

PART THREE

**NATIVE AMERICAN HISTORY
AND MYTHOLOGY**

JOHN COLLIER AND THE CONTROVERSIAL RESIGNATION OF COMMISSIONER CHARLES BURKE, 1921-1929

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The resignation of Charles Burke as Commissioner of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) on 9 March 1929, marked a major transitional point in federal Native American policy. Burke, in the tradition of previous commissioners, advocated Indian assimilation and allotment. Most of the commissioners who followed Burke, especially John Collier, pursued reform goals, such as Indian self-determination. Commissioner Burke had dodged countless accusations from Indian supporters, and his resignation, tendered amid cries of maladministration and scandal, seemed to confirm his detractors' charges of abuse.

Burke accused Senator W. B. Pine of Oklahoma and John Collier of a conspiracy to destroy him. Doubtless both men had reasons to despise Burke; the commissioner had made many enemies. Collier in particular aggressively attacked the Bureau of Indian Affairs as incompetent and inefficient, but the exact role Collier played in Burke's resignation is uncertain. Burke's withdrawal secured the conclusion of assimilationist policy and altered the course of American Indian policy permanently. Thus, a need exists to examine the relationship between Burke and Collier, primarily investigating the year leading up to Burke's resignation, and the research here focuses on the evidence behind Burke's allegations of conspiracy.

The simmering Collier-Burke conflict had started with the case of Jackson Barnett, a Creek Indian. Barnett discovered oil on his allotted land in Oklahoma and overnight he became a multimillionaire. Under suspicious circumstances he married Anna Laura Lowe, a white woman of ill-repute.¹ Barnett's subsequent and large monetary gift to the American Baptist Home

¹ Reports indicated that Lowe may have been a promiscuous woman and probably obtained Barnett's agreement to marriage by engineering his intoxication. See also "Trapped by Woman" and "Mrs. Barnett Again Refuses to Testify."

Mission of New York in 1922, approved by Burke, appeared to have been instigated by his wife and perhaps by Burke himself.² The validity of Barnett's gift and even his marriage came under attack early in Burke's administration, but by the end of 1928 it had expanded into public charges of the commissioner's corruption.

In 1928 and 1929, a special Senate subcommittee--established to investigate not only the conditions of American Indians, but also Burke's administration--concentrated their attentions primarily on the Jackson Barnett case. Members of the Senate subcommittee included Lynn Frazier of North Dakota, Robert LaFollette of Wisconsin, W. B. Pine and Elmer Thomas of Oklahoma, and Burton K. Wheeler of Montana. Senator Wheeler, "delighted by the opportunity to badger a witness," emerged as the dominant figure on the subcommittee. According to Lawrence R. Kelly, Wheeler "was never happier than in 1929 when he forced Commissioner Burke into retirement" (qtd. Smith 232). Although he "was the chief target of the investigation, [Burke] never fully realized his predicament." He treated the committee, according to Kelly, "in an often contemptuous and cavalier fashion" (Navajo 146).

Others understood the seriousness of the investigation, especially Warren Morehead and Edgar B. Meritt. Morehead, a member of the Board of Indian Commissioners, stressed to the subcommittee that the Indian problem did not begin and end with Charles Burke (McDonnell 354). The Indian Rights Association (IRA) even spoke out in Burke's defense, claimed that some members of the committee misrepresented Burke's character, and stated that Burke actually "accomplished a good deal for the welfare and advancement of the Indians" (Indian Truth 1). On 19 November 1928, Meritt, as Assistant Commissioner of Indian Affairs, appeared before the Appropriations Committee of the House of Representatives. His request for money, concurrent with the investigation of Burke, encompassed five of the large pages of the Congressional

² Barnett requested Burke's permission to place \$1,100,000 in two trust funds; one for his wife and one for the New York mission. In 1925 Barnett's guardian filed suit and stated that Burke had no power to approve such a transaction. The trusts were declared illegal, the Justice Department charged Burke with fraud and corruption, and then subsequently dropped the investigation. See also "Trapped by Woman."

Record and applauded Burke's extensive accomplishments.³ The congressional session ended after two solid weeks of hearings on Burke's maladministration and maltreatment of American Indians (Douglas).

On 7 January 1929, Burke appeared before the subcommittee and stated that "a conspiracy on the part of Senator W. B. Pine of Oklahoma" existed "to destroy me because James Hepburn, a certain Oklahoma politician, was not appointed Superintendent of the Five Civilized Tribes" ("Work"). Burke further asserted that "Senator Pine is using his political appointees now in the Department of Justice . . . to aid him in carrying out this dastardly conspiracy." Burke continued his tirade and stated that "Senator Pine is cooperating with John Collier, a notorious Indian agitator, who is actively engaged in a campaign trying to destroy me and the Indian Service." According to Senator Lynn Frazier, Burke, asked to prove his charges, "agreed to subpoena witnesses to substantiate his claims" ("Work").

Senator Pine argued that he never tried to destroy Burke. In the following day's edition of the New York Times, however, he stated that "for some time I have been of the definite opinion that Mr. Burke should no longer be Commissioner of Indian Affairs, and I have expressed that opinion to a great many people" ("Burke"). The next day, Charles B. Shelby, a lawyer named in Burke's accusations, charged that Albert Fall and Burke were guilty of conspiracy. Burke replied that Senator Pine was using Selby to destroy him ("Cabinet"). After allowing Burke to subpoena witnesses, the subcommittee resolved that Pine was "entirely innocent of the charges." Senator Wheeler verbally cornered Burke, forcing him to acknowledge that he had no evidence of a conspiracy (Parman 91).

The accusations of Burke's corruption spread from the BIA to the Department of Interior. Secretary of Interior Hubert Work admitted on 29 January 1929 that he withheld evidence against Burke in the Jackson Barnett case. His action caused the anti-Burke contingent to protest Work's obvious protection of the commissioner. According to the New York Times, Work interfered with grand jury action to protect Burke from alleged persecution in

³ Congress, House, Assistant Indian Commissioner Meritt for Outstanding Constructive Accomplishments During Commissioner Burke's Administration of Indian Affairs, 70th Cong., 2nd sess. Congressional recorded (13 December 1928), vol. 70, pt. 1, 542.

the Jackson Barnett case because Burke's wife was critically ill.⁴ To the delight of the anti-assimilationists, Burke quietly resigned, effective 9 March 1929. The New York Times reported on 14 March 1929, that Burke will have another position under the Federal government. This decision to give another place to Mr. Burke in the government is regarded as clearing him ("Another Place"). As a result, Burke stayed in Washington, D.C. and remained active in Indian affairs until his death in 1944 (Flynn, "Western" 6).

Born in 1861, Burke's life began during the final decades of Indian autonomy. He established a real estate business in South Dakota, although he had passed the bar examination. By the time he reached twenty-four years, Burke had already run a successful campaign for state representative and in 1898 won a seat in Congress. During his fourteen years in Congress (1899-1907 and 1909-1915) he had been both a member and later the head of the House Committee on Indian Affairs. Burke participated in Indian policy debates and advocated a Christian philanthropic approach toward the Indian plight. An article in Collier's touted that Burke had "known Indians for forty years" (Corey 15). Burke developed an intense dedication to the destruction of tribalism and believed that the federal government had an obligation to the Indians. He held assimilation to be the best course for American Indian policy and sought new methods to make the process efficient and realistic. Burke concluded that above all else, the Indian needed guidance from his white mentors.

Representative Burke engineered a major amendment to the Dawes Allotment Act known as the Burke Act (34 Stat. 182). The 1906 law postponed Indian citizenship and required certification of an Indian's competence to handle his affairs (Kvasnicka 251). The Secretary of Interior obtained the power to release any Indian judged competent to handle his own affairs. Prior to the Burke Act, the Dawes Act required even able Indians to endure a twenty-five-year trial period before their wardship status could be terminated. Burke's subsequent appointment to head the Bureau of Indian Affairs appeared to be a natural progression in his career.⁵

⁴ Congress, Senate, Senator Wheeler speaking against the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 70th Cong., 2nd sess. Congressional record (12 January 1929), vol. 70, pt. 2, 1613.

⁵ Laurence Kelly points out in "Charles Henry Burke 1921-29," in The Commissioners of Indian Affairs 1824-1977 by Kvasnicka and Viola, that Burke
(continued...)

The years prior to Burke's administration had been characterized by a growing national controversy; federal Indian policies increasingly had been reexamined by both critics and proponents of assimilation. The growing recognition that the nineteenth century assimilation campaign was incompatible with Indian cultures escalated in the twenties. Burke, an avid proponent of assimilation at the time, directed his energies toward reforms he deemed more important, such as efforts to improve Native American education and health care (Kvasnicka 53). When Burke entered the Indian Bureau on 7 May 1921, the two stated functions of the agency were to help American Indians achieve self-sufficiency and to hold Native American land in trust (Taylor 45). Burke's problems originated in part from his method of administration, but it "went beyond his personality or his competence as commissioner" (Flynn, "Thesis" 99). The age of assimilation had reached its nadir.

John Collier, the man Burke accused of conspiracy, also appeared to be destined for his life's work. During the early years of Collier's career, he worked as a social worker in New York City. His constant reform efforts for children and immigrants stressed anti-Americanization and anti-assimilation principles. His beliefs became widely distributed in the form of two community newsletters--Community Center and Civic Journal--both edited by Collier. Following World War I, he spoke on lecture tours and distributed pamphlets to spread his reform convictions.

In 1920, Collier and his family departed for a vacation in Mexico to escape the Red Scare fracas, stopping to visit the Pueblos in Taos, New Mexico.⁶ Collier's memoir, From Every Zenith, records his family's stop as

⁵(...continued)

was actually a compromise choice. Secretary of Interior Albert Fall sent President Warren G. Harding a recommendation for the appointment of J. George Wright. Wright seemed to be a good choice and his nomination was released to the press before Harding made his choice. Harding, incensed at the release of Wright's name before he had given his blessing, chose Burke out of spite. See also Denise M. Laque, "Charles H. Burke as Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1921-29," 5 May 1992, unpublished.

⁶ According to Diane T. Putney, Collier "publicly expressed his admiration for the Bolsheviks and their revolution in Russia. Agents from the Department of Justice placed Collier under surveillance" in 1919 (219). Collier and his family left New York soon afterwards.

a turning point in his life. He stated that the Pueblos gave him "a new . . . hope for the Race of Man" (Collier, Zenith 126). Collier who appreciated the Pueblos' reverence for nature and the beauty of their belief systems, rejected his own cultural heritage to embrace the Indian cause. Collier felt that Native American culture was worth preservation not only for the Indians' sake, but also as an adoptive value system to white society (Smith 228). The next months formed the basis of Collier's mission to save the Pueblos and to explain to others that Indian culture must be preserved so that Western civilization could survive (Smith 229).

Collier and Burke clashed over a number of reform drives, beginning with the infamous Bursum bill. Collier advocated the revival and support of Native American cultural life on communal lands held by self-governing tribes. The Bursum bill, supported by Secretary of Interior Albert Fall of New Mexico, threatened the Pueblos' Spanish land grants in New Mexico. The bill would declare these grants illegal and open the land for white settlement. Collier denounced Fall and Burke and propagandized the issue into a "David and Goliath" fight (Smith 229).

Allegations against Burke and the BIA escalated. The criticism was strong enough that in May 1923, Hubert Work, Fall's replacement as Secretary of Interior, delegated a "Committee of One Hundred" to advise the Interior Department. The committee made a preliminary report a few weeks later, and the Interior department launched a larger study. The Institute of Government Research guided the examination of Native American conditions and selected a staff of nine specialists who assembled under Lewis Meriam, crisscrossing the United States for seven months between 1926 and 1928. The members interviewed American Indians and officials and examined relevant statistics (Nabokov 306). Produced in February 1928, The Problem of Indian Administration, or the Meriam Report, "detailed dire poverty, inadequate housing and diet, disastrous epidemics, poor schooling and incompetence by reservation personnel" (Dippie 301).⁷

The altogether moderate tone of the report concentrated on the flaws within the system, not on Burke's purported maladministration. The Meriam Report stressed that the present government's aid for American Indian education and advancement was "largely ineffective" and promulgated the need for bureau

⁷ See also the report by the Institute for Government Research. The Problem of Indian Administration: Summary of Findings and Recommendations.

policies to evolve (Institute 8). According to Brian W. Dippie, Collier felt that the report "was too timid in assigning blame to the bureau" (301). Walter Woehlke, editor of Sunset Magazine, compared the Burke administration to a spider's nest and advocated "a housecleaning of the bureau" (15). Collier persuaded Indian supporters in the Senate to conduct a special investigation of the BIA and Burke's administration, which eventually culminated in Burke's BIA departure.

Charges of Burke's inept leadership held some credence. In 1924, a report from the Red Cross to Commissioner Burke detailed the ineffectiveness of the Indian health service, but he withheld it from the public and failed to implement its recommendations (Putney 255). Collier used the withholding of the report in a number of his congressional testimonies and articles as an example of Burke's corruption (Collier, "Are We" 453). Burke often stated his concerns about Indian education and health care, well aware of how little the Indian Service paid and how few applicants either area attracted. Yet, he hesitated to ask for more money from Congress. The Burke administration had inherited a tradition of inadequate appropriations for health services, but Burke did little to alleviate the trend.

Burke's questionable conduct continued and fed the protestors' mounting opposition to both federal government bureaucracy and to Burke personally. Burke's opponents appeared before Congress to introduce evidence that Burke had resorted to devious methods. They produced an article that appeared in a Santa Fe newspaper on 21 October 1925 according to which Collier was on the communist payroll and "C.J. Crandall [a BIA official] declared John Collier is paid \$10,000 annually by Moscow for his activities on behalf of the Indians" (69th Cong. 69). The origin of the news release remained in doubt until Burke claimed responsibility. He later denied involvement in the libelous action and explained his nonaction against the mysterious author as not important enough to warrant attention (69th Cong. 70). Progressive leaders appeared before Congress to express their outrage at Burke's obvious malicious actions against Collier.

Burke had infuriated Collier personally in the mid-1920s by suggesting that Plains Indian dances were "immoral and degrading acts which fostered idleness" (Flynn "Thesis" 99). Burke's conservative background led him to assume that Indians lived an uncivilized and unproductive lifestyle. Sean Flynn asserts that early in Burke's career he had accepted the "conventional wisdom that individualism, self-support, and agriculture represented Indian salvation" ("Thesis" 100). The Indian Rights Association "circulated a defamatory report on Pueblo dance customs . . . [and Burke] was easily persuaded that the dances

were also immoral" (Kvasnicka 259). Such sentiments, expressed by Burke, stirred Collier into decisive action against the Commissioner of Indian Affairs.

Foreshadowing the impending confrontation, Collier testified that the "subjects needing investigation in Indian affairs are not matters of personal malfeasance of corruption, unless incidentally, but conditions of a wholly impersonal character" (69th Cong. 37). Collier methodically researched many of the BIA's actions, discrepancies in appropriations, mortality and disease rates, and discrepancies in the bureau's estimated Indian population and produced the evidence to the Senate. Collier treated Burke's reform attempts with hostility, and they fought Burke's efforts to improve health care and education.⁸ He called for a Senate investigation of Burke and the Indian Office.

Burke testified: "I have been placed in a very false light here by the organization represented by Mr. Collier, and I have been placed in that light for the last three of four years" (69th Cong. 91). The commissioner also objected to "Collier's methods of procedure" and stated that Collier "calls attention to letters and telegrams which probably were initiated at his instance" (93). Burke maintained that Collier "circulates propaganda from time to time, sensational in character" (94). Burke referred to Collier's call for an investigation as superfluous, because the Meriam Report had reached its conclusions. The hearing became increasingly tense and ended with Collier and Burke quibbling over such inane matters as whether or not Collier could copy a Bureau document (94).

Burke and his supporters embarked upon a campaign to defend his character, and Burke noted in an interview: "I have been more or less under fire since I have been commissioner" (qtd. Flynn, "Thesis" 100). In 1926, Assistant Commissioner of Indian Affairs Edgar B. Meritt authored a pamphlet that denounced the reformers and stated that "there is considerable propaganda going on against the Indian Bureau for the purpose of releasing all Indians from government supervision" (Dept. of Interior 15). He also stated that the "proposition is fostered by selfish interest . . . [and] they are using the services

⁸ Burke made many unsuccessful attempts to improve Indian lives. He advocated a compulsory education program and an extended health care program for Native Americans. However, funding was his main obstacle and he was unwilling until late in his administration to request more money from Congress. He did oversee the passage of new federal policies, such as the Indian Citizenship Act (Stat., 1255) and made attempts to reform health care, such as the Southwest Trachoma Campaign. See also Laurence Kelly, The Assault on Assimilation, 355-375.

of white agitators who are willing to sacrifice" (15). Representative Cramton from Michigan, a Burke supporter, appeared before Congress to denounce Collier's efforts. He referred to the tactics of Collier and the IRA as "undesirable lobbying" and stated that Collier "is an insincere, unworthy, unreliable, misrepresenting, destructive lobbyist. He goes about peddling misinformation and threats with equal facility and irresponsibility, never constructive, but always destructive" (70th Cong. 3058).

Commissioner Burke also defended himself against blatant attacks by Collier and his associates in the media. An extremely harsh and critical article by Collier appeared in the 1 January 1927 issue of The Survey. Given the opportunity to reply, Burke wrote to the editor that "it is almost impossible to conceive of seventeen pages of typewritten matter that could contain so much that is untrue, misleading, and ridiculous" (Collier, "Are We" 454). Collier continued to produce criticisms of Burke and the Bureau, and reformers such as Frances Blanchard and Walter Woehlke joined Collier's efforts.⁹

Burke had other powerful enemies. He had attacked the Oklahoma probate system's alleged misuse of federal funds granted to Indians and had accused the system of working for the oil corporations. His actions incurred the wrath of Senator W. B. Pine, "a wealthy oilman who had little use for Indians." Pine countered the attack by accusing Burke of mishandling Indian money. Although he was cleared of the charges by a congressional committee in 1925, Burke's efforts to protect the estate of a Creek Indian, Jackson Barnett, led to a second investigation in 1929 and his eventual resignation (Kelly, Navajo 146). On the other hand, the Indian Oil Act, which was curiously enough supported by Collier and Frear, probably won the friendship of oilmen in America. Under the act, oilmen had the right to exploit any oil discoveries on Indian lands (Kelly, Assault 365).

The Senate subcommittee's investigation of the Jackson Barnett case, along with Burke's charges against Pine and Collier, hastened the end of Burke's BIA career. Given the opportunity to explain his actions in the Barnett case, Burke stated that Barnett clearly understood the gifts he made. Burke also

⁹ Articles criticizing Burke and the BIA included: John Collier, "Persecuting the Pueblos," Sunset Magazine 53 (July 1924): 50, 92-93; John Collier, "Our Indian Policy," Sunset Magazine 50 (March 1923): 13-15, 89-93; Frances Blanchard, "The Deplorable State of Our Indians," Current History 18 (July 1923): 630-636; and Walter Woehlke, "Let'Em Die!," Sunset Magazine 51 (July 1923): 14-15.

asserted that the Barnett's unconsummated marriage had been recognized by his predecessor, Cato Sells (70th Cong. 1623). However, Senator Wheeler accused Burke of perjury and pointed to evidence that established Burke's knowledge of Barnett's ignorance of monetary matters. Meritt testified days later about "statements by the propagandists that they are going to 'get us'" and use their influence in Congress and the Department of Justice "to destroy officials who have devoted their lives to the service." Wheeler only replied that "no one would be destroyed without evidence" (70th Cong. 1788).

Burke had little alternatives under the barrage of Collier's guns. He probably felt his claims of conspiracy were reasonable after years of persecution by the same man. The constant pressures of Collier's attacks, Burke's unpopularity, and the imminent end of assimilationist policies combined to spell disaster for the administration. Doubtless, Collier's relentless and sometimes merciless assault mounted against Commissioner Burke from 1923 to 1929 enhanced his own reputation as the Indian's chief defender. Once Burke resigned, Collier became an obvious contender for Commissioner of Indian Affairs and eventually received his appointment to the position in 1933.

At best Collier's role in Burke's resignation is questionable. Obviously, Collier participated in a full onslaught against Burke and the BIA. However, Collier appeared to aim more at the inefficient and unfair Indian policies than at Burke personally. Burke just happened to hold a position directly in Collier's line of fire, a key point when analyzed in combination with certain other facts. First of all, Collier's collaboration with Pine on the Indian Oil Act appears to be extremely unusual and does make Burke's accusation of a Collier-Pine conspiracy more plausible, but not certain. Collier also was instrumental in a barrage of anti-Burke and anti-BIA propaganda in magazines and in Congress. Yet, he rarely referred to Burke by name in his recriminations against the Bureau in the congressional testimonies and articles examined.

Burke's allegations are further undermined by two main opportunities Collier received to revile Burke by name. Collier's first chance appeared during subcommittee hearings on the conditions of Indians, one year after Burke's resignation. During Collier's testimony Senator Wheeler stated: "I was strongly of the impression that Mr. Burke [was] partial to one group and . . . didn't give anybody else a fair hearing." Wheeler then asked Collier if he agreed and Collier made a few general statements. Wheeler then baited Collier further, obviously presenting Collier the opportunity to bash Burke. Collier remained impartial, however, and reserved his critical comments only for the Bureau (71st Cong. 3484).

Collier's second opportunity appeared when he wrote his memoirs. As a period of intense struggle in his life, the twenties probably were memorable because he had outlined his beliefs and strategies for reform and formulated a detailed analysis of the problems of the BIA under Charles Burke's leadership during this time. Collier included, however, only a brief paragraph in his memoirs on Burke's accusations and subsequent resignation (Zenith 147). Burke's role in Indian affairs was nearly ignored, while other commissioners' administrations appeared in full detail. Perhaps Collier considered Burke's administration insignificant, although Collier fought him often in the period: either the rosy glow of memory had softened his account of events, or he felt it unnecessary to address their disharmony.

Burke and his reputation suffered under the heavy reformist barrage. He probably felt cornered and isolated from the onset of his administration as the era of assimilationists closed. Yet Burke's accusations against Collier and Pine, perhaps well-founded, cannot be proven and deserve further investigation. Collier directed his attacks primarily toward the Bureau, believing that in the interest of Indian progress, federal assimilation had to be aborted and assimilationists, even Burke, had to be thwarted. As an obviously passionate reformer and intelligent administrator, Collier most likely had the desire to obtain Burke's position as well. Such aspirations, however, in no way equaled a wish for the destruction of Burke as an individual. Collier doubtless disagreed with Burke not only personally, but also ideologically; nonetheless, Collier appeared to have made reform efforts, not attacks on Burke and the BIA. Burke's appointment as Commissioner of Indian Affairs fed the ire of Collier and other reformers determined to defeat assimilationist forces. Combined with Collier's determination and dreams, these factors spelled certain disaster for anyone who happened to be Commissioner of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

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50 Ginger R. Davis

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RECLAIMING THE FEMININE IN THE CHITIMACHA CREATION MYTH

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French influence came early to the Indians occupying what is now known as Louisiana. For some, foreign presence meant annihilation as evidenced in the destruction of the advanced culture of the Natchez; for others such as the Atakapas, gradual assimilation resulted in historians viewing them as non-existent. However, for the Chitimacha salvation emerged from the many swamps surrounding their homeland, a land they occupy today. Although the swamps protected their existence, the swamps did not protect their culture, a culture fragmented by European influence. Today some words remain, but much of their language has been lost as well as many of their myths and legends. Prior to the 1970's, Mrs. Faye Stouff, author of "The Great Spirit Makes the World," and wife of former Chitimacha chief Emile Stouff, collected this and other legends from Delphine Darden, whose lineage can be traced to many Chitimacha chiefs, and from other elderly women on the reservation. According to Mr. Nick Stouff, former Chitimacha chief and present historian of the Chitimacha Nation, Mrs. Stouff's translation is the only Native version of this sacred story. Mr. Stouff further asserts that the French impacted the oral traditions of the Chitimacha culture.

In this paper we contend that the oral traditions of the Chitimacha Nation did not escape foreign influence, an influence that was to weave its way into the very foundations of Native thought. According to Paula Gunn Allen, Native Americans view oral traditions as "the creative source of their collective and individual selves"; their oral tradition transcends the concept of a recorded history (224). To alter the fluid text, the living text, is to alter the identity of its people because the living, fluid text shapes and is shaped by the reality of life. According to Allen, if foreign influences disrupt "its [oral tradition] coherence, it [oral tradition] becomes the major instrument of colonization and oppression" (225).

The "internal coherence" of the Chitimacha oral tradition has been disturbed. Early writers of Indian traditions, particularly the French Jesuits, forced their beliefs on the people and on their oral traditions by superimposing Western patriarchal thought in translating and in recording Indian sacred beliefs (Allen 74). Masculine tunnel vision has obscured clarity in interpreting

gynocentric tribal traditions; thus male bias has seriously skewed the integrity of texts (Allen 223). Therefore, we contend that if one is to interpret the paucity of Louisiana Indian literature, one must follow the footsteps of Mary Shelly; one must carefully reconstruct the fragmented sibylline leaves, interpreting the white ink of women. Yet, one must also reinscribe the message using red ink with a feminine perspective to incorporate the complementary quality of Native American life as opposed to the oppositional structure of the Western world.

Using "The Great Spirit Makes the World," we show the trauma on Chitimacha sacred belief by the impact of a forced Judeo-Christian tradition on the interpretation/translation of Native American literature, an impact which has segmented the harmonic whole basic to tribal thought. Furthermore, we demonstrate that the forced dichotomy cannot be identified as simply masculine/feminine, for a modern feminist reading will not restore harmony to the text. Within the splintered whole, one recognizes the discordant voices of missionary, female, and Native American. Only when feminine spirituality, removed by the voice of the missionary, is reinscribed in the red ink of Native American thought will harmony and integrity be restored to the text.

In the opening lines of the Chitimacha creation belief, the Judeo-Christian voice is recognized in early references to the "Great Spirit" which precedes the traditional North American Indian motif of the earth-diver. This could reflect a relatively common practice of attaching a high god concept to existing traditional myths in Native American literature.¹ Such a practice grew out of contact with and subsequent domination by Western patriarchal tradition. The practice allowed Native Americans to retain their basic beliefs while participating in Christianity. Although many wise French missionaries in Louisiana "had a great understanding and tolerance of traditional Indian religion," according to Fred Kniffen, they did exercise great influence on the natives and on their beliefs as gradually Christianity replaced the native religion of the Chitimacha as well as that of other tribes of Louisiana. The ancient religion of the Chitimacha disappeared around the middle of the nineteenth century.

Furthermore, the echo of French missionaries resounds in the line "Blessed it, and made man of it." "Blessed" is a term that would roll more

¹ Noted both in Jordan Paper's "Through the Earth Darkly" (16) and Paula Gunn Allen's The Sacred Hoop (41). Much controversy exists over role of High God. According to Hultkrantz, usually in the Native American world the high god is a remote God receiving little attention (15).

easily from the lips of a Jesuit missionary than a Chitimacha. The word choice in the transformation of earth to living man parallels that of the transfiguration of bread into the body of Christ. "He blessed the bread, broke it, and gave it to his apostles." Furthermore, the use of the word "blessed" does not appear in Carpenter's translation quoted in Swanton's bulletin of 1911. The absence of the word "blessed" in Carpenter's earlier account would support its having been added later as Christianity enveloped the native religion (Swanton, Indian 356).

Perhaps more significant in supporting Christian influence is the correlation of the Great Spirit to the role of the father. This concept superimposes a Western patriarchal system onto the matrilineal structure of the Chitimacha. Within a matrilineal society, children belong to the mother's clan. The mother's oldest brother was responsible for the disciplining and upbringing of his sisters' children. By identifying the Great Spirit as a father image, an image not present in the earlier version, authority has been striped from the creator god, Kutahin, who is identified as feminine by Fred Kniffen (259). Not only has the gender been altered but so too have basic familial relationships.

Additional echoes of Genesis glimmer in the passage:

All was not well
 For the animals made fun of man and his companion
 Woman and Tobacco
 Chitimacha spoke to the Great Spirit
 Asked the Great Spirit for help--
 The great spirit was their father--
 Their father helped the Chitimacha--
 His children--
 Helped them make bows and arrows
 With the bows and arrows
 The Chitimacha brought down the laughing animals

The Chitimacha were in harmony with nature, with animals; they believed in the distant past when humans communicated freely with animals (N. Stouff, Interview). Furthermore, the world of the Chitimacha was a sacred world, a harmonic whole in which all parts--living and non-living-- were significant and worthy of respect. Harmony and balance in totemic clans supported the harmonic co-existence between Chitimacha and animals (Swanton, Indian 349). Thus, Indian belief in a harmonic whole and in totemic clans appears inconsistent with the Great Spirit's gifting them with bows and arrows to kill animals.

However, the inclusion of the term "laughing" to describe animal action toward man would justify the act of the Indians. The actions of the animals could be seen as unnatural; thus action taken by man might represent an effort to restore harmony. Indians often made sacrifices to restore balance to their world (Kniffen 257).² Support of the Christian influence, nevertheless, is evident in Carpenter's earlier version:

The animals meeting the men in their excursion, not only ridiculed them, but even despised them on account of their having neither hair nor feathers in ciemencies (sic) of the seasons. They then, feeling their nakedness, were humiliated, and Thomne Kene, pitying them, bestowed on them the bow and arrow, directing them to employ the flesh for nutriment and the skins for covering in punishment for their rillery. (Swanton, Indian 356)

Ridicule and humiliation were frequently employed among tribesmen as a form of coercion or reprimand. Yet in this story, humans have done nothing to merit correction; furthermore, the Supreme Deity rewards and aids them. However, the inclusion of "nakedness" and "humiliation" suggests a blending with Christian doctrine. A marked similarity exists between the noted Indian creation story and the following passage from Genesis: "The eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together" (Genesis 3:7).

If one "writes out" noted Christian influences and uses modern feminist criticism, incorporating the dichotomy of male/female and the passivity of woman to detect the feminine voice in "The Great Spirit Makes the World," two distinct, but contradictory voices still emerge. The first voice is that of passive woman, produced by a masculine Deity and given to man. "The Great Spirit gave man woman." Woman was to "bring great joy" suggests woman as an instrument to be used and enjoyed by man. That woman was an object to be acted upon by man is perhaps more clearly evident in the earlier version.

Thoume pitied them and created woman, but without movement. One of the men, endowed to govern the others, was inspired to take a rod and to teach the men and women in order to communicate action to them. [This echoes patriarchal Christian tradition]. They all slept and Thoume profited by the moment to provide them with the organs necessary to

² Charles Hudson notes that many phenomena were regarded by Indians as unnatural and drastic measures were taken to restore natural order. Kniffen also notes the practice among some tribes of Louisiana of killing newborn twins as twins were not considered a natural occurrence.

generation and connected with those organs the most voluptuous pleasure, when they awoke he told them, "Make you use of them thus, and there will issue from your women men who will resemble you." (Swanton, Indian 357)

"You" is clearly referring to men, and "them" to women; thus woman was clearly created to bring man pleasure and to procreate which is similar to the creative act of Western patriarchal tradition. Thus, the voice of woman is submissive and subjugated to the superior male "endowed to govern the others."

Later in the story, however, it is woman who obeys the Great Spirit; it is woman who emerges "shiny and bright." It is she whom the Chitimacha honor. It is woman who aids and provides for "her children." It is she whom the moon (male) chases "across the sky forever." Certainly this voice does not depict a submissive and subjugated woman. This is not a passive entity that exists solely to be acted upon by man. Yet the two voices juxtaposed within the same text create confusion and disrupt harmony--a basic characteristic of all Native American literature.

The duality of the feminine voice can be attributed to superimposing Western patriarchal thought on a Native American text by male translators and writers. The first voice, representative of Christian influence, opposes the second voice which is consistent with early Indian tradition. The conflict is the result of the "writing out" of female spirituality by early missionaries, thus rendering a skewed understanding of early native beliefs. If one, however, reads through an Indian lens, then one recognizes the significance of the juxtaposition of woman and tobacco. Although Western thought reads a negative connotation in the duality, Indian thought sees the sacredness of the two.

Tobacco was sacred to the Indian; it was generally used on ceremonial occasions; its use often accompanied chants and invocations to their deities. Smoke from tobacco was likewise sacred (containing power). Thus tobacco and its use were not only sacred, but were instruments of peace. Woman, too, was considered the instrument of peace, the basis for the harmony among the Indian people (McGaa 6). Therefore, viewed through the eyes of Indians, woman was a sacred gift to be honored, not a submissive object.

The basic text of "The Great Spirit Makes the World," woven in threads of traditional Indian beliefs, vocalizes the primordial voice of Native America. The fabric interweaves several basic strains common to Native American creation cycles. The "Earth Diver" who brings up sand or mud from the primal water is the most prevalent. Ake Hultkrantz identifies the earth diver myth as the most prevalent among Native American tribes and also suggests that

the diluvial myth is related to the more ancient myth of the primeval sea (31-32). The crayfish, a crustacean common to lower Louisiana, performs the function of the Earth Diver in the Chitimacha myth as well as that of the Houmas Indians of Louisiana. According to Redwolf, chief of the Houmas, the crayfish symbolizes courage, for it will not back down. The Earth Diver tradition supports the unity of Native American thought in that all are part of the sacred circle or sacred hoop. Even the Supreme Deity relies on the assistance of fellow creatures to create; thus, as Allen states, "the ability of all creatures to share in the process of ongoing creation makes all things sacred" (224). Therefore, it follows that the co-creation process also makes all things a significant part of the living whole to which all are part by virtue of their relationship to one another. Compatible with the Earth Diver tradition is what Hultkrantz calls the "emanatistic" speculation. Creation emanates from the body parts of the Supreme Deity. "From His body/ The Great Spirit made the world. . . ." Again, the Chitimacha belief is consistent with that of other Native American creation stories.

The muffled voice of Native Americans is also readily discernible when "the Great Spirit does not condemn Chitimacha" although "man was no longer good." To the Chitimacha, as well as to most Native Americans, evil existed side by side with goodness; it was a natural phenomenon and was accepted. Kniffen notes that "most tribal religions lacked the concepts of eternal punishment and sin" (255). Christianity did not teach them to pray, for they did pray in beseeching aid or in thanking the Great Spirit for gifts received. Christianity, however, did teach them to pray for salvation, for it introduced evil as sinful and punishable by the Supreme Deity.³ Earlier in the myth, when the Chitimacha had forgotten the Great Spirit, He gave them fire. The Great Spirit did not condemn but took action to restore order and balance to the world, thus re-establishing the harmonic whole.

As the story progresses, the voice of Native Americans grows in intensity. Native American sacred beliefs dominate the closing passages which appear less contaminated by Western thought. For example, "The Great Spirit told the sun and moon to bathe--/Bathe often and be strong." The concept of cleanliness and purification is not only important but also sacred among Native Americans. Not only did Indians of the Chitimacha tribe practice bodily cleanliness by bathing daily in the river, they also participated in ritual cleansing as part of their sacred ceremonies. In celebrating the harvest of the new corn,

³ The concept of sin noted by Kniffen is further supported by Amanda Porterfield in "American Indian Spirituality as a Countercultural Movement" (157).

members participated in a ceremony known as "pasketa" or "baseta." At the beginning of the ceremony they consumed the Black Drink, called "asi" which is made from a variety of holly. If drunk in sufficient quantity, "asi" induced vomiting, which cleansed their minds and bodies before they ate the new corn (Kniffen 259). Gatschet, having witnessed the ceremony in honor of the Noon-Day Sun, observed at the conclusion of the ceremony that the men drank water to induce vomiting, thus removing impurities from their bodies before feasting (Swanton, Indian 352). Among the Chitimacha, Black Drink was also taken before making decisions. Before one could participate in council, one must consume large quantities of the Black Drink. The vomiting, which resulted in a cleansed mind and body, drove out evil spirits and allowed for communication with only good spirits, thereby insuring one would not be misled in the decision-making process. According to Nick Stouff, the individual was required to partake repeatedly of the Black Drink. If he could not stand up to the ordeal, he was considered uncleansed and was barred from the council.

Sweathouses, as well as purging, were also used for healing and for purification. Swanton quotes Dumont who in his account tells of a sick person who after being placed on a low bed piled with seven or eight inches of moss was himself covered with moss so that only his head was free. Burning charcoal placed under the bed produced excessive sweating. He recounts the sick were usually cured, if not immediately, then in a few days (Indian 85). The spiritual significance of the Sweat Lodge Ceremony is revealed by Ed McGaa, Eagle Man, in his recent book, Mother Earth Spirituality. As the misty steam covers the participant, his own mist is brought forth, and that sweat, the "universal lifeblood comes forth." The participant experiences a spiritual bonding with Mother Earth as he "sits within her warm womb" and as his lifeblood, spread by the four winds, seeps back into Mother Earth (McGaa 62). Thus, the passage links the brightness and strength of the sun to her frequent cleansing, her bonding with Mother Earth.

Such a bonding could reflect an old tradition among tribes of Southeast America. Reflecting the duality of a complementary social structure is the relationship between internal fire and external fire of the sun and the earth. According to Allen, "[t]he core/womb of the earth is inward fire as the heart of heaven, the sun is external fire" (20). Ritual power, both creative and destructive, exists in their relationship. The relationship between inner and outer was evident in clan-based tribes and was evident among the Cherokee, a Southeastern tribe, who recognized both internal and external fire as female (Allen 20). Therefore, it would seem reasonable to assert that the Chitimacha, having a clan-based system, identified both the sun and the earth as female, and having a complementary as opposed to an oppositional social system, they recognized the dual powers. They equated fire with the sun, for like other

Native Americans they saw fire as a symbol of the sacred sun. Furthermore, the twin powers, identified as female, often assumed masculine/feminine identities after the coming of the white man. Among the Keres, twin sisters Uretsete and Naotsete existed before the creation of the world; yet, in time, Uretsete assumed a male identity. This was not uncommon in Native American oral tradition after the coming of the whites (Allen 19).

Using the Keres example, one could resolve the conflicting gender identities of Ku'tnahin, the supreme deity of the Chitimacha. Kniffen identifies Ku'tnahin as a powerful female sky god, a personification of the sun; Gatschet, an earlier writer, also identifies the Supreme Deity of the Chitimacha as the Noon-Day Sun (Allen 19). Although Swanton, in his 1911 bulletin, quotes Garschet's identity of the Supreme Deity, he gives a masculine identity to Ku'tnahin. Yet, in a later 1928 article, "Sun Worship in the Southeast," Swanton states: "The oldest material preserved from this tribe [Chitimacha] pictures a creator independent of the sun, the latter being represented as a powerful female deity. In later times . . . the sun was placed in the supreme position and is spoken of as a male being called Kutnahin" (89). In his 1911 bulletin, Swanton identifies this oldest material as Carpenter's translation of Martin Duralde's work composed at the beginning of the eighteenth century. As Swanton states, this version of creation suggests Western Christian influences. If one identifies Thoume Kene Kimte, the creator in Duralde's version, as a high god such as those superimposed on many Native American creation stories under missionary influence, then he can be removed. With his removal comes the need to fill the role of a creator god. The most logical candidate would be Ku'tnahin. Ku'tnahin is recognized as the Noon-Day Sun, the supreme god. That Ku'tnahin is revered and honored is evidenced by the ceremonies to him/her before the new moon. This is the same honor attributed to the sun in the conclusion of the creation story, a story that attributes a feminine identity to the sun. This is the same sun the Southern Cult, of which the Chitimacha were a part, worshipped as "the most sacred element of the universe" (Kniffen 259). Ku'tnahin is attributed with giving his people corn, a gift associated with Mother Earth and traditionally attributed to a female god. It appears logical that the sun was originally the supreme god, the powerful female deity to which all accounts allude, the feminine spiritually that was "written out" by the French missionaries. We contend that she was the dual female power with Mother Earth, and through their relationship all creation occurs. By re-establishing Ku'tnahin as creator god and by reinscribing her feminine identity, the conflicting voices of woman merge into one harmonious echo. She is Thought Woman of the Western Plains, "the spirit that pervades everything" (Allen 13). She is the mother of her children, as identified in the Chitimacha creation story.

The re-birth of Ku'tnahin as Supreme Deity, creator god, mother of her children breathes life into the mysterious statement: "The Great Spirit did not look like a man--/For the Great Spirit had no eyes--/ The Great Spirit had no ears--." If one equates Ku'tnahin with Thought Woman of the Keres people, she, like Thought Woman, is as the supreme Spirit, "both Mother and Father to all people and to all creatures" (Allen 15). Thought Woman is spirit, and as such is not limited to the single role of female. Such a role must have been most difficult for French missionaries too steeped in masculine domination to comprehend, much less accept. How easy to divide the two and to attribute the role of creator to a male high god. To appease the missionaries so as to salvage their own beliefs, the Indians would accept and incorporate the division into their belief.

The conclusion of the Chitimacha creation belief reinforces the dominance of woman and the Native American belief in purification and immediate punishment. That man's not bathing often caused him to lose strength and luster suggests spiritual purification as opposed to bodily cleanliness. Such a concept would parallel the practice of requiring man to purge himself before decision-making and before or during sacred ceremonies. Thus man, by not purifying himself, did not bond with his fellow man nor with Mother Earth. He did not draw nourishment from his spiritual source. Consequently, he was punished. Punishment among the Indians was not reserved for the hereafter, but was immediate (Kniffen 256). Isolation was one of the heavier penalties. DuPratz records: "If young people should happen to fight, a thing which I never saw nor heard of during the time I lived among them, they would threaten to make them live very far from the nation as persons unworthy to dwell with others" (qtd. Swanton, *Indian* 87). Kniffen also states that in extreme cases, the penalty for serious crimes was "expulsion from the tribal area" (256). Isolation was unnatural and was in itself considered evil. It denied the person an opportunity to bring himself into the balance and harmony of the greater whole; thus he was denied access to the communal knowledge, or as Allen states, "to conscious harmony with the universe" (256).

Therefore, isolated man must integrate his segmented being by reuniting with, as Allen states, "the power of woman, the center of the universe." It is for this purpose that man pursues woman. Support for this interpretation lies in examining the Chitimacha word "ini," which can translate "chase" or "pursue." Carpenter's earlier version translates "pursue," whereas, Stouff's translation uses "chase." The term chase appears inconsistent with the complementary social structure of Native Americans; such an interpretation would render man subservient to woman, and such is not the case in Native

American thought. However, if the translation renders "pursue," then man's action is the search for wholeness, a concept consistent with the basic belief of Native America.

Such a reading would describe the sacred circle, which according to Gloria Bird is "the major paradigm of Native thought." To the Chitimacha, the circle was symbolic of the sun, their Supreme Being. It was the circle of life, the dynamic circle of the wholeness, of the complementary nature, of the fluidity of Native American thought. Such a reading would restore feminine spirituality vanquished by the powerful sword of Christianity for the word was the sword; the sword that sliced feminine spirituality from the oral traditions of the Chitimacha. As the word infiltrated the religious beliefs of Native America, internal subjugation was born. The pulsating doctrine pumped new life, new meaning into the spiritual foundations of these bodies of adherers. Because the spiritual beliefs of Native America carry the genetic genes of the people--as these beliefs dictate the total identity, both spiritual and secular, of the people--they also contributed to the silencing of the marginalized woman and the "reservationized" Indian. However, like woman, Indian tradition does not surrender easily. Woman endures and so long as she exists, Native America exists; for as the Cheyenne insist, "no people is broken until the heart of its women is on the ground. Then they are broken. Then they will die." Therefore, we contend that the purity of interpretation in Native American sacred beliefs will occur when one reads the white ink--the sensitivity and perspective of woman--and reinscribes in red ink--the spherical, cyclical, gynocratic world of Native America.

APPENDIX

The Chitimacha Creation Myth "The Great Spirit Makes the World"

From his body
 The Great Spirit made the world--
 From His very own body
 The Great Spirit made the world--
 Made the world and all that is in the world.
 The Great Spirit did not look like a man--
 For the Great Spirit had no eyes--
 The Great Spirit had no ears--
 For without eyes or ears--
 The Great Spirit could see all things--

The Great Spirit could hear all things--
All things that were,
All things that were to be,
The Great Spirit could see--
The Great Spirit could hear--
Without eyes or ears
The Great Spirit would see and hear all things
 In the first days

When the Great Spirit made the world
There was water everywhere--
Water hid all of the earth.
But the Great Spirit made life come forth--
Made life come forth out of the earth--
The earth that was covered with water.
The Great Spirit thought life--
The thought of the Great Spirit lived--
First, the Great Spirit made the fish--
Both the fish and the shell fish--
The Crawfish lived in the water;
The Great Spirit spoke to the crawfish--
Told them to dive in the mud--
Told them to bring forth the mud
That the earth He had made might be above the water.
The crawfish obeyed the Great Spirit--
Brought forth the mud from the earth--
The Great Spirit was pleased.

 The Great Spirit held the mud in His hand,
Blessed it, and made man of it--
Blessed it, and made land of it--
The Great Spirit called the land and the man
"Chitimacha"
That lived as the land--
That lived as the man.
Chitimacha was the name the Great Spirit gave
To the thought of His life--

 Again the Great Spirit thought--
The thought of the Great Spirit was the law--
The law of the land--
The law of the man--

The law of Chitimacha
Was the thought of the Great Spirit.
There was happiness

So long as Chitimacha lived
 By the thought of the Great Spirit--
 Then Chitimacha forgot the Great Spirit--
 Again, the Great Spirit spoke--
 Told the Chitimacha to rub two sticks together
 This made fire--
 Fire to cook their food,
 Fire to warm them.

 From the beginning the world had fire--
 The fire and light and heat of the heavens
 For the thought of the Great Spirit
 Had made the sun--
 Had made the moon--
 The sun was the wife of the moon.
 But the Great Spirit did not forget;
 Though man was not longer good--
 The Great Spirit did not condemn Chitimacha
 Instead, the Great Spirit gave unto man--
 Gifts that were to bring great joy--
 The Great Spirit gave man woman--
 Gave man woman and Tobacco.

 Yet, all was not complete
 All was not well
 For the animals made fun of man--
 The animals made fun of man and his companion
 Woman and Tobacco.
 Chitimacha spoke to the Great Spirit
 Asked the Great Spirit for help--
 The Great Spirit was their father--
 Their father helped the Chitimacha--
 His children--
 Helped them make Bows and Arrows
 With the Bows and Arrows
 The Chitimacha brought down the laughing animals--
 Ate their flesh,
 Made clothes of their skins.

 From the beginning the Great Spirit spoke--
 Spoke to the sun and spoke to the moon--
 The Great Spirit told the sun and the moon to bathe--
 Bathe often and be strong--
 Strong enough to give forth light and heat.
 The sun obeyed the Great Spirit--
 She bathed often and kept herself shining and bright--

The Chitimacha honor the sun--
Always the Chitimacha have honored the sun--
For the sun has been good to them--
Many times she has listened to the voice of the Chitimacha--
Stood still for the Chitimacha--
Held her place while her children fought to victory
Stood still until the enemies of her children--
The enemies of the Chitimacha were defeated.
Many times the sun stood still for the Chitimacha
While the Chitimacha finished his work.

The moon was not like the sun.
The moon did not obey the Great Spirit.
The moon took no baths--
The moon did not obey.
So, like a lonely man,
The moon chases the sun--
Yes, the moon can be seen--
The moon can be seen chasing the sun--
Chasing the sun across the sky.
Since the moon did not obey the Great Spirit--
It must live alone,
Like a lonely old man--
The moon must live alone and chase the sun across the sky--
Must live alone and chase the sun--
Chase the sun that did obey the Great Spirit--
Chase the sun across the sky forever.

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