is Proud to be Regarded as the Indian’s Friend,” *Daily Chieftain*, February 2, 1900.

42. Debo, *And Still the Waters Run*, 27–30.

43. *Ibid.*, 27–28.

44. For further discussion of freedmen, see David Chang, *The Color of the Land*; Tiya Miles, *Ties That Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Celia E. Naylor, *African Cherokees in Indian Territory: From Chattel to Citizen* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Circe Sturm, *Blood Politics: Race, Culture, and Identity in the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

45. I find David Chang’s discussion of Chitto Harjo and the Snakes particularly useful and nuanced in his analysis of the group’s relationship to the Mvskoke-Creek Nation, Indian Territory, and Territorial race relations. Chang, *Color of the Land*, 96–105.

46. According to David Chang, in many ways this was a moment when strategy and rapid organization and mobilization were necessary. For him, this explains why some of the strategies and decisions of the Creek Nation might appear inconsistent or contradictory: “Why would Creeks eagerly enroll and select allotments while simultaneously electing officials who voiced opposition to allotment? . . . Creeks knew their opposition to the final division of lands might prove unsuccessful and so there was considerable incentive to hedge one’s bets and accept an allotment.” What was politically true was also literarily true. As Native writers used fiction and poetry to articulate aesthetically their impressions of the current moment or a multitude of futurities for Indian Territory, their literature was often deeply rooted in the contemporaneous moment, and often as complex—and sometimes contradictory—as the political tactics and strategies of elected officials, political groups, and other Native communities. *Ibid.*, 90.

47. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised ed. (1983; London: Verso, 2006), 35.

48. Round, *Removable Type*, 145–49; Brooks, *The Common Pot*, xxv–xxvi.

49. Round also notes that the Five Tribes were responsible for about 90 percent of such documents published between 1828 and 1906. Round, *Removable Type*, 146–47.

50. Trish Loughran, *The Republic in Print: Print Culture in the Age of U.S. Nation Building, 1770–1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 33–37.

51. Ray, *Early Oklahoma Newspapers*, 13–14; 97.

52. It is difficult to pinpoint exact subscription numbers for Indian Territory newspapers. However, the September 1, 1905, issue of the *Muskogee Democrat*, one of the most widely read newspapers in the Territory, cited subscriptions at 2,801 for daily circulation. For July 1905, the *Journal* ran a full-page advertisement claiming a 5,000-person readership and identified itself as “the medium for advertisers” because “it reaches the people.” The *Journal* was a weekly, not a daily, which might explain why its numbers would be greater than that of the *Democrat*, but these numbers were also run three years prior to the *Democrat*. In an era where the population increased rapidly year to year, this leads me to believe that the *Journal*’s claim to be one of the most popular newspapers was true.

53. Foreman, *Oklahoma Imprints, 1835–1907*, 174.

54. The paper was later moved to Eufaula, Creek Nation. *Ibid.*

55. Debo, *The Road to Disappearance*, 210.

56. “CREEK COUNCIL,” *Indian Journal*, July 25, 1902.

57. “W. C. Grayson’s Grocery Advertisement,” *Indian Journal*, July 25, 1902.

58. Littlefield Jr., *Alex Posey*, 148.

59. Charles Gibson, “More About the Spokogeos,” *Indian Journal*, July 25, 1902.

60. Littlefield Jr., *Alex Posey*, 146.

61. “Bower Tidings,” *Indian Journal*, July 25, 1902.

62. “Territory News Items,” *Indian Journal*, July 25, 1902.

63. “The Cruise of the Good Vrouw,” *Indian Journal*, July 25, 1902. 58.

64. For a more detailed discussion of the newspaper's origin, see Debo, *And Still the Water Runs*, 278.

65. Noenoe K. Silva, *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 1.

66. *Ibid.*, 3.

67. In 1905 the *Cherokee Advocate* reprinted a piece from the *Muskogee Phoenix* praising Native literary writers in the Territory and arguing that the strongest literature "in [Indian] Territory come[s] from the pen of the Indian. Alex Posey, who as Fus Fixico has won renown, Chas. Gibson and Tooquastie, all Indians can command more space in magazines and more dollars per space than any Anglo Saxon in the Territory." "Future of the Indian," *Cherokee Advocate*, January 7, 1905.

68. Wilson, "Printing and Publishing Industry," in *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, Oklahoma Historical Society, [www.okhistory.org](http://www.okhistory.org).

69. Daniel Heath Justice makes a similar argument in his discussion of early twentieth-century Cherokee writers. He writes: "With 'official' tribal sovereignty abolished by U.S. federal decree, Native communities engaged in rhetorical practices, both subversive and overt, of maintaining cultural distinctiveness and socio-political sovereignty." Daniel Heath Justice, *Our Fire Survives the Storm: A Cherokee Literary History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 92.

70. Louis Littlecoon Oliver, *Chasers of the Sun: Creek Indian Thoughts* (Greenfield Center, NY: Greenfield Review Press, 1990), 91. I first encountered the poem in Jace Weaver, *That the People Might Live: Native American Literatures and Native American Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 94–95.