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Political Protest, Conflict, and Tribal Nationalism

The Oklahoma Choctaws and the Termination Crisis of 1959–1970

VALERIE LAMBERT

The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, a tribe in which I am enrolled, is headquartered in southeastern Oklahoma and has a tribal citizenry of just over 175,000. Our tribal government currently compacts almost all of our tribe's Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and Indian Health Service (IHS) program funding and runs dozens of tribal businesses that today fund more than 80 percent of our tribal programs and services.¹ More than six thousand people work for our tribe, which is headed by a chief, a twelve-member tribal council, and three tribal judges.² Our people rebuilt our formal tribal political structures and institutions in the 1970s and 1980s, more than a half-century after the Curtis Act of 1898, the Supplemental Agreement of 1902, and the Five Tribes Act of 1906 eviscerated our elaborate nineteenth-century polity and allotted most of our land. Little scholarship exists about the era of our tribal history that spans the years between allotment in the early 1900s and the tribal nation-building of the 1970s, the era that is the focus of this article.

Despite the dearth of scholarship about this era of Choctaw history, by the late twentieth century a dominant scholarly narrative of this period had emerged. This narrative alleges that, during the greater part of the twentieth century, many Choctaws pursued a strategy of assimilation into the larger, non-Indian society and acculturation to white culture. "Nothing set the Five Tribes people apart quite so much," David W. Baird writes, "as their outspoken advocacy of assimilation with the white majority."³ James H. Howard and Victoria Lindsay Levine characterize Choctaw "sentiment" during the early twentieth century as "ultra-assimilationist," with many Choctaws undergoing "rapid white acculturation" and making "an all-out effort to remodel their culture to approximate

that of whites.”⁴ Naomi Ruth Hunke notes that in the 1930s leaders of the only Oklahoma Choctaw community still holding Choctaw dances and stickball games decided to stop such performances, citing as their reason “opposition” from Choctaw tribal officials, among others.⁵ In the late 1940s, anthropologist Alexander Spoehr concluded that, in part because of the Choctaw pursuit of acculturation, Choctaw kinship had “lost its importance as a means of widely establishing and regulating social relations” and “of integrating the local group.”⁶ Pointing to Choctaw behavior at the regional and national levels, several scholars have observed that the Five “Civilized” Tribes, including the Choctaws, provided much of the leadership for the Society of American Indians (SAI), a pan-Indian organization founded in 1911.⁷ The SAI, which Robert Warrior has identified as part of the “first important movement of twentieth-century American Indian intellectual history,” embraced a “mainstreaming ideology” and promoted Indian “integration” into the larger, non-Indian society.⁸

For many scholars, the ultimate expression of Choctaw assimilationist aspirations during these years is our tribe’s response to the termination era of federal Indian policy (1945–1960). In the late 1950s, Choctaw Chief Harry J. W. Belvin supported federal legislation to terminate our tribe, making the Choctaws one of as many as 109 cases of termination initiated between 1945 and 1960.⁹ The date upon which Choctaw termination was to become effective was extended three times in the 1960s before the law was repealed on August 24, 1970.¹⁰ While we did not become part of the 3 percent of the total Indian population that was terminated, according to historian Donald Fixico, “the Oklahoma Choctaws seized the initiative in abrogating their trust relationship with the government.”¹¹

Using interviews and archival research that I conducted in 1995–1996 and 2005, this article raises questions about the extent to which our people supported this effort to terminate our tribe and thus the extent to which assimilationist aspirations defined Choctaw experience during these years. By documenting the emergence in the late 1960s of an organized Choctaw youth movement that resisted Choctaw tribal termination, I seek to expand scholarly interpretations that address only a single Choctaw position on tribal termination, or that, like Kidwell, acknowledge but only briefly address Choctaw resistance to termination.¹² My discovery through oral history interviews of the existence of an organized Choctaw anti-termination movement prompted me to explore the conditions that help explain the pro-termination stance of Chief Belvin

and that shaped the ways our people responded to what locally was often termed “Belvin’s law.” I begin by identifying several of these conditions and by exploring how Belvin was able to create what I came to conclude was only a public appearance of Choctaw citizen support for termination. It appears that, during the first part of the termination crisis, Belvin was able to mobilize support for his law among our people only by failing to disclose that his law was a termination law. Later, the monopoly of control Belvin maintained over formal tribal political power permitted him to simply declare that such support existed, even in the face of growing Choctaw political protest against the Choctaw termination law.

After situating the termination crisis in broader local processes and realities, I then turn to the primary goal of this article: documenting the anti-termination movement. I explore the origins and development of this political protest movement, the actions that its leaders and members undertook, and the ways Choctaws responded to the mobilization efforts of the movement’s leadership. As will be seen, this resistance movement not only helped secure the repeal of the law mandating Choctaw termination but also produced a new Choctaw nationalism, a nationalism that later helped fuel the Choctaw nation-building of the 1970s and 1980s. I end by considering the questions that my material raises about the intentions that underlay the adoption by many Choctaws of a strategy of white acculturation during this period. My evidence suggests that this Choctaw strategy was fueled by goals other than political assimilation and that the mid-twentieth-century Choctaws saw no contradiction between pursuing white acculturation and being against political assimilation. By *white acculturation*, I mean the adoption of white Euro-American forms of behavior and cultural expression, and by *political assimilation*, I mean the dissolution of a group’s political distinctiveness and its absorption into another society.

The research upon which this article is based was conducted in 1995–1996 and 2005 in the Choctaw Nation and in Oklahoma City. In the course of conducting participant-observation anthropological field research for a larger study that documents the process by which the Choctaws rebuilt our tribe and that explores the social, political, and economic consequences of this nation-building, I conducted informal interviews with eight Choctaws who had participated in the anti-termination movement and ten others who helped identify key anti-termination activists and who later helped corroborate evidence I collected. The main problem I

encountered was that many of the most active Choctaw anti-terminationists were dead. A second was that all of those with whom I spoke were then seeking to depose longtime Choctaw Chief Hollis Roberts. Fearing that documentation of their prior opposition to a Choctaw chief (Chief Belvin) might compromise their ability to achieve their current political objectives, and fearing that documentation of their opposition to the federal government might have negative consequences for them and their families, all but Charles Brown, Darryl Brown, Buster Jefferson, and Jerry Jefferson became anxious when the possibility was raised of including their real names in print. I have therefore either omitted names or used pseudonyms in some parts of the text, taking care to clearly identify all pseudonyms. Additional material for this article was gained through archival research in the Research Division of the Oklahoma Historical Society, as well as in the Oklahoma City Archives and Records Division of the Oklahoma Department of Libraries. Finally, aspects of my methodology—including how to ask particular questions—were informed by my status as an enrolled citizen of the tribe and by my background of having been reared in Oklahoma.

DISSOLVING A TRIBE: CONDITIONS, STRATEGIES, AND
POLITICAL ACTIONS

During the termination era of federal Indian policy, the most vocal Choctaw advocate of Choctaw tribal termination was Harry J. W. Belvin. Born in 1901 near Boswell, Oklahoma, in the south-central part of the Choctaw Nation, Belvin was reared on a 1,280-acre ranch that grew corn and cotton and supported three hundred head of cattle and fifty horses.¹³ His father, who was Choctaw and Chickasaw, was a lawyer and a Choctaw language speaker who actively discouraged his children from speaking Choctaw and strongly promoted Christianity.¹⁴ His mother was white and abandoned the family when Belvin was young.¹⁵ After serving as both a state representative and a state senator, Belvin was selected Choctaw chief in 1948, a position that he held until 1975. Eleven years into his twenty-seven-year service as chief, Belvin persuaded Representative Carl Albert of Oklahoma to introduce federal legislation, passed on August 25, 1959, that initiated the process of terminating the Choctaw tribe as a legal entity.¹⁶

During his long career in public service, Belvin urged our people to

speak only English, lobbied for all Choctaw children to attend white schools, and in other ways promoted a strategy of Choctaw acculturation. His pro-termination stance suggests that he also sought the political assimilation of our people. To understand Belvin's support of termination in terms of his so-called personal views about acculturation and political assimilation, however, overlooks key structures that governed his adoption of a pro-termination stance and that directed his thinking about tribal public policy. Chief among these structures was the process by which he was selected chief, together with the content of his job description. To facilitate the dissolution of the Five "Civilized" Tribes, beginning in 1906 (and continuing to 1970, when PL 91-495, 84 Stat. 1091, was passed) the U.S. president appointed the Choctaw chief as well as the rest of the leaders of the Five "Civilized" Tribes.¹⁷ During this period the federal government also radically redefined the role of the leaders of the Five Tribes, declaring that beginning in 1906 their job was to facilitate the settlement of our tribal estates. Through the actions of his twentieth-century predecessors, as well as through other means, Belvin gained a clear sense of what the federal government expected of him. Early-twentieth-century Choctaw chiefs, well matched for their new role of carrying out federal objectives, facilitated sales of most of the unallotted Choctaw timber lands and some of the unallotted Choctaw mineral lands.¹⁸ Their actions resulted in the distribution to individual Choctaws of at least twelve per capita checks during the first few decades of the twentieth century.¹⁹

Some Choctaws whom I interviewed provided insight into the content of the rhetoric Belvin used to generate Choctaw popular support for termination. What is most striking about this rhetoric is that it suggests that Belvin did not see the goal of political assimilation as a goal that had broad popular appeal among Choctaws. The first thing that Choctaws with whom I spoke tended to claim about these communications was that, prior to 1969, Belvin never mentioned the word "termination" when promoting "his law." It should be pointed out that, if the word "termination" had been mentioned to the Choctaw people, they would have been fully aware of what this meant. During the 1960s, the Choctaws and most other tribes were well aware of the federal effort to terminate tribes. The Choctaws in particular were also aware of what, specifically, termination would mean for them individually and collectively. During the termination era of federal Indian policy, the Choctaws witnessed the

termination of at least four tribes in their home state of Oklahoma: the Wyandots, Peorias, Ottawas, and Modocs.²⁰ Beginning in 1969, ten years after the passage of the Choctaw termination law and one year before the Choctaws were to be terminated, word spread among Choctaws that Belvin's law was a termination law. Insight into the ways this knowledge was disseminated, the feelings of betrayal that this generated, and the impact of this apparent misrepresentation on the development of an organized Choctaw opposition to Belvin's law will be addressed later in this article.

Choctaws also insisted that, although Belvin was known to support political assimilation as well as white acculturation, at no point did he justify his law to his people in terms of its capacity to expedite the process of Choctaw absorption into the larger, non-Indian society. Instead, according to five Choctaws, Belvin marketed his law to Choctaws entirely as an initiative that would provide them with immediate economic relief. One consultant, to whom I will give the pseudonym Edwina Colbert, said that Belvin spoke often of his alleged extensive knowledge of the poverty, desperation, and urgency with which many Choctaws needed help, a knowledge that she (and others) said that Belvin had acquired by regularly going door-to-door visiting Choctaw households.²¹ Archival sources corroborate part of this statement. In a letter dated November 16, 1958, prominent Choctaw Muriel Wright wrote, "Belvin is liked, it is said, because he visits around among the Choctaws, and tries to keep them informed and interested in all that is going on in Indian matters."²² My consultant, Mrs. Colbert, together with other consultants Cole Ethridge and Grant Downing (also pseudonyms), told me that Belvin told them and other Choctaws that after "his law" took effect, sizeable per capita checks would be sent to their homes, checks that would enhance the short-term economic well-being of all Choctaws. Indeed, by and through termination, the tribe's assets would be decollectivized. Instead of being tied up in property and bank accounts, the wealth that the tribe held in common would be divided and distributed to the Choctaw people. When Belvin became chief, the Choctaws, together with the Chickasaws, held collectively more than ten million dollars in assets, including 400,000 acres of land that contained about two billion tons of coal and asphalt.²³ The immediate economic relief that these checks offered, Belvin was said to have explained to our people, was the reason Choctaws should support his law.

An essential part of the context that shaped the Choctaw termination crisis of 1959–1970 was the fact that, despite the relative collective wealth of the Choctaw tribe as compared to other tribes during this period, as individuals many Choctaws were poor, and unemployment rates were high. In the decade during which most actions related to Choctaw termination occurred—the 1960s—the BIA sounded an alarm about Choctaw unemployment in one Choctaw Nation county, identifying it as “critical”; in 1970 Choctaw unemployment throughout the Choctaw Nation was more than twice the state average.²⁴ In 1981 southeastern Oklahoma had the lowest average per capita personal income of any region in Oklahoma.²⁵ According to Choctaw activists, prior to 1969—when it appears that comparatively few Choctaws were aware that Belvin’s law was a termination law—a great many Choctaws spoke often and with much enthusiasm about the proposed per capita checks. Ross Swimmer, former principal chief of the Cherokee Nation (1975–1985) and former assistant secretary of the Interior of Indian Affairs (1985–1989), was well acquainted with Belvin and with the Choctaw people during the years leading up to 1969. About the Choctaw termination law, he told me, “Belvin wanted it. The Choctaws wanted it. What happened is that the settling of tribal affairs, particularly the coal and asphalt lands—of taking a big check, then distributing it *per capita*—was a huge enticement. Belvin got caught up in that.”²⁶ Choctaw scholar Clara Sue Kidwell implicitly concurs. “Tribal members found individual advantage in the per capita payment,” she notes, “and it seems that individualism had supplanted the notion of communal property.”²⁷

Another key condition that played an important role in determining the content and character of the Choctaw experience of our termination crisis was the then poor condition of our tribe’s formal political structures. A factor in the apparent failure of many Choctaws to learn until as late as 1969 that our tribe was slated for termination, the poor condition of formal Choctaw political structures also greatly affected the development, articulation, and perceived scope of a Choctaw-supported pro-termination position. When the BIA concluded in the late 1950s that most Choctaws supported the termination of our tribe—an important conclusion given that Congress defined such support as a near requirement for termination—there existed few formal structures of Choctaw tribal governance that could provide a check on our chief’s power and an institutionalized means for our citizenry to formally share their views with

our chief, with the U.S. government, and with large numbers of other Choctaws. In the early 1900s federal legislation eviscerated the Choctaw tribal government, dissolving its legislative and judicial branches and greatly reducing the size of its executive branch. Until the 1970s the Choctaw government was “an empty shell” with only a few staff and very few powers, an entity that Kidwell describes as a “shadow government.”²⁸ Even through the 1970s, according to Choctaw scholar Grayson Noley, the Choctaw tribal government was in “ruins” and had “no real structure.”²⁹ A decade after Belvin left office in 1975, Belvin’s brother, Frank, defended Belvin’s act of simply running any kind of bureaucracy at all, asserting that at midcentury the Choctaw “tribal government was only a long-forgotten shadow.”³⁰ During my field research, Choctaws who had worked for Belvin often commented on how tiny the tribal bureaucracy was during those years. One of Belvin’s former personal assistants, exaggerating to make her point, said, “All the business of the tribe that Belvin dealt with could fit in a cigar box. He used a Chief [brand] writing tablet and that’s all he needed. The business of the tribe fit into his top desk drawer. It was just nothing like it is now.” Another said, “Belvin worked hard. . . . Belvin was a friend of mine. [But] back then, the Choctaw Nation had no money [compared to the present], nothing. No grants, no money. Back then, no one paid attention to the Choctaw Nation.”³¹ The poor condition of Choctaw tribal governing structures amplified Belvin’s voice as spokesperson for the Choctaws. It also conspired to create a public appearance of widespread Choctaw support of termination. At a meeting of the Inter-tribal Council of the Five “Civilized” Tribes in 1954, Belvin defended his support of Choctaw tribal termination to the chiefs of the Cherokee, Muscogee Creek, and Seminole Nations, as well as to the governor of the Chickasaw Nation. He declared that many Choctaws were simply “not interested in tribal matters” and supported “the discontinuance of the tribal entity.”³² This was but one of many such declarations that Belvin made during the Choctaw termination crisis that ended in 1970, declarations that were made possible in part by the monopoly of control he maintained over formal Choctaw political power.

THE ANTI-TERMINATION CHOCTAW YOUTH MOVEMENT

Given that many Choctaws remember and sometimes mention the Choctaw anti-termination youth movement when they reflect upon the

twentieth-century history of our tribe, the virtual absence of this political protest movement in the existing scholarship is somewhat surprising. In 1995–1996 and 2005, I investigated this movement as part of a larger study of late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century Choctaw tribal sovereignty.³³ Choctaws old enough to remember our tribe's termination crisis and who were aware of the Choctaw anti-termination movement often brought up the name of Charles Brown, a full-blood Choctaw who was the movement's most important leader. As evidence of the scope of Brown's leadership and the import that Choctaws assigned to this movement, several years after the movement's end—when the Choctaw termination law had been repealed and the right of the Choctaw people to select our own leaders had been restored—this working-class Choctaw who had been a teenage high school dropout (and who only later completed his high school degree) was able to challenge professional politician Hollis Roberts, a former state legislator, for the tribe's highest office. In 1978 Brown lost the race for Choctaw chief by only 339 votes.³⁴

Evidence that I collected suggests that the Choctaw anti-termination movement began ninety miles away from the Choctaw Nation in Oklahoma City, where thousands of Choctaws had migrated during the first half of the twentieth century and where many more were “transplanted” in the 1950s by the federal relocation program.³⁵ Like many Choctaws at the time, as now, Charles Brown left the Choctaw Nation as a teenager, seeking work.³⁶ In Tulsa, he found employment first with Douglas Aircraft and later with the U.S. Postal Service. Believing that formal education would enhance his job prospects, Brown completed his high school degree and moved to Kansas City to attend watch-repair school. In 1950 he moved to Oklahoma City, where he repaired watches for Tinker Air Force Base. In 1969, before launching a career as a small-business owner in Oklahoma City, he launched the anti-termination Choctaw youth movement.

In 1995, five years before Brown began experiencing extensive memory loss, he told me his story of how the movement began, a story that some of those who had participated in the movement under his leadership told me that they did not know. Choctaw Angela Hall, for example, told me that when she had been recruited “to help our people” by helping repeal the Choctaw termination law, the Choctaw anti-termination movement had already been born.³⁷ “We didn't look back—at all,” she explained, “only ahead to everything we had to do.” From the

living room of his modest home in Oklahoma City, then seventy-seven-year-old Brown told me that in 1969 he got a knock at his door. At the door was another Choctaw who was also then living in Oklahoma City, a man who had just returned from a visit to Talihina in the Choctaw Nation. "He told me," Brown said, "that he wanted to know what was going on." At the Indian hospital and the BIA office in Talihina, the man had explained, staff members had said to him, "It's too bad what's happening." Brown said that he had been puzzled. As far as he was aware, there was not something momentous, even ominous, that was about to happen in the Choctaw Nation. He told his visitor that he would look into the matter.³⁸

Brown told me that he later phoned Choctaw Jim Wade, a member of one of Talihina's most prominent families. Wade's father was the town's chief of police; his brother, Malcolm, was later elected mayor. (Later, Malcolm also served on the Choctaw Tribal Council.) Wade told Brown that in less than a year—on August 25, 1970, in fact—the federal government planned to terminate the Choctaw tribe. The federal government's obligation to provide the Choctaws with health, educational, and other benefits for Indians would end, and Choctaw tribal assets, including thousands of acres of tribal land, would be liquidated. Brown said that he was shocked. Well aware of Belvin's public announcements to the Choctaw people that per capita checks were forthcoming, he assumed that these payments resembled the other payments that had been made to Choctaws earlier that century. Such payments had not settled the tribal estate and thus had not ended U.S. recognition of Choctaw political distinctiveness and nationhood. The feelings of betrayal Brown experienced were profound. More than thirty years later, his anger did not appear to have lessened.

Upon hearing this news from Wade that Choctaw termination was imminent, Brown contacted every Choctaw he knew to tell them "what was happening." "The opposition to Belvin's actions came primarily from urban Choctaws," specifically those in Oklahoma City, notes Kidwell.³⁹ In Oklahoma City Brown went door-to-door informing Choctaws about "the real story" behind Belvin's plan and asking for their help in preventing the plan from being carried out. Brown worked through Choctaw kinship networks to disseminate the news of this threat and to urge Choctaws to get involved. Almost every night, he and a secretary would meet, and before long a core group of eight to twelve "organiz-

ers” had emerged, all of whom were also angry and many of whom were young people. Brown provided a list of those who had been involved from “very early on,” many of whom, I later learned, unfortunately had passed away. According to Brown, the earliest anti-termination activists included Darryl Brown, Alfeas Bond, Ed Anderson, Vivian Postoak, Robert Anderson, Floyd Anderson, Bobbi Curnutt, Dorothia Damato, Carrie Preston, Carol Gardner, and V. W. “Buster” Jefferson. Jefferson’s wife, Jerry, a Ponca Indian, and Will T. Nelson, a non-Indian, were also among this group. These young, grassroots leaders “wanted to save the tribe,” said Brown, “because it was our tribe” and “because we were proud to be Choctaw.”⁴⁰ Several other early Choctaw organizers with whom I spoke treated as self-evident their reasons for becoming involved in the movement: they cared too much about the tribe to allow it to dissolve. In fighting for the continued survival of our tribe, these youth refused to accept the belief popular at the time that American Indian tribes were destined for extinction. They refused to accept a vision of our tribe’s destiny as one in which Choctaw pride derived only from the actions and achievements of the ancestors. These Choctaw youth insisted that the tribe regain its political, economic, and social standing; recapture the glories of the past; and rise like a phoenix from the ashes of the past. They insisted that the Choctaw people overcome the many obstacles that threatened the realization of this vision, obstacles that included widespread and endemic poverty, entrenched feelings of hopelessness and resignation, and the desire of many tribal members for the per capita checks that would follow the liquidation of Choctaw tribal assets and the final settlement of the Choctaw tribal estate. Their political mobilization was oriented toward (1) taking actions to secure the repeal of the legislation and persuade outsiders that Choctaws opposed the termination of their tribe and (2) mobilizing support among Choctaws for the legislation’s repeal.

Youth organizers expanded the scope of their nascent political protest movement by developing and disseminating newsletters, which they referred to as “papers.” Dissemination of these papers was extensive. “We handed those papers out everywhere!” explained one youth-movement leader.

We handed those papers out at singings, revivals, Indian powwows, and especially churches. . . . We asked people to send copies to relatives in California, Chicago, Dallas. We asked for the names and

addresses of all the “out-of-states” [Choctaws who lived outside Oklahoma]. Then we began sending *them* the papers. We knew we had to fight all over the United States. . . . Choctaws were scattered everywhere!⁴¹

Before the year’s end, the youth had organized a formal group, OK Choctaws, Inc. (hereinafter referred to as OK Choctaws), initially only for Choctaws living in Oklahoma City. Early meetings of the group were held in the houses of youth-movement leaders. To try to secure the repeal of the legislation before the August 25, 1970, deadline, OK Choctaws members made phone calls, sent telegrams, and wrote letters protesting the termination of our tribe. They lobbied Congress, writing at least one letter to each member of the U.S. Congress and speaking frequently with the senators and representatives from Oklahoma. They telephoned, wrote, and visited staff at the BIA area office in Muscogee and at the central office in Washington DC. They contacted the head of the BIA. Brown not only spearheaded this part of the mobilization effort but also micromanaged it. His fellow organizers claimed that, despite the growing numbers of Choctaw youth eager to devote their labor and other resources to saving our tribe, it was Brown who wrote most of the correspondence and made most of the phone calls. One such organizer, Buster Jefferson, went so far as to tell me that “Charles Brown almost single-handedly stopped Belvin’s effort.”⁴² Brown saved copies of much of the correspondence that he and other youth activists had written and received.

With an extensive letter-writing campaign well underway, these young, urban Choctaw activists devised an anti-termination petition for distribution in Washington DC. Networks of Choctaw kin facilitated the circulation of this petition and the collection of signatures. In the course of this effort, youth leaders heard news that the secretary of the interior was scheduled to give a talk in Will Rogers Park in Oklahoma City. Again using networks of Choctaw kin, they mobilized several hundred Choctaws to attend the event, at which time they “let him [the secretary] know,” as Brown put it, that contrary to popular belief, “we Choctaws were committed to keeping the tribe, not dissolving it.”⁴³

During the period when Choctaw youth were staging these and other events of political protest, they printed several issues of their anti-termination newsletter. Before long these newsletters were not only educating Choctaws about the termination legislation but also fostering connections among Choctaws, promoting the new urban group OK Choctaws,

and publicizing meetings of the OK Choctaws group. After the publication of only a few newsletters, organizers said that it became impossible to accommodate in their homes the large numbers of Choctaws who began showing up at meetings. Leaders then began regularly renting space owned by the Muscogee (Creek) Nation in a building on S.W. Thirty-fourth Street in Oklahoma City. During this period OK Choctaws meetings were also held at Southern Oaks in Oklahoma City.

By October 1969 the youth had solicited and secured the support of an organization called Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity (OIO).⁴⁴ OIO was an organization of Oklahoma Indian youth that had been founded five summers earlier at the University of Oklahoma by a U.S. senator's wife, LaDonna Harris (Comanche), who later became a nationally known Indian activist.⁴⁵ From OIO, the Choctaw youth activists acquired ideas about the political potential of Indian tribes, received valuable leadership training and experience, and located young Choctaw recruits for their movement while OIO began pursuing federally funded economic development in Choctaw communities.⁴⁶ The OIO was an important vehicle through which leaders and members of the Choctaw youth movement became exposed to the ideas of a larger, nationwide Indian youth movement that was emerging during that decade, the Red Power movement. This larger movement spawned and was defined by national Indian organizations that included the National Indian Youth Council (NIYC), founded in 1963 by eastern Oklahoma Indian Clyde Warrior, and the American Indian Movement (AIM), founded in 1968 by, among others, Sioux activist Russell Means.⁴⁷ Both NIYC and AIM offered "a pointed critique of the 'Uncle Tomahawk' native establishment," an establishment symbolized by such Indian leaders as Choctaw Chief Harry Belvin.⁴⁸ Although the achievements of the anti-termination Choctaw youth movement were almost entirely tribal, not pantribal, and although the anti-termination Choctaw youth movement has received almost no attention in the literature, ultimately it also helped define the Red Power movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

THE CHOCTAW HOMELAND

With a core organizing group well established, the Choctaw tribal homeland in southeastern Oklahoma became the principal site of Choctaw youth-movement organizing and political mobilization. The Choctaw

youth who had initiated the movement in Oklahoma City used networks of kin that extended throughout southeastern Oklahoma to help organize talks in the Choctaw Nation and to encourage Choctaws in the tribal homeland to attend these talks. The movement's principal spokesperson was Brown, who gave speeches in Hugo, Atoka, McAlester, Talihina, Antlers, Spiro, Broken Bow, Bethel, Idabel, and other towns in the Choctaw Nation.⁴⁹ Brown and the organizers also traveled to Dallas, home of a large Choctaw community, where Brown spoke and the growing numbers of youth leaders helped answer questions. The youth urged Choctaws to support the repeal of the Choctaw termination legislation, an event that they promised would bring about the tribe's rebirth. In explaining this prophesy, they developed and disseminated a set of ideas that eventually became the basis of a new Choctaw nationalism. The youth promised that the Choctaw Nation would become a major power once again. They promised that the tribe would regain its strength and self-respect and would elevate the Choctaw population to levels heretofore unknown. It was not the time, they said, to write the tribe's obituary. The tribe's destiny was not death; it was greatness. The youth activists made the Choctaw Nation not only "loom out of an immemorial past," as Choctaws had long been accustomed to seeing our tribe, but also "glide into a limitless future," a proposal that pro-termination Choctaws such as Chief Harry Belvin probably assumed to be impossible given the federal efforts to end the separate political histories of U.S. Indian tribes.⁵⁰

Choctaw support for this alternative vision of the Choctaw future and for the emergent Choctaw nationalism was great. So many wanted to be a part of this vision and the group that was promoting it, that the youth-movement activists helped Choctaw Nation residents establish chapters of the OK Choctaws group in different parts of the tribal homeland. The largest and most active of these chapters was located near Spiro in the northeastern corner of the Choctaw Nation. Another strong chapter, led by Hazel and Marvin Webb, was built near Smithville in the east-central part of the Choctaw Nation. These groups tended to exercise a high degree of autonomy from the Oklahoma City-based parent group. In general each chapter planned and organized its own anti-termination and other activities, often with little input from the parent group, and the leaders of these groups only sometimes kept the parent group informed of their work. An exception was the initiative of leaving anti-termination materials in the lobbies of local post offices. Local chapters

agreed “to cover” the post offices in their vicinities; Brown and his colleagues agreed to deposit anti-termination materials in the foyers of post offices located at a distance from the local chapters but still within tribal boundaries. In the Choctaw tribal homeland, after word had spread that Belvin’s law was a termination law, some anti-termination activity was also organized by individuals acting alone—that is, outside the OK Choctaws formal organization. Brown said that several times during this period he heard about a Choctaw who was wholly unaware of the existence of an organized anti-termination effort but who had been “doing things for months,” such as “stuffing anti-termination materials in mailboxes” along southeastern Oklahoma’s rural routes. Choctaws living in the tribal homeland “did a lot,” he added about the population amongst whom he had been reared. “They deserve a lot of credit for having made things happen.”⁵¹

The anti-termination Choctaw youth movement occurred at a time when Choctaw youth who were living in the Choctaw Nation were forging what Choctaw scholar Michelene Pesantubbee describes as a cultural revitalization movement.⁵² The “increased interest” that Choctaw youth in the 1960s began expressing “in learning or relearning their language, arts, dress, dances, songs and games” probably fueled their interest in stopping tribal termination and, more broadly, in promoting the development of a new Choctaw nationalism.⁵³ Importantly, this youth-led (and Choctaw Nation–based) cultural revitalization movement also contained a critique of the pro-acculturation views of many older Choctaws. Pesantubbee notes that, as part of this movement, Choctaw youth confronted their older kin and the leaders of Choctaw churches about “why Choctaws did not practice many of the traditions found among other native groups.”⁵⁴ At the same time, these youth told their elders that they wanted an identity that was not “based solely on a contemporary westernized culture” and a Christianity that was expressed “not only in Western forms.”⁵⁵ These youth, Pesantubbee explains, aimed “to construct a more satisfying culture” by “relearning Choctaw ways,” a goal that many older Choctaws resisted.⁵⁶

There is some evidence that during this period, as today, Choctaws treated white acculturation and political assimilation as two very separate issues, issues that non-Indian observers have tended to and still tend to conflate. Archival sources record Belvin as having strongly suggested that older Choctaws were the ones who wanted to keep the tribe, and the

youth, to dissolve it.⁵⁷ Belvin thus identified a largely pro-acculturation segment of the Choctaw population—older Choctaws—as espousing an anti-assimilation political position and a segment of the Choctaw population who at that point may have already been airing anti-acculturation views—the youth—as espousing a pro-assimilation political position. During my field research in the Choctaw Nation, my exploration of contemporary Choctaw life and experience turned up no Choctaw citizen who supported political assimilation; that is, I found no Choctaw who did not strongly support the continued recognition of the legal, political, and social structures that help define the Choctaw Nation and Choctaw nationality. I did, however, encounter many Choctaws who embraced and promoted a strategy of white acculturation. Early-twenty-first-century Choctaws see no contradiction in being both pro-acculturation and anti-assimilation, and the evidence presented above suggests that this was probably also the case during the 1960s.

Despite Belvin's apparent belief that the youth of his tribe were, as was he, pro-assimilation while older Choctaws were not, Belvin failed to treat the youth as even a part of the tribal citizenry, which appears to have strengthened the youth's feelings of anger toward the old chief. About six Choctaws with whom I spoke claimed that during his tenure as chief, Belvin sought and achieved a reputation as the "older Choctaws' chief." They claimed that Belvin expended little effort to reach out to the youth and dismissed the views of the youth as unimportant. More critically, Belvin failed to open the Choctaw tribal rolls to youth.⁵⁸ When the BIA conducted a report on the tribe's development potential in 1973, three years after the Choctaw termination law had been repealed, they found that Belvin had been maintaining a tribal roll that included only those Choctaws who had been enrolled by the Dawes Commission at the turn of the century—that is, only those Choctaws who were at least sixty-three years of age when the anti-termination movement began.⁵⁹ The BIA termed the Choctaw youth "the unenrolled" and took Belvin to task not only for failing to open up the tribal rolls to the youth but also for in many cases failing to maintain any records or even the scantiest of information about the tribe's youth.⁶⁰ The actions that Belvin took to marginalize the youth and to institutionalize divisions between older Choctaws and younger ones probably emboldened the youth activists to challenge the wisdom and leadership of a chief whom several youth activists described as quite popular among both non-Indian Oklahomans

and many Choctaws. A decade prior to the emergence of the anti-termination movement, Belvin had been selected “Outstanding American Indian of the Year,” and one youth activist acknowledged that “many” older Choctaws had a “fierce loyalty” to Belvin.⁶¹

The question of how many Choctaws participated in the anti-termination movement is one of the great unanswered questions about this political protest movement and about this period of Choctaw history. Former youth activists told me that they worked in part through Choctaw churches. Between allotment and the 1970s, Choctaw churches were one of the strongest extant Choctaw corporate structures, providing important arenas for local “extrafamilial social encounters” among Choctaws and acting as “the physical and social focal points of rural Choctaw life.”⁶² In 2006 I was somewhat surprised to learn that a Choctaw elder who had long been active in a Choctaw church near Talihina (and whose professional career included extensive public service to the tribe) remembered no anti-termination activity during the late 1960s in her church or in the area around Talihina, a Choctaw Nation town that has a long history of active political involvement in Choctaw tribal affairs. This account and others that I collected suggest that the anti-termination Choctaw youth movement was not a focus of Choctaw popular attention in all areas of the Choctaw Nation and that the movement may have flourished in only pockets of the tribe’s homeland. The movement may even have been quite small.

However small the numbers of Choctaws who mobilized against termination may have been, they were not too small to escape the notice of Chief Belvin. Archival sources reveal that Belvin responded to the Choctaw youth movement by, among other things, scheduling public meetings for Choctaws in different parts of the Choctaw Nation. In a flyer announcing a talk that the chief was to give on September 1, 1969, in Tushka Homma, a town nineteen miles southwest of Talihina, Belvin declared:

Many false rumors and much misinformation are, at present, being circulated regarding the [termination law and its amendments], and this meeting will provide opportunities for the Choctaws to get the full meaning of the Act and its consequences to the Tribe including the “Final Settlement” that has been talked about by the older Choctaws for the past 63 years. It is time that the Choctaws woke up.⁶³

Belvin scheduled another meeting for October 3, 1969, in the town of Atoka, about sixty miles southwest of Tushka Homma. In a written announcement of this meeting, the chief wrote that “every Indian in the area is strongly urged to attend this most important meeting,” which “will answer charges of O.I.O. workers and the OKC [Oklahoma City] Council of Choctaws” that “things have been mishandled” during his administration as chief. He continued:

When the Choctaws know the truth about this gad-fly organization that is trying so hard to get control of the Choctaw Tribe, I know that they will fight the move as true Americans. . . . I trust that the Choctaws throughout the Choctaw Nation will make it their business to know what the O.I.O and the Oklahoma [City] Council of Choctaws are trying to do to the Choctaws.⁶⁴

It is unclear what Belvin said to the Choctaw people during these and other talks that he delivered in the Choctaw Nation during the fall of 1969. By the summer of 1970, however, he had reversed his position. Then keenly aware of what appears to have been a high level of Choctaw opposition to the strategy of political assimilation that he was proposing, Chief Belvin, together with the commissioner of Indian Affairs, supported the repeal of the legislation.⁶⁵ This repeal occurred on August 24, 1970, one day before the Choctaws were to be terminated (see 84 Stat. 828). Two months later, on October 22, 1970, an unrelated law was passed formally restoring the right of the Five “Civilized” Tribes to select their own chiefs (84 Stat. 1091).⁶⁶

Belvin immediately began preparing for what he must have thought would be the fight of his life, the fight to keep his job after having supported legislation that had generated so much opposition from his people. The Choctaws’ election was scheduled for mid-August 1971. Borrowing from the ideas of a new Choctaw nationalism that had been developed by the youth activists, Belvin ran for chief on a platform of tribal rebuilding and tribal empowerment. He promised “to fight to prevent any [future] move to terminate the Choctaw tribe” and declared that his goal was to restore the Choctaw tribe to its former glory.⁶⁷ He pledged to “continue all Choctaw programs,” “expand programs,” and “establish a Choctaw Constitution and a legal Choctaw Council.”⁶⁸ “Vote for Harry J.W. Belvin,” his slogan read, “and Keep the Choctaw Nation on the Map.”⁶⁹ Belvin’s principal opponent was not youth activist Charles

Brown, whose renowned battle for the tribe's highest office came in 1978, but rather a two-term mayor of McAlester and a successful Choctaw businessman, Fritz Neill. Like Belvin, Neill pledged to rebuild the tribe and expand tribal programs.⁷⁰ Belvin won the race on August 14, 1971, after which he began his twenty-fourth year of service as Choctaw chief.

WHITE ACCULTURATION, POLITICAL ASSIMILATION,
AND TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY

Prior to their forced relocation from the American Southeast to Indian Territory (now Oklahoma) during the early nineteenth century, the leaders of each of the Five “Civilized” Tribes institutionalized, among other things, a strategy of white acculturation. Choctaw, Chickasaw, Cherokee, Creek, and Seminole tribal leaders constructed constitutional governments; made signal contributions to the building of new institutions such as churches and schools in their homelands; replaced old justice-making institutions with tribal courts; and incorporated selected other ideas, structures, and practices from the dominant white society. The intensity and visibility of these tribally directed programs of cultural transformation have led historians of the nineteenth-century Five “Civilized” Tribes to explore the reasons behind the pursuit of this strategy. Most such scholars—including Clara Sue Kidwell, Duane Champagne, and Richard White, to name a few—have concluded that the leaders of the Five “Civilized” Tribes believed that, by modifying their cultures and societies in particular ways, they were decreasing the chances that their tribal nations would either be dissolved or forcibly relocated to Indian Territory. In other words, the leaders of these tribes saw white acculturation as a means of resisting political assimilation and maintaining control of their tribal homelands.

In *Listening to Our Grandmothers' Stories: The Bloomfield Academy for Chickasaw Females, 1852–1949*, Chickasaw scholar Amanda J. Cobb explores the experiences of Chickasaw females who underwent an intense, institutionalized program of white acculturation at Bloomfield Academy, a Chickasaw boarding school, during the century that followed the tribe's relocation to Indian Territory. Cobb shows that most Chickasaw students embraced white acculturation—through literacy instruction—because they wanted to and because both this goal and its means had become Chickasaw traditions. “Policymakers and educators,” she writes, “thought

that acculturation meant that students would give up whatever characteristics made them Indian. Chickasaws knew that changing through acculturation did not have to mean giving up ‘Indianness’ for ‘whiteness.’ Only tribes can decide what it means to be Indian.”⁷¹

Cobb’s work archives a shift in Chickasaw views toward white acculturation during the postremoval period, a period when white acculturation became more of a choice for the Five “Civilized” Tribes. For the Chickasaws and probably also for others of the Five Tribes, white acculturation became less of a strategy oriented toward resisting political assimilation and maintaining tribal sovereignty and more of a way of expressing tribal identity—expressing a set of collective self-conceptions of both who these tribal nations were as separate peoples and who they wanted to be, as separate peoples, in the future. In short, as Cobb shows, white acculturation became an expression of Chickasaw sovereignty and self-determination. This shift decoupled the strategy of white acculturation from the strategy of political assimilation, creating opportunities for individual Five Tribes Indians to embrace different combinations of views on these two, now separate issues. As a result of this shift it became possible for a Five Tribes Indian to adopt, for example, a position of pro-acculturation and anti-assimilation; pro-acculturation and pro-assimilation; anti-acculturation and pro-assimilation; or anti-acculturation and anti-assimilation. This said, there remains little evidence that there has been widespread support for political assimilation among the citizenries of any of the Five “Civilized” Tribes at any point during their postcontact histories.

As shown by the above scholarship on the Five Tribes during the nineteenth century (and for Cobb, also during the first half of the twentieth), the integrity of a society’s political body is not necessarily compromised or even threatened by acculturation. In fact, when acculturation is undertaken as planned cultural change, as it was by the Five “Civilized” Tribes, it can even serve to promote group empowerment and identity: planned, self-conscious modification of one’s culture can encourage a citizenry to view its culture as dynamic, responsive, future-oriented, and constructed upon durable, even indestructible, foundations—foundations that a society may believe are further strengthened by the incorporation of new ideas, practices, and structures. Aspirations to acculturate are not always aspirations to politically assimilate, as the histories and experiences of the Five “Civilized” Tribes show.

Other nations facing similar dilemmas have arrived at different solutions, suggesting that analytically it may be best to treat acculturation and assimilation as independent social processes. For example, anthropologist Michael Lambert, who has significantly shaped my thinking about these issues, has documented the efforts of a West African people (the Senegalese) during the first half of the twentieth century to strongly resist white (French) acculturation while also strongly supporting the political assimilation of the Senegalese people into French society.⁷² The Senegalese wanted to end French recognition of Senegalese political distinctiveness and sovereignty, thereby acquiring for the people of Senegal the rights, responsibilities, and benefits of French citizenship and recognition of the Senegalese as French in the global political arena. But the Senegalese wanted at the same time to retain the cultural distinctiveness of their people. During the first half of the twentieth century, the Senegalese coupled a position of anti-white acculturation with a position of pro-political assimilation.

Michael Lambert's work and other scholarship provide an analytic model with which to reconcile, on the one hand, the Choctaw pursuit of acculturation that has been the subject of much of the small amount of literature on the twentieth-century Choctaws and, on the other, the anti-termination Choctaw resistance movement of the mid-twentieth century, the documentation of which has been a primary goal of this article. Scholars of the twentieth-century Choctaws have incorrectly assumed that because one of our chiefs, Harry J. W. Belvin, supported federal legislation during the 1950s and 1960s to terminate our tribe, and because many twentieth-century Choctaws embraced a strategy of white acculturation, the Choctaw people pursued a strategy of political assimilation during these years. Belvin's pro-assimilation stance, however, cannot be disentangled from his status as a political appointee of the U.S. government and from federal directives that he received to complete the settlement of the Choctaw tribal estate. Moreover, the documentation that I provide of Choctaw political protest against termination, together with interview evidence that suggests that Belvin did not believe that political assimilation had broad popular appeal among our people, indicate that Choctaws tended to see white acculturation and political assimilation as separate issues and that, in a context of widespread Choctaw support for acculturation, Choctaw support for political assimilation was comparatively weak.

Like their nineteenth-century ancestors, during the termination era of federal Indian policy the largely pro-acculturation older Choctaws did not see acculturation as a threat to their continued identity as Choctaws. Nor did they see it as eroding the social and political distinctiveness of our tribe. The debates during this period between the pro-acculturation older Choctaws and the younger Choctaws who denounced acculturation were debates over the content of the culture that our people would use to express our Choctaw nationality. They were not debates over whether our people should politically assimilate. Historian Richard White reveals that the goal of the nineteenth-century Choctaws' pursuit of acculturation "was not assimilation, but rather the retention of an independent national identity by a group in control of its own destiny."⁷³ The same can be said of that period of Choctaw history when we Choctaws experienced our most recent threat to continued existence of our tribe, the Choctaw termination crisis of 1959–1970.

NOTES

Parts of this article will also appear in *Choctaw Nation: A Story of American Indian Resurgence* (forthcoming from the University of Nebraska Press in July 2007).

1. Valerie Lambert, *Choctaw Nation: A Story of American Indian Resurgence* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, in press).

2. Lambert, *Choctaw Nation*.

3. David W. Baird, "Are the Five Tribes of Oklahoma 'Real' Indians?" *Western Historical Quarterly* (February 1990): 11.

4. James H. Howard and Victoria Lindsay Levine, *Choctaw Music and Dance* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 12–13; Baird, "Five Tribes of Oklahoma"; Sandra Faiman-Silva, *Choctaws at the Crossroads: The Political Economy of Class and Culture in the Oklahoma Timber Region* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

5. Naomi Ruth Hunke, *B. Frank Belvin: God's Warhorse* (Birmingham AL: New Hope Press, 1986); Howard and Levine, *Choctaw Music and Dance*.

6. Alexander Spoehr, *Changing Kinship Systems: A Study in the Acculturation of the Creeks, Cherokee, and Choctaw* (Chicago: Field Museum of Natural History, 1947), 208, 213.

7. Baird, "Five Tribes of Oklahoma"; Hazel W. Hertzberg, *The Search for an American Indian Identity: Modern Pan-Indian Movements* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1971). Hertzberg, *Search for an American Indian Identity*, 137, for example, discusses W. A. Durant, "a Choctaw who had long been a leading mem-

ber of the Oklahoma legislature,” and who was elected the first Vice President of SAI at the SAI conference in 1915.

8. Robert Allen Warrior, *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 14; Hertzberg, *Search for an American Indian Identity*; David Reed Miller, “Charles Alexander Eastman, Santee Sioux, 1858–1939,” in *American Indian Intellectuals: Proceedings of the American Ethnological Society*, ed. Margot Liberty (St. Paul: West Publishing Company, 1978); Baird, “Five Tribes of Oklahoma.”

9. Donald L. Fixico, *Termination and Relocation: Federal Indian Policy, 1945–1960* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986); David E. Wilkins and K. Tsianina Lomawaima, *Uneven Ground: American Indian Sovereignty and Federal Law* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001). Note that Judith Nies, *Native American History: A Chronology of the Vast Achievements of a Culture and Their Links to World Events* (New York: Ballantine, 1996) reports that, in 1958 alone, which was the year prior to the passage of the Choctaw termination legislation, as many as forty-eight *rancherias* in California were terminated. The legislation terminating the Choctaw tribe was PL 86-192, 73 Stat. 420 (1959).

10. PL 87-609, 76 Stat. 405 (1962); PL 89-107, 79 Stat. 432 (1965); PL 90-476, 82 Stat. 703 (1968); PL 91-386, 84 Stat. 828 (1970).

11. Francis Paul Prucha, *The Indians in American Society: From the Revolutionary War to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), identifies the percentage of the total U.S. Indian population that was terminated. Fixico, *Termination and Relocation*, 170.

12. Clara Sue Kidwell, “Choctaw in the West,” in *Handbook of North American Indians, Volume 14: Southeast*, ed. William C. Sturtevant and Raymond Fogelson (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2004).

13. Hunke, *B. Frank Belvin*.

14. Hunke, *B. Frank Belvin*.

15. Hunke, *B. Frank Belvin*.

16. PL 86-192, 73 Stat. 420; Clara Sue Kidwell and Charles Roberts, *The Choctaws: A Critical Bibliography* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980); Rennard Strickland, *The Indians in Oklahoma* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980).

17. See also “BIA to the Chickasaw, Creek & Choctaw 8/4/59,” Files of the *Office of Tribal Government Services, Five Civilized Tribes Files*, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Washington DC.

18. Muriel Wright, *A Guide to the Indian Tribes of Oklahoma* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951), provides a list of those who served as both Choctaw chiefs and presidential appointees prior to Belvin. They were Green McCurtain, 1906–1910; Victor M. Locke Jr., 1911–1918; William F. Semple, 1918–1922; William H. Harrison, 1922–1929; Ben Dwight, 1930–1937; and William

A. Durant, 1937–1948. For information about the actions these leaders took to dissolve the tribal estate, see Minutes of the Delegate Convention of Choctaws 6/5/34, Section x—Choctaw Elections, 1923–1983 and undated–1995, Oklahoma Historical Society, Research Division; Angie Debo, *And Still the Waters Run: The Betrayal of the Five Civilized Tribes* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1940); and B. T. Quinten, “Oklahoma Tribes, The Great Depression and the Indian Bureau,” *Mid-America: An Historical Review* 49 (1967): 29–43.

19. Minutes of the Delegate Convention of Choctaws 6/5/34 asserts that these twelve payments together totaled \$1,070 for each individual. Choctaw and Chickasaw freedmen were prohibited from sharing in the proceeds from the division of the tribal estate.

20. Strickland, *Indians in Oklahoma*; Vine Deloria Jr. and Clifford M. Lytle, *The Nations Within: The Past and Future of American Indian Sovereignty* (New York: Pantheon, 1984); Prucha, *Indians in American Society*. Carl Waldman’s *Atlas of the North American Indian* (New York: Facts on File, 1985), 194, reports that all four of these Oklahoma tribes (Wyandots, Peorias, Ottawas, and Modocs) were restored in 1979.

21. Personal interview with author.

22. Letter to “Uncle Brookes and Aunt Besse” from Muriel Wright, November 16, 1958, Peter J. Hudson Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division.

23. Debo, *And Still the Waters Run*; James D. Morrison, “Problems in the Industrial Progress and Development of the Choctaw Nation, 1865 to 1907,” *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 32 (1954): 70–91; Wright, *Guide to the Indian Tribes of Oklahoma*.

24. Faiman-Silva, *Choctaws at the Crossroads*.

25. Faiman-Silva, *Choctaws at the Crossroads*.

26. Personal interview with author.

27. Kidwell, “Choctaw in the West,” 529.

28. Arrell Morgan Gibson, “The Choctaws: The Story of a Resourceful Tribe in its Oklahoma Home—Yakni Achnukma, the Good Land,” *Sooner Magazine* (July 1965): 29; Kidwell, “Choctaw in the West,” 528.

29. Grayson Noley, “Forward: Choctaws Today,” in *Choctaw Language and Culture: Chata Anumpa*, ed. Marcia Haag and Henry Willis, ix–xii (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), x.

30. Hunke, *B. Frank Belvin*, 197.

31. Personal interview with author.

32. Minutes of the Inter-tribal Council of the Five Civilized Tribes’ Meetings at Muscogee, July 14, 1954, MS-8, vol. 1, Agency Files of Inter-Tribal Council of Five Civilized Tribes, Minutes of Meetings, 1951–1955, Oklahoma City Archives and Records Division, Oklahoma Department of Libraries.

33. Lambert, *Choctaw Nation*.

34. Jesse O. McKee and Jon A. Schlenker, *The Choctaws: Cultural Evolution of a Native American Tribe* (Jackson ms: University Press of Mississippi, 1980).

35. Kidwell, "Choctaw in the West," 530, notes that opposition to termination came primarily from urban Choctaws, and Kidwell and Roberts, *The Choctaws*, provides some information about Choctaw urban migration during the twentieth century. For example, Kidwell and Roberts note that the federal relocation program affected hundreds of Choctaws who were relocated not only to Oklahoma City but also to Tulsa, Dallas, Los Angeles, and other cities.

36. See LeAnne Howe, *Shell Shaker* (San Francisco: aunt lute books, 2001), for numerous references to Choctaws who left the Choctaw Nation in the twentieth century, seeking work.

37. The name Angela Hall is a pseudonym. Personal interview with author.

38. Darryl Brown, one of the youth movement's early members, told me that, due to Charles Brown's advanced age, he had misremembered this story. Darryl Brown claimed that his father, Charles Brown, had been visited by a clergyman, a man whose name Darryl could not recall, who had presented Charles Brown with a letter alluding to the imminent termination of the Choctaw tribe. Darryl Brown said that he could remember nothing else about the letter and was unaware of its current whereabouts. Personal interview with author.

39. Kidwell, "Choctaw in the West," 530.

40. Personal interview with author.

41. There existed (and continue to exist) Indian churches in Oklahoma City, as well as in Choctaw Nation, through which Brown, other grassroots Choctaw leaders, and candidates for tribal office have organized, campaigned, or both. An example of one of these church organizations in an urban area is All Tribes Faith of Oklahoma City, which, according to many Choctaws, was a major arena for Choctaw political mobilization during the early 1980s. Personal interview with author.

42. Personal interview with author.

43. Personal interview with author.

44. See "Scrapbook," I. A. Billy Collection, Box 1, Oklahoma Historical Society, Research Division. See also Kidwell, "Choctaw in the West."

45. See LaDonna Harris, *A Comanche Life*, ed. H. Henrietta Stockel (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000).

46. Kidwell, "Choctaw in the West."

47. Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior, *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee* (New York: New Press, 1996); Donald L. Fixico, *The Urban Indian Experience in America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000); Stephen Cornell, *Return of the Native: American Indian Political Resurgence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Warrior, *Tribal Secrets*.

48. Warrior, *Tribal Secrets*, 28–29.
49. During the period in which their mobilization of Choctaws was at its height, two new highways in southeastern Oklahoma were completed, facilitating the youth's efforts to penetrate even the most remote areas of the Choctaw Nation. Sarah Singleton Spears, *Yesterday Revisited: An Illustrated History of LeFlore County* (Poteau OK: Poteau Daily News and Sun, LeFlore County Newspapers Limited Partnership, 1991), 134, points out that 1969 witnessed the opening of Talimena Drive, a major road that runs east-west through the eastern part of Choctaw Nation, which had long been plagued by poor roads. In addition, according to one of my informants, Mary Kay Audd of the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority, in 1970 the southern section of the Indian Nation Turnpike, which runs north-south through Choctaw Nation, was completed.
50. Quoted are Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 11–12, about the ways peoples often represent their histories.
51. Personal interview with author.
52. Michelene Pesantubbee, "Culture Revitalization and Indigenization of Churches among the Choctaw of Oklahoma" (PhD diss., University of California at Santa Barbara, 1994).
53. Pesantubbee, "Culture Revitalization," 257.
54. Pesantubbee, "Culture Revitalization," 253.
55. Pesantubbee, "Culture Revitalization," 282–83.
56. Pesantubbee, "Culture Revitalization," 257, 285.
57. Minutes of the Inter-tribal Council of the Five Civilized Tribes' Meetings at Muscogee, July 14, 1954.
58. Personal interview with author.
59. Planning Support Group of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, "The Choctaw Nation: Its Resources and Development Potential, Report No. 213" (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1973).
60. Planning Support Group of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, "The Choctaw Nation."
61. Hunke, *B. Frank Belvin*.
62. Morris W. Foster, "Choctaw Social Organization," in *Choctaw Language and Culture: Chata Anumpa*, ed. Marcia Haag and Henry Willis, 250–54 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001); Faiman-Silva, *Choctaws at the Crossroads*, 125; Pesantubbee, "Culture Revitalization."
63. "Scrapbook," I. A. Billy Collection.
64. "Scrapbook," I. A. Billy Collection.
65. Kidwell, "Choctaw in the West."
66. For the laws, see 84 Stat. 828 and 84 Stat. 1091. Strickland, *The Indians in Oklahoma*; Noley, "Forward: Choctaws Today."

67. "Vote for Harry J.W. Belvin" Leaflet, 1971, I. A. Billy Collection, Box 1, Oklahoma Historical Society, Research Division.

68. "Vote for Harry J.W. Belvin," I. A. Billy Collection.

69. "Vote for Harry J.W. Belvin," I. A. Billy Collection.

70. "Fact Sheet About the Election for Choctaw Chief, Campaign Flyer of Fritz Neill," Section x—Choctaw Elections, 1923–1983 and undated–1995, Oklahoma Historical Society, Research Division.

71. Amanda J. Cobb, *Listening to Our Grandmothers' Stories: The Bloomfield Academy for Chickasaw Females, 1852–1949* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 113.

72. Michael C. Lambert, "From Citizenship to Negritude: 'Making a Difference' in Elite Ideologies of Colonized Francophone West Africa," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 35 (April 1993): 2.

73. Richard White, *The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment, and Social Change among the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 321.